BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY Volume 5: Matthew - Acts

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BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: MATTHEW

MATTHEW

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Duncan Heaster

MATTHEW CHAPTER 1

1:1 *The book of the generation*- "Book", Gk. *biblos*, suggests a formal volume. It could be that Matthew refers only to the genealogy- but in this case, *biblos* hardly seems the appropriate word. The Gospels were transcripts of the Gospel message preached by e.g. Matthew, and as time went on and the Lord didn't return, under inspiration they wrote down their standard accounts of the good news. The Greek *genesis* translated "generation" is also translated "nature" in its' other two occurrences (James 1:23; 3:6). If the "book" refers to the book of the Gospel of Matthew, the idea could be that this is a Gospel which focuses upon the nature of Jesus. Related words occur often in the genealogies- people "begat" [Gk. *gennao*] their descendants, until Jesus was *gennao* of Mary (Mt. 1:16). Jesus as a person had a 'genesis', He was 'generated' by Mary as His ancestors had been 'generated' by the 'generations' of their ancestors- the whole chapter is a huge blow to the idea that Jesus pre-existed as a person before His birth. His 'generation' is presented as being of the same nature as the 'generation' of His human ancestors.

The son of David, the son of Abraham- The Roman emperors and Greek heroes sometimes traced their pedigree back to a god- and therefore the genealogy of Jesus, whom the Gospels present as the ultimate Emperor, is quite radical in this regard. For it traces the pedigree of Jesus back to a man, Abraham. The greatness of Jesus was in his humanity.

1:2 *Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, Jacob begot Judah and his brothers*- The fact Isaac and Jacob had brothers is carefully omitted- because the descendants of Ishmael and Esau were not counted as the people of God.

1:3 *Judah begot Perez and Zerah of Tamar and Perez begot Hezron, Hezron begot Ram*- Since the Lord was descended through the line of Phares, why mention the birth of Zara- seeing that so many details are omitted in this genealogy, even whole generations, why take space to record this? Perhaps it was because Zara was the first born, but Phares got the birthright. And the genealogies teach us how God delights to work through the underling, the rejected, the humanly weak.

Tamar was a prostitute and adulteress, just like Rahab. See on 1:5.

1:4 *Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, Nahshon begot Salmon*- Salmon was of the tribe of Judah, because this is the genealogy through Judah (1:2). The two spies who had been faithful the first time when spies were sent out were Joshua and Caleb- of the tribes of Ephraim and Judah (Num. 13:6; Jud. 2:9). It seems a fair guess that when the two spies were sent out, they were from these same two tribes.

Salmon was a prince of the tribe of Judah- it's a fair guess that he was one of the two spies who went to Rahab, and he subsequently married her.

1:5 *Salmon begot Boaz of Rahab and Boaz begot Obed of Ruth and Obed begot Jesse*- Rahab was a Gentile and a sinner. Jesus was morally perfect, and yet the genealogy shows how He had much against Him spiritually. We can't blame our lack of spirituality upon our bad background. Note that there was so much intermarriage with Gentiles like Rahab and Ruth throughout Israel's history; their standing with God was therefore never on the basis of ethnic purity, but rather by cultural identity and God's grace. Matthew's genealogy features [unusually, for Jewish genealogies] several women, who had become the ancestors of Messiah through unusual relationships. It's almost as if the genealogy is there in the form that it is to pave the way for the account of Mary's conception of Jesus without a man.

1:6 *Jesse begot David the king*- Literally "*the* David *the* king". The others aren't mentioned as being kings. The implication may be that Jesus was the promised descendant of David and the promises of eternal Kingship made to David's descendant are therefore applicable to Jesus.

And David begot Solomon of her that had been the wife of Uriah- Literally "she of Uriah". "She that that been the wife of" is added by some translators in explanation, but isn't in the original. Whilst God 'forgets' sin in the sense that He no longer holds it against us, the memory of those sins isn't obliterated, and His word is full of such allusions to sin which although He has forgiven it and symbolically "blotted it out", it still remains within Divine history. We too can forgive but 'forgetting' isn't always possible, and is no sign that we have failed to forgive.

1:7 *And Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah, Abijah begot Asa* - Wicked Roboam begat wicked Abia; wicked Abia begat good Asa; good Asa begat good Josaphat; good Josaphat begat wicked Joram. Perhaps the emphasis is that spirituality isn't genetic, and neither is sinfulness. Jesus was perfect despite being from such "bad blood"; and we likewise can't blame our failures on bad background. Neither can we assume that the children of the faithful will be righteous.

1:8 *Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram, Joram begot Uzziah*- Three generations are skipped here. See on 1:17. Perhaps the omission was because Joram married Athaliah, daughter of Jezebel the wife of Ahab, and those generations were idolaters. As we note on 1:12, children who don't worship the true God are forgotten in the ultimate course of Divine history. In this case, his iniquity was indeed visited upon the third generation (Ex. 20:3-6).We also see here a fulfilment of the prophecy that Ahab's house would be eradicated (2 Kings 9:8).

1:9 *Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, Ahaz begot Hezekiah*- The record here and in :10 seems to stress that the good beget the bad who beget the good; as if to establish the point that natural pedigree is no guarantee of spirituality. This was something the Jews needed to appreciate.

1:10 *Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh begot Amon, Amon begot Josiah*- See on :9.

1:11 *Josiah begot Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the captivity in Babylon*-

The apparent contradiction with 1 Chron. 3:5,6 is solved if we understand this to be a reference to Joachin.

1:12 *And after the captivity in Babylon, Jechoniah begot Shealtiel, Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel*- Therefore the reference to Jechoniah being written "childless" (Jer. 22:30) perhaps means that as Jeremiah goes on to comment "No man of his seed shall prosper". If our children aren't spiritually prosperous, it is as if we were childless. Thus we see that the whole purpose of having children is to "raise a Godly seed".

1:13 *Zerubbabel begot Abiud*- Other children of Zerubbabel are recored in 1 Chron. 3:19. But it was through one who was not otherwise of note or fame that the Lord was descended. Or perhaps Abiud was another name for one of the sons listed there. The apparent contradiction with Lk. 3:27 is solved if we read that as "which was the son of Rhesa Zerubbabel". See on :16.

Abiud begot Eliakim, Eliakim begot Azor- This part of the genealogy is not found in the Old Testament. We wonder whether God as it were beamed this information into Matthew, or whether he did his own research through public registers and was Divinely guided and inspired in his findings and how he recorded it.

1:14 *Azor begot Sadoc, Sadoc begot Achim, Achim begot Eliud*- Matthew is presenting the line through Judah. But there was a Levite at this time also called "Zadok" (Neh. 10:21). It could be that this person was descended from both Judah and Levi through an inter-tribal marriage of his parents. In this case he would've been a potential king-priest, preparing the way for us to understand Jesus as a king-priest.

1:15 *Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot Matthan, Matthan begot Jacob*- The genealogies prove that Joseph was a descendant of David, indeed the rightful king of Israel had there been a monarchy at the time of Jesus. Jesus was his adopted son; he was "as was supposed", or 'as was reckoned by law', the son of Joseph (Lk. 3:23). The record in Luke appears to be that of Mary; Joseph being "the son of Heli" was probably by reason of marrying Mary, the daughter of Heli (Lk. 3:23); the Talmud speaks with gross vitriolic about Mary the daughter of Heli going to hell for her blasphemy, referring to Mary the mother of Jesus. This shows that the Jews accept that Mary was the daughter of Heli. Heli's father was Matthat, who can be equated with Matthan the grandfather of Joseph. Thus Mary and Joseph were cousins (hinting at an arranged marriage?), and therefore Jesus was a son of David through both his mother and father by adoption. In the light of this it is evident that the question mark over the validity of a genealogy through Joseph is an irrelevancy, seeing that Joseph and Mary had a common grandfather. The point has to be made that a humanly fabricated genealogy would be sure to make some glaring errors, especially if it was produced by simple, uneducated men as the Jews claim the New Testament was. The wonder of the New Testament genealogies is that closer study reveals ever more intricate internal evidence for their truth and reliability, rather than exposing more problems.

1:16 *Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ*- Lk. 3:27 describes Zerubbabel as the head / chief / leader. The term Rhesa is incorrectly rendered in many versions as a name. Perhaps Luke's point was that the Lord Jesus was the final Messiah, after the failure of so many potential ones beforehand. 'Zerubbabel the chief' would then be a similar rubric to "David the king" in Matthew's genealogy (:6).

Joseph was actually the rightful king of Israel, according to this genealogy. Yet he was living in poverty and without recognition for who he was- exactly the kind of person God would use for the great task of raising His only begotten Son.

1:17 *So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations and from David to the captivity in Babylon fourteen generations and from the captivity in Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations*- This must have some connection with the 42 stopping places before Israel reached Canaan, as described in Num.33:2. Thus the birth of Christ would be like God's people entering the promised land of the Kingdom in some way. It could be argued from this (and other evidence) that it was God's intention for the Kingdom to be entered by Israel at the time of Jesus- it was after all, His intention that Israel accepted their Messiah. But they crucified Him, and therefore the potential didn't come true. This open ended nature of God's prophetic program means that it's impossible to fit together all latter day prophecies into some chronological framework.

The genealogy presented by Matthew doesn't include every generation, there are some gaps (see on 1:8; and Zorababel was Salathiel's grandson, 1 Chron. 3:19, yet 1:12 says be "begat" him). Thus some "begat" their grandson or great grandson. Clearly Matthew had a purpose in presenting the material like this- but expositors have failed to come up with anything convincing. It could simply be that the Gospels were designed to be memorized, as most Christians were illiterate; and the 3 x 14 structure was to aid memorization. One interesting observation is that the last 14 generations from the captivity to the time of Christ amount to the 490 years prophesied for this same period by Dan. 9:25- if we take a generation to be 35 years, which it is in Job 42:16. The numerical value of the Hebrew word "David" is 14, so it could also be that Matthew is eloquently demonstrating that Jesus was indeed the promised seed of David. If indeed six is the number of man and seven represents perfection, then 6 x 7 = 42- the generations culminated in the perfect man, Jesus.

1:18 *Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit*- The Greek seems to imply she was understood ["found"] to be with a child which had come *ek*, out of, from, the Holy Spirit. This could be implying that Joseph himself believed or perceived that the child was from the Holy Spirit. This would explain why he sought not to humiliate her publically about the matter (1:19).

The descriptions of Mary as keeping things in her heart (Lk. 2:19,52), and the way it seems she didn't tell Joseph about the Angel's visit, but instead immediately went down to Elisabeth for three months… all these are indications that Mary, like many sensitive people, was a very closed woman. Only when Mary was "found" pregnant by Joseph (Mt. 1:18- s.w. to see, perceive, be obvious) was the situation explained to him by an Angel. It seems His move to divorce her was based on his noticing she was pregnant, and she hadn't given any explanation to him. She "arose" after perhaps being face down on the ground as the Angel spoke with her, and went immediately off to Elisabeth. And then, after three months she returns evidently pregnant (Lk. 1:39). Mary is portrayed as somehow separate from the other ministering women. It would have been psychologically impossible, or at best very hard, for the mother of the Lord to hang around with them. The group dynamics would have been impossible. Likewise in Acts 1:14 we have "the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus", as if she is separate from

them. She followed Him to Cana, uninvited, and also to Capernaum. Next she is at the cross risking her life, but she isn't among the women who went to the grave. Why not? It was surely natural that she would go there, and that the other women would go with her to comfort her. But she was a loner; either she went alone, as I think I would have tried to, or she just couldn't face contact with the others and simply hid away. And could it be that Jesus, in recognition of her unique perception of Him, appeared to her first privately, in a rightfully unrecorded meeting? But by Acts 1:14, she was in the upper room, as if His death led her to be more reconciled to her brethren, to seek to get along with them... although by nature, in her heart and soul, she was a loner, maybe almost reclusive. A struggler to understand. A meditator, a reflector, who just wanted to be alone, one of those who take their energy from themselves rather than from other people.

1:19 *And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not willing to make her a public example, decided to send her away secretly*- The very same phrase is used by Matthew to describe Christ as the ultimately just or righteous man as He hung upon the cross (27:19,24; Lk. 23:47; 1 Pet. 3:18); the implication is surely that Joseph's just or righteousness played a role in the final perfection of Jesus as the ultimately "just man". For it was he who would've first taught Jesus the *shema*, emphasizing the word "one" as Jewish fathers did, correcting the young Jesus as He stutteringly repeated it. The same term is used about Jesus now in His heavenly glory (Acts 22:14; 1 Jn. 2:1) and as He will be at the day of judgment (2 Tim. 4:8); the influence of parents upon their children is in some sense eternal. For Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever; we too, as the sum of all the influences upon us, will really be saved and immortalized as persons. And the same was true of Jesus; hence the words and style of Mary's hymn of praise can be found repeated in the later words of Jesus, and also in the words He spoke from Heaven to the churches in Revelation. Joseph had various alternatives open to him; the trial of jealousy of Numbers 5, divorce, seeking compensation from the father, public shaming of the wife, or to stone her. But his justice was such that he sought to show grace and quietly divorce her (see on 1:20 *Take unto you*). Love protects from shame, not as it were covering up sin which needs to be exposed, but seeking to cover over in the sense that God's atonement covers over our sins, as 1 Cor. 13 defines at length.

It was normal that the father of the crucified disposed of the body. But another Joseph, also described as a "just man" as Joseph was (Lk. 23:50), was the one who took this responsibility; remember that Joseph was alive and known as the apparent father of Jesus during His ministry (Jn. 6:42). Likewise one would think it appropriate that the first person to whom the risen Lord revealed Himself would've been to His mother, for she after all was the channel of the whole marvelous thing, the only one who for sure believed in a virgin birth. But by an apparently cruel twist of circumstance, it was to another Mary, Magdalene, that the Lord first revealed Himself, and it is she and not His mother Mary who takes the message to others. In this context we recall how in His last mortal moments, Christ motioned to His mother that John and not He was now her son (Jn. 19:26), addressing her as "woman" rather than "mother"- an unusual and even rude form of address to use to ones' mother in public. In all this we see a conscious diminishing of the human significance of the Lord's earthly family, in order to underline that now a new family of Jesus had been brought into existence by the cross. This must have been so hard for Joseph and Mary, as it is for us- to realize that we are

but channels, used by God in certain ways at certain times, to the development of His glory according to His program and not our own.

1:20 *But as he thought on these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying: Joseph you son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit*- The descriptions of Jesus as a "man", a human being, have little meaning if in fact He pre-existed as God for millions of years before. The descriptions of Him as "begotten" (passive of *gennan* in Mt. 1:16,20) make no suggestion of pre-existence at all. And the words of the Lord Jesus and His general behaviour would have to be read as all being purposefully deceptive, if in fact He was really a pre-existent god. There is no hint of any belief in a pre-existent Jesus until the writings of Justin Martyr in the second century- and he only develops the idea in his dialogue with Trypho the Jew. The Biblical accounts of the Lord's conception and birth just flatly contradict the idea of pre-existence.

He thought- The Greek *en-thumeomai* could mean to be angry or indignant, for that is how *thumeomai* is usually translated in the NT. His anger and frustration would still be possible even if he correctly perceived that the child was from God (see on 1:18).

"Do not be afraid" was a feature of Joseph's life at this time. The three Angelic appearances to him which are recorded show him immediately responding. Such immediacy of response is typical of God's faithful servants; delay in these cases is so often an excuse for inaction and disbelief. The Greek *phobeo* is also used of reverence and awe before God. Perhaps he understandably thought that he could in no way marry and sleep with a woman who had been the channel of God's Spirit to produce His only begotten son. Those thoughts surely did cross his mind, whatever view we take of *phobeo* here. We see here the sensitivity of God to human fears and feelings; He knows our thoughts and fears perfectly, and gives the needed assurance. The message that "that which is conceived of her *is* of the Holy Spirit" would therefore have had the emphasis upon the word "is", confirming Joseph in his perception (see on 1:18- he had perceived [AV "found] that the child was of the Holy Spirit).

The implication of "take Mary as your wife" could be that they were about to marry, when it became apparent Mary was pregnant. He immediately married her (:24), seeking to protect her from the shame of the situation, thereby giving the impression that the child was his.

1:21 *And she shall give birth to a son, and you shall call his name Jesus; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins*- But the mission of Jesus was to save "the world" (Jn. 3:17), to save those enter into Him (Jn. 10:9; Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:13). The "world" is ultimately the people of Christ whose sins have been forgiven.

1:22 *Now all this happened so what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying*- The present tense reflects the ongoing, living nature of God's word. Otherwise, a past tense would be required. What was spoken is still being spoken to each individual Bible reader / listener.

1:23 *The virgin shall be with child and shall give birth to a son; and they shall call his name Immanuel, which means God with us*- God *meta* us means somewhat more than

simply “God with us”. The idea is also “among”. God is now among humanity through we who are the body of Christ.

1:24 *And Joseph woke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife*- Such immediate obedience is highly commendable, especially as marrying an already pregnant woman was bound to make the rest of his life very difficult. We think of Rebekah and others who were immediately obedient; it is the flesh that always wishes to delay our response.

1:25 *But he did not have sexual intercourse with her until she had given birth to a son; and he called his name Jesus*- The obedience of Joseph (in this case, to :21) is emphasized. Likewise 2:20,21 “Arise... and he arose”.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 2

2:1 *Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea in the days of Herod the king, astrologers from the east came to Jerusalem, saying*- Probably Jews from Babylon who had seen the similarity between the 'star' and the Messianic star out of Jacob whom Balaam had prophesied (Num. 24:17). Perhaps they are called here *magos*, sorcerers, magic men, because this is the image they presented to Herod, rather than stating they were Jews in search of Judah's Messianic King. Daniel had once been counted amongst the 'wise men' of Babylon (Dan. 2:48).

2:2 *Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east and have come to worship him*- The star did not take them directly to Bethlehem. It may have disappeared for a while, so they went to Jerusalem, assuming the king was to be born there. This would indicate they were ignorant of Mic. 5:2, the prophecy of Messiah's birth in Bethlehem, or had at least failed to interpret the prophecy properly. Seeing that stars do not move across the sky over time in a way which can be followed on earth over a period of days or weeks, it's clear that again (see on :1), things are being described as they appeared to an observer on earth. It could be that they first saw the 'star' two years previously (see on 2:16).

Some kings become kings by revolution or war, others are born into a kingly line. They clearly understood that this king was in the kingly line of Judah- a direct descendant of David.

2:3 *And when Herod the king heard it, he was disturbed and all Jerusalem with him*- "All Jerusalem" were "troubled", whereas the birth of Messiah was to be a time of joy for Israel and "to all people" (Lk. 2:10). The despised and lowly shepherds rejoiced, but "Jerusalem", perhaps referring to the Jewish ruling class, were "troubled". They rejected the good news of the Gospel because it threatened their little power structure. "All Jerusalem" cannot be taken literally because there were some in the city awaiting the birth of Messiah and joyful at the news of His birth (Lk. 2:38).

2:4 *And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ should be born*- The priests are repeatedly described in the OT as the priests *of Yahweh* . Now they are merely the priests of the people, just as the OT "the feasts of Yahweh" become 'feasts of the Jews' in the Gospels. They hijacked Yahweh's religion and turned it into their own religion, meeting the basic religious needs of humans, rather than accepting His Truth for what it was. Biblically there was

to only be one chief priest- but Israel now had several, hence the plural *chief priests*.

"Be born" is Gk. *gennao*. Messiah was procreated, gendered, beginning within the womb of Mary- a concept incompatible with theories of a literal pre-existence of Christ.

Herod understood that the wise men were seeking the Messiah. This indicates that they were Jews who understood Messiah to be the King of Judah in David's line.

2:5 *And they said to him: In Bethlehem of Judea. For thus it is written through the prophet*- We get the impression that the reply was immediate, and that it was expected that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. When Angels appeared in praise of a baby born to a poor woman in a stable, people were not so quick to accept that God acted not according to their expectations of Him. And Judaism within the next 30 years moved away from this expectation towards a position whereby they taught that nobody could know where Messiah was from (see on Jn. 7:27).

2:6 *And you Bethlehem, land of Judah, are in no way least among the princes of Judah. For out of you shall come forth a Ruler, who shall be shepherd of My people Israel*- The emphasis is on the word "not". She was perceived as the least, but she was not in God's sight. This is so typically His style- to use the most despised and lowly in order to do His work. The same was His style with Mary.

2:7 *Then Herod secretly called the Magi and learned from them exactly what time the star appeared*- Herod was already making his plan. He wanted to know when the star had appeared because he felt the need to destroy any possible competitors to him. Already the desperate plan of mass genocide was forming within him. And there is a psychological consistency and ring of truth in the record. For "learned from them exactly" is the same word used in Mt. 2:8 of how he urges the wise men to "search carefully". If we are passionate about something, we wish others to have that passion; we urge them to the same feelings and attitudes which we have. And Herod does this to the wise men. The Scriptures time and again have this ring of psychological credibility to them; and when they then invite us to believe in the supernatural, the flow of credibility continues naturally.

2:8 *And he sent them to Bethlehem*- They followed this providential leading, and then the star re-appeared and confirmed them in the path (:9). Divine guidance is rarely constant, there are times when it appears to leave us and we are left to work and order our path on our own initiative, and then guidance reappears to confirm us.

And said: Go and search carefully for the young child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I may also come and worship him- "Search" is the same Greek word as in 2:7 concerning how Herod enquired diligently about Jesus. The impression is given that Herod wanted the wise men to as it were be his agents; his diligence was to be theirs. It could be that he was simply lazy to himself go to Bethlehem to see the child when it was far from confirmed that the child was in fact there.

2:9 *And they, having heard the king, went their way; and the star which they saw in the east went before them until it came and stood over where the young child was*- The star gave varying degrees of guidance- it led them to Palestine, and then to Jerusalem in general. Then it disappeared. Now it specifically pinpointed the building in Bethlehem. Divine guidance is rather similar in our lives.

2:10 *And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy*- Because the

star had disappeared but had now reappeared.

2:11 *And they came into the house and saw the young child with Mary his mother; and they fell down and worshipped him, and opening their treasures they offered to him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh*- These three gifts are typically what was offered to kings and there are several references to kings being presented with these three things. The extent of the wise men's conviction was therefore very great. This is how much it can cost us to accept that Jesus really is Lord and King of our lives- financial expense, risk, long travel...

Note the absence of any reference to Joseph. His amazing obedience and immediacy of response to God's word wasn't rewarded by any permanent recognition. He played his role without recognition, and this is the lesson to us in our largely unrecognized and humanly unappreciated lives.

2:12 *And being warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod*- The Greek for "warned" implies 'to be answered', so it seems they had prayed to God for guidance- and now received it.

They departed for their own country by another route- As Joseph the next night likewise had an Angelic message, immediately responded and 'departed' to another country. Their obedience was an example for Joseph and Mary to follow.2:13,14 Joseph was told to arise and take Jesus to Egypt; and he arose from sleep and did it. And the same double 'arising' occurred when he left Egypt to return to Israel (Mt 2:13,14 cp. 20,21).

2:13 *Now when they had departed, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying: Arise and take the young child and his mother and flee into Egypt and stay there until I tell you, for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him*- The Hebrew idea of 'seeking' includes the idea of worship- which was exactly Herod's pretext for wanting to locate Jesus. If Joseph hadn't been obedient, would God's whole plan in the Lord Jesus have been destroyed? Presumably so, or else the whole impression given of command and obedience would be meaningless, for Joseph would've just been acting out as a puppet.

2:14 *And he arose and took the young child and his mother by night and departed into Egypt*- That same hour of the night (assuming dreams happen at night), Joseph obeyed the strange call. The observation has been made that Matthew's record has much to say about Joseph, and Mary is presented as passive; whereas in Luke, far more attention is given to Mary herself. The suggestion has been made by Tom Gaston that Joseph gave eyewitness testimony which was used by Matthew, and Mary gave such testimony to Luke. "Arose and took" was in exact obedience to 2:13 "arise and take". See on 1:25. For *Departed*- See on 2:12.

2:15 *And stayed there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: Out of Egypt did I call My son*- One of many NT statements of the nature of inspiration of the OT writers. God spoke *dia* the prophets, they were a channel *for His word*, they were not speaking merely for and of themselves.

The emphasis is that *Joseph* fulfilled this prophecy- the grammar states that *he* was in Egypt until he was told to return. Hos. 11:1,2 speaks of how Israel were disobedient to this call: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt... But

the more I called Israel, the further they went from me". The implication again is that Joseph had the freewill to obey this call or not- and he was obedient. For the call to leave Egypt had not been answered by Israel and it was no foregone conclusion that it would have to be by Joseph.

2:16 *Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the astrologers*- The record doesn't give the impression that the wise men did what they did because they were mocking Herod. Rather did they fear him and obeyed God's desire to foil his evil plot. But Herod perceived what they did as mocking him, and the record states things from the perspective of how he perceived things [as with the language of demons]- see on 2:1.

Was furious- An example of where the Bible teaches us basic human psychology. He felt mocked by the wise men, although actually they hadn't mocked him, he just perceived it that way- and so he took out his anger against them on the babies of Bethlehem. He transferred his anger from one to another. And that explains why the woman behind the till was so angry with you for no reason this morning- because she was transferring onto you the anger she felt against her mother / partner / neighbour arising from an incident [probably a misunderstanding and wrong imputation of motives] which happened last night.

And sent out soldiers and slew all the male children that were in Bethlehem and in all the borders of it aged two years and under, according to the time which he had determined from the Magi- This would suggest that when he asked them when the star had first appeared, they replied 'about two years ago'. It would seem they had been planning their journey, or perhaps even making it, for two years.

2:17 *Then was fulfilled that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, saying*- Be aware that when it comes to *prophecy*, in the sense of foretelling future events, the New Testament sometimes seems to quote the Old Testament *without* attention to the context- at least, so far as human Bible scholarship can discern. The early chapters of Matthew contain at least three examples of quotations whose context just cannot fit the application given: Mt. 2:14,15 cp. Hos. 11:1; Mt. 2:17,18 cp. Jer. 31:15; Mt. 1:23 cp. Is. 7:14. Much Christian material about Israel shows how they have returned to the land, rebuilt the ruined cities, made the desert blossom etc., as fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies in Jeremiah etc. The context of these prophecies often doesn't fit a return to the land by Jews in the 20th century; but on the other hand, the correspondence between these prophecies and recent history is so remarkable that it can't be just coincidence. So again we are led to conclude that a few words here and there within a prophecy can sometimes have a fulfilment outside that which the context seems to require.

2:18 *A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children*- But the focus of the massacre was Bethlehem. Clearly a reference to one event is being applied to another, and this is how Matthew understood the 'fulfilment' of prophecy.

And she would not be comforted, because they are not- The words are used about Rachel's husband Jacob weeping for Joseph, a clear type of the Lord, and refusing to be comforted because he 'was not' [Gen. 37:35- cp. the brothers' explanation about Joseph's supposed death, that "one is not", Gen. 42:13]. This again is rather out of strict context because Rachel died before Joseph's supposed death (Gen. 35:19). The literary

argument seems to be that *if* she had then been alive, *then* she would have wept as Jacob wept for her son Joseph. Jacob's weeping [on behalf of Rachel] for the death of Joseph / Jesus was ultimately misplaced because Joseph was safe in Egypt. And so the weeping of 'Rachel' for the Bethlehem babies was done whilst Jesus was in fact safe in Egypt. This could explain the semantic link between the quotation of 'Out of Egypt have I called My Son' and then this quotation about Rachel weeping as Jacob wept for Joseph, when in fact he was safe in Egypt. Jer. 31:15,16 reports Rachel weeping for her children who had been lost, and then being told to stop crying because they would come again from the Gentile land where they had been taken. In other words, she was being told that the children she thought were dead and gone were actually alive- in a Gentile land. Which was exactly the case with Jacob's mourning for Joseph which is clearly the basis for the mourning of 'Rachel' here. But then the problem is that the women this verse is applied to in Matthew 2 had lost actual children by real physical death. It's all a very complicated argument, and very forced and unsatisfactory to Western eyes and ears because the context appears to always be so inappropriate and the facts don't quite fit. Only parts of the picture fit. But this is very much the style of Jewish *midrash* [commentary] on the Old Testament. It probably would've been more persuasive, interesting and intriguing to first century Jewish ears than it is to ours in the 21st Century.

2:19 *But when Herod was dead, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying*- Literally, "appears", not 'appeared'. The inconsistent use of tenses isn't the grammatical mistake of an uneducated, uninspired writer. This device is common in the Gospels. It focuses attention upon the Angel appearing, and encourages us to re-live the moment, as if to say, 'And wow, lo and behold- an Angel appears!'. The Gospels were initially intended for public reading, even performance on street corners, as the majority of people in the first century world were illiterate. So this kind of device is just what we would expect.

2:20 *Arise and take the young child and his mother and go into the land of Israel, for they are dead that sought the young child's life*- Herod was not alone in wanting Jesus dead. The "they" presumably referred to the Jerusalem leadership of 2:3 [see note there].

2:21 *And he arose and took the young child and his mother and came into the land of Israel*- Again we note his immediate obedience. International migration was a major thing in those days, when people rarely travelled more than 50 km. from their birthplace let alone moved that far.

2:22 *But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he withdrew into the region of Galilee*- The implication could be that Joseph had no other information apart that from Herod had died, but on crossing the border, he learnt that Herod's son was reigning- and Joseph feared to go further. Therefore, so I read the record, God made a concession to Joseph's weakness and told him to go to the backwater of Galilee. He "turned aside" into Galilee suggests in the Greek that he 'withdrew himself', as if pulling back into obscurity. The same Greek word is found in Mt. 12:15: "Jesus withdrew himself from there". He likewise "withdrew into a desert place" (Mt. 14:13), "withdrew [from the crowds]" (Mk. 3:7), "withdrew" when the crowds wanted to crown Him King (Jn. 6:15), judges "withdrew" and talked privately amongst themselves (Acts 26:31). So the picture seems to be that God intended Joseph

to raise Jesus somewhere other than Galilee, perhaps in Bethlehem or Jerusalem. But Joseph feared Archelaus, and therefore he was given a 'plan B', to withdraw and fade away into the obscurity of Nazareth. But in God's perfect way, the upbringing in Nazareth could also fulfil His plans and this explains the otherwise rather forced interpretation that Jesus lived in Nazareth so that He would be a 'Nazarene' (see on 2:23). God works oftentimes with us in the same way. He makes concessions to our weaknesses, and whilst the plan Bs, Cs and Ds don't fit as snugly into His prophetic intentions as plan A might have done- they still fit. Because He makes them fit. And that in my opinion explains the slight sense we get in some parts of the record here that events are being 'made to fit' Bible prophecies. And we see it in our own lives. We may take a plan C or D, e.g. a sister may marry an unbeliever, and this doesn't mean that God's purpose with her finishes, but rather that [e.g.] Bible teaching about marriage just doesn't fit as snugly to her experience as it might have done otherwise.

2:23 *And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets*- It was not specifically spoken by plural prophets that Messiah was to be called "a Nazarene" because He would grow up in despised Nazareth, but that was the implication of the prophecies that Messiah was to be despised of men. See on 2:22 for some thoughts about this apparent 'forcing' of the prophetic fulfilment here.

That he should be called a Nazarene - The town was despised spiritually as incapable of producing a prophet (Jn. 1:46; 7:52), and yet in Hebrew it meant 'town of the shoot', and the shoot was a title of Messiah (Is. 11:1). Again this is typical of God's style- to invest the most spiritually despised with the highest spiritual calling.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 3

3:1 *And in those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying*- Presumably this connects with 2:23, meaning that whilst the Lord was still living in Nazareth, John began preaching. One wonders whether John maybe began his ministry up to three and a half years before the baptism of Jesus, seeing his work was typical of the three and a half year Elijah ministry preparing for the *second* coming of the Lord Jesus.

3:2 *Repent! For the kingdom of heaven is at hand*-

"Salvation near to come" in Is. 56:1 is the same idea as discussed on Is. 46:13; 51:5: "I bring near My righteousness, it shall not be far off, and My salvation shall not wait; and I will place salvation in Zion... My righteousness is near, My salvation is gone forth". The idea was that the restoration of God's Kingdom, "salvation", had come near to the Jews in exile- and all they had to do was accept it, leave Babylon and go to Zion in faith and live it. But they refused, and most didn't even leave Babylon at that time. But God's word [of this restored Kingdom] didn't return to Him without having achieved its end- because this amazing good news was and is offered to the whole world, of whatever ethnicity, Jew or Gentile. And so the language is taken up in the New Testament- the Kingdom of God 'came near' again in the first century (Mt. 3:2; 10:7 "the kingdom is at hand"; Lk. 10:9,11; 21:31; James 5:8). The Kingdom coming near doesn't therefore have to mean that it was inevitably about to come. "Near", in the context of the Isaiah passages, meant that the possibility of it coming was indeed "near" at that time. But if it wasn't accepted, then the possibility would recede and be reapplied

to others. It came near to the exiles in Babylon, it came near to first century Israel- but both times they rejected it. And so it has come near to us, especially in these last days.

There has always been the rulership of God over the individuals whose hearts accept His Kingship. But through the work of the Lord Jesus, this rulership was made so much greater, and His example, teaching and spirit enabled believers to come more totally within that rulership. But clearly the Kingdom was "at hand" not in the sense of its literal establishment on earth physically, but in that as King of the Kingdom, the Lord Jesus could rightly have "the Kingdom of Heaven" as a title.

It appears that Matthew under inspiration expressed the Gospel in terms which were attractive and not unduly provocative to his hearers, hence he uses 'Heaven' for 'God' as was common Jewish practice. We too should present the Gospel with the same kind of forethought to the sensitivities and nature of our audience, rather than baldly present 'truth' to them considering that we have thereby done our duty. We are not seeking to merely fulfil a duty, but to actually "so speak" that we convert men and women.

A possibility is that the Kingdom of God / Heaven could have come soon at that time ["at hand"] *if* Israel had repented. Then they would not have killed their Messiah and King but rather accepted Him. Whilst God's purpose was not ultimately thwarted by Israel's rejection of the Lord Jesus and their impenitence, the Divine project would have taken a different form if they had repented and accepted Him. We note that those who responded to John's call to repentance were again asked to "Repent" by the Lord (Mt. 4:17). Their repentance was therefore only surface level. The Lord cursed the fig tree (cp. Israel) because they had only leaves, an appearance of repentance and spiritual fruit in responding to John's message, but actually there was not even the first sign of real fruit on that tree when it was really analysed. The Lord describes John as mourning to his audience, and them *not* mourning in sympathy and response (Lk. 7:32). They rejoiced in the idea of repentance, but never really got down to it.

3:3 *For this is he*- Is this part of John's message about *Jesus*? Or is this a note from Matthew about *John* being the voice in the wilderness? The other Gospel writers use the Isaiah quotation as if it is their comment on John (Mk. 1:3; Lk. 3:4). The present tense 'this is he' can be understood as part of the dramatic present tense style of some parts of the Gospels [see on 2:19]. The way Mt. 3:4 continues "And this same John..." might suggest that "This is he" is also Matthew's comment about John.

The voice of one crying- When asked who he was, John's reply was simply: "a voice" (Lk. 3:7). He was nothing; his message about Jesus was everything. In all this there is a far cry from the self-confident, self-projecting speaking off the podium which characterizes so much of our 'preaching' today. So John's appeal to repentance was shot through with a recognition of his own humanity. It wasn't mere moralizing. We likely don't preach as John did because we fear that confronting people with their sins is inappropriate for us to do, because we too are sinners. But with recognition of our own humanity, we build a bridge between our audience and ourselves. In this context it's worth reconsidering Lk. 3:7: "Who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?". John said these words to those who were coming to him wishing to be baptized by him- exactly because he had warned them of the wrath to come. It's possible that John meant this as a rhetorical reflection, thus enabling us to paraphrase him something like this: 'And what kind of man am I, who am I, just another sinful guy like you, who has warned you to flee? I'm nothing- don't get baptized because of me, but because you repent and

are committed to bringing forth the fruits of repentance". And it's worth meditating that if Israel had responded to his preaching, then the glorious salvation of God might have even then been revealed in the form of the Kingdom coming on earth, even then. But instead of heeding John's message, Israel in the end crucified their King, necessitating a latter day John the Baptist mission (Mt. 11:13,14; 17:11,12). And it's not going too far to suggest that our latter day witness to Israel and indeed to the world is to conducted in the spirit of John's preaching; hence the crucial importance of understanding the spirit and content of his witness.

In the wilderness- John the Baptist prepared a highway in the desert through baptizing repentant people (Mk. 1:3,4). This highway was to be a path *to* Christ as well as the one He would travel. Those converted became a path to Christ for others. One purpose of our calling to the Gospel is to assist others onto that same way. And it's worth reflecting that Christ can only come once the way for Him is prepared- as if His coming depends upon a certain level of response to our preaching, especially to the Jews of the very last days.

Make ready the way of the Lord- The quotation from Isaiah suggests that if the way was prepared by human repentance, then this would be the path over which the Lord's glory would return to Zion in the establishment of the Kingdom. See on 3:2 *repent*. The strong suggestion is that the Lord's coming in glory was a possibility if Israel had repented at John's preaching and accepted Jesus as their Messiah. Lk. 3:6 goes on to say that if they had repented, then the prophecy that "all flesh shall see the salvation of God" would come true- and that is clearly language of the future Kingdom of God on earth. For not even all Israel saw / perceived the Jesus / salvation of God, let alone "all flesh". The term "all flesh" is used frequently in the OT about mankind generally rather than just Israel; indeed it is used in contradistinction to Israel (Dt. 5:26; Job 34:15; Is. 49:26; Is. 66:16,23,24; Jer. 25:31; Dan. 4:12).

Make His paths straight- The implication is that the repentance of people in Judah would make straight the Lord's path over which He would travel. Repentant people are therefore His way to Jerusalem. This of itself suggests that the Lord shall only come to Zion once there is repentance in Israel, seeing repentant people are the way or road which enables Him to travel. The allusion is clearly to the practice of preparing the road for an important person to travel upon. The whole metaphor suggests that Christ will only come to Zion once His people are spiritually ready, once there is repentance, perhaps specifically in Israel. John the Baptist was to prepare the Lord's way (Lk. 1:76 same Greek words). But it was repentant people who were to prepare the Lord's way. John's appeal was for others to prepare the Lord's way by repentance. But his preaching meant that he was the one preparing the way; the change of life in his hearers would therefore as it were be counted to John. The work of preparing the Lord's way is mentioned in Mal. 3:1 as being the work of "the messenger"; and the context appears to be the restoration from Babylon. Perhaps because those addressed in Is. 40:1 ("Prepare *ye*") failed in their task and God sought to see it fulfilled through a specific messenger.

The ideas of fleeing wrath (Lk. 3:7) and preparing a way are surely based upon the Law's command in Dt. 19:3 that a way or road should be prepared to the city of refuge (symbolic of Christ- Heb. 6:18), along which the person under the death sentence for manslaughter could flee for refuge. John was preparing that way or road to Christ, and urging ordinary people to flee along it. They didn't like to think they were under a death

sentence for murder. They were just ordinary folk like the soldiers who grumbled about their wages, and the publicans who were a bit less than honest at work. But they had to flee. But they wouldn't be alone in that. If a man prepares his way after God's principles (2 Chron. 27:6; Prov. 4:26), then God will 'prepare' that man's way too (Ps. 37:23; 119:5), confirming him in the way of escape.
His paths straight- There is a definite allusion to the language here in Acts 13:10, where a man is accused by Paul of perverting "the right [s.w. 'straight'] ways of the Lord". Paul clearly saw *his* mission as likewise to prepare straight paths for the Lord Jesus by preaching the Gospel of transformation. The implication could be that John's mission ultimately failed, in that the Lord Jesus did not come to Zion in glory. Paul seems to imply that therefore that work is now placed upon all Christian preachers; we are to prepare the way so that the Lord can come to Zion and establish God's Kingdom. When we read that Paul instructed men "in the way of the Lord" (Acts 18:25) we have the same idea- we are preparing the way of the Lord Jesus. Each person who is truly converted is part of the Lord's highway, and once there is sufficient transformation of human life, the way will be ready enough for the Lord to return upon it.

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

There was an intensity and critical urgency about John and his message. John urged people to make their path "straight"- using a Greek word elsewhere translated "immediately", "forthwith" (Lk. 3:4 s.w. Mk. 1:12,28 and often). Getting things straight in our lives is a question of immediate response. He warns people to "flee from the wrath to come" (Lk. 3:7). This was what their changed lives and baptisms were to be about- a fleeing from the wrath to come. He speaks as if that "wrath to come" is just about to come, it's staring them in the face like a wall of forest fire, and they are to flee away from it. And yet Paul (in one of his many allusions to John's message, which perhaps he had heard himself 'live') speaks of "the wrath to come" as being the wrath of the final judgment (1 Thess. 1:10), or possibly that of AD70 (1 Thess. 2:16). But both those events would not have come upon the majority of John's audience. And the day of 'wrath to come' is clearly ultimately to be at the Lord's return (Rev. 6:17; 11:18). Yet John zooms his hearers forward in time, to perceive that they face condemnation and judgment day right now, as they hear the call of the Gospel. This was a feature of John; he had the faith which sees things which are not as though they already are. Thus

he looked at Jesus walking towards him and commented that here was the “Lamb of God”, a phrase the Jews would’ve understood as referring to the lamb which was about to be sacrificed on Passover (Jn. 1:29). John presumably was referencing the description of the crucified Jesus in Is. 53:7; for John, he foresaw it all, it was as if he saw Jesus as already being led out to die, even though that event was over three years distant. And so he could appeal to his audience to face judgment day as if they were standing there already. We need to have the same perspective.

John the Baptist's ministry was so that the 'crooked' nation of Israel should be 'made straight' and ready to accept Jesus as Messiah (Lk. 3:5). God's enabling power was present so that this might have happened; but the same word is used in Acts 2:40 and Phil. 2:15 to describe Israel as still being a 'crooked' nation. John's preaching, like ours, was potentially able to bring about the conversion of an entire nation. So instead of being discouraged by the lack of response to our witness, let's remember the enormous potential power which there is behind it. Every word, witness of any kind, tract left lying on a seat... has such huge potential conversion power lodged within it, a power from God Himself. John’s mission was to prepare Israel for Christ, to figuratively '*bring low'* the hills and mountains, the proud Jews of first century Israel, and raise the valleys, i.e. inspire the humble with the real possibility of salvation in Christ (Lk. 3:5). Paul uses the same Greek word for "bring low" no fewer than three times, concerning how the Gospel has humbled him (Acts 20:19; 2 Cor. 11:7; Phil. 4:12). It's as if he's saying: 'John's preaching did finally have its’ effect upon me; it did finally make me humble enough for the Lord Jesus'. And as John made straight paths for men's feet that they might come unto Christ (Mt. 3:3), so did Paul (Heb. 12:13). There was another reason behind John’s appeal for repentance. It was that he perceived how eager God is to forgive, and how our acceptance of that forgiveness is His glory and His salvation. John says, quoting Is. 40:5, that if men repent and ready themselves for the Lord’s coming, then “all flesh shall see the salvation of God”. But he is changing the quotation- Isaiah said that all flesh shall see the glory of God. But saving men and women is the thing God glories in.

3:4 *Now John wore a garment*- Lit. 'Had his clothing'. The Greek *ekho* translated "had" is also translated 'conceive', 'count' and 'take for'. He took himself as Elijah. Clearly John was consciously presenting himself as the Elijah prophet by the way he dressed. He had to make some personal effort to fulfill the prophecies about him. Even if a calling is intended for us by God, we still have to make conscious effort to fulfill it. We can easily overestimate the amount and frequency of Divine contact with Bible characters. It was not so much that John was told 'You are to be the Elijah prophet, now you must dress, act and speak like him!'. The choice of dress, appearance and even location in the wilderness were all probably John's own conscious attempts to be like Elijah, without being specifically asked. We too are set up with Bible characters whom we are asked to follow in essence- for this is why so much of God's word is really history. And there are ways in which the initiative is left with us as to how and how far we follow them.

Of camel's hair and a leather girdle about his loins- This was not the clothing of the poor- their garments were typically made of goat's hair. Indeed, camel's hair coats were a luxury. We therefore conclude that John was consciously modeling himself on Elijah, who had dressed like this (2 Kings 1:8).

And his food was locusts and wild honey- Not necessarily from bees, but perhaps tree gum e.g. from the tamarisk tree.

3:5 *Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him*- These global terms such as 'all Judaea' clearly aren't literal- people from all Judaea went out to John. Perhaps John set up his place of witness as he did so that those interested had to make some effort to come out to him for baptism, considering that candidates had to make some effort and show some commitment. On the other hand, if he wanted to reach as many people as possible, surely he could've set up his place of preaching and baptism in the city and thereby attracted and saved more people. For not everyone was able to make the long journey down to Jordan and back. One wonders whether he made the same mistake as the historical Elijah, in having too low a view of others. Whatever, his hard hitting message attracted people, so much so that the city dwellers streamed out to him, motivated by the testimony of the others who had been there and returned to share the good news of sin confessed and forgiven and of the coming of the Christ.

3:6 *And they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins*- As if they confessed their sins whilst in the water and the baptism process was ongoing. *Exomologeho* essentially means to agree with, hence the same word is used about 'confessing' in the sense of praising (s.w. Mt. 11:25, Rom. 15:9). To repent, to confess sin, is essentially to agree with God's perspective on our sins. They agreed that they were sinners. Elsewhere, what they did is described as 'the baptism of repentance', of *metanoia* (Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:3; Acts 13:24; 19:4). *Metanoia* strictly means to think again, or legally, a reversal of a legal decision. The legal connotations of the language are developed further in Romans 1-8, which expounds the Gospel in terms of the court room. I have suggested elsewhere that Paul may have heard John preaching, for all Jerusalem went to hear his message, including "many of the Pharisees" (:7), and Paul the Pharisee was living in Jerusalem at the time. This would explain his many allusions to John's teaching, and it could be that the whole legal approach of Romans 1-8 is based upon this language of charge, agreement with the charge and re-thinking of the human case which we meet here, right at the start of the NT Gospel story (see on 3:7 *The wrath to come* to see how Romans uses John's term 10 times). The decision that we are condemned must be agreed with by us, whereas previously we had not agreed with it- considering us to be not that bad as people, victims of circumstance etc. Our re-thinking leads to God's re-thinking and reversal of the judgment against us. Note that the whole sense of the Greek words for 'confessing' and 'repenting' is internal to the human mind. Practical change is not of itself implied in the words. This of course comes as a result of a genuine agreement with the charge of sin and a radical re-thinking. It is not therefore for us to demand repentance from others in terms of external appearance. We cannot judge the secrets of the heart, and are to accept repentance as claimed, seeing that it is a deeply personal and internal affair.

3:7 *But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them*- Lk. 3:12 records how there "came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do?". There is a parallel between desiring baptism and realizing that they must*do* something concretely in their lives. The baptism process brings us into the realm of God's gracious forgiveness and redemption, and into living contact with the real Christ. There is no way we can be passive to this and do nothing

about it. Note that Matthew himself was a publican- this is an example of the Gospel records being a transcript of the message standardly taught by e.g. Matthew.

You offspring of vipers- This intense, urgent presentation of the ultimate issues of life and death, acceptance and rejection, brought forth a massive response. People lined up for baptism. And John was hardly polite. He called his baptismal candidates a "generation of vipers", alluding obviously to the seed of the serpent in Gen. 3:15. Yet his tough line with them, his convicting them of sin, led them to ask what precisely they must do, in order to be baptized. They didn't turn away in offence. They somehow sensed he was for real, and the message he preached couldn't be ignored or shrugged off as the ravings of a fanatic. Time and again we see the same- the very height of the demand of Christ of itself convicts men and women of Him. And it's for this reason that it seems almost 'easier' to convict people of Christ and the need for baptism into Him in societies [e.g. radical Moslem ones] where the price for conversion to Him is death or serious persecution… than in the easy going Western countries where being 'Christian' is the normal cultural thing to do. The Gospel was presented in different forms by the early preachers, according to their audience. John the Baptist set the pattern in this. Having quoted the prophecy about the need for the rough to be made smooth and the proud to be humbled in order for them to accept Jesus, John "said *therefore* to the multitude… ye offspring of vipers" (Lk. 3:7 RV). He used tough and startling language because that was what the audience required. He had set his aims- to humble the proud. And so he used "therefore" appropriate approaches. The early preachers as Paul became all things to all men, so that they might win some. They therefore consciously matched their presentation and *how* they articulated the same basic truths to their audience. But perhaps even his comment "Generation of vipers" was said with a heart of love and appeal, reflecting the "heart of mercy" which he had come to know in the Father. He was "the friend of the bridegroom" (Jn. 3:29)- the one who introduced the groom to the bride and arranged the marriage and then the wedding. John's "Generation of vipers" stuff was all part of his attempt to persuade the bride, Israel, to accept the groom, the Lord Jesus. He wasn't angrily moralizing, lashing out at society as many a dysfunctional preacher does today, working out his own anger by criticizing and condemning society in the name of God. No, John was appealing. He had an agenda and an aim- to bring Israel and the Son of God together in marriage.

Who warned you- The Greek means to exemplify, to 'exhibit under the eyes', and can imply that John had himself shown them the way of repentance by having done so himself. John the Baptist rhetorically asked his hearers: "Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Mt. 3:7). The answer, of course, was 'Well, you, John'. And John continues: "Bring forth *therefore* [i.e., because I am the one who taught you] fruits meet for repentance". John recognizes that his converts will be after his image in one sense; as Paul put it, what his hearers had heard and seen in him as he preached, they were to do. So I suggest the emphasis should be on the word 'who', rather than on the word 'you'. The sense is not 'You lot of sinners? Ha! And where did you lot hear of the need for repentance!'. Rather is it a rhetorical question. Who warned them to flee from the wrath to come? John himself. Here we see another window onto the humility of John in his appeal. He is saying that he too has confessed and repented of his sins, and he knew this was witnessed in his life. And he asks the legalistic Pharisees to follow his example. John was asking them to repent of their legalism and accept Jesus as Messiah, and it would seem that John had had to pass through that very same path himself, freeing himself from the Essene's legalism which it seems he had got

associated with. And Elijah, John's role model, was another man who was led to repent of exclusivism and legalism. The point is clinched by a look at the Greek word translated 'warned'. It literally means to exhibit, to exemplify. John was the pattern for them. And if Paul was indeed amongst that crowd of cynical Pharisees, Paul was ultimately John's most stellar convert, although little did he realize it at the time. The same can happen with our preaching. We may make converts years after our death. And the lesson comes home clearly, that the preacher or the teacher is to be the living embodiment of his or her message, the word being preached made flesh in the preacher.

To flee from the anger to come- A common idea of Paul's especially in his letter to the Romans (Rom. 1:18; 2:5,8; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22;12:19; 13:4,5). 1 Thess. 2:16 surely alludes here in speaking of how the wrath has come upon the orthodox Jews. See on 3:6. In Mt. 23:33 Jesus seems to say that it is now impossible for that group to flee the coming wrath. Even in this life the frame of opportunity can come to an end before death.

Paul alluded to some parts of the Gospels much more than others. An example of this is the way in which he alluded so extensively to the passages related to John the Baptist. I would suggest that the reason for this is that he saw John as somehow his hero, one for whom he had a deep respect. In doing so he was sharing the estimation of his Lord, who also saw John as one of the greatest believers. There are many 'unconscious' links between Paul's writings and the records of John, indicating how deeply the example and words of John were in Paul's mind (e.g. Mt. 3:7 = 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9; Jn. 3:31 = 1 Cor. 15:47). Or consider how John said that wicked Jewry would be "hewn down" (Mt. 3:10); Paul uses the very same word to describe how the Jewish branches had now been "cut off" (Rom. 11:22,24). Paul saw himself as being like the best man, who had betrothed the believers to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2,3)- just as John had described himself as the friend of the bridegroom (Jn. 3:28). Or again, reflect how Paul's mention of John in Acts 13:24,25 apparently adds nothing to his argument; it seems out of context. But it surely indicates the degree to which John was never far below the surface in Paul's thinking.

3:8 *Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance*- It seems likely that Paul went to hear John the Baptist preach; "there went out to him all the land of Judea and they of Jerusalem" (Mk. 1:5), and at this time Paul was living in Jerusalem. I believe Paul heard John and was convicted by him of Christ. John preached the need to "bring forth fruits meet unto repentance" (Mt. 3:8); and Paul made those his own watchwords in his world-wide preaching (Acts 26:20)- Paul describes his preaching in language which is directly alluding to how John preached. As John said that he was *sent* to baptize, but especially to witness of Christ (Jn. 1:33), so Paul felt that he too was *sent to baptize*, but his emphasis was more on the preaching of Christ than physically baptizing (1 Cor. 1:17).

“Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance" must be connected with our Lord's description of the Gentile believers as "a nation bringing forth the (vineyard) fruits" of the Kingdom (Mt. 21:43). These are defined in Rom. 14:17: "The Kingdom of God is... righteousness, and peace, and joy". Christ's parable of the vine in Jn. 15 explains that it is the word abiding in us which brings forth fruit. Bringing forth fruit is therefore a way of life (cp. Rom. 6:21,22). In each aspect in which we 'bear fruit', we have in a sense 'repented'. Our repentance and fruit-bearing is not something which we can set time limits on within this life. Christ would have been satisfied if Israel had borne at least

some immature fruit (Lk. 13:7). Only when there is no fruit at all, in any aspect of spiritual life, will Christ reject us. Some will bear more fruit than others- some sixty, some an hundredfold. Mt. 3:8 connects repentance with fruit bearing. This shows that God may recognize *degrees* of repentance and response to His word, as He recognizes degrees of fruit bearing. It is far too simplistic for us to label some of our brethren as having repented and others as being totally unrepentant. In any case, the fruits of repentance are brought forth unto *God*, not necessarily to fellow believers (Rom. 7:4). There is a marked dearth of evidence to show that a believer must prove his repentance in outward terms before his brethren can accept him. The "fruits" John had in mind are made more explicit in Luke 3. In order to prepare the way of the Lord, to make a level passage for Him, the man with two coats should give to him who had none, and likewise share his food (Lk. 3:11). So the 'equality' and levelling was to be one of practical care for others. We have to ask, how often we have shared our food, clothing or money with those who don't have… for this is all part of preparing for the Lord's coming. It could even be that when there is more of what Paul calls "an equality" amongst the community of believers, that then the way of the Lord will have been prepared. And He will then return.

And yet despite the demand for "fruit", John the Baptist showed a spirit of concession to human weakness in his preaching. He told the publicans: "Extort no more than that which is appointed you" (Lk. 3:13 RV). He tacitly accepted that these men would be into extortion. But within limits, he let it go. Likewise he told soldiers to be content with their wages- not to quit the job. And seeing there were no Roman Legions in Judaea at his time [Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.5.1], these were likely Jewish soldiers. He didn't tell them to quit their jobs, but to live with integrity within those jobs. He told the soldiers to be content with their wages- implying he expected them to not throw in their job. This is juxtaposed with the command for them to do no violence. But not grumbling about wages was as fundamental an issue for John as not doing physical violence to people. To have as Paul put it "Godliness with contentment" [another of his allusions to John's preaching?] is as important as not doing violence. And yet our tendency is to think that moaning about our wages is a perfectly normal and acceptable thing to do, whereas violence is of an altogether different order. It's like Paul hitting the Corinthians for their divisiveness, when if we'd been writing to them we would likely have focused upon their immorality and false doctrine. John would have been far less demanding had he simply told the publicans and soldiers to quit their jobs. By asking them to continue, and yet to live out their lives within those jobs with Godly principles, He was being far more demanding. John places complaining about wages [a common human fault] in juxtaposition with doing violence to others (Lk. 3:14)- to show that in his serious call to a devout and holy life, there are no such things as little sins. Ez. 16:49,50 defines the sins of Sodom as including "pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor… they were haughty, and committed abomination". The abomination of their sexual perversion is placed last in the list, as if to emphasize that all the other sins were just as much sin. Likewise Paul writes to the Corinthians about their failures, but he doesn't start where I would have started- with their drunkenness at the memorial meeting. Instead he starts off with their disunity. Those things which we may consider as lesser sins, the Bible continually lists together with those things we have been conditioned into thinking are the greater sins. Clearest of all is the way Paul lists schism and hatred in his lists of sins that will exclude from the Kingdom. The Anglo-Saxon worldview has taught that

sexual sin is so infinitely far worse than a bit of argument within a church. But is this really right…?

3:9 *And think not to say within yourselves*- Always the Biblical emphasis is upon internal thought processes and the need to be aware of them. John's great convert Paul several times uses the same device in his letters- foreseeing the likely thought process in response to his message, and answering it ahead of time (e.g. 1 Cor. 15:35).

We have Abraham as our father, for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham- Said perhaps pointing to the stones. Perhaps they were the 12 stones set up after the Jordan crossing (Josh. 3 and 4). There is a word play between *avanim*, stones, and *banim*¸ sons. *Avanim*, stones, in turn sounds like *evyonim*, the term for the poor, the social outcasts- these were the "stones" which were being accepted into the covenant of grace.

3:10 *And even now the axe lies at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that does not bring forth good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire*- John's words about cutting down the fruitless tree are directly quoted by the Lord Jesus in Mt. 7:17-19; 12:33- as if to show His solidarity with John's teaching. Perhaps the Lord Jesus had heard these very words being preached by John when He went to be baptized by him. "Now [also]", right now; John felt that the day of Christ's judgment was very close. The language of gathering grain into the barn and burning the chaff is used by the Lord concerning the future judgment at His second coming (Mt. 13:30). John saw the Lord Jesus as already having the winnowing fork in His hand (:13), meaning that in essence, judgment began with the ministry of Jesus. In essence, we stand before His judgment right now. Judgment day is not some unknown future entity which has no connection with this life.

3:11 *I indeed baptize you in water to repentance, but he that comes after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to carry. He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire*- Christ "shall baptize *you*" plural was deeply meditated upon by Paul, until he came to see in the fact that we *plural* are baptized the strong implication that therefore we should be one body, without unnecessary divisions (= 1 Cor. 12:13).

John prophesied that the disciples would be baptized with fire (Mt 3:11); this was fulfilled by tongues of Spirit descending which looked like fire (Acts 2:3). Evidently this was not literal fire or else it would not have rested on the heads of the disciples. So the words of Matthew 3:11 spoke of how things would *appear* to the disciples, without saying so explicitly.

John described himself as a preacher of Christ who was not "worthy" to do so. The same Greek word is used by Paul when he says he is "not *meet* (s.w.) to be called an apostle" (1 Cor. 15:9); and that it was God's grace alone that had made him an "*able* (s.w. "worthy") minister of the Gospel" (2 Cor. 13:6). He knew that his "*sufficiency*" (s.w. "worthy") to give knowledge of salvation (John language- Lk. 1:77), to be a preacher, was from God alone (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5); and that in fact this was true of *all* preachers. But do we really feel like this in our preaching? John was a burning and shining light to the world (Jn. 5:35), just as we should be (Phil. 2:15). And therefore, if we are to witness as John did, we need to have the humility of John in our preaching. He was 'in the Truth' from a baby, he lived a spiritual, self-controlled life. And yet he

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

For baptizing in water unto repentance, see note on Mt. 3:3 above. Given that Isaiah 40 offered forgiveness in order to provoke repentance, it could be that the AV translation is correct- although *eis* ["unto"] has a very wide range of meaning. John baptized in order to lead people to repentance, rather than baptizing only those who had repented and got their lives in order. Even the NET Bible's "baptize... for repentance" could be read the same way- baptism was for the end of provoking repentance, rather than being baptism only for the visibly repentant. This likelihood is strengthened once we realize that there is surely an allusion here to Wisdom 11:23: "You overlook the sins of men, unto repentance". Repentance in any case is an internal attitude (see on 3:6), and John as he stood in the Jordan River was totally incapable of judging whether or not in practice his hearers had actually changed their lives. He baptized them because they had confessed their sins and re-thought, re-pented. Not because they had actually changed in practical, ongoing lifestyle issues. Likewise the apostles who baptized 3000 people in Acts 2 had no way of measuring repentance in practice. Mk. 1:15 records John's message as being: "Repent ye and believe the Gospel". This might seem to be in the wrong order- for we have come to think that surely belief of the Gospel comes before repentance. And so it does very often- but there is another option here- that the repentance is ongoing. Life after conversion is a life of believing the basic Gospel which led us to conversion and repentance in the first place.

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

The fulfilment of these things is recorded in Lk. 7:29 (see note there), where we read that those already baptized by John now repented upon encountering the Lord's teachings.

There is another take on John's prediction that those who came to him would be baptized by the Lord Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Mt. 3:11). The immediate context has the Lord speaking of "fire" in the context of the rejected chaff and wood being burnt with "fire" (Mt. 3:10,12). The Lord could be saying that those water baptized into Him would also be immersed into His Spirit, like going to live in another country in an immersion course- an immersion into another culture, language, history and way of being. But others would be baptized in the fire of condemnation. The difficulty is to connect this with the apparent fulfilment of it when the disciples experienced tongues of fire coming upon them before they received the Spirit and spoke in tongues / languages in Acts 2. Whenever fire comes upon a person from Heaven it is usually in condemnation, and fire is a common symbol of condemnation and judgment- rather than of 'being on fire for the Lord'. The secular usage of the term 'baptism of fire' has perhaps also misled English speaking readers. So I suggest that the appearance of tongues of fire upon the disciples was a reminder to them of the possibility of their condemnation- before they were empowered by the Spirit to do an amazing public work for the Lord. Just as the Lord upbraided them for their unbelief, and then empowered them to go and preach that unbelievers would be condemned.

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

3:13 *Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan, to John, to be baptized by him*- John's ministry was known throughout the Lord; perhaps the Lord travelled with others, some who would later become His disciples; this of itself was an act of identity with the humanity of first century Palestine.

3:14 *But John would have stopped him, saying: I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?*- There had clearly been contact between the Lord and John; John had not literally remained his whole life in the wilderness. Or if he did, then the Lord had travelled out there to meet him. His limited contact with the Lord had persuaded him that He was Messiah; for he wanted the Lord to baptize him. Baptism was

something which it was expected would be done either by the Elijah prophet or Messiah (Jn. 1:25).

3:15 *But Jesus answering said to him*- The sensitivity of the Lord is reflected in how He frequently sensed and foresaw human behaviour and objections / response to His teaching and actions. You can read the Gospels and search for examples. Here's a classic one: "But John would have hindered [Jesus]… but Jesus answering said…" (Mt. 3:14 RV). Jesus 'answered' John's objection even before John had properly expressed it (see another example of this in Lk. 22:70).

Permit it now, for thus it becomes us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he permitted him- Maybe the Lord Jesus felt that this act of total identification with sinners in their need was necessary for Him to achieve perfect / total righteousness. And He needed John's assistance in this- "it becomes *us*". He was baptized in order to be absolutely perfect, and that perfection involved the act of identification with sinners in order to totally identify with them. Perfection will never be achieved by holding aloof from sinners, but rather by identification with them that they might be saved. The reason for Jesus being baptized was surely that He wanted to identify with sinful man, taking His place in the line of mixed up folk waiting on the banks of the Jordan.

3:16 *And Jesus when he was baptized immediately came up out of the water, and the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and coming to rest on him*- Sometimes God indicates from what perspective the record is written; at other times He doesn't. Thus Matthew 3:16 makes it clear that the Lord saw Heaven opened at his baptism, and the Spirit descending like a dove. But Luke 3:21-22 just says that "the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended". Luke doesn't say that this is only what happened from the Lord's perspective. This problem of perspective is at the root of the misunderstanding of the demon language in the Gospels.

"To Him" suggests that only the Lord Jesus saw this, although John too saw the dove descending and heard the voice (Jn. 1:33). But He uses the same language in Jn. 1:51: "Hereafter *you* shall see Heaven open, and the Angels of God... descending", just as He had seen the heavens opened and the dove descending upon Him. His sense was that His experience at baptism was in essence to be that of all in Him. This connection lends weight to the idea that His baptism was an act of identification with us, He shared our experience and we are to share His. Likewise the Spirit 'lighted' upon Jesus at His baptism, and the only other time we find this idea is when He promised that although we know not from whence the Spirit 'lights' ["comes"], it will indeed 'light' upon every one that is born of water and Spirit (Jn. 3:8). The same term is used in Acts 19:6, where after baptism the Spirit 'lighted upon' those baptized. Thus the believer's baptism is spoken of in terms reminiscent of the Lord's. He was baptized to set us an example, identifying with us in order to appeal for us to likewise identify with Him.

3:17 *And a voice came from the heavens, saying: This is My beloved Son*- Surely an allusion to Gen. 22:2 (LXX), where the sacrificed Isaac was Abraham's beloved son.

In whom I am well pleased- Combining references to Ps. 2:7 and Is. 42:1. Klausner: "In whom I shall be blessed". Quoted about the Lord also in Mt. 12:18; 17:5. The contrast is with how the Father was not "well pleased" with Israel when they were in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:5); but He was well pleased with His Son in the wilderness. Many prophecies about Israel, the 'servant' of Isaiah's prophecies, come true in Jesus.

God's plan in Israel failed due to their disobedience, but the intention behind it came true in Jesus; He was the Son who fulfilled the Father's wishes after Israel failed Him. Jesus thus became the embodiment of Israel; He was their representative before God. It is in this context that the representative nature of the Lord Jesus was first established; He was God's Son who was fully representative of Israel. It is thereby through Him that Israel can be finally restored to their Father.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 4

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

Commentary on what this passage does *not* mean can be found in my *The Real Devil*.

4:2 *And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards he hungered*- The only other two men recorded as doing this are Moses and Elijah (Ex. 34:28; 1 Kings 19:8). The Lord chose to seek to enter into their experience; it was presumably His decision to fast for this period. And the Father responded to that by giving Him the encouraging vision of those same two men at the transfiguration. We see here how God is in dialogue with man; if we wish to identify with some Bible character, the Father will respond His side to enable us to do so yet more.

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

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

Deuteronomy 8:2 “The Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments (word), or no.”	Matthew 4 / Luke 4 “Jesus led up of the spirit” “forty days” “in the wilderness”. Jesus was proved by the temptations. Jesus overcame by quoting the Scriptures that were in His heart (Ps. 119:11), thus showing it was the Scriptures that were in His heart.
Deuteronomy 8:3. “And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna... that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word...of the Lord...”	“He was afterward an hungered". In John 6 manna is interpreted by Jesus as representing the Word of God, which Jesus lived by in the wilderness. Jesus learnt that spiritually He lived by the Word of God. “He answered...it is written, Man shall not

	live by bread alone, but by every word ...of God".,
Deuteronomy 8:5 "Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee"	Jesus no doubt reflected on His experiences. God chastened His Son, Jesus- 2 Sam. 7:12; Ps. 89: 32.

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

4:3 *And the tempter came and said to him*- Matthew's record speaks of "the tempter", and the suggestion has been made that this was a technical term used to refer to the Essene priest whose duty it was to test the claims to Messiahship made by people (5). This would confirm the suggestion that the Lord's temptations were at the hands of the Jews. The desert where He was would've been accessible from the Qumran settlement of the Essenes, and the preceding chapter 3 of Matthew has recorded how many of these people appear to have accepted baptism from John the Baptist in the very area where the temptations occured. Perhaps "the tempter" priest stayed around and entered into dialogue with Jesus. In confirmation of the idea that the "devil" was some form of Jewish priestly figure, we note that Mt. 4:4 records that Jesus told him that "It is *written*...". To the illiterate, Jesus usually said that they would have *heard* something *said* in the Old Testament; but to the literate Jewish religious leadership, He prefaces His quotations or allusions by saying that "It is *written*". The fact He uses this phrase here would suggest He may have been talking to one of that class. The Wisdom of Solomon 2:12-20 has a surprising number of similarities to the Lord's life and death amongst the Jews, suggesting that they did indeed subject Him to tests of His Messiahsip:

"Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man, since he annoys us and opposes our way of life, reproaches us for our breaches of the law an accuses us of playing false...he claims to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a son of the Lord. Before us he stands, a reproof to our way of thinking, the very sight of him weighs our spirits down; His way of life is not like other men's... in His opinion we are counterfeit... and boasts of having God as His father. let us see if what he says is true, let us observe what kind of end he himself will have. If the virtuous man is God's son, God will take his part and rescue him from the clutches of his enemies. *Let us test him with cruelty and with torture, and thus explore this gentleness of His and put His endurance to the proof. Let us condemn him to a shameful death* since he will be looked after- we have his word for it" (Susan Garrett lists several Greek words and phrases found in the Gospel of Mark which are identical to those in this section of the Wisdom of Solomon. It would seem that Mark was aware of this passage in the Wisdom of Solomon, and sought to show how throughout the Lord's ministry, and especially in His death, the Jews were seeking to apply it to Him in the way they treated Him. See Susan Garrett, *The Temptations Of Jesus In Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) p. 68.).

Every other use of the word "tempter" in Matthew is about the temptation / testing of Jesus by the Jewish leadership (Mt. 16:1; 19:3; 22:18,35); and that very group are presented as the 'satan' or adversary to the Lord Jesus and His work. There is nothing sinful of itself about putting someone to the test. The same word is used about Jesus putting the disciples to the test (Jn. 6:6); Paul tested / put to the test [s.w., A.V. "assayed"] the idea of preaching in Bithynia (Acts 16:7); we are to put ourselves to the test (2 Cor. 13:5); God put Abraham to the test (Heb. 11:17), false apostles were to be put to the test by the faithful (Rev. 2:2). It ought to be clear that there is nothing sinister nor sinful about the idea of being 'put to the test' nor of putting another to the test.

If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread- It's perhaps noteworthy that in the wilderness temptation, the Lord responds to the "If you are the Son of *God*..." by quoting Dt. 8:3 "*man* shall not live by bread alone"- and the Jonathan Targum has *bar nasha* [son of man] here for "man". If we are correct in understanding those wilderness temptations as the Lord's internal struggles, we see Him tempted to wrongly focus upon His being Son of*God*, forgetting His humanity; and we see Him overcoming this temptation, preferring instead to perceive Himself as Son of *man*. The *if... then* structure here (a 'first class conditional') effectively means 'Because...' (See Craig A. Evans, *Matthew* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2012) p. 83). In this case, we are clearly being given an insight into the internal thinking of the Lord Jesus. 'Because You are Son of God, why not...'. A truly human Jesus would inevitably have had such thoughts, and the record here makes that clear. Seeing that Mary appears to have become somewhat influenced by the surrounding view of Jesus as her illegitimate son, it's likely the Lord too had moments when He wondered whether this could all be true- whether He really was God's Son.

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

4:4 *But he answered and said: It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God*- The Lord overcame all His temptations by quoting from Deuteronomy, showing that His mind was seeking strength from the words of the Angel leading Israel through the wilderness. There are clear similarities between the Angel's leading of Israel through the wilderness and the Lord's experience in the wilderness:

Deuteronomy	**Matthew 4**

v. 2 "The Lord thy God [an Angel] led you... in the wilderness"	v. 1 Jesus led by the spirit (an Angel?) into the wilderness.
Forty years in the wilderness	Forty days in the wilderness
v. 3 "He (the Angel who led them in v. 2) suffered you to hunger".	The Angel made Jesus hunger.
The Angel "fed you with manna" (Ps. 78:25)	Jesus was tempted to ask the Angel to provide bread as He did to Israel in their testing.
"Man does not live by bread alone"	v. 4 "Man does not live by bread alone"

Thus the Lord Jesus surveyed His own experience in the wilderness, and saw that He could take to Himself personally the lessons given to Israel. The Angel led Israel through the wilderness "to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments or no" (Dt. 8:2). God Himself knows anyway, so this must be regarding the Angel, seeking to know the spiritual strength of Israel, as Job's Satan Angel sought to know Job's strength. Similarly, the Lord's Angel led Him into the wilderness, suffering Him to hunger, to humble and prove Him, to reveal His real attitude to the word of God. His quoting of the word to answer the temptations surely proved this to the Angel, especially since the Lord showed Himself so capable of thinking Himself into Scripture, and therefore taking the lessons most powerfully to Himself. The Lord was made to realize the importance of His memory of the word, as He would have later reflected that this was the only way He had overcome- that man spiritually lives by "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God". As a result of their wilderness temptations, both Israel and Christ were led to "consider in (their) heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God (the Angel) chasteneth thee". The chastenings of the Lord spiritually in the wilderness were therefore arranged by the Angels. There did not have to be Angels actually tempting Christ in the wilderness temptations- because they can act directly on a man's heart, they can lead us into temptation. The fact we pray for Him not to implies that He does- through the Angels, as He Himself tempts no man (James 1:13), although the Angels tempted Abraham, and Israel among others. Thus the Angels may arrange an external stimulus, e. g. the fruit of the tree of knowledge, knowing it must produce certain internal desires within us which tempt us. Note how the temptation to throw Himself off the top of the temple was a temptation to misuse Angelic care. He answered it by a quotation which has an Angelic context: "You (Jesus) shall not tempt the Lord your God, as ye tempted Him in Massah" (Dt. 6:16). At Massah the Israelites put the Angel to the test by questioning whether He could provide water (Ex. 17:2-7).

4:5 *Then the Devil took him into the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple*- The Greek for "took him" is often used in a non-literal sense, with the idea of receiving someone into an office or situation. The same word is used in :8 about the Lord being taken up a high mountain. The idea may well be that He was imagining being received

into rulership of the Messianic Kingdom, and was wondering whether that would be possible through accepting 'the devil', be it His own flesh or the Jewish system, who humanly speaking seemed able to offer a path to this. Likewise '*set him*' later on in :5 carries the idea of being appointed, established in authority.

The Synoptics speak of how satan 'comes to' and tempts and challenges the Lord Jesus to claim earthly political power, which 'satan' can give him (Mt. 4:8,9). But John describes this in terms of "the people" coming to Him and trying to make Him King- which temptation He refused (Jn. 6:15). Likewise it was 'the devil' in the wilderness who tempted Jesus to make the stones into bread. But in Jn. 6:30,31, it is the Jewish people who offer Him the same temptation. In the wilderness, the Lord responded that man lives by the bread which comes from the mouth of God. In Jn. 6:32, He responds likewise by speaking about "the true bread from heaven". The temptation from 'the devil' to publically display His Divine powers in front of Israel in the Jerusalem temple (Mt. 4:5,6; Lk. 4:9-12) is repeated by John in terms of the Lord's brothers tempting Him to go up to the same temple and openly validate Himself "to the world" (Jn. 7:1-5).

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

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

4:7 *Jesus said to him: Again it is written, You shall not make trial of the Lord your God*- The Greek effectively means 'On the other hand, it is also written...'. The Lord Jesus did not try to reconcile the two verses, He accepted them as part of a dialectic whereby this verse says that but this verse says this- which is typical Hebrew reasoning. Geek reasoning would seek to explain that this verse says this, but that is qualified by this other verse, so the truth is a mixture between the two verses. The Hebrew style of reasoning leaves apparent contradictions to the Western, Greek reasoning mind. But they are not this at all, just dialectical style.

4:8 *Again, the Devil took him to an exceeding high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them*- The Greek could be translated 'the very highest', clearly a reference to the time of the Kingdom of God on earth. It can hardly be that a fiendish being took the Lord Jesus literally up the highest mountain (Everest) from where He could see all the world. Nor would being up a tall mountain enable the Lord to see "the glory of them". Surely a non-literal event is implied here-within the Lord's mind.

The temptations are hard to take literally:-

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

- A comparison of Matthew 4 and Luke 4 shows that the temptations are described in a different order. Mark 11:13 says that Jesus was “in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan”, whilst Matthew 4 : 2-3 says that “when he had fasted forty days...the tempter (Satan) came to Him...”. Because Scripture cannot contradict itself, we can conclude that these same temptations kept repeating themselves. The temptation to turn stones into bread is an obvious example. This would fit nicely if these temptations occurred within the mind of Jesus. Being of our nature, the lack of food would have affected him mentally as well as physically, and thus his mind would have easily begun to imagine things. Just going a few days without food can lead to delirium for some (cp. 1 Sam. 30:12). The similarity between rolls of bread and stones is mentioned by Jesus in Mt. 7: 9, and doubtless those images often merged in his tortured mind - although always to be brought into swift control by his recollection of the Word

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

- It seems unlikely that several times the devil led Jesus through the wilderness and streets of Jerusalem and then scaled a pinnacle of the temple together, all in view of the inquisitive Jews. Josephus makes no record of anything like this happening - presumably it would have caused a major stir. Similarly, if these temptations occurred several times within the forty days as well as at the end of that period (which they did at least twice, seeing that Matthew and Luke have them in different order), how would Jesus have had time to walk (n.b. the devil “led” Jesus there) to the nearest high mountain (which could have been Hermon in the far north of Israel), climb to the top and back down again, return to the wilderness and then repeat the exercise? His temptations all occurred in the wilderness - He was there for forty days, tempted all the time by the devil (he only departed at the end, :11). If Jesus was tempted by the devil each day, and the temptations occurred only in the wilderness, then it follows that Jesus could not have left the wilderness to go to Jerusalem or travel to a high mountain. These things therefore could not have literally happened.

That the temptations were internal to the mind of Jesus is suggested by the way that in Matthew's record, there is a progression from the desert, to the temple pinnacle, to a high mountain- as if in some sort of ascent toward Heaven. It's even possible that Paul has this in mind when he comments that Jesus did not consider rising up to equality with God a thing to be grasped at, He dismissed that temptation, and instead He progressively *lowered* Himself, even to the death of the cross (Phil. 2:6-8).

4:9 *And he said to him: All these things will I give you, if you will fall down and worship me*- The Lord knew full well that "all things", the Kingdom of God when the kingdoms of this world have been subsumed beneath it, could only be given to Him to God. He was tempted to play God, to assume that by His own action He could grasp it for Himself without the cross. It is perhaps to this that Paul alludes when he writes that the Lord did not consider such equality with God a thing to be even grasped after (Phil. 2:6). Again we see how the essence of the wilderness temptations returned to the Lord on the cross. For Phil. 2:6 specifically speaks of the Lord in His time of dying.

4:10 *Then said Jesus to him: Away with you Satan! For it is written: You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve*- The record of the Lord's wilderness temptations is almost certainly a reflection of *His* self-perception; He spoke to the 'devil' / personification of sin which was within Him, He saw Himself as two people, and His spiritual man triumphed gloriously against the man of the flesh. Lk. 4:8 records how "Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve". He understood that we can only serve two masters: God or the flesh ("mammon" is another personification of the flesh, similar to 'satan'). He saw His own flesh, His own internal thoughts, as a master begging to be served which He must totally reject. His words are a quotation from Dt. 6:13, which warns Israel to serve Yahweh alone and not idols. He perceived His own natural mind and desire as an idol calling to be served. When the Lord explained what had happened in the wilderness to the disciples and thereby to the Gospel writers, He opened His heart to them. He gave us all a window on how He perceived Himself, as He sought to explain to men the internal struggles of the Son of God. Bringing it all back home, I must ask firstly how much we even *struggle* with temptation? And as and when we do, would we not be helped by the Lord's example of talking to ourselves, and personalising Scripture as He did? 'You don't want to do *that*! Give up your place in the Kingdom, for that... drug, that girl, that job? Of course not! Come on. There *is* a way of escape; Paul told me God won't try me beyond my strength, He will make me a way of escape'.

4:11 *Then the Devil left him, and angels came and ministered to him*- The same words are used of how they minister to *us* (Heb. 1:14). And the theme of Hebrews 1 and 2 is that the Lord was indeed of our nature, and in essence had the same relationship with us as they had with Jesus.

4:12 *Now when he heard that John was imprisoned*- It's as if the Lord took the end of John's public ministry as the cue to begin His ("from that time…", :17). He may have worked this out from the implication of the prophecies about the Elijah prophet. Or it may be that He took John's imprisonment as the sign to go to Galilee. Whatever, He was acting according to information which came to Him, and structuring His ministry accordingly. We get the impression that this was done without direct commandment from the Father but at His initiative.

He withdrew into Galilee- The Greek definitely implies to withdraw oneself. This seems typical of the Lord during His ministry- to go public for a while and then withdraw.

4:13 *And leaving Nazareth*- Gk. 'to forsake'. Perhaps because of the lack of response already apparent in His home town. Again, as commented on :12, we see the Lord making decisions about His ministry on His initiative in accord with how situations developed.

He went and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the borders of Zebulun and Naphtali- The idea is of 'to reside'. He changed His base from Nazareth to Capernaum in order to give His message more access to Gentiles.

4:14 *That it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying*- This sounds as if the Lord was consciously attempting to fulfil God's word. He was "the word made flesh" but He had to consciously achieve that. See on 3:15.

4:15 *The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, toward the sea, on the other side of the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles*-"Toward the sea" is "by the way of the sea" (AV). The idea was that John the Baptist was to prepare “the way” for Messiah. Even at this early stage in the ministry, it seems that the Lord recognized that that “way” was going to have to be amongst the Gentiles.

4:16 *The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light*-Each of the Gospels is somehow personalized to the writer. Matthew, for example, changes the Lord's quotation of Is. 9:9 from "the people which *walked* in darkness..." to "the people which*sat* in darkness saw great light" (Mt. 4:16), because he was *sitting* at the receipt of custom when the Lord called him (Mt. 9:9).

And for those dwelling in the region and the shadow of death- As if death is personified, having its own region and shadow. The darkness of the context in Is. 9:2 is that of Is. 8:22- the darkness of condemnation, for the rejected for whom there was 'no dawn' (Is. 8:20 Heb.). We can be condemned in this life and yet still change that verdict- by coming to the light of Christ. Isaiah 8 concluded by speaking of the wicked being sent into the darkness of condemnation (a common figure in Isaiah, e.g. Is. 5:30; 9:19). Those who dwell in the dark shadow of death are therefore those who have been condemned- but for them, the light of Christ arose from despised Galilee and the area around the Sea of Galilee (Is. 9:1- "the sea" surely refers in the context to the Sea of Galilee, not the Mediterranean).

On them a light has dawned- The light is clearly the Lord Jesus. He uses the same word soon afterwards in speaking of how God makes His light to ‘spring up’ upon both the just and the unjust, the evil and the good (Mt. 5:45). These categories are therefore within the group of those to whom the light of the Gospel has been revealed. Likewise the rising of the sun in the parable of the sower (Mt. 13:6 s.w.) would refer to the beginning of Christ’s public ministry; the various types of ground initially responded to John’s message, but when Christ’s ministry was revealed openly, i.e. the sun sprung up, then persecution began, and they fell away.

4:17 *From that time began Jesus to preach and to say: Repent!*- The Lord’s first public word was the challenge to change. His opening words were surely carefully chosen to verbatim repeat those of John (Mt. 3:2). He wanted to show the continuity of the message from John to Himself. For He was building upon John’s work, which had been intended to prepare the way for Him to come triumphantly to Zion over the ‘way’ which had been prepared in the hearts of repentant people. The exact repetition of John’s message could suggest that the Lord saw John’s ministry as not having been responded to- and therefore his message and appeal needed repeating.

So many times the Lord's words are prefaced with the statement that He "began to say..." (Mt. 4:17; 11:7,20; Mk. 4:1; 6:2,34; 8:31; 10:32; 12:1; 13:5; Lk. 4:21; 7:24; 11:29; 12:1; 20:9; 24:27). This is all quite some theme. His words were intended to commence something in the hearers, although usually that intended process wasn't and isn't allowed to go forward to its intended end. When a man today hears the Lord's words, that process likewise begins; but men truncate it. Samson was intended to "begin" delivering Israel from the Philistines (Jud. 13:5), and so the Spirit of God "Began" [s.w.] to move him to do so (Jud. 13:25). But he didn't let that process progress as intended, becoming caught up on anger and sexual lust issues. We have the sense

that God began a work in and through Samson that wasn't completed as potentially possible- perhaps with the implication, that it should have been but wasn't. Not until David's time would Israel be free from the Philistines (2 Sam. 8:1). Yet despite only partially fulfilling his potential, Samson did make a beginning. And he will be saved, despite all that was unfinished and all the unrealized potential. On one hand, the fool begins and doesn't finish (Lk. 14:30 "This man began to build, and was not able to finish"). On the other hand, we are saved by grace even when we don't finish. Likewise the Lord has "begun a good work in us" and will complete it- if we let Him, for He will keep on trying to finish it ("Being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will keep working at perfecting it, until the day of Jesus Christ" Phil. 1:6). The Galatians 'began in the Spirit' but left that path and tried to complete the work without the Spirit, "by the flesh", and failed (Gal. 3:3). The Lord 'began' doing and teaching in His ministry (Acts 1:1; 10:37 "that word began from Galilee") and continues.

For the kingdom of heaven is at hand- Gk. 'approaching'. The idea was that John the Baptist had attempted to prepare the way, the highway, over which Messiah would come. So now, Messiah was approaching. "The kingdom of God" was a title for Messiah, seeing that He was the King of the Kingdom; and the term is used like that in Scripture too, e.g. Lk. 17:21. The Kingdom could have been then established, the glory of Yahweh could have come to Zion if John's work of preparing the road for it had been successful. But ultimately, Israel would not. But the Greek can also mean that the Kingdom was being 'made near', it was being drawn near by repentance- which is why the Lord was appealing for repentance. This is a significant theme in Bible teaching- that the exact calendar date of the Kingdom's establishment is dependent upon the repentance of Israel. This repentance appears a prerequisite to the Lord's coming in glory and the establishment of the Kingdom. Our focus should therefore be upon appealing to Israel to repent.

4:18 *And walking by the sea of Galilee*- "Walking by" is literally 'around'. The idea could be that He walked all around the lake.

He saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen- The Lord's call always comes at the most inconvenient moment. It was whilst Simon and Andrew were in the very act of casting their net into the sea, caught in a freeze-frame of still life, silhouetted against the sea and hills of Galilee, that the Lord calls them to go preaching (Mk. 1:17). The Lord surely intended them to [at least later] figure out His allusion to Jer. 16:14-16, which prophesied that fishermen would be sent out to catch Israel and bring them home to the Father. And He called them to do that, right in the very midst of everyday life. Lk. 5:5 gives more detail. Despite having toiled all night and caught nothing, Peter was able to subdue his natural wisdom, his sense of futility, and the sense of irritation and superiority which exists in the experienced working man: "Nevertheless (how much that hides!) at *thy word* I will let down the net" (Lk. 5:5). It would seem that the parallel record of this is found in Mt. 4:18, which describes the call of the disciples soon after Christ's triumphant emergence from the wilderness temptations. We learn from Jn. 1:41,42 that it was Peter's brother, Andrew, who first told Peter about Jesus, and who brought him to meet Jesus first of all. The point is that at the time of Peter's call as he was fishing, he had probably heard very few of Christ's words personally. He had heard about Him, and listened to His words for perhaps a few hours at different times in the past. So where did he get this tremendous respect for the word of Christ from, which

he demonstrated when Christ called him? The answer must be that he meditated deeply on those words that he had heard and understood, and came to appreciate that the man saying them was worth giving all for. Our far easier access to God's word does not seem to make us more meditative as individuals. We have access to hearing God's word which previous generations never had. We can listen to it on any manner of mobile devices, have recordings of Scripture playing at home, analyse it by computer, hear it sung to us according to our taste in music, read it from pocket Bibles as we work and travel... we *can* and *could* do all these things. My sense is that we just don't make use of our opportunities as we should. Why has God given our generation these special opportunities to be ultra-familiar with His word? Surely it is because our age contains temptations which are simply more powerful than those of former years. So it is *vital*, vital for our eternal destiny, that we do make as much use as possible of all these opportunities. We should be *cramming*, yes cramming, our hearts and brains with the words of God. I certainly get the feeling that Peter would have listened to a recording of Isaiah on his mobile device if he had one, as he went out fishing; that he'd have had tapes of the Psalms going all evening long in his little fisherman's cottage, wife and kids caught up in his enthusiasm too (Mk. 10:10,15 suggests that the incident with the little children occurred in Peter's house).

4:19 *And he said to them: Follow me, and I will make you*- One intention of our calling to the Gospel is to bring others to the Kingdom. Evangelism isn't therefore something intended for only some within the body of Christ. And the Lord has a personal training program for each of us- "I will make you...".

Fishers of men- The Greek *halieus* is literally 'a salty one', from *hals*, salt. The Lord invites all in Him to see themselves as the salty ones of the earth (Mt. 5:13). The call to be fishers, salty ones, is therefore not only for those men on the shore of Galilee, nor for just some of us- but for us all. The Qumran documents spoke of 'the fishers of men' as being those who would condemn Israel in the last day; and yet the Lord clearly had the idea that they were to 'catch' people out of the 'sea' of the nations and bring them to salvation. So the preachers as 'fishers of men' actually have a double role- as Paul put it, to some our preaching is the savour of death, to others, the savour of life (2 Cor. 2:16). Not only does this encourage us as the preachers to *plead* with men to choose life rather than death; but it is a sober reminder that we too face the impact of the very Gospel which we ourselves preach, and must likewise live lives of ongoing response. We preach, therefore, aimed at a decision- not merely 'witnessing', nor simply imparting helpful information.

4:20 *And they immediately left the nets and followed him*- The Greek word translated "left" is used throughout the Synoptic records of the disciples 'leaving' what they knew in response to the Gospel. They left their nets, then their boat and even their father (:22). The same word is translated 'to forgive'. Because of our experience of having our sins 'let go' by God and His Son, we are thereby motivated to 'let go' not only others' sins and debts to us, but all the ties that bind us to the things of this life. The immediacy of their response is a theme of Matthew's; it is he who begins by so stressing how immediately Joseph and Mary responded.

4:21 *And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them*- They were intending to continue fishing. There was therefore no theatricism attached to their dramatic leaving of all.

4:22 *And they immediately left the boat and their father and followed him*- They became His disciples, that is the meaning of the idiom. The way the Lord called people in the midst of their daily lives, and they immediately "left all and followed Him" is surely recorded to set a pattern for all future response to Him (Mt. 4:22; Mk. 1:18). See on :20. Those fishermen who left their nets had heard the message some time earlier, but the record is framed so as to stress the immediacy and totality of response to Him, in the midst of daily life. In a day when the complexity of modern living can become an excuse to justify almost anything as an expression of discipleship, we need to remember the starker simplicities of Jesus' first call: "Follow me". And the immediate response which was made to it. In this sense, Jesus through His word that makes Him flesh to us, i.e. an imaginable person…still walks up to fishermen, into shops, accountants' offices, school classrooms: and bids us urgently and immediately leave behind our worldly advantage, and follow Him in the way of true discipleship. The immediacy of response is quite a theme (:20, and especially in Mark's early chapters). It continues with the speed at which people were baptized in the Acts.

4:23 *And Jesus went about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness among the people*- "Went about… teaching… preaching… healing" is just what we read of the Lord's followers doing in Acts. The preaching of the apostles (and of ourselves) continues the personal work of the Lord in whom they lived and moved, and therefore often Acts records the preaching work in language lifted from Luke as well as the other Gospel records (e.g. Acts 4:2; 5:12-16 = Mt. 4:23).

The preaching of the Kingdom is made parallel to preaching the time of acceptance with God and forgiveness of sins *now* (Lk. 4:43 cp. 19, 2 Cor. 6:2); Rom. 14:17, which seems to teach that the Kingdom of God is more about "peace and joy in the Holy Spirit", both now and eternally, than physical, tangible things. Christ's parables about the Kingdom don't speak of a political Kingdom, but rather about the relationship between God and the believer in the here and now.

4:24 *Then his fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and he healed them*
- The repetition of the word "and..." gives the impression that every kind of illness – physical and mental, understood and not understood – was healed by the Lord Jesus. "Lunatic" translates the Greek *selēniazomai* – "to be moon struck", derived from the noun *selēnē*, the moon. It's not true that some mental illnesses come from being moon–struck. But the idea is used, without correction – just as the idea of 'demon possession' is in the preceding phrase. "Brought" translates a word which was used in the technical sense of bringing sacrifice- and the idea of converts as sacrifices is repeated in Rom. 15:16.

4:25 *And great crowds followed him, those from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from the other side of the Jordan*- Luke makes the point that His popularity was not only because of the miracles, but because of His teaching. Lk. 4:22 records how people were amazed at the gracious words He spoke; there was something very unusual in His manner of speaking. Because of the gracious words and manner of speaking of Jesus, therefore God so highly exalted Him (Ps. 45:2). The Father was *so* impressed with the words of His Son. Evidently there must have been something totally outstanding about His use of language. God highly exalted Him because He so loved righteousness and hated wickedness (Ps. 45:7), and yet also

because of His manner of speaking (Ps. 45:2); so this *love* of righteousness and hatred of evil was what made His words so special.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 5

5:1 *And seeing the crowds, he went into the mountain and when he had sat down, his disciples came to him*- The article suggests a specific mountain in mind- perhaps the great mountain Jesus had in mind in 4:8? Jesus taught up a mountain, suggesting that His teaching is accessible to those who make some effort to receive it. The Sermon on the Mount is the equivalent of the giving of the Law, also on a mountain. As God / the Angel gave the law to Moses, so Jesus did to the disciples. The disciples ascending the mount to receive the teaching parallels them with Moses, with the implication they too were to relay it to Israel. Instead of the people being forbidden to come up the mountain, they were allowed to- for by the end of the Sermon we learn that the multitudes were also there (7:28,29) and descended from the mountain (8:1). The Rabbis also *sat* to teach- but they taught always indoors. The similarities and differences are being emphasized to demonstrate how Jesus was in continuity with Jewish culture and yet also radically different. The scene of Ex. 20 is of Moses ascending the mount to receive the Law, the first part of which was the ten commandments. The beatitudes seem to be the New Covenant's equivalent of the ten commandments- see on 5:22. The Lord's sermon quotes or alludes to all of the ten commandments (excluding the Sabbath) and redefines them (5:21,27). The way the Lord makes no comment upon the command to keep the Sabbath is surely significant. Simplistically, one could argue that He was suggesting that His followers would not be bound by the Sabbath commandment. But it was well understood in the first century that priests on duty were free from the Sabbath legislation. The hint could therefore be that the Lord believed that because His obedient listeners were to live their lives as the new priesthood, they were therefore free from Sabbath legislation. The Lord was surely very conscious that John had come to prepare the way for Him, in terms of Isaiah 40. And yet that same prophecy saw the good news being declared to Jerusalem from a mountain (Is. 40:9). Perhaps the Lord was seeking to consciously fulfil this by going up a mountain and proclaiming blessedness and good news to spiritual Jerusalem. It could be further noted that the Gospel of Matthew features five sections of recorded speeches of Jesus, each concluded by the phrase "When Jesus had finished these sayings" (Mt. 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). It may be that Matthew is seeking to present the Gospel as a new Torah, with five 'books' to it just as there were in the old Torah.

5:2 *And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying*- As if this struck Matthew, recalling how this manifesto of His teaching first fell from His lips. There may be the implication that what He said was by direct revelation from God.

5:3- see on 5:43. *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*- Our prayers should be like those of a man on death row in a dark dungeon, waiting to die, but groaning for salvation (Ps. 102:17,20). This is the extent of our desperation. We are "the poor" (Gk. 'the crouchers'), cringing in utter spiritual destitution (Mt. 5:3). And yet we have a terrible tendency to only occasionally *really* pray, content with prayer on a surface level. The Lord's parables invite us to see ourselves as, e.g., the desperate widow woman pleading for deliverance from her oppressive landlord (Lk. 18:3).

5:4 *Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted*- Associated in the Old Testament with mourning for sin (Ex. 33:4,5; Ezra 10:6; Neh. 8:9; Ps. 38:5,6). The comfort offered in Isaiah was specifically comfort for sinners who realized their desperation (Is. 12:1; 40:1). The time of God's grace was extended, therefore, to those who mourned for their sins (Is. 61:2,3; 66:10). Such Godly sorrow is the sorrow of repentance (2 Cor. 7:10).

We noted in chapter 4 that the Lord had in mind the way that John had prepared the way for Him in terms of the prophecy of Isaiah 40, which spoke of 'comfort' to God's doubting people. If this comfort were accepted, then the glory would come to Zion and John's work would have prepared a highway of repentant people over which the Lord Jesus could have come to Zion and established the Kingdom there and then. Comfort to the mourners was one of Isaiah's descriptions of that possible Kingdom. It could have all happened in the first century, but Israel would not- and so the final fulfilment of this comfort will be at Christ's return and the establishment of God's Kingdom fully on earth. "Be comforted" may be a prophesy of the Comforter which was to give a measure of comfort even in this life (Jn. 14:16).

5:5 *Blessed are the meek*- Those humbled by their sins. James, in his commentary on the Sermon, alludes here by saying that God gives grace to the meek, and therefore sinners should cleanse themselves (James 4:6,8-10).

For they shall inherit the earth- Clearly a reference to the promises to Abraham. But it was no good just being a physical descendant of Abraham- humility was the required characteristic. To the Lord, humility was the very *epitome* of righteousness (Mt. 5:5 cp. Ps. 37:29), as Malachi saw pride as the epitome of wickedness (see the parallelism in Mal. 4:1). There is a telling parallelism in Zeph. 2:3 which equates Yahweh God of Israel with humility: "Seek ye Yahweh... seek meekness".

5:6 *Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness*- Notice how some of the Lord's very first words on opening His ministry were "*Blessed* (Lk. 1:48) are they which do *hunger* (Lk. 1:53) and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be *filled* (Lk. 1:53)" (Mt. 5:6). Clearly He is alluding to His mother's own description of herself. It's as if He stands up there before the hushed crowd and lays down His manifesto with those words. This was the keynote of what He had to say to humanity. Everybody was waiting to hear what His message really was. And this is what He said. He was saying 'This, guys, is what I essentially and most fundamentally seek to inspire in you'. And He saw His dear mother as the epitome of the converts He was seeking to make. I lay great store by this allusion. For it makes Mary, at least at the time of the Angel's visit, truly our pattern. She heard the glad tidings and believed that word in faith, holding on to it in her heart (Lk. 8:15,21). She was a model for all who hear the Gospel. It could even be that the language of Lk. 1:32,33,35 is framed in such a way as to make Mary appear to be the first person who heard the gospel about Jesus.
Thirst after righteousness- The characteristics of the 'blessed' in the first four beatitudes are that they will be spiritually poor (:3), mourning (often used in connection with contrition for sin), humbled, and thirsting to be more righteous than they are. "Righteousness" could mean 'justice' but the term is used by Paul to specifically refer to 'justification from sin'. These descriptions immediately give us all the encouragement that this message of the Kingdom is for me, even me. The next blessing is for the merciful, the forgiving, because they shall obtain mercy- i.e. final cleansing from sin

and justification on judgment day. Although of course this is possible even now. See on 5:9 *peacemakers* and on 6:12.

For they shall be filled- S.w. Mt. 14:20 about the 'filling' of the multitude who came to hear the word of Jesus. All the Kingdom blessings have some fulfilment in this life. John's version of this is the record of the Lord saying that the salvation He provides would satisfy those who hungered and thirsted for it (Jn. 6:35).

5:7 *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy*- This is apparently missing in Luke's record. He says instead that the reviled and excluded will be blessed (Lk. 6:22). Samuel Lachs suggests another original text actually read "Happy are they who are excommunicated for they shall receive mercy" (Samuel T. Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary of the New Testament* (Jersey City: Ktav, 1987) p. 75). There's a clear connection with Ps. 18:25: "With the merciful you will show yourself merciful. With the perfect man, you will show yourself perfect". This verse was clearly in the Lord's mind, and it may shed light on His later challenge to be perfect as the Father is perfect (Mt. 5:48)- in this case, He would be inviting us to forgive others as God does. Paul in 2 Tim. 1:16 saw Onesiphorus as the merciful man of Mt. 5:7; and the Jerusalem ecclesia (Heb. 10:34) as the persecuted people of Mt. 5:12.

5:8 *Blessed are the pure in heart*- Heb. *bare lev*, also translated 'broken hearted' in Is. 61:1. A pure heart can also be understood in the context of what happens on repentance and receipt of forgiveness, for Ps. 51:10 uses the term to describe David's position after his repentance and forgiveness (also in Ps. 73:13).

For they shall see God- Again the Lord is encouraging the disciples whom He was addressing to see themselves as Moses (see on 5:1), for Moses was held in Judaism as the only one who had seen God (Ex. 33:11).

5:9 *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God*- Samuel T. Lachs suggests another original text actually read "Blessed are they that stumble" (Lachs, p. 77), and this would fit with our suggestion made on 5:6 that the 'happy' people are those who are spiritually weak but are accepted and forgiven. However, the reference may be to the priesthood, with whom God made a covenant of peace, that they might bring Israel to peace with Him (Num. 25:12; Mal. 2:6). Just as the Lord encouraged the disciples to see themselves as Moses, so He inspires them with the thought that they, the nothing special, secular Jews, could and would take over the work of the priesthood. Rabbi Hillel "exhorted his students to become disciples of Aaron, 'peacelovers and peacemakers' (mAb1:12)" (As quoted in Geza Vermes, *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 2004) p. 314).

5:10 *Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*- 'Persecute' is literally 'to drive away' (s.w. Mt. 1:23; 23:34), maybe carrying the idea of excommunication. Being thrown out of the synagogue was a major and frequent occurrence for many who came to Jesus (Jn. 9:22). There are Old Testament connections between persecution and suffering for sin (Dt. 30:1-7), so the Lord could also have in view, as often in the Beatitudes, that He is offering blessing and happiness for the messed up sinners who are suffering in this life for their sins.

5:11 *Blessed are you when men reproach you because of me, and persecute you and falsely accuse you of all sorts of evil*- Quoted by Peter in 1 Pet. 4:14 where he says that we are blessed / happy if we are reviled for the sake of Christ's Name. Verses 10 and 11 seem to imply that persecution, slander and serious opposition is inevitable for all who will follow Christ. Yet when these things happen, we seem to be shocked and surprised.

Paul's extraordinary ability to rejoice in his trials seems to have been rooted in his sustained reflection upon Mt. 5:11,12: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you... rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward... for so persecuted they the prophets" . These words are alluded to in at least 5 verses in his epistles. Again seeking to challenge the prevailing views of the Jewish leadership, the Lord invited His humble fishermen-followers to see themselves as the great prophets of old being persecuted by a wicked Israel (Mt. 5:11). When Corinth reviled him (2 Cor. 7:4), Paul saw this as being reviled and persecuted after the pattern of Mt. 5:12.

5:12- see on 5:7.

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven; for likewise they persecuted the prophets that preceded you- The language of persecution is also rooted very much in the language and experience of the prophets. The similar language in Mk. 13:8-11 and Lk. 21:12-18 suggests the same. Again, just as the Lord has challenged his secular, nothing-special followers to see themselves as Moses, now He invites them to see themselves as the prophets. And so a theme develops in the Sermon- that He is seeking to place the mantle of Moses, David and the prophets upon ordinary, sinful members of spiritual society, seeking to show them their huge potential significance in God's program. And that impression must come home to us too in our situations, no longer considering that spiritual heroics and work for God are somehow for 'the others', the leaders.

5:13 *You are the salt of the earth*- Salt inevitably affects, by reason of *what it is*, whatever is next to it. We are lights in a dark world. Lights give light. If the salt doesn't have the influence of salt, it is thrown away. Our poor record of preaching by personal contact is very worrying when seen in this light. We have hidden behind leaflets and press adverts and giving money. But if we aren't the salt, if we don't show *our* light in our little world; are we in fact the salt or the light of the earth? This unconscious spirituality, this natural witnessing, is the essential reflection of our experience of the Lord Jesus. He didn't say 'Do good works so that men may see the light'. He said "*let your light shine*" - and *then* men will see your good works and glorify the Father.

One characteristic of salt is that it creates thirst. We are mistaken if we assume that all those people out there are just waiting for us to come to them with a series of true doctrinal propositions. Virtually nobody is seriously interested- until they meet you and me. We need to create some sort of realization of need in those we mix with. Through our examples and through the way we make our initial approaches to them, we need to plug in to that basic human hunger for their creator. Plenty of other religions do just this- and we ought to be far more ‘in there’ than many of us are. The language seems to suggest that unless we are not influencing others, then we will be condemned. As in 4:19, the Lord seems to be teaching that some form of outgoing effect upon others, if not evangelism, is part and parcel of following Him. The parable of the light under the bucket in 5:15 teaches the same.

We *are* the salt of the earth. The Lord doesn’t say that we ought to be the salt of the earth, or should try to be. Salt with no flavour or influence is pointless, worthless, untrue to what it is intended to be, displeasing to its user, fit only to be thrown out; and so are we, if we fail to witness to others (Lk. 14:35). Likewise, we *are* the light of the world. By the very nature of who we are as in Christ, we are to influence the world around us. We don’t just hold the light in our hands; *we* are the light, our whole being, every moment we live. Preaching the light is not therefore something which we occasionally do. Sodium chloride (salt) is inert, meaning it remains unchanged by processes acting upon it and retains its characteristics through whatever. In the same

way as the believer is the city set on a hill which cannot be hid, the man who builds on rock, the good tree that must bring forth good fruit, so the Lord seems to be saying again that the essential direction of a believer's life is clear. God sees as either His people or not, and there is no grey area. We don't drop in and out of fellowship with Him. And this should be a comfort to us. We are His. Any salt that lost its saltness was not true salt, but some imitation (at the time, gypsum was sold by rogue salt traders as salt) or just something which appeared like salt- there is some 'salt' from the Dead Sea area which may have been in the Lord's mind. But the point was, that it was not true salt from the start. The covenant of salt was given to Aaron (Num. 18:19)- so yet again, the Lord is encouraging those secular men to see themselves as a new priesthood. The counter-culture of which Jesus is Lord is indeed radical. The Sermon on the Mount, and so much of Jesus' later teaching, revolves around "us" [His people] acting one way whilst the world acts in another. We are to love all men, whereas the world loves only its friends; we are to pray meaningfully, whilst the Gentile world merely heap up empty phrases; we are to seek the things of God's Kingdom, whilst the world seeks only for material things. Human values are radically reversed in Christ. The humble are exalted and the proud debased; the first are put last, the servant made the greatest. But Jesus also contrasts His followers not only with "the Gentiles" but with the contemporary religious people- the 'scribes and Pharisees'. Thus we are to be radically different both from the nominal church, and the secular world in general. Repeatedly Jesus speaks of "they" and "you"; and yet He also spoke of the handful of Palestinian peasants who really grasped His teaching as being the salt of the earth [Israel?] and the light of the [whole Gentile] world. It was their separateness from the world that was to be a part of the world's salvation. So Jesus was certainly not teaching a bunker mentality, an island existence, but rather a reaching out into the world of others for their salvation. The true radicalism is the radicalism of love- love lived out in ordinary life. Whether we strive for absolute truthfulness, what place we seek at a feast, the struggle to grant real and total forgiveness- this is the radicalism of love.

The beatitudes were spoken generally of all believers, but "You are the salt of the earth" was spoken specifically to the disciples. We can understand the 'earth' as the land- of Israel. The Lord pinned His hopes for the whole land of Israel on that band of rather unlikely men, most of them secular, non-religious Jews. It was in their power to change and prepare the whole land for Him. The very metaphor of salt was well chosen- for salt was cheap and common. It was by their very earthliness and humanity that their mission was to succeed, just as was the case for the Lord Himself.

But if the salt has lost its savour, with what shall it be salted? It becomes good for nothing but to be thrown out and trodden under the feet of men- The idea could be that if we are not salt for the earth, preparing people to be acceptable sacrifices to God, then there is no plan B. It all depends upon us. And if we don't do that work, then we shall be rejected. Note how Paul speaks of the conversion of people as the offering up in sacrifice of the Gentiles (Rom. 15:16).

"Good" in "good for nothing" has the idea is of being able, to have possibility. If we will not use our potential for good, then we will be rejected, because we have no possibilities for use. It's only when we wilfully lose our potential for good that we really are of no use. Lk. 14:34 carries the same idea- if salt loses savour, what then can be used for seasoning ["wherewith shall it be salted"]? The idea is surely that if salt cannot be used for making salty- then it can be used for nothing, it has no practical use.

The same phrase "thrown out" is used about the rejection of the wicked at the last day (Mt. 13:48; Jn. 15:6). The 'treading underfoot by men' would then refer to the faithful having some part to play in the condemnation of the wicked. The idiom may mean that they will be despised by them. Or there could be a literal element to it (Mal. 4:3 "the wicked shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in that day"). It is not for us to thus judge others *now* because we are to do so *then*.

5:14 *You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid-*

"The light of the world" was a title for the High Priest, and is used today of chief rabbis. But this exalted language is applied to secular people, holding on to basic faith by the skin of their teeth. "You are..." is read by us as meaning "You ought to be, you must be". But the idea is that we are set up as this world's light. And we are to live out what we are in potential.

The reference is surely also to Jerusalem, which was known as the city set on a hill (N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: S.P.C.K., 2001) p. 289). The connection between this city and "the light of the world" is clearly drawing from Old Testament descriptions of Jerusalem being a light to which the true Israel would rally and the Gentile world would come for enlightenment about the true God (Ps. 132:17 cp. 1 Kings 11:34-36; Is. 2:2; 60:1; 66:20). Jerusalem was the classic external symbol of Israel and Judaism- and the Lord is saying that His largely non-religious, secular Jewish disciples were to be the true Zion for the enlightenment of both Israel and the world. This is similar to His invitation for them to see themselves as Moses, who alone "saw God", and sharing in the persecutions of the prophets. This high calling echoes down to us- we who like to think that we are not amongst God's great heroes, and who prefer to leave the dramatic acts of faith to our leaders and high profile members. But the calling is to each of us, to be of no less significance than them, not to hide behind the grand religious symbols of faith such as the temple and the city of Jerusalem- but to be those things in daily life. Judaism understood the Levitical priesthood as the light of the Jewish and Gentile worlds. The Testament of Levi 14:3 claimed of the priesthood: "For as the heaven is purer in the Lord's sight than the earth, so also be ye, the lights of Israel, (purer) than all the Gentiles [or in another manuscript "ye who are the lights of Israel, shall be as the sun and moon"]". And yet as so often in the Sermon, the Lord applies the language of priesthood to his secular, spiritually poor listeners.

There appears the idea that if we hide who we are from others, then we are not really Christian. A city on a hill cannot possibly be covered. It is totally public. There must be an element about our discipleship which is likewise absolutely open and obvious to the world. When the Lord returns, it would be strange indeed if our neighbours were shocked to know that we were actually one of His people. The same word is used about the man who 'hid' the talent of the Gospel (Mt. 25:25). The relevance of this emphasis in the first century world was that it was apparently easier to merely quietly assent to Christian teaching, rather than come out in the open about it. The same word is used of how Joseph of Arimathea 'secretly', hiddenly, believed, for fear of the Jews (Jn. 19:38). But in the end, he 'came out', as we all are lead to do by providential circumstance and our own growing conviction of Christ.

All those who preach Him are like a city that cannot be hidden (Mt. 5:14); just as He likewise "could not be hid" in His preaching (Lk. 7:24). He was the light of the world, and so are we. In the work of witness, we find ourselves especially united to Him. We are Him to this world, and in a sense, He only shines in this world through us. Witnessing is in a sense for our benefit. Perhaps in answer to the unspoken question 'How can we avoid losing our saltiness?', the Lord replied by saying that a city set on a

hill cannot be hid (Mt. 5:14). He meant that the open exhibition of the Truth by us will help us in the life of personal obedience to Him. The city set on a hill is specifically spoken as being Nazareth, where the Lord had grown up (Lk. 4:29). Jesus must've seen the town from the distance and thought out His teaching over the years before He now publically stated it.

5:15 *Neither do men light a lamp and put it under a basket but on the stand; and it shines for all that are in the house*- The Lord speaks of how we are the light of the world, giving light to the world in the same way as "they" light a lamp. Who are the "they"? The point has been made that to 1st century Palestinian ears, the answer was obvious: Women. Because lighting the lamps was a typical female duty, which men were not usually involved in. Could it not be that the Lord Jesus even *especially* envisaged women as His witnesses? Did He here have in mind how a great company of women would be the first to share the news that the light of the world had risen?

The Greek article in "the lamp / candlestick" refers to the specific candlestick, and to Jewish minds this would surely have referred to the candlestick in the Holy Place (s.w. Heb. 9:2). This continues the theme of the Lord teaching a new form of Judaism, for His sermon on the mount is full of allusions to previous Mosaic practice, but redefining it. The implication of :16 is that ordinary men are present in the Holy Place too, who will see our light. Or it could be that Jesus has in mind how it was the priests who alone entered the Holy Place- and He is saying that the light from those who followed Him would illuminate the Jewish priesthood. The light of the candlestick is both the believer (Mt. 5:15) and the Gospel itself (Mk. 4:21). We are to be the Gospel. We must burn as a candle now, in shedding forth the light, or we will be burnt at the judgment (Mt. 5:15 and Jn. 15:6 use the same words). This is but one of many examples of the logic of endurance; we must burn anyway, so why not do it for the Lord's sake and reap the reward.

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

of possible consequence if we share the light, will result in the light going out. And that lesson needs to be learnt time and again.

5:16 *Likewise, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven*- These are those "in the house[hold]" (:15), "those who enter" (Lk. 8:16; 11:33). The general public does not seem to glorify God because of good works. 2 Cor. 9:2 seems to understand the verse as meaning that we give light and opportunity for praise to other believers. Paul writes of how the generous commitments of the Corinthian ecclesias had "inspired very many" to generosity (2 Cor. 9:2). And we too, in our abundant responses to God's super-abundant grace, will inspire each other likewise. I don't mean, of course, in the proud manner of many charity donors, trying to outshine each other before the publics' gaze by their 'generosity'. I mean that in the graces of forgiveness, kindness in a myriad modest ways, that we see performed by others, we will find *our* motivation to do likewise. For rightly-performed good works are a light to the world; perhaps it is their very modesty which makes them "*shine* before men". So in this sense we will perceive others' acts of grace and be inspired by them, no matter how discreetly and modestly done they are. For they inevitably shine in a way that gives light to all who are in the (ecclesial) house, so that they too glorify the Father (Mt. 5:16).

It could be that the "men" who glorify God in Heaven are the Angels- the same "men" who lit our candle in the first place (:15). "Men" in the parables who do the 'gathering' of our fruits (Jn. 15:6; Mt. 7:16) represent Angels, who are the ones who will actually do the gathering at the last day (Mt. 13:41; 24:31). This seems to make most sense, and avoids the idea of our doing good works specifically in order to impress men. And men do not glorify God just because they see our good works. But Angels, who lit our candle in the first place, notice how our light is shining out to others "in the house", and glorify God in Heaven ["*is* in Heaven" is unjustified- the idea is that they glorify the Father, in Heaven]. In this interpretation, the "men" are different to those who are "in the house".

5:17 *Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I came not to destroy but to fulfil*- The idea that the Lord Jesus ended the Law of Moses on the cross needs some reflection. That statement only pushes the question back one stage further- how exactly did He 'end' the Law there? How did a man dying on a cross actually end the Law? The Lord Jesus, supremely in His death, was "the end of the law" (Rom. 10:4). But the Greek *telos* ["end"] is elsewhere translated "the goal" (1 Tim. 1:5 NIV). The character and person of the Lord Jesus at the end was the goal of the Mosaic law; those 613 commandments, if perfectly obeyed, were intended to give rise to a personality like that of the Lord Jesus. When He reached the climax of His personal development and spirituality, in the moment of His death, the Law was "fulfilled". Then, it was "accomplished" (:18), and *ginomai* there is usually used about events being accomplished; the supreme event in view is the cross. The Lord taught that He "came" in order to die; and yet He also "came" in order to "fulfil" the Law (Mt. 5:17). Mt. 5:17 = Gal. 5:14. Christ fulfilled the Law by His supreme love of His neighbour (us) as Himself. The Law of Moses was intended to create a perfect man- if it were to be totally obeyed. The Lord Jesus did this- and therefore there was no more need for the Law. Yet the Beatitudes were addressed to those who hungered to be righteous, and who were spiritually poor, having broken God's laws. It was therefore in this context that the Lord Jesus sets before those very people the ultimate good news- that He has come determined to succeed in perfect obedience to the Law, and thus fulfilling it, He would remove its binding nature upon others. Hence the Law was added *until* the Seed should come (Gal. 3:19). This conclusion (in broad terms) was also arrived at by Dietrich

Bonhoeffer (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (London: S.C.M., 2001 ed.) pp. 74-76). The Lord's total obedience and fulfilling of the Law is therefore further good news for we who have failed both historically and in present life to keep it.

5:18 *For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or one tittle shall in any way pass from the law, until all things be accomplished*- Vine comments: "Jot is for jod, the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Tittle is the little bend or point which serves to distinguish certain Hebrew letters of similar appearance. Jewish tradition mentions the letter jod as being irremovable; adding that, if all men in the world were gathered to abolish the least letter in the law, they would not succeed. The guilt of changing those little hooks which distinguish between certain Hebrew letters is declared to be so great that, if such a thing were done, the world would be destroyed".

5:19 *Whoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments*- See on 'jot and tittle' (:18). Note the connection between breaking "these least commandments" and being "least in the Kingdom". The least in the Kingdom will therefore be those who didn't consider the small things worthy of their attention. But the principle is that by our attitude to that which is "least" we show our appropriacy to receive that which is great (Lk. 16:10 s.w.).

And shall teach men to do so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever shall do and teach them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven- The Lord explained that “the least in the Kingdom of Heaven” would have broken “the least” commandments, and would have taught men so (Mt. 5:19); and yet “the least in the Kingdom” was a phrase He elsewhere used about those who would actually be in the Kingdom (Mt. 11:11; 25:40 "the least of these my brothers"). Here surely is His desire to save, and His gracious overlooking of intellectual failure, human misunderstanding, and dogmatism in that misunderstanding (‘teaching men so’). The idea of being called / named / pronounced great or least in the Kingdom suggests differing degrees of reward distributed at judgment day. The idea of being called / named at the day of judgment has just been used in Mt. 5:9 (s.w.). There is thus the possible implication that some who will be accepted by the Lord who even at their acceptance at the judgment have wrong attitudes towards their brethren. Thus before the Lord of the harvest, those who thought they had worked hardest complained that those they thought had done less, were still getting a penny. They were rebuked, but they still had their penny (cp. salvation; Mt. 20:11). The subsequent comment that the first shall be last might imply that they will be in the Kingdom, but in the least place. Likewise the brother who takes the highest place in the ecclesia will be made with shame to take the lower place (Lk. 14:9). Or the bitter elder brother, angry at the Father's gracious enthusiasm for the worthless brother, is addressed by the Father (God) in language which is relevant to the Lord Jesus: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine" (Lk. 15:30). These sentiments are elsewhere expressed about the Lord Jesus. Is the implication that bitter elder brother is still in Christ and accepted in Him, even though his attitude to his brother is not what it should be? The least in the Kingdom will be those who break commandments *and teach men so* (Mt. 5:19); but the least in the Kingdom will be counted greater than John the Baptist was in this life (Mt. 11:11). The simple message is that there will be some in the Kingdom who simply weren't very obedient in this their day of probation. Admittedly, these details are capable of other interpretations. But bear these points in mind, especially if you ever struggle with the apparent harshness of some Christians you may meet.

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It is Jesus Himself who shall be called great (the same two words used in Lk. 1:32 "He shall be *great* and shall be *called* the Son of the Highest"). The one who would do and teach supremely would be Jesus. Here, as so often, the Lord makes an oblique reference to Himself (as in mentioning that some seed would bring forth one hundred fold). The fact we teach others to do righteousness will be a factor in our acceptance (Mt. 5:19); although not the only one. Again we see the implication that we are to somehow teach others, to engage with others, in order to be acceptable.

5:20 *For I say to you, that unless your righteousness shall exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no way enter into the kingdom of heaven*- The Lord asks us to *exceed* the "righteousness" of the Pharisees (Mt. 5:20). By "righteousness" he refers to their charity, for which they were well known. In addition to tithing ten percent of absolutely everything, they gave a fifth of their income to charity such as widows, orphans, newly-wedded couples etc. In addition they made anonymous gifts in a "quiet room" of the Temple. How does our giving compare to that? And the Lord challenges us that unless we *exceed* that, "ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven". Radical, challenging words- that are hard to re-interpret or get around. And yet surely the answer is that super-abounding (AV 'exceeding') righteousness is only attainable by being justified / counted righteous in Christ. The Lord's challenging statement was surely in order to lead us to the same conclusions reached in Romans 1-8 about being counted righteous when we have no righteousness of our own. For to super-abundantly exceed the technical, points-scoring righteousness of the Pharisees was well-nigh impossible.

'Entering the Kingdom' is a very common idea in the Lord's teaching. But He understood people to be 'entering' the Kingdom right now ("them that are entering", Mt. 23:13). In the same way as judgment is ongoing now, so is condemnation and entry into the Kingdom.

5:21 *You have heard that it was said to those of old: You shall not kill, and whoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment*- Jesus was addressing the illiterate poor. Elsewhere, to the educated and literate, He says that they are aware that "It is *written*". Here He quotes both one of the ten commandments and also the tradition of the elders. We need to reflect upon the implications of the fact that the vast majority of the early Christians were illiterate. Literacy levels in first century Palestine were only 10% at the highest estimate. Some estimate that the literacy level in the Roman empire was a maximum of 10%, and literacy levels in Palestine were at most 3%. Most of the literate people in Palestine would have been either the wealthy or the Jewish scribes. And yet it was to the poor that the Gospel was preached, and even in Corinth there were not many educated or "mighty" in this world within the ecclesia. Notice how the Lord said to the Pharisees: "Have you not *read*?" (Mk. 2:25; Mt. 12:5; 19:4), whilst He says to those who responded to Him: "You have *heard*" (Mt. 5:21,27,33). His followers were largely the illiterate. As the ecclesial world developed, Paul wrote inspired letters to the ecclesias. Those letters would have been *read* to the brethren and sisters. Hence the

great importance of ‘teachers’ in the early churches, those who could faithfully read and transmit to others what had been written.

5:22 *But I say to you*- Having quoted one of the ten commandments, Jesus implies that His teaching now supersedes them. See on 5:1.

That everyone who is angry with his brother- We are all brothers and sisters, each of us adopted into the Divine family, each of us freed slaves, rejoicing in that pure grace. Most times the NT speaks of ‘brothers’, it is in the context of tensions between people (see Mt. 5:21-24, 43-48; 7:1-5; 18:15-35). We can’t separate ourselves from our brethren any more than we can from our natural families. Once a brother, we are always a brother. No matter what disappointments and disagreements we may have, we are baptized into not only the Lord Jesus personally, but also into a never ending relationship with each other. We cannot walk away from it.

Without a cause- As added in some texts and AV. The Greek is always translated elsewhere 'vainly', the idea being 'in vain', 'without an effect'. Anger which doesn't achieve anything positive is wrong. God's anger is creative- e.g. the 'anger' of His judgment through the flood brought about the salvation of the faithful. Anger therefore is not in itself wrong. The motives are all important.

Shall be in danger of the judgment, and whoever shall say to his brother Raca shall be in danger of the council, and whoever shall say Moros shall be in danger of the fire of Gehenna- One of the major themes of the Lord's teaching in the sermon on the mount was the need to respect others; to see the value and meaning of persons. Indeed, it can rightly be said that all sin depersonalizes another person. Sin is almost always against persons. Relentlessly, ruthlessly, the Lord drives deeper, and yet deeper, into the very texture of human personality in demanding that, e.g., we are not even angry with others, lest we effectively murder them. To say "Raca" to your brother was to commit sin worthy of serious judgment, He taught (Mt. 5:22). "Ra-ca" was the sound made when a man cleared his throat to spit, and it was a term of abuse in earlier Semitic languages. To despise your brother, to disregard his importance as a person, was to be seen as an ultimate sin. In this light we should seek to avoid the many terms of abuse which are so common today: “a right idiot" etc. The Law taught that one should not curse a deaf person. Think what this really means. Surely the essence of it is that we should never be abusive, in any form, to or about anyone, even if it is sure that they will never know or feel our abuse.
Every word will be judged (Mt. 12:36), and in some cases by words we will justified and by our speech we will be condemned. So we must speak as those who will be judged for what we speak (James 2:12). The man who *says* to his brother 'Raca' or 'Thou fool' is in real danger of hell fire (Mt. 5:22). The tongue has the power to cast a man into hell fire (James 3:5,6)- some may be condemned for what they have said, perhaps connecting with how the beast is thrown into the fire of destruction because of his words (Dan. 7:11,12). Thus there is a link between the judgment of the unworthy and that of the world. The process of condemnation will remind the wicked of all their hard words and hard deeds (Jude 15). Yet now, we can speak words all too easily. Yet we talk and speak as those whose words will be taken into account at the last day. This little selection of passages is powerful- or ought to be. There is reason to think that specific record is kept of incidents, and in some form there will be a 'going through' of them. Thus when self-righteous Jews told their brethren "Stand by yourself, come not near me, for I am holier than you", God comments that "This is written before me... I will recompense" (Is. 65:5,6).

His standards were sometimes unbelievably high. Whoever called his brother a fool (Gk. *more*- a moron, but implying a rebel, an apostate- Ps. 78:8; Jer. 5:23 LXX)

was liable to eternal condemnation by Him. John Stott claims that the Greek may directly transliterate the Hebrew word *mara* (a rebel or apostate) (John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount: Christian Counter-culture* (Leicester: I.V.P., 2003) p.84). The fact that calling our brother a 'fool' warrants definite condemnation surely implies of itself that the term meant that the fool would be condemned at judgment day. If we condemn others, even if they are to be condemned, then we shall be condemned. That is the Lord's message. We must remember that in Hebrew thought, to pronounce a curse upon a person was seen as highly meaningful and likely to come about. To declare someone as condemned at the future judgment seat would therefore have had a huge psychological effect upon the person. They would have felt that they really would be condemned. The evil practice of disfellowshipping individuals, implying implicitly and at times explicitly that they have no place in the body of Christ, can have the same effect.
When the Lord spoke about calling your brother a fool being the same as murdering him (Mt. 5:22; 1 Jn. 3:15), He may well have been thinking of the passage in Leviticus 19:16-18: "Thou shall not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people... thou shalt not hate thy neighbour in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise (frankly, NIV) rebuke thy neighbour... thou shalt not avenge nor bear any grudge... but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself". The fact this passage is expanded upon so many times in Proverbs would indicate that gossip was as major a problem among the old Israel as it is among the new. But notice the fine psychology of the Spirit here: gossip in the church is related to having a grudge, to hating your neighbour in your heart, to not loving your neighbour as you love yourself (and we are *very* conservative about our own failings). To hate your brother in your heart, to gossip about him, was and is as bad as murdering him. And this same connection between gossip and murder is made in the prophets (Ez. 22:9 cp. Prov. 26:22). But the Law provided a way out. If you had something against your brother, frankly tell him about his failure, *so that* you would not hate him in your heart. If we don't do this, or try to get someone else to do it, we will end up hating our brother in our heart and we will gossip about him.

"In danger of" in the Greek doesn't imply a mere possibility, but rather, that such a person will receive the threatened judgment. "The council" refers to the Sanhedrin; but you didn't come before them for muttering 'Raca'. The Lord surely meant that such would come before the Heavenly council, of Angels. For this was a well-known, Old Testament based idea- that there is a Heavenly council of Angels. And Christ will come with the Angels with Him to judge us. So the rejected will first come before the Lord, then the Angelic council, and then condemnation. It could be argued that calling a brother 'Raca' and being angry at him without a cause would lead to discussion about this at the day of judgment; but not condemnation ['hell fire', Gehenna]. Only pronouncing a brother a 'fool' , i.e. positively condemned and not to enter God's Kingdom, would lead to that condemnation. There appears to be a three stage progression here from judgment / discussion to council (Gk. *sanhedrin*), to condemnation in Gehenna. It could be that the three ideas are all parallel. But it's tempting to see them rather as a progression, and to note the similarity with the three stage progression of Mt. 18:15-17, where in case of interpersonal conflict there was firstly a private reasoning with the brother, then bringing the church together to discuss the case (cp. the Sanhedrin), and then treating the person as a sinner. However, the surrounding context of Mt. 18:15-17 suggests to me that the Lord spoke all that tongue in cheek and did not intend it to be obeyed literally. For the question of the context is 'If my brother sins against me'. The Lord outlines the three step scenario- and then says

that if your brother sins against you, forgive him 70 x 7, that is, even if his repentance seems less than credible, without seeking to test the legitimacy of his repentance. The three stage process was well known in Judaism, and the connection with Mt. 5:22 shows that in the Lord's thinking, it was an attempt to reflect the judgment and condemnation of God in the community of believers today. And that is precisely what the Lord implores us *not* to do (especially in Mt. 7:1). *We* are not to attempt to mimic Heaven's judgment and condemnation in our encounter with our brethren in this life. There are churches and groups who seek to follow Mt. 18:15-17 to the letter, claiming they are being Biblical in their approach. But some more research would indicate that perhaps by doing so they are doing exactly what the Lord did not want us to do, and by doing so may be placing themselves in danger of condemnation.

5:23 *If therefore*- The link with :22 is not immediately apparent. The idea seems to be that we should reconcile with our brother in order to avoid the temptation to unwarranted anger with our brother, muttering 'raca' about him, or pronouncing him a condemned fool. If we are unreconciled, even if the situation is our brother's fault because *he* has something against *us*, then we are liable to the temptation to become wrongly aggressive and condemnatory towards him. And this is a significant part of spiritual life- getting ourselves into an environment of thought and situation with others where temptation will not press so strongly upon us. It's easy to leave situations unreconciled, but time does not actually heal them, and the situations lead to temptations towards aggression and judgmental attitudes which may lead to our condemnation.

You are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you- I'd always read this, or perhaps glanced over it, as saying that I shouldn't offer my gift on the altar if *I* had something against my brother, but I should reconcile with him; but seeing *I* have nothing against anyone, well I can just go on in serving the Lord. There may be others who have a problem with me, but then, that is for them to sort out with me. But no. The Lord is saying: 'If your brother has something *against you*; if the fault is *his*... then *you* take the initiative and try to reconcile it, before doing anything else'.

5:24 *Leave your gift before the altar and go your way*- The only Old Testament case of an interrupted sacrifice was Cain and Abel. Yahweh told Cain that if he would 'do well', then his sacrifice would be accepted, and Yahweh appears to suggest an animal for Cain to offer (Gen. 4:7)- on this basis I would suggest that the sacrificial meeting was interrupted by Cain murdering Abel. The Lord also may have in view the way that a thief or deceiver could repent by putting things right with his brother *and then* offering a sacrifice (Lev. 6:4-6). The Lord is assuming that we are guilty- and this is part of the hyperbole. If you have a relationship breakdown with your brother, then you are guilty. That's the hyperbole; we are not always guilty, but the Lord is making the point that we simply must do all within our power to reconcile, with a sense of pounding urgency. Refusal to talk to our brethren is absolutely not the right way. The Lord also surely has in mind the teaching that the sacrifice of the wicked is unacceptable (Prov. 15:8; 21:27). Again the hyperbolic point is that we should act as if we are the guilty party in the case of relationship breakdown, and act with urgency to put things right. For time never heals in these cases- the longer the situation continues, the harder it is to ever resolve. Perhaps in turn Paul alludes to these things by urging us to examine ourselves (and his context is to examine our attitude to our brother) before we make the sacrifice at the Lord's table in the breaking of bread (1 Cor. 11:27,28)- 'the Lord's table'

was another way of speaking about the altar, thus making the breaking of bread meeting the equivalent of offering sacrifice under the Old Covenant.

First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift- Particularly in that watershed night of wrestling, Jacob was our example. The Lord taught that we must all first be reconciled with our brother before we meet with God with our sacrifices (Mt. 5:24)- an obvious allusion to Jacob's reconciliation with Esau in his heart, and then meeting with God. We really must *all* go through that process, whether in one night or a longer period. Reconciliation with our brother is required before acceptably meeting God. And yet many if not most die unreconciled with someone. This is one window onto the necessity of the judgment seat- it is for our benefit rather than the Lord's. There we will become reconciled to our brethren as we observe their judgments, realizing why they were as they were, and perceiving our own desperate need for grace. The tough alternative to this suggestion is that those who refuse to reconcile with their brethren in this life shall not therefore meet the Lord acceptably. Now we perhaps understand better what Paul meant when he urged us "as much as lies in *you*" to live at peace with all men (Rom. 12:18). Given that Christ can come at any moment, or our lives end, there is an urgency in all this. Which lead the Lord to urge us to reconcile "quickly" with our brother at any cost (:25). See on :25 *lest at any time*.

5:25 *Agree with your adversary*- The context of the preceding verses imply this is our brother. The Lord recognized there would be satans and personal adversaries within His ecclesia.

Quickly- We must agree with our adversary quickly, for we are on our way to judgment (Mt. 5:25). This continues Matthew's theme of immediate response; see on 4:20. The call of the Gospel is effectively a call to go to judgment. If we truly perceive this, and our coming need for the utmost grace, we will settle our differences with our brethren- "quickly". The whole Kingdom of God is likened to the parable of the virgins about the judgment (Mt. 25:1). We are *speeding* towards judgment, therefore we should watch with urgency what manner of people we are (2 Pet. 3:11,12). This urgency of our approach to preaching is in harmony with the generally urgent call to spiritual life which there is everywhere in the Lord's teaching. He gives the impression that we are living life on a knife edge. He saw men as rushing to their destruction. We are the accused man on the steps of the court, whose case is hopeless. Now is the very last moment for him to settle up with his brother (Mt. 5:25 cp. Lk. 12:58). We're like the unjust steward, with a knife at our throat because all our deceptions have been busted. *Everything* is at risk for the guy. Life in prison, goodbye to wife and kids, poverty… stretch out before him. He *must* get right with his brethren by forgiving them their debts. We can't come before God with our offering, i.e. our request for forgiveness, if our brother has any complaint against us regarding unforgiveness (Mt. 5:23). Forgiving each other is as important as that. As we judge, so we will be judged. Our attitude to the least of the Lord's brethren is our attitude to Him. There are likely no readers who don't need this exhortation- to ensure that they have genuinely forgiven all their brethren, and that so far as lies within them, they are at peace with all men. At any moment the bridegroom may return… so have your lamp burning well, i.e. be spiritually aware and filled with the Spirit. Put on your wedding garment, the righteousness of Jesus, before it's too late (Mt. 22:11-13). He's just about to come. The judge stands before our door, as James puts it.

While you are with him in the street- Gk. "in the way". The Lord seems to have in mind

Joseph's admonition to his brothers to not fall out whilst in the way together, but to abide under the deep impression of his grace towards them (Gen. 45:24).

Lest- The idea seems to be 'In case he...', or even perhaps stronger, implying 'because he will...'. Surveying the NT usage of the term, it generally seems to imply that 'this will be the case'. The idea is that if you have an adversary and do not reconcile with him, then you will be found guilty. The facts of the case don't come into it- if you are unreconciled, then you are guilty. Thus hyperbole is to reinforce the point made in :24- that reconciliation is so vital. There is of course the unspoken rider, that we must be reconciled "as much as lies in you" (Rom. 12:18). Paul died apparently unreconciled to many brethren- they in Asia had turned away from him personally (note the irony, that they 'turned away; (2 Tim. 1:15) from the one who had 'turned them away' from idols (Acts 19:26)), although some of the believers in Asia are addressed positively by the Lord Jesus in the letters of Rev. 2 and 3. But the point of the Lord's hyperbole is that those unreconciled to their brethren will be tempted to get into aggressive and condemnatory attitudes which may well lead to their exclusion from the Kingdom. And therefore He uses this hyperbole- that the unreconciled will be certainly found guilty and condemned, simply because they are unreconciled and have adversaries amongst their brethren.

The adversary deliver you- The implication is that our brother has the power to deliver us to judgment, or not. Again we see how reconciliation is a choice; it is in our power to bring our brother to judgment for certain things, and that process might even lead to his condemnation. But, the metaphor implies, we can *not* be adversarial, reconcile, and therefore our brother will not come to judgment for being unreconciled with us.

To the judge- The synagogue official. Luke seems to translate the Palestinian style of things into terms which were understandable by a Roman audience. Thus Lk. 6:47; 11:33 speak of houses with cellars, which were uncommon in Palestine; and in Lk. 8:16; 11:33 of houses with an entrance passage from which the light shines out. The synagogue official of Mt. 5:25 becomes the "bailiff" in Lk. 12:58. In Palestine, the cultivation of mustard in garden beds was forbidden, whereas Lk. 13:19 speaks of mustard sown in a garden, which would have been understandable only to a Roman audience. It seems in these cases that inspiration caused Luke to dynamically translate the essence of the Lord's teaching into terms understandable to a non-Palestinian audience. Even in Mt. 5:25 we read of going to prison for non-payment of debts, which was not the standard Jewish practice. Imprisonment was unknown in Jewish law. The point of all this is to show that we must match our terms and language to our audience.

And the judge deliver you to the officer and you be thrown into prison- There will be degrees of punishment. For some, the judge will pass them to the officer, who will cast them into prison (i.e. condemnation). For others, the judgment will pass them to the council and from there to hell fire (Mt. 5:21-25). Although the wages of sin will still be death at the judgment, it will be a "sorer punishment" for those under the New Covenant than those under the Old. Because there are, in some way, degrees of sin, there must also be degrees of punishment (2 Chron. 28:13,22; 1 Cor. 6:18; Lev. 5:18 note "according to thy estimation"; Judas had a "greater sin" than Pilate, Jn. 19:11). The punishment of the wicked at judgment will somehow take this into account. If the rejected are destroyed together (Mt. 13:30) and yet there are varying degrees of punishment, it follows that the punishment must be on a mental level; and "gnashing of

teeth" certainly fits in with this suggestion. The progression judge-officer-prison is similar to judgment-council-Gehenna condemnation in :22. I suggested that this may refer to the stages of the judgment process for the condemned at the last day, with unresolved sin being passed further on to others [Angels?] to consider. I suggested also that perhaps judgment and council may refer to unresolved sins being referred to more serious processes of judgment, out of which we may still emerge 'saved', but have eternally learnt our lesson. The same idea may be here- and even the final 'prison' can be exited, although at great cost to us (although on the other hand, a similar metaphor is used in Mt. 18:34 for the unforgiving debtor who is cast into prison and tormented "until he should pay all that was due". This could be speaking of condemnation). These metaphors may all be speaking about the learning process through which the unreconciled may have to pass at judgment day.

The rejected amongst the people of God will in some ways share the condemnation of the world which they loved. It may be that there will be different geographical areas of punishment; some are cast into fire, others into outer darkness, into prison (Mt. 5:25)... or are these simply saying that there will be different kinds of punishment? Or are they different figures for the same thing? Whatever, the sense that the day is drawing near should find expression in the love and care we show towards our brethren. The Lord exhorts to agree with our adversary quickly, whilst we are on the way to judgment- and He says this in the context of warning us to be reconciled with our brother (Mt. 5:23,25). In the light of approaching judgment there is an urgency about our need for reconciliation both with our brother and thereby with God (is He the "adversary" in the parable?). All this talk about reconciliation is placed in the Lord's opening manifesto of His fundamental values and beliefs. It should have the same prominence in our thinking and action.

5:26 *Truly I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny*- This may refer to the eternity of final condemnation for having been unreconciled to our brethren. In this case, we need to do all we can so that each and every situation of lack of reconciliation is truly not our fault. At the very least we are to have an open table to all our brethren. But not getting out "until" could mean that a slack attitude to reconcilliation with our brethren will lead to dire consequences for us in this life, and there will be no way out until whatever our fault was in the matter, our debt, is completely manifested and paid.

5:27 *You have heard that it was said: You shall not commit adultery*- AV "Said by them of old time". The Lord seems to avoid saying 'By Moses'. He seems to be stressing that the ten commandments had come down to them in oral form; and He was standing before them actually telling them new commandments. The contrast is 'They said... but I say', rather than 'Moses wrote, but I write...'.

5:28 *But I say to you, that everyone that looks on a woman*- Bathsheba was "very beautiful to *look upon*" (2 Sam. 11:2). And David did just that. Our Lord surely had his eye on that passage when he spoke about him that "*looketh on* a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already" (Mt. 5:28). Jubilees 4:15,22, a commonly known book in Judaism at the Lord's time, claimed that the sons of God of Gen 6.2 were Angels who fell because they lusted with their eyes after "the daughters of men". As so often in the Bible, wrong ideas are alluded to and corrected. It was not that Angels sinned by lustful looks leading to adultery- this language is reapplied to us as humans. Looking on a woman lustfully is also the language of Job 31:1: "I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?". Job recognized that if he did so, this would be the same as actually committing the deed. He says he will not look lustfully on a maid because "Is not destruction to the wicked? and a strange

punishment to the *workers* of iniquity?" (Job 31:3). Thus Job's understanding that a lustful look in the heart was working iniquity was at the basis of Christ's teaching.

Lusting for her- Gk. 'to set the heart upon'. The Lord is not speaking about involuntary turning of the eyes to simply look at a woman.

Has already committed adultery with her in his heart- Gk. 'even now'. The suggestion is that the adultery is going to happen in real physical terms, but it happened before God at the time of fantasizing it. It seems to me that the sense of the Greek here implies that an act of actually physically committed fornication will always begin with lust for the act in the heart. This is not to say that sexual fantasy is OK and only actually performing it is sinful. But the sense of 'even now' would appear to mean that this is not what the Lord is teaching here. He is saying that acts of fornication are actually committed ahead of the act- within the human heart. Sexual fantasy about forbidden partners would surely be outlawed by the many NT commands about spiritual mindedness- e.g. "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1).

5:29 *And if your right eye causes you to stumble*- To make to stumble, not to give umbrage. The eye must surely be understood in the context of :28. It could be that the Lord specifically has sexual sin in mind. It is His form of "Flee fornication". Paul saw Mt. 5:29, 30 in a sexual context (= Col. 3:5); which fits the context of Mt. 5:28.

Pluck it out- The Greek word is every other time translated to save or deliver.

And throw it away - The Lord taught that we should cut off those parts of our lives that offend us, and "cast it [away] from you"- because in the end, the whole body of the wicked person will be "cast [away] into hell" (Mt. 5:29- the same Greek word is used in both places in this same verse). What He's saying surely is that we must recognize those parts of our lives which are worthy of condemnation, and *we* must condemn them now in this life, dissociating our spiritual self from our carnal self as Paul does in Rom. 7- for this is the meaning of the figure of 'casting away'. He has just used the term in 5:13,25, and it is so often used to mean 'cast to condemnation' elsewhere too (Mt. 3:10; 7:19; 13:42,50; 18:30; Lk. 12:49; Jn. 15:6). We are to "cast out" the parts of our lives which offend us, and if we don't, we will be "cast" into condemnation at the last day (Mt. 5:29.30). The word play on "cast" is obviously intentional; the Lord clearly has the idea that we are to self-condemn those things in our lives which are sinful and worthy of condemnation. If we don't, then we will be 'cast out' in our entirety at judgment day. Sin is to be condemned; we either condemn ourselves for it now, or we will be condemned for it then.

For it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish and not your whole body be thrown into Gehenna- The idea of self-condemnation is continued here. If we literally cut off part of our body, it perishes. If we do not, then the whole body will perish in Gehenna, the condemnation of the last day. For God is able to destroy [s.w. to perish] the body in Gehenna (Mt. 10:28). So we are to make perish those parts of our lives which make us sin- i.e. we are to condemn them.

5:30- see on 7:19.

And if your right hand causes you to stumble- Not just 'your hand'. The right hand was

a Hebrew idiom for the power, the thinking, the dominant desire of a man. If it's all taking us the wrong way, we must cut it off- and cast it from us, with no regrets about what we have given up.

Cut it off and throw it away, for it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish and not your whole body go into Gehenna- Even though Jesus never sinned, He reveals a remarkable insight into the process of human sin, temptation and subsequent moral need. This was learnt not only from reflection on Old Testament teaching, but surely also by a sensitive seeking to enter into the feelings and processes of the sinner. This is why no sinner, ourselves included, need ever feel that this perfect Man is somehow unable to be touched by the feeling of our infirmities. Consider how He spoke of looking upon a woman to lust after her; and how He used the chilling figure of cutting out the eye or hand that offended (Mt. 5:29)- the very punishments meted out in Palestine at the time for sexual misbehaviour. He had surely observed men with eyes on stalks, looking at women. Although He never sinned, yet He had thought Himself into their likelihood of failure, He knew all about the affairs going on in the village, the gutter talk of the guys at work... yet He knew and reflected upon those peoples' moral need, they were questions to Him that demanded answers, rather than a thanking God that He was not like other men were. Reflect on the characters of the Lord's parables. They cover the whole gamut of first century Palestinian life- labourers and elder sons and officials and mums and dads. They were snapshots of typical human behaviour, and as such they are essays in the way Jesus diagnosed the human condition; how much He had reflected upon people and society, and perceived our tragic need as nobody else has. He invites the zealous saint to cut off the various limbs of the body (for they *all* cause offence at some time!), so that he might enter the Kingdom. To the Jewish mind, imagining such a scene would have created the impression of priestly action. The sensitive reader is invited to see himself as "the offering and the priest".

5:31 *It was also said: Whoever shall send away his wife, let him give her a contract of divorce*- I suggested earlier that the Lord was carefully not saying that 'Moses said this, but I say differently'. But now He moves on to criticize the teaching of the religious leaders about divorce, which had effectively been elevated to the level of God's law. Divorce was often practiced in ancient societies for trivial reasons and in the heat of the moment. The divorce contract demanded by Moses however required some forethought; for one thing it had to be written, which in a largely illiterate society would involve getting others involved. And the contract would have stated the reasons, and the conditions regarding any issues of maintenance. This is a far superior and more morally developed way than in many primitive societies.

5:32 *But I say to you, that everyone that divorces his wife, except for the cause of sexual immorality*- The Lord has in view the guilty Pharisees of the Hillel school who were twisting Dt. 24:1-4 to mean that one could divorce for any reason so long as a divorce paper was written. Jesus at this point is not addressing the Pharisees but His potential followers. He is probably citing this well-known controversy in order to demonstrate how motives behind an action are what are culpable. He is inviting His hearers to consider the motive for divorce and perceive that as all important, rather than the fact of divorce. This is why I suggest the key word in this verse is *logos*, translated "cause". It is the *logos* of fornication which is the reason for divorce (see on 5:37). The thinking, reasoning, idea of fornication is what leads to divorce. This interpretation makes the Lord's reasoning here flow seamlessly and directly on from His teaching in preceding verses about the root of sexual sin being in the mind. So the Lord is indeed saying that the Hillel school of thought- that divorce was possible for any trivial reason- was wrong. But as always, He moves the focus to a higher and more demanding level.

He implies that "fornication" is the Biblical justification for divorce, but He says that actually it is the *logos*, the thought, of fornication which is the problem. And this is in line with what He has just been teaching about the thought and action of fornication being so closely connected.

Makes her commit adultery- There is no doubt that we can be counted responsible for making another brother sin, even though he too bears responsibility for that sin. The man who commits adultery causes his ex-wife to commit adultery too, the Lord observed (Mt. 5:32). Her sin remains her sin, but he too is guilty. Prov. 5:15,16 (NIV) teach likewise: that a man should drink the waters of his own well, i.e. take sexual fulfilment from his own wife, otherwise his waters (i.e. the sexuality of his wife) will overflow into the streets for all and sundry. She will turn to other men due to his unfaithfulness. Sin thus has so many aspects.

However, this supposes that "makes her commit adultery" means that a divorced woman will inevitably remarry and that remarriage is "adultery". And I am not persuaded this is the Lord's intended teaching. In any case, remarriage after divorce is not inevitable. But "commit adultery" here is an attempt to translate a passive verb. A passive means that the subject of the verb is the recipient of the action, rather than the one performing it. It's the difference between "He robbed him" and "He was robbed" [passive]. Problem is in English that you can say “I committed adultery” (active) but not “I was committed adultery” (passive). That's why the translations have been bungled. The updated NIV of 2011 seems one of the few translations that gets things right here: "Anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery". Read this way, Mt. 5:32 is not saying that any woman remarrying after divorce is automatically an adulteress, even if she is the innocent party. And translated this way, there is no contradiction with other Bible teaching that remarriage is permissible for adultery.

And whoever shall marry a divorced woman commits adultery- The 'whosoever' earlier in this verse seems to refer to men who thought they could divorce their wife for any reason and go off with another woman. This view led women into sinful relationships with those men. But perhaps what is in view in this part of the verse is the women who divorced their husbands for any reason- for women in some circles did have the power to divorce in the first century. The man who married such a woman was also committing adultery. The 'whosoever' refers to people who were getting divorced for any reason apart from fornication, and thereby leading both themselves and their new partners into sin.

5:33 *Again, you have heard that it was said to them of old: You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord*- This refers to perjury, i.e. lying about something in court. Perjury has a motive- e.g. simply lying about your age to a causal enquirer is not perjury, but it is perjury if you lie about your age in order to get old age retirement benefits. So we see the theme of *motive* being continued. But the Lord takes the matter further. He not only forbids false swearing but swearing at all- as if He foresaw that any oath is likely to end up a false oath, such is the weakness of humanity and our tendency not to be truthful. James 5:12 quotes this and says that "Above all" we should not swear falsely, lest we fall into condemnation. This is strong language. The implication is that if we lie in a human court, that is one thing- but that lie will be tried in the court of Heaven and will lead to condemnation.

5:34 *But I say to you: Swear not at all, neither by the heaven, for it is the throne of God*- The Lord taught that His people were to be unconditionally truthful, because every untruthful word would be judged at the last day (Mt. 12:36). When He taught us ‘swear not at all’ (Mt. 5:33-37), He spoke specifically about not swearing by the

judgment throne of God at Jerusalem. Jews and indeed all Semitic peoples were in the habit of swearing by the last day judgment, to prove that they were truthful (cp. Mt. 23:16-22). The Lord is saying that His people have no need to use those invocations and oaths- because they are to live *always* as if they are before the final judgment seat of God in Jerusalem. And therefore, our words will be true- because we live as men and women who stand constantly before His judgment presence. Swearing by "heaven" may refer to the temple; the "earth" of :35 would be the land of Israel.

5:35 *Nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet. Nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King*- The Jews, like many people, swore too easily. They thought that swearing by something greater than them was so acceptable that it actually excused them from basic truthfulness within their hearts. Their reasoning therefore was that they could lie about a matter because they judged they would never be found out; and swore by all manner of greater things to add credibility to their lie. This is the whole problem with religious structures of whatever kind; external things are invested with more authority and importance than the need for internal truth and spirituality. We see here the Lord's penetrating analysis of human psychology. The Lord clearly understood God as a personal being, who was personally manifest in the earth / land of Israel and Jerusalem- despite their apostasy. Clearly God does not offer His fellowship only on the basis of purity, nor does He practice any sense of guilt by association.

5:36 *Neither shall you swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black*- Starting with the greatest thing- the throne of God- down to the apparently most insignificant (one hair), the Lord shows that absolutely nothing (great or small) can give any more meaning to human words than the words themselves.

5:37 *But let your Yes mean Yes, and your No, No. For whatever is more than these comes from evil*- The AV and some manuscripts add "Let your communication be...". The word *logos* is used. The contrast is between 'swearing' in words, and having an internal *logos*, a thought behind the words, which is clear and honest. This continues the theme of 5:32 about the *logos* of fornication. We are to pay attention to our *logos* rather than merely the external word and action.
Yes, yes- People had the idea that there was normal language, and then oaths, which ensured that what you were saying was really true. The Lord is teaching that we should operate on only one level of language- absolute truth. We should not think that some areas of our language use can be less honest than others. The demand is for a total influence of God's truth into every aspect of human life and thinking.

Wrong words come *ek*, 'out of', evil or "the evil one". Yet the thrust of the Lord's teaching so far in the Sermon has been that wrong words and behaviour come *ek* , out of, the human heart and motivations. This, then, is 'the evil', personified as 'the evil one'. In using this term the Lord was radically redefining the popular conceptions of an external 'evil one' as an external being, teaching that it is the evil *logos* within the human heart which is the real 'evil one'. We note how deeply the Lord's teaching is concerned with internal thought processes. Whatever is more than a simple yes-no way of speaking involves something from 'the evil one'; and we weasel our way with words and meanings only when we are under temptation to be sinful. But that is a deeply internal, psychological situation, deep, deep within the human heart.

5:38 *You have heard that it was said: An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*- When the Lord Jesus gave His commandments as an elaboration of Moses' Law, that Law was still in force. He didn't say 'When I'm dead, this is how you should behave...'. He was showing us a higher level; but in the interim period until the Law was taken out of the way, He was opening up the *choice* of taking that higher level, even though

making use of the concessions which Moses offered would not have been a sin during that period. Thus He spoke of not insisting on "an eye for an eye"; even though in certain rare cases the Law did allow for this. He was saying: 'You can keep Moses' Law, and take an eye for an eye. But there is a higher level: to simply forgive'. And that in fact was inculcated by Moses' law itself.

5:39 *But I say to you: Do not resist him that is evil*- The Greek term for resisting evil occurs only in Eph. 6:13. We are in this life to arm ourselves spiritually, so that we may be able to resist in the evil day. If Paul is alluding to this part of the Sermon, the point would be that we are not to resist evil in this life, because our time to ultimately resist it will be in the last day. Then, along with the Lord Himself, we will resist and overcome evil through the establishment of the Kingdom on earth. Rom. 13:2 is likely another allusion to "resist not evil"- if we "resist" [s.w.] Governments whom God has put in power, then we are resisting God. This means that Paul fully understood that the 'powers that be' are indeed "evil", but they are not to be proactively 'resisted' by those in Christ. The time for that will come, but is not now. We are, however, to "resist the devil" (James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:9). Surely "resist not evil" is in view. We are to resist sin within us, but not evil in its political form around us. Again, as so often in the Bible, we see that the focus for our spiritual struggle is within rather than without. As always in the Sermon, the example of Jesus was the making of the word into flesh. James 5:6 seems to make this point, by pointing out that Jesus did not and in a sense does not resist evil done against Him: "You have condemned, you have murdered the righteous one. He doesn't resist you". And yet He will judge this behaviour- not now, but at the last day.

But whoever hits you on your right cheek- You singular. Time and again the Sermon on the Mount / Plain seems to take a broad sweep in its record of the Lord's teaching to us all; and then He suddenly focuses in on the individual. The AV brings this out well through the use of "you" (plural) and "thee" (singular): "Blessed are you poor… love your enemies… to him who strikes thee on the cheek…". Note how many times there is this change of pronoun in Luke 6. Clearly the Lord wants us to see our collective standing before Him, and yet not to overlook the purely personal nature of His appeal to us individually.

Turn to him the other also- The Lord was smitten on the cheek but enquired why He was being smitten, rather than literally turning the other cheek. But to do this would be so humiliating for the aggressor that it would be a far more effective resistance of evil than anything else. The power in the confrontation is now with the one who turns the other cheek. S/he is calling the shots, not the beater. The idea of not resisting evil and offering the other cheek (Mt. 5:39) we normally apply to suffering loss from the world without fighting for our rights. Yet Paul took this as referring to the need to not retaliate to the harmful things done to us by members of the ecclesia (Rom. 12:16,17; 1 Cor. 6:7; 1 Thess. 5:15). When struck on the right cheek- which was a Semitic insult to a heretic- they were to not respond and open themselves up for further insult [surely a lesson for those brethren who are falsely accused of wrong beliefs]. And yet the compassion of Jesus shines through both His parables and the records of His words; as does His acceptance of people for who they were. People were relaxed with Him because they could see He had no hidden agenda. He wasn't going to use them for His own power trip.

5:40 *And if anyone wants to sue you and take away*- A rather liberal translation of the single Greek word *krino*. The idea is quite simply of judging. We can be wrongly

judged by others without them taking us to court. The simple principle 'Do not resist wrong judgment of you' is a very large ask. Even in this life, truth often comes out. And if we believe in the ultimate justice of the final judgment, we will not for ever be going around correcting others' misjudgments and wrong impressions of us. That is something I have had to deeply learn in my own life.

Your coat, let him also have your cloak- It was forbidden by the Law to keep a man's outer garment overnight (Ex. 22:26,27). But the Lord taught *whilst the law was still in operation* that we should be willing to give it up, and even offer it (Mt. 5:40). The threatened man could have quoted the Law and kept his clothing. But the Lord bids us go to a higher level, beyond using God's law to uphold our own rights. And in this He raises a vital if difficult principle: Don't always enforce what Biblical rights you have against your brother. Don't rush to your own defence and justification even if Scripture is on your side. Live on the level of true love and non-resistance to evil. In this case the idea would be that even if someone amongst God's people does something unBiblical to us, clearly breaking God's laws, we are still to not resist evil but rather by our grace to them, shame them into repentance.

5:41 *And whoever shall compel you to go one mile, go with him two*- The Lord's high value of persons is reflected in how He taught His followers to not resist evil. A poor man had only two garments- an outer one, and an inner one (Dt. 24:10-13). Underneath that, he was naked. Yet the Lord taught that if you had your outer garment unjustly taken from you, then offer your abuser your undercloth. Offer him, in all seriousness, to take it off you, and leave you standing next to him arrystarkus. This would have turned the table. The abuser would be the one left ashamed, as he surely wouldn't do this. And thus the *dignity of the abused person was left intact at the end*. This was the Lord's desire. Likewise, Roman soldiers were allowed to impress a Jew to carry their pack for a mile, but they were liable to punishment if they made him carry it two miles. To offer to carry it the second mile would almost always be turned down by the abusive soldier. And again, at the end of the exchange, he would be the one humiliated, and the Lord's follower, even though abused, would remain with head up and dignity intact.

5:42 *Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would*- Luke says that the Lord taught that we should "give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they give into your bosom. For with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again" (Lk. 6:38). We might have expected Him to say: 'Give generously, with a good, running over measure, and this is what you will receive in return'. But He doesn't. He says simply "Give"; and then we will be given to in a generous measure, because with what measure we use in our giving, we will receive. Thinking it through, He means surely that "giving", by His definition, means a generous, well packed, abundant giving; for that *is* Christian giving. And note that the context of Lk. 6:38 is the Lord talking about not being critical and judgmental of others, but rather forgiving and accepting them. It is our 'giving' in this sense which is to be so full and generous. Only God's grace / giving can inspire this attitude within us, as we live hemmed in by the people of a materialistic, mean world, where nobody takes up a cross for anyone else. This is why Paul makes a play on the word 'grace' when writing to the Corinthians about giving; for *charis*, "grace", means 'giving'. He urges them to not receive God's grace in vain, but rather, motivated by it, to give grace to others (2 Cor. 6:1; 8:6,7,19).

Borrow from you- The Greek strictly means to borrow for interest. Seeing this was

illegal under the Law of Moses, the Lord is saying that we should just lend- but not for interest. We would all soon bankrupt if we read this as it stands in many English translations. Or it could be that the Lord was aware that He was talking to extremely poor people who had so little to lend that it was not as hard for them to take Him seriously on this point as it is for those who have so much more.

According to Luke's record here, the Lord taught that we must love our enemies "and lend [in whatever way] never despairing" (Lk. 6:35 RV). The Lord sought to inculcate in His followers His same positive spirit. To never give up with people, for all the losses, the casualties, the hurt… never despairing of humanity. This was and is the spirit of Jesus.

5:43 *You have heard that it was said: You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy*- The Lord's attitude to the Essenes is a case study in bridge building- developing what we have in common with our target audience, and yet through that commonality addressing the issues over which we differ. The Dead Sea scrolls reveal that the terms ""poor in spirit" and "poor" are technical terms used only by the Essenes to describe themselves". So when the Lord encouraged us to be "poor in spirit" (Mt. 5:3), He was commending the Essene position. Likewise when He praised those who were eunuchs for God's Kingdom (Mt. 19:10-12), He was alluding to the Essenes, who were the only celibate group in 1st century Israel. And yet lepers were anathema to the Essenes, and the Lord's staying in the home of Simon the leper (Mk. 14:3) was a purposeful affront to Essene thinking. The parable of the Good Samaritan has been seen as another purposeful attack upon them; likewise the Lord's teaching: "You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy" (Mt. 5:43). It was the Essenes in their *Rule Of The Community* who taught that Essenes must yearly chant curses upon their enemies. So the Lord even within Matthew 5, and certainly within His teaching as a whole, both commended and challenged the Essenes; His bridge building didn't involve just accepting their position.

5:44 *But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for them that persecute you*- Praying for our enemies and abusers, not wishing a curse upon them but rather a blessing, sounds like Job (Mt. 5:44 = Job 31:30). 'Blessing' has Biblical connection with the ideas of forgiveness and salvation. There would be no point in praying for forgiveness for the obviously impenitent unless God might actually grant it. This opens huge possibilities and potentials to us. God is willing to forgive people for the sake of the prayers and efforts of others (Mk. 2:5). Jesus isn't simply telling us to vaguely pray for our enemies because it is psychologically good for us and eases our pain a bit. Genuine prayer for abusers really has the possibility of being heard- for God is willing to save people for the sake of our prayers. Otherwise, this exhortation to do good to abusers through praying for their blessing would be rather meaningless. 'Cursing' likewise tended to carry the sense of 'May you be condemned at the day of judgment'. Those who condemn others will be condemned (Mt. 7:1 etc.)- and yet we can pray for their blessing. It is perhaps only our prayers and desire for their salvation which can over-ride the otherwise certain connection between condemning others and being condemned. This gives those condemned and abused by others so much work to do. In fact, so amazing are the possibilities that that alone is therapeutic. Moses' praying for Pharaoh in Ex. 9:28,29 is perhaps the Old Testament source of Christ's words. Let's not read those records as implying that Moses simply uttered a few words to God, and then each of the plagues was lifted. There was an element of real fervency in Moses' prayers- which may well be lacking in ours. This is surely an example of genuinely praying for our enemies.

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

5:45 See on 6:26.

That you might be sons of your Father who is in heaven- Jesus juxtaposed ideas in a radical way. He spoke of drinking His blood; and of a Samaritan who was good, a spiritual hero. It was impossible for Jews to associate the term 'Samaritan' and the concept of being spiritually an example. And so the stark, radical challenge of the Lord's words must be allowed to come down into the 21st century too. Lk. 6:35 has Jesus speaking of "children of the Most High" and yet Mt. 5:45 has "children of your father". What did Jesus actually say? Perhaps: "Children of *abba*, daddy, the Most High". He juxtaposed His shocking idea of *abba* with the exalted title "the Most High". The Most High was in fact as close as *abba*, daddy, father.

For He makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust- God consciously makes the sun rise each day- it isn't part of a kind of perpetual motion machine. Hence the force of His promises in the prophets that in the same way as He consciously maintains the solar system, so He will maintain His Israel. Ps. 104 is full of such examples: "He waters the hills... causes the grass to grow... makes darkness (consciously, each night)... the young lions... seek their meat from God... send forth Your Spirit (Angel), they are created" (not just by the reproductive system). There are important implications following from these ideas with regard to our faith in prayer. It seems to me that our belief that the world is going on inevitably by clockwork is one of the things which militates against faith. To give a simple example: we may need to catch a certain train which is to leave at 9 a.m. We wake up late at 8:30 a.m. and find it hard to have faith in our (all too hasty) prayer that we will get it, because we are accustomed to trains leaving on time. But if we have the necessary faith to believe that each individual action in life is the work of God, then it is not so hard to believe that God will make the action of that train leaving occur at 9:30 a.m. rather than at 9 a.m. when He normally makes it leave. The whole of creation keeps on going as a result of God having a heart that bleeds for people. “If he causes his heart to return unto himself”, the whole of creation would simply cease (Job 34:14 RVmg.). His spirit is His heart and mind, as well as physical power. Creation is kept going not by clockwork, but by the conscious outpouring of His Spirit toward us. In times of depression we need to remember this; that the very fact the world is still going, the planet still moves, atoms stay in their place and all matter still exists… is proof that the God who has a heart that bleeds for us is still there, with His heart going out to us His creation. And the spirit of the Father must be in us His children.

Just because the Father gives His sun and rain to all without discrimination, we likewise should love our enemies (Mt. 5:43-45). This is the imperative of creation. We noted on 5:44 that our prayer and goodness to our enemies is in order to lead them to repentance and salvation. This is surely one motive behind the way God sends rain and sunshine upon the evil as well as the good. His goodness to them is intended to lead them to

repentance. Only at the day of judgment will He execute judgment against them, and that is to be our perspective too. See on 5:39 *resist not evil*.

5:46 *For if you love them that love you*- We tend to love in response to others' love. But the love which the Lord has in mind is the love which is an act of the will, consciously effected towards the *un*loving.

What reward have you?- The idea is of wages. Whilst salvation itself is a free gift, in contrast to the wages paid by sin, this is not to say that there will not be some element of reward / wages / eternal recognition of our spiritual achievements in this life. The preceding verses have spoken of prayer and blessing for our abusers. This kind of attitude will be eternally rewarded. Not least if we see those we prayed for, those we blessed and forgave without their repentance, eternally with us in God's Kingdom. The final judgment will be of our works, not because works justify us, but because our use of the freedom we have had and exercised in our lives is the basis of the future reward we will be given. Salvation itself is not on the basis of our works (Rom. 11:6; Gal. 2:16; Tit. 3:5); indeed, the *free gift* of salvation by pure grace is contrasted with the *wages* paid by sin (Rom. 4:4; 6:23). And yet at the judgment, the preacher receives *wages* for what he did (Jn. 4:36), the labourers receive *hire* (s.w. wages) for their work in the vineyard (Mt. 20:8; 1 Cor. 3:8). There is a *reward* (s.w. wages) for those who rise to the level of loving the totally unresponsive (Mt. 5:46), or preaching in situations quite against their natural inclination (1 Cor. 9:18). *Salvation* itself isn't given on this basis of works; but the nature of our eternal existence in the Kingdom will be a reflection of our use of the gift of freedom in this life. In that sense the judgment will be of our works.

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

Even the tax collectors do the same- As demonstrated by the account of Zacchaeus, these were the most friendless people in society. Rejected by family, they were unloved by about everyone. The only person who would salute / greet them was a fellow publican (:47). The implication is that publicans [tax collectors] were loved only by themselves. Loving those who love us is little better than the selfish self-love of the lonely publican. Matthew was a publican and he surely had himself very much in view as he recounted this teaching of the Lord.

5:47 *And if you greet your brothers only, what do you more than they. The tax collectors do likewise*- "More" is, Gk., 'to super-abound'. This is a word characteristic of the new life in Christ. As God makes His grace *abound* to us, *we* are to *abound* to every good work (2 Cor. 9:8). We are to ‘abound’ in love to each other, as God abounds to us (1 Thess. 3:12). This is why there will never be a grudging spirit in those who serve properly motivated by God’s abundance to us. This super-abounding quality in our kindness, generosity, forgiveness etc. is a feature lacking in the unbelievers around us. If we salute our brethren only, then we do not super-abound (Mt. 5:47); if we love as the world loves its own, then we have missed the special quality of love which the

Father and Son speak of and exemplify. This radical generosity of spirit to others is something which will mark us apart from this world.

5:48 See on 5:7.

You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect- We are either seen as absolutely perfect, or totally wicked, due to God's imputation of righteousness or evil to us (Ps. 37:37). There is no third way. The pure in heart see God, their righteousness (to God) exceeds that of the Pharisees, no part of their body offends them or they pluck it out; they are perfect as their Father is (Mt. 5:8,20,29,48). Every one of the faithful will have a body even now completely full of light, with no part dark (Lk. 11:36); we will walk, even as the Lord walked (1 Jn. 2:6). These impossible standards were surely designed by the Lord to force us towards a real faith in the imputed righteousness which we can glory in; that the Father really does see us as this righteous. Men have risen up to this. David at the end of his life could say that he was upright and had kept himself from his iniquity (2 Sam. 22:21-24). He could only say this by a clear understanding of the concept of imputed righteousness. Paul's claim to have always lived in a pure conscience must be seen in the same way.

God makes concessions to human weakness; He sets an ideal standard, but will accept us achieving a lower level. "Be ye therefore perfect, *as* your Father in heaven is perfect" (Mt. 5:48) is proof enough of this. The standard is clear: absolute perfection. But our lower attainment is accepted, by grace. If God accepts our obvious failure to attain an ideal standard, we should be inspired to accept this in others. Daily Israel were taught this; for they were to offer totally unblemished animals. And yet there was no totally unblemished animal. We need to recognize that God sets an ultimately high standard, but is prepared to accept our achievement of a lower standard- i.e. God makes concessions. We all disobey the same commandments of Christ day by day and hour by hour. Yet we have a firm hope in salvation. Therefore obedience to commandments is not the only necessity for salvation. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect" (Mt. 5:48) goes unfulfilled by each of us- as far as our own obedience is concerned. It is possible to disobey Christ's commandments every day and be saved. If this statement is false, then salvation is only possible is we attain God's moral perfection, which is impossible. If disobedience to Christ's commands is tolerable by God (on account of our faith in the atonement), how can *we* decide *which* of those commandments we will tolerate being broken by our brethren, and which of them we will disfellowship for? If we cannot recognize degrees of sin, it is difficult to pronounce some commands to be more important than others.

There are times when Paul's inspired commentary opens up some of the Lord's more difficult sayings. On "Be you therefore perfect", Paul's comment is: "Be perfected" (2 Cor. 13:11). This is quite different to how many may take it- 'Let God perfect you' is the message. Relatively late in his career Paul could comment: “Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect” (Phil. 3:12), alluding to the Lord’s bidding to be perfect as our Father is (Mt. 5:48). Through this allusion to the Gospels, Paul is showing his own admission of failure to live up to the standard set. And yet we must compare “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect" with “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect…” (Phil. 3:12,15). In 1 Cor. 13:10, he considers he is ‘perfect’, and has put away the things of childhood. Thus he saw his spiritual maturity only on account of his being in Christ; for he himself was not “already perfect”, he admitted.

Luke’s account has "be merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (Lk. 6:36). Quite simply, who God is should inspire us to be like Him; to copy His characteristics [the

things of His Name] in our personalities. We must be "perfect" as our Father is; "be ye holy", because He is holy (1 Pet. 1:14-16); "kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God forgave… be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children" (Eph. 4:32; 5:1); "merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (Lk. 6:36). Prov. 19:11RV uses language frequently applied to Yahweh Himself and applies it to the wise man: "The discretion of a man maketh him slow to anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression". And thus Phinehas was commended for being "jealous with my jealousy" (Num. 25:11 RV)- his emotion at that time was a mirror of that of God Himself. Not only was language re-interpreted by the Christians. Whole concepts were reoriented. Holiness in the sense of separation from the unclean had been a major theme in the Mosaic Law, and it figured largely in the theology of the Pharisees. But the Lord quoted "Be holy because I, Yahweh your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2) as "Be ye therefore merciful, even as your father in heaven is merciful" (Lk. 6:36). To be merciful to those who sin is now the true holiness- not merely separation from them and condemnation of their ways. Note, too, how He invites us to interpret the Yahweh as "father", rather than transliterating the Name.

The Lord's manifesto as recorded in the Sermon on the Mount was structured and set up by Him in some ways as a 'new law' as opposed to the old law of Moses. And yet His law likewise proves impossible to keep. We cannot be perfect as our Father is. To a man and to a woman, we would admit that we cannot fully forgive our enemies from our hearts. And so, according to the Lord's law, we each stand unforgiven. We are to sell all that we have and give to the poor, or risk forfeiting the Kingdom because of our love of this world's goods (Mk. 10:17-22). An angry thought is murder, a passing lustful look becomes adultery- all mortal sins, which catch each of us within their net. Why was this? Surely yet again, the Lord wished to convict us of our guilt before Him, our inabilities, our desperation… so that we could come to appreciate the wonder of His character and His saving grace. For He was the one and only embodiment of His own teaching, to the point that the person who fulfilled all His teaching was in fact He Himself- and no other man. In knowing Him, we thus know our own desperation, and yet we likewise know- because we know Him- the certainty of our salvation by grace. Further, it becomes apparent that the Lord accepted with open arms those who were so very far from the ideals He laid down in the Sermon on the Mount. He convicted them of their guilt in such a way that with joy and peace they ran to His grace.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 6

6:1 *Take heed you do not do your good deeds*- Gk. 'to hold the mind towards'. Again and again, the Lord's emphasis is upon the innermost functioning of the mind and thought processes. For to be spiritually minded is the essence of Christianity.

Before men, to be seen by them- The same Greek phrase is used in Mt. 23:5 about the Pharisees doing all their works motivated by this desire to be seen of men. What we do *unseen* by men is therefore the litmus test of our love and Christianity. We should almost have an obsession about doing good works unseen by men- we must "take heed", consciously set our mind, to do unseen acts of kindness to others. Because the "reward", the nature of our eternity, will depend on these things.

Else you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven- Salvation is by grace, but the 'reward' will be in terms of how the *nature* of our eternal existence reflects good

things done in this life. The Greek word for 'reward' is quite common in the Sermon, and the first usage of it suggests that the reward is given in Heaven right now (Mt. 5:12 "great *is* your reward in Heaven", s.w. Jn. 4:36 "he that reaps receives wages / reward, and gathers fruit unto life eternal"; Mt. 5:46; 6:1,2,5,16). Yet the Lord comes from Heaven to give us the rewards after we have been resurrected at the last day (Mt. 20:8; Rev. 11:18; 22:12). So if we will be given an eternal reward for our works, it follows that there is a recompense for us noted in the books of Heaven at the very point we do the good deed. But there will be no such recompense for things which are openly seen of men, or anything which is consciously done so as to be seen by men. In the reality of life, the hardest thing about good deeds is when we sense nobody appreciates us, that we are holding the fort alone, that we have no recognition. On one hand, recognition for labour is hugely important to our basic psychological makeup- and employers have all come to realize that. It is only by appreciating the principle of eternal blessing for being*un*recognized that we can live the way Jesus asks of us. It is my observation in the life of believers that often the Lord's most zealous servants are marginalized, falsely accused, rejected from churches etc. The Lord's teaching here makes perfect sense of that phenomenon. He wants them to continue their service in a way which will be eternally recognized, and He wants to ensure their motives for their good works are not in order to be seen of men. Therefore He allows them to be marginalized. So that their works may be totally sincere, and receive an eternal recognition. It is also the case that when serving others, we reflect that nobody realized all the host of planning and frustrations which went into one good deed. A plan to visit someone in hospital may involve struggles with public transport, getting lost on the way, forgetting our telephone, being late home which meant we missed something important... and so forth. It is all those good deeds which others don't see. They 'see' only that we spent 15 minutes in a hospital visiting someone. But those other components to the good deed of the 15 minutes are all carefully logged with the Lord.

6:2 *Sound a trumpet*- The reference may be to the bronze collection 'trumpet' into which the wealthy loudly poured large numbers of pennies. Remember that Jesus was addressing His sermon to the illiterate and desperately poor. There was little likelihood they would ever do this. So we are to understand the Lord as making a warning out of those wealthy people- to all of us, in whatever context, great or small, to not advertise our kindnesses, and to not be motivated to it by the thought of what others would think of it.

That they may have glory of men - Perhaps the emphasis is upon "they". Our good works are to be so that "men" give glory to *God* (Mt. 5:16). To have any intention of attracting glory to ourselves is therefore to play God. For all glory is to go to Him.

Have their reward- The Greek translated "have" means both to receive fully, and intransitively, 'to keep away'. They get their full reward now, so they are keeping themselves away from any future reward at the last day. According to the allusion here in 1 Tim. 4:8, the implication is that we aren't to take Mt. 6:2,3 ("they have their reward") as implying that we have *no* reward in this life. We do (cp. Mt. 19:29).

6:3 *Do alms*- Jesus was addressing the very poorest in society. And yet He assumed they would do some good and show some generosity to others. We can too easily dismiss Bible teaching about generosity and assume it applies to the rich, or at least, not to me. Yet the Lord's implication is that every single person can give and be generous in some way. The Lord speaks here of "*when*" you give, rather than *if* you give. He took giving to others in need as being a basic, intrinsic part of life in Him.

Your left hand- There had developed a strong Jewish tradition that the right hand side of a man was his spiritual side, and the left hand side was the equivalent of the New

Testament 'devil'. The Lord Jesus referred to this understanding when He warned: "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" (Mt. 6:3)- implying that the good deeds of the spiritual man would be misused by the 'devil', e.g. in using them as grounds for spiritual pride.
Let not... know- The idea perhaps is that our good deeds should not be done consciously, we hardly know ourselves that we are doing them. The Lord taught just the same when He portrayed the faithful at the last day almost arguing back with their Lord before His judgment seat, totally denying they had done the good deeds which He was now rewarding them for ("when did we see You...", Mt. 25:39).

6:4 *Your Father who sees in secret Himself shall reward you openly* - as if God is especially manifest in Christ when we stand before him in judgment to receive our rewards openly. Our prayers "in secret" will be 'rewarded' "openly"; but the language of 'open reward' is used by the Lord in reference to the judgment: "For the son of man shall come in the glory of his father with his angels; and then he shall reward [s.w.] every man" (Mt. 16:27). In that day the workers will be 'rewarded' for their work (s.w. Mt. 20:8; Rom. 2:6; 2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 22:12); yet Mt. 6:4-6 says they will be rewarded for their prayers. Prayer will only ultimately be answered when the Lord returns; hence Mt. 6:4-6 leads on to the Lord's prayer, with its emphasis upon requesting the coming of the Kingdom, forgiveness etc. rather than petty human requests. Here again we see a connection between prayer and the final judgment.
In secret- So secret, according to our suggestion on 6:3, that we ourselves are not even fully conscious of them. There is repeated emphasis that what is in secret, concealed from view, will be openly rewarded (Mt. 6:6,18; Lk. 12:2). The day of judgment will be a judging of the secret things (Rom. 2:16; 1 Cor. 4:5). Absolutely nothing that is now hid shall not then be made open- this is a considerable theme in the Lord's teaching (Mt. 10:26; Mk. 4:22; Lk. 8:17; 12:2). The Lord's own journey to die at Jerusalem was done 'in secret'- as so often, He spoke His teaching to Himself (Jn. 7:10). The need for a sense of significance, reward and recognition to be attached to our works is basic to the structure of human personality. We're not asked to deny this, to live as if we are more or less than human. We're asked instead to realize that the day for that shall come, but it is not now, nor are we to seek it now from the eyes of men.
Openly- The public dimension to the judgment process will mean that somehow in a moment we will know 'the secret things' of each other. Only with that basis of understanding could believers who appear to differ in this life live eternally together.

6:5 *Seen of men*- The same Greek word is occurs in 6:16,18 (AV "to appear"). Doing spiritual things for the sake of external appearance was clearly a particular concern of the Lord Jesus. Church life inevitably leads to temptations in this area- mixing with the same people regularly, with families intermarrying over the years, appearance becomes a great temptation. But having this as a motivation for any act of spirituality is so abhorrent to the Lord.

6:6 *Shut your door*- The Lord taught the intensity of the life He required by taking Old Testament passages which refer to the crisis of the last days, and applying them to the daily life of His people. Take Is. 26:20, which speaks of how in the final tribulation, God's people will shut the doors around them and pray. The Lord applies this to the daily, regular prayer of His people- we are to pray in secret, in our room, with doors closed (Mt. 6:6)- clearly an allusion to the Isaiah passage. In the time of Elisha we read that when a problem arose, the people concerned went indoors and shut the door. Going inside and shutting the door is associated with prayer, both by the Lord (Mt. 6:6) and Elisha himself (2 Kings 4:33). The other instances of shutting the door don't involve prayer, but they involve obediently doing something in faith- the woman shut the door

upon her sons and poured out the oil in faith; she shut the door upon her sick son (2 Kings 4:5,21). Perhaps the implication is that what she did in faith and hope was read by God as prayer, even though she didn't apparently verbalize anything. The widow woman shut the door and started to pour out the oil into the vessels (2 Kings 4:5); the way the Lord alludes to this implies that she prayed before she started pouring, and yet she was sure already that it would happen (Mt. 6:6). This should inspire a spirit of soberness in our prayers.

Your Father- We should be saying and expressing things to God which are our most intense, essential, personal feelings. We cannot, therefore, easily use trite, stock phrases in our personal prayers. Note the grammatically needless repetition of the personal pronoun in Mt. 6:6: "You, when *you* pray, enter into *your* closet, and when *you* have shut *your* door, pray to *your* Father, which is in secret; and *your*Father who sees in secret shall reward *you* openly". Likewise when reading the Psalms, especially 71, note how many times David addresses God with the personal pronoun: thee, thy, thou… it really is a personal relationship.

6:7 *Vain repetitions*- We will not use "vain repetitions" (Mt. 6:7); the Greek means literally 'to stutter / stammer with the *logos*'. We know what the man with a chronic stammer is trying to say before he actually finishes saying it. To hear him saying the same syllables again and again is a frustration for us. It's a telling way of putting it. God knows our need before we ask (Mt. 6:8). Say it, if we have to be explicit, and mean what we ask. And leave it there. 'Don't keep stammering on in your prayers' is to be connected with what comes a bit later: "Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? Or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek)... but seek (i.e. pray for, Is. 55:16) the Kingdom of God, and His (imputed) righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mt. 6:31-33). We are not merely to believe that what we ask for we will receive. Note how again the word *logos* occurs; we commented several times in chapter 5 that this is a core idea in the Sermon. Our innermost thought and intention is of the essence.

6:8 *Your Father knows*- This gives a profound insight into the purpose of prayer. Prayer is not in order to inform God of human need. He knows all things, and He knows every human need. So if prayer is not in order to inform God of anything, what is it for? Ultimately, it is for our benefit. Keeping on and on repeating our perceived needs, repeating them vainly, as if we are endlessly stuttering, is actually a form of selfishness. Prayer is to be about dialogue with God, sharing life with Him, confession, sharing thoughts. An analysis of David's prayers as recorded in the book of Psalms shows that only about 5% of the verses are requests for anything material. The rest is simply talking with God. The idea of prayer as a mindless repetition of specific needs, in the belief that the more times we state them, the more likely God is to respond- is the very opposite of the kind of prayer which God intends. The Lord's model prayer which He goes on to give features only one request for anything material- and that is simply a request that God gives us enough food for today.

Things you have need of- The hope of the future Kingdom means that we will not now be materialistic. It will give us strength against materialism. And the model prayer was given by Jesus in the context of His comment on how some tend to always be asking God for material things. The Lord teaches that the paramount thing we should request is the coming of the Kingdom, and our forgiveness so that we might partake in it. *This* is the request we should be making- for "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of… after *this* manner therefore pray ye…" (Mt. 6:9,10). Later in Mt. 6 the Lord repeats the same words: "Your heavenly Father *knoweth that ye have need of all these things*… seek ye first his Kingdom" (Mt. 6:32-34 RV). The structure of the Lord's prayer reflects

this- for the first and only request in it is a seeking for the coming of His Kingdom. The RV of Heb. 10:34,35 brings out well the same theme: " Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your *possessions*, knowing that ye have your own selves for a better *possession*" (RVmg). Having warned against materialism, the Lord bids His men to "rather seek ye the Kingdom of God... it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (Lk. 9:31,32) in the place of seeking for material things. The more we grasp that it really is God's will that we will be there, the more strength we will have to resist seeking for material things in this life. By being sure that we will be there, the Kingdom becomes our treasure, where our heart is, rather than any material treasure in this life (Lk. 9:34).
Before you ask- The Kingdom prophecy that "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear" (Is. 65:24) is applied to us *now* (Mt. 6:8)- as if answered prayer is a foretaste of the Kingdom life. This speaks of intimacy of personal relationship, whereby long term partners, parents and children, know what the other is going to say before they say it; they know what the other is going to want or ask for before the other verbalizes it. And so it shall be eternally between God and man. But that wonderful experience starts now

6:9 *This manner*- The model prayer given by the Lord can of course be used just as it is. But it's worth noting that the Lord's own subsequent prayers, and some of Paul, repeated the essence of some of the phrases in it, but in different words. This may be a useful pattern for us in learning how to formulate prayers. The prayer of Jesus in Jn. 17 is in some ways an expanded restatement of the model prayer. In it, the Lord asks for the Father's Name to be hallowed or glorified (Jn. 17:1,11,12); for His work or will to be done or finished (Jn. 17:4); for deliverance from the evil one (Jn. 17:15). The prayer of Jn. 17 can be divided into three units of about the same length (Jn. 17:1-8; 9-19; 20-26). Each has the theme of glory, of directly addressing the Father, and of the needs of God's people- all clearly taken from the model prayer.
Our Father- The model prayer begins with the words "Our Father". Straight away we are bidden remember that no man is an island; the Lord intended us to be aware of the entire community of believers in our private prayers. "Give us this day *our* daily bread" may appear hard for comfortably off Christians to pray- until they grasp that they are praying for "our" daily bread, not "my" daily bread. There are so many in the brotherhood for whom having daily bread is indeed a constantly uncertain question. We should be aware of the whole brotherhood; and pray that "we" will be given our bread for today.
Who is in Heaven- A feature of Biblical prayers is the way they start with some reference to God, often involving several clauses. We are to firstly visualize Him there. This is to be connected with the idea of lifting the eyes to Heaven at the start of a prayer (Ps. 121:1; 123:1; Ez. 23:27; Dan. 4:34; Lk. 16:23; 18:13; Jn. 11:41; 17:1). "God *is in Heaven*, and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few (more often translated "little")" (Ecc. 5:2). Ezra, Nehemiah and Solomon all start their major prayers with a reference to the fact that God really *is* there in Heaven. The fact that God is a material, corporeal being is vital here. The very fact God has a spatial location, in Heaven, with Christ at His right hand, indicates of itself that God is a physical rather than purely spiritual being. The fact Christ really is there, seated at God's right hand interceding for us, was a concept which filled Paul's thinking (Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3,13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2 cp. 1 Pet. 3:22). This teaching about our having a *Heavenly* Father may appear quite painless to accept; but it was radical, demanding stuff in the first century. The family then was "the centrally located institution maintaining societal existence… it [was] the primary focus of personal loyalty and it [held] supreme sway over individual life". "Our father, *who is in Heaven*" was a prayer

hard to pray if one really accepted the full import of the words; every bit as much as it is today. The idea of belonging to another family, of which the invisible Lord Jesus in Heaven was the head, belonging to a new society of world-wide brothers and sisters, where the Lord from Heaven held "supreme sway over individual life", was radical indeed. It took huge commitment and a deep faith in this invisible head of the new family to step out from ones existing family. And the call of Christ is no less radical today. The social circle at uni, the guys at work, our unbelieving family members… now all take a radical second place to our precious family in Christ. And yet we so easily abuse or disregard the importance of our spiritual family; we too easily exclude them, won't meet with them, can't be bothered about them.
"*Hallowed / sanctified be Your name*" uses an aorist tense which implies that it will be accomplished as a one-time act; at the coming of the Lord. Indeed, the aorist tenses in the Lord's model prayer are arresting; each phrase of the prayer asks for something to be done in a one-time sense. This alone suggests an intended 'answer' in terms of the final establishment of the Kingdom. "Hallowed be Your Name" was actually one of the Eighteen Benedictions used by most Jews at the time. This common phrase was consciously seen as a reference to the YHWH Name (1). But the Lord purposefully juxtaposes *Abba*, "Father", with that phrase. This Aramaic, non-Hebrew, familiar word, an equivalent of "Daddy!", is placed by the Lord next to Judaism's most well known and frequently used blessing of the YHWH Name. By doing so, He was making the Name even more hallowed and glorious- by showing that the essence of that Name speaks of familiar family relationship with us, and is no longer the carefully guarded preserve of Hebrew people, thought, culture and language.

6:10 *Kingdom come*- Greek scholars have pointed out that some phrases in the Lord's prayer show a remarkable lack of etiquette and the usual language of petition to a superior; literally, the text reads: "Come Thy Kingdom, done Thy will". Is this part of the "boldness" in approaching God which the NT speaks of? That God should encourage us in this (although He also encourages us in reverential fear of Him) reflects something of His humility. The Kingdom of God refers to that over which God reigns. We are "a colony of Heaven" in our response to His principles (Phil. 3:20 Moffat). We are to pray for His Kingdom to come, so that His will may be done on earth (Mt. 6:10). The Kingdom and the doing of His will are therefore paralleled. His Kingdom reigns over all in Heaven, for there, all the Angels are obedient to Him (Ps. 103:19-21). By praying for the Kingdom to come on earth we are not only praying for the Lord's second coming, but for the progress of the Gospel world-wide right now. Not only that more men and women will hear it and respond, but that those who have accepted it might work God's will rather than their own to an ever greater extent. Whether or not we can physically spread the Gospel is in this sense irrelevant; our prayer should be, first and foremost if the pattern of the Lord's prayer is to be taken exactly, for the triumph of the Gospel world-wide. It has been pointed out by Philip Yancey that "Thy Kingdom come!" was violently in conflict with the Roman view that the lives of a subject people like Israel belonged to Caesar's kingdom. "'Your kingdom come!' is therefore a word of defiance; to pray it is a subversive activity. This is also how the authorities understand the ministry of Jesus: it is subversive and not to be tolerated" (2). The word *basileia* translated "Kingdom" definitely brought to mind the imperial reign or empire of Rome. Thus Hal Taussig comments: "Whenever anyone in Jesus' time used the term "basileia", the first thing people thought of was the Roman "kingdom" or "empire". That is, "basileia" really meant "Roman empire" to most people who heard it… It was to many ears a direct insult to the Roman empire. Uttered in the presence of Roman soldiers, such a prayer could have gotten [a person] in immediate trouble" (3).

And so with us, the seeking of the future Kingdom is a radical denial of the spirit of our age, which seeks its Kingdom now; it demands a separation from the world around us. The well-known description of the Kingdom in Is. 2:1-4 is in the context of appealing to Israel to change their ways. Because they would *then* walk in the ways of the Lord, therefore "O house of Israel [therefore] Come ye [now] and walk in the ways of the Lord" (2:5). The hope of Israel ought to motivate Israel to live the Kingdom life here and now.

*Your will be done- A*gain uses an aorist which demands a one-time fulfilment- in the sense of 'May Your will come about...'. The will of God is often associated with His ultimate plan of salvation (e.g. Eph. 1:5-12; Col. 1:20).It has been pointed out that "Hallowed be Your Name" is (grammatically) a request for action, rather than simply an expression of praise. Jesus prayed this in Gethsemane and it cost Him His life. We know from the Old Testament that God in fact "hallows" His own Name (Ez. 20:41; 28:25; 36:22,23; 38:16; 39:27). By asking God to "hallow" or sanctify / realize that Name in our lives, we are definitely praying in accordance with His will. He wishes to do this- and so He will surely do this in our lives if we ask Him. All the principles connected with His Name will be articulated in our lives and experience for sure if we pray for this- for we will be praying according to His revealed will in His word. And the ultimate fulfilment of all this will be in final coming of the Kingdom. But see on 7:21.

In interpreting the Sermon on the Mount, we need to look for similar phrases within the Sermon in order to grasp the sense the Lord was seeking to develop. And we have just such a connection of though here when we observe that the Sermon concludes with an appeal to 'do the will of My Father' (7:21; and the theme continues in the Lord's teaching, e.g. Mt. 12:50; 21:31; Lk. 12:47). We are praying therefore not only for Christ's return when the literal coming of the Kingdom on earth will mean that God's will shall be done on earth. We are asking for the principles of God's rulership / Kingdom over men (as outlined in the Lord's parables of the Kingdom) to be manifested in our lives; and for strength to do God's will on earth here and now. In probing deeper how the Lord understood the Father's will, we find the term specifically and repeatedly linked with the salvation of persons, supremely enabled through the Lord's death (Mt. 18:14; Jn. 6:39,40; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 1:5). We would therefore be justified in seeing this request for the Kingdom to come and [in parallel] God's will to be done as a request for the successful spreading of the Gospel worldwide (see note on "in earth" below). The coming of the Kingdom and the doing of God's will are in parallel- the coming of the Kingship of God in human life means that humans do God's will as taught by the Lord in the Sermon. Of course, the final physical coming of the Kingdom is also in view, but that is the final manifestation of the process which is now ongoing in human hearts. This more internal, spiritual interpretation of the coming of the Kingdom would be in line with the rest of the Sermon, which emphasizes the rule of Divine principles in the deepest parts of the human heart.

This phrase occurs verbatim on the Lord's lips when He Himself prayed in Gethsemane "Your will be done" (Mt. 26:42). So often we find the Lord Himself being the embodiment of His own teaching in the Sermon. The difficulty with which the Lord said those words shows how hard it is to really pray 'the Lord's prayer'. The way it can be rattled off so quickly is tragic.

In earth as... in Heaven- Gk. *epi* the earth, as the will of God is now done in (Gk. *en*) Heaven. *Epi* in this context has the sense of being spread throughout; whereas *en* more

simply and directly means "in". Is there a hint here that we are to be praying for the success of the geographical spreading of the Gospel of the Kingdom throughout the earth? Not just knowledge of that Gospel, but people actually submitting to God's Kingship and living by Kingdom principles; not just baptisms but transformed lives. By doing God's will as it is now done in Heaven, we are developing outposts of God's Heavenly Kingdom here on earth, and this will come to term in the return of Christ and the more physical establishment of the Kingdom on the planet, the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, in every fibre of earthly existence.

6:11 *Give us this day our daily bread*- Thishas long been recognized as an inadequate translation of a very strange Greek phrase. The adjective *epiousios* in "our daily bread" is one example of Christ's radical use of language; there in the midst of the prayer which the Lord bid His followers constantly use, was a word which was virtually unknown to them. Our bread only-for-this-day was the idea; the word is used for the rations of soldiers. The idea is 'Give us today, right now, the bread / food of tomorrow'. In ancient Judaism, *mahar* means not only tomorrow but the great Tomorrow, i.e. the Kingdom. Jesus spoke of the inauguration of the future Kingdom in terms of eating food together (Mt. 8:11; Lk. 6:21; 14:15; 22:29,30; Rev. 7:16). 'Give us the future Kingdom today, may it come right now' is perhaps one of the levels on which He intended us to understand the prayer. The aorist implies: 'Give us this once and final time' the bread of tomorrow. The Lord was surely alluding to the way that Israel in the wilderness had been told that "in the morning [tomorrow] you shall be filled with bread"; and this was widely understood in first century Palestine as being typical of the coming of Messiah's Kingdom. Notice too how Is. 55:10 connects the descent of God's word made flesh in Jesus, with the giving of bread. And one practical point. Even though we may have daily bread, we are still to pray for it. It's rather like Zech. 10:1: "Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain"; even when it's the season, still ask Him for what it appears you naturally already have. Israel were fed with manna one day at a time- this is so stressed (Ex. 16:4,19,20).

The idea of 'daily bread' recalls the gift of manna. There was to be no hoarding of manna- anything extra was to be shared with others (Ex. 16:8; 2 Cor. 8:15). But we live in a world where the financial challenges of retirement, housing, small family size [if any family at all]... mean that there appears no other option but to 'hoard manna' for the future. To some extent this may be a reflection of the way that life in these very last days is indeed quite different to anything previously known in history; but all the same, we face a very real challenge. Are we going to hoard manna, for our retirement, for our unknown futures? Or will we rise up to the challenge to trust in God's day by day provision, and share what's left over? "Give us this day our bread-for-today" really needs to be prayed by us daily. Let's give full weight to the Lord's command to pray for only "our daily bread", the daily rations granted to a soldier on active duty. It's almost impossible to translate this term adequately in English. In the former USSR and Communist East Germany (DDR), there was the idea that nobody in a Socialist state should go hungry. And so if you were hungry in a restaurant after eating, you had the right to ask for some food, beyond what you paid for. In the former East Germany, the term *Sättigungsbeilage* was used for this in restaurants- the portion of necessity. It's this food we should ask God for- the food to keep us alive, the food which a Socialist restaurant would give you for free. We shouldn't be thinking in terms of anything more than this. It's an eloquent essay in what our attitude to wealth, materialism and long term self-provision ought to be.

To steal is to take the Name of Yahweh called upon us in vain (Prov. 30:9), and therefore we ask to be given *only* our daily bread and no more (NIV); not so much that

if we are found out, the Name will be brought into disrepute, but rather that we personally will have blasphemed the imperative of Yahweh which is heavy upon us; these words of Agur are applied to us in Mt. 6:11.

6:12 *Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors*- Probably an allusion to the jubilee. We release / forgive men their debt to us, as God does to us. If we chose not to participate in this Jubilee by not releasing others, then we cannot expect to receive it ourselves (note the Jubilee allusions in Lk. 24:47). Around 90% of Old Testament references to sin use the metaphor of a weight or burden, which can be lifted by forgiveness. The Lord Jesus prefers to speak of sin as a debt, which can be forgiven by not being demanded and the debt erased. The metaphor of debt is somewhat richer than that or burdens. It opens the possibility that God lent to us, that He allowed us to get into that debt- because He didn't strike us dead for the sin. 'Debt' also carries with it the idea that we would like to repay, but cannot. This is the flavour of the Lord's opening to the Sermon- that He is the solution for those who would like to be spiritual but feel unable to be as they would wish to be (see on 5:6). The release of debt carries with it a greater sense of gratitude, knowing that we should not have got into the debt in the first place. All this was foreseen by the Lord in His change of metaphor from sin as weight to sin as debt. It has been noted that sin was not spoken as debt until Jesus introduced the idea. We are in debt to God. And yet so many have the idea that God owes them, and big time. The prayer of Apollonius of Tyana was that "Oye gods, give me the things which are owing to me". And that ancient attitude is alive today, leading to some who think it is their right not to work and to be supported, or expect some kind of material blessing from God. When actually, we are in deep debt to God, and forgiven it only by pure grace.

Our debtors- Those "indebted" to us (Lk. 11:4) are those who have a debt to us. But Biblically, who are those who are 'indebted'? The same Greek word occurs often in the New Testament. Mt. 18:30 explains that there is a debt to us if we have been sinned against and it's not been reconciled. The debt our brethren have to us, and we to them, is to love one another, to lay our lives down for each other, to entertain and receive each other at home (s.w. 3 Jn. 8; 1 Jn. 3:16; 4:11). A wife has her husband in her debt if he doesn't love her with the love of Christ (Eph. 5:28); our brethren are in debt to us if they don't give us material help when we truly need it (Rom. 15:27); or if they don't wash our feet (Jn. 13:14). A debt implies that it's not been paid; and so I come to the conclusion that the *forgiveness* of our debtors is forgiving our brethren when they don't love us as they should, don't care for us… and never apologize or rectify it. The debt is outstanding; they've not cleared it. But we are to forgive it; we are to forgive unconditionally, without demanding restoration or grovelling repentance before us. This is the challenge of that phrase in the Lord's prayer. For we ask for "our sins" in general to be likewise forgiven; and they surely include many 'secret sins' which we don't even perceive or haven't repented of. And further. "As we also forgive every one that is indebted to us" (Lk. 11:4) can actually be read as a word of command, a statement that is actually a request. The request is that the sins of those who've sinned against us be forgiven- in this sense, "whosesoever sins ye remit [s.w. forgive] they are remitted unto them" (Jn. 20:23). That's another challenging thought. If they're impenitent, how can they be forgiven? But if *we* forgive them, perhaps we are to understand that God is happy to forgive them. If we feel, as I do, that we've been sinned against so much… then we have a wonderful opportunity to gain our own forgiveness and even that of those people… by forgiving them. The more I hurt at how others have treated me, the more I realize my own desperate need for forgiveness. The two things, as the Lord foresaw in His model prayer, dovetail seamlessly together.

Further evidence that Jesus prayed in Aramaic is found by comparing the two records of the Lord's prayer; Matthew has "forgive us our debts", whilst Luke has "forgive us our sins". The Aramaic word *hobha* means both 'sin' and 'debt'. The conclusion is therefore that Jesus taught the disciples to pray in their native Aramaic dialect rather than in Hebrew or Greek. Further, the Lord's prayer has many links to the *Kaddish*, an ancient Aramaic prayer which included phrases like "Exalted and hallowed be his great name... may he let his kingdom rule... speedily and soon".

As we... The crucial little Greek word *hos* is elsewhere translated: according as, as soon as, even as, like as, as greatly as, since, whenever, while. Clearly enough, our forgiveness by God is dependent upon and of the same nature as our forgiveness of others.

"Forgive us our / debts sins as we have forgiven those who sin against us" (Lk.) again uses the aorist which implies 'Forgive us this once'. Could this not be an anticipation of the state of the believer before the judgment seat of Christ- 'forgive me please this once for all my sins, as I have forgiven those who sinned against me'. If so, we have a powerful exhortation to forgive *now*; for in that awesome moment, it will be so apparent that the Lord's gracious acceptance of us will be directly proportional to how deeply we accepted and forgave our brethren in this life. Notice how strongly Jesus links future judgment with our present forgiveness (Lk. 6:37). He teaches us to pray now for forgiveness on the basis of how we have forgiven others, knowing that in prayer, we have a foretaste of the judgment. Now we can come boldly before the throne of grace in prayer, just as we will come before that same throne in the last day.

6:13 *Lead us*- The Greek *eisphero* definitely means to lead inward. The internal process of temptation is in view here, as explained specifically by James 1:13-15- which may be a specific comment on this part of the Sermon. Much of James is an expansion upon the Sermon. Whilst the process of temptation is internal (and note how internal processes are the great theme of the Sermon), God is capable of leading a person in the process. The dynamics in the upward and downward spirals are ultimately of God.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one- This can only really come true when we are changed into divine nature; for only then will we be freed /delivered [aorist- once, finally, for all time] from the 'devil' of sin. The word for trial / temptation is *peirasmos*, and I have never been entirely satisfied that we can reconcile the Lord's words here with the fact that God does not tempt any man (James 1:13-15). However, I feel happier with the idea that the Lord may specifically be bidding us pray for deliverance from the latter day holocaust to come upon the saints. The Lord Jesus can keep us from "the hour of trial [*peirasmos*] which is coming on the whole world" (Rev. 3:10). When the disciples were bidden pray that they enter not into temptation (Mk. 14:38- *peirasmos* again), they were being asked to pray the model prayer with passionate concentration and meaning. Yet those men in Gethsemane were and are representative of the latter day saints who are bidden pray that they may escape "all those things" , the hour of trial /*peirasmos* which is coming, and to stand acceptably before the Son of man at His coming. We ought to be praying fervently for this deliverance; but I wonder how many of us are? For the days of the final tribulation will be shortened for the sake of the elect- i.e., for the sake of their prayers (Mk. 13:19,20). The final tribulation of the last days will be the supreme struggle between the flesh and spirit, between the believer and the world, between Christ and the Biblical 'devil'; and we are to pray that we will be delivered victorious from that struggle. Thus "Lead us not into 'the test'" (Mt. 6:13) could in this context be understood as a plea to save us from entering into the time of final tribulation- just as the Lord specifically exhorts us to pray to be delivered from that time. The implication would be that the final time of

testing will be so severe that indeed the elect will scarcely be saved. It seems to me that none of us have the urgent sense of the time of testing ahead which we should have; how many are praying daily to be spared it? How many are in actual denial that it will ever come, even though it's clear enough in Scripture?
We must pray not to be led into temptation (Mt. 6:13); but when we fall into such temptation (s.w.), count it all joy, James says (1:2). The exercise of praying not to experience those temptations was for our spiritual benefit, and God is willing that it should be so.

Deliver us from evil- Surely alluded to in 2 Pet. 2:9 "The Lord knows how to *deliver* the Godly out of temptations". Evil and temptation are thereby paralleled. The Lord Jesus based this part of His prayer on Old Testament passages like 1 Chron. 4:10; Ps. 25:22; 26:11; 31:8; 34:22; 69:18; 78:35,42; 140:1 and Prov. 2:12; 6:24, which ask for 'deliverance' from evil*people*, sin, distress, tribulation etc. here on earth. Not one of those passages speaks of deliverance from a personal, superhuman Satan. Esther's prayer in Es. 4:19 LXX is very similar – "Deliver us from the hand of the evildoer", but that 'evildoer' was Haman, not any personal, superhuman Satan. Even if we insist upon reading 'the evil one', "the evil one" in the Old Testament was always "the evil man in Israel" (Dt. 17:12; 19:19; 22:21–24 cp. 1 Cor. 5:13) – never a superhuman being. And there may be another allusion by the Lord to Gen. 48:16, where God is called the One "who has redeemed me from all evil". As the Old Testament 'word made flesh', the thinking of the Lord Jesus was constantly reflective of Old Testament passages; but in every case here, the passages He alluded to were *not* concerning a superhuman Devil figure. God 'delivers from' "every trouble" (Ps. 54:7), persecutors and enemies (Ps. 142:6; 69:14) – but as Ernst Lohmeyer notes, "There is no instance of the [orthodox understanding of the] Devil being called 'the evil one' in the Old Testament or in the Jewish writings" (4).
It's been observed that every aspect of the Lord's prayer can be interpreted with reference to the future coming of the Kingdom of God on earth. Prayer for deliverance from evil, the time of testing (Gk.), would then tally well with the Lord's exhortation to pray that we may be delivered from the final time of evil coming on the earth (Lk. 21:36). Another insight into this petition is that God does in fact lead men in a downward spiral as well as in an upward spiral of relationship with Him – Pharaoh would be the classic example. "Why do you make us err from your ways?" was the lament of Israel to their God in Is. 63:17. It is perhaps this situation more than any which we should fear – being hardened in sin, drawing ever closer to the waterfall of destruction, until we come to the point that the forces behind us are now too strong to resist... Saul lying face down in the dirt of ancient Palestine the night before his death would be the classic visual image of it. And the Lord would be urging us to pray earnestly that we are not led in that downward spiral. His conversation in Gethsemane, both with the disciples and with His Father, had many points of contact with the text of the Lord's Prayer. "Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation" (Mt. 26:41) would perhaps be His equivalent of "lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil".

For Yours...- The sense of 'for' is definitely 'because…', but it could simply be with reference to the entire preceding prayer. Or it could particularly be with reference to the preceding request: "Deliver us from evil". In any case, the question arises: Why should God answer the prayer, be it the entire prayer or the specific request for deliverance from evil, because the Kingdom, power and glory is God's? The idea may be that because the Kingdom we seek now to be part of, and to eternally live in, is God's, therefore it follows that He earnestly desires to grant it to us His children. And

we plead that He hears our requests, especially for deliverance from temptation and evil, because surely He wants to give us His glorious Kingdom. Because the Kingdom is *His*, all glory is to Him, and He wants to see us giving Him glory; because He has all power- therefore we ask Him to give us the requests we have made, because they are all intended to achieve glory to Him and to ensure our entry into His Kingdom. Another angle of exposition would be to consider that we ask for deliverance from temptation and sin because we know that God has rulership ("Kingdom") and power over all- given His unlimited physical and spiritual power, we ask Him to use it to answer our requests. This reasoning of course assumes that all that has preceded in the prayer is in order for us to enter the Kingdom and to see His glory worked out. Any requests for merely human benefit and advantage cannot be concluded with such an argument- that we ask God to hear this *because* the Kingdom, power and glory is His. *For Yours is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever*- This is the appropriate conclusion to a prayer that asks for the establishment of that Kingdom. Whilst commenting upon the Lord's prayer, it is worth pointing out that the Lord repeated the essence of each phrase at various points during His life. When facing His ultimate struggle when facing up to the cross, He asked that the Father's Name would be glorified (Jn. 12:28)- quoting His own words from His model prayer. It hurt and cost Him so much to pray that prayer- the prayer we may have known for so many years that we can pray it almost at no cost. But to truly ask for the Father's will to be done is in fact a commitment to the way of the cross (Jn. 6:38; Heb. 10:7-10; Mk. 14:36). So let us pray the prayer- but putting meaning into the words.

May I place two well-known Scriptures together in your minds. "*Yours* [God's] is the Kingdom". And "Blessed are you poor, for *yours* is the Kingdom *of God*" (Lk. 6:20). The Lord assures us that the Father wants to give *His* Kingdom to those who are poor in spirit, to the broken, to the self-doubters, the uncertain, those uncomfortable with themselves, the unbearably and desperately lonely, the awkwardly spoken… the poor in spirit. Those who would be the very last to believe that God would give *them* what is evidently *His* Kingdom. But not only *will* the Father do this, but Jesus stresses that it *is* ours right now. The certainty of the glory that will be revealed for us means that we cope better with suffering; as Paul writes, they "are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). *Amen*- Joachim Jeremias mentions that "according to idiomatic Jewish usage the word *amen* is used to affirm, endorse or appropriate the words of another person [whereas] in the words of Jesus it is used to introduce and endorse Jesus' own words... to end one's own prayer with *amen* was considered a sign of ignorance" (5). Thus Jesus was introducing a radically new type of speaking. But He did so because He wanted us to realize that if our spirit is united with God's, then our words to God are in a sense God talking to Himself; hence we say 'Amen' to our own words, when 'amen' was usually a confirmation of God's words. Jn. 16:26 fits in here, where in the context of speaking of the unity of the believers with the Father and with Himself, the Lord says that He will not need to pray for the believer, but God Himself will hear the believer. I take this to mean that Jesus foresaw that the time would come when our prayer would be His prayer. It's not so much that He prays for us, but rather prays with us and even through us.

6:14 *For if you forgive*- The Lord guessed that His teaching to ask for forgiveness "as" we forgive others would be radical and hard to accept. The Lord's teaching in the prayer ["as we forgive"] was clear enough, but He repeats it twice (also in :15), so that there be no possible difficulty in interpretation. He rarely spells things out this specifically and with such immediate repetition. The vital, eternally vital need to

forgive others is underlined. And the Lord repeats this teaching later in His teaching, with the further detail that unless we forgive others "from your hearts", we will not be forgiven (Mt. 18:35; also in Mk. 11:25). This chronic and urgent need to forgive others, aware that *how* we forgive them is the basis of *how* God will forgive us, leads to the question of whether we should forgive others without their repentance. If we first demand specific repentance, then this is the basis upon which we are asking to be judged; and we all, surely, sin without repentance, sometimes because at the time we do not perceive the sinfulness of our behaviour.
Paul alludes here in Eph. 4:32. Jesus said: "If you forgive, you'll be forgiven". Paul subtly changes the tenses: "You've been forgiven already, so forgive". It's as if Paul is saying: 'Think carefully about Mt. 6:14. Don't think it means 'If you do this, I'll do that for you'. No. God has forgiven you. But that forgiveness is conditional on the fact that in the future you will forgive people. If you don't, then that forgiveness you've already been given is cancelled. This is what Jesus really had in mind'. This would suggest a very close analysis of those simple words of Jesus, using all the logic and knowledge of Biblical principles which Paul had. Note that the command to forgive our debtors when we pray (Mt. 6:14) is applied by Paul to the need to forgive those who sin against us in the ecclesia (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13).

6:16 *Hypocrites… disfigure their faces*- There is a semantic connection between these words. A *hupokrites* was a play actor, one who wore a mask. These hypocrites create false faces for themselves, that is the idea- their disfigured faces are but as a mask. The Greek for "disfigure" occurs only five times in the NT, once here- and twice in the next few verses, 6:19,20, where the Lord warns that external material wealth 'corrupts', destroys itself, or is disfigured. By disfiguring their faces, they were destroying their faces, destroying themselves because they wanted to appear other than they were.

Appear unto men- s.w. 6:5, also in Mt. 23:27,28. To act in a way so as to spiritually impress men is especially distasteful to the Lord. The issue of what other churches, ecclesias or individuals will think of us is not to pay any part in our decision making and action. We are living, thinking and deciding in the loving gaze of the Father and Son. The wonder of that should mean that all fear of human criticism or desire for human approval plays absolutely no role.

6:18 *Which is in secret*- Gk. 'the One who is in secret / hidden'. The hiddenness of God is in the sense that He specifically looks at the hidden man of the heart (1 Pet. 3:4). This is the sphere in which He operates and sees.

Openly- Who we will eternally be in the Kingdom, is who we were secretly in this life. What we think about as we fall asleep, as we travel, walk down streets… this is the essence of the life in Christ. The change of nature we will experience at the Lord's return will simply be a physical manifestation of who we are in spirit in this life. We will be made manifest [s.w.], declared openly, at the day of judgment (1 Cor. 3:13). This means that we will be preserved as we spiritually are in this life. This means that the development of our spiritual person is of paramount importance, because that is how we shall eternally be. The Lord goes right on to warn against materialism (:19,20). But that is in the context of the paramount need for the development of spiritual mindedness. It is petty materialism which is the greatest enemy of this development- the cares of this life and the attainment of material wealth are what crowd out spiritual thinking. The treasure, the most important thing in our life, is our "heart", our thinking (6:21; "the good treasure of the heart", 12:35). Building up spirituality is placed in opposition to building up material wealth.

6:19 *Lay not up*- see on 6:18 "openly".

Rust corrupts- James 5:2 alludes here and states that wealth is already rusted and moth-eaten. So this perhaps was the Lord's idea here, although the grammar is unclear. The idea of gold is that it doesn't rust. What appears to be permanent material wealth is not, and is already rusted in God's eyes.

Break through- Literally, 'dig through'. Relevant to the earth houses of the very poorest people. The Lord's return is going to break up the house of those not looking for His return (Mt. 24:43 s.w.). It may be that 'thieves' is an intensive plural referring to the great thief, whom Jesus likens to Himself in Mt. 24:43. In this case He would be saying that He will take human wealth anyway at the last day- so we should give it to Him now and not seek it.
Because we know people (and brethren) who are richer and more wealth-seeking than we are, it's fatally easy to conclude that therefore we aren't rich, therefore we aren't materialistic. This is part of the subtle snare of materialism; that we all think that this is an area where we're not doing too badly; that really, we don't care *that* much where we live, or what the furniture's like, or whether we have money to take a holiday... But remember, our attitude to materialism is the litmus test of all our spirituality. None of us should be so quick to say that we're OK in this area. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break (Gk. dig) through and steal" (Mt. 6:19) was spoken to a huge crowd of Jewish peasants. The Lord wasn't only referring to the few rich men who might be hanging around on the edge of the group. He was talking to all of them. He knew their mud walled homes which thieves could so easily dig through. That little cheap bangle, that ring, thinly buried under the bed mat after the pattern of Achan, that prized tunic... the petty riches of the poor which they so strove for, which *to them* were priceless treasures. This is what the Lord was getting at; and His point was that *every one of us*, from beggar to prince, has this 'laying up' mentality. He is almost ruthless in His demands.

6:20 *Lay up*- The idea is of incremental growth. It's as if spirituality, both in personality and deed, is carefully noted in Heaven as it occurs.
6:21 *There*- Gk. 'to there'. The direction of our heart is towards where our treasure is. If our treasure is in Heaven, with God, then our life direction will be towards Him and not towards earthly things. The emphasis of the Lord throughout the Sermon has been on the state of the heart. The overall direction of our heart, our thinking, is all important. That direction cannot be both to earthly things and Heavenly things. Laying up treasure on earth cannot be done whilst having treasure in Heaven. The emphasis of course is on 'laying up', wilfully incrementing, not the mere possession of wealth which the Lord may send into our hands. 'Laying up' means to increment, not to merely possess. But it is the overall direction of our hearts which will be the deciding factor in our eternal destiny; 'to where' they are directed. And we can direct them by deciding what our treasure really is, and where it is.

6:22 *Single*- Healthy. This observation about single-mindedness follows on from the Lord's teaching about the overall direction of the human mind, observing that we cannot have two overall directions for our heart. Our eye must be single, the entrance of light must be only from one source. God gives to all men with a single eye (James 1:5 Gk.); and in response, we too must be single eyed in our giving (Mt. 6:22 s.w.- this is one of James' many allusions to the sermon on the mount). If our eye / world-view / outlook on life is *single* [s.w. 'simple' in the passages quoted], then our whole body / life will be full of light (Mt. 6:22). In daily work, in private reflection and planning for our immediate futures and present needs, there must be a direct and undiluted belief of the teachings of the Gospel, connecting those teachings to our daily life of faith. In this simplicity of the life of faith, in a world that makes life so complicated [especially for

the poor], we will find humility. With that simplicity and humility will come peace, and the ability to pray with a concentrated and uncluttered mind, without our thoughts wandering off into the petty troubles of life as we frame our words before Almighty God each morning and night.

I've always sensed that the more complex a person, the harder it is for them to be generous. But we are all commanded to be generous to the Lord's cause, knowing that nothing we have is our own. And I am not only talking to wealthy brethren. *All* of us have something, and all of us can give something to our brethren. Consider how the poor believers of the first century such as Corinth [amongst whom there were not many rich or mighty, Paul reminds them] collected funds for the poor brethren in Judea. There is a Greek word translated "simplicity" which is related to the word translated "single" here in Mt. 6:22. It occurs eight times in the NT. Five of these are in 2 Corinthians, written as it was in the context of Corinth giving funds for the Jerusalem poor. Consider how the word is translated:

- Paul had "*simplicity* and Godly sincerity" (2 Cor. 1:12)
- They had "*liberality*" (2 Cor. 8:2)
- "*Bountifulness*" (2 Cor. 9:11)
- Their "*liberal distribution*" (2 Cor. 9:13)
- He feared lest they be corrupted from "the *simplicity* that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3).

Evidently Paul saw a link between generosity and the simplicity of the faith in Christ. It doesn't need a lexicon to tell you that this word means both 'simplicity' and also 'generous'. The connection is because the basis for generosity is a simple faith. Not a dumb, blind faith, glossing over the details of God's word. But a realistic, simple, direct conviction. This is why Paul exhorts that all giving to the Lord's cause should be done with "simplicity" (Rom. 12:8- the AVmg. translates 'liberally'). Give, in whatever way, and don't complicate it with all the ifs and buts which our fleshly mind proposes. Paul warns them against false teachers who would corrupt them from their "simplicity"- and yet he usually speaks of 'simplicity' in the sense of generosity. Pure doctrine, wholeheartedly accepted, will lead us to be generous. False doctrine and human philosophy leads to all manner of self-complication. Paul was clever, he was smart; but he rejoiced that he lived his life "in simplicity...by the grace of God" (2 Cor. 1:12). If our eye is single (translating a Greek word related to that translated 'simple'), then the whole body is full of light (Mt. 6:22)- and the Lord spoke again in the context of generosity. An evil eye, a world view that is not 'simple' or single, is used as a figure for mean spiritedness.

6:23 *Evil eye*- This was an idiom for mean spiritedness. It continues the theme of materialism from the previous verses. To follow materialism is to be mean spirited-towards God. Speaking in the context of serving*either* God *or* mammon, the Lord uttered these difficult words: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth... the light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness... how great is that darkness!" (Mt. 6:19-22). All this is in the context of not being materialistic. The Lord is drawing on the OT usage of "an evil eye" - and consistently, this idiom means someone who is selfishly materialistic (Prov. 22:9; 23:7; 28:22; Dt. 15:9). The NIV renders some of these idioms as "stingy" or "mean". A single eye refers to a generous spirit (1 Chron. 29:17 LXX), and a related Greek word occurs in 2 Cor. 8:2; 9:11,13 with the sense of "generous". So surely the Lord is saying that our attitude to wealth controls our whole spirituality. Whether we have a mean or generous spirit will affect our whole life- an evil [stingy] eye means our whole body is full of darkness. Just let this sink in. If we are materialistic, our whole life will be filled with darkness, whatever

our external pretensions may be, and there is a definite link to be made here with the "darkness" of rejection. The riches of Jericho are described with a Hebrew word which means both a curse, and something devoted (to God; Josh. 6:18). This teaches a powerful lesson: such riches of this world as come into our possession will curse us, unless they are devoted to the Father.

6:24 *Serve two masters*- It would be too simplistic to interpret this as meaning that we are either totally serving the Lord, or not serving Him. Paul seems to have thought a lot about this verse because he refers to it several times in Romans, basing his entire Romans chapter 6 around the idea that we do not serve sin as a Master (Rom. 6:6). But he goes straight on to lament that in reality, he does serve "the law of sin" with his flesh, but "I myself" serve the law of God (Rom. 7:25). And he concludes the letter by warning that some do not serve the Lord Jesus (Rom. 16:18). Perhaps Paul is writing partly in response to confusion about the Lord's words- for we keep on sinning, yet He taught we can only serve Him alone. And his perspective is that we ourselves as believers are totally devoted to Him as our only Lord and Master. But the flesh, which we do not identify as the real self of the believer, continues to serve the sin principle. *Hate the one*- The Lord wasn't just trying to shock us when He offered us the choice between hating God and loving Him (Mt. 6:24 cp. James 4:4); He was deadly literal in what He said. The Lord hammered away at the same theme when He spoke of how a tree can only bring forth one kind of spiritual fruit: bad, or good (Mt. 7:18,19). James likewise: a spring can either give sweet water or bitter water (James 3:11). We either love God, or the world. If we love the world, we have *no* love of God in us (1 Jn. 2:15). The man who found the treasure in the field, or the pearl of great price, sold *all* that he had, in order to obtain it. If he had sold any less, he wouldn't have raised the required price. These mini-parables are Christ's comment on the Law's requirement that God's people love Him with *all* their heart and soul, realizing the logic of devotion. Samuel pleaded with Israel: " Serve the Lord with all your heart; and turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things [i.e. idols]" (1 Sam. 12:20,21). If we don't serve God whole-heartedly, we will serve the idols of this present age. There's no third road. If we are God's people, we will flee from the false teacher (Jn. 10:5). If we do anything other than this, we reflect our basic attitude to God's truth.

Hate... love- Because Israel were in covenant with God, *therefore* they were not to make covenants with the other nations, and marriage is mentioned as an example of this (Ex. 34:10,12). In his repetition of this part of the law in Deuteronomy, Moses gave even more repeated emphasis to the fact that our covenant with God precludes any covenant relationship with anyone else: "Thou shalt make no covenant with them... neither shalt thou make marriages with them... for thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all (other) people that are on the face of the earth. The Lord ...set his love upon you ...chose you... because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers... the Lord hath brought you out (of the world) with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen... know therefore that the Lord thy God, he God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments... and repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them; he will not be slack to him that hateth him. Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments..." (Dt. 7:2-11). The wonder of our relationship with Yahweh is stated time and again. To marry back into Egypt, the house of bondmen from which we have been redeemed, is to despise the covenant, to reverse the redemptive work which God has wrought with us. In this context of marriage out of the Faith, we read that God will destroy "him that hateth Him", and repay him to his face. On the other

hand, not marrying Gentiles was part of *loving*God (Josh. 23:12,13). So according to Moses, whoever married a Gentile was effectively hating God. It is possible that the Lord had this in mind when He taught that we either serve God and hate the world, or we love the world and hate God (Mt. 6:24). This isn't, of course, how we see it. We would like to think that there is a third way; a way in which we can love God and yet also love someone in the world. Yet effectively, in God's eyes, this is hating Him. Doubtless many Israelites thought Moses was going too heavy in saying that those who married Gentiles were hating God. And the new Israel may be tempted to likewise respond to the new covenant's insistence that our love of God means a thorough rejection of this world. Whoever even *wishes* to be a friend of the world is an enemy of God (James 4:4).

Hold to- There are only two masters whom we completely serve; we hold to either mammon, or God (Mt. 6:24). The idea of "holding to" in Greek implies holding *against* something else; the result of holding to God is that we are against everything else. "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Mt. 12:30)- rather than being passively indifferent. Men reacted to the Lord in ultimately one of two ways- they either truly believed on Him, or supported the Jews in murdering Him (Jn. 11:45,46). Those who apparently believed on Him but kept it quiet were forced by the cross and resurrection to make their commitment one way or the other [and serious reflection on the memorials of these things in bread and wine leads us to the same decision]. So much for the philosophy of balance! The Hebrew word for vacillate (translated "dissemble" in AV) also means to go astray; indecision and indifference are effectively decisions against God's way. The Hebrew language often reflects God's characteristics and attitudes.

Despise- The Greek word is usually used elsewhere about despising other believers (Mt. 18:10; 1 Cor. 11:22; 1 Tim. 4:12; 6:2; 2 Pet. 2:10). Loving God involves loving our brother, and despising our brethren means we do not love God but rather despise Him.

Mammon- When the Lord spoke of the impossibility of serving two masters, He personified the one as "Mammon", the antithesis of God. He goes on to define what he meant: "Therefore... take no *thought* for your life... which of you by *taking thought*... why *take ye thought* for raiment... therefore take no *thought* saying, What shall we eat?... seek ye first the Kingdom of God... take therefore no *thought* for the morrow" (Mt. 6:24,25,27,28,31,33,34). Clearly the Lord saw "Mammon", this personified anti-God, as an attitude of *mind*. He had the same view of 'Satan' as we do: a personification of sin in the human mind. He also saw seeking "the Kingdom of God" as somehow parallel with serving God rather than mammon. We would wish there were some third category, God, mammon and something in between; as we may idly speculate that it would suit us if there were three categories at judgement day, accepted, rejected, and something else. But both then and now, this very minute, this isn't the case. A deep down recognition of this will have its effect practically. If we are serving God, let's not give anything to mammon, let's not play games, juggling and using brinkmanship. There is fair evidence that in God's eyes, our attitude to materialism is the epitome of our spirituality. The Lord places before us only two possible roads: the service of God, or that of mammon (Aramaic for riches / wealth, Mt. 6:24). We would rather expect Him to have said: service of God or the flesh. Indeed, this is the choice that is elsewhere placed before us in the NT. However, the Lord evidently saw "mammon" as the epitome of all the flesh stands for. It is probably the view of many of us that while we have many areas of spiritual weakness, materialism is not one of them. But according to the Lord, if we are reading Him rightly, our attitude to the flesh generally is reflected in our

attitude to wealth. This is why the Bible does have a lot to say about the sacrifice of 'our' material possessions; not because God needs them in themselves, but because our resignation of them to His service is an epitome of our whole spirituality. Mt. 6:24 is alluded to in Tit. 1:9. Holding to God as your master rather than mammon is achieved through holding on to His word. Paul sees one application of serving mammon as acting in a hypocritical way in order to please some in the ecclesia (Mt. 6:24 = Gal. 1:10).

6:25 *Therefore*- Because our hearts can only be in one place, either with God or not, we should especially beware of materialism. For this more than anything else can lead us to hate God and to despise Him- because it takes our hearts away from Him.

Take no thought- The Sermon is concerned with how we think, with inculcating spiritual mindedness. The exhortations in this section against materialism arise out of that- they are appeals not to be materialistic and faithless in God's provision, because this leads to our thinking, our heart and mind, being on those things rather than with the Lord. It's true that the Greek translated 'thought' can mean 'no *anxious* thought'. But the problem is that we can make this mean that we are in fact allowed to spend a lot of time thinking about material things, so long as we're not 'anxious'. This line of interpretation seems to ignore the wider context. We can be spiritually minded, the Lord is teaching, if we simply accept that we shall never go hungry or naked. God will provide for His children who trust in Him. The Lord clearly saw material concerns as being the great enemy of daily spiritual mindedness. The emphasis upon not taking thought is considerable- the Lord uses the word five times in swift succession (Mt. 6:25,27,28,31,34). And He repeats the command not to take thought for what we shall eat or drink (Mt. 6:25,31). Luke's record records this warning not to worry about what we shall 'eat and drink' only once (Lk. 12:29), but it is prefaced by the parable of the rich fool, upon whose lips we find the same words. After he has spent a lifetime amassing wealth, he says to himself "eat, drink and be merry" (Lk. 12:19). Clearly we are to understand him as a man who failed to live by the Lord's principles not to worry about eating and drinking. Yet he was not poor. He was fabulously rich. The point is thus established that the rich, or at least those who have enough to eat and drink, are not to consider the Lord's principle as speaking only to the desperately poor who are tempted to worry about what they shall eat. The principle applies to the rich too. For it is a basic human principle that all of us, rich or poor, are tempted to expend mental thought about how we shall basically survive. The omission of the Sermon in John is typical of how John omits much of the Synoptic material, and yet repeats it in essence. He records the same 'eat and drink' language about our need eat and drink of the flesh and blood of the crucified Lord Jesus (Jn. 6:53). The point perhaps is that instead of expending mental energy worrying about how we shall eat and drink, we are to instead focus upon absorbing the Lord Jesus into our lives. And all material things will somehow fall into place. A similar idea is to be found in the Lord's warning not to worry about what clothing to "put on", because He uses the same word about how the rejected man had not 'put on' the wedding garment of the Lord's righteousness (Mt. 22:11). Repeatedly the later New Testament appeals for us to "put on [s.w.] the Lord Jesus" (Rom. 13:12,14; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:24; 6:11,14; Col. 3:10,12; 1 Thess. 5:8), so that in the last day we may 'put on' the clothing of immortality (s.w. 1 Cor. 15:53,54; 2 Cor. 5:3). If putting on *this* garment is our mental focus, then we need not worry about what we shall 'put on' for clothing in this life.
This is alluded to in Phil. 4:6. How do we obey that command to "take no thought for your life"? By praying consciously for every little thing that you need in daily life, e.g. daily bread. We do not have two masters; only one. Therefore, the more we grasp this,

the more we will give ourselves solely to Him. And this leads on, in the thinking of Jesus, to having no anxious thought for tomorrow; for a life of total devotion to Him means that we need not worry about tomorrow (Mt. 6:24,25). If we seek first His Kingdom, then we will not be anxious for tomorrow (Mt. 6:33,34).

Is not the life more than food, and the body than clothing?- This continues the theme outlined above. The presence of the articles focuses attention upon *the* life and *the* body- and surely the Lord has in view the life to come, which will involve having a glorious *body* (Phil. 3:21), not existence in any disembodied sense. The contrast is therefore between this present life, and *the* life to come; this present body, and *the*body which is to be given us. It's a question of identification; whether we focus upon this present life and body, or perceive that this life is but a miniscule percentage of our eternal existence, when we will not be living this life with this body. The life and the body to come are "more" than the present life and body; and the Greek for "more" is elsewhere translated 'the greater part', the idea being 'the major portion'. The vastly greater part of our existence will be with *the* life and *the* body which is yet to come. If we are secure in Christ and confident of our eternal destiny by His grace, then issues pertaining to this life and this body become insignificant.

6:26 *Behold*- Gk. 'gaze into'. Surely He drew attention to some birds flying around. And the Greek words behind "Behold" mean more than a casual glance. He asks us to look for some time with deep penetration at the birds of the natural creation, and learn a lesson.

The birds of the air... He feeds them- As always, the Lord applied His words to Himself. For we sense in Mt. 8:20 that He had really thought about His words. Yes, the Father feeds the birds- but they have nests, and the Son of Man at least that night had nowhere to lay His head. Note too that the birds of the air are generally unclean (Acts 10:12). The fact God feeds even the unclean animals ties in with the Lord's opening comfort when He began the Sermon that His message is for those who worry about their uncleanness and spiritual inadequacy before God.

Sow... reap... gather into barns- These words are repeatedly used by the Lord Jesus, especially in Matthew, for the work of the Gospel. The seed of the word is *sown* (Matthew records three sowing parables- Mt. 13:3,24,31 cp. Mt. 25:26); , then *reaped* at Christ's return (Mt. 25:26- as in 2 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 6:7-9; Rev. 14:15), and finally *gathered* (by the preachers and Angels, Mt. 3:12; 12:30; 13:30,47; 22:10; 25:26,32), "into my barn" (Mt. 3:12; 13:30)- the Kingdom. We cannot simply ignore all this use of identical language in Matthew's Gospel. I noted at 6:25 and elsewhere that the Sermon is often saying 'Do not worry about the activities which are part of this life, but focus instead on doing those activities in a spiritual sense'. I gave the example of how the command not to worry about what we shall physically eat and drink implies that we should instead be concerned about our spiritual eating and drinking. Remembering the focus of the Sermon upon the need for outgoing, proactive sharing of the Gospel, it would be fair to conclude that the Lord wishes us to not worry about sowing, reaping and gathering into barns in the literal sense, but instead to concern ourselves with doing those things *in the work of the Gospel*. 'Focus on sharing the Gospel, and all the material things will fall into place if you just trust that they will work out OK'.

Your Heavenly Father feeds them- God consciously feeds the birds with their every mouthful. "If God so clothe the grass of the field. . . shall He not much more clothe you?" (Mt. 6:30). In the same way, God individually and consciously cares for each blade of grass. Fundamentally, they do not grow so much as a result of chemical

combination or photosynthesis, but due to the conscious care of God using such processes. The idea of every little thing in life and the world being controlled by Angels contradicts the notion that God has set this world in motion according to certain natural laws, and that things continue without His direct intervention- as if the whole system is run by clockwork which God initially wound up. Intervention in this system by God has been called 'the hand of providence'. However, these ideas surely contradict the clear Biblical teaching that every movement in the natural creation is consciously controlled by God through His Angels, thus needing an energetic input from Him through His Spirit for every action to occur. "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your Heavenly Father feeds them" suggests that God consciously feeds the birds with their every mouthful. See too Mt. 5:45; 6:30; 10:29-31; Job 38:12,32; 39:27; Amos 9:6; Is. 40:7; Ps. 90:3; 104: 13; Prov. 11:1.

Better than- Quite a theme in the thinking of the Lord Jesus. The Greek word is used by Him at least three times in this way. Better than the birds, than many sparrows (Mt. 10:31), than a sheep (Mt. 12:12). Doubtless this thought was developed in the Lord by His observation of birds, flocks of sparrows and sheep- developing the implications of the simple thought that we are of more value than them to God. For we are made in His image in a way in which they are not.

6:27 *Taking thought*- As always, the emphasis is upon the state of the heart. No amount of mental worry can add anything to us. And so our hearts and minds should instead be devoted to the God who can transform our body into an eternal state of existence (see on 6:25).

Add- The same word occurs in 6:33. We cannot ultimately 'add' anything to ourselves in secular life; if we seek first the things of God's Kingdom [i.e. 'take thought' for them rather than our material life], then what is necessary for the material, human life will be added to us. The concept of 'addition' suggests we are to see ourselves as ourselves *without* the issues of food, clothing and survival. We are then to decide how we are to take care of those 'additional' issues. And the Lord is teaching that we are to focus upon spiritual things and the service of God's Kingdom, believing that He will 'add' these things to us. To perceive ourselves independent from our human, secular needs and position is hard. But Paul got the idea right when he spoke of how we bring nothing into this world and can take nothing out (1 Tim. 6:7). 'We' come into this world; we exist, but have nothing added to us initially. And 'we' exit this world, likewise without anything 'added'.

Stature- The Greek can mean 'age' as well as referring to our body. No amount of secular thought can add age to our lives. Because life, the eternal life, comes only from God. So it is to Him that our hearts belong. Again, the Lord Jesus was the word of the Sermon made flesh in His own example. For we read that He grew in stature before God (Lk. 2:52 s.w.)- not by anxious worldly thought. Perhaps Zacchaeus thought upon the implications of the Lord's words, because Luke uses the same word to note that he was of inadequate stature (Lk. 19:3). The 'stature' that we seek to attain is not any physique or longevity in this life- but the "stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13 s.w.). The amount of thought and effort that goes into trying to live longer, adding a cubit to our lifespan, is immense. And understandably so, for those who have only this life. Surely the Lord is saying that we should give no anxious thought to this, but rather, give our mental energy to growing into the age / stature of Himself.

6:28 *Thought for clothing*- The allusion is surely to how God provided food, drink and clothing which didn't wear out for the Israelites on their wilderness journey (Dt. 8:4), just as He will for those who have crossed the Red Sea in baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2).

Clothing- Again, it seems likely that the Lord intended us to refocus from material to spiritual. For later in Matthew we read of Him emphasizing the ultimate importance of having the right 'clothing' [s.w. "wedding garment"] to enter God's Kingdom at the last day (Mt. 22:11,12). On a simply practical level, it's my observation that many believers find spirituality hard because their minds are too taken up with making money- to fund the buying of branded, designer clothing. In our generation as never before, the price range of clothing is as never before. It is rather beyond me why in a brotherhood of need, it seems perfectly acceptable to not buy good second hand clothing and pay ten or more times the price for new clothing with the right brand name on it. But maybe that's just me.

Consider- Gk. 'to study deeply', used only here in the NT. The same idea, although a different word, as the Greek for "Behold" in 6:26. Whilst no doubt the Lord with a wave of the hand did draw attention to the mountain lilies growing where He was teaching, He was most definitely not inviting us to take a cursory glance at them. But rather to study them; and the unusual Greek word used for "consider" drove home that point. Perhaps He picked one and invited the disciples to gaze at it in silence for some time.

How they grow- The Greek can mean 'in what way' and also 'how much', 'to what great extent'.

Toil... spin- As so often in the Lord's teaching and parables, He was careful to balance what He said with relevance to both men ['toiling' in Greek has the idea of heavy labour], and women [spinning]. The later appeal for those who are 'toiling' in heavy labour to come to Christ (Mt. 11:28) is an invitation to know in this life a lifting of the curse of labour which came upon Adam. This is not to say that we shall not have to labour, but the desperate toiling for survival is mitigated by the knowledge that God will ultimately provide for His people.

6:29 *In... glory... clothed*- It is hard to avoid the connection with the description of the righteous as being clothed in glory at the last day. The clothing metaphor is repeated throughout the NT in this connection (e.g. Rev. 3:5,18; 7:9,13; 19:8). Of course we are dealing with metaphor here- plants are not literally clothed, although perhaps the Lord was alluding to them flowering as their 'glory'. The lily is glorious for what it is, not because it has laboured to make itself something other than it is. We will be made glorious by God in Christ. The city set on a hill cannot be hid. We are who and as we are before God. There is nothing to cover with clothing. This consideration alone puts the whole issue of present clothing into perspective.

Solomon- The Lord Jesus hinted indirectly at Solomon's pride when he said that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one wild flower, symbolic of how God would clothe, with imputed righteousness, even the weakest believer (Mt. 6:29,30). This reference to Solomon in Matt. 6:29 is only one of several hints that our Lord read Solomon in a negative light. He goes on to warn against excessive attention to food, drink and clothes (Matt. 6:31) - all things which the court of Solomon revelled in to a quite extraordinary extent. "Take therefore no (anxious) thought for the morrow...sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6:34) sounds like a rebuke of the way Solomon did just this in Ecclesiastes, as he intellectually battled with the sadness of knowing that all his achievements would mean nothing in the future. "But" , says Jesus, " seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33) - clearly a reference to Solomon seeking Divine wisdom and subsequently being blessed; surely the Lord is telling us to follow Solomon's example in this, but to avoid his pride and materialism. Solomon didn't seek the future Kingdom of God, but rather his own. The Lord taught that we should love

our enemies, and not fall into the trap of only loving those who love us (Mt. 5:44-46). He seems to be alluding here to Solomon's claim that wisdom says: "I love them that love me" (Prov. 8:17). Maybe I'm wrong, and the Lord didn't have His mind there on that passage; but in the context of Him re-interpreting and re-presenting Solomon to us, it seems likely that He was consciously showing that God's grace is in fact the very opposite of what Solomon thought. God loves His enemies, and doesn't only love those who love Him; and this is to be our credo likewise. The record of how Solomon spoke of his building of the temple can now be seen as blatant pride in his external appearance of spirituality; without the foregoing analysis of the *hints* of Solomon's pride, this wouldn't necessarily be a correct conclusion to reach; but with all these inspired links, surely we can read the following as pure pride: "Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven (hardly praying in his closet! Was Christ alluding to Solomon in Mt. 6:6?)... the house that I have built for thy name" (1 Kings 8:22,44). Solomon's frequent emphasis on the fact that *he* built the house makes a telling connection with the principle that God does not live in houses *built* by men (Acts 17:24?)

6:30 *If God so clothe the grass of the field... shall He not much more clothe you?*- The blessings God gives us do not come by clockwork- we thankfully recognize they are individual acts of mercy towards us. Perhaps our sometimes 'clockwork' prayers are an indication that we think God's blessings of food etc. are clockwork too? In the same way, God individually and consciously cares for each blade of grass. Fundamentally, they do not grow merely as a result of chemical combination or photosynthesis, but due to the conscious care of God using such processes. See on 6:26. The worry-free life is a characteristic of the true believer. If God gave us His Son, how much more will He not give us "all things"? The Lord brought out the point in Mt. 6:30: If God so clothes the grass… how much more will He clothe us, therefore, don't worry! "Clothe" translates the Greek *amphi-hennumi*- to enrobe around. The Lord seems to have been referring to a type of wild flower that appears to be draped around by its natural skin, rather like an iris. God gives the wild flowers robes… although they do not spin them or work for them (Mt. 6:29). Solomon's robes weren't as beautiful as them. And how *much more* will God clothe us, both literally and with salvation (for this is how the Bible usually uses the idea of God clothing us). God does so much for the lilies, who are to be 'thrown into the fire'… a phrase which inevitably connects with the Lord's other uses of that idea to describe the final condemnation of the wicked (as in James 1:11). God cares for flowers, and He even cares and provides for those whom He will one day condemn. For God to keep such people alive is a conscious outflowing of His lavish energy, His gracious gift of life and health. If He does that for things and persons which will ultimately be 'thrown into the fire', how *much more* will He clothe us. Let's remember that creation isn't run on clockwork; God makes His rain come, and His sun to rise, on the just and unjust; He's aware when a bird falls from the air; counts the hairs on our heads, as a mother dotes over a new-born baby's features. Just by keeping alive humanity (indeed, all of creation), God is lavishing His grace and consciously outgiving of Himself.

Cast into the oven- We have noted that the idea of 'casting' is used by the Lord with reference to condemnation at the last day; and 'the oven' is reminiscent of the imagery of Gehenna fire to destroy the rejected. If God shows so much care and gives so much passing glory to that which shall be rejected and be ultimately unused by Him in eternity- how much more will he clothe us whom He loves and has accepted with His nature. All worry about what garment we shall physically put on, let alone whether it

has a brand name on it or not, becomes subsumed beneath the wonder of the metaphor of our final clothing.

You of little faith- The word is used another three times in Matthew (Mt. 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). In each case it refers specifically to a lack of faith in the saving power of Jesus. The "little faith" is not so much in God's promised provision of physical clothing, but in the promise of final clothing in salvation. But God's care even for those whom He shall condemn, keeping them in life, and the glory He gives to the plant and animal creation which last but for days, is sure encouragement that He shall so much more super abundantly clothe us with salvation- and also, will ensure we don't go physically naked in this world. The Gospel records, as transcripts of the disciples' early preaching, show the disciples appealing to others to have faith, to believe and be baptized. And yet the same accounts record so often how weak and small was the disciples' faith. Matthew is a classic example: Mt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20. It was on the basis of this acknowledged weakness of their own, that the disciples could appeal so powerfully to others. The more real they showed themselves to be, the more credible was their appeal.

6:31 *Eat... drink... clothed* - The three things God provided for Israel in their wilderness journey. The same old clothes, food (manna) and water, of course. But He provided for them.

Clothed- God will provide, but the question is, how does He provide? The same word is used in Mt. 25:36,38,43 about the believer in Christ who is not clothed, and needs to be clothed by other believers- some of whom refuse to, whilst others do. If God really does provide food and clothing for His people- why are some apparently without them? One window onto that question might be that potentially all such needs have been met, in that the food and clothing is within the brotherhood. But there can be a dysfunction, in that it is not shared out as it should be- meaning that some go without the provision which God has potentially provided. But another window is that David could say that he had never seen the seed of the righteous begging bread at any time in his long and varied life (Ps. 37:25). And despite a lifetime in the poorer world I also have yet to encounter this. The promise holds true, in my observation.

6:32 *Gentiles seek*- God's people who worry and spend their thoughts on eating, drinking and clothing are no better than the Gentile world. This was a radical thing to say to 1st century Jews. It is a common Biblical theme that the unspiritual amongst God's people shall share the judgments of the world whom in spirit they are like. The idea of the Gentiles seeking is of course from Is. 11:10, where we read that finally the Gentiles will seek unto Christ (as in Acts 15:17). Perhaps the idea is that we should right now have that changed direction of 'seeking' which the Gentile world will have in the future. Our practical life in Christ is really all about our response to the abounding nature of God’s grace. If we really believe it, then we will trust in Him and not worry. Mt. 6:32 goes on to imply that the difference between the Gentile world and the believer in Christ is quite simply that we believe that our Father has this level of care and concern for us; and therefore we will not worry, whereas the unbelieving world worry constantly about material things. This is how much of a ‘first principle’ this really is.

Seek- Parallel with 'thinking' anxiously in :31. Again it is the overall direction of our hearts, to where our seeking is set, our mental life and thinking, which is the issue. Rather than individual acts of spiritual failure or success.

Knows that you have need- God knows our human situation. Our faithlessness and lack of spiritual mindedness is because of an unspoken sense that actually He is unaware of our needs and the nature of being human. But the God who knows all things is not unaware of humanity and the needs which accompany being human. Frequently the prophecies directed to the Jews returning from Babylon spoke at length of God's

amazing knowledge- because the sense was that whilst God existed, He did not know close-up about the human situation. He does, of course, know perfectly.

All these things- *Hapas*, 'all', means strictly 'each and every one of'. God knows every single human need relating to eating, drinking, clothing and existing. And He knows better than we do our greatest need- to eat and drink of that bread and blood which gives eternal life, and to be clothed with His nature.

6:33 *Seek first*- Seeking is paralleled with taking thought in :31,32. The overall direction of our lives must be towards the Kingdom of God above all. If that is put "first", then actually there is no room for thought about much else. The idea is not 'Seek the Kingdom first, and other things secondly'. Rather must the 'seeking' of our thinking be towards the Kingdom. 'Seeking' was a common Hebraism for 'worship'. But the Lord has defined 'seeking' as thinking, as the overall direction of our mental state, our heart. It was not merely a question of going through the worship rituals of Judaism in a holy space such as the temple. True worship is redefined as the state of our heart.

The Kingdom- I noted under 6:10 that the coming of the Kingdom in our lives is through the doing of God's will. The Lord's message is not simply that we should long for the coming of the Kingdom at His second coming; it is that starting right now, we should seek above all things to extend the principles of the Kingdom (as taught in the Lord's parables of the Kingdom) in our lives and in the world around us.

His righteousness- The Sermon was intended for those who earnestly wished to be righteous but felt unable to attain it as they wished (see on 5:6). Yet we should continue 'seeking' it. And Paul takes the thought further by declaring that if we really seek to be righteous, then we will become "in Christ" and believe in God's offer of imputed righteousness.

All these things- Semitic languages such as Aramaic and Hebrew can often have various levels of meaning in a phrase. The phrase may mean or say one thing, but also suggest something else. We are of course reading the expression of those phrases in Greek. *Pas tauta* (usually translated "all these things") need not necessarily be translated as a plural. The idea could equally be 'The whole, complete thing'- we might say 'The real deal'. And that would make sense of the connection between 'added' and Mt. 6:27, which speaks of how we cannot 'add' a cubit to our lifespan. The implication could be that 'the real deal', the *real*thing- eternal life, salvation in God's Kingdom- shall be added if we seek that Kingdom first and foremost. Alternatively, we can interpret more in line with the common translations and understand that 'all these things' is the same 'all these things' of the preceding verse 32- the material things which God knows we need. These things *will be added* to us if we do not seek them first, but rather seek God's Kingdom first. But there is the suggestion that the real 'all things' for us is eternity in God's Kingdom. For a discussion of what may have happened if these basic things are apparently *not* added to a believer, see on 6:31.

Shall be added- The only other usage of the word in Matthew is just a few verses earlier, where the Lord has pointed out that we are unable to 'add' a cubit to our length of human life nor to our body height (6:27).

6:34 *For tomorrow*- The only other occurrence of the Greek word in Matthew is a few verses earlier in :30. God provides for the grass which "tomorrow" will be cast into the fire. We observed under 6:30 that this is the language of condemnation. If God even keeps alive and provides for those who shall be condemned, and the things of the animal and plant creation which live for only a day or so, how much more will He care for us. The "tomorrow" which is in view is therefore the ultimate 'tomorrow'- of the coming of Christ. We are to take no anxious thought for the outcome of that day if we know that in our hearts we are seeking the things of the Kingdom above all. In the same spirit,

Paul taught that all who wholeheartedly love the Lord's appearing shall be saved (2 Tim. 4:8). We should not be full of worried thought about our possible rejection on that day, but rather the overall thinking of our mind should be positively full of the things of the Kingdom. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" could be read as meaning 'Yes there will be evil for some on that day, but don't waste your thoughts worrying about that. If your heart is for the Kingdom of God, you are secure. Don't worry about it". Although this is the ultimate sense of 'tomorrow' which the Lord has in mind, His words can be understood on a quite simple literal level too. We are to live one day at a time without worrying about the future, because quite simply- God will provide. Each day has its own problems, and don't worry about them ahead of time. Rather focus your thinking and mental energy upon the things of God's Kingdom. This is exactly in the spirit of the command in the Lord's model prayer to ask for enough food only for today (6:11). Living like this is of course seen by the world as irresponsible. But it is not irresponsible if we do so with a firm faith that God is responsible for our tomorrows.

Notes

(1) Hal Taussig, *Jesus Before God: The Prayer Life of the Historical Jesus* (Santa Rosa, CA: The Polebridge Press, 1999) p. 76.
(2) Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Harper Collins, 1998).
(3) Hal Taussig, *op cit* pp. 21,96
(4) Ernst Lohmeyer, *The Lord's Prayer*, translated by John Bowden (London: Collins, 1965) p. 214.
(5) See the article "Amen" in Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribner's, 1971) pp. 35,36.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 7

7:1 *Judge not, that you be not judged*- For Paul, one phrase from these chapters echoed in his mind throughout the years; thus "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Mt. 7:1) is at the basis of Rom. 2:1; the whole of Rom. 14, and 1 Cor. 4:3,5. The Lord's teaching about judging does not in fact say that the act of condemning our brother is in itself a sin- it's simply that we must cast out the beam from our own eye first, and then we can judge our brother by pointing out to him the splinter in his eye. But the Lord tells us not to judge because He foresaw that we would never completely throw out the beam from our own eye. His command not to judge / condemn at all was therefore in this sense a concession to our inevitable weakness (Mt. 7:1-5). The commentary of James on this part of the Sermon is interesting: “Don’t speak against one another, brothers. He who speaks against a brother and judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge" (James 4:11). In what sense is to judge / condemn our brother to judge the law? And which law? Maybe James considered Mt. 7:1 to be so fundamental a part of "the law of Christ" that he refers to it as "the law". I suggest under 7:24 that James considers the Sermon to be "the perfect law". The Lord had taught clearly that under His law, to condemn meant being condemned. Yet there were those in James' readership, as there are today, who think they can go ahead and condemn others. Seeing the Lord's law is so clear, James is saying that effectively they are condemning the law of Jesus, placing themselves as judges over His law by deciding that they can break it at will.

7:2 *For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged*- The "judgment" is of condemnation- every one of the 28 occurrences of the Greek word refer to "damnation"

or "condemnation". The 'judging' which is prohibited in :1 is therefore of condemning others.

And with what measure you use, it shall be applied to you- This verse begins with "For". Because of the principle that we shall be condemned if we condemn, we need to remember that we will receive according to the measure we use to people in this life. Again, a direct connection is made between our judgment experience before Jesus at the last day, and our attitude to others now.

7:3 *And why do you see the splinter that is in your brother's eye but ignore the plank that is in your own eye?*- In Luke, the Lord prefaces this mini-parable by saying that the blind can't lead the blind. For Him, a man with even slightly impaired vision was effectively blind. In this very context He speaks of the need to be "perfect... as his master". Only the perfect, by implication, can criticize their brethren. And the final reason He gives for not attempting to cast out the plank from our brother's eye is that "For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit" . This is rather hard to understand in the context. But on reflection, it seems that He is teaching that if we are good trees, we will have no corrupt fruit, no splinters in our eye- and because none of us are like this, there is corrupt fruit on each of us, we aren't perfect as our Master, therefore we shouldn't think of trying to cast out the plank from our brother's eye (Lk. 6:39-43). And of course He bids us to be perfect as our Father is. These high standards of demand were mixed with an incredible grace. Only a man who was evidently perfect could speak like this with any realness or credibility. Otherwise His words would just have been seen as the ravings of a weirdo. But there was a realness to His perfection that made and makes His demands so piercingly appropriate to us. The way He handled His perfection is a wonderful insight into His character. He knew that He was without sin; and He knew that the life He lived moment by moment was to be the pattern for all God's people. Yet somehow, He handled this in a manner which was never arrogant, never proud, and never off-putting to sinners; but rather, actually inviting to them.

This continues the context about judging from verses 1 and 2. Our attitude to others will be the Lord's attitude to us at the last day. If we are hyper-critical of others, then this is how the Lord will look upon us. If *He* should mark iniquity in us, none could stand (Ps. 130:3)- and we should struggle with the natural human tendency to mark iniquity in others. The question 'Why...?' is answered by the Lord in verse 4- He perceived that we excuse our judgmentalness and critical attitudes with the excuse that we actually want to assist the poor person who is the object of our critical gaze. How many times have we heard the bitterest, most carping criticism of others- rounded off with the excuse 'I actually really feel so sorry for him'. This is the very mentality the Lord is bringing to our attention. He bids us realize how we justify critical attitudes towards others on the basis that we kind ourselves that we want to help them.

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

brother's blindness / darkness, when we too have such limited vision (Mt. 7:3)? We can read the same passages time and again, and fail to let them really register.

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

7:4 *Or how will you say to your brother*- Remember that the Sermon was spoken to the disciples. The Lord is foreseeing how things would tend to go in the life of His collective people. There is something grotesque, absurd, over the top in this story. Christ's parables often have an element of unreality in them to highlight how His attitudes are unusual (e.g. the employer who pays all his men the same wages for different hours of work). And these unusual attitudes of His reflect the sensitivity of Jesus. But in this story of the two carpenters there is something not only unreal, but almost cartoon-like. We read it and think 'The Lord's obviously exaggerating, nobody would really be so foolish'. But that's exactly how He knew we would think! Our attempts to sort out our brother really are that absurd! Christ is effectively saying: 'Now, I know you'll think I'm exaggerating- but I'm not' (Lk. 6:41,42). Often it seems the Lord intends us to think His parables through to their end, imagining the necessary details. A splinter will come out of the eye naturally, it's presence will provoke tears which ultimately will wash it out. 'The grief of life will work on your brother to solve his problem, there are some spiritual weaknesses which time and the experience of life will heal; but I know you people will want to rush in and speed up the spiritual growth of your brother. But you can't do it!'. Christ even foresaw how we will stress the fact that our fellow believer is our "brother" as we try to do this; as if we'll try to be so righteous in the very moment when in God's eyes we do something grotesquely foolish. Doubtless the Lord's carpenter years were the time when He formulated this story. Perhaps He intends us to take it further, and pick up the implication that these two carpenters couldn't help each other; but there's another one who can... See on 13:28.

Let me remove the splinter in your eye, when you have a plank in your own eye?- "Remove" is s.w. 'cast out' in :5. The word is elsewhere used about the casting out of the rejected in condemnation (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk. 13:28; Jn. 6:37). It is also used about casting out from church (3 Jn. 10) and synagogue and society (Acts 13:50; Jn. 9:34; Lk. 6:22). In Luke's account of the Lord's presentation of the material, he uses the same word for "cast out" from religious association (Lk. 6:22) as he does just a few verses later for this 'casting out' of splinters (Lk. 6:42). The casting out is therefore a judgmental condemning of others- and that is the connection with the preceding context of Mt. 7:1-3. In practice, this involved religious disfellowship. Christ's people are to associate with each other in fellowship because they are convinced that by grace, they in the body of Christ shall share eternity together. To 'cast out' from fellowship someone is therefore to effectively 'cast them out' in condemnation. The same word is used in

both senses. The Lord's parable is most insightful- because He observes that actually to do this is a natural tendency for His followers, and they will justify it in terms of thinking they are doing it out of concern. And yet their attempt to do this is in fact the plank in their own eye. That judgmentalism is in fact a far worse failing than any fault they have observed in their brother. And this all flows directly and seamlessly on from the Lord's point blank statement that He will condemn those who condemn others (Mt. 7:1). The practice and upholding of the wicked practice of disfellowship therefore appears to be an issue upon which our eternity may be staked. We must pay any price, including social death and being cut off from communities and families we have known and loved, in order to avoid doing this.

We cannot "behold" our plank. This is an invitation to try to actually see the plank in your own eye. The plank is there exactly because you have tried to 'cast out' your brother, having heard the Lord's teaching about the need for a "single eye" (Mt. 6:22) and deciding that your brother's eye is defective. The plank is your judgmentalism. And that is what is so hard to perceive.

7:5 *You hypocrite*- Usually on the Lord's lips with reference to the Pharisees whom the Lord clearly detested and whom the rank and file disciples whom He was addressing likewise despised. But the Lord is saying that their critical, condemnatory attitude to each other would make them no different to the Pharisees.

First- The Greek *proton* suggests that the following clause is of ultimate, supreme importance; it's not simply a chronological statement that 'first do this, then do that'. If we condemn ourselves in our self-examination, we will not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). We are to most importantly [Gk. *proton*] “cast out” the beam from our own eye (Lk. 6:42)- and the Lord uses the same word about the ‘casting forth’ of the rejected at the last day. We are to judge our own weaknesses as worthy of condemnation.

Remove the plank from your own eye and then shall you- We are to condemn ourselves firstly, recognizing our major blindness, and then with the humility of spirit elicited by this, we will have crystal clear vision with which to assist others.

See clearly to remove the splinter in your brother's eye- The Greek *dia-blepo* is related to the verb *blepo* in :3 ("why do you *behold / see* the splinter..."). The judgmental believer sees the splinter in his brother's eye and wants to condemn him for it, but the one who has repented of his judgmentalism and removed that plank from his spiritual vision will see through ('through' is really the sense of *dia*). The translation "see clearly" doesn't seem to me to have much to commend it. The one who has repented of the plank of his judgmentalism will see through casting out / condemning the splinter in his brother's eye. "Then" you will see through casting out the splinter from his eye- *tote* more comfortably carries the sense of 'right then'. The moment you repent of your condemnatory judgmentalism, you immediately see through condemning your brother's weakness. And so the Lord has powerfully enforced His principle which He began with at the start of this section- do not condemn. And through this profound parable of casting out splinters and planks, He has brought us to see through our brother's splinter. But the only way you can do that is to cast out / condemn your own condemnatory attitudes. It is often claimed that those who have committed what some would see as 'major' sins feel unable to judge others for their sins, and this is seen as a weakness. But actually, we are all major sinners. Those who have repented or matured into softer, non-condemnatory attitudes are mature, and not 'weak' as they are portrayed by their hard line brethren.

The Lord foresaw the problems we would have within our community of believers in Him; from the schisms of the first century to the struggles of latter day believers. This story is a classic- of the carpenter with a beam in his own eye who is so keen to extract the splinter from the eye of his fellow worker (note how he almost forces himself upon his brother to do this!). There is something grotesque, absurd, over the top in this story. In this story of the two carpenters there is something not only unreal, but almost cartoon-like. We read it and think 'The Lord's obviously exaggerating, nobody would really be so foolish'. But that's exactly how He knew we would think! Our attempts to sort out our brother really are that absurd! Christ is effectively saying: 'Now, I know you'll think I'm exaggerating- but I'm not' (Lk. 6:41,42). Often it seems the Lord intends us to think His parables through to their end, imagining the necessary details. A splinter will come out of the eye naturally, its presence will provoke tears which ultimately will wash it out. 'The grief of life will work on your brother to solve his problem, there are some spiritual weaknesses which time and the experience of life will heal; but I know you people will want to rush in and speed up the spiritual growth of your brother. But you can't do it!'. Christ even foresaw how we will stress the fact that our fellow believer is our "brother" as we try to do this; as if we'll try to be so righteous in the very moment when in God's eyes we do something grotesquely foolish. Doubtless the Lord's carpenter years were the time when He formulated this story of the two carpenters. Significantly they both had wood in their eye- as if a brother will tend to seek to correct another brother who has in essence the same weaknesses, but the 'helping' brother considers that the other brother's is so much greater than his. Perhaps the Lord intends us to take it further, and pick up the implication that these two carpenters couldn't help each other; but there's another one who can...

In Luke, having spoken of the need to tolerate our brother, the Lord Jesus repeated His common theme: that there is no third road: "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye...? For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (Lk. 6:41-43). There's no third position. Either we love our brother, and bring forth good fruit; or we don't get down to it, and bring forth bad fruit. We can't sometimes bring forth good, sometimes bad. At heart, we are either loving or selfishly hateful. Anything less than following Yahweh with all our heart is seen as doing evil in His eyes (1 Kings 11:6).

If we can achieve true self-examination, perceiving what needs to be cast out of our lives and doing so, we have achieved something extremely valuable. We need to ask ourselves what real, practical influence the Gospel is having upon us; for life in Christ is about change, not mere acceptance (let alone inheritance) of a theological position which we loyally preserve to the end of our days as many misguided religious folk do. The value of true change is brought out powerfully when the Lord speaks of casting our pearls before pigs, to be trodden underfoot by them. He says this immediately after stating that we are to "cast out" the beams from our own eyes; but we are not to "cast [out]" our pearls before pigs (Mt. 7:5,6)- the Greek words for "cast out" in 7:5 (*ek-ballo*) and "cast" in 7:6 (*ballo*) are related. Clearly verse 6 belongs in the section about judging which begins in :1. The idea of being "cast out" is found earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, where the Lord warns of how saltless salt will be "cast out" and trodden underfoot (Mt. 5:13), the unforgiving will be "cast out" into prison (Mt. 5:25), those without fruit will be "cast out" into the fire (Mt. 7:29). To be cast out is to be rejected at the last day; and by condemning ourselves now in our self-examination, casting out

the eye that offends (Mt. 5:29,30), we avoid having to be “cast out” at the last judgment. If we condemn ourselves now in our self-examination, we shall not need to be condemned at the last day (1 Cor. 11:31). But we are not to cast out our pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and attack us. In this context, I take this to mean that the offending eyes etc. which we cast out are not to be cast out to the world, lest they condemn us (which is how the Lord used the figure of trampling underfoot in Mt. 5:13). Thus the teaching about not casting pearls before pigs is seamlessly in context with the previous teaching about casting the beam out of our eye. Our repentances are to be before God and not necessarily the uncomprehending world. The pigs would’ve confused true pearls with swine feed, and become angry once they realized those stones weren’t food but stones. They just wouldn’t have appreciated them. This isn’t any justification for hypocrisy; it’s simply stating that repentance is a private thing before God. But the point to note is that the offending eyes etc. which are cast out are likened by the Lord to “pearls”; they are of such priceless value. Thus we see the colossal importance of true change, of self-examination resulting in the transformation of human life in practice.

7:6 *Do not give*- We are to judge, but not to condemn (7:1). Clearly this verse 6 requires us to show discernment.

That which is holy to the dogs- Hagios, "the holy", could be translated 'the holy ones', the saints. They were not to be thrown out to the dogs- i.e. to be condemned. This command not to condemn would then fit in seamlessly with the teaching of the preceding verses. The dogs which were on the edge of the city are associated with condemnation in both Jewish thought and Biblically (Ps. 59:6,14; Rev. 22:15). We are not to condemn, to throw the saints out to the dogs.

Nor cast- Ballo, related to *ekballo* ("cast out") in :5. I have noted several times that 'casting out' is used in the Lord's thought for condemnation.

Your pearls- Pearls represent the believers. The 12 pearls of Rev. 21:21 represent the 12 disciples. The Lord Jesus in His work with us is "seeking goodly pearls" (Mt. 13:45). The pearls are 'ours' in the sense that all that are Christ's are ours, as He makes explicit in John 17. His pearls are our brethren.

Before the pigs, lest they trample them under their feet- Trampling by pigs was another Jewish figure of condemnation, of rejection into the Gentile world. Earlier in the Sermon, the Lord used the figure of trampling [s.w.] to describe condemnation and rejection (Mt. 5:13). To trample under foot meant to despise and specifically, to reject (s.w. Heb. 10:29 "trodden underfoot the Son of God"). Again the point is being made- don't condemn your brethren and treat them as mere worldlings, or even worse, those who shall be rejected from God's Kingdom. To refuse to fellowship them is treating them just like that.

And turn again and tear you to pieces- If we condemn our brethren, as it were casting them out to the pigs- those same pigs will turn on us and rend us- i.e., *we* will share the same condemnation which we gave our brethren. And thus the point of 7:1 is repeated- if you condemn, you shall be condemned. The same word translated "rend" is used by the Lord in Mt. 9:17 about how the wine of the new covenant will "burst" or destroy the old wineskins and the wine will run out from them. The bursting or rending of the

wineskins is a picture of destruction and condemnation. The pigs of condemnation to whom we consigned our brethren will turn again and trample *us* underfoot. Therefore-do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. This interpretation of verse 6 fits snugly into the context of the preceding verses. Any attempt to make it apply to not offering the Gospel to "pigs" in case we get hurt by them would seem out of context- and contrary to the spirit of taking the Gospel to all men without discrimination, and never holding back in sharing the Gospel from fear that we might get beat up for it.

7:7 *Ask and it shall be given you*- The connections within the Sermon surely send us back to Mt. 5:42 "Give to him that asks". The same Greek words are used. Our responsiveness to others will be reflected in God's responsiveness to us. And yet the Lord's style throughout the sermon is to elevate the natural onto a higher, spiritual plane. This is not a blank cheque promise, as is clear from both personal experience and Bible teaching. What we can be utterly assured of being given is God's grace and salvation. The Lord surely foresaw that the initial mental objection to His words would be 'But that's not true! I don't get everything I ask for, and neither did many Bible characters!'. But He wanted us to therefore think further as to what He might be really saying- and what He is saying is that forgiveness and salvation will surely be given to whoever asks. These things are summarized in 7:11 as God for sure giving "good things to them that ask Him". The parallel Lk. 11:13 summarizes those "good things" as "the Holy Spirit". The power of spiritual victory, the real way to holiness in practice, a spiritual mind, unity through forgiveness with God's mind / spirit, is assured to those who simply ask for it in faith. Seeking and finding, knocking on the door and it being opened, are likewise metaphors elsewhere used for God's assured positive response to our spiritual requests. John's equivalent to this part of the Sermon is perhaps the Lord's assurance that He will definitely*give* "living water" to whoever *asks* Him (Jn. 4:10); and the frequent references to us being given "the Holy Spirit" or whatever we ask in His Name if it results in the Father being glorified (Jn. 14:13,14; 15:7,16; 16:23,24,26). The letter of James is full of reference to the Sermon, and his allusion to 'ask and you will be given' is that if any man ask for *wisdom*, he will be given it (James 1:5,6), but a man will *not* be given things if he asks for material things to fulfill his own natural desires (James 4:2,3). It's as if James is answering the primitive objection: 'Jesus said if you ask, you will be given- but I asked for stuff and never got it'. And his answer is that the blank cheque promise is obviously about asking for spiritual things, not material things. 1 Jn. 3:22; 5:14,15 likewise speak of receiving whatever we ask- in the context of saying that we can look forward to the day of judgment and be confident of acceptance there. God is willing and eager to save us, as the whole wonder of the crucifixion makes clear. If we ask for forgiveness, salvation and the strength to be spiritual, then He has promised to give those things to us. The wonder of that means that any attempt to try to as it were extort material blessing from God is sadly inappropriate and will not enter the mind of those who are rejoicing in His salvation.

Seek and you shall find- As David "found" God through experiencing His forgiveness, so can "every one that is Godly" today (Ps. 32:6). It is quite possible that "seek and you shall find" was uttered by the Lord with his mind on Ps. 32:6 and David's experience. After all, we cannot expect this to be a blank cheque offer, that whatever we seek for we must receive. But if these words are an allusion to David's seeking and finding forgiveness in Ps. 32:6, then the promise is more realistic. If we seek for forgiveness and a living relationship with God, then we have this unconditional promise that we *will* find this. Yet in a sense, the time when we will ultimately find God will be at

the judgment: we will "find mercy of the Lord in that day" (2 Tim. 1:18), so that "ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless" (2 Pet. 3:14). We will find God, as He will find us, in that great moment of consummation; "for then shall (we) know (God), even as also (we) are known" by Him (1 Cor. 13:12;). Then we will "be *found* in him... that I may (then) *know*him" (Phil. 3:9,10). Yet David says that after forgiveness, we can find and know God. It is as if whenever we sin, we in a sense face our judgment seat. And the knowledge and 'finding' of God which we will then enjoy should be prefigured in our present experience of forgiveness. Should we not therefore pray for forgiveness with the intensity with which we would at the judgment, if we were then offered the chance to do so?

The 'seeking' which is in view is clearly of spiritual things. Not long previously in the Sermon, the Lord had used the same word in encouraging us to above all "seek the Kingdom of God" (Mt. 6:33). And now He is encouraging us that if we seek it, we will 'find' it- the word for "find" is elsewhere translated "obtain". If we really want the things of the Kingdom and to eternally be in that environment- we will be. The Lord Jesus Himself went out seeking for goodly pearls- and found them (Mt. 13:45,46). He goes seeking His sheep- and finds it (Mt. 18:12,13). He "found" faith in a Gentile (Mt. 8:10), He was as the woman who sought and found her precious coin (Lk. 15:8,9). Our seeking the things of the Kingdom is therefore not merely our personal seeking a place in its future establishment upon earth. We can seek the progress of the Kingdom principles which comprise the reign and kingship of God on earth right now. Part of that is in seeking men and women to submit to that Kingship / Kingdom. And that too shall ultimately succeed, as the Lord Jesus demonstrated in His own life despite so many setbacks and failures in response to Him. 'But nobody's interested!' is really the cry of unbelief in this promise. If we are seeking for men and women to submit to the things of God's Kingdom, then we shall find them- even if they may not join our denomination or agree totally with all of our theology.

Knock and it shall be opened to you- This again is the language of preaching. For Paul appears to allude to it three times in speaking of how doors of opportunity have been opened for him in the work of the Gospel (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3). The implication is surely that he had knocked in prayer, and the doors had been opened. If we pray for opportunities to preach, to save people (rather than spending our mental energy on condemning our brethren, in the context of :6), then God will respond. According to our principle of letting the Sermon interpret itself, it may be that the idea of the door being opened looks back to Mt. 6:6- in prayer, we are to shut our door and pray. And our knocking means that the door is opened. The particular metaphor of knocking upon a door and it being opened is used in Lk. 12:36 about the Lord knocking on our door at the second coming, and us opening; yet He stands today and knocks at the door, and we are to open to Him (Rev. 3:20). The point is surely that our relationship with Him is mutual, we knock and He opens, He knocks and we open. And at the last day, tragically too late, the rejected knock and the door will not be opened to them (Lk. 13:25). Their knocking is a desperate plea for salvation. But if we ask for it in this life- we shall receive it. So the metaphor speaks of seeking salvation and a relationship with the Lord in this life, but in context of the rest of the verse it also refers to our desire for others to have the door opened to them. John's equivalent to all this is perhaps His description of the Lord Jesus as the door, through whom any man may enter in to salvation. It's the same idea- the door is easily opened in this life, indeed the implication is that Jesus is effectively an open door for all who believe in Him.

7:8 *For everyone that asks receives, and he that seeks finds, and to him that knocks it shall be opened*- Note that the first two clauses [asking and seeking] are in the present

tense. If we ask and seek for spiritual things, we shall receive them. But the metaphor of knocking and opening I suggested on 7:7 has a specific reference to seeking salvation at the last day. Hence the Lord uses the future tense. His repetition of what He has said in 7:7 is to drive home the wonder of it all. That if we ask for salvation, for ourselves as well as opportunities for others to have it, for the extension of God's Kingdom and glory- we really will receive it.

The other couplets use the same Greek words as in 7:7 (seek... find; knock... opened). 'Ask' is the same Greek word, but *lambano* is used for 'receive' rather than *didomi* ("given", 7:7). The words 'ask... receive' are to be found again in Jn. 16:24, where the Lord says that in the era of the comforter, whatever is asked for in His Name will be received. This would not be the only time that the Sermon appears to look ahead to the promises of the Comforter era- see on 5:4. James 4:3 continues James' commentary on the Sermon by saying that his readership asked and did not receive (same Greek words) because they asked for the wrong things from the wrong motives. He was correcting the impression some had taken that the Lord was offering a blank cheque for anything. Our commentary so far has shown that the Lord is promising salvation and the things connected with the extension of His Kingdom principles in our lives and those of others.

7:9 *Which one of you*- The Lord was addressing the disciples in Matthew's record of the Sermon. We can imagine Him looking around at each of them.

If his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?- Ask... give are the same words as in 7:7. The Lord sensed that His promise of Divine response to prayer for salvation would be so hard for them to accept. He is here persuading them by all manner of methods to simply accept that reality. We are God's children, and He will not be cruel to us. It would be unnatural and counter-instinctive for Him to not save us. For His is the Kingdom- therefore He desires to give it to us, He designed it for us.

The point has been made that loaves of bread looked like stones, just as there were some fish (similar to eels) caught in the sea of Galilee which looked like snakes (7:10). This surely played a part in the Lord's temptation to turn the stones of the wilderness into bread (Mt. 4:3). The similarity of the Aramaic words for bread and stone would have strengthened the connection. The simple message is that God will not play a cruel trick on us- because He is our loving Father. The Lord sensed human scepticism about God's simple offer of salvation. It is simply there- for all who will trust Him in a simple, child-like way. Perhaps the stone is to be connected with how the same word is used for the millstone of condemnation in Mk. 9:42 and Rev. 18:21, and "the stone of stumbling" in 1 Pet. 2:8. If we seek the bread of the Kingdom (a common Jewish concept at the time, Lk. 14:15), God will not condemn us. Note how the Lord spoke of salvation and relation with Him as "the children's bread" (Mt. 15:26), the bread of salvation given (*didomi* as in Mt. 7:7) freely (Jn. 6:32). The Lord saw to the essence of human fear- of Divine condemnation, that instead of the children's bread we would be given the stone of condemnation. One reason for the crucifixion was in order to try to openly persuade the world of God's grace- that it is for real. The Lord's teaching here signals one of man's greatest difficulties: to believe in God's grace. To accept His desire and passion to save us.

The *giving* of bread to us by Jesus at the breaking of bread (*lambano* again, as in 7:8) is surely an acted parable of His utter commitment to indeed give us the bread we seek above all things (Mt. 26:26). Earlier in the Sermon, the Lord had used the same

words to teach us to do just this: "Give us this day our daily bread". So He clearly intends us to see ourselves as the hungry little child, asking his daddy for bread. And surely God will not disappoint. The prayer will be answered.

7:10 *Or if he shall ask for a fish, will give him a serpent?* - Lk. 11:11 labours the point: "If he ask a fish, will he *for a fish* give him a serpent?". The Lord is penetrating deep into the psychology of His people. We fear that the promised salvation may only be an appearance. And we are being shown here that that is to effectively accuse God of a cruel trick. At what stage the fish became a symbol of Christianity is not clear (there is a distinct similarity in sound between the Aramaic for 'Jesus' and for 'fish', something like 'Iisus' and 'Ikfus'), but the combination of fish and serpent tempt us to interpret this as also having the sense: Do you think that Christianity, the whole offer of the Kingdom I am making, is really such a cruel trick that it's really the serpent, the symbol of evil incarnate? Because that really is how it would have to be. It's either that, or gloriously true. And if we accept God as our loving Father, then with childlike faith we must also believe that His offer of salvation is simply true for us- if we ask. Again we see a connection with earlier teaching in the Sermon; for the Lord had taught His people to pray to "Our Father". Like all of the Lord's prayer, that is harder to pray than might first appear. Because if He really is our loving Heavenly Father, then we are to believe that if we ask Him for salvation and the things of His Kingdom, we shall surely receive.

7:11 *If you then, being evil*- This record of the Sermon was addressed to the disciples. Did the Lord consider them to 'be evil'? The only other time we encounter the phrase "being evil" is again on the Lord's lips and again in Matthew: "O generation of vipers, how can you, *being evil*, speak good things?" (Mt. 12:34). He may have the sense that 'Even the worst Pharisees have a soft spot for their little boys and would never play a cruel trick on them- so do you think God will do that to you?'. The sentence opens with the particle *ei*, and it would be justifiable to translate this 'Whether' or 'Even if' instead of "if". Even if they were as evil as the very worst sinners, they would still give their child bread rather than a stone. The logic is very powerful. If we believe God is basically good, then seeing even wicked people would not play a cruel trick on their kiddies, how much more would God not do that to us His beloved children, whom we address as "Our Father"?

Know how to give- Now the Lord moves beyond simply teaching that God will give us daily bread and salvation if we ask. He alludes here to how a father, even a man who is otherwise evil, has an intuitive sense as to what present his child would like. Paul Tournier's insightful book *The Meaning of Gifts* demonstrates that the desire to give gifts is psychologically part of 'love'. God knows what ultimately we would love so much. And yet, as the James 4:3 allusion demonstrates, it is not material things in this life which are in view here. God knows us and He knows all our possible futures, our eternal possibilities throughout His Kingdom. And He will surely give us that. He has created for us the most wonderful things to lavish upon us. To think that in any sense God is a 'hard man' is to tragically misunderstand. That persuasion only really comes from a lack of basic faith in Him and His grace.

Good gifts to your children- The emphasis upon "good" continues the laboured addressing of our fear that God just might not be 'good' and we might get a serpent rather than a fish from Him. The point is laboured because it is such a powerful array of step logic- if it's not all a cruel trick, then it is all wonderfully true. The parallel record

speaks of "the Holy Spirit" instead of "good gifts", and there is a clear connection with Eph. 4:8: "He gave gifts unto men", referring to the Holy Spirit. All the Greek words there are used here in Mt. 7:11,12. On one level, there is a prediction of the Comforter, as elsewhere in the Sermon (see on 7:8). And yet the principle appears to be clearly that in general terms, God will not only give us daily bread and future salvation, but so much more besides- in spiritual terms. Whilst the form of manifestation of Spiritual gifts has changed since the first century, the principle remains- that God will give His Spirit to those who are poor in spirit and who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

How much more shall your Father who is in heaven- Many times the idea of "Your father which is in heaven" is used in the context of faith in prayer being answered (Mt. 7:11; 18:19; 21:22; Mk. 11:24; Jn. 14:13; James 1:5,6,17 etc.). It's as if the reality of God actually existing in Heaven in a personal form should be a powerful focus for our prayers.

Give good things to them that ask him- Answered prayer is paralleled with being given the Holy Spirit (Mt. 7:11 cp. Lk. 11:13). The prayer of the Philippians for Paul is likewise linked with "the supply of the Spirit" (Phil. 1:19). These passages therefore teach that having spiritual fruit is associated with answered prayer (Jn. 15:16), as is the possession of the Comforter (Jn. 14:14; 16:24 are in this context). Many passages imply that God's hearing of our prayers is proportionate to His perception of our spirituality. He will not respond to the prayer of those whose way of life is contrary to His word: Ps. 66:18; Pro. 1:24-28; Is. 1:15; 59:2; Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:10-12; 29:12; Lam. 3:8,44; Mal. 1:7-9; Mk. 11:25; Jn. 9:31; James 1:6,7; 4:3; 1 Pet. 3:7,12. But He will hear the prayer of the righteous; and 'hearing' is an idiom for 'answering', it doesn't just mean that God takes cognizance of the fact the righteous have prayed: 2 Kings 19:20; Mt. 7:7; 18:19,20; Jn. 14:14.

7:12 *Therefore*- The reason why we should do to others as we would like them to do to us flow straight on from :11. But what is the connection of thought? Perhaps the Lord is changing tack here and introducing His concluding summary for the Sermon, which is about 'doing' what He has been teaching. The same Greek for 'do' here in :12 is translated 'bring forth' or 'do' in the distinct seven fold exhortation to do' which we find in 7:17,18,19,21,22,24,26. The Greek *oun* translated "therefore" is of wide meaning, and could just as comfortably introduce a new section rather than conclude the section about judging which began in 7:1. It can have the sense of 'truly' or 'certainly', as if introducing a major truth. But it may be that the context of judgment, so clearly established in the preceding 11 verses, is not out of the Lord's mind in His use of the word *oun*, "Therefore...". If we condemn others, if we drag them before God's judgment because we refuse to forgive them, then we must consider: Do I want others to do that to me? For we have all sinned and upset others to the point some struggle to forgive us. As we judge others, then we shall be judged likewise. If we really hope they have to answer for their sin against us, then perhaps they will have to. And would you like others to take you to the Divine court for your sins?

Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets- This is another way of saying 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. The Greek for 'do to you' recurs in Mt. 18:35 where we read how God shall 'do to you' if you do not forgive your brother. We also find the phrase in Mt. 25:40,45- 'whatever you do' to Christ's brethren, you do to Him and shall receive from Him accordingly. It is true that

what goes around, comes around- so it's best to treat others as you would like to be treated. But that kind of truth is expressed in almost every religious and cultural system of the world. My sense is that the Lord is not merely repeating conventional, folksy wisdom, but rather is elevating it to a far higher and more deeply internal, spiritual level. For this is His style throughout the Sermon. The recurrence of the phrase 'whatever you do' in Mt. 25:40,45 teaches that whatever we do (or do not do) to others, we do to Christ personally. And in that dimension of life, the 'come back' of our actions will not simply be in this life, but more importantly, at the last day. Judgment day, either explicitly or implicitly, forms a major theme in the Lord's teaching. If He is indeed teaching that what we do to others is done to Him and therefore will have its response at the day of judgment, rather than merely in this life as folksy wisdom teaches, then indeed we can understand His comment: "For this is the law and the prophets". The law and the prophets do indeed teach that human behaviour, especially that done to others, shall come to final judgment in the last day. But I would not say that 'what goes around, comes around' is exactly their major and noteworthy theme, true as that bit of folksy wisdom is.

7:13 *Enter in*- The context is quite clear that the Lord means 'enter into the Kingdom' (Mt. 18:3; 19:24; Lk. 18:25). But the question is, whether the Lord speaks of entering into the Kingdom at the last day, or in some sense, in this life. Luke's record of this statement of the Lord is in Lk. 13:24: "Strive to enter in at the narrow gate: for many... will seek to enter in, and shall not be able". This favours a 'last day' interpretation, for we know from the parable of the foolish girls that some will seek to enter at the time of the Lord's return and be unable to. Some other usages of the phrase 'enter in' imply the same (Mt. 5:20; 18:3; 25:10; Acts 14:22; Heb. 3:19; 4:6; Rev. 22:14). However, John's equivalent of this phrase speaks of the believer 'entering in' to a relationship and salvation with the Lord right now (Jn. 10:9). And other words of the Lord speak of 'entering in' to "life" right now (Mt. 18:3,8,9; 19:17). The guests enter in to the Messianic banquet now, before the Master comes, Mt. 22:12; the Scribes stopped men entering the Kingdom right now, Mt. 23:13; by birth of water and spirit we enter the Kingdom, Jn. 3:5; the Gentiles enter in every time one is converted (Rom. 11:25); a promise is given us of entering the promised rest, but we who believe do right now 'enter in' to that rest (Heb. 4:1,3). And yet we are to labour in order to enter into that rest (Heb. 4:11). The rich man must shed the load of his wealth and enter in- now (Mt. 19:23,24). For judgment day is too late to shed the load of wealth. We can therefore conclude that by following the Lord's teaching now, we enter into His Kingdom; insofar as His Kingship is exercised over us, we are His Kingdom, those whom He is King over. The outcome of the judgment day is not therefore some terrible unknown to us if we are in our hearts and lives clearly under His Kingship in this life. Our passage into the future Kingdom of God on earth will be a seamless continuation of our present experience.

By the narrow gate- The Greek could imply 'made narrow'. The Lord repeats the term in :14, emphasizing how narrow is the entrance. The contrast is with the wide gate and broad road. The idea of two gates facing a man was surely an allusion to the gates of Jerusalem, which had a main gate, through which camels could pass, and the small gate through which only pedestrians could enter. This leads me to favour the traditional interpretation of entering through into the Kingdom through the eye of a needle (Mt. 19:24; Lk. 18:25)- the rich must unload their camels of all their wealth and squeeze through the small needle gate. The narrowness of the gate is because it is so hard for

people to give up their materialism. They desire spirituality, to enter in, but not without their present attachment to wealth. Remember the Lord was primarily and initially addressing the poor. The desire for wealth, and especially mental concern about it, is the main reason why people do not grasp the way to the Kingdom. That needs some sober reflection, because our natural assumption is that warnings against materialism do not apply to *me*. Whenever we find ourselves making such an assumption, that Biblical warnings do not apply to us, we need to really ensure that we are thinking straight and that our self-deceiving flesh is not kidding us that we simply don't have to take the Lord at His word.

For wide is the gate and broad is the way- Surely the Lord at this stage in His ministry had in mind the way that John the Baptist had come to prepare a "way" for Him (Mt. 3:3). By admitting that this way would only be found by a minority of Israel, the Lord was perhaps tacitly recognizing that John's attempt to prepare a way over which the King of glory could come to Jerusalem had not succeeded.

That leads- *Apago* is used another 14 times in the New Testament. Ten of these specifically refer to being 'lead away to death', the majority referring to the leading away of the Lord Jesus to death on the cross. 7:14 contrasts being lead to destruction with being lead to life; but the way to life is through the death of the cross. We either bear our iniquities and their result (Lev. 19:8), or we bear the cross of the Lord Jesus. It's a burden either way. The Lord played on this fact when He spoke of there being two roads, one which *leads* to death, and the other to life (Mt. 7;13,14). The Greek word translated 'lead' is in fact part of an idiom: to be led is an idiom for 'to be put to death' (cp. Jn. 18:13; 21:18). Indeed, the very word translated “lead" in Mt. 7:14 is rendered "be put to death" (Acts 12:19). So, we're led out to death either way, as the criminal made his 'last walk' to the cross. We're either led out and put to death for the sake of eternal life, or for eternal death. The logic is glaring. The Hebrew of Ps. 139:24 reveals a telling play on words which makes the same point: "Wicked way" is rendered in the AVmg. as 'way of pain'; the way of wickedness is itself the way of pain.

To destruction- The Greek is used another 19 times in the New Testament, nearly always with reference to condemnation at the last day. We are making the choice now-condemnation, or the path to the cross, to death, and thence to eternal life. The essence of the future judgment is before us daily; "we make the answer now".

And many are they that enter in thereby- The same word used about the "many" who were now listening to Him teach (Mt. 4:25; 8:1). Surely He was saying that the Kingdom road is not found by many. And yet we compare this with the promise that Abraham's seed will become many. Compared to the wonder of salvation, we are indeed "many", but relative to the many who do not respond, we are a minority.

7:14 *For narrow is the gate and straight the road that leads to life*- "The way of the sluggard is blocked with thorns; but the path of the upright is a highway" (Proverbs 15:19 NIV). The road of the wise is described as a highway in Proverbs 16:17 too; and the way of the wicked is also strewn with difficult obstacles in Proverbs 22:5; "Whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths" (2:15). There is probably a designed contrast between this and the way the Lord described the road to the Kingdom as made narrow, and the way to death as a wide, broad highway (Mt. 7:13,14); the Proverbs seem to say the opposite. The answer may be that Proverbs is presenting God's viewpoint; in ultimate reality, the way to the Kingdom is wide and clear and easier, better marked, than the road to death. But the Lord turned all this round, because He

appreciated that from *our*perspective, this wouldn't be the case. We will think that the way to the Kingdom is made narrow (Gk.) and hard, restricted; whilst the road to death seems so wide and obviously right. The Lord Jesus based many of His parables on the Proverbs, and His words concerning the wide road to destruction and the narrow road to the Kingdom (Mt. 7:13,14) are surely based on the frequent descriptions of the ways / great way to life, and that to death, which Proverbs so often mentions. The road / way of life which we are on is really leading somewhere. "The way of the wicked" is opposed to the way of him "that followeth after righteousness" (Proverbs 15:9 cp. seeking the Kingdom and God's righteousness, Mt. 5:47).

But few- See on "many" in 7:13. We find another contrast between the few and the many when we read that only "few" will be chosen from the many who are called (Mt. 20:16; 22:14). The implication seems to be that out of the "many" who were then listening to the Lord's teaching ("many" in 7:13 is s.w. Mt. 4:25; 8:1), only a minority would enter into life. There seems fair Biblical reason to think that the community of God's people are a minority in the world, and yet within them, only a minority will finally choose the way of salvation. This helps make sense of why all the faithful lament the weak spiritual state of the church communities surrounding them. And recognizing that this is a general principle shields us from the disillusion which arises from having started out believing that the majority of our community are genuine believers. We have no option but to assume they will be saved, for we cannot condemn any individual; but on the other hand, we are to recognize that on a statistical level, only a few of those within the community will be saved. The majority of those who were 'baptized' in the Red Sea did not make it to God's Kingdom, and this fact is used in 1 Cor. 10 and Hebrews 3 and 4 to warn us not to assume that the ratio will be much higher in the Christian community.

Are they that find it- This is clearly to be connected with the Lord's teaching a few verses earlier that whoever seeks will find (Mt. 7:7,8). He is balancing out the statistical difficulty of salvation with the fact that those who want to be there just have to ask- and they will be. The promise that whoever seeks / asks will find / receive is not a blank cheque about material things, but rather is a promise of entry into the Kingdom. All those who truly love the Lord's appearing will enter the Kingdom (2 Tim. 4:1,8). It is so simple that it is hard to believe- those who truly seek to be in the Kingdom, will find a place therein. Note how the Lord here speaks of finding the way that leads to life, elsewhere He speaks of finding life (Mt. 10:39; 16:25). This is typical of the now / but not yet teaching of the New Testament. We have the eternal life in the sense that we are living that kind of life which we shall eternally live, we have entered the way to life; but we are still mortal and await the physical change to immortality.

7:15 *Beware*- Clearly the prohibition against judging others in the sense of condemning them (7:1) doesn't mean that we can't form a valid opinion about someone's genuineness as a teacher.

Of false prophets- Pseudo-prophetes means that these people are not spiritual at all, they are faking it, pseudo- prophets. To be such a fake, a *pseudo*, is not the same as being a believer who has failed in behaviour at times or who has some Biblical interpretations which we don't personally agree with.

Who come to you- The Greek phrase likely means 'Appear to you'.

In sheep's clothing- Dressed as if they are Jesus?

But inwardly- Given our inability to judge the inner thoughts of others, and the clear prohibition against judging to condemnation in the context (7:1), perhaps this is the Lord's comment upon them, and is not meant to be an invitation to us to claim to read the inward thoughts of others? However the next verse goes on to say that we can observe their fruits, and it is by their fruits that *we* are to discern them. But the Lord discerns them by their inward thoughts, which are visible to Him. Thereby His position on these false prophets becomes our position too- but we arrive there by different routes. We are to observe their fruits, whereas He looks upon their hearts. The Lord uses the same word several times to tell the Pharisees that *inwardly* or 'within' they are full of unspirituality (Mt. 23:25,27,28; Lk. 11:39). This suggests that His warning against "false prophets" is a warning against the Jewish leadership. But He uses the language of 'prophets' because this fits in with the Old Testament theme of false and true prophets. Just as the people had to discern between those two groups, so now, in an era when there were no more prophets in the Old Testament sense, God's people had to beware of imposters like the Pharisees. They were false prophets, false speakers of God's word, in that they had effectively elevated their interpretations of God's word [the *halakah*] to the same level as God's actual inspired word.

Are ravening wolves- The Greek word is always translated elsewhere as 'extortioner'. The Pharisees are clearly in view here, and yet the Pharisee of Lk. 18:11 thanked God with the same word, that he was not an 'extortioner' (Lk. 18:11). The Pharisee didn't see his own sin. The Lord saw their hearts and saw that they were extortioners, but they thanked God that they were not. This is an essay in the blindness of humans to their own sins, and in our need to see ourselves as the Lord sees us, with His eyes and from His perspective. This is the essence of self-examination. The motive of the Pharisees / false prophets was clearly financial gain. This is pinpointed by the Lord as the fundamental reason for their false prophecies, for their external appearance of spirituality- it was because they wanted cash out of people. This was and is clearly deeply upsetting to the Lord.

We've seen that these false prophets were specifically the Pharisees in the Lord's immediate context. When He warns the disciples that He is sending them out as sheep amongst wolves (Mt. 10:16), He is clearly alluding to His teaching here- that the Pharisees appear as sheep, but are as wolves. The implication could be that there would be fake disciples of Jesus, and that the real opposition to the work of the disciples would be the wolves of the Pharisees (see on 'The Jewish Satan' in my *The Real Devil*). This clearly happened after the Lord's death, where the Judaist plot to destroy Paul's preaching of Christianity involved Judaist 'false brethren in Christ' entering in to the flock as wolves (Gal. 2:4). In Jn. 10:12, the Lord speaks of how He as the good shepherd would give His life fighting the wolf so that the sheep might be saved; the implication is that the wolf killed Him. His death was at the hands of the Jewish leadership. Wolves don't usually kill men. This is an element of unreality to highlight the point- that legalism may not appear too bad nor too ultimately dangerous; but in fact it is, and was what led to the death of God's Son. Paul's warning that wolves would enter the flock (Acts 20:29) likewise came true in the Judaist false teachers who entered in to the ecclesias and destroyed so much, both spiritually and doctrinally. I have shown elsewhere that the roots of the false thinking which led to later false doctrines such as the Trinity actually began in Judaist ideas which entered Christianity. From our standpoint today, we can take the point that the major enemy of the Gospel will be legalism and posturing religious leaders.

7:16 *By their fruits you shall know them*- Perhaps the emphasis was upon the "you". The Lord knows the evil hearts of these people- but we can't see their hearts, and so *we* shall know them by their external fruits. The need for fruit as a sign of repentance had been a theme in John's teaching (Mt. 3:8,10), and the Lord in His Sermon is often building on John's words. The Lord's concern is about those who appear to have accepted His message, dressing as sheep, and yet are in fact completely false. The whole thrust of His Sermon is that acceptance of Him produces a change in human life; there must be fruit. And we take a simple lesson from that- if we are to be able to tell whether someone is a genuine Christian or not by whether their fruits are visible, we have to ask ourselves whether our lives are so markedly different from unbelievers. There is to be something about us, fruit hanging on us, which clearly differentiates us from the unbelieving world. The difference has got to be fairly obvious, because the Lord is here teaching that we can easily discern whether someone purporting to be spiritual is indeed so because the fruits of it will be evident. Therefore there will not be any debate about whether someone is in the wolf / false prophet category- because they either have the fruits of the Spirit, the signs of the transformed life, or they do not. And the difference will be obvious. And yet endless energy has been expended trying to judge false prophets according to the content of their Biblical exposition and teaching. The Lord, however, teaches that the litmus test is in their life, rather than in their intellectual position.

Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? - The idea is 'Of course not'. The Lord's point is that spiritual fruit is obvious, it cannot be hidden, like a city set on a hill. If there are grapes, the blessed fruit of the new covenant, on a person- then for sure they are not a thorn bush, with all the associations between thorns and cursing. In Mt. 12:33 the Lord makes an apparently obvious point- a good tree has good fruit, a bad tree has bad fruit. But the point is that we can easily, clearly tell whether someone has the fruit of the transformed life or not. There is no argument about it, because the fruit of the transformed life, lived according to this Sermon on the Mount, is public and visible. The seed of the Gospel which is sown by Jesus either brings forth fruit, or it doesn't (Mt. 13:8,26). So much angst about labelling individuals as false teachers is rendered unnecessary if we take this approach. And the false teachers with whom the later New Testament letters engage are teaching a false way of life, and Jude, Peter and John especially point out that their way of life indicates that they are false teachers.

Figs are associated with spiritual fruit (Mt. 21:19; 24:32), whereas thistles, like thorns, are associated with the curse (Gen. 3:18 "thorns and thistles"; s.w. Heb. 6:8 "that which bears thorns and thistles is rejected"). The point is, that the difference between the accepted and the condemned is apparent even in this life, because the fruit of the transformed life simply has to be seen publically on people. This is perhaps the Lord's expansion upon His command not to judge / condemn in 7:1. He's saying that we should not, however, walk around life blind and imperceptive, but rather take good notice of the presence or absence of fruit on a person.
The Lord puts it slightly another way in Lk. 6:44 when He says that men don't "gather" good fruit from a corrupt tree. The language of gathering is very much that of judgment to come; and yet the fruit is produced and gathered now, in the words / fruit that comes out of our mouth. This is why right now we can judge a false teacher, by his corrupt words [this is one of the contexts of the Lord's words about corrupt trees and fruit- we see the fruit *now*]. The corrupt man *will* speak villainy (Is. 32:6). But corrupt words

don't just mean expletives- the false teacher would be too smart to use them. He comes in sheep's clothing. But Lk. 6:41-44 gives us an example of "corrupt" words; words which create a corrupting spiritual influence in a man or in a community. One may *say* to his brother that he must cast out the splinter from his eye, although he has a plank in his own. And the Lord goes on to say that a good tree doesn't bring forth corrupt fruit. The corrupt fruit, as in the above passages, means 'corrupt words'. And in Lk. 6:45 the Lord concludes by saying that "for of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh". The corrupt fruit are the corrupt words of Lk. 6:42- saying, 'My brother, I'm very sorry, but I just have to correct you, you are so obviously wrong and stupid to walk round with a splinter in your eye, I can correct your spiritual vision, because I see perfectly. At the moment your spiritual perception ['eye] is just hopeless'. The Lord understood 'the eye' as ones' spiritual vision (Mt. 6:22,23). These kind of words, in essence, are the real leaven; they corrupt / pull apart over time communities as well as individual faith. These criticisms work away within a brother or sister, disaffirming them as believers, disaffirming them for who they are, raising doubt and not hope, humiliating them that they haven't made the grade… until they are corrupted. We have a specific example of a man being punished in judgment for his words, and it may well be the basis for the Lord's teaching here: "When the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done this…" (Is. 10:11,12). And there follows a long quotation of his words. These words were the 'fruit of his heart'- out of the abundance of his heart his mouth had spoken. And these words were almost cited back to him at the time of his condemnation. We know, however, that it is quite possible for human actions and words to *not* reflect the heart. Consider how Sennacherib invaded Judah but in his heart "he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so" (Is. 10:7). This is why the Lord clearly condemns the thought as being as bad as the action, even if the action isn't actually committed. Ps. 55:21 laments how words cannot reflect the true state of a man's heart: "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords". So why, then, is there so much emphasis on spoken words as the basis for judgment to come? Surely it is that although thoughts will also be judged, and the hypocrites revealed for who they are, it doesn't follow that a good man sometimes uses 'corrupt speech'. It's impossible. A good man cannot bring forth bad words. But a bad man can sometimes bring forth words which seem good on the surface, but which are in fact counterfeit. But it can't happen another way- a good man's words aren't just his surface level sin. And I for one flinch at this; because when I have to own up to having said inappropriate words, my flesh wants me to think that in my heart, I didn't mean them. And yet, ruthlessly, I must press the point: bad words reflect a bad heart. We can't justify them. We must repent of them, and by the influence of knowing God, through and in His Son and His word, we must change the state of mind that leads to them. And we should be, on one hand, simply *worried*: that bad words came out of a bad heart. And a good man cannot bring forth such corrupt fruit. There is with some especially the problem of temper, saying things well beyond what they really mean in hot blood. But here again, the words of hot blood do reflect something of the real man or woman. The tongue is a fire that can lead to condemnation, whatever and however we justify its' words as a relatively harmless outcome of our personality type. This may be true, but it isn't harmless.

7:17 *Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit but the corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit*- See on :18.

7:18 *A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit*- This appears to belabour the point made in the preceding verses. But the Lord so wishes to drive the point home- that fruit on a transformed person is obvious and visible. If we are to use the presence or absence of fruit as a basis for perceiving false teachers, then we will have no problem at all discerning who is of the Lord and who isn't. And yet this very issue of deciding on others' status has been fatally divisive and destructive for the Lord's church. Statements of faith are analysed, and the teaching of others is watchfully dissected to see if it fits that given statement- in order to decide whether someone is 'in' or 'out'. The Lord foresaw that tendency, for it was the tendency of the scribes too. And instead He offers us this other way, elevating spirituality to the highest level- whoever has the fruits "cannot" be a bad tree. The issue of 'fruit' therefore becomes the key methodology through which to make the judgments which we are called to make in life. The attitude is often expressed that 'Well they may be very nice Christians and all that, but they do not understand the Truth about... [issue X]'. The Lord is tackling that mentality head on, by saying that this "cannot" be the case; if the fruit is there, then they are a good tree, whatever misunderstandings they may have (and we all have them).

7:19 *Every tree that does not bring forth good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire*- The Gehenna fire of condemnation of the wicked is "already kindled" by men's attitude now (Lk. 12:49). The tree that will not bring forth good fruit "*is* hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Mt. 7:19)- alluding to the figure of Gehenna, into which the rejected will be 'thrown'. The ungodly *are* already like the chaff that will be blown away after the Lord's return (Ps. 1:4,5; 35:5; Job 21:18-20 cp. Is. 5:24; 17:13; 29:5; Dan. 2:35; Lk. 3:17). Those who lose their first love are *now* condemned (1 Tim. 3:6; 5:12). The Lord Jesus stands with the sword of judgment *now* going out of His mouth (Rev. 1:16), as it will do at the final judgment (Is. 11:4). The Lord's description of the rejected being cut down and thrown into the fire is surely referring to the words of Dt. 12:3 (cp. 7:5); where the idols of the world were to be hewn down and thrown into the fire. The Lord understood that those who worship idols are like unto them (Ps. 115:8; 135:18). Because the idols will be destroyed in the last day, all who worship them will have to share their destruction. And yet we can be hewn down by God's word now (Hos. 6:5) rather than wait for God to do it to us by the condemnation process. We must cut off (s.w. hew down) our flesh *now* (Mt. 5:30; 18:8 cp. 7:19).

7:20 *Therefore by their fruits you shall know them*- The belaboured repetition of the point (see on 7:17,18) is surely because we will have a strong temptation to undervalue spiritual fruit, and to seek to judge others in terms of their traditions, culture and specific interpretations- rather than by their fruit.

7:21 *Not everyone that says to me: Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven*- Mt. 7:21 = Rom. 2:13. Paul saw the "Lord, Lord" people of the parable as the Jews of the first century who initially responded enthusiastically to the Gospel. The contrast is between saying "Lord, Lord" in this life, and then in the future not entering into the Kingdom ("in that day", :22). The contrast is between merely *saying* and actually *doing*. The Lord repeats the idea in His mini parable of the two sons; the one who 'said' he would be obedient, and the other who 'did' the will of his father (Mt. 21:30,31). The acceptance of Christ as Lord means that we are as His servants and slaves; it is for us to 'do' His will and work. This fits with the context of the preceding verses- that if He is really our Lord, we will inevitably *do* His will, and that doing will

be actual, practical and visible. It is the false prophets who merely say but don't *do*, just as they claim to be good trees but don't have good fruit.

But he that pleases my Father who is in heaven- Or, "does the will". Allowing the Sermon to interpret itself, we see an obvious connection with our prayer asking "Your will be done" (Mt. 6:10). If that request was just asking for God to do His will, it would be easy to pray and also somewhat meaningless. But the connection with Mt. 7:21 means that we are asking that *we* do God's will. And doing His will is difficult, slow progress, building on a rock- as the rest of Matthew 7 records. The Lord's prayer in Gethsemane demonstrates the difficulty of praying for the Father's will to be done in our lives- prayed there with sweat like drops of blood (Mt. 26:42). So we are to pray for strength to do God's will, for spiritual strength to live obediently to the principles of the Sermon. 1 Jn. 5:14 encourages us that if we ask for anything "according to [*kata*] His will, He hears us". But asking *kata* His will could just as well be translated 'in order to fulfill'. If we want strength to do His will in practice, He will give it to us. And His will is expressed here in Matthew 5-7 quite clearly.

"The will of My Father in Heaven" is a fairly common phrase with the Lord (Mt. 12:50; 18:14; John's equivalent seems to be 'to do the will of Him that sent Me', Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38,39,40). The idea seems to be that we on earth can do the will of Him who is in one sense so far away from us, "in Heaven"; and thereby collapse that distance between us.

7:22 *Many*- The Greek often means 'the majority'. Here perhaps we have the clearest implication that only a minority of those who come to Christ shall ultimately be saved. Hebrews, Romans and 1 Cor. 10 suggest that if we think that natural Israel were far worse than spiritual Israel in terms of percentage coming to salvation- then we must take heed lest we fall.

Will say to Me in that day- Judgment will be a process, with the rejected initially protesting, seeking to change the Lord's mind- and then slinking away in shame. Nobody will be passive in that day. The only thing important will be acceptance at His hand and a place in the Kingdom. We will come to that position either by loving obedience to His ways in this life- or all too late, in condemnation. The logic is powerful- we must chose that desire for the Kingdom life *now* as the dominant emotion, overarching all our emotions, decision making and formation of our deepest desires.

Lord, Lord- Mt. 7:22 = 1 Cor. 13:2. To say "Lord, Lord" without really *knowing* Christ is living without love. Thus Paul saw an association between a lack of true love and an external show of appreciation of Christ's Lordship. Not doing what Christ says is a lack of love, in Paul's mind. If we appreciate this, we will see that those who are ignorant of Christ's words cannot show true love. Biblically ignorant Christians need to think through the implications of this. Those who insincerely say "Lord, Lord" now, will say the same then, at the judgment, with the same lack of reality (Mt. 7:21,22). The repetition of "Lord, Lord" shows that our attitude to Him in this life will be that we have when we meet in the last day. The sensation of working for the Lord can be so self-deceptive. He draws the difference between doing many wonderful works in His name, saying “Lord, Lord”; and *really* doing the will of the Father (Mt. 7:21,22). The parallel Lk. 6:46 has that men will say “Lord, Lord” but not really hear His words. To hear them is to do the will of the Father. Putting all this together, it is perfectly possible to bear His Name, call Him Lord, work hard for Him- and yet never really hear His words, and thereby never really know the will of our Father. From this parallel we can

conclude that our attitude to Christ in this life (e.g. "Lord, Lord!") will be our attitude to Him at the judgment seat. If we think He is a hard, unreasonable Lord: that is how He will be. To the froward (in this life), He will show Himself froward. Straight away we are met head on with a major challenge: Our attitude to Christ in this life will be our attitude to Him at the judgment seat. John's letters reason down the same line: "If (in this life) our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence (now) toward God... this is the confidence that we have in him... abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence... before him (at the judgment) at His coming" (1 Jn. 3:21; 5:14; 2:28). The confidence we have towards Christ now will be the confidence we have at judgment day. This fact should pull us up out of the spiritual indifference which characterizes so much of our lives. If we see Christ as an abstract theological necessity, a black box in our brain called 'Christ'; if we don't have a dynamic, two- way relationship with Him now- then this too is how we will regard Him then.

Did we not prophesy in your name- When we consider the Lord's teaching of Mt. 7:22,23 and 25:42-44 together, He's saying that those rejected at the day of judgment will be so on account of their *omissions*- hence their surprise, and anger because they knew that they had *done* good works; they thought that what they had *committed* was morally acceptable to God, and this would usher them into the Kingdom. But their sins of *omission* cost them the Kingdom. The mention of prophesying must be seen in the context of the Lord's warning in 7:15 about *false* prophets. To claim to have spoken / prophesied in His Name (cp. 'in sheep's clothing', appearing as Jesus) implies these people had considered themselves followers of Jesus in this life.

And in your name cast out demons and in your name do many mighty works?- The possession of Holy Spirit gifts which enabled healings and miracles to be performed was no guarantee of final acceptance at the last day. Pentecostal theology needs to take note of this- for the power to do miracles is simply not any guarantee of salvation, as they wrongly suppose. And we who live in an era when the miraculous gifts have been withdrawn can still take a powerful lesson- no matter how dramatically we may be a channel for God's activity in the lives of others, this is irrelevant to our final salvation. The essence of the life in Christ, the life of the Kingdom, is internal spiritual mindedness. The contrast is between 'doing' wonderful works and 'doing' (the same Greek word is used in :21) the will of the Father. The language of 'doing the Father's will' is used about the Lord's life and final death on the cross. To be as Him, to give our deepest life as He did, is not the same as doing external works for others.

7:23 *And then will I tell them*- The attitude which we have to the Lord Jesus *now* will be the attitude we have to Him at the day of judgment (Mt. 7:23 cp. Lk. 6:46). The Lord will "profess" to them that He doesn't know them and they must depart from Him; but Strong understands the Greek to mean 'to say the same thing as another, i.e. to agree with, assent'. The Lord will be agreeing with them, that they are worthy of condemnation. They will have condemned themselves, and the Lord will simply confirm this to them in His final verdict. If we are ashamed of Him now, we will be ashamed from before Him then (1 Jn. 2:28), and He will be ashamed of us (Lk. 9:26). Every time we are asked to stand up for Him and His words in the eyes of men, we are as it were living out our future judgment.

I never knew you- "Many" will be rejected at the judgment seat because they don't *know* the Lord Jesus Christ; they never had a personal relationship with Jesus, even though they have experienced answered prayer, done miracles, worked for their

Lord etc. (Mt. 7:22,23; 1 Cor. 13). They will have built a spiritual house, but on sand. It isn't difficult to be a good Christian outwardly. But to *know* the Lord Jesus? That's another question. The Greek for "never" means literally 'never at any time'. The course of their lives was such that there had never been a time when He 'knew' them. We rather expect Him to say '*You* never knew *Me*'. But He says that *He* never knew *them*- because the whole idea of 'knowing' Him is mutual. Insofar as we know Him (in a relational sense), He knows us- and vice versa. We really need to ask whether we are praying to Jesus, talking to Him, 'knowing' Him...

Depart from me- This is alluded to in 2 Tim. 2:19: 'Depart from sin now, or you'll depart from Christ at the judgment'. This is Paul's classic way of making plays on words; again an indication of how his writings are partly a product of his own meditation upon and familiarity with the Gospels.

You that work iniquity- And yet they have just protested all the good they did for others, healing, teaching etc. On one level, good can be done- but the good is a work of iniquity if it is done with an unspiritual heart, and especially in order to gain personal wealth or advantage (see on "ravening wolves", 7:15). In Old Testament times, God used the nations to do His will, but they were still condemned for their hearts being far from Him. Those who "do iniquity" [s.w.] are gathered out of the Kingdom at the last day (Mt. 13:41)- confirming that these people are within the visible Christian community. And there will be "many" of them (:22)- suggesting the Lord doesn't just have in view a handful of charlatans at the leadership level who claim to do miracles and teach in His Name just for money. This problem of thinking that we are justified before Him just because we are His channel of work is clearly foreseen by the Lord as a major and widespread problem. Mt. 24:12 could imply that this will be a specific latter day problem- for within the believing community, "because iniquity [s.w.] shall abound, the love of many [Gk. 'the majority'] shall become cold".

7:24 *Everyone therefore that hears these words of mine- Logos* suggests more than simply words. The Lord intends us to get to the essential intention of His Spirit. God's word is often styled His 'judgments' in the OT (e.g. Ps. 119:43,160; 147:19). In His word we see His judgments- how He judges and will judge. And in the wealth of Bible history we see examples of how these judgments have been articulated with men in practice. Thus the Lord Jesus concluded the sermon on the mount with a parable of judgment, that of the two builders (Mt. 7:24-27). One heard the Lord's words of the sermon and did them, the other heard but didn't deeply apply them. The message was clear: 'Deeply meditate on what I've just been saying. For this is the basis upon which I will judge men in the last day. You can try to discern for yourselves how seriously and fundamentally you apply my words; and in this you will have a preview of how I will judge you".

And does them- An echo of :21, he who *does* the will of the Father. The parallel is thus made between the will of the Father, and "these sayings of Mine" in the Sermon. Yet in the Lord's own case, the doing of the Father's will meant the death of the cross. This finally was and is the outcome of living in accordance with the Sermon. This is what it leads to. The figure of building a house on a rock conjures up the idea of sweating labour. Do we feel that we are spiritually sweating, in a sense? Is it that hard to understand and therefore do the words of Christ? A number of passages make this connection between labouring and understanding the word. Elders labour in the word

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

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

Shall be like- As in :27, "shall be likened unto". The future tenses imply that the truth of the parable of the builders will only be apparent at the day of judgment. The purpose of judgment day is largely for our benefit, and therefore the process will be public- we will learn from the rejection and acceptance of others. Paul alludes to the idea by saying that "the day [of judgment] shall declare" each man's building work (1 Cor. 3:13). And to whom will it be declared? The Lord already knows them that are His. It will be declared to the individual being judged, and to those who are observing. The Lord uses the same word translated 'likened' in speaking of how in this life, the state of the Kingdom in a man's life "*is* likened", present tense, right now, to various things (Mt. 13:24; 18:23; 22:2). But in Mt. 25:1 we find another future tense- at the Lord's return, the Kingdom *will be likened unto* the wise and foolish girls [cp. the wise and foolish builders]. We can perceive the essence of the Lord's future judgment in this life- for the Bible is full of His "judgments" ahead of time. Therefore the nature and outcome of the

final judgment need not be a mystery for us, if we perceive the principles of judgment which the Lord teaches in the Sermon and elsewhere. But all the same, that day will be the final and ultimate declaration of those values.

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

Comparing with the parallel Lk. 6:48 it seems that both men built on the same kind of ground- it was rock overlaid with sand. The difference was that the wise man dug through the sand to the rock, whereas the fool built only on the sand. To really get down to the rock of Christ is hard and long work. It is achieved through the process of 'doing' what He teaches. And the story is true to life- for so many of us in our spiritual biography can relate how we passed through years of being 'Christian' or religious without having any personal relationship with Jesus, not praying nor talking to Him, not sensing Him at all as a living Lord. The story suggests that there will be some, perhaps "many", who build a spiritual edifice of grand appearance which has no personal root in a relationship with Jesus- indeed, some actually preach against this because of their obsession with upholding theologies about the supremacy of God the Father. But getting through the sand, through the dirt and dust of our own humanity, to truly knowing Christ- this is what alone will come through judgment day.

Paul uses the metaphor of building about the work of converting and building up others in Christ (Rom. 15:20; 1 Cor. 10:23; Gal. 2:18), knowing that the day of judgment shall declare the quality of our work (1 Cor. 3:13). But even if that building work does not pass through the fire of judgment, we shall personally be saved (1 Cor. 3:15). But our

personal house must stand firm throughout the judgment process. Note there is a continuity between the house before and after the storm of judgment day- it "fell not". Who we essentially are in spiritual terms is who we shall eternally be; our spirit shall be saved at that day (1 Cor. 5:5), our essential spiritual person will be preserved. The experience of the day of judgment will not make us somehow flip over another side and relationship with the Lord, previously unknown to us. Those who say "Lord, Lord" in this life without meaning will use the same empty terms in that day (Mt. 7:21,22).

To get down to the rock, the man who truly heard Christ had to dig through the earth which the foolish man also dug into. Hearing Christ's words is likened to digging into that earth. Doing and understanding them is likened to then digging into the bed- rock. The foolish man did allow the word to go into him- skin deep. We need to ask ourselves how often these days the word really goes right through our skin, and forces us to hack into the bed- rock. Are we truly building our house on a rock? The force of Mk. 16:16, for example, went more than skin deep just before our baptism. We read it, thought about it, and did it. But now. Are we old and brave, thick skinned, hardened by the humdrum of repetition, no longer building a house on a rock? My sense is that many of us are. Let's be aware that Heb. 6:1,2 defines "the foundation" as "repentance", and an awareness of the reality of the resurrection and coming judgment. In some ways, the longer we are in Christ, the more likely it is that we will not reach down to the bedrock of these things as we ought to. I mean, how often these days do we really repent of something? How often does the reality of the judgment seat truly come home to us? The poetry of the Bible's language, especially if we read the same version, makes God's word glide over us. Exhortations, even the recollection of Golgotha's tragic scene, the final, friendless end... can all slip so easily over our heads. We rest on the laurels of past spiritual victories. Nothing really shakes us up, reaching right down to the bedrock. Surely each of us should be sensing a surge of spiritual urgency when we look at ourselves like this. Yet God will help us; it is He Himself who will "settle" us, or 'make a foundation for' us, as the Greek can mean (1 Pet. 5:10). The rock which our response to the word must reach down to is that of the crucified Christ. That rock represents Christ and Him crucified, according to Paul (1 Cor. 10:4 and 3:11 cp. 2:2). The Lord's parable of building on the rock was surely quarried from His understanding of Is. 28:16,17: “I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone... a precious cornerstone. The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place". Truly doing God's word will always lead us back to the spirit of the suffering Christ on Calvary. If it does not, our building, our apparent development within the much-vaunted Biblicism of our faith, is just a "refuge of lies". All our spiritual effort and suffering finds its ultimate summation in Christ's crucifixion. His suffering there is the quintessence of all spiritual struggle. It is quite possible that as we break bread weekly, we are merely digging a little deeper than usual in the earth, yet still not reaching down to the real meaning of building on the example of Christ's death. The wise man's house was "founded upon a rock". The same Greek word occurs in Col. 2:7, describing how we are "rooted and built up in him". The parallel Eph. 3:17 expands this to mean that if Christ dwells in our hearts, we are "rooted and grounded in love... able to comprehend... and to know the love of Christ", which was supremely shown in His death. Col. 1:23 associates this being "grounded and settled" with not being "moved away from the hope of the Gospel, which ye have heard". If the word really sinks down deep within us, it will reveal to us the love of Christ on the cross, it will result in true love, and all this will be the outworking of the basic doctrines of the Truth which we understood at baptism. Thus the hacking away at the rock is not only hard, grim work against human nature. It reveals the wondrous love of Christ. The

implication is that we can only really understand this love, that passes human knowledge, if we are really sweating away to obey Christ's words, to build our house on a rock.

7:25 *And the rain descended and the floods came*- The allusion is clearly to Noah's flood; although the Greek for 'flood' here usually refers to a river. Only those within the ark of Christ were saved. To do he will of God, to hear and do the Lord's teaching, to be in the ark of Christ, to be founded upon the rock of Christ as our dominant desire- these are all different ways of saying the same thing. Our core root, our foundation, our dominant desire, our main self-perception and self-understanding, must be of being and living in Christ. This is the fundamental divide between persons, not their statement of faith, their spiritual culture. It comes down to whether they have a heart for the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom. And we cannot judge those "secrets of men" in this life, but we can at least be sure never to reject anyone who professes to have such a heart for the Lord. Paul uses the same word for "descended" to describe how Christ shall descend from Heaven at His return (1 Thess. 4:16); likewise the word for "came" is used about the coming of Christ (Mt. 24:30,39 parallel the coming of Noah's flood with the coming of Christ). The coming of Christ will be judgment; our meeting with Him will be the coming of the rain etc. Even the house founded upon the rock took a fair beating- the purpose of judgment day is to reveal to the builder (and other observers) how he built.

The flood which came was like the day of judgment. This fits in exactly with the way Christ used the figure of the flood to describe His second coming in Mt. 24. Peter does the same in 2 Pet. 3. The beating of the stream upon the house on a rock (v.49) is a truly apposite figure for the day of judgment. It certainly implies a process of judgment, in which the unworthy will experience a gradual collapse of their spirituality. For the man with the firm foundation, the flood of the parable would have been a worrying experience. Would the house stand up to it? In many of the parables, we can profitably speculate as to likely details of the story. The wise man would have remembered his hard work on the foundation, not with any sense of pride or self- gratitude. But he would nevertheless have been aware of it. Our real spiritual effort will be so valuable in that day. Only then will we realize the extent of the fact that there can be no short cut to true spiritual development. A man cannot be crowned, unless he strive lawfully. The Lord's parable was no doubt partly based on Is. 28:17, which speaks of the day of judgment being like hail which "shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters (which) shall overflow". The spiritual house of the foolish builder was a lie, effectively; an appearance of real development which deceived men. For externally, men cannot know anything about the different foundations of houses built side by side. We are left to imagine the details of the parable. The foolish man would have run outside and watched his house being beaten down and washed away. He would have thought of trying to do something to stop the destruction, but then given up, realizing it was too late. The foolish girls saw that "our oil *is* running out" (Gk.). The unworthy will have that terrible sense of their opportunity and spirituality ebbing away from them. The impression is given in the parable that the two houses were next door to each other; again confirming our feeling that this parable is about different attitudes to the word within the ecclesia.

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

And the winds blew- The disciples surely recalled the Lord's teaching when they were on the sea of Galilee with winds blowing so strongly that they were going to drown (s.w. Mt. 8:26; 14:24; Jn. 6:18 s.w. 'blow'). Those incidents they would've understood as a foretaste of judgment and condemnation- out of which they were saved only by the presence and grace of the Lord Jesus. Perhaps the winds refer here to the Angels who will play a major part in our judgment process; for God makes His Angels winds (Ps. 104:4).

And beat upon that house- The Greek for 'to beat upon' is used seven other times in the NT- and always about falling down at the feet of the Lord Jesus. We either do that in our desperation today, or His judgment shall fall upon us in the last day. There is good reason to think that our meeting of the Lord will not be just to receive a yes/no decision. The picture of the storm beating on the house to see if it collapses implies a purpose and process of the judgment (Mt. 7:27). If it were only a yes / no decision, the language of tribunal, judgment and appeal which occurs in passages concerning the judgment seat would appear to be out of place. Both sheep and goats register their surprise at their Lord's comments on various specific actions of theirs which he discusses with them- "When saw we thee...?" (Mt. 25:44).

And it did not collapse- The same house stood before and after judgment. See on 7:24 "his house". The same word is used of how we desperate sinners in this life fall down before Jesus in confession that we have sinned and we dearly wish to do something about that debt (Mt. 16:26). We either do that, or we shall fall down in condemnation at the last day, with the same realization (Mt. 18:26). Every knee shall bow to Him in this manner- either in this life, or in condemnation before Him. This is what flesh must come to; and we must realize that now. We must fall down and be broken upon the rock of Christ now, or that rock will fall upon us and grind us to powder with the rest of the kingdoms of men (Mt. 21:41). Ananias and Saphira fell to the earth at their condemnation, whereas Saul fell to the earth in repentance (Acts 5:5,10; 9:4 s.w.). At the last day, we shall fall to the earth but be lifted up and made to stand (Rom. 14:4).

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

7:26 *And everyone that hears these words of mine and does not obey them, shall be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand*- The Jews who rejected the Lord Jesus are described as builders in Mk. 12:10; Lk. 11:48- and to unwise builders in Lk. 14:28.

7:27 *And the rain descended and the floods came and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it collapsed*- The Lord spoke of the rejected at the judgment as being like a house against which "the floods came, and the winds blew, and smote upon that house; and it fell". Floods (of the ungodly), winds (whirlwinds), smiting, a falling house- this is all language taken from Job's experiences. He went through all this *now*, just as each righteous man must come to condemn himself in self-examination *now* so that he won't be condemned then. Flesh must be condemned, each man must come to

know his own desperation. And if he won't do this, the judgment process at the last day will teach it him.

And great was its collapse- A common figure for condemnation (Mt. 15:14; Acts 5:5; Rom. 11:11,22; 14:4; 1 Cor. 10:8,12; Heb. 4:11; James 5:12). Condemnation will be tragic- "great". Not only for those individuals, but for the Father and Son and all of us who view it. These are the final words of the Sermon. The Lord ends on the note of the possibility of condemnation, despite His many positive, upbeat and encouraging words about the certainty of salvation. The tragedy of the future we might miss is simply so great that the Lord felt He had to say this. It isn't mere negative psychology. The eternal reality of the issues before us are such that we can do nothing else but let the Lord's concern and earnestness ring in our ears.

The parable of the builders is fundamentally about our attitude to the Lord. There is good reason to think it mainly concerns the attitude of the responsible; in Luke, these words of Jesus (Lk. 6:47) are set against the background of Lk. 6:27: "I say unto you which hear". The rest of the chapter seems to be addressed primarily to the disciples- e.g. Lk. 6:41,42 speak of them beholding the mote in their brother's eye; warning surely more relevant to believing disciples than to the world generally. The parable of the builders likewise refers to those within the ecclesia, who know Christ as their Lord: "Lord, Lord", they say. Among this class of people there would be "many" (Mt. 7:21- 23) who would hear Christ's sayings, but not do them. I'm obviously labouring this point, that the builders in the parable are those within the ecclesia, or at best the responsible. This is because the parallel record in Mt. 7 is rather unpleasant to apply to the ecclesia; it says that "many" of us will be in the category who say "Lord, Lord", and whose house will be destroyed. The Greek for “many" can imply 'the majority'. Even the majority of those who hear Christ's words simply don't do them. Now that's an uncomfortable statistic for us who sit before the bread and wine each week, seeking to hear Christ's words and do them. This parable was spoken in the context of crowds of the ecclesia of Israel coming to Christ, hearing His words, and doing sweet nothing about it. Such an attitude is not building a house on a rock.

7:28 *And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these words that the crowds*- Although the Lord started teaching only His disciples, leaving the multitude at the bottom of the mountain (Mt. 5:1), clearly many of them came up to hear Him over the course of His discourse- for in Mt. 8:1 we learn that the multitudes returned from up the mountain.

Were astonished at his teaching- The sense of reality commented upon in :27 left the people with utter astonishment. Never before nor since have the eternal issues of existence been stated so clearly and compellingly.

7:29 *For he taught them as one having authority and not as their scribes*- It was exactly because the Lord Jesus had the power to give or take eternity that He had this authority which the people sensed.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 8

8:1 See on 7:28. *And when he had come down from the mountain, great crowds followed him*- The word

for "crowds" is used 48 times in Matthew alone. The verbal picture is powerful- the Lord Jesus at the head of a multitude, with them, followed by them, and yet so alone...

8:2 *And a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying*- The Greek literally means to bow or crouch. Perhaps it is being used here in that literal sense, inviting us then to imagine the Lord extending His hand to the kneeling man (8:3). Or the idea could be that the man's worship was not in any external display of respect, but in the fact he believed in the Lord's ability and power to respond to his request. In this case, the man worshipped Jesus *in saying* "If You will, You can...".

Lord, if You desire, You can- The Lord replied that this was indeed His will (8:3). This coincidence of human will with that of our Lord is what fellowship with Him and answered prayer is all about. The phrase "If You will, You can..." is recorded identically in all three of the synoptics (Mk. 1:40; Lk. 5:12), as if they all wished to draw attention to the man's attitude and make an example of it- accepting that the Lord has all power ("can" = *dunamai*), but that our will is not always His.

Make me clean- The leper didn't ask so much for healing as for cleansing. He wanted the healing *so that* he could be accepted into the community of believers in the temple. Our requests for health and healing should likewise be motivated by a desire to use the healed situation in the Lord's service. Faith is inculcated by an appreciation of the height of Christ's exaltation. He now has all power in Heaven and in earth, and this in itself should inspire us with faith in prayer and hope in His coming salvation. On the basis of passages like Ex. 4:7; Num. 12:10-15; 2 Kings 5:7,8, "leprosy was regarded as a "stroke" only to be removed by the Divine hand which had imposed it" (L.G. Sargent, *The Gospel Of The Son Of God*, p. 28). The leper lived with this understanding, and yet he saw in Jesus nothing less than God manifest. Inspired by the height of the position which he gave Jesus in his heart, he could ask him in faith for a cure: "If thou wilt, *thou canst* [as only God was understood to be able to] make me clean".

8:3 *And he stretched out his hand and touched him, saying*- The Lord is described a staggering 28 times in the synoptics as touching people. This was a studied rejection of the false teaching of 'guilt by association' or 'contamination by contact'. More than that, the Lord was at such lengths to identify Himself with suffering people.

I do desire. Be made clean!- In Mt. 10:8 the Lord told the disciples to likewise "cleanse the lepers". Again the Lord is giving the disciples the work of the priests to do. For it was their job to pronounce lepers cleansed. But He is asking them to do what He Himself had done in Mt. 8:3. His work was to be theirs. The later NT references to *our* being cleansed by the Lord Jesus (Eph. 5:26; Tit. 2:14; 1 Jn. 1:7,9 etc.) perhaps look back to how the historical Jesus cleansed lepers in Galilee. We are to see ourselves in that isolated and rejected man.

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

8:4 *And Jesus said to him: See you tell no one, but go show yourself to the priests and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony to them*- The Lord had told the cured leper to tell no other man but go and offer for his cleansing, in order to make a witness to the priests. All three synoptics record this, as if it made a special impression on everyone (Mt. 8:4; Mk. 1:44; Lk. 5:14). It could be that the Lord is using an idiom when He told the leper to tell nobody: 'Go and make a witness *first and foremost* to the priests as opposed to anybody else'. Such was His zeal for their salvation. And the fact that "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7) shows how this apparently hope-against-hope desire of the Lord for the conversion of His enemies somehow came true. We noted on 8:3 that the work of the priests was to cleanse the

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

8:5 *And when he was entering into Capernaum, there came to him a centurion, begging him*- "There came" is a poor translation. The Greek word is related to that translated 'worship' in 8:2. The parallel is thus drawn between the socially isolated and poverty stricken leper, and the wealthy, respected Centurion. The point is that they both were experiencing the same utter desperation which led them to cast themselves upon the Lord. Social differences are therefore eliminated within the community gathered around Christ- on the basis of our common recognition of our desperation and His unique and sole ability to help and save.

8:6 *Saying: Lord, my servant*- Masters were well known for disregarding the welfare of their slaves, so in the centurion's passionate concern for his slave we have an insight into the nature of this delightful man.

Lies in the house paralysed- The same words recur in 8:14, where Peter's mother also lies at home sick, and the Lord heals her. The centurion's servant and Peter's mother are thus being paralleled- just as in 8:5 the wealthy Centurion and the poor leper are paralleled. The point is being made that many people from very different lives and circumstances had one thing in common- desperate need for healing and salvation at the hands of the Lord.

Grievously tormented- The same word for 'grievously' is used about the disciples' fear during the storm on the lake (Mt.8:26); the Lord was seeking to educate the twelve by showing them His ability to cure a person in a 'grievous' situation, and then the next day (or later that same day?) giving them the opportunity to themselves be in a 'grievous' situation from which likewise just His word was sufficient to save them. But they failed to see the similarity. And so a bit later, He have them another opportunity to learn from this situation. The servant was "tormented", and the very same Greek word is used about how the disciples "toiled" or were tormented in trying to row their boat in another storm (Mk. 6:48); in Mt. 14:24 we read that their ship was "tossed", or tormented [same word again]. And again, they failed to learn the lesson- that a word from the Lord was sufficient to save them out of 'grievous torment', just as it had done for the centurion's servant. In our struggle to attach meaning to event, we are to likewise perceive how the Lord demonstrates His power in another's life- and then brings us into a situation which in essence is similar, so that we might ourselves experience His power to meet *our* human need. And whether we 'get it' or not, He tends to repeat the lessons, as He did with the disciples.

8:7 *And he said to him: I will come and heal him*- See on 8:9 *Come and he comes.*

8:8 *And the centurion answered and said: Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof*- He was aware that Jews were not supposed to ‘come to' or under the roof of a Gentile (Acts 10:28). He was therefore aware that the purpose of God at that time was for Jews rather than Gentiles- his understanding was quite deep. See on 8:9. But the Lord was quite willing to go under the roof a Gentile; that is the significance of the Lord's response that He would come to the sick servant.

But only say the word and my servant shall be healed- He had a deep belief in the power of the Lord's word, and may well be alluding to the unique Hebrew conception of the creation of all things being through the medium of a word spoken. One of Paul's many allusions to the Gospels is in 1 Thess. 1:5, where he observes that the Thessalonians had not heard "the word only" but had had it confirmed by signs and miracles. He seems to be reminding them of the centurion, who believed "the word only" *before* he experienced the healing miracle.

8:9 *For I also am a man under authority*- The centurion had perceived exactly who the Lord Jesus was- a man, who was under (Divine) authority and yet had others beneath *his* authority. And he understand the Lord Jesus as his representative, very similar to him, but with far more power. Admittedly he seems to have misunderstood the issue of demons- he understood that the Lord could say 'go' to whatever mighty ones [cp. his soldiers] were making his servant sick. Whatever his beliefs about sickness and its cause, he believed the Lord Jesus was far more powerful than whatever was causing it. But the Lord all the same commended the man for his *faith* even if the precise content of that faith was misinformed, and if his way of life as a Roman centurion was not the best way of being a Jesus follower; not to mention that he was a Gentile. This opens a helpful window onto how the Lord feels about those who strongly believe in Him but have their understanding of some details awry.

Come and he comes- The same word just used by the Lord in saying that in response to the centurion's request: "I will come" (8:8). Perhaps the centurion is marvelling at the grace of the fact that he had asked the Son of God to come, and He had come in response...

Having under myself soldiers and I say to one: Go! And he goes. And to another: Come! And he comes. And to my servant: Do this! And he does it- The centurion seems to have believed in demon possession. He understood that his servant was “grievously tormented” by them. He believed that the Lord could cure him, in the same way as he could say to his underlings “go, and he goeth” (Mt. 8:6-10). And so, he implied, couldn’t Jesus just say to the demons ‘Go!’, and they would go, as with the ‘demons’ in the madman near Gadara? The Lord didn’t wheel round and read him a lecture about ‘demons don’t exist’ (although they don’t, of course, and it’s important to understand that they don’t). He understood that this man had faith that He, as the Son of God, had power over these ‘demons’, and therefore “he marvelled, and said… Verily… I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel”. He focused on what faith and understanding the man had. With the height of His spirituality, with all the reason He had to be disappointed in people, the Lord marvelled at a man’s faith. It is an essay in how He seized on what genuine faith He found, and worked to develop it, even if there was an element of false understanding in it.

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

There must have been certain similarities of personality type between the Lord and His

mother. Thus in Lk. 2:33 Mary "marvelled", and the same word is used about Jesus in Mt. 8:10 and Mk. 6:6.

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

With such great faith- But as demonstrated in the comment on 8:9, this man had profound *understanding*. Faith must have content, it is belief *in* something, and in this sense faith and understanding are connected.

8:11 *And I say to you, that many shall come from the east and the west and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven*- Gk. 'to recline'. The reference is to the Messianic banquet, where Gentile Christians will sit with Abraham and the Jewish fathers- because they have become the children of Abraham by faith and baptism into Christ (Gal. 3:27-29). Lk. 12:37 comments that the Lord will have to *make* the faithful sit down at that banquet- so strong will be our abiding sense that 'I am not worthy of this'. We note too the literal, personal nature of our existence in the Kingdom age.

8:12 *But the sons of the kingdom shall be*- The similar passage in Lk. 13:28 identifies this class as "you yourselves", the Jews of the first century in whose streets the Lord had taught (Lk. 13:26). They were therefore still in some sense God's Kingdom, even though the political form of that Kingdom had been overthrown in Zedekiah's time (Ez. 21:25-27). Likewise those who are under the dominion of the King are in a sense His Kingdom right now, even though the Kingdom is not yet restored in its visible, literal, political sense.

Cast out into the outer darkness- The metaphor continues from the idea of reclining at banquet in 8:11. Some would be cast out from that happy, well lit room- into the darkness outside. The idea of entering a banquet and then being cast out of it is repeated in the parable of the man without a wedding garment, who enters the banquet but is then likewise cast out into "outer darkness" (Mt. 22:12,13). That man therefore becomes symbolic of the Jews who trusted in their fleshly descent from Abraham as a guarantee of salvation and eternal fellowship with him. 'Cast into outer darkness' to experience weeping and gnashing of teeth is paralleled in Mt. 13:42 by "Cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth". The "furnace of fire" and the "outer darkness" are both therefore figurative. The language speaks of intense aloneness (in the darkness) and searing mental pain. The spectre and possibility of rejection at the last day is brought frequently before us in the Scriptures, especially in

the teaching of the Lord Jesus. It is an element, a dimension of life, that we need to bear in mind. On the one hand, the Lord seems eager to save anyone who believes, such is His grace; on the other pole there is this kind of language about condemnation. I submit that this is an intended, irreconcilable paradox which we are left with, purposefully, and for our good. I doubt that the paradox can be resolved, at least not by any intellectual, expositional process.

There shall be the weeping- Either we will mourn now in repentance (Lk. 6:25; the Greek for "mourn" is often in a repentance context), or we will mourn at the judgment (Mt. 8:12 etc.). Having foretold the inevitable coming of judgment day, Yahweh Himself pleads with Israel: "Therefore also *now*... turn ye even to me... with weeping, and with mourning" (Joel 2:12).

And the gnashing of teeth- Weeping and gnashing of teeth is emphasized in Matthew (Mt. 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30). Luke mentions it once (Lk. 13:28), Mark and John never. It was clearly a dimension to the Lord's teaching which struck Matthew deeply, and he used it often in his teaching of the Gospel, of which 'the Gospel according to Matthew' is a transcript. Gnashing of teeth suggests anger, and Lk. 13:28 says it is triggered by seeing Gentiles in God's Kingdom and Jewish people from the time of Jesus rejected. So it is partly anger with self, but also the raging anger which comes from jealousy. We need to meditate upon the way in which actual human beings who met Jesus in the flesh are for sure going to reappear at the day of judgment. On their deathbeds or later in life they may've idly reflected 'Ah yes, there was that Jesus guy I met once, the one they killed, and then a cult started based around Him afterwards'. Such people will reappear at judgment day, and their same basic personality will continue. As they were furious at the Lord's claim that Gentiles would be in God's Kingdom, so they will be in a blind rage about it still at judgment day. The only other time the Greek for 'gnashing' is used in the New Testament is in Acts 7:54, where again the Jewish conscience was pricked, leading them to gnash upon Stephen. How they were then in the first century is how they will be at the last day. The gnashing of teeth is clearly connected with the anger which comes from jealousy at others' acceptance. One cannot help think of the very many professing believers who have huge anger at the thought of an open table, or of someone they consider to be 'outside' of their small circle breaking bread at the Lord's table. Those same basic structures and constructs of thinking, that same essential personality, will reappear at judgment day. The awesomeness of having been resurrected and actually meeting Jesus in person will not change our basic personalities. Our spirit, in that sense, is preserved. The time for change of attitudes and transformation of character is now. In the OT, gnashing of teeth always means to hate somebody, often the righteous (Job 16:9; Ps. 35:16; 37:12; 112:10; Lam. 2:16). Could it not be that the rejected hate their Lord and His people, who will be watching the judgment in some form, and therefore go and join the ranks of the embittered armies that come against Him? Or is their extreme hatred against themselves? Ps. 112:10 speaks of the wicked gnashing with their teeth and melting away, suggesting that the slinking away process goes on even in the outer darkness; they wander, but in their aimless wandering they slowly slink yet further away from their Lord- the one who once fain would have carried them on His shoulders, gathered them under His wings. It's a terrible picture. Cain, in typifying all the rejected, felt that his condemnation was something greater than he could bear (Gen. 4:13).

8:13 *And Jesus said to the centurion: Go your way*- The Lord several times uses this word (literally, 'depart') to a person after having healed them or having had a saving encounter with them. He used it to the healed leper in Mt. 8:4, and again in Mt. 9:6 (the paralyzed man); Mk. 5:19 (Legion); Mk. 5:34 (the woman with an issue of blood); Mk.

7:29 (the Syrian woman); Mk. 10:21 (the rich young man); Mk. 10:52 (the blind man); Lk. 17:14 (the lepers); the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:16); the blind man at Siloam (Jn. 9:7); the resurrected Lazarus (Jn. 11:44). This is a significant theme, therefore, in the Lord's dealings with people. It suggests a commission, a sending forth on His work- the same word is found in the commission to "Go into the vineyard" to work (Mt. 20:4,7; 21:28), 'going' to bring forth fruit (Jn. 15:16) and finally in 'going' to the world to tell them of the Lord's resurrection (Mk. 16:7). We are each individually sent out from Him to do His work in our own unique way. The way for the great commission is therefore prepared by these many examples of 'sending'. That commission, the sending out, is therefore a totally personal matter- not something to be merely considered by missions committees, or groups of enthusiasts. We are each personally 'sent', bidden depart on our personal way, as a result of our encounter with the Lord.

As you have believed, so it is done for you– The idea could be that the quality, nature and extent of healing was dependent upon the nature of the faith. We ask for forgiveness for our own sins "as" we have forgiven others. There is here a recognition by the Lord that issues like faith and forgiveness are not simply black or white situations. They are processes, and there is clearly a sliding scale of measurement for things such as faith and forgiveness. The point is that according to where we set the slider on our own faith or forgiveness, so there will be a corresponding response from God. God's possibility is our possibility; and this is what the Lord was teaching the man who thought that it all depended upon the Lord's possibility alone (Mk. 9:23). The extent and nature of the Lord's healing seems to have been limited by the faith of the recipient (Mt. 8:13 " as...so" ; 9:29 " according to" ; 12:22 " inasmuch").

And the servant was healed in that hour- The phrase could mean that the servant was cured within the same hour, or at that very instant. In this case the suggestion would be that the centurion's faith was great and therefore the cure happened totally and instantly. The Greek for 'healed' is also translated 'made whole', so there could be a comment upon the extent (total healing) and immediacy (instant) of the cure- as a result of the man's great level of faith.

8:14 *And when Jesus had entered Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother lying*- As if the Lord noticed the problem and took the initiative to assist, rather than being asked to- although Luke says they did ask Him. But they asked for what He already had noticed and knew all about. Mk. 1:31 states that "they [told] Him about her" and He responded. Surely the overall picture is that He did notice her need. But He waited to be asked before responding- not because He would not otherwise have responded, but because He wanted to pique the intensity of request and entreaty on their part. We sense the same spirit in how He appeared to be asleep on the sinking boat, and how He made as if He would go further on the way to Emmaus. And His apparent silence in our own lives is surely to provoke our prayerfulness and faith likewise.

Sick with a fever- The Greek literally means 'to be on fire'. This is yet another example of phenomenological language. A high temperature was thought to be a sign that something was on fire within a person; that wrong idea is repeated without correction, just as the language of demons is. The simple point being made, time and again, is that however folk understood disease, the power of the Lord Jesus was so infinitely greater that whatever was supposed to be causing the illness effectively didn't exist.

8:15 *And he touched her hand and*- One of the colossal 28 references in the Gospels to the Lord touching needy and neglected people, thereby showing His desire to connect with us in our humanity. We noted under 8:14 that the belief was that this woman's high temperature was because of our fire deep within her. By touching

her *hand*, an extremity, perhaps the Lord was showing that actually that belief was wrong. But as with the whole issue of belief in demons as a cause of unexplained illness, the Lord dealt with the issue by inference and implication rather than a direct statement that 'this is wrong'. He reserved such a style for the condemnation of spiritual intolerance and other moral issues.

The fever left her- Also the language of the day, because illness was understood as having to go somewhere when it was healed.

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

8:16 *And when evening had come, they brought to him many possessed with demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all that were sick*- The healing had been done on a Sabbath, and so they only carried their sick to the Lord after sunset. We see here the power of religious tradition and fear of religious leaders and infringement of their traditions. There would have been urgently sick people, who needed healing as soon as possible. The people believed the Lord could heal them; but their fear of infringing sabbath traditions was even greater. And we see the same in essence today.

8:17 *So that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying: He took our infirmities and bore our diseases*- "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases" is how Is. 53 described the cross; but these words are quoted in Mt. 8:16,17 about the Lord's healing of people. The miracles therefore were performed in the spirit of the cross- personally identifying with the sick and healing them through that identification.

8:18 *Now when Jesus saw*- An example of how the Lord was so human that He still acquired knowledge by the exercise of His senses. Knowledge was not just beamed into Him.

Great crowds- Why did the Lord dislike the crowds? It may be that He simply found it nervously and spiritually too exhausting for Him to be surrounded by so many wrongly motivated people. If so, what does that mean about our decision making in view of our human limitations? Or it could be that His focus was upon the training of the twelve and He didn't want to be distracted from that. Or perhaps He foresaw that if the crowds remained too long with Him, then they would begin a public revolt to enthrone Him as a King or at least some figurehead in protest against the Roman occupation. Hence His continual emphasis that His kingdom was about internal renewal, not external revolt. There may well have been a simple logistical issue- He could not normally address thousands of people and be heard by them all without speech reinforcement. The feeding miracles seem to have involved the use of a natural amphitheatre which enabled this. But thousands of people just tagging along, pressing closer to see or feel a miracle… often there would have been no chance to actually teach them anything, and most of the crowd would've only heard exaggerated and distorted versions of what was being said and done by Jesus. And there was also the very real

practical danger of a stampede and people being trampled to death; Lk. 12:1 speaks of how one such "innumerable multitude… trod one upon another".

About him, he gave commandment to depart to the other side- The Greek *peran* doesn't have to mean this; it can also simply mean to go further or beyond.

8:19 *And there came a scribe and said to him*- Not necessarily a religious one, although probably this is the reference. The same word is also translated "clerk". It was after Jesus had commanded the disciples to sail to the other side of the lake, that this scribe came to Him. By talking to this man, who likely was just asking the Lord trick questions and trying to catch Him out, the Lord delayed their departure; with the result that they nearly lost their lives in the storm that came (Mt. 8:18-23). The disciples must have many times during that storm reflected with bitter annoyance how the Lord has gotten them in to this problem all because He had been wasting time with that Scribe. But the Lord had such a hopefulness and a spirit of passionate concern for the salvation of the individual, however arrogant and conceited they seemed to be, that He would risk danger in order to spend time with such a person. I find this an amazing example, surrounded as we are by a majority of people who appear like that Scribe.

Teacher, I will follow you- A massive 76 times we read in the Gospels of people following Jesus. Following Him *wherever He goes* is the characteristic of the faithful (Rev. 14:4). The following of Jesus around Palestine therefore was presented in the Gospel records (and they are transcripts of the preaching of the Gospel) as the pattern for all who would later follow Him. His teaching in these verses, as so often, is that following Him is not about being part of a large crowd which broadly identifies with Jesus and hangs around Him, although often not hearing and taking seriously His words (see on 8:18). It is about real self-sacrifice, and a following Him to the cross. In this we see a rebuke of the cultural 'Christianity' which has historically been so much a part of the Western world. It's hard to follow Him; whereas joining the Christian denomination in which they were raised is for many people easier to do than not do. But really following Jesus is not so easy, and it leads to the death of the cross.

Wherever you go- He sensed the Lord was trying to distance Himself from the crowds (see on 8:18) by going on beyond them, or to the other side of the Lake. And this man said he was willing to do that, to be in the inner circle which the Lord visibly had around Him. For when surrounded by the crowds, He addressed Himself to the disciples (Lk. 12:1; and also in giving the Sermon on the Mount, Mt. 5:1 cp. 8:1). "Go" here translates the same Greek word as the Lord has just used in 8:18- He commanded the inner circle disciples to "depart", or "go". And this scribe wanted to be in that inner circle and to go with them. The Lord Jesus had a way of gently turning comments and questions back on the person who made them, and of redefining the terms used. The man said that he would follow Him "whithersoever you got", i.e. to whatever end point the road may lead to. The Lord replied that He had nowhere to lay His head. In other words, it's the following of Him that we need to focus on, rather than the hardness of some possible great future sacrifice that may lie ahead. It's the road, and not the destination, that are important (Mt. 8:19-21).

8:20 See on 6:26.

And Jesus said to him: The foxes have holes and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head- The only other time the Greek phrase is used in the record that on death, He 'bowed His head' (Jn. 19:30). His later warnings about what it meant to follow Him were to the effect that it meant carrying our cross with Him to the place of crucifixion. Perhaps there is a hint of that here. It may be that that night, the Lord literally had nowhere to sleep. But it was not the case for Him every

night. Yet He seems to be purposefully painting a demanding picture in order to make the point- that following Him was not a case of tagging along with the crowd, hearing garbled reports of His words from others and enthusiastically hoping for some personal benefit from being involved with Him. Jesus died because He gave out His Spirit, as an act of the will. He gave His life, it was not taken from Him by murder. The fact the Lord died not just because events overtook Him and happened to Him is perhaps reflected in Paul's speaking in Rom. 6 of "the death that he died… the life that he liveth". He died a death; he Himself died it; and yet just as truly, He lived a life. He didn't just let events happen to Him. He was not mastered in His life by human lusts and selfish desires; He was in that sense the only ultimately free person to have ever lived. When He "bowed his head", the same Greek is used as in Mt. 8:20: "The Son of man has no place to lay / bow his head". It was as if He only lay His head down, giving out His life, when He knew it was time to rest from a day's work well done. He lived a surpassingly free life, and freely gave that life up; it was not taken from Him. When the Lord spoke of how "the son of man has nowhere to lay his head" (Mt. 8:20), He was apparently alluding to a common proverb about how humanity generally ["son of man" as generalized humanity] is homeless in the cosmos. In this case, we see how the Lord took every opportunity to attest to the fact that what was true of humanity in general was true of Him. Perhaps this explains His fondness for describing Himself as "son of man", a term which can mean both humanity in general, and also specifically the Messiah predicted in Daniel.

8:21 *And another of the disciples said to him*- The scribe of 8:19 could therefore be classed as a 'disciple'. The term doesn't necessarily refer to the twelve, although there does seem a distinction between the 'multitudes' who followed and from the edge of that crowd heard a few garbled versions of the Lord's words and work (see on 8:18), and 'disciples', those who were willing to be learners from Him as from a rabbi.

Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father- This was perhaps said in response to the Lord's decision to move on beyond the crowds, or "to the other side" (see on 8:18). Like the scribe, this man wanted to be in some kind of inner circle. And he had shown some interest- it would seem that on the morning of his father's funeral, he had come to listen to Jesus. But he wanted the Lord to delay His departure until he had completed burying his father that afternoon. It seems that a third individual also wanted to follow the Lord further in response to the command He gave to the inner circle to "depart"; for Lk. 9:61 records another person wanting the Lord to just wait until he had run home to say goodbye to his family and explain his absence.

8:22 *But Jesus said to him: Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead*- All three people (see Lk. 9:61) wanted to follow Jesus. But the Lord's point is that unless they were going to pay the price until it hurt, then they were not following Him. They were just tagging along the huge crowds. There is a clear link between following Christ and carrying His cross. Mt. 10:38; Mk. 8:34; 10:21 make it apparent: "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me". But there are other less evident connections. The man following his father's coffin was told to break off and come follow Christ instead (Mt. 8:22)- as if following Him involved following Him unto the place of death. The faithful women who literally followed Him to the cross are described as *also* having followed Him in Galilee (Mk. 15:41), as if their following then and their literal following of Him to Golgotha were all part of the same walk.

8:23 *And when he had boarded a boat, his disciples followed him*- This is quite a compliment, given the definitions the Lord has been giving in :22 about the difficulty of following Him truly. Chapter 8 emphasizes this theme of following Jesus, the Greek

literally means to take the same road as (8:1,10,19,22). Verses 21 and 22 emphasize that this was not as easy as merely literally walking around Palestine with Him, externally following- but it involved the loss of all one holds dear in human life. And the road or way taken by the Lord ultimately led to the cross. A huge 76 times this word is used in the Gospels. The following of Jesus in all ways is the essence of Christianity- for the faithful are those who follow the Lamb *wherever* [and that surely is the emphasis] He goes (Rev. 14:4).

8:24 *And without warning, a furious storm*- The word is also translated "earthquake". The waves from the earthquake "covered" or 'hid' [s.w.] the ship. Given the intensity of the situation it seems unlikely the Lord was really "asleep". Here we have a picture of the apparent silence of God. He appeared to be asleep, He remained with eyes closed, lying there as the boat was hidden beneath the waves. But He did this surely to pique the intensity of faith and urgency of appeal in their prayer to Him for salvation. And the apparent silence of the Lord in our lives is ultimately to try to achieve the same effect.

Arose on the sea- Same Greek word occurs in 8:26 "there was / arose a great calm". Just as easily as God can raise up a crisis, He can raise up the resolution to it. The changes of tense in the Gospel records suggest an eye witness telling the story. Take the parallel Mk. 4:37: "And there arises a great storm of wind , and the waves beat into the boat, insomuch that the boat was now filling" (RV). But the rest of the account in the surrounding verses is in proper past tenses- e.g. "He arose, and rebuked the wind, and said..." (Mk. 4:39). The impression we have is of the author getting carried away with the memory of the event, and telling it as if it's happening. And this is especially fitting if in fact the Gospels were performed live rather than coldly memorized as prose.

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

8:25 *And they came to Him*- 'Coming to' can be understood in the sense of worship. His apparent silence led them to an intensity of prayerful approach to Him. See on :24.

And awoke him- Literally, to raise up. 'Asleep' in 8:24 can also mean simply to lay down to rest. It seemed He didn't want to do anything- until they imposed upon Him with all their energy and intensity of focus upon Him and Him alone as their Saviour. And the whole situation was raised up to that end.

Saying, Save us, Lord!- Peter used the same word when he urged the Lord in another storm "save *me*" (Mt. 14:30). We see how the Lord repeated the storm experience in the lives of the disciples, hoping they would learn the lesson of faith and focus upon Him, and repeating them so that they might be learnt. The two incidents are again

connected by the rebuke "Ye [plural] of little faith" (8:26) and then to Peter "You [singular] of little faith" (Mt. 14:31).

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

Mark records that they actually said: "Carest thou not that we perish?" (Mk. 4:38). His whole life and death were because He *did* so care that they would not perish (Jn. 3:16). It's so reminiscent of a child's total, if temporary, misunderstanding and lack of appreciation of the parent's love and self-sacrifice.

8:26 *And he said to them: Why are you fearful?*- Fear and unbelief are again connected in Rev. 21:8. The unbelief refers ultimately to disbelief in our salvation, fear of condemnation; see on 8:25 'We perish'.

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

It seems to me that all the Lord's servants are taught by increments, progressively, being

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

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

Mark records that the Lord commanded the waves "Peace, be still". His authoritative "Peace, be still" (Mk. 4:39) was probably primarily addressed to the Angels controlling the natural elements. The reference to Angels 'ministering' to Him after the temptations suggests their inferiority. Thus He could summon twelve legions of Angels at the time of His greatest passion- maybe He remembered this incident and it was a temptation to Him to use this power over Angels at the crucifixion.

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

ministry, He brought that calmness about; for in principle, His sacrifice was ongoing throughout His life. His blood is a symbol both of His cross and of the life He lived.

8:27 *And the men*- An unusual term for the disciples. But it's understandable- they were awed by the power and majesty of the Father and Son, and therefore keenly felt their humanity.

Marvelled, saying- A word so often used about the response of people to miracles. The Lord had marvelled at another's faith in 8:10, and now men marvel at His faith. A very positive mutuality is suggested here between the Lord and His followers.

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

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

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

8:28 *And when he had arrived on the other side*- The Gospel records often paint a broad scene and then zoom in upon the person of Jesus. Mark does this by using a plural

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

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

There met him two possessed with demons- Mark and Luke focus upon just one of them, Legion. Luke says that Peter went to the Lord's tomb after the resurrection, yet several other disciples also went there ("some of our number"). Luke chose to focus upon only Peter; and here too, he chooses to focus upon only one of the two demoniacs.

Coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could go that way- See on 8:34.

For a detailed study on this incident, see my discussion of it in *The Real Devil*. See too commentary on Mark 5 and Luke 8.

8:29 *And they cried out, saying: What have we to do with you, you Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?*- The language of judgment at the last day, "the time" (Rev. 14:10; 20:10). See on :30 *a good way off* and on :31 *cast us out*. Legion believed he was demon possessed. But the Lord didn't correct him regarding this before healing him; indeed, one assumes the man probably had some faith for the miracle to be performed (Mt. 13:58). Lk. 8:29 says that Legion "was driven of the devil into the wilderness", in the same way as the Lord had been driven into the wilderness *by the spirit* (Mk. 1:12) and yet overcame the 'devil' in whatever form at this time. The man was surely intended to reflect on these more subtle things and see that whatever he had once believed in was immaterial and irrelevant compared to the Spirit power of the Lord. And yet the Lord 'went along' with his request for the demons he thought were within him to be cast into 'the deep', thoroughly rooted as it was in misunderstanding of demons and sinners being thrown into the abyss. This was in keeping with the kind of healing styles people were used to at the time – e.g. Josephus records how Eleazar cast demons out of people and placed a cup of water nearby, which was then [supposedly] tipped over by the demons as they left the sick person [*Antiquities of the Jews* 8.46–48]. It seems to me that the Lord 'went along with' that kind of need for reassurance, and so He made the pigs stampede over the cliff to symbolize to the healed man how his disease had really left him.

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

"Torment *me* not" (Mk.5:7) = “Are you come to torment *us*?” (Mt. 8:29). “*He* [singular] besought him” (Mk. 5:9) = "*the demons* besought him" (Mk. 5:12) The man's own words explain his self-perception: "*My* name [singular] is Legion: for *we* are many (Mk. 5:9)". This is classic schizophrenic behaviour and language. Thus Lk. 8:30 explains that Legion spoke as he did because [he thought that] many demons had entered into him.

8:30 *Now there was afar off from them a herd of many pigs feeding*- The term is used about those 'far off' from Christ, the unsaved (Lk. 15:20; Acts 2:39; 22:21; Eph. 2:13,17). The men saw themselves as far from Christ, with nothing in common between them and Him (:29). His response was to say that OK, let's get the condemnation over and done with- and you yourselves shall be saved. This is very much the kind of teaching which John's Gospel records as being specifically on the Lord's lips. See on :31.

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

Suffer us- AV and some manuscripts. They recognized Jesus as not only Son of God but also their Lord, in total control of their final destiny.

Send us away into the herd of pigs- The same word is used about the rejected at the final judgment 'going away' into condemnation (Mt. 25:46).

Why did the pigs run over the cliff, and why did the Lord Jesus agree to the man's request for this?

Because mental illness features intermittent episodes, it's understandable that the Lord sought to comfort those cured that the change He had brought was permanent. Thus the Lord tells the 'spirit' assumed to be tormenting the mentally afflicted child: "I command you, come out of him, *and enter no more* into him" (Mk. 9:25). It's in the same vein that He drove the pigs into the lake as a sign that Legion's cure was permanent. I suggest that it was a kind of visual *aide memoire*, of the kind often used in the Bible to impress a point upon illiterate people. I suggest that's why in the ritual of the Day of Atonement, the scapegoat ran off into the wilderness bearing Israel's sins. As the bobbing animal was watched by thousands of eyes, thousands of minds would've reflected that their sins were being cast out. And the same principle was in the curing

of the schizophrenic Legion- the pigs were made to run into the lake by the Lord Jesus, not because they were actually possessed by demons in reality, but as an *aide memoire* to the cured Legion that his illness, all his perceived personalities, were now no more. Mental illness is typically intermittent. Legion had met Jesus, for he recognized Him afar off, and knew that He was God's Son (Mk. 5:6); indeed, one assumes the man probably had some faith for the miracle to be performed (Mt. 13:58). He comes to meet Jesus "from out of the city" (Lk. 8:27) and yet Mt. 8:28 speaks of him living in the tombs outside the city. He pleads with the Lord not to torment him (Mk. 5:7)- full of memories of how the local folk had tied him up and beaten him to try to exorcise the demons. Probably Legion's greatest fear was that he would relapse into madness again; that the cure which he believed Jesus could offer him might not be permanent. And so the Lord agreed to the man's request that the demons he perceived as within him should be permanently cast out; and the sight of the herd of pigs running over the cliff to permanent death below, with the awful sound this would've made, would have remained an abiding memory for the man. Note how the 'demon possessed' man in Mk. 1:23 sits in the synagogue and then suddenly screams out (Mk. 1:23)- showing he was likewise afflicted by intermittent fits.

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

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

The desire to see the disease return to the herds of swine probably stemmed from a need to know that his affliction had been cured in a rather permanent sort of way. And the Lord went along with this. The idea of transference of disease from one to another was a common Semitic perception, and it's an idea used by God. And thus God went along with the peoples' idea of disease transference, and the result is recorded in terms of demons [which was how they understood illness] going from one person to another. Likewise the leprosy of Naaman clave to Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27). God threatened to make the diseases of the inhabitants of Canaan and Egypt to cleave to Israel if they were disobedient (Dt. 28:21,60). Here too, as with Legion, there is Divine accommodation to the ideas of disease transference which people had at the time.

8:32 *And he said to them: Go. And they came out and went into the pigs, and the whole*

herd rushed down the hill into the sea and perished in the waters- Death in the sea was seen as condemnation; the same figure is used of Babylon's final condemnation.

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

8:33 *And they that fed them fled, and went away into the city and told everything, including what had happened to them that had been possessed with demons*- See on :34 *besought*.

8:34 *And all in the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him they begged him*- "Begged" is the very same word used about the demons / mentally ill men 'beseeching' Jesus in :31. As the mentally ill men besought Jesus to send away the demons, so the city dwellers besought Jesus to also 'go away'. As the keepers of the pigs "went their way" (:33), so the same word is used of the demons 'going away' into the pigs (:31,32). As the city dwellers 'came out' to meet Jesus, so the mentally ill men 'came out' of the tombs to meet Jesus (8:28) and the demons 'came out' of them (8:32). Perhaps the idea is that those unbelievers were spiritually in the same position as the despised mentally ill men whom they had excluded from their society. And the story ends with the mentally ill saved, and the townspeople asking Jesus to depart from them, which will be the exact position of the rejected at the last day (Mt. 25:41; Lk. 13:27). It is they who are condemned, by their own wish; the mentally ill men asked for the pigs to bear their condemnation, which they felt worthy of- and thus were saved. The parallel record in Mark 5 records three prayers to Jesus: "the devils besought him", and "Jesus gave them leave" (vv. 12,13); the Gadarenes "began to pray him to depart out of their coasts" (v. 17); and He obliged. And yet when the cured, earnestly zealous man "prayed him that he might be with him... Jesus suffered him not" (vv. 18,19). After the fascination, physically and intellectually, had worn off, very few of the crowds continued their interest. The Lord scarcely converted more than 100 people in the course of His ministry. We are familiar, from our own experience of sin and failure,

with the pure grace of the Lord Jesus. We see that largeness and generosity of spirit within Him, that manifestation of the God of love, that willingness to concede to our weakness; and therefore we can tend to overlook the fact that the Lord Jesus set uncompromisingly high standards. I would even use the word "demanding" about His attitude.

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

Mark records further: “And as he was entering into the boat, he that had been possessed with demons pleaded with him that he might go with him. But Jesus did not permit him. Instead he said to him: Go to your home, to your family, and tell them how great things the Lord has done for you and how he had mercy on you. And he went his way and began to publish in Decapolis the great things Jesus had done for him, and all men marvelled” (Mk. 5:18-20). This preaching in Decapolis rather than to his family could be read as disobedience. The Gospels are transcripts of the twelve disciples’ own preaching and obedience to the Lord’s commission for them to go into all the world and tell the news of what they had seen and heard of Him. Yet there is a theme in the Gospels, consciously included by the writers and speakers, of men being disobedient to the preaching commission which the Lord gave them. When some were told to say nothing, they went and told many others (Mk. 7:36). And as Acts makes clear, the disciples themselves were disobedient, initially, to the commission to go tell the Gentiles the good news of their salvation. Legion’s disobedience is especially instructive for us:

Mk. 5:19	**Mk. 5:20**
Go to thy *house*	He goes to the *ten cities* [Decapolis]
unto thy *friends*	He goes to *strangers*
tell them [Lk. 8:39 “*show* them”- by personal demonstration to individuals]	He “*publishes*”
how great things	how great things
the *Lord [i.e. God]* hath done for thee	*Jesus* had done for him
and how he had mercy on thee.	[ignored]

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

Mary's praise that "He hath done to me great things" is surely behind her Son's words in Lk. 8:39, where He bids Legion go home" and shew how great things God hath done unto thee". Her eternal influence on her Son is a huge encouragement to all mothers. For the language of the risen Lord in Revelation has discernible links with language she used to Him in His infancy.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 9

9:1 *And he entered into a boat and crossed over*- The Gospels record the Lord entering into a boat around 15 times. The visual image of Him entering the boat remained deeply with the Gospel writers. It's an incidental proof of the veracity of their records as eyewitness accounts. There must've been something about His body language as He climbed over the boat's side which lodged deeply within them. Perhaps because it is awkward for a man to climb over a boat's side, especially for one who had not grown up as a fisherman, messing with boats from childhood. Perhaps that proof of His utter humanity remained with them all, and is artlessly reflected in their later write-up of their time with Him.

And came into his own city- Another essay in the Lord's humanity. The same term is used about Joseph going to be taxed in "his own city" (Lk. 2:3).

9:2 *Behold*- AV and some manuscripts. Another encouragement for us to play 'Bible television' with the record, inviting us to 'Look' at Him, imagining the Lord in a particular situation which is being described.

They brought to Him- The term is also used of bringing a sacrifice to God, but in this case of the lame.

A paralysed man, lying on a bed- The Greek *ballo* suggests they had thrown him onto the bed / stretcher in their haste to bring him to Jesus. "Bed" is Gk. a table or a couch. They had grabbed whatever could serve as a stretcher.

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

Son, be of good courage- The same term is used later in the chapter, when the sick woman is told that because of *her* faith, she can be of good comfort because the Lord will heal her (9:22). Note too that the woman "said within herself" (Mt. 9:21), using the same phrase as used about the scribes talking 'within themselves' (9:3). The parallel in the situations is surely to underline the lesson- that the faith of *others* can be as effective as the faith of an individual in leading to healing and forgiveness.

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

9:3 *Behold*- AV and some MSS. We are invited to imagine the faces of those men, and likewise perceive as Jesus did what they were thinking within.

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

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

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

9:4 *And Jesus knowing their thoughts*- Matthew says the same about the Lord in Mt. 12:25. Time and again, the Gospels record how He “perceived” things about people. Admittedly this could have been because He simply had a Holy Spirit gift to enable this. But I prefer to think that His sensitivity, His perception, aided by His extraordinary intellectual ability as the Son of God [for intelligence and perception / sensitivity are related]… these things developed within Him over the years so that He could sense the essential needs and feelings of others to an unsurpassed extent. “Jesus, seeing their thoughts…” (Mt. 9:4 RVmg.) shows how He came to perceive the hearts of others from His observation of them. This was the same Jesus who could be ridiculed into scorn / shame / embarrassment (Mt. 9:24), such was His sensitivity to others. This incident helps us to understand the ability of the mind / spirit of the Lord Jesus to connect with that of human beings. Mk. 2:8 puts it like this: "Now immediately, when Jesus realized in his spirit that they were contemplating such thoughts, he said to them, "Why are you thinking such things in your hearts?" (NET Bible). The spirit / mind of Jesus was at one with the spirit / mind of those men. Such was His sensitivity. I don't think it was a gift

of Holy Spirit knowledge so much as His sensitivity to the minds of men... and yet Rom. 8:16 calls Jesus "The Spirit" as a title, saying that He bears witness with our spirit / mind, in His intercession to the Father. So this incident in the Gospels gives us as it were an insight into how He *now* operates too... He's the same today as yesterday. He's at one with our mind / spirit, and also with the mind / Spirit of the Father. Thus is He such a matchless mediator. The way the Lord Jesus 'knew' things because of His extreme sensitivity, rather than necessarily by some flash of Holy Spirit insight, isn't unparalleled amongst other men. Elisha knew what Gehazi had done when Gehazi went back to ask Naaman for a reward- Elisha commented: "Went not my heart with you, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet you?" (2 Kings 5:26). Elisha imagined Naaman dismounting from his chariot, etc. And he could guess that the request had involved "money... garments" etc. That the Lord's knowledge wasn't necessarily automatic is reflected in the way we read things like "When he saw their faith... when Jesus heard it..." (Mk. 2:5,17). He 'saw' and knew things by the sensitivity of His perception.

Said: Why do you think evil in your hearts?- The Gk. means 'to ponder', to dwell upon- which is how the word is translated in its two other occurrences in the New Testament (Mt. 1:20; Acts 10:19). The human heart is a fountain of evil thoughts, but the sin is to dwell upon them as the Jews were doing. We note again how the root cause of the Jewish plot to murder the Son of God is located as attitudes within their hearts which grew into the final sin of the crucifixion.

What evil did the Lord have in mind? The use of *poneros* here rather than any word carrying the idea of sin would suggest the Lord had a particular evil act in mind; and surely, He could foresee the evil of the crucifixion. He perceived that this was beginning as a jealous thought brooded upon within their minds. The Lord may have had the same idea in mind when He taught that the Jews would bring forth evil things from their evil hearts (Mt. 12:34,35). The 'evil things' may have been an intensive plural for the greatest evil- the crucifixion. A review of the passages listed in the commentary on 9:3 will reveal that He perceived it was the state of their mind which would lead them to kill Him; there is therefore a great appropriacy in the language of 'satan' being used about both the Jewish opposition, and the mind of the flesh.

9:5 *For which is easier to say*- Gk. 'less work'. The Lord meant 'Which is easier *for Me*'. There were plenty of claims to heal people; but to forgive sins was of a different order altogether. But the Lord is saying that for Him, they are one and the same; and that His healing was performed in this case on the basis of having forgiven the man his sin. Not only could He forgive sin, but in this case He could remove the consequence of it. For the Lord healed the man *so that* they would realize that He had power to forgive sins (:6).

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

The disciples observed as Jesus made a lame man *arise*, take up his bed, and follow Him (Lk. 5:25). But in Acts 9:34, we find Peter doing just the same to Aeneas, even

taking him by the hand as he had seen Jesus do to Jairus' daughter. What Peter had seen and learnt of the Lord Jesus, he was now called to do. Not for nothing did he tell Aeneas that "Jesus Christ maketh thee whole", thereby recognizing the connection between him and his Lord.

9:6 *But so you may know*- The reason for the healing miracle was to teach that He could forgive sins. This is why I suggest that in this man's case, his paralysis was a direct and publically known result of his sin. Perhaps he had been alcoholic, or become paralyzed in an accident whilst stealing something. In this case his friends are to be commended for so wanting his healing, because many would have shrugged him off as someone who was suffering justly. The link between his illness and his sin was so clear that to heal him was seen as effectively forgiving him *and* removing the consequence of his sin. David, Moses and others often asked for the consequences of sin to be removed and at times received this. The palsied man was healed by the Lord in order to *teach others* that Jesus had the power to forgive sins. Job was a "perfect" man before the afflictions started; and he is presented as a 'perfect' man at the end. The purpose of his trials was not only to develop him, but also in order to teach the friends [and we readers] some lessons. The purpose of our trials too may not only be for our benefit, but for that of others. If we suffer anything, it is so that we might help others (2 Cor. 1:4). He didn't *only* reward the faith of the man's friends; His motive for the miracle was to seek to teach those Scribes. Our tendency surely would have been to ignore them, to be angry that in the face of grace they could be so legalistic and petty and so far, far from God... and get on and heal the sick man who believed. But the Lord's picture of human salvation was far wider and more inclusive and more hopeful than that.

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

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

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

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

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

9:7 *And he arose and departed to his house*- Emphasizing his exact and studied obedience to the Lord's command to Him in :6.

9:8 *But when the crowds saw it*- A word used about 150 times in the Gospel records. The crowds were a major feature of the Lord's ministry, and they must have been a great trial to Him. We sense Him seeking to avoid them, to stop them gathering, and yet being so compassionate towards them, despite their often superficial grasp of His works and message. It makes an interesting exercise to consider whether on balance the Gospel writers take a positive view of the crowds or not. John seems to be more negative about them, whereas Matthew seems to emphasize their wonder, naivety, weak understanding and fickleness. But all the Gospels seem to present a clear pyramid structure beginning with Jesus, then an inner circle of disciples, then the twelve, then the crowds, and then the unbelieving, aggressive Jewish leadership. There are certainly similarities with Moses on Sinai and in his relationship with Israel, but they cannot be pushed too precisely. The crowd here in Mt. 9:8 is contrasted favourably with the Scribes- the opening "But..." suggests that they marvelled at the Lord's authority, whereas some of the Scribes became bitterly jealous.

They were afraid and glorified God, who had given such authority to men- See on 9:6 *Son of Man*. There may be significance in the plural *men* rather than *a man*. They marvelled that one of them could have such power to forgive and remove the consequences of sin. It is all an essay in the Lord's evident humanity.

9:9- see on 4:16.

And as Jesus left there he saw a man- Towards Matthew, the author of the account. Such close up detail makes sense if this is indeed an eyewitness account. It's almost as if Matthew had a video camera on his desk and captures the Lord walking towards him after healing the paralyzed man.

Called Matthew- Matthew’s preaching of the Gospel makes reference to himself as if he had no personal awareness of himself as he recounted his part in the Gospel events. Whilst personal testimony has a role, the Gospel is about Jesus and therefore "we preach not ourselves" but Christ as Lord and Saviour. If the focus is upon us rather than Him, then we are failing dismally. The humility of the Gospel writers when they refer to themselves is highly instructive. There is reason to believe that Matthew was himself a converted Scribe, who had perhaps turned away from it to being a tax collector; the way he has access to various versions of Scripture and quotes them as having been fulfilled in a way reminiscent of the Jewish commentaries (compare Mt. 4:12-17 with Mk. 1:14,15) suggests this. Matthew's other name was Levi (see Mark and Luke's record), strengthening the possibility he was once a Levitical scribe; for the scribes were drawn from the priests and Levites. The point is that in this case Matthew would be referring to himself when he writes: “Every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old” (Mt.

13:52). Yet he does so in a beautifully oblique and selfless manner. The Scribes have just been mentioned in the previous incident, which apparently took place within sight of Matthew's desk (9:3).

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

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

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

And he arose and followed him- Exactly as he had just observed the paralyzed man obediently arise and go where the Lord told him (9:6- another example of Matthew highlighting immediate response to the Lord's call). It's as if Matthew saw himself in that paralyzed man. As the man was laying on the 'bed', so Matthew was sitting 'on' the receipt of custom, the elevated chair and desk (*epi*, translated "at", is better translated in this context "on"). The Lord spoke with "authority" in the eyes of the people- so that a man arose and followed Him. What gave Him this? Surely it was His lifestyle, who He was, the way there was no gap between His words and who He was. The word of the Gospel, the message, was made flesh in Him. There was a perfect congruence between His theory and His practice. The repeated amazement which people expressed at the Lord's teaching may not only refer to the actual content of His material; but more at the way in which He expressed it, the unique way in which word was made flesh in Him. The way the Lord could ask men to follow Him, and they arose and followed is surely testimony to the absolute, direct and unaccountable authority of Jesus. It was surely His very ordinariness which made Him so compelling.

9:10 *And it came to pass, as he sat eating in the house*- Matthew's record is purposefully ambiguous. Whose house? His own house, where He was living? For Capernaum is called "his own city" at that time (9:1). Or the house to which the healed paralytic had returned (9:6)? Or Matthew's house? However, the other Gospels say that the house was Matthews, and the presence of other publicans supports that. We note Matthew's humility in his recounting of the Gospel, that he leaves the identity of the

house vague. He had no desire to boast that he had once hosted Jesus within his private home. Humility and self-abnegation must really be the lead characteristics of all tellers of the Gospel.

Many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples- Clearly the associates of Matthew. They came and sat down with Jesus whilst He was eating. And He accepted them. Note the Lord's open table. Lk. 5:30 RVmg. describes how publicans and sinners had Pharisees and Scribes among them as they all sat at the same table gathered around Jesus. There was something in His person and teaching which welded people together.

9:11 *And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to his disciples: Why does your Teacher eat with the tax collectors and sinners?*- To break your bread with someone, to eat together, was a religious act in Palestinian Jewish society. The Lord broke His bread with sinners in order to bring them to repentance; not because He considered they had cleared some kind of bar of moral and doctrinal acceptability. His table was open, radically so, and so should ours be.

9:12 *But when he heard it, he said*- Did He overhear? Or simply perceive, as in 9:4?

They that are sick need a doctor- Literally, a healer. The same word is used of how "by his stripes you were healed" (1 Pet. 2:24). All who will finally be saved have been healed by Jesus. Therefore "they that be whole" must be understood as meaning 'those who *think they are* whole'. The Lord's healing work was done by fellowshipping with those who realized their need for healing. He broke His bread with them first; He didn't heal them and then invite only the healed to His exclusive table. This breaking of bread with them was a 'calling to repentance' (9:13). The many records of the Lord's physical healing were all intended to be acted parables of His healing of spiritual sickness

Not they that are healthy- The Greek word is usually translated with the sense of 'being able'. The Lord's work was with them who felt *unable* to be righteous, who felt that circumstance and past history had left them spiritually incapacitated.

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

9:13 *Go*- The Lord was telling them to literally get out of the house, and do some Bible study. Of course, the Pharisees spent their time doing this. The Lord's point was that if they really meditated upon the implications of God's love of grace over sacrifice, then they would understand that it is therefore actually necessary to eat with sinners to call them to repentance.

And learn- The Pharisees saw themselves as only teachers, not pupils. The Lord had diagnosed this problem, for He told them as a teacher would tell a pupil: “Go ye and learn what that means...”. He sent them away to do some homework. And there is a warning for speaking brethren here; the repeated experience of teaching can take away from the eternal sense of student-ship which the true believer will ever feel.

What this means- Literally, 'what is'. The same two Greek words have just been on the Lord's lips to the Scribes- "*What is* easier..." (9:5). Capernaum was a small place, and probably the incidents recorded in Matthew 9 featured the same group of opponents.

I desire mercy and not sacrifice- This was some kind of proof text for the Lord, for He says exactly the same words in Mt. 12:7: "If you had known what this means, I will have mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless". The context of Hos. 6:6 (from where the Lord was quoting) was of God appealing to a deeply apostate Israel through the situation of Hosea and Gomer. He appeals for her to show *chesed*, covenant love ("mercy"), and not just give the external appearances of a marriage relationship (cp. offering sacrifices). Here in the Capernaum incident, the Lord is saying that He fellowships with sinners because God loves the display of grace rather than technical obedience. If God wishes *chesed*, covenant love, from us, then how do we show it? By fellowshipping with sinners and thereby calling them to repentance. The love which God wishes us to show to Him is channelled in practice through calling others to repentance. For that is the greatest display of love for Him. And if that principle is followed, then we will be lead through the practice of such grace to never condemn the guiltless (this is how the Lord uses Hos. 6:6 in Mt. 12:7).

I came not to call- It was the disciples, including Matthew, who had only recently been 'called' (Mt. 4:21). Matthew again is showing that he considered himself a sinner, one of the sick who needed a doctor.

The righteous- Those who *thought they were* righteous.

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

9:14 *Then the disciples of John came to him, saying*- Was this also in Capernaum? If so, we note that John's influence had spread as far north as Galilee. In any case, the impression is given of wave after wave of questioning, activity, controversy. It would've all been so mentally draining of the Lord's spirituality and emotions.

Why do we and the Pharisees often fast- The Greek for 'often' can just as well mean 'largely', i.e. they abstained from food for long periods.

But your disciples do not fast?- Implying they didn't even do so at the Day of Atonement, the one Biblical command for fasting? The Lord's disciples were mostly secular men whom He was trying to turn into spiritual people. And this continues to be the thrust of His work with people. The focus of our preaching should likewise be on getting unspiritual, secular people to believe, rather than focusing on trying to persuade

those who already believe in Him to change their understandings of some points. I don't say we shouldn't do this, but far more will be achieved to His glory by bringing unbelievers to faith, rather than correcting misbelievers. Another reason why John's disciples thought the Lord's men didn't fast could have been because they took seriously His command to not appear to others to fast. And John's disciples proclaiming their fasting meant they were overlooking the Lord's clear teaching *not* to do this in the Sermon on the Mount. But in His gracious way, the Lord didn't point out the obvious *faux pas* in their reasoning. He could've said 'John told you to obey Me. I teach not to proclaim your own fasting. Why aren't you obedient to My teaching?'. But instead He reasoned with them on their own ground. And again, we see a pattern for our engagement with others- not to always baldly confront misunderstanding and reduce it to a right / wrong, black and white issue, but to lead the person further by accepting for a moment that their faulty assumptions are true; for they are true to the person who holds them, and the Lord recognized that.

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

9:15 *And Jesus said to them: Can the sons of the bride chamber*- John had likened himself to the Lord's best man at a forthcoming wedding. The Lord phrases his reply to John's disciples in terms they would've understood- a pattern for us to follow in our response to people. Note too that the Lord's answer implied that His wedding was about to happen. He hoped against hope that Israel would respond, and the Messianic banquet would be soon. But in His later parables, He spoke of how even the guests couldn't be bothered to attend it; it was delayed until human response was suitable. But His hopefulness for human response is again a pattern for us, to have a hopeful attitude in our witness.

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

But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be- Not necessarily plural- s.w. "the day" (Mt. 6:34; 10:15), "that day" (Mt. 7:22)

Taken away from them, and then they will fast- The Gk. *apairo* is a form of the Greek *pairo* which has just been used in 9:6 ("*take up* your bed") and which is now used in the next verse about the new cloth 'taking from' the old garment (9:16). What exactly the connection of thought might be is hard to say. But clearly the 'taking of Jesus from' the disciples was to be at the same time as when the new wine and new cloth were available, which would 'take from' the old cloth in destroying it. This time was surely the death of the Lord Jesus, at which the new wine of His blood confirmed the new covenant and thus ended the old. It was then of course that the disciples mourned (s.w. Mk. 16:10 "they *mourned* and wept"); and the same Greek word for 'taken from' occurs in Jn. 19:15 where the Jews cry "Away with Him!"- to the cross; in Jn. 19:31,38 where the body of Jesus is 'taken from' the cross and in Acts 8:33 "His life is *taken from* the earth". Significantly, Col. 2:14 uses the word to describe how on the cross, Christ 'took away' the old covenant. This is the idea of its usage in Mt. 9:16, that the new wine and new garment would 'take from / away' the old. And it was achieved by the 'taking away' of Jesus at the cross. Through the grace of Jesus, He is in love with us; He has called us to be His bride. He sees us in an extremely positive light. He counts us as righteous to a degree that is a real struggle to believe- even during His ministry, "when we were yet sinners", and when the only example He had of His bride were those faltering 12. He tells the Jews that His people will fast and mourn for His absence after His departure, with the intensity that the friends of the bridegroom would have if the groom suddenly collapsed and died at the wedding (this seems to be the picture of Mt. 9:15, seeing "taken away" as an idiom for sudden death). This is surely a positive view of the sorrow of the body of Christ for their Lord's absence. Even if we see in this mini-parable only a description of the disciples' sorrow after the Lord's death, He is giving a very positive description of the disciples' joy, saying that they didn't fast for joy of being with Him; He describes their joy as the joy of the friends of the groom at the wedding. Yet the Gospels paint the twelve as a struggling, uncertain group of men, eaten up with the petty arguments of this life, unused to the self-control of fasting. Peter, for example, had until very recently been a possibly immoral young fisherman (1 Pet. 4:3). The happiness of the disciples is explained in terms of them being at a wedding. The happiness of the wedding is normally associated with alcohol, and the context of Mt. 9:15 goes on to explain that Christ's new covenant is symbolised by new wine. The difference between John's disciples and Christ's was that Christ's were full of the joy of the new covenant. But there is ample reason to think that they were heavily influenced by Judaist thinking; they didn't go and preach to the Gentile world as Christ commanded, and even Peter was marvellously slow to realize the Jewish food laws had been ended by Christ, despite the Lord's strong implication of this in Mk. 7:19 (not AV). Yet the grace of Jesus saw His men *as if* they had grasped the meaning of the new covenant, *as if* they had the joy of true faith in and understanding of His work; and He spoke of them to the world in these terms. We can take untold comfort from this; for we dare to believe that the Lord does and will confess our name (character) in a like exalted manner to the Father and His Angels.

There seems to be the idea that fasting was somehow part of the Mosaic system that we have now left behind. Yet the Sermon on the Mount clearly implies that the Lord saw fasting as part of the path of discipleship (Mt. 6:16-18). And there are many examples of fasting in the Old Testament that are quite unconnected with obedience to

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

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

9:16 *No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth*- The stress may be on "a *piece*". Taking parts of Christ's teachings was the temptation being given in to by John's disciples (9:14 and see note there on *fast not*). The torn old garment had to be thrown away and the new one totally accepted and publically worn. The Greek for "new" is not the same as in "new wine" in :17. Here the word means not dressed, not worked by a dressmaker. The only other time the related word occurs is in Mk. 9:3 concerning the clothes of Jesus not having been worked by a dressmaker (AV "fuller"). The Lord Jesus presents Himself here as raw, fresh, unworked to suite the appearance of men.

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

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

clothed with the white garment of Christ's imputed righteousness (Rev. 19:8; Mt. 22:11); by dividing with each other we are seeking to rend and thereby destroy that covering. "New" translates a different Greek word than that which in the parallel Mt. 9:16 and Mk. 2:21 is translated "new". The word there means something which has not been carded. "*Agnaphos* is a combination of the negative article *a*, with *knapto*, meaning, "to card". It is sometimes translated undressed, uncombed or, as above, unfinished, and refers to wool or cotton cloth that has not been carded or combed so that the fibers are aligned, giving it both strength and a smoother, more finished appearance". This suggests that the New Covenant is an unfinished work, God's work in us is ongoing and may take apparently unstable turns and changes- e.g. prophecy is often conditional, the intended timing of Christ's return has and may yet still change, dependent upon factors like the freewill repentance of Israel; God may plan one line of possibility for someone or a whole nation, e.g. Nineveh or Israel at the time of Moses- but change His stated intention in response to human prayer and repentance. This open-ended approach simply can't be squared with the "old" set-in-stone approach of the Old Covenant. The same message is taught by the next parable- *new* wineskins are required, because the New Covenant wine is fermenting, they need to be soft and flexible enough to change; if they are old and set, they will burst because of the movement and dynamism of the new wine. The wine of the Lord Jesus is therefore not about tradition, about a set pattern; but is rather a call to constant change and evolution. Yet paradoxically, religious people become set in their ways more than any, and seek stability in those traditions; whereas the activity of the Lord Jesus is the very opposite.

Onto an old garment- The same phrase is used to describe the Mosaic system in Heb. 1:11.

For the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made- AV and some MSS: *That which is put in to fill it*- This translates one Greek word, *pleroma*, which is elsewhere simply translated 'to fulfil' and refers to the fulfilment of the Law in Christ and "the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

Takes from- Gk. to separate, divide. The encounter with Christ means that ultimately there can be no brinkmanship in remaining partly with the old way, be it the Mosaic way or the way of secular modern life, and partly in the Lord's way. There will only be a painful and messy division in the end.

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

Is made worse- The word and its NT usage has a moral sense. The division is made more evil. In the context, the Lord was addressing John's disciples who had come under the influence of the Pharisees (9:14). He is saying that they must fully commit to Him, or else the schism between them and the Jews and them and Himself will only become worse and more destructive. There could be no middle way between Christ and orthodox Judaism; the early church tried it, as the NT letters demonstrate, but in the end, it came to a sad and bitter end, and the permanent division of the garment. And this is how all schisms go- unless there is a wholehearted acceptance of Jesus and His

teachings, the end finally will be a bitter, destructive rending. The pre-existing, initial schism between persons (cp. that between John's disciples and Christ) will only be made worse unless there is a total surrender to the Lord's ways. In all the unhappy church history which most of us have experienced, that is proved true time and again. Likewise there are those who seek to hide their faith in societies and social situations where it is costly to go Christ's way; but ultimately, they have to choose one way or the other. The rent is made worse. A city set on a hill cannot be hid by its nature.

9:17 *Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins*- A clear reference to Christ's blood of the new covenant.

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

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

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

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

And both are preserved- The loss is not only to the untransformed person. There is also a loss and damage to the new wine, the Lord Jesus. He is not undamaged by the loss of any of His people. Their failure is His re-crucifixion, the pouring out again of His blood, but in vain. All this signals the danger of not being totally transformed after having received the Truth. Interestingly, a form of the Greek *suntereo* ["preserved"] is used in Jn. 2:10, where it is noted that the Lord Jesus *kept* [Gk. *tereo*] the best wine. *Tereo* is frequently on the lips of the Lord in John's Gospel (and is widely used by John in his letters), in the context of 'keeping' His word. But this is done by totally surrendering

human life to be a vessel totally devoted to the new wine we have received, rather than steel willed, nail-biting, white-knuckled struggle for obedience to specific laws.

Luke's record adds that the Lord concluded by observing that "No man also having drunk old wine immediately desires new: for he says [deep within himself], The old is better" (Lk. 5:39). This appears to be a concession to the weakness of John's disciples, and to our weakness. Having taught that unless we are transformed, we shall shatter and be destroyed / condemned, the Lord accepts the basic conservatism of human nature- that we will not make the change immediately. There was indeed a changeover period between the Lord's death and the destruction of the temple in AD70. And in human lives today, the Lord recognizes that the total change of life will not come immediately- because we are essentially conservative. In seeking to make the total transformation, we ourselves must realize that however progressive, liberal, flexible, open to new ideas we think we are- when it comes to spiritual change, we are terribly conservative. And it is such unbridled conservatism which stops people changing and accepting the new wine. There is the assumption in many Christian groups and minds that conservative = righteous, and change is likely to be for the worst. And yet the Lord is teaching that it is our native conservatism which stops the vital, transforming change which is necessary to avoid the shattering of life and personality now, and final destruction at judgment day. The Lord here recognizes the basic conservatism of human nature; even those who consider themselves "liberal" are often only so in comparison to others, in relative terms- we are all in fact basically conservative. We stick with what we know and don't easily go outside our comfort zone of the old and familiar. We all find change hard; new wineskins are able to be stretched. He was perhaps, in the context, making some apology for John's disciples, who still couldn't fully allow themselves to be filled with the new covenant wine. The Gospel of Jesus is all about change and being stretched; and He recognizes that we find this so very difficult. People do not immediately / quickly respond to the new wine of the new covenant because, the Lord piercingly observed, they think the old was better (Lk. 5:39). He perceived, with His amazing penetration of the human psyche, that there is a conservatism deep within us all that militates against the immediate response to Him and the new wine of His blood / sacrifice which He so seeks. Yet once we have made this immediate response in a few things, it becomes easier to get into an upward spiral of response to Him. We become truly a new creation in Him, breaking constantly with factor after factor in our past, which has previously defined us as persons. Quite simply, we become new persons, with all the rejection of the 'old' ways which this requires.

The parable of the sower shows how the Lord foresaw that the majority who responded to His word would not hold on; He knew that men would not immediately appreciate the blood of His cross, but would prefer the old wine of the old covenant (Lk. 5:39). He saw that our spiritual growth would be an agonizingly slow business; as slow as a tiny mustard seed growing into a tree, as slow as a man digging a foundation in rock, or a seed growing and bringing forth fruit. Such growth is *very* slow *from a human perspective*. The parable of the wine exactly predicted the attitude of people to Christ's work in taking the Old Covenant out of the way. The Lord is surely saying: 'I know you won't immediately want the blood of my new covenant. I understand your nature, by nature you'll prefer what you are familiar with, the Old Covenant; you won't "straightway" desire the new wine, but (by implication) you will, after a while' (Lk. 5:39). He foresaw how the implication of the blood of His sacrifice wouldn't be accepted by His people first of all. It would be a process, of coming to accept how radical the gift of His blood is. As we weekly take the cup of His covenant, we come to

see more and more the excellency of that blood, and its supremacy over all else. Christ recognized that conservatism in human nature which will naturally shy away from the marvellous implications of what He achieved for us. And true enough, whenever we talk about the present aspect of the Kingdom of God, our present blessings of redemption in Christ, the sense in which we have already been saved...there is a desire to shy away from it all. And true enough, the early Christian believers desperately clung on to the Mosaic food laws, circumcision and synagogue attendance as far as they could; the command to witness to the Gentiles was likewise not taken seriously for some time. It must have been painful for the Lord to know this and to see it, recognizing in it a lack of appreciation of His life and final sacrifice, a desire to reconcile with God without totally committing oneself to His work. He saw the possibility of His blood being wasted if men didn't change from old to new wineskins. The slowness of the changeover in attitudes amongst the early believers must have been a great pain to Him; as if His blood was being poured out again. The implication is that we shed His blood afresh if we won't change, if we allow the conservatism of our natures to have an iron grip upon us we not only destroy ourselves, but waste the blood of the Son of God. This is the danger of the conservatism that is in our natures; it was this which led men to shed the Lord's blood, and it is this same element within us which He foresaw would lead us to crucify Him afresh. How many times has this conservatism been mistaken as true spirituality! How careful we must be, therefore, not to adopt any attitude which glorifies that conservatism and masks it as the hallmark of a stable believer. The sensitivity of Jesus to the value of the human person was the very opposite of this.

9:18 *While He spoke these things to them*- The impression is given that the ruler was begging the Lord for the healing of his daughter, but instead the Lord delayed responding in order to complete the teaching He was giving about the vital need for total transformation if we have received the new wine. He felt His message was that important. We also notice something which we see several times in the Gospel records- the Lord appears to not respond to human need, to even be deaf to it. For a while. The reason for that, both then and now, was surely to pique the intensity and urgency of the requests.

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

Came and knelt before him, saying- Perhaps not in so many words, but in that believing in the Lord's absolute power in action is a form of worshipping Him. The same formula is used in Mt. 8:2- the leper worshipped Jesus in that he expressed faith in His power to cleanse (also in Mt. 15:25). The Greek *proskuneo* is not used (as some Trinitarians wrongly claim) exclusively of worship of God. It is used in the LXX, classical Greek and in the later New Testament for worship of men- e.g. Cornelius worshipped Peter (Acts 10:25), men will worship faithful Christians (Rev. 3:9), the beast is worshipped (Rev. 13:4).

My daughter is even now dead- The Greek could carry the idea of 'for now, she is dead' (see the usage in Mt. 3:15; Jn. 13:7; 16:12,31; 1 Cor. 13:12 etc.); in this case, the man believed her death state was only temporary, until the resurrection he believed Jesus would achieve.

But come and lay your hand upon her that she shall live- The man "came" to Jesus, and now Jesus 'comes' to the man; the same Greek word is used twice. The impression is given of a mutuality between the Lord and those who come to Him in faith.

9:19 *And Jesus rose and followed him, as did his disciples*- This verse zooms in close on the body language and physical movement of the characters, as if the author was the cameraman on the scene. Truly we have eye witness accounts in places like this. The image of the Lord Jesus following a man is unusual, as readers are accustomed to the disciples following the Lord, not Him following men. The point perhaps is that He is responsive to human need and prayer in a sense controls Him, according to His will of course. The picture is of the man racing ahead, so eager to get home. This sets the scene for the interruption to the journey, and serves to heighten the sense we get of his frustration with the woman who is taking up the Lord's time, when for him, every second counted so crucially.

9:20 *Behold*- AV. If Matthew is like a cameraman at these scenes, the word "behold" is as it were a zoom in message, bringing us to focus upon an individual.

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

Came behind Him- The scene is being developed from 9:19, where the Lord and the disciples are following the rushing man; and now we 'see' the woman coming behind Jesus, as if she in this sense was also one of the disciples who followed behind Him.

And touched the border of his garment- Her example inspired the many others who later sought to do this in Mt. 14:36. It has been suggested that the hem of the garment referred to the blue band which was to be worn by Jews to remind them of their commitment to obedience to God. In this case she would have been seeking to associate herself with the righteousness of Christ and be healed / saved [the same Greek word is used] thereby. In essence, this is what faith and baptism into Christ is all about. But the simpler reading is that she thought that if she associated herself even with the Lord's periphery, she would thereby be saved / healed. Given Jewish phobia about blood and the fact that any touching her would have been ritually unclean, she surely disguised her condition. And yet she didn't consider that her uncleanness could make the Lord

unclean. Her view of His righteousness was correct- it can be shared with us, but our uncleanness cannot negate His purity. She was driven to this insight by her desperation, just as Job's desperation led him to understand doctrinal truths that were beyond his time and place.

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

Focus	**Distraction**	**Resumed Focus**
The sick woman touches His clothes, and He turns around to see her. He wants to talk to her.	The disciples tell Him that this is unreasonable, as a huge crowd is pressing on to Him	"He looked round about [again] to see her that had done this thing" (Mk. 5:30-32). He talks to her.
He says that the dead girl is only sleeping; for He wants to raise her.	"They laughed Him to scorn"	"But..." He put them all out of the house and raised her (Mk. 5:40,41).
He was moved with compassion for the crowds, and wants to feed them and teach them more.	The disciples tell Him to send the people away as it was getting late	He tells the disciples to feed them so that they can stay and hear more (Mk. 6:35-37)
Again He has compassion on the hunger of the crowd	The disciples mock His plan to feed them	He feeds them (Mk. 8:3-6)
He explains how He must die	Peter rebukes Him	He repeats His message, telling them that they too must follow the way of the

cross (Mk. 8:31-34)

9:21 *For she said within herself*- Earlier in this chapter the inner thoughts of the Scribes were discerned by the Lord (9:4); here again we have insight into private thoughts. This emphasis upon thoughts continues that of the Sermon on the Mount; and contributes to the general impression Matthew gives of the importance of thought, what Paul later calls 'spirit'. For to be spiritually minded is indeed the very quintessence of Christianity.

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

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

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

Daughter- Perhaps the Lord was using the term in the Hebraic sense of 'descendant', seeing her as a daughter of Abraham because of her faith in Him.

Be of good courage- The language has clear parallels with the healing of the paralyzed man recorded earlier in 9:2. "Son" there is matched by "daughter" here, and is followed by the same "be of good comfort". This phrase is used by the Lord four times in the Gospels (Mt. 9:2,22; 14:27; Jn. 16:33); like all of us, He had some phrases He liked to use. But after His resurrection, He used the same phrase when He appeared to Paul (Acts 23:11). He is the same today as yesterday (Heb. 13:8), even down to His word choice and style of speaking. The Jesus whom we shall meet at judgment day is the same Jesus who walked around Galilee; and likewise, our essential personality will be continued eternally throughout the Kingdom. Our spirit will be saved (1 Cor. 5:5), just as His was.

Your faith has healed you. And the woman was healed at that moment- The emphasis was on the word "faith"; see on 9:21. The *faith* of the sick woman is commended by the Lord- when it was due to her *understanding* of the significance of the *hem* of the Lord's robe that she had touched Him. She had perceived the connection with the High Priest's hem; perhaps too she had added Job's comment about our touching but the hem of God's garment into the equation. And certainly she perceived that the sun of righteousness of Mal. 4 had healing in his hems / wings of his garment.

The Centurion's servant was healed for the sake of *his* faith; Jairus' daughter was healed because of *his* faith (Mk. 5:36). Hence the Lord told them to believe and stop wavering, so that she would be made whole, or "saved" (Lk. 8:50). This comes straight after the Lord's commendation of the woman with "an issue of blood": "Thy faith hath made thee whole [or, saved]" (Lk. 8:48). It's as if the two healings are similar in their result- being made whole, or saved- and both required faith. But the woman's own personal faith which led to her healing is paralleled with the faith of the family of the girl who was resurrected.

Luke adds: "There comes one from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying to him, Your daughter is dead, trouble not the Master" (Lk. 8:49). We naturally ask: *who* was this "one" who came with this message? In the Gospels, it is often the disciples who term Jesus "the Master". The implication is that it was they who thought that Jesus wouldn't have the power to raise the dead, perhaps connecting with their own studied lack of faith in His resurrection later. And the Lord goes on to calm them: "Do not fear *but* believe" (Lk. 8:50). This shows the power of fear- it is fear which stops faith, fear is the opposite of faith. If we know the love that casts out fear, then a whole new style of relationships becomes possible. In so many relationships there is a balance of power which is more realistically a balance of fear- a fear of losing, of being made to look small, a fighting back with self-affirmation against the fear of being subsumed by the other. Be it parents and kids, teachers and students, pastor and flock, so often both sides fear the other. Yet if we are truly affirmed in Christ, no longer seeking victory because we have found victory in Him, His victories become ours… then our whole positioning in relationships becomes so different. For example, our fear of rejection becomes less significant if we believe firmly in our acceptance in the eyes of the Lord, the only one whose judgment has ultimate value. If we can say with Paul that for us the judgment of others has very little value, because we only have one judge… then we will no longer worrying about acting in such a way as to impress others. No longer will it be so important to not express our inner thoughts about people or situations for fear of not using the constant 'nicespeak' which results in judgment from others unless it's used. There will be a congruence between what we feel and think within us, and what we actually show. And thus we will avoid the dysfunction which is so apparent in so many, as they forever struggle to control their outward expressions, hiding their real self, with the real self and the external self struggling against each other in a painful dis-ease.

9:23 *When Jesus came into... He saw...He said*- This is the process of usual human experience, perception and response to perception. It's yet another evidence of the Lord's humanity. The Greek phrase for "came into" is used so often in the Synoptics. Just in Matthew 9, Jesus came into His own city (9:1), came into the ruler's house (9:23) and came into a house (9:28). Consider the other usages of the phrase in Matthew alone: He came into Israel (Mt. 2:21), came into Nazareth (2:23), came into Capernaum (4:13), came into Peter's house (8:14), came into the land of the Gergesenes (8:28); came into a synagogue (12:9), came into a house (13:36), came into His own region (13:54), came into the land of Gennesaret (14:34), came into Magdala (15:39), came into Caesarea

(16:13, came into Capernaum (17:24), came into the borders of Judea (19:1), came into Bethphage (21:1), came into the temple (21:23), came into Gethsemane (26:36), came into the place called Golgotha (27:33). Mark and Luke record even other cases of His 'coming into' various towns, areas and situations. It is a huge emphasis. John's Gospel uses the term, but frequently in the more abstract sense of the Lord Jesus 'coming into' the (Jewish) world. The prologue uses the Greek phrase three times alone in describing how Jesus 'came into' the world and into "His own" (Jn. 1:7,9,11). He was the light and prophet that "came into the world" (Jn. 3:19; 6:14). John's references to the Lord Jesus coming "into the world" (Jn. 12:46; 16:28; 18:37) are therefore not to be read as implying that He literally came down out of Heaven into the world; but rather they are John's more abstract equivalent of the Synoptics' direct and repeated statements that the Lord came into the Jewish world of His day, into human situations. His sending of us out "into" the world is therefore inviting us to go forth and enter into our world and its various situations just as He did. We are to replicate His ministry in our world and situations.

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

9:24 *He said: Leave!*- He was not particularly attempting to create some calm before doing the miracle; but rather was He telling the hired mourners and flute players that their services were no longer necessary. Often the Lord acts before a miracle as if He is sure the miracle is going to actually happen. In this He exemplifies faith- believing that we have already received what we asked for, and acting appropriately. We think of Paul being so confident in his release from prison that he asks people to prepare a room for him to stay in (Philemon 22). In this case, the Lord saw the dead as if she was actually alive, although sleeping. This is to be our perspective regarding those whom we believe shall be resurrected.

For the little girl is not dead but sleeps. And they Laughed at him in scorn- This is recorded in all three of the Synoptics (Mk. 5:40; Lk. 8:53). It made a deep impression upon them all. The Greek could suggest (although not necessarily) that there was a process of derision here which left the Lord looking somehow scorned ("to scorn"). Perhaps He blushed, or looked at the ground- for He was after all human. Clearly these people were just the hired mourners and flute players. There was an element of anger in their derision because clearly money and payment were at issue if they were to just be sent away.

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

to resurrect the girl. And they have the profound humility to tell the world about that in their record of the Gospel.

9:25 *But when the crowd had been put outside*- The Lord was consciously seeking to reduce the element of hysteria at the miracle He knew He was going to do. He wanted as few as possible to see the dead body actually revive. There was perhaps a similar logic in the way His own resurrection was not done publically and His risen body was only seen by a relatively few rather than being displayed publically. This was not His way, nor the Father's way, even during His ministry.

He entered in and took her by the hand, and the little girl arose- The whole scene of putting mourners out of the house, taking her by the hand and raising her up was followed exactly by Peter in raising Tabitha. The Lord's style, language and even body language became the pattern for those who had been with Him, and it must be the same for us. The Gospels are written in such a way, that through the power of inspiration we can as it were be there with the disciples likewise watching Jesus and learning of His Spirit.

Mark adds that the Lord said: "Talitha cumi, which is, My child, I say to you, Get up" (Mk. 5:41). "Get up" there isn't from the '*anastasis*' group of words which are used about the 'rising up' of dead people in resurrection. It's *egeiro*, which more literally means 'to get up'. 'Honey, it's time to get up now' was what the Lord was saying- not 'I command you to resurrect'. He had raised her, given her life, and He knew that. In fact, He'd done it a while beforehand. For He told the mourners: "The girl isn't dead, she's only sleeping" (:24; Mk. 5:39). He raised her even before going into the room- and He knew that. And so when He finally saw her, He took her hand and gently asked her to get up out of bed. His gentleness, His faith, His calmness, His certainty that the Father heard Him- are all wondrous. The way the Lord healed people reflects His sensitivity- He commanded food to be brought for this girl who had been dead and was therefore hungry (Lk. 8:55).

The Lord Jesus, in His ministry, had forbidden the extroverts from publicly preaching about Him, as they naturally wanted to (e.g. Mk. 8:26). To keep silent was an act of the will for them, something against the grain. It is hard to find any other explanation for why He told Jairus not to tell anyone that He had raised his daughter (Lk. 8:56)- for it would have been obvious, surely. For they knew she had died (8:53). By contrast, those who would naturally have preferred to stay quiet were told to go and preach (e.g. Mk. 5:19). Perhaps Paul was in this category. The parallel between the Lord's words and works is brought out in Lk. 9:43,44: "They wondered at all things which Jesus *did*…He said…let these *sayings* sink down into your ears". There are no distinct 'sayings' of Jesus in this context; He wanted them to see that His works were His words. There was perfect congruence between what He said and what He did. Perhaps this was why He told the parents of the girl whom He resurrected "to tell no man what was done" (Lk. 8:56), even though it was so obvious; He wanted His self-evident works to speak for themselves, without the need for human words. For His works were essentially His message.

9:26 *And the fame thereof went into all that land*- Gk. 'the rumour'. This is why the Lord seems to have disliked doing public stunts and miracles in front of many eyes; He didn't want this kind of publicity. Rumours, inevitably exaggerated and distorted, started to spread about Him. He wanted to teach God's word, and the miracles were incidental to that. So easily, they created a false message about Him because of the rumours which were created by them. It was inevitable that such rumours would spread, and yet it is hard to find anywhere in the Gospels where the Lord specifically seeks to correct them. Instead He focused upon being Himself and teaching the message He had

come to deliver, and living the life He had to live. This focus needs to be remembered by us in our ministries, for the more earnestly we work for Him the more rumours will be generated and come back to our ears. But the Lord appears to have largely ignored them, and to have allowed His own personal example to be the ultimate answer to all rumours.

The Greek *ge* is used for "land" and the language could hint at a global distribution of the Lord's fame, as if Matthew saw in this a foretaste of the future spreading of the Gospel about Jesus.

9:27 *And as Jesus passed on from there*- It was such a long day for the Lord, wave after wave of need assailing Him. And perhaps He had many such days, this is just one typical day recorded. That He maintained mental perfection despite exposing Himself to such pressure and exhaustion is a window into His love and desire to save humanity. He could easily have reasoned it was better to take it easy locked in a monastery-type existence. But that would've led to sins of omission, and love is simply not like that. The same word is used again in Mt. 20:30, where again two blind men latch onto Him as He 'passes by' or 'departs'. The picture is of circumstances repeating in the Lord's life, just as they do within ours. Doubtless the later two blind men were inspired by the story of these two blind men. The note that the Lord 'passed by' is again an indication of eye witness accounts, with the Gospel writer as a kind of inspired cameraman focusing closely upon the Lord's movements and presenting us with a gripping picture of Him and His movements, so that we may really feel we too are 'there'.

Two blind men followed him, crying out, and saying: Have mercy on us, son of David!- A phrase emphasized in Matthew more than the other Gospels. Significantly, he records the phrase on the lips of the wise men who came from a Gentile land (Mt. 2:1-12), a Gentile woman (Mt. 15:22), children (Mt. 21:15) and twice on the lips of two blind men (here and in Mt. 20:30). Perhaps the implication is that the Jewish spiritual leadership didn't perceive Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of David- it was the blind, Gentiles, children, women, i.e. the marginalized, who did so.

There is a definite connection between the appeal for mercy and faith the Jesus is "Son of David", both here and elsewhere (Mt. 15:20; 20:30,31). This surely was because of their understanding that God's mercy would not depart from David's son (2 Sam. 7:14; 22:51), the mercy to David was therefore "sure" (Is. 55:3); thus these people understood that if *Jesus* as the "Son of David" enjoyed the mercy / favour of God, therefore He could share that mercy with them. They believed what the Lord made explicit in John 17- that the relationship He enjoyed with His Father could really be shared with all who believed in Him. No wonder that the Lord healed these thoughtful, marginalized people; they really had meditated deeply upon Him. We should also note that in Hebrew thought, being a 'son of' someone meant sharing their characteristics. And David must be the most merciful of all the Old Testament characters; his grace to Saul and the family of Saul, to Absalom and all who rose up against him, are amazing.

9:28 *And when he had arrived into the house*- The men had been crying (Gk. 'shrieking') to Him as He was walking to the house; but He waited until He was in the house before healing them. This is similar to how on the way to cure Jairus' daughter, the Lord appeared not to be so urgently responsive; He stopped to cure the woman with blood issues. Likewise He remained 'asleep' on the boat as the waves almost submerged it. This is not because He doesn't care, is too busy, or has slow responses to human situations. Rather by this method does He seek to heighten *our* sense of desperation, faith and need for Him.

The blind men came to him, and Jesus said to them: Do you believe- It might have seemed obvious that they believed the Lord was able to heal them. But by having to

face the question, the issues are focused. And the Lord also perceived a difference between people who simply have desperate need and urgently beg anyone for help- and those who believe in His ability to resolve the issue. The cry of need is not the same as the cry of faith. The cry of need simply is an animal cry of desperation for help, any help, from anyone. Whereas the cry of faith is focused specifically upon the Father and Son and their unique ability and power. The Lord clearly wanted to ensure these men made that distinction, and He works in our lives likewise. The question "Do you believe...?" sounds rather like a question asked before baptizing someone. It's possible that Matthew was aware of that, and was again seeking to develop a continuity between the people Jesus encountered during His ministry, and we whom He encounters today.

That I am able to do this?- The Lord wanted to know if they accepted His *ability* to do the cure. He was probing the degree to which they would accept that He could therefore choose not to cure them. He therefore spoke in terms of His *ability* to cure.

They say to him: Yes Lord- A poor translation. *Nai* means far more than "yes", it is a solemn affirmation, better rendered 'Truly'. Along with the confession of the Lordship of Jesus, this heightens the impression that we have here some form of early confession of faith, as if these men were being set up as representative of all those who later would likewise profess faith and come from darkness to light. Being blind, these men had never seen Jesus and yet they believed in Him; perhaps there is emphasis in Matthew upon the faith of blind men because these people were in a similar situation to the recipients of his Gospel- believing on having heard but never having actually seen Jesus.

9:29 *Then he touched their eyes, saying*- The eyes of these blind men may well have been secreting ritually unclean body fluid. Actually touching the eyes, when the Lord had all manner of options open to Him, reflects His desire to connect with human weakness and need as directly and intimately as possible. Again, Matthew the cameraman is as it were zooming in close up on the movements of even the Lord's fingers. Around 30 times the Lord is described as touching people to heal them, with the principle "touch not the unclean thing" clearly in view. By doing so, making this conscious allusion to one of the greatest tenets of Judaism and Jewish social interaction, He was redefining 'touching'. He perceived that the ritual requirements not to touch the unclean were not because there was anything unclean in itself on a metaphysical level, but rather to teach against involvement in wickedness. But to save the unclean, we must touch them, be involved with them, enter into their lives, engage with them. And the Lord insistently and repeatedly demonstrated this by touching the unclean. Many conservative Christian believers make the same mistake as the Jews- they consider that the Lord's table must be closed to the unclean. But there is no guilt by association. We are not to "fellowship the unfruitful works of darkness" in the sense of participating in them ourselves, but we are to reach out to and 'touch' the individuals caught up in those things. The Lord's redefinition of 'touch' needs to be taken seriously by many conservative communities today. And we note how just a few verses earlier, earlier that same day, the unclean woman had 'touched' Jesus. And now He in turn touches others. In ritual terms, He was unclean and was spreading His uncleanness to another. But He was actually spreading His holiness by doing so. He was purposefully subverting the understanding of guilt by association and uncleanness by physical touch.

According to your faith be it done unto you- This might imply that the extent of their restored vision was dependent upon the degree of their faith. In some cases, the Father and Son operate in a sovereign way, as with the blind man of John 9 who was cured without knowing who Jesus was. In others, their action and the extent of it is directly in proportion to human faith.

9:30 *And their eyes were opened*- The Lord's work is to be repeated by us, for we are commissioned as Paul was to open the eyes of those in spiritual darkness (Acts 26:18). We therefore are not to simply view Him and His work in Palestine as history, as interesting background... He there, in all His ways, in life and death, is our real pattern to be copied in our own contexts of life.

And Jesus strictly ordered them, saying: See that no one knows it!- The Greek for "see" means just that, indeed it can mean to stare, to look intently at something. Clearly it's a play on ideas- 'Now you can see, use your seeing to ensure that nobody knows about this'. But surely it would be obvious? How can a healed blind man be hidden? How can it not be known what has happened to him? And this was exactly the point. In line with the Lord's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, our witness is essentially in who we are. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. There is no possibility that a lamp burning in the darkness can be unnoticed. And by this command to tell nobody, the Lord was encouraging them to witness in exactly the way He had outlined in the Sermon. Clearly the man wanted to shout out his good news. But by quietly walking around, seeing life as it really is, being his normal self, this would be an even more powerful witness.

9:31 *But they went and spread abroad his fame in all that land*- Disobedience to the Lord's commands about witness is a sad feature of the New Testament record, not least in the initial refusal by the disciples to obey the great commission and take the Gospel to the entire Gentile world.

9:32 *As they were leaving*- S.w. "departed" in :31. This was a very long day for the Lord. Again, Matthew's record focuses upon physical movement of the players in the scene. It was as the cured blind men were going out of the house, intent on disobedience to the Lord's request not to publicize their cure, with the Lord surely guessing that would be the case, that people brought a dumb man to him for healing. Wave after wave of pressure and human need broke against the Lord; we can only admire His stamina and core principle of love which enabled Him to endure and not turn others away because of His own exhaustion.

A dumb man who was possessed with a demon was brought to him- Gk. they lead to Him. Again, Matthew focuses close up on the person of the Lord and the physical movements involving Him. The statement is not that he was dumb *and* demon possessed. Clearly the idea was that his dumbness was thought to be due to His possession by a demon. The causes of dumbness have now been analysed and explained. It's not caused by demons, and is today usually capable of some degree of cure or improvement. Therapy doesn't partially drive demons away. Clearly, the language of demon possession was used to describe illness and human conditions which could not be otherwise explained in the first century.

9:33 *And when the demon was cast out, the dumb man spoke and the crowds marvelled, saying: Such a thing has never been seen in Israel!*- Recorded from the perspective of the onlookers. They couldn't perceive that a dumb person could be healed without something exiting them. I have heard doctors in less developed parts of the world using language such as 'This will get it out of you' when persuading uneducated folks to take medicines. This verse proves too much for those who claim demons actually exist- for it suggests that dumbness is cured by a demon being located and cast out from within the person. Yet dumb people are cured by medical methods that make no reference to demons. The dumb spoke, whilst in the same chapter, on the same day, the lame had been made to walk and the blind been given sight; and the deaf had been given hearing (if Mk. 7:32-37 occurred at the same time). So during this very long day in the Lord's ministry, the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 35:5-7 had been initially fulfilled. Perhaps the people came seeking such healing because they were convinced that

Messiah had come and His Kingdom must be beginning. Despite their misunderstanding the nature of the Kingdom, the Lord seems to have responded positively to their faith, just as He does with misbelievers today.

There were people claiming to cast out demons in Israel at the Lord's time. But as Josephus records, they operated by first asking the sick person for the name of the demon within them and then cursing that demon until it supposedly departed. The need to name demons was therefore very important for the exorcists. The problem with dumb people was that they couldn't speak, most were illiterate and couldn't write, so it was thought to be very hard to cure the dumb because they could never name the demon possessing them to an exorcist. The Lord's healing of dumb demons (as the people understood it) therefore placed Him in a category of His own far above the exorcists.

9:34 *But the Pharisees said: By the prince of the demons he casts out demons*- We sense that the Pharisees were desperate to minimize the Lord's miracles, but they were driven to admit they were miracles, the demons did actually leave (as they saw it), and all they could say was that the Lord must therefore have been in league with the prince of the demons. This of course was a foolish and desperate argument, because as the Lord later pointed out, their sons also claimed to drive out demons, so that would imply that they were also in league with the prince of the demons. This shows that the miracles of Jesus were beyond doubt, as those by Peter were later. Genuine miracles wrought by the Holy Spirit cannot be denied even by the most cynical- contrasting sharply with many Pentecostal claims of healing and supposed exercise of the Spirit gifts of healing.

9:35 *And Jesus went about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues and*- As in 4:23, the emphasis seems to be upon the Lord trying to get to as many isolated people as possible. The Greek suggests this idea, and is used again in Mt. 23:15 "You *compass* sea and land to make one proselyte". The Lord's emphasis upon the villages rather than the big cities such as Sepphoris was in line with His mission to specifically get to the marginalized and those whom no itinerant preacher ever would bother trying to get to. The "villages" would've been no more than a few houses, requiring hours of walking to, over hilly tracks. Our own missionary work can take an example from this, but for all of us there should be the spirit of wanting to spread the message to the very corners of society.

Preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom- Literally, heralding the Gospel of the Kingdom. Not 'Preaching / heralding the Kingdom', but heralding the preaching of that Kingdom. The difference is significant. The Lord saw Himself as doing the groundwork for another evangelizing of the Kingdom- namely that which would be done by us. Significantly we read that Paul simply preached [s.w.] the Kingdom (Acts 28:31). Matthew, like the other evangelists, often hints at the great commission to spread the Gospel with which the Gospels all end (even John, if you look for it!).

And healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness- As if the Lord purposefully tried to engage with every kind of human need and weakness. This means that His unity with humanity, His ability to be a total representative and utterly sympathetic High Priest "in every point" (Heb. 2:14-18; 4:15,16), was not something which was achieved automatically. He consciously worked on it, and His life of engagement with humanity resulted in Him developing into the unique mediator and representative which He is. The language here is repeated in 10:1 concerning the work of the disciples- the Lord's preaching ministry isn't mere history, it is to be replicated in essence in *our* ministry.

Among the people- AV and some MSS. Literally, "in" the people. There is the hint at internal sickness and healing.

9:36 *But when he saw the crowds, he was moved with*- This is part of the general summary of His preaching work which we have in :35. Most men would've inwardly groaned whenever they saw the crowds surging towards them. But not the Lord. Every time He saw a crowd of humanity, He was moved with compassion. We too are faced by human need, crowds of it, if only we will have the sensitivity to perceive it. And instead of groaning and raising eyebrows, we ought to be moved with compassion at their need, at how humanity is rudderless- if we have the spirit of Christ.

Compassion for them- Several times used in the Gospels about the Lord's response to people. In His self-revelation in the parables, the Lord uses the same word about Himself and the Father- He is the Samaritan who "had compassion" on the wounded man (Lk. 10:33), as the Father of the prodigal son likewise had compassion on him (Lk. 15:20). Mk. 6:34 adds at this point that He *therefore*, as a result of that compassion, started to "teach them many things". Then He asked His disciples, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest…" (Mt. 9:36-38). It was their spiritual as well as their material and human need which evoked His compassion. I have to say that this spirit of urgent compassion is not as strong among us as it should be. There seem few if any tears shed for the tragedy of humanity. The world's desperation seems written off as 'they're not interested' rather than felt as a tragedy that should evoke our emotional and practical response. When Jesus saw the leper who wanted to be "clean"- not just 'cured' or eased of his discomfort- He made an emotional response. He put forth His hand, touched him, and made him clean- because He was "moved with compassion" (Mk. 1:40,41). Mt. 14:14; 15:32; 20:34; Mk. 5:19 and Lk. 7:13 all record other times when the sheer humanity of the situation evoked the Lord's compassion: e.g. the woman in the funeral procession of her dear son, or the hungry crowds, unfed for 3 days…

Because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd- Could be rendered "harassed and helpless". The hypocrisy of the Pharisees didn't simply irritate the Lord, He went further to proactively feel sorry for the crowds who were without a shepherd- and He did something about it. Their lack of shepherds is the background for the Lord's command to pray therefore for *workers* to be sent out into the harvest (Mt. 9:37,38). We might think that the crowds being without a shepherd would lead the Lord to urge that good shepherds be sent to them. But instead He chooses another metaphor- seasonal labourers required to go and reap a harvest. Perhaps this was because He didn't consider the disciples nor indeed anyone in Palestine at the time to really be capable for shepherding. He was the only shepherd- the singular good shepherd. Perhaps the point of the change of metaphor was that the Lord's flock doesn't need mere shepherds, those in the positions of leadership, so much as *workers* first and foremost. The Lord is clearly alluding to the concern of Moses that after he died, the people would not be "as sheep which have no shepherd" (Num. 27:17). The hint is that Israel were in effect without Moses- whereas the Jewish religious leadership considered that they were being fiercely faithful to Moses. Perhaps there is also the hint that the Lord realized that He would not always be with these crowds (He had just taught that the bridegroom would be taken away from them in 9:15), and His prayer is that the Father will send out workers to replace Him. For our ministry in this world is effectively that of Jesus reincarnated in us as His body. See on 10:1.

9:37 *Then said he to his disciples:The harvest*- The harvest and reaping is ultimately at the Lord's second coming (Mt. 13:30,39). The prayer here could not simply be for more Gospel workers, but for the Angels who are the reapers in Mt. 13:39 to be sent forth- thus, a prayer for the second coming, motivated by the hopeless situation with the shepherds of God's people. But we can surely interpret the Lord as

once again teaching the 'now but not yet' aspect of His Kingdom. Insofar as we go out and reap the harvest, we are doing what the Angels will do at the second coming. Note how He saw the crowds who wanted only loaves and fishes as a great harvest. He saw the potential... Note how the phrase "the harvest is *plenteous*" uses the word usually translated "great" in describing the "great multitudes" that flocked to the Lord (Mt. 4:25; 8:1,16,18; 12:15; 13:2; 14:14; 15:30; 19:2; 20:29) . Those crowds were seen by Him as a harvest.

Indeed is plentiful- His preachers were like harvesters working in the very last hour to bring in the harvest- in fact, the harvest was spoiling because it's not being fully gathered. The fault for that lies with the weak efforts of the preacher-workers ("few" both in number and weakness, as the Greek means). This means that the ultimate degree of success of the Father's work with men to some degree depends upon us. There are people who would be gathered if there were more and stronger, better workers (not so "few"), but who will not be. To some extent the Father has delegated His work into our hands. He will not necessarily raise up another way of harvesting those people into His Kingdom if we fail Him. In this lies the power of the fact that *we* are the labourers who do the reaping in our Gospel work now; and yet it is the Angels who do this reaping at the last day (Mt. 13:39). This means surely that there is a direct correlation between whom *we* reap for the Lord now and who shall finally be gathered into His Kingdom by the Angels at the second coming. Our responsibility for others' eternity and the extent of God's glory on this earth is huge. The Lord Himself here prayed that more labourers would be sent forth into the harvest, but the real answer only came in the sending forth of labourers by the Father in the post-resurrection dispensation (Mt. 20:1). We are all commanded by the great commission at the end of Matthew to go forth and do this work.

But the labourers- The parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Mt. 20:1-8) suggests that all who are called to the Gospel are called to be labourers in the harvest. The call is not to learn a few theological truths and preserve them, nor to slump into a culture of meeting attendance or churchianity. It is to labour in harvesting the great potential which there is in this world.

Are few- The Greek means in both number and strength. The parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Mt. 20:1-8) suggests that many of those who are called for this work only work a few hours, they are standing idle a long time before being called. They are the weak, the lazy, the handicapped, the old, those with a bad work record, whom nobody wanted to hire. Most of the Lord's workers are like that- we shouldn't be surprised to find the Lord's workforce full of those who seem most unsuited to the work of harvesting others. The disciples were the labourers- for a few verses later we read that He sent them forth in His work with the comment that they were labourers who were worthy of their hire (Mt. 10:10). The Lord only had the 12, perhaps, because that was all there was in Israel able to do the job. And He asked them to pray that there would be more sent forth by the Father. This shows the blessing which will go behind the efforts to spread the Gospel to all the world in the last days. There is a fervent, *urgent* desire of the Lord for this, and so His blessing will surely be with all who catch the same spirit of urgency. According to the parable of Lk. 14:23, the quality of converts is sacrificed (by the Lord, not us) for the sake of numbers- which connects with the idea that the coming of Christ is to some degree dependent upon the full number of the Gentiles being converted (Rom. 11:25). Likewise the drag net was brought to land once it was full of fish (Mt. 13:48). The Lord speaks of how "few" (the Greek implies physically weak, cp. the unwanted labourers in the market place) the labourers are (Mt. 9:37), and therefore more (numerically) are needed. Any lamentation

about the weakness of the latter day ecclesia must be seen in this context; the Lord is desperate for the places at the supper to be filled, although woe to those who come in without a wedding garment (Mt. 22:12).

9:38 *Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest*- The Lord is praying that the time of the great commission, the sending forth of God's people worldwide to reap the harvest, would be hastened. But it had to wait until after the Lord's resurrection because the disciples were not yet mature enough for it. The Lord *prayed* and urged others to pray, that the great commission would be given as soon as possible. With what eagerness, therefore, does He watch our fulfilment of it; and with what sadness therefore does He observe our negligence and even denial of it.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 10

10:1 *And he called to him his twelve disciples*- Implying they were not always with Him. But there seems an intended contrast between calling them to Him, and then sending them forth (:5). They were with Him when they were away from Him. It is simply so, that when we witness, the words we speak are in effect the words of Jesus. Our words are His. This is how close we are to Him. And this is why our deportment and manner of life, which is the essential witness, must be in Him. For He is articulated to the world through us. And it explains the paradox of the parallel record in Mk. 3:14, whereby Jesus chose men that they should "be with Him and that He might send them forth to preach". As they went out to witness, they were with Him, just as He is with us in our witness, to the end of the world [both geographically and in time]. And this solves another Marcan paradox, in Mk. 4:10: "When He was alone, they that were about Him with the twelve asked Him…". Was He alone, or not? Mark speaks as if when the Lord was away from the crowd and with His true followers, He was "alone"- for He counted them as one body with Him. This was why the Lord told Mary, when she so desperately wanted to be personally with Him, to go and preach to His brethren (Jn. 20:18), just as He had told some of those whom He had healed- for going and preaching Him was in effect being with Him.

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

And to heal all manner of disease and all manner of sickness Every kind of sickness and disease was to be engaged with by them because they were to be the re-incarnation of Jesus' personal ministry, His body to the world. See on 9:35.

10:2 *Now the names of the twelve apostles are these. The first Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother*- Note this is not the record of the choosing of the twelve, but rather of their commissioning and being sent out. The list is broken up into pairs, perhaps because they were sent out as six pairs.

James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother- Mark adds that James and John were to be the “sons of thunder" (Mk. 3:17), another Rabbinic phrase, used of the young trainee Rabbis who stood at the left and right of the Master of the Synagogue during the Sabbath services (hence the later appeal for confirmation as to whether they would *really* stand at the Master’s right and left in His Kingdom). These uneducated men were to take the place of the learned Scribes whom they had always respected and lived in fear of... truly they were being pushed against the grain. See on 16:19.

10:3 *Philip and Bartholomew* Apparently the same as Nathanael, also mentioned with Philip in Jn. 1:46-51.

Thomas and Matthew the tax collector, James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus- The Gospel records were transcripts by the evangelists of their personal preaching of the Gospel. Matthew adds in the list of the disciples that he was “the publican” (Mt. 10:3). And throughout, there are little hints at his own unworthiness- in his own presentation of the Gospel to others.

10:4 *Simon the Canaanite*- Not 'from Canaan' but a *kananites*, a zealot. We see the wide range of men the Lord called into His band; Matthew the tax collector would've been seen as a traitor, whereas the zealots were at the other end of the political spectrum. The way the 12 didn't break up as a group after living together under extreme psychological conditions is a testament to the unifying power of the person of Jesus. The composition of the Lord's body is the same today, including "all [types of] men". Sadly denominationalism and churchianity has led to churches often being clusters of believers having the same socio-economic, racial and personality type positions, rather than being conglomerations of literally all types of t, of whatever accent and formation.

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

10:5 *These twelve Jesus sent out and ordered them, saying*- Literally, apostled them. Whoever is sent forth is apostled, and the great commission sends forth all believers.

Do not go unto the Gentiles and do not enter into any city of the Samaritans- Given Judaism's strong opposition to Jesus and His teaching, did the Lord foresee they would be tempted to go to the Gentiles? He surely wanted them to replicate His ministry as exactly as possible- and He was sent at that stage to Israel and not to the Gentiles.

10:6 *Instead*- The construction 'Not this but rather that' could mean 'Focus more on that than this', i.e. focus upon the Jews. It was not necessarily a total prohibition on preaching to Gentiles. For similar constructions see Jn. 17:9 and 1 Cor. 1:17.

Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel- It's hard to tell whether the Lord meant that all Israel were lost sheep, or whether He meant that the apostles were to go to the lost sheep within Israel- to the spiritually marginalized whom He too had targeted. For the sense of the commission is that they were to replicate His ministry, as if they were Him to the world around them. He was personally sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel

(Mt. 15:24) and He asks them to do just the same. His mission was theirs, and it is ours. As He was sent out by the Father, so He sends us out; we're all in that sense 'apostles', sent out ones. The Lord's parables about *His* searching for the lost sheep until He found it were to be understood by the apostles as now applying to *them*. And we understand from His words here that He considered that lost sheep to be Israel. The search until it was found would then be an appropriate figure for the Lord's never ending search for Israel, a love which He can never give up over the centuries. The allusion is also to Ezekiel 34, which speaks of "the house of Israel" being lost sheep because of their bad shepherds. The Lord doesn't specifically state that the disciples are now the new shepherds of Israel (see note on 9:37,38). He simply sends them to the lost sheep. It seems they were not ready for full pastoral responsibility, but they were to begin their shepherding. We note that the Lord specifically commissions Peter to "feed My sheep / lambs", and these are here defined as the lost sheep of Israel. Hence Peter's ministry specifically to the Jews. These were the sheep who were now lost because of the Jewish religious leadership. The Lord was sending out the apostles to try to provide what the standard religious leadership didn't, even though they weren't mature enough to be designated as 'shepherds' at that stage; and that is how many of us feel or felt when we first perceived we too are being sent out just as much as they were. Notice that the Lord sent the disciples to the lost sheep as sheep (10:16)- not as shepherds. It is the commonality we have with our audience which is the bridge across which we can engage with them and persuade them. To stress what we have in common on a human level is what sets up the possibility for those 'flash' moments when we really get something of the Gospel across to them.

10:7 *And as you go, preach*- The idea could be that they were to 'preach' whilst travelling, not just as set piece deliveries of speeches about the Gospel, but the good news of the Kingdom should come out of them from who they were, "as" they were going. The same word is in the great commission to us, to 'go and preach' (Mt. 28:19). It was a foretaste of the greater worldwide campaign which was to be the way of life for all in Christ.

Saying: The kingdom of heaven- In the person of Jesus, the essence of the Kingdom came nigh to men (Mt. 10:7; 11:4; 12:28)- and this was why one of His titles is "the Kingdom". The Kingdom of God is about joy, peace and righteousness more than the physicalities of eating and drinking. In this sense the Kingdom was "among" first century Israel. The Kingdom of God is not merely a carrot held out to us for good behaviour. It is a reality right now, in so far as God truly becomes our king.

Is at hand- Mt. 10:7 and Mk. 6:12 parallel preaching the soon coming of the Kingdom with preaching repentance. The Greek could mean 'Is soon coming', 'Is being brought near' or 'Has come near (already)'. All these meanings were likely intended by the Lord, hence the choice of this wide meaning phrase. The Kingdom was potentially scheduled for establishment 'soon', but Israel's refusal of the Gospel and rejection of the Lord Jesus meant that it was delayed. Mt. 21:34 uses the same phrase to describe how the time of harvest 'drew near'- but the husbandmen refused to give the fruits, and so another program of operation was put into practice. Rom. 13:12, James 5:8 and Heb. 10:25 likewise speak of the day of the second coming drawing nearer by the day. Regardless of whatever delays there may be to the Divine program, we are to live as if "The Lord is at hand" (s.w., Phil. 4:5), as if He is about to come soon. In another sense, by response to the Gospel, the time for the establishment of the Kingdom was being hastened, being

'brought near'. But in a sense, the Kingdom had come near to Israel in that Jesus as King of the Kingdom was the embodiment of Kingdom principles, and He was amongst men at that time. Those who witnessed His Kingdom-like healing miracles had the Kingdom brought near to them (Lk. 10:9). The teaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom was therefore a bringing near of the Kingdom to men. The Lord Jesus, the essence and embodiment of the Kingdom, was there amongst men, and the apostles were heralding ['preaching'] His presence.

10:8 *Heal the sick*- The sayings of Jesus have been translated back into Aramaic, the language of His day, by C.F. Burney. He was struck by the degree to which they had a rhythmic shape, like many of the prophetic sayings of the Old Testament. Thus a passage like Lk. 7:22 has six two-beat lines followed at the end by a three beat line; the commission to the disciples here in Mt. 10:8 rhymes, both in Aramaic and in Greek. The Lord's prayer is expressed in two-beat lines. The crunch point of the Lord's forgiveness parable in Lk. 15:7, that there is joy in Heaven over one sinner that repents, uses the device of alliteration, i.e. similarly sounding words.

The noun for "heal" is found once, in Heb. 3:5, where in the context of describing the Lord Jesus He is called "a servant". The acts of healing were done in a servant-like way. This contrasts sharply with the pride associated with many Pentecostal healers. Whatever good we do others, dramatic or not so dramatic, is to be done as an incarnation of the supreme Servant of all, the Lord Jesus. For it is His ministry which we are performing, not ultimately our own.

Raise the dead- The Greek definitely means 'to awake'. We wonder how many dead people were raised by the apostles, even though the power of resurrection appears to have been granted them here. It's tempting, given the spiritual dimension to the three words chosen here for their work (heal, cleanse, raise), to wonder whether their ministry was intended to be of spiritual service and healing, with physical miracles in second place, although not out of the picture.

Cleanse the lepers, cast out demons- The word also has the sense of moral cleansing. Again the Lord is giving the disciples the work of the priests to do. For it was their job to pronounce lepers cleansed. But He is asking them to do what He Himself had done in Mt. 8:3. His work was to be theirs.

Freely you received, freely give- Gk. 'without a cause'. The allusion is not to anything monetary, but to the free gift of God's grace to us. The only other occurrence of the Greek phrase 'give freely' is in Rev. 21:6, where we read of the free gift of the water of eternal life to whoever really wants it. There is a connection between us 'freely giving' the Gospel now (Mt. 10:8), and being given 'freely given' salvation at the last day (Rom. 8:32; Rev. 21:6). The freeness of God's gift to us should be reflected in a free spirited giving out of the Gospel to others. Paul's decision not to take money from Corinth (1 Cor. 9:18) was due to his deep, deep meditation on the principle contained in Mt. 10:8; although there were other passages in the Gospels which he knew implied that it was Christ's will that the missionary should be paid (1 Cor. 9:14 = Mt. 10:10). This issue of payment shows how Paul based his life decisions on his understanding of the principles of the Gospels. He did far more than learn those Gospels parrot-fashion. They were in his heart, and influenced the direction of his life.

10:9 *Acquire no gold, nor silver*- The idea of the Greek is to get or acquire, and the hint could be against taking money for their work with people. But the meaning extends into

verse 10, and the sense is clearly that they were not to worry about how materially they were going to do their preaching tour. They were to trust that what was basically necessary would be provided, just as it was for Israel on their wilderness journey. To just go out and preach with nothing behind them was a huge challenge to their faith in the principles of the Sermon on the Mount, which taught to take no anxious thought for food or clothing (Mt. 6:25). And their obedience and success is likewise a great challenge to our own faith- for so often lack of finance and material things is what leaves many good intentions to preach stillborn. But it is the Lord's will that should spread the Gospel, and as a wise old brother of wide missionary experience told me in my youth "I have never seen a preaching initiative fail for lack of funds".

Nor brass for your purses- Even small coins were not to be considered necessary for the missionary work to finally succeed.

10:10 *No wallet for your journey, neither two coats*- Maybe a reference to a double garment. But the similarity with Israel's wilderness journey is clear. No food pouch for the road, no extra clothes or shoes- because as the Father provided those things for Israel, so He would for those who preach His Kingdom.

Nor shoes, nor staff; for the labourer is worthy of his food- The Lord has used the word about how the labourers are "few", meaning both weak and also few in number (9:37,38), and He will go on to speak of how the labourers He uses to reap the harvest are those who have been standing around unused by others because they are maybe old, weak, lazy or have a poor work record (Mt. 20:1,2,8). Clearly the Lord recognized that His labourers would be weak, but He still expects them to be recognized as "worthy" of support as they attempt to do His work.

The Greek for "food" can mean 'rations', as if they were to be as soldiers on duty. They were to believe that their needs would be met. The mechanism for meeting that need was presumably from the things provided by those who would receive them, although the Lord was clear that they wouldn't always get a positive reception (:14). Their faith in the provision of their needs by their audience was therefore tantamount to faith that some at least would respond positively to their message. Note that by the time Paul wrote 1 Tim. 5:18, this phrase was considered as "Scripture", another hint at an early date for the writing down of the Gospel accounts. The context of that verse is of the financial support of teachers of the Gospel. It seems the Lord expected that those who gave their lives to spreading and teaching His word should be supported in doing so. Note that the context here in Mt. 10 is of itinerant preachers being supported; Paul doesn't quote the Lord's words strictly in context, because he applies them to teachers based in one particular church. But this is how we are to interpret Scripture- taking the principles and applying them to our situation locally, even if that situation may differ in some ways from the original situation and context in which the principle was first established or stated.

There is a strong theme in the NT that none of the Lord's people are ultimately "worthy", but rather unworthy. There will be faults with all preachers. But by reason of their devotion to the Lord's word and work we are to consider them "worthy" of support- even if aspects of their wider unworthiness are apparent. Support is not only to be given to those who appear faultless, for none are. The word 'worthy' is used later in Matthew 10. Those who respond to the message are "worthy" (:13); there is a mutuality between

the teacher and the convert, they both consider each other 'worthy' in that the righteousness and worthiness of the Lord is imputed to them both. Later in the chapter, the Lord teaches that the 'worthy' are those who take up their cross and follow Him, regardless of loss of family and social standing. Their journeys in the preaching of the Gospel were therefore seen by the Lord as a taking up of the cross and following Him (10:37,38). There is nothing therefore glamorous to missionary work, and that point needs to be well understood especially by young people who jet off to exotic places in the name of Gospel extension work.

According to Mark's record of the Lord's words here, He is picking out the picture of Israel as they were on Passover night, as an illustration of how His disciples should be on their preaching mission. "He called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth... and commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse: but be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats". All this is couched in the language of Israel on Passover night. His next words for them appear to be stating the obvious, unless they allude to Israel remaining at whatever place they reached until the fire and cloud moved them on: "In what place soever ye enter... there abide till you depart from that place" (Mk. 6:8-10). It must be remembered that God intended Israel to be a missionary nation, teaching the surrounding world of His ways by their example of obedience to His law. As Israel left Egypt with the gold and jewels of Egypt, so, Jesus implied, the disciples were to carry the precious things of the Gospel.

10:11 *And into whatever city or village you shall enter, search out who in it is worthy*- The contrast is between the worthy and those who don't accept the Gospel (:13,14). So the worthy would be those who have responded to the Gospel already. The Lord's fame had gone throughout Israel (Mt. 4:24) so the apostles weren't going into totally virgin territory. They were following up on the rumours people had already heard about Jesus. "Worthy" seems a strange term to use for the believers, but maybe already the Lord was teaching the idea of imputed righteousness. Those who had believed in Him were "worthy", and He expected them to likewise consider the preachers of the Gospel to be "worthy" of their support. Belief in Him, therefore, was not without practical demands; it was natural and expected of the Lord that those who had believed in Him should provide materially for His preachers. The first mention of this word for "worthy" in the NT is in Mt. 3:8, where John the Baptist asks his followers to bring forth fruit worthy of repentance. Perhaps 'the worthy' had become a technical term for those who had responded to John's teaching about Jesus, or at least openly confessed faith in Jesus. The mission of the apostles here may have been to follow up on them. This would mean that the information in Lk. 7:4 that a man was "worthy" of a healing may have implied that he was one of those who had responded to John the Baptist.

And stay with them until you go- To build relationships, to enhance the possibility of a house church developing there later, and to avoid the temptation to shop around for the best accommodation or the wealthiest sympathizers. Luke adds: "Go not from house to house". The Lord at least twice stressed to His disciples that they were not to go preaching from house to house, but rather focus upon one house in a village and make that the centre of their work (Lk. 9:4; 10:7). Clearly His intention was that they built up house groups rather than scattered converts. Perhaps this was alluded to by Paul when

he criticized sisters who went spreading gossip “from house to house” (1 Tim. 5:13). He surely had house churches in mind.

10:12 *And as you enter into the household, greet it*- The Lord empowered the traditional *Shalom* greeting with real meaning when uttered by the apostles on entering a house. The household were offered real peace with God- all they had to do was say yes to it. If they did not, then the opportunity was withdrawn (:13).

10:13 *If the household be worthy*- Worthy of Christ (same word in :37,38). None are worthy (Rev. 5:4) except Christ (Rev. 5:9), yet if we are in Him, we are counted worthy. The Greek word is used about those who responded to John the Baptist producing fruit 'worthy of repentance' (Mt. 3:8; Lk. 3:8). It could be that the Lord is using the word in a technical sense, referring to those who had responded to John's preaching.

The apostles would have gone to the household because they had heard that it was worthy, or believing in Jesus (see on :11). But the Lord was well aware that there would be those who had a name as believers in Him who actually were not. Even though the household was "worthy" in the sense of having professed faith in Him, they needed to confirm that by accepting the *shalom* offered in Christ's Name. Note that the household was judged as worthy or unworthy. Here we see the beginnings of the house church movement which was so characteristic of early Christianity. We note too the household baptisms mentioned in the NT. One purpose, therefore, of the apostles visiting these households was to find out who had a name as a Christian believer, and to ascertain whether they were indeed believers. The test was whether the household who claimed to be Christian would receive them, the representatives of Jesus, who were as His body to the world. If the household publically professed faith in Jesus, having heard something about Him or maybe learnt from John the Baptist, but refused to accept Christ's brethren and the word of Christ as they taught it- then they were classified as not actually believing at all. This has uncanny parallels with our own day, where many claim publically to be "worthy", to be believers in Jesus personally- but refuse and reject His brethren and are not seriously interested in His words. Herein lies the danger of 'out of church Christianity'. Whatever that means, if it means in reality that we profess a personal allegiance to Jesus but have no time for His people- then it is wrong and a path to rejection by Him. Vague connection with the idea of Jesus and advertising it publically is not enough of itself- if we reject His brethren, then we have rejected Him. This is a sobering challenge to those whose closed table policies lead them to reject many of His brethren and representatives. There has to be a connection with the use of the same word “worthy” in 10:12- the labourer in the Gospel’s work is “worthy” of being supported. The connection could simply be that the worthiness of the household is proven by whether they consider Christ’s servants likewise ‘worthy’, and whether they treat them accordingly.

Let your peace come upon it, but if it be unworthy, let your peace return to you- See on 10:12. If the household didn't accept Christ's brethren, then the peace of salvation which He had invested the apostles' greeting with, would be withdrawn. His *shalom*, His peace and fellowship with those who name His Name, is dependent upon whether or not they accept His brethren.

10:14 *And whoever*- Whichever town, according to :15.

Shall not receive you, nor hear your words, as you go out of that household, or that city- To receive an apostle personally was to receive his words. As the Lord was the word made flesh, so there should be a continuity, an identity and congruity between the

words we preach and us as persons. This means that the receiving of the preachers as persons was connected with receiving their words.

Shake off the dust of your feet- The disciples were to shake off the dust of their feet against unbelieving Israel (Mt. 10:14; Mk. 6:11; Acts 8:51), in allusion to the Rabbinic teaching that the dust of Gentile lands caused defilement. Israel who rejected the Gospel were thus to be treated as Gentiles. Time and again the prophets describe the judgments to fall upon Israel in the same terms as they speak of the condemnations of the surrounding nations (e.g. Jer. 50:3,13). The message was clear: rejected Israel would be treated as Gentiles. Thus Joel describes the locust invasion of Israel in the language of locusts covering the face of Egypt (Joel 2:2,20 = Ex. 10:14,15,19). Israel's hardness of heart is explicitly likened to that of Pharaoh (1 Sam. 6:6); as the Egyptians were drowned, so would Israel be (Am. 9:5-8). As Pharaoh's heart was plagued (Ex. 9:14), so was Israel's (1 Kings 8:38); as Egypt was a reed, so were Israel (1 Kings 14:15). As Pharaoh-hophra was given into the hand of his enemies, so would Israel be (Jer. 44:30). Even if we are separated from this world externally, we can still act in a worldly way, and share the world's condemnation by being finally "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32).

10:15 *Truly I say to you, it shall be more tolerable*- There will be degrees of punishment for the rejected at the last day.

For the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city- The people from Sodom will appear at the day of judgment. Seeing that knowledge brings responsibility, it follows that somehow those people had had God's word preached to them, just as the towns of first century Israel had. But by whom? There is no direct record of Abraham or Lot witnessing to them, but it could be that Lot's righteous living was counted as a witness to them which demanded they too accepted Lot's righteous lifestyle. Seeing that Melchizedek lived in the area, one wonders whether he may have witnessed to them. In any case, we read only a few incidents from the lives of Bible characters; perhaps Abraham and / or Lot made a major witness to those cities and to the area around them ("*the land* of Sodom…").

10:16- see on 24:14.
I am sending you out- When He uses the metaphor of sending out His sheep in Jn. 10, the Lord makes the point that He leads them forth, going ahead of them. And yet with the sending out of the apostles, He didn't literally go with them nor go a day's journey ahead of them. He went before them in the same way as He goes before us, His sheep of this age- in personal example. As He had gone around Israel preaching, so they were to replicate His ministry. And He is a most unusual shepherd, in that He sends them forth knowing that they are walking right into the wolves. "I send you forth" is actually a quotation from the LXX of Ex. 3:12, where Moses is sent forth to take Israel out of Egypt. Thus the Lord bids His men see themselves as Moses, taking Israel out of Egypt, which becomes a symbol for orthodox Judaism. This subversion of popular Jewish understandings continues throughout this section.

As sheep- Bridge building involves us becoming 'as' our target audience- as Paul was a Jew to the Jews and a Gentile to the Gentiles. Thus the Lord tells the disciples to go forth and preach as sheep / lambs; in order to appeal to the lost sheep of Israel (Mt. 10:6). They were to be as sheep to win the sheep.

In the midst of wolves- The language suggests they would be totally outnumbered. They were making a brave witness in the teeth of aggressive opposition. Jewish teaching was that Israel was the sheep which was surrounded by 70 wolves, seen as the Gentile nations (*Pesiqta Rabbati* 9:2*; Tanhuma Toldos* 5). The Lord is subverting this idea- the apostate, legalistic, Torah-observant Pharisees were in fact Gentiles in the Lord's eyes, and the true Israel was comprised of the secular, spiritually immature followers of Jesus.

Therefore be wise as serpents- The Lord may not be using the snake here as a symbol of sin or sinful people. He may simply be alluding to the way that when a snake moves into a new area, it is cautious, uses camouflage to blend in, spies out opportunities, doesn't act hastily and doesn't immediately go for what looks the easiest target. These kinds of characteristics were absolutely necessary for the apostles to emulate in their work. The Lord was not a fan of mass rallies and high profile publicity, rather did He prefer to work as quietly as possible and as deeply as possible with individuals; and He wanted His preachers to do the same. Yet again, as with "in the midst of wolves", the Lord is alluding to an understanding then common within Judaism; in this case, to *Shiyr hashirim Rabba*, fol. 16: "The holy blessed God said to the Israelites, Ye shall be toward me as upright as the doves; but, toward the Gentiles, as cunning as serpents". The Lord is saying that the Jewish religious leadership, with all their hatred of Gentiles, were to be treated as Gentiles- for this is who they were. And again, the true Israel are the Lord's bungling, hesitant, misunderstanding followers and preachers.

And harmless as doves- Doves and snakes are not aggressive and move away from conflict- whereas wolves are aggressive. Perhaps that is the Lord's point- be wise, prudent, but not aggressive, and retreat from confrontation.

10:17 *But beware of men*- As in 10:16, this is an appeal to not be like sheep in their naivety. The apostles were going to suffer, ultimately. Therefore, they should beware of trusting men too quickly, because the aggression towards them was going to be far greater than they imagined. The apostles likely didn't think that the Jewish religious leadership were as bad as the Lord knew them to be, and they were initially too concerned not to upset them (Mt. 15:12). The "men" of whom they were to "beware" were surely the Pharisees, because elsewhere the Lord teaches the disciples to "beware" of them (Mt. 7:15; 16:6,11,12; Lk. 20:46); and He goes on in this verse to speak of "*their* synagogues", showing that "men" are in fact the Jewish religious leadership.

For they will deliver you up to councils- Their Sanhedrin. The language of 'handing over', Sanhedrin and scourging is all relevant to the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. He is teaching here that the preaching of His Gospel is an incarnation of Himself, and will result in our suffering the essence of His own sufferings and death. To go out on the road of missionary witness is to walk the path of the cross. It's not anything glamorous- if done properly as He intended.

And in their synagogues they will scourge you- Scourging was usually only practiced for blasphemy or breaching public order. Maybe we are to read this in the context of the Lord asking His preachers to be as snakes and doves, to not be provocative and not seek to create public showdowns with the Jewish leadership. Perhaps the Lord foresaw that some of His men would fail in this, and suffer accordingly. Or perhaps He foresaw how belief in Him as God's Son would be

classified as the ultimate blasphemy. And yet synagogues could only scourge those who were members. The Lord foresaw that His preachers would remain within the synagogue system rather than leave it totally. The fact Paul was scourged in synagogues (2 Cor. 11:25) shows that in being a Jew to the Jews, he opted to remain within the synagogue system. This fact shows that the Lord Jesus didn't intend His people to formally break with the synagogue system, even though it was apostate in doctrine and practice. This indicates that there was absolutely no sense within Him of 'guilt by association' nor a demand for His people to leave apostate systems- they were to remain there until they were cast out of the synagogues (Jn. 16:2) (See references to the Jewish laws in W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988) Vol. 2 p. 183).

10:18 *Yes and before governors and kings you shall be brought for my sake, for a testimony*- The Lord wanted to give even kings and rulers the chance of repentance. The legal language suggests that a court case was going on- in the court of Heaven, situations on earth are tried, and the witness of the apostles at their earthly court cases against *them* was used in the court case *against the rulers* which was going on in Heaven.

To them- Or, "against them". The "men" of :17, the Jews; for there is a contrast made between "them" and "the Gentiles". In :14 the Lord has taught to shake off the dust of their feet as a "witness against" the unbelieving Jews (this is added in the parallel records in Mk. 6:11 and Lk. 9:5).

And to the Gentiles- Yet the commission told the apostles to *not* go to the Gentiles. The Lord speaks in this wider sense because He wanted them to realize that what He was asking them to do on their brief preaching tour was to be understood by them, even then, as programmatic and prophetic of their (and our) later witness to the entire world, as required by the great commission. The implication is that the "men" of :17 are the ones who will lead to the disciples being persecuted by Gentiles; and this indeed is how it worked out, due to a program of Jewish orchestrated opposition to the Gospel's spreading. The idea of a testimony to or against the Gentiles is to be found in Mt. 24:14, where we find the same two Greek words used in speaking of the preaching of the Gospel as a *testimony* to "the nations" (s.w. "Gentiles") in the very last days. The spreading of the Gospel to the whole world will likely be facilitated by high profile, well publicized legal cases against the Gospel's preachers- something perhaps we have yet to see in the last days.

10:19 *But when they deliver you up*- The Jews (the "men" of :17, the "them" of :18) delivering Christian preachers to Gentile powers, after the pattern of what they did to Jesus.

Do not be anxious how or what you shall speak, for it shall be given to you at that time what to speak- A major theme of the Sermon on the Mount is not to be anxious; the same word occurs in Mt. 6:25,27,28,31,34. Here the Lord is surely saying that the general principles He had taught there would not have specific fulfillment in time of persecution. Likewise "for My sake" in 10:18 alludes to Mt. 5:11.

"Given you" is language appropriate to Moses and prophets like Jeremiah; it is here applied to the Lord's generally secular followers (Ex. 4:10-12; Jer. 1:6-10). He was continually encouraging them to see that ministries which they had never considered possible of realistic emulation were in fact to be their pattern. Time and again, the Lord

is saying that His experience under persecution will be ours. For it was *given* Him what to *speak* (Jn. 3:34; 12:49 same words) and He wants us to know that if we preach Him and seek to replicate His ministry in our own, then God likewise will strengthen us as He did His own Son. We note that it was likewise *given* to the apostles what to *speak* in Acts 2:4; 4:29. They misunderstood the great commission- they twisted it to mean that they must preach to all Jews rather than to all the Gentiles; but by grace, God still kept this aspect of the promise to support obedience to the commission given; even if it was misunderstood.

10:20 *For it is not you that speaks, but the Spirit of your Father that speaks in you*- Mark has "the Holy Spirit", but the reference to God as Father paves the way for the next teaching- that human family will likely forsake us if we are faithful to our true Father (:21). Even although "we do not know how to pray for as we ought, the Spirit himself intercedes for us" (Rom. 8:26). The Spirit of the Father and Son speaks in us when we pray (Rom. 8:15), if our will / spirit is theirs. To put this in more technical but I think very telling terms: "The subject-object scheme of 'talking to somebody' is transcended; He who speaks through us is he who is spoken to" (Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* Vol. 3 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963) p. 192). It's perhaps the thought behind Mt. 10:20: "It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you". This is why Paul can thank God that he finds himself praying constantly for Timothy (2 Tim. 1:3)- because he recognizes that not only can we influence God by our prayers, bur He influences us in what we pray for.

We read "in you", not, as we might expect, 'through you'. It may be that the Lord is hinting that if we have the Spirit of God within us, if we are thinking in a spiritual way generally in life, then in times of crisis that Spirit which is in us will guide us to say the right things when under pressure. This approach would explain the present tense here, when the context is speaking of the future (:19). He doesn't say 'It will not be you who will speak, but the Spirit which will speak in you'. The present tense is used here in :20 to suggest that if we are *now* spiritually minded, with our spirit being God's Spirit, then in that future time of crisis we will know how to speak, the words will come out right, because we have lived now in a spiritually minded way. The idea of the Spirit of God speaking in a person, so that their words are not theirs but God's, was language which Jews would've associated with the Old Testament prophets. Again we see the Lord inviting His secular, immature followers to see themselves as the prophets, those whom they had been taught were in a class of their own, and to whom they as mere secular men could in no way pretend. But the Lord's followers were to be a new Moses, new prophets, a new priesthood, a new Israel.

10:21 *And brother shall deliver up brother to death and the father his child, and children shall rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death*- "Deliver up" is a term used about the Lord's delivering to death, just as 'to cause to be put to death' is used of His death (Mt. 26:59; 27:1; Mk. 14:55; 1 Pet. 3:18). Our sufferings in the final tribulation, and for preaching the Gospel generally, grant us a fellowship with our Lord's sufferings. Given the close knit nature of Middle Eastern families, the language of family breakup used here would've been far harder for the initial hearers to accept than it is for many of us. The family was seen as sacrosanct, somehow your family would always be there for you. But the Lord is teaching that the dislike of Him and His message would be such that it would unleash a social and psychological force of hatred such as had not been known previously. Judaism taught that it was only Gentile families which were like this- only Gentiles betrayed their brother, their parents and their

children. But the Lord is teaching that through Israel's rejection of Him and His people, Israel were acting like Gentiles and thus becoming as them in God's sight.

10:22 *And you shall be hated of all men*- This again was Judaism's understanding of Israel's experience in the Gentile world (the word is used of Gentile 'hate' for Israel in Lk. 1:71); but the Lord is teaching that His followers were the true Israel, and the Jewish orthodoxy who hated them were in fact the unsaved Gentile world.

For My Name's sake- It is the Jews who would do this (Jn. 15:21) and yet by doing so, they would simply be doing what "all nations" would do the Lord's people 'for His Name's sake' (Mt. 24:9).

But he that endures to the end, the same shall be saved- It is only by having *hupomone* that we can be saved (Mt. 24:13 cp. Lk. 21:19). And yet Mt. 10:22 would suggest that it will be difficult to have *hupomone* in our last days; many will fall away. Our present world is ever changing; stability in work, residence, relationships etc. seems impossible. *People give up so easily.* The generation brought up on telly and Snickers bars and deregulated Capitalism seeks only immediate resolution and satisfaction; and their short-termism fuels yet further their endless quest for the new and novel. And yet *we* must endure to the end in our work for the Lord and our relationship with Him, believing the same One Faith, living the same spiritual life which those doctrines demand. He amongst us who has *hupomone* to the end of the last generation, right up to the day when the Lord comes, the same will be saved (Mt. 24:13). The Lord Jesus had *hupomone*, it lead Him to the cross and beyond; and we must share His spirit of *hupomone* if we would ultimately share in His salvation (2 Thess. 3:5; Rev. 1:9; 3:10).

The "end" in view may well be the Lord's second coming, when "the Son of Man comes" (:23), in the context of the latter day preaching of the Gospel during the tribulation; for this passage in Matthew 10 is repeated in the Olivet prophecy in this same context. But not all readers of these words will have lived at that time. James so often comments upon Matthew's Gospel, and James 5:11 is the only other place in the NT where the words for 'enduring' and 'end' occur: "We count them happy which endure [an allusion to the 'blessedness' of the Beatitudes as recorded in Matthew]. You have heard of the patience [endurance] of Job, and have seen the *end* of the Lord". The "end" may therefore refer to the end of the period of trial in some aspect which the Lord brings into the life of a believer.

10:23 *But when they persecute you*- Persecution was and is a matter of 'when' rather than 'if'. The parable of the sower likewise assumes that persecution because of the word will definitely come. "Persecute" is yet another word which figures frequently in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:10,11,12,44) as an event bound to happen to those who follow the Lord. So often, believers stumble because their experience of it catches them off guard. But we are to expect it, and a life lived under Sermon on the Mount principles will prepare us for the moments of crisis when persecution comes to us in direct and ugly forms.

In this city- Which city? The fulfilment of this prediction was surely in the persecution of the Christians which began in Jerusalem; but Jesus was not then talking in Jerusalem. But "this city" could be translated "that city", and the city every Jew had in mind was Jerusalem.

Flee into the next- Fleeing persecution was a characteristic of the persecuted prophets and righteous. Hebrews 11 is full of allusion to the language in which Judaism's heroes were spoken about in the first century, and Heb. 11:34 speaks of how the Old Testament heroes of faith *fled* the edge of the sword (s.w.). Again and again, the Lord is seeking to inspire His secular followers that they are not to glance at those men as icons of a faith far beyond they themselves, but to realize their significance, and to be as them in the history of the new Israel that was now being created.

For truly I say to you, you shall not have gone through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man comes- The construction could mean that *when* they had gone over the cities of Israel, then the Son of Man would come. "Gone over" translates *teleo*, the noun of which the Lord has just used in the preceding verse (:22) in saying that despite persecution for preaching, they must endure to "the end". All this was His intention for the disciples in the first century, but this whole section of Matthew 10 is later repeated in the Olivet Prophecy, which clearly has reference to the last days. When the witness to Israel is ended, then the Lord will return. The whole picture of preaching within Israel whilst enduring fierce persecution is exactly the picture we get from a futuristic understanding of parts of the book of Revelation. I have outlined such an interpretation in my *The Last Days*.

The idea could be that they would still have cities to flee to right up to the point when the Son of Man comes. The preachers of the Gospel will somehow be preserved in the final tribulation- that would appear to be the message, although Rev. 11 and other passages hint that some at least of them will due.

10:24 *A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his lord*- The Lord is partly speaking to the possible desire in some of the disciples to be martyrs for His cause. Peter's attitude in Gethsemane was clearly of that nature, and some of the disciples came from radicalized, fanatical backgrounds. Martyrdom was a common concept in the first century, and the Lord's warning to flee persecution, to bring about a quiet revolution rather than a political one, was aimed at warning against any desire for a quick, glamorous death for the sake of the Kingdom. In the context, He has warned them to flee persecution (:23). He could be saying that the game plan was that *He* was to die in 'that city' of Jerusalem, but *they* were to seek to preserve their lives so that they could make a longer and more effective witness to Him. They were not 'above' Him- He was the one who had to die as the perfect sacrifice, not them. They were to be 'as' Him in terms of personality (:25), and be satisfied with that- it was to be "enough" for them to bear His reproach (:25). The Lord elsewhere taught Peter that the time for martyrdom would indeed come for Peter- but not right then. So there is the possibility that the Lord is implying 'You are not at this stage *huper* ("above") Me, for the moment, focus on being "as" Me (:25), as disciples learning to copy their teacher'. This suggestion is strengthened by the fact that Paul later writes that we are indeed to be *huper* Christ, in the sense of being instead of Him, for His sake, in our witness. Thus we are to preach "*huper* Christ... in Christ's stead [*huper* again]" (2 Cor. 5:20), suffering in the work of preaching *huper* Christ (2 Cor. 12:10; Phil. 1:29; Col. 1:24), giving our lives *huper* Christ (Acts 15:26), in response to Christ's death *huper* us (Rom. 5:8 and often). So when the Lord taught in Mt. 10:24 that the disciples were not to give their lives *huper* Him their Lord and Master, He might have meant 'at this time'. The time would come, but for then, they were to focus on learning of Him.

10:25 *It is enough*- As explained on :24, the Lord may be teaching that the apostles were not to eagerly choose a martyr's death- that was for Him, not them. It was enough for them that they shared in His sufferings by being slandered as He was.

For the disciple that he be as his Master- See on :24.

If they have called the Master of the house- The head of household. A term often used by the Lord in His parables. And yet He implies that this role is to be functionally aspired to by us. Those instructed in the things of the Kingdom are like a 'master of the house' (Mt. 13:52), and as the household's master would watch for the thief coming, so *we* are to fulfil His function and watch (Mt. 24:43,44).

Beelzebub- 'Beelzebub' has various possible meanings, but one of them is 'Lord of the house'. By using this term, the Lord's critics were implying He did in fact have a household over whom He was Master and Lord. The Lord is saying that He is the head of the family, the household, and the disciples are His *oikiakos*, His relatives, His family ("them of His household"). This idea of disciples being part of a new family based around their teacher, with them all thereby becoming brothers and sisters, was unheard of in the various schools of the Rabbis. A Rabbi had disciples, but the imagery of family was not used. The family unit was exalted as supreme in importance, and could not be emulated in other contexts. The Lord is teaching that the bonds between Him and His followers were so strong that they were indeed a new family, of more importance and significance than the natural family, which no longer claimed first loyalty in the lives, feelings and self-perceptions of His followers. Even today, this is a radical challenge- for so many turn back from full discipleship because of placing loyalty to family above loyalty to Christ. The reasoning is that what we do for family is done for Christ, and family must come first. But time and again the Lord's teaching is that our spiritual family are to come *before* our natural family. So many divisions and dysfunctions within the Lord's body are caused by those who name His Name insisting on putting their family unity before the unity of *His* family. We can't fellowship *them* because if we do, then uncle Tommy won't fellowship *us*... and so the selfish destruction of the Lord's body continues by those who love themselves more than their Lord.

How much more them of his household!- At first blush, this may seem strange. Usually the charismatic, visible leader attracts more slander than his individual supporters. But we see here the Lord's sensitivity to every individual experience of slander for His sake- for He presumably means 'The sum total of all the suffering of My preachers down the centuries until I return will be far more than what I personally shall suffer from the Jews'. We see here His loveliness- His grace, His generosity of spirit, His sensitivity to all we suffer for Him.

10:26 *Therefore fear them not*- Because of the detailed judgment which is to come, at which every name calling, every suffering, shall be openly revealed for what it is and judged- why fear men and their religious elites, or even death itself (social or literal) at the hands of their persecution.

For there is nothing- The Greek could be translated 'Nobody'. This would fit with the sense of the next verse, which is that we as persons should not hide ourselves but come out in the open now, just as we shall be openly revealed at judgment day.

Covered- The Lord uses the same word to warn against 'covering' our light in the sense of not openly preaching and showing who we are (Lk. 8:16).

That shall not be revealed- Judgment has a sense of 'now, but not yet'. Thoughts are revealed now, both to God and to ourselves (if we are perceptive enough to know ourselves); and this is especially stimulated and enabled by reflection upon the cross (Lk. 2:35 s.w.). And yet the public revealing of our thoughts and who we essentially are will be done publically at the day of judgment (1 Cor. 3:13 s.w.). In this sense, 'we make the answer now'. More on this huge theme in *Judgment to Come*.

And nothing hid that shall not be known- The Father right now "sees in secret" (Mt. 6:4,6,18 s.w.). So the concept of being able to even be 'hidden' from Him is foolish. Again, we are to live as if we are at judgment day. Therefore our light of the Gospel should not be placed in a 'hidden place' (Lk. 11:33 s.w.)- the idea of *not* preaching, concealing our faith, is foolish because we shall come out in the open about it at the last day anyway. The "secrets of men" (s.w. 'hidden') shall be judged openly (Rom. 2:16), the "hidden things of darkness" will be made manifest (1 Cor. 4:5)- not to God, who sees them right now anyway, but to ourselves and to others. We are therefore to 'come out' with the Gospel now, whatever the cost, and take comfort that "the hidden man [s.w.] of the heart" is noticed by God and it is this which shall be judged (1 Pet. 3:4).

10:27 *What I tell you*- It could be argued that the content of the Gospel which is to be preached is therefore to be the words of Jesus, what He told the disciples. That is certainly how they understood it, for the four Gospel records are transcripts of the early preaching of the Gospel by the disciples, and they are just that- what the Lord told the disciples.

In the darkness- In the same way as the day of judgment will be a bringing to light what was done and said in darkness (:26), we should live now in that transparent spirit, openly speaking the Gospel, not hiding it, bearing in mind that one day and for eternity, it will be openly revealed who we are and what we believe. The Lord later stated that "in secret [s.w. "hid" in :26] have I said nothing" (Jn. 18:20). He was for a moment adopting the perspective of the disciples, just as He does with the language of demons; *to them*, what He was telling them was said in darkness, was hidden. But it was not to remain hidden within their hearts and brain cells, they were to speak it forth *now*, in that they were to live in the spirit of judgment day today. There are many allusions to Job in the New Testament; far more than may be apparent on the surface. Mt. 10:27 is one of them: "What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops". The idea of God telling us things in the ear which we must then openly declare is surely looking back to Job's words in Job 42:5. "Darkness" is also a Job idea; the word occurs at least 30 times in the book. The final appearance of Yahweh in the darkness of the thundercloud was His reproof of Job's repeated suggestion that the darkness of sin somehow separated God from involvement with man. What Job was told out of darkness, he had to speak forth in the light. It seems that Job's spiritual growth is being picked up by the Lord and presented as our pattern. He does the same in Lk. 18:30, another of the allusions to Job in the New Testament, when He speaks of how each of us must give up house, wife, brethren and children for the Kingdom's sake, and then afterwards receive "manifold more in this time, and in the world to come…". This is exactly the position of Job (Job 42:10), and yet the Lord applies it to each of us.

Speak in the light- This verse is repeated in Lk. 12:3 but from a different perspective: "Therefore whatever you have said in the darkness shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors shall be proclaimed upon the housetops". We are to preach upon the housetops what the Lord told us in the ear. But what *we* have spoken in the ear, or whispered, shall likewise be broadcast from the housetops. Nothing will be secret in the day of judgment, and so we are not be secretive about our faith now. We are to live as if we are in the Lord's judgment day presence- because in essence, we are. For judgment is going on right now. John's take on light and darkness is that Jewish society was the darkness in which the light of Christ was shining (Jn. 1:5; 12:46). The Lord may therefore be implying that they were still partially in darkness, and into that darkness He had come and was showing them the light.

And what you hear in the ear- The personal relationship which we have had with Christ will be very evident at the judgment. What we say to Christ in His ear in the bedroom in the darkness, will be openly spoken by Christ at the judgment (Lk. 12:2,3). God dwells in darkness (Ex. 20:21; 1 Kings 8:12). Speaking in the bedroom in secret with the knowledge we will be openly rewarded is the language of prayer (Mt. 6:6). Our private relationship with the Lord now, praying to Him in our bedroom, meditating about Him there, will then be spoken out loud. But there is a related statement from the Lord: What we hear from Him in the ear, we must speak openly (Mt. 10:26,27; after the pattern of Isaiah in 22:14). Putting these passages together, we get the picture of us speaking to God through Christ, talking in His ear, as one might whisper something very personal into a friend's ear, in the darkness of our bedroom. And then the Lord whispers back in our ear, i.e. His revelation to us (through the word) is very personal and not perceived by others; but we must openly, publicly act upon it. And this private relationship we have with the Lord in our prayer life will then be revealed openly at the judgment. God told Samuel "in his ear" about Saul's future, and although the message must have been hard to relay to Saul, Samuel did so, on the housetop (1 Sam. 9:15,25). The similarities with the Lord's words are too close to be accidental. Surely He saw each of us as passing through the essential experience of Samuel. As we witness our relationship with Christ to an unspiritual world now, so He will speak openly of us to God (Mt. 10:32; Rev. 3:5), Angels (Lk. 12:8) and to the world (Lk. 12:2,3). He will openly confess our name, i.e. our character and personality. What we have said to Him privately will be revealed in the light, i.e. in the Kingdom (Col. 1:12). Preaching on the housetops is built on the language of 1 Sam. 9:15,25, where God speaks in Samuel's ear, and then he speaks that word to Saul on the housetop. The Lord is saying that in essence, we are all in Samuel's position; we hear the word of this world's salvation, the word about "the Kingdom" as it was for Saul, and that very fact is in itself the imperative to overcome our natural reservations and share it with those for whom it is intended- even if, as with Saul, we consider them unlikely and unspiritual hearers.

The outcome of the judgment seat will be a reflection of our attitude to witnessing to others: "What you (the twelve disciples) hear in the ear, that preach upon the housetops... *whosoever* therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven" (Mt. 10:27,32). The Lord seems to go beyond briefing His men before they set off on their preaching mission; He goes on to say that in a sense, *whoever* follows their example will be confessed before the Father. Notice what He *isn't* saying: He isn't saying that if you're keen about preaching, this is the be-all-and-end-all of spiritual life, and this alone will guarantee your acceptance with God.

He says that what we hear (i.e. believe) in the ear, our own very personal understanding and belief of the Gospel, must be spread abroad openly to others. Our salvation is through faith in God's absolute grace; but if it is *real* faith, we will preach it on the housetops, we simply can't keep the knowledge of *such* grace, such great salvation, to ourselves.

Proclaim upon the housetops- According to the Talmud (*Shabbat* 35b), it was the priests who were to proclaim the commencement of the Sabbath by blasts on the shophar from the housetops. Again, the Lord takes language appropriate to the professional religionists and applies it to His largely secular followers. All the time He was seeking to encourage them that *they* were to do this work. And the proclamation of the Kingdom is thus turned into a form of proclaiming a Sabbath of rest. Hebrews uses the language of the Sabbath concerning the Kingdom of God. The idea of teaching upon the housetops what we hear in the ear is language which surely alludes to how Isaiah and the prophets heard God's word in their ear and then taught it to others (Is. 5:9; 50:4). The idea was that the Lord's followers were not to see the prophets as pale faced, iconic figures- but to realize they were no less than them in their service of God and His Son.

10:28 *And do not be afraid*- The Lord was quite clear that His followers should expect death and serious suffering for preaching Him. He perceived that fear of audience response would be a strong factor in the temptation not to preach Him. But He gave the reason for not fearing in :26- all shall be revealed at the day of judgment. Belief in the doctrine of final judgment therefore has huge impact upon life in practice- in this case, giving us strength not to fear the consequences of our witness. For many believers today, persecution unto death is not a likely consequence of witness; fear of slight embarrassment, being thought 'odd' for turning a conversation around, is a very small price. The Lord is asking us here to accept that witness for Him may well cost us death. If we accept that, accept it as part and parcel of the Lord's basic message, then our approach to witness will be quite different. Fear of audience response will no longer be a major factor, if we have solemnly accepted that we are prepared to die for the sake of preaching the Gospel. Luke's record adds: "I say unto you *My friends*, Be not afraid of them…" (Lk. 12:4). If we are His friends, the friends of the Son of God, the prince of the kings of the earth- why fear audience response when we witness? The labored assurances of the next verses about being of more value than sparrows etc. are all in the context, therefore, of assuring us that we need not ultimately fear negative response to our witness.

Of those that kill the body but are not able to kill the soul- It is our 'real self' which will eternally endure. In this sense, for the faithful, their body may be killed but their soul cannot be. I take this to mean that who they essentially are is for ever recorded by the Lord, and they will be given that same personality at the resurrection. Significantly, the Bible speaks not of the 'resurrection of the body' [it's the creeds which speak of this], but rather "the resurrection of the just", "the resurrection of the dead". The resurrection is more about resurrected characters than resurrected bodies, although the process will involve a new body being given.

But rather fear Him who is able to destroy- See on 16:25 *lose it*.

Both soul and body- The inference can be drawn that the rejected will have both soul and body destroyed at the last day. This means there must be a resurrection of the body-

and then the destruction of that body in the condemnation process, as well as of their "soul". *Psuhe* has a wide range of meaning- sometimes it can mean simply the body, at other times, the essential personality. This too will be destroyed, for the memory of the rejected will be forgotten, they will cease to exist in all dimensions. There should be a "fear" of rejection; there are more details, more frequently, about the condemnation experience than the joy of acceptance in that day. This is not negative psychology; the Lord in His wisdom knew that this was necessary for us, to keep ever before us the sense of the future we may miss. This should be our fear, far more than death or social rejection by those to whom we witness.

In Gehenna- The Jews believed that 'hell' had three sections: Gehenna, a place of eternal fire for those Jews who broke the covenant and blasphemed God; 'the shades', an intermediate place similar to the Catholic idea of purgatory; and a place of rest where the faithful Jew awaited the resurrection at the last day. This distinction has no basis in the Bible. However, it's significant that the Lord Jesus uses 'Gehenna' and the figure of eternal fire to describe the punishment of people for what the Jews of His day would've considered incidental sins, matters which were far from blasphemy and breaking the covenant – glancing at a woman with a lustful eye (Mk. 9:47), hypocrisy (Lk. 12:1,5; Mt. 23:27–33), not giving a cup of water to a "little one", forbidding a disciple of John the Baptist to follow Jesus (Mk. 9:39–43); not preaching the Gospel fearlessly and boldly (Mt. 10:25–28). These matters were and are shrugged off as of no eternal consequence. But just like the prophets of Israel did, the Lord Jesus seizes upon such issues and purposefully associates them with the most dire possible punishment which His Jewish hearers could conceive – Gehenna. Time and again, the Bible alludes to incorrect ideas and reasons with people from the temporary assumption those ideas might be true. The language of demons, as we will show later, is a classic example. And it's quite possible the Lord is doing the same here with the concept of Gehenna – the punishment for the Jew who breaks the covenant and blasphemes. The Lord was primarily teaching about behaviour, not giving a lecture about the state of the dead. And so He takes the maximum category of eternal punishment known to His audience, and says that this awaits those who sin in matters which on His agenda are so major, even if in the eyes of the Jewish world and humanity generally they were insignificant.

10:29 *Are not two sparrows*- "An inscription of the Emperor Diocletian setting out the maximum prices that might be paid for various articles of commerce shows that sparrows were the cheapest of birds used for food..." (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Leciester: I.V.P., 1992)). This is another example of the Lord's radical collision course with the Rabbis; He taught that God's care even embraces sparrow. For the Rabbis explicitly forbad prayers that mentioned God's care for birds, because they argued that it was dishonouring to God to associate Him with something so small as a bird (*Berith* 5.3). And the Lord purposefully stood that idea upon its head. The Rabbis had a whole list of unforgivable sins, like murder, apostasy, contempt for the Law, etc. But the Lord went further. His many words of judgment weren't directed to the murderers and whores and Sabbath breakers; they were instead directed against those who condemned those people, considering themselves righteous. He calls those who appeared so righteous a 'generation of vipers'. The publican, not the Pharisee, finds God's acceptance, according to Jesus. And again, the Lord is making a telling point- because Rabbis held that repentance for publicans was almost impossible, because it was impossible for them to know exactly all the people they'd cheated. Very clearly, the Lord's message was radical. He was out to form a holy people from whores and gamblers, no-good boys and conmen. And moreover, He was out to show that what

God especially judges and hates are the things that humanity doesn't think twice about: hypocrisy, self-righteousness, judgmentalism, exclusion of others…

Sold for a very small coin- An assarion / farthing, the tenth part of a drachma / denarius, which was a day's pay for a labourer. The Matthew record has the Lord saying that two sparrows are sold for one farthing; Luke 12:6 records that He said that five sparrows were sold for two farthings. So what did the Lord really say? I suggest something like this: 'As you know, two sparrows are sold for one farthing, they cost half a farthing each; but often, as you know, *five* sparrows are sold for *two* farthings, they'll throw one extra in for free, they're worth so little'.

And not one of them shall fall on the ground- One sparrow "shall not fall on the ground without (the knowledge of) your Father". God is aware of the death of each bird- He does not allow animals to die due to their natural decay (the clockwork mechanism) without Him being actively involved in and conscious of their death. Again, Jesus shows how God's knowledge and participation in the things of the natural creation must imply an even greater awareness of us. "The very hairs of your head are all numbered… you are of more value than many sparrows" (Mt. 10:30,31). God hasn't wound up this world and left it ticking by clockwork, dispassionately looking on as Israel and all His people make such a mess of things. He sends the rain, consciously; not a sparrow falls from the air [i.e., as the result of a man's sling stone- for birds die in their nests usually, not in mid-flight] without Him being aware, and, by implication, grieving for it. He even knows how much sparrows are sold for. See on 6:26.

Withiut your Father- The Lord was "the word made flesh". All that He taught, He in some way experienced and obeyed. In the time of His persecution and death, He fell to the ground literally (same words- Mk. 14:35) as well as figuratively (same words Jn. 12:24); and called out to the "Father". Clearly He had in mind His own earlier teaching; but how hard and demanding it was for Him to live it out.

10:30 *But the very hairs of your head are all numbered*- see 2 Sam. 1:23. The redeemed are a community whom man cannot number (Rev. 7:9), as many as the stars in the sky which neither Abraham nor any man could number. The Lord may be making an allusion to this in order to highlight the scale of knowledge which God has- He numbers the community of believers exactly, over space and over time, and He also numbers the hairs on every one of His people. This vast knowledge of God is often referred to in the Psalms as a guarantee that therefore God will ultimately protect His people. Lk. 21:18, which we have shown to have similarities with the preaching commission of Mt. 10, comments that "there shall not an hair of your head perish". The question is whether the Lord is assuring His preachers that they will not ultimately die; it might sound like it, from such assurance. And yet earlier verses in the preaching commission sound as if the preachers will indeed suffer, quite possibly unto death. And we know that some of them did suffer death. So what are we to make of these assurances of protection, so strong that the preacher should be fearless and not fear death as a consequence for preaching? I suggest that the Lord, as often in His teaching, is speaking on an elevated, spiritual level. The possibility of death for witness is a clear theme of His, especially in Revelation. These strong assurances of protection and salvation from death would therefore be His way of saying that His ultimate salvation of His preachers at the resurrection will involve the preservation of them as unique personalities, down to the hairs of their head. And therefore they should not fear death in this life. For He knows

them. The fear of death revolves around the sense that I as the sum of all my experiences, my uniqueness, shall be no more- and the Lord is urging us to believe that God not only knows our unique attributes better than we do, but shall ultimately preserve them in the resurrection of the body and in the nature of the life eternal.

10:31 *Therefore fear not*- The Lord is asking a lot here; He's asking for us to preach without fear of consequence and audience reaction. That is a step beyond preaching knowing the likely price, and being willing to pay that price. To know that price and yet preach without fear is a step beyond being willing to accept consequence.

You are of more value than many sparrows- The same word is used in the same context in Mt. 6:26. Having spoken of how God provides for the birds of the air, the Lord drives home the comparison: "Are you not much better [s.w. "of more value"] than them?". The term is again used in Mt. 12:12: "How much then is a man better than a sheep". We must give full weight to this triple emphasis on how much more valuable we are than the mortal animals whom God is so careful for. The request that we do not fear is repeated and labored throughout the section. It is fear of what others think and may do which so often holds us back from witness, be it to family members or literally approaching people on the street. With such laboured assurances, we are to overcome fear and "therefore" preach openly- this is the force of the "therefore" in :32.

10:32- see on 10:27.

Therefore- See on :31 "more value". The sense here is 'accordingly'- in accordance with the colossal emphasis upon not being held back one bit by fear of consequence, we are to accordingly confess Christ before men. The requirement not to fear but to confess is so strong that it could be called a first principle of the Lord's teaching. We are to be fearless in witness.

Everyone who shall confess me before men- Confessing Christ before men can also be an allusion to baptism, not just bucking up the courage to give someone a tract at work (Mt. 10:32 = Rom. 10:9,10). This allusion is confirmed when we realize that "confess" translates two Greek words, 'to confess in'. We confess in Christ by baptism into Him. In another sense, our witness is because we are in Christ, we are Him to the world, and therefore His fearlessness unto death in witness should be ours. The Lord spoke of how if we confess Him before men, He will confess knowledge of us before the Father; and if we deny Him, He will deny us. This language is applied by John to John the Baptist- for he comments that John the Baptist "confessed and denied not, but confessed, I am not the Christ" (Jn. 1:20). In this sense, John Baptist is being set up as our example in preaching- and again, John comments that we too are to confess the Son and not deny Him (1 Jn. 2:23), after the pattern of John the Baptist. And yet note what John's 'confession' was- it was a profession of his unworthiness, that although he was the herald of the Christ, he was not Jesus. Again, we see here a pattern for our witness to the Lord. Eph. 6:15 speaks of our each being 'sandaled' with the preparation of the Gospel. Who prepared the way of the Lord by preaching, wearing sandals? John the Baptist. It seems Paul is alluding to John here, setting him up as the preacher's example. The reference to "loins girt" (Eph. 6:14) would also be a John allusion- the record twice (in Mt. 3:4; Mk. 1:6) stresses how John had his 'loins girded'.

When He says He will confess *us* before the Father, He means He will confess *our name* before God (Rev. 3:5); He knows us according to our names / characters. He speaks of ecclesial members as "names" in Rev. 3:4; He calls His own sheep by name, and they each know His voice, responding to His word *individually*. The call to one sheep will only be recognized by that sheep; the others won't respond (Jn. 10:3). He will take individual note of each sheep, treating them accordingly, as the shepherd leads more gently those that are with young (Is. 40:11). It seems that even now, we each have

our own individual name with the Father and Son, encompassing their understanding of our essential character. It may even be that in the record of Scripture, God inspired the writers to record the names of individuals according to His judgment of them (or at least, how the faithful viewed them at the time), rather than by the names they actually went under. What mother would have named her child Nabal (fool), or Ahira (brother of evil, Num. 1:15), or 'sickness' or 'wasting' (Mahlon and Chilion)? These names were either given to them by others and the use adopted by God, or simply God in the record assigned them such names.

The same two words forr "confess [in]" are found in Rom. 10:9 "If you shall *confess with* your mouth the Lord Jesus… you shall be saved". The idea of *homolegeo* seems to be of public confession; literally to *homo-logos*. The Lord has just used the word *logos* with reference to the "words" of our preaching before men (10:14). *Homo* has the sense of being together with others. It can carry the sense of 'assent', in that our*logos* comes together with the *logos* of another; but the majority of NT usage is clearly with the sense of professing, making our *logos* before others. At the day of judgment, the Lord will "profess" His verdict to men (Mt. 7:23) and here we learn that He will "profess" it to His Father too. The weight of evidence on the basis of usage is that this word refers to public profession of a *logos*, of our innermost thought- which is exactly in line with the themes of the Sermon on the Mount: that our internal thought and position, our *logos*, is crucially important; but if it is a Christ-like *logos* then it will be impossible to conceal it, it must naturally become public, for a city set on a hill cannot be hid. Consider the evidence:
-Herod *confessed* [AV "promised"] with an oath" in front of witnesses to give Herodias' daughter whatever she wished (Mt. 14:7)
- John the Baptist *confessed* in his preaching (Jn. 1:20)
- If anyone *confessed* openly that Jesus was Messiah, then they would be cast out of the synagogue (Jn. 9:22; 12:42)
- The Pharisees *confessed* their doctrinal positions, i.e. they openly taught them (Acts 23:8)
- Paul *confessed* his beliefs publically when on trial (Acts 24:14)
- Timothy *confessed* his confession before many witnesses (1 Tim. 6:12)
- Some openly *confess* their knowledge of God when their private lives don't match that public confession (Titus 1:16)
- The faithful *confessed* their faith in God's promises before all (Heb. 11:13)
- Teachers *confess* a doctrinal position about Jesus in their teaching and must be assessed by their audience accordingly (1 Jn. 2:23; 4:2,3,15; 2 Jn. 7).

In Matthew 10, the Lord uses the word in the very context of the need to openly witness. He who refuses to make this public profession will not be accepted in the day of judgment; the Lord Jesus will not confess such a person before "My Father". Rom. 10:9,10 likewise predicate salvation upon this public confession. And the contrast in Matthew 10:32,33 is between *confessing* Christ and *denying* Him before men, leading to being *denied* by Jesus before "My *Father*". Without doubt, 1 Jn. 2:23 has all this in mind when teaching that "Whosoever *denies* the Son, the same has not *the Father*, but he that *confesses* [s.w.; AV "acknowledges"] the Son has the Father also". Taken together, these usages of *confession* present a solid case- that salvation is related to public confession. That is not to say that salvation is by works, nor is it to say that evangelism is the be all and end all of the Christian life- after all, we all have different gifts, some are more pastoral than evangelical. Salvation is by grace *through faith*; and if we believe, then we cannot be passive, we become a city set on a hill which cannot

be hid. Otherwise, as the Lord teaches several times in the Sermon on the Mount, we have not really believed in God's grace. The Sermon teaches that there is no such thing as a secret Christian, a candle lit which nobody else sees or gets a hint of. The absolute necessity of public confession was taught throughout the Sermon, and it is being made plain again here in Mt. 10 and throughout the other references to confession. In this area particularly, we are faced with the temptation of sins of omission- to consider that we are believers because we have mentally assented to certain theological propositions about Christ, but not making any public commitment or confession about them. No wonder the Lord raised this theme in encouraging His preachers to go forth fearlessly.

I will also confess him before my Father who is in heaven- The "also" suggests there will be a direct correlation between our confessing of Him before men now, and how He speaks of us before the Father both now and in the last day. The same idea is found in the way in which He earlier taught that we are forgiven *as* we forgive others. What's going on in Heaven concerning us need be no mystery to us- because it is a direct reflection of our lives of forgiveness, witness etc. in this world. The future judgment seat will be only a bringing to earth of the judgment seat which even now is going on in Heaven. Mt. 10:32 surely also has in view the Lord's speaking to the Father in Heaven right now, in this life. But compare the parallel Lk. 12:8: "Everyone who acknowledges Me before men, the Son of man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God". Of what does this speak? Surely of the last judgment [note the reference to the "Son of man", a term usually used about judgment to come; and denial before the angels surely equates with the "I never knew you" of the final judgment]. The events of the last day, with the Lord confessing or denying us before the Father and the Angels, are actually going on this very day.

10:33 *But whoever shall deny me*- The whole purpose of the true church is to be a light to the world- "the only cooperative society in the world that exists for the benefit of its non-members", as William Temple put it. The Lord will tell some in the last day that He never knew them, He will deny them; and yet He will deny those who never confessed Him before men (Mt. 8:23; 10:32,33). These people will have prophesied in His Name [i.e. preached to the ecclesia], and done "mighty works" for Him; but the fact they didn't confess Him before men is seen as not knowing Him; for to know Him is to perceive that we are intended to confess Him before men. This, perhaps, is our greatest danger. The presence and witness of God is no longer in a tent in the Sinai, nor in a Jerusalem temple. God reveals Himself through the group of ordinary, mixed up folks who comprise the ecclesias. For the watching world, we present proof that Christ is indeed alive; we provide the visible shape of what God and Jesus are really like. This is how vital is the matter of witness. It is utterly fundamental to the whole purpose behind our having been called. If we deny Christ, we deny that Jesus is the Christ (1 Jn. 2:22); and yet we deny Christ if we don't preach Him (Mt. 10:33). It follows that if we really believe that Jesus was not just Jesus of Nazareth but the Christ of God, therefore we won't deny Him but will preach Him. This is why there is connection between confessing Jesus as Christ and preaching Him (Jn. 9:22; Acts 18:5; Phil. 2:11). A grasp of who the Lord Jesus really is and the height of His present exaltation will naturally result in a confession of Him to the world, as well as a deep personal obedience to His word and will (Heb. 2:1).

There are at least three Biblical examples of people denying Jesus- the same Greek word is used- and yet repenting. Peter denied the Lord "before all" (Mt. 26:70), and yet was restored. The entire crowd around Jesus, including the healed woman, initially 'denied' they had touched Jesus (Lk. 8:45); but the woman then came out into the open

and confessed Christ before all. The Jews 'denied' Christ (Acts 3:13,14) but then repented and were baptized publically. The point is, that in the moments when we deny Him, He denies us; but we can change the situation.

It's tempting to wonder whether all this talk of confession and denial is only really relevant to those standing trial for their Christian faith, with the threat of death before them and the possibility of saving their life if they make some symbolic denial of Christ. But the words for confessing and denying occur together in Tit. 1:16 about those within the ecclesia who "Profess [s.w. 'confess'] that they know God, but in works*deny* Him". We can make the profession of faith before men, and in the public confession of baptism- whilst effectively denying the faith in our lives. There were some within the ecclesias of the first century who 'denied' the Lord (2 Pet. 2:1). External membership can appear as 'confession', but the point is that it isn't necessarily. It can actually be a front for denial of Him…

Before men I will also deny him before my Father who is in heaven- There is a direct correlation between our attitudes to witnessing before men now, and the attitude of the Lord Jesus about us in Heaven "before", or 'before the face of', the Father. Witnessing is essentially personal, each of us individually "before men". As modern life progresses in reducing relationships to online abstractions, we must remember this. An individual may press the right keys on their keyboard, send money online to a preaching organization- and yet never be making any witness about Christ before the faces of men. Indeed, those with whom the person does have face to face relationships may well be totally unaware he is a Christian. It's this kind of thing which the Lord is addressing in such demanding terms- our witness *before men* , not in some anonymous world of avatars, is related to how we witnesses about us *before the face of God in Heaven*.

10:34 *Think not that I came to send peace on earth*- The Lord surely has in mind what He has just commanded in 10:13, where He uses the same words to describe how the apostles were to let their *peace come* upon the households they entered- the peace of *shalom* with God, the salvation of Jesus. But that peace could return to them unclaimed, and the Lord's words here in :34 seem to imply that He is warning them that generally, their message of peace will not be accepted. In the exposition of 10:13,14 I suggested that the households being visited were those who had initially responded to the message about Jesus as preached by John. The sad reality was that many of these did not further respond to the peace offered to them in Christ.

"Peace on the earth" is an allusion to the prophecies of peace in the Messianic Kingdom, and to the Angelic proclamation that there would be peace on earth through Christ (Lk. 2:14). The disciples were prone to be influenced by Jewish expectations and hopes for an imminent Messianic Kingdom to be established. The Lord's point is therefore surely that they were not to preach a gospel of immediate peace on earth, but rather one to come in the future; He made the point later that He had come to take peace from the earth (Rev. 6:4), but of course He offered *peace with God* through forgiveness and reconciliation which He would achieve through His life and death (Col. 1:20).

I came not to send peace- The context is the Lord telling His preachers to 'come' to households and pronounce the 'coming' [s.w.] of peace (10:13). But He is warning them that the potential will typically not be realized; only a few individuals within those households would accept the message, and effectively they were going to be breaking up those households because of the total loyalty to Christ and the new household in

Him which they were to demand. Their coming to those households was effectively His personal coming to them- for in the work of witness they were Him, just as we are too. Who wants to break up another's household? I found myself thinking about that after coming to realize the social and relational results of baptizing individuals into Christ in Moslem families and societies. We can only do so if we are utterly convinced that the only ultimate household worth belonging to is that in the body of Christ.

But a sword- The *machaira* was really a dagger, suggesting interpersonal conflict and hatred. He wanted His preachers to be under no illusion as to the result of people accepting their message; there would be acceptance of it on a national level, the implication is that the Lord expected individuals to accept it, and to suffer in their relationships and family life as a result of it. This needs to be remembered in our preaching too. We are not offering an easy life now, of peace and happiness on all fronts- but rather peace with God and hope in the future Kingdom of God on earth.

10:35 *For I came to set a man at variance against*- The single Greek word translated here is a form of the noun for 'two'. The division would be down one line, into two groups- the household of origin, and the household of Christ, where He was head of the household. Division within families, especially between sons and fathers, was seen as far more awful than it is today. But the offer of Christ to be Lord, to be our head, is so compelling and colossal in implication that there can simply be no other option than division, at least emotionally and psychologically, between those members of a household who accept Him as Lord and head, and those who will not. The implications of what the Lord is teaching here outlaws any thought of marriage out of the faith; to consciously create a divided family from the start can only reflect a very low level of commitment to Him as Lord, Master and household head.

His father and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law- Why these specific examples? Perhaps the Lord envisaged the younger generation being more responsive than their elders. But maybe His point was that the younger members of an extended family were expected to obey the head of the household- and the good news of His Kingdom, His dominion over men and women, was that loyalty was no longer to be to the head of the family, but to Him. For He was offering men and women entrance into a new King-dom, where He was King and His dominion was accepted in the lives of those who accepted the Gospel of that Kingdom.

10:36 *And a man's foes shall be they of his own household*- Jewish thought was that their enemies were the Romans, and Zechariah's song reflects this expectation- that Messiah was to save Israel from her foes (s.w. Lk. 1:71,74). The Lord is redefining things. The foes were no longer to be the Gentiles, but all those who rejected the Gospel. For a strongly family based society, this was an almost impossibly high bar to jump. But the implication was that those who accepted it would not be alone, but would be making the sacrifice in order to take their place in a new family. For those raised within believing households, the radical nature of the call to leave family is hard to appreciate. One can understand all the positive hopes and often unrealistic expectations held by those who do break with their families in order to come to Christ, and their difficulty in finding that many long established members within the new household are sceptical and highly critical of the community. The Lord's teaching about the cost of following Him in terms of loss of relationships must be given its full weight. Loss of relationships, especially family ones, is part of following Him in spirit and truth.

The use of "own" i "own household" suggests that the believer was still to accept his or her unbelieving family as their own.

10:37 *He that loves father or mother more than me is*- This is the language of Levi (Dt. 33:9), encouraging the disciples that they, secular men that they largely were, must consider themselves the new priesthood by whom Israel were to be taught and saved.

Not worthy of Me- We must supply something for the "Me"; the idea is surely that we are not worthy of His love and death for us, of *His* family, if we love *our* family members more than Him. The contrast is between "Me" and our earthly families. 'Worthiness' was an idea associated in the first century mind with families. We cannot be worthy of membership in His family if we choose to identify ourselves as members of our natural family first and foremost. On one hand we are never worthy of Christ, and yet He implies here that He does consider us worthy of Him *if* we respond. This is not the same as salvation by works in the sense that Paul later decries; it is salvation by grace through faith, but faith without works is dead. There must be some response. The idea that we can never be worthy of Christ is therefore quite simply wrong, or at best poorly worded and inadequate. He speaks here of being worthy of Him by sacrificing family relationships; and being not worthy of Him by refusing to sacrifice them.

And he that loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me- Huper Christ means just that in the accusative, "more than" Him. But the idea of *huper* in relation to the Lord is used many times in the NT concerning His death "for" or *huper* us. It would seem likely that the Lord had His death for us in mind at this point, for He goes straight on to speak of how we are to take up our cross and follow Him to His death on Golgotha (:38). The shift of thought towards the cross in :38 is more natural if we perceive that He is already thinking of it in :37 when speaking of our being worthy of 'Him', i.e. His death for us.

10:38 *And he that does not take his cross*- The context is about the preaching of the Gospel. It is not at all glamorous. We should be ready to die a martyr's death. That is the clear teaching here. The context before and after this teaching about the cross is of preaching the Gospel and suffering persecution and broken relationships because of it. This, then, is the sense in which the Lord foresaw many of us suffering for His sake. We are bidden carry His cross (Mt. 20:23; Gal. 6:12), and yet also our own cross (Mt. 10:38). In our cross-experiences, those times when there is no other Christian option but to shoulder it... *then* we know something of the cross of the Lord, and then He is actively aware of that small kindred between His cross and ours. He remembers how it was, and sees the commonality of feeling which we have attained.

And follow after me, is not worthy of me- Reflect on a Gospel parallel to see the huge importance of being a disciple of Jesus. In Mt. 10:38 the Lord says that whoever doesn't take up his cross and follow after Him, "is not worthy of me". In Lk. 14:27 we have the same words, but concluded with "… the same cannot be my disciple". To be a disciple of the Lord is to be worthy of Him. To seek to walk as He walked, to follow behind Him, is to be worthy of Him. The important thing is to follow, for all our stumblings, but at least to be in the way behind Him. I have made the point that the instructions regarding witnessing here have their equivalent in the Olivet prophecy, and they may particularly refer to our preaching just before the Lord's return. At that time especially, "a man's foes shall be they of his own household", and therefore "he that takes not his cross (then), and follows after Me, is not worthy". Our response to our trials then during the tribulation will effectively be our judgment seat.

Consider the contexts in which the Lordspoke of taking up His cross: (1) In Luke 9:23-26 He tells the crowds that they have come to His meetings because

of the intriguing miracles of the loaves and fishes. The Lord is saying: 'Don't follow me because of the loaves and fishes; take up my cross'!
(2) The rich young man was willing to be obedient in everything apart from parting with his wealth. In this context, of asking the most difficult thing for him to do, the Lord spoke of taking up His cross - in the man's case, giving up his wealth.
(3) The command to take up the cross in Mt. 10:38 is in the context of the Lord's description of the family problems which would be caused by responding to His word. Presumably some were willing to follow Christ if they didn't have to break with their families; but He asks them to take up the cross in this sense.

In all of these cases people were willing to follow the Lord - but only insofar as it didn't hurt them. They were unwilling to take on board the idea of consciously deciding to do something against the grain of their natures and immediate surroundings. Yet this is what taking up the cross is all about, and it is vital for our identification with our Lord. It is very easy to serve God in ways which reinforce the lifestyles we choose to have anyway; it is easy to obey Divine principles only insofar as they compound our own personality. By doing so we can deceive ourselves into thinking that we are spiritually active when, in reality, we have never walked out against the wind, never picked up the cross of Christ.

10:39 *He that finds his life*- The Lord must surely mean us to read in an ellipsis: 'Thinks he has found the meaning of life without Me'. For the Lord has just called the unsaved audience of His preachers "the lost" (10:6 s.w.).

Shall lose it- The Lord has just spoken of how God will "destroy" (s.w. "lose") the "soul" (s.w. "life") of those rejected at the last day (10:28). So here in :39 He is surely thinking of destruction of the 'soul' / "life" at the last day. Only those responsible to judgment will appear at the day of judgment; so the Lord's teaching here concerns those who have known Him, who are responsible to Him, but who are not totally committed to Him; those who think that despite their knowledge of Him, they can 'find their lives' without Him. See on 16:25 *lose it*.

And he that loses his life for my sake- The same Greek word is translated to destroy, to die, to mar, to cause to perish. Once again, this is not what we wish to hear- that we must do real damage to our human life, crucify it, if we are to share in the life of Jesus. 10:28 has just spoken of the destroying / losing of life in condemnation; perhaps the 'loss / destruction of life' is in self-condemnation. This would continue a major theme of the Lord's teaching- that those who condemn themselves in this life shall be saved from condemnation at the last day.

Shall find it- As we go up the spiral of spiritual growth, we will find the true life- perceive, see, realize (Mt. 10:39 Gk.) the real, spiritual life, as the wayward son "came to himself", he found himself, when he repented. The Lord had laboured the point that whoever seeks shall *find* (Mt. 7:7,8,14), and the context clearly is of spiritual things and salvation. The Lord spoke in Mt. 7 of *seeking* and finding, here He speaks of *losing life* in order to find it. The language of seeking and losing suggests a process, rather than some finely spoken, albeit genuinely intended, momentary statement of commitment to the Lord. The more we*seek* the things of the Kingdom, the more we will naturally lose our fleshly life. The loss of life the Lord has in view is clearly a process of "seeking" the things of His Kingdom- rather than the death of martyrdom. The taking up of the cross in the previous verse is the epitome of losing life… but the Lord intended it to be understood as a way of life, a sharing of the same road as Him ["following" Him], upon which dying is literally a way *of* life as well as the way *to* life. What in practice does it mean to 'lose life'? Issues concerning where we live, careers,

food, the pleasures of this life, all become eclipsed by the mission before us- of consciously dying, *in His service*. For the entire context here is about serving the Lord by sharing the Gospel with others, engaging fully with the mission the Lord intends for us. The context of the Lord giving His people work to do would suggest that the life which is 'found' is not only the life eternal at the last day, but is the life in His service. This kind of life will be eternally lived, and it is in that sense that we can understand the Lord's words elsewhere that those who follow Him right now begin living the eternal life, the kind of life in His service which they will eternally live. If we are ever seeking to balance and arrange things so that we can apparently live our fleshly life as well as 'His' life, then we have failed to grasp the entire point of His teaching. Total surrender, absolute and eager, willing submission, is what He is about.

10:40 *He that receives you receives me, and he that receives me receives him that sent me*- The Lord is speaking of 'receiving' His preachers and materially supporting them (:13). He's saying that every act of support given to them is done as it were directly to Him. He has the same idea in Mt. 25:35-45- whatever was done to "the least of these My brothers" was done to Him. His "little ones", the disciples / preachers in their immaturity (:42), were all the same His, and whatever was done to them was done to Him and to His Father. We note that Mt. 25 speaks of material support of food, clothing, hospitality to the unknown and visiting in prison- all exactly in the context of the preaching mission He sent His disciples on. Whatever more general reference there may be in Mt. 25:35-45, clearly the primary reference was to the Lord's future judgment of those who claimed to be His (who had accepted John the Baptist's message), in accordance to whether or not they had materially supported the disciples on their preaching mission. Luke's version of this teaching records that the Lord said that "He that *hears* you, hears Me" (Lk. 10:16). The 'receiving' was therefore of the message and therefore receiving the disciples personally (10:14 "receive you… hear your words"). We are the voice and face of Jesus to people- it's a concept colossal in its implications. Our attitude to receiving or accepting each other is our acceptance or rejection of Jesus personally. Hence Paul tells the Galatians that they had "received me… as Christ Jesus" (Gal. 4:14), surely alluding to the Lord's teaching here. We are to "receive one another, as Christ also received us" (Rom. 15:7).

The idea of *shaliach*, whereby someone's representative was seen as them, was well known in Judaism; the Lord is almost quoting it here, and He does the same in the next verse. Realizing this is going on is a key to correct interpretation of the next verses.

10:41 *He that receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward, and he that receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward*- This is a quotation of well-known Jewish thinking. I have shown multiple times in this commentary that the Lord was seeking to encourage His followers that they were no less than Moses, the prophets and the "righteous men" of the Old Testament. The context here is encouraging them that they are worthy labourers, worthy to receive material support from those they stay with. The 'receiving' of them on their preaching mission (:13) is the 'receiving' the Lord now has in view. His idea is that just as those who received Old Testament prophets will receive a prophet's reward at the last day, possibly 'from the prophet' as the Greek could mean- so just as much those who materially support the disciples will be rewarded. Such supporters will in no wise lose their reward (:42) – just as surely as those who supported Old Testament prophets will be rewarded, to no lesser extent, those who supported the disciples would likewise be rewarded.

10:42 *And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple; truly I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward*- Giving a cup

of cold water to the little ones doesn't necessarily refer to sticking banknotes in a collection for Oxfam. The Hebrew writer took it as referring to our love for Christ's little ones, within the ecclesia (Mt. 10:42 = Heb. 6:10). And the context says the same. The Lord was inviting the disciples to see themselves as none less than the likes of Elisha, who were supported in their work by various well-wishers.

According to the interpretation of :41, these "little ones" refer to the disciples. But why "*these* little ones" and not "you"? I suggest that verse 42 is effectively a soliloquy, perhaps spoken out loud in the presence of the disciples, but all the same, it is Jesus speaking to Himself.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 11

11:1 *And it came to pass when Jesus had finished commanding his twelve disciples*- Vine feels that the *dia* in *diatasso* ["commanding"] suggests "a distributive force: giving to each his appropriate charge". In this case we see the initial application of the parables about the servants being each given a specific work to do. That work was to preach to specific people whom the Lord intended for each of the disciples. Those parables apply to us- perhaps in that we are each intended to take the Gospel to specific individuals. If we fail in that work, there is no guarantee that the Lord will give that work to others; the harvest will simply not be gathered as it could have been.

He departed from there to teach and preach in their cities- Without their presence (as they were away on their preaching tour), the Lord went to their home areas. He showed by this how He saw out witness amongst those whom we know and our families to be of the utmost importance- and He was and is willing and eager to back up our credibility in such witness.

11:2 *Now when John heard about the works of the Christ while in prison, he sent word by his disciples*- AV "Sent two of his disciples". It can't be insignificant that John sends two disciples out just after the Lord had sent out *His* disciples two by two in Matthew 10. Surely this is a literary device to set up John in negative contrast to the Lord at this time; John sent out his pair of disciples in response to his crisis of faith. He knew Jesus was to do mighty works- but he had heard of them only by report. Those he sent out had already heard and seen the Lord's miracles (:4), and yet John sends them to Jesus to ask if He is Messiah. It all reads rather negatively about John. It could even be that he died at a low point in his faith, and yet the Lord's positive comment about Him surely suggests that He saw John as being ultimately saved. The records of the Kings of Israel and Judah, along with various passages in Ezekiel 18, place great emphasis upon how a man *finishes* his spiritual journey, and yet there are also Biblical examples of faithful men dying at low ebb spiritually; this will not necessarily exclude from the Kingdom, and John the Baptist may be another example.

11:3 *And said to him: Are you he that comes*- The emphasis may be on the word "you". The coming one was a well-known term for Messiah, based upon Ps. 118:26.

Or look we for another?- Despite John's clearly stated belief that Jesus was the promised bridegroom, the lamb of God and Son of God (Jn. 1:29-34), it seems things had not gone according to the prophetic program John had imagined- and he now had doubts about Jesus. For a man claiming (at least implicitly) to be Messiah, it would've been an unnecessary question to ask Him 'Are you Messiah?'. It could be inferred that John still believed in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, but had begun to wonder if He was only the *herald* of "another" whom they should be looking for in order to establish the Kingdom. It could be that John's understanding of himself as the Elijah prophet had

led him to expect that all Israel would repent, and then Messiah Himself would come and establish His Kingdom immediately. For this is indeed how the prophecies of Isaiah 40 and Malachi 4 could be read. Perhaps John was full of such self-doubt that he wondered if he really had been the Elijah prophet, and was thinking that maybe he had just heralded the Elijah prophet, Jesus, who was in turn to herald "He that should come". This is the problem with holding a dogmatic view of prophetic sequences- when they prove wrong, either because our interpretation was faulty or because human lack of response means they are to come true in another way than ideally planned, then often peoples' faith in Christ Himself is damaged. If we have an open ended view of prophecy, whereby we understand it to state possibilities which may have other ways of fulfillment than what is ideally intended, then such crises don't arise. "Look we for another?" doesn't sound as if John was simply asking for a sign, in the spirit of Gideon. He had major questions about the whole prophetic program, sensing that something had changed; the word for "another" is also translated "altered" (Lk. 9:29). In this sense, his question may not necessarily reflect a crisis of faith in Jesus personally, but rather an earnest desire to know the new details of the revised prophetic program.

So even John the Baptist, whose teaching had prepared most of the twelve to accept Jesus, seems to have not been altogether clear about what we might consider fundamental things. He speaks here of Jesus as "the one to come", a commonly understood description of the Elijah prophet, based on the phrase being used about him in Mal. 3:1- and not of Messiah Himself. Thus John the Baptist anticipated that this "one to come", his cousin Jesus, would be a refining fire (Mt. 3:12)- which is exactly Malachi's language about the Elijah prophet (Mal. 3:2; 4:1). This would explain why John the Baptist had apparent 'doubts' whilst in prison as to whether Jesus really was the Messiah. And it would also explain why the disciples expected Jesus to act like Elijah in Lk. 9:52-56. It was not until the baptism of Jesus that John the Baptist came to understand Jesus as the "one to come"; so the preparatory work which he had done with the disciples must have had what we would call a flimsy doctrinal basis. When Jesus called them to follow Him, and they so quickly obeyed, it is often assumed that John the Baptist had prepared them for this. But that preparation must at best have been very shallow and incomplete, given John's own admission that he did not recognize Jesus for who He was until His baptism. Why, however, was John's misunderstanding recorded in the Gospel records? Or the misunderstanding of his father Zacharias, that John was in fact the promised Messiah, "the prophet", the one would bring forgiveness of sins and freedom from the Romans (Lk. 1:71-79)? Perhaps for the same reason as the language of demons is used, especially to describe the miracles at the beginning of the Lord's ministry. He didn't correct this. But over time it became evident that the sheer power of the Son of God meant that in practice, demons didn't exist. Likewise, as the ministry of Jesus unfolds to us in the Gospel records, it becomes apparent that He was Son of God, the Messiah- and not merely an Elijah prophet.

11:4 *And Jesus answered and said to them: Go and tell John*- They had already told him once- the same word is used for how they initially had told John these things (Lk. 7:18). There is definitely the sense that John needed to work through the implications of what he was hearing, rather than having some specific explanation from the Lord.

The things which you hear and see- The request that John 'hear' these reports more carefully begs connection with the Lord's frequent comment that the Jews heard but did not really hear (e.g. Mt. 13:13-17). John's lack of understanding appears to be in some sense culpable and at best disappointing to the Lord. The Lord is seeking to assure John that if he just thinks about the evidence, it's clear that Jesus is indeed Messiah,

and as John had earlier preached- Son and lamb of God, who saves His people from their sins. He seems to be saying that that was so wonderful and fundamental, that the rearrangement of the prophetic timetable is in a sense irrelevant compared to that. Whether or not the timing or chronology of events surrounding the Kingdom comes true as we expect, or whether or not we discern how God has re-planned the fulfillment of prophecy- is all irrelevant compared to the wonder of knowing Jesus as the Christ and personal Saviour.

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

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

11:6 *And blessed is he, whoever shall find no cause to stumble over me*- Clearly the Lord saw John as likely to be about to stumble. As explained earlier, the cause of stumbling was [and is to this day] that the Lord at times makes changes in the outworking of His prophetic program. Because things haven't gone just as mere humans imagined it, because they can't get their heads around God's huge sensitivity to human repentance and choices, nor His subsequent willingness to change His timetable to accommodate that… therefore people stumble at Christ. The Lord encountered a similar

situation in Nazareth, where people again were "offended in Him" (Mt. 13:57) because His Messiahship was not as they supposed it ought to be. Likewise the death of the Messiah by crucifixion caused even the disciples to be offended- it was simply not how they had imagined Messiah's salvation. They were "offended" exactly because He was 'smitten' (Mt. 26:31), even though the Lord had warned them ahead of time about His death so that they would not be offended (Jn. 16:1). The cross was therefore a rock of offence to many (1 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 5:11). So often we see the process- people come to Jesus with preconceived notions of how things should be, and fit those notions into the structure of their 'Christianity'. But the Christ's most fundamental teachings may in fact outlaw their beloved notions and favourite suppositions. And because their imagination of Jesus doesn't fit in with who He actually is- they stumble. It's like falling in love with an idea of a person, rather than with the person as they actually are. God's word presents Jesus as He actually is, and it is this which we must accept, allowing it thereby to jettison all preconceived notions we have of Him. The parable of the sower taught that persecution leads to people being offended (Mt. 13:21), and John was certainly undergoing persecution for the word there in prison. But persecution leads to spiritual stumbling largely because of the dashed expectations- that with Christ, all shall go well for us, and we in this life shall be delivered from problems. But the Lord is stressing throughout His teaching that that Jewish conception of Messiah and Messiah's Kingship over men was simply incorrect. Those who followed Him would suffer and die, in one form or another, the death of the cross.

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

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

A reed shaken with the wind?- The reference is probably to the reeds growing in the Jordan where John baptized. Just as the people didn't go there to look at the reeds but at John as God's prophet, so the Lord is hinting that they should not look on John's weakness but upon who he essentially was. When John the Baptist had this crisis of faith, the Lord spoke of John to the multitude as if he was a strong believer, no reed shaken in the wind of doubt. And yet He didn't just paper over John's doubts and forget them, pretending He hadn't seen. The message He returned to John encouraged him to look back to the Isaiah prophecies of Messiah, and to remember especially the way that the weak, doubting ones would be made strong. The Lord evidently sought to strengthen the weak John by this allusion. The language of being *shaken* by *wind*is used elsewhere by the Lord in describing the process of condemnation at the last day (both Greek words are found in Mt. 7:25,27). The Lord's idea may therefore be: 'Sure, John is wavering

at this very moment. But when you saw him in the wilderness, he wasn't; and in God's eyes, even now, he's not shaking in the wind, he's not going to be condemned at the day of judgment- even though, as you've just heard, he has his doubts and weaknesses'. Perhaps the Lord had John in mind when He soon afterwards spoke of how He would not condemn even a broken reed (s.w.- Mt. 12:20), but rather still use it as a channel for the oil of the Spirit. The whole situation with John is helpful in coping with others who clearly are passing through times of trial which is resulting in their faith wavering. Think positively of who they were, have been, and still essentially are…

11:8 *But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments?*- The allusion is surely to Herod and Herodias, who had imprisoned John. John's clothing was rugged, not soft (Mt. 3:4).

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

11:9 *But what did you go out to see?*- Three times in :7-9 the Lord reminds them of their trek out into the wilderness to hear John; His point is that the respect they once had for him should remain, despite his wavering under extreme suffering. God's overall impression of Job appears similar, and it is a good teaching for we who are all too inclined to too harshly judge a good believer for a temporary period of weakness. The Greek phrase 'go out to see…' is used in classical Greek about going out to a spectacle or show. The Lord is suggesting that perhaps that was all their interest in John might have been, just as today likewise, it's quite possible to visit the truest church and hear the truest teaching, yet unperceived by those who are merely 'going to church'.

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

11:10 *This is he*- The emphasis is on the word "is". He *was* the prophet who came to herald Messiah. And yet John had denied that he was Elijah, nor "that prophet" (Jn. 1:20), surely a reference to the Elijah prophet; even though he later stated that he had been 'sent before' Messiah (Jn. 3:28), and was the voice of the Isaiah 40 prophet crying in the wilderness (Jn. 1:23). The Lord is saying 'Actually, John *was* that prophet. He initially denied it in his humility, but he really was and is "that prophet". Now again his humility has led him to self-denial, he's wondering whether in fact I am the Elijah prophet and the Messiah Himself is yet to be 'looked for'. But take it on My authority- he really was the Elijah prophet, even though his humility leads him to self-doubt at times'. See on :14 *this is Elijah*.

Of whom it is written: Listen- AV "Behold". An invitation to perceive, and the Lord was asking them to perceive in that imprisoned man a great prophet, to see beyond his

temporary, surface-level crisis of John, to perceive that "this *is* he".

I send my messenger before your face; he shall prepare your way before you- The pronouns are somewhat different from the original in Mal. 3:1: "Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before [My face] ... says Yahweh of Armies". Jesus, as the face and presence of God to men, interpreted the words of His Father as being spoken personally to Him. The way was prepared before God's face, according to Malachi, but God's Son applies that to Himself. That is not to say that Jesus was God in any Trinitarian sense. He was the supreme manifestation of God, and He quotes Malachi 3 in such a way as to teach that to those with ears to hear. We have a window here onto how the Lord Jesus read Scripture; passages about His Father were applied by Him to Himself, but that is no claim by Him to be God Himself in person.

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

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

11:11- see on 20:11.
Truly I say to you, among those that are born of women- The Lord Jesus was Himself the greatest of all born of women (Gal. 4:4), but in His humility He adds no rider to the effect 'John was the greatest of all born of women, Myself excepted, of course'. How we love Him for His humility.

There has not arisen a greater than John the Baptist. Yet he that is the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he- The little ones were the disciples, according to what the Lord had recently said in Mt. 10:42 (s.w.). He was urging them, yet again, to see their exalted status and to get over Judaism's attitude that the prophets were icons to whom the rank and file of God's people should never pretend. The Lord is using hyperbole here to make the point- that His immature 'little ones' were going to be far greater than even John, the greatest prophet. Or He could be implying that there will be some element of rank in God's future Kingdom- ruling over different numbers of cities, one star differing from another in glory. And the least in that age will be far greater than John was *in this life*. And yet Jesus was proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom in the

sense of the breaking in of God's principles in the lives of men. He could mean that John was the greatest under the old system, but the least of those within the new system were greater than John. Oscar Cullmann made a case for translating *mikroteros* here as "the youngest", with reference to the Lord being younger than John the Baptist and yet greater than him (see Jn. 3:30).

Note the present tense in "is greater". The following verse speaks of preaching the Gospel of that Kingdom (Mt.11:12 cp. Lk.16:16), perhaps implying that by responding to Christ's Gospel of the Kingdom we are associated with the Kingdom, and are thereby "greater" than the message which John preached.

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

11:12 *And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and men of violence take it by force*- This can be seen as constructing a parable from the idea of Roman storm troopers taking a city. And those men, the Lord teaches in his attention grabbing manner, really represent every believer who responds to the Gospel of the Kingdom and strives to enter that Kingdom. The same word translated 'take by force' is used by the Lord in Lk. 16:16: "The Kingdom of God is preached, and every man *presses into* it"; true response to the Gospel of the Kingdom is a struggle. Entering the Kingdom is a fight (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). We either violently snatch / take the Kingdom by force (Mt. 11:12), or the devil of our own nature will snatch us away (s.w. Mt. 13:19; Jn. 10:12). The choice before us is that pointed: fight or fall. The Lord graciously and generously saw the zeal of the mixed up, uncertain, misunderstanding disciples as storm troopers taking the city of the Kingdom of God by force- knowing exactly where they were coming from and where they were going. The cause of the Kingdom must be forcefully advanced by "violent men". This was the sort of language the Lord used. He wasn't preaching anything tame, painless membership of a comfortable community. The Lord saw the zeal of the uncertain, misunderstanding disciples as storm troopers taking the city of the Kingdom of God by force- knowing exactly where they were coming from and where they were going.

However, there are other alternatives in interpretation. It's been suggested that 'the violent ones' may have been a term used to describe Jesus and His followers by His opponents; in which case the Lord would be alluding to this and saying that the enthusiasm of His people was in spiritual and not physical terms. Another option would be that the Lord is alluding to the Zealots and other groups who were trying to bring the Kingdom of God about by political, violent action; and the Lord would then be lamenting that since John's time, there were men who had misunderstood his message of the Kingdom by trying to bring it about by force. And there is a telling double meaning in the Greek for 'take it by force'; it could also mean that the Kingdom is

under attack by these violent men. In this case, the real meaning and progress of the Kingdom as God intended, in terms of His spiritual dominion in human life, was being hindered by those who were trying to establish it by force. This suggestion is re-enforced by the use of the same word in Jn. 6:15, where the mistaken multitudes wanted to 'take [Christ] by force' and make Him King there and then. And this would explain the context- the imprisonment of John by the violent Herod would then be the basis for this saying. The violent were attacking and taking by force the Kingdom preachers like John.

11:13 *For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John*- The sentence begins with "For…". This is an explanation of the cut-off point between the time of the Kingdom, and the period of the law and prophets. It was as if their work was being done up until John. The *law* prophesied until John in the sense that in the Messiah whom John proclaimed, the law's prophecies were fulfilled. Note that the law just as much as the prophets is to be seen as prophesying. And yet other changeover points or boundaries are suggested within the New Testament. The law would 'pass' when all was fulfilled, which seems to hint at the 'finishing' of all when the Lord cried "It is finished!" on the cross. The law would not pass *until* this point (Mt. 5:18, using the same word as in 11:13 "until"). The Lord's death was clearly a major ending point for the old system. And yet Heb. 8:13 speaks of the old system as decaying and becoming old, and being about to vanish away- surely in the destruction of the temple in AD70. There are other hints in the NT that the old system somehow operated with some level of acceptance from God until AD70. Why the different potential changeover points? Presumably because the hope and intention was that John would successfully prepare the way, and the Messianic reign would be ushered in by Israel's acceptance of their Messiah. And yet they killed Him. That point in itself was the theological changeover moment. But still not all Israel accepted the apostolic preaching of repentance for the crucifixion. And so in practice, the changeover point came when the temple was destroyed and any serious obedience to the old covenant was thereby rendered impossible. In all this we see God's amazing grace and desire continually to work with people, factoring in the possibility of their repentance.

11:14- see on 21:32.
And if you are willing to receive it- The same word was used earlier in this section, when the Lord spoke of the apostles being 'received' by those who had initially responded to John's teaching (Mt. 10:14,40,41). If Israel would receive it, John the Baptist was the Elijah prophet. The course of fulfillment of prophecy was conditional upon whether John succeeded in turning the hearts of Israel back to the fathers or not; on preparing them for the great and terrible day of the Lord. The Kingdom *could* have come in the 1st century had Israel received John as Elijah. But they would not. And so another Elijah prophet is to come in the last days and prepare Israel for her Messiah. "If ye are willing to receive him, this is Elijah which is to come" (RVmg.) says it all. The Elijah prophet who was to herald the Messianic Kingdom *could have been* John the Baptist- if Israel had received him. But they didn't, and so the prophecy went down another avenue of fulfillment. It could be that Mal. 4:6 implies that there is still the possibility that even the latter day Elijah ministry may not be totally successful- for the earth / land is to be smitten with a curse unless he succeeds in turning the hearts of the fathers to the children, and there is no lack of evidence that the land may well be 'smitten' in the last days.

Some prophecies are fulfilled according to the acceptance of their fulfillment by believers, and therefore have their fulfilments in different ways at different times. Thus for those who received it, Malachi's 'Elijah' prophecies were fulfilled in John the Baptist, for those who accepted him (Mt. 11:14). The implication is that for those who didn't, those prophecies weren't fulfilled. When the Lord stood up and read from Isaiah, He commented that "this day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Lk. 4:21). He didn't mean that His reading those words in a synagogue had fulfilled them. He speaks of "your ears" as standing for 'your correct perception / understanding' in Mt. 13:16. What He was surely saying was that for those of them who perceived who He was, Isaiah's words were ringing true. For those who rejected Him, of course, they weren't fulfilled, and therefore their complete, universal acceptance / fulfillment would be delayed until a future day; just as it was with the 'Elijah' prophecy.

The "it" in "receive it" could refer to the prophetic message of the Law and prophets- hence GNB offers "and if you are willing to believe their message…". It was taken as assumed that every Jew received / accepted the Law and the prophets, but the Lord's point was that if they really received it, then they would accept John's message and now accept Him as Messiah. Likewise the Lord challenges the Jewish scribes as to whether they had ever really read the Old Testament (Mt. 21:16,42; Mk. 2:25)- when they spent their days doing so (Jn. 5:39 RV).

This was Elijah that has to come- See on :10. John in humility and self-effacement had denied being the Elijah prophet (Jn. 1:20), and he now had a similar doubt, wondering whether in fact Jesus was the Elijah prophet and the Messiah was still to be looked for. The Lord is saying that John was who he was, the Elijah prophet, despite John's self-doubt. And we again have an example- we are to treat our brethren as whom God sees them as being, notwithstanding their temporary weaknesses and self-doubt. The use of "this" rather than "he" could be because the Lord had in mind the Elijah prophet's ministry, and not just John personally.

11:15 *He that has ears to hear, let him hear*- The Lord often uses this phrase, the idea seems to be that not all have the capacity to really hear, but if we do, then, we still have to exercise a choice as to whether we do or not. That would also be true to observed experience, because that is indeed how it seems- some people have no interest in God's word, something is not 'given' them, so that they never 'get it'; and those to whom it is given, there must still be a conscious choice exercised. For those who decide rightly, it becomes true that to him who has, more is given (Mt. 13:12). That verse in 13:12 begs the question 'Has what?'. The answer is surely given here in 11:15: 'ears to hear'. The hearing or listening which the Lord refers to is listening to the message of John- for the next verses liken John's ministry to calling out to people to respond, although most choose to be non-responsive. Maybe the idea is 'Despite John having a temporary crisis of faith and understanding, that is no excuse for not hearing his message'. Perhaps the tension is being developed between the need to *hear* John, whereas it is thrice stressed that this crowd had gone out into the desert to *see* John (11:7-9), as if they were going to a show- a powerful challenge that echoes down to our generation of churchgoing and churchianity.

11:16 *But unto what shall I liken this generation?*- The Lord several times spoke of that entire generation as sinful and unresponsive to the Gospel. Yet the context here is talking of John the Baptist's work. This therefore was a tacit recognition that John's

ministry had been unsuccessful in terms of converting all Israel, and therefore clearly there was to be a change in the prophetic program. As noted earlier in commentary on this chapter, it was this change in the prophetic program which was worrying John, even though unnecessarily in terms of his own salvation.

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

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

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

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

son analogy is used for preaching and conversion later in the NT. There is the implication too that the initial preacher continues to call the tune, to direct the dancing of the convert, even after initial acceptance of the invitation.

Remember that the Lord is addressing those who had gone out to hear John preach (:7-9). He is implying that they had not actually responded to his call to them.

11:18 *For John came neither eating nor drinking and they say he has a demon*- The Gospels give the impression that there was mass response to John's preaching, but according to the Lord's reasoning here, He felt that "this generation", society as a whole, had rejected John's message and slandered him as in league with demons. Exactly the same was said about the ministry of Jesus (Jn. 8:48 uses the same term about Jesus- "He has a demon"). Surface level interest in the message, even applauding it and making a great effort to go out into the desert to hear it preached, was and is not the same as responding in real repentance.

11:19 *The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say, Look, a gluttonous man and a drunkard*- The Lord was accused of being a drunkard, a glutton, and a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Mt. 11:19; Lk. 7:34). This is all language reminiscent of the commands for the parents to slay the 'rebellious son' of Dt. 21:18-21. It's conceivable that one of the reasons why His death was demanded was because of this. Hence His relatives sought to take Him away out of public sight. It's also been claimed that the Jews' complaint that Jesus 'made Himself equal to the Father' (Jn. 5:18) is alluding to a rabbinic expression which speaks of the 'rebellious son' of Dt. 21 as being a son who makes himself equal to his father. The shame of being Jesus' mother eventually wore off upon Mary, or so it seems to me. Just as the shame of standing up for Christian principles can wear us down, too. In passing, note that the prodigal son is likewise cast in the role of the 'rebellious son' who should be killed; the correspondence suggests that the Lord Jesus can identify with sinners like the prodigal because He was treated *as if* He were a sinner, a rebellious son; even though He was not in actuality. The criticisms of the Lord here were all related to His drinking, eating and table company. Jesus showed by His fellowship with "the poor in spirit" that He meant what He said. He, as God's Son, extended His Father's fellowship to them in the here and now of this life. Luke seems to have been especially perceptive of the fact that Jesus often accepted invitations to eat with those whom others despised (Lk. 5:29; 7:36; 10:38; 11:37; 14:1). In 1st century Palestine, to eat with someone was a religious act. The host blessed and broke the bread and then broke off a piece for each guest, thus binding together all present. This was why the many sects of Judaism carefully limited their table fellowship (notably the Pharisees and Essenes). Thus it was the Lord's desire to share table fellowship with the very lowest (apparently) within the community of God that brought Him such criticism (Mt. 11:19; Mk. 2:16). His teaching also made it plain that He saw table fellowship with Him at a meal as a type of the future Messianic banquet, to be enjoyed in His Kingdom at His return, when redeemed sinners will again sit and eat with Him (Lk. 22:29,30). To accept the gift of the bread of life at the breaking of bread is to symbolize our acceptance of the life that is in Him. If we believe what we are doing at the memorial meeting, we are showing our acceptance of the fact that we will be there, and that what we are doing in our humble breakings of bread is in fact a true foretaste of the Kingdom experience which awaits us.

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

But wisdom is justified by her children- Appreciating the inter-relation between 'doctrine' and practice will result in our seeing through the fallacy that because someone's deeds are good, therefore it doesn't matter too much about their doctrine. The spiritual fruit which God seeks is that which is brought forth by the seed of His word, the Gospel. To *really* understand the basic Gospel with one's heart is to bring forth fruit, to be converted. True wisdom is justified by the works she brings forth (Mt. 11:19). This is why true conversion involves understanding and perceiving, and not merely hearing doctrinal truth (Mt. 13:15). Yet the counter argument would be that there are people who know God's truth who behave poorly, and there are those who know little of it who act well. This is why the Lord speaks of "wisdom", not "truth"; for wisdom is God's truth applied in practice.
On another level, we see here the Lord's response to slander, both of Himself and John. Wisdom is justified of her children- in the end. The "children" are those of Himself and John, who have just featured in His parable of the preachers, His children, meeting lack of response in the town square. Even if there is lack of response to the invitation, the Lord was confident that both His 'children' (the "little ones" of Mt. 10:42) and John's would be the justification of the truth and wisdom which they were teaching. This is all a comfort to those undergoing slander. In the end, if we are on the side of wisdom, we shall be justified.

11:20 *Then he began to chastise the cities*- The Lord also upbraided the disciples for their unbelief (Mk. 16:14 s.w.). Again we see the Lord being positive towards His disciples in the eyes of the world, and yet privately challenging them with the same language of criticism which He had for the unbelieving world. His imputation of righteousness to us doesn't mean He is blind to our weakness.

Wherein most- Gk. 'the majority'. We must give this word its full weight. The majority of the Lord's miracles were done in three tiny villages- Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. We have just learnt that whilst the disciples were away on their preaching tour, He had gone to preach in their home villages (11:1). Perhaps some time had elapsed between verses 19 and 20. He had had little response. Philip, Andrew and Peter were all from Bethsaida, the 'home of fishermen' (Jn. 1:44; 12:21). We sense that the Lord had a specific plan in mind for His preaching work. He made a particular focus upon Galilee and the home villages of His disciples- and Galilee was of course His own home area. We see in this policy a desire by Him for us to witness in our own immediate environment and family situations. Mk. 8:22-26 records the only miracle the Gospels record as performed in Bethsaida, and the Lord told the cured blind man not to tell anyone in Bethsaida about the miracle- presumably because the people there had already seen ample miracles and had not repented.

Of his mighty works had been done, because they had not repented- Here we see the purpose of the healing miracles. They were not simply to alleviate human suffering for the sake of it- they were specifically designed to lead people to repentance. God's

goodness is intended to lead to repentance (Rom. 2:4). The doing of Christian 'good works' can't be criticized in itself, but it needs to be observed that they often seem to be performed 'for the sake of it', whereas the Lord's works were always within a wider plan and aim of bringing people to spiritual healing.

11:21 *Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have*- God likewise looks down upon our lives today, seeing all possibilities, and how unbelievers would respond so much more to Him than His own dear people. It's the pain of the parent, knowing that other children would respond so much more to their love than their own beloved offspring. The Lord Jesus had something of this when He commented that Tyre and Sidon would've repented had they had His message preached to them; but Israel would not. To know all possible futures must make experiencing human life and poor decision making all the harder and more tragic for the Father and Son.

Repented- Here we see that the intention of the miracles was not merely healing in itself, as a good to humanity- but rather to invite people to repentance. Hence the connection between healing and forgiveness in the account of the healing of the paralyzed man.

Long ago in sackcloth and ashes- Made of camel and goat hair, therefore very similar to the clothing of John the Baptist- which is the context here (11:8).

11:22 *But I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you*- Tyre and Sodom were major Gentile cities. The Lord clearly believed their inhabitants would be resurrected and appear at the future day of judgment. Seeing that knowledge is the basis of responsibility to judgment, it follows that there was some witness made to them. Ezekiel's prophecies of condemnation against Tyre can therefore be seen as conditional prophecies, like the prophecy of Nineveh's destruction- they could have repented in response to them. The witness to Sodom was presumably through the witness of Lot's righteous life. The extent of human responsibility to Divine judgment would appear to be far greater than we might suspect. Those who live in the presence of believers are surely responsible to judgment, according to the pattern of Sodom. Clearly there will be degrees of punishment at that day- and for the home villages of the disciples, their suffering will be 'intolerable'. The implication is that if the witness of Ezekiel, Lot etc. had been backed up by the kind of miracles the Lord was performing, then this would've tipped the balance- and they would've repented.

11:23 *And you Capernaum, shall you be exalted to heaven?* - Here we have another example of the Bible being written from the perspective of men. Capernaum was exalted in her own eyes, the people there were spiritually proud and exalted in their own eyes. Likewise "the wise" in :25 refers to those who thought they were wise.

You shall go down to hades- The prophecy against Babylon of Isaiah 14 is here applied to the towns of Israel. The point is that the condemnation of the wicked Gentiles will come upon those of God's people who act like them. Likewise the punishment of Babylon was to be cast as a millstone into the sea, but this is applied by the Lord to those of God's people who make their brethren stumble (Mt. 18:6; Rev. 18:21).

For if the mighty works- The Greek *dunamis* also has the sense of ability, possible power. The miracles, to which the "mighty works" clearly refer, had potential power to bring the people to repentance, but they were content to just accept the temporal blessings of knowing Jesus rather than being moved by those blessings to repentance.

Had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes- The Lord knew that cities like Tyre and Sidon would have responded to the Gospel in the first century; had it been preached to them. But the message was taken to Jewish villages like Chorazin and Bethsaida instead. Such was God's love, His especial and exclusive love for Israel. Sodom likewise would have repented if the message of Lot had been backed up by miracles; but, that extra proof wasn't given. But such a concession was made to Israel through the ministry and miracles of Jesus.

11:24 *But I say to you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you*- The Greek for "tolerable" could suggest 'endurance', hinting at a period of suffering rather than an eternal state of suffering. The suffering will be the sense of regret for what could have been, how they could have responded. This sense will be so acute that it is described in figurative terms as Gehenna fire, gnashing of teeth etc. Time and again we must remind ourselves of this, so that day by day we 'grasp the moment' and proceed in life with no ultimate cause for spiritual regret.

11:25 *At that time Jesus answered*- Often the Gospels record that Jesus "answered and said...". Yet it's often not clear whether anyone had asked a question, or said anything that needed a response (Mt. 11:25; 22:1; Mk. 10:24, 51; 11:14,22,33; 12:35; 13:2; 14:48; Lk. 5:22; 7:40; 8:50; 13:2; 14:3,5; 17:17; 22:51; Jn. 1:50; 5:19; 6:70; 10:32; 12:23,30; 16:31). If you go through this list, you will see how Jesus 'answered' / responded to peoples' unexpressed fears and questions, their unarticulated concerns, criticisms, feelings and agendas. This little phrase reveals how sensitive Jesus was. He saw people's unspoken, unarticulated needs and responded. He didn't wait to be asked. For Jesus, everybody He met was a question, a personal direct challenge, that He responded to. And of course this is how we should seek to be too. And yet here in Mt. 11:25 He could be responding to His own question and reflection upon why so few responded and why only the immature disciples seemed to understand anything at all? We see here a window into the very internal thought process of the Lord, something which could only come from a Divinely inspired record.

I thank You O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth- This is language taken directly from the *Hodayot*, the Qumran "Thanksgiving Psalms". There is reason to think that in his years in the Qumran area, John the Baptist became familiar with the Qumran community, and may have passed on some of their style and culture to his converts. The multitudes addressed here by the Lord had initially responded to John (11:7). So it would seem that the Lord is bridge building with them, speaking to them in terms known and accessible to them, and yet leading them further and away from the legalism and extremes of Qumran thought. Note how there is a juxtaposition of God's Almightiness, as Lord of Heaven and earth, with His closeness to us as "Father".

That You did hide these things from the wise- Those who think they are wise in their own eyes- see on "exalted" in :24.

And prudent- Again we see the Lord's grace, for the disciples themselves weren't 'understanding' (s.w.) of everything at this time (s.w. Mt. 13:51; Mk. 6:52 they considered / understood not; 8:17,21; Lk. 18:34; 24:45). Yet to them was revealed the Truth which others had hid from them.

And did reveal them to- This continues the thought of 11:15, that only some have ears to hear. The word is used in Mt. 16:27 of how the truth of Christ was revealed to Peter, one of the "babes".

Babes- An essay in the serious immaturity of the disciples, and yet the Lord's love of them all the same. They are the 'little ones' of 10:42, the little children in the town square of 11:16. See on 1 Cor. 1:19. Paul saw the simplicity of the Corinthian believers as the sort of thing Christ referred to in Mt. 11:25.

11:26 *Yes Father, for so it was well-pleasing in Your sight*- We have the same kind of thing in Revelation, where Angels as it were take a breath and praise the Father for His wisdom in the judgments which they have just executed. We have here one of the few times when we get the record of the Lord's actual words to God in prayer. We note that He repeatedly addresses Him as "Father"; and through receipt of the Spirit, His relationship with the Father becomes ours. And "Father" ought surely to be our most common form of address to God.

11:27 *All things have been delivered to me by my Father*- Gk. 'were delivered'. The "all things" may be the power of salvation for all men.

And no one knows the Son save the Father. Neither does anyone know the Father- Gk. 'to know fully'. Nobody, the disciples included, to whom the Father had 'revealed' repentance, fully knew the Son nor the Father. There is a parallel to be observed here between 'knowing the Father' and repenting; for the context speaks of how the majority had not repented despite the Lord's miracles. The little ones, the babes, the disciples, had repented- but this had been 'revealed' to them by the Father (:25). Now, the Lord speaks of how the Son 'reveals' the Father. The life of repentance is the life of knowing the Father. To know God is to know our sinfulness and repent. And this is the "rest" from sin which the Lord speaks of in :28.

Save the Son- Whether or not Joseph died or left Mary by the time Jesus hit adolescence, the fact was that Joseph wasn't His real father. He was effectively fatherless in the earthly sense. As such, this would have set Him up in certain psychological matrices which had their effect on His personality. He could speak of His Heavenly Father in the shockingly unprecedented form of 'abba', daddy. He grew so close to His Heavenly Father because of the lack of an earthly one, and the inevitable stresses which there would have been between Him and Joseph. A strong, fatherly-type figure is a recurrent feature of the Lord's parables; clearly He was very focused upon His Heavenly Father. He could say with passionate truth: "No one knows a son except a father, and no one knows a father except a son" (Mt. 11:27; Lk. 10:22).

And to whomsoever- The idea is not that the Lord Jesus had a list of humanity and chose a few from that list. He has earlier spoken of the freedom of choice to 'receive' (:14) God's message, and He was urging all men to do so. Although all men are potentially delivered to Him, the Father is revealing Himself to only some of them. The Father is revealed in the Son, as John's Gospel makes clear. It's not that some people are chosen by the Son to have this revelation; rather is it a statement of fact, or method-

the knowledge of the Father is through the Son revealing Him. And this is why He goes straight on in :28 to urge people to come to Him. The ideas of coming to Him and 'whomsoever', anyone, are very much the language of John's Gospel and the Revelation, which concludes with an appeal to 'whosoever will' to 'come' to Christ and salvation.

The Son wishes to reveal Him- This revealing is by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10; Eph. 3:5). It was not flesh and blood that revealed the Lord to Peter (16:17). As noted on 1 Pet. 1:21, relationship with God is predicated upon relationship with the Son; He is the only way to the Father. Academic Bible study, consideration of the apparent evidence of apologetics, will not reveal God as Father to men. It is the Son who reveals Him. If we take the jump of faith in accepting Him, only then will He reveal the Father to us.

11:28 *Come to me all you that labour and are*- See on :27 "whomsoever". The Lord may be urging the audience to come unto *Him* in the same way as they had come out to hear John preaching (:7-9). The invitation at the last day to "Come" into the Kingdom (Mt. 25:34 s.w.) is heard even now in the invitation to come after Him. The preceding verses share with us a beautiful insight into the mind and inner prayer of the Son to the Father. He meditated upon why apparently so few were responding, and went on to marvel at the Father's wisdom in revealing only to some, and to the immature 'little ones' of His disciples. But arising out of that time of prayer and meditation, the Lord goes on to make a public appeal to whosoever will to come to Him. And this is the exact pattern which our public witness and appeal to others should follow.

Heavy laden- The context is a lament that because people are wise, prudent and exalted in pride, they will not come to the Father and Son. But this way of life and thinking is in fact a hard way to live. Hence the Lord commends His own humility to those proud people. Whilst the arrogance and self-assurance of modern man seems an impossible barrier to the Gospel, we must be aware that actually they are struggling with it and are laden down with it. The word is only elsewhere used about the lawyers lading people with heavy burdens (Lk. 11:46)- not only of guilt, but also of pride in having kept irrelevant laws. David found his sins associated with Bathsheba "as an heavy burden... too heavy for me... I am (thereby) bowed down greatly" (Ps. 32:4,6). Surely our Lord was thinking back to David when he invited all of us: "Come unto me, all you who labour and are heavy laden (with sins), and I will give you rest... for My... burden is light" (Mt. 11:28-30).

And I will give you rest- The Lord Jesus invites those who follow Him to accept the "rest" which He gives (Mt. 11:28). He uses a Greek word which is used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, for the Sabbath rest. Jesus was offering a life of Sabbath, of rest from trust in our own works (cp. Heb. 4:3,10). We shouldn't, therefore, keep a Sabbath one day per week, but rather live our whole lives in the spirit of the Sabbath.

The Pharisees were the ones burdening the people (Mt. 23:4; Lk. 11:46), so this could be read as a fairly direct appeal to quit respecting the religious leaders of the day and follow the teaching of Jesus instead. Legalism and obedience to the Law is likened to an unbearable yoke (Acts 15:10; Gal. 5:1).

11:29 *Take*- The same word is used in the challenge to "take up" the cross. To take up Christ's cross, to take on His yoke, is to learn of Him, to come to know Him. Yet do we

sense any *pain* in our coming to know Christ? We should do, because the cross was the ultimate symbol of pain, and to take it up is to take on the yoke, the knowledge, of Christ. Clearly the knowledge of the Father and Son is so much more than knowing theological propositions about them.

My yoke- The yoke metaphor was commonly used at the time to speak of a career or profession / daily occupation. Our 'career' is to be in His service, and any human yoke or career is to not be seen by us as our defining situation in life. We can't be 'career people' in the sense that many are in this world- for our career is with the Lord. And yet the yoke was also understood as 'teaching'; for Sirach 51:26 has the sage inviting students to put their necks under his yoke and learn his teaching. The Lord Jesus is a yoke- He unites men together, so that the otherwise unbearable burden of the spiritual life is lighter (Mt. 11:29). If we do not let our fellowship with others lighten our load, then we basically have not been brought under Christ. To be in Him, under His yoke, is to put our arms around our brethren and labour together. The Lord paralleled "Come unto *Me*" with taking His yoke upon us, in order to have a light burden (Mt. 11:28-30). A yoke is what binds animals together, so that they can between them carry a burden which otherwise would be too great for them individually. The invitation to come unto Jesus personally is therefore an invitation into a community- to be lined up alongside another, and have a yoke placed upon us. Without submitting to this, we can't actually carry the heavy burden laid upon us. This heavy burden laid upon the believer must surely have some reference to the cross we are asked to share in and carry. We can't do this alone; and perhaps it happened that the Lord Himself couldn't even bear His own cross without the help of another, in order to show us the point. We can't claim to have come personally unto Jesus, somehow liking the idea of the Man Jesus, intellectually accepting His teachings on an abstract level- and yet keep our distance from our brethren. It seems increasingly true that human relationships are almost impossible to maintain at an intimate level- without Christ. He is the yoke which enables the psychological miracle of people pulling together, for life, in order to carry His cross. The most essential "law of Christ" is to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2). Paul had this in mind when he described his brethren as 'yokefellows' (Phil. 4:3). For Paul, his joy and crown would be to see his brethren accepted into God's Kingdom at judgment day. David had the same spirit when he wrote of how he longed to "see the prosperity of Your chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of Your nation, that I may glory with Your inheritance" (Ps. 106:5). His personal vision of God's Kingdom involved seeing others there; there's no hint of spiritual selfishness in David. And he goes straight on to comment: "We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity... our fathers understood not..." (Ps. 106:6). David felt himself very much at one with the community of God's children, both in their failures and in their ultimate hope. Life with God simply can't be lived in isolation from the rest of His people. Our salvation in that sense has a collective aspect to it, and if we want 'out' with the community of believers in this life, then we're really voting ourselves out of their future glory.

The reference to having a heavy yoke lifted recalls the servant song which spoke of the need to "undo the bands of the [heavy] yoke" (Is. 58:6). Paul takes passages from Isaiah's servant songs and applies them to us. The servant who suffered and witnessed to the world was evidently the Lord Jesus. And yet Isaiah is also explicit that the servant is the whole seed of Abraham, "Jacob", the slowly-developing people of God (Is. 41:8; 44:1). There are many connections within Isaiah between the servant songs, and the descriptions of the people of Israel into which the songs are interspersed. The Saviour-servant was to bring out the prisoners from the dungeons (Is. 42:7), so was every

Israelite “to let the oppressed go free... loose the bonds”, and to “undo the bands of the [heavy] yoke” (Is. 58:6) as Christ does here (Mt. 11:28,29); His work of deliverance is to be replicated by each of us in our witness. Whoever is in Him will by this very fact follow Him in this work. In Isaiah’s first context, the suffering servant was King Hezekiah. Yet all Israel were to see themselves as ‘in’ him, as spiritual Israel are to see themselves as in Christ. “He was oppressed”, as Israel at that time were being “oppressed” by Assyria. As they were covered in wounds and spiritual sickness (Is. 1:5,6), so the suffering servant bore their diseases and rose again in salvation victory. Significantly, Isaiah 40-53 speak of the one servant, whereas Isaiah 54-66 speak of the “servants” who fulfil in principle the work of the singular servant. When the Lord speaks of a change of yokes for the weary and a granting of rest in Him (Mt. 11:28-30), He is using terms taken from Isaiah’s restoration prophecies. The offer of rest was rejected by the exiles then; but is taken up now by all who accept Christ, realizing that they are in the same state as the exiles in Babylon.

And learn from me, for I am meek and lowly in heart- Vine comments: "The word for the Christian virtue of humility was not used before the Christian era, and is distinctly an outgrowth of the Gospel". To be able to say in genuine humility that one knows the state of their own heart, and that it is humble, is an essay not only in humility but in the acute self-knowledge of the Lord. The Greek translated “lowly” definitely means cast down, depressed, implying a bringing down from a superior position (s.w. 2 Cor. 7:6). This helps us understand the language of Phil. 2:5-11, which speaks of the progressive humiliation of Christ, culminating in the death of the cross. Even at this point in His ministry, the Lord felt that He had been brought down in mind- He felt the progressive nature of His humility. And in that passage, the appeal is to allow that kind of mind and process to be in us, which was in Christ.

And you shall find- The yoke is *given* but we still have to *find* it by accepting the potential enabled by the Lord.

Rest for your souls- He assures us that if we come to Him, we will find “rest” (Mt. 11:29); but the same word is only used elsewhere about the rest / comfort which our brethren give us (1 Cor. 16:18; 2 Cor. 7:13; Philemon 7,20).

11:30- see Ex. 2:11.

For my yoke is easy- A poor translation. The cross of Christ is anything but "easy"; the idea is more that it is helpful for service; the relationships He enables between believers is what makes it easier for us to carry the heavy loads of His service, i.e. the cross. Even if we still insist on the translation “easy”, we reflect that the way to the Kingdom is easy relative to the wonder of what is in store for the faithful (2 Cor. 4:17); and yet from our human perspective it is hard indeed, a life of self-crucifixion (Acts 14:22; Rev.7:14). “Easy” translates *chrestos*, which sounds very like the ‘Christ’. By this word play the point is being made that Christ *is* His yoke. One of the most essential things about Christ is that those in Him are bound together with each other. Any view of ‘Christ’ which excludes those in Him is therefore fundamentally flawed. Paul therefore teaches avoidance of any who cause division contrary to the teaching of Christ which we have “learned”- using the same word used here about Christ’s uniting yoke being ‘learning’ of Him (Rom. 16:17). See on 20:16.

And my burden is light- Mic. 2:3 reminded Israel that they will be under the yoke of judgment if they reject Yahweh’s yoke. The Lord spoke of His servants having a light yoke. The Bible minded among His hearers would have thought back to the

threatened punishment of an iron yoke for the disobedient (Dt. 28:48). 'It's a yoke either way', they would have concluded. But the Lord's yoke *even in this life* is light, and has promise of the life which is to come! The logic of taking it, with the restrictions it inevitably implies (for it is a yoke), is simply overpowering. Note that the Greek for 'light' essentially means 'able to be carried'- which connects with the idea of 'taking up' the yoke and cross (see on 11:29). The point is- it is doable. The cross can be carried, the yoke can be worn- if we learn of Christ and thereby learn to take our place with others in carrying it.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 12

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

And began to pluck ears of grain to eat- The only point in mentioning this would presumably be because the Pharisees came and stopped them. This shows how closely the Lord and His men were under the critical eyes of others, even from a distance.

12:2 *But the Pharisees, when they saw it, said to him: Look, your disciples do what is unlawful on the Sabbath*- A constant concern with the Pharisees (Mt. 19:3; 22:17; 27:6; Jn. 5:10; 18:31). The Lord's attitude here was to show that the Old Testament itself envisaged situations where true spirituality was above law. The parable of Mt. 20:15 brings the point home- the generous employer justified his pouring out of grace, giving the weak and lazy the same penny a day as the hard workers, on the basis that 'It is lawful for me to do what I wish'.

12:3 *But he said to them: Have you not read*- Of course they had, many times. But the Lord here and several times elsewhere challenges them (and us) as to whether we have really read what we have. The Lord could have legitimately answered them: 'It is lawful to pick corn whilst passing through a field, the Law allows for this if one is poor, and my followers are indeed poor. There is nothing in the Law which stipulates this permission doesn't operate on the Sabbath'. But as always, the Lord was prepared to meet people where they were, and to take them to a higher level. He seeks to teach by general principle that the extent of His Lordship meant that He and His men were free to do as they pleased on this kind of matter. He reasoned that 'OK, let's assume you're right, but David and *his* men broke the law because they were about God's business, this over-rode the need for technical obedience'. The Lord Jesus wasn't constantly correcting specific errors of interpretation. He dealt in principles much larger than this, in order to make a more essential, practical, useful point.

What David did when he was hungry, and they that were with him- The Lord's reasoning depends upon drawing a parallel between Himself and David, and David's warriors and the disciples. Again, He is encouraging them to see themselves as no less

than the warriors of David who later became the governors of Israel. Aaron's sons were the ones who were intended to eat the showbread (Lev. 24:5-9)- and again the Lord is inviting His secular disciples to see themselves as a new priesthood.

12:4 *How he entered into the house of God*- For non-Levites to enter the Sanctuary was also not 'lawful', quite apart from eating the bread which only the priests could lawfully eat. This prepares the way for the Lord's later parable about God urging unclean street people to 'enter [His] house' because Israel had rejected the invitation (the same words are used- Lk. 14:23). The psychological magnitude of the Lord's new system of thinking is hard to appreciate. Non-Levites could now enter it- and even the worst of the Gentiles. But the magnitude of the new thinking in Christ for anyone, not least secular people of the 21st Century, is no less.

And ate the showbread, which it was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them that were with him, but only for the priests? - The Lord defended the non-observant Judaism of the twelve as being due to their joy that He, the bridegroom, was with them (Lk. 5:33,34). When they 'ground corn' on the Sabbath, the Lord defended them to their critics by saying that they were like David's men eating the showbread. Those guys were just walking through a cornfield rubbing ears together as their manner was, as they had done on many a Sabbath day, but not realizing that this time there was some Scribe out with his binocular vision scrutinizing them. They surely weren't doing it because their minds were on the incident of David's men eating the showbread. The Lord had asked them to obey the Scribes, who sat in Moses' seat, over this kind of trivia. But He doesn't rebuke them. Rather, He defends them to others, imputing far more spiritual perception to them than they had (Lk. 6:1-4).

Clearly the Lord is suggeseting that His ragtag crowd of disciples and questionable ministering women were the new priesthood of a new Israel.

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

The priests in the temple- The rabbis taught that "Temple service takes precedence over the Sabbath" (W.D. Davies *Matthew* p. 313 (*op cit.*)). Thinking through the logic of the Lord's argument, He clearly has the view that His disciples are about the work of the temple, walking through that cornfield. Otherwise His appeal to the rabbinic dictum had no sense. Again, He is encouraging His followers to see themselves as far more than secular, not very spiritual people who are personally attracted to the teachings of Jesus and are awed by His miracles. He's saying that actually they are as priests, professionally committed to serving God actively.

Profane the Sabbath and are guiltless?- The Lord (Mt. 12:5) said that the priests "profaned" or 'desecrated' the Sabbath; He didn't say that because they kept the spirit

of it, that was OK. By using a word as extreme as "profaned" He seems to be even emphasizing the point of paradox within God's self-revelation.

Having accepted the Bible as the source of authority, we find that the Bible does not categorically list what behaviour is acceptable and what is unacceptable. Even within the Law of Moses, to obey some commands meant breaking others. And it is a common dilemma of sincere believers that they find themselves having to break one principle to keep another. The Bible is written in such a way as to give clear instruction to those who love and respect it, and yet to confuse those who do not fundamentally accept it into thinking that their faulty understanding is in fact the will of God. This is why it is true, on a surface level, that you can prove what you like from the Bible. Adolf Hitler, Jim Jones, David Koresh *et al* all managed to 'prove' the most bizarre things from the Bible- and persuade others to genuinely think that to do evil was in fact doing righteousness. So the fact that someone thinks that they are correctly interpreting the Bible does not thereby justify them, however sincere their conscience may be. And it does not mean that the church must therefore accept them, just because their conscience is clear and they think the Bible justifies their behaviour. The opposite of love isn't so much hatred, as indifference. To be indifferent to the real welfare of our fellows in this world, and of *all* our own brethren, is perhaps our most common sin. The Lord taught us that we should have a sense of urgency in our response to others. The Lord showed by His example that it is better to meet the hunger of human need than to keep the letter of Sabbath law (Mk. 2:25,26). *His* urgency, *God's* urgency, *our* consequent urgency… all means that when even Divine principles appear to come into conflict, we are to be influenced above all by the urgency of others' need.

12:6 *But I say to you, that one greater than the temple is here*- AV "in this place". Sacred space was a big idea within Judaism. The Lord is directly challenging it by stating that He as a person was more holy and significant than the temple. The way He ate with sinners and touched the ritually unclean likewise reflect a redefinition of the holy. The implication could be that the Lord was standing at the edge of a cornfield (He was not within the synagogue- :9)- and He declared everywhere touched by Him to be holy.

12:7 *But if you had known what this means*- This continues the challenge of :3- "Have you never read?". They *had* read, but without understanding. They had read without perceiving meaning- and it led them to "condemn the guiltless". Without unduly exalting intellectualism for its own sake, this is a sobering thought- that the crucifixion of God's Son was the result of a chronic lack of understanding of God's word. To pay lip service to Biblicism is not enough; the meaning in the words, the whole issue of interpretation, is crucially important; getting it wrong can lead to crucifying the Son of God afresh. The Greek *esti* translated 'means' is basically the verb 'to be'- if they had known what the Scripture 'is' they would've have condemned the guiltless. The Bible 'is' its true interpretation, and this idea comes to its ultimate term in the declaration of Jesus as being 'the word'.

I desire mercy- Hos. 6:6 says that Yahweh "desires mercy". These two Hebrew words sound similar to each other- mercy / grace is so identified with God's passion and desire. The same Hebrew words are to be found in the statements that He desires / delights in grace / mercy (Jer. 9:24; Mic. 7:18). If *He* delights in forgiveness and grace, then we should also; His passion should be ours. This of itself outlaws the critical eyes of the Pharisees, noticing the disciples' infringement of a law and feeling the need to 'take up the matter' with them. And it will be the same with us. The human tendency to observe

others with eyes of criticism and sensitivity to their weaknesses will be displaced if we simply delight in mercy. The Hosea passage goes on to condemn the Jewish religious leadership in language which the Lord clearly used in constructing the parable of the good Samaritan: "As troops of robbers wait for a man, so the company of priests murder in the way by consent" (Hos. 6:8). But there's a subtle twist- the priest in the Lord's story passed by on the other side and simply did nothing. That inaction is paralleled with being as bad as the thieves themselves. The priest was returning from having offered sacrifice, but he didn't show mercy- and God wants mercy and not sacrifice. Note that the passage in Hos. 6:6 is perhaps purposefully ambiguous. It could mean 'I want to see you showing mercy, and not [so much offering] sacrifice'; or it could mean 'I myself want / love / delight in [showing] mercy rather than [receiving] sacrifice'. The ambiguity is because God's will / love / delight should be ours. And we can read the quotation of that passage here in Mt. 12:7 with the same double meaning. His passion for grace must be ours, and this precludes looking critically at others, eager to perceive their breaches of our perceptions of God's law.

And not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless- Who exactly did the Lord have in mind? He has just used the same word when stating that the priests work on the Sabbath and are “blameless”. By condemning the disciples, the Pharisees were thus condemning the priests too. This argument of course supposes that the Lord’s secular, spiritually ragtag followers were in fact priests- the priests of the new system He was bringing in. The ultimately guiltless was of course the Lord Himself, and He foresaw their final condemnation of Him, perceiving that in essence it had already happened. For whoever condemns His followers condemns Him, so deeply is He associated with them. But how would the Pharisees have avoided condemning the guiltless disciples by appreciating that God wants mercy and not sacrifice? I suggest that the Lord is again meeting them on their own level: ‘You consider the disciples are guilty. OK, that’s not what the Law says, but OK, let’s assume they are. But if you simply *loved* showing mercy as God does, then you would not have condemned them anyway. You would’ve overlooked the incident’.

12:8 *For the Son of man is Lord*- Here as elsewhere we see the juxtaposition of the Lord's humanity and His Lordship. His exaltation is precisely because He was human; He has authority to judge us because He was Son of man (Jn. 5:27). The Lordship of Jesus was predicated upon His obedience to death and exaltation (Acts 2:36), and yet Jesus was calmly confident that this would be achieved by Him; to the point that He could reason that He already was "Lord" and thereby able to abrogate the Sabbath and act as the ultimate temple.

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

12:9 *And he departed from there and*- Luke’s record adds that this was on another Sabbath- at least the next week.

Went into their synagogue- The point is that the Lord was *outside* the synagogue when He declared that the "place" where He was then standing, in or near a cornfield, was holy ground; see on :6. It was "their" synagogue, just as the temple was "the temple of the Jews", and the feasts of Yahweh had been hijacked to become "the feast of the Jews".

12:10 *Behold*- AV. I have suggested that this word is best understood by likening Matthew to a cameraman shooting a movie, who now zooms in on an encounter.

And saw a man having a withered hand. And they asked him, saying: Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?-His right hand, according to Luke. His own strength and ability to act was withered.

So that they might accuse him- A legal term. They wanted to get Jesus in court over this issue. But there's no evidence they actually did, and there was no recorded mention of Sabbath breaking in His final trial- so well and profoundly did He answer them.

12:11 *And he said to them: Which of you, if having only one sheep*- A poor man, who had only one sheep- as in the parable Nathan told David. The Lord saw the man with the withered hand as His sheep- His only sheep. Here we have an insight into an old problem: 'Seeing we are many and Jesus is one, how can it be that He feels so uniquely towards me, when He has so many other people to think about and relate to?'. It is possible for God and His Son to have emotional and psychological capabilities which we do not have. The Lord seems to be teaching here that He identifies with the poor, who has only *one* sheep; but He feels to each of us as if we are all that He has. Likewise in the parable of the woman who lost one of her dowry coins; they were all she had. We are all Jesus has. He has no other group on another planet in another dimension- we here on earth, we with all our dysfunction and poor response to His love, are all He has. And further- *you* are all He has. The man had been sick for some time, but the Lord saw his situation as if it had only just happened, that Sabbath day, and felt an urgency to respond. The *urgency* is a key issue- for the issue wasn't healing, it was why Jesus couldn't wait a few hours until the end of the Sabbath to heal. The Mishnah taught that the Sabbath could be broken if life was in immediate danger (m. Yoma 8.6). The Pharisees obviously reasoned that this wasn't the case- a paralyzed hand could wait a few hours for healing. But Jesus was perhaps making the point that to Him, human need is urgent and cannot wait. We must remember His sense of urgency when we struggle with His apparent slowness to respond. The spirit of urgency comes through the Gospel records and also the Acts.

And it falls into a pit on the Sabbath day- The Law specifically foresaw such a situation, pronouncing judgment against the person responsible for leaving a pit open so that animals might fall into it (Ex. 21:33,34). The Lord's point was that there was not a moment to lose once this happened- there was an urgency to save the animal, and that urgency was far more important than seeking to condemn the person who had breached the law. And this was how the Lord saw that man with a "withered hand"; the need was the call, and to Him there was an urgency about the situation that was far more important than any concern about legalistic obedience to laws- be they real or imagined.

Will not grab hold of it- This apparently unnecessary detail is included because the same word is used about the Lord's touching or grasping of people before He healed them (Mt. 9:25; Mk. 1:31; 5:41; 9:27). As they would urgently lay hold upon a lost sheep and lift it out of a pit, so the Lord laid hold upon people and healed them. Reflect on how the Lord 'took hold' of people before healing them. This feature of the miracles demonstrated His desire to fully take hold of our human experiences, thereby identifying Himself with us- and on that basis, healing us. The same idea, although a different word, is to be found in the language of Heb. 2:16, speaking of the Lord Jesus taking hold upon humanity by having our nature.

And lift it out?- The same word is used for people 'rising up' after being healed by the Lord (Mt. 8:15; 9:5,6,25; 10:8; 11:5). Jewish people would've thought of the rescue of Joseph and Jeremiah from pits. The healing of this man, like so many of the healing miracles, had a spiritual intention- it was in order to save him from the pit of death. We

saw on 11:20 that the purpose of the miracles was to lead people to repentance, not simply to alleviate human need for the sake of it.

12:12 *How much then is a man of more value than a sheep!*- The Lord favourably compares men to animals (to birds, Mt. 6:26; sparrows, Mt. 10:31; and again in Lk. 12:7,24). Whilst in the manner of our death we are as "the beasts of the field", the Lord seems to be at pains to ensure we realize the value and meaning of the human person, made as we are in God's image. If we treat people as animals, we have failed to perceive something of God which is uniquely in humanity.

Therefore- Again, the Lord doesn't base His argument around the obvious misunderstanding of the Law which the Pharisees had. He avoids a tit-for-tat expositional battle over semantics by introducing higher principles- the sheer value and need of the human person transcends any issue of legalistic obedience to any law, be it God's laws or the interpretation of them. This is a principle which legalistic churches need to bear in mind to this day in their decision making.

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

12:13 *Then said he to the man: Stretch out your hand*- Matthew uses the same word to describe how the Lord Himself stretched forth *His* hand in order to heal, save and welcome (Mt. 8:3; 12:49; 14:31). Again we are encouraged to perceive a sense of mutuality between the Lord and His people.

And he stretched it out and it was restored whole, as the other- This detail is recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke. It is another touch of the eye witness- the man would've held out both his hands and everyone would've looked from the one to the other, observing they now looked so similar.

12:14 *But*- AV "then". Here we see the common human feature of doing evil in response to the experience of grace. Even amongst believers, and even at judgment day, there is the possibility of the eye becoming evil because of His goodness and grace to others (Mt. 20:15). We see the principle in both secular and church life. Grace shown to others can elicit the worst evil from religious people. We shouldn't be surprised at this phenomenon; but it is the very surprise at encountering it which causes so many to become disillusioned with the church and ultimately with the Lord.

The Pharisees went out- Again, an emphasis on physical movement. We imagine Matthew's camera covering their departure from the synagogue.

And took counsel against him, how they might destroy him- S.w. "a consultation". Nothing formal is necessarily implied by the word. Perhaps we are to imagine them gathering in a tight circle somewhere outside the synagogue.

12:15 *And Jesus perceiving it*- Were there sympathizers for Jesus within the Pharisees who told Him this? Or is this another case of Him perceiving the minds of men?

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

Mark adds that the Lord withdrew grieving for their hard hearts. The way the Lord didn't just ignore the Jewish leaders, as we might ignore trouble makers at a public meeting or correspondence course students who ask endless questions... this is really quite something. He grieved for the hardness of their hearts (Mk. 3:5), and finally broke down and wept over Jerusalem, in an agony of soul that they would not respond. The

apparently foolish catch questions of Mk. 3:21-29 are answered in some depth by the Lord, and He concludes with pointing out that they are putting themselves "*in danger* of eternal damnation" (although, notice, not yet condemned). One senses the urgency with which He put it to them. He was angry [i.e. frustrated?], "being grieved for the blindness of their hearts" (Mk. 3:5). Are we just indifferent or evenly smugly happy that men are so blind…? Or do we grieve about it to the point of angry frustration? Remember how Moses and Paul would fain have given their eternal life for the conversion of Israel, this is how they felt for them.

12:16 *And charged them that they should not make him known*- It was predicted of the Lord's preaching that He would not "strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice [raised up in this way] in the streets". And for this reason He asked His converts not to "make him known" in this way; He wanted them to witness *as He witnessed* (Mt. 12:16,19). This is quite something, the more we reflect upon it. He rebuked the self-righteous, restored peoples' dignity, alleviated their poverty and sicknesses to give them a foretaste of the future blessings of His Kingdom on earth, opposed legalistic and corrupt religious practices, and ultimately gave His life to show that even His enemies were encompassed in His love. This is the pattern for us, especially in our seeking to do these things in the lives of those who respond to the Gospel.

But the same words ("*make Him known*") are used about how later, He was made known by the church (Acts 4:16; 1 Jn. 3:10). It could well be that as so often with Semitic languages, we must read in an ellipsis- 'Not make Him known [immediately, right then, at that time]'. The implication could be that they were indeed to make Him known- but later. The great commission, to take the knowledge of Christ to all men everywhere, could then be comfortably read in this context; the commission signalled the end of the relative silence which the Lord called for. In line with our comments on how and why the Lord withdrew Himself from the crowds in the preceding verse (:15), it would seem that the Lord was constantly concerned on a practical level that His ministry would be badly impaired if the masses of Palestine rose up out of His control and made Him King. He wanted above all to teach and personally model the Kingdom, and being at the centre of a political uprising thrusting Him forward would not enable that. *Phaneros*, "known", is only elsewhere used in Matthew in the Lord's teaching about what would happen "openly" (s.w.) at the establishment of the Kingdom at the last day (Mt. 6:4,6,18). The Lord didn't want them trying to establish the Kingdom there and then in their own strength, and especially whilst so seriously misunderstanding the nature and essence of the Kingdom- for they still thought it was all about military victory against Rome. So it could be that the idea of 'to make known' may mean far more than 'Don't tell anyone'; it was psychologically impossible to expect that multitudes of people who had seen healings would literally not breathe a word to anyone else. It was obvious that healings had been done- people came home healed. To 'not make known' doesn't have to mean 'Don't tell a word of this to anyone', indeed the Lord's parables and other teachings suggest that such telling of others is an inevitable part of response to Him. I suggest it means more of the flavour of 'Don't declare Me publically as King'.

12:17 *That it might be fulfilled*- This is often stated as the reason why the Lord did and said things. He was consciously seeking to be 'the word made flesh' and consciously tried to fulfil the Old Testament prophecies. Despite strong resistance to this idea by some expositors, Harry Whittaker particularly, it seems to me the most natural understanding of the phrase and the force of the word "That...".

Which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying- The implication could be that Isaiah publically spoke these words, directing Israel's attention to a "servant" figure of his own time, who all the same failed to be Messianic as intended, meaning that the prophecy had its fulfilment reapplied in Jesus. Or perhaps it was because the Lord was addressing people who had largely only *heard* Isaiah being read. Literacy was only a few percent in first century Palestine, and nobody had the Old Testament scrolls at home. Therefore the Lord speaks in terms of Isaiah *speaking* and *saying*, rather than writing and us reading.

12:18 *Look at My servant whom I have chosen, My beloved in whom My soul is well pleased. I will put My Spirit upon him*- The focus was to be upon beholding Jesus personally, and not listening to endless tales of miracles, inevitably exaggerated as they were passed around. If this is the reason for the quotation, then the stress would be upon *beholding* Him, appreciating Him, rather than seeking to get temporal benefit from His healing miracles.

And he shall declare judgment to the Gentiles- The Lord didn't want the crowds getting so maxed out on His miracles and other physicalities that they paid no attention to His message; for the purpose of His being amongst men was primarily to "show justice". And that justice was to be shown to *Gentiles*- they were to be shown justice and salvation, not slain so that a Kingdom of God open to Jews only could be established upon Gentile corpses. This was the kind of false view of the Kingdom which the Lord didn't hold and didn't want given credibility by associating Himself and His miracles with it. But *krisis*, translated "justice", can also mean judgment in the sense of future judgment to come. Yet these same Gentiles who were to be shown (according to that reading) judgment to come, were to be given the opportunity to trust in the Messiah's Name (:21). And justice [s.w.] was to be "cast out" in victory- i.e. victory against judgment. In Christ, mercy was to triumph against judgment, rejoicing against it as if after a bitter contest which was won by mercy (James 2:13). But to appreciate that good news, the Gentiles firstly had to realize what "judgment" really was. These were the things the Lord wanted to teach, but to get the points over, He needed the crowds to not be so hyped up by His miracles and to stop all talk of establishing a political Kingdom at that time.

The Lord's showing judgment to the Gentiles and not publicly striving or crying in his preaching (Mt.12:18-21) primarily fulfilled the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 42:1-3. Note how His gentle, low pressure attitude to preaching will be the same in the Kingdom as it was in the first century. In the same way Is. 54:13 concerning the future preaching of the Gospel in the Kingdom is quoted about Christ in Jn. 6:45.

As in :21, the purpose of the healing was to show something to the Gentiles. But there were no Gentiles mentioned as being in the audience. Are we to infer that there were some present? More likely, as this whole incident occurred in a Jewish synagogue (:9), the Lord's point was that the unbelieving amongst God's people are no better than Gentiles. The Lord's miracles showed forth God's judgment principles; in them He showed judgment to the Gentiles, and sent forth God's judgments (Mt. 12:18-20 quotes Is. 42:1-3 concerning how the Lord will do this at the events of the second coming).

12:19 *He shall not strive, nor cry aloud, neither shall anyone hear his voice in the streets*- Is. 42:1,2 concerning Christ's witness to the *Gentiles* is quoted in Mt. 12:19 regarding His witness to an apostate Israel. Those among God's people who break their covenant with Him, He sees as the world. Israel were to be made like "the top of a rock" just as Gentile Tyre would be (Ez. 24:7; 26:4). "Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers", the Lord said to Israel (Mt. 23:32)- yet He was alluding to how the Gentile

Amorites filled up the cup of God's judgments and then had to drink it. Pharaoh's heart was hardened to bring about God's glory, but Paul uses the very same language, in the same context, to describe what was happening to an apostate, Egypt-like Israel (Rom. 9:17). Korah and his company were swallowed by the earth, using the very language which Moses so recently had applied to how the Egyptians were swallowed by the earth at the Red Sea (Ex. 15:12).

Not strive- This is quoted from the servant song of Is. 42, and the Lord is applying it to all those who follow Him. If *He* is not to strive or clamour in the streets, then neither are those who follow Him to do so. For all that is true of Him is true of them. Paul makes the same point in stating that "the servant of the Lord must not strive" (2 Tim. 2:24). The "servant" is ultimately the Messianic servant of Isaiah's servant songs, but the point is that all that is true of that Servant is true of all those in Him.

The streets- The Lord didn't shout out in the streets who He was. He wished His followers to follow His example in *showing* the message to the world just as He did- in who He was (Mt. 12:18). Christ's instruction to His recent converts not to spread the Gospel in an unseemly way, because it was written about *Him personally that* "he shall not strive nor cry; neither shall any man hear *His* voice in the streets". In other words, the true preacher of Christ is solidly identified with Him by the very act of preaching. Truly "we are ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor. 5:20) in our witnessing. His voice is our voice.

12:20 *A bruised reed he shall not break and a smoking wick he shall not quench*- The Hebrew words used in Is. 42:3 suggest this is a reference to the candlestick; the words respectively mean a shaft / stem, and a wick. Little strength, little light (if the reference is to the reed which took oil to the lamps of the candlestick), little heat- but all the same, the Lord seeks to fan it into life rather than walk away in disappointment; and by doing so, sets a challenging example to many of us, whose most frequent complaint is the weak state of the brotherhood's members. If the reference is to a damaged and smoky candlestick, this becomes the more poignant- for the candlestick was a clear symbol of Israel and then of the ecclesias (Rev. 1:12,13,20; 2:1).

When judgment is finally cast out by mercy at the last day, then the dysfunctional candlestick will be quenched or destroyed in condemnation. Note how the metaphor of quenching a fire is used here for condemnation; but in another metaphor, condemnation is spoken of as the very opposite- unquenchable fire. This is sure proof that we are not to read 'unquenchable fire' as literal.

Until- The Lord's patience with the useless candlestick of Israel and the weakness of the ecclesia will be "until" His final victory over judgment. That happened in one sense on the cross, but in another sense it will only happen when death is swallowed up in victory at the day of judgment. Until then, both He and us are to patiently bear with the damaged and dysfunctional ecclesial candlestick. But in that day, those elements of the candlestick which refuse to give light to the house will be "broken", the Greek meaning 'broken in pieces'- the language of condemnation (Mt. 21:44).

He sends forth judgment to victory- Gk. to cast out, thrust out. See on 12:19 *show justice*. Judgment is cast out *eis*, "in", victory.

12:21 *And in his name shall the Gentiles hope*- Mark's record adds what Matthew strangely omits- that the great crowds whom He charged to not "make Him known" included Gentiles (Mk. 3:6-8). This makes sense of why the Lord healed "all" in the crowd (:15)- the sense is not that He healed every person in the crowd, as not all of them were in need of healing; perhaps rather the stress on "all" is to show that the sick

Gentiles who were present were *also* healed. Note that "In His Name shall the Gentiles trust" is a quotation from the LXX of Is. 42:4 and not the Masoretic Text, which reads "The isles shall wait for His law". The ready acceptance of the LXX by the inspired NT writers, even preferring it over the Hebrew, has many implications. One of them is that the genealogies as found in the LXX do not support the idea of Adam being 4000 years before Christ, which is essential to those who believe that the six day / thousand year periods ended in 2000 AD and the Millennium must now be established.

12:22 *Then was brought to him one*- The Greek is used about bring an offering. We recall how the conversion of individuals is spoken as offering them as a sacrifice in Rom. 15:16. Bringing people to the Lord is offering them to Him because they are to present themselves, or be presented, as living sacrifices in His service (Rom. 12:1). There may therefore be a connection with the use later in this verse of *thereapeuo* for "healed", as this word is also translated "worship" in the sense of Divine worship. The Lord had just cured large numbers of people, but then withdrew from them. Now they find Him again and bring just one sick person for healing. The people were "amazed" (:23) at this one healing- whereas the Lord had healed many sick people in :15. We are left with the impression of how deeply "amazed" the crowds must have been, if there was so much amazement at just one cure, there must have been super amazement at the mass healings.

Possessed with a demon, blind and dumb, and he healed him, so much so that the dumb man spoke and saw- The Greek strictly means to be exercised or controlled by a demon. This is the language used at the time for explaining medical situations which today we would diagnose differently. Blindness and deafness are explicable in medical terms. The verse states that the Lord 'healed' the man and therefore, because of that healing, the blindness and deafness left him. The language of healing of persons is not what we would expect if the Lord instead engaged in battle with demonic entities in Heaven or at least, outside of the man.

12:23 *And all the crowds were amazed, and said*- See on 12:22 *brought*. This is a strong word, meaning utterly astonished, and even used about madness (Mk. 3:21; 2 Cor. 5:13).

Can this be the son of David?- The people made a direct connection between the ability to do miracles and being Messiah. Yet earlier in this commentary I have pointed out that generally the Lord worked with an economy of miracle, and the number of miracles He did appear to have decreased as His ministry progressed. His understanding of Isaiah 42:1-3 just quoted was that Messiah should be 'beheld', be understood and appreciated on a spiritual level, rather than be a miracle worker whipping up mass support because of that. And yet He appreciated the strong connection in peoples' minds between Messiahship and miracles, and He therefore conceded to this by doing miracles.

12:24 *But when the Pharisees heard it, they said: This man does not cast out demons but*- Their comment appears to have been made in very hot blood, for it was logically contradictory to claim that someone who cast out demons must therefore be in league with the prince of the demons; because their own sons (either literally or in the sense of their disciples) claimed to cast out demons (:27). And if Jesus was actually on the side of the prince of demons, why then was he as it were fighting for the other side by casting out demons. Such gaping error in logic was exactly what the Pharisees were constantly careful to avoid; but their intense jealousy of the Lord led them to make this

logical error. Again we note that the Lord's style was not so much to directly state the errors of his opponents, but to work on the assumption that their beliefs were correct- and to then follow those beliefs to their logical conclusions, thus showing how those positions contradicted themselves to the point they could not be true. This is one explanation for the use of the language of demons in the Gospels, even though demons don't in fact exist.

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

The Jews accused the Lord of being in league with the prince of the demons, Beelzebub. His comment was that if the family / house of Satan was so divided, then Satan "has an end" (Mk. 3:26). His approach was 'OK you believe in demons, Beelzebub etc. Well if that's the case, then according to the extension of your logic, Satan will soon come to an end, will cease existence. That's the bottom line. As it happens, I am indeed 'binding the strong man', rendering Satan powerless, making him 'have an end', and so whichever way you look at it, believing in demons or not, the bottom line is that My miracles demonstrate that effectively Satan is powerless and not an item now'. The way the New Testament is written reflects the same approach. When the Lord was alone with His disciples, He explained further: "If they have called the Master of the House [i.e. Jesus] 'Beelzebub', how much more shall they call them of his household?" [i.e. the disciples] (Mt. 10:25). By saying this, the Lord was clarifying that of course He didn't *really* mean that He was part of the Satan family, working against Satan to destroy the entire family. Rather was He and His family quite separate from the Satan family. But He didn't make that clarification to the Jewish crowds – He simply used their idea and reasoned with them on their own terms. Note in passing how the Jews actually thought Jesus was Beelzebub, or Satan. This would be one explanation for their mad passion to kill Him; for those labelled 'Satan' were hunted to their death in such societies, as seen later in the witch hunts of the middle ages. The Jews say Jesus as a false miracle worker, a false Messiah, a bogus Son of God – all characteristics of their view of 'Satan'. Some centuries later, the Jewish sage Maimonides described Jesus in terms of the antichrist: "Daniel had already alluded to him when he presaged the downfall of a wicked one and a heretic among the Jews who would endeavour to destroy the Law, claim prophecy for himself, make pretences to miracles, and allege that he is the Messiah" (*Maimonides' Epistle to Yemen*). It's been suggested that the way the Jewish rabbinical writings call Him *Yeshu* is an acronym for the Hebrew expression ימח שמו וזכרו (*yemach shemo vezichro* – "May his name and memory be obliterated"). This was the very Jewish definition of Satan. They saw Jesus as Satan

himself; hence they were so insistent on slaying Him. Yet by the deft twist of Divine providence, it was through the death of Jesus that the *real* Devil (i.e. the power of sin) was in fact slain (Heb. 2:14). To those with perceptive enough minds to see it, yet once again the Jewish ideas had been turned back upon them to reveal the real nature of the Devil to them, within their own frames of reference and terminology. Likewise Beelzebub means literally 'the lord of the house'; and the Lord Jesus alludes to this in describing Himself as the Master of the House of God.

Judaism had taken over the surrounding pagan notion of a personal 'Satan'. And the Lord Jesus and the Gospel writers use this term, but in the way they use it, they redefine it. The parable of the Lord Jesus binding the "strong man" – the Devil – was really to show that the "Devil" as they understood it was now no more, and his supposed Kingdom now taken over by that of Christ. The last Gospel, John, doesn't use the term in the way the earlier Gospels do. He defines what the earlier writers called "the Devil" as actual people, such as the Jews or the brothers of Jesus, in their articulation of an adversarial ['satanic'] position to Jesus.

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

12:25 *And knowing their thoughts, he said to them*- But they had "said" these things (:24). Perhaps they said these things within their own minds. Or maybe the contrast is to highlight the upcoming teaching that thoughts are as good as words (:34-37). To hear their words was to know their thoughts.

Every kingdom- Again the Lord accepts their position for one moment as true, and yet takes it forward to its logical implication. If Beelzebub was fighting against his own side, then all the same, Satan's Kingdom was divided against itself and would soon crumble into self-destruction. Therefore what Jesus had done ought to be seen as a presage of Satan's Kingdom ending and, by implication, the soon triumph of God's Kingdom.

Divided against itself- The Lord Jesus framed His parable about Satan's kingdom rising up and being divided against itself in the very language of the Kingdom of Israel being "divided" against itself by Jeroboam's 'rising up' (1 Kings 12:21; 2 Chron. 13:6)- as if Israel's Kingdom was Satan's kingdom.

Is brought to desolation- The Lord only uses the Greek word elsewhere with regard to latter day Babylon's destruction as a result of her followers rising up against her (Rev. 17:16; 18:17,19). This typically been how God destroyed Israel's enemies in the Old Testament- by them turning upon themselves. It follows another great Biblical theme- that those who ultimately will be condemned are in practice self-condemned and bring about their own condemnation.

And every city or house divided against itself shall not stand- The Lord is teaching that the breakup of a Kingdom, even Satan's, must start on the household level and progress higher. Perhaps this is a hint at the growth of *God's* kingdom beginning with the household conversions and house churches with which Christianity started.

12:26 *And if Satan*- Mark adds that the Lord spoke all this "in parables" (Mk. 3:23). 'Satan' was a parable and is being used here in a non-literal sense. The Lord reasons

with them on their own ground, assuming for a moment that their wrong ideas were true- hence "*if* Satan...". The one who cast out Satan / demons was of course Jesus personally. Their false logic and theology had led them to label a good man as Satan just because He did a good work of healing. So quickly, false logic and theology drives jealous people along a path of demonization, negative labelling of others and religious hatred.

Casts out Satan- But the argument is about casting out of *demons* (:27). One thing we learn from this use of language is that beliefs about 'Satan', demons and the casting out of demons were very vague and poorly defined. And that is how it is to this day with those who believe in the literal existence of 'Satan' and demons. When pressed for definition and a more connected theology, they flounder.

He is divided against himself. How then shall his kingdom stand?- Ez. 17:14 uses this language about how Old Testament kingdom of Judah no longer 'stood' because of their disobedience. The true Kingdom of God would 'stand' for ever (Dan. 2:44). The Lord may be hinting that Israel was no longer God's Kingdom and was in fact therefore Satan's kingdom- for the true Kingdom of God would always stand. It is Satan's Kingdom which falls, not God's.

12:27 *And if I*- Three times in succession the Lord uses the "if... " clause. Logic and consequence of position is therefore significant to Him. If it were not, it would totally not matter what we believed about anything.

By Beelzebub- 2 Kings 1:2 clearly tells us that Beelzebub was a false god of the Philistines. Jesus did not say, 'Now look, 2 Kings 1:2 says Beelzebub was a false god, so your accusation cannot be true'. No, He spoke as if Beelzebub existed, because He was interested in getting His message through to His audience. So in the same way Jesus talked about casting out demons – He did not keep saying, 'actually, they do not exist', He just preached the Gospel in the language of the day.

Cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out?- The miracles claimed by the Jews would've compared poorly with the Lord's, rather like the attempts by the Egyptian magicians to imitate the miracles of Moses. The Lord never makes that point directly. He accepts that these people claimed to 'cast out demons' and reasons as if that is true- in order to clinch the greater point, that their whole belief system was deeply flawed. It seems to me that this is one reason why the NT writers go along with the idea of demons- to demonstrate by colossal implication that either they do not exist, or they are utterly powerless.

Therefore shall they be your judges- Their own sons who had claimed to do miracles would be presented at the day of judgment when their lives were examined. The point would be made that they had condemned Jesus for something which their own sons did, and yet they had not condemned *them*, and therefore they would be condemned / judged at the hands of their own sons. Likewise the Lord reasoned that the presence of the Queen of Sheba at judgment day would be a condemnation for some in first century Israel (12:42). Judgment day will not be a mere yes / no encounter. Our lives will be laid bare, specific incidents raised and the implications of them discussed, with the persons involved or implicated standing there giving testimony; or at least, this is how it shall be for the rejected. There is a colossal importance to life and living, to justice, to the implications of actions. It's no good just shrugging and hoping for the best, allowing the passage of time to work a kind of pseudo-atonement, whereby we forget the implications of our actions.

The fact the Pharisees' children cast out demons condemned the Pharisees. Noah's very example was a condemnation of his world (Heb. 11:7); the very existence of believing Gentiles judges the Jews as condemned (Rom. 2:27); and the very existence of the repentant Ninevites condemned first century Israel (Mt. 12:41). The faithful preaching of the Corinthians would judge an unbeliever (1 Cor. 14:24). Noah's very act of righteousness in building the ark condemned / judged those who saw it and didn't respond (Heb. 11:7). This is why the rejected will be shamed before the accepted; they will bow in shame at their feet (Rev. 3:9; 16:15). Perhaps it is in this sense that "we shall judge angels" (1 Cor. 6:3)- rejected ecclesial elders, cp. the angels of the churches in Rev. 2,3? The point is, men's behaviour and conduct judges others because of the contrast it throws upon them. And this was supremely true of the Lord. No wonder in the naked shame and glory of the cross lay the supreme "judgment of this world".

12:28 *But if I by the Spirit of God*- One reason the Lord did miracles was to try to drive people towards a final decision about Him- see :30. Either He did them by the Spirit, and was therefore attested at God's Messiah and providing a true foretaste of the Messianic Kingdom- or, as the Pharisees claimed, the source of power He was clearly tapping into must be from 'the other side', from evil. The population were therefore faced with a deep choice- either He was who He claimed, or He was an agent of Satan. There was no middle position. It was clear that Jesus, a manual worker from Nazareth, had access to some cosmic power on a scale previously unknown in the earth. The Bible clearly teaches that there is no power but of God. And there is only one God. Those teachings alone make redundant any concept of a personal cosmic Satan and demons. If I had faced off against first century Palestinians deeply persuaded of demonic forces, I think I would've gone down the road of arguing that the God of Israel is omnipotent, quoting Is. 45:7 etc. But the Son of God did it differently. He demonstrated beyond doubt, even by his fiercest enemies, that He had access to superhuman power. He was happy to bear with their idea that there were two 'powers' in the cosmos- of good (from Yahweh) and evil (from Satan). But He then argued that seeing He was doing good, He must therefore have access to that good power. He must, therefore, have unique relationship with Yahweh. Those who clung on to their beliefs in Satan and the power of evil were left with no option but to accept that either He was of Satan, or of God. And seeing His works were *good* (as they grudgingly admit in Jn. 10:33), they really had to accept He was of God. And clearly His power was such that effectively, the supposedly 'evil force' was of no account. The next verse goes on to develop the point- that these miracles were a plundering of the palace of 'Satan', so therefore the power of Jesus was such that He had effectively subdued this being and left 'him' powerless. This was a far more effective path to take than a point blank denial of the existence of any evil power or Satan figure. A comparison of Mt. 12:28 and Lk. 11:20 shows that “the finger of God” and “the spirit of God” are parallel - God in action is His spirit.

Cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you- The Greek *phthano* can carry the idea of to anticipate or precede; it is translated "go before" in 1 Thess. 4:15. The Lord's miracles were a foretaste of how the Kingdom of God on earth will be, with no sickness and total healing, spiritually and physically. In the ministry and person of Jesus we see a foretaste of how the Kingdom of God will actually be; and 'the Kingdom' was a title of Christ, so closely was He personally the epitome of that time (Lk. 17:21). If we want to know what the future Kingdom of God on earth will be like- look at the person and actions of Jesus. He was in Himself the proclamation and essence of that Kingdom. The descriptions of a renewed earth in Isaiah focus very much on the physicalities of that time, and at best describe the situation during the initial

part of God's Kingdom. But the ultimate spiritual essence of life in eternity is to be found in Jesus as a person.

12:29 *Or how can one enter into the house of the strong man and ruin his goods*- 'Beelzebub' can mean 'Lord of the house'. The 'strong man' is clearly 'Satan' in the parable the Lord is creating here (Mk. 3:23). See on :28 *by the Spirit*. And note the allusions to Samson (Jud. 14:18). The strength of sin, and thereby the extent of the Lord's victory, is brought out by another unreal element in the Lord's picture of "a strong man fully armed [guarding] his own court" (Lk. 11:21 RV). This householder is fanatic; he wanders around fully armed to protect his own courtyard and his goods, rather than getting servants or guards to do it. The Lord being "stronger than he" through the cross was therefore indeed strong.

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

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

And then he will ruin his house- AV "Spoil his goods". The same word is used in Mt. 11:12 of how the Kingdom of God is being "taken by force" by those entering into it. The "spoils" of Satan are those things which he has taken away; surely the spoils taken from Satan by Christ refer to the righteousness which our nature takes away from us. Lk. 11:22 adds another detail to the story. The "armour" of Satan which he depends

upon is taken away by Christ on the cross, and then Satan is bound, and his spoils shared out. The armour of Satan is the antithesis of the armour of righteousness (Eph. 6:11,13). As the Kingdom of God has a God who dwells in darkness, a Prince, an armour, a Christ, a dominion, a will and spirit, fruits, rewards etc., so does the kingdom of (the personified) Satan. The armour of righteousness is the fruit of the Spirit, the righteous characteristics of the Spirit. The armour of Satan is the fruits of the flesh nature. These have been taken away by Christ, He has bound Satan, and therefore what Satan has robbed us of, the fruits of righteousness, his spoils, can be taken at will by the Lord Jesus. We have shown that Christ was alluding to Is. 53:12, which says that through the cross, Christ divides the spoil with the bound ones, i.e. us. In this lies a paradox. Binding is associated with sin (Ps. 68:6; Is. 61:1; Lam. 1:14; Lk. 13:16). We are bound, in many ways, intrinsically limited by our own natures. Only at the second coming will Satan be bound, i.e. the Lord's personal achievement will be physically shared with the world (Rev. 20:2). Yet we, the bound ones, are given the goods which the Lord personally took away from the bound Satan. Those goods are the righteous attributes which our natures stop us possessing as we should. The dividing of the spoils to us by the victorious Lord (Lk. 11:22; Is. 53:12) recalls how the Lord divided *all* His goods between His servants (Mt. 25:14), the dividing of *all* the Father's goods between the sons (representing the good and bad believers, Lk. 15:12).
We have elsewhere shown that these goods refer to the various aspects of the supreme righteousness of Christ which are divided between the body of Christ. The spoils divided to us by the Lord are the various aspects of righteousness which He took for Himself from Satan. The picture of a bound strong man having his house ransacked before his eyes carries with it the idea of suspense, of daring, of doing something absolutely impossible. And so the idea of Christ really taking the righteousness which the Satan of our very natures denies us, and giving these things to us, is almost too much to believe. It is normally the fellow-soldiers who share the spoils (cp. Heb. 7:4). But we didn't even fight; the spoils are divided amongst the bound ones (Is. 53:12 Heb.). Satan in general is still unbound (cp. Rev. 20:2). Christ bound the Satan within Himself personally, and took the spoils of victory for Himself. Col. 2:15 says that Christ "spoiled" as a result of His victory on the cross; and the Greek specifically means 'to completely divest *for oneself*'. He is being painted as the lone hero who took it all for Himself; of the people there was none with Him in His great battle on the cross (Is. 63:3). And indeed, He was the lone hero. But the point is that He has shared with us the spoils of righteousness which He took for Himself as a result, even though we are not worthy to receive them. Seeing the teaching of the Lord is just outline principle, it is evident that through His death He gained possession of absolute righteousness, and then shared this with us. In the first century, the outward demonstration of this was in the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. "He led captivity captive (more language of the heroic victor), and gave gifts unto men", the miraculous gifts, in the first century context (Eph. 4:8,11). But what was taken away from Satan was not only power over illness. If this was the main meaning of Satan being bound and his spoils shared with us, then it would follow that the effect of Christ's binding of Satan was only in the first century; for those miraculous gifts of the Spirit are no longer available; illness still triumphs over God's people. The spoils of Satan refer to the righteousness which Satan limits and denies. It is this which has been taken from him, and divided to us all as a result of the cross. The miracles of the first century were a physical reflection of this, just as the rending of the temple veil and resurrection of some dead saints was a physical foretaste of the spiritual possibilities opened up by the Lord's death. There are many references to the spiritual blessings which are even now mediated to us (as the whole body of Christ) on account

of the Lord's death; we (as a community) are given peace and "eternal life" (Jn. 14:27; 17:2; 1 Jn. 5:11), knowledge (2 Cor. 4:6), wisdom (Eph. 1:17; James 1:15), peace (2 Thess. 3:16), understanding (1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:7), love in our hearts (Rom. 5:5), grace (Eph. 4:7), comfort (2 Thess. 2:16), righteousness (Rom. 5:16,17), confidence (2 Tim. 1:7), sexual self-restraint (1 Cor. 7:7). All the different aspects of the 100% righteousness of our Lord, *all* His goods, the spoils He personally took from Satan, are divided up amongst ourselves, some having spiritual possibilities in one area, others in another. As a community we are counted as if we have overcome the world, overcome Satan, as Christ did, although on a human level we are still bound (Jn. 16:33 cp. 1 Jn. 2:13,14; 5:4). Only at the day of judgment will we have overcome all (Rev. 21:7 cp. Lk. 11:22 s.w.), but we are treated as if we have already done so. *Goods*- If indeed sickness was caused by Satan's power, then the Lord's miracles were a spoiling of his goods. The language here is clearly parabolic- including the reference to 'Satan'. But the miracles were an invitation to others to come and share in the victory the Lord Jesus had won over the 'strong man'; and this provides the context for the 'gathering' of the next verse.

12:30 *He that is not with Me is against Me*- The original is memorable- either *meta* Me, or *kata* Me. The Lord is speaking here from *His* perspective. For He Himself observed that Judas 'ate *with Me*', but lifted up his heel '*against* Me' (Jn. 13:18). It's simply not so that all those who claim to be with the Lord are therefore with Him and on the same side as we who know we are in truth 'with' Him. He is simply observing an ultimate truth- that finally, there will be (and therefore is not now) any middle position in relation to Him. It's not therefore for us to insist that anyone who claims to be 'with Him' is so merely because they say so. Let His words sink in to you personally: “He who is not with me is against me… he that is not against us is for us” (Mt. 12:30; Mk. 9:40). We may think we are not against the Lord’s cause, even if we’re not as committed to it as we might be; many an unbaptized young person has told me this. But to be ‘not against’ Jesus means we must be *with Him*. Nobody can be passively ‘not against’ Jesus. If we’re not whole heartedly with Him, we’re against Him. That’s how His demanding logic goes. A relationship with Him demands the whole person; *you*, your very heart and essence.

And he that does not gather with me scatters- In connection with the gathering of spoil from the strong man's house in :29. There is a tendency to use this verse as a general statement of principle, but the surrounding context is specifically about the Lord's healing miracles being part of the spoil He has plundered from the 'Lord of the house', Beelzebub / Satan. We saw on :28 that people were faced with the choice of accepting the Lord's miracles were performed using either God's power, or Satan's. The whole issue pushed the audience to a crucial choice- of accepting of Jesus as God's special Son, or as Satan. The miracles were proof that the Lord Jesus had bound the power of Satan- the power which people believed was behind illness. If you didn't want to go and gather the spoil, then you were actively scattering it abroad. This hyperbole was used to force all the cautious people who remained undecided to realize that ultimately, there is no such thing as agnosticism. If you are not eagerly gathering the spoil the Lord has now released, then you are actively working against Him.

12:31 *Therefore I say to you: Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven to men*- His simple claim that God can forgive men all sins was radical (see the parallel Mk. 3:28)- for the Rabbis had a whole list of unforgivable sins, like murder, apostasy, contempt for the Law, etc. But the Lord went further. His many words of judgment weren’t directed to the murderers and whores and Sabbath breakers; they were instead directed against those who condemned those people, considering themselves righteous.

He calls those who appeared so righteous a 'generation of vipers'. The publican, not the Pharisee, finds God's acceptance, according to Jesus. And again, the Lord is making a telling point- because Rabbis held that repentance for publicans was almost impossible, because it was impossible for them to know exactly all the people they'd cheated. Very clearly, the Lord's message was radical. He was out to form a holy people from whores and gamblers, no-good boys and conmen. And moreover, He was out to show that what God especially judges and hates are the things that humanity doesn't think twice about: hypocrisy, self-righteousness, judgmentalism, exclusion of others… See on 10:29.

ut the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven- The exposition offered above suggests that people were forced to a choice. Jesus of Nazareth had access to superhuman power, far more than anyone had ever had. Which power was it, within the framework of their dualistic view of the cosmos- of Satan or God? Was He God's supreme agent on earth- or Satan's? There was no middle ground. All had to choose. The miracles were good. Therefore, it was Satan who had been bound. Jesus was therefore of God. To insist He was from Satan was to wilfully refuse to believe the evidence God had placed before them. There was no forgiveness for this choice- whilst it continued. If anyone wanted to repent and accept that Jesus was of God, to gather with Him, to be with Him rather than against Him- then that was always possible. Note that there is no statement that *repentance* is impossible, rather that *forgiveness* is impossible whilst a person is in the position of so strongly rejecting Christ as God's Son. For those who did accept Christ as of God rather than of Satan, then "all manner of sin" could be forgiven them, including even at times speaking against Him personally (:32). From one viewpoint, the only way we cannot be saved is to wilfully refuse to participate in the new covenant. The Lord laboured the point that the "unforgivable sin" was to "blaspheme the Holy Spirit" (Mk. 3:28-30; Mt. 12:31-37; Lk. 12:10). But it's been demonstrated that this is a reference to Jewish writings and traditions such as Jubilees 15:33 "where not circumcising one's child is unforgivable, because it is a declaration that one does not belong to the covenant people".

12:32 *And whoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man*- See on :31. The sin of stating that Jesus was Satan's agent rather than God's could not be forgiven whilst it continued to be the position of a person- although repentance was always possible. For those who had accepted Jesus as God's unique agent, they can be forgiven all manner of failure (:31), including speaking "a word" against Him. Maybe the Lord foresaw the situations in which persecution could be avoided for an apparently few words calling Him accursed. And He, along with Matthew, wanted to assure those who would do this in the weakness of a moment that in fact they had *not* blasphemed the Spirit and were not beyond forgiveness. The 'speaking against' is clearly parallel to 'blaspheming'. Blaspheming the name of Jesus was and is required by various anti-Christian regimes such from Judaism through the Roman empire to fundamentalist Islamic states today. Surely the Lord had this in mind. And the encouragement is that this is forgivable. But to decide He is not the Son of God but the embodiment of evil is a situation for which there is no forgiveness because it is wilfully continued in. The Lord has just stated that whoever is not with Him is against Him (:30), but here He foresees a situation when one of those who is ultimately 'with Him' will speak 'against Him'- and yet be forgiven. Because that moment of failure was not the overall position of a man's life. The denials by Peter, replete with curses / blasphemy, would surely be the parade example.

The “son of man” here could refer to Jesus, but it could just as comfortably mean ‘human beings’. One angle on this passage is to remember that the Gospels were written as a means of preaching to Jewish people at some point after the Lord’s resurrection. The message may be: ‘Whatever sin you committed against Jesus, even to the point of crucifixion, is forgivable. But now the Holy Spirit is witnessing to you through the apostles to repent and accept His forgiveness. If you refuse *that*, then there will [obviously] be no forgiveness for you’. The Lord foresaw the situation as it would be in the lives of his audience, and that explains His language here.

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

Neither in this age, nor in the age to come- This is not suggesting that there is some kind of forgiveness in this world and another kind of forgiveness in the world to come, the Kingdom age. Rather is the simple point being made that the forgiveness granted or not granted now is directly related to "the world to come". The judgment is as it were ongoing now. The positions we adopt now are those we shall eternally hold.

12:33 *Either make*- In their interpretation of Jesus they had to see Him as either good or bad, and He urged them to make a choice. The miracles were good fruit- therefore He was good, and working by God's Spirit rather than being an agent of Satan. The fruit of the tree equals the words (as in Prov. 12:14; 13:2); a corrupt man will speak corrupt words. And these will be the basis of his condemnation. By contrast "the fruit of *our* lips" should be praise (Heb. 13:15). "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth" (Eph. 4:29) refers to this passage- the corrupt fruit is corrupt words. But the idea is that we bear the fruit*now*- our words *now* are our fruit.

The tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree corrupt- The Lord had taught in the Sermon on the Mount that it was a fundamental principle with Him that true spirituality cannot be hidden; what is within is openly revealed, even in this life. Good fruit means a good tree. His works were the good fruit. The Pharisees were claiming that His fruits, His works, were corrupt, and therefore He was corrupt. The Lord is asking everyone, especially the disciples, to decide one way or the other- either He is a good man doing good works, or an evil man doing evil works. There is no half way position, as He made clear in :30 (“He that is not with Me is against Me”). They were to ‘make’ or consider, decide, about Him one way or the other.

Aand its fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by its fruit- As so often, the Lord is repeating the principles of His opening manifesto in the Sermon on the Mount (cp. Mt. 7:17,18). The fruit of a man's life reflects who he essentially is; the good fruit of the Lord's miracles was clear proof He was not of Satan but God's Son and supreme agent.

12:34 *You offspring of vipers*- A clear allusion to the Jews as the seed of the serpent of Gen. 3:15 who would be the ones who would be in conflict with the seed of the woman, the Lord Jesus.

How can you- Because of the principle that who we are internally is ultimately reflected by our external actions and words (:33), it was impossible that their 'good words' could be sincere because the other fruit of their lives showed they were rotten within. "How can you..." doesn't mean that they could not change. It means that given their present internal condition, they could never speak good things. The 'good word' which the context has in view is the confession that Jesus of Nazareth is God's Son; the evil word was that He was Satan's agent. This wrong judgment of Jesus' identity was because of their evil heart. Their doctrinal mistake was a reflection of their internal fleshly thinking. The Lord said that the Jews were evil, and therefore good things could not come from them (Mt. 12:34; 7:17-20). And yet He also said, presumably with the same audience in mind, that although they were evil, they potentially knew how to give good things, e.g. to their children; and therefore how much could God give them good things if they repented (Mt. 7:11).

Being evil speak good things- This may be an intensive plural, 'the good thing'. The good thing to be spoken was the confession that Jesus was Son of God. John's Gospel emphasizes this, and Rom. 10:9,10 suggests that a verbal confession of Jesus as Lord was required in the conversion process: "if you shall confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and shall believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved. For with the heart man believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation". This confession was likely made at baptism, as in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch. We must ever remember that Matthew's gospel is the transcript of his preaching of the Gospel; it was a missionary document, intended to bring forth the confession that Jesus is Lord and Son of God. This is not to say that the Lord's teaching here does not establish basic principles regarding the connection between thought and speech. It does. But the specific context is of confessing that He is Lord rather than of Satan.

For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks- Gk. 'that which remains'. The idea may be that a certain amount of human thought is taken up with basic human functioning, but that which remains over and above that, the part of our thinking which we can consciously control, is what must be controlled- for it is that part of our thinking which controls the words and actions which are the fruit on the tree of a man's life (:33).

12:35 *The good man*- The good man is as the good tree. His good fruit or works is because of a good mind within- and vice versa. The Lord as always took the issue to its deepest essence- which was within the deepest heart. He was the ultimate “good man” and good tree. His good works came forth from deep within Him, they were a reflection of His mind.

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

And the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth- The Lord uses the same word to speak of "this evil (AV "wicked") generation" in :45. The problem with Jewish society as a whole was how they thought. This is the Biblical emphasis- sin comes from our thinking, and not because society is controlled by a personal cosmic 'satan' figure.

Evil things- The words of blasphemy accusing Jesus of being Satan's agent.

12:36 *And I say to you, that every idle word that men shall speak*- Gk. lazy, unproductive. At first blush, this seems a strange word to use in the context of

explaining that the words of blasphemy the Jews had uttered would be judged at the last day. We expect a word to be used which carries the sense of blasphemy or proactive aggression. Instead, the Lord uses this word for "idle". His point was that what is ultimately wrong with blasphemy is what is wrong with all unspiritual language- it is not creative, not productive, it is a waste of potential resource. We marvel at His insight. Words can be powerful and creative, but we will answer for those which are not. The connection between Rom. 14:12 and Mt. 12:36 suggests that Paul recognized that we all speak idle words which we will have to give account of at judgment. Therefore, because of our rampant tongue, we will stand in deep need of grace. So therefore, Paul says, you'd better be soft on your brother now, in this life. Every word will be judged (Mt. 12:36), and in some cases by words we will justified and by our speech we will be condemned. So we must speak as those who will be judged for what we speak (James 2:12). The man who *says* to his brother 'Raca' or 'You fool' is in real danger of hell fire (Mt. 5:22). The tongue has the power to cast a man into hell fire (James 3:5,6)- some may be condemned for what they have said, perhaps connecting with how the beast is thrown into the fire of destruction because of his words (Dan. 7:11,12). Thus there is a link between the judgment of the unworthy and that of the world. The process of condemnation will remind the wicked of all their hard words and hard deeds (Jude 15). Yet now, we can speak words all too easily. Yet we talk and speak as those whose words will be taken into account at the last day. This little selection of passages is powerful- or ought to be. There is reason to think that specific record is kept of incidents, and in some form there will be a 'going through' of them. Thus when self-righteous Jews told their brethren "Stand by yourself, come not near me, for I am holier than you", God comments that "This is written before Me... I will recompense" (Is. 65:5,6).

They shall give account of it in the day of judgment- For every idle *rhema* ["word"], men shall give a *logos* ["account"], another word. We shall have to explain the *logos*, the intention, of idle words. Literally we will have to give a word for a word. This surely suggests that words will be as it were played back to us in that day and we will explain the *logos* , the intention and inner sense, behind those words. But the Lord of course will know all this anyway. It will be a profound preparation for entry into eternity- to have our idle words played back to us, and our having to give an explanation of what our innermost thought behind them really was. The whole process will elicit self-knowledge to the ultimate extent. The words behind 'give an account' are found elsewhere in NT teaching about judgment. We must give an account of our stewardship of the Lord's goods (Lk. 16:2), give an account of our moral lives (1 Pet. 4:3-5), give an account of those under our spiritual care (Heb. 13:17); and give an account / logos of our idle words. Without doubt, judgment will not be a mere yes / no decision, nor an awards ceremony. It will be a revelation to ourselves of our motives, the *logos* behind our words and actions.

12:37 *For by your words you shall be justified and by your words you shall be condemned*- In the context, the Lord is referring to how their words regarding Him being an agent of Satan would lead to their condemnation. Yet their words had all started from basic jealousy which ran on unbridled. From their own mouth and words men will be judged (Mt. 12:37; Lk. 19:22 cp. 2 Sam. 1:16). The reference may be to Eliphaz (Job 15:6): “Your own mouth condemns you, and not I”; or to Prov. 18:21: “Death and life are in the power of the tongue”. And yet perhaps even now, men are justified by their words before the court of Heaven- for 'justify' means to pronounce righteous, and this pronouncement / justification is therefore given even now. "So shall thy judgment be; thyself hast decided it" (1 Kings 20:40). It could even be that the Lord

cites the condemnatory words of the rejected uttered during their lifetimes and leaves these as their condemnation. Woe, therefore, to he or she who has said unrepentantly that they don't want to be in the Kingdom if brother x or sister y are going to be there. The specific words which some have spoken will be the reason for their condemnation. "Their princes shall fall by the sword for the rage of their tongue" (Hos. 7:16)- not so much for their idolatry, their worldliness… but for their uncontrolled and cruel words. By our words we will be acquitted [Gk.] and by our words we will be condemned (Mt. 12:37)- but it is God who acquits, and therefore nobody but He can condemn us (Rom. 8:33; Is. 50:8). Yet how does and how will He do this? Surely on the basis of our acquittal or condemnation of others. The connection in thought surely shows that through our words, we form our own judgment of ourselves, to acquittal or condemnation.

Our eternal destiny will be *ek*, from out of, our words. If the Lord had simply meant 'according to, on account of', another word or construction would've been used. The use of *ek* suggests that the decision on our eternity will not only be on account of our words, but *in* our own words- for it will be *out of* our own mouths. We think of David's response to Nathan's parable and how his own words were his appropriate judgment. Lk. 19:22 is clearest: "Out of [*ek*] your own mouth will I judge you". The servants *thoughts* about his Lord are then cited back to him as if they were his spoken *words*, and he is judged according to those words. There could be no more powerful exhortation as to the significance of spoken words, but the appeal must not be to merely curb the tongue by brute psychological force, but rather to have the new mind and spirit of Christ which simply will not speak words leading to condemnation. The intensity and deeply personal force of the Lord's reasoning was such that that group of Pharisees went silent and brought in another group to raise yet more legalistic and theological issues with Him; but those things were and are to this day simply a way of trying to take the Lord's intense and practical *moral* pressure off us. It is a common theme that the wicked snare themselves, falling into their own pit, judged by their own words, rather than God specifically snaring them (e.g. Ps. 7:15; 9:15; 57:6; Prov. 26:27; 28:10; Ecc. 10:8). From their own mouth and words men will be judged (Mt. 12:37; Lk. 19:22 cp. 2 Sam. 1:16; 1 Kings 20:40). It could even be that the Lord cites the condemnatory words of the rejected uttered during their lifetimes and leaves these as their condemnation. Woe, therefore, to he or she who has said unrepentantly that they don't want to be in the Kingdom if brother x or sister y are going to be there. "He that keeps his mouth keeps his life; but he that opens wide his lips [in this life] shall have destruction" at judgment day (Prov. 13:3). The link between the final verdict and the words we use today is that clear. See on 21:43.

The words by which men shall be condemned are clear from the context- the words of blasphemy against Jesus, making Him the supreme agent of Satan rather than of God. But this is not to say that a general principle is not also being demonstrated. Words reflect the inner man, the Lord has taught- and so they are a fair index for judgment. This cuts right through the idea that we can harbour evil thoughts and yet cover them in nicespeak. The culture of nicespeak lays revealed for what it is- the Lord is saying that ultimately, our words *will* at some point reflect our thoughts. The whole section began with the explanation in :24,25 that the Jews "said" but Jesus "knew their thoughts". I suggested in the commentary there that perhaps they never actually spoke those words out loud. It is these thoughts for which by which we shall be judged.

The idea of being "justified" by our words at first sight it could seem that this contradicts Paul's argument for justification by grace alone- and not by the steel willed control of

our words. But Romans 1-8 is a unit, and the teaching about justification by grace is on the basis that those in Christ are in a status, "in Christ", under grace- and in that status, the Spirit of God is at work in the human minds of all those who are in that status. And the Lord has made clear here that the words He will judge are those which are a direct reflection of the human heart or spirit.

12:38 *Then certain of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying: Teacher*- It would seem these were a different group of Pharisees to those with whom the Lord was in engagement earlier in the chapter; they address Him as "Master". They appear at least to be trying a more subtle approach than the previous group. Mk. 3:22 notes that this group had come from Jerusalem.

We would see a sign from you- The context of the chapter makes it clear that the Lord had been clearly doing signs / miracles. So maybe the emphasis is on *we*. They were maybe claiming that they personally had not been present when the signs were done, and now they wanted to see one. But Lk. 11:16 adds the detail that they sought a "sign *from Heaven*". This continues the issue under debate; the Pharisees accepted that Jesus was doing signs / miracles, but they considered them to be from 'Satan'; the Lord has responded by saying that His good works show He is a good man working on God's behalf, and that they would be called to account at the last day for their blasphemy. But it seems this other group of Pharisees continue in the blasphemous position- their response is to assume that the earlier miracles were signs from 'Satan', but now they give the Lord a chance to do a sign / miracle from God ("Heaven"). They repeated this request later (Mt. 16:1), and again the Lord answered them with "the sign of the prophet Jonah". It's not necessarily wrong to require a sign- Gideon's example comes to mind. The disciples themselves asked for a sign (Mt. 24:3), and the Lord answered them to the effect that there would be "the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven" (Mt. 24:30). "In" Heaven can mean 'by the instrumentality of [Heaven]'. The similarity of words and concepts is so close that there must be some continuity in meaning. It could be that the sign of the Son of Man given by Heaven in the last days is the sign of Jonah- the successful preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles and the resurrection from the dead.

12:39 *But he answered and said to them: An evil and adulterous generation*- The Lord may have in mind female adultery, alluding to the Old Testament passages which liken Israel to an adulterous wife. The parallel is between self-righteous Jewish society of the first century and sexually immoral but penitent Nineveh of previous centuries.

Seeks after a sign, and there shall no sign be given it- The idea could be 'no *further* sign', as if the Lord was saying that He would do no further dramatic miracles to seek to persuade the Pharisees. In this case, the allusion would be to the Egyptians not believing the signs given them (Ex. 4:9), resulting in their final destruction. Unbelieving Israel are no better than Egypt / the world, and will "be condemned with the world". Note that here as often we have to read in an ellipsis: 'No *more* sign'. For He had been doing signs / miracles in abundance. Or perhaps, seeing that He did continue doing miracles: 'No sign *greater than* [that of Jonah]'.

Except the sign of Jonah the prophet- The 'resurrected' Jonah was a type of the Lord- and he was a 'sign' to the Ninevites presumably in that he still bore in his body the marks of a man who had been three days within a fish. It could be that the fish beached itself, and vomited Jonah out of its stomach in its death throes (this is how beached whales meet their end). In this case, the fish would have drawn the attention of the local population, as would have the man with bleached hair and strange skin who

walked away from it. We too as witnesses of Christ will have something about us that is unintentionally striking in the eyes of those with whom we mix. There was no human chance that Jonah would be listened to when he came to preach judgment against Nineveh. Some guy standing on the edge of town, saying 'You're all gonna be destroyed'. People would have laughed, ignored him, or told him to shut up. But there was something about him that was gripping and arresting. He was living proof that the judgment of God is real, and that His mercy is just as real. Presumably Jonah must have said far more than "Nineveh is going to be destroyed".

It is a worthwhile speculation that for Jonah to be a sign to the Ninevites by reason of being three days in the whale (Mt. 12:38-40), he must have borne in his body the marks of his experience for all to see, as our Lord did. Being inside the fish for that period may have made his flesh change colour or bear some other physical mark so that he could be a sign to them of what had happened. Doubtless he recounted his story to them- so that they were encouraged by the fact of God's love to the resurrected Jonah to repent and likewise throw themselves on God's mercy. In all this we see Jonah as a type of Christ. They would have looked upon that man as we look upon Jesus, to see the love of God manifested in him; they responded by repenting in sackcloth, casting off their materialism, and living in a way that showed their complete belief that " the judge stands before the door" . What is our response to Jonah/Jesus?

12:40 *For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*- Matthew's Gospel doesn't seem to teach a literal 72 hours for Jesus in the grave. But a 'day' can mean 'part of a day'- as in 1 Kings 20:29; Esther 4:16-5:1. The term is surely used to highlight the connection with Jonah's experience.

As Jonah was three days in the whale and then came up out of it to preach to the Gentiles, so the Lord would be three days in the grave and then would rise- as a sign to the Jews. But how was His resurrection a sign to them, seeing they never saw His risen body? Yet the Lord's reasoning demands that His resurrection be a sign to them, just as tangible as the re-appearance of the drowned Jonah. But, the Jews never saw Him after the resurrection...? The resolution must be that in the preaching of the risen Jesus by those in Him, it was as if the Jews saw Him, risen and standing as a sign before them, every bit as real as the Jonah who emerged from the whale after three days.

12:41 *The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation and shall*- Again we must read in an ellipsis, '[the people of] this generation'. For individuals and not entire generations will be judged. 'Standing up' is possibly an allusion to the resurrection of the responsible at the last day, but more likely the figure is of a judge arising in judgment to state the verdict; which in this case, is condemnation. The Lord in :27 has spoken of how the children of the Jews would judge those Jews in the last day. The Lord clearly seems to envisage the judgment process as having a public dimension to it. The fact one person was spiritually responsive, given a similar or harder set of circumstances than what another has had who did not respond, will therefore as it were be the judgment of the person who didn't respond. It clearly won't be merely an awards ceremony nor a yes / no decision, but rather will context and precedent from others be taken into account. 'If *they* responded and *you* did not, given similar circumstances, then *they* will condemn *you*'- that seems to be the Lord's reasoning.

Condemn it- The truly righteous among the remnant "shall tread down the wicked... (as) ashes under the soles of your feet" (Malachi 4:3). "The wicked" are those of Malachi 3:18 and 4:1 - the unspiritual element amongst the latter-day Jewish 'remnant' in Jerusalem. This implies that in some way the spiritual Jews acceptable to Jesus will mete out judgment on the rejected ones. Perhaps in similar fashion the men of Nineveh

will condemn the first century Jews at the judgment, and we will judge Angels (1 Cor. 6:3). In this way the righteous remnant shall " discern (judge) between the righteous and the wicked" (Malachi 3:18). The men of Nineveh will condemn first century Israel, just as the folly of the rejected will be made manifest unto all men (2 Tim. 3:9). This is not so as to simply humiliate the rejected. It is so that the faithful *learn* something too. This was all foreshadowed in the way that Israel experienced their judgments in the sight of the nations, so that God's principles would be taught even to the Gentile world (Ez. 5:8,15). Indeed, the idea of God executing judgment on His people *in the sight* of others is quite common (e.g. Ez. 5:8; 16:41). But we can learn the principles of God's judgments right now, from His word.

For they repented- The Lord is going to soon claim that initially the people had responded to John's message- the demon had been as it were cast out and the house of Israel left swept and cleaned (:43,44). But both John and Jesus appealed for repentance, in the very same words: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Mt. 3:2; 4:17). But they had not really repented; they had responded to a religious message but not really repented. And the challenge comes down to us- as to whether our repentance, along with any spiritual act, is indeed the real thing or a mere appearance.

At the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, one greater than Jonah is here!- This effectively is a noun, referring to "the preaching" as in the message of Jonah. What he preached was judgment to come, and the Ninevites repented on hearing it. The Lord was teaching not only judgment to come, but was making specific the call to repentance implicit within that message, and urging people to accept God's grace. Hence those who heard Him were even more guilty before the Ninevites. Jonah's preaching occurred *after* he had been three days within the whale; after the Lord had been three days in the earth, He too would preach mightily, through the ministry of those 'in Him' who were effectively His representatives and appealed on His behalf. But He reasons as if that appeal was already being made- as if in essence He had already passed through the cross and resurrection. This is not the only time He reasons in this way; in proclaiming Himself Lord, the serpent lifted up on the pole, the One who had already "overcome the world", He reasoned as if the successful outcome of His death had already occurred. Such was His faith that He would come forth triumphant.

12:42 *The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment*- "Rise up" translates *egeiro* whereas "rise up" in :41 translates *anistemi*. The Ninevites will "rise in judgment", as a judge arises to pronounce a verdict; whereas the Queen of the South arises "in *the* judgment", with the article. The difference may be because the Queen of the South is being portrayed as being resurrected along with the people of the Lord's generation. The reference is perhaps more to resurrection than to arising in judgment.

With this generation and shall condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, one greater than Solomon is here!- If Sheba is at the very end of 'the earth', we have another confirmation that the 'earth' or land in Scripture often refers to the land promised to Abraham, and not the entire planet. The point is that she made a huge effort to come to hear Divine truth, whereas Christ as "the wisdom of God" stood before their eyes and they refused to believe and repent. The parallel is between the Queen of Sheba and the Ninevites, who repented. We may be able to infer that she likewise repented upon hearing Solomon's wisdom. The whole theme in this section is of the need to make an abiding repentance upon hearing God's Truth as spoken by His Son.

12:43 *When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none*- The ministry of the Lord Jesus was a follow up to that of John the Baptist, and that theme is never far from us in Matthew's Gospel. The

unclean spirit was cast out of Israel due to their surface level response to John's preaching- this was the sweeping of the house. But it returned and that generation became more evil than before. This lays the basis for the parable of the sower, which was told the same day (13:1)- the seed initially experienced some growth, but then the 'evil one', the Jewish system, stunted that growth.

Demons supposedly didn't like water (as in Mt. 8:28-34). Again we find the Lord using the language of the day without correcting it. The reference is also to the Jews going into the wilderness to hear John's preaching.

The Lord has just given an invitation to come to *Him* and find "rest" (Mt. 11:28 s.w.). Hebrews may allude here when suggesting that Moses and Joshua could not give Israel "rest", only Messiah could (Heb. 4:8-10). John's work gave Israel a desire for this "rest" and pointed them to Jesus as the One who could give it- but they were refusing to take it. And so the (parabolic) unclean spirit was returning to the house of Israel and would make them worse than before.

12:44 *Then it says: I will return*- The Greek word is elsewhere translated to convert (Mt. 13:15). Israel's rejection of Jesus was effectively a re-conversion away from John's message. The same word is used of how John was to convert Israel to their God (Lk. 1:16,17).

To my house from which I came out- The same word is used thrice about that generation going out into the wilderness to hear John (Mt. 11:7-9).

And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order- The only other usage of the word "swept" is in the Lord's self-description of His 'sweeping' the house of Israel in order to find the lost (Lk. 15:8). The house of Israel had been swept- but the nation had not been 'found' because they would not come to Jesus in repentance.

12:45 *Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation*- "State" is an addition from the translators. "The last" was the state of condemnation which that generation ended up in. The Lord's comments that the first would be "last" (Mt. 20:16) could therefore be taken as a reference to the final condemnation of the Jewish religious leadership, "the first". However, "the last", the *eschatos*, could refer to their status at the judgment of the last day. But the essence of judgment is now, and the Lord saw them as already in that state. It "*is* worse" and yet thus 'it *shall* be' for that generation.

12:46 *While he was yet speaking to the crowds*- The same word for "speaking" is used later in the verse, in reporting that His mother and brothers wished to talk / speak with Him. The impression is given that He was talking, but they wanted to talk to Him rather than to listen.

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

his brethren… for they [Levi] have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant". The last sentence is the essence of the Lord's saying that His true family are those who keep God's word and do it. The strong implication of the allusion is that the Lord felt that His mother and brethren had committed some kind of apostasy.

12:47 *And someone said to him: Look, your mother and your relatives wait outside, wanting to speak to you*- Note how in the parallel Mk. 3:32 we read that "thy mother and brethren seek for thee", and in Mk. 1:37 the same word occurred: "all men seek for thee"; and also in Lk. 2:45, of how Mary sought for Jesus. The similarity is such that the intention may be to show us how Mary had been influenced by the world's perception of Him. And we too can be influenced by the world's light hearted view of the Lord of glory. It's so easy to allow their patterns of language use to lead us into blaspheming, taking His Name in vain, seeing His religion as just a hobby, a social activity… In passing, it was not that the Lord was insensitive or discounted her. It is in Mt. 12:46 that Mary wanted to speak with Him, and presumably she did- but then He goes to His home town, back to where she had come from (Mt. 13:54), as if He did in fact pay her attention.

12:48 *But he answered and said to him that told him: Who is my mother? And who are my relatives?*- These terms are repeated three times in :48-50. In a fiercely family based society, such radical redefinition of family was remarkable, and the Lord was labouring His radical point lest there be any misunderstanding. He was creating a new family, based around hearing and doing His Father's will; there was a new Father, God, and those who did His will were His children. The nature of the scene portrayed here seems to suggest that in His case, as in so many others afterwards, the new spiritual family was separate from the family of origin; for they were here outside the house. And we must bear in mind that 'house' meant not only a building but a family. This gives new meaning to the way that Paul and James (especially James) so love to address their brethren as "my brothers" (James 1:2,16,19; 2:1,5,14; 3:1,10,12; 5:10,12). Their brethren in Christ were really their new family. And it should be the same for us. The divided state of the body of Christ today is surely a result of over-familiar, over-privileged believers failing to grasp the wonder of the fact that others have come into the family by conversion into Christ. In believing communities comprised of first generation converts, there is generally a far greater sense of brotherhood.

12:49 *And he stretched out his hand towards his disciples, and said: Behold, my mother and my relatives!*- Another mark of an eyewitness account is found in this reference to His stretching out His hand. Given the loss of family many had experienced, this visual image would've remained in their memories, to be drawn upon in the hard times of rejection by family of origin. The Greek *epi* translated "toward" could strictly mean 'over'- as if the disciples were sitting near to Him. For it was they, rather than the general audience, whom He knew were doing the Father's will.

The Lord implied that those who did God's will were closer to Him than His physical mother or sister or brother (Mt. 12:48-50). It has been observed that "in a kinship-oriented society like Israel, it must have been startling for people to hear of a bond that was even deeper than that of the natural family". And so it is in many parts of the world today.

12:50 *For whoever shall please my Father who is in heaven*- Or, "Do the will of"- another allusion back to the crunch line of the Sermon on the Mount, that the true community would be comprised of those who did the will of the Father in Heaven. The Lord spoke of Himself as 'doing the will' of the Father, supremely in His death on the cross. Heb. 10:7,9 speaks of the Son 'doing the will' of God in dying on the cross, and

the passage then goes on to appeal to us likewise to do that same will (Heb. 10:36). And it is God who will work in us through the Spirit to empower us to do that will- if we ourselves so wish (Heb. 13:21).

He is my brother and sister and mother- The very fact the Lord calls us brethren in Mt. 12:50 the Hebrew writer saw as proof of Christ's humanity (= Heb. 2:11).

MATTHEW CHAPTER 13

13:1 *On that day*- This is programmatic to our understanding of chapter 13. The preceding chapter 12 has recorded how the Lord now changes His position regarding the Jews. Instead of the positive tone of the Sermon on the Mount and the hopeful appeal to Israel, from now on in Matthew there is much talk of condemnation to come, of Israel's rejection of the Gospel, and of how they were an adulterous generation for whom judgment was reserved. From now on, the Lord started using parables- hence the shock of the disciples and their question 'Why parables?' immediately after He had finished the sower parable (:10). And He spoke in parables exactly so that from now on, the masses would *not* understand. The mission of John had been largely unsuccessful, despite the good initial response. The Jewish religious leaders and the hopes for an immediate Kingdom in this world had lead Israel to reject the message, and their last state would be now worse than the first. The parable of the sower speaks of seed which initially grew (Israel's response to John's message) and then went wrong.

Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea side- He has just spoken of how the house of Israel is being re-inhabited by seven evil spirits. The suggestion could be that He was now dissociating Himself from the house of Israel and was going to the sea of Gentiles.

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

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

In Mark we read that Jesus “entered in to a ship, and sat in the sea” (Mk. 4:1). All else was irrelevant- even the boat He was in. The focus is so zoomed in on the person of Jesus. And Paul in his more 'academic' approach sees Jesus as the very core of the whole cosmos, the reason for everything in the whole of existence. Of course He didn’t literally sit in the sea. But this is how it would have appeared to a spectator sitting on the grassy hillside, hearing Jesus’ voice clearly from a great distance because of the natural amphitheatre provided by the topography. In this case, the Spirit adopts this

perspective in order to invite us to take our place on that same hillside, as it were, beholding the Lord Jesus in the middle distance, looking as if He were sitting in the sea. Perhaps the record is implying that listeners were so transfixed by the words and person of Jesus that they stopped seeing the boat and only saw Jesus, giving the picture of a magnetic man with gripping words sitting in the sea teaching a spellbound audience. There's another example of this kind of thing in Jud. 4:5: "The mountains melted ['flowed', AV mg.]" – to a distant onlooker, the water flowing down the mountains gave the impression that they themselves were melting; not, of course, that they actually were.

13:3 *And he spoke many things to them in parables, saying*- The Lord in chapter 12 seems to have concluded that the contemporary generation was wicked and bound for condemnation; they had rejected John's message after having initially responded to it, and had rejected Him. This is now the first time that we read in Matthew of the use of "parables", and it seems to be in direct context with what He has said to Israelite society at the end of chapter 12. He is now speaking to them in this form so that they will be confirmed in their disbelief. The Kingdom principles which He had so clearly expressed in the Sermon on the Mount now become "mysteries" of the Kingdom (:11); instead of the Kingdom which could then have been established had Israel accepted Jesus as Messiah, the Kingdom principles would work quietly from within until such time as the Kingdom were to be politically established at a far future date. No longer do we read of the Kingdom coming 'near' and being 'heralded'. And the themes of most of His subsequent parables in Matthew include Israel's rejection of the Gospel. He spoke *things* to them, but in parables. This of itself suggests that He used parables so that people would *not* understand, as is made explicit in :11,12. His parables were not, therefore, simple stories with an obvious meaning. They may appear that way to us who have some understanding of their interpretation, but that was clearly not how they were understood by most of the initial audience. Even if they thought they understood them, it's made clear in :11 and :12 that they didn't. The change in style is due to His conclusion that that generation were condemned and had refused John's ministry and therefore Christ's message. From now onwards He would not be giving them any more- He was cloaking the message in parables, and explaining them only to the minority who had properly responded.

The chiasmic structure of Matthew 13 has been observed by several expositors, and it makes the sowing of the weeds by "the enemy" the central point of the entire presentation; the point is, that Israel initial response to the Gospel preached by John had been destroyed by a conscious program to stop the message being accepted, operated by the Jewish enemy / satan:

Sower and the Soils (vv. 1-9)
Question by Disciples/Answer by Jesus (Understanding) (vv. 10-17)
Interpretation of the Sower and the Soils (vv. 18—23)
Tares (vv. 24—30)
Mustard Seed (vv. 31—32)
Leavening Process (v. 33)
Fulfillment of Prophecy (vv. 34—35)
Interpretation of the Tares (vv. 36—43)
Hidden Treasure (v. 44)
Pearl Merchant (vv. 45—46)
Dragnet (vv. 47—48)
Interpretation of the Dragnet (vv. 49—50)

Question by Jesus/Answer by the Disciples (Understanding) (v. 51) Householder (v. 52)

Listen, the sower went out to sow- The Lord's teaching in 12:43 that the Jews had not responded to John the Baptist lays the basis for the parable of the sower, which was told the same day (13:1)- the seed initially experienced some growth, but then the 'evil one', the Jewish system, stunted that growth. Who is the sower? The preacher, or the Lord Jesus? Some Greek texts read "*a* sower" (followed by the AV), others "*the* sower" (cp. the Diaglott). Perhaps the Lord said both: 'A sower, the sower, went out...'. Surely the sower is the Lord Jesus, but in *our* work of witness we are *His* witnesses. For we represent Him to the world. This is why "the Spirit (the Lord the Spirit, Jesus) and the bride (the ecclesia) say, Come"; ours is a united witness with Him.

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

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

13:4 *And as he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side*- The Greek *hodos* means simply 'the way'. It is the very word used about John the Baptist seeking to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus (Mt. 3:3). If Israel had responded as envisaged in the Isaiah 40 passage which speaks of this, then the way or road would have been prepared and the glory of Yahweh would have travelled over it to establish God's visible Kingdom in Jerusalem. On one hand, the fact the sower sowed even on the 'way' is an element of unreality in the parable which simply points to the extreme enthusiasm of this sower, casting the seed onto all types of human personality, including those who appear hopeless cases.

The seed of God's word would have made the rough way smooth for the King of glory to ride over to Zion. But instead the seed was despised and even condemned, trampled underfoot - an idiom meaning it was despised and even condemned. And then the birds came and took it away altogether. The way was not prepared by response to the seed because of the Jewish leadership stopping others responding. We note the usage of the same word to describe how some despised individuals sitting in 'the way' were in fact persuaded to respond to the Kingdom invitation (Mt. 22:9,10); Bartimaeus was likewise sitting in the way [s.w.] and responded, following Jesus "in the way" (Mk.10:46,52). The 'way [side]' could have responded to the seed- but it didn't. Because men came and trampled it under foot, and the birds came and took it away. It wasn't as if there was no chance at all that it could have responded.

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

The picture of fowls coming down to take away the seed is firmly rooted in a host of Old Testament passages which speak of fowls descending on apostate Israel (Is.18:6; Jer.7:33; 15:3; 16:4; 19:7; 34:20). These birds taking away the seed are interpreted as "the wicked one" (the Biblical devil) 'catching away' the word. There must be a thought connection here with Jesus' comment that from him who would not understand the sower parable "shall be *taken away* even that he hath" (Mt.13:12). Those who would not make the mental effort to grapple with Christ's parable had what understanding they did have snatched away by the Jewish devil. "The wicked one" responsible for this easily connects with "the devil" of the parable of the tares which follows; this parable has frequently been interpreted with reference to Jewish false teachers of the first century. "The wicked one... catcheth away" the seed/word, as the Jewish wolf "catcheth" the sheep (Mt.13:19; Jn.10:12). This association of the first century Jewish system with the wolf/ wild beast/ devil/ wicked one is probably continued by some of the beasts of Revelation having a similar Jewish application in the first century.

Lk. 8:5 literally translated speaks of "birds of Heaven". The fowls taking away the unfruitful seed is the first of a number of connections with the true vine parable of Jn. 15, where the ideas of Divine husbandry and fruitfulness due to the word recur. In Jn. 15:2 the fruitless branch is taken away by God; in the sower parable, the birds remove the fruitless plant. The conclusion is that God sends 'birds' of various kinds to remove the spiritual deadwood from His ecclesia. It is in this sense that false teaching (e.g. the Judaist "fowls" of the first century) is allowed by God. parable of the sower connects

the Devil with the fowls which take away the Word from potential converts, stopping their spiritual growth. This would aptly fit the Judaizers who were leading the young ecclesias away from the word, and the Jews who "shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men... neither suffer ye them that are entering (young converts) to go in" (Mt. 23:13). The Devil takes away the word of the Kingdom, "lest they should believe and be saved" (Lk. 8:12).

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

13:5 *And others fell upon the rocky places where they had not much earth*- The Greek *petrodes* is a form of *petra*. The Lord had taught that the wise man who heard and did His sayings developed his spiritual house upon a *petra*, a rock (Mt. 7:24). And of course Peter was the *petra* upon which the church would be built (Mt. 16:18). So again we see that it was not impossible for the seed on the rock to prosper. The problem was that some who began their growth upon rocks stopped growing because of persecution and tribulation (:21)- which in the first instance was from the Jews.

And immediately- There is nothing wrong with this, indeed this is as response to the word should be; and Matthew often notes the immediacy of response. When you perceive an opportunity to do the Lord's service, *respond immediately*. See it as another opportunity for "redeeming the time". This is a major Biblical theme. Israel were not to delay in offering their firstfruits to God (Ex. 22:29), lest their intentions weren't translated into practice. The disciples *immediately* left the ship, simply put their nets down and followed (Mt. 4:20,22); Matthew left his opened books and queue of clients in the tax office and walked out never to return (Lk. 5:17,18 implies). There is a marked theme in the NT of men and women hearing the Gospel and *immediately* responding by accepting baptism. In this spirit Cornelius immediately sent for Peter (Acts 10:33), and the Philippian jailer was immediately baptized, even though there were many other things to think about that night (Acts 16:33). Joseph was twice told in dreams to "arise" and take the child Jesus to another country. Both times he "arose" in the morning and just did it, leaving all he had, responding immediately (Mt. 2:13,14,20,21). Paul and Luke immediately went to preach in Macedonia after seeing the inviting vision (Acts 16:10); Paul "straightway" preached Christ after receiving his vision of preaching commission (Acts 9:20). Indeed, the records of the Lord's ministry are shot through (in Mark especially) with words like "immediately", "straightway", "forthwith", "as soon as...". He was a man of immediate response, Yahweh's servant *par excellence*. He dismissed the man who would fain follow Him after he had buried his father, i.e. who wanted to wait some years until his father's death and then set out in earnest on the Christian life. The Lord's point was that we must immediately respond to the call to live and preach Him, with none of the delay and hesitancy to total commitment which masquerades as careful planning. Note how the Lord told another parable in which He characterized those not worthy of Him as those who thought they had valid reason to delay their response to the call (Lk. 14:16-20). They didn't turn Him down, they just thought He would understand if they delayed. But He is a demanding Lord, in some ways. What He seeks is an immediacy of response. If we have this in the daily calls to service in this life, we will likewise respond immediately to the knowledge that 'He's

back' (Lk. 12:36, cp. the wise virgins going immediately, whilst the others delayed). And whether we respond immediately or not will be the litmus test as to whether our life's spirituality was worth anything or not. All this is not to say that we should rush off in hot-headed enthusiasm, crushing the work and systematic efforts of other brethren and committees under foot. But when we see the need, when we catch the vision of service, let's not hesitate in our response, dilly dallying until we are left with simply a host of good intentions swimming around in our brain cells. Instead, let's appreciate that one aspect of the seed in good soil was that there was an *immediacy of response* to the word, a joyful and speedy 'springing up' in response (Mk. 4:5).

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

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

13:6 *And when the sun had risen*- See on 13:5 *sprung up*.

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

And because they had no root, they withered away- The same word used by the Lord about how Israel were the fig tree who had once had promise of fruit (in their initial response to John) but was now withered (Mt. 21:19,20). Those who initially accept Christ but do not abide in Him are likewise "withered" (Jn. 15:6). John's emphasis upon 'abiding' in Christ likely has reference to the need to accept John's message about Christ and abide in it, rather than wandering off and back to Judaism. Both James and Peter seem to allude to this point of the parable in their teaching that the word of God stands forever, whereas flesh withers away (James 1:11; 1 Pet. 1:24). As we will note on 13:22, the seed is to become the person. Those who do not wither are those who have the seed within them, the power of eternal life which endures. "Because they had no root, they withered away" (Mt. 13:6) is alluded to in Jn. 15:6 concerning the branches of the vine withering as a result of God's word not abiding in them. The connection between the plants of the sower parable and the branches of the vine is further evidence that the sower parable mainly concerns the response to the word of those *within* the ecclesia.

13:7 *And others fell upon the thorns*- This of itself didn't mean that growth was impossible. The Lord's next parable makes that clear- the good sees brings forth fruit,

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

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

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

13:8 *And others fell upon the good ground and yielded fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty*- The next parable is clearly related to this parable of the sower. There, the same word is used for the "good seed", the "children of the Kingdom" (13:24,38). The ground refers to the hearts of people; but in the parable of the good seed, the seed itself is paralleled with the person. The word had become flesh in them, as it was in the Lord Himself (Jn. 1:14). John the Baptist had preached about the need to be a "good" plant bearing good fruit, or else face condemnation (Mt. 3:10, and repeated by the Lord

in Mt. 7:17-19). The appeal was for the audience to be as John intended, to follow where his teaching led. They had initially accepted that teaching but had failed to follow where it led. And this was to be their condemnation.
Mk. 4:8 adds the significant detail that it was the *fruit* that the plant yielded which "sprung up and increased". The picture is of a plant bringing forth seeds which themselves germinate into separate plants and bear fruit. This can be interpreted in at least two ways:
1) True spiritual development in our lives is a cumulative upward spiral; successfully developing spiritual fruit leads to developing yet more.
2) The new plants which come out of our fruit refer to our converts, both from the world and those within the ecclesia whom we help to yield spiritual fruit. There is another link here with the parable of the vine bearing fruit: "I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should *go* and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (Jn. 15:8,16). This connects with Christ's command to them to *go* into the world preaching the Gospel and thereby making converts. In this sense our spiritual fruiting is partly through our bringing others to glorify God through the development of a God-like character. It is in this context of using the word for preaching and personal spiritual development that we receive the glorious encouragement "that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he (will) give it you" (Jn. 15:7,16). Every believer who truly strives to bring forth fruit to God's glory, both in preaching to others and in personal character development, will find this promise constantly true.
God works like this because He is prepared to accept that different people will make something different of His Truth. The parable of the sower shows this in that the "good ground" brings forth 30, 60 or 100 fold. Some believers respond three times as actively to the Gospel as others; yet they will all be accepted at the end. I see a connection between this parable and the Lord's words to the rich, righteous young man: '"If you will be *perfect*..." sell what you've got; and then you'll receive *100 fold* in this life, and eternal life in the Kingdom' (Mt. 19:12,21). Presumably, that man at that time was (say) in the 30 or 60 fold category. The Lord wanted him in the 100 fold category. But if that man didn't sell all that he had, it doesn't necessarily mean that Christ would have rejected him ultimately. In this context, He says: " Many that are first (in this life) will be last (least- in the Kingdom); and the last shall be first" (Mt. 19:30). Those who don't sell all that they have will be in the Kingdom, but least in it. The poor of his world, rich in faith, will be great in the Kingdom (James 2:5). We need to ask ourselves whether we really accept the parable of the sower; whether we are strong enough to let another brother be weak, to accept that even if he's in the 30 fold category, he's still acceptable to his Lord, just living on a different level. Indeed, it isn't for us to go very deeply at all into how exactly the Lord sees others; because we can't know. The point to note is that God wants us to rise up the levels of commitment. Paul was persuaded that the Romans were “full of goodness, filled with all knowledge”, but he prayed they would be filled yet further (Rom. 15:13,14).

I have shown in the commentary above that growth was in fact possible on each type of ground, and the New Testament contains examples of where this happened. I suggest that in fact there are only three types of ground- the way side, the rocky and the thorny. These three types of ground would then match the three types of good ground- which gave 30,60 and 100 fold increase. Putting the gospel records together, the Lord's description of the good ground contains elements of the initially good response from the three bad types of ground. The good ground represents a good state of mind- for the ground is clearly to be understood as the heart of those receiving the word. This

category therefore refers to those on the three other types of ground who *did* respond to the end, who overcame the pressures upon them not to respond further. This also removes the moral problem which is otherwise presented- in that it would appear that the seed of the word is spread, but the good ground people can do nothing else but respond, and the bad ground people can do nothing but not ultimately respond because of who they are by nature and where they are situated in life. The good ground category had to 'keep the word' (Lk. 8:15)- they didn't let men tread it underfoot nor birds take it away. Given their position in life, even by the wayside, they still responded by keeping the word. There was an element of choice and human effort required- rather than some categories being inevitably unable to keep the word because of their location in life and surrounding influences upon them. In this we see huge encouragement in our cluttered lives today, subject as they are to negative spiritual influences which at times seem too strong to resist. And we are further encouraged in our own sowing of the seed- nobody is incapable of response, from the deepest room in a strict Moslem family to sharing a one room apartment in Europe surrounded by materialistic, unGodly people.

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

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

In Palestine, sowing precedes ploughing. The sower sows on the path which the villagers have beaten over the stubble, since he intends to plough up the path with the rest of the field. He sows amongst thorns because they too will be ploughed in. And it has been suggested that the rocky ground was land with underlying limestone which barely shows above the surface. Even if some preaching work appears not to bear fruit, this shouldn't discourage us from the essentially outgoing spirit we should have in spreading the word far and wide. Many of the parables have an element of unreality about them, designed to focus our attention on a vital aspect of teaching. The sower parable has 75% of the seed sowed on bad ground, due to the almost fanatic way the sower throws the seed so far and wide, evidently without too much attention to whether it lands on responsive soil or not. His emphasis was clearly on broadcasting the seed far and wide. We should desire to see the spread of God's ways, His Truth, His will, the knowledge of the real Christ, to as many as possible.
The word / seed which fell into good ground produced fruit. This connects with Jn.

15:5,7, which says that the branches of the vine bring forth fruit through the word abiding in them. Likewise the good ground keeps the word and continually brings forth fruit (Lk. 8:15). It is common for us to learn something from the word, apply it for a few days, and then forget it. Yet surely the implication is that if our hearts are truly open to the word, it will have permanent effects upon us, if the word abides in us. For this reason it is necessary to pray at least daily for our minds to be good ground for the word, and to retain what we already comprehend. Those on the good ground who hear and understand in Mt. 13:23 are described as those who hear and keep the word (Lk. 8:16). True understanding of the word's teaching is therefore related to an ongoing practical application of it. We may read a human book and understand it at the moment of reading; understanding God's word is quite a different concept. Truly understanding it means keeping it in our heart and therefore in our lives. The seed fell on good ground, "sprang up, and bare fruit"; indeed, it kept on bearing fruit (Lk. 8:8,15). The plant being sown was therefore a repeating crop. True response to the word will lead to wave after wave of spiritual progression. Again, we see that the sower parable is describing an ongoing response to the word- it keeps on being sown by the believer keeping the word, and fruit is continuously brought forth.

13:9 *He that has ears, let him hear*- Seeing that the next verses show the Lord considered Israel generally to no longer have ears to hear (see on :1 also), this would seem an appeal to the disciples to perceive what He is saying, even though the majority of Israel cannot. Therefore He asks them later to "*Hear* the parable" (:18)- for He knows they do have ears to hear. But even they had to make a conscious effort to hear- those with ears are asked to hear. Understanding, in the sense Jesus uses the idea, doesn't come naturally but requires effort.

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

13:10 *And the disciples came and said to him: Why do you speak to them in parables?*- This question is understandable if this was the first parable the Lord spoke; see on :1. They were taken aback by His changed method of teaching, probably noticing

that the eagerly listening multitudes had not properly understood it, overhearing all kinds of wild guesses at what the Lord was maybe driving at.

13:11 *And he answered and said to them: To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven*- The things which God has prepared for those who love Him, things which the natural eye has not seen but which are revealed unto us by the Spirit, relate to our redemption in Christ, rather than the wonders of the future political Kingdom (because Mt. 13:11; 16:17 = 1 Cor. 2:9,10). The context of 1 Cor. 2 and the allusions to Isaiah there demand the same interpretation.

But to them it is not given- Here we see the element of predestination- understanding is "given". Paul in Romans speaks of such predestination as the supreme evidence of our salvation by grace. One example of the Lord Jesus' emphasis on our salvation being through grace rather than our works is found in the way the parables teach that our acceptance is to some degree dependent on our predestination. Thus the parable of the types of ground suggests that we are good or bad ground at the time the seed is first sown; the fish are good or bad at the time they first enter the net; the wise virgins take the oil with them from the start of their vigil. I would suggest that this is not just part of the story. It was evidently within the Lord's ability to construct stories which featured the idea of bad seed or fish etc. changing to good, and vice versa. But He didn't; indeed, His emphasis seems to have been on the idea of predestination. This isn't to decry the effort for spirituality which we must make; but His stress of the predestination factor is surely to remind us of the degree to which our calling and salvation is by pure grace.
The Lord's grace to His men is reflected in Mark's record of how the twelve were confused by the Lord's parables. He responds that He speaks in parables so that "them that are without" would not understand; but His followers would, He implies, "know the mystery of the Kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables". And yet it's immediately apparent that the disciples were equally confused by the parables. We sense the Lord's frustration with this: "Know ye not this parable? How then will ye know all parables?"- i.e. 'If you don't understand this parable, it means you won't understand any of them, which makes you equal with the crowd of those outside of Me, whom I'm seeking to leave confused'. And we note how straight away Mark notes, perhaps in sadness and yet marvel at the Lord's grace: "But without a parable spake he not unto them [the disciples]: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples" (Mk. 4:10-13,34). Mark, or Peter writing through Mark, could look back in wonder. They the supposed disciples, learners, of the Lord Jesus had been as dumb as the crowd; but by grace alone the Lord had privately explained the parables to them. And our understanding of true Bible teaching is likewise a gift of grace, when we are every bit as obtuse as the people in darkness who surround us. The phrase "them that are without" (Mk. 4:11) seems to have stuck with Paul; he uses it five times. Perhaps he saw that a characteristic of the believers, those separated from the world of darkness, was that they understood the parables; and this would explain Paul's frequent allusion to them, stressing as he does the need to appreciate their power. But those "without" in His other teaching clearly refer to those rejected at the judgment, who will stand "without" begging for admission to the Kingdom (Lk. 13:25; Rev. 20:15). But those 'without' in Mk. 4:11 are those who chose not to understand the Lord's teaching, for whom it's all parables, fascinating perhaps, but confusing, unclear, and not something they are really bothered to understand. This connection of thought doesn't mean that intellectual clarity of understanding alone decides who will be, indeed who is, within or without of the Kingdom. But it is all the same true that the

Kingdom life both now and in the future requires us to understand so that we might believe and live and be as the Lord requires.

13:12 *For whoever has, to him shall be given and he shall have abundance*- The faithful do not get the blessing solely by their own effort, but through the gift of God. The context requires we understand this as 'having' the ability to hear the Lord's words and practically 'understand' them (:9). Mt. 13:12 speaks of what a man has, whereas Lk. 8:18 AV mg. more precisely speaks of what a man *thinks* he has. Matthew's record adopts a more human perspective. This Greek word for "abundance" is used about the 'abundance' which characterizes the life of the believer. But the 'abundance' is not of material things, but of understanding of and thereby relationship with the Lord.

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

13:13 *Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing, they see not, and hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand*- See on 13:12 *even what he has*. It was their initial seeing and hearing of John the Baptist which became the basis of their subsequent total blindness and deafness to Jesus. If the word sown isn't responded to further, or only partially so, then there remains only a hardening. We must respond, and immediately- and be led wherever the word leads us.

13:14 *And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which said: By hearing you shall hear and shall in no wise understand, and seeing you shall see and shall in no wise perceive*- Jesus spoke the parable of the sower so that the Jews "by hearing... shall hear, and... not understand" (Mt.13:14), which is quoting from Is. 6:9,10 concerning Israel hearing the preaching of Jesus during his ministry. This would explain the present tenses in Mk.4:14-20: "These *are* they by the way side... these *are* they... which *are* sown...". That prophecy evidently had fulfilment at Isaiah's time; the point is thereby established that prophecy can have multiple fulfilments.

13:15 *For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest*- Here we have explained why some people don't get it, will not understand. It's not that they are mentally inadequate. The Lord's reason is because they realize, albeit subconsciously, that if they do, then the process will lead to repentance, to change, and thereby to spiritual healing. And people don't want to change, to allow God's claim over every part of their lives. And so they choose not to

understand. So often we marvel that despite God's Truth being so simple, so few understand it. That is now no mystery- for the Lord's explanation here is that it's because they don't actually want to change. It's why so many prefer a life of apparently searching for Truth, rather than accepting the most obvious Truth, which is Christ. It's why despite all the miracles and teaching and personality of the Lord Jesus, so few wanted to accept Him as Messiah. This would've been of great relevance to the disciples and first century preachers who first heard this, for whom Israel's rejection of Jesus would've been so hard to understand.

They should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and repent, so that I should heal them- True conversion involves understanding and perceiving, and not merely hearing doctrinal truth (Mt. 13:15). True understanding is a seeking for God, a doing good; hence those who sin have no true knowledge as they ought to have, whatever their theoretical understanding (Ps. 14:2-4). But we can nominally believe the Gospel, 'understand' it in an intellectual sense, and bring forth no fruit to perfection (Mt. 13:15 cp. 23)- not perceiving the power of the Gospel. Understanding and perceiving the meaning of the parables would result in conversion, repentance and forgiveness (Mk. 4:12). Moses persevered because he*understood*. "Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law" (Ps. 119:35) is one of many links in David's thought between understanding and obedience.

The Lord spoke of conversion as really seeing, really hearing, really understanding, and commented that the disciples had reached this point (Mt. 13:15,16). But he also told them that they needed to be converted and become as children, knowing they knew nothing as they ought to know (Mt. 18:3). There are levels of conversion. "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Lk. 22:32), the Lord told Peter. Yet Peter was converted already! The Lord had spoken of conversion as really seeing, really hearing, really understanding, and commented that the disciples (including Peter) had reached this point (Mt. 13:15,16). But he also told them that they needed to be converted and become as children, knowing they knew nothing as they ought to know (Mt. 18:3). Quite simply, there are different levels of conversion. Baptism isn't conversion: it's a beginning, not an end.

13:16 *But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear*- The disciples were so slow to perceive. And yet the Lord could (perhaps gently and smilingly) tell them: "Blessed are your eyes, for they see" (Mt. 13:16). Yet He later reprimanded them for being so slow of heart to perceive… Surely He was speaking of the potential which He recognized in them; a potential which He rejoiced to see. Of course we are blind and spiritually obtuse. And yet the New Testament speaks of us as if our blindness has been lifted. In the same way as our Lord sees us as if we are perfect, without blemish, as if we are already in the Kingdom, so he sees us as if we are without blindness. This is how he treated the disciples. He spoke of them as "seeing", i.e. understanding (Mt. 13:16; Lk. 10:23). But frequently he despaired at their lack of spiritual perception, i.e. their blindness. Yahweh describes His servant Israel, both natural and spiritual, as a blind servant: "Who is blind but my servant?... who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant?" (Is. 42:19). There is a real paradox here: a blind servant, or slave. What master would keep a blind servant? Only a master who truly loved him, and kept him on as his servant by pure grace. Yet this useless blind servant was God's servant and messenger- even though the blind were not acceptable as servants or sacrifices of God under the Law (Lev. 21:18,22)! God uses His spiritually blind servant

people to proclaim His message to the world. The disciples, still blind to the call of the Gentiles, were sent out to preach to the whole world! As the Lord was the light of those that sat in darkness (Mt. 4:16), so Paul writes as if all the believers are likewise (Rom. 2:19). Paul points out the humility which we should therefore have in our preaching: there are none that truly understand, that really see; we are all blind. And yet we are "a guide of the blind, a light to them that sit in darkness" (Rom. 2:19). Therefore we ought to help the blind with an appropriate sense of our own blindness.

13:17 *For truly I say to you, that many prophets and righteous men desired to see the things which you see and saw them not, and to hear the things which you hear and heard them not*- These men, the Lord said, wanted to understand but didn't. But He has just explained that lack of understanding is rooted in a subconscious refusal to understand. He is using 'seeing' here in the sense of understanding, rather than physically seeing. I therefore wonder whether He is speaking with irony- of the Jewish false prophets and supposedly 'righteous ones'. They claimed to desire understanding, but they never attained to it.

13:18 *Hear then the parable of the sower*- The Lord has defined 'hearing' earlier in the context as something which requires conscious effort. He is therefore issuing a command here, rather than speaking a meaningless preface to the interpretation.

13:19- see on 13:38.
When anyone hears the word of the kingdom- “The word”, the “word of the Kingdom”, “the Gospel”, “the word of God” are all parallel expressions throughout the Gospels. The records of the parable of the sower speak of both “the word of God” (Lk. 8:11-15) and “the word of the Kingdom” (Mt. 13:19). The word / Gospel of God refers to the message which is *about* God, just as the “word of the Kingdom” means the word which *is about*the Kingdom, rather than suggesting that the word is one and the same as the Kingdom. "The seed is the word of God" (Lk.8:11), i.e. the word of the Gospel of the Kingdom (Mt.13:19). The parable gives the impression that the ground was in a certain condition when the seed was first sown; there seems no hint at the possibility of changing the ground, although we will see later that there is a sense in which this is possible. The stony ground, for example, is in that state as soon as the seed lands upon it. It seems that Jesus is showing us how God looks down upon the preaching of the Gospel to various people, seeing that He speaks about things which are future as if they are already (Rom. 4:17). He knows the type of ground which each of us will ultimately be. Therefore, as far as God is concerned, we are good ground, or whatever, at the time of our first encounter with the Gospel, even if we are initially stony or thistle-filled. The seed is the word (Lk. 8:11); and "the word" doesn't necessarily mean the whole Bible (although the whole Bible is of course inspired). The phrase specifically means the word of the power of the Gospel, by which we were ushered into spiritual being. And *this* is what brings forth fruit, through our 'patient' and continued response to it. We were born again, "not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God... and this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you" (1 Pet. 1:23,25). Time and again the New Testament uses "the word of God" or "the word of the Lord (Jesus)" as shorthand for the preaching of the basic Gospel. *This* is the seed, this is the source of new life, this is what can lead to new character and behaviour in us. James speaks of being "doers of the word" (1:22,25), using the same word as in the parable of the sower, there translated 'to bring forth fruit'. Note that "the word of God" in the NT often refers specifically to the Gospel. James foresaw the possibility of hearing the word of the

Gospel but not doing it, not bringing forth what those basic doctrines imply. He foresees how we can admire it as a vain man seeing his reflection in a mirror. We are not to be "forgetful hearers" of the word of the basics, the "implanted word" (1:21 RV- another reference to the sower parable). We aren't to learn the Gospel and then forget those doctrines. We are to be doers of them.

And understands it not- The Lord has just made clear that not understanding Him is a conscious, wilful intellectual act; and people shut their eyes so that they will not understand, lest it demand too much from them personally (:15). The wayside category are not, therefore, merely predestined not to understand. It's not that they were just in the wrong place, exposed to the wrong teachings and religious culture, and therefore they did not understand. For anyone who hears the word or seed of Christ, refusal to understand it is a conscious choice. It may not appear like that, but the Lord has said in :15 that it is. By 'understanding', the Lord means the understanding which brings forth fruit. He is here redefining 'understanding the word', making it refer to something fruitful in practice. He spoke against a religious culture in which spirituality was seen in terms of being a microscopic student of the Old Testament and word by word, verse by verse, coming to the right theological interpretation. Many of us were raised in a similar environment. And the Lord here is redefining 'understanding the word' away from the sense of 'correct exposition' towards 'responding faithfully in practice, bringing forth fruit'. The bad ground, therefore, involved an element of choice to be like that. We showed on :4 that there were 'wayside' persons who *did* respond; our location in terms of culture, environment, psychology etc. is *not* an inevitable barrier to responding to the word which we hear. This proves that sin, in its various manifestations as a 'devil', can be resisted through an understanding of the word. *When* there was no understanding of the word, *then* the devil came. Likewise 1 Jn. 5:18-20 teaches that those who are born again by a true understanding of the word are not even touched by the "wicked one". Mere knowledge of the word will not necessarily stop the spiritual temptations; the word must be hid in the heart to stop sin (Ps.119:11); not just left on the surface of the soil. Those on the good ground both hear *and* understand it (Mt.13:23), corresponding in the first instance to those who heard the parables and understood them. There is no doubt that a degree of intellectual effort is required to understand the word, not least the parables. The Jews generally did not "hear with their ears"- they did not respond or recognize the basic message of the word, let alone go on to understand it.

In his justification of confusing the Jews through the sower parable, Jesus twice lamented that they did not *understand* (Mt. 13:13,14). He was basically saying that the Jews were the bad ground in the parable; the fowls snatched away the seed because they did not *understand* (Mt. 13:19). By contrast, those on the good ground *did* understand (Mt. 13:23). Those who heard the word "and anon with joy receiveth it" only to later fall away (Mt. 13:20,21) approximate to the Jews who initially rejoiced at the word of Christ preached by John and later Jesus himself (Jn. 5:35). "The care of this world" (Mt. 13:22) must primarily refer to the Jewish world.

Then comes the evil one- Note that the parable was spoken the same day as the discourses of chapter 12- see 13:1. The entire context of the parable and the preceding chapter is that it was the Jewish world system which hindered people from further responding to the seed / word about Jesus which they had first heard from John the Baptist. As I showed at length in *The Real Devil*, the Jewish system is frequently

described as the 'satan' or adversary of the early church. By 'the wicked one', the Lord's audience would've understood 'satan'; and the Lord is redefining their view of 'satan' as being not so much the Gentiles or some cosmic being, as their own religious elders and system.

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

That which was sown in his heart- Clearly the types of ground represent types of heart or mind. In addition to the elements of unreality in the parables, there are other features which shout out for our attention. Often details are omitted which we would expect to see merely as part of the story. For example, the parable of the ten girls says nothing at all about the bride; the bridegroom alone is focused upon, along with the bridesmaids. Where's the bride in the story? Surely the point is that in the story, the bridesmaids are treated as the bride; this is the wonder of the whole thing, that we as mere bridesmaids are in fact the bride herself. Another example would be the way in which the sower's presence is not really explained. No reference is made to the importance of rain or ploughing in making the seed grow. The preacher is unimportant; we are mere voices, as was John the Baptist. But it is the type of ground we are which is so all important; and the type of ground refers to the type of heart we have (Mt. 13:19). The state of the human heart is what is so crucial. Yet another example is in the way that there is no explanation for exactly why the tenants of the vineyard so hate the owner and kill His Son. This teaches of the irrational hatred the Jews had towards the Father and Son. And why would the owner send His Son, when so clearly the other servants had been abused? Why not just use force against them? Here again we see reflected the inevitable grace of the Father in sending the Son to be the Saviour of the Jewish world.

This is he that was sown by the way side- The person is put for the seed. Because according to a person's attitude to the word of Christ, so he is.

13:20 *And he that was sown upon the rocky places, this is he that hears the word and immediately with joy receives it*- So long as he 'believes for a while' (Lk.). Belief and joy are therefore paralleled. The later references to our joy *remaining* unto the end of our spiritual path surely allude here (Jn. 15:11; 16:22; Acts 20:24; Heb. 3:6). Note how in Jn. 16:22 the joy of the disciples could be taken from them by those who took Christ from them; another hint that the persecution which choked the joy came from the Jews, who were those who took Christ from them. Joy and faith are linked many times in the New Testament; we must ask whether we really have the joy which is the proof of real faith.

13:21 *Yet he does not have root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles*- The house built on sand was destroyed by a flood, an oft used type of the second coming and day of judgment. The equivalent in the sower parable is "when the sun was up... they were scattered" (Mt. 13:6). The sun is a symbol of both Christ's return and also of "tribulation or persecution! (Mt. 13:21). It seems that Jesus is teaching that our response to the word now is in effect our judgment seat; if we do not properly grow by it, in time of trial (the sun rising) we will spiritually die. Therefore when "the sun of righteousness" arises (Mal. 4:2) at the day of judgment, we will be "scorched" or 'burnt up' (Gk.). There are other examples of where a man's attitude to God's word in this life indicates his position at judgment day (e.g. Acts 13:46). In the same way as we call upon a reserve of word-developed spirituality in time of trial (the "moisture" of the parable), so we will at judgment day. When Paul spoke of how we *must* go through tribulation to enter the Kingdom (Acts 14:22), perhaps he was alluding to the parable of the sower, where the Lord taught that when, and not "if" tribulation arises (Mt. 13:21). Paul knew that it *must* come because of the way the Lord had worded the interpretation of the parable.

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

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

Thorns were symbolic of false teachers in the Old Testament ecclesia (Ez. 2:6; Is. 33:12-14). It is a repeated theme that thorns are devoured by fire (Ex. 22:6; Ps. 118:12; Ecc. 7:6; Is. 10:17), looking ahead to the destruction of all false elements of the ecclesia. The thorns easily equate with the tares of the next parable, which represent false teachers (primarily the Judaist infiltrators of the first century ecclesia). It would seem from this that some members of the ecclesia are never right with God, but exist purely for the spiritual trial of others; although it cannot be over-emphasized that it is quite wrong to attempt to label individuals as this 'thorn' element. Thus Jesus pointed out that grapes (the true Israel) and thorns can be apparently similar (Mt. 7:16), but "Ye shall know them by their *fruits*". The thorns of the sower parable and those they influenced were "unfruitful". However, seeing that "the thorns sprang up *with it*" (Lk. 8:7), there was some genuine spiritual growth, matched by the appearance of this among the thorns too. Heb. 6:8 likewise speaks of the thorns as believers who grew up within the ecclesia. This indicates the dual-mindedness of those who only partially commit themselves to the word; knowledge like this should play an active part in our self-examination. Because the thorns outwardly look like true believers, having an outward appearance of spiritual growth even more zealous and strong than that of the plants which they

choke, it is impossible to personally identify the "thorns"; but there can be no doubt that, according to the parable, they *must* be present among the ecclesia. The seed "fell *among* thorns" (Mt. 13:7), showing that this thorn category were already within the ecclesia when the person who was to be choked was converted. We have shown that Biblically the thorns are false teachers; yet Jesus interprets them as "the care (Gk. 'divisions'- the double mindedness of serving two masters) of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches" (Mt.13:22). The conclusion to be drawn is that the false teachers are responsible for the new convert being choked by these things. Mk. 4:19 says that these lusts enter into the convert's heart. Therefore the thorns must influence the person's thinking, so that he follows after these things until "he becometh unfruitful". The Greek for "choked" is from a root meaning 'association, companionship'. Marshall's Interlinear renders the Greek text of Lk. 8:7 in keeping with this idea: "Growing up with the thorns choked it". Thus it is through close association with the thorn element already in the ecclesia, that the new convert who enters it is corrupted. We each have to ask 'What type of ground are we as an ecclesia? Do *I* have thorn elements to me...?'

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

And the deceitfulness of riches- There are not a few Bible passages which confirm this view of materialism, as *the* besetting temptation of every human soul, and which confirm that therefore our attitude to materialism, serving God or mammon, is the litmus test of our spirituality. The parable of the sower teaches that for those who begin well in the Truth, who don't fall away immediately or get discouraged by persecution, "the deceitfulness of riches... the cares and pleasures of this life" will be their temptation. I would have expected the Lord to either speak in more general terms about the flesh, or to reel off a list of common vices. But instead He focuses on the desire for wealth as the real problem. The love of wealth is the root of *all* evil behaviour (1 Tim. 6:10). And I would go further, and suggest that so many of the excuses we hear which relate to "I haven't got time" (for reading, preaching, meeting, writing...) are related to this desire for material improvement. The desire for advancement takes an iron grip on a man's soul. As we move through life, our thinking is concerned with prices, with possibilities, with schemings... what *ought* to be the surpassingly dominating aspect of our life, the Son of God and His Truth, takes a poor second place. The connection between the desire for riches and the devil (our nature) is powerful. The devil is a deceiver. And 'riches' is also a deceiver (Mt. 13:22). That we know for sure. The desire for material things, for the false security of bank balances, the excuse that we are allowing ourselves to be so preoccupied for the sake of our families, the idea that we are only human beings and so God will let us be dominated by these worries... all this is the deception of the flesh. God *does* remember that we are dust, and yes, of course we *must* provide for our own, some thought (but not *anxious* thought) must be given to tomorrow (Mt. 6:25,31,34). But these facts must never make us push God's Truth into *second* place. The lilies of the field are fed and dressed by God without anxiously worrying about it. Israel on their wilderness journey were miraculously provided with food *and clothing,* surely to prefigure God's basic material care of His spiritual Israel of later years. David, all his life long, never saw the seed of the righteous begging bread (Ps. 37:25).

Choke the word- Paul had thought deeply about the parables. He doesn't just half-quote them in an offhand way. For example, Mt. 13:22 says that riches choke a man's response to the word. 1 Tim. 6:9 warns that those who *want to be rich* are choked by their *desire* for riches. Likewise Paul saw the rich man of Mt. 19:23 as actually one who *wanted* to be rich (= 1 Tim. 6:9,10). So Paul had thought through the parable. He saw that possession of riches alone wouldn't choke a man; he saw that the Lord was using "riches" as meaning 'the desire for riches'. And because "riches" are relative and subjective, this must be right. And therefore the Spirit was able to use Paul's deductions. My point is that the Spirit *could* have used just anyone to write (e.g.) 1 Tim. 6:9. But it was no accident that God chose to use a man with a fine knowledge and appreciation of His Son to be His pen-man.

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

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

rejection, setbacks and only a minority responding- the work of the Kingdom will succeed. That is one aspect of the parable.

The parable of the sower concluded by lamenting that the Lord's general Jewish audience did *not* understand, and He spoke the parables knowing they wouldn't understand and would be confirmed in this. And He stressed that a feature of the good ground is that His message is understood. In this context, the Lord commends the disciples because they saw and heard, in the sense of understanding (Mt. 13:13,15,16,23). Yet so evidently they didn't understand. And yet the Lord was so thrilled with the fact they understood a very little that He counted them as the good ground that understood.

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

The parable of the sower leaves us begging the question: 'So how can we be good ground?'. Mark's record goes straight on to record that the Lord right then said that a candle is lit so as to publicly give light and not to be hidden (Mk. 4:21). He is speaking of how our conversion is in order to witness to others. But He says this in the context of being good ground. To respond to the word ourselves, our light must be spreading to all. The only way for the candle of our faith to burn is for it to be out in the open air. Hidden under the bucket of embarrassment or shyness or an inconsistent life, it will go out. We will lose our faith if we don't in some sense witness to it. Witnessing is in that sense for our benefit. When the disciples ask how ever they can accomplish the standards which the Lord set them, He replied by saying that a city set on a hill cannot be hid (Mt. 5:14). He meant that the open exhibition of the Truth by us will help us in the life of personal obedience to Him. We must give forth the light, not keep it under a bucket, because "there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested; neither was anything kept secret, but that it should come abroad" (Mk. 4:21,22). In other words, the very reason why God has hidden the things of His word from the world and some aspects of them from our brethren, is so that we can reveal them to them. The ecclesias, groups of believers, are lampstands (Rev. 2:5 cp. Ps. 18:28). We must give forth the light, not keep it under a bucket, letting laziness (under a bed) or worldly care (a bushel) distract us; because "there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested; neither was anything kept secret, but that it should come abroad" (Mk. 4:21,22).

Luke goes on to record the Lord's teaching about a candle. Burning brightly before others is therefore the way to be good ground. We are compared to a candle that is lit (cp. our baptism) *so that* it may give light to others (Lk. 8:16; 11:33); the woman (the Lord Jesus) lights a candle (He uses believers) to find his lost coin (through our efforts) (Lk. 15:8; this must be seen in the context of the other two references in Luke to lighting a candle). If we don't give light (God's word, Ps. 119:105) to others, we are a candle

under a bucket, and therefore we will lose our faith, the flame will go out. So it's hard not to conclude that if we don't naturally give the light to others, we don't believe. The very nature of a lit candle is that it gives light; *all* candles do this, not just some. The Lord wants to use us as His candle, and He will arrange situations in life to enable this. Nothing is done secretly that will not then come to the light (Lk. 8:17 RV)- and therefore we should come to the light right now, living life in God's light and before His judgment (Jn. 3:20,21). This not only means we should not sin 'in secret', but more positively, we should feel and realize His constant affirmation of us for thoughts and actions which are invisible to others or for which we do not receive any thank. The Lord taught that either the 'devil' will "take away" the word from the rejected, or He will "take away" what He has given them at the last day (Lk. 8:12,17). In this sense, the word "abiding" in us is a foretaste of the day of judgment- if we don't let it abide, and the 'devil' of the world or our own humanity takes it away from us, then effectively such people are living out the condemnation process even in this life. "My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God and do it" (Lk. 8:21), refers back to His recent parable of the good seed that "did" the word which they heard (8:15). But surely that group of fascinated, surface-interested onlookers didn't all come into the good seed category, who held the word to the end, all their lives? He was so positive about others' faith.

13:24 *He set another parable before them, saying: The kingdom of heaven is likened to a man that sowed good seed in his field*- Potentially, even then, the field of the world had been given to the Lord Jesus.

13:25 *But while his men slept, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and then went away*- The sense of "while" is supplied by the translators. It could just as well mean that *when* men slept- after the death of the apostles? And yet the Lord commands His followers *not* to sleep, and Paul in 1 Thess. 5 repeats this. The implication could be that the sowing of the weeds was avoidable if the Lord's workers had been more attentive. Jesus so understands human weakness. But let's try to enter into the sense of shame and hurt which He must feel at our apathy; the shame is similar to the shame of the farmer who has tares growing in his field. Everyone sees it's the result of his workers sleeping instead of keeping the night watch as they should have done (Mt. 13:25). The Lord foresaw this; He saw that the ultimate harvest wouldn't be a good one. Even some that looked like "good seed" would be rejected (Mt. 8:12 cp. 13:38). Yet in this same context, Christ speaks of how the believer starts off as a tiny mustard seed, but in the Kingdom grows into a tree which will shelter others (Mt. 13:32). He saw *how* small are our spiritual beginnings compared to our position in the Kingdom. The least in the Kingdom will be spiritually greater than John the Baptist was in his mortal life (Mt. 11:11). The false teachers "crept in" just as a serpent creeps (Jude 4). The same group may have been in Christ's mind in His parable of the tares being sown in the field of the (Jewish) world by the Devil, *secretly* (cp. "false [Jewish] brethren unawares brought in", Gal. 2:4–6). In the parable of the sower, "the Devil" is defined as the enemy of Christ the sower / preacher of the Gospel – and His enemies initially were the Jews. These were the "tares" sown amongst the wheat which Christ had sowed, "things that offend" – and Paul warns of the Judaizers who caused *offences* and schisms to wreck the ecclesia (Rom. 16:17; 14:13; Mt.13:38,39,25,41). This is all confirmed by Jesus in Mt. 15:12–13 describing the Pharisees as plants "which My Heavenly Father hath not planted" which were to be rooted up at the judgment.

Mark's record speaks as if the *sower Himself* slept. The humility of the Lord Jesus is a reflection of the humility of God His Father. He spoke of Himself as the sower,

who sleeps (in His death) and then works night and day (His present Heavenly labour for us) so that the seed should bring forth fruit- "He knows not how" (Mk. 4:27, with allusion to Ecc. 11:1,5,6). Despite all things having been revealed unto Him, and the Spirit immeasurably given to Him, He had the spiritual and intellectual humility to openly recognize that our spiritual growth and ultimate salvation is a mystery to Him. It was the Father alone who gave the increase. He forgot things at times, didn't understand absolutely everything (e.g. the date of His return, or the mystery of spiritual growth, Mk. 4:27), made a mistake when working as a carpenter, cut His finger. But He was never frustrated with Himself; He was happy being human, comfortable with His humanity.

13:26 *But when the plants sprang up and brought forth fruit, then the weeds appeared also*- See on :7. This is the "good ground" category of the previous parable. They were sown amongst thorns and yet all the same, brought forth fruit. It may be that the Lord intends us to perceive that one mark of spiritual maturity is that once we start to bring forth fruit, we realize that we are surrounded by weeds / thorns. But we cannot for sure judge any given individual as being in that category.

13:27 *And the servants of the householder came and said to him: Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then has it weeds?*- To a Palestinian rural audience, the answer was obvious. Enemies sowing weeds amongst the wheat was a fairly common occurrence. The story is set up to make these servants seem somehow foolish for not suspecting the obvious explanation. In the first instance, the Lord is addressing the problem the disciples were having as to why there was such mixed response to the Gospel. He's gently trying to explain to them that surely it was obvious why there wasn't better response- there was, clearly enough, a systematic campaign orchestrated by the Jews to damage the harvest.

13:28- see on 15:14.
And he said to them: An enemy has done this! And the servants said to him: Then do you want us to go and gather them up?- The term is used several times in the parables of Matthew 13, and in the context it effectively means 'to judge'. The gathering process is the judgment- not only because the process of gathering and judgment will likely be in a split second in terms of time as we understand it, but because our attitude in the moment when we know 'He's back!' will effectively be our judgment. Those who go immediately will be saved, and those who delay to prepare themselves will thereby show themselves unworthy. "Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?" (Mt. 13:28) shows Christ's knowledge that this would be the desire of His servants throughout the generations. If we take His teaching seriously, we must come to the conclusion that all of us have a desire to "help" our brethren by 'sorting out' the weaknesses which we see in them, but that there is the real possibility that often this desire is spiritually grotesque in God's eyes. According to the parable of the tares, we are very sure that we know who are the tares and who are the wheat. But we can't be as sure as we feel, is the Lord's message. Some we feel are obviously tares are actually wheat. And the sensitivity of Jesus foresaw this so accurately. There's a fascinating twist in this story that is exactly descriptive of our experience. The servants slept first of all, after the word was first sown, and only once the wheat and tares came to bear fruit did they pester the Master to let them root up the tares. This reference to bearing fruit must be read in the context of the preceding parable of the sower, which describes how the good ground bears fruit (Mt. 13: 26, 8). The implication is that the servants

shouldn't have been sleeping first of all, thinking there wasn't really much to do in the field. And so it is a familiar pattern: conversion is followed by a period of feeling there isn't much to do, and then the realization dawns that due to our own negligence in those early days there are some tares in the ecclesia. The desire to sort out the tares therefore comes some time *after* conversion. And on the overall level, there is another truism: the servants of Christ are keener to eradicate error than stop it in the first place. It's sad to see that there is almost a despising today of the warnings against 'the thin end of the wedge'; awareness of the possibility of apostasy is seen as somehow negative- exactly as the parable predicts. The parable implies that *if* a greater level of watchfulness was maintained by the servants, there wouldn't be the tares. But, as the Lord foresaw, we seem to lack this watchfulness, often under the guise of feeling that we must sort ourselves out rather than guard against apostasy being introduced. The sensitivity of Jesus constructed that parable with the aim of showing the thoughtful how deeply inappropriate is their desire to root up the tares. He clearly had in mind the prophecy of Himself in 2 Sam. 23:6,7: "The sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken by (human) hands: but the man that shall touch them (Christ) must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place (just outside Jerusalem) "where Christ was "fenced with iron". It isn't possible for us to uproot the tares because this can only possibly be done by the one who totally uprooted sin in Himself, dying to it on the cross. This association between Christ's right to judge and His victorious death is shown by the way the "tares" will be burnt in the same area as He was crucified in. Phil. 2:9-11 reasons along the same lines; because Christ died for us, He *therefore* has the right to have every knee bowing to Him at the judgment. On account of being "the Son of man" and yet also being our perfect Messiah, He has the right*therefore* to be judge (Jn. 5:27 cp. Dan. 7:13,14). The Lord understood all this; and to the thoughtful, those who would grasp His allusion to 2 Sam. 23, He was saying: 'If you think you can root up the tares, if you think you have that wisdom to identify the tares, you are really insulting the greatness of what I achieved on the cross. It's only on account of that that I have the ability and right to divide wheat from tares, sheep from goats'. See on 7:4. *That we go*- The emphasis is surely on the “we”. They assumed that because they were the man’s servants, they were therefore also the reapers. The contrast drawn between the servants and the reapers was an element of unreality in the story. For farmers didn’t have a separate category of workers who were specifically “reapers”. But this householder did, and the element of unreality points to the fact that contrary to what we intuitively think, the work of reaping is *not* for us. There are others, the Angels, who will do this. And the other element of unreality is that the householder wanted the weeds to continue to grow, even though they would be taking away moisture and nutrients from the good seed. This is the way the Lord wishes for things in this life. Those who offend, who cause the righteous to stumble, will only be removed from them at the last day (:41). The preceding parable of the sower had featured a type of ground where there were thorns who grew up and stopped the good seed from developing; but the point was that the ‘good ground’ category would still prosper *despite* growing next to weeds. Such was and is the power of God’s word in Christ, that those who respond to it can still bring forth amazing yield *despite* the presence of the weeds next to them.

13:29 *But he said: No. Lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them*- The message is that we can rightly sense that there are pseudo plants within the field, but we can never actually define any one individual as being one of them. The parable of the wheat and weeds features another unlikely happening. Someone sows

weed seeds on top of the wheat seeds. The farm workers who were sleeping aren't upbraided as we might expect. The weeds can't be uprooted because the roots are intertwined; and anyone walking into the field to remove them would trample the wheat. So how, therefore, can they be rooted up at the time of the harvest? It can only be by some super-human reapers- i.e. the Angels. It is totally and utterly beyond *us* to do the uprooting. And yet this obvious meaning has still not been perceived by many of us.

13:30 *Let both grow together until the harvest, and in the time of the harvest I will say to-* The parables invite us to see the Lord gathering the wheat to one place and the tares to another, as if the gathering is the judgment (Mt. 13:30); the wheat is gathered to the garner, and the chaff to the place of burning (Mt. 3:12). There is the implication that effectively, the division between sheep and goats happens in the gathering process (Mt. 25:33); our response to the gathering is our judgment. The Angel who reaps for judgment 'thrusts in' his sickle, and 'casts out' the wicked in rejection (Rev. 14:19). But 'thrust in' and 'cast out' in that verse both translate the same Greek word *ballo-* the implication being that the gathering-to-judgment process is in fact the separation process. Likewise the net is "cast" into the sea in order to gather people for judgment, and then the rejected are "cast" away (Mt. 13:47,48).

The suggestion is that when the fruit is ready, then the harvest begins. The calendar date of the Lord's return is therefore variable; it depends upon the development of spiritual fruit by the last generation before His return.

The reapers- These are different to the 'servants' of :27. The implication is that we are the servants, and not the reapers. And yet the same word is used in Jn. 4:36-38 about how in preaching the Gospel, we are reaping people into the harvest of eternal life. As an exercise in Biblical exposition, this simply shows that a figure may be used in one context in an entirely different way, even with a completely opposite sense, to how it is used in another usage. And in yet another sense, we as it were reap ourselves according to how we sowed in this life (Gal. 6:7-9). And yet we shall be reaped by the Angels in the actual judgment process; the connection perhaps shows that effectively, we judge ourselves.

Gather up the weeds first and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn- This detail is surely not merely incidental. The idea is that the wicked and righteous will be gathered together with others within their same category. Then, it will finally be clear who is who; they will be displayed together. There is the implication in the words of Christ to the angel/reapers that the unworthy will be destroyed together: "Gather together *first* the tares, and bind them in bundles (i.e. together) to burn them". "*First*" here may well mean 'most importantly' rather than first in terms of time. It will be our Lord's desire to get the miserable business of destroying wilful sinners over and done with as quickly as possible- a far cry from the orthodox belief that Jesus somehow revels in the punishment of sinners. He can then concentrate on the joy of having the wheat gathered (together) into His barn (Mt. 13:30).

All these parables end with the impression that the faithful are going to be of eternal use to others, providing food / salvation for them. The 100 fold increase of the good ground was to be eaten, the wheat turned into bread or sown again, the mustard seed tree gives shelter to others, etc. We are to develop a desire to do that for others in this life, so that we might eternally do it in reality.

13:31 *He set another parable before them, saying*- Bearing in mind the Lord's earlier explanation that He was speaking to the Jewish masses in parables so that they would not understand, I wonder if the "them" here refers specifically to the disciples.

The kingdom of heaven is like a grain- Gk. 'a kernel'. The element of unreality is that a farmer would not consciously sow one tiny seed in a field. But the Lord does this, knowing the potential power within that one tiny seed. He 'takes' this one tiny seed [in his palm, we are to imagine] out into the field and sows it. And the mustard bush was perceived as a weed, a wild bush, not a crop. But it grows into a tree, it grows far greater and more majestically than could ever be expected. Here again is the Lord's encouragement to His disillusioned preachers- the growth of the Gospel, rather like the unreal increase on the good ground, is out of all proportion to what it initially is. Preaching appears 'foolish' (1 Cor. 1:18,21); that by sharing the Gospel with others, the vast majority of whom ultimately reject it, something so wonderful and eternal can really come. This parable thereby highlights the faith of the Father and Son, the sowers, that the word of the Kingdom really would survive and grow out of all proportion to its beginnings. This was exactly the encouragement which the disciples needed to hear, disillusioned as they were by the pathetic response to John's ministry and the Lord's real spiritual demands upon people.

Of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field- The mustard seed becomes a tree so big that all the birds of the air can live in it (Mk. 4:32). But mustard trees aren't *this* big. Surely the point is that the small seed of the Gospel produces a quite out of proportion result- by reading literature, spotting a press advertisement, getting baptized... we will by grace become part of the Kingdom of God, and provide shelter to the nations of this world. This is the extraordinary power of the Gospel. This is how far it will take us, and the extent to which we can, through the Gospel, become saviours of men. See on 13:33. Each of the records of the great preaching commission in the Gospels ties in with earlier passages within the same Gospel record. Mark's "preach the gospel to every creature" is to be understood in the context of the Lord's prophecy that the seed of His Gospel would be sown by preaching, and would result in creatures of all kinds coming under its' shadow (Mk. 16:15 cp. 4:32). The extent of witness we make is our choice; and according to how well we do it, so the extent of the shadow of the Kingdom gives shelter to many kinds.

13:32 *Which indeed is smaller than all seeds*- Gk. *mikros*, the tiniest, the least. Mark adds that it was the tiniest of all seeds *in the earth* (Mk. 4:31). It was the tiniest seed known in the land- and the term often refers to the land promised to Abraham. It was the tiniest imaginable seed. And it would grow into the greatest imaginable tree. The point has been made that orchid and other seeds are actually smaller than mustard seeds (H. N. Moldenke and A.L. Moldenke, *Plants of the Bible* (Waltham, Mass.: Chronica Botanica Company, 1952) p.61). But the Bible is written from the perspective of its original hearers, it never claims to present global scientific truth, and the mustard seed was the smallest seed known to the Lord's audience.

But when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree- Not 'grows into' a tree. The tiniest seed was only supposed to grow into a bush, but this unusual seed 'became' a tree, *ginomai* carrying the sense of being 'caused to become'. This was another element of the unreal- a shrub became a tree. It is AV "The greatest"; but the

mustard bush is not the greatest herb and it is far from the tallest tree. The emphasis is on the word “it”- when *this* particular tiny seed grows… The point is that this particular tiny seed had extraordinary growth. This on one hand speaks of the amazing growth experienced by the believer from the apparently tiny beginnings of the Gospel. And yet the specific language of *the greatest* suggests the entire parable may refer to the Lord Jesus, the ultimate seed, tiny and despised, yet who grew to become the Kingdom of God under whose branches the Gentile world would find blessing. For 'the Kingdom' was a legitimate title for Jesus, the King of the Kingdom who embodied it in His very person (Lk. 17:21). If here the Lord (as elsewhere) is speaking parables to and about Himself, it would in this context be in encouraging others as to the huge extent of growth possible. For Jesus is the parade example of how something which began so small- an egg within the womb of a barefoot unmarried teenager- could become so great.

So that the birds of the sky come and lodge in its branches- Mark records that the Lord emphasized that the branches were "great", *megas* (Mk. 4:32). The *mikro* seed became *mega*; but the greatness of the tree was because of the greatness of the individual branches. A mustard bush doesn't have 'great' branches, but in this unreal story, it does have them. According to the Lord's parable of Jn. 15:5, the branches represented the disciples: "I am the vine, you are the branches". The total greatness of the Lord Jesus depends to some extent upon the degree to which we grow into great branches. The disciples were depressed at the lack of response to their message, and the failure of John's ministry in first century Palestine. The Lord is encouraging them personally that from their *mikro*, tiny beginnings, they would become great branches, and be able to provide shelter for the birds of the Gentiles; although the "birds" in the earlier parable of the sower were representative of the Jewish religious leaders. When the disciples later baptized priests and Pharisees, the Lord's ambitious vision began to come true.
There are a number of insights throughout the parables into how the Lord perceived His future Kingdom. Significantly, His emphasis in the parables of the Kingdom is upon our spiritual status then, rather than on the physical wonders which His reign will bring on the earth. He foresaw how although our faith is so puny now, as a mustard seed, we will be those who will be as a solid tree, a real place of refuge, to the nations of the Millennium (Mt. 13:31,32 = Ez. 17:23,24).

13:33 *He told them another parable: The kingdom of heaven is like the yeast*- This continues the theme of the preceding parable; which was about a *man*, and now He tells a similar story balanced out with a *woman* as the central figure. Again the point is that from tiny beginnings, great influence comes. And as a note in how to perform Biblical exegesis, we should learn here that because yeast is used negatively in some Bible passages, it doesn't *always* have to require that meaning. The Gospel which we preach is likened to yeast- in itself a startling comparison- because it is through our humanity that we will influence others, by being our real, human selves. Yet the woman mixing yeast is preparing a huge amount of bread, according to the specifications in Mt. 13:33. This is perhaps to show us that whilst our influence may be quiet and unseen, the quietest witness can have a huge influence. W.D. Davies quotes Pliny and the Mishnah, giving examples of the use of yeast as a *positive* symbol (W.D.Davies, *Matthew* (*op cit.*) p. 422).

Which a woman took and hid- The teaching of Jesus works quietly from within- that

could be the sense. Just as the tiny seed of the Gospel produces huge results finally, so the yeast of the Gospel has disproportionate influence. But we must give full weight to the Lord's other teachings about hiddenness. We are to become a city set on a hill which *cannot* be hid (Mt. 5:14; our good works "cannot be hid", 1 Tim. 5:25); it is the rejected who hide the talent of the Gospel so that nobody sees it (Mt. 25:25). Ultimately, the yeast hidden within us at the time of sowing the seed, at the time the yeast is first inserted into the dough, will become public. In the wider context of this section, the Lord is explaining to the disciples the tragedy of how the seed or yeast first sown by John the Baptist has not achieved its intended result- because people were still hiding it, as Joseph and Nicodemus did (Jn. 19:38 s.w.- Joseph was a 'secret' or 'hidden' disciple). And we find the same word just two verses later in Mt. 13:35- the Lord was now speaking forth publically things which had been 'hidden' (AV "kept secret") in the Old Testament period. The treasure was "hid" in the field of the world, but the Lord Jesus gave all that He had so that He could redeem / buy the world, the field, and bring the hidden treasure to light (Mt. 13:44). Perhaps we could say that the yeast was only hidden to those who did not have eyes to see; for that has been the context of the Lord's teaching here (see on 13:10).

In three measures of flour until it was all raised- Until the flour was completely influenced. The hint could be that when the Gospel, the yeast, has done its complete work and the flour is finally completely leavened into a loaf- then the Lord will come. His work then will be complete. The calendar date of the Lord's return is therefore 'open' to some extent, just as the harvest is reaped only when the fruit (of the Spirit) has been brought forth.

It's tempting to see some connection with Paul's warning that false teachers must be removed from the church, because a little yeast leavens the whole lump (1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9). It could be that he is simply using the figure of yeast in a different sense. But his frequent allusions to the Gospels make us wonder whether he is consciously alluding to the Lord's teaching here in Mt. 13:33. It could be that he is saying 'Get rid of the *old* yeast, the yeast of false teaching and associated unspirituality- and instead, be influenced by the *true* yeast, of Christ's teachings rather than the yeast of *false* teaching'.

13:34 *All these things spoke Jesus in parables to the crowds, and without a parable he said nothing to them*- See on 13:10. The idea surely is that *from now onwards* the Lord only spoke parables to them, which explains the shocked question of the disciples in :10 as to why there was this change of teaching method. Mark adds that the Lord Jesus spoke the word to men “as they were able to hear it”, not as He was able to expound it (Mk. 4:33). He didn’t always relay to men the maximum level of understanding which He Himself possessed. The language of Jesus as recorded in John's Gospel is very different to that we encounter in the other Gospels. Indeed, the difference is so striking that some have claimed that John put the words into Jesus' mouth in his account. My suggestion is that the Lord did in fact say all the words attributed to Him in all the Gospel records. But He had two levels of talking with people- a Heavenly, spiritual kind of style (which John picked up on); and also a more earthly one, which Matthew, Mark and Luke tended to record. In our context, the simple point that emerges is that Jesus spoke in different ways to different people; He tailored His language in accordance with His audience. It's significant that there are no records of Jesus casting out demons in John's record; this occurs only in the more audience-friendly accounts of

the Synoptics. There is a tendency, it seems to me, for brethren particularly to insist on flaunting their knowledge, to have to correct others who have inferior knowledge or less mature interpretations. The Lord taught men the word "as they were able to hear it" (Mk. 4:33), not as He was able to expound it. If we ask where He obtained this humility and ability from, it is clearly an inheritance from His dear mother, who stored up things in her heart and didn't reveal them to others, just quietly meditating over the years. He spoke the word to men "as *they* were able to *hear* it"- He didn't always relay to men the maximum level of understanding which He Himself possessed . There is a tendency amongst some personality types to turn every disagreement over interpretation of Scripture into a right : wrong, truth : error scenario. Matters relating to basic doctrine are capable of being dealt with like this. But to turn the interpretation of every Bible verse into a conflict area is a recipe for ecclesial disaster. So often the debate becomes personal, with a brother sure that *he* is right and the other wrong, and the other must be shown to be wrong. This leads inevitably to pride, and there is the possibility that the other party is degraded and feels abused by the other. We simply have to accept that much of Scripture is open to various levels of interpretation, which if placed side by side would appear to be contradictory. Consider, for example, how many different applications the NT gives to Psalms 2 and 110.

13:35 *This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet*- Again we see the Lord consciously trying to make the word flesh.

I will open my mouth in parables- Asaph in Psalm 78 seems to be saying that he was going to recount the history of Israel in order to reveal to his audience the hidden message of Israel's history; and he was not going to "hide" that message from them, but rather to 'declare' it and 'make it known': "I will open my mouth in a parable, I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, declaring to the generation to come the praises of Yahweh, His strength, and His wondrous works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a teaching in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children" (Ps. 78:1-5). And yet the Lord has been saying that He will teach in parables in order to hide, not declare and not make known God's Truth to the majority of Israel. But Psalm 78 says that He *will* declare these things. The point surely is that these truths were being declared, made known etc. *to the disciples*, but the very process would continue to hide them from Israel as a whole. The context of Ps. 78 is likely Asaph seeking to declare to Judah under Babylonian domination the meaning of their history and how Israel's history was to come to a climax and a full declaration of its meaning in Messiah. It therefore has relevance to the true Israel under Roman domination. Note that Ps. 78:2 is quoted here as it is in Jn. 6:31; Ps. 78 is alluded to at least 10 times in the N.T. The strongly uneven nature of quotation from the OT shows that some OT chapters were as it were proof texts for the early church; Ps. 110 is the clearest example.

I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world- See on 13:33 *hid*. Many of the Lord's parables portray the [preaching of] the Gospel of the Kingdom of God as a kind of secret force: treasure hidden in a field, the tiniest seed in the garden, wheat growing among weeds, a pinch of yeast worked into dough, salt on meat... these are all images of something which works from within, changing other people in an ongoing, regular manner.

13:36 *Then he left the crowds*- AV "Sent the multitude away". Here we sense the power of the Lord's personality, able somehow to send a crowd of eager people away.

And went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying: Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field- The disciples only got the interpretation of the parables because they made the effort to go into the house and ask Him. Previously in this chapter the Lord has spoken of how blessed they are because they understand the parables, and how the crowds don't. But clearly effort had to be made to reach that understanding, it was not automatically beamed into them. They clearly didn't automatically understand the parables because they asked the Lord to "declare" or (Gk.) expound them to them. They do the same in Mt. 15:15.

13:37 *And he answered and said: He that sows the good seed is*- The present tense may suggest that the Lord was referring to the response to His preaching there and then.

The Son of Man- But it also refers to any preacher. If we are in Christ, then in our preaching, we are Him to this world.

13:38 *The field*- The emphasis is repeatedly on the fact that it is *His* field (:24,27,31). The Lord often speaks as if He has already overcome the world, even though the cross was still future for Him. So confident was He that the Father would bring Him through to inherit all things.

Is the world- In the first instance, the Jewish world.

And the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom- We would expect the good seed to represent God's word, as it does in the earlier parable of the sower. And in a sense, it does; but the word becomes flesh in those who truly respond to it, and therefore the Lord interprets it as individual believers. Being 'children of' something suggests that we have that thing as our family of origin, our parent. And this is how we should feel towards the things of God's Kingdom. "The Kingdom" is placed in contrast with "the wicked one". The plants are the children or offspring of whoever sowed them. The weeds were sown by the wicked one, and the good seed were sown by the Lord Jesus; but He is styled "the Kingdom" in that as King of that Kingdom, this is a legitimate title for Him. He was and is the essence of the Kingdom.

It is our attitude to God's word which is the fundamental indicator of our spirituality. The sower parable teaches this by its equation of the seed / word and the types of ground. In the next (but related) parable of the tares, "the good seed are the children of the Kingdom" (Mt. 13:38)- i.e. the seed / word is people. In the sower parable, we read of "He which received seed by the way side" (Mt. 13:19), connecting the believer with a type of ground which receives the seed, whilst Lk. 8:12,13 speak of the people as the seeds rather than the types of ground: "Those (seeds) by the way side are they... they on the rock are they...". Mt. 13:19 speaks of people receiving seed by the way side, but Mk. 4:15 likens their *heart* to the way side, where the seed was sown. In God's sight, a person *is* his heart or way of thinking (Prov. 23:7); and to God, a person's attitude to the word *is* his mind.
The RV translates the parable of the sower as if the seed sown is the convert: "he that was sown…" (Mt. 13:19 RV). And later on in Mt. 13:38 we are told so again: "the good seed are the children of the Kingdom". Yet the seed was a symbol of the word of God. The parallel between the seed and the convert is such as to suggest that the word of God will produce converts in some sense; it will not return void (Is. 55:11). The apparent

dearth of response to some preaching therefore poses a challenging question. Are we preaching the word of God alone, or our own ideas? Does God withhold blessing for some reason unknown to us? Is this parable only part of a wider picture, in which somehow the word *does* return void due to man's rejection? Thus the word of God was 'made void' by the Pharisees (Mk. 7:13 RV- a conscious allusion to Is. 55:11?)…. This is perhaps one of the most defiantly unanswerable questions in our experience. As an aside, one possible explanation is that "the word" which is sent forth and prospers, achieving all God's intention, is in fact Messiah. The same word is used about the 'prospering' of the Servant in His work: Is. 48:15; 53:10 cp. Ps. 45:4. Another is to accept the LXX reading of this passage: "…until whatsoever I have willed shall have been accomplished". Here at least is the implication that *something* happens and is achieved when we preach God's word. The same idiom occurs in Ez. 9:11 AVmg., where we read that "the man clothed with linen"- representing Ezekiel or his representative Angel- "returned the word, saying, I have done as thou hast commanded me". The word 'returned' in the sense that someone, somewhere, was obedient to it even if others weren't. We must believe, really and truly, that the word will not return void, but it will accomplish what it is intended to achieve. We are not scattering seed with the vague hope that something might sprout up; we are planting, fully expecting to see a harvest. "The word of God grew and multiplied" (Acts 12:24) surely means that the number of converts to the word multiplied- for the same word is repeatedly used in this sense (Acts 6:1,7; 5:14; 9:31; 19:20). Thus "the word of God" is put by metonymy for 'the response to the word of God', as if the word will inevitably bring forth response.

And the weeds are the sons of the evil one- I have demonstrated throughout the exposition of this chapter, beginning with the parable of the sower, that the adversary to the growth of the word of Jesus in the first century was initially the Jewish system. They are here personified as 'the wicked one'. And the noun is used elsewhere in this context by the Lord; He speaks of not resisting the evil one [s.w.] when the disciples were hit on the cheek, which was distinctly a synagogue punishment for uttering heresy (Mt. 5:39). Judaism understood 'the wicked one' as a personal Satan figure, but the Lord is redefining it- as they themselves. On a wider scale, the New Testament does this masterfully, redefining the common understanding of 'Satan', the adversary, the wicked one, as a personification of you yourself. The Lord specifically defines the Jewish religious leaders as 'the wicked one' in Mt. 7:11: "If you then, being evil [Gk. 'the wicked one']...". Earlier that same day (Mt. 13:1) the Lord had three times called them "evil ones" and an "evil generation", using the same word*poneros* (Mt. 12:34,39,45; John's Gospel likewise records the Lord calling the Jewish world "evil" in Jn. 3:19; 7:7). They were the personification of 'the wicked one' because they had 'evil' [s.w.] in their hearts (Mt. 9:4 "why do you think evil in your hearts?"); for moral 'evil' comes from the heart (Mt. 15:19). Later in this chapter He uses the word to speak of how the 'wicked ones' will be separated from the righteous at the last day (Mt. 13:49). Clearly 'the wicked ones' are people- and not supernatural beings. Note how the very same word and grammatical construction is used to describe a church member as "the wicked one" (1 Cor. 5:13; 2 Thess. 3:2). The term does not of itself require any reference to a supernatural being.

We shouldn't seek to over-interpret every element of a parable- although such approaches often yield very fruitful lessons. Indeed, here is the difference between parables and allegories- an allegory requires every symbol to be interpreted, but

parables aren't like this. It's a different genre. The focus is often on the end stress, not the details of the parable itself. And so I submit that rather do we need to seek to perceive the main issues which the Lord is seeking to get over to us, through these special features of His stories. Indeed, when the Lord *does* give interpretations of His parables, He doesn't give interpretations of every feature which formed the furniture of the parable. When He gives quite a detailed interpretation of the parable of the wheat and tares, He doesn't comment on the significance of the servants sleeping, the barn, the*bundling* of the weeds, etc.

13:39 *The enemy that sowed them is*- The Lord uses the same word in Lk. 19:27 to describe how the Jews who refused the Gospel were the Lord's "enemies". Paul likewise uses it to speak of how the unbelieving Jews are "enemies" (Rom. 11:28).

The Devil- see on :38.

The harvest- The Lord used the same metaphor in Mt. 9:37,38 in speaking of how during that earlier part of His ministry, the harvest was ongoing and He was sending out the disciples to reap the harvest; at that time, the Lord could say that "the fields are white already to harvest" (Jn. 4:35); the disciples were sent out to harvest it (Jn. 4:38 s.w., AV "to reap", literally 'to harvest'). But now He speaks of the harvest as being at a considerable distance in time from where they were now located- "the end of the age". This could be an example of the 'now but not yet' theme, whereby the language of the Lord's return and future Kingdom is used about our present experience. But in line with my observations about the abrupt change in the Lord's attitude to Israel at the end of chapter 12 (see on 13:1,10), it seems to me that He now considered that the time of harvest had been delayed. The parable of the sower earlier in the chapter had taught that the crop would only be reaped "when the harvest is come" (Mk. 4:29). This likewise was an implicit statement that the time of harvest in Mt. 9:37,38 had now been delayed. And one of the factors was not simply that the fruit was not ready, but that there had been insufficient labourers to harvest it (Mt. 9:38). Likewise the parable of the weeds suggests that weakness amongst the Lord's servants had led to the problem being experienced- if they had not slept, then the enemy would not have sown the weeds (Mt. 13:25). This is perhaps why towards the end of His ministry, the Lord taught that *He personally* was going to do the harvesting, albeit assisted by the Angels (Mt. 25:26 "I harvest", s.w.; AV "reap"); see on :41.

Is the end of the world- The Greek *aion* means 'age', and so there is no suggestion here of the destruction of planet earth. The disciples impatiently asked when this would be, using the same term (Mt. 24:3). The phrase is only used outside Matthew in Heb. 9:26, where we read that the Lord's death on the cross was "the end of the age"- and this is part of an argument that the Mosaic age has ended and should not be, as it were, lived in any longer. Paul uses a related phrase in 1 Cor. 10:11 to describe how his generation lived at a time when the ends of the ages had *already come*. Paul was writing before AD70. In neither of these references is there any suggestion that 'the end of the age' was in AD70; rather the reference is to the Lord's death on the cross, which ended the Mosaic age. The Lord defines "the end of the age" more specifically in Mt. 13:40 as "the end of *this* age"- the period in which He was then living, which was the Mosaic age. The significance of the events of AD70 appears to me to have been overstated and over interpreted by many expositors. I suggested that "the harvest" was possible in the first part of the Lord's ministry, but He delayed it because of Israel's lack of fruit and a

lack of faithful harvesters. He delayed to 'the end of the age'- His death on the cross. But the harvest didn't happen then either. God's ultimate appeal, indeed the ultimate appeal of Jesus Himself, was in His death, in His body hanging upon the cross for all to see, and in His resurrection. But that appeal went unheeded by Israel. And so it seems to me that the time of harvest has again been delayed, to the final end of the age at His second coming. The great preaching commission includes the promise of the Lord's personal presence with and support to His preachers "until the end of the age" (Mt. 28:20); the implication could be that the new age which the Lord had in mind would be terminated by the Gospel being preached into all the world. This naturally connects with the Lord's teaching that the Gospel "shall be preached in all the world... and then shall the end come" (Mt. 24:14). He doesn't define "the end". The end of what? Surely "the end of the age" which He had taught about here in Mt. 13:39. But the "end" is therefore without a specific chronological terminus- because it depends upon whether the preachers take the Gospel to all the world. Perhaps He didn't say specifically "the end of the age" in Mt. 24:14 because He realized that His death would be the end of one age, the Mosaic age, but the final end of the age would depend, to use His earlier metaphor, upon the ripening of the harvest and the zeal of the preachers to harvest it.

And the reapers are Angels- "The reapers" means literally 'the harvesters'. The same word has been used for how the disciples were sent to harvest in the earlier part of the Lord's ministry. The suggestion could be that this is all part of the Lord's changed program- now, it is no longer the disciples who would reap, but the Angels would. Note how the Lord's parable of labourers in the vine harvest suggests He had a chronic problem getting enough workers- the owner is desperate to get absolutely anybody to do a bit of work in that harvest, paying men a day's wage if they only worked one hour. And connect this with how the Lord prayed and asked others to pray that more labourers would be sent out to harvest (Mt. 9:38).

The point has been made that when the Angels first come to call us to judgment at the second coming (Mt. 13:39), there will be an element of choice as to whether we immediately accept the call to go and meet Christ. Noah and Lot were invited, not forced, to leave the world. Those who respond to Christ's return" immediately" will be accepted, implying that the unworthy delay. This means that the response is optional in the first instance (Lk. 12:36). There are other indications of this. The most obvious is in the parable of the virgins, where the wise go out to meet their Lord immediately, whilst the foolish delay in order to spiritually prepare themselves.

13:40 *As therefore the weeds are gathered up and burned*- These are the same weeds of the sower parable, who choke the response of people to the message of Christ, initially in the form it was preached by John the Baptist. They refer to *people*; yet the similar parable of Mt. 25:41 speaks of how the devil and his angels, his followers, are to be burnt in fire. The devil and his angels therefore refer in the first context to the individuals and collective system behind them which have discouraged response to Christ. The 'angels' of Mt. 25:41 are the weed category of people defined here in chapter 13.

With fire, so shall it be at the end of the world- I suggested in the above commentary on :39 that the harvest began earlier in the Lord's ministry, but He recalculated His program and delayed it. Likewise the idea of a gathering of and destruction of the wicked in "fire" is clearly taken from the Lord's earlier teaching that the fruitless trees

were even then being cut down and were about to be thrown into the fire (Mt. 7:19- note the tenses), which was in turn repeating the words of John the Baptist, who predicted that in the ministry of the Jesus whom he was announcing, "He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire; whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor and he will gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire" (Mt. 3:11,12). Note again the tenses- this was about to happen, the winnowing fan was already in the hand of the Lord Jesus. But now, the Lord reschedules that judgment and burning until "the end of the age", and urges the disciples to allow the weeds to grow in the field and just wait until Divine judgment comes. Again, it would be possible to understand all this as part of the nexus of 'now but not yet' language we find in the New Testament; in a sense, that fire was "already kindled" by human rejection of the message (Lk. 12:49), and we can even now drag men out of that fire (Jude 23). But the context of Matthew 13 is without doubt a change in program by the Lord, and I therefore prefer to see this change in timing as part of His rescheduling of His program. In the past, God Himself had clearly reinterpreted and rescheduled His prophetic intentions with Israel and various Gentile nations (e.g. Nineveh), and so this should not strike us as unusual. Indeed in these last days it could well be that there were various times in the 20th Century when prophetically, the stage was set for the Lord's return; but there was again a rescheduling, partly because of the poorness of the harvest, and partly because of the reluctance of His people to go out and gather it, preferring instead to squabble amongst themselves and chase their own tails over the finer points of Biblical interpretation.

13:41 *The son of man*- A term often associated with the Lord in His role as final judge, for due to having fully had human nature, He thereby has the right to judge men (Jn. 5:27).

Shall send forth His Angels- Practically and concretely, how will we be gathered to judgment? How? When? It seems that the Angels will suddenly appear to us in the course of our mundane lives, and invite us to go to meet Christ. "The reapers" of the harvest "are the angels"; it is they who will gather the believers, and then divide them into wheat and tares (Mt. 13:40-42). As men gather in a net and sort out the fish, so the angels will at judgment day (Mt. 13:47-50). "Men (angels) gather (the branches), and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (Jn. 15:6). This same equation of men and angels is seen in Lk. 6:38, this time concerning how the angels will mete out rewards as well as punishment at the judgment.

The Greek *apostello* ("send forth") is earlier used of the Lord sending forth the apostles / disciples to gather the harvest (Mt. 10:5,16,40; 20:2; Mk. 3:14). But now the Lord is rescheduling His program, perhaps due to the weakness of the disciples in doing the work (see on :39 *The harvest*); instead of them doing the work, He would do it, at the end of the age, through His Angels. The same word is used in the preceding sower parable, of how the sickle is 'sent forth' to gather the harvest when it is ripe (Mk. 4:29). Such rescheduling is common in God's working with men. Earlier, the Father had 'sent forth' prophets at the time of harvest- but they had not been given any fruit; and therefore He sent His Son (Mk. 12:2 s.w.). The same word is used about how at "supper time", when all things of the Kingdom were "ready", servants were "sent" to bring the guests (Israel) to the table (Lk. 14:17); but they refused.

It is not until the harvest that they are sent out to root out of the Kingdom all things that

offend. There is a sense in which the Angels have limited knowledge about our spiritual capacities; "We are made a spectacle... to Angels" (1 Cor. 4:9) implies that the Angels look on at the sufferings God has brought on us through our guardian Angel, and intensely scrutinize how we are acting as if earnestly watching a theatre play (so the word "spectacle" implies). Thus they are anxiously looking for the outcome of their trials on us, not knowing the final result. The fact that only at the judgement will the names of the worthy be confessed to the Angels by Jesus (Rev. 3:5) makes it appear that the ultimate outcome of our probations is not known to our guardians, hence their eagerness in our lives to see how we react.

It seems that when Christ first comes, He sends *His* Angels to gather us (Mt. 13:41), and it is also His Angels which punish the wicked (Mt. 13:41); however it is God's Angels which reward the righteous (there seems a distinction between the Angels of God and of Christ). The Angels of Christ bring us to Him with their report on us, and He then makes the decision- those same Angels are told to arrange the destruction of their charge if unworthy, whilst the worthy are confessed to the Angels of God for glorification.

And they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling and them that do iniquity- Literally, 'All that offend'. The sentence continues: "And *them* which do iniquity". The reference is to *people*, those weeds who stopped others growing, in the terms of the parable of the sower. Causing stumbling to others is clearly a major sin in the Lord's eyes, and we need to give His perspective its full weight in assessing the likely impact of our dealings with others. To cause others to stumble, to offend them, leads to condemnation with a millstone around the neck; but we can do that *in this life*, be condemned for it, and yet whilst there is life- we can repent. For Peter was one such who potentially caused another (none less than the Lord) to stumble (Mt. 16:23). We note that it is the Jewish world whom the Lord saw as full of offence / stumbling (Mt. 18:7). In our day it is those who cause division who cause others thereby to stumble (Rom. 16:17); for even the whiff of division is what is so spiritually carcinogenic to new converts and indeed to us all. Causing others to stumble from the path to the Kingdom is the leading characteristic of the condemned, according to the Lord's words in Mt. 13:41. Compare His words: "It is inevitable that offences come; but woe to that man by whom they come" with "The son of man goes as it is written of him; but woe to that man (Judas) by whom the son of man is betrayed!". The Lord sees those who cause offence as being as bad as Judas. It's serious. We are the body of Christ. It has been truly said that Jesus has no face, no hands, no legs on this earth apart from us. Positively, this means that we beseech men and women "in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 2:10 RV).

The Kingdom is here described by the Lord as a time when all those in the ecclesia who cause others to stumble will have been thrown away into condemnation (Mt. 13:41). Yet in some things we all offend others (James 3:2). Our places in the Kingdom will therefore be by pure grace alone; but we must respond to this wonder by *trying* as earnestly as possible to only upbuild and not to stumble our brethren. A personally 'righteous' believer may well be excluded from the Kingdom for the effect he has had on others. Both God and the pastors of Israel are described as having 'driven out' Israel from their land (Jer. 23:2,3,8); the pastors' sin resulted in all the people sinning and deserving judgment, and God worked with this system, confirming His people in the evil way they had taken.

"Them that do iniquity" are not necessarily a separate category to 'all who offend'. To cause others to stumble is the essence of 'doing iniquity'. And we can make others stumble passively; for attitude and unspoken messages have huge effect upon others' spirituality. *Anomia*, "iniquity", is literally 'not-law'. Yet again the Lord is driving home the paradox- the legalistic, law-following Jews were in fact not keeping the Law. The Lord specifically states that the Pharisees are "full of iniquity" (Mt. 23:28 s.w.). And in Mt. 24:12 He again defines 'iniquity' as being damaging to others- the abounding of 'iniquity' causes "the love (*agape*) of many [to] become cold". And in our own times, this is clearly seen; legalistic attitudes cause that vital *agape* love to disappear from individuals and communities of believers.

13:42 *And shall cast them into the fiery furnace*- Defined in 13:50 as *the* furnace of fire. The reality and picture of final condemnation was so clearly in the Lord's mind so often. He saw clearly where disbelief in Him and legalistic behaviour was going to ultimately lead. To Jewish minds, the idea of being cast into a fiery furnace on a King's orders obviously recalls Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego being cast into such a furnace in Daniel 3. This incident was held up in militant Judaism of the time as the ultimate example for Israel in their struggle against the Gentile world. But, the Lord is saying, there will be no deliverance for you. *The* furnace begs for Biblical identification with Sodom and Egypt both being described as "the furnace" (Gen. 19:28; Dt. 4:20; 1 Kings 8:51; Jer. 11:4); and yet Jerusalem was to become "the furnace" when burnt by Babylon (Ez. 22:18,20,22). The punishment of the rejected will be to be treated as this world, "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32), sharing Babylon's judgment of having a millstone around her neck and being cast into the sea of the world. But Judaism's strongest theme was their much vaunted separation from the Gentile world. And yet they were to be judged as the very world they hated, because in essence their legalism brought them to the same moral position as that world, and even far worse.

There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth- A phrase so often used by the Lord (Mt. 8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Lk. 13:28). He evidently had the vision of the last day judgment before Him. Here, as so often, it serves well to consider in what tone of voice He spoke. His passion for the lost and urgent desire to save from condemnation lead us to wonder if He spoke these words almost in tears, knowing what was coming. The desolation of the rejected would be so deep because they would then realize the eternal future they could have had. When He spoke of blessedness for those who weep now (Lk. 6:21), the Lord surely meant 'those who weep for the wretchedness of their own spiritual failure, who recognize how worthy they are of condemnation and feel it as if it had happened'. In contrast, those who wish to appear so spiritually wonderful before men will "weep" in the last day- they will be condemned (Lk. 6:25 s.w.). Peter likewise wept in this life after denying the Lord, experiencing the condemnation of going out from the Lord into darkness with shame; but repented and will be saved.

13:43 *Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*- The second coming of Christ as Malachi's "sun of righteousness" is a clear Bible theme. At the transfiguration, a clear vision of the Kingdom age, the Lord's face shone as the sun (Mt. 17:2); and it is He personally who shall shine forth to all at His second coming (Lk. 17:24). The Lord is saying that we will then be openly revealed as Him. But "shine forth" translates *ek-lampo*; and we are to be a visible *lampo* right now, shining in a way which cannot be hid from men (Mt. 5:15,16). Again and again, we

find the Lord's later teaching so often rooted in the Sermon on the Mount. Our shining before men now is related to our shining eternally in the age to come. The other clear OT allusion is to Dan. 12:3- those who turn many to righteousness shall shine eternally. The opposite to causing others to stumble (and being condemned for it) is to teach others righteousness (and be saved). We cannot therefore be somehow in a neutral position, doing nobody any evil and yet nobody much good either. We are either making them stumble or turning them to righteousness.

Contrary to how some wish to interpret things, the Lord did understand "the Kingdom" to have a future aspect; for He speaks of how "then... in the Kingdom" the righteous will shine as the sun. The shining of the sun was to give light on earth, and this basic reason for the sun is mentioned often in the Bible. In some way, we shall eternally give light to others; and this aspect of the Kingdom life must begin in us now. Even in the future Kingdom, the basis of our witness to the world will be that we are in Christ. Thus Micah's description of how "the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass" (Mic. 5:7) is consciously alluding to the then-famous Messianic prophecy of Ps. 72:6: "*He* shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth". The blessings Messiah brings are to be articulated through the witness of those in Him. Those who have lived in Him will then shine as the brightness of the firmament (Dan. 12:3). But the description of the Lord's face shining as the sun draws on this; as if to say that our shining in the future Kingdom will be because we were and are in Him. We will shine forth then (Mt. 13:43), as the Sun of righteousness Himself.

He who has ears, let him hear- The Lord has earlier in this chapter told the disciples that His audiences generally did not have ears to hear; but the disciples do. This would therefore be an invitation to the disciples specifically to use the potential for understanding which they had. They were to continue shining; for the context of this whole long day's teaching (see on 13:1) was that they were weary in their witness because of opposition and lack of response.

13:44 *The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field*- This mini parable, and the next one about the man seeking to buy pearls, presents things to us from the perspective of the Lord Jesus. He had just taught that "The field is the world" (:38). Who bought / redeemed the world? The Lord Jesus. It is "*His* field" (13:27,31). When did the Lord "buy" (this is the word usually translated "redeem") the world? In His death on the cross, which cost Him all that He had. We note that the parable puts the focus on the joy of the obtaining rather than all that was given up and lost. Surely Paul alludes here when he writes that we are "bought [s.w.] with a price" (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23) and should act and feel accordingly. Why did the Lord do this? Because within "the world" there was "treasure"- us, those who are finally His special personal possession. Here we see neatly explained the difference between the Lord's redemption of the whole world, "all men", and yet personal salvation only being experienced by a few hidden within the world, His "treasure". Rev. 5:9 may have this in mind when speaking of how the saved were "redeemed [s.w. "bought"] by [Christ's] blood out of every tribe, language, people and nation". But to save *us* He had to redeem the world, purchase the field. Yet we are 'hidden' in the world; not that our faith is to be invisible, but insofar as we are a minority. This again was in the context of encouraging the disciples that the poor response to their message in the Jewish world was nothing to be unduly discouraged by. The world- and perhaps the Lord had in view the *Jewish* world for

whom Christ primarily died (Gal. 4:4,5)- was to be bought by Christ in His death, but only a few would respond and be 'found' as His treasure. Again, we find "treasure" mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount. The principle that "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mt. 6:21) applied to the Lord- His heart is totally with us. And there is to be a mutuality between a man and his Lord; if we are our Lord's treasure, then we are not to lay up treasure on earth, but rather have Him as *our* treasure (Mt. 6:19,20) just as we are *His* treasure. Paul seems to play around with this idea of 'hid treasure', for he uses the same Greek words twice. But each time, slightly differently. He speaks of how we the light of God's glory has *shone*in our hearts, using the very same word as in Mt. 13:43 about the righteous shining as the sun in the Kingdom; but he then says that this "treasure" is hidden in the "earthen vessels" of our own bodies (2 Cor. 4:6,7). Just as we as a community are 'hidden' in the soil of the field / the world, so actually the real essence of our relationship with Christ is likewise hidden within all the dust of our own personal humanity. This is not to say that we can relax and justify worldly living as being merely 'the flesh'. But it is a comfort that the Bible teaching here recognizes that our real spiritual essence is indeed 'hidden' in the dust and ashes of all we have to do as we go about life in the flesh in this present world. Again, as it were playing with the ideas, Paul speaks of how "In Christ are *hid* all the *treasures* of wisdom" (Col. 2:3). There is no very obvious semantic connection with the Lord's teaching about us being His treasure hid in this world. So perhaps this is one of Paul's many unconscious allusions to the Gospels, whereby he had the words so deeply in his consciousness that they influenced his thinking and writing both consciously and unconsciously. For more examples of this, see my discussion of the issue in *Bible Lives*.

We note that Israel are often described as God's special treasure (Ex. 19:5; Dt. 7:6; 14:3; 26:18; Ps. 135:4; Mal. 3:17 "His jewels / very own treasure"). The treasure is the pearl of great price of the next parable; and the gates of the New Jerusalem are giant pearls, with the names of God's people written upon them (Rev. 21:12); Rev. 21:19,20 says the foundation stones are adorned with precious stones. The true Israel of God were what the Lord found, and redeemed the whole world in order to have us for Himself. This idea is applied to us in Tit. 2:14; the Lord Jesus "gave himself on our behalf, in order that he might ransom us from all lawlessness, and purify to himself a precious people, zealous for good works". Our preciousness to God is the idea behind "do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Mt. 10:31; Lk. 12:7).

Which a man found- In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord had put the emphasis upon *us* seeking and finding the way to life (Mt. 7:7,8,14; 16:25). Yet He is also searching for us; He speaks of how He 'found' faith in a Gentile man, and had been seeking to find such faith in Israel (Mt. 8:10 s.w.). The Lord told parables of Himself as the good shepherd seeking and *finding* the lost (Lk. 15; Mt. 18:13 s.w.), of Him seeking and*finding* workers for His work (Mt 20:6), wanting to *find* fruit on the fig tree (Mt. 21:19; Lk. 13:7), *finding* people to come to the marriage supper (Mt. 22:9,10). This is why when the searching Lord finds the man searching for Him, there is a spark of mutuality which makes all the Angels of the cosmos rejoice. Thus the same words are used about the early disciples 'finding' Christ, and Him 'finding' them (Jn. 1:41,43). We may justifiably speak of our search for God, for Jesus, for "the truth", but the reality is that the Father and Son were in search of *us.* The Hebrew prophets likewise present God as in search of man, and not simply awaiting our approach to Him if we wish to make it, with passive emotionless indifference. The Lord is saying that His death on the

cross would not be simply to die for the world; it was because He had 'found' the treasure of believers. But who did He find? A small group of mixed young men, one time prostitutes and a few Gentiles. That was enough. His finding of *them* motivated Him to die for the world that He might save *them*. In this we have a window onto the apparent 'wastage' of God; that the whole world was redeemed just for the sake of a few. Some argue for universal salvation on this basis- that why should Christ have died to save just a few. But the parable is clear- it was for joy at having found the minority, which were to Him a priceless treasure, He bought the entire field- just to get them. This is the waste and abandon that comes with love, and only a utilitarian, pragmatic, loveless legalist would question its authenticity, credibility or necessity. So the Lord is encouraging His dispirited disciples that He has found them, and He rejoices over them with love and devotion; and they have found Him. That the rest of the world haven't responded cannot take anything away from this experience.

There were many contemporary stories about treasure being found. It was common in Palestine for wealth to be buried; to avoid it being taken by invaders or occupying powers. And often the owner died or forgot where the treasure had been buried. In the contemporary stories, it was always a peasant or labourer who accidentally discovered the treasure whilst digging- which was the work of the poor. So the audience would have imagined a poor labourer selling all he had, desperate to buy the field. We see here the humility of God. For that poor labourer is Him, in His Son. Needing and eager to sell absolutely all, in order to buy the field. And by implication, He had nothing in this world before He found us.

And hid- It seems that He hides the treasure, although it could mean that He hides Himself. Hiding the treasure gives the impression of an intensely personal relationship between Him and the treasure which He can't share with others. Or if He hides Himself for a period before going to buy the field, we likewise get the impression of a man overcome with an intense sense of in-loveness which only He can understand. This is how He felt about the disciples. It could be in the context of 13:10-15 (see notes there) that He means that He is hiding Himself from the world by telling them parables from now on; and instead will focus on giving His all to get the disciples and the few with "ears to hear" as His special treasure. He is thus putting a far more positive slant on His realization of how Israel generally have rejected Him, only a minority have accepted Him, and Israel had not accepted her king, nor John's ministry, and so Yahweh's glory was not going to come to Zion as envisaged. The Lord is saying that He has so fallen in love with the remnant who*had* responded, that He felt a joy so great that He would give all He had to redeem the whole world in order to save them. And this is in keeping with His teaching in the previous parables- that the wonder of the few good seeds who respond amazingly, of the wheat that grows so well despite the weeds, is such that all the loss, rejection and casualty is worth it.

If we really want to make encounters and conversations work, we need to consider who we're talking with. The Lord's parables of Mt. 13:44-49 make it clear that people have different motivations when they first encounter our preaching. Some are merely fish caught in the Gospel net and compelled to come in; others are as the merchant man who is searching for good pearls, who sells all he has to get that pearl and just have it, gazing at it with admiration and appreciation each day; others are as the man who finds something of value in a field, maybe he sees there's some precious raw material he can exploit there, and so he buys the field in order to get some benefit for himself. The strange (to my ears) comment in Mt. 13:44 that the man 'hides' his discovery appears to

contradict the reality that we should joyfully share our discovery of Christ with others. Perhaps the picture is being painted of a man with all the wrong motivations, who comes to the treasure from the viewpoint of 'What can I selfishly get out of this' (it may be in our age... a desire for welfare support, a partner, a social club...). And yet all the same he has come to the treasure, been called to it, allowed to find it... that is perhaps the point. All these types of people have differing motivations, and need to be treated differently by us.
The man who finds treasure [or, perhaps, a deposit of precious metal in a field which could be mined] *hides the fact* (Mt. 13:44), and sells all he has to buy that field. The hiding of the discovery speaks to me of the utterly personal knowledge between a man and his Lord which we enter into when we 'find' the treasure of the Kingdom, the pearl of great price. For any man or woman who hears the Lord's words, He and His Father will enter in and make their abode with them (Jn. 14:23). Although we are a great multitude of redeemed, yet the communication of the Father and Son to us are still amazingly unique, even though we all hear and read the same actual words, and reflect upon the same facts. Right back at the beginning of God's relationship with Israel He had made the point that "I will meet you [plural] to speak there unto thee [you singular]" (Ex. 29:42).

The hiddeness of God's people is quite a theme. Whilst we are to shine as lights in the world, in another sense we are indeed obscure and hidden. We are "in" the world, the field. But redeemed by Him out of it, in His eyes.

And in his joy- This is the joy of the in-love Jesus, so excited at having found the remnant, the treasure in the field of the unbelieving world, so excited He hides Himself for a while, or hides the treasure from others' view. One of the motives behind His endurance of the cross (which was how the field of the world was bought / redeemed) was "joy". Not joy in the sense of giggling and happy-clappy; but "joy" in the sense that He could speak of "My joy" just hours before beginning the ordeal (Jn. 15:11; 17:13). The parables of Luke 15 describe the Lord's joy as being in relation to finding the lost, and this was what had happened in the Lord's 'finding' of the disciples and responsive remnant.

He went and sold all that he had and bought that field- **We have just been told earlier that "the field is the world". God in His Son bought the world, paying the price for "the world's redemption", "God so loved the world that...". But He did so in order that we, His treasure hidden in the world, might be His. This is how we can understand the Bible teaching about the Lord's death in one sense redeeming the world. The next parable of the dragnet teaches the same. Many fish are enclosed in it, but the whole exercise was for the salvation of the good fish amongst them. The expense to God was therefore total; His "all", conspected into the death of His Son, was given for us. Our redemption was not therefore some side project, one of many outreaches into the cosmos. His expenditure for us was highly focused and total. And that is signalled to us by the element of unreality- that a merchant gives his all for something, just one object, which cannot earn him income as it is. Pearls had no market value- they were seen as valuable beyond any material calculation, and the price was solely in the eyes of the buyer.**

These very words are used by the Lord in teaching that the rich ruler should sell all that he has- and give to the poor (Lk. 18:22). The Lord wasn't asking the man to do anything that He Himself was not doing. His giving to the poor was in giving

redemption to *us*. And the Lord was a "cheerful giver"; He gave up all "with joy" for us; and in the first instance, to die for that small group of mixed up men and women who tagged around with Him. "Sells *all*" might suggest He was wealthy; seeing that the Lord was not a wealthy man, we wonder what this 'wealth' was which He gave up, recalling Paul's comment that He who was rich became poor for our sakes on the cross (2 Cor. 8:9). What did He 'give up' or 'sell'? What was His real loss? Perhaps it was that as God's Son He could personally have been saved without the cross, but He did all He did in order to save us- and thus set the ultimate example of overcoming selfishness.

The man who sells all to buy the field containing the treasure (Mt. 13:44)- what does he *do* with his newly found wealth? The question, of course, bids us reflect what we have done with the wealth of the Gospel which we have found. These open-ended parables with unanswered questions are left hanging because the point is, it all depends upon our response as to how they end in our cases! The parables are thus not just cosy stories. They challenge our response. Our tidy images of reality are shattered by the open endings and elements of unreality in the parables. Our minds are arrested and teased by them, as they lead us to self-realization, self-knowledge, at times even healthy self-condemnation. The parables, especially those which Luke records, appear to end leaving us with unanswered questions. Does the wounded traveller survive and get better? When does the Samaritan return? How much does it cost him? Was the beaten man happy to see the Samaritan when he returned? Who inherits the property of the rich fool? Does the barren fig tree produce a crop in the end? Does the elder brother finally join in the party? Does the unjust steward succeed in getting himself out of his problems after his dismissal? What happens to the rich man's five brothers, seeing Lazarus isn't allowed to go and warn them? Do they hear Moses and the prophets? Do the riff raff come in from the lanes to the Great Supper? Does the unjust judge actually resolve the widow's complaints? How does the rich merchant survive, after having sold all he has for the one pearl, thus discarding his entire past, his life's work…? And what does he do with the pearl? He, presumably, sits and treasures it, but can do nothing with it in order to prosper materially… And yet we are left to reflect upon this.

13:45 *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like to a man that is a merchant*- A traveler, for that is the essence of the Greek word translated "merchant". He was going around seeking- just as Jesus was in search of believing hearts. Paul saw himself as the man who gives all to buy the pearl (Mt. 13:45,46 = Phil. 3:7,8; although this passage also alludes to Moses; as if he took inspiration from Moses to be like the man in the parable). He saw the excellency of the knowledge of Christ as the pearl whose beauty inspired even a rich man to give up all that he had. Paul took comfort, real comfort, from the way he found himself in situations similar to those of his Lord.

Seeking- Elsewhere the Lord speaks of Himself as *seeking* (s.w.) the lost- the lost coin, sheep and son (Lk. 15; 19:10 s.w.). Those rather unfortunate people were beautiful pearls to the Lord, and that is how He sees the irritating self-righteous ones, the alcoholics, the druggies, the lazy, the socially awkward… whom He so seeks as His precious treasure. We are to seek Him and His Kingdom and His Father (Mt. 6:33; 7:7,8). And yet He seeks us. Hence there is some kind of 'flash' when we meet, a flash which is felt throughout the cosmos, in which *all* the Angels of Heaven rejoice. The Lord was seeking fruit on the Jewish fig tree (Lk. 13:6 s.w.) and found none; but just one response was as it were a "pearl" for the Lord. Thus the Lord is presented as

'seeking' individuals who respond, often from very bad life situations. John puts this in more spiritual terms in recording how the Lord 'seeks' God's glory (Jn. 7:18), alluding to how Moses sought the same glory in more visible terms. The repentance of that unlikely minority is the very essence of Yahweh's glory.

Fine pearls- Perhaps the tension is between His seeking for pearls in the plural, but being so thrilled to find just one (:46), for which he was prepared to give all. This would be in the spirit of the preceding parables; that the beauty of the response of a minority is such that it makes the failure to redeem the others seem less hard. This merchant didn't find the many pearls he had intended to find; but he was so thrilled to find just one beautiful one that he would give all he had just to get it, and presumably, to end his business life and just sit and admire the pearl. For the question 'And what did he do next?' seems to require that kind of answer. For what he did wasn't the wise thing to do in business terms. It is the element of unreality in the little story. Note the use of pearls as representative of believers in Rev. 21:21; and see the note on "pearls" under Mt. 7:6.

13:46 *And having found one*- He was thrilled with just one, even though He began seeking pearls in the plural (:45). The combination of 'seeking' and 'finding' beyond question is to be connected with the Lord's teaching about His seeking and finding of wayward individuals (Lk. 15 and see on :45; the same Greek word for "find" is used a significant seven times in the parables of Lk. 15). **The Lord finds workers (Mt. 20:6), finds guests for the wedding feast (Mt. 22:9,10). But they are all "one" pearl.** This strange little story could be making the simple point that if the Lord saved only one person, He would be thrilled by that. This is all directly in the context of this chapter, in which the Lord is discussing the general lack of response to Him, and comforting His flagging preachers in the disillusion which arises from little response to the Gospel. The Lord had taught that we should seek and be assured that we will find, in spiritual terms. All of His teaching He spoke to Himself, and He was the word of His own teaching made flesh. *His* understanding of seeking with the assurance of finding was that if we seek for persons to respond, we will find. Even if only one person. This surely should be our daily prayer- that we will be lead to meet the right people, that our seeking for others will result in at least one being found.

Of great price- As the King of the Kingdom, the term "Kingdom of Heaven" can in some ways be applied to the Lord personally. Having spoken of how "the field is the world" (Mt. 13:38), the Lord goes straight on to speak of how "the Kingdom of Heaven" is like a man who gives all that he has so that he can buy or redeem a field in which He perceives treasure. The same man is also likened to a merchant who sells all that he has in order to buy a pearl of great price. In the utter bankruptcy, the selling all to obtain or redeem one thing, we surely see a parable of the cross, through which death the Lord Jesus redeemed the field of the world, and the pearl of great price [to Him]. Perhaps Paul had his eye on these parables when he spoke of how in the cross, the Lord Jesus who had been rich became poor for our sakes (2 Cor. 8:9). That pearl, that treasure hidden within the field of the world, then becomes symbolic of us. It was of "great price" (Mt. 13:46)- and Paul again may have this in mind when he warns that we "are bought with a price" (using a related Greek word) and should therefore serve the Lord who bought us and not anyone else (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23). Thus we see not only the cost of our redemption, the utter self-emptying of the Lord in His time of dying; but also a picture of how valuable we are to Him. We also see some outline explanation of the

way in which the Lord's death redeemed "the world", and yet we are His special treasure hidden within it. In one sense we as His treasure is still hidden within this world; in another sense of course we are to be as a city set upon a hill which cannot be hid. We should be concerned at the danger of hiding our light under a bucket; but in another sense, our relationship to the Lord is such that it is by its wonderful nature 'hidden' from the world in which we currently lie. The strange feature of Mt. 13:44- that the man (in this interpretation, the Lord Jesus) 'hides' the treasure- perhaps becomes understandable in terms of Col. 2:3, which speaks of the Lord Jesus as having all God's treasures 'hidden' in Himself. The 'man' bought the field "for joy thereof" (Mt. 13:44); and despite all the pressure of the crucifixion process, the Lord Jesus could still speak at that time of "my joy" in our redemption (Jn. 15:11; 17:13). Just as the merchant man was "seeking" pearls and 'found' one of great price, so the good shepherd, the Lord Jesus, 'seeks' [same Greek word] fruit on the fig tree (Lk. 13:6), 'seeks' the lost coin until it is found (Lk. 15:8), 'seeks' and saves that which was lost (Lk. 19:10) and 'seeks' His sheep until He finds them (Mt. 18:12). The 'finding' of the lost sheep, the pearl of great price, in some sense happened in the Lord's death. Hence He pictures Himself as the shepherd carrying the redeemed sheep on His shoulders with head bowed forward- exactly the posture of a man carrying a crossbar on his shoulders.

He went and sold all that he had- The very same phrase is used by the Lord in speaking of how the hopelessly indebted man was sold "and all that he had" (Mt. 18:26). The picture is of absolute and total destitution from selling every imaginable possession. This story does indeed have a strange twist to it. A rich man so loved a pearl which he saw that he became a pauper by selling absolutely *all* he had- his business, his transport, his expensive clothes- in order to buy a pearl. And, finishing off the story, we are to surely imagine him living the rest of his life in some humble dwelling amongst the poor of this world, daily admiring the beauty of his pearl, totally unrealized by the world around him, caring for it as the most important thing in his whole existence, realizing that in it was the epitome of absolutely all his being: his love, his wealth, his future, his joy of life day by day. And this is what the Lord did from His deep in-loveness with persons who only had potential to become pearls. He was and is in love with the idea of who we may become. **He found the hidden treasure in the field before He bought the field / world. That hidden treasure was us potentialy, but in reality, the very weak disciples whom He found. He redeemed the world, even though they weren't His treasure, just in order to get them. The connection with Mt. 18:26 could be that as the Lord gave all that He had in order to raise the price, so we are to give all that we have in response to our huge and unpayable debt to Him. As He sold all that He had and gave for us, so are we to forgive. He did this in His life and death, as per Mt. 20:28 "to give his life as a ransom for many". The ideas of seeking, finding, giving all we have etc. are therefore used of the Lord Jesus seeking and finding and buying us. But these terms are used elsewhere of our seeking and finding the kingdom, and giving our all to have it as our chiefest joy and most precious treasure. The Lord's attitudes and work for us thereby elicits our similar response to Him and His Kingdom.**

And bought it- The Greek is elsewhere translated "redeem". This speaks of our redemption by the love and self-sacrifice of the Lord on the cross. The emphasis is perhaps on *autos*, "it". He had searched for many pearls, but was thrilled with giving His all for just one single one.

The element of unreality is that a man would put his entire wealth into one thing- the field, or the pearl. It runs against the wisdom of splitting up resources lest one investment fails. And the pearl of itself cannot produce income; it is not a shrewd investment. This merchant makes his decision in "joy". The idea is that his whole existence is totally taken up with his project. And this is the picture of the Lord's focus upon us; hence His extreme concern if any of us fall away, and His intense interest in our moment by moment existence. Merchants were thought to be shrewd, but this one apparently isn't. Rather does he have a fixation on one thing. And the God and Lord of the cosmos have a similar fixation on us. There are many implications that they have no other interest, no other woman out there, only us few weak ones on this planet.

13:47 *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net*- It's so easy to have a negative spirit. Are people sincere? Do they just get baptized in the hope of material help? Can we cope with so many converts? Won't many of them leave? What does this person really believe about doctrine? Can you believe them? Isn't this or that the thin end of the wedge? This isn't the spirit of the Lord's parable about the drag net fishermen (note, not fishing with a line for a special, prize catch- but concentrating on saving as many as possible, of whatever quality, Mt. 13:47). In drag net fishing, one big fishing boat drags a net which is tied to a small dinghy. God's fishing is thus dependent on us, the smaller boat, working with Him. Thus the harvest was plenteous during the Lord's ministry, but relatively few were converted due to the dearth of labourers (Mt. 9:37 implies). 1 Cor. 12:21 gives something more than a random example: the head (the Lord Jesus) cannot do without the feet (a symbol of the preacher in Rom. 10:15). In the work of witness especially, the Head is reliant on the preacher for the work He wills to be done.

That was cast into the sea and gathered fish of every kind- We are being gathered to judgment *now* (Mt. 13:47; 22:10; Jn. 11:52) although we will be gathered then to meet the Lord (s.w. Mt. 3:12; 13:30). We are as fish *gathered* into the net, and yet also*gathered* into vessels at the judgment (Mt. 13:47,48). The gathering is both then and now; our gathering into the net, our first response to the Gospel, is a gathering unto judgment. The Hebrew idea of 'calling' very often implies a calling to give account- e.g. God calling Adam to account (Gen. 3:9), Pharaoh calling Abram to account (Gen. 12:18), and Abimelech likewise (Gen. 20:9- other examples in Gen. 26:9,10; Dt. 25:8). Our calling to the Kingdom is effectively also a calling to give account. The point is, we must act now as men and women will do so on their way to judgment and the meeting with their ultimate destiny. Then we will not be bickering amongst ourselves or worrying about our worldly advantage; then, only one thing will matter. And so now, only one thing matters. When we go to judgment, we are not to look back as did Lot's wife; and yet we are not to look back having put our hand to the plough in this life. By starting on the way of Christ, we are starting on our way to judgment. See on 13:48.

"Of every kind" here is *genos*. Does *genos* here suggest that every genetic type of human being will have been called to the Gospel by the time the fishing is done? The word can of course refer to a nation or kindred. The suggestion is perhaps that once persons of every nation / kindred have been gathered into the net, then the night of fishing is over and the judgment (and therefore the Lord's return) can happen. Hence our extension of the Gospel net to every *genos* will affect the coming of the Lord. Mt. 24:14 is actually explicit about this; indeed, it is a repeated teaching of the Lord

(although only implicit at times) that He will come only once we have extended the net of the Gospel to every nation.

13:48 *When it was full*- Again we see the teaching that the drawing of the net to shore, the beginning of judgment, the return of Christ- is only once we have achieved certain objectives in preaching. Every *genos*, every nation or kindred, must have its representatives in the net. It must be "full" in the sense that there is a specific number of persons who must be saved. Paul specifically states this and uses the same word translated "full" in Rom. 11:25: "Until the fullness [full number] of the Gentiles be come in". "Until the times {s.w. "opportunity"] of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Lk. 21:24) probably has the same reference- for the same word is used for "fulfilled" as for "full". The opportunity of the Gentiles to be saved will come to fullness. And then shall the end come.

Men drew it to shore- It cannot be incident that the only other usage of the word for "shore" in the synoptics is earlier in this chapter, in 13:1. The crowds stood on the shore, whilst the Lord taught them. In one sense, judgment is yet to come; in another, as we hear His word, we are judged. They on the shore were as it were at judgment day. See on :47 *gathered*.
Sat down- Perhaps alluding to how a judgment session 'sits'. But it cannot be accidental that the same word is used of how the Lord was "sitting" as He taught the people (the word is used twice- Mt. 13:1,2). As the people were on the shore, it was as if they were before Him in judgment; He sat there as if He were sitting in judgment before them. See on :47 *gathered*.

And sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad- An allusion to Jewish ideas that the Gentiles were those 'cast away' and that they were the 'good ones'. But the whole idea of the faithful coming out of the sea, with all its associations with the Gentile world, suggests that the Lord foresaw how many of the good fish would in fact be Gentiles and not Jews. The image of 'casting away' surely shows the Lord's attitude to the rejected. There is no pleasure in their destruction, but rather simply getting rid of them and focusing upon the "good" category. In a Jewish context, hearers would assume that the fish who were cast away were the ritually unclean fish of Lev. 11:10-12 which could not be eaten. The Jewish leaders who made others stumble are thus declared unclean, and fit only to at best be cast back into the sea, the Gentile world.

13:49 *So shall it be in the end of the world. The angels shall come forth and separate the wicked from among the righteous*- This work is actually done by the Angels, but the Lord uses the same word for "sever" in Mt. 25:32 for how He personally will separate the sheep from the goats. We can fairly assume that His personal judgment of us will to some extent be delegated to the Angels. If indeed we each have guardian Angels in this life, then their involvement in our judgment would be appropriate. The word is only elsewhere used in the Gospels for how the orthodox Jews would sever the true Christians from their fellowship (Lk. 6:22), and the word is likewise used in the sense of religious fellowship in Gal. 2:12, where Peter "separated himself" from table fellowship with Gentile Christians when the Jewish brethren were present. And this was how the word was used within the Judaism of the time- what we might call 'to disfellowship' in a religious sense. The sum picture of these usages is surely that we are *not* to operate any fellowship policy which pretends to sever the clean from the unclean- because this is not for us to do, and whenever it was practiced (by the Jews

and by Peter)- they got it wrong. The faithful were the ones wrongly separated from.

13:50 *And shall cast them into the fiery furnace. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*- See on 13:42.

13:51 *Have you understood all these things?*- The word is used repeatedly in the context concerning how the Jewish world do not understand, because they do not want to understand, whilst the Lord considers that the disciples have ears to hear and have indeed understood (Mt. 13:13,14,15,19,23). But the Lord wanted to be sure; He wanted to get the disciples to consider the question. *He* thought they understood, but He wanted *them*to know that they understand; He wanted them to share His view of them. Just as in Romans 6, Paul wants his readers to "consider" themselves as "in Christ" just as God sees them.

They said to him: Yes- AV "Yes, Lord". A little phrase we find a significant seven times on the lips of those who encountered Jesus and to whom He asked questions regarding their belief in and commitment to Him (Mt. 9:28; 15:27 Gk.; Mk. 7:28; Jn. 11:27; 21:15,16). I wonder whether it was the early equivalent of the later questioning of a baptismal candidate as to whether they believe, to which they effectively answer "Yes, Lord". In this case, the question to the candidate is ultimately asked by the Lord Himself, albeit through the medium of the baptizer: 'Do you understand and believe in Me?'.

13:52- see on 9:9.
And he said to them: Therefore every scribe- All of the other occurrences of the word in the Gospels refer to the Jewish scribes who spiritually lorded it over the masses of secular Jewish people. The Lord is inviting the disciples, who were largely secular men and women, to believe that if they did indeed 'understand' the things which the scribes did not- then *they* were the new scribes, the new religious leaders and interpreters of the Law, in the new Israel which the Lord was creating based around Him rather than Moses. The force of "*every* scribe" would be to assure the disciples that every single one of them was included in this new vision of leadership.

Who has been made a disciple of the kingdom of heaven- The Greek *matheteuo* specifically means 'to disciple', and thereby the Lord is making clear the connection He sees between being a scribe (a teacher) and being a disciple (learner). Perhaps 'Matthew' saw the play on his own name. We cannot simply learn of Him; the nature of the understanding we receive is such that we must share it with others by teaching. The Lord uses the same word in telling the disciples to go out and make disciples (Mt. 28:19). We are to seek to make men learners, not give them a set of theological truth which they are to grip on to in an unthinking manner. We are to lead them to the feet of Jesus and to a position wherein they accept *Him*as their teacher. Distributing New Testaments and persuading people to accept the message seems to me a classic way in which we can do this in our generation. And we wonder whether Matthew, *Matthaios*, specifically records this saying of the Lord which none of the other Gospel writers do exactly because he perceived the connection between his own name and the concept of discipleship. For the words are related. Remember that his Jewish name was Levi (Mk. 2:14), but Matthew seems to call himself 'Matthew', as if after his conversion, his very name and public image before men was now to be that of 'disciple'. Discipleship was a major concept for him.

Instruction in the things of the Kingdom in the context of Matthew 13 surely means to be instructed through correctly understanding the parables of the Kingdom which the chapter is full of. Because the disciples understood them, they were thereby instructed in the things of the Kingdom. We note that the things of the Kingdom which were explained by the parables were not simply details of the future Kingdom of God to be established on earth. They taught about the Lord Jesus and His ways amongst men-right now. It's quite possible that "the things of the Kingdom" and "the [things of the] name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:12) are not two separate groups of theological teachings but rather are the two phrases put in parallel as referring to the same things. For the Lord Jesus was and is the essence of His Kingdom and the living exemplification of God's dominion / king-dom over men.

Is like a man who is a householder- The "householder", the head of the household, is a term used repeatedly by the Lord with reference to Himself personally; He considered the disciples to be the members of the new household over which He was head. Only a few verses earlier He has likened Himself to such a "householder", using the same word (Mt. 13:27; also in Mt. 10:25; 20:1,11; 21:33; Lk. 13:25; 14:21). Without any doubt, the Lord used this term about Himself. So He is saying that if they understood the essence of the parables of the Kingdom, they were not only as scribes, teachers, but like unto the head of the house Himself- the Lord Jesus personally. This is the specific teaching of Mt. 10:25: "It is enough for the disciple that he be[come] as his master". The Lord's teaching of others was not an end in itself; to know the mind of Christ and thus become as the teacher is a real possibility. The height of the calling and possibility is breath-taking. Correct 'understanding' of the Lord's teaching could not be given a higher importance and end result; although as I have tried to explain, 'understanding' is not the same as grasping academic theory. By its nature, it involves action. "A man, a householder" perhaps emphasizes the humanity of the Lord Jesus in order to demonstrate that rising up to His status is not at all out of the question for us who are human.

Who brings out- This was what the Lord was doing there and then in His teaching, bringing forth things of the new covenant and the old. And He is saying that if they are instructed in the things of the Kingdom, then they can do the same. The idea of bringing forth things out of a treasure must surely be connected with the Lord's usage of the very same words earlier that same day (13:1) in His teaching that "a good man out of the good *treasure* of his heart *brings forth* good things" (Mt. 12:35). The heart is also called the "treasure" in Mt. 6:21. In the context of 12:35, the Lord is referring to Himself as the "good man", who was doing good things- despite being accused of doing 'evil things' by the Jewish leaders. The ultimate 'treasure' of the Lord at this time was His heart, His mind. And thus the invitation to be "like" the Lord becomes even more intimate and meaningful. We are being invited here to have the mind of Christ. He has already explained that the learner [disciple] is to be the scribe [the teacher]. If we have the mind of Christ, then just as He brought forth things new and old from the treasure of that mind / heart, then we shall do likewise. Yet we note that the householder, the Lord Jesus, brings forth these things out of *His*treasure. And He has just spoken of how He finds His treasure- us- in the field of the world (Mt. 13:44 s.w.). The idea is that if the disciples understood, then He would bring forth out of *them* "things new and old" with which to impress the watching world. Again- the learners [disciples] were to be used by Him as scribes [teachers]. In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and

knowledge (Col. 2:3 s.w.), but He reveals these things to the world through His followers.

From his treasure- Every one who is taught the Gospel will naturally *bring forth out of his treasure* (his innermost heart- Lk. 6:45) things new and old- his new knowledge, plus his old things of the old covenant (Mt. 13:52 cp. Song 7:13). The Lord said that a scribe (one who knows well the Old Testament scriptures) who also knows the Gospel of the Kingdom is like a man who brings out of "his treasure" things new and old (Mt. 13:52). But Jesus had just defined the "treasure" as the Gospel of the Kingdom (Mt. 13:44). If we make that 'treasure' *our* personal treasure, the most valuable thing in our whole being, then out of the basic Gospel that is in our hearts we will bring forth things "new and old". Our treasure is where our heart is (Mt. 6:21). Yet the treasure is the basic Gospel, i.e., that Gospel lodged in our deepest hearts. The old things of basic certainties; and the new things relating to our increasing appreciation of what they really mean, these will come out of us in our lives and feeling and being.

Things new and old- The Lord's previous use of these terms in Mt. 9:17 was in the context of the things of the old and new covenants. Matthew's Gospel was clearly aimed at Jews, and his point in recording this was surely to assure them that not everything from the "old" way had been rejected.

13:53 *And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed from there*- This seems to serve as the end point of the longest day recorded in the Lord's ministry apart from the crucifixion (see on 13:1). The idea is that when He had finished the teaching, He departed. We meet the same idea and Greek word for "finished" in Mt. 11:1 (also Mt. 19:1; 26:1- "When He had finished [s.w.] commanding His twelve disciples, He departed". We get the impression that He was teaching according to a program; when He had finished delivering what He intended, it was time to go. And He went. This impression is given several times in His ministry. The question is whether God directly revealed this to Him, or whether He Himself on His initiative designed a program of teaching and ensured that He kept to it. My sense is the latter, which explains the way that earlier in this chapter He appears to take the decision to change from one teaching program to another.

13:54 *And coming into his hometown he taught them in*- The fact Jesus had a *patria* is an eloquent essay in His humanity. His physical origins were earthly; He didn't literally come down from Heaven, having been a pre-existent being there.

Their synagogue- The Mosaic feasts are described in the OT as "feasts of the Lord", but in John as "the feast of the Jews". We have the same idea here in the reference to the synagogues as *theirs*. The Jews had hijacked *God's* religion and turned it into their own, just as "the table *of the Lord*" has been turned effectively into 'our table' by so many who profess to be mere guests at that table. Matthew repeatedly speaks of*their* synagogue (Mt. 4:23; 9:35; 10:17; 12:9), and also of the 'synagogues of the hypocrites' (Mt. 6:2,5; 23:6,34)- not the synagogues of God.

So much so that they were astonished- The Gospels emphasize how people were astonished at the Lord's *doctrine / teaching* (the same word is used in Mt. 7:28; 19:25; 22:33; Lk. 2:48; 4:32) . There was something arrestingly different in the Lord's message, quite apart from the astonishing miracles He performed. We note how on hearing Paul's teaching, men were "astonished [s.w.] at the doctrine of the Lord" (Acts 13:12). Our preaching and teaching is the Lord Jesus as it were personally teaching

others; for we are Him to this world. And the response to our teaching is therefore comparable to the response made to the Lord's. The phrase "wisdom and mighty works" in Greek seems to directly connect the wisdom [the teaching] and the miracles [the works]. Mk. 6:2 is more explicit in the connection: "What wisdom is this... that such might works are worked?". The miracles were therefore directly connected to His teaching. Any 'doing good' we may do in society is to be likewise underpinned by our teaching of the Gospel, and is to be a consciously connected exemplification of it. As in the Lord's ministry, there is to be a clearly visible connection between the teaching of the Gospel, and the good works.

And said: From where has this man received this wisdom and these mighty works?- The idea may have been: 'From God, or from Satan?'. But see on :56 *whence*. They couldn't 'get it' that a man could come to such things through private study of God's word and personal relationship with God.

One of the most surpassing wonders of the Lord's character was that He could live for 30 years in a small town in Galilee, never ever committing sin, and never ever omitting an act of righteousness... and yet when He stood up and basically proclaimed Himself to be Messiah, the people were scandalized. They were shocked that this carpenter's son should think He was anything much more than them. Yet whenever we try to be a bit more righteous than our fellows, it's always noticed and held against us. Yet the Lord Jesus was both perfect, and also in favour with men. He came over as the ordinary guy, and yet He was perfect, and the light of this world. In this there is a matchless example for us. This wondrous feature of the Lord's achievement in His own character is reflected by the way His own brothers, who knew Him better than any, perceived Him to be just an ordinary person. When He started implying that He was the Son of God, they thought He'd gone crazy. I wish to labour the point- that to my mind, one of the most artless and surpassing things about the Lord was that He lived a sinless life for 30 years, and yet when He began His ministry those He lived with were shocked that He could ever be the Messiah. He was "in favour" with men (Lk. 2:52), not despised and resented as many righteous men have been. He was the carpenter, a good guy- but not Son of God. Somehow He showed utter perfection in a manner which didn't distance ordinary people from Him. There was no 'other-worldliness' to Him which we so often project to those we live with. We seem to find it hard to live a good life without appearing somehow distasteful to those around us. In fact the villagers were scandalized [*skandalizein*] that Jesus should even be a religious figure; they had never noticed His wisdom, and wondered where He had suddenly gotten it from (Mk. 6:2,3). This suppression of His specialness, His uniqueness, must have been most disarming and confusing to Mary. Her son appeared as an ordinary man; there was no halo around His head, no special signs. Just an ordinary guy. And this may well have eroded her earlier clear understanding that here in her arms was the Son of God. Until age 30, the Lord was "hidden" as an arrow in a quiver (Is. 49:2). So profound was this that Mary may have come to doubt whether after all He was really as special as she had thought, 30 years ago. 30 years is a long time. We also need to bear in mind that opposition to Jesus both from the other siblings and from His home town was significant. A fair case can be made that He actually moved away to Capernaum, perhaps before the start of His ministry. Mk. 2:1 RVmg. describes Him as being "at home" there; Mt. 4:13 NIV says He lived there; Mt. 9:1 calls it his "own city" (cp. Mk. 2:1). Don't forget that the Nazareth people tried to kill Jesus early on in His ministry- this was how strong the

opposition was. And Mary had to show herself for or against... and it seems she at least on the surface didn't exactly show herself for Him.

13:55 *Is this not the carpenter's son*- "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James? And they were offended at him" (Mk. 6:3). Mark records that they said "the carpenter" (Mk. 6:3). In full, therefore, they likely said that Jesus was "carpenter, son of a carpenter". Such was His humanity that He appeared to have just followed the profession of His supposed 'father' on earth. In essence, the same is happening to Trinitarians. They just can't hack that Jesus, Son of God, perfect human being... was truly human, with a human brother, mother and relatives. And so they have stumbled off into various wrong theories and theologies about Jesus to try to rationalize and spiritually legitimise their lack of faith in Him as a human person.

Jesus was poor. He was from Nazareth, a village of between 200 to 2,000 people, about 7 km. away from Sepphoris, a city of 40,000. And He would have gone through the process of socialization which anyone does who lives in a village under the shadow of the big town. He is described as a *tekton* or manual worker ("carpenter" in many translations). "A *tekton* was at the lower end of the peasant class, more marginalized than a peasant who owned a small piece of land. We should not think of a *tekton* as being a step up from a subsistence farmer; rather, a *tekton* belonged to a family that had lost its land". The problem was that the Jewish authorities insisted that the tithes were still paid, and these could amount to around 20% of agricultural income. But the Romans added their own heavy taxation system on top of this. Farmers had to pay a 1% land tax, plus a 12% crop tax on produce, as well as various other custom, toll and tribute taxes. For those who wished to be obedient to the Government as well as the Jewish law, there was a total taxation of around 35%. Those who could no longer pay their taxes to Rome lost their land, and a *tekton* was one in this class. It has been noted: "Some peasants who were forced from their lands turned to carpentry as a profession". A case has even been made that the term "Abba" ['daddy'] was specifically "from lower class Palestinian piety". If this is so, then we see yet another window into the poverty of the Lord Jesus, extending even to the kind of language He used to address His Father in prayer. So Jesus was Himself marginalized, the poorest of the poor [perhaps because of paying all the required taxes and not being dishonest], in one of the poorest corners of the Roman empire. The poor needn't think of Jesus as so Heavenly that He doesn't know their crises; the crises that come from not having food or money, the problems of drought, the worry about the weather, the rains not coming, the problem of broken equipment and worn out clothes and shoes, the distress that a little brother is sick, there's medicine in the nearby town, but no money for it...He *knows*. He really does. He can and does relate to all this. And it's why He is so especially watchful, according to His own teaching, of how we respond to those in such need. It means a lot to Him; because as a poor man, He must have known what it was to receive charity, to be given a few eggs by a neighbour, some milk from a kind woman down the street. When He taught "Blessed are the poor... the hungry", He immediately had a realness and credibility. For all the poor want to be better off. But He was so self-evidently content with who He was. The poor also want a bit more security for the future than just knowing that they have enough food for today. Yet Jesus could teach people to pray only for the food they needed for each day. And they were to forgive their debtors. This was radical stuff for people who lived a generally hand to mouth existence as day labourers and subsistence farmers. Only if Jesus was real and credible would people have flocked to hear Him and taken His teaching seriously. The fact He preached to the poor was a sign that He

was indeed Messiah (Lk. 7:22); the context of that passage suggests it was something totally unusual, that a religious leader should bother with the poor. Serious religion was some kind of hobby for those rich enough to be able to spare the time for it. But Jesus turned all this upside down; He, the poor man, preached to the poor, and showed them that God and salvation was truly for them more than anyone else.

Is not his mother called Mary- It has been suggested that the title "son of Mary" given to Him in Mk. 6:3 implied that they considered Him illegitimate- for men were usually called by their father's name. ""Jesus, son of Mary" has a pejorative sense… [there is a] Jewish principle: A man is illegitimate when he is called by his mother's name". The perception of the surrounding world may have influenced Joseph, and must have surely given rise to at least temptations of doubt within Mary as the years went by. See on Mk. 3:21. It has also been observed that it was unusual for the villagers to describe Jesus as "the son of Mary" (Mk. 6:3)- even if Joseph were dead, He would have been known as Jesus-ben-Joseph. It could well be that this was a reflection of their perception of how closely linked Jesus was to His mother. According to Talmudic writings like *Yebamot* 78b, Dt. 23:3 was interpreted as meaning that a fatherless man wasn't allowed to enter the temple or marry a true Israelite. The reference to Jesus as "son of Mary" (Mk. 6:3) rather than "son of Joseph" is, apparently, very unusual. It reflects the Lord's lack of social identity in first century Israel; He had no father's house to belong to. In passing, the jibe in Mt. 27:64 "the last deception shall be worse than the first" is likely a reference to Mary and Jesus claiming that He was the result of a virgin birth- this, as far as the Jews were concerned, was the "first deception".

And his brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? - The Greek *a-delphos* literally means 'connected to the [same] womb'. Whilst it is true to say that the term is used for close relatives as well as blood brothers, the idea is still present of very physical natural connection. If Mary had no other children (as the Catholics claim) or the Lord Jesus personally pre-existed (as most Protestants claim) or only passed through Mary's body as a pre-existent Angel (the Watchtower's version of pre-existence), then surely another Greek word would have been used apart from *adelphos*. This whole passage speaks eloquently and deeply of the Lord's humanity and cannot be easily explained away by Trinitarians or believers in a personal pre-existence of Christ.

This makes it apparent that Mary the mother of James and Joses is clearly enough Mary the mother of Jesus- for He had brothers of those names. She had followed Him to Cana, and she faithfully followed Him to the cross. But Rev. 14:4 alludes to all this by saying that all the redeemed follow the Lamb wherever He goes. Thus Mary and the ministering women, following even to the cross, become typical of us all. Not only following the Lord in popularity, but also in the real and radical demands of His cross.

13:56 *And his sisters, are they not all with us?*- The intention of using this particular phrase was probably to hint that the Lord's sisters were 'with' the local population in their cynicism about Jesus. *Pros* definitely can carry the idea of 'on our side', 'pro'.

From where then did this man get all these things?- As in :54 "Whence...". We note their sense that "wisdom" had to be imparted from outside a person. Their perception was that there were bodies of wisdom that could be passed on to disciples / learners. But they had never noted Jesus for studying in any particular rabbinic school, nor

following any sage. He was a secular, working man- not a religious freak. Therefore they found it hard to grasp from where He had got His understanding. The idea that a man could study God's word, have a personal relationship with God and learn direct from God was very strange to them. They considered that truth and wisdom had to be passed on from man to man, not discovered personally. And that attitude is alive and well today. 'What Bible School did you finish?' becomes more important than an individual's relationship with the Lord and direct learning from Him.

13:57 *And they were offended by him*- He was a stumbling block to Israel generally, and particularly to His own neighbours. When He taught terrible judgment for those who make others stumble, He must have spoken with acute awareness that He too would make others stumble. *En autos,* "in / by Him", grammatically means that He was the instrumentality of their stumbling. The point is that He did not do this intentionally, and the fault for the stumbling was with the stumbler. In some things we all make some stumble, James comments (James 3:2). When He declared Himself as Messiah, the people who had grown up with Him were scandalized (Mk. 6:3 Gk.). He was *so* human that even though He never sinned, the people who intimately knew Him for 30 years thought that He was truly one of them. In our making the word flesh, we tend to irritate people by our apparent righteousness, or turn them away from us by our hypocrisy. But the Lord truly made the word flesh, to the extent that the very dregs of society could relate to Him as one of them. There is a wonder in this that requires sustained meditation. In essence, the same is happening to Trinitarians. They just can't hack that Jesus, Son of God, perfect human being... was truly human, with a human brother, mother and relatives. And so they have stumbled off into various wrong theories and theologies about Jesus to try to rationalize and spiritually legitimise their lack of faith in Him as a human person. When He declared Himself as Messiah, the people who had grown up with Him were scandalized (Mk. 6:3 Gk.). He was *so* human that even though He never sinned, the people who intimately knew Him for 30 years thought that He was truly one of them. In our making the word flesh, we tend to irritate people by our apparent righteousness, or turn them away from us by our hypocrisy. But the Lord truly made the word flesh, to the extent that the very dregs of society could relate to Him as one of them. There is a wonder in this that requires sustained meditation. If He indeed was God, a Divine comet which hit this world for 33 years and sped off again, then the depth of His humanity was nothing less than a cruel deception.

But Jesus said to them: A prophet is not without honour- We need to ask *why* this is so true. In the first century Palestinian world, a person wasn't defined so much by 'who they were' as by 'whom they belonged to and where they originated from'. Hence their problem with seeing that the Lord had access to wisdom and power which they did not have as a group. He didn't get that from them- and this confused them and their lack of understanding it turned to anger with Him. He had become different to them, therefore He was not of them- so they reasoned. And yet He *was* of them- the record stresses that they were His natural *patris*("country") and *oikos* ("family"). This is the same problem as Trinitarians have- they can't see that the Lord could have what He had, and yet be one of us, of our human nature. And perhaps that partly explains their frequently observed anger with non-Trinitarian Christians. This proverb is quoted again in Jn. 4:44 but in a different sense. The Lord is recorded as leaving Judea and going to Galilee exactly because a prophet has no honour in "His own country". Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, not in Galilee. It could be that He went to Galilee from Judea because the "country" He had in mind here in quoting this proverb was Bethlehem,

rather than Nazareth. And yet in Mt. 13:57 He uses this proverb about Nazareth. Perhaps this explains His deep amazement at His rejection now in Nazareth- see on :58.

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

13:58 *And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief*- He could not do a mighty work in Nazareth because of their unbelief- as if He would have done a mighty miracle greater than the few healings He did perform there, but that possibility was discounted by their lack of faith (Mk. 6:5,6). Although the Lord at times healed people who had no faith (e.g. the blind man who didn't even know who the Son of God was), yet it seems that the Lord in this context wanted to see faith before healing people. Thus we see His sensitivity in operating in a different way with different people. Sometimes He does things for people *in order that* they might come to faith; in other contexts, He will only do things for people if they first have faith. It would seem therefore that He expected faith from His family and neighbours, seeing that they knew Him. Mk. 6:6 adds the comment that the Lord was "amazed" at their unbelief- the only time we hear of Him being 'amazed'. Yet given His penetrating psychological insight into people, surely He could have guessed at the response in Nazareth? His amazement would therefore seem to be a reflection of His supreme *hopefulness* for people- a characteristic which makes the Lord so altogether lovely and such a powerful example to us.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 14

14:1 *At that time Herod the tetrarch*- Literally, 'one of a fourth'; a reference to how after the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC, the kingdom was divided amongst four others.

Heard the report concerning Jesus- A play on words: *akouo... akoe*. The Lord has recently used the same word play in saying that unbelievers "By hearing shall hear [same two Greek words] and shall not understand" (Mt. 13:14). The connection may be to demonstrate that pagan Herod was no better than the unbelieving Jewish religious leaders. Even in the Old Testament, unbelieving Israel are often described in terms of the Gentile world. We can also note that the Gospels were designed for memorization, and such word plays are common in order to assist committing them to memory. The Gospels likewise should be the lifeblood of all serious Christian living and thinking in this age of electronic memory.

14:2 *And said to his servants: This is John the Baptist!*- The people thought that Jesus was John the Baptist resurrected (Mk. 6:14). Perhaps this was because they looked somehow similar, as cousins?

He has risen from the dead- The idea of bodily resurrection was around in the first century, but very often in the sense of a dead person not really dying but returning *redivivus* in another form. This was widely believed about Nero- and there are allusions to the legend of Nero *redivivus* in Revelation (they are deconstructed there

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

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

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

And put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife- Josephus claims that she was in fact married to another relative, not Philip, before she married Herod (*Antiquities* 18:136). We can simply decide to trust the Biblical record over Josephus. Or it could be that Josephus refers to a previous relationship she had. See on 14:10 for another conflict with Josephus.

14:4 *For John had said to him: It is not lawful for you to have her*- The laws of Lev. 18:16; 20:21 were applicable to Jews; which opens the wider question as to whether we ought to be drawing the attention of the world to their disobedience to Biblical principles, even though they do not claim any faith in the Bible. Criticizing others' ways of living leads to anger if the point isn't accepted; and we have a classic case of it here. The Herods were from Idumea, but although they weren't ethnic Jews,

they claimed to be religious Jews. So it could be that John's attitude was that if someone considered themselves as being under God's law, then they should be obedient to it and were therefore culpable before Him for disobedience to it. In this case, we do not actually have here any reason to think that a Christian's duty is to lobby the unbelieving world leaders to be obedient to God's law.

14:5 *And though he wanted to put him to death*- The same Greek words used about Herod wanting to kill Jesus in Lk. 13:31.

He feared the people- Another similarity with the plans of the Jewish leadership to kill Jesus, and being frustrated by "the crowd" because they counted him as a prophet (the very same words are used in Mt. 21:46); see on 14:3 *laid hold on*. These similarities between the deaths of John and Jesus draw a parallel between the despised Gentile Herod (regarding John and the Jewish leadership (regarding Jesus). Yet again, highly religious, legalistic people who have rejected the spirit of Jesus are equated with the very worst of the Gentiles.

Because they held him to be a prophet- As made explicit in chapters 12 and 13, the crowds did not accept the essential message of John- but they fiercely defended him as a prophet, speaking God's word. Acceptance of an inspired word is one thing, but to grasp the essence of the Lord Jesus is quite another.

14:6 *But at Herod's birthday party, the daughter of Herodias danced before all and pleased Herod*-

A manipulative woman arranging the death of a prophet through a weak willed ruler recalls Jezebel in 1 Kings 21; and she was a protagonist of Elijah, upon whom John the Baptist was clearly modeled.

14:7 *Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatever she should ask*- This continues a theme we find in the book of Daniel- powerful rulers making a rash oath and feeling forced to carry it out because of shame and the pressure of courtiers. The contrast with God, the ultimate ruler, is not that He is not so rash and not manipulated by His subjects. Rather the contrast is surely that Yahweh *does* change, He has no fear of shame or being shamed; such is His grace that when He sees a repentant Nineveh, He *does* change His original intention. The fear of shame and pressure from the eyes of others is what leads so many leaders into behaviour and positions which are against their better judgment. There is no shame in change. Indeed, change is part of real spirituality.

Mk. 6:23 adds "Up to half my kingdom". This is alluding to the king's promise to Esther in Esther 5:23, but it seems an allusion with no context or specific meaning, for Herodias was not at all Esther.

14:8 *And she, being encouraged by her mother, said: Give me here*- The emphasis on "here" is strange. She wanted the head brought in before everyone. This rather strongly contradicts Josephus' claim that John was beheaded in the Machaerus fortress, a long way from Herod's court.

The head of John the Baptist on a platter- The feast would have been full of plates with various dishes. The idea was that the head would be offered for eating. The implication is that the head would've been brought immediately, which suggests that John was imprisoned nearby. This again rules out Josephus' claim that John was beheaded in the Machaerus fortress, far from Herod's palace in Tiberias. The offering of a head on a platter is full of allusion to pagan ritual. Herod, as one who claimed to be an observant Jew, was now forced to choose- between being a serious Jew, following Divine principle, or a pagan. He was forced to decide- and chose wrongly. He had earlier wanted to kill John, and now his evil thought was being brought to action, in a powerful outworking of the Lord's principle that the thought is indeed counted as the

action. We ask, naturally, why it all had to be as it was. John would've carefully reflected upon the life of Elijah, and John would've seen the parallel between Jezebel and the manipulative women behind his own death- and taken comfort from that in his last moments: that he was in fact the Elijah prophet.

14:9 *And the king was grieved*- And yet we learnt in :5 that Herod had wanted to kill John because John had criticized Herod's lifestyle. We may feel flushes of anger against a person, but if it were to come to actually carrying out what we imagine- we would likely regret it.

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

14:10 *He sent word and had John beheaded in the prison*- The implication is that the court party was held close to the prison. This would have been most unlikely if Josephus is correct in claiming that John was imprisoned and beheaded in the fortress of Machaerus. Herod's court was in Tiberias. See on 14:3. The implication of the language is that Herod took full responsibility for this- as if he personally beheaded John. And he realized this later in his conscience: "John whom I beheaded… John have I beheaded" (Mk. 6:16; Lk. 9:9).

14:11 *And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother*- The Greek for "brought" is used only four times in Matthew, twice in this verse, and three times in this chapter. The Lord uses the word of how He wished the loaves and fishes to be "brought" to Him for His Messianic banquet (Mt. 14:18). It may be that Herod's banquet is being set up in contrast to that of the Lord Jesus described later in the chapter.

14:12 *And his disciples came and took away the corpse and buried him*- The phrase is only used elsewhere about Joseph taking up the body of the Lord Jesus after His death (Jn. 19:31,38). And doing the same with it- burying it. He was likely one of the followers of John the Baptist, and his fine action here was surely motivated by the memory of those brave brethren who 'took up the body' of John. The example of devotion shown by believers can inspire later believers in different contexts. The power of example is far greater than we can ever imagine.

And they went and told Jesus- The same Greek words are found in Jn. 20:18. Here, after the 'taking up of the body' of the Lord Jesus and 'burying' it, just as had been done to John's corpse, Mary "went and told" the disciples. The disciples "went and told Jesus" of John's death; now, Mary goes to tell the disciples of the Lord's resurrection. The similarity of language and yet the inversion of the ideas is all surely intentional. The intention is to show that the tragedy of John's death was vindicated and gloriously reversed in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

14:13 *Now when Jesus heard this*- Therefore the feeding of the five thousand came some time before the parables of chapter 13, and is not in chronological sequence; it is part of the flashback to John's death. Perhaps the intention is to present the Lord's banquet as the antithesis of Herod's banquet which led to John's execution. We see here yet another insight into the Lord's humanity. Knowledge of John's death wasn't beamed into the Lord's mind; He didn't have the total omniscience of God. For He was not God Himself, but the human Son of God. He had to be informed of some things

before He knew them. And He reacts in a very human way- He wants to go away on His own with His closest friends to reflect upon the death of a relative and co-worker. But again, in a typically human way, His plan to have time out relatively alone was thwarted- despite His intention to get away alone, or at least just with His close friends, the crowds heard He had been spotted heading out to an uninhabited area, and followed Him there by foot.

He withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place to be alone- Lk. 9:10 says that it was near to Bethsaida. This indicates the literal accuracy of the Gospels, because Bethsaida was just outside the boundary of Herod's jurisdiction, and it would be understandable that after his execution of John, the disciples and Jesus might want to be outside of his territory.

But when the crowds heard, they followed him on foot from the cities- This is added to demonstrate their commitment to hearing Him teach. Why were they so keen to make such effort to get to Him? Mt. 13:54-58 records how the Lord taught in the synagogue but didn't get a good response, nor did He do many miracles there because of their unbelief. But now He leaves, and the people flock after Him. This may be understandable just in terms of basic psychology- when a wonderful offer is not taken up but appears to be receding, people then desperately grab onto it. Perhaps that's why the Lord seems well disposed to these people- healing and feeding them (see on :22). But we also get the impression that the Lord was not constantly available for teaching and healing. I have previously remarked that the intensity of some of the days which the Gospels record was surely not repeated every day of His ministry. It seems He spent most of His time training the twelve and only occasionally made public appearances to teach and heal.

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

implications of real basics. Do we believe Jesus existed and said those words? Yes. Do we believe the Biblical record is true and inspired? Yes. Well, this Jesus who made these promises and statements about eternal life was "sealed" / validated by God. Do we believe this? Yes. So, what He said is utterly true.

14:14 *When he went ashore he saw a great crowd*- We could picture Him hiding away in some cave or bush, noticing the crowds combing the area, having spotted the abandoned boat. And then battling with a desire to retreat further into the bush away from them, or to send them away- but instead having compassion on them and going out to meet them with teaching and healing. But that is unlikely the right reading, because Mk. 6:33 notes that some of the people who ran around the lake got to the destination before they did. The 'coming forth' would therefore have been coming forth from the boat to land. That moment is perhaps noted because the obvious inclination would have been to sail further and find a better resting place, far from this irritating crowd.

And he had compassion on them and healed their sick- Mark adds the reason- "because they were as sheep having no shepherd" (Mk. 6:34). His pity was therefore for their spiritual state rather than their material need. This being 'moved with compassion' is a major characteristic of the Lord which the Gospel writers noticed (s.w. Mt. 9:36; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34 in Matthew alone- see too Lk. 7:13; 10:33; 15:20). The Greek speaks of a literal movement within the ribcage, as if the Lord's actual body was moved by the compassion He felt. The Lord Jesus is the same yesterday, today and at the day of judgment- and forever. This same basic pity is part of Him, as it is of His Father- and it must be with us too. Several times when we read of the Lord showing such pity, it is in the context of others *not* doing so. In this instance, the disciples don't want to feed the hungry people; and likewise in Mt. 15:32. In Mt. 18:27 the compassion of the Lord to His indebted servant was not reciprocated by that servant; the Samaritan of the parable had compassion when the priest and Levite did not (Lk. 10:33); the Father had compassion on the prodigal son when the older brother did not (Lk. 15:20). Such compassion is therefore an act of the will, rather than a streak some are born with. We can shut up our "bowels of compassion" against human need (1 Jn. 3:17), we have to "put on… bowels of mercies" (Col. 3:12).

14:15 *And when evening had come, the disciples came to him, saying*- The implication is that they weren't standing by Him, but rather watching cynically from a distance. Which explains their harsh attitude to the crowds. After all, they too had been followers of John the Baptist, they too wanted to get away on their own to mourn the news of His death. They probably felt the Lord should've sent away the multitudes from the start. It's not hard to sense that the record paints the disciples negatively at this time. But who wrote this record? The Gospels are transcripts of how the disciples preached the Gospel. Despite the process of inspiration, the disciples in their recounting of the Gospel repeatedly mentioned their own weakness, and thereby would've come over as all the more credible to their audience. And in this we see a fine pattern for our own witness.

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

Send the crowds away- Twice they wanted to turn away those who wished to come to Jesus, and whom He wished to accept (Mt. 14:15; 15:23). As with the two miracles of bread, the second incident was giving them the opportunity to learn the lesson from the first incident- and yet they failed. Likewise they "forbad" John's disciples just as they wrongly "forbad" the little children to come to Him (Lk. 9:50).

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

14:16 *But Jesus said to them: They need not go away*- See on :15 *the time is now past*. They ask the Lord to send the multitude away (Mk. 6:36), whereas Jesus later taught by word and example, that whoever came to Him He would not turn away (Jn. 6:37). Mark and Matthew present themselves, the disciples, as seriously out of step with their Lord at this time. And surely the communities which they were establishing were likewise tempted to 'send away' or deny fellowship to those whom the Lord would have them fellowship.

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

The Lord told the disciples to feed the crowd, when they had nothing to give them (Mk. 6:37). He was actually quoting from 2 Kings 4:42, where the man of God told his servant to do the same. He gave what bread he had to the people, and miraculously it fed them. The disciples don't seem to have seen the point; otherwise, they would have realized that if they went ahead in faith, another such miracle would likely be wrought.

But it seems that God almost over-ruled them to make the response of the faithless servant of 2 Kings 4:43: "Shall we... give them to eat?" (Mk. 6:37). They were almost 'made' to do this to make them later see the similarity with the 2 Kings 4 incident. If they had been more spiritually aware at the time, the Lord's quotation would have been a fillip for their faith.

When the Lord calmly bid them feed the huge crowd with just a few loaves ("How many loaves have ye? Go and see" (Mk. 6:38)), we are left to imagine those men, almost paralysed and certainly gobsmacked by the extent of the demand, awkwardly going away to count their few loaves. He could be seen as a demanding Lord. The Lord Jesus said many "hard sayings" which dissuaded people from seriously following Him. He kept speaking about a condemned criminal's last walk to his cross, and telling people they had to do this. He told them, amidst wondrous stories of flowers and birds, to rip out their eyes, cut off their limbs- and if they didn't, He didn't think they were serious and would put a stone round their neck and hurl them into the sea (Mk. 9:42-48). He healed a leper, and then spoke sternly to Him (Mk. 1:43 AV mg.).

It makes a good exercise to re-read the Gospels looking out for cases of where the Lord urged the disciples to not look at Him as somehow separate from themselves, an automatic Saviour from sin and problems. Thus when it was apparent that the huge, hungry crowd needed feeding, the Lord asked the disciples where "*we*" could get food from to feed them (Jn. 6:5). In all the accounts of the miraculous feedings, we see the disciples assuming that Jesus would solve the situation- and they appear even irritated and offended when He implies that this is *our* joint problem, and *they* must tackle this seemingly impossible task with*their* faith. The mentality of the disciples at that time is that of so many Trinitarians- who assume that 'Jesus is the answer' in such a form that they are exempt from seeing His humanity as a challenge for them to live likewise.

The disciples, in John's record, complain: "From whence shall *we* find bread in the wilderness?". The record of the disciples' murmuring in John 6 reflects how influenced they were by the Jews around them. "The Jews then murmured at him", and the Lord rebukes them: "Murmur not among yourselves". But then we read of how "Jesus knew in himself that his disciples were murmuring" (Jn. 6:40,43,61). And again, remember that these gospel records were written by the repentant disciples, and they were using the example of their own weakness in order to appeal to others. The disciples appeared to share Judaism's idea that Moses never sinned. When the Lord challenges them to find food for the crowd in the desert, they quote Moses' hasty words: "Whence shall I have flesh to give unto all this people?"; and note Moses almost mocks God by saying that all the fish of the sea wouldn't be enough to feed the people (Num. 11:13,22). Faced with the same need for bread and fish, the disciples justified their lack of faith by quoting Moses, apparently unwilling to accept that Moses' words at that time were not of faith. The way everything worked out, they doubtless learnt that Moses, like them, was of imperfect faith and spirituality.

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

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

14:18 *And he said: Bring them here to me*- The word "here" would appear to be redundant in terms of the meaning if the Lord simply meant 'OK, give them to Me'. He wanted to focus the disciples upon the need for His personal presence and involvement with whatever we are willing to give Him. The loaves and fishes had to be brought *here*, to Him, and the miracle would proceed only once they were in His hands.

14:19 *And he commanded the crowds to sit down on the grass; and he took the five loaves and the two fishes and*- The zoom of Matthew's camera is now very close up. We are invited to play 'Bible television' with the language and re-live it all again.

Looking up to Heaven- This detail not only suggests the close fellowship enjoyed between the Father and Son, to the extent that the Lord could pray with open eyes looking up to Heaven, knowing there was no barrier between Him and God. But we also as it were have the camera zoomed in upon the Lord, yet another indication that we have in the Gospels an eye witness account. Likewise the Lord's way of looking up was noticed in Lk. 19:5; 21:1.

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

Time and again, it becomes apparent that the Lord especially designed incidents in His

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

14:20 *And they all ate*- See the special section about the openness of Jesus.

And were filled- Perhaps alluding to Dt. 8:10, "you shall eat and be full".

And they collected what was left over- Eph. 1:8 talks of how God has lavished or abounded His grace upon us. The same word is used about the Lord not only made miraculous loaves and fishes, but there was so much that abounded ("what was left") that it filled twelve baskets. Why did the Lord do that, and why make the disciples pick up all those crumbs? Surely to give them an object lesson in how God delights in abounding to us. He didn't just give the people food; He abounded to them. The record of each of the feeding miracles, in each of the Gospels, uses this word translated "remained" in commenting about the fragments that were left over- although the real meaning is 'to abound'. Each of the Gospel writers was therefore deeply impressed by the fact that the Lord not only provided food- but such an abundance. All this sets the background for Paul's use of the very same word to describe how God's grace has "abounded" to us in Christ (Rom. 3:7; 5:15; Eph. 1:8).

Of the broken pieces- Why this feature in both the feeding miracles? In Mt. 16:9,10, the Lord asks the disciples to recall how many baskets they took up after each miracle- in order to help them to show faith in another time of need. The details of the Lord's past actions with us need to be remembered- because they are designed to fortify us in future tests of faith. We sense that all along, the Lord was working with the disciples (just as He does with us) according to a specific program, tailor made for them, designed to lead them from one spiritual level to another whilst re-enforcing the points learnt.

Twelve baskets- A different word to that used in the feeding of the 4000 in Mt. 15:37. This here in 14:20 is the smaller basket, used for carrying ritually clean food when in Gentile areas.

14:21 *And they that ate, besides women and children, were about five thousand men*- It is tempting to try to work out some significance in the figures here and in the feeding of the 4000 recorded in Mt. 15. Five loaves and two fishes fed 5000 with 12 baskets taken up; seven loaves and a few fishes fed 4000 with seven baskets taken up. With the food distributed each time by 12 disciples. One observation would be that the total number of loaves used was 12, which was the number of loaves required for the showbread (Lev. 24:5). The loaves in totality represent the Lord Jesus, the bread of God's presence in Israel, offered to all and sundry- not just to the priests. The Lord had made the same point in reminding Israel that David and his men had eaten the showbread- the things considered exclusively for the religious elite were now open to all, women and kids and Gentiles included. The very same Greek phrase "about five thousand men" occurs in Acts 4:4, to describe the total number of converts made by the disciples in the very early days of the church. Surely there must be some connection here. As the disciples moved amongst the crowds, each of them repeatedly breaking the bread of Christ to the multitudes, they were being trained towards the day when they would move amongst other multitudes preaching Christ and baptizing people into Him. It would seem that there were two major incidents when the disciples preached and performed mass baptisms; the 3000 in Acts 2:41, and then either 2000 or 5000 (depending how one reads the Greek) in Acts 4:4. These days of mass baptisms were probably never repeated in the history of the early church; and so the two feeding

miracles were to prepare them for those two later incidents. In our yearning to attach meaning to event, we too can be encouraged that what we currently cannot understand is likely preparation for some potential future calling for us at some point in the future.

Beside women and children- AV. The Greek for "beside" can carry the sense of being separate from physically, as if the men were seated in a slightly different place to the women and children- which is just how a Middle Eastern feeding scheme would be run to this day.

14:22 *Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side of the sea, while he dismissed the crowds*- Jn. 6:15 says that the crowds wanted to "take him by force to make Him a king". Yet these were the same folk, it seems, who had showed little real faith in Him previously- see on :13 *on foot*. They were so fickle. They evidently saw the connection between the feeding miracle and Him being Messiah, but their understanding of Messiah was that He was to be a King offering immediate salvation. Ecclesiastes Rabbah 1:9 claimed that "...as the former redeemer caused manna to descend... so will the latter redeemer cause manna to descend". We get the impression that the Lord felt under a sense of great urgency- He "constrained" the disciples to get into the boat and leave, whilst He sent the crowd away. Perhaps He felt that the crowd intended to make Him King and the disciples the leaders of their new *junta*, but by sending the disciples away, He was greatly reducing the chances of them doing this. However the other reason was simply that the disciples themselves were looking for an immediate kingdom and glory, and He knew the temptation would be too great for them. He likewise works with us so often to deliver us from temptation He knows is too great for us.

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

However, Jn. 6:15-17 implies they got tired of waiting for the Lord Jesus to return from

prayer, and so they pushed off home to Capernaum, leaving Him alone. Yet by grace He came after them on the lake, to their salvation.

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

He went up the mountain by himself to pray- The term *kata idios* ["by himself"] is used about 16 times in the Gospels, covering around 12 different occasions. The need to be alone with the Lord or with the Father is therefore a significant theme. The Lord had departed to the deserted place because of this need to be *kata idios* (:13), but His plans were thwarted by the unexpected tenacity of the crowd in following Him there. In this we see another picture of His humanity. But ultimately, God granted Him the need He felt to be *kata idios*, to be alone with God. Perhaps one reason He so insistently sent both the crowd and the disciples away was because He knew He simply had to be alone with God. And there can be times like this for us too. No matter how stupid we might appear in secular life, there can be a time when you just have to go and sit in the toilet for 5 minutes in your lunch break and pray. The Lord uses the term in speaking of how we are each given something very personal which we are to use in His service- *kata idios*, 'alone by ourselves', or as in AV "according to his several ability" (Mt. 25:15). Each sheep is called by the Lord *kata idios*, AV "by name" (Jn. 10:3). And therefore the judgment of each believer will be *kata idios*, AV "according to his own labour" (1 Cor. 3:8). There is a very wide range of translations of this phrase. But the idea is that we were each individually called by the Lord and given different callings, and our judgment will be according to this. This is not to say that there is anything other than one basic faith, Gospel, Hope, Lord etc. But in many denominations and fellowships the idea is pushed that each believer must adopt an identical, detailed statement of understanding and calling. Yet in practice, the frames of our calling and the Lord's hopes for our responses vary significantly between individuals.

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

When evening came, he was there alone- This is a pointed repetition of the information that the Lord was there *kata idios*- alone apart, by Himself. His aloneness with God is being brought to our attention. Prayer in one sense has to be a lonely experience. This is all surely why the Lord Himself is frequently pictured by the Gospel writers as making an effort to be alone in prayer to the Father (Mk. 1:35; 3:13; 9:2; Mt. 14:13,23; 17:1; Lk. 6:12; 9:28; 22:39,41). This is all some emphasis. Be it rising in the early hours to go out and find a lonely place to pray, or withdrawing a stone's throw from the disciples in Gethsemane to pray… He sought to be alone. Jn. 6:15 emphasizes this repeated feature of the Lord's life: "He departed again into a mountain himself alone". The fact He often ["again"] retreated alone like this is emphasized by three words which are effectively saying the same thing- departed, himself, alone. Much as

we should participate in communal prayers or in the prayers of our partner or our children, there simply has to be the time for serious personal prayer in our lives. And I have to drive the point home: *Are you doing this?* Putting it in other terms- are you alone *enough.* Incident after incident shows the Lord doing something alone, and then the disciples somehow being presented as doing the same. Take the way He departed "himself alone" when the crowd wanted to make Him king; and then soon afterwards we read that the crowd perceived that the disciples had likewise departed 'themselves alone' [same Greek phrase and construction, Jn. 6:15,22]. The point is that the world is presented as perceiving the disciples in the same terms and way as they did Jesus, even when, in this case, Jesus was not physically with them. And we too are to be "in Him" in our work of witness for Him.

14:24 *But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them*- People at that time had a strong association between the sea and the forces of evil and condemnation; beginning with the condemnation of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, the Bible itself speaks of condemnation as being swamped at sea by the waves. The Egyptians perished "in the midst of the sea" (Ex. 14:23,27; Ez. 29:3); Jonah drowned "in the midst of the sea" (Jonah 2:3) as does the fool of Proverbs (Prov. 23:34), as did Tyre and the Gentile nations (Ez. 26:12; 27:26,27,32; 28:8; Ps. 46:2) and Babylon (Jer. 51:63). The disciples doubtless felt condemned. For there were these 12 Old Testament references to condemnation ringing in their Jewish ears. Their cry for salvation was therefore not merely for physical deliverance, but a cry for deliverance out of condemnation. They were "tossed with waves"- the very term used for the torment of the rejected (Rev. 14:10; 20:10). The disciples had earlier seen people who were tormented [s.w. "tossed"] being delivered by the Lord- to pave the way for them personally crying out for that same deliverance (s.w. Mt. 8:6).

14:25 *And in the fourth watch of the night*- Between three and six a.m. This indicates how long they had been struggling. It is the same 'watch' of the night in which God used the sea to destroy the Egyptians and thus save His people (Ex. 14:20).

He came to them- The Greek strictly means that He departed, He left to walk over the sea to them, in the fourth watch of the night. Mk. 6:48 adds the detail that "He would have passed by them". This is often His style to this day- it's not that He plays hard to get, but He wants to elicit in us a sense of our desperation for Him. Likewise He often asked sick people what He could do for them, when it was obvious what they wanted. For the same reason on the road to Emmaus, He made as if He would have gone further- to elicit in those disciples an urgent desire for fellowship with Him. The same word translated "passed by them" had just been used by the disciples in saying that "the time is now *past*" and so the Lord should send the crowd away to feed themselves. The disciples likely realized that they were being corrected for their desire to turn away the crowds of people from the Lord; admittedly their motivation was poor, as the Lord seems to explain to them in John 6, but it was seriously wrong to turn them away. Mk. 6:48 says that "He saw them toiling in rowing" and then, later, He went to them. He didn't literally see them rowing; but in His sensitive mind, He imagined just how it would be for them, and so He went to them.

Walking upon the sea- The Greek *peripateo* means to walk *around* (from whence 'peripatetic'], and is used about our walk of life, career, habits etc. The impression is of the Lord walking around at ease upon the waves which were so frightening to the disciples. Walking on the sea, Jesus "would have passed by them" (Mk. 6:48). I don't suppose He *would* have done, because He was 'coming unto them', but this was how they perceived it – and thus the record stands written, from a human perspective.

14:26 *And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were disturbed, saying*- The word is specifically used in literature of troubled water (and in Jn. 5:4,7). The state of the water was as the state of their minds. Hence the power of the image of the Lord Jesus walking at ease upon that troubled water.

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

And they cried out for fear- These Greek words are only used together elsewhere in Rom. 8:15, where Paul says that we do not cry out in fear, but rather cry "Abba, Father". This would again present the disciples at this point as condemned and far from the right relationship with the Father and Son which they should've had. The point of the incident is that they were saved out of that, by grace.

14:27 *But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying: Be of good cheer*!- They had at least twice heard the Lord comfort others with those words before healing them (Mt. 9:2,22). According to their recollection of His words, so their comfort would have been. And that principle applies to us today.

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

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

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

How exactly was Peter motivated to walk on water? We want to know, because it's the motivation that we so urgently need. We read that the Lord "passed by". This is the very language used in the Old Testament concerning theophanies, i.e. those times when God 'passed by' before His people, accompanied by earthquake, rain, wind, fire etc. These ideas all recur here in the account of Jesus 'passing by' before the fearful disciples. In Mt. 14:27 the Lord tells them: "It is I". This was a reference to the "I am" of the Yahweh Name. Peter knew that it was Yahweh who walks upon the waves of the sea (Job 9:8), and so he asks that if Jesus is really "I am", God manifest in flesh, then He will bid Peter also walk on the water. It was Yahweh whose way was *upon* the sea (Ps. 77:19 Heb.; Ps. 29:3). Indeed, the whole incident on the lake is almost prophesied in Ps. 107. The people are hungry in desolate places (:4,5), they are filled by Yahweh with good things, as the Lord Jesus fed the multitude (:9); some go down to the sea in ships (:23); a storm arises, sent from God (:25); they are troubled and cry out (:27,28); and then Yahweh delivers them, bringing them to their desired haven (:28-30). Peter, I think, perceived all this. He saw that this Man from Nazareth was indeed manifesting Yahweh, and he is asking that he too will be a part of God's manifestation; he perceived that what was true of Jesus really could be true for us. If Jesus, manifesting Yahweh, walked upon the sea, then so could Peter. When Peter asks Jesus to "bid me come unto thee", the Greek word translated "come" is also translated "to accompany". He wanted to walk with Jesus on the water. He wanted to do what Jesus was doing. This of itself explains how the fact Jesus did what God did [e.g. walk on waves] doesn't mean He is "very God of very gods"- for Peter realized that he too could have a part in that manifestation. If Jesus was a man of our nature and yet God manifest, then, Peter reasoned, I too can manifest the Father. And the same is true for us, today. The reality of God's manifestation in the human Jesus should inspire us too to leave our comfort zones and enter the adventure of living Godly- living like God- in this present world. Peter "came down" out of the ship to go walking on water (Mt. 14:29). He is described as "coming down" [s.w.] in Acts 10:21, where he came down from the roof top and said: "Behold I am he whom ye seek; what is the cause wherefore ye are come?". "I am he" uses the same two Greek words as in Mt. 14:27, when the Lord says "It is I". Three Greek words occurring together like this is surely not incidental. Peter recalls when he 'came down' out of the ship- and now, he really is Christ-manifest. He speaks as Jesus did; and further, "I am he whom ye seek" and "wherefore [are ye] come" are the very phrases of Jesus in Gethsemane. The record is showing us that consciously or subconsciously, Peter is Christ-manifest now. The words and person of Jesus have all had such impact upon him that now for him, "to live is Christ". To 'come down' and manifest Him is what life is all about; Peter's coming down out of the ship is a cameo of a life lived like this, time and again manifesting Him, overcoming the fear, the cowardice of our brethren, the distractions of the life and world which surrounds us…to walk out unto Him.

14:28 *And Peter answered, and said: Lord, if it is you*- I suggested on Mt. 14:22 that the Lord had hinted that He would come to them walking on the water. Jn. 6:17 comments that the disciples were in the boat in the sea "and Jesus was not come to them"- suggesting He had promised to do so and they should have been looking for Him, walking on the water to them. Perhaps Peter had grasped this, and therefore reasoned that what the Lord could do, all in Him could likewise potentially be empowered to do. Another angle on Peter's question is that He realized that only the Lord would ask such a thing of His followers. No ghost, satan, Angel or other imagined entity would actually invite a disciple of Jesus to do such a thing. To challenge us to the very limit of human faith is indeed the Lord's unique and distinguishing characteristic. Yet another slant on Peter's words is provided by the consideration that the three Greek words translated "If it is you" are always used elsewhere in the Gospels about whether Jesus is indeed the Christ ("tell us *if it is you* the Christ", Mt. 26:63; Lk. 23:37,39; Jn. 1:25; 10:24). The miraculous providing of manna had been sure evidence that Jesus was indeed Messiah, the Christ. But they still doubted. But on the other hand, Peter was willing to be persuaded again, and it is to his huge credit that he obeyed the Lord's invitation to get out of the boat and walk on the water. Mark's account of this incident omits all reference to Peter walking on the water (Mk. 6:45-51). Yet there is good reason to think that Mark is really Peter's gospel; in characteristic humility, he emphasizes his failures and downplays his achievements in his Gospel record. Hence this omission of any reference to Peter's bravery may indicate that this incident places Peter in a positive light; it was a tremendous achievement, and he humbly declines to mention it.

Command me- Peter's unswerving respect for his Lord's word is seen as he looked out of that sinking ship on Galilee, battling with his own humanity as he weighed up in his own mind whether to be spiritually ambitious enough to get down into that raging water. He only felt able to take such a leap of faith if he had Christ's word behind him. So he yelled out above the noise of the wind: "If it be thou, *bid me come* unto thee" (Mt. 14:28). In other words: 'With your word behind me, I'll have a go; without it, I won't'. How much spiritual ambition is there within us? Or do we huddle in the sides of the ship, or desperately expend our own strength to bring about our salvation, without even seeking the word of Christ? Peter's request to be bidden walk on the water was (typically) both full of faith and yet also tinged by an element of unspirituality. His words as recorded here ("If it is you, bid me come unto you on the water") appear strikingly similar to the LXX of 2 Kings 5:13, where a spiritually limited Naaman is rebuked for expecting to be asked to do something "demanding"- also connected with going into water!

To come to you- The same words are used in describing how Peter obediently 'came unto' Jesus on the water (:29). This phrase is used multiple times in the Gospels for people coming to Jesus. The crowd had 'come unto Jesus' (Jn. 6:5) and the disciples had clearly not been happy about that, and wished to send them away. The crisis on the lake was not so much the Lord's punishment of the disciples for that attitude, but rather His attempt to teach them a better attitude (see on 14:30 *sink*). Now Peter realizes the need to come to Jesus and the grace of His 'coming to' them on the lake. This is why he asks to 'come unto' Jesus, rather than simply to walk on water. Never again would He despise those who wished to come to Jesus; Peter was asking permission to do what the crowd had done, and which he had despised them for doing- namely, coming to Jesus. The Lord's discourse afterwards emphasized the need to 'come to Him' and how all who

were of God would come to Him and never be turned away (Jn. 6:35,37,44,45,65). Peter's desire to come to Him made Peter typical of all disciples. The same challenge, to leave the boat and walk on water, echoes down to us all. Peter as so many others had in a sense already 'come unto' Jesus but now he perceived that he was to come to Him again, going through a level of re-conversion.

By walking on the water- The Lord walked "on the sea" (:25) but Peter asks to walk "on the water". Different words are used. I would be open to suggestion as to the significance, if any, of this difference.

In the account of Peter walking on water, we have a cameo of what it means to walk out of our comfort zone. Peter asked the man on the water to invite him to walk on the water; for Peter knew that only Jesus would be that demanding. He's a demanding Lord for us too. Peter didn't have to get out of the boat. But He realized that following the Lord Jesus involves this stepping out of our comfort zone. For us, it may be making a radical donation of our money, our time, a donation that really hurts, that is significant, not a giving that is well within our comfort zone. Or it may be a radical forgiveness, a radical refusal to answer slander, to not fight back, to day after day after day live amidst provocation. This may be our walking out on the water. Picture Peter as he stood by the side of the boat, wind blowing his hair back and forth, rain driving into his forehead, his brethren muttering "You're absolutely *crazy* , there's no need for this…we're only going to have to save you ourselves". He must have felt so alone. There was no human encouragement. Probably his thoughts went back to the wife and kids he had left behind on the other side of the lake, in that humble home in that quaint fishing village. But his focus was upon one Man, the same Lord and Master whom we look out to from the sides of our ships. The sheer bravery of Peter's walking on water stands out. Was he afraid to walk on water? Of course he was. But he focused all his faith into the word of Jesus: "Come!". He overcame his fear to the point that he climbed over the sides of the boat. Picture him there, with one leg over the side and on the water, and the other still in the boat. He couldn't stay like that. He had to go only forward. The only thing that kept him back was fear. And it is basically *fear* which holds us within our comfort zones. Fear, fear, fear…that's all it is. To know 'truth' in its experiential sense should free us from fear; for fear is related to the unknown. God appeals to Israel: "Of whom has thou been afraid or feared, that thou hast lied?" (Is. 57:11). Fear leads to our abdicating from the responsibility of making choices; and this is why humanity has such a dearth of truly creative imagination, and why genuinely new ideas are so rare. But the true life in Christ is a life of repeatedly overcoming that fear, the fear which paralyzes, which holds you back. Let the widow woman of 1 Kings 17:13 be our heroine; she had totally nothing, just some flour; and she was hunting around in a parched land for two sticks with which to make a fire to bake it and eat her last meal, then to lie down in the dust of death. She must have been literally on her last legs. But then god through Elijah asked her to give Him even what terribly little she had. And Elijah encourages the frightened, wide-eyed woman: "Fear not!". And she went forward in faith and gave him her very last hope of life. Living at such an animal level would have made her very self-centred; but she stepped out of it in response to the Lord's challenge. Fear is, to my mind, the greatest single barrier to faith and true spirituality. It is fear alone which stops us from keeping commitments, from not entering into covenant relationship as deeply as we are bidden. This is why people shy away from covenant relationships, be they with the Father through baptism, or to another person through marriage or having children. Fear holds us back. We fear even ourselves, our own spiritual capacity, our standing before the Father. Our inner anxieties, our

unconscious inner conflicts as we stand with Peter on the edge of the boat, contemplating what walking on water concretely meant, often lead us to criticize others or to speak and act with a hypocritical bravado. Yet true faith asks us to risk. As a psychotherapist friend of mine once jotted to me: “We are asked to risk all we believe ourselves to be, we may find we're not what we thought ourselves to be, our constructs of the self will be pushed to the limit and we're afraid of what we may find of ourselves, that we may not be what we imagine ourselves to be in the construct upon which we have built our theories of the self. Obeying rules, staying within the construct, is much easier, much safer. We may have never tested ourselves in the real world. To launch off into the unknown, into a future that contains or may contain unknown risk, where our worst fears are realised, the greatest fear may be that we are failures... most of us, it would seem, don't have enough faith in there even being a God to risk even getting out of the boat let alone walking on the water”. Don’t underestimate the power of fear when it comes to walking on water. Nor let us fail to appreciate that the fearful are listed alongside the unrepentant whores and idolaters who shall remain outside the city of God (Rev. 21:8). Our thirst for love, our fear of death and spiritual failure before a perfect God, the fear of displeasing or misunderstanding the infinite God…these fears should all be taken away for the man or woman who is truly clothed with the imputed righteousness of Christ. Yet they have a way of persisting in our weakness of faith. And so there develops a conflict between our true conscience and the false suggestions of our faithless fears. All this can lead to neurotic behaviour and a repression of conscience. The only way out of this is to boldly step forward as Peter did, albeit bricking ourselves as we do so.

14:29 *And he said, Come*- The Lord's appeal to all men to 'come to Him' invites us to see ourselves as Peter, the prototype for all who would 'come unto Jesus'. Peter was asking to do as the Lord was doing- walking on water. Our coming to the Lord is therefore not merely an intellectual assent to a set of theology, however good that theology may be. The Lord defines coming to Him in practice as coming to the sick and imprisoned and thereby coming unto Him (Mt. 25:36).

And Peter got out of the boat- The idea of "go out" is 'to descend'. The boat was not that much above the water, but the point is being made that Peter 'came down' from it. The same word is used about how the disciples 'came down' to the sea as they boarded the boat (Jn. 6:16). And Peter is to descend yet lower when he sinks into the water. The impression is that the whole incident was intended to bring Peter down- and from thence to be raised up by the Lord's grace. The Lord's following discourse about Himself as the bread of life has many verbal connections with the incident on the lake which preceded it, as well as the feeding of the 5000 which had preceded that. Thus He emphasizes in the discourse the need to 'come' to Him, just as Peter had done. He also uses this same word for 'come down' to speak of how He too 'came down' as the bread of God (Jn. 6:33,38,41,42,50,51,58). It cannot be coincidental that this word has been used of the disciples 'coming down' into the boat (Jn. 6:16) and of Peter 'coming down' from the boat into the water (Mt. 14:29). Surely the message is that in Peter's 'coming down', and indeed in the necessary 'coming down' in humiliation of all disciples- the Lord is with us and has passed through the same. The idea of 'coming down' suggests both humility, and also, in the context, manifesting God, being sent from God. But this very process means it is done in humility. The Lord developed the same theme with Peter when he later sees the sheet of unclean animals 'coming down' to him, and then he is commanded to 'come down' to the Gentiles waiting for him below (Acts 10:11,20,21).

And walked upon the water to go to Jesus- The very words in Mk. 6:48 used about the Lord Jesus walking on the water to go to the disciples. Peter wanted to replicate exactly what his Lord was doing; and he knew that if it really was his Lord, then this was possible. As He is the light of the world, so are we. If we in Him, we too are Abraham's singular seed; all that is true of Him becomes true of us. And if He can walk on water, then given the appropriate motive, time and context, we too can do so.

At Peter's initial conversion, he had also been in his ship on the sea of Galilee, and had seen Jesus walking [s.w.] near the sea shore (Mt. 4:18). He left his boat, and responded to the call to follow Jesus. Now it's the same basic scene, but this time Jesus is walking not "by" the sea but "on" the sea. The similarity is perhaps to teach Peter that the Lord's real call may be repeated throughout our lives; the initial response may be relatively painless, but through the storms of life, the Lord teaches us as He did Peter how radical is the response required. To follow Him meant not merely walking away from the cares of this life, the boat, the nets, the fishing…but if Jesus walks on water, then those who follow Him must do likewise. And Peter, to his immense credit, perceived this; he saw his Lord walking on water as an imperative that demanded he do likewise. For him, Jesus wasn't just a Saviour on whose back he could ride to salvation in God's Kingdom. Yes, He is of course our saviour wherein we sink and drown in our weaknesses. But He is more than that; He is an inspiring example. His offer to walk on water wasn't motivated, therefore, by any form of inquisitiveness or daredeviling; the offer to walk on the water was rooted in his grasp that if this is where the Lord walks, then axiomatically, we must do likewise. When the Lord walked "by" the sea, Peter had come out of the boat and followed Him; now the Lord walks "on" the sea, Peter perceives that he must follow Him even there. For "he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, as he walked" (1 Jn. 2:6- the same word is used as in the record of Peter's walking on water with Jesus, making it possible that John is upholding Peter's example for us all). For many, our conversions were relatively painless; indeed, for those raised in the faith, it may have been easier to get baptized than to walk away from it. But the essentially radical invitation to follow Jesus is repeated in later life; and the validity of our earlier choice to follow is put to the test by our later response to the same invitation.

14:30 *But when he saw*- His focus wandered from Jesus, for one can only 'see' the wind by seeing what it blows. Perhaps his focus moved from the face of Jesus to His clothes, or maybe he even looked back to the sails of the ship being blown, or down to the waves beneath him. Our focus on the Lord's face likewise so easily wanders.

The wind was strong- The Greek can strictly mean 'stronger, mightier', with the sense of comparison to something else- as in "one *mightier* than I" (Mt. 3:11), "a *stronger* than he comes" (Lk. 11:22). The wind seemed stronger to Peter- than what? Presumably- stronger than the power of Jesus. Maybe Paul had this in mind when he used the word in 1 Cor. 1:25; 10:22: "The weakness of God is *stronger* than men... [men] are not *stronger* than Him". Even though the Lord was Himself standing at ease upon those waves. Peter later uses a related word to speak of the strength or might which God gives in order to fulfil our ministry (1 Pet. 4:11). He had learnt the lesson- that nothing equals God's power, nothing is really stronger than Him. And yet any lack of faith in Him is effectively saying that there are winds or crises stronger than Him.

He was afraid- The record presents this as direct disobedience to the Lord's command "Be *not* afraid" (14:27). The Gospel records are transcripts of the preaching of the

apostles, and they seem to love to emphasize their own weakness, especially that of Peter, their early leader, the rock upon whom the church was initially built. Such recognition of weakness should likewise stud our own presentations of the Gospel.

And beginning to sink- The same word is only used elsewhere in Mt. 18:6 where we read that those who turn away the little ones, as Peter and the other disciples had wished to do by wanting to send the crowd away, will be condemned by being cast into the sea where they will drown (s.w. "sink"). It wasn't that the Lord was punishing Peter for his attitude, but rather helping him realize that this was what condemnation would feel like for turning little ones away. We noted on 14:28 *come unto you* that the Lord's subsequent discourse when they reached land pointed out that their turning away of the crowd was the very opposite of His refusal to turn away any who come to Him. We must pause and reflect whether in any way we are turning the little ones away; or whether we are lending support to any church policy which results in that. Peter's experience of what condemnation would feel like surely empowered him never to do this in any way. Especially through supporting exclusions of the little ones from the Lord's table we run the risk of making the same mistake- with eternal consequences. We really must think through the implications of our positions, whatever it costs us in this brief life.

When Peter was sinking, he was living out the picture we have of condemnation at the last day. When we read that he began to "sink" into the sea of Galilee, this is exactly the image we find in Mt. 18:6, where the Lord says, in response to the question 'Who will be the greatest?', that he who offends one of the little ones will be drowned [s.w. "sink"] in the midst of the sea, His audience would have immediately associated this with the midst of the sea of Galilee, just where the storm had occurred. Peter seems to have realized that this warning was pertinent to him, for it is he who then interrupts the Lord to ask how often he should forgive his brother (Mt. 18:21). Peter sinking into Galilee, giving up swimming but desperately throwing up his hand to the Lord [you don't swim with a hand outstretched], is the position of each person who truly comes to Christ. This is the extent of our desperation; baptism, conversion to Him, is most definitely not a painless living out of parental expectations. Note how they were "tossed" or 'tormented' (Gk.) by the raging waves (Mt. 14:24)- the very same word is used about how the rejected will be "tormented" in condemnation (Rev. 14:10; 20:10). Peter's salvation by the hand of the Lord was representative of us all. As he drowned there in the lake, he was effectively living out the condemnation of the last day. But he appealed urgently to the Lord: "Save me!". Later, Peter was to use the same words in his preaching, when he appealed to his nation to "save [themselves]" by calling on the name of the Lord, just as he had done on the lake (Acts 2:40). He saw that those people were in just the position which he had been in on the lake.

He cried out, saying- The use of the two words highlights the significance of his words.

Lord, save me!- Even in a moment of crisis, Peter's mind was in God's word; for here he is quoting from the urgent cry of the drowning man which is recorded in Ps. 69:1,2,14,15. This is where our subconscious absorption of God's word is so valuable. In the split second of crisis, the word comes to mind. The words are significant because they are the words used by Peter in urging others to call upon the same Lord to be saved. He was such a compelling preacher- persuading 3000 people to be baptized instantly- exactly because he had called out these very words himself. It is only by knowing our own desperation that we will be compelling preachers. No amount of artistry, presentation or wordsmithing can produce anywhere near the same effect. He

encouraged the crowds to likewise call upon the name of the Lord and be saved (Acts 2:39). He saw himself then and there, in all his weakness and yet sincere desperation, as the epitome of us all. But the parallels don't stop there. Peter had asked the Lord bid him 'Come unto me' (Mt. 14:28). Yet this is the very language of the Lord to all: 'Come unto me...'. Yet Peter went further; in the same way as the Lord stretched forth His hand and saved Peter, so He stretches forth His hand, Peter observed, to save all who would come to Him (Mt. 14:31 = Acts 4:30). But Peter is framed as Jesus, in that he too stretched out his hand to save others as Jesus had done to him (Mt. 14:35 = Acts 5:15,16; Mt. 14:31 = Acts 3:7), bidding them come through the water of baptism as Jesus had done to him. As Jesus was worshipped after saving Peter, so men tried to worship Peter (Mt. 14:33 = Acts 3:11). So Peter went through what we all do- having been saved by Jesus, having come to Him and having been rescued by the outstretched arm, he responds to this by doing the same for others. When the Lord "caught" hold of Peter as he sunk in the waves (Mt. 14:31), a Greek word is used which occurs only once elsewhere: "He did not take hold [s.w. to catch] of Angels, but of the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:16). The Hebrew writer was surely alluding to the Lord's 'catching' of desperate Peter and pulling him to salvation- and saw in Peter a symbol of all those who will be saved by Christ.

Note that Peter cried out "*Lord*, save me!" when most men in that situation would have simply cried out "Save me!". But his grasp of the Lordship of the One he followed inspired faith. If He was truly Lord, He was capable of all things. "Lord, save me!" was a call uttered in a moment of weakness. His "sinking" (Mt. 14:30) is described with the same word used about condemnation at the last day (Mt. 18:6), and yet Peter in his preaching persuades condemned men to do just the same: to *call* on the *Lord* in order to be *saved* (Acts 2:21,40,47; 4:12; 11:14). He invited all men to enter into the weakness and desperation which he had known on the water of Galilee, and receive a like unmerited salvation. And when he tells his sheep that the righteous are "scarcely saved" (1 Pet. 4:18) he surely writes with memories of that same gracious deliverance. And in discussing ecclesial problems he points out that all of us have had a similar salvation, and should act with an appropriate inclusiveness of our brethren (Acts 15:11).

14:31 *And immediately Jesus stretched out his hand*- Peter again reflects his experience of personal salvation in his witness to others- for he likewise stretched out his hand to the lame man, and again with "immediate" effect, as here on the lake that night (Acts 3:7 s.w.). Peter felt that all the work he did by his own hand was effectively the Lord "stretching forth His hand to heal" (Acts 4:30). He realized that *his* hand was now the hand of Jesus, the same hand which had stretched forth [s.w. Acts 4:30] to save *him* on the lake that night. Our experience of salvation simply has to be re-enacted by us towards others. There is great emphasis in the Gospels upon the hands of Jesus- so often stretched out to heal, save and bless; the hands out of which no sheep can be taken, the hands into which all power has been given by the Father, the hands which were nailed through by men in their ignorance and rejection of God's salvation. And those hands are our hands. Think through this again- the Lord "stretched forth his hand" to save Peter (Mt. 14:31); and this is the very phrase used by Peter in Acts 4:30, speaking of how the Lord's hand is "stretched forth to heal". Peter saw himself on the lake as typical of all whom the Lord saves. Yet, it was *Peter*, not the Lord Himself, who stretched forth his hand to do the Lord's healing work on the lame man (Acts 3:7). Again, Peter is thinking back to the incident on the lake and perceiving that he is now Christ manifest as he had intended to be then. Thus it was the principle of God

manifestation which inspired Peter to reach out of his comfort zone so dramatically; and properly appreciated, it can motivate us likewise.

And took hold of him and said to him- The writer to the Hebrews twice uses the same Greek word. First, in describing how the Lord Jesus 'caught hold' of all the seed of Abraham in His saving work (Heb. 2:16), and again in speaking of how God "took" [s.w. "caught"] Israel "by the hand" and redeemed them from Egypt (Heb. 8:9). Peter is thus presented as everyman in Christ. He was saved out of condemnation, drowning in the waters for turning away the little ones. There is surely in each of us, looking back upon our lives, the sense that we were in His grip, and still are; He took hold of us, to save us. And there is a mutuality in this- for we too desperately catch hold of the hope of the Kingdom (s.w. 1 Tim. 6:12,19).

O you of little faith- A word used five times by the Lord, four of them recorded in Matthew (Mt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31;16:8). It's as if Matthew loved to emphasize in his preaching how weak their faith had been.

Why- The *eis tis* construction means far more than "why?". The simple sense of "why?" could have been expressed in one word. This little phrase is elsewhere translated "to what purpose?" (Mt. 26:8; Acts 19:3). The idea would then be: 'You know you need saving. To what purpose is doubt? Will doubt save you? No. So, seeing that lack of faith will not save you, and you need saving, then totally believe in My ability to save you'.

Did you doubt?- A form of the Greek for 'twice' or 'double'. James surely has the incident in mind when he warns not to be a double minded man, wavering in faith "like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed" (James 1:6,8). He is holding up Peter- leader of the early church to whom he was writing- as the example of how *not* to be. This is no evidence of any tension between James and Peter; rather is it typical of what Peter himself does, in drawing attention to past weakness and development from that weakness as the sign of real spiritual strength and the basis for legitimate respect. James is clearly telling his readers not to be like Peter. It is easy for our reaction against Catholic extremism to lead us to under-estimate the high status of Peter in the early church. Here was James, also a respected elder, telling the flock to take a snapshot of their great leader Peter in his moment of weakness on the lake- and not be like him! Leaders of worldly organizations have a way of telling the flock that all their fellow leaders are as spotless as they are. But this wasn't the case in the early church. It was Peter's very humanity which was and is his inspiration.

14:32 *And when they boarded the boat*- Jesus and Peter. The "they" is contrasted with the "they" who were still in the ship (:33). The word picture is of Jesus and Peter united very closely.

The wind ceased- Gk. 'grew weary', as if there was a brief period over which the raging decreased.

John speaks in his Gospel of those who received Christ (Jn. 1:12,16; 3:32 etc.)- and it is in allusion to this that he speaks of how the disciples 'received Christ' into their ship whilst about to drown on Galilee (Jn. 6:21). Their desperation as they faced death was understood by John as a symbol of the desperation of all those who truly receive Christ. But without perceiving our desperation, can we properly 'receive' Him?

14:33 *And they that were in the boat*- They are not simply called 'the disciples', perhaps because as Matthew retold the Gospel, he felt that at that time they were not worthy of the name. The desire to send away the crowd hungry was such a major failure. And it makes sense that in the process of retelling the Gospel to audiences (of which the Gospel records are transcripts), Matthew would emphasize this- that the Lord turned nobody away, and neither would the apostles who were now retelling the story- because they had learnt how wrong that would be.

Worshipped Him, saying- Let's not miss the significance of the fact they 'came' to Him. The same word has been used of Peter 'coming' to the Lord on the water (:28,29), of the crowd 'coming' to Jesus immediately prior to their departure in the boat (Jn. 6:5), and the Lord will go on straight away to teach the need to 'come' to Him (Jn. 6:35,37,44,45,65). Peter's example inspired them all. They too realized that the crowd had not been wrong to 'come to Jesus', and that they had been wrong to want to send them away (Mt. 14:15); for they had been saved exactly because Jesus does not send away any who come to Him (Jn. 6:37). Those who were in the ship came and worshipped Him after He came into the ship- suggesting that they kept themselves at some distance from Him and Peter, marvelling at Him, realizing their unworthiness, and therefore cowering around the sides of the boat.

Of a truth you are the Son of God- The implication is that they had doubted it previously. The miracle of feeding 5000 people surely had elicited faith in them that He was God's Son. But when He appeared silent to their needs when about to die on the lake, they started to lose that faith- just as we can, when the Lord doesn't act as we think He should or when He appears completely silent. The title they use is "Son of God" when they could just as easily have called Him 'Messiah' or some other equivalent term. Because He acted as God, whose voice is greater than stormy winds (Ps. 148:8) and who walks upon the waves of the sea- they therefore concluded and intuitively felt that He must be God's Son. And yet when Trinitarians perceive that Jesus did things which the Father is spoken of as exclusively doing, they conclude that 'Jesus is God'. But that was never the conclusion of the disciples- their conclusion and immediate, intuitive feeling was that therefore this Son of man must be also Son of God. And that is indeed the Biblical position. The only other person who cried out "Truly [this was] the Son of God" was the Centurion at the cross (Mt. 27:54- the same three Greek words are used). Our experience of the cross likewise leads us to the same position as the disciples upon the lake. And it seems likely that this exclamation that 'I truly believe Jesus is God's Son' was one of the declarations made by baptismal candidates in the early church (as it was in Acts 8:37). In this case, Matthew and the apostles would have been holding up their own conversion experiences as a pattern for other believers, just as Paul saw his conversion as a pattern for all who would later believe (1 Tim. 1:16).

"You are the Son of God" was the emotional confession of a moment, because Mk. 6:52 says that their hearts were hard and they didn't "understand". In this we see the fickleness of what can appear to be faith; we can with sincerity say one thing, when actually our hearts very soon go to a position of unbelief or at least, far lower faith than in the heat of the glorious moments when faith is rewarded. The Gospel writers use their records to bring out their own fickleness. After having been awed to this confession by the Lord's stilling of the storm, they are soon almost mocking Him for asking who had touched Him, when hundreds of the jostling crowd had touched Him (Lk. 8:25 cp. 45).

After recording the feeding of the 5000, Luke records that the Lord asked the disciples again about who He was, and Peter replied that He was the "Christ of God".

The Lord was seeking to develop and consolidate their confession of faith. Thus in Lk. 9:18, the Lord Jesus asks His men: "Whom say the people that I am?". Why did He ask this? Surely, with His sensitivity and insight into people and society, He knew full well the various theories that first Century Palestine entertained about Him. It seems to me that He asked this question for the disciples' sake; He wanted them to reflect upon the wide range of wrong theories which there were concerning His identification. And this led on to His next question: "But whom say ye that I am? Peter answering said, The Christ of God". Surely the Lord Jesus knew what they thought of Him, without needing to ask them. Philip and Nathanael had earlier revealed that they considered Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah and "the Son of God" (Jn. 1:45,49). So, why did the Lord ask this question? Again, it was surely to focus His disciples upon the reality of the fact that despite all the various wrong theories, they actually knew the truth about Him. But the Lord then goes on to His essential point: "Tell no man that thing; saying, The Son of man must suffer many things…and be slain, and be raised…If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me… For what is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?" (Lk. 9:21-25). The Lord told the disciples to "Tell no man" by saying that "The Son of man must suffer…". I submit that "Tell no man…" is almost hyperbole; surely He means 'For now, focus more on the fact of my forthcoming death and your response to it, than telling others. If you gain the whole world for me in your preaching but lose your own salvation, what are you advantaged?'. After His resurrection they were to tell others; as the great commission made plain. And there is a powerful message to us all here, especially to those who concern themselves with large amounts of preaching. We should not be so caught up in listing the errors of others that we fail to appreciate the huge personal import of the truth that we do surely know. Indeed, the Lord sought to focus His men upon the Truth they knew by asking them firstly to consider all the wrong theories about Him. He then went on to bring home to them the radical, transforming impact of that Truth if it is properly believed and acted upon. Luke seems to draw attention to this theme again in Lk. 10:20, where the disciples return from a successful preaching mission to be told to focus their elation instead upon the reality of their own personal salvation: "Rejoice not [i.e. not so much] that the spirits are subject unto you: but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven". We are not to turn a blind eye to others' misunderstandings; the tragedy of the errors of Islam, Judaism, Hinduism etc. should not pass us by. But neither are we to remain obsessed with them. We are to be led by such reflection to rejoice in the basic truth of Jesus which we have been blessed with.

14:34 *And when they had crossed over, they came*- Perhaps the emphasis is upon *they*. The Lord and His disciples were now united again.

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

14:35 *And when the men of that place recognised him*- This would suggest that they didn't know His face. Their faith was therefore based around the word about Christ

which they had heard. Matthew may well have this in mind as an example to the audiences he is preaching too, who were likewise hearing about Christ and being asked to show practical faith in Him, even though they had not seen Him. We in our generation are of course in the same situation.

They sent word to all in that region and brought to him all who were sick- These "men" were not disciples. But they 'sent out'- Gk. *apostello*. Although they were not the apostles, they acted as apostles, purely on the basis of what they had heard about Jesus, as they had not personally seen Him before. And they sent out the message to "all", inviting people to come to Jesus and 'leading' them to Him (AV "brought them to Jesus"). This is all very much the language and concepts of the great commission. That commission was to be obeyed by those who had not personally met the Lord, whose faith was based upon the word of others; and they were to do the work of apostles, going to "all" and urging people to come to Jesus. These "men" of Gennesaret are being set up as a model of obedience to the great commission, and are therefore a particular role model for our generation. Mark seems to put the emphasis at this point on the Lord going out into all the region. Mk. 6:56 speaks of His preaching campaign as focusing on the towns, villages and "country" - in modern terms, the villages, hamlets and isolated rural dwellings. He made the effort to get out to the individuals, the poorest and loneliest of society. So the Lord went out to people in those hamlets (Mk.), and yet people from those hamlets came to Him (Mt.). This is how the Lord operates to this day. God is in search of man, and yet man is in search of God- hence the cosmic joy in the 'touch' of meeting.

"Sick", Gk. *kakos* can mean a very wide range of illness, including spiritually.

14:36 *And they pleaded with him that they might only touch*- The Greek *parakleo* means literally 'to call near' and in this case we can understand it literally. They felt that they had to touch Him in order to be healed (unlike the cases of faith in His spoken word which the Lord so commends). Therefore, needing that physical presence, it makes sense to understand *parakleo* here as meaning to literally call near. They called Him near so that they might touch the hem of His garment.

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

MATTHEW CHAPTER 15

15:1 *Then there came to Jesus Pharisees and scribes*- Matthew records many people 'coming to Jesus'. A related word is found in Jn. 6:37: "All that the Father gives me shall come to Me; and he who *comes* to Me, I will in no way reject". Many 'came to Jesus' but only some really came. Again we see a warning against surface level Christianity- coming to Him externally, but not in essence.

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

15:2 *Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?*- The word *presbeteros* would've been understood by all to refer to members of the Sanhedrin. And yet the later New Testament uses the word about elders within the Christian church, who got to that status regardless of social position but purely on the basis of spiritual qualification; thus a spiritually qualified slave or young believer in their 20s could be a *presbeteros* in the new Israel which was being consciously created by the Lord in parody of the old Israel.

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

For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread- Rabbi Joses claimed that "to eat with unwashen hands is as great a sin as adultery." And Rabbi Akiba in captivity used his water ration to wash his hands rather than to drink, resulting in him almost dying of dehydration.

15:3 *And he answered and said to them: Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?*- Although the Lord was very hard in some ways upon the twelve, accusing them of "no faith" etc., whenever He spoke about them to others or to His Father, He was so positive and defensive about them. This is a valuable window onto His current mediation for us. The disciples were ordinary Jews who weren't such righteous men; they didn't wash before a meal, and the Pharisees criticized them. The Lord explained why this wasn't so important; but the disciples still didn't understand (:15,16). And yet He justifies them to the Pharisees as if they *did* understand, and as if their non-observance of ritual washing was because of their great spiritual perception. Surely the Lord imputed a righteousness to them which was not their own. He had asked the disciples to be obedient to every jot and tittle of the teaching of the Scribes, because they "sit in Moses' seat". And yet when they are criticized for not doing what He'd asked them to do, for not washing hands before a meal, the Lord Jesus vigorously defends them by criticizing their critics as hypocrites (Mk. 7:2-8). Indeed, the Lord's passion and anger with the critics comes out very clearly in the subsequent record of the incident; and it is the essence of that passion which He has for us in mediating for us.

The force of “also” transgress is that the Lord didn’t deny that His men were transgressing the tradition of the elders- even though He had elsewhere taught them to obey those who “sit in Moses’ seat” (Mt. 23:2). But still He justifies His disciples to the world, reflecting His love and imputation of righteousness towards them. And this Lord is our Lord.

The tension is between human *tradition*, and Divine *commandment*. There is a tendency to assume that tradition passed down over a period of time is in fact from God. Even the most protestant of Protestant churches have this tendency. And it is in all of us. The Lord goes on to demonstrate that God’s *command* is transgressed not only by bold faced disobedience, but equally by seeking to get around its real force and by *omitting* to do what that command implies. Accepting the real implication of God’s inspired word means that we will fearlessly break with tradition when necessary, and will examine whether our response to His word is direct obedience or rather a mirage, ‘getting around’ the direct requirement. All this is the practical outcome of believing the Bible to be inspired.

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

15:4 *For God said*- AV "Commanded". His word speaks directly to us, whereas the Greek word for “tradition” means something passed down. To make the point, the Lord speaks of the commandments of Moses as *God* commanding. The Jews spoke of *Moses* commanding (Jn. 8:5), and although the Lord also does (Mt. 8:4), His point is that it was effectively *God* commanding.

Saying- AV. This apparently redundant word severs to emphasize that God’s word is a living word, speaking directly to us, and not mediated to us through passed down traditions of men.

Honour your father and your mother, and he that speaks evil of father or mother- The Lord Jesus saw as parallel the commands to honour parents and also not to curse them. These two separate commands (from Ex. 20:12 and 21:17) He spoke of as only one: "*the* commandment" (Mk. 7:9). He therefore saw that not to honour parents was effectively to curse them (Mk. 7:10). *Omitting* to honour parents, even if it involved appearing to give one's labour to God's temple, was therefore the same as *committing* the sin of cursing them. He therefore speaks in :6 of how they did *not* honour their parents by the legal loophole they had devised- but this is the same as cursing them. The Lord looked very deeply at the implication of human behaviour and positions; and He does the same with ours too. The fact He has such penetrating depth of analysis highlights His patient grace with us- for He realizes the nature of human sin far more perceptively than we do, who see only a few implications of each sin.

Must surely die- In Mark's account, the Lord taught that to wangle one's way out of caring for their parents by delegating it to the synagogue was effectively cursing them, and those guilty must "die the death" (Mk. 7:10,11). To him who knows to do good but does it not, this omission is counted as sin (James 4:17- written in the context of brethren omitting to help each other).

15:5 *But you say*- The saying of God (note the word "saying" in :4) was overridden by the saying of men. This quotation was from the passed down traditions of the Jews. But the Lord says that *you* say this. The 'saying' of the Rabbis became the 'saying' of those who obeyed them. Thus obedience to a command (in this case, of men) is counted as 'saying' it- for we pass on teaching by our example of doing it. The depth of the Lord's analysis of their behaviour is amazing.

Whoever shall say to his father or his mother- To give a word, or written contract.

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

The very language of "profit" is inappropriate. If we have a duty to help someone, then that help is hardly their "profit". The very term reduces love and the care that comes from love to a mere transaction.

15:6 *He shall not honour his father*- To not honour ones' parents is, in the Lord's book, to actively curse them, even though it is doubtful those He was criticizing ever actually did so (Mt. 15:1-6). This is the power of sin of omission.

Thus you have made void the word of God because of your tradition- It could mean, literally, of no authority. Again the Lord is making the point that practical obedience to God's word is a function of what authority we give it. To disobey God's commands by seeking to 'get around' them is effectively saying that God's word is of no authority. And this is the context of this whole discussion- God's word is the sole authority, and not human tradition and the concessions to disobedience made by men. His word is sent forth and *will accomplish* its purpose, Isaiah says; and yet we can make "the word of God of none effect" by our traditions or our lack of preaching it. The word / Gospel will inevitably have a result, and yet it is also limited by the attitudes of men. Or we can understand "effect" as just that- effect. The command to honour and practically care for elderly parents had an "effect". God's laws are not simple tests of obedience for the sake of it. The process of obedience has "effect"; disobedience

therefore robs us of the positive effect which obedience will bring. Caring for elderly parents, putting "honour" into practice rather than leaving it as mere words, is designed to teach us something. Here in Matthew we read of the "commandment" (*entole*) of God, but in Mk. 7:13 of the "word" (*logos*) of God. What did the Lord say? Perhaps: 'You make the commandment, that is, the intention (*logos*) of God, of no effect". God's word of command is a *logos*, an intention. See on :9 *in vain*.

It's also quite legitimate to understand *akuroo* as meaning to disannul (s.w. Gal. 3:17). In this case, the Lord is saying that the Jews were doing the unthinkable for them- disannulling God's law. The law was disannulled by the death of the Lord Jesus, and Judaism and the early communities of Jewish converts clearly struggled with that idea. But Matthew records the Lord's words at this point to demonstrate that effectively, the Law had been disannulled already by Jewish disobedience to it and following human traditions which left the Law without power and function.

Again, "tradition" is put here for 'the keeping of tradition'. Tradition means 'that which is passed on', and it is only that if it is actually practiced.

15:7 *You hypocrites*- The Lord could use this term about people only because He could see what was on the inside (the heart, :8). We who cannot do this are perhaps not able to define others in this way.

Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying- The reference to "this people…" was not to be understood as only Isaiah's hearers, but all who read this living word (:8). And so this is in the end how to study the Bible- to let it speak to *you in your generation*.

15:8 *This people honours me with their lips but their heart is far from me*- The prophecy quoted from Is. 29 is a criticism of the common people of Judah at Hezekiah's time; there was Godly leadership, but Isaiah laments that the ordinary people were far from Yahweh. But the Lord quotes this as relevant to the Jewish religious leadership, who prided themselves on their separation from the mass 'people of the land' whom they considered as apostate. Yet again we see His radical turning upside down of the Jewish worldview and creation of a new order, where secular people like His disciples were to be the new Sanhedrin leadership (see on 15:2 *elders*). Note that He was at this stage specifically addressing the Jewish elders, because only in :10 does He call the crowd to Him to listen.

They honoured with their lips, but their heart was far from God; they externally kept His commandments, but they frustrated their intention by not letting them influence their essential selves (Mk. 7:6-9). They fiercely guarded the pronunciation of His Covenant Name; but in reality, they forgot that Name (Jer. 23:27). The Lord perceived that "your tradition… the commandments of men… your doctrines" resulted in the hearts of Israel being "far from [God]". Doctrine was intended to affect the heart; and false doctrine resulted in the heart being far from God. True doctrine, on the other hand, was and is intended to bring the heart close to God. Doctrine / teaching is therefore to affect the heart; it is not just the intellectual basis for unity in a community of believers. And the Lord goes on in this very context to talk of how "every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up" (Mt. 15:13). The Greek for "planted" is interpreted by James Strong as meaning "Figuratively, to instil doctrine". The planting of the believer is through the instillation of Godly doctrine, rather than the doctrines of men. Note how the Lord speaks of doctrine as a command in Mt. 15:6,9:

"Thus have you made the *commandment* of God of none effect by your tradition... in vain they do worship Me, teaching for *doctrines* the commandments of men". And He taught earlier that the doctrine of one God was in fact a command to action. Doctrine, *didache*, is teaching, not just theory; it is commandment towards action. For doctrine and practice are linked. In this we are helped to assess whether any idea or interpretation is indeed a 'first principle doctrine' or not. What does it inspire in practice? Or is it merely the academic interpretation of the human brain cells?

15:9- see on 15:2.

But in vain do they worship me- Worship and sacrifice to God can be done "in vain" if our attitude to His word is wrong. The reason for the vanity of their worship and devotions was because their doctrine was wrong. This clearly shows that religious devotion alone doesn't mean anything in terms of acceptability with God. And it also shows that the intention of doctrine, of teaching from God's word, is so that our lives are *not* lived "in vain"; there is "effect" in the outworking of God's true word in human lives. "In vain" here is surely to be semantically paralleled with "no effect" in :6.

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

Which are the precepts of men- The emphasis was surely upon the word "men". The Lord has been comparing the commandments of *God* with Jewish tradition. Tradition had become the word of God to these people.

15:10 *And he called to himself the crowd*- His previous teaching in this chapter was therefore given to the "scribes and Pharisees" of :1 in a private audience. See on :8 *this people*.

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

15:11 *It is not what enters into the mouth which defiles the man*- The same words are found in the Lord's final message to us in Rev. 21:27- nothing will *go into* the Kingdom of God which *defiles*. Surely He had in mind the words He had spoken here 30 years previously. Nothing can go into and defile- but a *person* can. The Lord is showing that defilement is a personal matter, not a question of avoiding eating or touching 'unclean' things. The whole discussion here about defilement is in the context of the Pharisees criticizing the disciples for eating "with defiled, that is, unwashed, hands" (Mk. 7:2

s.w.). Paul had meditated upon the Lord's teaching here deeply, because he clearly alludes to it in saying that he is "persuaded by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean [s.w. 'defiled'] in itself" (Rom. 14:14). Again we see the nature of the living word- these black words on white paper, those shimmering images on our screens, become the Lord Jesus reasoning with us and persuading us over issues.

But what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man- Here we see the huge importance placed by the Lord upon our words. He goes on to explain that it is what comes out of the *heart* which defiles (:18,19), but words are an expression of the heart. Therefore by them we shall be judged (Mt. 12:37). What comes out of the heart is what comes out of the mouth (:18)- ultimately, at least, after we have finished all the hypocritical games of trying to say one thing whilst thinking otherwise. And Mark adds that what comes out of *the man*, what comes out "from *within*", is what defiles him (Mk. 7:15,23). A man is his heart and so he is his words, just as "the word was [and is] God". We note that the same word is used about gracious words 'proceeding out of [the Lord's] mouth' (Lk. 4:22). They were a reflection of the grace deep within Him, which *is* Him. And likewise ungracious words are not to 'proceed' [s.w.] from *our* mouths, but only words that "may minister grace to the hearers" (Eph. 4:29).

15:12- see on 17:10.

Then came the disciples, and said to him: Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?

- The Lord's teaching that nothing external can defile was undermining the very basis of their worldview. No wonder they were angry. Although it was the death of Christ which ended the Mosaic Law and cleansed things so that nothing should be called "defiled" (s.w.- Acts 10:15,28; 11:9), the Lord ahead of that time pronounced this to be the case. And in essence this was the case anyway- because in spiritual terms, the 'unclean' things could not defile a person. They were only declared unclean under the Law of Moses to teach people about the more important internal defilements they should avoid.

The Lord elsewhere taught of the immense danger and responsibility of making another stumble / be offended (18:6,8,9). But sometimes stumbling is inevitable- "in many things we offend all" (James 3:2). Responsibility for stumbling is therefore not only with the party who causes it. Some did stumble at the Lord's teaching (Mt. 11:6; 13:21,57); He was a rock of stumbling. But perhaps the disciples hoped the Pharisees would be converted, and considered that the Lord's teaching here was so radical that it was going to make them stumble from that path. According to this understanding, the Lord didn't make the Pharisees ultimately stumble. The disciples *feared* He would, thinking (wrongly) that a less demanding message might make the way easier for the Pharisees. And the Lord conceded to their concerns, whilst not agreeing with them- for in Mt. 17:27 He picks them up on this incident and tells that they should act in such a way that does not "offend" others.

15:13 *But he answered and said: Every plant which my heavenly Father did not plant shall be rooted up*- It was commonly understood that all Israel were the planting of the Lord, having been planted as vines in His vineyard (Num. 24:6; 2 Sam. 7:10; Ps. 44:2; 80:8,15; Is. 5:2; Jer. 2:21; 11:17; 45:4). Yet He implies here that the scribes and Pharisees were *not* planted by God. The Old Testament references to Israel having been planted by God are many- to say that Israel's religious leaders were *not* planted by God

was to clearly say that He did not consider them to be the true Israel. But the restored Kingdom of God was to feature planting of new vines (Is. 41:19; 51:16; Jer. 24:6; 31:28; 32:41; Ez. 36:36; Am. 9:15) just as He had planted a garden in Eden (Gen. 2:8), and so again the Lord is hinting that the old Israel was coming to an end, and a new Israel being planted which was in embryo the Kingdom of God, paradise restored. Paul picks up this figure in speaking of how his preaching of the Gospel was 'planting', specifically, a vineyard (1 Cor. 3:6-8; 9:7). This connects with the Old Testament and New Testament descriptions of Old Testament Israel as the vineyard God planted (Mt. 21:33; Lk. 13:6; 20:9). Paul saw that a new Israel was being formed one by one. Teaching God's word is described by Paul in 1 Cor. 3:6-8 as 'planting', and it would seem this was a Jewish metaphor used for the instilling of God's word into students. In this case, the Lord would be continuing the theme developed so far in Matthew 15- that attention to God's word is what makes someone part of the true Israel. Because of their rejection of the word of God in favour of the word of men, the Pharisees and scribes were therefore not planted by the Father. This was their choice.

Clearly the Scribes and Pharisees were plants, in the same field as the ones planted by the Father, who would be rooted up. They had been planted by someone other than the Father. This of course is exactly the picture presented by the parable of the wheat and weeds. But the Lord taught in that parable that the 'rooting up' must be left to the Angels at the last day. The subsequent command to the disciples to "let them alone" could be understood in the context of the wheat and weeds parable- the idea might be 'Don't *you* think you can sort them out. Leave them alone. Let God do it'. The Lord saw the problem that the disciples might root up wheat as well as weeds (He uses the same word- Mt. 13:29). And His concern was justified- for as noted on :1, there were within this general category of Scribes and Pharisees a number who would later repent and come to Christ. Those who are to be plucked up at the last day are in essence already plucked up by God, from His perspective (Jude 12 s.w.). The repentance of some of those Scribes and Pharisees (see on :1) who appeared in the 'to be plucked up' category is a great example and warning to us. If the disciples had rooted them up then, those individuals would not later have come to Christ. So one reason why we are not to 'root up' is because we have no idea how that person may change in later life; we do not see the specific potentials in people.

15:14 *Let them alone*- The Lord bothered with the scribes and Pharisees, and some were converted thanks to His efforts (see on :1). But He knew it was best for the disciples to keep away from these people. Yet He may have meant 'Don't *you* try to root them up'- see on :13.

They are blind guides- But some in this category repented (see on :1). That was how they were at that time. But even blind leaders can repent, Saul of Tarsus being the great example. They were heading for the "ditch" of condemnation, but some pulled back.

And if the blind are guided by the blind, both shall fall into a pit- The blind can lead the blind into the ditch, i.e. to be 'rooted up' in condemnation (Mt. 15:13,14 cp. 13:29). And yet *now* in this day of marvellous opportunity, we can lift both ourselves and others out of that pit of condemnation (Mt. 12:11). Some of those who are now 'rooted up', i.e. condemned as they would be in the future judgment (Mt. 13:28), who are "wandering" as the rejected will in the last day, can still be saved from this by us pulling them out of the fire of condemnation (Jude 12,22). Men can escape from the "damnation of hell" in

which they are in (Mt. 23:33). Herein lies the urgency of our task in both personal repentance and pastoral work. But we note too the responsibility of leaders- they can lead others to condemnation. We do well to analyse our leaders. When the Lord elsewhere spoke of the blind leading the blind, He went on to tell the story of the partially sighted man who tries to remove what he perceives as a splinter of wood from his brother's eye (Lk. 6:39-42). The implication is that we are all blind, and need leadership- but by the Lord, not by each other. And He is saying the same thing here in Mt. 15. By telling the disciples not to be led by the Pharisees in order to avoid falling into condemnation, He is effectively implying that the disciples were blind- for if the blind lead the blind, then they will fall into the ditch of condemnation.

The pit is that of condemnation. And yet the Lord likens Himself to a man who lifts His sheep out of the ditch / pit (s.w. Mt. 12:11). We can be condemned in this life, as Peter was, and yet be saved out of it. Just as some of those blind Scribes and Pharisees were saved (see on :1).

15:15 *And Peter answered and said to him: Explain to us the parable*- The Lord replies by expanding upon what He has said in :11 about a man being defiled by what comes out of him, rather than by what he eats or touches. And yet the Lord's teaching in :11 was hardly parabolic. Perhaps it was too much for the disciples to believe that the Lord had declared void the entire conception of becoming unclean by what you eat; and they assumed He must be talking in parables. Peter in Acts 10 was still convinced that defiled food should not ever be eaten. But it could also be that the "parable" Peter wanted explained was what the Lord had just spoken about the blind leading the blind and falling into a ditch; Lk. 6:39 specifically calls this saying a "parable". In this case, the Lord didn't oblige, at least not specifically. He went on to expand on His previous teaching that we are defiled by our own thoughts and words, rather than by what we eat. Perhaps the Lord meant that once that point was truly grasped, then it would be apparent that the Pharisees with their concept of ritual defilement by food were blind leaders- and should not be given the status of leaders.

15:16 *And he said: Are you still without understanding?* - The emphasis may be on the "still"- He says the same in the next verse, "Do you *still not* understand?". The Lord asked the disciples; as if to say that He was surprised the disciples still hadn't come to the understanding which He hoped the Pharisees soon would. The crowds that followed the Lord didn't understand His parables; in fact, He spoke in parables so that they wouldn't understand, as He intended His teaching only to be grasped by the disciples (Mk. 7:17,18). Therefore, in that very context, it is significant to read of the Lord's frustration and disappointment when the disciples likewise didn't understand the parables. And the record goes on to show that in fact it was a regular occurrence, that they like the crowds didn't understand the parables, and the Lord had to explain to them later. So the disciples, contrary to the Lord's high hopes of them, were no better than the crowds. They too 'didn't get it'; and Mark's [i.e. Peter's] record of the Gospel therefore brings out the point that they too, the ones now preaching to the crowds, only got the understanding they did of the Lord by an undeserved grace. This is the kind of humility we need in our teaching of others, especially when it involves correcting their lack of understanding on a point.

15:17 *Do you not understand, that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the belly and is expelled?*- The world would not perceive / understand (Mk. 4:12); but they did, or so the Lord told them. And hence His distress that they did *not* perceive (Mk. 7:18;

8:17); and yet He said that blessed were their ears and minds, because they understood what had been hidden from so many. Surely He imputed more perception to them than they really had. The Lord was frustrated that by this point in His ministry, they still didn't understand that food couldn't really defile a person. And even by the time of Acts 10, Peter was still not persuaded of this. The Lord's hopefulness in them was such that He had great expectations of the speed of their spiritual growth, which resulted in disappointment for Him. This is all very much the enthusiasm of the lover for the beloved.

15:18 *But the things which proceed out of the mouth come forth out of the heart, and it is they that defile the man*- Mark adds: "This He said, thus making all foods clean" (Mk. 7:19). Paul really did meditate on every word of his Lord. Thus he says he was *persuaded* by the Lord Jesus that all foods were clean (Rom. 14:14)- this is how he took the Lord's teaching in Mk. 7:19. Those words *lived* to Paul, they were as the personal persuasion of his Lord, as if Christ was talking to him personally through the Gospel records. Peter was taught the same lesson (Acts 10:14,15), as was Paul: "I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself" (Rom. 14:14). Earlier, Paul had reasoned that to refuse certain foods was a sign of spiritual weakness (Rom. 14:2). Our attitude to food "does not commend us to God" (1 Cor. 8:8). Most incriminating of all is the warning that apostate Christians would teach men, "to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth" (1 Tim. 4:3).

15:19 *For out of the heart*- I have repeatedly used this verse to demonstrate that sin comes from within, and not from any cosmic being called 'Satan'. If indeed Satan is responsible for initiating human sin, then this would be the classic place for the Lord to teach it. Instead, He traces sinful words and actions to their true source, the heart. That, in the end, is the great 'satan', or adversary. "Out of the heart" parallels "out of the *mouth*" (:18)- the implication is surely that sin is committed through the route of heart - mouth - action. The Lord heavily condemns thought (heart) and words (mouth) because these are considered not sinful, or not very sinful, by human judgment. What one thinks internally is not a criminal act in any court of law, and what one says is only rarely so. External actions are all important in human judgment (remember the context is of washing at meal times)- the Lord is saying that thought and word are the essence which God looks at rather than the external action. What comes out of the mouth comes out of the heart- that is the clear teaching. And yet we fool ourselves into thinking that we can think one thing, and say something else with our mouth. The Lord's parallel would suggest that sooner or later, that breaks down, and words reflect thought.

The Pharisees were concerned about things entering a person and defiling them. The Lord perceptively noted that this implied that a person was basically clean, and just needed to avoid contamination by externalities. His teaching attacked that base assumption- He taught that the inward parts of a man were the source of defilement. This difference in perspective is reflected in differing approaches to the Gospel today. Some focus upon the need for social reform and improvement of the circumstances surrounding people, believing that the right external environment will lead to reformation of life. I favour the approach taken by the Lord- that the essence is of internal reformation, so that in whatever external environment we are living, the internal spirit is pure. The Lord reasons from the very structure of the human alimentary canal, that unclean food is naturally passed out of our system. But there is no such

natural, inbuilt ability to deal with matters of the heart. The implication could be that we therefore need external intervention in the arena of the human heart in order to be cleansed and have strength against defilement- and this is precisely the work of the Holy Spirit, bearing in mind that 'spirit' usually refers to the mind / heart. It may be that the Lord is not so much teaching the need to somehow control the fountain of potential defilement thrown up by the heart- as implying that we need a new, cleansed heart. This is what was promised as part of the new covenant (Ez. 18:31; 36:26), and those in Christ have entered that new covenant and received the promised gift of the Spirit to transform the human heart, the "inner man" (Eph. 3:16).

Come evil thoughts- Mark's parallel record uses the same Greek word for "thoughts", but different ones for "proceed" and "evil", although the meaning is similar (Mk. 7:21). The Lord likely said the same thing twice, repeating phrases in sentences, and repeating whole sentences with slight differences. This was inevitable in speaking without speech reinforcement and with much background noise. Further, given the illiteracy of the audience and the newness of the ideas being presented, any teacher would have repeated the ideas several times over, using slightly different words. I have often found myself doing this when speaking in a missionary context to illiterate people. Once I replayed a recording of my preaching, and noticed myself doing this. From then on, I never had much problem with the fact that the parallel records in the Gospels often use different words and phrases for the same ideas. And of course it's highly likely the Lord spoke in Aramaic, and Matthew and Mark are as it were translating that Aramaic into literary Greek. It's absolutely legitimate to translate an original spoken word in various ways, indeed it would appear suspicious, forced and unnatural if the Gospel writers used precisely the same Greek to translate the Lord's original Aramaic.

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

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

15:20 *These are the things which defile the man - but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man*- The emphasis may be upon the word "hands". The idea would then be that it is the heart which requires washing, rather than hands. In this case the Lord would be directing their minds to Jer. 4:14: "O Jerusalem [note the Pharisees in question were from Jerusalem, Mt. 15:1], wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts dwell within you?". But this of course begs

the question- how can a man wash his own heart? Surely it needs the Father and Son to do this for us. The whole offer of Jesus is of a *holy* spirit or heart to be given to those who believe in Him. Perhaps John's equivalent of this section of teaching is in the repeated mention he makes of the Greek *nipto*, to wash- the same word used here in Mt. 15:2. John records how utterly essential it is for the disciple to allow the Lord Jesus to wash *them* (Jn. 13:5,6,8,10,12,14, and also in the record of the cleansing of the blind man in Jn. 9:7,11,15). The cleansing of the heart in and by Christ is implied by the teaching recorded here in Mt. 15, but only made explicit in John's Gospel.

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

15:21 *And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon*- The word is used of fleeing persecution or avoiding difficult circumstances (Mt. 2:12-14,22) and often about Jesus (Mt. 4:12; 12:15 “when Jesus knew it, He *withdrew Himself*”; 14:13 “When Jesus heard of it, He departed thence”). We get the sense of the Lord desperately needing to be away from the crowds, out of the limelight, alone with the Father and the disciples. And yet so often when He makes such a withdrawal, the crowds follow Him, or human need is felt by Him to an almost overpowering extent, so that He again comes into the public view. This need to ‘withdraw’ may simply have been from basic human fatigue, both physical and psychological. Or there may also have been the desire to focus upon training the twelve rather than being side-tracked by trying to give surface level fragments of teaching to the crowds who were clearly more interested in miracles than in His teaching. Recall how at the end of chapter 12 and from chapter 13 onwards, the Lord turned away from the crowds towards the minority who had responded. But whatever the reason, His responsiveness to human need and potential was amazing.

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

15:22- see on 18:11.
And a Canaanite woman- Canaanite women are presented in the Old Testament as very much Israel's *femmes fatales*. Nobody else is described in the New Testament as a person "of Canaan" (see note on 10:4). Indeed it would appear a term not commonly in use at the time. It is therefore used in order to create associations in Biblically aware minds that here was a woman whom classically, a believer should beware of and give a wide berth to. This fits with the inversion of stereotypes and shattering of expectations which this incident presents. For the Lord had gone to this Gentile area expecting to get a break from engagement with people, because His mission was not to the Gentiles (see on :21 *Tyre and Sidon*).

From that region came out- AV "Came out of the same region". The phrase is awkward and lengthy if the intention was simply to convey the idea that she was a local woman, a woman from that area. *Exerchomai apo* ("Came out of") implies a proceeding forth from, and is even translated "escape". *Apo* has the sense of cessation, completion, separation, departure. Further, the Greek word translated "region" or "coasts" (AV) is not the same as that used to describe the region in :21. It strictly means a boundary or border. The impression we get is of a woman who lived in the area and yet had radically come out of it. Perhaps the awkward phrase is used to create this impression- that this Gentile woman had come out of her environment in the hope of connecting with the God of Israel. One could just about translate it with integrity: "A woman of Canaan who had emigrated out from that very area...".

And was crying: Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David- These were the very words used by the blind men of Mt. 9:27. Perhaps she was inspired by them, or at least the rumours she had heard of them, their understanding and their healing. See on 9:27 concerning the connection between David and mercy. "Lord"*, Kurios,* is used about men in passages like Acts 25:26; Gal. 4:1; Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22 and Rom. 14:4, so it is nothing but intellectual desperation which leads Trinitarians to claim that the use of *kurios* means that people thought Jesus was God. The confession of Jesus as Lord was however a fundamental part of conversion to Christianity in the early church. To openly accept Him as Lord of human life was and is the essence of the Christian call. To call upon Him as Lord is presented in the later New Testament as the essence of conversion to Him (Acts 2:21; 22:16; Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Cor. 4:5). The Gospels are full of examples of men and women who called upon Jesus as “Lord” during His ministry, and these individuals are being set up as the prototypes of those who would later convert to Him. The Gospel writers such as Matthew were preaching towards conversion, towards men and women calling upon Jesus as Lord in baptism and devotion to His Name. So the people they record doing this during His ministry are presented as role models to be followed by their audience. But those whom Matthew records as calling upon Jesus as *kurios* are those on the edge of Jewish society- a leper (8:2), a Gentile centurion (8:6,8), blind men (9:28)- and now this Canaanite woman. Matthew emphasizes three times that she repeatedly called Jesus “Lord” (15:22,25,27). In a society where religion was largely a hobby for men, it was quite radical thinking to present a female role model- let alone a Gentile one. See on :27 *masters' table.*

The parable of Mt. 18:33 uses this same phrase "Have mercy on me" and presents it as the very essence of the Gospel. We all beg the Lord to “have mercy on me”, and are to likewise reflect that mercy to others. Again, the woman is being presented as typical of all who would come to Christ. And the word is used in the later New Testament about how all in Christ have received such personal mercy (1 Tim. 1:13,16; 1 Pet. 2:10). But the request was in fact for her *daughter*. The parent is totally identified with the sick child, and in this we see the absolute psychological credibility of the record.

My daughter is severely oppressed by a demon- The very same words were repeated by the man of 17:15. He likewise asked for *mercy* to be shown to his *son*, as she had asked for her daughter, because he was likewise “badly vexed” (the same two Greek words are used). Just as she was inspired by the blind men of 9:27 (see above), so she in her turn inspired another man who heard of her story. This is how communities can get into an upward spiral of spiritual growth. The idea was that a demon had possessed the daughter and was controlling her, perhaps [as was thought] convulsing her. However, today we understand what causes convulsions- and it isn't demons. The

language of being controlled by demons is clearly phenomenological, the language of the day for illnesses which were otherwise inexplicable to the people of the time. The healing of the daughter resulted in her being "whole" or "healed" (:28). The implied 'driving out of demons' was simply another way of saying she was cured.

15:23- see on 14:15.
But he did not answer her- Another case of the apparent silence of the Lord, seen also in His not coming immediately to Lazarus when He received news of his sickness, His appearance of walking past the drowning disciples on the lake, and making as if He would go further on the way to Emmaus (cp. Is. 30:18). And, we might add, in His apparent delay in returning to establish the Kingdom, along with countless examples from human lives today. But this delay and silence is not at all from disinterest and hard heartedness, let alone distraction with other issues. We are accustomed to human lack of response to us being because of those things, and we can too easily assume that the Lord's apparent lack of response is for similar reasons. But the Bible, and the Gospels especially, surely make it clear that the lack of response is indeed only apparent- it is ultimately part of a larger spiritual plan for our eternal good at our latter end. In this case, the silence elicited in the woman a depth of understanding and intensity of hope and faith which perhaps she had not had previously. For she didn't shrug and walk away, muttering that all Jews were snobs and elitists. Instead, she considered that indeed, she was not worthy of any response, and yet seeing that this Son of David was the epitome of God's grace, she renewed her faith and appeal. Instead of shrugging and walking off, "she worshipped Him" (:25), in the spirit of Job, who said he would trust God even if He slew him (Job 13:15). And was rewarded.

And his disciples came [pros-erchomai] and begged him, saying- The woman "came" (*erchomai*) and worshipped Him (:25). The coming of the disciples to Jesus and begging Him (to send the woman away) *and being rejected* is clearly matched in the record by the woman coming to Jesus (a related word is used), begging Him- *and having her request accepted*. Again, the Gospel writers are presenting themselves negatively, in humility recognizing that their way of rejecting the Gentiles and turning people away was *wrong*. This of course had great significance in the communities of believers which were formed as a result of Matthew's Gospel being believed. For the tendency to turn away Gentile believers was very strong.

Send her away- The very word the disciples had recently used in requesting the Lord to 'send away' the hungry crowds (14:15). He intended them to learn from their mistake, and so providentially they were presented with another case of someone whom they were tempted to "send away". And they failed the test. And so in the feeding of the 4000 which now follows in the record, they are again presented with a temptation to "send away" the crowds (15:32)- and again, they fail. Surely Matthew is bringing out the point that they had failed miserably to grasp this point- that the Lord's followers are tempted to send away those whom He will not send away. This point was of extreme practical relevance amongst groups of Jewish converts who were tempted to 'send away' Gentile converts from table fellowship. It's just possible that the disciples were using the term "send away" in the sense that it is sometimes used elsewhere- to loose, to send away with the request granted (18:27; Lk. 13:12; 14:4). But it seems to me from the surrounding context of the sending away of the crowds that we are intended to read this as the disciples yet again wanting someone to be refused by Jesus, when He wanted to accept them.

For she cries out after us- The Greek *opisthen*, "after", really means 'behind'; and the word used for 'crying' is literally 'to growl or croak'. This is the language of an unwanted dog running behind men and irritating them with the noise of its barking. This paves the way for the language of the woman as a pestering dog (see on :25 *worshipped Him*). But there is also a sadly typical attitude displayed here- 'This person is irritating*us*, therefore, we deny them a relationship with the Lord personally'. So many of those called to Christ are indeed irritating types- it is the 'normal', calm, self-satisfied types who fail to perceive their need for Him.

15:24 *But he answered and said: I was only sent*- The Lord Jesus, who spoke and acted the words of God, was clearly willing to change His position depending on human response. He initially declined to heal the daughter of the Canaanite woman because, as He clearly stated, He had been sent *only* unto "the lost sheep of the house of Israel"; and it was not appropriate, He said, to take the food from those children and feed it to Gentile dogs (Mt. 14:24,26). He may well have had in mind His own principle of not throwing pearls before swine [Gk. 'wild dogs'] (Mt. 7:6). But… He changed. He healed the woman's daughter. He was so deeply impressed with her perception and faith that He changed the operation of His principles.

To the lost sheep of the house of Israel- The ambiguous genitive here could mean that the lost sheep *were* the house of Israel; or that the lost sheep had been lost *by* the house of Israel. The *apollumi* sheep means more than 'lost' as in confused and in the wrong place; the word has the distinct sense of 'destroyed' or 'dead'. The Lord's mission was almost to resurrect the slain sheep of Israel.

15:25 *But she came and knelt before him, saying: Lord! Help me!*- The kneeling was worship. The Greek *proskuneo* is defined by Strong as meaning "to lick like a dog licking his master's hand, to crouch". This paved the way for the Lord's response, that it was not appropriate to cast the children's food to the dogs. And she responds that she is as a dog under the children's table (:27). Her posture, therefore, was perhaps consciously intended to mimic a crouching dog. Her worship was not in song, but simply in recognizing that He alone can "help".

The Canaanite woman simply prayed: "Lord, help me". The Lord's response was to heal her daughter, with the comment: "Be it unto you even as you wish" (Mt. 15:25,28). She didn't specifically ask for anything, she just stated her problem, but the Lord understood her few words as expressing her hidden will, and treated this as her specific prayer request. And here we have untold comfort for those who feel (needlessly) that they are not good at praying because they're not good at verbalizing.

15:26 *And he answered and said: It is not right to take the children's bread*- The idea could be of taking the food the children were eating, and giving it to the dogs. Or, the Greek could equally mean 'the food intended for the children'. In this case, the Lord would be implying that He had received food to give to the children, and it was inappropriate for Him to instead throw it to the dogs rather than giving it to the children. The *artos*, "bread", is specifically bread rather than food in general. The bread obtained by the Lord is easily understandable as salvation; Judaism expected Messiah to bring manna for Israel, and the Lord makes it clear in John 6 that the manna He would give was Himself and salvation in Him. The bread of Israel was to be the salvation of the world, but it was only given to the world because of Israel's rejection of it. In this we

see the economy of God, how even through human rejection of the Gospel, the final purpose of God towards salvation is still furthered.

And cast it to the dogs- The Lord so respected Israel that He felt giving the Gospel to the Gentiles instead of them was like casting good food to dogs (Mk. 7:27). Israel (the children) didn't want to eat, but the Lord painted them as if they did. The "crumb" that was cast to the dogs was a great miracle; but Christ saw that as only a crumb of the huge meal that was potentially prepared for Israel. It seems the idea here is meant to be connected with His invitation to us to sit at table with Him and share the meal, both now (Lk. 14:8) and in the Kingdom (Lk. 12:37). Just one crumb of the Lord's meal is a mighty miracle, and yet we are asked to sit down and eat the whole meal with Him: as symbolised in our eating of "the Lord's supper". This is an eloquent picture of the greatness of our position as members of His table now, as well as in the future.

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

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

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

We can too easily assume that she is considering the Jewish children sitting at the table as the masters of the Gentiles. But she uses *kurios* for 'master', and I noted on :22 that she is recorded three times here as addressing Jesus as *kurios,* "Lord". There is no Biblical nor spiritual warrant for thinking of Jews as 'masters' or 'lords' of the Gentiles. Her triple use of *kurios* regarding the Lord Jesus surely suggests that she is thinking

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

15:28 *Then Jesus answered*- This has been said in :23,25 and :26. His responsiveness to human words, actions and perceptions was clearly very impressive to Matthew. And this Lord is our Lord.

O woman, great is your faith- The Lord commended the Canaanite woman for her understanding of the Hope of Israel and the Gentile's place in it: "Great is your faith" (Mt. 15:28); great was her understanding, and therefore her faith. Mark records that the Lord also said: "For this saying go your way; the demon is gone out of your daughter" (Mk. 7:29). This shows the value which the Lord placed on correct understanding. The Gentile woman had seen the feeding of the 5,000 and *understood* the implications of the lesson which the Lord was teaching. We get the feeling that the Lord was *overjoyed* at her perception and therefore made an exception to His rule of not being sent at that time to the Gentiles, but to the house of Israel.

Be it done to you even as you wish. And her daughter was healed from that moment- It was done unto her daughter, for her sake- an example of a third party being healed or blessed by the Lord in response to the faith of another person (see Mk. 2:5 for another example- the paralyzed man was cured for the sake of the faith of his friends). This sets a challenging precedent for us in our prayers for others. John seems to consciously allude to the Lord's words here when recording how the Lord stated a general principle, that if His words abide in us "You shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you" (Jn. 15:7; see too Mt. 18:19). The Lord was setting up that woman as the role model of all who would believe in Him. His words abode in her- see comment on *from that very hour*. Mark adds: "The demon is gone out of your daughter". The Lord Jesus used well known medical techniques in His ministry (Mk. 7:33; Jn. 9:6); not because He needed to use them, but in order to somehow get His hearers at ease. And so, it seems to me, He used the language of demons. He dealt with people in terms which they would be able to accept.

We get the impression that the woman didn't have her daughter with her. She had to go home believing in the Lord's words, and according to that faith it was given to her.

15:29 *And Jesus departed from there and came near to the Sea of Galilee*- The Greek could imply a relocation, as if He had been based in that Gentile area and now returned to spend time in Galilee.

And he went up the mountain and sat there- Reminiscent of the giving of the sermon on the Mount, the earlier feeding of the 5000 (Jn. 6:3 "Jesus went up into a mountain, and there He sat"), and also His sitting upon the Mount of Olives teaching (Mt. 24:3). Sitting on a mountain was metaphorical for reigning (Rev. 17:9). Although His political Kingdom had not yet come, in His teaching He was as it were ruling over His people- which is exactly the sense in which He is now ruling over us His king-dom, those under the domain of His teaching and rulership as Lord and King.

15:30 *And there came to him great crowds*- The use of the Greek word *ochlos* is perhaps intended to be associated with the very similar word *oichos*, family. The Lord was seeking to turn those multitudes of variously motivated people into a family- His ecclesia.

Having with them the lame, blind, dumb, maimed and many others- This is an intentional echo of the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 35:5,6, where we read of the healing of "the blind... the deaf... the lame... the dumb". The Lord purposefully healed multitudes of lame and blind, and allowed them to come to Him in the temple (Mt. 21:14). His acted out message was clearly that those who were despised as unfit for God's service were now being welcomed by Him into that service. The lame and blind were despised because they couldn't work. They had to rely on the grace of others. Here again is a crucial teaching: those called are those who can't do the works, but depend upon grace.

And they put them down- Another touch of the eye witness account. For they had just carried handicapped people up a mountainside.

At his feet, and he healed them- This is not merely an incidental description. To be *para pous* ("at the feet of") a person was significant- it was a declaration of their seniority as a leader and teacher (Lk. 7:38; 8:35,41; 10:39; 17:16; Acts 4:35,37; 5:2; 7:58; 22:3). The term would surely not have been used here unless it has that sense. The point is perhaps that people were brought to Jesus, with all the healing and teaching that implies, because of the effort of third parties for them.

15:31 *So much so that the crowd wondered*- They had struggled to carry those sick and handicapped folk up a mountainside, casting them down in exhaustion at the Lord's feet (see on :30). Surely they did so because they believed. Precisely what they hoped and prayed for was given- hence the record labours the point that the dumb *spoke*, the blind *saw*, the lame *walked*, the maimed were *made whole*. And yet when they saw the fulfilment of what they had hoped and prayed for, they "wondered". Rather like the believers praying for Peter's release and then being amazed when he appeared at the door. We can genuinely believe and even act according to that faith, and yet not have the faith which calmly envisages the answer as having effectively been already given.

When they saw the dumb speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel- The implication is therefore that these were Gentiles. The Lord therefore broke His bread with non-Jews; see digression on 14:20.

The account of the feeding of the 4000 is very similar to that of the feeding of the 5000. Therefore see notes on 14:14-21.

15:32 *Then Jesus called his disciples to him, and said*- We often meet this note in the Gospels. The implication is surely that if discipleship involves being with and following Jesus, then the disciples are therefore recording their own weakness in noting that they were often *not* with Jesus and had to be called unto Him. And it is observable that in many of the cases of being called to Him, they were somehow astray in action or attitude- separated from Him not just physically. The Greek specifically means 'to call towards', and so the pattern is established of the Lord's basic call being repeated throughout the course of our discipleship.

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

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

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

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

dropped from Heaven into *our* hands, but rather than they will be provided in order to meet the need.

I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way- Mark adds "Because some of them had come from afar" (Mk. 8:3). This again is a hint at Gentile presence in the crowd- see on :31.

15:33 *And the disciples said to him: Where can we get so many loaves in this deserted place to fill so great a crowd?*
- "From whence shall we get bread here in the wilderness?" (AV) is how Peter / Mark recorded their question to the Lord (Mk. 8:4). But the wording is so very similar to the LXX of Ex. 16:3, where a faithless Israel asked the same of Moses; and Moses responded, as did the Lord, in providing bread from Heaven. Did the disciples actually say those words? Would they really have said the very words which Israel did in one of their lowest ebbs of faith and understanding? My suggestion is that they did indeed say something similar in essence, but Mark / Peter purposefully recorded it in terms which highlight the similarity with unbelieving Israel- to as it were emphasize how weak the disciples were at that point. Peter was the public leader of the early ecclesia, and yet the Gospels all emphasise his weaknesses. The Gospels all stress the disciples' lack of spirituality, their primitive earthiness in comparison to the matchless moral glory of God's Son, their slowness to understand the cross. But there are also more studied references to their failures. Mark's account of their words at the feeding of the crowd is shot through with reference to the attitude of faithless Israel in the wilderness: "Where shall we ['And this includes me, Mark...this is what we said to Him...'] get bread to satisfy this people in the wilderness?". We must note that the very same word "Whence…?" was used by the disciples before the feeding of the 5000 earlier (Jn. 6:5). The answer to the question then had been 'From Heaven'. But the repeated situation didn't seem to register with the disciples. Just as circumstances repeat in our lives too, but we don't perceive it.

Mark has 'Whence can a man…" (Mk. 8:4). Their reasoning was that no *man* could meet this huge need, and so therefore, they naturally couldn't meet it- for they were only men. Man can't, therefore we can't. And so our reasoning goes so often. Something is humanly impossible, therefore it is impossible to me, because I am human. The life and person of the Lord Jesus challenged this thinking very deeply. For He was fully human, of our nature, our representative, and yet did super-human things. With God's manifestation and involvement in human life, then human beings can achieve that which is humanly impossible. And this was exemplified supremely in the Lord Jesus, once we appreciate He was of our nature and not some Divine puppet playing a mere role- as required by Trinitarian theology.

They were indeed "filled" (:37). The Lord has just said to the Gentile woman that the Jews must first be "filled" (s.w. Mk. 7:27) before the Gentile dogs are fed. In Matthew 15, the feeding of the 4000 comes straight after the Lord's encounter with that woman. It seems the point is that the Lord judged that the time had now come to fill the Gentiles. For this was largely a Gentile crowd (see on :31).

15:34 *And Jesus said to them: How many loaves have you? And they said: Seven, and a few small fish*- The feeding of the 4000 is clearly recorded in the same style and with much the same language as the feeding of the 5000. We are surely intended to place the events together. Five loaves were used in the healing of the 5000, and seven here- making a total of 12 loaves. Jewish minds would surely have thought of the 12 loaves

on the table of showbread (Lev. 24:5). Moses personally was to "set them" on the table in rows (Lev. 24:1,6), which connects with how the loaves were "set" before the people (Mk. 8:6), who at the feeding of the 5000 were set down in rows (Mk. 6:40 Gk.). The hint was clearly that the most sacred bread of Judaism, the 12 loaves of the showbread, were being set before Gentiles, women, children and secular Jews- by non-priests, the disciples. And all were welcome to partake, without testing their qualification. The rending of the veil into the Most Holy at the Lord's death was only really making public that which the Lord had already achieved in His life.

The Lord's teaching style continually revolved around posing explicit and implicit questions to His hearers, such as "How many loaves do you have?". John's Gospel contains a total of 161 questions; and one brief passage in Mark (Mk. 8:14-21- the parallel to this section in Matthew) records how the Lord asked seven questions in quick succession. In this sense, the Lord Jesus intended to be intrusive into human life; He penetrates the depths of our being. His call to pick up a cross and follow Him was radical- so radical, that His hearers both then and now tended to [even unconsciously] negate the totally radical import of His demands.

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

15:35 *And he commanded the crowd to sit down on the ground*- The Greek really means to recline at table. This is another indication that He was presenting as it were the Messianic banquet, and fellowshipping at table in a spiritual sense with whoever wished to be present. See the digression at 14:20.

15:36 *He took the seven loaves and the fish; and he gave thanks and broke the bread and gave it to the disciples*- The same Greek words for 'took' and 'loaves' have just been used in 15:26, where the Lord told the Gentile woman that it was not appropriate to 'take' the 'bread' (s.w. "loaves") intended for Israel and give them to the Gentiles. But now, just ten verses later in the narrative, He does just that (bearing in mind the evidence that this is a partly Gentile crowd). The impression is surely that the woman's spiritual perception deeply impressed the Lord, to the point that He decided the time had come to begin giving Israel's bread to the Gentiles. This openness in both the Father and Son is a function of their supreme sensitivity to men. See on 16:5.

And the disciples gave them to the crowds- The Lord gave the broken bread to the disciples, eloquently speaking of the gift of His life. They in their turn "did set before the people" (Mk. 8:6). We must pass on that which was given to us by the Lord. Paul is our example in this (1 Cor. 11:23). We must, of course, have a valid relationship with the Lord in the first place, feeling we have definitely received something from Him, if we are to pass it on. The Greek term for "set before" recurs in 1 Tim. 1:18 and 2 Tim. 2:2 concerning how we simply *must* pass on the word which has been given to us. Quite

simply, if we've really heard it, really received it, we must pass it on. Paul saw the breaking of bread prefigured in Christ's feeding of the 4000 (Mt. 15:36 = 1 Cor. 11:24).

15:37 *And they all ate and were filled*- See on :33 *to fill*.

And they collected- According to Mk. 8:19-21, one of the reasons behind the Lord telling them to do this was simply to make them more deeply aware of the huge amount of bread which the Lord had created- to the point that they should realize that things like bread, and indeed all physical externalities, were just ultimately insignificant to the Lord. "And they reasoned one with another, saying: It is because we have no bread... When I broke the five loaves among the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you gather? They said to Him: Twelve. And when the seven among the four thousand, how many basketfuls of broken pieces did you gather? And they said to Him: Seven. And He said to them: How is it that you do not yet understand?". Clearly the Lord was carefully working out a plan of spiritual education for them- and they failed to respond well to it. He does the same in our lives, although we may be barely perceptive that the process is even running.

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

"What was left over" is Gk. 'super-abounded'. This is noted in all five records of the feeding miracles. The poor notice wastage of food, and this was the wastage of food *extraordinaire*. But such super generosity is the hallmark of God's activity, as it should be a feature of our spirit too. The prodigal recalled how there was always 'an abundance of loaves' with the Father (Gk. "bread to the full", AV; Lk. 15:16).

The Greek of this verse is identical to the conclusion concerning the feeding of the 5000 in 14:20. The similarity between the two feeding miracles is very pointed and extensive. The point may simply be that the Lord was consciously repeating a situation so that the disciples would have the chance to put into practice what they should have learnt from the earlier situation. This principle would explain the strong sense of *déjà vu* which surely all of us have observed in the course of our lives.

The crowd were filled, totally satiated; and the leftover food *filled* the baskets. The impression is given of superabundance of provision.

15:38 *And besides women and children*- Gk. 'at a space from'. This was literally true, in that women and children would have sat separately from the men. At least 10,000 people would've been present in total.

They that had eaten were four thousand men- Eating is a consciously presented theme in this chapter. The disciples are condemned for eating in an unclean manner (15:2), the Gentile woman eats the crumbs rejected by the Jews (15:27), and now a huge

crowd of Gentiles (see on :31) including women and children (the socially and religiously marginalized) also “eat”. The incident is surely placed next to that of the Gentile woman eating the ‘crumbs’ in :27 in order to show the eagerness of the Gentiles for the bread of Israel. The amazing example of going three days without food in order to receive spiritual food (:31) demonstrated beyond doubt the legitimacy of Gentile interest in the Messianic bread / manna of the Kingdom.

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

15:39 *And he sent away the crowds, boarded the boat and went into the region of Magdalla*- The Greek *horion* definitely means a border, rather like a state line in North America. Matthew especially uses the term, 7 times in all; it only occurs twice in the other Gospels, and only one other time in the New Testament. At the borders of the regions there were often customs posts through which travellers must pass. Matthew had once 'sat at the customs table', and likely knew these crossing points, or at least, took note of them as they passed through them. This is yet another incidental evidence of the veracity of the records- the Gospel of Matthew really was written as it claims, by a tax collector called Matthew- albeit under Divine inspiration.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 16

16:1 *The Pharisees also with the Sadducees*- The force of *kai* ("also") is that they were united. Here we see the theme being developed of how groups who were otherwise against each other united against the Lord as their common enemy. This came to its ultimate term in the Lord's crucifixion, where even Pilate and Herod became friends (Lk. 23:12). Acts 4:27 comments that not only Pilate and Herod, but even Jews and Gentiles, were gathered together in unity against Him. This of course was a parody of how in the sphere of God's Kingdom, Jew and Gentile were brought together in Christ- for Him, rather than against Him. All that is true of God's sphere of operation appears to have its parody in the system of the world.

Came to test him- This was exactly the situation in the wilderness temptations, strengthening the impression that the source of the temptation was the 'Satan' or adversary of Jewish thinking and the Jewish system.

And asked him to show them a sign- This appears an exact repetition of the situation in 12:38,39- the same words are used. The point is simply that the same requests and answers were given at different times throughout the Lord's ministry. That seems to me to have the ring of truth- for anyone with any missionary experience will nod their head and recall how often that has been their experience. And yet the critics love to make elaborate claims based on the similarity with 12:38,39. It simply depends with what spirit we come to the records- those who believe in inspiration will see circumstantial

evidence for veracity in such things, whereas those bent on downgrading the Gospels to human, fallible records will use the same material to find fault.

From Heaven- The implication was that the Lord's miraculous signs were from 'satan', from beneath rather than from above. This was tantamount to blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. See notes on 12:38,39.

16:2 *But he answered and said to them: When it is evening, you say: It will be fair weather, for the sky is red*- The Lord's examples relate to reading the appearance of the sky. This is His answer to their request for a "sign *from Heaven*"- bearing in mind that in Hebrew and Aramaic, the words for 'sky' and 'Heaven' as in the abode of God are the same. They realized that the same sign- the redness of the sky- could signify two different things. The sign is specifically defined as being the sign of Jonah- the resurrection of Christ (12:38,39). If they perceived the sign of reddened sky in the evening, then it was a sign of "fair weather". The word "weather" is an insertion from the translators and reflects no original Greek word. Most other usages of the Greek for "fair" refer to acceptance with God: "*Well done* (s.w. "fair") good and faithful servant" (Mt. 25:21,23); "*Well* (s.w. "fair"), you good servant" (Lk. 19:17; and see Acts 15:29; Eph. 6:3). If they read that sign right in the evening, then their morning would be 'fair'- acceptance with God. But if it was in the morning that they saw the sign, then there would be "foul weather" (:3). Again, "weather" is an insertion by the translators, but the Greek really refers to heavy rain- it is translated "tempest" or "storm" in Acts 27:20, and where it is elsewhere translated "winter", the literal sense would be 'rainy season'. The language of rain, storm and tempest recalls Noah's flood and is a clear metaphor for condemnation. The Lord is observing that the same sign can portend two different destinies- depending upon when it is perceived. The sign is that of Jonah, and the resurrection of Jesus. If they perceived that in the evening, before the night time and darkness of death- then that sign would mean their salvation and blessing. But if only in the morning, after His resurrection- then it meant the rainstorm of condemnation for them.

16:3 *And in the morning: It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening*- See on 16:2.

You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky- AV "You hypocrites". Hypocrisy may seem a strange charge to level at men who could read the weather but did not want to perceive that they were Nineveh with Jonah in their midst; and according to their response to the Lord's resurrection, their eternity would be decided. The charge of hypocrisy would seem to me to imply that they realized indeed who Jesus was, but were acting as if they didn't. The Lord said as much in designing a later parable to have the Jews saying "This is the heir; come, let us kill Him" (Mt. 21:38). Another option is that their ability to read basic signs in the weather made them responsible to discerning who Christ was and their need to repent; and to not use our potential abilities is perhaps seen by the Lord as hypocrisy.

But you cannot interpret the signs of the times- The "sign[s] of the times" which they wanted but couldn't discern can be seen as the whole work of Jesus, rather than specifically the signs of His coming again. The "sign[s]" which they sought for were in front of them at the time of their asking for them. They therefore cannot really refer to fulfilled latter day prophecies. The lesson is that as farmers and shepherds act accordingly as they interpret the weather, so we ought to respond to the resurrection of Christ [cp. that of Jonah], because it portends the return of Christ in judgment. And the outcome of that sign was either to their blessing ["fair weather"] or condemnation [rainy

/ foul weather]. There is no reason to think that "signs" and "times" have to be read as plurals. They could just as easily refer to the one great sign of the one great and ultimate time. The one great sign would then refer to the Lord's resurrection, perception of which (and *when* it was perceived) would lead to either acceptance or rejection at the ultimate "time" of the last day. This is how the Lord elsewhere uses the word *kairos* ("times") : "The time of harvest" (Mt. 13:30); "the time of the fruit" (Mt. 21:34); "you know not when *the time* is" (Mk. 13:33).

16:4 See commentary on 12:38,39,45.

An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and there shall be no sign given to it except the sign of Jonah- This sign is defined in 12:38,39 as his figurative death and resurrection, symbolic as it was of the Lord's. But seeing the Lord only appeared to His followers, how was His resurrection such a compelling sign to the Jews? Likewise, the resurrection of Jesus was to give assurance "to all men" (Acts 17:31). But how? They hadn't seen Him. There was no Euclidean reason for them to believe in His resurrection. How is it an assurance to all men and a sign to the Jews? Surely in that the disciples (and ourselves, in this age) are the risen Lord's representatives "to all men", and through us they see the evidence of Christ risen, and thereby have assurance of God's plan for them. This explains how the wicked and adulterous generation to whom the Lord witnessed were given the sign of the prophet Jonah- that after three days, the Lord would re-appear. But that sign was only given to them through the preaching of the apostles- that generation didn't see the risen Lord Himself. But the witness of the disciples was as good as- for in their witness, they represented the Lord.

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

16:5 *When the disciples reached the other side*- The style of reporting this doesn't say 'When *they...*'. And yet presumably the Lord went with them. Hence the impression is given of a mental separation between the disciples and the Lord. This would have been all the more painful for Him because He had just 'left' the Jewish masses to focus upon them (see on 16:4)- and even they were now somewhat 'off' with Him, and still caught up in hardness of heart, not perceiving the wonder and meaning of the feeding miracles (:9).

They had forgotten to bring any bread- This is the very same Greek phrase used about the Lord 'taking the bread' in the feeding miracles (Mt. 14:19; 15:36). The phrase occurs five times in the next verses (16:5-10- "loaves" is s.w. "bread"). The phrase is

used a total of 23 times- here, about the taking of bread in the feeding miracles, and about 'taking bread' at the breaking of bread service. The only other use is directly in the context of the feeding miracles (see on 15:26). To 'take bread' therefore refers to an act of religious significance- for the 'taking of bread' in the feeding miracles was clearly invested with deeper meaning, as brought out in John 6. The disciples at this point seem to have sensed that there was something significant in 'taking bread'- but they had not figured out what. Because when the Lord warns them about the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees, they assume He is referring to their failure to 'take bread'. Their slowness to understand is really brought out in the record. The Lord had earlier used yeast as a symbol of influence and effect worked by teaching (13:33). But they didn't grasp that He meant 'beware of the influence and teaching of the Jewish leaders'- even though that had been such a major theme of His teaching from the beginning. Instead, they superstitiously felt that they must be at fault concerning 'bread' because the Lord had mentioned yeast, and so they concluded that the Lord considered their forgetting to 'take bread' as being somehow sinful. They were really so far off in understanding, and yet the Lord elsewhere speaks so positively about their understanding of His message.

16:6- see on Mt. 15:2.

And Jesus said to them- The disciples heard the Lord's warning about yeast, missed the danger of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and therefore wrongly assumed the Lord was saying something about the bread they had not taken.

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

Of the Pharisees and Sadducees- Here, yeast is used in a negative sense. The preaching of the Kingdom by us is also likened to yeast- a symbol for that which is unclean (Mk. 8:15; 1 Cor. 5:6-8). Perhaps the metaphor is simply of 'spreading'. Or maybe the Lord used this symbol to show that it is our witnessing as humans, as the sons of men, which is what will influence the 'lump' of humanity. People are increasingly acting like the personalities they feel they are expected to be, rather than *being* who they *are*.

16:7 *And they discussed this*- Every one of the 16 NT usages of *dialogizomai* (and they are all found in the Gospels) is in a negative context, of the reasoning of the flesh against the spirit, or of legalism against faith. The flesh prefers the way of internal debate rather than simple action in faith, because the longer we keep ourselves talking (as it were), the greater the chance we shall be finally disobedient. They "reasoned among themselves", and the Lord perceived that they so "reasoned" (:8). This double usage of the word is to be found in an earlier Gospel incident, where the Scribes "reasoned in their hearts", "among themselves", and the Lord likewise "perceived... that they so reasoned amongst themselves" (Mk. 2:6,8; Lk. 5:21,22). The point is that the disciples were acting like the Jewish religious leaders- which is precisely the context here, for in the preceding verse the Lord has warned them not to become mentally influenced by these people. This part of the Lord's ministry has rightly been described as His "crisis in Galilee"- the disciples present themselves here in the Gospel records as far from Him in understanding and spirit.

Among themselves- The impression is given of the disciples away from Jesus, huddled together keeping out of the Lord's earshot- and He perceives what they are whispering, and raises the issue with them (:8).

Saying: We did not bring any bread- See on :5 *take bread*.

16:8 *And Jesus, aware of it, said: O you of little faith!* - Note the Lord's parallel of 'little faith' with little understanding. *Pistis*, one of the NT words for 'faith', is translated in the LXX as both 'faith' (e.g. Dt. 32:20; Prov. 12:22) and 'truth' (Prov. 12:17; 14:22; Jer. 5:1). Indeed, another word used in the LXX is 119 times translated 'truth' and 26 times 'faith'. There *is* a connection between true knowledge of the Gospel and faith. And this faith is the basis for our works. We don't just learn the propositions of the one faith before baptism, and forget them. The triumphant spiritual life *lives them out*. Knowledge and faith are paralleled in John's thought (Jn. 8:32 cp. 14:1; and 6:69 cp. 11:27)- in stark contrast to this world's emphasis upon works rather than faith. Hence Isaiah's appeals to *know* and *believe* Yahweh (Is. 43:10).

16:9 *Do you still not understand? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered*- One gets a fraction of insight into the Lord's struggle when we read that He perceived that the disciples were worried about bread; and He laments that they do not perceive the miracle of the loaves which He had wrought (Mt. 16:9). His perception, His sensitivity, is contrasted with the lack of these things in His followers. He must have therefore been so humanly alone.

16:10 *Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many baskets you took up?*- It seems that in educating the twelve, the Lord designed the numbers of baskets they took up in order to be memorable by them. As they were immersed in all that broken bread, they were intended to perceive that bread was utterly no issue to the Lord. But they failed to learn that intended lesson, and the Lord was disappointed that the memory and intended lesson had not remained with them.

16:11 *How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees*- The disciples were rebuked as being "of little faith" in the matter of not *understanding* the Lord's teaching about leaven (Mt. 16:8-11). It has been commented that the sayings of Jesus "are everywhere too subtly penetrated with theological claims and dogmatical instruction for the distinction commonly drawn between Christian "ethics" and Christian "dogma" to be other than forced or artificial". His doctrines lead to His practice. Doctrine is likened by the Lord to yeast- it is going to affect the holder of it (Mt. 16:11,12).

16:12 *Then they understood*- On their own admission in the Gospel records, the understanding of the disciples was pitiful. Not only did they not really listen to the Lord's words, the words of the Only Begotten Son of God, but they retained many misconceptions from the world around them which did not accept Him. Thus they failed to see after two miracles relating to bread, that literal bread was not so significant to the Lord (Mk. 8:19-21). It's possible that "then they understood" doesn't necessarily mean that finally, they got what the Lord was on about. Because on another occasion He identifies "the leaven of the Pharisees" as "hypocrisy" (Lk. 12:1), rather than their teaching generally. So perhaps they still did not totally get the drift of the Lord's thinking.

That he told them not to be careful concerning the yeast in bread but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees- The Lord's teaching to the disciples about this came directly after He had told the Jews that they would be given no sign apart from that of Jonah. I have suggested above that He foretold that the Jews would fail to perceive the meaning of His resurrection; and He feared that the teachings of the Pharisees and

Sadducees would lead the disciples likewise to not perceive this. We see here a classic example of where wrong teaching about apparently smaller issues can lead to.

16:13 *Now when Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi*- Again we get the impression that the Lord was working to educate the disciples according to some kind of program. He surely would have loved to ask them this question earlier, but He waited for some reason until they were in Caesarea Philippi. What that reason was isn't clear. Perhaps He wanted to wait until they were back in Jewish territory after their excursion into Gentile territory, the purpose of which had been to get away from the spotlight of publicity and teach the disciples. And like a good teacher, now the Lord tested their apprehension of His teaching.

He asked his disciples, saying- *Erotao* can mean to pray, to entreat, to ask for something- rather than to casually enquire about an opinion held. He asked the question seeking a positive answer; He was indirectly asking them to believe in Him as God's Son.

Whom do men say- This was to pave the way for His more significant, personal question: Whom do *you* say I am? (:15). "Say" translates *lego* which more specifically means to speak rather than 'to believe' or 'to understand'. He wanted to know the words of men's' actual lips about Him- which again hints that the disciples were not with the Lord all the time. They were often with people when the Lord wasn't present. Psychologically, considering others' views of Christ helps us better understand where we personally stand regarding Him- indeed, this is true generally in terms of self-understanding. Hence the Lord firstly asks whom others thought Him to be, rather than simply asking the disciples whether they believed in Him as the Son of God.

That the Son of Man is?- This is how the Lord saw Himself. Twice in Mark, Jesus is addressed as "Messiah" but He replies by calling Himself "the Son of man" (Mk. 8:29-31; 14:61,62). If this was His preferred self-perception, should it not be how we perceive Him? AV "That I the Son of Man am" is good translation but it remains an awkward phrase, until we perceive that the Lord is juxtaposing His humanity as "son of Man" and His Divine aspect, as the 'I am', the revelation of Yahweh in human flesh (see on :17 *Simon Barjona)*. Often we encounter this in the New Testament, especially in John's Gospel. The most highly exalted language about the Lord is to be found nearby to other statements of His absolute and total humanity. The Lord's words here lay the ground for His question to the disciples as to whom they thought Him to be. He has led up to that question by describing Himself as "the Son of Man". This was His preferred self-perception. Peter's response: "The Son of the living God" was therefore especially gratifying to the Lord, because Peter didn't merely repeat the Lord's own phrase "the Son of Man". Peter shows that he perceived the Divine side to Jesus, despite His evident humanity. Perhaps Peter was joining in the implied dialogue set up by the Lord juxtaposing His humanity ("son of Man") and Divine side ("I... am") in the phrase "I the Son of Man am". The Lord says that He is "Son of Man", and asks the disciples whom they think He is- and Peter gives the other side of the story, by saying that He is "Son of... God". Perhaps Peter was responding to the Lord's hint at this when He asks "Whom do you say that *I am?*" (:15), for this could have been heard as an allusion to the Yahweh Name. We see this kind of dialogue ("banter" would not be too coarse a word) going on in the Lord's conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4. And He seeks to lead us in such dialogue, speaking personally to us through His word and life experiences, as we respond in the words of prayer and life decisions made for and to Him.

Another possibility is to translate the phrase: “Who do men say that I am? The Son of man?”. This would be tantamount to asking the disciples whether people generally believed He was Messiah. As made clear at the end of chapter 12 and throughout chapter 13, the Lord knew full well that the majority did not accept Him as that, because they had effectively rejected John's message about Him. The crowds had simply liked his hard line about sin and his invitation to recognize human sinfulness. They had not gone further in accepting the solution he had proposed, which was acceptance of Jesus as Messiah. The Lord knew full well the answer to His question, but He wanted the disciples to consider it in order to elicit from them the recognition that John's ministry had not been accepted by Israel, and that their belief in Him as Messiah left them standing with their backs to the Jewish world. Compromise with that world, intellectual or social, was impossible.

16:14 *And they said: Some say John the Baptist*- Literally, *the* John the Baptist. "Some..." is simply translating *ho*, the definite article. "The John the Baptist" would therefore appear to be the main opinion- after that, some thought Jesus was Elijah, others thought He was another of the prophets. There was a strong belief in dead people reappearing in the form of others, *redivivus*, a kind of reincarnation. This had been Herod's view of Jesus, that He was the resurrected John the Baptist. None of the opinions they list include the possibility that Jesus was Messiah. The disciples' answer is therefore a tacit recognition of the failure of John's ministry. He was known even at that early stage as "John the Baptist" because his baptism of so many people was what he was noted for. But that baptism, that recognition of sin, had not led people to accept Jesus as the Christ. It happens so often, that we can have a temporary conviction of sin, and even do something about it- but to fully come to Christ is a different question, and it seems that few go on to make that vital connection.

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

And others Jeremiah- Why was Jeremiah a popular candidate? Was the persecution of Jeremiah by the Jerusalem leadership seen as a common theme with Jesus? Or the urgency of his appeals for repentance before the day of judgment came? Or the depth of his grief for Israel?

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

We can note that in 12:23 the crowd asks: "Is not this the Son of David?". That was a Messianic title. But the answer given here shows that this suspicion that Jesus might be Messiah was just a passing thing. The miracles themselves did not persuade the crowds

of the Lord's Messiahship. Pentecostals should take note of that- miracles do not necessarily produce faith.

The false notion that the Lord Jesus literally pre-existed and was then somehow incarnated, or re-incarnated, was a pagan idea that had become popular in Judaism around the time of Christ. In fact the road to the Trinity began with Justin and other 'church fathers' coming to teach that Jesus personally pre-existed- even though they initially denied that He was God Himself. The Qumran sect, some of whose followers became the first Christians, believed that the "Teacher of Righteousness" pre-existed as the former prophets and would be an incarnation of them. This explains why they thought Messiah had previously been incarnated as Moses, Elijah and the prophets. In this lies the significance of the account in Mt. 16:14-18. Jesus enquires who the people think He is- and the disciples answer that the popular view is that Jesus of Nazareth is Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets reincarnated. But this was exactly who first century Judaism thought Messiah would be. So the crowd view was indeed that Jesus was Messiah- but "Messiah" as they understood Messiah would be. The significance of the incident lies in Peter's affirmation that Jesus, whom he accepted as Messiah, was not a re-incarnation of a pre-existent prophet but was the begotten Son of God. Note in passing that the false doctrine of pre-existence is connected to the pagan myth of incarnation and re-incarnation. If, for example, Jesus really was existing in Old Testament times, then somehow He would have had to have been re-incarnated in Mary's womb.

16:15 *He said to them: But who do you say that I am?*- The effort required in interpreting Jesus is, it seems to me, designed by God, whose word it is which we are discussing. The intention is to make us think about Jesus, struggle with the issue of His identity and nature, in order that we should understand Him better, and thereby love and serve Him the more intently. Perhaps that is why so little is recorded of Jesus- all the speeches and actions of Jesus found in the Gospels would've occupied only three weeks or so of real time. The rest of His life, words and actions we are left to imagine, given what we do know of Him. He wants us to reflect, as He did the disciples, "Whom do *you* think I am?" (Mk. 8:29). Perhaps that is why at least in Mark's Gospel there is the theme of Jesus not wanting men to be told in point blank terms that He was Messiah.

"Say", *lego*, means to talk out loud, and is the same word used in 16:13. The Lord may have been asking whom they talked about Him as. *Lego* means specifically to talk about; the Lord chose not to use words like 'understand' or 'believe'. Maybe He is alluding to His principle that words express inner thoughts and beliefs. And so instead of asking them whom they *believed* or*thought* Him to be (although that is the essence of His question), He asks them whom they talk about Him as. Because spoken words do ultimately reflect inner faith and understanding.

16:16 *And Simon Peter answered and said*- Peter is set up as our example and pattern. The records portray him in such a way that we see so clearly the similarities between him and us. The good intentions, the flashes of zeal, the miserable failures, the essential loyalty to the Man who was better than he. The Gospels also portray Peter as the representative of the group of disciples. It is Peter who answers when the Lord asks a question of them all (Mk. 8:29 cp. the other accounts). The way Jesus looks upon all the disciples as He speaks to Peter makes Peter some kind of representative of them all in the Lord's eyes (Mk. 8:33). In Mt. 16:17 Peter is commended for having had the Father reveal Jesus to Him. Yet Mt. 11:27 says that the Father reveals the identity of His Son to *all* who truly come to Him. Thus Peter is representative of all who have truly perceived the Son's identity in Jesus of Nazareth. In one Gospel, all the disciples ask a

question, while in the parallel passage Peter is stated to have asked it (Mk. 7:17 cp. Mt. 15:15 and Mt. 21:20 cp. Mk. 11:21). Even outsiders considered Peter to be representative of all the disciples (Mt. 17:24). “Peter and those with him” is how the group is described (Mk. 1:36; Lk. 8:45 Gk.; 9:32). Peter’s crucial confession that he believed that Jesus was the Son of God is repeated almost verbatim by all the disciples, sometime later (Jn. 6:69; 16:30). He is truly the representative disciple.

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

Peter’s proclamation of Jesus as Messiah half way through Matthew and Mark’s records of the Gospel (Mk. 8:29) is presented by them as a climax of understanding. And yet according to Jn. 1:41, Andrew and Peter had known this right from the start. The implication is surely that they, as simple working men, probably illiterate, had merely repeated in awe words and phrases like “Messiah” and “Son of God” with no real sense of their import. Yet again, the Lord gently bore with their misunderstandings, and Peter of his own initiative, 18 months later, came to gleefully blurt out the same basic ideas but with now far deeper insight- although he still incorrectly perceived the Messiah as one who would not suffer but provide instant glorification. Thus the spiritual growth of the disciples is revealed.

Rarely in the Gospels does someone actually declare Jesus to be the Christ, the anointed one, Messiah. This of course was the thrust of John's teaching, denying that he was the Christ but saying that he was heralding Him. Despite all the surface level response to John, with so many baptized that he was known as "the Baptist" very soon after His death (:14), it seems that only the disciples really grasped his essential message about Jesus. See on :14. Peter had made the same confession of faith in the same words ("You are the Christ, the Son of the living God") some time previously, after the feeding of the 5000 (Jn. 6:69). It would seem that "the Christ, the Son of God" is therefore being presented as a formula for confession of faith. Martha likewise confesses faith in Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of God" (Jn. 11:27). The connection between the words "Christ" and "Son of God" is found elsewhere. Mark's Gospel is a proclamation of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (Mk. 1:1); Luke begins his Gospel predicting that Messiah would be "called... Son of God" (Lk. 1:32,35), not by being named "Son of God" by Mary (He was named 'Jesus'), but called on as Son of God by those believing in Him. Indeed it was the whole intention of John's Gospel to bring people to faith in "the Christ the Son of God" (Jn. 20:31). Therefore the Eunuch's confession before baptism that he believed

that "Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37) can be seen as a triumph of the Gospel- Philip likewise preached towards the same end as John did through his Gospel. Paul likewise preached the "Christ... is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20). A 'Christ' was simply an 'anointed one', someone anointed or commissioned for a specific task- and there had been many people anointed in this way. The uniqueness about Jesus the Christ was that this Christ was the uniquely begotten Son of God. This explains why there is such a strong emphasis upon believing that Jesus was the Christ who was Son of God. And to this day, it is this uniqueness which differentiates the real Christ from a mere understanding that He was a good man who did indeed historically exist and die. The question is how much more, if anything, was required from people in terms of understanding before a person was considered to have believed 'in Christ'. The evidence of Acts and the Gospels would appear to indicate that 'belief in Christ' meant simply believing that He was Son of God and identifying with Him. The centurion (Mt. 27:54), healed persons (Mk. 3:11)

The Son of the living God- We naturally enquire as to the significance of "the *living* God". In Mt. 22:32 the Lord seems to connect this with resurrection; He says there that God is still the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob because He will ultimately resurrect and immortalize them, seeing He is 'not the dead God but the living God' (Gk.; see Lk. 20:38). His 'living' becomes ours in that He will give us life; "living water" refers to water which gives life (Jn. 7:38), and "the living God" likewise (see another hint of resurrection by "the living God" in Rom. 9:26). "The living *bread*" meant 'the bread which gives life', and this is paralleled by the Lord with "the living *Father*" who also gives life (Jn. 6:51,57). Having taught that, Peter had gone on to state that Jesus was indeed "that Christ, the son of the living God" (Jn. 6:69). This would suggest to me that Peter perceived this connection with resurrection, and when here in Mt. 16:16 he uses the same phrase again, we may be justified in seeing within it an understanding of how the Lord would not only be resurrected but would be the source of life to others. The phrase "living God" was used in Judaism, e.g. the High Priest adjures the Lord Jesus "by the living God" (Mt. 26:63)- but more in the sense that the living God sees and knows all things. Again, we note that it was John the Baptist who preached (AV "bare record") that Jesus was the Son of God (Jn. 1:34). Yet after his death, it was only Peter, the disciples and a few others who accepted this- for :14 has made it clear that most people considered Jesus to be some reincarnation of a previous prophet, but not "Son of God". In commenting upon the end of Matthew 12 and the meaning of the parables about poor response to the word in Matthew 13, I suggested that the Lord recognized at that point that the Jews had been unresponsive to John apart from the circle of disciples- and He switched focus at that point onto them. See on 16:18 *gates of hell*.

Even before this the disciples on Galilee had confessed: “Of a truth thou art the Son of God!”. Peter’s confession was evidently of an altogether higher level. The titles we apply to God and Jesus come to have more meaning to us over time. But straight after his confession, he showed his complete misunderstanding of the Lord’s death, and the whole message of following Him to that same end. He was rebuked: “Thou savourest not the things of God”, straight after having been told that his understanding of Jesus’ Sonship was given to him of God. If he savoured that knowledge, he would have understood the message of the cross which his Lord so insistently preached. But he wasn’t yet at that level. He had to be told at the transfiguration: “This *is* my beloved Son… hear ye him” (Mt. 17:5). It was as if the Father was emphasizing the imperative which lay in the fact that Jesus really is Son of God: if that is truly comprehended, we

must hear Him. The implication is surely that Peter had almost painlessly confessed the Divine Sonship of Jesus. Perhaps the Father had in mind the way Peter, for all his acceptance of that Sonship, would later forget the Son's words and mindlessly deny Him. Straight after this incident, Peter says that his Master pays taxes, as if this is something the Lord just had to do. But the Lord seems to rebuke Peter, by reminding him that if He is truly Son of God and Lord of all, then it is quite inappropriate for Him to have to pay such taxes; for the Father's children are free (Mt. 17:24-27). This evidence all indicates that there are different levels in knowing that Jesus of Nazareth is Son of God. 1 Jn. 5:13 says as much: those who believe on the name of the Son of God must come to believe (i.e. on a higher level) on the name of the Son of God. We must ask ourselves of our own degree of appreciation. For every member of the ecclesia is built up on the foundation of faith that Christ is the Son of God.

16:17- see on 13:11.

And Jesus answered and said to him: Blessed are you- The Lord is thrilled that although John's teaching about Him as Son of God had generally been ignored or rejected (see on :14), Peter had grasped it. He had earlier explained that although the preaching of the word by John had generally not brought forth a permanent response in Israel, the disciples were "blessed" because they *did* understand (13:16). The idea of being "blessed" with an understanding suggests that the understanding was a blessing given- see later in this verse on *not revealed*.

Simon Bar-Jonah- Simon, son of John. The Lord is contrasting Peter's natural origins, speaking of Peter's old name and his natural father, with Peter's high spiritual status as one of the few who perceived the Lord as being the Son of God. This juxtaposition of the natural and spiritual sides in a person is exactly what the Lord had just done with regards to Himself- see on 16:13 *The Son of Man*.

For flesh and blood has not revealed it to you- The correct understanding of the Lord was a "blessing", something given. Earlier the Lord had taught that the Father through Himself had chosen to "reveal" Himself [s.w.] to the spiritually immature disciples ("babes"), and not to the Jewish religious leaders who studied every letter of the Old Testament from dawn to dusk (Mt. 11:25,27). John's equivalent of this is his record of the Lord's comment that the Jews generally did not believe because Isaiah had prophesied that the "arm of the Lord" had to be "revealed" [s.w.] to people, and it was revealed only to a few (Jn. 12:37,38). And our spiritual birth is not of "flesh and blood" but by the sovereign will of God for us (Jn. 1:13). Paul surely has all this in mind when he writes that the things of God "are revealed unto us by His spirit" (1 Cor. 2:10 cp. Gal. 3:23; Phil. 3:15). Faith in Christ therefore requires 'revelation' from God. There was an element to which the disciples, and all of us who have truly responded to the word of Christ, have chosen to do that, and this is pleasing to the Lord. But if that was where the story ended, then salvation would be a matter of human works and intellectual tenacity and correctness in interpretation. Grace would be out of the equation, and God would face off against man over an open Bible which man must correctly interpret and live by if he is to be saved. The will of the Father for human salvation, and the depth of human moral and intellectual weakness, is such that this cannot be the way to salvation. Paul in Romans starts talking about predestination and election in the context of demonstrating that salvation is by grace, and therefore such metaprinciples exist- so that human works and correctness of understanding is only *part* of the final, invisible equation which finds its sum in human salvation. And so it has to be so that there is *some* element of God revealing Truth to us, blessing us with that revelation. Hence

the Lord tells Peter that it is God's grace in revelation, His 'blessing', rather than "flesh and blood" which has revealed this to Peter. And yet the Lord says this against the backdrop of having spoken about the mixture of flesh and spirit in human salvation- see on *Simon Barjona* and on 16:13 *The Son of Man*.

But my Father who is in Heaven- Luke's equivalent seems to be that the Father which is in Heaven gives the Spirit to His children (Mt. 7:11 cp. Lk. 11:13). Again, the emphasis is on God's part- our part is to request and then to be receptive and responsive.

16:18 *And I also say to you*- The theme of :17 has been that human action, faith and response is only part of the overall picture of spiritual work and human salvation. The church is to be built- by Jesus- upon the rock of faith in Jesus as the Son of God. Again, the two aspects come together. Flesh and Spirit, Son of Man and Son of God, "flesh and blood" and Heaven.

The idea was perhaps that the Lord was going to build His church upon Peter and the confession of faith which Peter had made, but the Lord was going to be the builder and not Peter. This would instil into Peter an appropriate humility for his later work of bringing thousands to Christ so publically.

You are Peter- In response to Peter's 'You are the Christ'. We note here the mutuality the Lord was seeking to build up in His dialogues with His followers, and that sense of mutuality between us and our Lord can be felt today too.

And upon this rock- The term could refer to Peter personally, as his preaching was chronologically the basis upon which the church began. Perhaps the Lord held the shoulders of Jesus and spoke those words to the disciples- that upon the rock of Peter ["rock"], the future community was to be built. But the context is of declared faith in Him as God's Son. If this confession of faith (see on :16 *The Christ*) is the basis upon which the community was and is built, then we need to ask what else is really required as the basis for Christian faith. That confession is only a beginning- the Lord will build upon it. The Lord is surely alluding to Rabbinic teaching that Abraham was the rock upon which the community of Israel was to be built- and showing that each believer in Him as Son of God was no less than Abraham in the new Israel.

I will build- The idea of building upon a rock naturally recalls the Lord's parable of Mt. 7:24-26. As so often, the Lord told that parable to Himself as well as to us; He Himself built a house upon a rock, and He therefore knows how very slow the progress is. In that parable, the ability of the house to withstand the testing storm of judgment day depends upon the builder. We must take the step of faith, and yet the Lord builds upon that and our final passing through judgment day is partially dependent upon His building of us. And yet the metaphor of building is taken over by Paul as referring to the work that *we* do in building others up (Rom. 14:19; 15:2,20; 1 Cor. 14:4,17 Gk.). The clear implication is that our efforts for others are partially responsible for their entry into the Kingdom. I keep saying 'partially', because as we have seen throughout this chapter, the human factor works together with the Divine factor to achieve ultimate salvation for individuals. The Jewish religious leaders are likened to builders who built without a true foundation (Mt. 21:42; Acts 4:11)- and so the Lord is saying that He has taken over that job, and the leaders of the ecclesia share with Him in doing it (the 'masterbuilders', 1 Cor. 3:10; 2 Cor. 10:8). But not only the leaders- for we each are to build each other up (Rom. 15:2; 1 Thess. 5:11 s.w.). And yet it was Peter himself who speaks of how we are "built up" by the Lord (1 Pet. 2:5)- it's just that in practice He

works through others, so that the church in a sense builds itself up (Eph. 4:16).

My church- The first reference to *ekklesia* in the New Testament. The only other usage of the word in the Gospels is in Mt. 18:17, where the Lord speaks of a process of telling a matter unto "the church" in the case of interpersonal disputes. The Lord implied, therefore, that He was confident that despite the failure of John's ministry, the minority who had responded and believed in Him as God's Son would provide the basis upon which He would successfully build a community of believers. Every reference to "the church" in the later New Testament needs to be understood in the context of how the *ekklesia* is first introduced in the Gospels. It is a community built by the Lord Jesus personally. The Septuagint had used *ekklesia* concerning the community of Israel; the Lord's talk of building another *ekklesia* based around faith in Him was radical stuff- for the obvious objection of Judaism would have been that the *ekklesia* already existed. The Lord's use of *ekklesia* in this sense was radical, and an effective rejection of the old Israel in order to build a new one- not on Abraham personally, but on faith in Him (which Abraham exemplified through his faith in the promised seed). The LXX of Gen. 28:3 speaks of an '*ekklesia'* (AV "multitude") of people' being created from Abraham's seed. And the Lord is now redefining this- as those whom He would build up into a new nation, based upon faith in His Divine Sonship.

And the Gates of the grave- An allusion to Rabbinic teaching that Abraham sat at the gates of hell to prevent the circumcised falling into it (mentioned by Edersheim in *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*). The Lord is saying that faith in Him is what shall save us rather than descent from Abraham. And yet the Old Testament speaks of the gates of death as being under God's control (Job 38:17; Is. 38:10), and He can "lift me up from the gates of death" (Ps. 9:13). The "gates of hell" can only not prevail against us through resurrection of the body. Peter's confession of faith was that Jesus was "Son of *the living* God", and I outlined the connections between "the living God" and the idea of resurrection under 16:16 *Son of the living God*. We should note that there were many wrong beliefs about "the gates of hell". The Lord doesn't specifically dismantle nor criticize them, just as He doesn't do so with the wrong idea of demon possession. Instead He places emphasis upon belief in Him and the hope of resurrection, which meant that death, and whatever "the gates of hell" were imagined to be- simply had no power over the believer in Him. His repeated 'casting out of demons' showed the same- however 'demons' were understood, the Lord's power was so great over them that they remained no credible worry for the believer in Him.

This may also be an allusion to a cavern in northern Palestine known as "the gates of hell". The Lord had just been in that area instructing the disciples- it's likely they had heard of it, or even made a tourist excursion to view it. The Lord is saying that even that much feared precipice, into which the locals threw sacrifices to ward off the powers of the underworld, had no power against faith in Him as the Son of God.

Shall not prevail against it- The only other time the word is used is in Lk. 23:23, speaking of how the voices of the Jews "prevailed" to get Christ crucified. He must have recalled His own words here, that the gates [or gatekeepers / rulers] of the grave would not ultimately prevail against Him.

16:19 *I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven*- The root word for 'key' means literally to close or shut. The Scribes "shut up" the Kingdom (Mt. 23:13 s.w.) - the job of Peter was to use the Gospel to open the way to salvation to ordinary people and those otherwise shut out by the Jewish leadership. The same word is found in Mt.

25:10 where the Lord speaks of how He will shut the door to the Kingdom at judgment day to those who didn't want to be there in this life (and again in the context of final condemnation in Rev. 20:3). The parable of Lk. 11:7 adds an interesting insight- even if in this life the door is shut [s.w.] to a person, if their way of life warrants condemnation, such is the Lord's grace that it can be opened in response to the intercession of others on behalf of that person. The key to entry or exclusion from the Kingdom was given to Peter in the sense that the Gospel of Jesus as Son of God could open the Kingdom to people, and if they hear that message and reject it, then the Kingdom is closed to them. It doesn't mean that Peter could just chose to condemn or save individuals. Rather does it show that the keys to eternity are in our hand, and we should therefore be devoting our lives to opening the doors for others to that eternal future. The keys of knowledge were given to Peter, and through his preaching they opened up the closed door of salvation to many who would not otherwise have entered (Mt. 16:19). Losing bonds is the language of bringing salvation and forgiveness (Is. 51:14; 58:6; Mt. 13:30; 18:27; 22:13; Lk. 13:16). And those keys are likewise in our hands too. If we introduce the Gospel of salvation to a man, the door is opened to him; if we don't, it remains closed for him. In this sense what we bind and loose is automatically confirmed by God, in that He has delegated to us the preaching of entrance into His Kingdom. Because the salvation of others is in our hands, both in and outside of the ecclesia, we are held responsible for their eternal loss if we do not minister to them. "Rescue those being led away to death [if we don't, then they will die]... if you say, "But we knew nothing about this", does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards *your* life [as you keep your brother's life] know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done? [at judgment day]" (Prov. 14:11,12 NIV).

Whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven- The promise is repeated to all the disciple in 18:18, disproving Roman Catholic interpretations of Peter. There is here a continuation of the idea of the Gospel as being the keys to the Kingdom. "Whatever" could equally be translated "Whoever". The idea of binding is connected in the Lord's thought with condemnation (s.w. Mt. 12:29; 13:30; 22:13 cp. Rev. 20:2). The idea isn't that Peter arbitrarily had the power to condemn someone, and have his decision confirmed by Heaven. Rather is this almost hyperbolic language an encouragement to us as to the eternal power of the Gospel we also preach. By men rejecting it, they are bound in condemnation; by accepting it, they are loosed. Their response to the Gospel we preach is to their condemnation or salvation, and what goes on here on earth is reflected in Heaven. We can think that if we offer the Gospel to a man and he shrugs and walks on in his life, somehow the passing of time after the encounter makes it less eternally meaningful. But not so. He encountered the offer of salvation from us, and the choice of rejecting or accepting it is reflected and noted in Heaven. This is the intense significance of our witness, the eternal moment of every encounter. Another time the words for binding and loosing occur together is in the account of the disciples being sent to loose a donkey that had been tied (Mk. 11:2-5). One wonders if the Lord intended them to perceive in that simple domestic task an acted parable of their possibilities- through unloosing that which had been bound, the way was enabled for the Lord to enter into Jerusalem. The hint might be that the witness of His people in the last days is what can enable His return and triumphant entry to Jerusalem. So very much has been delegated to us.

Binding and loosing were terms widely used amongst the Rabbis with respect to the force of their commandments and judgments having God's agreement (even in the NT record, 'binding' means 'to decree' in Mt. 23:4). They had the keys to the Kingdom (Mt. 23:13), and shut it up against men. Now, in the Lord's new Israel, Peter was to have that power. An uneducated fisherman was to have the place of the learned Scribes; it would have seemed so much more appropriate if Paul took this place. James and John were to be the "sons of thunder" (Mk. 3:17), another Rabbinic phrase, used of the young trainee Rabbis who stood at the left and right of the Master of the Synagogue during the Sabbath services (hence the later appeal for confirmation as to whether they would *really* stand at the Master's right and left in His Kingdom). These uneducated men were to take the place of the learned Scribes whom they had always respected and lived in fear of... truly they were being pushed against the grain.

16:20 *Then he ordered the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ*- The Greek word is used five times in Mark, but never in the other Gospels. This has the ring of truth to it- a group of people observing one man would each be struck by different things He did, and their records would reflect that. And that's just what we see in the Gospels.

"Tell" translates *epo*, to say, and it has just been used in recording how Peter *said* that Jesus was the Christ (:16). The Lord is progressing with the revised plan of operation which He began to make public at the end of chapter 12. He was effectively giving up on the masses, and instead focusing upon the disciples as the method through which He would after His death be able to appeal to the masses. In order to not be distracted, to spent time more intensely with them, He asks them not to fuel the kind of Messianic speculation which was then rife in Palestine.

"That he was the Christ" is AV "Jesus the Christ"- an unusual phrase. 'Jesus' was one of the most common names in Palestine at the time. The Lord's idea was perhaps that they were not to tell people that He, the man named with the common name 'Jesus', was in very truth the Christ. They were allow people to continue to merely see 'Jesus' rather than 'the Christ'. By the very silence of the disciples about what they firmly believed and so wanted to share, they would have been driven to discuss the Messiahship of Jesus *amongst themselves* and also to reflect personally within themselves about the Lord's Messiahship.

16:21 *From that time*- Again we see the Lord educating the disciples according to a timetable. Now He was satisfied that they were convinced of His Messiahship and Divine Sonship, He felt He could move on to teach them more about His death and resurrection. This is how we were likewise taught the components of the Gospel; but we should not think that the Lord's teaching process ends there for us. He is continuing to teach us, in accordance with how quickly we have grasped the preceding elements.

Jesus began- Matched by Peter 'beginning' to argue with the Lord (:22).

To explain to His disciples- Mk. 8:32 adds that "He spake that saying openly". But He has just given the impression in :20 that these things were private; He showed them "to His disciples". "Openly" in Mk. 8:32 is a poor translation; the word is elsewhere rendered 'boldly' or 'confidently'. The words He spoke about His forthcoming death and

resurrection He spoke with a boldness of spirit that came only from total faith.

That- The sense of *hoti* in the context is definitely causative. The idea is that He showed them *why* these things must happen. He didn't just foretell the events of the passion, but explained why they must be.

He must- The usage of *dei* is so common in the Lord's discussion of His death.

Go to Jerusalem- Eis has more the sense of '*into* Jerusalem'. Perhaps He foretold the 'triumphal entry' and how so quickly, things would unlovely themselves. Such explanation was necessary, otherwise the euphoria of the triumphal entry being dashed by what then happened would've been perhaps too hard for the disciples to cope with.

And suffer many things- The phrase is used elsewhere of the sick woman who had "suffered many things" at the hands of "many physicians" (Mk. 5:26), and yet is used elsewhere about the Lord's 'many' sufferings at the hands of the Jewish leaders (also in Mk. 9:12). Surely the Lord perceived in her someone who was sharing something of His final sufferings. All our sufferings are likewise part of His crucifixion sufferings, and if we suffer with Him, we shall also therefore experience His resurrection. That woman was therefore set up as an example of us all.

Mark and Luke (Mk. 8:31; Lk. 9:22) add here that the Lord added that He would be "rejected" by the Scribes, elders and Priests. The same word is used about the stone of Christ being "rejected" by themselves, the builders (Mt. 21:42). The word carries the sense of legally condemning. They rejected the sinless Son of God as a condemned sinner and demanded His death. If nothing else we learn some basic psychology- that when a person touches the conscience of less spiritual people, they are likely to intensely slander the person and effectively demand their death, which in our day may be the social death of rejection.

From the elders- Presbuteros is specifically used of the Sanhedrin members. The Lord's predictions here are highly specific and detailed.

And chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised- Literally, 'High Priests'. There was only supposed to be one High Priest, but the position was so lucrative and argued over that there were a group called the 'High Priests'- so far had Judaism fallen away from basic Biblical teachings, despite their zeal to keep the details.

16:22 *And Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying: Be it far from you, Lord. This shall never happen to you!*

- Peter is quoting verbatim here from Is. 54:10, which speaks (in the Septuagint) of showing mercy to oneself. "Be it far" is Gk. 'Be merciful to yourself' (s.w. only Heb. 8:12 "merciful"). As an illiterate fisherman, he must have meditated and meditated upon the words he heard spoken to him in the synagogue readings. Let's be aware that in the preceding verse 21, Jesus had been explaining that passages like Is. 53 pointed forward to Christ's suffering and resurrection. Peter is responding by quoting a verse a little further on, in the same context. If Peter understood that Jesus was the Old Testament Messiah, he surely understood, in theory at least, that the Old Testament required a suffering Messiah. For him, of all men, to discourage Jesus from fulfilling this was serious indeed; hence Christ's stiff rebuke, likening him to the satan of His wilderness temptations, in that Peter too misquoted Scripture to provide an easy way out. If, as we have discussed elsewhere, Mark is really Peter’s Gospel, it is surely

significant that Mark especially emphasizes how Peter especially didn't understand the need for Jesus to suffer crucifixion (Mk. 8:17-21,27-33; 9:6,32; 14:37). Showing the chinks in our own armour is surely the way to be a credible warrior for the Gospel.

Mark's record brings out the sustained mutuality between the Lord and Peter- for Peter rebukes the Lord, and then the Lord rebukes Peter (Mk. 8:32,33). About twenty times in the Gospels we read of the Lord rebuking or charging (s.w.); but whenever the disciples do it, they seem to rebuke the wrong person over the wrong issues. Again, the Gospel writers bring out the distance and mismatch between the disciples and their Lord.

"This shall not be" could suggest that Peter thought that by his own strength and use of force he could stop this happening. By saying this he not only over-estimated his own strength, but showed his naivety about the strength and nature of the opposition to the Lord. He likely still didn't appreciate how evil were the Jewish religious leaders.

16:23 *Turned and said*- The very same words are used in Lk. 22:61 where the Lord turns and *looks* upon Peter. The repetition of such visual images serves to teach how circumstances are repeated in human lives, each bearing the same Divine hallmark. The way the Lord "turned" and addressed people is recorded often in the Gospels, especially noticed by Luke (Lk. 7:9,44; 9:55; 10:23; 14:25; 22:61 ; 23:28; Jn. 1:38). Again this is exactly what we would expect from eyewitness testimony- a certain physical characteristic or aspect of body language noticed, remembered and reflected in a write up of those memories.

The Gospel records, Luke especially, often record how the Lord turned and spoke to His followers- as if He was in the habit of walking ahead of them, with them following (Lk. 7:9,44,55; 10:23; 14:25; 23:28; Mt. 9:22; Jn. 1:38). As we saw above, Peter thought that following the Lord was not so hard, because he was literally following Jesus around first century Israel, and identifying himself with His cause. But he simply failed to make the connection between following and cross carrying. And we too can agree to follow the Lord without realizing that it means laying down our lives. The Lord brought Peter to face this with a jolt in Mt. 16:22-25. Peter was following Jesus, after He had predicted His crucifixion (for Jesus "turned, and said unto Peter"). He thought he was following Jesus. But he was told: "Get thee *behind me*… if any man will come *after me* (s.w. 'behind me'), let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and *follow me* (s.w.)". The italicized words are all the same in the original. Peter didn't want the Lord to die by crucifixion at Jerusalem, because he saw that as a follower of Jesus this required that he too must die a like death. Peter needed to get behind Jesus in reality and really follow, in the sense of following to the cross, although he was there physically behind Jesus, physically following at that time. The Lord was saying: 'Don't think of trying to stop me dying. I will, of course. But concentrate instead on *really* getting behind me in the sense of carrying my cross'. John's record stresses that the key to following Jesus to the cross is to hear His word, which beckons us onwards (Jn. 10:4,27). All our Bible study must lead us onwards in the life of self-sacrifice. But Peter loved the Lord's words; but, as pointed out to him at the transfiguration, he didn't hear those words of Christ deeply. And so he missed the call to the cross. He had just stated that Jesus was Messiah; but soon afterwards he is recorded as saying that it was intrinsic within Jesus' Messiahship that He *mustn't* die or suffer.

To Peter- Mark says the Lord “rebuked” him (Mk. 8:33). But the very same Greek word has occurred just prior in the narrative, when Peter has just declared Jesus to be “the Christ of God”. The Lord responded by commending Peter for his blessed insight, but the record continues: “And [Jesus] strictly charged them [s.w. “rebuked”] them, and commanded them to tell [i.e. preach to] no man that thing”, and He goes on to underline to them how He must suffer on the cross (Lk. 9:21). Why did the Lord both commend and rebuke Peter for discerning that He was indeed the Christ of God? Surely because, in the context, Peter understood Messiah to be someone who would there and then bring salvation without the cross. Again we see how there was something in Peter as there is in us all which somehow revolted at the idea of real cross carrying. And it was for the same reason that the Lord “strictly charged” [s.w. rebuked] those who wanted to blaze around the news that He was Messiah- because they didn’t perceive that the Messiah must first suffer and rise again before being declared in fullness “Lord and Christ”.

Get behind Me, Satan- When He said He was going up to Jerusalem to die, Peter asked him not to. “Get behind me, Satan" was not the Lord wishing temptation to get behind him. He was telling Peter, whom He here calls ‘Satan’, to get behind Him and follow Him up there to Jerusalem, carrying His cross with Him (Mt. 16:23). Peter didn’t want the Lord to go up there, to die like that, because he knew that this meant that he too must carry the cross. Here lies the reason for our recoiling at the cross. We realize that it implies all too much for us, if this is truly what the Lord went through.

"Get" is the same word translated "Get hence [Satan]" in Mt. 4:10. The temptation here was to take Peter's position and think that the Kingdom was possible without the death of the cross. And clearly the situation here is reminiscent of the wilderness temptation, which was in essence the same- to think of ways around the cross. And again, the Lord told the Satan to "get hence". In essence, this is the sum of all human temptation, hence the Lord's very clear statement in the next two verses about the absolutely unavoidable necessity of the cross. The Lord was therefore speaking to Himself when He envisaged a person wishing to "save his life", to avoid death, yet wanting to "gain the whole world". This had been exactly the temptation of 4:8, to try to take "the whole world" without the death of the cross (:26). The command to 'get away behind' the Lord and follow Him is expanded upon in :24,25 to mean 'to follow to the cross'. But by the time of His death, the Lord knew that Peter just wasn't going to make it. For the Lord uses the same word translated "Get" here in Jn. 13:36 in telling Peter: "Where I am now *going* [s.w. "get"], you cannot follow Me [s.w. Mt. 16:24 "follow Me"] now". It seems it was the Lord's particular desire that Peter should die with Him on the cross - Peter's willingness to do this was therefore partly a desire to follow his Lord's intention for him, rather than the mere language of bravado. But finally He realized that Peter wasn't going to make it, at least not at that time: "But you shall follow Me eventually" (Jn. 13:36). We can usefully meditate upon the Lord's intentions for us, and at what times He intended us to rise up to them... and how even when we fail to mature as we should, He still holds out hope that we shall eventually get there. And this is to be reflected in our patience with our likewise developing brethren.

″Behind Me" is the same word translated "come after Me" in :24. This is a command to Peter to stop trying to dissuade Christ from the cross, but rather to get behind Him and carry that cross. Note how following behind the Lord and carrying His cross are identified in 10:38; Lk. 9:23; 14:27. Instead of just literally walking behind Him, the Lord is saying that real discipleship is to carry a cross behind Him.

You are a hindrance to me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man- The Greek *skandalon* literally means a trap or snare. But the Lord Jesus saw the snare and therefore didn't fall into it. Peter's attitude was a snare to the Lord in that it was attractive to Him- a savouring of the flesh rather than of Godly things was therefore attractive to the Lord. Some reflection on this will surely find in this a profound evidence of the Lord's utter humanity. For 'very God of very God' would no way have reasoned like this nor found the things of men an attraction over the things of God. Peter's fleshly thinking was a trap or snare to the Lord Jesus in that it was found superficially attractive by Him.

16:24 *Then said Jesus to his disciples: If anyone wants to be my follower, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*- The disciples had a psychological barrier in understanding the teaching of the cross, just as we can likewise. Often when He spoke of the cross and His sacrifice, His followers either changed the subject or turned away. They were even against the idea of crucifixion (Mk. 8:32; 9:32-4; 10:35-40). They failed to see the centrality of the cross. And these reactions can characterize our response to the cross, both in terms of turning away from considering its physicalities, and also in our own cross-carrying. And yet there is a sense of inevitability about the cross. We *must* face these things. Circle all the times in John 19 words like "therefore" occur (and cp. Acts 2:23). Consider how Luke records the indefatigable determination in the Lord's face during the final journey up to Jerusalem. There is the same inevitability about our cross carrying; even if we flunk it all the way through our lives, we eventually come to death. My name chiselled by some disinterested artist on a gravestone, with the radio playing in the background as he sits hunched up in his workshop.

Lk. 9:23 adds that the Lord asked us to take up our cross *daily*. Having spoken of the need to take up the cross daily, the Lord Jesus employed this form of logic to encourage people to really take on board what He was suggesting: "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross... *for* whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, and the gospel's, the same shall find it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own life (AV "soul")? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mk. 8:34-37). If we follow Christ, we must lose our natural life. If we don't, even if we gain the whole world, we will lose our natural life. *I must lose my life, one way or the other*. We need to go through life muttering that to ourselves. God asks our life, our all. If we hold it back in this life because we want to keep it for ourselves, He will take it anyway. The cross was a symbol of shame (Heb. 12:2 speaks of the shame of the cross). In this context verse 38 continues: "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed" at the day of judgment. We either go through the shame of carrying the cross now, especially in our personal witnessing to those around us; or we will suffer the eternal shame of rejection (Dan. 12:2); our shame will then be evident to all (Rev. 16:15).

Mark, who as we have suggested elsewhere was effectively Peter writing, records three instances of where the Lord's prediction of the cross was met by the disciples' misunderstanding, and His subsequent efforts to teach them the real meaning of discipleship, and the paradoxes which this involves:

	Mark 8	Mark 9	Mark 10
Geographical description	Mk. 8:27	Mk. 9:30	10:32
Note that the incident took place whilst they were on the road walking	8:27	9:31	10:33,34
Misunderstanding by the disciples	8:32,33	9:32	10:35-41
Jesus calls the disciples to Him, implying they were no longer following behind Him	8:34	9:35	10:42
Teaching about true cross-carrying discipleship	8:34-9:1	9:33-37	10:42-45
Paradox	Save life / lose life	First / last	Great / least

The point is, that following Jesus in the way involves picking up and carrying His cross. But this repeatedly wasn't understood by the disciples, and they seem to have stopped walking behind Him as they should've done. Be aware that Mark is a transcript of Peter's preaching of the Gospel message; He's surely pointing out how terribly slow he had been himself to pick up the fact that walking behind Jesus is a call to carry a cross. And of course a glance back at our own discipleship and walk behind Jesus indicates just the same with us; and perhaps we should admit that more freely in our preaching, in order to like Peter make a stronger appeal for men to follow Jesus with no misunderstanding of what this involves.

Luke gives more detail about this saying about carrying the cross (Lk. 9:23-26). In the context of telling His followers to witness to Him, the Lord equates this with taking up their cross daily (Lk. 9:23,26). To not bear that cross is to deny the knowledge of Him before men. To live the crucifixion life is the essential witness. Every act of grace, every evident sign of self-control, every statement of forgiveness towards misunderstanding and unrepentant men... all this is showing something of the cross. And in this, painful and difficult as it is, demanding and driving-to-the-limit as it must be, lies the essence of our being the Lord's witnesses. To witness Christ is not to just painlessly distribute a few tracts. It is to live out the dying of the cross. Take up the cross, and follow me" is inviting us to carry Christ's cross with Him - He speaks of "the cross" rather than 'a cross'. The Greek translated "take up" is that translated 'to take away' in the context of Christ taking away our sins. Strong says that it implies "expiation" (of sins). This connection, between our taking away / up the cross, and Christ's taking away our sins, suggests that the efficacy of His cross for us depends upon our daily 'taking up the cross'. It is vital therefore that we "take up the cross" if our sins are to be taken away by Him. But our taking up of the cross is a response to the taking away / up of our sins. We all know from experience that how we start each day is important. Indeed, how we start any enterprise is crucial- hence the need for a sound understanding of the basic

Gospel before we're baptized. We so often meet the phrase "rose early in the morning" in the Hebrew Bible. Strong defines the Hebrew *shawkam* translated "rose early" as essentially meaning "to incline the shoulder to a burden... literally to load up on the back of man". In this we see an evident connection with the Lord's thought about taking up the cross *daily*, for that surely implies we are to take it up each morning (Lk. 9:23). Men and women had arisen each morning for 4000 years and inclined their shoulders to the burden of the day, loaded themselves with it onto their back. And the Lord now took humanity further, in redefining that "load", that burden, as His cross. Practically, does this not mean that we are to reflect as we come to consciousness each morning that we are to load ourselves with His cross? This thought need not necessarily lead to an image of having to burden ourselves with an impossible, awful weight. For again in allusion to this idea of loading oneself up each morning, the Lord spoke of how His burden is *light*! Here perhaps is one of the finest paradoxes of the spiritual life- that His cross, the life of self-sacrifice and self-giving unto the very end, is indeed heavy and demanding... yet in another sense it is "light", far lighter than the burdens of legalism which Pharisaic religion bound [and binds] upon people. Lk. 9:23,24 describes cross carrying as a rejection of saving *our* life, of making our present life as rich and fulfilled as possible; and instead concentrating on *giving up* our lives. William Barclay comments on this passage: "A man must spend his life, not hoard it... the Christian must realize that he is given life, not to keep it for himself, but to spend it for others; not to husband its flame, but to burn himself out for Christ and for men... the questions are not 'How much can I *get*?', but, 'How much can I *give*?'. Not 'What is the *safe* thing to do?', but 'What is the *right* thing to do?" (William Barclay, *The Gospel Of Luke (*Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 122). The threat of Lk. 9:23-25 rung in Paul's mind (in 1 Cor. 3:15; 2 Cor. 7:9; Phil. 3:8): If a man gains the world for Christ but does not take up the cross, or is ashamed of Christ's words and principles in this world, he will be *cast away*. Especially does Paul allude to these words in 1 Cor. 9:27: "Lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway". Paul recognized his temptation: to think that his zeal for preaching excused him from taking up the cross. In essence, we must all see our own likely temptations: to focus on one area of spirituality, with the hope that it will excuse us from the cross.

16:25 *For whoever would save his life*- The Lord is speaking also to Himself here- see on :23 *Get*. I find it hard to avoid the conclusion that it is the process of our engagement with God's word, our love of it, our integrity in considering it etc., which is therefore more important to God than our grasping the final 'truth' of each clause in a final, Euclidean sense. By saying this I take nothing away from the fact that "the truth" is "in Jesus", that there is a wonderful personal reality of salvation for each of us in Christ, a living personal relationship with Him. My point is simply that God's intention in giving us His word is surely not to relay to us a heap of individual specific truths- for the written word isn't the best way to convey such things to simple, illiterate folk, nor indeed to computer-assisted students of our own times. Rather does He seek us to enter into *relationship* with Him and His Son, and He uses His word and its ambiguities as a way of achieving this. The Lord Jesus used language like this- consider how He uses the word *psuche*, life, in Mk. 8:34-37. We are to lose our life in order to find life... and "what does a man gain by winning the whole world at the cost of his true self? What can he give to buy that self back?" (NEB). The ambiguous usage of *psuche* is surely in order to get us thinking about our relationship with Him. And thus the Lord's parables often end with questions which have open-ended, ambiguous answers, through which we reveal and develop our relationship with Jesus- e.g. "What will the owner of the vineyard do?" (Mk. 12:9- kill them? be gracious to them? give them yet another

chance? keep them as His people anyway?). I am not saying that correct interpretation of Scripture doesn't matter; rather am I saying that in *some*ways, in some places, in some aspects, interpreting the Lord's words is designed by Him to be open-ended rather than intended to lead us all to identical conclusions.

Shall lose it- Luke's record speaks of forfeiting life or self. Jesus speaks of how a person can lose their place in the Kingdom as a person losing or forfeiting their own self; He was thereby teaching that a place in the Kingdom was possessing one's own real self (Lk. 9:25 RV). To lose life is paralleled with the Lord to unashamedly witnessing to Him in an unbelieving world; and He calls us each one to lose our lives in this way (Mk. 8:35). Being ashamed of Christ's words doesn't just apply to not speaking up for the Truth when someone invites us to a topless bar after work. It's equally true, and the punishment for it just the same, in the context of not speaking out Christ's word in the ecclesia, to our very own brethren (Mk. 8:38 = 2 Tim. 1:8). The Lord Jesus will be ashamed of the rejected when He comes in the glory of the Father (Mk. 8:38). There is a telling juxtaposition of ideas here- shame and glory. Amidst the utter glory of the Father's throne, surrounded by Angels, the Lord will be sitting there with eyes downwards in shame as the rejected stand before Him and walk away. The Proverbs speak of how shame is to be the ultimate end of the wicked, and glory the end of the righteous. Yet it is *the rejected who* go away "into shame". *They* will be "ashamed before him at his coming". Yet the Lord will so feel for even the rejected, that He feels for them and reflects their feelings. This is no stern-faced judge chasing away those He is angry with. This is a window into the Lord's ineffable love and feelings even for those for whom it truly is too late, for whom the way to the tree of life is now barred. The way the Lord Jesus says that He will be "ashamed" of those He has to reject (Mk. 8:38) opens an interesting window into what it means to have Divine nature. It doesn't mean that we will not then know the range of emotions which we have as humans today- for we are made in God's image. To think of the Lord of Heaven and earth, on the throne of His glory, sitting or standing there "ashamed"... because of His people. And shame is really a concept relevant to the presence of others- and the others who will be present will be the Angels and ourselves. Before us, we who are ourselves *so* weak and saved by His grace alone, He will feel shame because of those He has to reject. But there's another way of looking at the Lord's 'shame'. It is the rejected who will have shame in that day (Dan. 12:2). Such is the nature of the Lord's love and empathy that He will somehow feel their shame, feel embarrassed for them as it were. Which thought in itself should banish for ever any idea that we are coming before an angry Master. The Lord of grace is the One who will be, and is, our judge. And even in His condemnation of men, His essential love shines through. His condemnation of Israel involved them wandering for years in the wilderness; but during that wandering, "in all their affliction, he was afflicted" (Is. 63:9). God shared in their feelings and suffering of rejection; just as the Lord Jesus will share in the shame of those who walk away from Him at the last day in shame. God's being with Israel during their wilderness wanderings is cited in Am. 2:10 as an example of His especial love for His people.

The Lord had earlier taught in Mt. 10:28 that in the condemnation of the last day, it is God who will destroy [s.w. "lose"] life ["soul", s.w.]. But here the Lord says that a man will lose / destroy his own life if he is ashamed of His words and seeks to gain the world for himself in this life. The point is that ultimately the condemned will have condemned themselves; the process of losing / destroying life is initiated and performed by people in this life, and the final condemnation is simply giving them what they themselves

wished for. And the Lord goes further to say that whoever 'finds his life' will lose or destroy it (Mt. 10:39). To find life for ourselves, to think that by obtaining ['finding'] the world, the ideal life for ourselves, is to actually lose or destroy life. But in Mt. 10:28,39 the Lord teaches that men cannot take that "life" from us- only God can, at the day of judgment. He clearly doesn't simply have mortal life in view, because this can be taken from us by men. Perhaps the idea is that for those written in the book of life, they 'have' eternal life, as John's Gospel makes clear. No man can take that from us. But if we spend our lives trying to find the ideal life for ourselves in this life (the coolest place to live, high income, fulfilling career etc.), we are in fact losing or destroying that eternal life, and therefore there is such a thing as names that were once written in the book of life being erased from it. In Luke's record, the Lord goes on to say that He had not come to destroy [s.w. 'lose'] men's lives, but to save (Lk. 9:56). It is men who destroy / lose their own lives, they condemn themselves, rather than the Lord seeking to condemn them. The Father likewise has no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked. Rather does He simply confirm their own self-destruction. John's version of this saying about losing life is found in the context of the Lord speaking to Himself about the need to die on the cross: "He that loves his life shall lose it" (Jn. 12:25). To avoid the cross is to love life- this fleeting life. Attitudes like 'Spoil yourself!', 'You deserve it!' and 'Have a fun time- you only live life once' are all examples of loving life rather than losing it in self-condemnation for the hope of the eternal life. Lk. 17:33 repeats the words, in the context of commenting upon Lot's wife- her wistful look back to Sodom was because that was her life, the life she had loved.

The Greek text in Mt. 16:25,26 and Lk. 9:25 can bear a re-translation and re-punctuation which quite alters the sense as found in the English translations. It shows the Lord emphasizing the evident and compelling logic of losing our lives for His sake: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For how much a man is profited if he shall gain the whole world (in the Kingdom) and lose his own soul (now, as I asked you to do, to lose your soul for me)!... for the Son of man shall come... and then he shall reward every man according to his works", i.e. the losing of our soul is through our everyday works. Lk. 9:25 makes the same point: 'How is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world (the Kingdom) and lose himself (now)!: *or* - be cast away, be condemned at the judgment, because he tried to keep his soul, he didn't see the logic of all this!'. The point is, a man at the day of judgment will be willing to give up *everything*, even the whole world if he possesses it in order that he may find acceptance. But then it will be too late. *Now* is the time to resign all for the sake of that blessed acceptance.

I mentioned above that the Greek for 'losing life' has been used by the Lord in 10:28,29,39 to speak of losing or destroying life in the condemnation of the last day. Perhaps the idea is that we resign not only any attempt to materially turn this life into the eternal life, our small world into God's Kingdom- but we also condemn ourselves now, so that we shall not be condemned in the last day. Flesh must be condemned, and it is our wisdom to do it now.

And whoever shall lose his life for my sake- Mk. 8:35 adds: "And the Gospel's". The Lord envisaged that the preaching of the Gospel could likely involve the loss of life. For many of us today, that is not the case; and in fact it has usually not been the case for the majority of Christ's followers over time. But the idea is that we are to sacrifice life for the Gospel; be it momentary embarrassment, social death, defriending on social networks or sacrifice of career and wealth. This is the large part which "the Gospel" was envisaged as playing in the life of a believer. Mk. 8:35-38 records the Lord's teaching here slightly differently: "For whoever would save his life shall lose it,

and whoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, he shall save it! For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? For what should a man give in exchange for his life? For whoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man also shall be ashamed". The Lord Jesus paralleled "my sake and the gospel's" with "me and my words" (Mk. 8:35,38). He Himself thus understood the Gospel to be His words. Preaching, in whatever form, is not glamorous. It is a sacrifice of self, a not saying and doing as we feel, a surrendering of our own rights- for the sake of others' salvation, both in the preaching of the Gospel and in helping our brethren to salvation.

Shall find it- 10:39 has made it clear that if we find our lives we shall lose them. This finding of life likely refers, therefore, to finding it in the day of judgment. However, according to John's Gospel, the essence of the eternal life, the kind of life we can eternally live, can be lived right now in Christian experience today. So this is an element to which we who have forfeited having the Kingdom now, in all the apparent possibilities for self-fulfilment which there are today, can find the eternal life now in that we can live the Kingdom life today. Likewise if we take the Lord's yoke upon us, we shall "find rest unto [our] lives / souls" (Mt. 11:29 s.w.). And the implication is that that experience begins now, having shed the heavy burdens of guilt and legalism.

16:26 *For what shall a man be profited*- Mt. 16:26 records the Lord as teaching: "What *will it* [future] profit a man [i.e. at the future judgment], if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?". Mk. 8:36 has: "What *does it*[right now] profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?". Could it be that the Lord said both these things at the same time- to make His point, that the essence of judgment day is being decided right now by our decisions today? And the Lord's next words make the same point: "What shall [at judgment day] a man give in return for his life?" (Mt. 16:26) is matched by Mk. 8:37: "What can [right now] a man give in return for his life?". The question we will face at judgment day, the obvious issue between winning for a moment and losing eternally, or losing now and winning eternally… this is being worked out right now. The choice is ours, hour by hour, decision by decision.

The metaphor is clearly of trading: profiting, gaining, exchanging, losing. The parable of trading the talents uses the same metaphor. Mt. 25:17,20,22 speak of 'gaining' more talents- the same word used here about 'gaining' the world. And yet the intended paradox is that by losing materially, declining to profit and gain in the material things of this world, we shall gain eternal things. The idea of not being profited by gaining the things of this life is recorded in all the Synoptics (Mk. 8:36; Lk. 9:25). John's equivalent is to record the Lord's teaching that the flesh can "profit" (s.w.) nothing, whereas His words are spirit and life (Jn. 6:63). The spiritual life, lived in response to His word, is the true profit. There can be no ultimate profit in any fleshly, worldly enterprise.

If he shall gain- See on *profit*. We are to 'gain' more talents for the Lord, not the world for ourselves (Mt. 25:17,20,22 s.w.). We 'gain' our brother (Mt. 18:15)- not for ourselves, but for the Lord; Paul wanted to 'gain' men by all means for Christ (1 Cor. 9:19-22 s.w. four times). Unspiritual husbands are to be 'gained' by the spiritual efforts of believing wives (1 Pet. 3:1). The first century believers likely memorized the Gospels, and so Paul's repeated usage of the word 'gain' regarding gaining others would've been easily connected with the 'gaining' of talents in the parable, where the same word is also repeatedly used. Instead of gaining the world for ourselves, we are

to gain people for Christ. Instead of careers and long hours at work to fund a cool lifestyle, we are to spend time visiting, phoning, writing, emailing, arranging things… for the gaining of individuals for Him. The contrast is between gaining *persons* for *Christ* and gaining *things* for *ourselves*. Paul had clearly meditated upon the Lord's teaching here because he says that whatever things were once "gain" for him [s.w.] he now counted as *loss*, and even saw his death, the loss of this present life, as "gain" (Phil. 3:7; 1:21). The "things" he no longer wished to "gain" refer to his life of legalistic obedience and condemnation of others (Phil. 3:4-6). The call to no longer gain but lose is not simply an invitation to unload our wealth in monetary terms. If it were, then it would only apply to the minority of believers over time who have been wealthy. More essentially, the call is to lose whatever human advantage we have had, even spiritual power and advantage over others, in order to align ourselves with the life and death of our Lord. Paul continues the allusion to this section by saying that he has counted all such human advantage as "loss" (Phil. 3:8)- the same word used in "lose his own soul / life"- in order that he might "gain" Christ. The gaining of life which the Lord spoke of is described by Paul as a gaining of Christ- for He is our life (Col. 3:4). Our existence is eternally intertwined with His.

The whole world- An allusion to the Lord's wilderness temptations. Yet again, He speaks largely to Himself in His teaching of others, as every true teacher does. The parallel records in Mark and Luke speak of suffering and loss in order to not be ashamed of the Lord's words and to preach those words. The work of witness is the 'gaining' of people for Him. It is not incidental, therefore, that the only other reference in Matthew to *holos kosmos*, "the whole world" is in the context of speaking of how the Gospel is to be preached to "the whole world" (Mt. 26:13). With this in mind, it may also be that the Lord is warning that a preacher may indeed gain the whole world for God in a spiritual sense- and yet be cast away himself. In this case, He was more than ever speaking to Himself, He who did die in order to gain the world. What we do for others is no replacement for personal spirituality. If this is a valid interpretation, perhaps subtly built in by the Lord into His appeal to not gain the material world for ourselves, then we must re-examine the common assumption that a person must be good and spiritual because of all the good they have done for others. That good may indeed have been done, but is no guarantee of deeply personal integrity before God.

And forfeit his life- The allusion to Mt. 10:28,29 means that no man can take life from us, but God can, at the condemnation of the last day. Therefore the "life" in view is not simply mortal life, which can be taken from us by men. Rather does it refer to our eternal life, potentially given to us from the foundation of the world in Christ. We cannot give anything for that, it is priceless. We are to accept it, but if we accept it, then we will not seek to gain the world for ourselves in a material sense in this life. Note the emphasis upon his "own" life. The eternal life which we shall eternally experience is personal to each of us. The Bible teaches personal salvation. You, and me, as the sum total of all we have experienced, we as persons… shall personally be saved. The eternal life is not therefore merely a biophysical state which can no longer die; immortality is not merely the absence of death. It is more personal than that. It is about you and me personally existing for eternity; we ourselves as persons shall be saved and eternally continue. This of course highlights the eternal importance of character development in this life; for we shall eternally be who we develop into.

Or what shall a man give in exchange- The Lord is perhaps envisaging how some might

think to offer their wealth in order to buy eternity at the last day- verse 27 goes on to speak of the day of judgment as if this is the scene which the Lord has had in view throughout this section. Surely nobody will actually do that- at that day. But effectively, that is how so many live today, thinking that their attempts to acquire this world can somehow be compared to the riches of eternity.

For his life- The Greek and Hebrew words translated "soul" ["life"] have a very wide range of meaning. The idea is usually of the person, the life, often the natural life. But here we have one of a few usages where the word is used about the person and their life in the sense of the person and life which they could eternally be in God's Kingdom. The use of "soul" here rather than "life" is perhaps because the Lord has been emphasizing personal salvation- see on *his own life*.

16:27 *For the Son of Man shall come*- There is a powerful practical result of the connection between the cross and the judgment. The Lord brings it out when He gives three reasons for denying ourselves and taking up the cross; the final and most compelling is "*For* (because) the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he give every man according to his works" (Mt. 16:24,27). Take up the cross, do what is hard for you spiritually, because this is the basis upon which you will be judged- how far you took up the cross, really denied yourself. Before the cross of Christ, we know the way we ought to take. Before the judgment seat, we will know likewise. But we make the answer now. Luke adds that the Lord will be "ashamed" of those who have been ashamed of Him in this life. If we are *now* ashamed of our Lord before men, we will be in the condemnation process (Lk. 9:26 cp. 1 Jn. 2:28).

In the glory of his Father with his angels- The intention of this phrase may be to demonstrate that the Lord will execute judgment with the full authority of the Father. Or perhaps the language is to remind us of the awesomeness of the day of judgment, and how inappropriate it would be to stand there and think that before the light of that moral and physical glory, with all the Angels present, we could suggest giving our wealth as an exchange for our soul.

And then shall he repay every man according to his deeds- The Greek refers to payment, and this is how the word is usually translated in the Gospels. And this is in keeping with the metaphor used here- of trading, gaining, losing and exchanging. The payment to us is for our loss of material advantage in this life; the attitudes which led to this are therefore the "works" which shall be paid back. It could be argued that the idea of paying a reward implies that the "every man" in view here refers to the group of faithful believers. For it is those accepted into the Kingdom who shall be given payment. In one sense, the penny a day refers to salvation, which all the same requires us to resign seeking the reward of this world. Or it could be that in another sense, the nature of eternity will indeed be according to the works we have done, in that one star differs from another in glory, and the servants were rewarded with different levels of reward according to their trading on their Master's behalf.

The 'deeds' of the context refer to taking up the cross, not wanting to gain the world for ourselves but seeking to gain men for Christ. These 'works' appear largely to be mental attitudes rather than deeds physically performed. The work of God is to believe in Christ (Jn. 6:29). The outcome of the day of judgment is according to human works in the sense that it is only a confirmation of the decision and judgment about ourselves which we ourselves have decided in this life- see on 16:25 *lose it*.

16:28 *Truly I say to you: There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom*- Mk. 9:1 records that He also said:

"The Kingdom of God come with power". It is of course argued by many that the Gospel writers are merely summarizing the Lord's words in their own words. After extensive comparison of the Gospel records, I find this explanation unnecessary- because in no case of apparent contradiction do I see that the different forms of words are mutually contradictory. The Lord could easily have said something like: 'Till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom (Mt.)- The Kingdom of God come with power (Mk.)'. Luke's "Till they see the Kingdom of God" (Lk. 9:27) is perfectly in accordance with this- the first part of that clause ("Till they see") is from Matthew and "the Kingdom of God" is from Mark. It's statistically incredible that there is not a single case that I have come across in comparing the Gospels which is impossible to reconcile in this manner. If the Gospel writers were anything less than Divinely inspired, there would simply have to be contradiction between the accounts. I therefore see no need to assume that the writers were summarizing the Lord's words in their own words. This manner of repeating the same basic truth several times, e.g. 'Till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom (Mt.)- The Kingdom of God come with power (Mk.)', is true to my human experience in preaching the Gospel in public formats to illiterate people. I tend to repeat the same basic idea in slightly different words. And this is exactly what the Lord would've been doing, and the records of His words reflect that.

The preceding verse 27 has clearly used the language of Christ's coming and His Kingdom in the context of the final judgment, when payment will be made to those who have 'lost' in this life that they might gain eternally. It is of course no coincidence that the synoptics each go on to record the transfiguration. But the connection with verse 27 means that the Lord surely was referring to His actual return in glory and final judgment. The language of '*Some* here will not taste of death' is strange if the Lord has in mind an event which would occur within the next week. Surely He meant that that generation would see His coming in glory. The transfiguration was at best a vision or foretaste of that time, the evident "glory" involved with the situation is to be connected with the "glory" that will be revealed at the Lord's second coming (:27). I note under 17:1 that the Lord may not have been even expecting the transfiguration when He spoke these words in 16:28. What are we to make of this?

One suggestion is that just as it had been possible for Israel to have been prepared by John to accept Jesus as Christ and thus enabled the King of glory to come to Zion and establish His Kingdom, so it was possible that the Kingdom of God could have been established in that generation. But Israel crucified the Son rather than giving Him the fruit of the vineyard, and even afterwards they did not repent *en masse*, and those who did failed to take the Gospel to the Gentile world to the extent which was then required for the Kingdom to come. "*Shall not* taste of death" uses the same word as in 10:23: "You *shall not* have gone over the cities of Israel [in preaching the Gospel] before the Son of Man be come". But it seems that the disciples did not fulfil the preaching commission as intended, for the Lord's parables of harvest lament the paucity and weakness of the labourers, to the extent that the implication is that the harvest was largely spoilt because of this.

Much hinges around how we understand *heos an*, translated "until". "Until" suggests that one state is ended after an event happens. Did the Lord mean 'You will not die until the Kingdom comes, and then you will die'?. That reflection alone suggests we need to think more carefully about the translation of those Greek words. Did the Lord really mean that they would not die until they saw the Kingdom come, and then they would?

It could be that *heos an* is capable of a conditional meaning, as if to say 'Some of you will not taste of death *heos an* the coming of the Kingdom- i.e. you need not necessarily die, until the Kingdom come'. The problem with that is that every attested usage of *heos an* means 'until'; hyper examination of a common Greek term and trying to make it mean something else, or hoping such a meaning might be legitimate, is not the way to conduct Bible study.

Which leads me to my preferred suggestion- that the Lord indeed was saying that some of those present would indeed taste of death after they had seen His coming in glory. In this case, those referred to would be the rejected, those who had sought to gain the world for themselves in this life, rather than losing it all now in order to gain the future Kingdom at the day of His coming. The Lord often speaks of the awful position of the condemned in the last day. They will “see” Him- and *eido* refers more to understanding and recognition than to physical seeing- but all too late, for after that, they will then die the second death. According to Mt. 23:39, those who condemned Him to death would see Him again, and say "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord", they would accept Him as Messiah- but when? At His return, they as persons responsible to judgment will be resurrected and then in that day will wish to welcome Him as Messiah. But too late. This is the basis for the gnashing of teeth at the last day- seeing His coming and Kingdom, recognizing Him as Lord, but then having to die. Rev. 1:7 speaks of this situation- those who pierced Him will see Him at His coming in glory and bitterly weep. So the Lord is foreseeing how some would indeed be resurrected to judgment, see His Kingdom come- and then have to die "the second death".

However, it seems another meaning is also loaded within the words. John's Gospel speaks of how only those who are born again can "see the Kingdom of God... see life" (Jn. 3:3,36). Later, John records how the Lord spoke of how those who keep His word shall never "see death... never taste of death" (Jn. 8:51,52). The idea would then be that some of them would come to find spiritual life, and see the essence of the Kingdom in their lives- and the following account of the transfiguration would then be proof that this was indeed achieved in embryo by at least three of them. In this case we could also understand "the Kingdom" as a reference to the King of the Kingdom, the 'royal splendour' referring to Christ personally- and the disciples saw this in the transfiguration. The connections with John's Gospel are strong, but it would however seem strange for Matthew to start using language in such symbolic ways in the style of John. For this is generally not his style at all.

It is the "Son of man" who shall 'come'. The Lord will essentially be the same as the Gospels present Him when we see Him again. This is why Jesus even in His earthly life could be called "the Kingdom of God", so close was the link between the man who walked Palestine and the One who will come again in glory. “They see the Kingdom of God come” (Mk. 9:1) is paralleled by “They see the Son of man coming” (Mt. 16:28). Indeed it would seem that the references in the Synoptic Gospels to the ‘coming’ of the Kingdom are interpreted in the rest of the New Testament as referring to the personal ‘coming’ of the Lord Jesus (e.g. 1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20). In that very context of referring to Himself as "the Kingdom of God", the Lord speaks of His return as 'the days of the Son of man'- the human Jesus. And yet He also speaks in that context of how after His death, men will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, i.e. how He had been in His mortal life (Lk. 17:20-26). As He was in His mortal days, so He will essentially be in the day of His final glory.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 17

17:1 *And after six days*- Lk. 9:28 speaks of "about an eight days after", reckoning inclusively and perhaps wishing to express the idea of 'About a week later'.

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother- Peter is mentioned first. An over-reaction against Catholic views of Peter can lead us to under-estimate the undoubted supremacy of Peter in the early ecclesia. He was in the inner three along with James and John, and in incidents involving them he is always mentioned first, as the leader (Mt. 17:1,2; 26:37; Mk. 5:37). He is the first to confess Jesus as Messiah (Mt. 16:13-17), the first apostle to see the risen Christ (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5), the first to preach to the Gentiles. Being given the keys of the Kingdom is language which would have been understood at the time as the Lord making Peter the Chief Rabbi of His new ecclesia. The Acts record without doubt gives primacy to Peter as the leader and chief representative of Christ's fledgling church. But, humanly speaking, he was the most unlikely choice. The one who in the eyes of the world and brotherhood should have sat a fair while on the back burner, done the honourable thing… in fact, many honourable things, in just keeping a respectful and bashful silence. And there is no lack of evidence that Peter himself would have preferred that. But no, he was commissioned by the Lord to specifically lead the church. The early church was to be built on the rock of Peter. Whether we like to read this as meaning the rock of Peter's confession that Christ was the Son of God, or as simply meaning Peter's work as the manifestation of Christ, *the* rock, the Acts record shows clearly that the early church was built upon the specific work of Peter.

And led them up a high mountain by themselves- Being led up [Gk.] a high mountain by the leader to be present at a theophany is very much the language of Moses taking Joshua and earlier another trio of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu) with him part way up Mount Sinai, and likewise experiencing a shining face (Ex. 34:29-35) and God's voice from a cloud (Ex. 34:5). Moses returned from the Mount with shining face and the people were afraid- just as happened here (Mk. 9:6). Perhaps Peter vaguely comprehended all this when he wanted to build 'tabernacles', because this was the task given to Moses for Israel to complete. Lk. 9:32 speaks of the *exodus* which the Lord was to make at Jerusalem- a reference to His death. It was the Passover lamb which died at the Exodus- the implication is that now God's people were free to leave Egypt. Again, those secular fishermen were being shown (through the obvious parallel) that they were none less than Joshua in this new Israel which was being created; and after the Lord's departure, they were to take His place and lead God's Israel into the Kingdom.

The idea seems to be that just as He had taken the twelve into Gentile areas for a period of intense teaching of them, so even within the twelve He focused upon these three and wanted to spend time alone with them. He "took" them means to desire association with, to come close to. This was His intention, and one wonders whether the transfiguration was therefore unexpected for Him. Previously when He had tried to get the twelve away by themselves, there had been unexpected events which hampered that, such as the crowds following them, and even in Gentile areas the Lord seems to have been surprised by the faith and need to perform miracles which He encountered. In this case, it would be unintentional that the transfiguration is recorded as following

straight after His words about His coming in His Kingdom; it wasn't as if the Lord said those words knowing that some would witness the transfiguration. According to Lk. 9:28, the Lord's intention was to go up the mountain "to pray", but whilst He prayed, the transfiguration occurred. See on 16:28.

Luke mentions that the Lord took Peter, James and John, started praying and then there was a theophany; but in their human weakness they missed much of it because they fell asleep. This was exactly the situation in the Garden of Gethsemane, with the same three involved; it was as if He was seeking to train them for it. They were "heavy" with sleep (Lk. 9:32), and the word is only used elsewhere in the Gospels to describe how the same three were "heavy" with sleep in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:43; Mk. 14:40). Even if Jesus Himself wasn't consciously doing this, we have here an example of how the Divine hand leads us through experiences in order to prepare us for others which are to come later in similar form.

17:2 *And he was transfigured before them*- Christ's transfiguration was a cameo of the change that should be apparent deep within us, for Paul says that *we* should likewise be transformed (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18 s.w.), and he uses a related word in speaking of how Christ is to be "formed" within us (Gal. 4:19). *Metamorphoo* means a change of *morphe*; not necessarily of essential nature, because we too are to be transformed in this life, and have a new *morphe* develop in us (Gal. 4:19). But it could be that the 'other form' in which the Lord now appeared was in the form in which He will be in the Kingdom. The idea of a change of *morphe* of the Lord Jesus recurs only one other time- in the hymn concerning the Lord's death in Phil. 2:6,7 where we read that although Had the *morphe* of God, He went through a seven stage progressive humiliation until He took on the *morphe* of a slave in the final death of the cross. One purpose of the transfiguration was for Moses and Elijah (who had both had Divinely arranged deaths or departures from ministry) to encourage the Lord concerning His upcoming death (Lk. 9:31). And yet He appeared as He will in the Kingdom, with shining Kingdom glory. The suffering and the glory were thereby manifested to and upon Him at the very same time, to show how inextricably linked they are. Perhaps too the point was being made that when He would hang there with the *morphe* of a dying and rejected slave, in Heaven's eyes, He was in Kingdom glory. John's equivalent of this is to record how the Lord spoke of His death as a 'lifting up', an idea which in Hebrew has connotations of 'glory'. The shame of the cross was only from the world's viewpoint, whereas from a spiritual viewpoint, His death was the very acme of spiritual glory. The blood drenched garment became in God's eyes a glistering white raiment (Lk. 9:29). This would explain why in one sense the transfiguration was a Kingdom vision, and yet it was also about the Lord's death. Peter later reflected that he could preach with conviction about the coming of Christ because he was present at the transfiguration (2 Pet. 1:16-18). The Kingdom element of the experience cannot be divorced from the fact it was also an encouragement from Moses and Elijah concerning the cross. Note that John was also powerfully inspired by the transfiguration, opening his Gospel with an allusion to it in saying that "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father" (Jn. 1:14). James likewise appears to reference the transfiguration when he writes of how the Lord's glory is so surpassing that there should be no jostling for human glory amongst us His people (James 2:1). The descriptions of the Lord Jesus are very similar to the language used about the scene at His resurrection- Angels in shining garments (28:3; Lk. 24:4), frightened and uncomprehending disciples (28:5). And yet

the theme of the conversation was the Lord's death (Lk. 9:31)- but it took place with a preview of the resurrection scene.

And his face shone- The same word used about the shining associated with the Lord's second coming (Lk. 17:24). Having taught that we too should be transfigured (2 Cor. 3:18 s.w.), Paul goes on to say that God has "shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). This is transfiguration language. We are to be transformed into that same image. He there becomes the picture of what each of us in Him are evolving into.

As the sun- The Lord's return will be as the rising of the sun (Mal. 4:2). The same figure is used for the Kingdom age and His return in Mt. 13:46 and Rev. 1:16.

And his garments became white as the light- The same word used about the white clothing of the Angels at the resurrection ("white as snow", Mt. 28:3, just as in Mk. 9:3; Mk. 16:5; Jn. 20:12). In the midst of the conversation about His upcoming death (Lk. 9:31), there was the encouragement of what the resurrection glory would be like. The same word is also used about the Lord's current appearance in Heavenly glory with clothes "as white as snow" (Rev. 1:14- the very phrased used in Mk. 9:3). Indeed, the description of the risen Lord in Rev. 1 has many connections with the language used about His appearance at the transfiguration. Again the idea was to show Him how He would be after His glorification, to motivate Him to go through with the *exodus* at the cross which He must fulfil at Jerusalem. "As the light" is hard to understand, but the Codex Bezae reads "as the snow", in line with Mk. 9:3.

Mark adds that the Lord's clothing was "white as snow, such that no fuller on earth can white them" (Mk. 9:3). The Hebrew mind would have obviously thought of the clothing of God Himself, the "ancient of days" of Dan. 7:9, which is described likewise. The comment that no *man* could ever make them so white is also a hint in that direction. He was clothed with the clothing of God. This doesn't make Him God, for Revelation has many descriptions of the faithful having the same kind of clothing. Against this background, the promise of Is. 1:18 becomes the more awesome- that even although our sins are red as crimson, yet they can become white as snow. This can only be achieved by the wearing of God's own clothing, the gift of His imputed righteousness, which Paul extensively glories in throughout Romans 1-8. Rev. 7:14 speaks of plunging our robes in the blood of the lamb, and them becoming white. It's all so paradoxical- that this whiteness cannot be achieved by man, no fuller on earth could do this, but by plunging [surely an allusion to baptism] into the red blood of Christ. This is the challenge of faith- to believe that the promised whiteness can be achieved through Christ. It was possible even in Isaiah's time, on the basis that God looked ahead to the work of Christ which as it were enabled Him to do this. Therefore the reference to "no fuller on earth" suggests that there is a fuller in Heaven who can do this. And Mal. 3:2 is specific that the Messiah heralded by the Elijah prophet, John the Baptist, would be like "fuller's soap" in cleansing men through the judgment of their sins. David in the depth of his sin appealed to God to 'full' him ("wash me", but s.w. 'fuller'- Ps. 51:2,7); and this was done for him, on account of the future work of Christ which the Father then held in view. The Lord's glistering garments are therefore available for all of us. And it is with that connection that the scene there becomes no mere spectacle to behold in awe from afar, but a real picture of our own possibility before God. Luke adds that the disciples "saw his glory" (Lk. 9:32). This is absolutely the language

of Moses and the Old Testament heroes seeing Divine glory in theophanies, and like the disciples, hearing God's voice (Ex. 33:18 Heb. – "shew" is the same word translated 'to see'' Isaiah- Jn. 12:41; Ezekiel- Ez. 1:28). Yet again the Lord was seeking to show those secular men that they were called to work on the level of Moses and the prophets in the new Israel which the Lord Jesus was creating out of manual labourers, prostitutes, tax collectors, swindlers and sinners. See on :5 *cloud*.

17:3 *And there appeared before them*- See on :9 *the vision*.

Moses and Elijah- They appeared "in glory" (Lk. 9:31), as the Lord did- this is clearly a vision of the Kingdom. The Lord Jesus was the firstfruits from the dead, who opened the way to immortality. So there is no way that they were already glorified before His death and resurrection. It was a vision (:9), of the Kingdom. Just as Jesus was not then glorified Himself at that time, neither were they. They spoke of how the Lord was going to "fulfill" the *exodus* in His death at Jerusalem (Lk. 9:31). It was Moses who could supremely explain this to the Lord, having himself slain the Passover lamb and experienced the *exodus* made possible thereby.

Talking with Jesus- The transfiguration follows straight on from the Lord's talk about the Kingdom at the end of chapter 16. It was a foretaste of the Kingdom. Yet the Kingdom is fundamentally a *relationship* with God. Thus the foretaste of the Kingdom presented at the transfiguration was of faithful men in spiritual conversation with the glorified Lord Jesus, with His face shining as the sun as it will in the Kingdom, as the "sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2).

Luke adds that the disciples' eyes were heavy and they fell asleep at the critical moment. But earlier, "having remained awake", the same disciples were blessed with a vision of the Lord's glory (Lk. 9:32 RVmg.). If they had remained awake in the garden, they would have seen the Lord being glorified by Angelic visitation. But they didn't perceive how the circumstances were repeating, and thus didn't find the strength and inspiration which was potentially prepared for them through the similarity of circumstance.

17:4 *And Peter said to Jesus: Lord, it is good for us to be here. If it pleases you*- Throughout the Lord's ministry, Peter had a mental barrier to the idea of his Lord suffering and dying. It could be argued that his desire to build tents and remain in the mountain of transfiguration was rooted in this- Moses and Elijah had just spoken with the Lord Jesus about the path He must take to death (Lk. 9:31), and Peter somehow wants the Lord to stay there in the mountain (Mk. 9:5). And yet Peter's later preaching has so much to say about the Lord's death. And his letters contain quotations and allusions from Isaiah's suffering servant prophecies (1 Pet. 2:21 etc.). Further, if we accept the idea elsewhere discussed that Mark's Gospel is a transcript of Peter's preaching of the Gospel, it becomes significant that Mark's version of the Gospel likewise emphasizes Jesus as the suffering servant. Thus what Peter was once blind to, he made a special point of preaching. The content of his witness reflected his deep awareness of his past blindness- and therefore his appeal to others to 'get it' was the more powerful seeing that he himself had patently 'not got it' for some years. And it shouldn't be hard to translate his example into our daily experience, speaking of our weaknesses and former blindnesses rather than coming over as the self-congratulatory religious guy.

It is also possible to understand Peter's suggestion simply as the kind of inappropriate thing a man would say who wants to make a response to spirituality, but doesn't know how to. He wanted to do something material and physical- he simply didn't know what to say (Mk. 9:6). The response was the voice from Heaven telling Peter to *hear* Jesus, to respond to His word, rather than run around doing inappropriate works just because we feel we have to *do* something.

I will make here three tabernacles- one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah- See on 17:1. It may have taken much of the day to climb the mountain, and Peter was maybe thinking of where they were going to sleep for the night. Or was did he also have in mind a celebration of the feast of Tabernacles at that time? Later, Peter came to see his death as a taking down of a tent (2 Pet. 1:13), using the same word for the tabernacle he had wanted to build for his Lord at the transfiguration. Then, he had wanted the tent to be set up so that the time of the Lord's departure wouldn't come; so that the Lord would stay with them there, with Moses and Elijah, in what must have seemed like the Kingdom of God. Again, Peter didn't want the cross, neither for his Lord nor for himself. But by the time he wrote 2 Peter, he had learnt his lesson; he saw that his tent must be taken down. The vision of the glory of the Lord Jesus, the words of His coming death and future Kingdom, these were quite enough. There had been no need of the tent on the mountain, and now he saw there was no need for the tent of his body either. We are all the same. Our death will literally be a death with the Lord, in that our resurrection will be after the pattern of His (Rom. 6:5). Peter learnt this lesson from the transfiguration because he describes his coming death as his *exodus* (2 Pet. 1:15), just as Moses and Elijah had spoken then of the Lord's coming death (Lk. 9:31).

17:5- see on 16:16.
While he was yet speaking, a bright cloud- Moses had previously entered the cloud of glory, seen God's glory and heard God's voice- on the top of a mountain. Moses' ascent into the mountain and into the very cloud of Divine glory was understood in Judaism as the very zenith of human spiritual achievement of all time, coming so close to the very personal presence of God, never to be repeated amongst men. And now, three fishermen were having the very same experience. No wonder they feared as they themselves entered into that cloud (Lk. 9:34).

Overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, saying: This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased- This was literally the word of God, and yet it was actually a string of three quotations from God's word in the Old Testament: "You are My Son" (Ps. 2:7), "In whom My soul delights" (Is. 42:1), "Hear Him" (Dt. 18:15). It must have been a profound evidence of the Bible's Divine inspiration. The very voice of God repeating His own words as found in the Law, Psalms and Prophets- the three divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Hear Him- This was intended to take the mind back to Dt. 18:15, where it was written that Messiah would be 'heard' by the faithful. But Peter fell down paralyzed with fear; he didn't really hear the son of God then. Yet in Acts 3:22, Peter quotes Dt. 18:15 and asks his hearers to obey the passage by hearing Jesus, through his preaching of Him. He was asking his audience to do what he himself hadn't done.

17:6 *And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face and were terrified-* The strong similarity with Moses (see on :5 *cloud*) was such that they felt utterly unworthy, which is what falling on the face is commonly associated with in the Old Testament (Abraham, Gen. 17:3; Joseph's brothers, Gen. 50:18; Moses, Num. 16:4; Balaam, Num.

22:31; Joshua, Josh. 7:6; Ruth, Ruth 2:10; Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. 2:46). Their fear is similar to Israel's when confronted with the sight of a similar theophany on a mountain. They felt, as we all do at times, that all this was beyond them. The Lord's comfort of them was not simply reassuring them that they were not going to be consumed by the vision, but more so encouraging them that they really could rise up to the height of the calling to be as Moses. Paul grasped the point when he invites us *each one* to see ourselves as Moses, beholding the glory of God in the face of Christ, "we each with unveiled face" (2 Cor. 3:18 RV). Each of us are as Moses, not just the church leadership, but each one of us who has entered a personal relationship with Christ and seen God's glory in His face.

17:7 *And Jesus came and touched them, and said: Arise and be not afraid*- This is intentionally similar to the experience of Daniel in Dan. 10, with the Lord Jesus lifting up the disciples, who were feeling unworthy as Daniel did. Again, the disciples were being taught that in the new Israel, there are no heroes set in stained glass that are high above our possible reach. We are the heroes. Just as Daniel felt unworthy, so did the disciples- the connection made the point that the heroes of Judaism were also weak and felt their sinfulness, and on this basis the disciples were encouraged to be like them and rise up to their spirit.

Their fear was not simply of the majesty of the moment, but more fundamentally their fear of being called to be as Moses- see on :6. A massive 23 times we find the Greek phrase translated "Fear not" on the lips of the Lord Jesus. His consistent, persistent reassurance of His faltering followers, whose fear is often because of their own moral inadequacy, is significant indeed.

17:8 *And lifting up their eyes, they saw*- 'Lifted up', *epairo*, is surely intended to resonate with *egeiro* ["arise" / 'get up'] of :7. The picture is given of the Lord bending down and touching them, as if they are children, and urging them to rise up. Instead, they just raise up their eyes, and see only Jesus. We really are invited to play 'Bible television' here. The scene is so imaginable. And again, the Gospel writers and speakers were emphasizing the weakness of even the three leading disciples. Peter spoke inappropriately, offering to make booths when instead God wanted him to 'hear' His Son; their fear is likened to the fear of unspiritual Israel at the theophany on Sinai; they are scared to get up in obedience to Jesus' touch, raising their large childlike eyes to Him instead… Indeed the record of the transfiguration really stresses the disciples' weakness, exhibited in the face of the Kingdom glory of their Lord and the earnest encouragement of Him by more spiritual men to go through with the cross- whilst they slept.

No one, save Jesus only- In the Greek as well as in translation, this is really labouring the point. The "save / only", *monos*, is redundant- they saw 'nobody except Jesus' is a statement which needs no further qualification, indeed grammatically it almost *cannot* be given further qualification, and reads awkwardly because of the *monos*, "only", that is added. But the word "only" is added to emphasize that their focus was solely upon Him. That was the purpose of the event, and it had been achieved. Christ centeredness is the ultimate, final and total issue of our experience of Him, the Law and the prophets. The transfiguration ends with this total focus *monos* upon Christ; this was the practical effect of the theophany. John's Gospel doesn't record the transfiguration, but as so often, it is indeed alluded to. For John's Gospel is full of references to seeing glory, to hearing the Son. It's as if John presents Jesus to us a constant theophany, not one that three of the best disciples go up a mountain to see for a short period, but one which is continually before each of us, and which according to

Paul's allusions to it, draws us into its very process. For we too are transfigured as we like the disciples behold the Lord's transfiguration (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18 s.w.).

17:9 *And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying: Tell the vision to no one, until the Son of Man be risen from the dead*- Whilst this literally means 'the thing seen', the transfiguration was indeed a vision. Seeing that Christ is the firstfruits from the dead and that there is no conscious survival of death, it follows that at best Moses and Elijah were resurrected especially for the occasion. But they "appeared in glory" (Lk. 9:31), as if they were in the Kingdom. The Greek translated "appeared" has the strong sense of 'being seen / observed'. This is how they were seen- another hint at a vision. When the event finished, Lk. 9:36 says that Jesus was "found alone"- but that is a poor translation of *heurisko*. He was seen, perceived alone- again hinting that the entire experience was a vision rather than occurring in reality. The way that "Suddenly, when they had looked round about" they saw only Jesus, finding Moses and Elijah had disappeared (Mk. 9:8) would also hint at a visionary experience. Note that there is no suggestion that Moses and Elijah went off anywhere, let alone 'returned' to Heaven. The vision of them simply abruptly ended. They saw nobody "except Jesus only with themselves" or "they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus" (Mk. 9:8) would suggest that they were as it were looking at themselves from outside of themselves- again, ideas appropriate to a visionary experience rather than an actual personal encounter. And this is how the incident with Moses and Elijah began, for "there *appeared unto them* Moses and Elijah talking with Him" (:3). It was an appearance *unto them*, a vision which ended when they saw themselves from outside themselves and realized they were actually alone with Jesus. The language of 'appearance' used throughout the records of the transfiguration would also suggest that the incident with Moses and Elijah was an appearance *to them*, in their eyes and perception, rather than necessarily in reality.

"To no one" maybe connects with the fact that they saw "no man" except Jesus (:8); and so they are asked to tell the vision to "no man" until after the Lord's resurrection. It could be that the Lord wanted them to retain their focus upon Him by not telling others but instead meditating personally upon what they had seen. The vision had been of the Lord's resurrection glory- we noted above the similarities in language to the shining garments of the Angels at the resurrection scene. The Lord didn't want people to think that He had already attained that glory without the cross. Even though in prospect He had that glory, He was insistent that no impression be given that He could attain it without passing through the cross. This was particularly important for Peter to appreciate, who several times entertained a hope that glory was possible for the Lord without the cross.

The Synoptics each record the transfiguration. But did John? He saw it, and here he was commanded to tell it to others after the resurrection. It would be almost impossible for his Gospel record to not mention it. I have suggested that he actually begins his Gospel with the recollection of how he had seen the Lord's glory at the transfiguration (Jn. 1:14 "we beheld His glory"), and that the whole Gospel presents Jesus in "glory" and being "beheld" or 'seen' in that glory.

Mark adds (Mk. 9:10) that "they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean". This comment indicates how secular they were; for the idea of bodily resurrection was well known within Judaism- the Pharisees believed that the dead would rise, although the Sadducees denied it. But the disciples were clearly unfamiliar with the idea, because they simply hadn't been seriously religious people. The word for 'questioning' is used 10 times in the NT and always in a negative sense, mainly of the unbelieving Jews questioning the things of

Christ. Thus it is used twice later in Mk. 9 (Mk. 9:14,16) about the Jews questioning about Jesus. Such questioning is so often an excuse for lack of faith, pressing for over-definition of everything as an excuse for disbelief. Instead of focusing on the glory of Jesus, they got distracted (willfully) by semantics, words and meanings.

17:10 *And his disciples asked him: Why do the scribes say*- The disciples were evidently still under the influence of Judaism and the religious world around them, and this background died hard for them. "Why say the scribes…?", they reasoned, implying that their view was of at least equal if not greater weight when compared with that of the Lord Jesus [as they also did in Mt. 17:9,10]. He had to specifically warn them against the Scribes in Lk. 20:45,46; He had to specifically tell them not to address the Rabbis as 'father' (Mt. 23:8,9), implying they had too much respect for them. The way the disciples speak of the Scribes as if they have such a valid theological position reflects their upbringing and respect for the ruling elite of the synagogue (Mt. 17:10), with whom the Lord was at such total variance. They were concerned that the Pharisees had been offended by the Lord's words (Mt. 15:12). We again see here how the disciples were out of step with the Lord's thinking, pursuing their own mental agenda, and not doing that they had just been told- to 'hear Him'. For the Lord has just told them very seriously ("charged them") to not say anything about this experience until He was resurrected. But instead they are grappling with another issue- if this Jesus was really Messiah, well why hadn't Elijah come first, as the Scribes taught? Clearly we see them pursuing a line of thought which precluded their attention to what the Lord was so earnestly seeking to tell them.

That Elijah must first come- This provides another insight into the shallowness of their understanding. The transfiguration had persuaded them, at least for the moment, that Jesus was Messiah. But they were confused as to why the Elijah prophet hadn't come first. John the Baptist, whom they had followed and believed, had clearly cast himself in the role of Elijah. But it seems that they hadn't really grasped the significance of John's ministry at all.

17:11 *And he answered and said: Elijah indeed comes*- There can be no doubt that 'Elijah' will come in some form: "I will send you Elijah the prophet before the *coming* of the great and dreadful day of the Lord... lest I *come* and smite the earth" (Malachi 4:5,6). The coming of the Lord must therefore be preceded by Elijah's work. His mission will be to direct Israel's attention to God's Word, "lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Malachi 4:4,6). This was evidently not totally fulfilled by John the Baptist, seeing that the land was smitten after A.D. 70 due to Israel's failure to repent. "Lest I come..." is clearly referring to God's manifestation in Christ's second coming - it is associated with the arising of "the sun of righteousness" (Malachi 4:2,6). Whilst John fulfilled the role of the Elijah prophet to those who truly repented (Mt. 11:14), he emphatically denied that he was 'Elijah' (John 1:21,23). This can only mean that the Elijah prophet is yet to come. Our Lord silences all doubt about this: "Elijah truly shall first come, and restore all things" (Mt. 17:11). Elijah's work will be to turn the hearts of Israel back to the patriarchs in repentance (Malachi 4:6 cp. 1 Kings 18:37), so that Christ comes to an Israel who have turned away from unGodliness (Is. 59:20). John being a mini-Elijah prophet, it is to be expected that the broad features of his ministry will be repeated in the work of the final Elijah prophet. John was called "the Baptist", so evident was his emphasis on water baptism. Indeed, the name 'John' and the image of water baptism are hard to separate. There is fair reason to think that 'Elijah' will also literally baptize. "That (Christ) should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water" (Jn.1:31) seems to make baptism a pre-requisite for accepting Christ. Indeed, Jewish theology expects baptism to be

associated with the coming of Messiah and the Elijah prophet. Therefore the Jews asked John: "Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias" (Jn. 1:25).

And shall restore all things- The restoration of the Kingdom is ultimately Messiah's work (Acts 1:9-11). The restoring referred to here would therefore mean spiritual restoration. Mark's account of John's activities clearly alludes to the Malachi passages about the Elijah prophet, and the descriptions of Elijah's clothing, appearance and diet are clearly intended to help us identify him with a prophet like Elijah. The LXX in Mal. 4:5 speaks of how the prophet will *restore* the hearts of the fathers to the children. This confirms that the restoration to be achieved by the Elijah prophet is largely spiritual, psychological and internal. The more physical restoration of the Kingdom on earth is Messiah's work. But the Lord is placing Elijah's work in the future- because Israel had failed to respond to it. And yet what are we to make of the repeated descriptions in the Gospels of "all" Israel going out to John and repenting? My suggestion is that they were eager for a Messiah to come and save them from the Romans; John appeared looking like and alluding to Elijah, and so they were eager to accept him as an Elijah prophet, knowing that this heralded Messiah. They 'repented' because there was a clear connection made in Judaism between Jewish repentance, and the Elijah prophet and Messiah's coming. Thus: "Israel will fulfil the great repentance when the Elijah of blessed memory comes" (Pirqe R. Eliezer 43 [25a]); and many other examples are quoted by Walter Wink (Walter Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (Cambridge: C.U.P. 2006) p. 3). The Qumran documents even claim that the faithful would go out into the wilderness to the Elijah prophet and separate themselves from the unholy in Israel (1 QS 8:12-16) (More examples are given in Carl Kazmierski, *John the Baptist: Prophet and Evangelist* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999) p. 26). Hence the intended sarcasm of the idea that in fact "all" Israel went out to the wilderness to John! Therefore their repentance was as it were self-induced and merely symbolic, because they believed it was part of a sequence of events which would lead to Messiah's coming and liberation from Rome. This would be a classic example of surface level spirituality and response to God's word, when in fact the response was motivated by selfish and unspiritual motives. No wonder John appealed to them to *really* repent. The Lord says that Elijah comes "first", *proton*, above all, most importantly, to achieve this restoration- the implication being that the fact John's ministry had failed to bring "all" Israel to this position, meant that there must therefore be another Elijah ministry which would succeed before Messiah could come in glory. And this would indeed "restore" the *hearts* of Israel, as Mal. 4:5 LXX requires.

17:12 *But I say unto you, that Elijah came already and they knew him not, but did to him*- Christ accused the Jews of rejecting John the Baptist (Mt. 17:12; Lk. 7:32–35), and on other occasions He commented on the fact that they had accepted his teaching, with the result that spiritually their house was swept and garnished (Mt. 12:44; Jn. 5:35). We can conclude from this that their *appearance* of accepting John's message was spoken of by Jesus as if they had accepted it. Likewise Christ called the Jews both children of hell (Mt. 23:15) and children of the Kingdom (Mt. 8:12); the latter was how they perceived themselves. The things "done" to John surely include his death for the Lord goes on to say that He will "likewise suffer of them", "of this generation" (Lk. 17:25). But it was the despised Herod who had John murdered. And yet Jesus here says that that generation had done that to John- despite the fact that he remained, it seems, immensely popular amongst that generation. Again the Lord is stressing that all the apparent response to John had not been sincere- the Jews who had seemingly responded to him were in fact as bad as apostate Herod and it was effectively *they* who had killed him. Naturally such language begged the response that no, it was Herod and his

courtiers who killed John, not the mass of people. But the Lord is saying that effectively, it was that generation who had locked John up and killed him.

Mk. 9:12 adds more detail to the Lord's words: "Elijah indeed comes first and restores all things. And how is it written of the Son of Man, that he should suffer many things and be set at nothing?". His question was (as so often with Him) in answer and response to their unexpressed question- that surely Elijah is to have a successful ministry and then the Messiah would begin His Kingdom in glory. The Lord was asking them the question about the prophesied sufferings and rejection of Messiah in order to answer the question He could see in their minds. So often "He answered and said…" something, when no question was verbalized. But He perceived the question in the minds of His audience, such was His sensitivity. Only a week or so ago He had told them how messiah must "suffer many things" (Mt. 16:21) and now he uses the same phrase again- although it seems they had forgotten or not appreciated what He had then told them.

Whatever they would- Mk. 9:12 adds: "As it is written of him". There seems no specific prophecy stating that the Elijah prophet would be unsuccessful, unless one really reads between the lines of Malachi's prophecy about the Elijah prophet. More likely is that the "him" refers to the historical Elijah. All that was written of *him* had come true of John the Baptist, in that the alliance between Ahab and the manipulative Jezebel which led to Elijah's persecution was mirrored in that between Herod and the equally manipulative Herodias, which led to John's demise.

Likewise shall the Son of Man suffer by their hands- Mk. 9:12 extends this in saying that He would likewise "suffer many things and be set at nought". Significantly, the same Greek word is used in Lk. 23:11 to describe how Herod "set at nought" Jesus at His trial; and it was the same Herod who had John the Baptist murdered.

17:13 *Then understoo the disciples that he spoke to them of John the Baptist*- Towards the end of Matthew 12 and throughout chapter 13, the Lord had explained at length how Israel *en masse* had *not* "understood" (the same word is used) about John, but the disciples *had* understood (Mt. 13:13-15,19,23). He then solemnly asked the disciples whether they had "understood" (s.w.; Mt. 13:51), and they assured Him that they had. They are presented as children, saying they understand when they don't. The Lord commended them for understanding when the masses didn't. But this understanding was imputed to them by Him. On one hand we see His simple and pure love for them, counting them as understanding what they didn't; on the other, we see how His hope that they would understand paid off, for they did finally. And this is the practical outworking of imputed righteousness and the status that is counted to us "in Christ"- we are to live out that status in practice, and the Lord works patiently with us to ensure that we do. And likewise in our pastoral work with others; faith and love and hope in others are at times rewarded, although not always.

17:14 *And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and knelt before him, saying*- This meeting with the crowd occurred the day after the transfiguration (Lk. 9:37)- presumably they slept up the mountain for the night. The transfiguration record is replete with references to the theophany on Sinai. Moses' return from the mount was to a faithless people of God, and the same is found here, in that the disciples had been unable to perform a healing which they had potentially been given the power to do.

Note how the three accounts dovetail so nicely: Jesus and the three with Him moved towards the crowd (Mt.), Jesus having noticed them from a distance (Mk.), and the crowd came towards them (Lk.). And as Jesus came (*erchomai*) towards the crowd, there came out of the crowd towards Him (*pros-erchomai*) the man who wanted a healing for his son (Mt.). Mark records that the people ran towards Jesus when they

saw Him (Mk. 9:15- presumably His face was shining after the encounter, after the pattern of Moses), which explains why Luke says that the man had to 'cry out' from out of the crowd (Lk. 9:38- Gk. 'to holler', to get attention amidst the rush of all the others towards Jesus) and that Jesus firstly asked the Scribes what they were questioning His disciples about. We really can powerfully reconstruct the scene by putting the three different viewpoints together. Matthew focuses upon the man who came to Jesus wanting healing for his son. The best analogy is to cameramen. Matthew focuses close up upon one man; Mark is taking a broader view of the crowd as a whole, and therefore picks up the brief question to the Scribes first of all- they made no answer that is recorded, and the Lord's answer to whatever questions they were asking was given in the healing miracle. That there are no actual contradictions of fact or chronology is to me a profound internal evidence of an inspired record, with a common Divine hand behind all the authors. If these were three uninspired men writing their recollections some time after the event, or uninspired people writing down what had been passed down to them as originating with those men, then for sure there would be contradictions. Because misremembering of detail is just part of our human condition, and the supposed lengthy process of oral tradition would inevitably have meant there was further corruption and unclarity added. The lack of contradiction in the accounts and the way they complement each other so perfectly has to me the hallmark of the Divine. Even witnesses who agree together to lie in court and rehearse their stories many times over- still end up contradicting each other. But that is not the case with the Gospels.

Mark adds: "All the crowd, when they saw Him, were greatly amazed; and running to Him saluted Him" (Mk. 9:15). They ran up to Him- and He add Peter, James and John with Him. This sentence in Greek is intentionally similar to the account of Acts 3:11, where again "All the people [cp. "all the crowd"] ran [s.w. "running to Him"] together unto them… greatly wondering [s.w. "greatly amazed"]. The response of the crowd to Peter and John in Acts 3:11 could not possibly have been contrived by them. Their experience at the return from the transfiguration was to prepare them for their own later witness, when without the physical presence of Jesus, they were Him to the world. And the same kind of carefully, sensitively planned education of us is ongoing now. Not only do situations occur and then repeat in essence later in our lives, but what we go through in this life will only have understood meaning in the Kingdom, when we shall put into eternal practice what we are learning now. But for now, there is an inevitable difficulty in attaching meaning to event, because we cannot foresee the billion situations in our eternities where we will put into practice what we are now learning.

17:15 *Lord, have mercy*- This is a phrase commonly used by those who besought the Lord for a miracle. But later in the New Testament, the word is used almost exclusively concerning the Lord's spiritual grace and mercy specifically in providing salvation. We are left wondering, therefore, whether each of those who requested such "mercy" were not thinking solely of physical healing, although that was obviously very much in their minds, but also had a sense of their need for spiritual healing, forgiveness and salvation. And this was what led to their requests for healing being positively received by the Lord. For presumably there were many requests for healing which were not met, seeing that the majority of the Lord's miracles were done in three small villages (see on 11:20).

On my son- His only child (Lk.).

For he is epileptic and suffers terribly- Literally, "Lunatic". Literally it means one who is "moon struck". It was once believed that if a person went out walking at night

when there was a clear moon, they could get struck by the moon and become mentally ill. We use that word “lunatic” today to describe someone who is ill, but it does not mean that we believe mental illness is caused by the moon. If our words were written down and re-read in 2,000 years’ time, people might think we believed that the moon caused illness; but they'd be wrong because we are just using the language of our day, as the Lord Jesus did 2,000 years ago. The New Testament likewise reflects this association between the moon and mental illness. "They brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, and those which were lunatick, and paralytics; and He healed them" (Mt. 4:24 A.V.). The repetition of the word "and..." gives the impression that every kind of illness- physical and mental, understood and not understood- was healed by the Lord Jesus. "Lunatick" translates the Greek *selēniazomai*- "to be moon struck", derived from the noun *selēnē*, the moon. It's not true that some mental illnesses come from being moon-struck. But the idea is used, without correction- just as the idea of 'demon possession' is in the preceding phrase.

For often he falls into the fire and often into the water- Descriptions of the rejected as gnashing teeth, cast into fire and water, wallowing helpless... is all the language of the demoniac (Mk. 9:18-22). This connection shows at least two things: that there will be a madness in the rejected, the tragic aimlessness of the demented. And secondly, that because the demoniac was cured, it is possible for a man whose behaviour leads to his condemnation *now* to still repent, before it's too late. And yet although the rejected may appear demented, they may well not feel like this. They will gnash their teeth with anger, not least against themselves. Being cast into fire or water were both figures of condemnation. The young man felt he was worthy of condemnation- hence conviction of the Lord's saving mercy would have been enough to cure him of the deep sense of unworthiness which he had.

17:16 *So I brought him to your disciples*- Lk. 9:40 adds that he "besought" them, he begged them, to heal the child. According to Mark, when the father of the dumb child brought him to the disciples, he tells Jesus that “I brought unto thee my son”, but the disciples couldn’t cure him (Mk. 9:17 RV); he perceived Jesus as His followers, just as folk do today. The Lord had earlier given them power over “unclean spirits” (10:8)- but still they couldn’t heal him. The power given to them was therefore potential power, but it was no guarantee that they would actually do the works. Alternatively, we could conclude that that power was only given to them temporarily. Or, that there is a difference between the twelve, and the more general “disciples” / followers of Jesus. However it would have been strange indeed if the man had not brought his son to the group of the twelve in the hope of healing. And it is the disciples, presumably the twelve, who then come to the Lord and ask why they could not perform the cure (:19).

But they could not cure him- They had no *dunamai* (possibility); Mk. 9:18 uses a different word- according to Mark, the man said that they “could not” using *ischuo* (more carrying the sense of physical power). The man therefore bewailed at least twice that the disciples couldn’t help; and he asks the Lord Jesus to help “if You can” (Mk. 9:22- *dunamai*). They did have the possibility; but they lacked the faith to actualize it (Mt. 10:8; Lk. 10:19,20 “I give unto you power… over all the power of the enemy… the spirits are subject unto you”). We too have been given potentials which require faith to exploit, and our failures to do so leave people with the impression that the Lord Himself is limited- for, like the disciples, we are His representatives in this world, and people coming to us are effectively coming to Him.

Mk. 9:23 adds that the father of the child was asked whether he could believe [i.e., that Jesus could cast out the demon]. The man replied that yes, although his faith was

weak, he believed [that Jesus could cast out the demon]. His faith was focused on by Jesus, rather than his wrong beliefs. Faith above all was what the Lord was focusing on *in the first instance*. Mark also adds the detail that the Lord "asked his father: How long has this been happening to him? And he said: From a child. And often it has cast him both into the fire and into the waters to destroy him; but if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us. And Jesus said to him: Rather, if you can! All things are possible to him that believes. Immediately the father of the child cried out, and said: I believe! Help my disbelief!". It is a feature of our nature that we can believe and yet disbelieve at the same time. We frequently commit the horror of limiting God in our attitude to prayer. All too often we see ourselves in the man who believed and yet still had unbelief: "If thou (Jesus) canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible" (Mk. 9:22,23). The man thought that Christ's power to help was limited: 'If you can do anything to help, well, please do'. The Lord Jesus turned things right round: 'If you can believe, anything's possible' - in other words, God can do anything, but His ability to directly respond to some particular need is limited by our faith, not by any intrinsic lack of ability within Himself. The man hadn't thought about this. He saw God as sometimes able to help a bit; Christ turned the man's words round to show that God's power is infinite, limited only by our faith. The word "believe" in Mk. 9:23 is omitted from many texts. Thus we could paraphrase: "Regarding that " If you can..." which you said- as regards that, well, all things are possible". This is the view of F.B. Meyer and Marvin Vincent. The RV reads: "And Jesus said unto him, If thou canst! All things are possible to him that believeth". It is clear enough that God at times limits His power. He *could* save everybody, indeed He wishes to do this, yet He allows human freewill to be genuine and meaningful, to the extent that not all will be saved. Israel in the wilderness "limited the Holy One of Israel". He was left by Israel as a mighty man powerless to save. The Greek word *dunatos* translated 16 times "mighty" is also 13 times translated "possible". God's might is His possibility. But our freewill can limit that might. All things are possible to God, and therefore all things are possible to the believer- but if the believer has no faith, then, those possibilities of God will not occur (Lk. 1:49; Mk. 9:23; 10:27). And so I have no problem with a God who limits His omniscience.

17:17 *And Jesus answered and said: O faithless and perverse generation! How long shall I be with you? How long must I tolerate you?*- An example of the Lord's perhaps unconscious usage of His Father's words is to be found in this exasperated comment. Of course the Lord would have spoken those words and expressed those ideas in Aramaic- but the similarity is striking with His Father's Hebrew words of Num. 14:27: "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation…?". As a son comes out with phrases and word usages which 'Could be his father speaking!', so the Lord Jesus did the same thing. What I am saying is that the Lord was not merely quoting or alluding to the Father's Old Testament words, in the way that, say, Paul or Peter did. As the Father's Son, He was speaking in the same way as His Father, no doubt saturated with the written record of the Father's words, but all the same, there were those similarities of wording and underlying thinking which are only seen between fathers and sons. And His words of Mt. 17:17 = Num. 14:27 seem to me to be an example of this. It was the disciples who were faithless (:20). In chapters 12 and 13, the Lord had drawn a clear difference between the disciples, and the unbelieving surrounding generation. It seems that He now despaired of whether that distinction was valid; He sees them, in the heat of that moment of bitter disappointment, as no better than the masses who did not believe. The "faithless" will be condemned (Lk. 12:46 "his portion with the

unbelievers", s.w.), and this is the term used about the world generally (1 Cor. 6:6; 7:12); or as the Lord puts it, this "generation". And yet the Lord uses it here about the disciples and again in Jn. 20:27. The very phrase "perverse generation" is used by Paul about the unbelieving world (Phil. 2:15). To use this term about the disciples is therefore significant; the Lord really felt that His faith and hope that they were different from the Jewish world had been misplaced. After His encounter with Elijah and Moses, he doubtless expected more of God's people.

This fits in with a Biblical theme- of people being confronted with acute spiritual temptation immediately after a highly spiritual experience. And this is true to life- so often, merely hours after a highly intense spiritual experience [e.g. at a breaking of bread meeting] we find ourselves assailed by temptation and spiritual depression. It's not that we are encountered by a physical person called 'Satan' immediately after our spiritual 'high'; rather it is a feature of human nature that the closer we come to God, the stronger is the tidal backwash of *internal* temptation immediately afterwards. Consider some examples:

- Noah walks off the ark, a superb triumph of faith, into a cleansed and pristine world, with the rainbow arch of God's grace above him- and gets dead drunk (Gen. 9:21-24).
- Moses renounced greatness, stood up for God's people and then left Egypt by faith, "not fearing the wrath of the king" (Heb. 11:27); and yet ended up fleeing in fear from Pharaoah (Ex. 2:14,15).
- Moses returned from the awesome meeting with God on Sinai and gave in to a flash of anger, during which he smashed the tables of the covenant- a covenant which had also been made with him personally.
- Israel were ecstatic with joy and confidence in God as they stood on the other side of the Red Sea- but very soon afterwards they were giving in to temptation in the wilderness, accusing God of intending to kill them and being careless for them.
- Judas went from the spiritual height of being present at the first "breaking of bread" meeting with the Lord Jesus, just prior to His death, directly into temptation from "the Devil" and then went out into the darkness of that night (Lk. 22:3).
- Soon after his spiritual triumph on Carmel, Elijah is to be found suicidal and bitter with God, and considering that the other faithful in Israel are in fact also apostate (1 Kings 19:4-11).
- Samson's life was full of giving in to spiritual temptation immediately after he had been empowered by God to do some great miracle.
- Immediately after having been saved by God's grace from a huge invasion (2 Sam. 11), David sins with Bathsheba and murders Uriah (2 Sam. 12).
- After the wonder of having a terminal illness delayed by 15 years in response to prayer, Hezekiah gives in to the temptation to be proud and selfish in the events of Is. 39.
- Soon after the wonder of the miracles of the loaves and fishes, the disciples hardened their heart to it and accused Jesus of not caring for them (Mk. 4:38; 6:52).
- Paul straight after his wonderful vision of "the third heaven" finds himself struggling with a "thorn in the flesh", a term I have elsewhere suggested may refer to a spiritual weakness or temptation (2 Cor. 12:7).
- After the wonder of baptism and the confirming voice from Heaven, Jesus was immediately assaulted by major temptation in the wilderness.

This is surely the most graphic and intense expression of frustration in the entire recorded history of the Lord Jesus. His frustration was with how His disciples were not living up to their potential, and how faithless they were. And we daily exhibit the same

terribly disappointing characteristics. But *how long* may not necessarily be a cry of exasperation- although it could be that. There can also be the sense of 'Until when?', and the time in view was the Lord's death. John's Gospel records the Lord several times speaking of how His hour or time had not yet come, and how He agonized until it did. That end point was clearly the moment when He cried from the cross "It is finished".

When Jesus returned from the Mount of Transfiguration, He found that the disciples had failed to do a cure because of their lack of faith. He describes them as [part of] a "faithless generation" again indicating how the disciples were all too influenced by Judaism, the "generation" or world around them. The disciples and Judaism / the Jewish world are paralleled in Jn. 7:3,4: "Let your disciples see your work… show yourself to the world".

Bring him here to me- The man had brought [s.w. "bring"] his son to the disciples, they couldn't heal him, and so the Lord asks for the child to be brought to Him personally. And yet He had taught that in their witness, the disciples were Him to this world. Coming to them was coming to Him. But He despaired that in this case, there was now a difference between them and Him. They were unable to manifest Him as they should because of their lack of faith. And there are times when our status as 'brethren in Christ' likewise fails, and we fail to be Him to this world and He has to intervene and reveal Himself more directly to men.

Mk. 9:19 records how He asked for the son to be brought *pros* Me, literally, 'here with Me'; but this is the same term used in the Lord's lament: "How long shall I be with [*pros*] you?". The Lord's physical presence was required for this miracle- the son must be "here" (Mt.), "with Me" (Mk.). But the Lord was making the point that He would not always be literally with them, and then such cures would have to be done by the disciples without His physical presence. And it seems He despaired as to whether they were ready for this.

17:18 *And Jesus rebuked him; and the demon went out of him*- There are a number of parallels between the language used of 'casting out' demons, and that used about healings. Jesus "rebuked" demons in Mk. 9:25, and yet He "rebuked" a fever (Lk. 4:39) and the wind (Mt. 8:26). Demons are spoken of as having "departed" (Mt. 17:18), yet we read of leprosy 'departing' (Mk. 1:42) and diseases 'departing' after cure (Acts 19:12). I'd go so far as to say that every case of a person being spoken of as demon possessed has its equivalent in diseases which we can identify today – e.g. epilepsy, schizophrenia. The peoples of the first century, and their predecessors, believed that demons and the Satan monster were somehow associated with water- that was why, they figured, the water mysteriously kept moving, and at times blew up into storms. When we read of God 'rebuking' the waters and making them calm or do what He wished (Ps. 18:16; 104:7; 106:9), we're effectively being told that Yahweh of Israel is so infinitely superior to those supposed demons and sea monsters that for God's people, they have no effective existence. The Lord Jesus taught the same lesson when He 'rebuked' the sea and wind during the storm on the lake (Mt. 8:26). The same Greek word is used to described how He 'rebuked' demons (Mt. 17:18 etc.). I have no doubt that the Lord Jesus didn't believe there was a Loch Ness-type monster lurking in Galilee which He had to rebuke in order to save the disciples from the storm; and likewise He spoke of 'rebuking' demons as a similar way of teaching others that *whatever* ideas they had about demons, He was greater and was in a position to 'rebuke' them. Likewise He assured His men that they had the power to tread on snakes, scorpions, and all their enemies (Lk. 10:17-20). The image of a victorious god trampling his foes and snakes underfoot was well established in the surrounding cultures, and had entered Judaism. The Lord is teaching those fearful men that OK, if that's your perception of things, well,

in your terms, you have ultimate victory through working 'in My name'. It must be noted that the man had previously described the boy's condition as being due to how "A spirit seizes him… and it *departs* from him with great difficulty" (Lk. 9:39). The condition was intermittent (consistent with viewing the condition as epilepsy rather than actual, literal manipulation by a spirit or demon). Trying various remedies, probably including beating him, the condition 'departed'. The Lord's cure is described in the same terms, with the implication that it was total and permanent, rather than partial and temporary, as their 'healings' were. The Lord said that the 'spirit' would never again enter the boy (Mk. 9:25).

And the boy was cured from that moment- The immediate effect of the Lord's healings contrasted sharply with those of faith healers, both then and now.

Mk. 9:27 adds that the Lord touched him and lifted him up- exactly what He had done to the terrified disciples on the mount of transfiguration (Mt. 17:7 s.w.). By doing so, it was made apparent that the disciples (even the three best of them) needed healing themselves rather than being in a position to perform the miracles, as the Lord had hoped they could; and as indeed they could.

17:19 *Then came the disciples to Jesus privately, and said*- In a house (Mk.).

Why could we not cast it out?- They were surprised at their inability, which suggests they had performed such cures before and had faith that they could do miracles. The Lord's explanation in the next verse that they had no faith ("unbelief", *a-pisteo*, no faith) would therefore have been hard for them to initially accept. His idea was that we either believe or do not believe, and often what seems to us as faith, even if it is admittedly small faith, is ultimately not faith. John's Gospel even more clearly presents faith as something one either has or doesn't have. And yet in reality there are gradations of faith, and the Bible recognizes this. The Lord's next comment that "*If* you [really, as you think] have faith as a grain of mustard seed..." was therefore speaking to their assumption that although their faith was small, they did actually believe. Again we see how the Lord sees to the inner, unexpressed thoughts and positions of His audiences, and addresses them. This presentation of faith as an absolute, a black or white position (and John's Gospel stresses this even more), is a huge challenge to examine our faith.

17:20 *And he said to them: Because of your little faith*- See on :19 *Why could we not*. "Ye of little faith" (Lk. 12:22,28); they had "no faith" (Mk. 4:40). "Where is your faith?" (Lk. 8:25). They asked for their faith to be increased (Lk. 17:5). Luke records that the Centurion had more faith than the disciples (Lk. 7:9). The Gospel writers were very self critical regarding their own faith in the message they were now preaching. They openly admit that they didn't have enough faith to cure the sick boy. Jesus told them this: it was "because of your little faith…if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove…" (Mt. 17:20 RV). Think carefully what is going on here. They had not even faith as a tiny grain of mustard seed; they didn't have the faith to cure the boy. But Jesus says they did have "little faith". He recognized what insignificant faith they did have. He was so sensitive to the amount of faith in someone, even if it was insignificant in the final analysis. We likewise need to be able to positively and eagerly discern faith in those we preach to and seek to spiritually develop. In a similar kind of way, God was disappointed that His people had not only been disobedient to *Him* , but they had not even been obedient to their conquerors (Ez. 5:7). He so values obedience, and had an attitude that sought to see if they would show it to at least someone, even if they had rejected *Him*.

For truly I say to you: If you have faith as small as a mustard seed- This calls for obvious connection to the Lord's earlier likening of the Gospel of the Kingdom to a grain of mustard seed which then grows into a great tree (13:31; Lk. 13:19). The Lord then had been explaining that although the disciples' faith was small, and His plans for the Kingdom had tiny, almost invisible beginnings in that group of disciples, yet they would grow into the Kingdom. But now, in the heat of this disappointed moment, the Lord feels that the disciples don't even have such beginnings. In this frustration and deep disappointment we have yet another window into the Lord's utter humanity.

You shall say to this mountain- Just a very small amount of real faith during this life will enable us to move "this mountain", perhaps referring to Mount Zion. The idea of Mount Zion being moved sends the mind to Zech. 14:4,5, describing how Mount Zion will be moved at the Lord's return; and also to Ps. 125:1, which speaks of how they who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be removed; and yet Christ said we *will*remove it by prayer. The point of these allusions is surely to show that real faith will bring about the coming of the Kingdom, which is a totally super-human achievement; the unshakeableness of Mount Zion is likened to the solidity of true faith. The Lord's point seems to be that if we truly believe, then the coming of the Kingdom will be brought about by our faith; the outcome of our faith in this life will be seen in the Kingdom. But what our faith will achieve in the Kingdom will be hugely out of proportion to what it really is now. But there is another way to read Mt. 17:20: "If ye have (now) faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall (in the Kingdom) say to this mountain (of Zion), Remove hence..."; as if in the Kingdom we will be control of the physical world as the Lord was even in His mortality. In this case, His commanding of the sea and waves will be shared by us in the Kingdom; not just sea and waves, but mountains too (Mt. 8:27).

But the Lord spoke these words at the foot of the mount of transfiguration, and the more comfortable interpretation would be to think of Him saying these words with a nod towards the mountain from which He had just come down. Real faith would enable that Kingdom experience to be replicated anywhere. The vision of the Kingdom which had been seen there could be moved anywhere- by faith. There was maybe another gentle encouragement for them to think in terms of God's Kingdom as not being geographically limited, but capable of removal to the Gentiles, if they had faith. The Lord uses similar words after cursing the fig tree, symbolic of Israel and God's ultimate destruction of her: "If you have faith and doubt not, you shall not only do what is done to the fig tree, but even if you shall say to this mountain: Be taken up and cast into the sea, it shall be done" (Mt. 21:21). In that passage, the mountain is almost certainly a reference to Mount Zion. The sea was symbolic of the Gentile world, and so the Lord would be developing His teaching which began here at the mount of transfiguration- the things of the Kingdom, centered as they then were in the mountains of Israel, could be moved to the Gentile world by faith.

Move from here to there, and it will move- Ps. 46:2 was perhaps in the Lord's mind: "Therefore we won't be afraid though the earth shakes, though the mountains are moved into the heart of the seas". In this case, the Lord would be suggesting that if we have real faith, we will not fear the results of that faith. We will not fear mountains being cast into the sea; and it is fear which holds us back from faith, we unconsciously fear the answer we apparently seek in prayer.

Nothing shall be impossible for you- With *God* nothing is impossible (Lk. 1:37- the only other occurrence of the word in the NT), but here nothing is impossible *unto us*. God's possibility is our possibility; and this is what the Lord was teaching the man who thought that it all depended upon the Lord's possibility alone. There are other

instances where the extent and nature of the Lord's healing seems to have been limited by the faith of the recipient (Mt. 8:13 "as... so"; 9:29 "according to"; 12:22 "inasmuch").

17:21 *But this kind*- This kind of demon? In this case, the Lord is again using their wrong ideas (in this case, about some demons being stronger than others) without really believing them, talking to them in terms which they understood.

Will not go out- Angels are of course active in answering our prayer, obeying the commanding voice of God Himself in Heaven- answers to prayer "go… out" by prayer and fasting (Mt. 17:21). The answer to prayer is therefore likened to a 'going out'- of the Angel and command from the throne of grace? This language of 'going out' is frequently used in the Old Testament about the going forth of the cherubim Angels. See Is. 37:36 for another example.

Except by prayer and fasting- Which evidently, the disciples should have done but had not. The Lord wasn't naive, although He was so positive. He told the disciples quite frankly here that they were full of "unbelief", and couldn't do miracles which He expected them to because they didn't pray and fast (:19-21). And yet when quizzed by the Pharisees as to why His disciples didn't fast, He said it was because they were so happy to be with Him, the bridegroom (Mt. 9:15). Here surely He was seeing the best in them. They come over as confused, mixed up men who wanted the Kingdom there and then and were frustrated at the Lord's inaction in establishing it. But He saw that they recognized Him as the bridegroom, as Messiah, and He exalted in this, and saw their lack of fasting as partly due to the deep-down joy which He knew they had. Perhaps they tried to do this miracle without even praying about it (Mk. 9:29). Or maybe they prayed only on a surface level, and it was not counted as real prayer. Only intense prayer could send forth this kind of answer from God; He does not act on emotional grounds, just because He feels sorry for somebody. It needs to be noted that initially the man's child was not cured because the disciples didn't have the faith to do it. This teaches that God's activity for others is partly dependent on the prayers of a third party. These words are applied to us all in 1 Cor. 7:5, the only other place in the NT where they occur together; we are to give ourselves to prayer and fasting in domestic married life with the passion and intensity required to perform a miracle.

17:22 *And while they stayed in Galilee, Jesus said to them*- Luke adds that the curing of the young man led to wonder and amazement at His healing power, but He wished the disciples to realize that the crowds would all the same turn against Him: "But while all were marvelling at all the things which He did, He said to His disciples: Let these words sink into your ears. For the Son of Man shall be delivered up into the hands of men" (Lk. 9:43,44). The note that He reminded them about His passion whilst they were still in Galilee is another hint at the Lord's structured approach to training the twelve. Before they went back to Jerusalem, He wanted them to be aware well ahead of time that He was going to His death. Mark adds that He didn't want people to know of His presence because He was teaching the disciples about His death. Once again we encounter the theme of the Lord intensely focusing upon His disciples rather than upon the masses of Israel. It could be argued that He could have healed far more people had He not had this policy; but His long term intention was to create a solid body of followers who would bring His message to the world after His death. And we must likewise achieve a balance between good deeds for the world, and the need for strengthening the body of believers.

The Son of Man shall be delivered up into the hands of men- Mk. 9:31 puts this in the present tense- He *is* betrayed / delivered [s.w.]. The Lord likely said both- He shall be betrayed, [in fact] He is being betrayed / delivered. This is the sense recorded in John, of "the time comes but now is" (Jn. 4:23; 16:32). He knew that the essence of the

delivering over to the Jews / Romans was happening right then, although the final delivering / handing over was when in Gethsemane He said that "the hour is come… the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners" (Mk. 14:41). The word for 'betrayed' means literally to be handed over or delivered, and so the Lord's statement wouldn't have necessarily implied to them that there was to be a betrayal from amongst their own number.

17:23 *And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised up*- Clearly the rising again was at a specific moment, "the third day". This is proof enough that the Bible intends us to see the Lord's rising again as bodily resurrection and not some spiritual reincarnation over a period of time.

And they were greatly distressed- Luke notes that the saying about the cross was "hidden" from them (Lk. 9:45). And yet in prayer to the Father, He rejoices that these things are not hidden from them (Lk. 10:21,23). This gives insight into the Lord's present mediation for us in prayer- speaking of us as far better than we are. The message of Christ crucified was "hid" from them (Lk. 9:45; 18:34)- and Paul surely alludes to this when he says that this message is hid by the veil of Judaism from those who are lost (2 Cor. 4:3). Luke adds that straight afterwards, "there arose a dispute among them, which of them was the greatest" (Lk. 9:46). Time and again we see this in the Gospels- when the Lord speaks of His upcoming death, the disciples change the subject. This explains our own problem with mind wandering at the breaking of bread or in the study or even reading of the crucifixion accounts. This difficulty on focusing upon Him there is likely because His death requires our death and suffering, and subconsciously we realize that- and would rather not.

17:24 *And when they arrived in Capernaum, they that collected the tribute money*- Matthew was also from Capernaum (9:9), so these were his one time colleagues. Josephus says that the temple tax was payable in March, a month before Passover. This would suggest that Matthew is now recording incidents in the final month of the Lord's life. The half shekel (as RV) of the temple tax (Ex. 30:11-16). This had to be paid in the old coinage of Israel, and the money changers in the temple converted Roman money into this coinage at a large profit. It was their tables which the Lord overthrew.

Came to Peter and said: Does not your teacher pay the tribute money?- Even outsiders considered Peter to be representative of all the disciples (Mt. 17:24). "Peter and those with him" is how the group is described (Mk. 1:36; Lk. 8:45 Gk.; 9:32). Peter's crucial confession that he believed that Jesus was the Son of God is repeated almost verbatim by all the disciples, some time later (Jn. 6:69; 16:30). He is portrayed as the representative disciple. It is Peter who answers when the Lord asks a question of them all (Mk. 8:29 cp. the other accounts). The way Jesus looks upon all the disciples as He speaks to Peter makes Peter some kind of representative of them all in the Lord's eyes (Mk. 8:33). In Mt. 16:17 Peter is commended for having had the Father reveal Jesus to Him. Yet Mt. 11:27 says that the Father reveals the identity of His Son to *all* who truly come to Him. Thus Peter is representative of all who have truly perceived the Son's identity in Jesus of Nazareth. In one Gospel, all the disciples ask a question, while in the parallel passage Peter is stated to have asked it (Mk. 7:17 cp. Mt. 15:15 and Mt. 21:20 cp. Mk. 11:21).

17:25 *He said: Yes*- The question naturally arises as to why, then, the Lord miraculously provided a coin to pay the temple tax if He had already paid it; and why that coin only paid for Jesus and Peter, and not for the other disciples. Another question is why this tax had to be paid in Capernaum (:24) and not in Jerusalem or the home towns of the

disciples. My suggestion is that the payment of that tax at that time and place was unnecessary, but the Lord did so in the spirit of His teaching about offering to go two miles when asked to go one; or offering the undergarment to him who asks your cloke. In commenting upon those teachings, I made the point that such offers restored the balance of power to the abused and took it away from the abusers, who would feel awkward accepting the offer. And we are therefore left to wonder as to whether the coin was really accepted by the questioners. It would've seemed a chronic waste of money to the unspiritual, but the Lord works on a higher level than the pragmatic and utilitarian.

The Pharisees taught that one could only worship in the temple if the temple tax had been paid (Jostein Adna, *The Formation of the Early Church* , (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005) p. 27). The Lord could have engaged with that wrong view in direct confrontation. But He didn't. In His gracious way, He once again went along with misunderstandings by paying what was required, and yet His example and teaching demonstrated that service to God was totally independent of such human demands. The children of God who are "free" from such taxes could be understood as all Israel, and more specifically, the new Israel, comprised of God's own Son and His disciples.

And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first of all, saying- The Greek word for "first of all" really means 'to anticipate'. Again we see the Lord's sensitivity in knowing what is in human nature. So often we read that He "answered and said…" when there had been no stated question. That acute sensitivity to human thinking and situations remains with Him to this day, and should be a great comfort to us at the day of judgment.

Simon. What do you think? The kings of the earth, from whom do they receive toll or tribute? From their own children, or from strangers?- There was a double meaning here, for there is in Semitic languages 'the plural of majesty', whereby the plural can be used to speak of one great thing. The great king of the earth was God. His children are therefore free from the demands of men; but the Lord goes on to teach that we should all the same submit to those demands in order not to make them stumble. Another approach is invited by the possibility that the phrase "kings of the earth" has been consciously lifted from Ps. 2:2 LXX, which speaks of how "The kings of the earth… and the rulers… take counsel / were gathered together against Yahweh and His Christ". One of the many applications of this verse is to the rulership of the earth / land of Israel collaborating in the crucifixion of Christ and later of His disciples (Acts 4:26; note how He speaks of "the rulers *of the Gentiles*" in 20:25). There are indirect applications of Ps. 2:2 to the Jewish leadership in Mt. 22:34; 26:3,4. The priesthood of the time has been described as "A priestly aristocracy"; therefore the language of kingship was not inappropriate to them. Josephus speaks of the priesthood as this: "The constitution became an aristocracy, and the High Priests were entrusted with the leadership of the nation" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 20:10, 5). So it could well be that these rulers which the Lord was focusing on were the Jewish religious rulers and priests of the day, and their children were free from the temple tax. Yet the Lord argues that the disciples are likewise free from it- because they were the new priesthood.

Again we note the high status the Lord argues for His followers- the children of kings, and in this case, the King of all the earth. The implication was that the Jews who paid the temple tax, considering it as the highest sign of their membership in God's

people (as it was a voluntary tax), were in fact thereby showing that they were strangers, Gentiles, and not His true children.

17:26 *And when he said 'From strangers', Jesus said to him: Therefore the children are free*- Barnes summarizes the argument: "Kings do not tax their own sons. This tribute-money is taken up for the temple service; that is, the service of my Father. I, therefore, being the Son of God, for whom this is taken up, cannot be lawfully required to pay this tribute". Peter later asks his sheep: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man… unto governors… *as free*… honour all men" (1 Pet. 2:13-17). This is all evident allusion to the way he had once felt that as free in Christ and in Israel, he didn't need to submit to men and pay taxes. But the Lord had gently rebuked him, and provided the coin to pay for them both (Mt. 17:25-27). The Gospels records would have been well known amongst the early believers; there is a tradition that at least the Gospel of Mark was learnt by heart as part of instruction for baptism. Peter's readers would have known of the incident, and now, here he is telling them to learn the lesson he had had to learn. The Lord seems to make a concession to the inability of the surrounding world to understand Him, when He tells Peter that as God's people, they are free from the requirement to pay taxes to the present world. But "lest we should offend them", we should pay them (Mt. 17:27). As the Lord spoke to men according to their level of ability to comprehend Him (Mk. 4:33; and consider how He used the language of demons), so should we.

The statement that His followers were "free" from paying the temple tax was effectively a statement that the Lord's greatness as "one greater than the temple" (12:6) meant that He was at liberty to therefore abrogate the teaching of Torah- for Ex. 30:13,14 did indeed stipulate a temple tax. His overturning of the tables of the moneychangers, who enabled the payment of the temple tax in practice (21:12-17) was likewise effectively stating that the temple tax law was not binding on His followers. The Lord taught that the tax should be paid so as not to offend the potential Christian faith of the Jews, rather than because it was a question of obedience to Divine law- because that law was ended.

Another consideration is that the Lord is alluding to the Jewish idea that the priests themselves were exempted from the temple tax (*Sheqalim* 1.8)- because He considered His followers the new priesthood. He had used the same argument in justifying why the disciples could grind corn on the Sabbath- they were, He implied, like the priests who could even eat the showbread on the Sabbath.

17:27 *However, not to give offence to them*- This sets the scene for the Lord's sober teaching about the eternal danger of offending others (i.e. making them to spiritually stumble) in 18:6-9. His own example was of supreme effort not to offend others. He likewise carefully explained to His disciples the likely sequence of events surrounding His death "so that you should not be offended" (Jn. 16:1). But He also knew that they would be offended because of those things (Mt. 26:31). But so sensitive was He to the tragedy of others stumbling that He as it were laboured against His own foreknowledge, so that others would not be offended in Him. We are without doubt to take His example to ourselves, and go to any lengths to ensure that others do not stumble, especially because of us. The Lord specifically focused upon Peter, in order to teach him the extent we should go to in order not to offend others; because He had recently rebuked Peter for being a cause of stumbling to Him (Mt. 16:23). Not to offend others was a major plank of the Lord's teaching- it was the epitomy of the kind of iniquity which would exclude from His Kingdom (Mt. 13:41), and literally any length must be gone to in order not to offend (cutting out own eyes, hands etc.; Mt. 5:29,30). Paul speaks of

divisions and offences which are contrary to the doctrine learnt by the early Christians (Rom. 16:17). That "doctrine" or teaching would've been the Gospels themselves; and these teachings about not offending others were therefore up front as first principles in the early church. We do well to note that Paul brackets together divisions and offences; spiritual stumbling so often comes from division, and those who cause division thereby make others stumble. This is so true to observed reality amongst us- people spiritually stumble because of their exposure to divisions.

As the Son of God, walking freely in His Father's house, Jesus didn't have to pay the temple tax (Mt. 17:26,27). He could have insisted that He didn't need to pay it, He could have stood up for what was right and true. But doing this can often be selfish, a defence of self rather than a seeking for the Father's glory. And so He told Peter that "lest we should offend them", He would pay it. He was so hopeful for their salvation one day that He was worried about offending these wretched men, who weren't fit to breathe the same air that He did. We would have given up with them; but He worried about offending what potential faith they might have. The Lord spoke of not making the Orthodox Jews stumble by not paying the tribute; yet He goes on to say that one must beware lest we make the little ones who believe, to stumble (Mt. 17:27; 18:6). Is it not that He saw in Orthodox Jewry the beginnings of faith… a faith which was to come to fruition when a great company of priests were later obedient to the faith in Him? None of us would have had that sensitivity, that hopefulness, that seeking spirit. It is truly a challenge to us. In those last six months, the Scribes and Pharisees repeatedly tried to trick the Lord. But He took the time to answer their questions, seeking to lead them to understanding and repentance- and His denunciations of them were probably softly and imploringly spoken, still seeking for the inevitability of future judgment to lead them to repentance. As the Son of God, walking freely in His Father's house, Jesus didn't have to pay the temple tax (Mt. 17:26,27). He could have insisted that He didn't need to pay it, He could have stood up for what was right and true. But doing this can often be selfish, a defence of self rather than a seeking for the Father's glory. And so He told Peter that "lest we should offend them", He would pay it. He was so hopeful for their salvation one day that He was worried about offending these wretched men, who weren't fit to breathe the same air that He did. We would have given up with them; but He worried about offending what potential faith they might have. Even at the end of His ministry, He still sought to convert them. He reasoned with them, using carefully prepared Old Testament allusions in the hope they would understand them, when we would almost certainly either have given up, or would just be gritting our teeth, trying to be patient with them because we didn't want to sin…but He was full of a genuine, unpretended desire for their salvation. See on 8:4.

Acting as He would act is really the whole key to not giving offence / causing others to stumble. He above all valued the human person to an extent no other human being has ever reached. When asked to pay the temple tax, which apparently few people paid in Galilee at that time, the Lord did so "lest we should offend them"- even though, as He explained to Peter, He was exempted from it, as the Son in His Father's house (Mt. 17:27). He could have appealed to higher principle. But the Lord was worried that somehow He might make these apparently mercenary, conscience-less legalists to stumble in their potential faith. We would likely have given up with them as not worth it. But the Lord saw the potential for faith within them. And only a few verses later we are reading Him warning that those who offend the little ones who believe in Him will be hurled to destruction (Mt. 18:6). Could it not be that the Lord saw in those hard hearted, hateful legalists in the ecclesia of His day…little ones who potentially would believe in Him? And His positive, hopeful view of them paid off. For a year or so later

those types were being baptized, along with a great company of priests. People change. Remember this, and given that fact, try to hope for the best, as your Lord does with you. People *can* change, and they *do* change, even those whom at present you just can't abide in the brotherhood.

Go to the sea, cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find- Peter still carried his fishing tackle round with him in his pack, apparently. He had a strong attraction to fishing, almost making us wonder whether "Do you love Me more than these?" was a reference to the haul of fish lying there when the Lord spoke those words. His claim in Mk. 10:28 to have "left all" wasn't really totally true. He evidently had in mind how he had left his nets and walked away, following Jesus (Mk. 1:18). Then he thought he was following Jesus in the way the Lord demanded. For some time later, the Lord "entered into one of the ships, which was (i.e. still, at that time) Simon's…" (Lk. 5:1). Peter had been fishing all night in Jn. 21:3- strange, for a man who had so dramatically left his nets to respond to the Lord's call. But after the miraculous catch of fishes, Peter "forsook all, and followed him". Note that Mark's [Peter's] Gospel omits many incidents, but also uses the device of repetition to stress what the writer considers significant. Thus in Mk. 1:16 Peter tells us twice that he *was* a fisherman [cp. 14:68]. By the time of Lk. 18 and the conversation with the rich young man, Peter was confident he had forsaken all. But "I go a fishing" (Jn. 21:3) would suggest that even this forsaking of all had not been so dramatic. The boats were still there. The Lord had taught that following Him meant not just leaving behind for a moment, but selling up and giving the money to the poor. This Peter had not done. But he assumed that because he was physically following Jesus, well therefore what the Lord demanded of the rich young man, he had as good as done; for that young man wouldn't follow Jesus, but Peter would. It is easy to understand how Peter reasoned- for the fact we are apparent followers of the Lord in a world which chooses to reject Him, can lead to an assumption that we must of course be following just as He asks of us.

A coin. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself- A *stater*, a shekel (RV)- enough to pay two half shekel taxes, for Peter and Himself (see on :24).

The whole incident of fishing for the coin in order to provide the temple tax is somewhat strange at first blush- until we realize that it is in fact a further commentary upon the prediction of the Lord's death which He has just made in the immediately preceding verses. The temple tax was Biblically described as "the atonement money" (Ex. 30:16), "a ransom for his soul" (Ex. 30:12), and this led the Jews to claim that all who paid it therefore were represented in the sacrifices offered on the temple altar. It's therefore logical that this incident follows straight on from the Lord's prediction of His death on the cross. The Mishnah made the connection clearly when commenting upon the temple tax: "R. Eleazar (the Amora) further said: a man would pay his Shekel and thus obtain atonement" (*Baba Bathra* 9a). The coin He provided was to be given "for Me and you", the *anti* (translated "for") suggesting that the coin was *instead of* or *representative of* 'Me and you'. At least theoretically, the temple tax was used to buy the animals which were sacrificed- and so the Lord would be teaching that He provided the atonement money, the ransom, because He was the animal sacrificed. And He provided for both Himself and Peter, representative of all the disciples at this moment (see on :24), in that His sacrifice was the basis of His own redemption insofar as He too was human. If Matthew indeed is bringing out a more figurative aspect of the story, this would explain the rather strange way the questioners are recorded as asking "Does your Master *teleo* tribute?" (:24). *Teleo* means to fulfill; and this is how the word is usually used in the New Testament. There were more obvious words which could

have been used to express the simple idea of 'payment'. The usage of the word surely hints at the Lord Jesus not just paying but fulfilling the type of the temple tax. It's noteworthy that here in Mt. 17 we have the second prediction of the Lord's sufferings and death. The first prediction was also followed by an allusion to the temple tax- the Lord speaks there of what a man could give "in exchange [s.w. 'ransom'] for his soul" (Mt. 16:26)- the very phrase used in the LXX of Ex. 30:12, which speaks of the temple tax as "a ransom for his soul". And in that same context in Mt. 16, the Lord speaks of His resurrection as being predicted in "the sign of the prophet Jonah", whereby salvation was in the mouth of the fish. And that theme is here continued. The third prediction of the passion is likewise followed by the statement that the Lord's death was "a ransom for many" (20:28)- yet another allusion to the temple tax of Ex. 30:12. The initial question was whether the Lord paid the temple tax. As so often, He answers the question with a meta principle which places the issues so far higher than the original question. He was providing the actual atonement money, ransom and sacrifice which the temple tax prefigured. He *was* those things. To ask Him to pay a coin to a corrupt religious leader was so irrelevant and inappropriate. And yet having made the point, in His grace and condescension to human weakness, He still pays the coin in concern that otherwise, the potential faith of those legalists might be somehow hindered.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 18

18:1 *At that time*- At the end of chapter 17, the Lord has spoken of His death. According to the parallel records, the disciples had been arguing amongst themselves as to who was or would be the greatest amongst them in the Kingdom. This detail is omitted in Matthew because he seems to want to emphasize how in the light of the Lord's prediction of His death, the disciples still argued about petty things and were divided amongst themselves because of their own pride. In the shadow of the cross. Again we see how self-critical were the Gospel preachers and writers- for the Gospels are transcripts of how they usually preached the Gospel message.

The disciples came to Jesus, saying- Their arguments and divisions had been carefully conducted by them outside of His earshot, just as we can wrongly assume that our own church politics are somehow not in His presence. The Lord knew their discussions, for He asked them what they had been arguing about, and they refused to say (Mk. 9:33,34). Lk. 9:46,47 makes clear His perception: "There arose a reasoning (Gk. *dialogismos*) among them, which of them was greatest. And Jesus perceiving the thought (Gk. *dialogismos*) of their heart...". In any case, they gave the game away by asking who was greatest in the Kingdom. Luke is bringing home the point that the discussion amongst them also took place within their hearts; the thoughts of jealousy gave direct birth to the words spoken.

Who then is greatest in the Kingdom of heaven- The present tense suggests that they had accepted the Lord's frequent teaching in the parables of the Kingdom that the rulership, the dominion of God is in essence now amongst His followers. They wanted to know which of them He considered the greatest. We could possibly infer that there was a perception that one of them, presumably Peter, was perceived by the Lord as the greatest. And they disagreed with that judgment. The Lord had indeed spoken of "the least in the Kingdom" (11:1), which suggests He did indeed see some element of gradation amongst His followers. Without doubt, Peter, James and John formed an inner

three whom the Lord appeared to have especial hopes for, and out of them, Peter was the one the Lord seemed to have especial hopes for, and it had just recently been demonstrated in 17:24 that Peter was perceived even by outsiders as the leader of the pack. The Lord's response was that whoever became as the little child "is greatest in the Kingdom" (:4)- again, using the present tense, as if He saw the essence of His Kingdom as already existing in the form of the disciples. And yet He seems to suggest that their focus should be upon *entering* the Kingdom (:3) rather than being the greatest in it. The suggestion was that He doubted whether they had yet entered that community as they should have done; they had yet to be "converted" (:3). But at other times, He is so positive about them, especially when justifying and defending them to the unbelieving world around them. This is typical of love. Love is not blind, the weaknesses of the beloved are noted and commented upon, and yet the object of love is still seen as wonderful and spoken positively of to others. The whole Biblical teaching of justification and imputed righteousness is really just the logical outflow of the love of God and His Son for us.

The Lord had repeatedly implied that He would be the greatest in the Kingdom, because He humbled Himself the most. When the disciples asked Him “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom?” (Mt. 18:1), they therefore reflected a complete lack of appreciation of *His* greatness. The disciples' immaturity and squabbling amongst themselves had led them to forget the superlative greatness of the One who stood and sat and walked amongst them. And conversely, they had failed to allow His surpassing greatness to make all discussion about which of them was the greatest absolutely irrelevant. Thus their perception of His greatness, the extent of it, and the nature of it, only grew *after* His death.

Mk. 9:35 adds that before the Lord called the child to Him, He made the comment that "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all". The Lord Himself on the cross was the ultimate "servant of all", and therefore was the first of all. This may explain the Lord's comment that the last shall be first and the first last (Mt. 19:30)- He may have intended us to read in an elipsis to the effect that he who *wants to be* first shall be last, and he who *wants to be* last shall be first. There was to be a glorying in being the last, the servant of all- exemplified in the Lord's washing of the disciples' feet.

18:2 *And he called to himself*- Just as the Lord is often described as calling the disciples. The idea is that those called, which included the disciples, should be as little children.

A little child- The disciples are framed as doing exactly the opposite soon afterwards, when they forbad the little children [s.w.] to come to Jesus (19:13)- whereas the Lord actually invited them to Him. Again we note how the Gospel writers present the disciples as so often out of step with their Lord.

And set him- The Greek means to stand, not to sit- this is how it is usually translated. Mk. 9:35,36 says that the Lord *sat* but He *stood* the child in their midst. But *histemi*, often translated "set" in Mt. 18:2, has the strong connotation of standing up or setting someone up in a position. "The midst" suggests the disciples were in a closed circle, and the Lord stood the child within the circle. If you call an onlooking child into the midst of a group of unknown adults, they will typically not want to come. We see the powerful attraction of the Lord to children in that this child came, although likely with

much nervousness, wanting to come to Jesus, but not into that closed circle of men- just as so many today. Almost certainly the child came to the Lord and He held the child close to Himself; for He goes on to urge the disciples to "receive" such little ones, implying they were reluctant to have the child amongst them. That closeness to the Lord was what was being set up as an example. The scene is portrayed graphically if we put the Gospel records together- the Lord *sat* with the men in a circle around Him, He calls the child to Him, stands him up "by Him" (*para* Him means close by Him, Lk. 9:47) and then 'takes' him, cuddling the child to Himself "in His arms" (Mk. 9:36)- whilst He is sitting down. The natural response of the child who had been stood would be to want to sit down, holding on to Jesus, and not to stand above those men with their attention focused upon him. This natural desire to come down, to humble self, is what is being memorialized by the Lord as the pattern for all who wish to enter His Kingdom. Perhaps we can imagine the scene even further- the child would've wanted to come to Jesus personally, but the circle of disciples with their apparent superiority and judgmentalism would've been offputting. But still the child came, and the Lord in Luke's record urges the disciples to allow the child to join the circle and "receive" him. This scenario is seen so often in the body of Christ in our days. In the early church, there soon developed a problem about 'receiving' others, not least children, women and Gentiles- and the Gospel records through this incident show how seriously wrong the disciples were not do do so. Luke's record goes on to record the incident with John's disciples where the Lord's disciples didn't want to "receive" them- implying they did not immediately grasp the teaching themselves.

In the midst of them- This phrase is used several times about the Lord Jesus Himself standing in the midst of His followers (Lk. 24:36; Jn. 1:26; 8:9; 20:19,26). The supreme "child" was the Lord Jesus. This connection between Him and that child was it seems perceived by Peter later, when he uses the same word to describe the Lord Jesus as God's "holy child" (Acts 4:27,30). If as suggested the Lord held the child to Himself, the identification would have been visually powerful and the image would've remained with the disciples. The Lord Himself clinches the connection by saying that whoever becomes as that child will be the greatest in the Kingdom- and He clearly was and is the greatest in the Kingdom (:4). Lk. 9:48 makes the connection beyond doubt in recording that the Lord then said that "Whosoever shall receive this child... receives Me". His subsequent comment there that "For he that is least among you all, the same is great" is surely a reference to Himself, rather than urging them to be the least so that they might be the greatest. The Lord's answer as to who was greatest in the Kingdom was therefore to indirectly point out that He is the greatest, and we should simply seek to be like Him, using the little child as a template to that end. The antidote to division, therefore, is to be focused upon Christ and to seek to simply enter the Kingdom- the things of the Kingdom and of the Name (Acts 8:12).

The Lord took a child and set him in the midst of those rough fishermen and tax collectors. He said that they must become like that child; and further, they must receive that child as a representative of Himself, and thereby, of God Himself. In probable allusion to this, Paul teaches that in malice we should be children, but in understanding: men (1 Cor. 14:20). The child in the midst of men, wide eyed, simple and sincere amidst men full of cynicism and human wisdom and self-righteousness and the gruffness of the flesh... This was a symbol of every true believer, of the Lord Himself, and of Almighty God, as they were and as they are in the midst of a world and even a brotherhood that, like the disciples, so often stares on uncomprehending. The aptness

was not in the child's humility [if indeed a child can be humble], but in the purity of the innocence and sincerity and unassuming directness.

18:3- see on 13:15,16.

And said: Truly I say to you, except you turn and become as little children, you shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven- This is all sober language, repeated quite soon afterwards (Mk. 10:15; Lk. 18:17), indicating the degree to which the Lord saw the salvation of the disciples as being in doubt unless they were going to humble themselves, and quit their pride and the divisions which come from it.

There are levels of conversion, as exemplified in the life of Peter who was not totally 'converted' until he devoted himself to strengthening his brethren after his encounter with the Lord after the resurrection. The same Greek words for "become as" are used for the need to become as their Lord and Master (10:25). The focus was to be upon becoming as Christ, rather than seeking greatness amongst themselves. The idea of 'becoming' suggests a process- to become as Him was to be the thrust of Christian life.

18:4 *Whoever therefore shall humble himself*- This is the very language of the Lord Jesus on the cross; the hymn of Phil. 2 speaks of seven stages in the Lord's self-humiliation until He finally died "the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8), and then the hymn speaks of seven stages of exaltation. This is yet another indication that the little child, the one who would be greatest in the Kingdom, was to be seen as representative of the Lord personally. The disciples had initially followed John the Baptist, and his message had been that men must be "brought low" (s.w. 'humble self'; Lk. 3:5). And yet they had clearly not grasped this, even though in chapters 12 and 13 the Lord seems to rejoice that they had responded to John in spirit and truth, unlike Israel generally. Such was His grace and positive feelings about His beloved. To humble oneself suggests conscious effort, and yet it is almost impossible to make ourselves more humble by our own act of the will, or by some self-instigated internal intellectual process. Paul speaks of how *God* humbled him (2 Cor. 12:21), and Peter speaks of humbling ourselves "under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you" (1 Pet. 5:6). He is willing to humble those who wish to be humbled, and so the essence of self-humiliation is surely to appreciate that God is seeking to humble us, and to cooperate with this, allowing His mighty hand to humble us, rather than resisting the process. We need to daily carry this in mind- that today, God seeks to continue His process of humbling us, so that He might exalt us in His time.

So how, then, can we 'humble ourselves'? When Israel was a child... she was humble, as we should be after our spiritual rebirth at baptism. It is evidently not something natural; for it is a fruit of the spirit we must develop. It isn't a natural timidity or nervousness or shyness. By realising our own sinfulness, we will realise our condemnation, and thereby be 'brought down'. For we are condemned for our behaviour, but saved out of that condemnation. The exact, vast debt is reckoned up-before we are forgiven (Mt. 18). We have been invited through the Gospel to sit down in the Kingdom: "But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 14:10-11). Humbling ourselves is therefore sitting down in the *lowest* place- not just a low place. Strictly, the Greek means 'the farthest' away from the Lord Jesus, who sits at the head of the table. Like Paul we must somehow get that deep and genuine apprehension that we are "chief of sinners"- and sit in the *lowest, farthest* place. This would mean that we 'each esteemed our brother better than ourselves to be', not in any

naïve, meaningless way; not seeing strengths where they simply don't exist; but seeing him [or her] that way simply in comparison to our own lowness. Seeing others as higher than ourselves is a sure remedy for every case of ecclesial friction and division. So often pride develops from a worry about what others will think of us, a desire to be seen as acceptable and not unusual. It leads to a hyper-sensitivity regarding what others may be implying about us [I am verily guilty of this]. The humbled mind will not see things in these terms. *If only we would each, personally, learn this lesson, or at least grasp the truth and beauty and power of it*. The publican was so worried about his own position before God that he paid no attention, so we sense, to the hypocritical brother next to him: "The publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner… this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for … he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:13-14). That sin-conscious man is an essay in self-humbling. This is why David sometimes parallels "the meek" and the repentant sinner (e.g. Ps. 25:8,9).

It seems to me that so often in His teaching, the Lord was speaking to and about Himself. We understand from Phil. 2:8 that on the cross, the Lord "humbled himself". He used just those words in speaking of how the greatest in the Kingdom, the one who would be the most highly exalted (and He surely had Himself in view) was the one who would be the most servile in this life. His references to *becoming* as a servant He therefore spoke partly as exhortation to Himself (Mt. 18:4; 23:12; Lk. 14:11; 18:14). The Mt. 18:4 reference speaks of humbling oneself in terms of being converted and becoming like a little child. This was lived out by the Lord in His life and ultimately in His acceptance of the death of the cross. Yet this is what "conversion" is essentially about. In the same way as the Lord Jesus Himself had to be "converted" even at the very end of His life, to accept the awfulness of the crucifixion with an almost child-like simplicity (in some ways- e.g. His silence when surrounded by evil accusers, just like "the child in the midst"), so we too will pass through stages of 'conversion'. Note in passing that the same idea of the humble being exalted is used by the Lord in Lk. 18:14 with reference to how the humble man recognizes His own sinfulness. Whilst the Lord was sinless, perhaps part of His humiliation and taking on a servant-form involved His acceptance of the full horror of sin, and His willingness to bear it for our sakes.

Whilst humility isn't a natural characteristic of children, we are asked to take as it were a snapshot of that child in that situation, looking at the ground, pining away inside himself. The Lord said that the child had "humbled himself" (Mt. 18:4)- showing that He didn't see children as naturally humble. But as he stood (or sat, Mt. 18:2 Gk.) in the middle of the circle, the impishness and immature self-assertion was driven out, and in a moment the child was humbled. That child in that situation, the Lord said, represented the true disciple; and it represented Himself, the Lord of glory. It seems to me that the Lord was standing next to the child, identifying Himself with it, in the middle of the circle of disciples. *In the very same context, a few verses later* the Lord spoke of how He was *in the midst* of the disciples (Mt. 18:20). There is no doubt He saw that humbled child as the symbol of Himself, possibly implying that He Himself had been progressively humbled, from one level to another. Yet in Lk. 9:48, the Lord goes further: the child represents not only the believers and their Lord, but also *the Father* (Mt. 18:5; Lk. 9:48). The humble surroundings of the Lord's birth, the way the exalted Lord of life and glory appeared from the tomb dressed like a working man (whilst the Angels, far inferior, had shining white garments), the way during His life He spoke in such a way that reflected His lack of formal education (Jn. 7:15)- all this shows a humble, super-human Father. And His Son was and is the same. Indeed, Lk.

2:12 RV (cp. Is. 7:11,14) says that *the* sign would be that the Son of God would be laid in a cattle trough; this was to be the extraordinary indication that God Himself was involved in this wonderful birth.

As this little child- In *Against Celsus* 3.55, Origen defends Christianity against the allegation that it requires men to leave the world of men and go mix with women and children in "the washerwoman's shop"- presumably a house church Celsus knew. Lucian of Samosata even mocked Christianity as being largely comprised of children and "old hags called widows". Marcus Cornelius Fronto likewise mocked the way "children" [and by that term he would've referred to teenagers too] participated in the breaking of bread [*Octavius* 8-9]. The teaching of the Lord Jesus was attractive to children / young people. They like women were treated as of little worth; the Greco-Roman world considered that children had to be taught, and couldn't teach a man anything. But the Lord Jesus repeatedly set children up as examples of discipleship (Mk. 9:36,37; Lk. 9:47,48; as Heb. 12:5-9). So we can understand the appeal of early Christianity to young people, teenagers, especially girls. O.M. Bakke has written a fascinating study entitled *When Children Became People*. The thesis is that the teaching of Christianity gave disenfranchised people an identity and meaning as persons- women and slaves are obvious examples- but this also applied to children / young people. They too were disregarded as people in Mediterranean society; and yet in Christ they were given their value as people. In the house church setting, we can imagine how this happened. Celsus mocks how teenage boys go to Christian house churches to be taught by women- reflecting how attractive Christianity was for young people. Solomon's words: "I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in", i.e. to rule God's Kingdom (1 Kings 3:9) are alluded to in Mt. 18:3,4; become a child so you can rule the Kingdom; Christ was the greatest child as he will be the greatest ruler. This sets Solomon up as our example in this respect.

The same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven- Elsewhere the Lord taught that he who humbled himself would be "exalted" (Mt. 23:12; Lk. 14:11; 18:14), a word which is used both about His 'lifting up' on the cross (Jn. 3:14; 8:28; 12:32 and His ascension to Heaven (Acts 2:33; 5:31; Eph. 4:8), with all the subsequent 'exaltation'. Again, we sense that He has Himself in mind here- He who made Himself the lowest, was to be lifted up both on the cross and to Heaven. Paul makes a telling allusion to this idea in saying that he has humbled himself, not so that *he* would be exalted, but so that the weak brethren in Corinth might be (2 Cor. 11:7). When Peter later preached that Jesus was 'the exalted one' (Acts 2:33; 5:31) he perceived finally what the Lord was driving at here- that *He* was the greatest, the most exalted one, because He had humbled himself the most. And therefore all argument about seniority or greatness amongst the body of Christ was therefore irrelevant and deeply inappropriate.

On at least four separate occasions, the Lord taught that he who *exalts* himself will be *abased*, and he who *humbles* [s.w. abases] himself will be exalted (23:12; Lk. 14:11; 18:14). This was clearly a major theme in His exposition of the Gospel of the Kingdom; this is what will happen when that Kingdom is established at His return. He paralleled conversion with humbling oneself (Mt. 18:3,4). The humble will be exalted, and the exalted humbled. Because this will happen, we must *now* humble ourselves, so that then we might be exalted. The majority of references to humility in Scripture refer to humbling*oneself*; humility, hard as it is to define, is something consciously done, as an act of the will. Yet the Father confirms us in our efforts. The Lord *humbled himself* to die on the cross (Phil. 2), and yet the cross*humbled him* (Acts 8:33). If we don't humble *ourselves* now, then God will do this to us through the process of condemnation at the judgment. In this lies the insistent logic of humility. It was the logic Israel failed

to comprehend... "When Israel was a child...". It is prophesied of those who will be condemned: “Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty [as Moses did in this life]. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low” (Is. 2:10-12). “And the mean man shall be brought down, and the mighty man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled: But the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment” (Is. 5:15,16). There are many similar passages; the theme of ‘bringing down’ pride is a major one in the first half of Isaiah (2:17; 13:11; 25:5,12; 29:4; 32:19). They pave the way for the announcement that in man’s response to the Gospel of Christ, “Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain” (Is. 40:4). By the hills of human pride being brought down, and the giving of confidence to those so low in the valleys of hopelessness and lack of self respect, there is a levelling of all those who respond to Christ. But more than this; in this lifting up of the hopeless and bringing down of the proud, there is a foretaste of what will happen in the future day of judgment. In essence, “we make the answer now” by whether or not we bring down our pride, or whether we summon the faith in God’s grace and imputed righteousness to believe that we, who are nothing, are lifted up in His sight. “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low” (James 1:9-10).

18:5 *And whoever shall receive one such little child in my name receives me*- To not offend others we must “receive” them (Mt. 18:5). It is written of Jesus that when crowds of materialistic, fascinated people followed Him, “He received them, and spake unto them of the Kingdom” (Lk. 9:11). He didn’t just turn round and read them a lecture about the Kingdom. “He *received* them”. Presumably Luke means to reflect how he perceived something in the Lord’s body language that was receiving of that crowd of peasants- whom we would likely have written off as just dumb groupies with no more than surface level interest. And we too must receive one another, even as the Lord has received us (Rom. 15:7)- and this includes receiving him who is even weak in the faith (Rom. 14:1). We should be looking for every reason to receive and fellowship our brethren, rather than reasons not to.

The disciples would've had to open their closed circle to allow the child to enter. As the child settled down in the arms of the Lord Jesus, he was effectively added to the circle of disciples. Children were counted as non-persons in first century society, along with women, serious sinners, the mentally ill and lepers. The Lord is powerfully teaching that our attitude to such persons is our attitude to Him and therefore to God (Mk., Lk.). The challenge comes down to many of us too, who come from closed table communities. The Lord foresaw that to form a tight circle around Him was the natural response of those who followed Him, but He is saying that unless we open that circle, we are in danger of actually not having received Him at all. Our not receiving of such persons is going to make them stumble ("offend them"), and this warrants eternal condemnation. The Lord had bidden the disciples 'humble themselves', and now they are given an opportunity to do so- by 'receiving' amongst themselves, as one of them, into their circle, a little child. Opening our circle and accepting amongst us those who do not share (at least, at this time) our level of faith, understanding or even culture- this is indeed a humbling experience. All that is in us cries out to keep them excluded, and to keep our circle tightly closed against them. But the argument for a closed circle, or a closed table, is ultimately one which originates in pride and a refusal to humble self.

The little child was to be identified with the Lord Jesus personally. See on 18:2. To not receive the little ones is to not receive Jesus personally. The issue is of eternal importance, as the next verse emphasizes. We cannot simply go along with such rejections and refusal to receive others just because it is the policy of a church or fellowship to which we have belonged or grown up in. Social death and rejection by our brethren is nothing compared to the painful rejection at the last day which the Lord speaks of.

Mark inserts at this point the question about a man casting out demons although 'not following us' (Mk. 9:38-42). The Lord rebukes them for this and goes on to warn them about not offending little ones. In Matthew, that warning follows straight on from the teaching about the need to receive little ones- as if refusing to receive them is what makes them stumble. The case raised by the disciples, as it were in protest at His teaching about receiving little ones, was presumably one of John's disciples. Although they had a different spiritual culture, history and even doctrinal understanding, the Lord had earlier likened both His and John's disciples to children in the marketplace working in parallel, presenting the same message in different ways. They were admittedly immature in some ways and in parts of their doctrinal understanding, but the Lord is teaching that this is what made John's disciples "little ones", and they must still be accepted. The Lord warns twice in that section in Mk. 9:38-42: "Forbid him not". This is the same as saying 'Receive him, do not forbid him from entering your circle'. It is the same word which the Lord will go on to use in Mt. 19:14 about not forbidding another group of "little children". The Jewish world was to be condemned exactly because they hindered or forbad [s.w.] men to enter the Kingdom (Lk. 11:52- see on 18:7 *Woe to the world*). Peter surely alludes to the Lord's teaching when reasoning: "Who can forbid water" that Gentiles be baptized (Acts 10:47). Refusing baptism to those not considered good, ready or mature enough is surely a way of forbidding and not receiving little ones.

18:6 *But whoever shall cause one of these little ones that believe in me to stumble*- Why the warning against offence, causing to stumble, in this context? The context so far in this chapter has been about the need for humility and not dividing against each other in jostling for seniority in the community of believers. Lk. 9:48 says that the Lord went further and urged the disciples to receive such children. Surely the connection is in the fact that refusing to receive little ones and divisions amongst believers are what cause little ones to stumble, hence Paul brackets together "divisions and offences" (Rom. 16:17). This is the sin of division- it causes little ones to stumble, and that is so true to observed experience in the body of Christ. Refusing to receive little ones and divisions over this matter have caused so many of the little ones to go away from Christ. Lk. 17:1,2 repeats the teaching about not offending little ones, and the Lord goes on to teach about the need for unlimited forgiveness of others. Not forgiving is a form of not receiving others, and this too can lead the person to stumble from the way.

The implication may be 'Even just one'. If 'just' one person is rejected by us, then we have not received Christ and condemnation awaits us. Each encounter we have with people is therefore of eternal moment and significance. We cannot hide behind any sense that 'generally' we are innocent on this matter; if just one is rejected by us, then the Lord's terrible picture of condemnation must loom large before our eyes. Of course we can in this life repent and seek to put things right with one we previously rejected. But for the rest of our days we need to live in quiet humility realizing that we should

have been rejected, that we caused a little one to stumble from the way, and our salvation truly is by grace.

By "little ones *who believe in me*" the Lord was clarifying that He was not so much talking about the spiritual acceptance of children as the acceptance of believers in Him whom His disciples might consider spiritually immature or inappropriate for acceptance into their closed circle. This may well have reference to John's disciples, whom the disciples were slow to accept, both in the Lord's ministry and probably also in the early years of the church. In the parallel records, He saw those who "follow not us" as being "on our part", not losing their reward, as being the little ones who believed in Him; and He saw wisdom as being justified by*all* her children, be they His personal disciples or those of John (Mk. 9:38-41; Lk. 7:35). John's men had a wrong attitude to fellowship- they should have 'followed with' the disciples of Jesus; and it would seem their doctrinal understanding of the Holy Spirit was lacking, although not wrong (Acts 19:1-5). Indeed, they are called there "disciples", a term synonymous with all believers in Luke's writing. And the Lord too spoke in such an inclusive way towards them. No wonder His disciples had and have such difficulty grasping His inclusiveness and breadth of desire to fellowship and save.

It would be better for him that a great millstone should be hung about his neck and that he should be drowned in the depths of the sea- The very language of Babylon's judgments at the last day. The believer who makes another to stumble by not receiving them is therefore no better than Babylon, the archenemy of God and His true people. And Rev. 18:21 speaks of how *Babylon* shall be cast into the sea as a millstone- such 'believers' will at the last day face Babylon's judgments, they will be "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32), sent back into it from the judgment seat of Christ to share the world's fate. Even though externally they had been so separate from the world, so separate that the refused to receive the "little ones". But this attitude is in fact a worldly attitude; by having it, we are showing that we are of the world.

A nice picture of the Lord's perception of the disciples is found in the way He said that the little boy who came to Him, responding to His call (Mt. 18:2) represented the "little ones" who believed in Him (Mt. 18:6). 'Little ones' is a title of the disciples in Zech. 13:7; Mt. 18:3; Jn. 21:5; and it is disciples not literal children who have Angels in Heaven (Mt. 18:10). The context in Mt. 18:11,12 speaks of the spiritually weak, implying the 'little ones' were spiritually little as well. Christ's talking to them while he knew they were asleep in Gethsemane and the gentle "sleep on now" , spoken to them whilst they were asleep (Mk. 14:41,42), sounds as if He was consciously treating them as children- especially fitting, given their spiritually low state then. His father-like care for them is seen also in His promise in Jn. 14:18 RVmg. that He would not leave them "orphans", but He would come to them. The disciples were not orphans- because they had a true and real Father-figure, in the Lord Jesus. But the disciples were the Lord's children. John records in his Gospel only once how Jesus described His disciples at the Passover meal as "My little children" (Jn. 13:33). The Lord Jesus was acting as the father of the family, instructing his children as to meaning of the Passover. But the same phrase occurs seven times in 1 John. He had dwelt upon that phrase of the Lord's, and it clearly came to mean so much to him. Our child-father relationship with the Lord Jesus likewise needs sustained meditation. In this sense, the Lord Jesus was manifesting the Father, and thus leading the disciples to the Father through Him.

Drowning in the depth of the sea was a common figure for the condemnation of the wicked. And yet Mic. 7:19 had spoken of how the sins of the faithful in Judah would be cast into the depths of the sea and drowned like the Egyptians at the Red Sea. And yet individual condemnation is spoken of with the same metaphor. The meaning is

surely that our sins will be condemned, and thus forgiven; but if we are not identified with our sins, then we shall not be. In this lies a strong basis for understanding Paul's introspection of Romans 7- clearly he recognizes his sins, but doesn't identify himself personally with them.

We rather than the Lord are the ones who in essence have demanded our condemnation; His judgment is merely reflecting our own choice. The idea of self-condemnation is perhaps behind the Lord's teaching in Mt. 18:6. If we offend one of His little ones, "it is profitable for [us] that a great millstone should be hanged around [our] neck, and that [we] should be sunk in the depth of the sea" (RV). This is the language of Babylon's future condemnation at the last day (Rev. 18:21). But how can such a condemnation be "profitable" for us? Remember that James teaches that in some things, we all offend someone (James 3:2). Maybe the Lord is saying: 'When you offend others, as you all do at times, then you're deserving of condemnation at the last day. But condemn yourselves for it, now, in this life; that will be profitable for you, and then you need not be condemned at the last day'. It's a sober thought, that deserves introspection. We all offend others- let's give James' words their full weight. And instead of going down the road of 'Yeah but it was after all *their* fault they allowed themselves to be offended...', let's just allow these Bible passages their obvious meaning. Our poor attitude to others at times shouts for our condemnation. And we need to recognize that, resolving to live life ever more sensitive to our colossal impact upon others.

18:7 *Woe to the world... the man*- CEV: "The world is in for trouble because of the way it causes people to sin". The *kosmos* in mind was surely the Jewish world [the word usually has this primary meaning in John's Gospel]. In this case "Woe to that man" would then be specifically addressed to the disciples; they were to take the warning to themselves each one, which is why the next verse speaks of the need for 'you' singular to do absolutely everything to avoid causing another to stumble. The Jewish religious system caused men to stumble, as the Lord often pointed out. Bu there would be an especial woe to the individuals who caused the stumbling, because for doing this they will be liable to personal condemnation. The Jewish world, the system, was to face the "Woe" of Divine judgment specifically because it made men stumble spiritually. That's what these words of Jesus seem to be saying, and His criticisms of that system recorded elsewhere would accord with that view- the 'Woes' He pronounces on the Jewish system in Mt. 23 particularly focus on the damage that system did to people, and the barrier it became between God and man.

Because of temptations to stumble! For it is necessary that the temptations occur, but woe to that man through whom the temptation comes!- The Lord continues His theme of giving offence to others when He says: "It must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! [The Lord must have said this after such careful introspection, knowing that He was the rock of offence to many, and that Jewry were to be 'offended' by Him]. *Wherefore* if thy hand or thy foot *makes you a cause of stumbling* [i.e. to others], cut them off…" or else you will be condemned (Mt. 18:7 Gk.). This is how important it is to search our lives and see what may cause others offence. And, in His relentless way, the Lord continues: "See that ye despise not one of these little ones" (Mt. 18:10), the little ones He has Himself just been so careful not to offend, by paying up His taxes. We offend people by 'despising' them. And, on and on and on, Jesus incisively takes His teaching further- in the parable of the shepherd who seeks the lost sheep.

To *not* seek others' salvation is to despise them. We may not think we are despiteful people. But effectively, in His eyes, we are…if we neglect to actively seek

for their salvation until we find it. To not offend others is thus made parallel to seeking their salvation. And the shepherd seeking the lost sheep matches the man who plucks out his eye and cuts off his hand lest they offend others. So you see the parallels throughout Matthew 18:

Lest we offend them	Pay the temple tax, go fishing, make the effort
Lest we offend others and are cast into condemnation	Pluck out our eye, cut off our hands and feet
Lest we offend the little ones and are cast into the sea	Receive the little ones as if they are Christ, see the Christ in them
Don't despise others	Go out looking for the lost sheep with unlimited effort
Lest we are cast "to the tormentors"	Give unlimited forgiveness to your brother, try to "gain your brother"

The self-willed effort we must make to not offend our brother is quite something. Just imagine looking at yourself in the mirror, wedging your finger nails under your eye socket, and pulling out your eye. This is the conscious effort we must make not to offend, and thereby to save. It's really quite something. Note that the parallels tabled above show that to not offend is to save. If we seek above all the salvation of others, then we will not offend them. We will, quite simply, *care for them* as the Lord cares for us.

18:8 *And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble*- Cause you to stumble. The context has spoken of not offending the little ones, and of the terrible condemnation awaiting those who cause others to stumble. There are two legitimate meanings of the words here. The idea could be 'If these things cause you to stumble others'; or, 'If these things cause you yourself to stumble'. But the ambiguity is surely intentional. If we make others to stumble then we have made ourselves stumble, for if we make others stumble out of the way to the Kingdom, then we shall not be there ourselves. The point is clear- we are to go to absolutely any length, paying any personal cost, in order not to cause stumbling to a little one.

Cut it off- I suggest the Lord is parodying the orthodox Jewish idea of cutting off members of the community in order to preserve the rest of the body of believers- an idea equally common today amongst some in the new Israel. The Lord is saying that in order to avoid personal condemnation, we are to cut off our own limbs if necessary- in order to avoid causing a little one to stumble. The cost of not causing the little ones to stumble is therefore very personal; because communities, both secular and religious, tend to cause little ones to stumble by their policies, it follows that individuals will pay a high price for stepping out of line by insisting that we will not cause them to stumble. The preceding verse has explained how "the world", the Jewish religious system of the Lord's time, the *ekklesia* of the day, lead others to stumble, and that individuals must take personal responsibility for this. In the same way as the whole system was destroyed

in AD70, so personal condemnation at the last day awaits the individuals who make others stumble.

And throw it away- The Greek for "cut off" here is that translated 'hew down' in speaking of condemnation at the last day in Mt. 3:10; 7:19; Lk. 13:9; Rom. 11:22. The idea of 'casting' ["throw it"] is used about the casting of the rejected into condemnation at the last day (Mt. 3:10; 5:13,25,29; 7:19 and often). This is the language of latter day condemnation- and yet the Lord says that this is what we must do to those parts of our bodies which cause us to make little ones stumble. I believe that we have here the idea which James 3:2 is articulating more directly: "In many things we offend all". We are warned that if we offend / make others stumble, then we shall be condemned. James says that we all make others stumble in some way (and honest self-examination will reveal that to us). So, we all should be condemned. But we must recognize and confess wherein we have done this, and condemn those parts of our lives which have done that- and cast them from us.

It is better for you to enter into life maimed or lame, rather than having two hands or two feet to be thrown into the perpetual fire- The lame, blind and maimed were those not acceptable for service in God's tabernacle (Lev. 21:18; Dt. 15:21; 2 Sam. 5:8). The Lord surely has this in mind. He seems to be saying that to avoid offending little ones, it is better to be unacceptable for priestly service now, and yet therefore enter God's Kingdom. The implication, therefore, is that by *not* being seen as fit for priestly service, we avoid offending little ones. The only interpretation which makes sense of this to me is that the Lord foresaw that by fellowshipping the little ones, we may well be excluded from public priestly service in the house of God in this life, because those running the show generally exclude those who think in terms of an open table. But that is a cheap price to pay for entering the Kingdom. And we will be miserable excluded from His Kingdom if we make others stumble by acting in such a way as merely keeps us in with the religious powers that be, that keeps us fit *in their sight* for service. And this again is absolutely true to observation in the body of Christ. Those who are inclusive of little ones tend to be sidelined from public service by those who are decision makers within the ecclesia. But that is a cheap price for entrance to the Kingdom.

It's better to limp into the Kingdom than be rejected for self-righteousness. Surely there is an invitation here to see the limping Jacob, walking away from the encounter with the Angel, as our role model. The personality we will be in the Kingdom will reflect the struggles we have personally endured in this life. Relationships in the Kingdom of God will reflect these. Thus those who had consciously chosen to be eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom are comforted that in the Kingdom they will be given a name and place in God's temple better than of children in this life (Is. 56:5). All the faithful will be given a name and place in the temple; so what especial consolation was this to those eunuchs? Surely the point is that the name (personality) they will then have will gloriously reflect the self-sacrifice and personal Biblical understanding which they went through in this life. This alone proves that the reward will be individual. The Lord's picture of men entering the Kingdom without limbs is surely making the same point (Mk. 9:47); the result of our self-sacrifice in this life will be reflected by the personality we have in the Kingdom. And there is evidence that the Man we follow will still bear in His body, throughout eternity, the marks of the crucifixion (Zech. 13:6; Rev. 5:6).

18:9 *And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it away*- The idea has been pushed that this refers to sexual lust. But that is not the context here. The context is of our offending others, and how we should be willing to pay any price, no matter how awful for us, so that we do not do that. I suggested above that the allusion is to how the blind, maimed and lame could not enter the priesthood for public service. The Lord is saying that it is better to be out of public service in the community of believers, if it means upholding policies which make little ones stumble. In the *kosmos* or the *ekklesia* of His day, it was necessary to separate oneself personally from the damage to others which the system was doing. It's better to enter into the Kingdom not having had the honour of public priestly service in the community in this life, rather than to have that public honour and yet cause others to stumble, meaning we shall not enter the Kingdom. The idea of entering the Kingdom without an eye or limping doesn't necessarily mean that we shall eternally be like that. I suggest it means that we enter the Kingdom having not had those things in this life, and not having therefore had a public ministry. The Lord was speaking to the 12 disciples at this point, some of whom, Matthew (Levi) especially, could have had a priestly career. Or He could be making the point that they were not going to be able to ever be priests in the old system because of their inclusiveness- but they would be shepherds of the *new* Israel He was forming, as He goes on to explain in :12-14.

Mk. 9:43-47 spells out the details of the condemnation in laboured detail- if our eye offends, or causes us to offend others, then cut it off, for it is better to be without an eye in this life than to be condemned in Gehenna, where the worm and fire are 'eternal'. And this is repeated concerning the hand and foot. We read of eye, hand and foot together in only one other context- of "eye for eye... hand for hand, foot for foot" being the punishment for damaging a 'little one' within the womb of a woman (Ex. 21:24; Dt. 19:21). Nowhere else in Scripture do these three words occur together. By not receiving a little one, despising them and thus causing them to stumble, we are doing the equivalent of the Old Covenant sin of beating up a pregnant woman and causing handicap to the 'little one' within her. It could be that the Lord is saying that we can be responsible for damaging those who have not yet come to spiritual birth, to the point that if they are born, then they will be born with serious defects which are our fault. And such defects will have been the result of not receiving them, even in their immature state. Thus the table practice of the Lord was to accept people at His table at whatever stage of their spiritual growth or journey, even those not as yet born again, not yet converted, not yet repentant... in order to try to bring them to that point.

It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna- The Lord bid us cut off the hand or foot that offends, and thus enter into life halt...blind, rather than be condemned in Gehenna (Mt. 18:8,9). It sounds as if 'entering into life' means entering into the Kingdom; and so it can do, for this clause is set as the antithesis for being condemned at the last day. Yet it is hard to imagine us entering the Kingdom somehow maimed, and in any case then we will not need to be without what causes temptation. The figure rings more true to our lives today; if we cut off our flesh *now*, we will live the rest of our mortal days somehow lacking what we could have had. In this case, we enter into life right now, insofar as we cut off the opportunities of the flesh. Jesus told another man that if he would enter into life, he must keep the commandments (Mt. 19:17). Insofar as he kept those commands, he would right now enter into life. We are entering into life, eternal life, right now!

The Lord Jesus spoke several times of taking up the cross and following Him. This is the life you have committed yourself to by baptism; you have at least tried to take up the cross. The full horror and shock of what He was saying doubtless registered more powerfully with the first century believers than with us. They would have seen men in the agony of approaching death carrying their crosses and then being nailed to them. And the Lord Jesus asked men to do this to themselves. Our takings up of the cross will result in damage- the plucked out eye, the cut off foot. And notice that the Lord says that we will enter lame into the eternal life, or enter the Kingdom with just one eye (Mk. 9:45-47). Surely this means that the effects of our self-sacrifice in this life will in fact be eternally evident in the life which is to come. The idea of *taking up* the cross suggests a conscious, decided willingness to take on board the life of self-crucifixion. Taking up the cross is therefore not just a passive acceptance of the trials of life. There's a radical in each of us, even if the years have mellowed it. The way to express it is surely through radical devotion to the Father's cause. On one hand, Jesus spoke to men as they were able to hear it, not as He was able to expound it. Yet on the other, He gave His radicalism free reign. The Sabbath miracles seem to have purposefully provoked the Jews. When He encouraged His men to rub the corn heads and eat them like peanuts as they walked through a field one Sabbath, He knew full well this was going to provoke confrontation. And he said what was anathema to the Jews: "The Law was made for man and not man for the Law". Where there is human need, the law can bend. This was a startling concept for a Jew. Jesus described the essence of His Kingdom as mustard seed, which was basically a weed. It was like a woman putting leaven [both symbols of impurity] into flour. Surely the Lord was trying to show that His message was not so Heavenly that it was unrelated to earthly life. It was real and relevant to the ordinary dirty business of life. The woman who have everything she had was noted by the Lord as His ideal devotee. He taught that it was preferable to rid oneself of an eye or a limb and to sacrifice sex if that is for us the price of entry into the Kingdom (Mk. 9:45-47). The parable of the man who built bigger barns taught that in some senses we should in His service like there's no tomorrow. He expected His followers to respond immediately, to pay the price today rather than tomorrow, with no delay or procrastination. There is an emphasis in His teaching on immediacy of response, single-mindedness and unrestrained giving. This is radical stuff for 21st century people in the grip of manic materialism.

Gehenna was the ravine south of Jerusalem where ‘little ones’ had been sacrificed to Moloch (Jer. 7:31; 10:5,6; 39:35). So there is an appropriacy in this particular picture of condemnation. Those who stop others entering God’s Kingdom and lead them to condemnation will share the same condemnation; what they did to others will be done to them.

18:10 *See you do not despise one of these little ones*- Paul uses the same word in one of his many allusions to the Gospels in 1 Cor. 11:22, where he warns that exclusive attitudes at the breaking of bread, even having ‘another table’ to ones despised brethren, was in fact despising the entire church of Christ. Our attitude to the little ones is our attitude to Him and thereby to the entire church or body of Christ. Elsewhere, the Lord uses this word for "despise" as counterpoint to loving; the opposite of loving is to despise (Mt. 6:24; Lk. 16:13). He is forcing us to perceive that we either love little ones by accepting them, or we despise them. We of course would prefer to argue for some third way, whereby we are conveniently indifferent to some and accept others whom we consider on our moral and spiritual level. But those whom we do not love and accept, we effectively despise. That is the Lord's understanding. The Lord had warned His

followers to “despise not” the ‘little ones’ (Mt. 18:10). Paul picks up this phrase in 1 Tim. 6:2 in warning servants not to despise their masters who were brethren; the implication that they were to treat those wealthy but perhaps not very spiritually mature masters as ‘little ones’, with all the patience this would require.

For I say to you, that in heaven their angels do always see the presence of my Father who is in heaven- The Greek could equally mean that they fully behold the face of the Father. The idea seems to be that the “little ones” are in fellowship with God, they are indeed represented in Heaven, they are ‘before God’, in His presence. And we should therefore not reject anyone who has relationship with God and in a spiritual sense is in His presence. This is the essence of John’s teaching- that we cannot claim to have fellowship with the Father unless we fellowship His children, and if we do not fellowship His children, then we thereby break our relationship with the Father. It is seriously wrong, therefore, to admit on one hand that individuals are in fellowship with the Father, and yet refuse them fellowship.

The guardian Angels of Christ's "little ones", "do always behold the face of My Father in Heaven". There seem two options here:
- The Angels may be physically present with us on earth but also maintain a presence in the 'court of Heaven', perhaps by means of another Angel there.
- A more likely explanation lies in the meaning of the word "behold" - 'to look to, be aware of, perceive, take heed'. Although physically present with us, the Angels are intensely aware of the face of God which they behold when assembled in the court of Heaven awaiting God's words of command. The "little ones" in the context are the spiritually weak- does this have something to do with their Angels being physically absent from them in Heaven?

18:11 *For the Son of Man came to save*- In the context, the point is that if *His* mission was to fellowship with and thereby save "the lost", then it should be ours. His method of saving the lost was to have table fellowship with them in order to try to lead them to repentance and salvation. All that is true of Him is to be true of us- we have the same mission and should use the same methods. And refusing to open our closed circle to the little ones is going right against that method.

Those which were lost- The Lord Himself was evidently very conscious of the inclusiveness of both male and female in His redemptive work. He came to save that [both male and female] which was lost (Mt. 18:11). He asked His people to follow Him in His cross carrying, and then told them to follow a *man* bearing a pitcher of water (doing woman’s work)- probably a slave bearing water for the purification rites of Passover. In asking this He was requesting us to see in that man a symbol of Himself in His time of self-sacrifice. Yet the Lord saw Himself as a slave, a man doing woman’s work, as the seed of the woman...surely the Lord had worked out in advance this wonderful blend of the genders in the figure He chose to represent Him. He spoke of leaving one’s sister for His sake as being a sacrifice, whereas the contemporary culture would rarely have felt that way about a female relative. Jesus not only spoke to women publically, but is even recorded as allowing a Gentile woman to change His mind (Mt. 15:22). This was unthinkable and shocking to contemporary society.

The sentence begins with “For…”, connecting the “lost” with the “little ones”. Following through the theme of this section, the lost, the little ones, the despised ones, will be won back and not stumbled by receiving them in table fellowship. This is the going out to seek the lost. The Lord’s parables describe those He will save as the son who refused to go to work, but later went, sheepishly aware of his failure; the sheep that went away, i.e. those Christ came to save (Mt. 18:11) (a symbol of us all, Mt. 18:12 cp. Is. 53:6); the lost coin; the son who went away and sowed his wild oats, and then

returned with his tail between his legs. Christ expects that we will fail, as grievously as those parables indicate. Yet we have somehow come to think that they refer either to our follies before baptism, or to those within our community who publicly disgrace themselves. Yet they describe *all* the faithful. But is there that sense of contrition in us, really? Aren't we more like the elder brother, or the son who said "I go, Sir, but went not" (Mt. 21:30)?

18:12 *What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray*- Of course we must use our freewill and repent, but the Lord in the parables of the lost coin and sheep likens us to things which *cannot* repent and are not repentant, and yet all the same are brought back by the Lord's endless searching and pastoral care. By all means compare this with Peter's comment that the Lord's exaltation was in order to give *repentance*, not just forgiveness, to God's people (Acts 5:31; 11:18 cp. 2 Tim. 2:25). This is the extent of His atonement for men; not only to enable forgiveness, but to show His matchless grace yet further in even granting *repentance* to men. In the light of this it remains open to question how much credit we can personally take for our repentance. Not all lost sinners will come back, but the Lord speaks as if He will search always, in every case, *until* they do. These hyperboles are all to teach the vast extent of His desire to win back the lost. In the light of this, who are we to start questioning whether or not a brother has actually repented, if he says he has and shows this to some extent?

Does he not...?- The answer is, No, he doesn't. This is the element of unreality in this parable. It seems there are such elements in all the parables, and they are there to signpost us to the essential point of the parable. The Lord's parables all feature an element of unreality, which flags attention to His essential point. The shepherd who left the 99 and went after the lost one was an unusual shepherd. Common sense tells us that one should think of the good of the majority, not max out on the minority. We invest effort and resources in ways which will benefit the maximum number of people. But the Lord turned all that on its head. The heart that bleeds cannot disregard the minority, however small or stupid or irritating it or they may be. For people matter, and the heart that bleeds will bleed for every single one.

Leave the ninety nine- This may appear irresponsible. But it is in line with the Lord's grotesque language of cutting off body parts in order to avoid offending little ones. It's hyperbole to make a point- that the one little one or lost one is to have our maximum attention. I suggested above that the loss of body parts was an allusion to rendering themselves unfit for priestly service under the Old Covenant system. The Lord may be continuing the idea. Focusing on the little ones, the lost, may well lead to our being judged unfit for wider shepherding roles by those who are the power brokers within the human side of God's people on earth. But so be it. Lose that kudos, those roles. Focus on saving the lost. For that is what the Lord did, and thanks to that, we have been found and saved.

The idea of "leave" is 'to send away', and four times in this chapter alone is translated 'forgive' (Mt. 18:21,27,32,35). The same word is then found in Mt. 19:14, where the disciples again forbid little ones and refuse to 'receive' them, and the Lord tells the disciples to 'suffer' those little ones to come to Him. The use of the word suggests that the disciples needed to 'forgive' their immaturity. The whole section is very thematic and it therefore seems unlikely that the repeated usage of this word is insignificant. Maybe the Lord is hinting that we should not waste energy on unforgiveness, but rather forgive even 99 sheep, and seek by all means to rescue / save / receive / not cause to stumble the one. It's as if unforgiveness towards others may lead the "one" to stumble. And that is indeed true to observed experience, because those

who stumble are often full of stories from church life of where they encountered unforgiving attitudes towards others. The parable seems to be saying that if someone has been offended by the exclusion they experienced from the majority, then we are to forgive the majority and all the same do all we can to regain the lost. The closed circle of disciples who turned away the children from Jesus thus become the 99 sheep; the focus must be upon winning back those who have become lost. The parable teaches this in itself, because a sheep will only leave the flock if there has been some incident or situation between the flock and that sheep which mean that the flock has rejected or excommunicated it. For sheep do not just wander off alone from the flock and get lost. They tend to stay together by nature.

On the mountains- The Old Testament is clear that the sheep of God's people were lost on the mountains because of poor shepherding (2 Chron. 18:16; Jer. 50:6; Ez. 34:6). The language of 'going astray' fits this picture, because the Greek word essentially means 'to be deceived' and is used in the context of the Jewish religious leaders deceiving ordinary Jewish people in the first century (Mt. 24:4; Gal. 6:7; 2 Pet. 2:15; 1 Jn. 2:26). The mission of the disciples was to take over the role of the shepherds; they were resigning from the chance of being shepherds under the Old Covenant, disqualifying themselves from priestly service by cutting off their limbs, leaving the shepherding of the 99- but thereby becoming the shepherds of the New Covenant.

We all have the desire to keep our faith to ourselves, to hold onto it personally on our own little island... and it was this attitude which the Lord so repeatedly and trenchantly criticized. And in his demanding way, he implied that a failure in this would cost us the Kingdom. He more than any other must have known the desire for a desert island spiritual life; but instead he left the 99 righteous and went up into the mountains (i.e. he prayed intensely, after the pattern of Moses for Israel?), in order to find the lost sheep (Mt. 18:12).

And go in search of the one that went astray?- We are all such sheep who have gone astray (1 Pet. 2:25 s.w.). We are to replicate what the Lord did for us, in seeking the lost. But it is only if we perceive the degree to which we really were "astray" that we will be motivated to use His methods to likewise save others. This is especially difficult to achieve for those raised in believing homes, who were schooled into Christ from an early age. The lost sheep who leaves the fold and goes off is based on Ps. 119:176: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments". The lost sheep that is found therefore has the attitude of recognizing it is lost, that it is still the servant of the shepherd although isolated from him, and still has not forgotten the things of God's word. The picture in Ps. 119:176 is strange indeed: a lost sheep asking the shepherd to come and find him. It's as if the sheep talks to himself, feeling the shepherd can't and won't hear, feeling that he's just too far away. And this is *exactly, exactly* the position of all those who leave the faith and return: they don't forget the doctrines of the Truth, in their hearts they feel too far away, but they wish somehow something could happen to get them back. This explains the type of sheep one is dealing with in the parable, and why the parable isn't true of all who go astray.

18:13 *And if he finds it*- Although in other parables the Lord is presented as searching *until* He finds the lost sheep, there is the possibility that He will not find it. Such is the huge power the Father has given human freewill.

Truly I say to you, he rejoices over it- The same word used for the man of Lk. 15:5 rejoicing in finding his lost sheep, and the Father's rejoicing at the return of the prodigal (Lk. 15:32). The time of rejoicing is at the day of judgment, when sower and reaper shall "rejoice together" when the fruit is gathered unto life eternal (Jn. 4:36 s.w.). The

rejoicing is when the sheep is 'found', and whilst that can happen in a sense in this life, the ultimate 'finding' of the sheep is surely at the final change of nature when Christ returns. Our joy at the day of judgment will not simply be because of our own personal salvation, but because of how others are receiving that great salvation, in part thanks to the efforts we made for them in this life. Paul's "crown of rejoicing" would be to see his converts accepted in that day (1 Thess. 2:19).

More than over the ninety-nine that never went astray- We could read this as meaning 'who did not *think* they went astray', seeing that all the Lord's sheep go astray. In this case, the reference might be to the majority of Israel; the Lord was saying that His disciples were to go searching for the little ones, the children, the women, lepers, whores and gamblers, and forgive or not worry about the masses of Israel who didn't consider they needed repentance. Or this could simply be the element of unreality in the story- the 99 simply function as part of the furniture of the parable, to focus our attention upon the proactive effort we should be making to win back the lost. And this huge effort stands in contrast to the negative attitude of the disciples in not 'receiving' the little ones.

18:14 *So it is not the wish*- It is not the Father's *will* that little ones should "perish" (see too Jn. 6:39 s.w.), but :13 has made it clear that the finding of the lost is conditional: "*If so be* that he find it". Such is the huge power delegated to us, the extent of human freewill- that it can even stop the will of God being fulfilled. Because we have a choice as to whether we do His will or not.

Of your Father who is in heaven- RVmg.: "It is not a thing willed before your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish" seems to refer to the guardian Angels who represent the "little ones" before the court of Heaven. Every situation in which we reject the little ones is played out in the court of Heaven. This section began with the disciples thinking that their internal politics could somehow be hidden from the Lord (see on :1 and :2). They cannot be. The situations, discussions, rejections, formulations of policies, inward thoughts… are all played out before the throne of God in Heaven.

That one of these little ones- This serves to show that the lost sheep are the same as the little ones.

Should perish- The Son of God came to "save that which is *lost*" (:11- s.w. "perish"). His mission was indeed the doing of God's will- that little ones should not "perish" or be "lost". But it's possible that they will be- because we can make them stumble, make them perish, even though it is the will of the Father and Son that they do not perish. The Lord gave His life so that they would not be lost / perish (Jn. 3:15,16 s.w.). But we can fight against the intention of the cross by making them stumble and thereby perish. The same word is used for how we can make a believer stumble and they thereby "perish": "Don't destroy [s.w. "perish"] with your [attitude to] food him for whom Christ died" (Rom. 14:15). By doing so we are making the cross of Christ of no power for that person. Exactly the same is said in 1 Cor. 8:11, and I think 2 Jn. 8 has the same idea: "Look to yourselves, that we don't make to perish [s.w.] those things we worked for"- and those things were surely the converts which John's community had converted and built up.

18:15 *And*- AV "Moreover". Thus the previous theme is continued. Having spoken of such radical inclusiveness, the Lord foresees and tackles the obvious objection- that there may be cases where a believer has sinned against us, and that, surely, would be a reason for exclusion from the circle of disciples. But of course that would be illogical- if we are to be open to the little ones coming into the circle, then once they are within

it, it would make no sense to then throw them out of it because they sinned against us. And the Lord now spells that out clearly.

If your brother sins against you- Luke's record adds: "*Take heed to yourselves*; if your brother trespass... forgive him" (Lk. 17:3). This is alluded to in Acts 20:28, where Paul says we should *take heed* of the likelihood of false teachers. Surely what he's saying is 'Yes, take heed to forgive your brother personal offences, take heed because you'll be tempted *not* to forgive him; but have the same level of watchfulness for false teaching'. On another level, "take heed" suggests that in the case of personal offence, the tendency may be not to actually talk to your brother about it, nor to consciously forgive him in your heart. And it is these undealt with issues which create so much damage, both to us and to others. The purpose of the process outlined here is *not just* for the sake of the brother who has erred, it isn't just a polite protocol to follow; it is for *our sake too*, who have seen the weakness of our brother. *Unless* we talk frankly to him about it, between us *alone*, then we will end up hating him in our heart (even though it may not feel like that) and we will gossip about him. The frank raising of the issue with our brother is associated with loving our neighbour as ourselves. This is actually the opposite to what we would think; we would imagine that it would be more 'loving' to say nothing to our brother. But in this case, we will inevitably gossip about him and be bitter against him. The practice of true love will result in an open community in which we can frankly discuss with each other the issues which concern us, with love and not hatred in our hearts. This is the teaching of Lev. 19:16-18. No wonder the Proverbs expand upon it so much. And no wonder the Lord appropriated it as a ground rule for His ecclesia- there must be no gossip in the church. See on 5:22.

"Trespass" is the same word translated "sin" in 18:21 where Peter alludes back to these words and asks how many times his brother can "sin" [s.w. "trespass"] against him and be forgiven. The Lord's answer is basically 'An unlimited number of times', which indicates that Peter is to forgive without analyzing the integrity of the supposed repentance. Luke's record in Lk. 17:3,4 could suggest (if read in isolation from the context) that the sinning brother should only be forgiven if he repents. But the way the Lord clarifies this to Peter effectively offers a far higher level of response to the brother's sin. If he is to be forgiven multiple times for the same sin, even the same day, and if the genuineness of his repentance is irrelevant- then in practice the Lord is teaching to forgive without requiring repentance. The lower level is to forgive only upon repentance; but the only problem with that is that as we behave in this matter, so we shall be dealt with by the Lord. In the Lord's prayer we are taught to ask for forgiveness *as* we forgive others. It's therefore important for us to be as generous as possible in forgiveness. As so often in spiritual life, taking the lower and easier path (in this case, forgiving only if we receive repentance first) creates a far harder situation for us- in this context, only being forgiven ourselves if we consciously repent of absolutely every sin. Not for us, therefore, could be David's prayer to be forgiven for his "secret faults" (Ps. 19:12), those that were secret or hidden from himself.

This whole section about 'taking matters up' with our brother and forgiving upon repentance (Lk. 17:3,4) seems out of step with the spirit of the material which precedes it (about doing absolutely anything to receive our weak brother), and with that which follows it (the teaching about unconditional forgiveness regardless of repentance). I suggest it is purposefully out of step with it, and is in fact an allusion to and parody of synagogue disciplinary rules; it is certainly alluding to the procedure for disciple mentioned in the Qumran documents as being practiced in the Qumran community (1 QS [Rule of the Community] 5:24-26; CD [The Damascus Document] 7:2; 9:8). The synagogues had a disciplinary sanction of *Niddui*, casting out with no further

association, and it would seem clear that the Lord is alluding to this when He speaks of making the disciplined brother as a Gentile and publican. There is evidence that later Christian excommunication was called "the judgment of the Jew", so clear was the Judaistic basis for the later Christian practice of excommunication (Lawrence Frizzell, 'Excommunication', in E. Kessler and N. Wenborn, *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2005) p. 152; see too G. Forkman, *The Limits of the Religious Community. Expulsion from the Religious Community within the Qumran Sect, within Rabbinic Judaism and within Primitive Christianity* (Lund: Gleerup, 1972)). This kind of parody of the language and practices of Judaism is common on the Lord's lips, and I have mentioned such cases throughout this exposition. This would explain the way that He goes on to assume there is some kind of established meeting with a congregation, witnesses etc. Admittedly He uses the word *ekklesia*, often translated "church", instead of synagogue, but the synagogue was the *ekklesia* for the very first disciples (we note how the early ecclesia is called a "synagogue" in James 2:2, and early Christian writers like Ignatius and Hermas likewise call the church a "synagogue"). When recounting Old Testament history and quoting from the Old Testament, Josephus at least nine times replaces the LXX *sunagoge* with *ekklesia* (F.J.A.Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia* (London: Macmillan, 1898) p. 7). *Ekklesia* as a word doesn't have any religious connotation. And strictly speaking, the *ekklesia* was not so much the body of believers or synagogue as the called-together assembly of the members at a specific time and place, which in the synagogue context ratified disciplinary decisions. The word developed into meaning 'the church' generally in the later New Testament, but initially it meant a specific local gathering of called individuals at one place and time, and had no universal sense to it. There was no established Christian congregation at the time the Lord was speaking, and yet He speaks as if such a system was well known by the disciples. Hort comments on the use of *ekklesia* in Mt. 18:17: "The actual precept is hardly intelligible if the *ekklesia* meant is not the Jewish community, apparently the Jewish local community, to which the injured person and the offender both belonged" (Hort, *ibid.*, p. 10). To therefore follow this section to the letter in *church* life today may be totally missing the point, and acting as the synagogue did- rather than as did the ever forgiving Lord of unconditional 'receiving' of little ones, sinners, the lost etc. This is only a suggestion- my notes on the passage don't always assume that this is the only interpretation.

Go show him his fault- The Greek word carries the sense of convicting a person, persuading them; it carries with it the hope of success. It's not a case of merely telling a person that we have noticed their faults, it is an attempt to convict a person of them with a view to their positively changing. The Lord uses the word later when He comments that He does this in love and hope of reformation: "As many as I love I rebuke [s.w. 'tell a fault' here] and chasten; be zealous therefore, and repent" (Rev. 3:19).

Between you and him alone- This is so difficult! We would far rather notice the fault and tell others about it. This teaching is likely one of the most disobeyed principles of the Lord. The sense of being alone together is supported by the command to "*go* and tell him his fault… alone". The command to "go" and tell him he fault would seem a mere literary flourish until we perceive that *hupago* means not simply 'to go', but to go away, to depart. We are to depart from the time and place of realization of the offence against us, and then *alone* with the brother, attempt to convict him of a better way.

If he hears you, you have gained your brother- The question arises as to whether the gaining / regaining of the brother is to us personally, or to God. It *could* mean that

personal regaining of relationship is in view. But the word translated 'gain' is elsewhere used about gaining or regaining a person *to God* (1 Cor. 9:19-22; 1 Pet. 3:1), and the word is repeatedly used in the parable of the talents, whereby the servants 'gain' more talents *for their Master* (Mt. 25:17,20,22). In practice, this surely refers to gaining *people* for Him. The two are of course related, because to gain a brother for the Lord is to gain a brother for ourselves.

Here the Lord says of a sinful brother: "If your brother sins… go and point out the fault… if he listens to you, you have [re]gained your brother". But in Lk. 17:3, He says: "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him". This would parallel the brother's 'repentance' with him 'listening' to you. Seeing repentance is a state of the heart, and we simply can't know the hearts of others, it seems to me practically impossible to judge the level of another's repentance. The Greek and Hebrew words translated 'repentance' strictly mean a change of mind, and not necessarily any works / actions. God in this sense can 'repent'. It seems to me that we have to recognize a changed state of heart in our repentant brother, without demanding 'works'.

18:16 *But if he does not hear you, take with you one or two others, that at the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established*- The principles of Mt. 18:16,17 concerning dealing with personal offences are applied by Paul to dealing with moral and doctrinal problems at Corinth (= 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Cor. 5:4,5,9; 6:1-6). The context is indeed of personal offences, but as with all Scripture, we are not using it out of context if we extract the principles and apply them in different contexts.

The "two or three witnesses" were required in order to execute someone under the Mosaic law (Dt. 17:6; 19:15; Heb. 10:28); having 'witnesses' was very important to the Jews in the way they operated their judicial thinking (Mt. 26:65; Acts 6:13; 7:58). Surely the Lord didn't intend His new Israel to as it were re-enact the death penalty by excluding someone from the community if they personally offended you, didn't repent and therefore were unforgiven by you? That would be absolutely in conflict with His teaching which surrounds this section. This kind of legalistic, judgmental approach, and the need to establish "every word", seems so out of step with the radical grace, acceptance, patience, forgiveness without repentance and non-judgmental of the preceding and subsequent teachings of Jesus. The sharp difference in tone confirms me in thinking that the Lord here is not merely speaking tongue in cheek, but is parodying synagogue disciplinary procedures, as suggested on 18:15.

18:17 *And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church*- I have suggested in commentary on :15 and :16 that the allusion is to the synagogue methods of discipline, rather than to the church of Christ which had not then been established. There is no hint that this procedure was intended for application in the future, after the church was established. Greek tenses are specific, and this could have easily been conveyed. But it isn't; indeed, the whole procedure is spoken of as if it were already in existence and was what those offended by their brother could do right away.

And if he refuses to hear the church also, let him be to you- It seems that we have here a case of the Lord offering a concession to human weakness, to live His Truth on different levels. For the parable of the lost sheep shows Christ never giving up; but then there is the teaching of :15-18 concerning us trying to gain the brother that has offended us (Mt. 18:15 = Prov. 18:19), resulting in finally throwing him out of the church if we fail to reach an understanding with him. The teaching here seems to be that it is legitimate in such a case of personal offence to give up with the brother and separate from him. But the preceding parable shows Christ saying that He never gives up. And then in :22 Christ tells Peter ("I say unto *thee*", singular) never to stop forgiving his brother in a case of personal offence, up to 70 times seven. My summary of all this is

that the ideal standard is never to give up in trying to regain our brother; but it is possible to live on the level of 'taking up' every issue with him, and eventually parting from him. 'But', the Lord continued, 'For you Peter, I expect a higher level; constant forgiveness of your brother, all day long!'.

If your brother sins against you, you can go to him, then get the church involved, and then, the Lord says to the person sinned against, let him be unto "thee" as a Gentile / publican. About the only advantage from the KJV is the way 'thee' signifies a 'you singular' as opposed to 'ye / you' which in KJV English meant 'you plural'. Modern English no longer makes a distinction. So, let such a person be unto*thee*- you singular, not your ecclesia- as a Gentile and Publican. And what was Jesus' attitude to them? To mix with them, eat with them in table fellowship, and try to win them. Clearly this is talking about personal relationships, not ecclesial disfellowship.

As the Gentile and the tax collectors- The Lord's attitude to Gentiles was so different to that of religious Jews. He ate with them, thereby sharing religious fellowship; spoke positively of them, healed them and looked forward to the way that His death would end the spiritual status difference between Jew and Gentile; and therefore the Lord acted as if it were effectively ended anyway. The intention of 'being as a Gentile' was surely that it meant 'Have nothing to do with him'. But the Lord *did* have much to do with Gentiles, and by implication He did not think that the Jewish religious attitude to them was correct. Surely He is alluding here to Jewish 'disfellowship' practices, speaking tongue in cheek. For are we to really imagine Him now teaching that we are to only forgive our brother if he repents, and if we feel he has done wrong to us, drag him through a whole procedure of meetings and then declare him 'a Gentile', one not to be associated with? Surely not.

Matthew, the human author of this Gospel, had been a "tax collector" (10:3). The Lord did not ignore publicans as the religious Jews did; He had shocked the Jews by eating / fellowshipping with publicans (9:10,11). So the command to treat someone whom you won't forgive because they haven't repented (Lk. 17:3,4) as if they are a publican makes little sense if this is what Jesus is personally commanding us. Because He had taught by example that we should share religious fellowship with publicans, and He looked forward to sharing eternity with them (21:31,32)! It seems therefore almost certain that He is simply re-stating the well known procedures for disfellowshipping someone from the synagogue. The Lord is surely teaching that unless we practice radical acceptance and forgiveness of others, then we will end up disfellowshipping the little ones rather than receiving them. It would be fair enough to conclude the translation of each verse in Mt. 18:15-17 with a question mark- as if to say, 'Is this *really* how you want to carry on, endlessly taking up issues with your brethren, initiating procedures against them and then refusing to receive them at your meetings?'. The sense here in :17 would then be 'If he won't hear your witnesses- what, tell it to the church? And if he doesn't hear the church- make him to you as a Gentile and publican?'.

How we treat each other should be a reflection of how God treats us. We can make concessions for each other's weaknesses, accepting that some will live on higher levels than others; or we can demand a rigid standard of spirituality from them. I would venture to say that neither of these attitudes are *morally* wrong in themselves; it's just that as we judge, so we will be judged. For some time I have struggled with Matthew 18. It's a chapter all about forgiveness, of forgiving until 70 times 7, of never giving up our search for the lost sheep; *of being soft as shy children in dealing with each other* (a matchless, powerful analogy if ever there was one). But wedged in the middle of the chapter is this passage which says that if your brother personally offends you, go

to him and ensure that he sorts it out; and if he doesn't, take someone else with you, then tell the other believers about him, and throw him out of the church. This always seemed to me rather out of context in that chapter. But there must be a point behind the paradox presented here. Perhaps it's something along these lines: 'If your brother offends you, you are quite justified in 'taking it up' with him, demanding he acknowledge his wrong, and eventually expelling him from the church. But- why not just forgive him, without demanding an apology from him?'.

18:18 *Truly I say to you: Whatever things you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever things you shall release on earth shall be released in heaven*- 'Binding' is associated with the binding of the rejected in condemnation at the last day (Mt. 13:30; 22:13; Rev. 20:2). The idea of binding and loosing occurs here in the context of warning us not to be too hasty to cast a brother out of the ecclesia. The earlier context of this section is of not causing others to stumble. It doesn't mean that any ecclesial decision has God's automatic sanction. But because salvation is related to remaining in the Christ body, the Lord may be saying: 'By unnecessarily expelling someone from association with My people, not 'receiving' them, you are endangering their salvation. I won't necessarily come to their rescue; I have delegated the keeping of that brother to you. You are your brother's keeper. If you throw them out, they will probably lose their salvation. What you do on earth in these decisions is not necessarily overridden by Heaven. The eternal saving of a man is delegated to his brethren, and therefore you also have the possibility of causing him to stumble from salvation'. The implication of this is surely that we should only cast out of the ecclesia those who openly and beyond doubt have placed themselves outside of God's salvation- and we cannot judge whether they have or not. And the Lord surely meant us to compare this against His command not to judge. He is surely saying in this passage: 'You can argue it out with your brother, and eventually get the ecclesia to disfellowship him. But by this you'll be saying that he is out of the way of salvation, and what you do may well drive him to condemnation; for it's a hard and unlikely way to the Kingdom without your brethren. And you know that you mustn't condemn him. So better just forgive him, 490 times / day, unconditionally'. Paul takes this idea seriously when he says that if he forgives anybody, he does it "in the person of Christ", and so, by extension, the church at Corinth did too, seeing they were partakers in that same one body of His (2 Cor. 2:10).

Another approach is suggested by the consideration that the Greek words for binding and loosing, along with their derivative words, are often used in the NT for binding in prison, and loosing from prison's bonds. In this case, as in 16:19, the Lord may simply have the idea that through the power of the Gospel (16:19) and through forgiving and receiving sinners (here in chapter 18), we have the power to loose people. The "keys of the Kingdom" are in our hands. And if we don't do that, then we effectively bind them. And God ["Heaven"] will not as it were come rushing in to change things. He has given us genuine freewill, which means that our decisions with regard to others have significances which He doesn't necessarily mitigate. For otherwise, human behaviour would lose meaning and ultimate significance.

We should note that here the language of "the keys of the Kingdom" used in 16:19 to Peter specifically is now repeated to all the disciples. It is not so that Peter was given some unique power which the others were not.

18:19 *Again I say to you, that if two of you*- Surely to be connected with the "two or three witnesses" of :16, and the "two or three" of :20- see note there. The idea may be that in your decisions about how far to go in 'receiving' a little one, you will be confirmed in that decision by Heaven. Or the sense may be that seeing the little ones

should be 'received' without limit, if the group of you making the decision pray for strength to do that, then it will be granted.

Shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask- The Bible nowhere offers such a blank cheque assurance that literally whatever we ask for we shall receive. Always there is a specific context to such assurances that prayer will definitely be answered and requests given. That specific context here is concerning not offending others, efforts in winning them back and receiving them. We note that this is foreseen as a collective activity, involving more than you- because decisions regarding fellowship involve at least two or three.

It shall be done for them by- An allusion to the saying of 'Amen', so be it, may it be done. Your 'Amen' will in this case surely come true. Some of the assurances that prayer will surely be answered are in the context of praying for others. "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them" is in the context of concerned brethren trying to win back a weak brother. Likewise "If we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us... if any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death" (1 Jn. 5:14-16). Again in a forgiveness context, Solomon asked that God would hear Israel "in all that they call unto thee for" (1 Kings 8:52).

My Father who is in Heaven- The whole section emphasizes how God in Heaven is intensely involved with what we are doing on earth with regard to these decisions about excluding or including others (see :10,14,18,20).

18:20- see on 18:4.

For where two or three- This obviously connects with the two or three witnesses just mentioned in :16. There the Lord had said that if you won't unconditionally forgive your brother, then before two or three witnesses you can disfellowship him. I suggested that this was said tongue in cheek, for the Lord's intention in the surrounding context is that we should unconditionally forgive. But if we choose not to, then we can take this lower level of responding to sin against us. But He warns that we take this decision with Him in the midst of us, very much present. He has made this point in other language when reminding us that the representative Angels of the sinner are in God's presence in the court of Heaven, and what we do, how we decide, is being played out in the very presence of God. This saying about His presence in the mist of the "two or three" is saying the same thing. This evidently alludes to a Rabbinic saying preserved in the Mishnah (*Aboth* 3.2) that "If two sit together and study Torah [the first five books of Moses], the Divine presence [*shekinah*] rests between them". The Lord was likening Himself (His 'Name') to the Torah, the Old Testament word of God; and His presence would be felt if that Law was studied as it ought to be. Surely the hint is that if we agree together to show grace and acceptance to a little one, then this is the outcome of the true study of Torah. But whatever decision we come to regarding issues of forgiveness, acceptance and exclusion of others, we must accept the Lord's laboured and sober warnings that we are taking them in the very presence of the Father and Son. And we must recall how this whole section begins in 18:1,2 with the disciples thinking that their strivings against each other were somehow hid from their Lord- when He knew exactly what the thoughts of their hearts were about these things.

The personal presence of Jesus amongst us when gathered may suggest that He is especially manifested / revealed in the gathered together groups of believers, in a special and far different way to which an isolated believer reading a Bible may know the presence of Jesus. All this must especially be true of the breaking of bread- the only other time in the New Testament we meet the three Greek words translated "I am in the midst" is in Lk. 22:27, where the Lord comments how He is in the midst of the disciples

at the first breaking of bread. Of course, mere church attendance doesn't mean we perceive Christ there, in the midst of us; we perceive Him there insofar as we perceive the spirit of Christ in our brethren. The context is of two or three being gathered together in united prayer and receiving the answer. Receiving the gift of answered prayer is paralleled with the personal presence of Jesus in their midst. Answered prayer is part of His presence with us. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" surely promises a special closeness of Christ when we are physically gathered together. All those who have made real effort to gather together for the memorial meeting will know the truth of this. Our community increasingly features many in semi-isolation; this promise of special spiritual blessing in meeting together is something which they can and surely *do* know the truth of. The close fellowship which was engendered by the Passover feast, as Israel huddled together in family units around the slain lamb, the focus of their love and gratitude to God, explains why Israel were repeatedly warned not to share that meal with those not in covenant with God. However this cannot mean that the presence of Christ is *only* available if two or three physically gather together, and that He does not tabernacle in the individual. We could also read the clause as meaning that if two or three gather in His Name, this is because of Him being in their midst; i.e. unity, gathering together, is only possible around the person and presence of Christ.

Are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them- Literally, 'synagogued'. I have suggested above that the Lord is parodying the process of synagogue discipline, and teaching that His followers should not follow that but rather unconditionally accept the little ones. By doing so, they would no longer in practice be able to be part of the synagogue structure, which was based around excluding rather than including. I would read the Lord here as yet once again teaching that He is establishing a new Israel; the new synagogues would be comprised of twos and threes of secular but sincere believers earnestly praying together that the lost might be found, for forgiveness for those who have sinned against them without repentance.

18:21 *Then Peter came and said to him: Lord*- Peter asked: "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?". Jesus responds with a parable in which a man who calls his king "Lord" is himself forgiven, but refuses to forgive another man. Surely that parable was specifically for Peter, the one who delighted to know Jesus as Lord. He was warned through the parable that calling Him 'Lord' wasn't enough. An appreciation of Him as Lord of his life would mean quite naturally that he had a spirit of frank forgiveness for his brother, not carefully measuring it out, but rather reflecting his Lord's forgiveness of him. If Jesus is really Lord, then everything which He does and all that He shows becomes an imperative for us to follow.

How often- Jesus replies, 70 x 7. i.e. to an unlimited extent, even when the repentance is obviously insincere. It's as if He's saying that yes you can go through the procedure of sorting it out with your brother and rejecting him from your personal company. But, the higher level, is to simply forgive him. It's like adultery under the Law. There were several options for the husband. Do a trial of jealousy and make her infertile. Stone her. Divorce her. Or, just forgive her. We surely all ought to be aiming for the higher level. Those who quote Matthew 18 as a reason for withdrawal are in my view living on a lower spiritual level than those who forgive 70 x 7. But the gracious Lord doubtless shall accept them too in the last day.

Shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?- The Lord's comment that "If your brother shall trespass against you" (:15- see notes there) is picked up here by Peter. The Lord's reply was that Peter should forgive his brother to an unlimited extent, each and every day. It seems to me that the Lord was saying that the 'one-two-out' attitude

which He had just described was very much the lower level of response, the way of the Jewish synagogues; He wished His followers to take the higher level, of unconditional forgiveness. Indeed, the whole passage where He speaks about going to see your brother and then telling the church is wedged in between His teachings about grace and forgiveness. It's so out of place that one wonders whether He wasn't saying it very tongue in cheek, in allusion to the synagogue discipline methods. At the very least, He seems to intend the contrast between His surrounding words and those about 'one-two-out' to sink in, to the point that we realize, as He told Peter, that there is indeed a higher way.

Until seven times- Lk. 17:4 adds “in a day”. Perhaps Peter had in mind how Jacob bowed seven times to Esau and was forgiven (Gen. 33:3), or perhaps he had wondered whether the sprinkling of blood seven times in the Mosaic rituals spoke of forgiveness of a maximum of seven sins in one day, as some Rabbis taught (Lev. 4:6,17; 8:11; 14:7,51; 16:14,19; Num. 19:4). Or perhaps Prov. 24:16 was another source for his thinking- “a just man falls seven times and rises up again”. The Lord’s answer was that we need to forgive far more than seven times because we too sin far more than seven times / day- which is the function of the hopelessly indebted servant in the following parable. Peter’s phrase “*until* seven times” is strangely lifted right out of Dan. 4:23, where Nebuchadnezzar was to be punished “until seven times” passed over him. Peter often alludes to Old Testament scripture in his recorded speech; he was very Bible-minded. He may have been suggesting ‘Even if someone’s as bad as Gentile Nebuchadnezzar, we should still forgive them, I suppose, but that surely is the limit’. But the Lord’s subsequent comment about 70 sevens is from the prophecy of Daniel 9 regarding the far longer “times” which were to pass over Israel for their sin. So His comeback on Peter’s clever allusion was: ‘No, Peter. Don’t forgive people “till seven times”, as much as God did Gentile king Nebuchadnezzar- but as much as God forgave *Israel*, which was an infinite amount, 70 times, more than that!’. Such level of dialogue with Peter would’ve been perfectly possible and normal, for he really knew and loved the Old Testament and was quite the amateur Bible student- see ‘Peter: Bible Student’ in my *Peter and Paul* (Sydney: Aletheia, 2008). See on 18:27 *Forgave him the debt*.

18:22- see on :15.

Jesus said to him: I do not say to you until seven times, but until seventy times seven- The Lord's command to forgive 490 times per day (Lk. 17:4,5) is surely teaching that we have no ability to judge the sincerity of repentance; all we can do is forgive. Seven being the number of completeness, we are surely to understand this saying as not so much 490 times, but an infinite number of times.

Comparing with Luke, perhaps the Lord said this twice- once saying "seven times" (Luke) and then (as Matthew) "seventy times seven". He is really labouring the point. "Seven times" invites us to think of Lamech's bitter song: "If Cain will be avenged seven times, truly Lamech seventy-seven times" (Gen. 4:24); and also the seventy sevens of judgment upon Israel in Daniel 9. The Lord's policy of total forgiveness is thereby being presented as the counter to the natural human desire for vengeance. Our desire to judge and achieve revenge-to-the-end is to be displaced by a passion for unlimited forgiveness 'to the end'.

18:23 *Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened*- This "therefore" is crucial. Because we must forgive 490 times / day regardless, therefore, of the sincerity of repentance, *therefore* the Kingdom of God [i.e. the behaviour of those who claim to be under the domain of God’s Kingship] is like the forgiveness of the King of that

Kingdom. How was it that he had a servant who was so hopelessly in debt? 10,000 talents can be seen not as a literal number but as meaning ‘a huge, infinite amount’. How did the position arise? Because the King had repeatedly forgiven him debts without demanding repayment, and had given in to requests for yet more debt. This is the connection between the parable and the fact we have to forgive 490 times / day. It’s because we too repeatedly sin each and every day. How many times do you catch yourself each day muttering or thinking a brief prayer for forgiveness of some failure? If it’s not 490 times, then that’s because you’re not sensitive enough to human failure and Divine standards. And how really sincere is our repentance each time? Do we not find ourselves asking for the same basic sins to be forgiven, hour by hour, day by day? If we have been forgiven so much, then we simply *must* accept the little ones and forgive them, regardless of their repentance.

To a certain King- Gk. ‘an *anthropos* King’, a human king. This strange phrase emphasizes how the King in view here, the Lord Jesus, was and is only exalted to Kingship because of His humanity. He is judge *because He is* the “son of man”. In the issues and feelings regarding forgiveness and acceptance, the Lord Jesus fully understands our humanity.

Who would make a reckoning with his servants- The word is only used again in 25:19 about the last judgment. And yet the parable seems to speak as if the last judgment is only at the end of the story, after the forgiven servant has had time to grab his fellow servant, demand the debt, get him into prison, and the other servants have gone to inform their Lord, who then punishes him with “torment”. There is an intended confusion here- because the essence of judgment day is going on now, and we ‘make the answer now’ every time we are confronted by a little one needing acceptance into our closed circle, every time we are sinned against, every time a sheep goes astray. This is seamlessly in the spirit of the earlier part of this block of teaching, where the Lord has spoken of those who offend the little one by not accepting and not forgiving as being sure of future damnation, and has urged us to cut off any parts of our lives which have stumbled others and cast them from us, as a symbol of self-condemnation now, so that we are not condemned in the final judgment.

The Lord spoke of how when we sin, He 'takes account' of us and forgives us- and we are to respond by being frankly forgiving to those in our debt (Mt. 18:23,24). But the Lord uses the very same words and imagery in speaking of how at His return, He will "take account" of His servants and utter an unchangeable verdict upon them (Mt. 25:19). The connection of thought is surely to indicate that in our repeated experience of sin, coming before the throne of grace, receiving the judgment of condemnation, seeing it changed and responding by showing grace, we are living out the essence of the meeting with God which is yet to come. This is how God uses our experience of sin, repentance and forgiveness. The whole process is in order to give us an insight into the future judgment. The reality is that in those experiences of today, we can change the verdict. But in the last day it will be too late.

″Reckoning″ is a *logos*. He asks us even in this life [see on *Take account*] to share our inner motives and core feelings / ideas with Him, the *logos* of our lives. Especially in this area of rejection of others and unforgiveness of them. The king (Jesus) makes a reckoning with His servants right now, and it is for us to be influenced by the gracious accounting He shows towards us, and then in this life reflect an appropriate grace to our brother (Mt. 18:23 RV). The reckoning is going on right now, indeed in a sense it occurred on the cross.

We could however read this as an allusion to how ancient kings had senior servants or satraps who had to gather income or taxes for the king, and then present the money to him annually. In this case, the Lord may be addressing this parable particularly to elders in His church, His senior servants. He wants them to understand that they are hopelessly in His debt.

18:24 *And when he had begun to reckon*- See on :23 *take account*. These words were spoken to Peter, and he seems to have later grasped their meaning when he wrote of how judgment is now beginning at the household of God, the church, "us" (1 Pet. 4:17- the same Greek word for 'beginning' is used). Every time we engage with those who sin against us, each moment we remember them and the associated situations, we stand at the day of judgment making our own answer according to how we think and feel towards them. It is a very personal question. We simply cannot exclude them just because the circle of disciples around us [with which this section began] are hard set against those persons. We are to be as the Lord, and break the circle, putting the child in the midst. In a sense the judgment process has already begun; Mt. 18:24 says that the Lord has "begun to reckon" now, and so now we must urgently forgive one another. He is watching our attitude to each other here and now. Mt. 18:33,35 teach that the attitude we have towards our brother deep in our heart will be revealed and discussed with us at the judgment.

One was brought to Him- The same word used about the little ones being brought unto Jesus and being rejected by the disciples (19:13). The word is so often used of how people were brought unto Jesus. **But the idea is that this servant was summoned. He was suspicious because of his huge debts. And this man is every man. He had not taken the initiative in confessing to the King. He had no active conscience and was in denial at the magnitude of his debt, built up by repeated fraud and foolishness. He was given a foretaste of judgment day, by being called to account in this life. This is what happens when God intervenes in human life and calls us to Him. If He doesn't, or if that call goes unheeded, the debt increases... the man who owes 10,000 talents will just go on borrowing or stealing more talents. The man who responds to the Gospel is called to account.**

Who owed him- The Greek is also translated 'a sinner', so clear is the connection between debt and sin. The Lord is clearly alluding to His own model prayer, where He taught that we are to ask for forgiveness "as we forgive our debtors" (s.w. 'one which owed', Mt. 6:12). It seems that although the disciples presumably obediently prayed that prayer, the reality of the implications wasn't felt by them.

Ten thousand talents - One hundred million denarii (Mt. 18:23). This was a monstrous, unimaginable sum- in 4BC, the whole of Galilee and Peraea paid only 200 talents per year in taxes, one fiftieth of the amount. The annual income of Herod the Great is estimated at only 900 talents (New Jerome Bible Commentary). The Lord was using shock tactics to show how great is man's debt to God... and to throw into strong relief the sharp contrast with the way the fellow servant has such a trivial debt. The story is plain. The sins we perceive others have committed against us should be as nothing compared to the huge debt we feel personally before God. This explains why the acceptable man in another parable prays with his hands on his breast- when every Palestinian Jew would have expected a story about a man praying to feature him with uplifted hands, as was the custom. The unusual element to the story brought out the extent of the man's contrition. Indeed, the total acquittal of the indebted man, with no further penalty at all, would have caught the early hearers by surprise. The man, they imagined, would have walked off surprised by joy, ecstatic, thankful, relieved. And yet he goes and does something totally unexpected and illogical- he grabs another man and

demands he pay up his debts. The unexpected twist of the story of course brings out the madness of any unforgiveness on our part, and the awful nature of human ingratitude for forgiveness- just as in the two carpenters parable.

Attic talents were divided into denarii, which is the point of comparison in the parable. So 10,000 talents was equivalent to 60 million days' wages if a man earned a penny / denarius a day. It represented about 200,000 years work. This is a sum almost beyond calculation- and thus is our debt before God. We are in utter bankruptcy before God. That the man should ask for patience and time from the king and offer to repay the debt... suggests the enormity of the debt had still not registered with him- and that may explain his harshness to his fellow servant. It also highlights the King's grace in having compassion on him, when the man didn't really appreciate the enormity of his debt. The ration between 100 pennies debt and the 200,000 years work debt... is huge. It is 1 to millions. Because a penny a day was the wage paid at harvest time and not every man worked for that every day. 10,000 was the highest number in ancient arithmetic, and the denarius was the smallest denomination. This is the ratio between our sin before God, against others' sins against us. It is this which empowers us to forgive others.

Josephus mentions the figure of 10,000 talents as being the total worth of the temple system; 2000 talents in gold coins and 8000 talents in other forms of gold. In this case the Lord would be saying that the first servant was the temple leadership, possibly the high priest. He had been forgiven for all that theft; but he must forgive others. We see again how the Lord wanted literally all men to repent, even the richest and most powerful. Just as the likes of Pharaoh and other world leaders were appealed to for repentance. Josephus also claims that Palestine had a tax debt to Rome of 10,000 talents. Again the idea would be that God is far kinder than Rome, than this world. He forgives totally and without obligation- apart from to in turn forgive.

The hopelessly indebted slave had the whole debt reckoned up with him and *then* the Lord wrote it off (Mt. 18:24,25). This was surely for the benefit of the servant. The servant hopelessly, desperately in debt to his Lord is a picture of the believer's debt to God (Mt. 18:25). The Lord didn't say 'Well, don't worry about it, I've got plenty, just forget it'. He reckoned up the exact debt, calculated it with the servant progressively panic stricken as the full figure registered: and "his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made". Only *then*- and this is a crucial feature of the story- "the servant therefore fell down, and besought him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all". This was of course a nonsense; he had no way of paying it. But in his desperation, at the very and utter limits of human feeling, he fain would pay it all. And only then, "the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him". This is not to say that the Lord is a hard man. But His frank forgiveness is not lightly given. Remember that God is elsewhere described as the magistrate who is to be feared, "lest he hale thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and the officer cast thee into prison. I tell thee, thou shalt not depart thence, till thou hast paid the very last mite" (Lk. 12:58). And yet again, the Lord is not a hard man. In the context of our spiritual bankruptcy, "He constantly lendeth to thee" (Job 11:6 Heb.); and yet He demands our deep recognition that He deserves and in a sense should be given it all back. This will be our attitude, if we appreciate that indeed sin is serious.

There are degrees of sin- in God’s sight. But this parable teaches that for us, our perception is to be that the colossal extent of our sin is such that we should be eager to

forgive anyone anything, because whatever they have done is so small compared to *what we perceive* that *we* have done. The difficulty is that it may actually be that in God's judgment, some have sinned less than us- and we get a strong hint at the nature of that judgment in the Bible. But *from our perspective* we are to feel that our sin is so much hugely greater than anything anyone else has done. Paul was a great example of this, progressing over time as he wrote his letters from considering himself "least of the apostles" to being "less than the least of all saints" to finally being "chief of sinners".

18:25 *And since he could not pay*- Neither of the indebted servants in the parable could pay. It's an urban myth to think or assume that in cases of sin against us, the sinner can put it right. He cannot. The only way forward is unconditional forgiveness on our part, which must be granted knowing that the person cannot put anything right. This is a window onto the issue of whether or not we should forgive only if the person repents. The parable is at pains to demonstrate that personal debt cannot be repayed- all that can be done is to write it off. Even if letters of regret are written in total sincerity and with absolute meaning behind every word, they can never repay the debt. All we can do is to forgive, and therefore the person's repentance to us is in that sense irrelevant.

It could be argued that the man truly wanted to pay the debt, but was unable. This should be our feelings about our sins. The man was forgiven his debt due to his *desire* to repay it, even though in fact he couldn't repay it. Sin can, in a sense, never be put right, it can only be covered over. And the man was expected to reflect his experience of forgiveness in how he dealt with his brother. Our fellowship of failure should be bound close together by our common experience of God's forgiveness. What we owe to God can never be repaid. Realizing this affects how we define what is repentance. Just one sin brings eternal death; after sinning, we cannot go back and re-live those minutes, hours, days or years when it was committed. All we can do is trust in God's grace and believe that God will negate the just results of that sin. Because we are forgiven debts which we can never repay, we are asked to liberally forgive our brethren for their far smaller debts. It appeared that the man who owed a small amount was better able to repay it than he who owed much. But the *ability* of our brethren to repay the debt of their sin is not something we should consider. Surely this is what the parable teaches. The *ability* of people to repent is something we should not *consider*. God does not consider *our* ability to repay Him- for we are utterly unable to do so.

A case can be made that the man did in fact have some of the money, because he had stolen it [rather than borrowed it] from the King, and had at least some of it stashed away- see on 18:34 *The tormentors.*

His master ordered that he be sold- This King is clearly angry and hurt at the extent of the debt; but he also has a heart of compassion (:27). According to the story line, he really intended the servant to be sold to another master. He didn't want anything to do with this man any more. But then he changed. Without this detail about the King's anger, we would be left with the impression that he is a soft hearted type who didn't take the personal loss, betrayal and pain with any real personal suffering. But the Heavenly King, God Himself, does indeed have these feelings, and it is this reality which gives backdrop and meaning to His frequent movement with compassion in subsequently forgiving us. His forgiveness of sin, just like ours, doesn't mean that He is indifferent to sin. This is therefore a recognition by the Lord that forgiveness isn't instant nor automatic, but that like God, we will legitimately feel hurt and anger before moving on to forgiveness.

We could say that the original sentence, to be sold, was in fact changed. This didn't happen. The man was forgiven the debt and there was no demotion of the

man. Under Jewish law, a man could only be sold into slavery for theft. Clearly he owed this vast amount because he had stolen it. But that is not gone into nor does he confess it. He was left in a position of power, it seems; he had the power to arrest ['lay hold on'] the other servant. He was totally justified. This is how we are with the Lord by grace.

With his wife and children- The Lord spoke this in the first instance to Peter personally, in answer to his question. Peter had a wife (1 Cor. 9:5) and at least one child (1 Pet. 5:13). Likewise the way the servant "fell down" before the King (:26) is just as Peter had recently done before Jesus (Mt. 17:6 s.w.).

And all that he had- But he "had" [s.w.] nothing to pay with, "he had not to pay" [AV]. What he did have was not even the right currency with which to repay what he owed. Even if he and his family were sold to be someone else's slaves, the amount received would be tiny compared to the huge debt. We are maybe intended to imagine that it was reflection on this fact which led the King to simply show compassion. We cannot repay our debt to God, even if we give our bodies and very being to Him. All we can do is hope for His grace, and so it is with our forgiveness of others.

And payment to be made- The idea is of repayment, putting things right. The powerful point of this parable is that when someone sins against us, they *cannot* put it right, they cannot repay. We must forgive without that- which meshes well with the impression we get from this entire section that we are to accept, receive and forgive the little ones in an absolutely open manner without demanding repentance or them restoring a situation. So much forgiveness and reconciliation fails to happen in practice because of this assumption that the one who has done wrong must somehow put it right. Even if e.g. a stolen item is restored, the damage done in other ways by the theft cannot be put right. Except by our forgiveness. **We see here how despite the enormity of our debt, Divine justice requires that payment be made, and even death itself will not cancel that debt.**

18:26 *The servant therefore fell on his knees, saying*- This is precisely what the second servant does to the forgiven servant (:29 s.w.; he also asks for "patience" just as the first servant did). Our situation before God is exactly mirrored by the situation of others before us who have sinned. The Lord's prayer had made this point, in asking that we be forgiven *as* we forgive others. Forgiving them, therefore, becomes of utterly crucial importance in our personal salvation. Nothing else we may do or be can compensate for unforgiveness, rejection of little ones, and the subsequent causing them to stumble which this causes. See on :25 *His wife and children*.

Fell down and worshipped- AV. The two words often occur together. The basis of real worship is thereby defined for us as being a deep conviction of the depth of our sin. Such worship isn't therefore something that can just be turned on or turned off. True worship has very deep roots, in deep conviction of personal debt and a core desire to somehow beseech God's grace.

Lord, have patience with me- See on :26 *Fell down*. The servants both ask for "patience", and yet the story invites us to see how irrelevant is that request- no amount of time can repay such a huge debt. Even although the servant therefore doesn't throw himself on the King's grace to the extent he ought to have done, and still entertains the absurd idea that he can actually somehow repay the debt- the King shows grace. Again, the attitude of those 'little ones' we engage with will be far from ideal, they miscalculate their debt just as the servant genuinely thought he could "pay all", they fail to appreciate the damage done, the hurt caused, believing that they can put right what clearly they never can. But the King's forgiveness of that servant is our pattern for forgiving those indebted to us by their sins and poor behaviour. Yet again we see the hint that

forgiveness based upon repentance and restoration is not what is needed at all. Sin cannot in that sense ever be restored or put right by the sinner, but only by the grace of the one sinned against.

And I will pay you all that I owe- The servant is presented as insincere, to those who meditate a bit upon the information given. His falling down at the feet of the King was not sincere, surely; for instead of admitting his fault and begging for grace, he claims that with time, "patience", he can actually repay it. No amount of work could repay his debt. The huge sum which he 'owed' the King was so large that we are invited to imagine that the debt had arisen more by theft than by being lent that huge amount. For why would he, a servant, need to borrow such a huge amount? We are led to expect a confession of theft from the King- but there is none. Likewise the huge sum of debt is an element of unreality in the story that attracts our attention. The King typically would have killed such a person- but this unusual King doesn't do that. He offers him a way out apart from death- and still the man isn't grateful, he doesn't even want to do a period in bonded slavery for his sins. Within the context of Israel, a slave could only be held for seven years. And "in the seventh year he shall go out a free person, without debt" (Ex. 21:2). In the seventh year, all debt was to be forgiven (Dt. 15:1-3). So this gracious King was willing to actually forgive the debt and give the man a path to total freedom. But he didn't want even that- he wanted time so that he could pay the debt. He clearly had no real conception of the extent of his debt. And he even implies that the problem is with the King not being patient enough- as if to say 'If only you were patient, I can pay all this back'.

18:27 *And the lord of that servant, being moved with compassion*- The Lord forgave the sinner exactly because he could not put it right. Bearing in mind the insincerity of the man's words and claims even after being called to account, it is clear that the King's pity was not because of the man's genuineness. It was rather pity at the sad state of the man, pity at his pride, at his pathetic wriggling on the hook. The King's pity and forgiveness is set up as the pattern for ours- and this, therefore, must be shown not only to those who appear sincere in their repentance, but to those like this servant, who appear patently insincere, repeating the same sin 490 times each day. The King had pity, realizing that power in this case was solely in His hands. And so it is with our interactions with those who sin against us. We have total power. They are unable to put anything right ultimately. Because they have done what they have done, just as we have done what we have done. **The Lord's compassion was because of how pitiful was the man's failure to realize the extent of his debt. Not because the man wanted to repay it.**

Released him- This is hard to interpret because *apoluo* can have such a wide range of meaning. It can mean to simply send away. Or it could mean that the man had already been bound as a convicted criminal- in which case, the 10,000 talent debt was due to theft, which is likely what the initial hearers would've assumed anyway.

And forgave him- The same word translated "forgive" occurs in 19:14, where the Lord rebukes the disciples for forbidding the little ones to come to Him, and tells them to "Suffer [s.w. "forgive" through the idea of leaving alone] the children". The suggestion is that despite all this emphasis on receiving little ones, the disciples failed to do so still. This shouldn't be hard for us to imagine, because the church is full of those who know these principles in theory but fail to apply them, turning away so many little ones week by week. The king forgave his servant; but in the parable of Lk. 16:7, it seems that the king's servants also have the power to forgive others what they owe to their lord. Our forgiveness of others is therefore recognized in Heaven, although that is not to say that if we will not forgive a person, therefore God will not. The connection

between our forgiveness and God's forgiveness (in the context of this section's teaching about offence) may be that if we don't forgive people, they often stumble out of the way of relationship with God and thereby God doesn't forgive them. Whereas if we forgive them and accept them, they often remain in a relationship with God whereby their sins are forgiven by Him.

I mentioned under 18:26 *I will pay you all* that the King was alluding to the seventh year release for slaves. But this King, despite the insincerity of this servant, simply proclaims the forgiveness and release there and then. This is how King Jesus operates- He makes the seventh year of release the ongoing status in which He lives with men and women. And this is to be our pattern, not waiting until the seventh year, not demanding a passage of time or partial restoration before we forgive, but doing so immediately without attention to issues of sincerity of repentance. The King's example in immediately offering the spirit of the seventh year release is surely saying that we should forgive and accept without demanding any passage of time. Observation of ecclesial life suggests that in the end, members are forgiven about anything, but it just takes time. But if forgiveness is going to be granted, why not grant it immediately… The release from slavery and debt in the seventh year was on the basis that Israel had been released from slavery in Egypt by grace (Jer. 34:13,14; Dt. 15;12-15), an exodus which speaks of our baptism into Christ (1 Cor. 10:1,2). If we have been released, we are to thus release others. They were to "let go" their indebted slave brother (Dt. 15:12 Heb.) just as Israel were "let go" from Egypt (Ex. 5:1). They were to send away the released slave "not empty handed" but with gifts (Dt. 15:13)- exactly as Israel left Egypt *not empty handed*but with the gold and gifts of Egypt (Ex. 3:21,22; 12:35,36).

I noted at 18:21 *Seven times* that Peter's initial question about forgiving "until seven times" was a quotation from Dan. 4:23 about the seven times or years punishment upon Nebuchadnezzar. It could be the Lord is alluding to this in saying that the spirit of the seventh year or 'time' should be lived out all the time; they were not to wait "until seven times" or years to forgive. And the release from debt must be given no matter how insincere the debtor, and no matter how huge the debt. And immediately. The Lord's language of loosing and forgiving debt and His allusion to the seventh year release is therefore radical and far reaching. If we are to show His forgiveness, then we have no option but to be absolutely open and inclusive of all. According to Jer. 34:17-22, Judah's captivity in Babylon was solely because they had rejected the need for granting release to their brethren; for that they were condemned.

The debt- An unusual Greek word is used here to express debt. *Daneion* occurs only here in the New Testament. It seems to mean a gift as well as a debt; there were other standard words for "debt" which the record could have used, but did not. Perhaps the strange word choice is to teach us that whatever we think we have borrowed or even stolen from the Lord cannot really ever be repayed- it is effectively made a gift to us. In our forgiveness of others, we must remember that they can never repay, and so our forgiveness of them is not on the basis that they have repayed something, but on the basis that we consider their theft from us to be a gift from us to them.

Another path here is suggested by the fact this word is used in classical Greek for a loan. It is a gift-debt. In this case the King is graciously reframing what was clearly theft from him as in fact simply a case of borrowing. Nothing in the man's behaviour nor attitude justified this grace. And so it is with us. Here we have justification by grace. The fact the man was handed to the tormentors until he paid... means that he likely did have some of the money stashed away, and under

torture would reveal where it was. For how else could torture result in a debt being repaid? He presents as totally unworthy of forgiveness.

18:28- see on 20:15.

But that servant went out and found one of his fellow-servants, who owed him a hundred denarii- "Went out" is the language of condemnation at the last day. By being unforgiving to our brother, we are condemning ourselves. And this has been the Lord's message earlier in this section- for those who make their brother to stumble by not accepting and forgiving him, they have an awful condemnation awaiting them. "Went out" is the language of Judas going out (Jn. 13:30), Cain '"went out" (Gen. 4:16), as did Zedekiah in the judgment of Jerusalem (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). Esau went out from the land of Canaan into Edom, slinking away from the face of his brother Jacob, sensing his righteousness and his own carnality (Gen. 36:2-8). Even in this life, those who leave the ecclesia 'go out' after the pattern of Judas, condemning themselves in advance of the judgment by their attitude to the ecclesia (1 Jn. 2:19 cp. Acts 15:24). The unrighteous flee from God now, as they will then (Hos. 7:13). Yet Peter in this life "went out" from the Lord (Mk. 14:68) and then some minutes later further "went out and wept bitterly" (Lk. 22:62), living out the very figure of rejection at the judgment- and yet was able to repent and come back. In this life we can be judged, condemned, weep...but still repent of it and thereby change our eternal destiny. But at the final judgment: it will be just too late. That 'judgment' will be a detailed statement of the outcome of the ongoing investigative judgment which is going on right now.

"Went out" presumably means from the presence of the King. All demanding of debt from others is done outside the king's presence. This is a parable of the Kingdom of God, of how things are under His Kingship. The demanding of debt from others is to go out from His presence.

He remained in the service of his master, even though the master / King had considered selling him into slavery to another man. But this King retained such a bad and insincere servant- again, setting up the pattern for our unlimited acceptance of others and not rejecting them. The staggering number of unrealities in this parable is in order to direct us towards the need for radical acceptance of others and open forgiveness without repentance- things which are indeed unreal for us in their demands. And yet without this, can we be forgiven? Faced with the teaching here, I end up asking God for what apparently I cannot or should not ask- forgiveness for my unforgiveness. And strength to indeed forgive, quicker and more fully.

And he laid hold on him- The Greek is several times used to mean 'arrested'. The first servant had the power to arrest and "cast into prison" (:30). We assume therefore that the first servant was a senior one, hence his ability to borrow or steal 10,000 talents. And still he has retained his position!

And took him by the throat- The Greek means to choke or strangle, it is only elsewhere used about the choking to death of the Gadarene pigs in the sea, representative as they were of condemnation of the unclean at the last day (Mk. 5:13). He was not only demanding repayment but almost killed the man in order to extort a promise of repayment. All our sympathies are directed by the story to be against this first servant- but he was the one who the Lord who knows all was so forgiving and acceptant towards. And that is set up as our example. **By trying to kill the man by strangling, he was placing him in a position where he could never repay the debt. Rather like putting him in prison.**

Saying: Pay what you owe- There was indeed a debt. We are to forgive the person who 'repents' 490 times / day for the same sin. Clearly enough, their repentance wasn't sincere. Yet we are still to show forgiveness without waiting for repentance. The

parable of Mt. 18:28-30 implies that forgiveness involves us not requiring of our brother that which we could legitimately demand of him. That surely is saying that we are to forgive our brother without demanding full repentance in terms of 'putting things right'. We are to follow God's example of frankly writing off the debt. This parable of the debtors splits the responsible into two categories; those who forgive their brother, and those who demand that their erring brother pays up what he owes, even though he can't possibly do so. All of us who walk away from our annoying, spiritually weak brethren (as we perceive them) are playing with our salvation. The day of judgment will be a day of surprises for all of us.

18:29 *So his fellow-servant fell down and begged him, saying: Have patience with me and I will pay you*- The words and actions of the second servant are exactly those of the first servant before the King. We are to see ourselves as the first servant- and he was not very sincere, nor did he appreciate the enormity of what he had done. But we are presented as being him, up to the point where he imprisons his fellow servant. The difference between him and us is that we are to forgive our indebted brother. But our repentances and pleadings for mercy are likewise less than totally sincere- the ease with which we repeat sin is surely proof enough of that. And we are not, therefore, to refuse forgiveness to our brother because we sense his repentance is insincere.

18:30 *But he refused*- The first servant wouldn't show patience to the second servant, even though he had asked the King for "patience" with himself. He didn't believe that the second servant would repay the money given time. And yet he puts him in prison, from where likewise the second servant will have no possibility of repaying the debt. He has no sensible option than to write off the debt. Just as forgiveness with or without repentance is not ultimately an option for us. The request for patience was exactly what he had made to the King. The King dismissed it as unreal and untrue; the King didn't say 'OK, well, in six months' time, then'. He just forgave him. The first servant was being brought to realize how he had made the King feel. The very similarity with his own position surely beckoned him towards a similarly gracious response. But he would not. The awfulness of the situation becomes even worse if we consider that he was delivered to the torturers in order to repay the money because he [presumably] did in fact have much of the money, but had stashed it away in secret locations; see on :34 *The tormentors*. **The lesson is that we are to not put people in a position from where they cannot repay. Cutting them off from social contact, disfellowship... is all often of that nature. This is a parable of the Kingdom of God. Those who will be in the future Kingdom must live in its spirit now. Forgiveness is obligatory. It is not an option. Otherwise we have "gone out from" the presence of the King and His Kingship, His domain, His Kingdom.**

And had him cast into prison- See on :28 *Laid hands on*. He was a senior servant who still had the power to do this. The King expressed his anger in a more Biblical way- the first servant was to be sold as a slave labourer so that at least some of the debt would be repaid, and then in the seventh year he would go free and the debt cancelled. But that servant now puts the other servant *in prison*. The Law of Moses never envisioned any kind of prison system, even though there were prisons in the surrounding cultures. Rather was correction to be effected more quickly and at the hands of those who had been offended or wronged. In prison, the man had absolutely no chance of repaying the debt, and so to imprison until he should repay the debt is oxymoronic. And obviously so, especially to the initial audience. They knew that those in prison had to be provided

for by their families, and so the truth was actually the opposite- imprisoning the man would increase debt, not reduce it. But this is what we do by not forgiving people- we put them in a position where they are a spiritual liability to others, and we assign them to a place where they can never get right with us. Because the earlier section in this block of teaching has demonstrated that to not forgive or to exclude is to cause another to stumble. Not forgiving damages the unforgiven person- that's the point. It puts them in a place where they cannot escape- it makes them stumble, or as in this parable, it imprisons them. This is a powerful picture of the damage caused by unforgiveness.

Until he should pay that which was due- Another possible twist to the story is that the first servant believed that the second servant had family members or friends who were capable of paying the debt; by throwing him into prison, he was thereby putting pressure on the family to pay the debt. This kind of thing often happens with forgiveness; granting forgiveness or acceptance is made possible only if third parties respond. Typically the argument is 'We will only accept you if you reconcile with X or Y'. The King, by contrast, dealt directly with the offender in offering a way forward- and finally abandoned any attempt at partial and negotiated solutions, and just gave frank and total forgiveness.

18:31 *When his fellow servants saw what had taken place*- There is a similarity with the workers who notice the weeds sown amongst the wheat and who then go and tell their Lord, rather than taking affairs into their own hands.

They were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place- What are we to do when brethren... refuse to speak to us or others, divide families, cause others to stumble; and all the other long list, the endless sentence, which we could now write or come out with? How are we to feel, how are we to cope with it? When the fellow believers saw the unreasonable attitude of a brother against another, they were "vehemently distressed" (AV "very sorry" doesn't do justice to the Greek)- not about themselves, but about the situation and the punishment of their fellow servant. Matthew uses the same Greek words to describe how distressed the disciples were to learn that there was a betrayer amongst them (Mt. 26:22). That extent of distress can destroy men and women. So "they came and told their Lord all that was done". They didn't just "tell Him". They went and told Him. We are invited to imagine the process of coming before the Lord's Heavenly presence in prayer, like Hezekiah spreading Sennacherib's letter before the Lord. The parable suggests there was no response from the Lord to the grieving servants. He called the offender to Him, asked for an account, and punished him. This speaks of how we shall be called to account at the Lord's return. But until then, there's silence from the Lord. But that silence is to develop our faith and perspective in the day of judgment. If there were bolts of fire from Heaven in response to our prayers, there would be no faith required, no longing for the Lord's return, no trust in His ultimate justice. The Greek translated "told" means 'to declare thoroughly'. Tell the Lord every detail of what happened, how you feel; what colour shirt he was wearing, exactly how she looked at you. Just as children artlessly retell every detail of a hurtful event. When they saw "what was done", they came and declared thoroughly to their Lord "what was done" (Mt. 18:31). The double repetition of the phrase suggests we should indeed tell all the details to Him; but not more, and stripped of our interpretation of them. Prayer isn't to be merely a list of requests; it's a pouring out of ourselves and our situation before God, as David taught us in his Psalms. And in this sense one rises from their knees healed and able to cope. The believers of

the parable told their Lord of the ungrateful behaviour of their brother (Mt. 18:31)- they brought the situation before Him, without asking specifically for something to be done.

18:32 *Then his Lord summoned him and said to him: You wicked servant; because you pleaded with me*- What is the function of the detail about the fellow servants informing their Lord, and His response being to call the wicked servant and punish him? The calling to account and 'eternal punishment' is surely allegorical of the second coming of Christ and the final judgment. The impression is surely that He is encouraged in doing this by His servants coming to Him and sharing with Him their hurt at the way His servants are being treated- both within the household as well as outside of it.

I forgave you- The Lord was absolutely sure that He would be victorious on the cross; His parables speak of our responsibilities and blessings on account of what He knew He would achieve for us. Thus the Master in the parable is able to remonstrate with the unforgiving servant: "I forgave you all that debt". The Lord's assumption was that He would attain our forgiveness on account of successfully enduring the cross. Yet He triumphed through His faith; although He was all too aware of the human possibility of failure, He believed He wouldn't fail, He made use of the constant encouragement of the word to this end. He described Himself as the Lord of the servants, and also as the King (e.g. Mt. 18:23 cp. 31- there are other similar parables)- even before His cross. He had such confidence that He would be crowned as a result of His future cross. The tenses in Greek can be used very exactly (unlike Hebrew); it was quite within the ability of the Lord to build into His parables the concept of future Kingship. He could have implied 'When I'm King, I'll judge like this'. But instead He saw Himself as already having overcome. "Be of good cheer, I have (already) overcome the world... now I go my way to him that sent me (bypassing the cross in His words)... I have glorified thee... I have finished the work thou gavest me to do" (Jn. 16:33,5; 17:4); these are only a few samples of the Lord's remarkable confidence that He would overcome. This confidence is reflected in the parables. He was practising His own preaching concerning believing that we have already received what we ask for. No doubt His words recorded in Jn. 15-17 and the parables which reflected this confidence came back to Him as He struggled to quell His crisis of doubt in Gethsemane.

All that debt- The hint could be that the exact amount was still clearly in the King's mind. God forgives sin but He doesn't literally forget it in the sense of as it were deleting it all from memory cells. It is 'forgotten' in the metaphorical sense of not being held against us. Peter was the one initially addressed here, and he uses the ideas in his later letter, when he criticizes some of his converts for having forgotten that they were purged from their old sins, and notes that therefore they were without motivation in living the Christian life (2 Pet. 1:9).

Because you desired me- AV. Actually, as noted at :26, the wicked servant didn't actually desire forgiveness of the debt. He asked instead for time, "patience", so that he could repay everything he owed. The pity of the Master was more because of the man's lostness and how little he appreciated his own position. However, the Master kindly and sensitively read through the man's request for 'time to repay' to the desire of the man's heart- that the debt be written off in total. And he did so. The Father and Son likewise perceive the spirit behind our prayers, and see through the surface level word choice which we make. This of itself is a great comfort to those who fear that they 'are not good at praying'. Because it is our inner spirit rather than our word choice which is the essence of prayer.

18:33 *Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow-servant*- This doesn't give the force of *dei*, which is the imperative, 'must'. The idea isn't that he *ought* to have been compassionate, but that he was obligated to be, he 'must' be like that. This

is exactly the teaching of the earlier part of the chapter- condemnation awaits us *unless* we are forgiving and acceptant of others.

Even as I had mercy on you?- The Lord's compassion is clearly intended to be ours, who are to live and move and feel "in Him". The Lord of the servant "*was moved with compassion* and forgave him"- the very words used about the Lord being "moved with compassion" for the spiritual and human needs of the Galilean Jews He lived amongst in His life. But the point of the parable was: "...shouldest not thou also have had compassion…?" (Mt. 18:27,33). If we have seen and known His compassion, ought we not also to show that compassion in the same way as He did and does? His compassion must be ours. The Samaritan of Lk. 10:33 was clearly intended to be interpreted as the Lord Jesus. He "had compassion" on the dying man of humanity, not counting the personal cost and risk; and then the Lord bids us each to go and do likewise. Our 'doing likewise' will issue in us too sensing the tragedy of those who have not heard, of those without a shepherd, of those who have fallen out of the way. We will be like the Father who was likewise moved with compassion for his wayward son (Lk. 15:20). The crowds of unknowing people who stream before us each day, the sad fact that we are so outnumbered in this world, that those you live and work with are dying in ignorance of the wonderful eternity that *could be* for them… that they live their lives in the darkness of selfishness, as existence rather than real life, without the light of the knowledge of the glory of God as it is in the face of Jesus Christ… all these things will powerfully *move us* to witness after the pattern of our Lord.

"Even as" is the very teaching of the Lord's prayer, wherein we daily ask for forgiveness *as* we have forgiven others, in accordance with our attitude to them. This is the very meaning of those who sin against us in life- their function is really to provide us with practice for forgiveness and thereby a basis for our own forgiveness.

18:34 *And his lord was angry*- The wrath of God here stands in sharp contrast to the amazing grace He has just shown to the indebted man. His anger was not that the man had stolen such a colossal sum from him [see on*The tormentors*], not admitted it, not appreciated the depth and gravity of the theft, not repented… but rather that despite that, the man would not forgive another. The purpose of the parable in its end thrust [which is so significant in nearly all the parables] is that unforgiveness of others is the ultimate and worst sin, far worse than anything else, including lack of repentance for our own sins.

And delivered him to the jailors- In the Lord's frank forgiveness of the heavily indebted man, there was no mention of any conditions. But when that same man refused to forgive his debtor, he was brought back into court, the debt was re-instated and he was eternally imprisoned until he paid every bit of it. The frank forgiveness of the debt, the 'release' from it, was actually conditional on him being forgiving to others subsequently. But that condition wasn't mentioned.
In the furniture of the parable, the tormentors may refer to the prison keepers. But the same word is used in Rev. 14:10; 20:10 about the tormenting in fire of the beast and his supporters at the last day. Clearly the point is that self-righteous unforgiveness of the little ones, the obviously immature and even insincere, will lead to the same condemnation as the very worst of the world. The same point was made by the Lord talking about offenders of little ones having a millstone put around their neck and cast into the sea- the very punishment of Babylon.

"Jailers" can also be rendered "tormentors". Another option is that the man needed torturing- and that is the essential force of the Greek word used- because clearly his huge debt was a result of theft, and he did actually have the money stashed away somewhere. Hence the need for torturing to get him to confess where it was hidden.

This would mean that his claim not to have anything at all to pay back was simply a false plea, a fake repentance. Which would be a function within the story exactly relevant to the context, which is that we should forgive others without limit, regardless of the sincerity of their repentance; and realize that so much of our own repentance is hardly that genuine either, resulting as it has done in the huge debt which we personally owe to God; a debt so great we are to perceive it as far more serious than anything anyone has done to us. If this interpretation of the torturers is valid, and it is hard to interpret it any other way really, then this throws into an even worse perspective the man's demand for the 100 denarii from his fellow servant. He already had considerable wealth stashed away… Remember that this unpleasant, insincerely repentant man is our representative right up to the point where he encounters his fellow servant who is in his debt. All his insincere representations about his debt, his complete failure to appreciate the extent and gravity of what he had done- these are all typical of our shallow repentances. And this serves to remind us not to refuse forgiveness to others because we consider their repentance somehow insincere. We also reflect that the King surely knew that the servant had stolen the money- it was such a huge sum. But He chose not to 'take the matter up'; He didn't make that specific allegation. And this lends weight to my suggestion that the earlier language of 'taking up a matter' with a brother who has wronged us is not a command for us to do so, but is rather a parody of Jewish and legalistic thinking.

There are of course those who misuse this verse to support their view of literal torture at the last day. But remember that this is a parable, and that every other entity in the parable has a fairly obvious interpretation. The torturers likewise must represent someone or something, rather than be the only element of the parable which is taken literally. That they represent something is clear, but what- is not so clear. In Matthew's pictures of judgment, the Angels have a major part to play in punishing the wicked (Mt. 13:41,42,49,50; 22:13). So perhaps they refer to how Angelically-ministered punishment will bring the wicked to some state of self-knowledge and confession, although tragically all too late.

We have here the reality that Divine forgiveness can be rescinded- if we do not forgive in response to it. So the question "Am I forgiven of past sins?" is open ended. Can God take back His forgiveness of us? Apparently so. If we do not forgive, we will not be forgiven. The mass forgiveness of debt, especially tax debt, was well known in the first century world. A new king often announced such mass amnesties to some of his indebted subjects. But always there were obligations that went with this. In the Kingdom of God, in *His* Kingdom under His kingship, the obligation was simple- to forgive others.

Until he should pay- The teaching is surely not that through the experience of torment, the man somehow could earn the 10,000 talents. Then he would finally be free and justified before God, as if through some kind of Roman Catholic purgatory. Rather I suggest the Lord is demonstrating His principle of judging people from their own mouths and according to their own words (Lk. 19:22- the context is likewise of a "wicked servant"). The servant had claimed to be able to "pay all" if given time (:29). Now, that untruth is being quoted back to him.

All that was due- The same Greek word is used elsewhere in this chapter only with regard to how the wicked servant perceived the debt of his brother- he uses the word in saying "Pay me what you *owe me* ['what is *due* to me']" (:28), and demanding the man "Pay the debt", 'that which was due' (:30). Again the words and attitudes of the wicked servant are being quoted back to him, and he is being treated as he treated his brother.

The big debtor was rejected because he wouldn't forgive his brother. The Lord says that He will make such a person pay all the debt. There is a connection here with an earlier parable, where He spoke of how unless a man agrees with his adversary quickly, the adversary will drag him to court and jail until he pays all that is due (Mt. 5:26). The adversary of the parable, therefore, is the Lord Himself. He is the aggressive invader marching against us with an invincible army (Lk. 14:31), with whom we must make peace by total surrender. Putting the Lord's teaching in context, He is showing Himself to be very harsh and demanding on the unforgiving believer, but very soft and almost unacceptably gracious to those who show forgiveness.

18:35 *So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you*- The unpleasant wicked servant is therefore symbolic of us each one- at least up until our meeting with our fellow servant, after our own experience of forgiveness. And the wicked servant up until that point is not presented positively, but rather as insincere in his repentance, and totally miscalculating the extent of his own sin.

If you do not forgive your brother- The same ideas are repeated, relentlessly. This most sober warning applies to each one of us, not to some of us. None are exempt, none are in a position where this problem of forgiveness doesn't apply to them. It applies to each of us. If we consider that we do not struggle with the issue of forgiveness, then it seems to me that we are not in touch with ourselves.

From your heart- By adding this detail, the Lord seems to recognize that forgiveness (like all spiritual characteristics) can appear to have been achieved on the surface, when it has not been achieved in the heart.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 19

19:1 *And it came to pass when Jesus had finished these words*- The same phrase is used in 26:1, as if Matthew sensed how the Lord was teaching them in a very structured way, delivering content and then moving on to somewhere or something else as soon as it had been delivered.

He departed from Galilee and came into the region of Judea on the other side of the Jordan- The significance is that this was the beginning of His journey to Jerusalem and death. The teaching throughout Matthew 18 is profound, He teaches the need for absolute and unconditional forgiveness and perception that our sins are the colossal 10,000 talent debt, making all sin and failure against us thereby seem minimal. And if we 'don't get it', then condemnation awaits us at the last day. And on that note, He finishes the instruction of the twelve and begins His journey to die at Jerusalem. The departure coming straight after His most challenging and profound teaching serves to highlight the importance of it, as if this is the crescendo of His message to His followers.

There is a clearly intended chiasmus developed in this part of Matthew, and whilst chiasmus is a typical way of simply ordering material, it also helps us with interpretation. According to the following pattern, the section about divorce [D1 in the outline below] is to be paralleled with the Lord's teaching about not despising little ones and not dividing the body of Christ by unforgiveness [D in the outline]. The body of Christ is Divinely joined together and to refuse to accept its members is to do despite to God's most holy intentions. The teaching against divorce is therefore addressing the same principles. It's a cruel paradox that so many have been so intolerant of divorce based upon this section that they have broken the principles concerning it which are the basis of the parallel section in 18:10-14 about unity and not despising little ones. So what is wrong with divorce is therefore what is wrong with the behaviour criticized in

18:10-14- a despising of others and refusing to view their significance in God's sight, because of our own self-righteousness and self-obsession; a lack of forgiveness and failing to perceive the significance of human relationships before God. Thus to divorce your partner becomes parallel with not accepting your brother / the "little ones'.

"A. 17:24–27: Giving freely; money; sacrifice
Challenge
"Parable" (Who should pay taxes anyway?)
B. 18:1–7: Little children are the essence of the kingdom of heaven
C. 18:8–9: Sacrifice of the body for the sake of the kingdom
D. 18:10–14: Do not despise what God values
Parable (Lost sheep)
E. 18:15–17: What to do when a brother sins
F. 18:18–20: Agreement between heaven and earth
E1. 18:21–35: What to do when a brother sins
Parable (Unforgiving servant)
D1. 19:1–9: Do not separate what God has joined
C1. 19:10–12: Sacrifice of the body for the kingdom of heaven
B1. 19:13–15: Little children are the essence of the kingdom of heaven
A1. 19:16–20:16: Giving freely; money; sacrifice".

19:2 *And great crowds followed him; and he healed them there*- The emphasis is upon the location of these mass healings- "there", in Judea "beyond Jordan" (:1), a semi-Gentile area. The suggestion grows stronger and stronger that the future of His work is with the Gentiles.

19:3 *And Pharisees came up to him*- Presumably "there", beyond Jordan. They had maybe heard that He was there because of the rumours of great miracles, and yet they made the effort to go to Him there with their legalistic questions. Their petty legalism contrasts sharply with the wonder of His teaching and extent of His miracles. They tagged along with the crowds, for they "also" came unto Him.

And tested him, by asking- Another hint that the source of 'testing' in the wilderness which returned to the Lord later in His ministry was from the Jewish satan / adversary.

Is it lawful to divorce one's wife- According to the chiasmic structure of this section [see above], this teaching about divorce is parallel with the Lord's teaching about not despising little ones but rather unconditionally forgiving them (see notes on chapter 18). It cannot therefore be accidental that there is a word play in the usage of the word *apoluo*, to "put away", because the word is also used concerning forgiveness, the sending away of the sin of another, and releasing them from debt to us. The word has just been used in 18:27, where the gracious Lord "loosed" the wicked servant from his huge debt without repentance. And so the question here is whether a man could put away / forgive / release his wife "for every cause". In a sense, the man was indeed to release / forgive his wife for every cause, for everything. But of course the Pharisees had in view the sense of sending away in divorce, and not forgiveness. The Lord surely means them to understand that they should send her away- in forgiveness.

For any cause?- The standard interpretation is that the Pharisees were seeking to draw the Lord into taking a position behind either the school of Hillel (that a man might divorce his wife for any reason) or that of Shammai (divorce was allowable only for unfaithfulness). The Hillel school had justified Herod Antipas recent marriage on this basis, and he was likely to crack down on anyone teaching otherwise- this was obviously one reason they sought to lead the Lord into this whole minefield. But if so, the question arises as to why they should raise this issue with Him so apparently 'out

of the blue'. If the question was simply as to which rabbinic school the Lord supported on this issue, then it would seem that He quite clearly came down on the side of Shammai- 'for unfaithfulness' (:9). But whenever the Lord was given such questions, He always avoided giving such direct answers but rather elevated the issues to a much higher and yet more essential level. I suggest that what they found so shocking was His teaching about unconditional forgiveness regardless of the sincerity of repentance, and so they came to Him with the case of adultery in marriage- where surely, so they thought, there could be no forgiveness for adultery and in fact Moses commanded that a man divorce his wife in this case. Whichever rabbinic school the Lord supported, He would surely have to admit that there were some sins which could not just be forgiven but must be acted upon in terms of divorce and exclusion from the marriage. Their use of *apoluo*, to "put away", was therefore a conscious allusion to the Lord's usage of the word in 18:27, where the gracious Lord "loosed" [s.w.] the wicked servant from his huge debt without repentance. So I would read the Pharisees here as implying: 'You claim a man must forgive his brother anything without checking out his repentance; but OK, can a man really forgive his *wife* "every cause"? And Moses surely did sanction divorce for some reasons, whether you go with Hillel ['every or any cause'] or Shammai [for adultery]". In terms of connection with the Lord's previous teaching, the Lord had taught that if someone sins against you, i.e. a personal offence, then you can drag them through the synagogue discipline system ["tell it to the *ekklesia*/ assembled meeting"]- although the higher level was unconditional forgiveness. For many listeners and readers, that teaching begs the very same question: "OK, so far so good, Jesus… but really, literally, for every cause, in every case…?". The Pharisees are asking this question, assuming that they have the Lord trapped because Moses teaches divorce for some things. Of course, Moses doesn't 'teach divorce'- there was a higher level. If your wife sinned against you, you could do as Hosea did, and simply forgive her, rather than making use of Mosaic concessions. Hence the Lord's answer is basically that any verses in the Law which might appear to teach divorce are in fact concessions to human weakness and not the ideal standard.

19:4 *And he answered and said: Have you not read*- The Lord is addressing the literate Pharisees, rather than the illiterate crowds who *heard* rather than *read*. His implication is that He wondered whether they had even read the opening passages of the Torah, which describe the creation of Adam and Eve. They had of course read them, but the Lord's implication is one which echoes down to us today- we can read, many times, and yet not really read as God intends, and not grasp the most essential meaning of the text. So many times the Lord uses this challenge- 'Have you not / never read?' (in Matthew alone: 12:3,5; 21:16,42; 22:31). This perhaps is one of our greatest temptations in this over-literate age- to read, but not really read.

The parallel Mk. 10:3 records the Lord asking "What did Moses command you?". We note He doesn't say 'command *us*', not because He considered Himself above the Mosaic law, but maybe because the law was a bond of covenant between God and Israel, and He saw Himself as the mediator of a new and different covenant. His point was that Moses had written this command to "you" the hardhearted, those so hard and spiritually dry that they needed such concessions from God (Mk. 10:5)- but the Lord wasn't in that category. The two questions are connected to each other- 'Have you not read?' is followed by a request for them to quote what they had read ["What did Moses command you?"]. This highlights the Lord's point that one can know the text of Scripture and be able to quote it and even sensibly discuss it- without having *really*read it for ourselves in the sense of grasping the personal message and implication for ourselves.

In Mark, the Lord begins His reply by pointing out that Moses' teaching about divorce was "for the hardness of your heart", and was a concession to their weakness not found in God's original intention "at the beginning". Their legalistic mindset considered that if Moses stated something, then it was a command to be obeyed. But the Lord tried to demonstrate there were different levels accepted by God- rather as He had taught in chapter 18 that in the case of personal sin, we can drag the person through the synagogue discipline process, or apply the higher level of forgiveness without qualification and condition. And He repeats that here- seeking to get them to see that the higher level was to stay together and remain in with the process of unity between persons that God wishes to operate; and the lower level would be to make use of Moses' concessions to human hardness. Assuming a literal record of the Lord's words here, Mt. 19:8 repeats the point that Moses allowed divorce "for the hardness of your heart"; the idea of Moses having granted a concession was significant to the Lord. Because His theme here as in chapter 18 was that there are different levels upon which we can live before God, and thus had it ever been.

That He who made them from the beginning made them male and female- The whole nature of creation was so that there would be a process of division, separation and then uniting together to produce fruit. The processes of separation and unity were inbuilt to creation, but we are to allow them to operate in the way that God intends- not needlessly separating and not uniting in wrong ways at the wrong times. Various views of evolution are disallowed for those who believe the Lord's words here- that male and female were created by God in the beginning.

19:5 *And said: For this cause shall a man*- Although a different original word is used, the idea is clearly the same as in the original question in :3, about whether it was lawful to divorce "for every cause".

Leave- The Hebrew and Greek words for "divorce" mean literally to go or send away from. And this is the same idea which the Lord now uses (although a different original word) in saying that because of how God created humanity, a man will leave or go away from [the same idea as 'divorce'] his parents and cleave to his wife. The Lord is surely saying that the process of leaving / separating and cleaving to another is natural and intended by God- but it must be done within the bounds of His intentions.

His father and mother and shall cleave to his wife- Translated in Eph. 5:31 as "shall be joined to his wife". The reference in my opinion is not to the wedding nor to the sexual act so much as to a process of being joined together, parallel with 'becoming one flesh', which is conducted by God in response to a man and woman wishing to come together. This involves His work on the minds of the couple and through orchestrated circumstance in their lives which results in their coming together as one. But the process is ongoing. This is surely a parade example of where God is able and eager to work on the minds of people directly. There could be no falser impression than that an indifferent God faces off against man over an open Bible, leaving it over to us how far we wish to be obedient. He is actively seeking to work in the very inward parts of the minds of His people, by His Spirit, in order to bring us together with Him and each other. The reason why sex before marriage or casual sex is wrong is that this is a physical coming together without the spiritual bonding or joining process which God has promised to perform in the lives of His people. The existence of this bonding process is another reason why marriage to unbelievers is not appropriate- because it will be hard for God to work on the heart of a person who has closed their heart to Him.

And the two shall become one flesh?- "*Shall be* one flesh" (AV) is a future tense. The process of unifying works towards a final unity between persons called "one flesh".

It's hard to say what point is in view here- a point where a married couple are "one flesh" presumably speaks of the consummation of marriage in sexual intercourse. Clearly the whole implication here is that two people cleave to each other whilst at the same time leaving their parental background or family of origin, and during that process there is a psychological process of confirmation going on from God, binding them together; and this then comes to term in "one flesh". This intended process rules out casual sex, just as it rules out individuals remaining psychologically bonded to their parents or family of origin. The false teaching regarding sexual matters argued that sleeping with a prostitute was OK so long as it was understood that the sexual act made two into flesh (1 Cor. 6:16); but this of course was just attaching a Bible verse to a situation in order to justify what people wanted to do. In sleeping with a prostitute, two do not become one in the Biblical sense because there has not been the spiritual process of God joining the couple. And that is what is wrong with it.

19:6 *So they are no more two but one flesh*- This appears to be a status, referring to marriage rather than solely to the sexual act. Because it is paralleled with "what God has joined together" and is not to be sundered.

What therefore God has joined together- As a couple "cleave" to one another, so they become one flesh (Gen. 2:24). But this becoming one flesh is interpreted by the Lord Jesus as meaning that God actively joins the couple together; as*they* cleave to each other in the process of their relationship, so *God* joins them together. Clearly the Lord understood Gen. 2:24 as speaking of the process of marriage, rather than simply the ceremony of a wedding. In passing, note that the Hebrew idea of two becoming one had already been used in Genesis- the morning and evening, the day and night, were fused by God into one day (Gen. 1:5- the same Hebrew phrase is used). Similarly we read of the waters becoming, or being made one, by God (Gen. 1:9). It's as if the immense power of God in creation is unleashed in His bonding of man and wife together. To put that asunder is to fight against the very creative power of God.

Let not- Because by sundering relationships, we are pitting ourselves against the intentions and processes of God's Spirit and His actions amongst men. But of course we can indeed put asunder what God joined. He does not force His ways and processes upon people. The parallel [see on :1] is with how we can refuse acceptance to the 'little ones' by despising and not forgiving them. God's processes intend to create unity between His people as well as between marriage partners; but we can chose to disallow the effect of His work, both in our own lives and those of others. By rejecting people, the Lord had taught in the previous section of the chiasmus, we make them stumble and damage the "little ones". And those same principles apply in marriage- the little ones are made to stumble, and the rejection of a marriage partner often leads them into sin, i.e. they are made to stumble. This I think is the sense of Mt. 5:32, that divorcing a partner causes her to commit adultery- i.e. we will lead her to a sinful life.

Man separate- The same Greek word is used in 1 Cor. 7:10,11,15 of how Paul allows for a wife to "depart" or 'sunder' from her husband. Clearly, therefore, the Lord is presenting here an ideal state. But that presentation doesn't mean that God will not tolerate lower levels of living before Him. Man can put asunder what God has joined not simply in our own marriage. It can just as much be done by parents seeking to keep their children within the sphere of the family of origin, not letting go; by pressurizing one side of a marriage to adopt a position against their partner, etc. Especially is this true of those who demand that a believing husband or wife not have fellowship with their believing partner because of theological or 'fellowship' differences.

19:7 *They said to him: Why then did Moses command to give* - They had missed the point, that a concession is not a command. Their legalism required that if something was in the teaching of Moses, then this must be done. But they missed the point that there were actually levels of response within the Mosaic law. Adultery could be simply forgiven, dealt with through the trial of jealousy in Numbers 5, become the basis for divorce, or result in the woman being killed. Such a position is very hard for legalists to cope with, desiring as they do clear definition for every situation in life. Hence the Lord emphasized twice in this dialogue that divorce was a concession for their hard hearts.

A certificate of divorce- Gk. *Biblion apostasion*, literally this could be understood as 'A Bible / writing of apostasy'. The 'lower level' option of divorce for adultery was all part of a law which was "holy, just and good", but it could so easily be misused and thus lead people into moral apostasy.

And to put her away- Their legalism is reflected in how they don't simply say that Moses 'commanded' divorce, but rather than Moses commanded a bill of divorce and then divorce. The legal aspect was all important to them.

19:8 *He said to them: Moses for your hardness of heart allowed you to send away your wives, but from the beginning*- Moses allowed divorce for the hardness of Israel's hearts and yet Moses himself appears to have divorced his wife (Ex. 18:2)- for the hardness of his heart? See Dt. 20:14. This appears to be the second time in this discourse that the Lord talks about the way Moses had made a concession to their weakness- see on 19:4 *Have you not read?*

It was not so- Here we have another connection with the preceding argument in chapter 18 (see on :1). This time, to the statement that "it is not so" (same Greek phrase) that the Father wishes a little one to perish, and therefore we should not cause them to stumble but rather forgive and accept them. The idea is clearly that divorcing a partner, even for adultery, rather than forgiving and accepting them still within the marriage, is likely to cause that straying little one to stumble. And this is the whole context of the Lord's teaching that the higher level is not to divorce for adultery- even though He clearly accepts that as a lower level, in the same way as in chapter 18 He accepts the possibility that in the case of personal offence we can drag the offender through the synagogue disciplinary process and reject them. But the problem with that is that it's likely to cause them to stumble, and we will find it hard to do that if we accept the full import of the parable with which He concludes chapter 18. We are to perceive ourselves as the serious sinner, the colossally indebted man, who effectively has no option but to forgive all sin against him. Mark's record goes on to use this same phrase "not [to be] so" in Mk. 10:43, in teaching that it is not to be so amongst us, the community of God's people, that we are in any sense superior to each other but rather should be servants to each other. Perhaps that also is relevant to this whole issue of whether we demand what is owed us from those who sin against us, even in the case of adultery within marriage.

In Mark's record, the Lord went on to quote from early Genesis: "But from the beginning of the creation: Male and female made He them. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cling to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh; so that they are no more two but one flesh". It was Moses who wrote Genesis, under Divine inspiration. So the Lord was saying that actually, Moses within his own writings laid down a principle and yet also recorded a concession to weakness. This idea is so hard for the legalistic mind to accept- that within Divine law there are different levels, all is not black and white.

19:9 *And I say to you*- This rubric is usually used when the Lord is replacing commands of Moses with His own higher standard. He appears to be merely repeating the Mosaic teaching- that there was an exception which permitted divorce, namely adultery, but that otherwise, divorce was not be countenanced. But in this case He would appear to have allowed Himself to have been drawn into the debate between Shammai and Hillel, and was coming down directly on the side of Shammai [divorce only for adultery]. This is not His style- the Lord engages with questions thrown at Him by lifting the issues to a different level, rather than answering them on the same level as they were given to Him. Mark's record has the Lord clearly teaching that divorce should not be countenanced for anything, and the disciples respond in amazement that it would be better not to marry rather than sign up for this (:10). Perhaps they held the common chauvinistic view that a wife was almost inevitably adulterous and would likely need to be divorced at some stage in the marriage. The Lord responds to that by saying that He accepted that not all His followers could live by what He was teaching (:11). To understand how "I say unto you" was therefore something radically new and higher than Moses' teaching, we have to therefore include Mark's record of His teaching that there should never be divorce for any reason. He mentions that there should be no divorce "except for *porneia*" in order to clarify in passing that Hillel's view that Moses allowed divorce for literally anything was not correct. But "I say unto you" suggests He was not merely reiterating Moses' position, but adding something new and more demanding. But we only see what that was by putting Mark's account [no divorce for any reason] together with what we have here in Matthew's. Jewish law in the first century *demanded* that a man divorce his wife for adultery, and in that sense the Lord's principle that ideally he forgive her rather than divorce her was something radically new.

Whoever shall send his wife away- The Lord seems to have in view a situation where a man proactively takes the decision to send his wife away. The implication could be that if he has to send her away, then she actually wishes to remain with him. The language of sending away surely implies she was still living with him. Therefore what is in view is a situation of unforgiveness on the part of the husband, and that is the entire context of this section of teaching which began in Matthew 18. The adultery was therefore a temporary situation and didn't involve the wife moving in with another man. In such a case, this whole passage is not directly relevant. The more general idea in chapter 18 of dealing with personal sins against us is now in chapter 19 focused down to the classic personal offence, the sin against us of a partner committing adultery. And let us note that the whole passage beginning in chapter 18 is speaking of ideal standards, whilst the Lord is prepared to accept lower standards (:11). Let's remember that in 1 Cor. 7 we are challenged that the single life of devotion to the Lord is the highest level, and marriage in itself is a concession to human weakness which most of us have made use of. And overarching all our thinking about this matter, especially in terms of our response to those who may divorce for not very solid reasons, we have the parable at the end of chapter 18. We are to see ourselves as chief of sinners, with an unpayable and huge debt to the Lord, compared to which all sin against us is of small account. We also need to remember that others' behaviour to each other is not a sin against us. The teaching here is very personal- about how we are to respond to personal sin against us, and here in chapter 19 the specific example of adultery within marriage is raised. This teaching is not really about how we should respond to the sins of others (e.g. divorce for the wrong reasons) which we observe from a distance.

Except for porneia and shall marry another, commits adultery- This is a more general word than *moichao*, the word which refers strictly to 'adultery' and which we find used later in this verse and e.g. in 15:19. Indeed *porneia* appears to be a different category of sexual sin to "adultery" in Heb. 13:4. Remember how this section is an expansion upon the general teaching in chapter 18 about how to respond to personal offences against us. The word in practice, therefore, refers to whatever unfaithfulness constitutes a personal offence against a marital partner. The word could, therefore, just as well refer to the use of pornography. Pushing for a strict interpretation of the word misses the point- that this teaching is in the context of personal offences and forgiving what needs to be forgiven. Any view other than this ends up having to define the word in terms of the insertion of body parts into other body parts; and yet there are a whole range of sexual, mental and emotional positions which may just as well be the *porneia* which a partner must forgive. The Lord's use of *porneia* rather than *moichao* would appear to be a disagreement with Shammai's school, who taught that divorce was possible strictly for *moichao*, adultery. In this we see again that the Lord isn't coming down on either side of the Shammai – Hillel dispute, but rather teaching an altogether higher level.

And he that marries a divorced woman, commits adultery- I noted above that 'sent away' [NEV "divorced"] suggests the woman has committed adultery but remains living with her husband. The "whoever" here may not necessarily be global, as if to say that anyone who marries a divorced woman is an adulterer. Because clearly the Lord recognizes that adultery breaks the marriage bond and He appears to consider that once that is broken, then remarriage is possible- just as the marriage covenant between God and Israel was broken, and He entered into relationship with another wife, the Gentiles, or more exactly, the body of Christ comprised of whoever (Jew or Gentile) who believes in Christ. It needs to be seriously noted that the English word "whoever" found in many translations doesn't translate any original Greek word in the text. The text literally reads 'And the one marrying her who is sent away commits adultery'. That 'one' in view could well be the man with whom she has had the affair. This reading means that contrary to how some wish to read these words based on the mistranslation "Whoever", the Lord is not in fact condemning second marriage. His theme is of forgiveness, and of the spiritual damage done by not forgiving. If a man will not forgive his wife for an isolated act of adultery, then he is likely to lead her towards marrying the man she sinned with and thereby falling deeper into sin. And her husband's lack of forgiveness will have played a part in making her stumble in this way. This is how I would understand the Lord's teaching in Mt. 5:32, that sending away a wife causes her to commit adultery. See on :10 *The man*.

19:10 *The disciples said to him: If such is the case*- See on 19:9 *I say unto you*. But *aitia*, translated "case", more commonly means an accusation, a legal case against someone. The idea is probably that if by marrying a divorcee or by remarrying after divorce a man is really going to be accused of adultery, then it is better not to marry in the sense of remarrying in the cases the Lord has just outlined. On this reading, they would not be fearful of first marriage, marriage as a concept, but rather of the kind of marriage after a marriage breakup which appears to be adulterous in the Lord's eyes. He therefore goes straight on in :11 to assure them that although they have indeed understood Him correctly, He is talking of ideal standards and is prepared to accept lower achievements and to make concessions to human weakness in this area.

Of a man- AV "The man". The presence of the article suggests that a specific man or case is in view- and this would be 'the one' who marries the woman whom he has had an affair with whilst still living with her first husband, whom he 'sends away'.

With his wife, it is better not to marry- They thought that the Lord's policy of no remarriage in this case meant that marriage was "not good". And yet the Genesis record clearly states that it was "not good" for a man to be unmarried. Matthew in his own [over-ruled] word choice seems to be commenting how they were out of step with the spirit of Genesis. However, the Greek reads *sumphero* ['profitable', 'good'] *ou* [not] *gameo* ['marry'], and a better translation would be 'It is good / profitable not to marry'. The 'marrying' they had in mind was surely the case of marrying a married woman with whom one had had an affair, for this is the 'marrying' of the immediate context in :9. The Lord has just used *sumphero*, "good", in 18:6 in saying that those who offend little ones would be "better" cast into the sea with a millstone around their neck. And He had used it twice earlier in saying that it is "profitable" to lose our dearest body parts and enter the Kingdom, rather than offend a little one and be rejected from it (Mt. 5:29,30). Given the connections between this section about marriage and the earlier teaching about offending little ones in chapter 18 (see on :1), these occurrences of the same word can't be incidental. Note too that 1 Cor. 7:35 speaks of the single life as being for our "profit" [s.w.]- and Paul's teaching there about marriage is full of allusion to the Lord's words here in Mt. 19. The disciples could therefore be read as agreeing with their Lord- it is profitable / good not to marry- in the specific case in view, which is if a man has an affair with a married woman and then is faced with the choice of marrying her. The Lord then almost rushes on to say that in this whole area of sexual and moral failure and less than ideal marital situations, there is the possibility of following Him still even if lower level decisions have been taken and sins committed. The "eunuchs" that He now speaks about in :12 are those for whom marriage was not possible- but His point is, that for some this is simply too much to "receive", and the implication is that He encourages people to accept the higher level ("let him receive it") whilst accepting those who don't.

The New Testament is full of examples of concessions to human weakness. 1 Cor. 7 is a chapter full of this kind of thing. You could paraphrase it something like this: 'Basically, consider the option of not marrying. *But and if* you do, it's no sin. Once married, don't separate; *but and if* you do, this is allowable. If you are an elderly widow, it's best not to re-marry; *but and if* you do, OK go ahead'. The Lord Jesus recognized that these sorts of concessions to failures in married life had been made earlier; He spoke of how God through Moses had "for the hardness of your hearts" allowed divorce under the Law, although this was hardly God's original ideal in Eden (Mt. 19:8). The Lord Jesus spoke the word to His listeners "as they were able to hear it" (Mk. 4:33), following the same pattern. The exceptive clause, allowing divorce for adultery, is a prime example of this kind of concession. And yet the Lord speaks in Mark 10 as if there is no allowance for divorce even in this case; whilst in Matthew's record He clearly allows it. The point is, God doesn't advertise His concessions to human weakness (and neither should we). He leads men to attempt life on the highest level. Likewise Num. 6:7 speaks as if a man *couldn't* make himself unclean and end his vow, whereas in fact there was legislation which allowed him to take this lower level. But the Father doesn't want us to be minimalists, serving Him at the lowest level; quite to the contrary.

19:11 *But he said to them: Not all men can receive this saying*- The saying is surely that of :9 which is prefaced by: "I *say* unto you"- the saying that putting away your wife and remarrying is adulterous. To the legalistic mind, this is so hard to accept that- that

a statement that certain behaviour in a given context is adulterous can actually be ignored or broken on the basis that the strength to 'receive' it was not given.

But they to whom it is given- The strength to obey is a gift, just as repentance (Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25; 2 Pet. 3:9 Gk.) and other spiritual fruits are gifts; and in this case, it is not given to all. Again, this is hard for the legalist to accept. It is given to some to receive a saying of Jesus- and not to others. Our greatest obediences, therefore, can never be felt to be purely the triumph of our own strength of will. Even they are gifts of grace. Being 'given' the ability to 'receive' the Lord's word is expressed in terms of being "able" to receive it (:12). No other teacher apart from the Lord would have been so profound as to say that what He was teaching could only be obeyed if we are 'given' the strength to do so. And yet the idea which follows of making ourselves eunuchs for the Kingdom indicates a huge amount of willpower and conscious effort, in order to live up to the potential made possible for us.

19:12 *For there are eunuchs that were born so from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs that were made eunuchs by men*- Perhaps the idea is that there are some people who are put into a position in which they cannot remarry due to the failures of others [cp. "of men"]. The purpose of making men eunuchs was so that they would be faithful servants of a king- and the King in our case is the Lord Jesus.

And there are eunuchs that made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake- By the literal cutting off of a body part. In this we see another connection with chapter 18, where the Lord had taught that it was better to cut off body parts in order not to offend a little one (18:7-9). The teaching not to divorce and remarry, to remain single if need be, was therefore not just a command with no reason behind it. The intention, according to the parallel with 18:7-9, was in order not to make the woman concerned stumble because of your unforgiveness of her. Once we perceive this context of forgiveness and not causing to stumble, we realize that the whole teaching here is not about divorce and remarriage in a global context, but specifically as to what to do in the case that a wife commits adultery as a one-time event, whilst she remains living with her first husband. This was the context of the initial question- is it possible to forgive so unconditionally, as Jesus had just taught, even if your wife commits adultery? And the answer to that is 'yes'. It may be in certain cases of failure that one remains single, making themselves a eunuch, but the decision will be in order not to make another little one stumble and sin. The one caused to stumble may be the first partner, or it could be the woman to whom the husband is subsequently married. This desire not to cause others to stumble, especially the partners involved, is what should be the guiding principle in all our thinking about this vexed topic.

"For the Kingdom of Heaven's sake" is to be paralleled with the command to cut off body parts *in order to the enter the Kingdom* in 18:7-9.

He that is able to receive it, let him receive it- The Greek literally means 'to have space for'. We have here the Lord's recognition of varying spiritual capacities, and His other parables suggest the same in talking of varying amounts of spiritual wealth being given to different servants, with His expectation of differing response. And it is for this reason that our ultimate status in His Kingdom shall vary- one star differs from another in glory, one rules over five cities, another over two. Of course we are all inclined to think that we are one talent material, that this is not given to me to live by. But in this lies the

crucial need for a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus within which we ask Him to reveal to us what are His hopes and expectations of us, the nature of our talents and callings.

19:13 *Then little children were brought to him*- This continues the connection with the beginning of this section in chapter 18, which began with a little child being brought to the Lord and Him making the disciples open their closed circle in order to accept the one whom they considered so far beneath them spiritually. He taught then, and teaches again here, that they were to see in the children symbols of themselves, in all their weakness and misunderstanding. In the same way as here the children are "brought" to Jesus, so we often read in the Gospels of people [including the disciples] being "brought" to Him. Their [and our] salvation depends partly upon others having brought us to Him.

So that he should lay his hands on them and pray- The Lord agrees to the request, blessing little ones for the sake of the efforts of third parties who bring them to Him (as in Mk. 2:5 and so often in the work of saving and curing men). As the children 'received' this blessing, so the Lord urges the disciples to 'receive' the things of the Kingdom- for Mk. 10:15 records the Lord's further comment that "whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no way enter into it". Those children receiving His grace and blessing, all the more gracious because they received it thanks to others bringing them to it, represent each disciple who receives the grace and blessing of the Kingdom.

But the disciples rebuked them- Just as they had turned away the little one in chapter 18, as they sought to send away the hungry crowds, forbad John's disciples and tried to turn away the Syro-Phoenician woman. And they did this despite the Lord's sober warning that turning away little ones is making them stumble, and will lead to eternal rejection from God's Kingdom. The disciples in their preaching, of which the Gospels are transcripts, were stressing how they had so failed to grasp this vital teaching.

19:14 *But Jesus said: Let the little children come to me*- See on 18:12 *Leave*.

And do not prevent them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven- The Lord rebuked the disciples for 'forbidding' John's disciples and the little ones to come to Him (Mk. 9:38); and yet He uses the same word to describe how the lawyers hindered [s.w. 'forbad'] people to enter the Kingdom. There's a very clear parallel here between the disciples and their Jewish teachers who had so influenced their thinking. But they finally got there- for Peter insisted that Gentiles should not be forbidden [s.w. 'hinder'] baptism (Acts 10:47); and he uses the same word again when he says that now, he will not "withstand [s.w. 'hinder'] God in hindering people to come to Him (Acts 11:17). The awfulness of the disciples' attitude is brought out by the use of the word in 1 Thess. 2:16, where Paul says that the way the Jews 'forbad' or hindered the preaching of the Gospel was cause for the wrath of God to come upon them "to the uppermost". And the disciples initially followed their Jewish elders in this kind of behaviour. In passing, there is a sober warning here to those who would likewise 'forbid' baptism to those who sincerely seek it, and who will not allow 'little ones' to the Lord's table.

Mk. 10:15 adds: "Whoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no way enter into it". This is exactly how the whole section began in Matthew

(18:3). The Greek for "receive" is often used about people accepting the Gospel. The implication is that one can receive the Gospel of the Kingdom of God- and yet not enter it, because we didn't receive it as a child. We didn't accept that we are the 'little ones', accepting we know so little, and just marvelling at the special grace being shown us which we accept in awed wonder. The language of 'entering the Kingdom' is used both of our final entry into the Kingdom when Christ returns (Mt. 25:10,21; Jn. 3:5), and of our current entering the Kingdom. The rich man can enter the Kingdom right now if he sheds the load of his wealth (Mt. 19:23,24). The Scribes stopped and hindered those who were entering the Kingdom from entering, locking the door through which the Kingdom could now be entered, all because they chose not to enter themselves (Mt. 23:13; Lk. 11:52). So it's a case of 'Now but not yet'. We do *now* enter into God's rest, and yet we are promised that we *will* enter that rest at Christ's return (Heb. 4:1-11). The Lord had warned that our righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes, or we will likewise not enter the Kingdom (Mt. 5:20); but that righteousness is in accepting the blessing of righteousness as a little child; for without *that* we shall not enter the kingdom. Those who do the will of the Father will enter the Kingdom (Mt. 7:21)- and that will is to be as little children and accept gifts without seeking to justify ourselves or earn them.

Mark and Luke both add that "Whoever shall not *receive* the Kingdom of God as a little child shall not enter therein" (Lk. 18:17). The Greek word for "receive" is different to that used here in :12, where the Lord bids those able to "receive" the highest standard concerning remarriage to do so. But the idea is surely the same. How do we 'receive' His high standards and challenges in personal decision making? By receiving them as those children received His blessings, not arguing back, accepting whatever comes from His hand, not considering that we are in any position to do anything other than receive what He gives us. Note that the children *receiving* His blessings become, therefore, the pattern for our *receiving* His demands upon our personal living, our forgiveness even of adulterous partners, our rejection of legitimate options of remarriage [in some cases] in order to follow His higher standards. This is nothing less than profound.

19:15 *And he laid his hands on them and departed from there*- His blessing was and is mediated without physical contact. The need for physical contact in order to receive blessing was embedded in the religious mentality of the time, and is seen to this day in so many rituals and traditions of the Catholic and Orthodox churches. The sick woman thought to herself that if she could only *touch* Jesus, she would be made whole; but He responded that He made her whole because of *her faith* (9:21,22). He was gently correcting her mistaken understanding of the power of touch. And yet the Lord made a concession to this misunderstanding by indeed touching the children as requested.

19:16 *And someone came to him and said: Teacher*- Mark adds that he came running to Him and kneeled before Him.

What good thing- The man was clearly influenced by the Jewish idea that one supreme good deed could assure the doer of salvation. This was particularly popular amongst the zealots, who considered that suicidal attacks on the Romans could assure them of salvation; the same mentality is to be found in Islamic suicide bombers today. But in His typical manner, the Lord doesn't address the misunderstanding but rather works with it. He ends up telling the man that if he sells all he has and gives to the poor, then he will have "treasure in Heaven" (:21). This, therefore, isn't a global command to every Christian. It was designed especially for this young man who thought that just

one great act of obedience would secure salvation. The Lord went along with this by giving him such an example; but added: "And come and follow Me", thus gently correcting the idea that one great act is enough for salvation.

Shall I do- Rom. 7:19 is Paul's allusion here, where he laments that like the young man, the good that he would do [same Greek words] he finds himself unable to do because of the sin that dwells within him. But instead of walking away from the Lord as this man did, Paul threw himself upon the Lord's grace. This zealous young man was also understood by Peter as representative of us all; for he clearly alludes to him in 1 Pet. 3:10,11: "He who would love life and see good days [cp. the young man wanting to "have eternal life"]… let him… do good" (same Greek words).

That I may have eternal life- Mk. 10:17 notes that he also asked what he must do to "inherit" eternal life, as if he considered eternity a right that he must receive if he does only one great deed. The disciples heard the Lord assuring His people that those who follow Him will "*have* eternal life", enter the Kingdom, enter into life, etc. But having heard all that, Peter asked: "We have left all… what shall we *have*?" (Mt. 19:27). The irony of it all is tragic. They'd just been promised they would "have" eternal life. But that wasn't enough. Their focus was very much on this life; what shall we have *here and now*? They couldn't see very much beyond the present, past the curvature of their earth. Ruth's unnamed relative could have been her redeemer; but when he realized he would have to marry her and have children, and split up his fields into more strips so as to give those children an inheritance along with that of his existing children- he pulled out. He wouldn't 'mar his inheritance'. He saw ahead to his death, to the next generation. His horizon was 20 years at most. But Boaz who didn't think like this established his spiritual inheritance eternally, and is therefore mentioned in the Lord's genealogy. Whilst the short sighted man passed off the page of history anonymously; his name wasn't preserved.

19:17 *And he said to him: Why do you ask me about what is good?*- Or: "Why do you call Me good?". The Greek of the subsequent sentence may not mean that the Lord was implying 'Only God is good- I am not good'. Translators have added a number of words to try to flesh out the meaning of the words. The sense could just as well be 'None is as good as the one God'- and therefore, we should keep *His* commandments. In other words, the Lord is not so much saying that He Himself is not 'good' but rather refocusing the man's direction away from Himself towards the Father. For the man had come running to Him asking what he should do in order to inherit or rightfully have eternal life. And the Lord is refocusing the man upon the Father and the Father's commandments. The Lord may therefore have a rhetorical sense in His question '*why* do you call Me good?'. His sense would have been: 'Why are you so keen to call me "good", setting me on a level with God? Instead, focus on obeying God's commandments and tackle your hardest challenge- to give away your wealth, and then follow Me in the itinerant life towards the cross'. The man's overly high and unrealistic view of Jesus, as if He were God Himself, was really an excuse for his own refusal to face the challenge of living the Christian life. Every false doctrine has a psychological basis, and the idea that Jesus is God and the Trinity are no different. To accept Jesus as less than God, as totally human, is a far deeper challenge to our living than accepting Jesus as being God Himself. If Jesus was human, sharing our own flesh, in which there dwells no good thing (Rom. 7:18), and yet was able to be perfect- this lays down a huge challenge to each of us. It's far less challenging to accept Jesus as God and therefore

good and perfect by nature. This is why I suggest the Lord is probing *why* the man called Him "good"- and redirected him towards the need for keeping the commandments and living the committed life in practice. So we have here a passage of deep significance for discussions about the Trinity. The Lord cites the unity of God as meaning that He alone is ultimately 'good', and challenges the man who wanted to treat Him as God as to whether this was not just an excuse for not doing the hard work of following Him in practice.

There is only One who is good. If you would enter life- This is in response to the man's request that to know what to do that he might *have* eternal life. He saw the eternal life as beginning at judgment day, and thought he could do one great act now in order to assure getting that life then. The Lord tells him that he must "Come follow Me" (:21)- it was a way of life rather than one great act of sacrifice that was required. And we enter into life now, in that we can begin living the kind of life we will eternally live. The man had separated the future Kingdom from present life in a way that we are all tempted to. The future begins now in this respect. The Lord Jesus is the Kingdom of God (Lk. 17:21); *He* is the salvation of God rather than anything physical (Lk. 3:6). The Lord paralleled entering into the Kingdom with entering into "life" (Mt. 19:17 cp. Mt. 19:23; Mt. 18:3 cp. Mt. 18:8). He saw being in the Kingdom as essentially being about a *life* that would be enjoyed.

Keep the commandments- The Lord uses *tereo* for "keep", and the young man replies that he has "kept" the commandments from his youth, using *phulasso* (:20), which more has the sense of 'preserving'. His legalistic mind prides itself on having preserved the statement of faith, as it were; he has not [as the Scribes endlessly feared] added to the commandments but has preserved the correct text. But the Lord uses a word which implies more to obey and live by the commandments. The same mentality is perceivable in the one talent man, who kept his talent in pristine condition- but didn't use it (25:25). One problem with legalistic attitudes to statements of faith is that they can give the impression that the entire duty of man is to preserve them to the letter; when the Christian life is a call to obedience and action, rather than mere intellectual, theoretical preservation of ideas, however correct those ideas may be as theories.

The question of course is why the Lord chose to repeat the last six commandments of the ten commandments. Perhaps He perceived that they had special relevance to this rich young ruler. Harry Whittaker makes an interesting but not totally convincing case that the rich young man here was Barnabas and these commands were very relevant to him as a Levite- see *Studies in the Gospels* chapter 148.

19:18 *He said to him: Which? And Jesus said: You shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness*- Paul's references to the Gospels suggests that he had carefully meditated upon the passages to which he consciously alludes. The fact and way in which he *alludes* rather than quotes verbatim reflects the fact he had thought through and absorbed the teaching of the passages rather than learning them parrot fashion. Here in Mt. 19:18,19 the Lord Jesus combines two quotations from the Law: Ex. 20:12-16 followed by Lev. 19:18. Paul, in a different context, to prove a different point, combines those same two passages, although separating them by a brief comment (Rom. 13:9). This surely indicates that he had meditated upon how his Lord was using the Law, and mastered it so that he could use it himself.

19:19 *Honour your father and mother and, you shall love your neighbour as yourself*- See on :18.

19:20 *The young man said to him: All these things have I observed from my youth*- The record stresses the incongruity and inappropriacy of the young man's self-righteousness: "The *youth* answered, all these have I kept from my *youth* up". He was young- and he says that since a young man he had kept all the commands. Now the Lord doesn't lecture him about self-righteousness, nor does He point out that the young man is way over rating his own spirituality and obedience. Instead, the Master focuses on the positive- as if to say 'You are zealous for perfection? Great! So, sell what you have and give to the poor. Go on, rise up to the challenge!'.

What do I still lack?- Mk. 10:21 provides the Lord's answer: "One thing you *lack* [s.w.]", but the "one thing" was to distribute his wealth and to follow Christ. The two things seem therefore related; it was the wealth which was stopping the following of Christ. The man had come to the Lord asking what great deed he must do to obtain eternal life, and so he was aware of his obedience to the commandments. He obviously felt that obedience to Mosaic law was not going to be the basis of eternal life, and he sensed that there was some great deed he must yet achieve. Therefore "What do I still lack?" shouldn't be read as an arrogant statement that he lacked nothing because he had been legally obedient. Rather is it a genuine question, seeking a concrete, clear and achievable answer.

19:21 *Jesus said to him: If you would be perfect*- The Lord is saying that if the man wants to serve Him on the highest level, then he should sell all and give to the poor. And the man went away from Christ because of that. Because in his pride, he considered he was serving already on the highest level. This introduction of the idea of different levels of service is seamlessly in context with the teaching about 'receiving' the Lord's high standards concerning divorce and remarriage; but the Lord had recognized that not all were able to reach them. And this incident happens in demonstration of this principle. The man could have humbled himself as a little child, and admitted he couldn't rise to that standard of selling all- and yet still begged to be allowed a place as a Christ follower. And surely the Lord would have accepted him, because there is no evidence that literally selling all we have is a global requirement for men to enter the Kingdom. Zacchaeus only have *half* of his goods away (Lk. 19:8). This is, therefore, encouragement for all who feel they can't rise up to the highest standards. There is still a place for them, for all of us- for we all fail to attain them. Only our pride will turn us away because of their existence and our failure to attain them. The incident also functions as a foil for those who think they are in a position to condemn those who don't rise up to the highest level regarding divorce and remarriage- have they, with their perfect marriages, sold all they have and given to the poor? If not, then allow others likewise to live on a lower level in other areas of human life. See on :26 *With God all things are possible.*

Go sell your possessions- We note that the Lord treated each person differently. Jesus approved Zacchaeus' distribution of only half of his possessions- whilst demanding that the rich young man give away literally all. And He never seems to have demanded that those of His followers who owned houses should sell them. See on :16 *What good thing.* The same principle is seen in His preceding teaching about divorce and remarriage- His ideal standard is not 'given' to everyone, just as it is not a requirement of everyone that they sell and they have and give to the poor. The Lord taught that we receive the Lord's goods [s.w. "what you have"] on conversion to Him (25:14). We

resign all, but receive all. By giving away our earthly wealth, we directly receive wealth in Heaven. Lk. 12:15,33,44 make a sustained play on this Greek word: "A man's life doesn't consist in the abundance of the *things which he possesses* [s.w.]... sell *what you have* [s.w.] and give alms... [the Lord] will make [such a man] ruler over all *that he has* [s.w.]". Whilst the specific command to the young man to sell all he had and give it to the poor was not in one sense universal, i.e. not a command to every believer, yet the spirit of it (according to Luke 12) is indeed to be followed by us all. We must at least "forsake ['to bid farewell to'] all that [we] have [s.w.]" (Lk. 14:33). The early believers did not 'say' that anything they possessed [s.w.] was their own (Acts 4:32)- Luke surely intends us to connect this with his earlier record of how the Lord had taught that our attitude, at very least, must be that we do not really 'own' those things which we apparently 'have'.

Luke adds: "One thing you lack...". The Lord was quoting from the LXX of Ps. 23:1. Because the Lord [Jesus] is our shepherd, "not one thing is lacking to me". The selling and sharing of his wealth is paralleled by the Lord with following Him. The one thing that was lacking was to shed his wealth *and* follow Christ. To follow Christ, to have Him as our shepherd, is therefore no merely intellectual affair, nor is it a question of legalistic obedience to a set of principles we inherited from our youth. It requires the most painful sacrifices.

And give to the poor- Lk. 18:22 uses the word "distribute". The Lord laboured the point: 'Give, yes go out and distribute the proceeds, to the poor'. Luke again uses the word in describing how the early believers did indeed sell their possessions and 'distribute' to the poor within the ecclesia (Acts 4:35).

And you shall have treasure in heaven, and come follow me- Alluded to in James 1:12.

19:22 *But when the young man heard that saying, he went away*- When he understood the *logos*, the essential intention of the Lord's teaching.

Sorrowful- Mk. 10:22 describes him as "sad", literally the Greek means that he became overcast, as the sky clouding over. His joy, therefore, was because he had wrongly assumed that he could do some simple dramatic act well within his comfort zone, and thus attain an assurance of salvation. But his face clouded over when he realized that he was being called outside of his comfort zone. This is an exact picture of the disillusion which clouds so many once they perceive that the call of Christ is not to a mere social club or to surface level religion.

"He went away" is significant because the entire section starting from chapter 18:1 is purposefully framed so that the incidents connect with each other. The Lord had welcomed the little children to come to Him, and rebuked the disciples for forbidding them. This young man- also a 'little one'- went away from the Lord. The implication is that the little children had more spirituality and devotion to Christ than this man. The exhortation to become like little children therefore meant that whatever stops us coming to Him must be jettisoned- and for this 'young one', it was his wealth.

For he was one that had great possessions- Again Luke's record of the early church alludes here, speaking of how possessions were sold and the money distributed to the poorer believers (Acts 2:45; 5:1 s.w.).

19:23 *And Jesus said to his disciples: Truly I say to you: It is hard for a rich man*- The sense is not simply that it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom, but that he shall enter with difficulty. The Lord goes on to say that such shall enter the Kingdom only by God's grace and possibility of saving those who do not rise up to the higher levels that He bids us to (:26). In what, then, is the hardness or difficulty- if God is willing to accept our living on lower levels? The difficulty is in not walking away from Christ as the young man did, because of our pride; what is hard is to be like a child, the model throughout this entire discourse, and simply accept God's grace in Christ.

To enter into the Kingdom of heaven- The man walked away, whereas if he had cast himself upon the Lord's grace, or better still, sold what he had and given to the poor, then he could have right then begun to enter into the Kingdom. We begin entering the Kingdom right now; we are, according to another teaching, walking on the road to the judgment, and must get right with our brother who walks on the way there with us. The parable of the camel (i.e. the rich would-be believer) being unloaded of its wealth before it enters the city (Mt.19:23,24) represents a rich man entering the Kingdom (the city = the Kingdom, as in Rev.22:14; 21:2; Heb.13:14; 11:16; a city can also represent believers). If he sheds his riches now, it follows he is then able in some sense to enter the Kingdom now. This mini parable is in the context of Mt.19:21: "Sell that thou hast... and thou shalt have (now) treasures in (the Kingdom of) Heaven". This is the same idea as in Mt.18:4: "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child (which necessitates parting with riches etc.), the same is (now) greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven". In these few words is our highest challenge.

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

19:24- See on 7:13.

And again I say unto you- Note the double repetition of this powerful point- that wealth makes entry into the Kingdom difficult.

It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God- I go with the old explanation that this is an allusion to a loaded camel needing to be unloaded of its 'wealth' so that it could squeeze through the pedestrian gate- a call to become human, to realize we are naked before God, and our wealth adds nothing to us. Mark's record uses a term for "the eye of a needle" which the Septuagint always uses for "the holes of the rocks" (e.g. Jud. 6:2; 15:8,11; Jer. 13:4; 16:16), from whence we see the idea of a hole in the rocky city walls.

In the beauty and depth of His simplicity, the Lord comprehended all this in some of the most powerful sentences of all time: *It is very hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom.* He *must* shed his riches, like the camel *had* to unload to pass through the needle gate (Mt. 19:24). This is such a powerful lesson. And it's so simple. It doesn't need any great expositional gymnastics to understand it. Like me, you can probably remember a few things very vividly from your very early childhood. I remember my

dear dad showing me this as a very young child, with a toy camel and a gate drawn on a piece of paper. And I saw the point, at four, five, maybe six. It is *so clear*. But what of our bank balances now, now we're old and brave? It's easier for a camel, the Lord said. Why? Surely because someone else unloads the camel, he (or she) has no say in it. But in the story, surely we must be the camel who unloads himself, who shakes it all off his humps, as an act of the will. And as we've seen, the spirit of all this applies to every one of us, including those without bank accounts.

19:25 *And when the disciples heard it, they were surprised, saying*- A strong term. They were really so shocked that wealth made it hard to enter the Kingdom, implying they were strongly persuaded that wealth was a gift from God and a sign of His approval of a man. This of course was quite foreign to the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount and other teaching of the Lord, and Matthew uses this strong term to highlight how far they had been from understanding His most basic teachings.

Who then can be saved?- "Can" translates the same word the Lord uses in the next verse to say that with God, even the saving of the wealthy who don't quit their wealth is "possible"- on the basis, therefore, of His willingness to accept a lower standard of achievment to that He ideally requires. And this is in the context of His offering a lower standard to unconditional forgiveness in chapter 18 (you can not do this if your brother sins against you, and instead drag him through the synagogue disciplinary process), and His demand for forgiveness of adultery (although if you fail in this you can take the lower level and divorce your partner- if it is not 'given' to you to accept that standard).

19:26 *And Jesus looking upon them said to them: With men this is impossible, but*- The Lord maintained eye-contact with His listeners: Mt. 19:26; Mk. 3:5,34; 5:32; 8:33; 10:21, 23,27; Lk. 6:10; 20:17; 22:61; Jn. 1:42. These are all separate occurrences; the fact is really being emphasized. This paying appropriate attention with eye contact is also a good strategy for matching the silences that occur from time to time in any serious conversation. Most of us can tell when another is thinking by observing the eyes, and when they are not their eyes will tell you. The way the Lord Jesus had of lifting up His eyes was something which evidently struck the Gospel writers (Lk. 6:20; Jn. 6:5; 11:41; 17:1 cp. the emphasis upon the eyes of the risen Lord in Rev. 1:14; 2:18; 5:6; 19:12).

With God- The status of *para* God is often applied to the Lord Jesus (Lk. 2:52; Jn. 6:46; 8:40; 16:27; Acts 2:33). The suggestion could be that because of the status of the Lord Jesus with the Father, such gracious salvation is possible which would be impossible if men simply had to have the steel will to obey the Father's ideal principles.

All things are possible- Lifted from the Septuagint of the word to Sarah about the birth of Isaac (Gen. 18:14). Those Old Testament heroes were not merely stained glass figures- our own belief in salvation regardless of wealth is as dramatic as the belief of an old woman that she could have a child. The context here, however, is talking of how those who choose a lower level- in this case, *not* selling their wealth and giving to the poor- can still be saved by God's gracious possibility. This harmonizes with the whole theme of :12, that to some is 'given' the possibility of living on the idea level regarding divorce and remarriage, but if that cannot be attained to, then God will still accept us. See on :21 *If you will be perfect* and :25 *Can be saved*.

There are at least two instances in the Gospels where the Lord Jesus is quarrying his language from the book of Job, and shows a certain identification of himself with Job. In Mt. 19:23-26 the Lord explains the irrelevance of riches to the spiritual good of entering the Kingdom, saying that "with God all things are possible" - without money. This is almost quoting Job 42:2, where Job comes to the conclusion that all human

strength is meaningless: "I know that Thou canst do everything". It may be that Jesus is even implying that through the tribulation of his life he had come to the same conclusion as Job. See too 5:27-30.

19:27 *Then asked Peter, saying: We have left all*- The family based structure of the first century is hard to fully empathize with from our distance. Family was all. Peter comments that the disciples had "left our own homes" (Lk. 18:28 RVmg.), and the parallel Mt. 19:27 says "left *all*". Your home was your all. To have to leave it for the sake of Christ was the most fundamental thing you could do. Hence the real meaning in the first century of the Lord's response that such converts would receive families in this life, i.e. in their relationships in the ecclesia. And yet the radical call of Christ is no less demanding and intrusive as men and women meet it today, the only difference being that the starkness of the choices is less pronounced today- but just as essentially real.

I have repeatedly mentioned that the material in chapter 19 is strongly related to that in chapter 18. The Greek here for "left / forsook all" is identical to that in 18:32: "I *forgave* you *all*". Peter had balked at the idea of 'forgiving all'. It is easier to 'forsake' [s.w. 'forgive'] all material things than to *forgive* all. This explains why the incident of the rich young man follows the teaching about the need to forgive all. He would not forsake all, just as some would not forgive all. Peter claims to have forsaken all, and yet it's apparent that he struggled with the idea of *forgiving* all, thinking that seven times / day was more than generous enough of him. Likewise one wonders whether Peter had really forsaken all materially- he still had a wife, and apparently his fishing boats back in Galilee, to which he returned after the Lord's resurrection.

And followed You- Just as Peter's claim to have "left all" was perhaps questionable, likewise Peter seems to have under-estimated what 'following Christ' really meant- for the idea of carrying the cross is strongly connected with following Christ (10:38; 16:24). And Peter failed to carry that cross to the end, for he denied the Lord when the going got tough.

What then shall we receive as a reward?- The emphasis is on the word "we". The Lord had taught that the rich needed to give up their wealth if they were to be saved- but God's grace was enough to make even their salvation possible if they didn't rise up to that higher level. Peter considered that he and the disciples *had* given up what wealth they had. And the Lord agrees with Peter- indeed, there would be great blessings for them in the future Kingdom.

Peter had the impression that by forsaking all and following the Lord, he would somehow benefit. He still had to learn that the carrying of the cross is not to be motivated by any desire for personal benefit, spiritual or otherwise. We live in a world in which religion, like everything else, is seen as a means toward some personal benefit. If we love the Lord, we will follow Him, wherever the life in Him leads us; sheerly for love of Him, and recognition that His way is the way to glorifying the Father. Peter had left all, but expected something back. For the excellency of fellowshipping the sufferings of the future Saviour, Moses gave up all the riches of Egypt. The Lord responded by saying that nobody who had left all *for His Name's sake* would go unrewarded (Mt. 19:29). The riches, the surpassing excellence of Christ, all the things tied up in His Name, these were not appreciated at that time by Peter. They are enough, purely of themselves, to make a man count all things as dung. Later, he understood this. He told the lame man that the silver and gold which he had was the salvation possible in the Name of Jesus (Acts 3:6). Peter rejoiced that he was counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name, and he preached in that Name. There is quite some emphasis on this: Acts 2:21,28; 3:6,16; 4:10,12,30; 5:41. Now he had learnt his mistake, or rather he

realized the poverty of his understanding of the Lord. He now found the excellency of the Lord's Name an imperative of itself to witness to it. Likewise "for his name's sake they went forth" in obedience to the great preaching commission (3 Jn. 7; Rev. 2:3).

19:28 *And Jesus said to them: Truly I say to you: You who have followed me*- This is in response to Peter's claim that they had "left all and followed You" (:27). The Lord doesn't include Peter's claim that they had "left all", but rather focuses upon the 'following Me'. This may well have been because He knew that Peter had not in fact "left all" to the degree that Peter thought he had (see on :27). They hadn't then grasped the idea of what really following involved; they hadn't in one way or another laid down their lives with Christ. And then there is the problem of "twelve". Judas didn't follow to the end, and will not sit upon a throne in the Kingdom. The Lord surely means, therefore: "You who will have followed me…". Or is that He spoke of "the twelve" as a title for the group of disciples, and what He meant was that even at that early stage He counted their desire to follow Him to the cross as if they had done it? We must see our failing, following brethren likewise. He counted His sheep as following Him (Jn. 10:27) even then, although he knew they were not then strong enough to follow Him to the end (Jn. 13:36). The risen Lord especially wanted the women to tell Peter that He was 'going before him' to Galilee (Mk. 16:7)- with the implication that even in his weakness and dejection, He wanted Peter to still try to follow Him and re-live the cross in his life.

The Lord was so generous spirited towards His disciples. He knew that Peter would not follow Him as planned, to the cross- indeed, none of them would (Jn. 13:36,37), but He speaks to them as if they would be successful ultimately in following Him.

In the regeneration- The reference is to the last day, when the Kingdom of God as it was in the form of Israel will be regenerated / restored. But the only other occurrence of the word is in speaking of baptism as "the washing of regeneration" (Tit. 3:5). The Kingdom experience and process begins now- a thought which although common in the NT probably fails to grip us as it should. For is our own depressed and passive spiritual experience today really the Kingdom life as it could be? The Greek word literally means 'the re-naturing'. The final and ultimate change of nature will be at the last day, but the essence of such regeneration begins now.

When the Son of Man- As so often, the term is here associated with the glory and judgment reigning of Jesus. This is because His glorification is on the basis of His having been so human.

Shall sit on the throne of his glory, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones- The Lord foresaw the twelve *who at the time included Judas* sitting in glory upon twelve thrones. The question therefore arises as to whether or not the Lord knew Judas would betray Him, and if He did [as He says He did], then why did He apparently trust Him? Samson trusted Delilah and yet knew on another level she would betray him. This is just a common psychological condition. It helps explain why the Lord Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas would betray him (Jn. 6:64), and yet how He could really trust in Judas as his own familiar friend, confide in him (Ps. 41:9), tell him that he would sit with the other eleven on thrones in the Kingdom (Mt. 19:28). This was ever a serious contradiction for me, until considering the Samson : Delilah relationship in depth. A man can know something about someone on one level, but act and feel towards them in a quite different way than this knowledge requires. David likewise must have known Absalom's deceit; but he chose not to see it, for love's sake. "They also that seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things [just as Absalom did in the gate]...but I, as a deaf man, heard not" (Ps. 38:12,13). Paul surely knew how Corinth despised him, how little they knew and believed, and as he himself

said, the more he loved them, the less they loved him. And yet in all honesty he could say: "As ye abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence and in your love to us" (2 Cor. 8:7). Yet the more abundantly he loved them, the less they loved him- not the more abundantly. Yet he saw them as loving him abundantly. One also gets the sense that the Gibeonites' deception was somehow guessed by the elders of Israel, but against their better judgment they disregarded the tell-tale signs (Josh. 9:7). Or Amasa, taking no heed to the sword in Joab's hand- against his better judgment, surely (2 Sam. 20:10). This is a feature of human nature; and for me so far, the contradictions evident in the Jesus : Judas relationship and the Samson : Delilah relationship are only explicable for me by realizing this. The whole thing is an eloquent essay in the Lord's humanity and the depth of His 'in-loveness' with Judas the traitor. And this Lord is our Lord, the same yesterday and today. Our self-knowledge will be deepened by realizing that we too have this spiritual schizophrenia: it's not that we are spiritual one day and unspiritual the next. We are both flesh and spirit at the very same moment. Appreciation of this will help us cope with the more evident failures of our brethren. It doesn't necessarily mean that they must be written off as totally unspiritual and insincere because of acts and attitudes of evident unspirituality. The Spirit is still there, at the very same moment. Think of how Samson slept with a whore until midnight, and then in faith rose up and was granted the Spirit to perform a great act of Christ-like, cross-like victory over the enemies of God's people. Let's note that when the Lord repeats this teaching at the last supper, He mentions only that the faithful will "sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Lk. 22:30). Surely He realized that 'the twelve' were not now all faithful.

Lk. 22:30 speaks of the disciples sitting eating and drinking at the Lord's table, judging the twelve tribes. The suggestion is that the seats at His table somehow turn into thrones of judgment. In this case the idea may be that being in fellowship with the King means that we are co-rulers with Him; His table of fellowship becomes the basis of judgment for the Israel who refused Him and His disciples. Or in another sense, the seats at His table merge into seats of glory and of judgment. If we are at His table now, we shall be rulers in His Kingdom.

Judging the twelve tribes of Israel- There are many problems in trying to work out the chronology of events at the judgment seat. I suggest they are resolved by understanding that there will be a collapsing of time [and space too, if Einstein's relativity theory is correct] at the day of judgment. This would explain difficulties such as how we and the disciples can come before the judgment throne of glory when we and they are seated there (Mt. 19:28 cp. 25:31); and how the judgment of the world seems (from some Scriptures) to be simultaneous with the judgment of the household.

The Lord has repeatedly spoken in terms of establishing a new Israel, and so He may have in mind here the tribes of spiritual Israel. In Revelation, the disciples form the foundation stones of the new Jerusalem; the entire edifice of the Christian church was built upon men who were so weak in faith, understanding and perception. But *krino* ["judging"] can just as well mean 'condemning'. In this case the Lord's picture would be of the despised disciples playing a part in the judgment and condemnation of natural Israel who had rejected Christ.

19:29 *And everyone that has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold and shall inherit eternal life*- This list of things to be forsaken recalls the language of the Levites forsaking these things in order to serve God (Ex. 32:26-29; Dt. 33:8-10). The secular disciples again are encouraged to see themselves as the Levites of the new Israel the

Lord was creating. Mt. 19:27-30 has a series of extended allusions to the fact that we are now the priesthood. The Lord speaks of how His followers will each have left mother, brother etc. to serve Him, referring to how Moses blessed Levi for forsaking these very things so as to God's service (Dt. 33:9). But He also spoke of how they would forsake houses and lands for His sake and the Gospel's- a reference to the way the Levites resigned their right to physical inheritance in the land for the sake of their relationship with God and the work they were called to. In the same way as Moses predicted that the Levites would be materially blessed even now as a result of their dedication (Dt. 33:11), so the Lord made the same promise. And there is no Christian who has heart and soul committed themselves to the Gospel's work, either in the world or amongst their brethren, who has not lived to see the truth of this definition of priesthood.

Rom. 15:16 speaks of the preacher as offering up his converts upon the altar [note how Acts 11:7 uses the same image of 'offering up' sacrifices to describe preaching]. And this connects with how Paul had earlier spoken in Rom. 12:1 of offering ourselves as living sacrifices in dedication. The aim of the preacher, therefore, is to provoke a sacrificial life in his or her converts, after the pattern of the Master whom they learn of. When we read of 'ministering' in the NT, we are to generally perceive an allusion to the spirit of priesthood; for it was the OT priests who were understood as "ministers". Paul speaks of preaching God's word, both in the world and to brethren and sisters, as ministering (Col. 1:23,25; 1 Cor. 9:13). He saw himself as a minister of the Gospel "that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable" (Rom. 15:16). This is priestly language. Paul saw his efforts for others as preparing a sacrifice. He says that we are *all* ministers (cp. priests) of God, stewards of the true Gospel, and should act appropriately (1 Cor. 4:1). Others gave money to poorer brethren, and again this is described as ministering, priest-ing (Rom. 15:27; Heb. 6:10). Reminding brethren of basic doctrines they already know is another kind of ministering (1 Tim. 4:16). Indeed, Peter says that we *each* have something to minister to each other, there is some way in which we can each serve each other (1 Pet. 4:10,11). We must bear one another's burden, as the priesthood bore the burden of Israel's iniquity (Num. 18:1,23). This is the meaning of priesthood. Paul speaks of his preaching work as offering up the Gentiles, as if he is a priest (Rom. 15:16)- and in the same figure, Peter is encouraged to preach to Gentiles by killing and eating animals in a peace offering (Acts 11:7). The command that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel is referring back to how the priests had no material inheritance but lived off the sacrifices (Num. 18:11). And for us, the honour and wonder of preaching Christ should mean that we keep a loose hold on the material things of this life. And as we are *all*priests, we are all preachers.

It is perhaps significant, given the theme of 'following' in the records of Peter, that he became well known for 'leading about' his wife (1 Cor. 9:5), as if she followed him everywhere. Peter translated the principles of following Christ into domestic life. There was a time when he may well have 'forsaken' his wife in order to follow Christ (Mt. 19:27-29). But further down that path of following he came to see that as he was to follow his Lord to the end, so he was to be as the self-crucifying Christ to her, and lead her in her following of him that she might follow Christ.

"For My Name's sake" is parallel with "The kingdom of God's sake" (Lk. 18:29) is paralleled with the sake of the Name of Christ by the account here in Mt. 19:29. The things of the Name and the things of the Kingdom were therefore not two different things, rather were they different ways of referring to the same realities.

The Lord's prophecy that the believer receives fathers, mothers, houses, lands etc. only has its fulfillment insofar as the ecclesia is willing to share these things and relationships with its members. But the condition of the fulfillment was not explicitly stated. We forsake all human relationships to follow the Lord Jesus (Mt. 19:27-29). And He promises to compensate for this even in this life. But it depends to what extent we are willing to accept and perceive it. Through meaningful fellowship with our brethren we will find those relationships which we have given up compensated for, even if we aren't physically close to our brethren. In reference to Israel's deliverance from Egypt we read: "God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains" (Ps. 68:6). To be set in a new family is paralleled with being brought out from slavery. Part of the process of our redemption is that we are set in a new ecclesial family. This must be a reference to how Israel were brought out on Passover night, where the families and lonely ones had to join together into households big enough to kill a lamb for. The implication of Ps. 68 could be that it was in these family groups that they travelled through the wilderness. The N.C.V. reads: "God is in his holy Temple. He is a father to orphans, and he defends the widows. God gives the lonely a home. He leads prisoners out with joy...". The very house / family of God becomes the house / family of the lonely. Hence the ecclesia *is* the house of God (1 Cor. 3:16). We find true family in the new family of God. By baptism we are "added together" with those others who are likewise saved in Christ (Acts 2:47 RVmg.). We will live together eternally with the other members of this new body and community which we enter. The links between us within that new family are even stronger than those with our natural family; and hence any division amongst the family of God is the greatest tragedy. What this means in practice is that we must fellowship each other. Even if we are isolated from other believers, one can always write letters, make phone calls, invite others to visit them, attempt to meet others…

"Inherit eternal life" are the very words of the rich young man (Mk. 10:17). The answer to that man's question was that we have to lose now, if we are to win eternally; we must forsake material things if we are to inherit the life eternal. As he was only a young man, it's likely that his wealth had been inherited. He was being told that the greatest inheritance was of life eternal, but this didn't come easily nor by good luck or circumstance, but in response to a lifetime of following Jesus. The things which were to be forsaken include [putting the records in Mark and Luke together with Matthew]: family, brothers, sisters, father, mother, lands, houses etc. These were all the things which the young man had received by inheritance, and to forsake association with his family, on behalf of whom he had received his wealth, would've been crazy and social suicide. It was as crazy as trashing a winning lottery ticket and walking away the same you were before you bought it. But this is the radical calling of those who must forsake materialism in order to inherit eternity. Therefore all seeking for material advantage in this life is surely inappropriate if in fact we are to forsake it even if it comes to us without our seeking it.

19:30 *But many shall be last that are first, and first that are last*- The context is of the Lord having taught that a rich man *must* shed his wealth in order to enter the Kingdom, *but* God's grace is such that He is prepared to save the rich who*don't* do that. With God this is "possible". Chapters 18 and 19 have demonstrated the idea of living on different levels. The Lord had told the rich young man that if he "would be perfect", then he should sell all he had and give it to the poor. In this amazing comment at the conclusion of the section, we learn that in fact "many" who are first in this life *and choose to remain first* shall still be saved, although they will be "last" in the Kingdom. The same word for "last" is used in the parable which speaks of believers having to take

the “last” or ‘lowest’ place around the Lord’s table (Lk. 14:9,10). There are and will be gradations between the Lord’s people, both now and eternally. Those who are “first” in this brief life, retaining their wealth when they should not, shall be saved by grace but will be the least in the Kingdom. Whereas those who are the least in this life, or make themselves the least, will become the first in God’s Kingdom.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 20

20:1 *For*- The context is the end of chapter 19, about the first now being last in the eternal order of things to be established at Christ’s return. The parable is therefore about the situation amongst believers in Christ. At 19:1 I presented a chiasmus plan, showing that this parable is to be read in the context of chapters 18 and 19 with their theme of the need to accept and not reject our brethren. That theme is to be found at the very end of the parable- insofar as the harder workers are inclined to reject their brethren who have not worked so long nor so hard. Many of the parables contain their essential point right at the end, and this parable does likewise. The end stress is upon the need for the harder working brethren to accept their weaker brethren, standing as they all do before the judgment presence of the Lord Jesus. The teaching that “the last shall be first” concluded chapter 19 and it concludes this parable (20:16). I suggested under 19:30 that the point of this is that the first in a secular sense *within the community of believers*will be saved only by grace and will be “the last” in the Kingdom. The phrase therefore talks of salvation by grace, and this is the theme of this parable too.

The context of the parable is Peter's comment: "What shall we have therefore?", implying that the disciples ought to get a far greater reward than the spiritually immature rich people who refused to part with their wealth but could be saved anyway by the Lord's grace. The hard workers are thereby to be equated with the disciples and all who consider themselves spiritually superior to others- they “expected that they should have received more” (20:10 NIV), just as Peter likewise expected more. The parable suggests the Lord wanted to specifically reward the lazy and weaker workers. For they are called first to receive their penny- when surely appropriacy would demand that the harder workers were first in line. And yet the parable had wider relevance to the situation in the first century- and today. The harder workers somehow felt unhappy with the *basis* of contract upon which the lazier workers had been taken on and 'saved' by being given the same penny as they. But the basis of salvation was the same- for the zealous and for the lazy, for Jew and Gentile. And that basis was grace. The weaker workers showed perhaps more faith in the Master's offer- because it would've seemed unreal that they would be given the same pay as the stronger, longer workers. But they believed it- which is why they went to do their little work.

The impression we are left with is that the Lord was and is utterly desperate for workers- He is willing to take on any "little ones" prepared to believe His amazing offer. And the same impression is given in the parable of the street people being urged in to the feast. All they had to do was say yes- there was an urgency to fill the house. And surely we in these last days must perceive ourselves as the 11th hour workers, then ones taken on at the very last minute. That alone adequately explains the mixed bag which comprises the body of Christ in our times, and the weak state of that body.

The kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house- AV "A man". The man, the head of the house, is clearly the Lord Jesus. And the Kingdom of God is like… Him.

The grace of the Lord Jesus, His manner of being and judging amongst men, is the essence of the Kingdom both now and evermore.

Perhaps we are to connect this parable to the other parable about a *householder* who had a *vineyard* (21:33- the same Greek words are used). Putting the two parables together, God worked so hard to prepare the vineyard so that maximum spiritual fruit would be brought forth. But Israel rejected His prophets and murdered His Son- even though God was confident they would "reverence My Son", actually they killed Him. The wonderful vineyard was therefore given out to the Gentiles, or at least, to others, whom the owner was likewise confident would tend it and bring forth fruit for Him. But this parable indicates that actually He had a major problem getting them to come work in it- meaning that much potential fruit was lost. And the parable of 21:28 says that the vineyard owner's very own sons were not much help either- one refused to go, and only later went to the work; the other said he would go and work, but never did. God's hopefulness for human response, and the tragedy of our paucity of response, is thus brought out yet stronger. It may be objected that the parables appear to be chronologically out of sequence if they are indeed intended to be read together. My response would be that we have in the Gospels a highly abbreviated record of the Lord's teaching, and likely He repeated His teachings and parables many times over. Perhaps the parable of the vineyard owner was told in full [both parables put together] several times, but we have just parts of the parable recorded on two separate occasions.

Who went out- This is emphasized four times (also in :3,5,6). The Greek word is often used about the Lord Jesus 'going out' to men with the Gospel; it is the same word in Jn. 8:42 "I *proceeded forth*… from God" and Jn. 13:3 "He was *come from* ['went out from'] God". Rather than suggesting any personal pre-existence, this is simply a reference to the Lord *during His ministry* likewise 'going forth' to men and women with the Gospel, seeking to engage men in the Father's service. The call of the Gospel, therefore, is not merely to believe the Gospel- it is a call to action, to harvest fruit, to work in the vineyard.

Early in the morning- The very same Greek phrase is used about how the Lord "went out early in the morning" to pray about the calling of the disciples (Mk. 1:35). The language is also used about the earliest disciples 'going out' from the tomb of the risen Lord, also "early in the morning", to bring word to others. The message was ultimately not just passing on information, but an invitation to actually work.

The Lord Himself was noted for rising up early and praying (Mk. 1:35). The observant Jew prayed three times / day, the first and last prayers being merely the recital of the *shema*. Yet Jesus spent hours in those morning and evening prayers (Mk. 1:35; 6:46). Is. 50:4 prophesies of the Lord Jesus that morning by morning, God awoke His ear "to learn as a disciple". That last phrase is surely to signal the intended similarities between the Lord's path of growth, and that of all disciples. The next two verses go on to predict that because of this morning-by-morning teaching process, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting" (Is. 50:5,6). Thus we come to the cross, the life of cross carrying, as the end result of our morning reflections. It was from His own experience that the Lord could bid us take up our cross- *His* cross- each morning.

Have you ever had to make yourself wake up before dawn, without an alarm clock? You can only do it by having a deep internal, subconscious awareness that you must get up early. You don't sleep well, you keep waking up and wondering if it's time to get up. So to make oneself rise up early was easily understood as a figure expressing great mental effort. And God did this *every day* for centuries... This figure of rising up early is surely the basis for the Lord's parable in Mt. 20:1- where God is likened to a man

going out early in the morning to hire labourers. It is through the ministry of His word that God does this- each morning that word calls us to labour for Him in His vineyard. Israel didn't notice the huge effort God puts into His word- that every day He rose early and taught them. We can also misunderstand Biblical inspiration to mean that God effortlessly inspired "the original autographs" long ago, and moved on; but actually the whole process is an ongoing and incredible outgiving of God's energy in appealing to us. And... in our mismanaged, weakly disciplined lives, is it so that we don't even make time to read His word daily? If Job could value God's word *more* than His regular daily food... then for us too, regular contact with His word should be part of the atmosphere of life within which we live.

To hire- Rom. 4:4 uses the same word in stressing that salvation is not our "hire" from God, it is the gift of grace. One wonders if Paul is alluding to the parable- to make the point that salvation is a gift, and yet in another sense we each receive a response for our labour. This is in that our labours now will receive eternal recognition in the form in which we will be throughout eternity.

Labourers for his vineyard- Literally, 'toilers'. There can be no mistaking the Lord's impression here- response to His invitation is not merely intellectual assent to the truth of Bible teachings, nor is it about painless involvement in the work of His church when, how and how far convenient to us. It's an invitation to toil and really work in His enterprise. The Lord had earlier lamented that the harvest was more plenteous than the few labourers (Mt. 9:37,38). He had asked the disciples to pray for more labourers- and the added detail of this parable is that those labourers were still not enough, and were weak [nobody had wished to hire them] and didn't in the end do much work. In this we see how the total conversion of others is limited by the preachers; for the Lord surely implies that there are more potential converts than there are preachers to bring them in. This passage paves the way for the giving of the great commission to us all later in Matthew- to work in the vineyard in harvest time, gathering the plentiful harvest. The "Go…" of :4 fulfils the same function. Elsewhere the Lord likens labourers to the preachers. He clearly saw a primary reason for our calling as to preach and help others to the harvest of the Kingdom. He called us in different ways to labour for and with Him in this work; not to merely passively hold various doctrinal truths in intellectual purity, or to dumbly attend church meetings of whatever sort.

20:2 *And when he had agreed with the labourers*- The Greek carries the idea of entering into a contract- the new covenant. We enter covenant relationship with the Father and Son when we are baptized. Again I must labour the point- that this agreement, this entry into Christ and His vineyard, is not merely a sign that we like the social club or that we assent to the teachings of a particular Christian denomination. It is a personal commitment between the individual and their Lord, to work for Him.

There is the suggestion in the parable of the labourers that the Lord makes some big concessions to human weakness. The Spirit in Paul points the contrast between realizing that salvation is by pure grace, and the wrong perception of salvation as a wage paid for works (e.g. Rom. 6). Indeed, the whole spirit of the Bible is that we should be willing to serve for nothing. The parable of the slave preparing his Master's meal after working hard for him a whole day makes this point. And yet in the parable of the labourers, Christ *agrees* with the labourers for a penny (note his humility, cp. God reasoning with men to accept His forgiveness, Is. 1:18); He asks them to go to work, and then He will give them the wages (cp. salvation). He even describes their salvation as "that which is right", so much did He present the Gospel to them from the selfish level they were then on. The Lord was not ignorant of the line of argument Paul would later present regarding salvation by pure grace. Surely the parable is teaching

that the Lord recognizes that in our spiritual immaturity at the time of our conversion, we do need the Kingdom as a carrot, as a motivator. He treats us on this low level initially, hoping we will rise up the higher level of grace. It is possible to witness this spiritual growth in converts, and also in the community of true believers over time; initially we are motivated by the reward of the political Kingdom, but as spiritual perception increases, we grasp Paul's gospel of pure grace. The concept of working and being rewarded decreases, and the recognition of salvation by grace increases, with the resultant zeal for a truer spirituality.

For a denarius a day- The implication is that the workers were intended to work for several days. But at the end of the first day comes the scene which is clearly intended to be reminiscent of the last judgment. The idea may be that the last day comes sooner than expected and is hastened by the Lord of the harvest.

He sent them into his vineyard- "Sent" translates *apostello*, meaning that all who go to work for the Lord, including the weak who work only one hour, are in fact apostles. We have a specific sense of mission, a sense of having been given a concrete and actual mission in life. That sense is rarely met in unbelievers, and the senses of mission they may have typically only last for part of their lives and become tinged with disillusion. The mission of harvesting men and women for the Kingdom never becomes like that.

20:3 *And he went out about the third hour and saw others*- Here is an insight into how the Lord 'foresees' potential workers / believers, but it is over to them if they respond to the call given. Truly God and His Son are in search of man.

Standing idle- The Greek *argos* definitely means 'lazy' and isn't a particularly positive word to use about someone (Some young widows became *argos*, gossiping and interfering where they ought not because they had nothing better to do, 1 Tim. 5:13; Cretans were rumoured to be lazy, *argos,* Tit. 1:12). The word means literally a non-worker. These men hadn't been hired because they were lazy. The ones the Master was so eager to use were in fact not very good workers, in fact they were non-workers. The hard workers obviously had a problem with the acceptance of these men, and their being treated on the same basis as themselves. This section thus continues the theme begun in chapter 18 and developed throughout this set of material which this parable concludes- see on 19:1. The hard workers equate with the disciples who didn't want to accept or forgive the "little one", the man who would not forgive others their inadequacies and ended up condemned, the big debtor who refused to forgive others their minor debt to him. This parable finishes with the harder workers rebuked and possibly even rejected- and these lazier ones accepted. The point is that the harder workers were disciplined / rejected because of their despising of their weaker brethren.

If we insist on reading *argos* as meaning strictly those without work, then another challenging lesson is presented. All human endeavour and achievement is a standing around doing nothing- compared to the ultimate achievement of harvesting for the Lord, of working with the Lord in His work of bringing people to eternity and to ultimate existence.

In the marketplace- The Lord's preceding usage of this term had been in the context of the work of preaching. He had spoken of how His disciples were like children in marketplaces appealing to others to respond to His message (11:16). But in this parable, the men in the marketplace were inactive and lazy. And yet at the end of the parable, these are the ones who are more acceptable than those who work harder but reject the lazy workers. The similar usage of "the marketplace" in these two parables suggests that whilst it is the Lord's followers who appeal to other children, their 'fellows' in humanity, it is also the Lord personally who works through them to make the appeal.

20:4 *And to them he said: You go*- This again paves the way for the "Go…" of the great preaching commission which Matthews's Gospel concludes with.

Also into the vineyard and- The hint may be that the later workers are working for their Lord on the same basis as the harder and longer workers, even if their achievements and levels of service vastly differ.

Whatever is right I will give you- "Right" translates *dikaios*, a word carrying a distinct moral sense and elsewhere translated 'righteousness'. The idea of the gift of righteousness, that which is right, is at the heart of much of Romans (Rom. 5:17 specifically speaks of "the gift of righteousness"). The penny paid for a few hours work speaks of salvation, granted as an undeserved gift, and yet also somehow 'that which is just / right' because of the way we are counted just because we are in Christ. There was no specific promise of a penny, and yet this was judged by the Lord as 'what was right'. Intentionally, the storyline of the parable leads us to cry out that it is *not* just to give labourers the same pay, when some work far longer and harder than others- at least 12 times longer, in some cases. But it *is* just in the new justice taught by the Lord. The point of the paradox is that human works and achievements are so irrelevant in terms of obtaining salvation, the penny. Rather like the 100 pennies owed to the man who had been forgiven a 10,000 talent debt (18:28).

Preaching is a spiritual exercise for the benefit of the preacher. We could get the impression that the labourers were called to go out into the vineyard because the Lord felt sorry for them, standing idle with no work or livelihood- rather than because He needed them. If this was His motivation, He wouldn't have called anyone at the 11th hour, neither would he have paid them all the same wages if he was only using them for his benefit. God will call His people unto Himself without us doing a thing; and yet we have a responsibility and even a commission to take Christ to the world. The fact God will call His people to Himself anyway does not exempt us from the duty of witnessing; and the process of this witnessing is so often for *our* benefit.

And they went their way- We explained on 19:1 how there is a whole block of material presented in a long chiasmus, and this parable is the closing part of the section which began at the start of chapter 18. It's significant therefore that *aperchomai*, translated here to 'go [a] way', recurs twice in the section. The man with the colossal debt 'went his way' and imprisoned his slightly indebted brother (18:30), and the rich young man 'went away' sorrowful (19:22). In each case, men 'went their way' after having been confronted by extreme grace. The rich man in that despite not wanting to part with his wealth as requested, he could still be saved by grace; the man with the colossal debt who had it frankly forgiven. They 'went their way' into obscurity, unable to accept the grace offered. These weak, lazy labourers went *their* way to harvest at least a few for Christ, believing and clinging on to the Lord's desire to use even them despite their inadequacy.

20:5 *Again He went out*- The very same words used of how the Lord 'again went out' to teach the Gospel (Mk. 2:13).

About the sixth and ninth hour and did likewise- Peri ("about") used in relation to time doesn't have to mean 'roughly at' that time, it could mean that throughout the sixth, ninth and eleventh hours, the Lord searched for workers. In this case we see an indication of His urgent need for workers. The harvest really is there to be brought in, all complaints that 'nobody is interested' are simply a reflection of a serious mismatch between the potential harvest and the approach being taken to harvesting it. Typically great effort is expended on trying to get people to sign up to a denominational position and be regular attenders at meetings- and if that fails, the feeling is that evangelism has failed because the harvest is simply not there, 'nobody is interested'. But the clear

impression from this parable and others is that the harvest is indeed there- the problem in harvesting it is with the labourers. The work of harvesting isn't the same as doing a public relations exercise for a denomination. We may or may not succeed in getting folks to sign up for our denomination or fellowship; but the work of harvesting men and women into Christ isn't necessarily the same thing as that. And that work is guaranteed of success.

20:6- see on 22:8.

And about the eleventh hour- The servant goes at the 11th hour and hires the men who others had refused, presumably because they didn't look strong enough for the work. And they get paid the very same wage as those who had worked all day. This element of unreality serves to highlight the (humanly) irrational zeal of the Lord for the spread of the Gospel in the last days before His return. He will take on anyone who is willing to work, no matter how feebly, no matter for how short a time; the fact they are standing there ready and willing to do their little bit is what is important to Him. A man does not usually go out between 4 and 5 p.m. looking for more labourers, with sunset approaching. He must have had an unusually great need for workers, racing against time to get the harvest in. And this is the very urgency of the Gospel, and the passion of the Lord's desire to get the harvest reaped. God could reap the harvest of the earth, requiring not help from man. But He has chosen to work through men in the preaching of the Gospel, and therefore the number of workers and their zeal reflects the amount of harvest of souls that can be reaped. The eternal destiny of others is therefore seen to depend on our extent of labour in preaching. It's also apparent that the amount of harvest was unreally huge- hence the unusual running backwards and forwards to get more workers. One expects the manager to know the size of the harvest and hire the right number of labourers at the start of the day. But in this parable, he doesn't. The awesome size of the potential harvest out there in this world means that *never* should we conclude that 'nobody's interested'. There is a *huge* harvest out there. And in passing, it can be noted that grapes have to be harvested at just the right time. If they're left even a day too long on the vine, the sugar content becomes too high and they are no use. We can perhaps infer that the parable describes a scene on a Friday, with the Sabbath coming on when nobody can work- and yet it is *just* the right day for reaping the harvest. This makes the obvious connection in our minds- that just before the Sabbath day of the Millennium, in the last days, there is an abnormally huge harvest to be reaped. And this would connect with other Biblical teaching about a great appeal being made to all nations, just prior to the Lord's return. The parable also yields the lesson that those men would not normally work for one hour. We are to imagine those men with families at home who needed feeding. No pay that day, no food. But they were willing to do at least something. And their generous Lord simply pitied their poverty, so he gave them a day's wage- even to the 11th hour workers. And this is the Lord who has graciously hired us. Likewise, no rich King who finds that the wedding of his son will be poorly attended would go out and invite beggars. The element of unreality is that he so wants every place filled. No human King, nor his son, would want riff raff at the wedding, just because his own class of people turned down the invitations. But the King of Heaven is unlike any human king. He wants others to share in the joy of His Son, and absolutely nobody is too low to share; and moreover, He has a compelling desire to fill those places. The implication is that the net is being spread wider and more compulsively as the days shorten unto the supper.

He went out and found others- This parable forms the closing section of the block of material which began at the beginning of chapter 18 and which is arranged in a chiasmus [see 19:1]. The Lord's 'finding' of men to do His work connects with the

'finding' of the lost sheep in 18:13. These men whom the Lord 'finds' are the lost sheep. The parallel is thus between the lost sheep, the child brought into the midst, the man who owes 100 pence, the brother who sins against us… and now, the lazy or weak labourers who are saved by grace. The point of the section is that they must be accepted- and the parable speaks of how those who have worked harder and longer will have a tendency not to do so. And that tendency may cost them their own salvation.

Standing, and he said to them: Why do you stand here idle all the day?- The implication is almost that they should've gone to work without waiting to be invited. They should've been motivated by the tragedy of an amazing harvest wasting. Or perhaps the question was more rhetorical. Why were they idle? Why had nobody hired them? Because they were weak, lazy, had bad reputations, been fired by other employers, were too old to work effectively… And the Lord wanted them to be fully aware of their inadequacies before He sent them to do His harvesting work. The same is seen in how the Lord made the disciples perceive their own blindness and lack of faith- and *then* gave them the great commission. This is indeed the ultimate qualification for preaching work. And that is taught by the Lord's hand in life, not by Bible colleges or preparatory programs.

The parable of the labourers indicates that the Lord's desire for response to the Gospel will increase as the coming of the Kingdom advances. Apparently He increasingly is the Jesus who understands human weakness. There is an element of unreality in the parable; the servant goes at the 11th hour and hires the men who others had refused, presumably because they didn't look strong enough for the work. This element of unreality serves to highlight the (humanly) irrational zeal of the Lord for the spread of the Gospel in the last days before His return. The parable of the marriage supper explains why this is. We need to enter into the sense of urgency and tragedy which there was; the marriage of the King's son was going to be delayed because the guests didn't want to come. The shame, even anger, of the King (cp. God) and the bridegroom (cp. Christ) need to be imagined; and this really is the feeling of the Father and Son whenever the Gospel is rejected. And time and again it happens, from Sunday School kids to those hundreds who every year complete Bible study courses and turn away from the call.

20:7 *They said to him: Because no one has hired us*- They answered honestly, recognizing that in the urgency of harvest, nobody had hired them. Their answer implied a recognition of their weakness- through old age, mental issues, laziness, bad reputation, physical weakness or disability. But it is twice emphasized that they "stood" in the marketplace and did not *sit* there, as is common in marketplaces in the Middle Eastern harvest time sun. Their saving feature was that they were willing to work, and they recognized their weakness; and they believed that they would be given an appropriate reward by this strangely gracious employer. This is so important, and forms almost the only precondition which the Lord requires to work with men. The Lord surely knew why they had not been hired. They had been there all day- so He had surely seen them when He had gone out looking for workers earlier that day. His question to them was therefore rhetorical. He wanted to elicit from them a recognition of their weakness. We also sense that as He would have noticed them earlier in the day, He as it were was lowering the bar because He was as it were driven to do this by the chronic lack of labourers and the unexpectedly huge harvest. The same lowering of the bar just before the last day, the final end of the harvest, is seen in the parable of the street people being urged in to attend the majestic supper.

The Lord had earlier spoken of the disciples as labourers in the work of the Gospel, who were worthy of their hire (Lk. 10:7; Jn. 4:36 s.w.). The connection with that

teaching is in that the Lord was inviting the disciples to see themselves as those who had been first hired, and was warning them that the potential harvest was so great that He was taking on other workers whom they would be tempted to despise. This is exactly the theme of the entire block of material which began with their rejection and despising of the little ones at the start of chapter 18.

He said to them: You go also into the vineyard- AV adds: "And whatever is right I will give you". He imputes righteousness to His weak workers, so that payment for a day's work becomes that which is "right" for those who have only worked one hour.

20:8 *And when evening came*- The Lord's coming is likened to the dawn in Mal. 4, here to the sunset. The day of opportunity for service ends, and yet in another sense the sun arises heralding the eternal day of God's Kingdom.

The owner of the vineyard said to his steward- AV "The Lord". The Lord of the vineyard is presumably God, and His "steward", the duty manager, is the Lord Jesus.

Call the labourers- Kaleo is used both of the calling of men and women to the Gospel in this life, and also of the final call to judgment. In responding to the call, we are actually embarking upon a journey to judgment, and therefore as the Lord elsewhere explains, it is absurd if we uphold differences with our brother on that journey. We are on our way to judgment- that should humble us and impart a sense of urgency to every moment of this journey. Mt. 22:3 speaks of how the Lord's Angelic servants "call them that were bidden". But "call" and "bidden" both translate *kaleo*. The called ones are further called- to judgment.

And pay them their wages- At the judgment, the preacher receives *wages* for what he did (Jn. 4:36), the labourers receive *hire* (s.w. wages) for their work in the vineyard (Mt. 20:8; 1 Cor. 3:8). There is a *reward* (s.w. wages) for those who rise to the level of loving the totally unresponsive (Mt. 5:46), or preaching in situations quite against their natural inclination (1 Cor. 9:18). *Salvation* itself isn't given on this basis of works; but the judgment is of works in order to teach us self-knowledge. And this is why there will be a 'going through' of our deeds. In this life, we see ourselves in a dark mirror; but only when the Lord appears will we clearly see ourselves face to face. This coming to true self-knowledge will only be possible through the judgment process. There is indeed a 'wage' paid for Gospel work; each man shall receive "his own reward [s.w. "hire"] according to his labour"- but that "reward" is the fact that a man's work 'abides' through the fire of the final judgment (1 Cor. 3:8,14). So whilst the hire / reward / wage is on one hand salvation, it will also be unique to each of us and directly in proportion to the success of our work with others. If they enter the Kingdom, then that will be an aspect of our eternal reward, and thus Paul can say that his eternal "crown of rejoicing" is the likes of his Thessalonian converts standing approved at the final judgment (1 Thess. 2:19). So often, allegiance to a particular denominational way of thinking hinders believers from this work. They may read these words and find the idea somewhat strange, because they feel they have never brought anyone into the group they belong to. But the group we ultimately belong to is the body of Christ. The commission to take the Gospel to the world and baptize them is given to each of us. And so we do well to ask ourselves the question: 'How many times have I ever asked someone if they want to be baptized, offered to baptize them, and baptized someone?'. Fear of eldership displeasure and rejection from what is little more than a church social club has hamstrung so much such witness.

Beginning from the last to the first- The giving of the payment begins at the last, which is an element of unreality in the story. The message may be that this was in order to teach the longer and harder working labourers that the wage really was a penny a day for each worker. The purpose of the judgment process will be for our benefit, and one

of the hardest lessons for Christ's people is to accept that others who worked less than us are really also saved to the same extent and by the same grace as we are.

20:9- see on 25:23.

And when they who were hired about the eleventh hour came- I mentioned earlier that *peri* with time clauses can mean 'throughout'. The payment was at the twelfth hour; some had been hired at various points throughout the eleventh hour, meaning that they had worked far less than an hour. It outrages all human works-based justice to think that they received the same as those who slogged twelve hours. But this is to affront our sense of justification by works, and to demonstrate to us that salvation cannot be on the basis of works but rather on the basis of the contract / covenant which all by grace have entered into. And the parable has an even more demanding twist in its end stress, whereby those who considered this was unreasonable and felt they should be given more for their superior work are in fact rejected for thinking that. If indeed "Go your way" means they are fired from the Master's service.

They each received a denarius- No employer really pays all workers the same amount as the 11th hour worker; no creditor would really cancel debts simply because the debtors can't afford to pay, and take nothing at all from them; no father would really give preferential treatment to a wayward son over a son who had never disobeyed him. But the point is, God acts in the very opposite way to how we do or would do. His grace to sinners makes no human sense. And He asks us through these parables of His Son to walk out against the wind and follow His example in our treatment of sinners. Our own natural sense cries out that he who works most should have the most pay; but the unreality of the parable teaches us that this principle is set aside in the way God deals with us. *Any* gift from the Father and Son is by grace alone. The elements of unreality in the parables often bring out the extent of God's grace. The fruit farmer [=God] asked His worker [= the Lord Jesus] to cut down a barren fig tree. But this worker had such fondness for the tree, he was so unusually concerned for it, that he pleaded that it be given some more time. This reflected the Lord's love for Israel, a love beyond all reason. Likewise, which wealthy person would ever arrange a banquet and invite the very dregs of society to it? Here is the Father's amazing grace. Sometimes we have to fill in the details [another feature of the Lord's amazing stories] in order to perceive this grace. The younger son, for example, demanded his share of the inheritance; and thus he lost his name, forfeited any claim to family membership, and openly showed that he did not wish to be part of his father's family. And yet he was received back with such grace and longing by the Father.

This addition of *ana* ["every man"] is to underline that they each, every one individually, received their pay. The sense would be conveyed quite adequately without the addition of this word, but the Lord wished to remind us of how each of us will personally meet the Lord at judgment day, and we will behold each of those whom we considered the little ones, inferior workers or believers to ourselves, receiving their rewards. The public aspect to the judgment process is several times brought out- e.g. the rejected will walk naked and others will see their shame (Rev. 16:15).

20:10 *And when the first came, they supposed*- NIV "they expected". The connection is clearly to Peter's expectation that he and the disciples who had forsaken what they had should be rewarded more than those who had not done so (19:27). We are led by the story line to sympathize with their position- our sense of human justice cries out against such an approach, whereby the harder workers were rewarded the same as the slacker and shorter workers. But that outcry is intended. Because the point is, that we are the colossally indebted man, saved by grace; the 11th hour workers who were too weak and lazy to do much for their Lord. This parable forms an appropriate

conclusion to the material which began at the start of chapter 18. The despising of the little ones by us is simply because we have failed to perceive that *we* are the 10,000 talent hopeless debtor, *we are the man… we* are the weak workers, etc.

Yet *nomizo*, "supposed", is the verb of the noun *nomos*, the law. They believed it was their legal right to receive more than the later workers. But they had "agreed" in contract for a penny a day (:2). The law was not at all on their side. They only came to this new and very twisted view of their rights by observing the Lord's grace to the weaker, shorter workers. Their eye or outlook became evil because of the Lord's goodness. We too can come to assume that salvation is our right, failing to maintain any sense of wonder at God's grace to us.

That they would receive more, but likewise each received a denarius- This again is particularly appropriate to Peter, who had to be forced to consider carefully whether he did in fact love the Lord "more" [s.w.] than others (Jn. 21:15).

20:11 *And when they received it, they grumbled at the master of the house, saying*- The word is repeatedly used concerning Israel's murmuring against Christ (Lk. 5:30; Jn. 6:41,43; 7:32; 1 Cor. 10:10). These who murmured against Christ's grace at the last day were therefore, we can conclude, under the influence of Jewish legalism and a sense of superiority to others. The tension is between them murmuring at the very moment in which they "received it".

Those hired into the vineyard first "supposed (on judgment day) that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house... but he answered one of them (what's the significance of this?) and said, Friend (a description of the faithful, Jn. 15:15; James 2:23), I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is... I will give unto this last, even as unto thee" (Mt. 20:10-15). If the penny represents salvation, the harder workers only started questioning once they saw, to their amazement, the weaker and shorter workers receiving a penny. They received the promised reward of salvation, but couldn't understand the principles on which the Lord rewarded the weaker servants. If the hard working faithful will have a problem with this even at the judgment, how much more now?

20:12 *These last*- The Lord answers the question "Are there few that be saved?" by insisting that we personally strive to enter by the narrow door (Lk. 13:23,24). This was the same message the Lord had taught Peter through the parable of the 1st hour labourer getting distracted by the reward of the 11th hour one. He had that tendency to look on the faults of others (Mt. 18:21), to compare himself with others (Mt. 19:21 cp. 27; 26:33). John's Gospel ends with Peter yet again being distracted by the possible spiritual destiny of his brother John- 'What about *this* man?' was answered by the Lord with an appeal to Peter to not worry about that but instead "You- follow Me". And so, so many tragic times we do the same. We are distracted from the quintessence of our lives, the following, to death, of the Lord, by our jealousy of others and our desire to enter into their spirituality rather than personally following. We should rather be like the weak old labourers in the parable who walk away from judgment day clutching their 'penny' [of salvation], thinking "I really shouldn't have this. I didn't work for a day, and this… this coin… this is a day's pay". But we will be there. You and me. For all our doubts and fears, our chronic lack of self worth, for all the inward, unspoken struggles to believe and understand, that nobody knows nor even notices. We will be there. This

is grace, and this will be grace. Truly there is all joy and peace through believing these things, “that ye may abound in hope” (Rom. 15:13). Paul was ever aware of his own proneness to failure. He saw himself as tempted to be like the man in the parable who thought he should have more, because he had laboured more abundantly than the others (Mt. 20:12 Gk. = 2 Cor. 11:25).

Have spent- Clearly the harder workers believed that there was to be a direct connection between work and reward. And the purpose of the story is to debunk that idea.

Only one hour- The labourers had been brought into the vineyard at various times. It was the scandal of the 11th hour labourers which so stuck in the gut of the original workers. And those 11th hour workers, at least in chronological terms, are us- called in these very last days. We therefore can see ourselves as the recipients of maximum grace- for we are hardly the strongest or most functional of the generations of Christ's servants, more focused as we are on internal grievances than on the massive work of getting the amazing harvest in.

But you have made them- This is precisely the same word used earlier in the verse to speak of how the weaker workers had 'worked' or, literally, 'made' only one hour. By accident, almost, these complaining labourers had stumbled upon the salvation by grace and imputed righteousness which Paul spells out in Romans in so many words. The strangely gracious Lord of the harvest had 'worked them' as worthy of a day's pay; He had imputed to them the work of a whole day when they had only done a fraction of that. And still the workers didn’t get it. The story ends with them still in confusion.Some will be in the Kingdom who have big questions about the justice of God (Mt. 20:12,13 "friend"); the wise virgins, apparently selfishly, won't give any oil to the others; some will sit in the Kingdom in "shame" because they thought they were greater than other brethren (Lk. 14:9- cp. the elder brother?); some remonstrate that a highly rewarded brother already has ten pounds, and surely doesn't need any more exaltation (Lk. 19:25).

Equal to us- It was on this basis that they were all made "equal" before the final judgment. The basis of their unity, therefore, should have been- and indeed *is*- the fact that our salvation is by imputed righteousness. Peter surely learnt the lesson of all this when he spoke of how to the Gentiles had been *given* by God the 'like' [s.w. "equal"] *gift* which had been given to "us", the Jewish disciples (Acts 11:17). In this sense the dimensions of the new Jerusalem are "equal" (Rev. 21:16 s.w.).

Who have borne the burden of the day- The same words used for carrying the burden of the cross and of the sins and failures of others (Lk. 14:27; Jn. 19:17; Rom. 15:1). It can be no accident that here in Mt. 20 the Lord goes on to speak of His cross and the need to participate in that death through carrying the cross. Whenever we behold the cross, surely we are left with the deep impression that 'I would not have gone through with this'. But that is the burden we are to carry, and no amount of other works or attainment of standards can compensate for that. The disciples thought they could so easily carry that cross (20:22 "we are able"), just as these workers were sure that they had borne the required burden and should be rewarded for it. But in the light of the cross and of the demand implicit within it to likewise suffer in the salvation of little ones, the hard workers had carried nothing. Their salvation too was to be on the basis of total grace.

And the scorching heat- This is the language of the day of judgment (2 Pet. 3:10,12; James 1:11). These hard workers had been through nothing- they had not been through

the day of judgment, at which acceptance will be proportionate to our acceptance of other little ones.

20:13 *And he answered and said to one of them*- The personal nature of the judgment is emphasized, as we saw in :9,10 where it is twice stated that the payment was given to each individual.

Friend- This term could imply that for all their blindness and unfounded sense of superiority over their brethren, these workers were still acceptable with the Lord. But the same word is used in 22:12 for the man who is condemned because he thinks his own clothing is good enough for the wedding, and will not take the garment of righteousness offered him; and it is also used by the Lord concerning Judas the betrayer (26:50). These more negative associations of "friend" must be considered together with the possibility that "Go your way…" means effectively 'You're fired!'. The idea that we are superior to our brethren because we achieved more than them is so obnoxious to the Lord that it may be the basis for the condemnation of such people. That is the undoubted implication and possibility. The structure of the parable leaves it somewhat unclear, because indeed the issue is unclear. The Lord may forgive the unforgiving, show grace to the ungracious- and save them. This would indeed be in line with His grace. But on the other hand, we are to understand that such arrogant and exclusive attitudes warrant condemnation before Him at the last day.

Note that before the Lord of the harvest, *having received* the 'penny' of salvation and Divine nature, those who thought they had worked hardest complained that those they thought had done less, were still getting a penny. They were rebuked, but they still had their penny (cp. salvation; Mt. 20:11). The subsequent comment that the first shall be last might imply that they will be in the Kingdom, but in the least place. Robert Roberts wrote that he was certain that the only response of the saints once they are given Divine nature will be to break down in tears. And I agree with him. And the passion of Jesus may mean He does likewise. Being Divine doesn't mean you don't cry- in whatever way Divine beings cry. Which is why, in some ways, there are tears in Heaven as we pass through our vales of tears down here. Some will be in the Kingdom who have big questions about the justice of God even then (Mt. 20:12,13 "friend"); some will sit in the Kingdom in "shame" because they thought they were greater than other brethren (Lk. 14:9- cp. the elder brother?)- i.e. self-imposed shame and embarrassment; some remonstrate that a highly rewarded brother already has ten pounds, and surely doesn't need any more exaltation (Lk. 19:25). This all suggests that even after our acceptance at the judgment, we may be more 'human' (or whatever word I should use) than we may now imagine. More emotional, more seeking towards understanding, with a greater potential for eternal growth, than perhaps we have thought. Divine nature doesn't mean being passionless. Whichever hymn writer called the Kingdom "passionless renown" just, quite frankly, got it wrong [or was trying too hard to rhyme his words]. Because God *is* passionate; and we will share *His* nature.

There is even here the possible implication that some who will be accepted by the Lord who even at their acceptance at the judgment have wrong attitudes towards their brethren. Thus before the Lord of the harvest, those who thought they had worked hardest complained that those they thought had done less, were still getting a penny. They were rebuked, but they still had their penny (cp. salvation; Mt. 20:11). The subsequent comment that the first shall be last might imply that they will be in the Kingdom, but in the least place. Likewise the brother who takes the highest place in the ecclesia will be made with shame to take the lower place (Lk. 14:9). Or the bitter elder brother, angry at the Father's gracious enthusiasm for the worthless brother, is addressed by the Father (God) in language which is relevant to the Lord Jesus: "Son, thou art ever

with me, and all that I have is thine" (Lk. 15:30). These sentiments are elsewhere expressed about the Lord Jesus. Is the implication that bitter elder brother is still in Christ and accepted in Him, even though his attitude to his brother is not what it should be? The least in the Kingdom will be those who break commandments *and teach men so* (Mt. 5:19); but the least in the Kingdom will be counted greater than John the Baptist was in this life (Mt. 11:11). The simple message is that there will be some in the Kingdom who simply weren't very obedient in this their day of probation. Admittedly, these details are capable of other interpretations. But bear these points in mind, especially if you ever struggle with the apparent harshness of some Christians you may meet.

I do you no wrong- The grace shown by one to another can be perceived by a third party as a personal attack upon that third party. But that is just an illusion, a game of the mind- and yet it explains why there is so much anger with the Lord because of His grace to others. The hard workers felt the Lord was personally doing them wrong- when instead He was giving them exactly what He had promised and what they had hoped for.

Did you not agree with me for a denarius?- The question arises as to what exactly the Lord was supposed to give these men beyond a penny. Likewise, the Lord can give us no more than salvation, the penny. The fact He may give it to those we consider far beneath our level, doesn't mean that somehow He must give us more than salvation.

20:14 *Take*- This is a slightly strange way of talking about a penny which the Lord had given to the worker. It might imply that the worker had thrown it down on the ground in protest. Or the sense of 'take away' which is in the Greek may suggest 'Take it and go away from Me', lending weight to the possibility that the subsequent "Go your way" is effectively a firing of the man from the Master's service- a hint that the penalty for superior thinking concerning little ones is in fact rejection by the Lord.

That which is yours- Salvation will be intensely personal, it will be as it were 'our very own'. Having been faithful in what the Lord entrusted to us in this life, we will receive at the day of judgment "that which is your [very] own" (Lk. 16:12).

And go your way- This could be interpreted as meaning 'You're fired'. Harry Whittaker was a great fan of this view in his *Studies in the Gospels.* Perhaps the hard working labourers were sent packing by the Lord because of their complaint at the others getting the same payment for what they considered to be inferior work to theirs. If the parable is meant to be read in this way, then it seems so sad that those hard working men (cp. brethren) were *almost* saved, but for their attitude to their brethren.

It is my wish to give to this last even as I gave to you- Here and in :15, *thelo*, "I will", doesn't mean 'I want' but rather to choose, to be disposed to. The idea connects with the conclusion in :16, that the saved are those who are "chosen". These ideas of a sovereign undeserved gift, the will of God, Divine choice and election [*elektos* is the word used for "chosen" in :16] are all found again in Romans, where Paul makes the same point more pointedly and directly: Salvation cannot be by works, but by grace. And the element of election and predestination within the final algorithm of human salvation is proof enough that works are not and cannot be of paramount importance.

20:15 *Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own money? Or is*- This is another connection with the earlier part of the chiasmus which began in chapter 18. In this case, to the question of 19:3 as to whether it is "lawful" [s.w.] to divorce a wife for any reason. The Lord's answer had lifted the question to higher levels, by arguing that the spirit of the law was to forgive marital failure without limit. He is expanding upon that thought here, by teaching that the spirit of 'law' is to accept the weak believer, the little one, the sinner, with no regard to their works but rather upon the basis of their

having entered and ‘agreed’ to the covenant of grace. He imputes righteousness to His weak workers, so that payment for a day’s work becomes that which is “right” for those who have only worked one hour.

Your eye evil, because I am good- A figure for mean spiritedness (Dt. 15:9; Prov. 23:6). They should have been generous spirited, and the connection is clearly to the colossal debtor in the parable at the end of chapter 19, who should've been generous to his indebted brother. God's grace to us, the honour of having served Him so long, should mean that we are happy at the inclusion of those who appear far less than us, which is the context of this entire section of material which began in chapter 18. And the Lord’s words here are so tragically and frequently true to observation in spiritual life. The grace shown by some towards others who are clearly morally or doctrinally weaker provokes untold anger towards those who are showing the grace. This explains why otherwise nice natured believers can shake in rage, use expletives and behave with unnatural anger towards those whom they perceive as opening the circle, weakening the boundaries behind which they have hidden, by welcoming in the children, the little ones who are apparently so far beneath other believers in faith and behaviour. Their eye clouds over as evil as they behold the grace of others. There are Biblical examples of this, but the hatred towards the Lord Jesus Himself, hatred unto the death of the cross, is proof enough. And the same path was followed by men of grace such as Paul and Peter.

"Is your eye evil, because I am good" was quarried from Jonah 4:2-4, where Jonah is also asked a similar question after his bitterness that God had allowed Nineveh to repent. We must be aware that such self-righteousness and uncomfortableness at the repentance of others is a feature of our very essential nature. The Lord Jesus overcame this aspect of His nature superbly.

The pureness of the grace of the Lord Jesus is hard to plumb. He knew that the extent of His grace would cause others to stumble. The element of unreality in the parable of the labourers shows this. He hired the labourers no-one else wanted, the old and weak workers, some of them only for an hour, and still gave them a day's pay. They must have walked away from the pay table with their heads spinning, scarcely daring to believe what they held in their hands- a matchless picture of the response of the faithful after learning of their acceptance at the day of judgment. But the outlook of those who felt their salvation (the penny) was less by grace than the others became bitter: "Is your eye evil, because I am good?". In saying this, the Lord was referring back to Dt. 15:9, which warned Israel not to have an evil eye towards their poverty stricken brother (cp. the unwanted labourer) who asked for a loan near the time of the year of release, when all debts were cancelled. In the year of release, Israel were "to remit every private debt... and not*demand* it of thy brother" (Dt. 15:2 LXX). This is behind Mt. 18:28, where Christ speaks of the man who demands repayment from his brother. The Lord is implying: You should live in the spirit of the year of release all the time, giving without expecting. Lk. 6:35 has the year of release in mind, in the idea of lending without expecting anything back. This only happened in the year of release. "Is thine eye evil, because I am good" is therefore saying that the Lord's grace towards the poverty-stricken labourer had provoked an "evil eye" in the others, they somehow felt that they were having to give to him, that they were standing to lose by his acceptance. Yet, as the Lord implies, this is a nonsense attitude. Of course we don't stand to lose anything by another's acceptance! And it's possible to reason that it was those 11th hour labourers represent the accepted, whilst the complainers are rejected ("Go thy way" has been read by some as meaning they were fired whilst the others were taken on permanently). But with what superb accuracy does He get right inside the future

mentality of many in His ecclesia! How very true this parable has been time and again in the history of our community. Discussion of and practice of the idea of grace has provoked untold bitterness amongst those who live less by grace.

20:16 *So the last shall be first and the first last*- The entire section beginning in chapter 18 has taught that those who refuse to forgive and accept the spiritually weak- will in fact be condemned. And yet the section also speaks of the possibility that they will be saved, just as the rich are told to sell what they have and give to the poor, if they "will be perfect"- otherwise they will be condemned. But the Lord says that salvation even in that case is "possible" with God, by grace. Therefore the section concludes on the same note- on one hand hinting at the condemnation of the hardest workers because of their despising of their weaker brethren, whilst on another hand suggesting that they shall be in the Kingdom, although "last" in the Kingdom, due to their superior attitudes.

For many are called but few chosen- AV. This is the conclusion to the large chiasmus of material which began at 18:1 (see on 19:1). The conclusion is that salvation is partly on the basis of predestination- some are simply chosen, others aren't. The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. Paul speaks of choosing and predestination in the context of seeking to persuade believers that salvation is by the gift of grace and not according to works- and he could well have been prompted to that thinking by the Lord's usage of 'choosing' here. God uses language in a relative sense in order to emphasize something. Thus we read of many being saved (Gen. 22:17), yet in another sense few will be saved (Mt. 7:14; 20:16; Lk. 13:23). Relative to the wonder of salvation, many will be saved; but numerically, the figure will be small, from the perspective of this world. See on 11:30; 25:19.

20:17 *And as Jesus was going up*- This could refer to the uphill journey, but 'going up' was a technical term used for going up to Jerusalem, particularly to keep a feast- Passover, in this case. Mark adds: "And Jesus went before them, and they were amazed; and as they followed they were sore afraid".

To Jerusalem- From Jericho, 19:15. Hence they went "up", uphill to Jerusalem. These small details all support the position that the Gospels were written by eye witnesses and were not created many years later by people who were not present. They were going the opposite direction of man in the parable of the Good Samaritan, who went *down* from Jerusalem to Jericho. We may be able to infer that the Lord intended us to read that man as one who was not going in the way of the cross, who was going away from Jerusalem rather than towards it- and who was still saved by the grace of the Samaritan / Jesus.

He took the twelve disciples aside- The implication is that there were others travelling with them, and the Lord wished to explain the reality of the cross to the disciples alone.

And on the way he said to them- It could be inferred that "the way" is the way to Jerusalem and the cross; the disciples were following Jesus in that "way" without appreciating what it really involved and where it ultimately led, and that can be true for us too.

20:18 *Listen, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man shall be*- This was stating the obvious, but He wanted them to perceive their part in the journey to the cross which He was making; for His path to death and resurrection was to be theirs, as it is ours too.

Delivered to the chief priests and scribes; and they shall- The Greek means literally 'to

hand over'; the idea of betrayal was maybe implicit, but not as explicit as in the English word 'betrayed'. It's the same Greek word as in :19, translated "deliver". The word is very common on the lips of the Lord, as if He saw the moment of 'handing over' as the quintessence of all His sufferings- the hand over from God's Providential protection to the powers of darkness.

Condemn Him to death- Exactly fulfilled, using the same Greek words, in Mk. 14:64.

20:19 *And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify; and the third day he shall be raised up*- The Lord's predictions of His sufferings are detailed. The question arises as to whether this knowledge was beamed into Him by Divine revelation, or whether He worked it all out from Old Testament anticipations and prophecies of Messiah's sufferings. All the details could indeed have been understood from the Old Testament.

20:20 *Then…*- So often, the Lord's predictions of the cross are responded to in most unspiritual ways, as if the message really failed to penetrate. As with us today, people turned off at the message of the Lord's death. Whenever this happens, we must enquire as to *why* we turn off; for it surely has a psychological basis. Why does out attention wander so easily when reading or hearing discussed the crucifixion passages? The psychological, subconscious reason may well be that we realize that whatever is true for the Lord is to be true for us; His death there is the pattern for our death to self today. And we would far rather not be reminded of that.

The mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, kneeling before him and asking a certain thing of him- The mother of James and John. We can identify her with Salome, who was likely the mother of Mary the Lord's mother (see Jn. 19:25; Mk. 15:40; Mt. 27:56). They were His cousins, and in the culture of nepotism in which they lived, it would be normal for them to have some honourable place in the future Government of their relative. But the Lord's answer was that such fleshly connections were irrelevant; there was no short cut around drinking His cup and suffering with Him. So often, having predicted His cross, the disciples become obsessed with petty issues; just as we can, right before His cross.

20:21 *And he said to her: What do you desire?*- These are the very words the Lord goes on to use to the blind men in :32 as He left Jericho, and to the blind man He met as He approached Jericho (Lk. 18:41). The similarity in the stories of the blind men He spoke to is surely for the same reason as His repetition of "What do you want?" both to them and to Salome and again to her sons. It's all to build up the impression that He is asking people to focus upon what their dominant desire really is. And such an approach is not unknown in depth psychology today. The Lord uses the same word for "want" in asking the crippled man if he 'wanted' to be made whole (Jn. 5:6). Of course he did, and the Lord knew it. So His question was to elicit in the man a sense of what his dominant desire really was. The Lord raised him up, and went on to comment that as the Father raises up people, so His Son enlivens whom *He* wants [s.w.- Jn. 5:21]. The 'want' of the man and the 'want' of God's Son coincided, just as can happen for us all- if our dominant desires are His. Therefore later in Jn. 15:7 the Lord almost comments on the incident with Salome by saying that if His words abide in us, then we shall ask what we wish [s.w. "want"] and it shall be done [s.w. 'do']. There was no blank cheque promise, as Salome and her sons had wrongly implied. It was often His style to focus people on what they were asking for, encouraging them to verbalize and thus define their deepest

desires. This is why He made as if He would go further on the way to Emmaus, why He appeared to be sleeping during the storm, and in another storm appeared to intend to walk past the diciples (Mk. 6:48). All this was to elicit from His people an awareness of their need for Him. He works the same today, through providential circumstance in our lives, to make us ask ourselves what we really and essentially want. He has just spoken in detail of His sufferings, and so His question was rhetorical. 'If I am going to do all that for you- what else could you ask for?'. The wonder of salvation for us as sinners is such that we should see all our other requests in that context.

Mk. 10:37 makes it clear that the brothers themselves went on to request this, having tried to manipulate the Lord through the use of a female. Here is a classic example of where reading the entire Bible gives us a wider and fuller perspective. But a caveat needs to be sounded about such intertextuality, as it is called- the practice of interpreting a text in the light of other Bible texts. Of course, to get the wider and truer picture, this is a quite necessary and legitimate way of studying the Bible. But remember that the vast majority of believers over history have been illiterate. They heard the Gospels read to them. The text as it stands spoke to them- there are no Divinely inspired footnotes which signpost us to one of the parallel Gospels for the fuller picture. The easy use of computer-assisted analysis of the Biblical text is unique to our age, but one downside of this is that it can too easily be assumed that such endless chasing of connections with other Scripture is in fact how the text was originally designed to be read. It clearly was not. The fact the text of the entire Bible stands up to such analysis and indeed glows with glory under it- doesn't mean that this is the only nor even the intended way to receive the text. The ability to perform such detailed intertextuality just wasn't there for the illiterate; they heard the text of the Gospels as it was read, and there was a message within the text as it stands which they were intended to perceive.

She said to him: Command- Literally, 'say'. The same word is used in describing the Lord's response; He "answered *and said* [s.w.]" (:22). What He gave or said was not directly what she wanted, but rather an invitation to die with Him, and to share in whatever consequences arise from that.

That in your kingdom- Mk. 'In your glory'. This confirms that she had 19:28 in mind, where the Lord had promised a sitting on thrones when He sat "in the throne of His glory". The mother of James and John wanted them to have great reward in the Kingdom. The Lord's basic answer was: 'Take up my cross, follow my example, focused as it is on getting others to the Kingdom' (Mt. 20:21,27,28). They were to be to others examples of selflessness. In the parable of the labourers, the hard, all day workers came expecting their pay; they were sent away, it could be, in rejection. But those whom the parable appears to commend worked having made no agreement nor mention of the reward they would receive. Thus when James and John clamoured for a reward in the Kingdom, they were told instead to go away and serve; this was what it was all about, being the minister of others, serving for nothing- not badgering the Lord for a reward in the Kingdom (Mt. 20:20-26).

These my two sons may sit, one on your right hand, and one on your left hand- She surely had in mind the Lord's recent assurance that the twelve would sit upon twelve thrones judging the tribes of Israel (19:28). But even that wasn't enough. She wanted even more. The record leaves us gasping at her: 'What? Even that promise, and the prediction of the Lord's death for you- still not enough for you??!'. This is intended to put all our requests and dominant desires in a different context. If we have been

promised the Kingdom and the Lord has died for us- then what other dominant desires should we have? Surely none. For those things should be the dominant issues within us.

Mark records the brothers asking: "Master, we would that You should do for us whatsoever we shall desire"- presumably trying to tie the Lord to His words in 18:19 about the successful prayer of "two… who should agree as touching anything they should ask". But of course the Lord's context there was quite different. It was about restoring the lost to the way to the Kingdom. So often we likewise can seize hold of the Lord's words and try to twist them to as it were manipulate God into response. This sort of thing goes on *ad nauseam* in many Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, taking Bible phrases out of context and aggressively holding God to words He never uttered in the context required of them by the audience. They had the focus all wrong- they wanted to be in the Kingdom "for us". Our motive for wanting to be in the Kingdom needs to be analysed. Is it for God manifestation, or mere human salvation from death that we are interested in [to paraphrase a well known quote from John Thomas]?

20:22 *But Jesus answered and said: You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink*- The statement that men 'know not' is usually and extensively on the Lord's lips in a negative sense. We can therefore read Him here as deeply disappointed in her. Note how the Lord uses the plural 'you'; He clearly saw that the question was being asked by the sons through their mother, and the parallel records show Him asking them directly what *they* really wanted. "We know not what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom. 8:26) seems to be some kind of allusion back to the mother of Zebedee's children asking Christ to get her two sons the best places in the Kingdom (Mt. 20:22). He basically replied 'You know not what you pray for', in the sense of 'you don't appreciate'. It may be that Paul in Rom. 8 is saying that in our desire for the Kingdom, in our groaning for it, we don't appreciate what we ask for as we ought, yet Christ nonetheless makes powerful intercession for us to this end.

The cup that I am about to drink?- The Lord's death was therefore His cup, and also His 'baptism'. He asks us to be baptized with His baptism and to regularly drink His cup in the memorial meeting. These things are easily performed, and yet they are an agreement to die His death. We too can far too easily say "I am able...", when like the disciples, we fail to perceive the horror of the cross and what is being asked of us. We therefore participate in these symbols, these metaphors, with bowed head, deeply aware of our likely failure to carry the cross to the end, but grateful for our participation in *His* cup and baptism, the One who did in fact die the death of the cross.

And to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?- AV. Note the present tense compared to the future tense of "the cup that I shall drink of". And yet in Lk. 12:50 He speaks of the baptism that He must still be baptized with in crucifixion. His death on the cross was in essence lived and died by Him throughout His life. This is why the prophecy of His death in Isaiah 53 is also quoted about experiences during His life. And there is an ongoing element to baptism, just as Israel were baptized "in the cloud and in the sea" as they passed through the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1), and yet lived beneath the cloud throughout their wilderness journey- as if their baptism was ongoing. We likewise die and resurrect with Christ in an ongoing sense as we die to the flesh and progressively experience His new life breaking through into our mortal experience (2 Cor. 4:11). Note too how Paul speaks of baptism in the present tense in Rom. 6:4- we *are* buried with Him by baptism, although Paul has just said in Rom. 6:3 that we *were* baptized as a one-time past even. If Paul were simply referencing the point of their baptism in Rom. 6:4, he would have said 'We *were* buried with Him'. The sense of Col. 2:12 and 1 Cor. 12:13 may be similar- "By one Spirit we are all [present tense]

baptized into one body". The whole language of baptism by the Spirit surely suggests a process rather than a one time event of immersion in water.

The Lord spoke with arresting continuous tenses of how 'The good shepherd *is laying* down his life for the sheep... I *am laying down* my life of myself' (Jn. 10:11,18). He *would be* delivered up, but in principle He went through it in His daily life beforehand. He speaks of "the cup that I *shall* drink of, and.. . the baptism that *I am* baptized with" (Mt. 20:22). This sheds light on four occasions in John's gospel when the Lord appears to use tenses in a confusing way. He speaks of how He *will* go to die on the cross, but that in a sense "I am" there already.

They said to him: We are able- The Lord surely remembered their childlike over confidence when He Himself prayed for that cup to be "able" (AV "may" s.w.) to pass from Him so that He didn't have to drink it (Mt. 26:42). Yet the Lord is so generous spirited to them. He says that they will indeed be "able" to drink His cup (:23)- but the places of honour in the Kingdom were solely for the Father to give. He alludes to this in telling Peter that he was not "able" (s.w.) to follow Him to death on the cross at that time, "but you shall follow Me afterwards" (Jn. 13:36). We would likely have told them to take more seriously the Lord's predictions of His death by crucifixion which He had just uttered, and be more realistic about their own failure to suffer and die like that. But He is so more positive and gracious.

The Lord Jesus Christ's sensitivity to our thinking that we really have borne His cross comes out here. Those men, with all their unspirituality, could quite coolly state that they wanted the highest place in the Kingdom, and could say with confidence that they could shoulder the cross of Christ. The Lord's reply was gracious and generous spirited indeed: "Ye shall indeed drink of my cup" - 'when you're a lot more spiritually mature', He could have added. We *sense* rather than are explicitly told His sensitivity to men thinking they can shoulder His cross; for He alone knows what the cross of Christ entailed and entails. And in speaking of our own sufferings, we too need to learn these lessons, and compare our sufferings against Christ's with the utmost caution, with the sensitivity to *His* feelings, recognizing that we must act as men and women who have been *counted as if* we shared His death, and not as those who have actually "resisted unto blood (in our) striving against sin". To confidently identify some of our brethren as tares is only one example of the way in which we can hurt our Lord's feelings, by acting and thinking in ways which are only appropriate for He who did actually carry the cross.

20:23 *He said to them: You shall drink*- Seeing even the Lord baulked at drinking that cup in Gethsemane, this is an incredibly positive comment to make. But none of us, including the twelve, die the death of the cross as Jesus did. He may have seen this as true insofar as by baptism into His death, His personal death and resurrection are counted to us, as if we have participated in it. As we reconstruct in our own minds His death, every fibre in our being cries out: 'I would not have endured that'. The wonder is that by baptism into Him, His death, that death, even the death of the cross, is counted to us. And with that we should be content, rather than seeking for grandeur in the resurrection age as the disciples were doing. When it came to actually giving the twelve His cup to drink, the Lord invited them: "You- drink all of it" (Mt. 26:27). The force of *pas* there appears to refer to all of the cup, the whole cup- rather than inviting all of the disciples to drink, because it was surely axiomatic that they were to all drink it. The Lord was saying that He counted them as having fully drunk His cup- a cup which He Himself flinched to take. This is the degree to which we are in Him and counted as participating in His death by reason of our status "in Him". Another possibility is that the Lord spoke these words specifically to the twelve and envisaged that each of them

would die through crucifixion- although whether they did is not historically confirmable.

My cup indeed- John's equivalent of this is the Lord's word that unless we drink His blood and eat His flesh, we can have no salvation (Jn. 6:53). This therefore has reference to our participation in His death, and our symbolic acceptance of this in the breaking of bread. To drink the Lord's cup is parallel with partaking at the Lord's memorial table in 1 Cor. 10:21. The breaking of bread means many things, and each time we do it we may likely focus on different aspects. But it is not easy for us, or it should not be easy for us. To drink that cup can never be done in a blase spirit of 'Yes, we are able'. Rather with humbled hearts do we accept that our being counted as having participated in it is by grace alone. Peter was amongst those who thought he was able to drink the Lord's cup, and yet the Lord had to rebuke Peter for seeking to deter Him from drinking it- "Put up your sword... the cup which My Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" (Jn. 18:11). Peter's desire for the Lord not to drink it was psychologically rooted in his recognition that the Lord's cup was to be his cup.

But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand- When the disciples foolishly sought to have what they thought were to be the favoured places at His right hand and His left, the Lord could have answered: 'You foolish people! Those on my left hand will be condemned!'. But He graciously didn't comment on their glaring error. He pushed a higher principle- that we should not seek for personal greatness, seeing that God is the judge of all (Mt. 20:23). Yet sadly, so much of our preaching has been solely concerned with pointing out the errors of others without being sensitive to what little faith and understanding they *do* have, and seeking to build on it.

Is not Mine to give- A profound rebuttal of the primitive and mistaken equation of Jesus with God which is found in Trinitarian theology.

But it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father- A specific future is being prepared for each of us in God's Kingdom (22:4; 25:34; 1 Cor. 2:9; Heb. 11:16 "He has prepared for them a city"), a unique place prepared in the Kingdom for us by the Lord's death (Jn. 14:2,3) and yet *we* are likewise being "prepared" (s.w. Lk. 1:17,76; 12:47; 2 Tim. 2:21; Rev. 19:7; 21:2 "His wife has *prepared* herself"). God is preparing a unique destiny and role for each of us in His Kingdom, but that preparation work is in terms of how we are being prepared in this life. Therefore all our present experiences are specifically intended to prepare us for the kind of person and role we shall eternally have. In this lives the the ultimate significance and meaning to human experience if we are indeed Kingdom people. A huge amount of intense preparation is being packed into a very short space of time in this life. The lack of meaning and significance attached to even is what causes the depression which dogs each secular person, especially as they grow older. The Lord's point was that He was going to the cross to prepare places for them all in the Kingdom (Jn. 14:2,3 s.w.). He had just predicted His death. This was where their focus was to be, rather than seeking something for themselves. It's often been commented that God is beyond or even outside of our kind of time. God pre this present creation may have been like that, and He of course has the capacity and possibility to be like that. But it seems to me that particularly in connection with those with whom He is in relationship, He chooses to not exercise that possibility. Instead, God Almighty throws Himself into our experience, by limiting Himself to our kind of time- with all the suspense, hope, excitement, joy, disappointment which this involves. Time and again we read of how God says He is "shaping evil against you and devising

a plan" against His enemies (Jer. 18:11; Jer. 26:3; Jer. 49:20,30; Jer. 50:45; Mic. 2:3; 4:12). For the faithful, He says that He is making plans for them for good and not for evil, "to give you a future" (Jer. 29:11). The Lord Jesus had this sort of thing in mind when He spoke of how the Kingdom will have been being *prepared* for the faithful from the beginning of the world (Mt. 25:34; Mt. 20:23).

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

20:24 *And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation concerning the two brothers*- This suggests that the favour asked was asked secretly. The Lord sensed or overheard their anger, and called the group to Him (:25). The ebb and flow of the disciples to and from Jesus is noted especially in Matthew, probably another indication of their own weakness which formed such a major part of their witness. For the ideal was to abide in Him, to constantly follow Him, and not come to Him and then go from Him in squabbles and jealousies amongst ourselves.

20:25 *But Jesus called them to himself, and said: You know*- This is in response to the anger of the ten against the self-seeking manipulation of the two. He now taught them the spirit of absolute servanthood as an answer to feeling resentful against the unspirituality of our brethren. Even if they are indeed so terribly wrong and simply 'don't get it', as the two brethren clearly didn't, our response should not be anger but rather servanthood towards them. This is all to be found in the implication of the word "But...".

That the rulers of the Gentiles- The *archon*, literally, 'the first'. The Lord had just taught in the parable of the labourers that a principle of His Kingdom was that the first were to be last.

Lord it over them- Gk. *katakurieuo*. Literally, to be *kurios* over, to be as Lord over. His idea was that if He is our *only* Lord, then there can be no lording it over others even when they are clearly unspiritual as the two brethren were at this time. This is where our belief in the Lordship of Jesus really cuts deep. For we naturally would like to think that we are superior to those who 'don't get it' about the spirit of Christ. But we are to see Him as total Lord, and ourselves as servants. Our natural anger and indignation at others' weakness is to be replaced by servanthood. And yet the body of Christ is littered with the wreckage of believers angry with others who refused to serve them but rather stormed out from them or rejected them- rather than staying to serve them, realizing that they are under the Lordship.

The style of leadership / control known in this world isn't to be exercised by the elders of God's flock (Mt. 20:25,26; 1 Pet. 5:3); ecclesial organization shouldn't reflect the structures and practices of big commercial organisations, e.g. Leadership is to be based upon spiritual attributes and the ability to change and convert the lives of others, rather than secular skills such as fund raising, computer literacy, management etc. Yet sadly many ecclesias and Christian organisations seem to confuse the difference between management skills and spiritual leadership. The two things aren't the same. An executive director of a company may very well not be the right brother to lead an ecclesia. The Greek language is full or words containing the

compounds *kata-* and *arch-*, implying power over others, as part of a hierarchy. The leaders of the Roman world used these terms (Mt. 20:25), as did the synagogue leadership. But never does scripture use these kind of words about those who are 'elders' in the true ecclesia. It's a pointed omission. On the other hand, there are many *sun-* prefixes: fellow-worker, fellow-citizen, fellow-soldier, fellow-heir etc. The New Testament emphasis is certainly on what we have in common rather on the fact that in practice some are more capable of organising, or deserve especial respect for their evident spirituality and "for their work's sake". And the teaching of the Lord Himself was more concerned with how to follow Him than how to lead others. Likewise, there were many contemporary Greek words used to describe religious gatherings, e.g. *heorte, synodos, koinos*. But instead the word *ekklesia* is used, meaning a gathering together of town citizens with equal rights to discuss a matter. This is how the word was understood at that time.

And their great ones- The *megas*, the mighty, the strong, the superior. The context is the sense of spiritual superiority felt by the ten against the spiritual weakness of the two brethren and their mother.

Exercise authority over them- They have *exousia*, power, control, over their inferiors. It is the Lord Jesus who is *the* Lord, and who has this *exousia* uniquely over His followers and indeed the whole world (Mt. 7:29; 9:6; 21:24; 28:18 etc.). For us to be indignant and superior against the unspirituality of our brethren is thus to usurp the unique role of the Lord Jesus. Quite rightly should we refer to Him as "the Lord", for this is who He must be in daily life and thought. The failure of others does give us in a human sense this *exousia*, this control, power and superiority- but the Lord goes on to say that it must *not* be so amongst us (:26), we are to resign this for servanthood. The Lord repeated His teaching here almost verbatim in Lk. 22:25- and He states it there immediately after predicting that one of the twelve would betray Him. He did so because He did not want them to be angry and superior over even Judas- He wanted them to instead resign those feelings for servanthood.

20:26 *It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you*- This is in the singular- for "let *him* be your minister". The Lord may not be intending 'If any of you wants to be the greatest, then be the servant'. He may instead be developing the theme of His absolute and unequalled Lordship by saying that *the one* who shall be great shall be the minister- and He had solely Himself in view. He knew that He was to be the greatest in the Kingdom, the one with ultimate and total *exousia* (see on :25). And the path to that was through servanthood, and He invited His men to likewise participate in that servanthood.

Must be your servant- The idea may be an appeal for the disciples to allow the Lord to be their minister. This appeal had to be repeated at the last supper, when He wished to wash their feet, to be the ultimate servant, and Peter didn't want to "let Him" be his minister. So instead of thinking about what they could personally get out of the Kingdom [as the two brethren], or being spiritually superior over their weaker brethren [the ten], they were to instead accept the Lordship of Jesus and His ministration to them. And the form in which He was supremely a servant was in His death on the cross. And yet as so often, the Lord is speaking to Himself on one level, as well as to the disciples on another level. He is the one who to be great had to make Himself a minister of all, and yet He invites all those in Him to pass through the same process. For all that is true of Him is to be true of us. Hence He goes on to say that "Even as" He ministered, so should they (:28).

One of the commonest allusions to priesthood in the NT is the idea of ministry. Time and again, the Old Testament speaks of the priests *ministering* in the priest's office. The priests are specifically called God's ministers (Is. 61:6; Jer. 33:21; Ez. 45:4; Joel 1:9,13; 2:17). The early Christians would have heard and read many of the New Testament references to ministers and ministry as invitations to see themselves as a new priesthood. The Lord said that we should aim to be a minister, a priests, to every one of our brethren, not expecting them to minister to us, but concentrating on ministering to them (Mt. 20:26). This is exactly against the grain of our nature, and also of the concept of religion we find in the world. People *expect* to have others spiritually ministering to them. They expect a priest-figure to do all their thinking for them. But our Lord said that we are each other's priests, we're not here to be ministered ('priest-ed') to, but to minister, and give our lives in service to each other.

When James and John asked to have the senior positions, the Lord didn't rebuke them; he just told them that the greatest would desire to be a servant (Gk. *diakonos*) of all (Mt. 20:20-28). The utter degradation of the cross, and the Lord's willing humbling of Himself to accept it, is a pattern for all who would take up His cross. The "servant of all" would make no distinctions concerning whom or how he would serve; such servanthood was a complete and unqualified act of surrender. And this is taken by the Lord as a cameo of His mindset on Calvary. In conscious allusion to this, Paul could speak of how he had become a slave of all men, that he might help some to Christ (1 Cor. 9:19). He was a slave of the Gospel, a slave of the kind who was lower than the least of all others, i.e. a slave of all (Eph. 3:7,9). He didn't preach himself, but rather preached that he was a servant to all his brethren, for the sake of the fact that he was in Christ, the servant of all (2 Cor. 4:5). Thus he almost advertised his servant status; he preached himself as a slave. Paul wished to be perceived by his brethren and the whole world as merely a slave of Jesus (1 Cor. 4:1). In our talking to each other, or in our writing, it does us good to analyse how many personal pronouns we use; how much we are preaching ourselves rather than Jesus Christ. Any who may appear to be leaders or organisers are serving *Him*, who debased Himself to that depth. There can be no room *at all* for any sense of superiority amongst us. We are servants *of all*, not just of those individual brothers or ecclesias whom we happen to get on well with.

20:27 *And whoever would be first among you*- The *protos* (chief) amongst the disciples was clearly the Lord Himself. So again, the Lord may not necessarily be inviting His followers to seek greatness in the future Kingdom, but rather inviting them to focus upon His Lordship and achievement through His upcoming death. Instead He may have Himself in view- the One who is to be chief is to be the servant of the disciples, which the Lord did through His death on the cross. And it is His death there which is the context for this whole teaching, seeing He has just given a detailed prediction of it. However, the Lord's teachings often have reference to both Himself and to the disciples, and we have noted a number of times where He seems to have specific reference to Peter. For Peter was the *protos*, the chief disciple, according to Mt. 10:2 [s.w.]. And within the Lord's words there is the nod to Peter that he must learn the spirit of servanthood if he is to be worthy of that special calling as the leader of the pack which the Lord clearly had in mind for him. The Lord has just had a lot to say about the *protos* being last in the preceding parable of the labourers, using the word three times in 20:8,10,16. He is perhaps answering the question which arises from that parable: How practically can we be the last? The answer is by serving as He served, by identifying ourselves with the "last" labourers rather than the "first" who thought they were spiritually superior over their weaker fellow labourers.

The Lord Jesus was the supreme example of spiritual ambition in daily life. When the disciples debated about who would be greatest in the Kingdom, Christ said that "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be... servant of all" (Mk. 9:34,35). Christ was the "servant of all" because He *desired* to be the greatest in the Kingdom. It was this ambition which motivated His endurance of the daily cross of His life: "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: *even as* the Son of man came... to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:27,28). He was drawing on the ideas of Hos. 13:1, where Ephraim exalted himself when he humbled himself to speak to God with the trembling of a true humility. The Lord Jesus was not esteemed by men in His death (Is. 53:3); the same word occurs in Dan. 4:17, concerning how Yahweh will exalt the *basest*, the least esteemed, to be King over the kingdoms of this world. That made-basest man was a reference to the Lord Jesus. He humbled Himself on the cross, that He might be exalted. Peter had his eye on this fact when he asks us to humble ourselves, after the pattern of the Lord, that we might be exalted in due time (1 Pet. 5:6). Christ desired greatness in the Kingdom, and so can we; for the brighter stars only reflect more glory of the Sun (1 Cor. 15:41). This very thought alone should lift us up on the eagle wings of Spirit above whatever monotony or grief we now endure.

Shall be your slave- Consider the influence of Christianity on the Greek language of humility. The Lord taught that the leaders, the great ones, in His Kingdom, would be the humble servants (Mt. 20:27). Christ spoke of himself as a humble King, which would have been a contradiction in terms to the first century Greek mind. Consider the following commentary by Alan Hayward: "The ancient Greeks had no time for humility. In fact, their language didn't even have a word for it until well into the first century... the early Christians evidently had to coin a word for it. It's a clumsy, long word, made by sticking together the Greek word 'low-down' and the Greek word 'mentality'. The sudden appearance of this new word in Greek literature during the first century is generally attributed to the influence of the early church" [Alan Hayward, *The Humble King*, 'The Bible Missionary' No.131, January 1994].

20:28 *Even as the Son of Man came*- If the Lord was speaking of Himself as the One who was to be the minister so that He might be great, it is possible that verse 28 is a commentary from Matthew rather than the words of the Lord- pointing out that in fact the Lord had Himself in view in the preceding verses.

Not to be ministered to- Surely the Lord develops this teaching when He characterizes the rejected as insisting that they had never missed an opportunity to minister unto Him personally (25:44). Putting these teachings together, perhaps the Lord means us to understand that He did not come to be personally served, but rather does He 'come' to us in the form of His needy brethren, each encounter with them is an encounter with Him. People did of course minister to the Lord in His life (27:55; Mk. 1:31; 15:41; Lk. 8:3 s.w.), but He surely means that He didn't come *so much as to be ministered to* as to Himself minister to others. In this the exquisite beauty of His Lordship. He is indeed Lord, but He didn't come to be personally treated as Lord but rather His psychological focus was upon what He could do for others. And this is His comment upon the desire of the two brethren to have a grand place in the Kingdom "for us", they were seeking something for themselves, whereas the example of the Lord which they were to follow was of focusing upon serving, rather than having an eye upon the reward.

But to minister- The Lord is the same yesterday, today and forever. His focus in His life was upon serving others, and yet the word is used of how He who served at the last supper shall also 'come forth' [s.w. "the Son of Man *came*", Mt. 20:28] to "minister" to

His people at the future Messianic banquet (Lk. 12:37).

And to give his life as a ransom for many- The Greek *lutron* is only used in this place in the NT, although the LXX uses it for the Hebrew *pidion*, the ransom payment for human life (Ex. 21:30; Num. 3:49-51; Num. 35:31). The word means literally 'to loose'. The idea may be that something [a life, an eternal life] was potentially prepared for the "many" which was tied up [by human sin], which the Lord's death would unloose and make available. But why use this particular term in this context? The connection is clearly with the idea of being a servant, a slave of the lowest order. And what did they loose? The sandals of the guests at meals, after which they washed their feet. There is clearly a connection of thought between the Lord's teaching here and His washing of the disciples' feet at the last supper, whereby He visually fulfilled the picture of being a servant and not being ministered unto, despite Peter's objections. His unloosing of the disciples' sandals and cleansing their feet, dressed as He was on the cross, having laid aside His outer garment and being clothed only with a loincloth, was all a prefigurement of His death on the cross. He invited us all to do as He had done- to participate in His death by dying for others that they might live. And that has various fulfilments day by day, in self control, not demanding from our brother, forgiving, rebuking, caring for, teaching... telephoning, emailing, and so forth.

20:29 *And as they went out from Jericho*- The healing of the two blind men as they left Jericho must be compared with the healing of Bartimaeus as He left Jericho (Mk. 10:46), and the healing of a blind man as He approached Jericho (Lk. 18:35). These accounts are not in contradiction. One of the two blind men was Bartimaeus, and he is the one Mark focuses on. The healing of the first blind man is indeed described in the same terms as the healing of the other blind men, but the similarity of the language is in order to demonstrate how the Lord worked in the same way in different lives at slightly different times. And there are other examples of incidents repeating in Biblical history but being described in similar language. We are left with an abiding impression that what happens in our lives has been in essence repeated in other lives. And surely the healing of the first blind man inspired the others to take the same leap of faith, just as we are to be inspired by the way others have responded to the Lord's hand in their lives.

A great crowd followed Him- The section began with the idea of the Lord now being on His journey to death in Jerusalem, and bidding the disciples follow Him on that path. The crowd followed, but not in that deeper sense. The same term is used of the healed blind men- they too "followed Him" (:34), but the implication is that they followed Him with understanding. The parallel Mk. 10:52 records that one of the men, Bartimaeus, "followed Jesus in the way". That last phrase would surely be redundant unless it was pregnant with some deeper meaning, and that meaning surely rests in the idea of following the Lord in the way of the cross which led to Golgotha.

20:30 *And two blind men who were sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus was passing by, cried out, saying*- Mk. 10:52 speaks of how at least one of these blind men followed Jesus "in the way", using the same word *hodos* as used here for "the way". Their sad position, sitting maybe for years day by day *para* or by, next to "the way", was in fact putting them in a position when at the right time, they could get up and follow the Lord along that "way". See on :34 *Followed Him*.

Lord, have mercy on us, you Son of David- These were exactly the words of the two

blind men of 9:27, who were likewise cured as the Lord "departed" from a town, just as here the cure happened as He departed from Jericho. The similarity and connection is obvious. From God's side, we see how He works according to pattern in the lives of people. And humanly, the blind men had somehow passed on to other blind men the truth that there was mercy / grace in the Son of David, which could be manifested in the restoration of sight. In this lies the significance of the fact that according to Lk. 18:35, another blind man had very recently said exactly these words and made exactly this request as the Lord *approached* Jericho. Far from being [as supposed by the critics] a jumbling up of material by uninspired writers, we see rather the development of a theme- that blind men at various places and times approached the Lord with the same words, and made the same connection between His mercy and Him being the Son of David. They may simply have thought that as the Son of David, He had the characteristics of David- which included remarkable mercy and grace to his enemies. We also see how once a community is broken into with the Gospel, it spreads within that community, expressed in the words and concepts which that community understands, and in the style which originated with the first ones in the community who accepted the Gospel. I have seen this happen in communities of the deaf, Gypsies, HIV patients, ethnic minorities under persecution, language groups etc. And so it happened amongst the blind beggar community in Palestine. Such communities have amazing links to each other and paths of communication.

The connection between "the son of David" and "mercy" is surely rooted in the description of the promises to David as "the mercies [*chesed*] of David" (Is. 55:3; Acts 13:34; 1 Kings 3:6; 2 Chron. 1:8; Ps. 89:49 "The mercies which You promised unto David"; Is. 16:5 "In mercy shall the throne be established... in the tent of David"). These promises were utter grace; "mercy" translates *chesed* , which is about the closest the OT comes to the NT concept of grace. David rejoiced in this *chesed* / mercy shown to him (2 Sam. 22:51; 2 Chron. 7:6; Ps. 101:1). Solomon pleaded for grace on the basis of the fact that God had shown such covenant mercies to David (2 Chron. 6:42 "Remember the mercies of David"). The mercies of David surely also refer to God's mercy, the mercy of grace, shown to David in forgiving him the sin with Bathsheba and Uriah- he begged for forgiveness on the basis of God's "tender mercies" (Ps. 51:1). It could be argued that David's forgiveness was on account of his pleading for the mercies shown to him in the Davidic covenant to be continued to him. For in that covenant God had promised that *chesed* would not depart from David (2 Sam. 7:15), and David therefore begs for forgiveness on the basis that grace / *chesed*would indeed not be withdrawn from him (Ps. 51:1). From all this, David pleaded in crisis towards the end of his life to fall into God's hands because "His mercies are great" (2 Sam. 24:14). In response to the*chesed* ["mercy", or grace] shown David, he too was characterized by humanly senseless *chesed* to his enemies in the family of Saul (s.w. 1 Sam. 20:15; 2 Sam. 2:5 "you have shewed this kindness / *chesed* unto Saul"; 2 Sam. 3:8; 9:1,7) and to Hanun his Ammonite enemy (2 Sam. 10:2 "I will shew kindness / *chesed* unto the Hanun"). What is so impressive is that the network of blind men, from Galilee to Jericho, had figured this out, or at least part of it. They saw the connection between grace and David, and were inspired to throw themselves upon the grace of David's Messianic Son. There was in those times [as there is in much of the world today] a deep belief that blindness was the direct result of sin (Jn. 9:2). These blind men almost certainly felt that their blindness was a result of their sin, and so they felt a moral need for forgiveness, so that the blindness would be lifted. According to Mk. 10:46, one of the blind men was called Bartimaeus, literally 'Son of the unclean'- doubtless this was what he had been dubbed

by others, for no Hebrew mother would have named her son that. And they believed that Jesus could indeed cleanse them, morally forgive them, and thereby restore their sight. This would explain why they screamed [Gk.] "Have mercy on us!". This was a moral request; they didn't simply call out for healing.

20:31 *And the crowd rebuked them*- This is yet another example of where the Lord is presented as eager to accept, when men [including disciples] are more eager to reject. The same word has just been used in 19:13 for how the disciples rebuked the little ones from coming to the Lord- and were in turn rebuked. The impression is that in the disciples' exclusivity, they weren't being [as they supposed] more spiritual than the world around them, but rather were they being simply as that world. Soon afterwards, the Pharisees told the Lord to "rebuke" His disciples, and He replied that it was impossible for them to "hold their peace" (Lk. 19:39,40). These are all words and phrases taken from this incident. Now it is the disciples who refuse to be quiet, and it is the Pharisees who want them to be quiet. Again the point is made that the desire to silence and exclude others is from the world, and not of Christ. The Lord's acceptance of people is consistently painted by the Gospels as being far more inclusive and extensive than that of men. The human tendency to reject and erect barriers is simply not there in Christ.

That they should hold their peace; but they cried out the more, saying, Lord, have mercy on us, you Son of David!- This fits with my comment on 20:21 *What do you want?*, in that this could be seen as piquing their sense of urgency for Christ.

20:32 *And Jesus stood still and called them, and said: What do you desire I do for you?*- See on 20:21 *What do you want?* The Lord a way of focusing men upon their need. Thus He would have passed by the desperate disciples as they struggled in the storm, He would have gone further on the road to Emmaus, and He asked the blind men the obvious question: “What will ye that I shall do unto you?” (Mt. 20:32). He only partially cured another blind man, to focus that man’s mind on the faith that was needed for the second and final stage of the cure (Mk. 8:23-25). He elicited from the father of the epileptic child the miserable childhood story of the boy- not that the Lord needed to know it, but to concentrate the man on his need for the Lord’s intervention (Mk. 9:21). He wanted them to focus on their need: in this case, for sight. He let Peter start to sink, and only then, when Peter’s whole heart and soul were focused on the Lord, did He stretch forth His hand. The Lord deliberately delayed going to see Lazarus until he was dead and buried; to elicit within His followers the acuteness of their need. And was He *really* sleeping in the boat with the storm all around Him? Was He not waiting there for them to finally quit their human efforts and come running to Him with faith in no other (Mk. 4:38,39)? Only when men were thus focused on their desperate need for the Lord would He answer them. The Lord further focused men’s need when he asked the lame man: “Wilt thou be made whole?” (Jn. 5:6). Of course the man wanted healing. But the Lord first of all focused his desire for it.

20:33 *They said to him: Lord, that our eyes may be opened*- The one thing they wanted was to see. Those healed blind men are types of us. True understanding (seeing) should be the one thing we want. "Wisdom is the *principal* thing; therefore get wisdom" Prov. 4:7). See on 20:21 *What do you want?* This was obviously a rhetorical question, and it succeeded in the intention of making the men verbalize their dominant desire. Likewise the Lord works with us to make us focus and understand what is our dominant desire- and then seeks to reposition that focus. In this section He has done that by

placing all human desires and requests in the shadow of His death for us. For how could we want anything 'extra' after He has done that for us, with all it enabled.

20:34 *And Jesus, being moved with compassion*- So often we read this, indeed the Greek word is only used for the compassion of Jesus during His ministry; and it is never in itself because the object of the compassion had some great spirituality or was somehow worthy of that compassion. Rather was it basic pity, which is the idea in the Greek; pity at the human condition. It is exemplified in how the Samaritan had compassion upon the wounded man, and how the Father has compassion on the prodigal (Lk. 10:33; 15:20). In this case, as explained above, the blind men did indeed have quite some spiritual insight. But that of itself didn't elicit the Lord's compassion. The Lord who is the same yesterday as today was and is simply moved by human need- and responds.

Touched their eyes- Which were likely secreting ritually unclean emissions. Again the Lord shows an eagerness to identify with human uncleanness rather than avoid it. He could, after all, have cured the men in a different manner. This was the same manner in which the Lord had cured the two blind men in 9:29. The critics love to see here a confusion in reporting a singular incident twice. But it seems perfectly likely that the Lord rewarded the fact that these men had heard of the faith of the other blind men, come to share it- and therefore the Lord treated them likewise. There is a continuity and similarity in the way in which the Lord works in human lives, which is why our sufferings are designed so that we can share what we learnt from them with others who are suffering in the same way (2 Cor. 1:4). It likewise explains the otherwise uncanny similarities which there are between the experiences of believers, both with those contemporary with us and personally known to us, and others in the past or of whom we read in the Bible.

If indeed there are major bloomers in the Gospels and in the Bible generally [as the critics suggest regarding these incidents of healing the pairs of blind men], then naturally the question arises as to how reliable the Biblical text really is. Liberal Christians tend to argue that some is, other parts aren't. But no basis is given for deciding which parts are reliable and which are not. Nor does there seem any reason why God would inspire some parts of the Bible but not others. But the wonder is that the Bible, and the Gospels particularly, can be analyzed at depth and found not to contradict but rather to dovetail seamlessly in a way in which no human piece of writing ever could. This is particularly seen in the four Gospels, and it is this seamlessness and lack of contradiction which led sceptics like Frank Morrison in *Who Moved the Stone?* to become committed believers in the bodily resurrection of Christ. In musical terms, the whole united record reads as a symphony. There is no need to remove one note from it, or a few notes here and there. The overall wonder is lost by doing so, to the point that it is a desecration of the Divine product. If there are passages which we cannot reconcile, the way of humility is surely to accept that we are still waiting for more insight and understanding- rather than arrogantly insisting that Divine inspiration somehow faltered at that point.

And immediately they received their sight and followed him- See on :30 *Followed Him* and :30 *Sitting by the way*. Mk. 10:52 adds that at least one of the blind men "Followed Him *in the way*". But He told the man "Go *your* way" (Mk. 10:52). The man's way was now the Lord's way, the way of the cross. There's surely a play on words here, for *akoloutheo* translated "followed" means literally 'to be in the same way with'.

The Lord told the man to go *his* way, but the man followed Jesus in *His* way, the way which has been defined in :17,18 as the way to the cross. Our way is His way, not in that He dominates and subsumes our individuality beneath His own, but in that we each follow Him in our own particular and unique way. That is not to say that we each have our way in life and that journey must of itself be the right one. It's axiomatic that every man has his own path in life. As believers in Christ, our path must be *following Him*, and not just wandering around in life; but each one in Christ follows their Lord in their own unique path.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 21

21:1 *And when they drew near to Jerusalem*- This suggests that Matthew was not with them at the time. I suggest he was, but in the analogy of the cameraman, he has as it were shifted his camera to Jerusalem and records the group approaching.

And came to Bethphage, to the mount of Olives, then Jesus- 'The house of figs'. There is likely a connection to the incident later in this section when the Lord curses the fig tree (:19). Perhaps we are to assume that He hoped for figs in Bethphage too, and was likewise disappointed. Bethphage has even been given the meaning 'House of unripe figs', which would confirm this impression (See Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (Jerusalem: Horeb, 1903, reprint) p. 1132).

Sent two disciples- The question arises as to why He didn't simply take the two animals Himself. The practical answer would be that if He had gone further into Jerusalem to get them, then he would as it were have entered Jerusalem but not in the way He intended to, which was to consciously fulfil the prophecy about the humble King entering Jerusalem on a donkey. But that explanation throws the question one stage further back. Why was it specifically a donkey from that village and person which was required? Could He not have found one in Bethphage? The effort required to send two disciples ahead of Him to get the animals and then bring them back to Bethphage seems considerable, when donkeys were common enough. The answer is not clear, but it could be that there was an anonymous person who specifically wanted to give those animals to the Lord in order to fulfil that prophecy. The Lord knew this and had obviously discussed it with the owner previously, because the owner would recognize Him as "the Lord" (:3), and would provide them once he perceived the Lord wanted them. In this little incident we see therefore the extent the Lord will go to, now as well as then, in order to take up the initiative of those who love Him. If we take that initiative in service, the Lord will surely use it, and make every effort to do so.

21:2 *Saying to them: Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me*- The Greek words translated "tied" and "loose" occur together several times, usually rendered 'bind' and 'loose'. Earlier in Matthew, the idea of binding and loosing has been used about the way that the decisions and actions of believers can have eternal consequence upon others, and our bind and loosing is to some extent reflected in and confirmed by Heaven (16:19; 18:18). This conception of binding and loosing was surely intended by the Lord. Verse 4 makes clear that all this was done in order to fulfil the prophecy of Zech. 9:9 that Messiah would come to Zion riding on a donkey and her foal. But that prophecy had to be consciously fulfilled. Whether or not the Messianic prophecies were fulfilled was

therefore left to the initiative of the Lord and His followers. And it's the same in our last days- if, e.g., we choose to fulfil the prophecy that the Gospel must go into all the world before the end comes, then in that sense the actual time of Christ's coming is left in our hands. There are other Messianic associations with a donkey- Abraham took Isaac to be sacrificed on a donkey (Gen. 22:3,5); Solomon rode to his coronation on David's donkey (1 Kings 1:33-44).

The question arises as to why both a donkey and foal were required. He surely didn't straddle both at the same time. He rode on the donkey whilst the colt followed. Perhaps this has reference to the way that the Lord's final entry into His Kingdom would be on the backs of both Jews and Gentiles; the immature foal with no rider would therefore look forward to the Gentiles. Another possibility is that "A donkey, *and* on a colt, the foal of a donkey" is a Semitic parallelism effectively meaning 'A donkey, actually, a foal of a donkey'. If that's the case, then the Lord rode the foal of a donkey, not yet broken in. It would've been hard to ride, probably trying to throw Him; His journey into the city would've been almost comical, because He would nearly have been thrown and would've hardly made a sedate, solemn procession. The parallel records stress that no man had ever sat upon it (Mk. 11:2; Lk. 19:30). This would've spoken clearly of the difficulty of the Lord's entry to His Kingdom whilst riding on Israel. However, :2 speaks in the plural, of loosing the animals and bringing *them* to the Lord. It may simply be that a donkey nursing her foal, distracted by this, was the most unmilitary, non-glorious form upon which the Lord could've entered Jerusalem. Perhaps it was a parody of how triumphal entries require a King to be on a charger pulling a chariot. The Lord had a donkey instead of a charger, and instead of a chariot being pulled by the charger, the foal was in tow behind the donkey.

Mk. 11:4 says that the donkey was tied at a gate, at "a place where two ways met". This translates the word *amphedon* which in the LXX (e.g. Jer. 17:27) is used for a palace. Herod had a palace on the Mount of Olives and maybe this is what is being referenced. It could be that the donkey and foal were provided by Herod's servants, because Joanna was a disciple of Jesus who provided for Jesus from her "substance"- and she was the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward (Lk. 8:3). In this case, the Lord was further parodying a King's triumphant entry by riding upon Herod's donkey.

21:3 *And if anyone says something to you, you shall say: The Lord*- See on 21:1 *Sent two disciples*.

Has need of them- God in a sense is in need of man, just as Jesus was, or allowed Himself to be.

And immediately he will send them- "Send" here translates *apostello*, and naturally we think of the apostles, those sent forth with the Gospel. And as so often taught by implication, the Lord is in need of man, the harvest needs workers and without them, in His wisdom, it will not be harvested. We are surely being invited to see these animals as representative of those upon whom the Lord will ride in order to enter Jerusalem in glory. But He rode upon the bucking, difficult colt which had not yet been broken in. This hampered His triumphal entry. And there was the donkey itself with nobody sitting upon it. Just as the Lord consciously tried to fulfil Zech. 9:9 by obtaining these animals, so the hint surely is that His final triumphal entry will be on the basis of us His people carrying Him in.

21:4 *Now this happened so*- The Gospels are highly abbreviated accounts, and yet a significant amount of time is spent explaining how the Lord obtained the donkey and foal. This is to show how consciously He tried to fulfil God's word. He consciously tried to make the word become flesh in Him, as we must (Jn. 1:14).

That it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying- The use of *hina* definitely suggests action *so that* there might be a specific outcome, in this case, the fulfilment of prophecy. This construction is common in the Lord's ministry- something was done *hina*, in order to achieve, the fulfilment of prophecy (Mt. 1:22; 2:15; 4:14; 21:5; 26:56; 27:35; Mk. 14:49; Jn. 12:38; 13:18; 15:25; 17:12; 19:24,36).

21:5 *Tell the daughter of Zion*- A term used in the prophets for the righteous remnant within Jerusalem. The idea was that they would perceive how the Lord was fulfilling the Messianic prophecy of Zech. 9:9. However, the Hebrew text of Zech. 9:9 says that the King comes "having salvation"- but that is omitted in this quotation. The ultimate 'triumphal entry' was yet to come. The Lord entered Jerusalem to obtain salvation through death on the cross, not to bring the immediate salvation from Rome which the people were so fixated upon.

Look, your King comes to you, meek and riding upon an ass and upon a colt the foal of an ass- Kings were supposed to enter their new capital on a charger, a war horse, beaming in proud triumph. The idea of a humble king was an oxymoron to the first century mindset. But the Lord was a King like no other- a humble king, who entered Zion not on a charger but on a donkey with a colt wandering insecurely behind them. Zech. 9:9 goes on to say that by doing this, He will bring deliverance from the war horse / charger: "Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, *humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey*. He will *cut off the chariot* from Ephraim *and the war horse* from Jerusalem; and the *battle bow shall be cut off*, and he shall *command peace* to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River [Euphrates] to the ends of the earth". In this we see the principle of non-violent victory over violence; the King who comes riding on a donkey will thereby "cut off... the war horse" which was threatening Jerusalem. That war horse was initially a reference to Rome, from whom the Jews thought Messiah would violently deliver them. The Lord went to great efforts to fulfil this prophecy of Zech. 9:9- in order to demonstrate that it was by humility and non-violence that deliverance from violence would finally come. The other accounts say the Lord rode upon the foal of the donkey (e.g. Jn. 12:15). If He sat upon this animal rather than the mother donkey, the Lord was showing how He chose to ride in the 'chariot' rather than on the donkey pulling it. But the donkey and foal were the humblest and weakest imitation possible of a charger and chariot. But this was exactly His point. The glorious victory procession came from Bethphage "and Bethany" (Mk. 11:1), which can mean 'house of the poor'. It was here that the Lord sat upon the humble donkey- again reinforcing the idea that He came as a humble King.

21:6 The record emphasizes the disciples' obedience and solidarity with the Lord, placing their personal clothes as His saddle (:7). It must've all seemed rather bizarre, for they too nursed hopes of an immediate salvation and Kingdom, but they were commendably willing to go along with His insistence of teaching the lesson of 'the humble King'. Jn. 12:16 adds the information that the disciples didn't understand at the time, nor did they see the connection with Zech. 9:9: "These things his disciples did not understand at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about him, and that they had done these things to him". And yet they went along with it all. It is an essay in loyalty and obedience, although not in perception and faith.

21:6 *And the disciples went and did as Jesus directed them*- This is to note their obedience to an otherwise very strange command. They surely secretly hoped that He would achieve a dramatic Messianic salvation. And He was teaching them that that salvation was not now, and He was deconstructing the whole idea of a triumphal entry, as noted on :6. It is to their credit that they humbled themselves beneath this idea.

21:7 *And brought the ass and the colt and put on them their garments; and he sat thereon*- Using their garments as saddles. The fact both animals were saddled was to make the point that one rider was missing. For according to the other Gospels, the Lord sat upon the colt. The mother donkey was saddled, but without a rider. This added to the strangeness of the spectacle. The missing rider was perhaps a reference to how Israel had not as a whole responded in bringing Messiah to Zion. Maybe it referred to the Gentiles who had yet to be converted. Or perhaps to the fact that Israel had rejected John the Baptist and he had been killed- and therefore there was no Elijah prophet bringing Messiah into Zion. Elijah was the great horseman of the Divine chariot (2 Kings 2:12; 13:14; he is called the "horsemen" plural, but this is an intensive plural for 'the one great horseman'). Elijah was the chariot horseman, the one who was to ride on the horse which pulled the chariot in which there was Messiah [this was a Rabbinic understanding of the Elijah prophet]. But he was strangely absent in this acted parable. The saddle was there for him, provided by the few disciples who had responded to John / Elijah; but he wasn't there. This absence of the Elijah prophet was surely indicative of the fact that John had not been the Elijah prophet for most of Israel- they hadn't responded properly to his message. Therefore the true triumphant entry of Messiah was yet future. This is why the phrase "bringing salvation" is excluded from the quotation of Zech. 9:9. It was not so much a 'triumphant entry', but a *parody* of a triumphant entry.

21:8 *Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road*- Paul speaks of how Israel were cut off branches because of their rejection of Jesus (Rom. 11:17,19). The crowds who accepted Him in the wrong way very soon rejected Him; so in a sense, they cut themselves off. And they did this because they misunderstood Him, expecting Him to give immediate deliverance.

Jn. 12:13 says they were palm branches. But palms and the shout of "Hosanna" are associated with the feast of Tabernacles. And this was Passover, not Tabernacles. All the way through this brilliant visual stunt by the Lord, there was the message that He was not as they had imagined, He had come to die as the Passover Lamb, not to immediately give them the Tabernacles celebration which they wanted to see there and then.

The behaviour in this verse was exactly that associated with the triumphant entry of a victorious king. The much laboured account of the Lord's obtaining a donkey and her foal and thus riding into the city was really a studied parody of that whole conception of Messianic victory. For Him, the victory would be to hang lifeless upon a cross. True greatness was in humility. And instead of beaming with pride, Lk. 19:41 adds the detail that He wept over the city, knowing how they had rejected Him. According to Harry Whittaker, *Studies in the Gospels, "*The rabbis had a saying: "If Israel be worthy, Messiah comes with the clouds of heaven (Dan. 7:13); if unworthy, riding upon an ass" (Zech. 9:9)". So the entire triumphant entry was indeed a parody which sooner or later the Jews came to grasp. Hence their anger- for the whole incident declared them unworthy.

Whilst what the Lord arranged was indeed a parody of a triumphant entry, designed to highlight the importance of humility and sacrifice, He was surely conscious that He

was acting out, however dimly, the prophesied future and ultimate triumphal entry of Messiah into Jerusalem and the temple, coming from the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4; Is. 62:11).

21:9 *And the crowds that went before him and that followed shouted: Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!-*

Hosanna means 'Save now'. This obsession with 'Salvation now' was their equivalent of today's prosperity Gospel, which is a similarly false understanding of the Lord. Matthew records here that the people cried 'Hosanna' at Christ's entry into Jerusalem. Seeing that first century Israel spoke Aramaic, this is doubtless what did actually come out of their lips. But Luke says that the same group of people shouted "Glory" (Lk. 19:38). Luke's Gospel seems to be designed for the Greek speaking world, and so he uses the Greek equivalent of 'Hosanna', even though they did not actually say that word. The way the New Testament quotes the Old with slight changes without pointing this out is another example of how God's word mixes interpretation with direct transmission of facts (e.g. Ps. 32:1-2 cp. Rom. 4:6-7). God has inspired His word in order to interpret certain facts to us. This is further proof that we are not intended to insist on a strictly literal meaning to everything we read (for example, that the sun literally rises). This fact is not irrelevant to the issue of demons. The accounts of demons being cast out are framed in such a way as to show the supremacy of God's power over the vain traditions of the first century world.

"He that comes" was a clearly Messianic title. They accepted Jesus as Messiah, but their understanding of Messiah was so wrong. They assumed He would bring 'salvation now', and immediate freedom from the Romans and economic hardship.

Hosanna "in the highest" suggests that because the people wanted 'Save *now*' and immediate deliverance from Rome, they assumed that God shared their view. Thus they assumed that their cry of 'Salvation now!' was being uttered in Heaven too. This assumption that God is of course in tune with our wishes is very dangerous- the dashing of this expectation was what unleashed the fury and gross misjudgement in these people which lead to their very soon screaming for the death of God's Son.

The other records add that the Pharisees asked the Lord to restrain His supporters. His response was "I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out". There's a strong similarity between the Aramaic and Hebrew words for "sons" and "stones"; and the Lord's 'sons' were the disciples, His spiritual children. It was the disciples who were enthusiastic for His triumphant entry- the crowds soon lost their enthusiasm.

21:10 *And when he had arrived in Jerusalem*- See on :11 *The prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.*

All the city was stirred, saying- This is the word for a quake or tremor, the crowd were shocked deeply- by the idea of a humble King.

Who is this?- The Lord was well known in Jerusalem, His miracles and previous visits had hardly gone unnoticed. The question was rather 'What kind of person is this?'. His careful effort to obtain a donkey and colt, and ride the bucking colt in imitation of a charger and chariot... had worked. It had achieved the desired effect of stunning people by the new paradigm of humility which He was exemplifying. The "daughter of Zion" (:5) was singularly unimpressed by the coming of their King. Doubtless there was a connected element of sarcasm in Pilate's question: "Shall I crucify your King?" (Jn. 19:15). And they stated beyond question that they would rather have Caesar as their

King than this humble man from Nazareth.

21:11 *And the crowds said: This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee*- I think we can conclude that this answer was not given in proud introduction of their Messiah, but rather agreeing with the sceptical question 'What kind of person is*this*?'. For Nazareth and Galilee were despised and hardly seen as the origin of Messiah nor of any half decent prophet. "Out of Galilee arises no prophet" was the Jewish position (Jn. 7:52). It was to them an oxymoron to say that a prophet, let alone Messiah, could come from there. And Nazareth, with its Gentile connotations and a reputation for siding with the Roman occupants, was likewise despised. Nathanael struggled with the idea that Messiah could come from Nazareth: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (Jn. 1:46). We can feel the mockery in the recorded words of the girl in the courtyard concerning Peter: "This fellow was also with Jesus *of Nazareth*", and the subsequent comment that Peter shared the Galilean accent of Jesus (Mt. 26:71). This sceptical answer to the Jerusalem crowds was given by the "multitude" that welcomed the Lord into Jerusalem. In the hour or so which His parody of a 'triumphal entry' took, their enthusiasm turned to bitter disillusion. This was not the Messiah they had expected. And their enthusiasm turned to bitter cynicism and disappointment. This is the significance of the information that they said this "When He was entered into Jerusalem" (:10). The crowd greeted Him as their Saviour King, throwing their garments in the street before Him, but as He rode the bucking colt with the dawdling, unenthusiastic donkey before Him, their views changed over that 30 to 60 minutes. Lk. 19:41-44 adds that He burst into tears of desperation and predicted that the enemies of Israel [clearly He had the Romans in view] would soon destroy the city and temple. This was so unpatriotic, and the exact opposite of what the crowds expected from Him: “When he drew near, he saw the city and wept over it, saying: If you had known in this day, even you, the things which belong to your peace! But now they are hid from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies shall set up a barricade around you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and shall dash you to the ground, and your children within you; and they shall not leave in you one stone upon another. All this will happen because you did not perceive the time of your visitation”. The Lord implies that their rejection and destruction was precisely because they turned away from perceiving His entry into the city as their “visitation”. They didn’t think this was the “time” because they weren’t seeing immediate salvation. Or rather, they didn’t wish to see it. All they could think was that this was not their man, not at all the Messiah they had expected. Their cry of 'Save now!' ['Hosanna'] produced no dramatic action on His part. He just kept on riding that awkward beast, wandering probably in a zig-zag through the streets.

21:12 *And Jesus entered into the temple of God*- This again was a conscious parody of Judaism’s Messianic hopes. Their idea was that Messiah would enter Jerusalem in triumph against their Gentile enemies, and enter the temple. This was based upon their reading of Mal. 3:1: “The Lord whom you seek shall suddenly come to His temple”. But the context of Malachi 3 required a positive response by Israel to the herald of Messiah, i.e. John the Baptist. And this had not been forthcoming. And the next verse goes on to suggest that this coming of Messiah will not be of much blessing to Israel- “But who may abide the day of His coming [i.e., “to His temple”]? And who shall stand when He appears?” (Mal. 3:2).

Mark’s record appears to state that the Lord first entered the temple, looked around and walked out (Mk. 11:11) and the next day returned to cleanse the temple of traders. It could be that He cleansed the temple twice. Or it could be that this silent looking

around and walking away, returning to Bethany, 'the house of the poor', was another intentional creation of an anti-climax. The Jews expected Him to do something dramatic- and He simply looked around in sadness and left for 'the house of the poor'- to return and cast out the traders and thus make the performance of sacrifice impossible there.

And cast out- A verb elsewhere used by the Lord about condemnation (8:12 and soon after this incident, in 21:39; 22:13; 25:30). Instead of bringing salvation to Israel's temple, He entered it and condemned the orthodox, casting them out of God's house and forbidding them to enter it to carry things through it (Mk., Lk.). Instead of them, the Lord in their place welcomed children and the handicapped into God's house. Sacred space was a major concept in Judaism; the Lord's expulsion of the Orthodox from it and replacing them with those considered unworthy of entry was a highly significant thing to do.

All them that sold and bought in the temple- This is the context of Zech. 9:8: "And I will encamp for the sake of thine house as a garrison that none pass through or return; and no exactor shall pass through them any more: for now I have seen with mine eyes". This would allude to the Lord's looking around the temple and walking out of it; He banned carrying things through the temple (Mk. 11:16), and all exaction of money. The Lord had not long earlier described Sodom as the place where the wrong kind of buying and selling went on, and He had likened His generation to Sodom (Lk. 17:28). This, again, was hardly what the crowds expected to hear- a likening of their most sacred place to Sodom, and a prophecy of its destruction at the hands of the Gentiles. The ban on carrying things through the temple referred to the practice of taking a short cut through the court of the Gentiles rather than having to walk all around the temple complex. The Lord was thereby proclaiming the court of the Gentiles as holy as the rest of the temple building. Note that the Lord also expelled those who were *buying* the animals for sacrifice- ordinary Jews wanting to offer sacrifice. This surely hinted at an ending of the Mosaic law in view of the Lord's upcoming sacrifice. This was all so much what the Jewish masses did *not* want to hear.

And overthrew- This was not done in simple anger. The Lord's motive was still their reformation. He had entered the temple in allusion to their expectation that Messiah would triumphantly enter Jerusalem and proceed into the temple. They had based that idea upon Malachi 3. But that prophecy continued: "Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple . . . *and he shall purify the sons of Levi*" (Mal. 3:1,3). This 'cleansing' of the temple was His attempt to purify the sons of Levi. His hopefulness was simply amazing. And it is a strong pattern for we who give up so easily with people.

The tables of the moneychangers and the seats of them that sold the doves- These were the sons of Annas, the High Priest. This deepened the anticlimax- the Lord entered Jerusalem and the temple- and cast out the sons of the High Priest. Instead of entering the temple in glory, fulfilling the hope of Ezekiel's vision of the temple where Messiah enters the temple from the East, instead the Lord entered the temple- and in a huge anti-climax, castigates the Jewish religious leadership, throwing them out of the temple, and being acclaimed only by those excluded from Judaism: children, the lame and blind. See on :17 *Went out of the city into Bethany*.

21:13 *And he said to them*- The Lord several times quoted an OT passage which if quoted further would have made a telling point. Thus He quoted Is. 56:7: "My house shall be called an house of prayer", leaving His hearers to continue: "...for *all* people".

He recited Ps. 8:2: “Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise”, leaving them to complete: “...that thou mightest still [through their witness] the enemy and the avenger”. For the Bible minded, these things ought to have taught them. There is reason to think, in the subsequent response of a Jewish minority after Pentecost, that at least some did make these connections. They made use of the spiritual potential they had been given.

It is written- The Lord quotes from Is. 56:7, but the surrounding context of the quotation is relevant to the Jewish leadership who were present and deeply critical of the Lord's actions (:15). Is. 56:10,11 condemns Israel's elders as "blind watchmen... dumb dogs... greedy dogs which can never have enough, shepherds that cannot understand, every one looking for gain". "Dogs" was understood as a reference to the Gentiles- and the Lord is saying that they are effectively Gentiles. Significantly, Is. 56:6 has spoken of "the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord... taking hold of His covenant". This is often how God works- for those who are sensitive to His word, the quotations given speak far more deeply. The potential for greater understanding is thereby given to those familiar with His word. This is one reason why I encourage perseverance in reading the Bible even if at the point of reading we feel we are not understanding much and simply building up a familiarity with the text. That familiarity can be a basis for later revelation to us.

My house- Just as the "feasts *of the Lord*" are described as "feasts *of the Jews*", *God's* house becomes "*your* house" (23:38). They had hijacked God's religion for their own ends, just as so many do today.

Shall be called- Luke uses the present tense, "*is* called". The Lord surely said both, His point being that prophecies of the future Kingdom are to be lived out by us in essence today.

Den of thieves- The Kingdom prophecy of Zech. 14:21 that there will no longer be a trafficker in the Lord's house was fulfilled by the Lord's casting out the traders from the temple. Many of the Kingdom prophecies of healing were it seems consciously fulfilled in the Lord’s healings: Is. 35:6 LXX the stammerer healed = Mk. 7:32-35; Is. 35:3 = Mk. 2:3-12; 3:1-6; Is. 35:8,10 = Mk. 11:1 Bartimaeus following on the Jerusalem road. This doesn’t mean that these passages will not have a glorious future fulfillment. But in the person of Jesus and in the record of His life we see the “Kingdom come nigh”, as He Himself said it did. We can so focus on the future fulfillment that we can forget that He was the Kingdom in the midst of men; the essence of our eternal future, of the coming political Kingdom of God, was and is to seen in Him. Satan fell from Heaven during His ministry ((Lk. 10:18), as it will at the second coming (Rev. 12).

A house of prayer; but you make it a den of robbers- This invites us to see the thieves who robbed the man in the Samaritan parable as the Jewish leadership, whose priests and Levites refused to help people after the damage they themselves had caused (Lk. 10:30). The thieves "stripped him of His clothing" just as they later did to the Lord Jesus. The Lord uses the same figure of thieves for the Jewish leadership in Jn. 10:1,8. The Lord quotes here from Jer. 7:11, which speaks of the temple being profaned by adultery and Baal worship, resulting in the Babylonian invasion. He is saying that Israel's hypocritical piety in His day was none less than Baal worship, and therefore the Gentiles would come and destroy that place.

21:14 *And the blind and the lame*- Previously banned from the temple on the basis of 2 Sam. 5:8 LXX. Those rejected from the sacred space now came in to replace those

whom the Lord had ejected from it. Clearly His view was that kids and cripples were to replace the pious religious Jews.

Came to Him in the temple and he healed them- The time scale couldn't have been more than a few hours. It presumably took Him some time to eject the Jews from the temple and to stop people carrying burdens through it. The marginalized had heard that the others had been ejected- and came to Him naturally. They would've walked or looked around with glee at the sacred space previously denied to them. Quite why the temple guard didn't arrest the Lord is a significant question. They were surely there, and the Jews would've wanted them to intervene. I suggest the Lord stopped them in their tracks by supernatural power, just as He had earlier been able to walk through the midst of those seeking to kill Him (Jn. 8:59). The Lord demonstrated clearly that He could restrain the power of civil authority, guards and soldiers- if and when He wished. His submission to them in the process of arrest and crucifixion was therefore the more remarkable. It was His submission, not their power. Those same leaders and soldiers would surely have realized that He had the power to restrain them- for He had done so here in the temple, so shortly before His arrest and death. We see here an essay in how the process of His death was a result of His wilfully giving His life; it was not taken from Him, He laid it down (Jn. 10:17,18).

21:15 *But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did and the children that were crying in the temple and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David!*- Presumably they too had been cast out of the temple. This conversation likely took place after the Lord had finished in the temple.

They were moved with indignation, and said to him- Their eye was evil because He was good. The welcoming of the previously marginalized into sacred space produces a similar reaction today. If such categories are allowed to break bread, some get angry to the point of white hot hatred, which in God's eyes is murder. Their eye became evil because He was good. The same Greek word for "displeased" is used regarding how the ruler of the synagogue was indignant because the Lord had healed on the Sabbath (Lk. 13:14).

21:16 *Do you hear what these are saying? And Jesus said to them: Yes. Did you never read*- He was speaking to the educated who could read. "Never read" would've jarred with them- they spent their lives poring over the Scriptures. But we can read and yet never really read as God intends.

Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings you have perfected praise?- A strange grammatical construction, the plural "babes" have a singular "mouth", so united are they in devotion to the Lord. Hence we find that the word translated "perfected" is elsewhere rendered "perfectly joined together". The quotation from Ps. 8:2 is from a Psalm often alluded to in the New Testament. It was first written as David reflected upon his victory over Goliath, an incident clearly typical of the Lord's victory on the cross. The young people rejoiced in David's victory and joined Him in triumphing over his enemies in praise to God for the victory. This indicates that the Lord considered His victory as in a sense already accomplished; He saw those youngsters' praise of Him and acceptance of their place in God's house as being effectively their praise for His victory over the Goliath of sin. The quotation also associates the angry, intellectually defeated Jewish leaders with the Philistines- another one in a series of suggestions that they are

effectively Gentiles and no longer God's people (see on :13). Let's pause to give all this teaching its due weight- that legalism and exclusiveness are no better than Baal worship, and such orthodoxy is only a faithfulness to human tradition rather than to God.

21:17 *And he left them and went out of the city*- His 'going out of the city' is allusive to the language of Ezekiel, in that the glory begins within the city but progressively lifts up and goes out of it.

To Bethany and lodged there- This continues the radical subversion of Jewish Messianic expectations. They had expected a glorious entry into Jerusalem by Messiah, and His entering the temple in order to fulfil the hopes of Ezekiel's temple visions- that Messiah in glory would enter the temple. Instead, the Lord enters Jerusalem on a rider-less donkey, Himself sitting awkwardly on a wayward foal, enters the temple and castigates the Jews, throwing them out of it. And now He leaves the city and goes to Bethany, "the house of the poor". Rather like a pretender to the Presidency mounting a not very serious coup attempt, and going to spend the night in a low cost housing area, perhaps in an apartment in a run down tenement block known as 'the house of the poor'. Or perhaps a night shelter would be the most dynamic equivalent. That is not to say that the home in Bethany was actually poor, my comment is on the meaning of 'Bethany' as 'house of the poor'. The use of *eis*, "into", rather than a word carrying the sense of *unto*, serves to heighten the sense of anti-climax. He ended this parody of a triumphal entry by entering into 'the house of the poor'.

The Lord being the psychologist *extraordinaire* that He was, it could almost seem that He was engineering a situation which would turn public opinion against Him and lead to His betrayal to the Romans. And yet on the other hand, He had made all these points multiple times in His teaching, beginning in the Sermon on the Mount. He had explained as clearly as could be that His Kingdom was not at that time a political one, rather was it about service of others and internal transformation. He had so often elevated humility above anything else. But all His teaching had been skim listened to; people had taken what they wanted from Him, and decided that He was who they wanted and needed Him to be, rather than who He said He was. And so through this parody of a triumphal entry, He was visually and very publically explaining what He really stood for. And thereby very powerfully exposing their hopes as mere selfishness, their ideals as misplaced, their understandings as faulty. I wouldn't say that He did this with the express intention of bringing about His death, but rather motivated by the hope that His one last appeal might still trigger response amongst the true "daughter of Zion". His predictions of His death, however, indicate that He knew what would happen. A psychologist weighing up the situation as it stood at the triumphant entry, even if he didn't know how the story would end, would likely be able to predict accurately what would've happened. The Jews would become deeply angry with Jesus, their hopes in Him would have turned to hatred and anger, they would desire to kill Him, and being unable to legally do so, would hand Him over to the Romans to execute. Indeed, Judas had already trodden this road one step ahead of the masses.

21:18 *Now in the morning as he returned to the city*- A hint that His final return in the morning of Zion's new day will require at least some fruit on the fig tree, the beginnings of repentance and spiritual fruit in Israel.

He became hungry- Hungry in the morning, having spent the night at Mary and Martha's home? Had Martha failed in providing food for some reason? More likely the Lord had been fasting for Israel's repentance. And His hunger spoke of His desire to see even the beginnings of spiritual fruit on the fig tree of Israel. His fast was for fruit on Israel; if He had found it, He would have eaten it and thus broken His fast.

21:19 *And seeing a fig tree by the roadside, he went to it and*- Symbolic of Israel (Jer. 24:1-8; Hos. 9:10,16; Is. 28:4 RV; 34:2,4,8; Rev. 6:13; Lk. 13:6-9; 17:6; 19:6; Mic. 7:1 RV). Israel were seen by the Lord as the tree by the roadside, whose fruit should have been for all that passed by (Dt. 23:24). But because there was not even the glimmer of this kind of giving of fruit, they were condemned by the Lord.

Found nothing thereon- His disappointment was great because of His earlier parable about Himself and the fig tree, in which He had put these words in His own mouth: "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well; but if not, after that thou shalt cut it down". He looked over and around the tree, desperate to see at least some signs of fruit. He realized that the tree of Israel had to be cut down.

But leaves only- The inadequate covering for sin with which human history began in Eden.

And he said to it: Let there be no fruit from you- If the fruit on the fig tree represents spiritual fruit, does this suggest that now the possibility of repentance was taken away from them? It was as if judgment day had really arrived for them even in this life; for there will be no possibility of repentance then. Or it could be that the Lord was annulling the prophecies about *Israel* filling the face of the earth with fruit. His emphasis then would have been on "May no fruit grow *on you*". The tree of Israel was to be cut down, and the fruit was to come from the fig tree "and all the trees" of the Gentile nations. This is the connection with the Lord's later sign of the fig tree and all the trees (Lk. 21:29); when spiritual fruit is seen on all of them, when the Gospel has gone into all the world, to all the trees / nations, then shall the end come (Mt. 24:14).

Again- AV "For ever", for the *aion*, the age. He could mean throughout the new age which was to start, for Israel are prophesied as finally blossoming and filling the face of the earth with fruit (Is. 27:6). Or it could be that that prophecy about Israel was conditional, and the Lord is accepting that their rejection of Him meant that it and other such prophecies were now disallowed from fulfilment in themselves by what they were going to do to Him.

And immediately the fig tree withered away- "From the roots", Mark adds. This meant the ground was cursed- the land of Israel. And the roots may refer to the ending of the Mosaic law. "Ephraim ['fruitful'] is smitten, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit... My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him: and they shall be wanderers among the nations" (Hos. 9:10,16,17).

21:20 *And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying*- Their amazement is presented in Mk. 11:21,22 as a lack of faith, calling forth from the Lord the rebuke: "Have faith in God". After all the miracles they had seen, it's pathetic that they doubted as to the Lord's ability to dry up a fig tree. Yet again, the initial Gospel writers and preachers draw attention to their own weakness of faith. Seeing that the fig tree was such a well known symbol of Israel (see on :19), the disciples may have perceived the

incident as an acted parable. Their comment "How soon is the fig tree withered" (Mk.) could be seen as a criticism of how quickly the Lord had withered it. But this would in turn indicate that they had totally failed to understand His earlier teaching of how He had asked the Father for more time for Israel than He had intended to give it, and had personally done the servile work of digging and dunging it in the hope that fruit would come. Their struggle to believe what the Lord had done reflected the wider struggle they and we have to accept that humility, the humble entry rather than the triumphal one, is the way of God. They struggled to believe that the entire system of formal religious worship was being done away and replaced by kids and cripples, literally and spiritually, in the sacred space. The Lord's subsequent exhortations to faith must be seen in this context- the faith to believe this. I recall a brother once at the heart of a community of believers being disfellowshipped over a false accusation. I urged him to break bread alone. He told me that he didn't have the faith... to sit and break bread alone, with no hymns, no president, no surrounding church. We sat in a fast food joint in a London suburb and I had to lead him in the breaking of bread service- he was so used to standing there on Sunday mornings, either presiding or giving the lesson... He has often recalled that there in McDonalds, he found his faith. Faith in God and Jesus, and not in any organization or human church.

How did the fig tree immediately wither away?- The Lord had said that it would happen immediately (:19). According to the other records, the disciples made this comment the next day. They somehow doubted the Lord could work with such immediate effect. And this strange lack of faith was surely because they perceived that the fig tree represented Israel and all they had once held dear in their culture. The disciples asked how the fig tree [cp. Israel] withered away so quickly. The answer, of course, was in that Jesus had faith that it would. He goes on to tell them that if *they* had faith, the mountain of Zion, the hope of Israel, would be cast into the sea of nations (:20,21). The Lord Jesus is surely saying that *His* faith should not be seen as separate from *our* faith. According to the faith of the disciples, the Hope of Israel, rejected by the withered fig tree of Israel, could be spread to the Gentiles. But the spread of the Gospel world-wide was and is conditional upon our faith, modelled as it must be upon His example.

21:21 *And Jesus answered and said to them: Truly I say to you, If you have faith*- See on :20. The faith in view was faith in the Lord's new way of doing things, a religion of kids and cripples outside of organized religion.

And doubt not- The 'faith' was faith in the passing of the Jewish system. "Doubt not" translates *diakrino* which can better be translated to make a difference, to discriminate. It was as if the Lord was saying: 'I know you believe. But to believe in *this* will be hard. Don't make a difference, believing in some things and not others. Believe in this too'.

You shall not only do what is done to the fig tree, but even if you shall say to- They too were to play a part in the withering of the fig tree- by preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles.

This mountain- There is a clear semantic connection between the cursing of the fig tree and the moving of the mountain into the sea. The mountain in view was the temple mount. The Lord is comforting them that not only would the tree of Israel be withered, but the whole mount Zion, the most sacred space in Judaism, would be cast to the Gentiles [the "sea"]. This kind of thing was what His parody of a triumphal entry had been all about, and His casting out of the religious Jews from the temple and replacing

them with kids and cripples, those formerly excluded from the sacred space. The faith to move the temple mount to the Gentiles was the very faith which Peter was later required to have in preaching to the Gentiles represented by Cornelius. The Lord recognized that this paradigm shift was a matter of faith, and He urged the disciples to realize their psychological problem and accept it needed special help from God to get over. This incident obviously had huge relevance for the first century communities of believers who were baptized as a result of Matthew's Gospel; for acceptance of the end of the Jewish system and the acceptance of the Gentiles was the live issue for the early churches. Mk. 11:25 adds: "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses". The motivation in accepting others into fellowship, in accepting the casting of the sacred space of Mount Zion to the Gentiles, was to be from realizing their own urgent need for forgiveness and their moral frailty. Those faced with similar struggles about accepting others, or allowing previously rejected categories into Christian fellowship, need to take this advice.

Be taken up and cast into the sea, it shall be done- To be removed and cast into the sea was a word picture of condemnation. And yet *airo*, to remove or take away, surely reflects the Hebraism of 'taking away' with reference to taking away sin (s.w. Jn. 1:29; 1 Jn. 3:5 "takes away the sin of the [Jewish] world"). This was a phrase with two possible meanings. The disciples could achieve this in that their preaching would give mount Zion both the possibility of sin being taken away [if they responded] and of condemnation, being cast into the sea like Gentile Babylon [if they rejected their message]. The same words and ideas are found in Rev. 18:21, where Babylon is 'taken up' [s.w. "removed"] and cast into the sea. However, the Lord soon uses the same word in telling the Jews that the Kingdom was to be "taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits [of the Kingdom]" (:43). This reference to fruit connects with the Lord's teaching about the fig tree which was cursed for not bearing fruit. The rejected servant was likewise to be 'taken away' in condemnation (22:13), just as the flood "took them all away" (24:39), the talent was 'taken away' from the rejected (25:28,29). Significantly, the Lord had used this same word for 'remove' or 'take away' in the first cleansing of the temple, when He commanded the traders to "Take these things away" (Jn. 2:16); and likewise it is used about the 'taking away' of the branches of the tree of Israel (Jn. 15:2). The Lord is telling the disciples that they too will be able to make such a removing of the unclean from the system of Judaism, and likewise cause the withering of Israel's tree. In fact it was the Romans who "took away our place and nation" (Jn. 11:48 s.w.) but this was on account of Israel's rejection of the disciples' preaching. In that sense, therefore, it was they who had caused the temple Mount to be taken away and cast into the sea of Gentiles. This too is the power of our preaching. We are not merely discharging a responsibility to evangelize so that we feel better, let alone doing a PR exercise for our local church or denomination. Our presentation of the message to others has eternal consequence for them- to their salvation or condemnation. Significantly, the same word is used for how on the cross, the Lord 'took away' the Mosaic Law (Col. 2:14).

"Cast into the sea" were the very words used by the Lord in describing the fate of the Jews who made the little ones stumble (Mk. 9:42). The little ones had been brought into the temple to replace the Jewish religious leaders. Those leaders had previously refused to accept those little ones. Their judgment was to be cast into the sea as Babylon (Rev. 18:21 same words). But this would only happen once the disciples had preached to them

after the resurrection- they were given chance after chance, despite the Lord's cursing of the fig tree with immediate effect.

Mt. 21:21 = Rom. 4:20. Paul saw Abraham as being like the man in the parable who had the faith to throw mountains into the sea.

21:22 *And all things, whatever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive*- This evidently has some context and limitations, because there is no reason to think that we literally receive whatever we ask. Even the Lord didn't. The context is the ability to change, the ability to accept paradigm shifts, to have the courage to preach; the mindset which can cope with a previous worldview coming to an end. This is exactly why people are so unwilling to change cherished beliefs and practices- because their conservatism is more powerful in their own minds than God's word. We need to accept we have this problem, and rejoice that whatever we ask for in this psychological and at times practical battle will indeed be granted to us.

21:23 *And when he had entered into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said*- "Entered" is *erchomai* , and is matched by the priests and elders 'coming' to Him, *proserchomai*. The impression is created of direct confrontation, head on.

By what authority do you do these things?- Presumably they thought they had Him caught out, because *exousia* was supposedly solely with Rome. He could hardly say the Romans had given Him such authority. And yet if He said anything other than 'Rome', then He could be reported to the Roman authorities. However, their reference may have been to what we noted at 21:14- the Lord had held back the temple guard from arresting Him and stopping His forceful overthrowing of the temple traders. This question was quite to be expected of a man who had recently used violence to overthrow tables and force men off the premises. Who had given Him such authority?

And who gave You this authority?- To this day this question is heard. People, especially religious people, find it so hard to accept that somebody can have a personal relationship with God which enables and empowers them to operate as sovereign free agents amongst mere men. This cry is especially heard from those who themselves think they have authority and seek to hold on to their petty power at all costs. It is the typical cry when someone obeys their Lord's command to baptize people, takes the initiative to extend fellowship to another etc.

21:24 *And Jesus answered and said to them: I also will ask you one question, which if you tell me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things*- It is not necessarily wrong to avoid answering a question- although few of us could do so in the spiritually and logically flawless way the Lord did here, let alone at a moment's notice.

The AV is mistaken in translating "If you tell me, I will tell you". The sense rather is: 'If you answer this question, then in that answer you will have My telling you the answer to your question'. They finally answered in :27 that 'We cannot know' (AV again is unhelpful by offering here "We cannot tell"- the Greek words for AV "tell" are all different in this section).

21:25 *The baptism of John*- Perhaps John's message was so centred around the appeal for baptism that "the baptism of John" is being put for 'the teaching and ministry of John'. Or maybe the Lord has in view His own baptism by John. In this case, His reasoning would be that His authority came from the fact that He had been baptized by

John. Seeing John's work was from God and had Divine authority, this meant therefore that the Lord was empowered by that baptism to operate with God's authority. If that is indeed what the Lord intended, then we have another window onto the perplexing question of why the Lord was baptized by John.

Where was it from? From heaven or from men?- Gamaliel uses the same logic in Acts 5:38,39 in urging the Jews to boil all the personal feelings and doubts down to a simple issue: Are these men and their work of God or man? This approach is helpful to us too, assailed as we are by unclarity about others. Is a man in Christ or not? Does God work through him or not? Is he of God or men? There is no middle ground here. This is what I submit concerning myself to those who doubt me, and it is the approach I seek to take with others with whom I have to engage in spiritual life. And Gamaliel rightly concluded that if something is of man and not of God, then we have little to worry about. Finally it will come to nothing. We should be concerned rather with the eternal consequence of refusing those who are clearly of God. If of God, we must accept them.

And they discussed it among themselves, saying: If we shall say, from heaven, he will say to us, why then did you not believe him?- This could imply they withdrew for discussion amongst themselves. But such a withdrawal would've been a sign of weakness. More likely we have here an insight into their own internal reasonings. In this case, the statement in :27 that "They answered... and said, We cannot tell" was uttered by each of them in turn as the Lord asked them individually.

21:26 *But if we shall say, from men, we fear the crowd*- They all considered John as a prophet, whereas the chief priests and elders did not. We see here a marked difference between the people and their religious leaders. Indeed, the leaders despised the common people: "This people who know not the Law are cursed" (Jn. 7:49). And yet very soon now, the leaders would be apparently controlling the people to cry for the blood of Jesus. But this chapter so far has shown that this was not really the reason why the masses turned against Jesus. They turned against Him because of His dashing of their hopes and refusal to pander to their expectations, exemplified by His wilful parody of a triumphal entry into the city and temple. The huge gap between the elders and the masses was so great that it cannot be credible that the elders managed to manipulate them so quickly to turn 180 degrees and to reject the Jesus whom their hero John had insisted was the Messiah.

For all hold John as a prophet- And yet the Lord had said that “the men of this generation” held John to be demon possessed, i.e. crazy (Lk. 7:33). We can on one hand feel and state respect for someone, whilst in reality not accepting them as any authority at all, and effectively considering them as if they are mad, not to be taken seriously.

21:27 *And they answered Jesus and said: We do not know*- See on :25 *They reasoned with themselves* and :24 *If you answer Me.* The Greek means 'We cannot *know*'. They had set themselves up as defenders of the Faith, whose duty it was to analyse the claims of teachers and decide whether or not they were false prophets. But now they are beaten in fair intellectual fight. They can give no answer, and yet by saying they could not judge John's claim to be a prophet, they were abdicating the very role of assessors of teachers which they claimed to have, and which they were using against the Lord.

He replied to them: Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things- He meant that they knew in their consciences and did not need Him to spell it out to them in

words. This was again His style in His silence before His judges, and in His brief answer to Pilate: "You are saying it" (Lk. 23:3). The answer was in Pilate's own words rather than the Lord's.

21:28 *But what do you think? A man*- God.

Had two sons, and he came to the first, and said- In the form of John, who "came unto you" (:32- a related word is used for "come"). God was manifest in the preaching of John, just as He personally comes to men through our preaching. This accounts for the special sense of Divine presence which we have in our efforts to preach His Son and appeal to men. Paul can speak of how God Himself appeals to people through us (2 Cor. 5:20; 6:1).

Son- These people were already in the family of God. They represent those to whom John the Baptist came (:32).

Today- The suggestion is that there is urgent work to do, presumably harvest was ripe and what was not gathered today would be lost. The refusal to work was therefore rooted in a refusal to appreciate the significance of their work. Without it, harvest would be lost, and they would all be the poorer.

Go and work- The Lord's interpretation is that the "work" required was belief and repentance (:32). The work of God is indeed to *believe* in the Lord Jesus (Jn. 6:29). This definition of 'works' was so different to that held by Judaism, according to which 'works' were physical acts of obedience to specific legal regulations. And yet clearly the Christian call is to action, to "works", without which any profession of faith is "dead". We are to "go trade"[s.w. "go work"] with the talents given us, and the man who does not so work with them will be condemned (Mt. 25:16). Paul's apparent deprecation of "works" in Romans (Rom. 4:4,5; 6:23) is surely to be understood with reference to "the works of the Law" of Moses (Rom. 3:27; 9:32; Gal. 2:16; 3:2,5,10), i.e. works done in obedience to that legislation in the hope of salvation upon that basis. The call is to work in response to the call. Not simply assent to theology, the specific doctrines of a Christian denomination, join a Christian social club; but work, labour, toil for Him in His service.

In the vineyard- The vineyard must refer to the means of bringing forth spiritual fruit, according to the Lord's use of the vine figure in Jn.15. Being in the vineyard is therefore all about bringing forth the fruits of spirituality, showing forth the moral likeness of God. This is the intended "work" we are asked to do. And yet the idea of being called by God to work in His vineyard [Israel] was language used in Judaism for the call of the priestly class to do the work of religious specialists amongst the nation of Israel, God's vineyard. But the parable teaches that this is God's invitation to everyone in the new system of things which He is developing.

21:29 *And he answered and said: I will not*- Not so much a bald refusal as 'I don't wish to, I don't have the desire to'.

But afterward he repented and went- This Greek word for "afterward" is used three times in Matthew 21 (and only 9 times elsewhere in the NT). The Jews are criticized for not repenting "after" they had seen the whores repent at John's teaching (21:32); and "afterward" (AV "last of all"), after sending the prophets of which John was the last, God sent His Son to appeal to Israel (21:37). The son who initially refused to work therefore speaks of those in Israel who refused to hear the prophets and John, and yet "after" all that appeal, responded to the Lord Jesus.

"Afterward he repented" is exactly the same words in :32. Afterwards- after the Lord's ministry- they did *not* repent. The Jews who initially responded to John are therefore are the son who said he would work but never did. The same Greek word for "afterward" is also found in :37: "Last of all [s.w. "afterward"] He sent unto them His

Son". The Lord's coming was intended to bring the disobedient son to repentance- and to go work in the vineyard.

He went- to work in the vineyard. The motivation of the man to labour was because he had repented and been forgiven. His motive was not simply obedience out of respect to his Father, but rather now was it gratitude for forgiveness.

21:30 *And he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said: I go sir*- Literally, "I, Sir!". The suggestion is that he was presenting himself as more obedient and respectful than his brother. And yet as so often, those who consider themselves the longer and harder workers in the vineyard, feeling superior to their weaker brothers, are in fact less than them in practice. Surely the Lord had in mind Ex. 24:7: "All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient".

But did not go- In the parable of the two sons, the Lord divides us into two groups- those who respond to a calling to 'go' by saying they will, but don't go; and those who refuse to go but afterwards go. This is clearly an allusion to Jonah. But Jonah is thus made typical of each and every one of us.

21:31 *Which of the two did the will of his father? They replied: The first. Jesus said to them: Truly I say to you*- The contrast is between doing the will of God, and simply saying in words that we will. This is the very tension which the Lord illustrates in the parable of the houses built on sand and rock. The same words for 'doing the will of the Father' are found in 7:21: "Not every one that says unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that *does the will of My Father*". Israel's response to John had been a saying of "Lord, Lord" to Jesus, a prompt response to the request to work in the vineyard- but they never went further. They did not actually repent, even though John's message had been a call to repentance. Repentance can be easily 'made' in words, but this is merely surface level. We need to examine our own repentance in the light of this caveat. Surely the Lord had this same category in view when He spoke of how "many stripes" await the one who knows his Lord's will, but doesn't do it (Lk. 12:47 s.w.). As ever, the Lord had Himself in mind as He spoke such demanding words. He was the Son of the Father who "did the will" and finished His "work"; who said yes straight away, and fulfilled it (Jn. 4:34; 6:38; Heb. 10:7,9 s.w.). In all our teaching of others we must likewise never take our eyes off our own position before God.

That the tax collectors and the prostitutes- Matthew, the speaker and author of this Gospel, had been one of them, a tax collector. His appeal for others to respond to the call was therefore interlaced with his own recognition and proclamation that he was in the category of those who had initially said 'No', but afterwards repented. Doubtless the Lord was aware that His followers included tax collectors and prostitutes and He was seeking to justify them.

Go into the Kingdom of God before you- To 'go before', *proago*, means just that. The word has just been used of how the crowd 'went before' Him in His [parody of a] triumphant entry into Jerusalem (:9). It doesn't necessarily mean that they would enter the Kingdom, for as mentioned above, the Lord's teaching was that those who did not do the will of God would not enter the Kingdom at all. The idea is rather that the harlots and tax collectors would go into the Kingdom as their heralds, suggesting that their judgment at the time of the Kingdom would be on the basis that the serious sinners had repented and entered the Kingdom, but they had not. And that fact would be waiting for them as they arrived for judgment at the gates of the Kingdom. Paul may be alluding to this when he says that the sins of some men 'go before' them to judgment (1 Tim.

5:24 s.w.). Or it could be that even at this dire moment, the Lord still entertained the hope that His persecutors and enemies would enter the Kingdom finally, even if the whores would have a better place in the Kingdom than them.

21:32 *For John came to you*- His coming to the people was as it were God's coming to them (:28,30). God was manifest in him, as He is in all preachers. We are His voice and appeal to men.

In the way of righteousness- The very phrase used in 2 Pet. 2:21 about the Christian Gospel. John's work had been to prepare the Lord's "way" (3:3; 11:10), over which Messiah could have come in glory to Zion, in fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecies about this. The Lord is referencing the idea that if Israel had responded to John, then the triumphant entry into Zion which He had just parodied earlier in this chapter could really have been achieved.

And you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him- This was clearly intended to address the inner thought of the audience, that "If we shall say, from heaven, he will say to us, why then did you not believe him?" (21:25). The Lord knew their thoughts- clearly, in this instance at least, not so much as from direct Divine revelation, but from His sensitivity to them and reading of their minds.

John the Baptist was a popular preacher. All Jerusalem went out to hear him. Even the hardline Orthodox were baptized by him. People liked his hard line austerity, his criticism of them. They lined up to hear it, and to confess their sins to him. But Jesus interpreted it differently. He said John's ministry was like children wanting to play at funerals with some other children- so they started weeping, but the others still wouldn't respond. Jesus came, piping; He wanted them to play weddings. But still they didn't respond in true repentance (Lk. 7:32-35). The Lord judged that Israel didn't respond to John; indeed, *if* they had truly received him, he would have been the Elijah prophet for them (Mt. 11:14 RVmg.). What this teaches is that believers can respond to a tough line, to the ra-ra of an uncompromising moralizing message; and yet not *really* repent nor accept the Lordship of Jesus in their hearts. Mt. 21:32 states clearly that the Jews generally didn't believe John the Baptist, nor repent. And yet they flocked to him in apparent repentance and were baptized. As we all know, repentance is one of the hardest things to be thoroughly genuine about.

And afterwards when you saw it- The second son who had said 'Yes' but not gone to work needed to become as the first son; realizing he was no better than the first son, and likewise repenting and going to work whilst there was still time, to achieve at least something in the Father's vineyard. But it was a bridge too far for the Jewish leadership and Israel in general to make this connection- that they had to shift from their self-righteousness into the position of the whores and tax collectors.

The good example of others contributes to our experience of the upward spiral. And yet if we don't respond to them, we can be held accountable for it and slip into the downward spiral. Thus the Lord held the elders of Israel guilty because when they saw the whores and tax collectors repenting at John's preaching, "you, when you had seen it, repented not". They should have been influenced by the repentance of those people; they should've allowed repentance to be contagious. But they didn't, and so they were held guilty for that. The Lord is telling the Jews that they were even more culpable for not repenting at the preaching of John the Baptist because the publicans and sinners had done so; and they hadn't. They should've changed their minds ['repented'] after they saw the publicans and sinners repent- so the Lord incisively observed and judged. The implication of that seems to me to be that we are intended to be inspired to faith and

repentance by that of others. This is why the Christian life is intended to be lived in community.

You still did not repent- Mt. 21:29,32 parallel 'repent and work' with 'repent and believe'. As the Lord said in Jn. 6:29, the work of God is to believe- in the forgiveness of sins. The experience of repentance and forgiveness will result in an ever deeper faith, and the works of gratitude which are inseparable part of faith. The parable speaks of repenting and going to work in the Father's vineyard; as if care for our brethren, seeking their fruitfulness and that of this world [after the pattern of the vineyard of Isaiah 5] is the obvious work of repentance. The Lord castigated the audiences of John the Baptist that they did not "repent, that ye might believe". Repentance would lead to faith… and yet it is faith which leads to repentance. The two things work together to form an upward spiral of growth.

And believe him- Their repentance and acceptance of the forgiveness of sins which John spoke of necessitated their belief in Christ as the lamb of God, the sacrifice for sin, of whom John also spoke. The repentance he urged them to make suggests that forgiveness was available- but his message was that that forgiveness was possible ultimately through the work of Jesus as the lamb of God who took away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29). Paul explained this in so many words: "John truly baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe in Him [Jesus] who should come after him" (Acts 19:4).

AV "Repented not so that you might believe him" translates an awkward phrase in the Greek, and the translations which suggest 'You didn't repent and believe him' are being too simplistic. There is definitely a causative sense implied- they did not repent *so that* they believed him. To repent, to change their minds as required by John, involved believing his message, which was about Jesus as the lamb of God who took away sin and thereby gave meaning and possibility to their repentance. Here, the Lord connects repentance with belief; yet we read that in practice, people believe and are baptized in order to receive forgiveness of sin. So belief and repentance are connected. The belief in John that is spoken of here was effectively a belief in Jesus: "John truly baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe in Him [Jesus] who should come after him" (Acts 19:4). If we repent, change our minds and decide to respond, then immediately the issue of forgiveness is thrown up. Have I now been forgiven? Can I be? How? And this is what leads seamlessly into faith in Christ as the lamb of God to take away our sin.

21:33 *Hear another parable*- The Lord's hopefulness at their response is remarkable; He makes a continued appeal to those who in other teaching He has stated have gone too far and are even now condemned. His hopefulness for human response is outstanding and a huge encouragement for us.

There are strong similarities between the Lord's parable and the song of the vineyard of Isaiah 5:1-7, especially in the LXX: "*Let me sing for my well beloved a song of my beloved about His vineyard* [The genre is significant; what begins as a joyful, idyllic harvest song turns into bitter disappointment and declaration of judgment]. *My beloved had a vineyard on a very fruitful hill* [The environment was ideal]. *He dug it up* [to dig was the work of the lowest servant, but God did this]*, gathered out its stones* [the effects of the curse were ameliorated]*, planted it with the choicest vine* ["the men of Judah"]*, built a tower in its midst, and also cut out a wine press therein. He looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, please judge between Me and My vineyard. What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it?* [Absolutely all has been done to enable our fruitfulness. The Father

wants fruit above all- in the Mt. 21 parable, the owner seeks the actual fruit, rather than cash payment. This element of unreality serves to show His passionate interest in fruit] *Why, when I looked for it to yield grapes, did it yield wild grapes? Now I will tell you what I will do to My vineyard. I will take away its hedge, and it will be eaten up. I will break down its wall of it, and it will be trampled down* [The downtreading of the temple at the hands of the Gentiles]. *I will lay it a wasteland. It won't be pruned nor hoed, but it will grow briers and thorns* [The language of the curse in Eden. The land was as the Garden of Eden, but Israel sinned "as Adam"]. *I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it* [the language of Elijah, prototype of John the Baptist]. *For the vineyard of Yahweh of Armies is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant: and He looked for justice, but, behold, oppression; for righteousness* [the fruit required was justice and righteousness- instead, as Isaiah 5 goes on to explain, there was materialistic selfishness]*, but, behold, a cry of distress*".

There was a man that was master of a house- Literally, the head of the family. Clearly in this parable it refers to God, but the Lord used exactly this term to refer to Himself specifically (10:25; 20:1,11; Lk. 13:25). It is far too simplistic to conclude 'Therefore Jesus is God'. There is too strong a weight of Biblical evidence against that position. The titles and functions of the Father are clearly applicable to the Son- and in fact the same Greek word is used about us as believers "in Christ" (13:52; 24:43).

Who planted a vineyard- The language of planting a vineyard and eating the fruit of it is used in 1 Cor. 3:6; 9:7 about *our* work of preaching. Paul was unafraid to interpret the parable on multiple levels. We are to be fruitful; but in our work of sharing the Gospel with others we are also the planters who come seeking fruit on our converts. The suggestion could be that the owner personally did the planting and preparing. I say this because Isaiah 5, upon which the parable is based, includes this feature- of the owner doing so much personally. See on :34 *The winepress*. All has been done so that we can produce spiritual fruit; but so often we excuse our lack of fruitfulness by blaming environment factors. The situation in our country, our town, workplace, marriage, family, health etc. And we can put huge effort into trying to change environment because we consider that we can be more fruitful for God in a different environment. But whilst passivity and fatalism are just as wrong, it must be accepted that our environment in the bigger picture has been uniquely and thoughtfully prepared by God so that we might be fruitful. For it is clear from the parable that our fruitfulness is God's most passionate desire and intention for us. He would hardly place us in any other environment, therefore, than one ideally prepared by Him in order to enable and enhance our fruitfulness.

And set a hedge about it- The same word is used for the Law of Moses as the "wall of partition" (Eph. 2:14). Although the vineyard was to be given to others, it was itself destroyed and dismantled by the owner; which involved the taking away of the Law of Moses. The vineyard functioned differently, on the basis of fruit being produced in the vine of Christ (Jn. 15).

And dug a winepress- This was the place where the grapes were trodden to produce wine. It features in all record of this parable. What does it represent? Perhaps the temple, designed to be the means of producing the wine of covenant relationship with God. The targums on Isaiah 5, the song of the vineyard upon which the parable is based, interpret it as a reference to the destruction of the temple. But the Lord only elsewhere uses the term when three times using it as a symbol of God's final judgment of condemnation (Rev. 14:19,20; 19:15). This is typical of the structure of God's plans with men. What is designed for our blessing can also be for our condemnation, just as a cup of wine is

used as a symbol of both blessing and condemnation. Time and again we are left with nothing but two choices before us- of acceptance or condemnation. Israel were the vine of God's planting which produced bad fruit (Jer. 2:21; Dt. 32:32,33; Hos. 10:1). The lack of good grapes on the vine was because of Israel's unspirituality (Jer. 8:13) and allowing the wonderful vineyard to become overgrown (Jer. 5:17). The reason why the workers beat and killed the servants was surely because actually they had no fruit to give them, even though the environment was perfect for good wine. The land of Israel was an environment and climate ideally suited to producing good vines (Dt. 8:7). There was supposed to be joy at the gathering of the vine harvest- and that connection is frequently made in the Old Testament. Indeed, the pictures of joy and wine at harvest are the pictures of the Messianic Kingdom. It could have come- but Israel didn't produce the good grapes. Likewise, believe it or not, God has created an ideal environment for each of us to produce spiritual fruit. The song of the Vineyard in Is. 5:1-7 is clearly the basis of the Lord's parable here, and this is the thrust of that story- that all had been done by God for the viticulture to flourish, but it didn't because of Israel's refusal to respond and to work. Isaiah 5 goes on to condemn Israel for drunkenness (Is. 5:11-13,22), as if they had used the vine for their own selfishness, rather like the Jews had made the "feasts of Yahweh" the "feast of the Jews", His house had become "your house", and just as we can use the structure of God's working with men, the body of Christ, the mystical temple, as a social club for our own pleasure. God therefore withheld rain so that in any case, fruit was now impossible for Israel (Is. 5:6); and that is exactly the Lord's message in Mt. 21. The Isaiah 5 passage is in turn developed in Is. 27:2-6, where we find that Yahweh Himself guarded the vineyard, watered and weeded it, such was His almost obsessive interest in this project (Is. 27:3). The fruit hoped for was righteousness and justice (Is. 5:7); human injustice usually arises from passivity, going along with a group situation which hurts individuals and denies them justice. And this was the lack of fruit which led to condemnation. Is. 5:5 and Ps. 80:13 say that the judgment of the vineyard is in terms of having its walls broken down and it being destroyed; the Lord's parable doesn't deny that, but doesn't specifically mention it- rather does He focus upon fruit being produced by different workers. Jn. 15 uses the imagery of the vine to suggest that fruit now comes from being branches within the vine of Christ- which grows with no reference to any vineyard, freestanding in the world.

And built a tower- It may be that the emphasis upon the tower and winepress is simply to show the degree of effort God went to so that the vineyard could produce fruit. The details of the allegory fall away compared to the supreme point- that God did all possible to provide an environment which would produce fruit.

And let it out to husbandmen; and went into another country- Not necessarily the ascension of the Lord Jesus. It could be a reference to God's entry of covenant with Israel, at which "God came down on mount Sinai" (Ex. 19:20; 20:19) and then "ascended up on high" (Ps. 68:18). The Greek specifically means to go into a foreign, i.e. Gentile, country. It is used of the prodigal son going into a far country (Lk. 15:13). Let us remember that the Son in the parable represents the Lord Jesus, the owner is clearly God. This going away is not therefore representative of the Lord's ascension to Heaven, although it appears to be used that way in 25:14,15; Mk. 13:34 ["the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey", s.w.]. This may just be the furniture of the parable, alluding to the common experience of absentee landlords. These were often characterized by being uncaring for their land; but this owner was particular careful for his project to the point of obsession. He wanted the fruit, not money. It therefore may

be part of the impression given, that the owner appears to be absent and disinterested- but in reality He is passionately interested. And this is exactly the position with God, who is perceived as somehow distant and passionless about His project on earth. There may also be the hint that even before He considered giving His precious vineyard to the Gentiles, which appears at the end of the parable, He had in fact initially envisaged this, and had in some form gone to the Gentiles right from the start of His project with Israel.

Initially, the parable would've got the hearers on the side of the labourers; because it was a frequent complaint that absentee landlords abused their tennants, who worked hard just to send cash off to the landlord in another country. But the parable twists around, so that after initially identifying with this group, the people came to see that it was they who stood condemned.

21:34 *And when the harvest season drew near*- A phrase used by Matthew about the drawing near of the Kingdom at Christ's time (3:2; 4:17). But by the end of His ministry, the Lord was warning that false teachers would wrongly claim that "the time draws near" (Lk. 21:8). Clearly He taught that the time had drawn near, but not come. He taught at the end of His ministry how He was as a man who had gone to a far country for a long time. This invites us to understand that with each appeal of the prophets, and of John as the last prophet, the time potentially could have come. God's purpose is thus open ended. Peter uses the same word to speak of how the end of all things is drawing near (1 Pet. 4:7), and Paul likewise (Rom. 13:12). It could have come in AD70- but again, a great delay, until our last days. This is why setting any date for the second coming is inappropriate- for it is a case of fulfilling preconditions, rather than awaiting a day fixed on a calendar. "The season" for fruit (Mk. 12:2) had indeed come, many times- all was potentially ready for it, but human failure meant there was no harvest.

He sent- The Greek *apostello* again encourages the apostles to see themselves as the equivalent of the Old Testament 'sent ones'- the prophets.

His servants to the husbandmen, to get his fruit- The prophets (2 Kings 9:7 and often). Note that the prophets were sent from God, as the Lord Jesus was; but this doesn't imply they were in Heaven with God before their sending, and neither was the Lord.

21:35 *And the husbandmen took his servants and beat one*- When the world reviled him, Paul saw himself as the beaten prophets Jesus had spoken about (2 Cor. 11:24,25 = Mt. 21:35). Mk. 12:4 adds that the last servant was “wounded in the head”, surely a reference to the beheading of John the Baptist and shameful treatment of his severed head.

And killed another and stoned another- There are few accounts of Old Testament prophets being killed or stoned. But beating, stoning and killing are Mosaic punishments for apostasy, and so the idea may be that Israel excused their lack of spiritual fruitfulness by judging as apostate the prophets who demanded this of them. This is typical- the unspiritual transfer their own anger with themselves and awareness of their own coming judgment onto others, whom they condemn as worthy of judgment and punishment.

21:36- see on 13:19.

Again, he sent other servants more than the first, and they did the same to them- The two groups of servants is unique to Matthew’s account, and is perhaps an allusion to the Jewish distinction between the “former prophets” and the “latter prophets”.

21:37 *And last of all he sent his son to them, saying: They will respect my son*- Lk. 20:13 adds "It may be that...". The Greek *isos* is tantalizingly hard to understand. It

could mean 'Perhaps'; or equally it could mean 'They will, surely'. Lk. 20:13 adds “My beloved Son”. Thus the joyful harvest song of Is. 5:1, the "song of my beloved”, becomes the tragedy of "My beloved son". The invitation "O inhabitants of Jerusalem… judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard" (Is. 5:3) is matched by the rhetorical question: "What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do unto them?" (Lk. 20:15). This too was addressed by the Lord to Jerusalem’s inhabitants.

We wonder of course how the Father could truly feel like this if He is omniscient. My suggestion is that He limits His omniscience in order to enter fully into our human experience; which means that His expressions of shock and disappointment are legitimate reflections of how He actually feels.

21:38 *But the husbandmen, when they saw the son, said among themselves*– That is, they conspired. This is quoting the LXX of Gen. 37:18. And the allusion is also to *"When they shall see him,* there is no beauty that they should desire him" (ls. 53:2). "Shamefully handled" (Mk. 12:4) is s.w. Is. 53:3 LXX "despised".

This is the heir- The leaders of first century Israel initially recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (Mt. 21:38 cp. Gen. 37:20; Jn. 7:28). They saw (i.e. understood, recognized) him, but then they were made blind by Christ (Jn. 9:39). It was because they "saw" Jesus as the Messiah that the sin of rejecting him was counted to them (Jn. 9:41). This explains why the Roman / Italian nation was not held guilty for crucifying Christ, although they did it, whereas the Jewish nation was. And yet there is ample Biblical evidence to suggest that these same people who "saw" / recognized Jesus as the Christ were also ignorant of his Messiahship. "Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am... Ye neither know me, nor my Father... when ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he" (Jn. 7:28; 8:19,28) were all addressed to the same group of Jews. Did they know / recognize Jesus as Messiah, or not? As they jeered at him on the cross, and asked Pilate to change the nameplate from "Jesus, King of the Jews", did they see him as their Messiah? It seems to me that they didn't. In ignorance the Jewish leaders and people crucified their Messiah (Acts 3:17 RV). And yet they knew him for who he was, they saw him coming as the heir. I would suggest the resolution to all this is that they did recognize him first of all, but because they didn't want to accept him, their eyes were blinded, so that they honestly thought that he was an impostor, and therefore in ignorance they crucified him. And yet, it must be noted, what they did in this ignorance, they were seriously accountable for before God.

Come, let us kill him and take his inheritance- Their assumption therefore was that the landlord must have died, for otherwise, killing the son would not have given them the inheritance. They acted, as we can, as if God is dead; although they would never have admitted that. The apparent non-action of God can likewise lead to the wrong impression that He is effectively dead. Seizing a vineyard for personal possession reminds us of Ahab’s actions in 1 Kings 21:15,16- making Naboth a type of Christ, and associating the Jewish religious leadership with wicked Ahab. However, Ahab did repent- and one wonders whether the Lord built in this allusion in reflection of His amazing hopefulness for Israel’s repentance. The allusion to Ahab may have been born in the Lord's Bible-saturated mind by the way that Isaiah 5:6 spoke of rain being withheld from the vineyard, as happened in Ahab and Elijah's time.The confirmation of Israel in their evil way was brought to its climax in the crucifixion of Christ. The leaders of first century Israel initially recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (Mt. 21:38 cp. Gen. 37:20; Jn. 7:28). They saw (i.e. understood, recognized) him, but then they were made blind by Christ (Jn. 9:39). It was because they "saw" Jesus as the

Messiah that the sin of rejecting him was counted to them (Jn. 9:41). This explains why the Roman / Italian nation was not held guilty for crucifying Christ, although they did it, whereas the Jewish nation was. And yet there is ample Biblical evidence to suggest that these same people who "saw" / recognized Jesus as the Christ were also ignorant of his Messiahship. "Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am... Ye neither know me, nor my Father... when ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he" (Jn. 7:28; 8:19,28) were all addressed to the same group of Jews. Did they know / recognize Jesus as Messiah, or not? As they jeered at him on the cross, and asked Pilate to change the nameplate from "Jesus, King of the Jews", did they see him as their Messiah? It seems to me that they didn't. In ignorance the Jewish leaders and people crucified their Messiah (Acts 3:17 RV). And yet they knew him for who he was, they saw him coming as the heir. I would suggest the resolution to all this is that they did recognize him first of all, but because they didn't want to accept him, their eyes were blinded, so that they honestly thought that he was an impostor, and therefore in ignorance they crucified him. And yet, it must be noted, what they did in this ignorance, they were seriously accountable for before God.

21:39 *And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him*- Surely a reference to the Lord being crucified outside Jerusalem. In this case, the vineyard specifically speaks of Jerusalem and the temple. Mk. 12:8 appears in English to suggest a different order: Took, killed, cast out of the vineyard. But the Greek text doesn't have to be read strictly chronologically. Strictly, they "took Him, killed and cast out of the vineyard". The killed-and-cast-out need not be chronological. Or it could be that the Lord is teaching that effectively, they had killed Him before casting Him out and crucifying; the essence of the cross was ongoing in His life. That is clear enough in a number of Gospel passages.

"Cast Him out" has obvious connection to the way in which the Lord was crucified outside the city limits of Jerusalem. But 'cast him out' is parallel with the stone being "rejected" by the builders (:42). The 'casting out' therefore speaks of religious rejection from the community. The same word is used of how the Lord was cast out of Nazareth (Lk. 4:29), and how believers would be cast out from Judaism (Lk. 6:22) and the synagogue (Jn. 9:34); and even from the legalistic church (3 Jn. 10 "casts them out of the church"). Any who experience being cast out of the visible body of God's people are thereby fellowshipping the Lord's crucifixion sufferings. Yet sadly the experience destroys many- when it can be taken as a share in His sufferings, knowing that if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. It is the same word used for the casting out of the rejected from the Kingdom to final condemnation (8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk. 13:28); those who cast out of the vineyard, the Kingdom (:43) will themselves be cast out of the Kingdom at the last day.

21:40 *When therefore the owner of the vineyard shall come, what will he do to those husbandmen?*- The Lord Jesus said this with the cry still echoing in His ears concerning Himself: "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord" (:9). He clearly has Himself in view, 'coming' in behalf of His Father. His parody of a triumphal entry into Jerusalem was really an entering of Jerusalem in judgment upon them. His entry into Jerusalem and the temple was in essence the Lord of the vineyard coming. He certainly uses the language of the Lord coming with reference to Himself (23:39; 24:42,46,48; 25:19; Lk. 12:36).

21:41 *They said to him: He will miserably destroy those miserable men*- In the Greek, "miserable" [*kakos*] is related to "wicked" [*kakos*]. Those men will suffer their own

wickedness. And just as the Jews said that those wicked men would be punished with their own wickedness, so out of their own mouths they were judged; in the same way as the Father had asked the Jews to "judge between Me and My vineyard", even though they were the vineyard (Is. 5:3). It would seem that the literal words of the rejected will be quoted back to them at the day of judgment (Lk. 19:22 "Out of your own mouth will I judge you"; Jude 15 "To convict all that are unGodly... of all their hard words"). This is just as David was invited to speak words of judgment on a sinner, and was told: "thou art the man". God will remember against Edom the specific words they spoke when Jerusalem fell (Ps. 137:7 RV). See on 12:37.

And will let out the vineyard to other husbandmen- The Lord's judgment is different. He will *give* the vineyard to the others (:44). And yet He will come and destroy the vineyard, and the new nation He will choose will not just give Him some of the fruit, but will themselves become part of the vine, and themselves bear fruit to Him (:43; Jn. 15).

Mk. 12:9 records that the Lord spoke of how the owner Himself would "come and destroy the husbandmen". This is a shocking change in tempo- the owner has appeared impotent, distant and naive, to the point that the husbandmen considered He was effectively dead. They reasoned that if they killed the Son, then the vineyard would be theirs. But this is exactly the nature of Divine judgment. The God who appears effectively dead, at least impotent, distant and naïve, will suddenly reveal Himself in direct judgment. We believe that now by faith, but it shall surely happen.

Who shall pay him the fruits in their seasons- Literally, 'times'. But for the Lord there is only one harvest. Once the fruit is ripe from the first harvest, then it will be reaped. Or it may be that God's aim is that we the husbandmen bring forth all the required fruits (of the spirit) "in their seasons". This indicates that over time, the various members of the body between them will bring forth every aspect of God's spirituality. The parable of the talents indicates how we have each individually been given something different by Christ. The parable of the pounds is along the same lines; as is the story of the Master who went away and left his servants looking after the house. *Each* of them was given his own *separate* work to do (Mk. 13:34). This accounts for the way in which each of us will be judged according to our own works- i.e. according to how far we have done those things which Christ intended us personally to do.

21:42 *Jesus said to them: Did you never read in the scriptures*- They spent their whole lives reading Scripture, and Ps. 118 was a well known Passover Hallel. But we can read and yet never really read as God intends.

The stone which the builders rejected- The Lord would be "rejected of the elders, chief priests and scribes" (Mk. 8:31 s.w.); indeed, "rejected by this generation" (Lk. 17:25).

The same was made the head of the corner- If the builders rejected this stone, the implication is that another set of builders used it in another building, which became the temple of God. This is precisely the situation with the vineyard being taken away from the Jewish tennants and another group of workers being taken on. The quotation is seamlessly in context with the parable.

This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes- In whose eyes would the elevation and acceptance of the stone [a similar Hebrew and Aramaic word to "son"] be marvellous or miraculous / praiseworthy? The quotation is from Ps. 118:23. This Psalm is a dialogue between the speaker, who is in suffering and rejection and yet has

hope of resurrection and glorious acceptance, and another group of people who sing or speak their response. This is why there are statements in the first person e.g. "The Lord is *my* strength... *I* will praise you", and then responses of the group: "It is marvellous in *our* eyes... *we* will rejoice and be glad... *we* have blessed you... the Lord has showed *us* light". Who is this group? The Psalm opens with instruction to "The house of Aaron... Israel... them that fear the Lord" to respond to the Messiah figure in praise (Ps. 118:2-4). The priesthood are often paralleled with all Israel, because it was God's intention that eventually all Israel should be a priestly nation. The significance of the quotation in Mt. 21:42 is that it was to be the intended response of the "house of Aaron", Israel's religious leaders, to the acceptance of the rejected stone / son of God. But it was the Lord's disciples who would make this response. They, therefore were the new "house of Aaron"- yet another hint that the Lord was creating a new Israel with another priesthood.

21:43 *Therefore say I to you: The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you*- The whole vineyard system is spoken of as the Kingdom of God. The Jewish people were therefore not the Kingdom of God- because the Kingdom was taken *from* them and given to others. They had been instated as God's Kingdom at Sinai, but now, by implication, that status was being withdrawn from them.

And shall be given to a nation- In the singular. The various nationalities of the new group of workers are irrelevant, we are seen as one new nation, a new people.

Bringing forth the fruits of it- This is subtly different to 'rendering Him the fruits in their season' (:41). The new nation are no longer merely tennants, but are the vine themselves; the fruit is to be on them. And this is exactly the way the imagery of viticulture is used in Jn. 15. Spiritual fruit is the fruit of the Kingdom. The fruits of the Spirit in terms of personality traits, characteristics etc. are the fruits which will eternally be seen in the Kingdom. They are a firstfruits, a foretaste, of the Kingdom age. In John's terms, we are living the eternal life now, the kind of life which we shall eternally live.

21:44 *And he that falls on this stone shall be broken to pieces, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust*- AV "Will grind him to powder". There is an unmistakable allusion here to the stone destroying the image, the Kingdoms of men, in Dan. 2:44. The choice we have is to fall upon Christ and break our bones, to get up and stumble on with our natural self broken in every bone; or to be ground to powder by the Lord at his return, to share the judgments of this surrounding evil world- being "condemned with the world...". Yet strangely (at first sight) the figure of stumbling on the stone of Christ often describes the person who stumbles at his word, who rejects it (Is. 8:14,15; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:7,8). In other words, through our spiritual failures we come to break ourselves, we become a community of broken men and women; broken in that we have broken our inner soul in conformity to God's will. As Simeon cuddled that beautiful, innocent baby Jesus, he foresaw all this: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again (resurrection) of many in Israel... that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk. 2:34). If we are to share his resurrection, if we are to experience such newness of life in this life, we must fall upon him, really feel the cutting edge of his word. We must be broken now; or be broken and ground to powder at the judgment. See on 3:11.

21:45 *And when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived*- The connection with Isaiah 5 was so clear, and that song of the vineyard was a well known passage understood as the justification for the destruction of the first

temple.

That he spoke of them- Peri in this construction more means 'through'. They realized that their very own words of :41 were the Lord talking to them. They had been trounced, and stood self-condemned. And so they went blindly ahead in their hurt pride and confirmed it by planning to murder the Son who had been sent to them. They should have stopped in their tracks and repented. They realized they had uttered the words of their own condemnation. The Lord Jesus had spoken to them through their own words. They were furious about it. The only options were to repent, to give in; or to go madly ahead, fuelled by the hurt pride of a moment, and do the unthinkable in murdering God's Son.

21:46 *And although they were seeking*- The very language of Herod seeking to destroy God's son (2:13,20). They were no better than the despised Herod.

To arrest him- The Greek for "Lay hands on / arrest" is likewise used for what Herod did to John the Baptist (14:3). The Lord uses the same word soon afterwards to describe how His servants will likewise suffer (22:6 "The remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully and killed them"). The Lord intends us to see all our sufferings as part of His. Matthew repeatedly uses the word to describe how the Jews laid hands on the Lord to arrest and kill Him (26:4,48,50,55,57).

They feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet- We see the fickleness of the crowd. They were soon crying for the Lord's blood.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 22

22:1 *And Jesus answered and spoke again in parables to them, saying*- As often with the Lord's parables, He begins by setting up an expectation (in this case, of joy and fulfilment) which is then dashed by human failure, and turns very unpleasant and indeed calls forth the hardest judgments. The parable is clearly related to that of the wicked husbandmen at the end of chapter 21, and seeks to add more detail and justification for that judgment upon Israel. The feast can be understood as a betrothal feast, to celebrate the engagement of the Son, rather than speaking of the marriage supper of the Lamb. And yet it could also refer to this, in that this was planned and could have happened far earlier than it finally will do, just as in the previous parable, the time of fruit was ready right from the time of the sending of the first servant.

The parable is clearly quarried from Zephaniah 1:7,8: "The day of the Lord is at hand; for the Lord hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests. And it shall come to pass... that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel". The context of Zephaniah is his appeal to Judah at Josiah's time (Zeph. 1:1), who had *appeared* to respond to Josiah's call to repent, but not in their hearts. It was exactly his "princes" who had apparently responded to his appeal for radical reformation (2 Chron. 34:29-32); but in Zeph. 1 they are condemned as insincere. This is clearly seen by the Lord as analagous to Israel having responded to John's attempted reformation- when their hearts were far from it, and eventually they like the Judah of Josiah's day were to be judged and have their city and temple burnt by the Gentiles.

22:2 *The kingdom of heaven is likened to a certain king, who made a marriage feast for his son*- The parable of the marriage supper is what "the Kingdom of heaven is like". As with so many of Christ's parables, this one too is quarried from the book of Proverbs; in this case Prov.9:2-5, which describes how wisdom makes everything ready for her feast. The food and wine which is there represents the wisdom of God. The Kingdom of God is therefore likened to this supreme feast on the knowledge of God. The Kingdom will therefore be a feast of such things. We love God in this life, but surely we cry out for a greater understanding and appreciation of Him? Do we not cry for wisdom, and lift up our voice for understanding? If we do have this feeling, then we will be supremely motivated to strive to reach that glorious time of true knowledge.

22:3 *And sent out his servants*- The parable is similar to that of the preceding parable of the wicked husbandmen. These servants are God's "servants the prophets" who in Old Testament times called Israel to repentance and the Kingdom. The term "servants" is used throughout the parable. The servants go again to Israel, and are beaten and killed (:4). Those "other servants" are perhaps the apostles in their witness to Israel after the Lord's death, whose rejection culminated in the burning up of their city of Jerusalem (:7). More "servants" are then urgently sent to bring in anyone willing to say "yes". And they refer to our witness in this age. Yet it is also the "servants" who bind and destroy the rejected (:13). These servants are all "sent", *apostello*. There is a clear continuity between the witness of the prophets, the apostles and ourselves. "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" in the sense that our preaching of Him is in the spirit of the Old Testament prophets (Rev. 19:10). Again we are all encouraged to see ourselves as brethren of the prophets; they were not, as Judaism supposed, some separate group of white faced saints. Our witness is the equivalent of being them in the new Israel. The "servants" who bind the man in condemnation refer in other parables to the Angels. It could be that we too do this work; or it may be that we're being shown that we are not only in a continuum with the Old Testament prophets and 1st century apostles, but are likewise inline with the Angels. Hence an Angel urged the apostle John that He was one with John and also "your brethren the prophets" (Rev. 22:9). We are not alone. We are in a direct line, on a continuum, with Angels, prophets and apostles, the *elohim* of the new Israel and new age created in Christ.

God's servants (the Old and New Testament prophets - Rev. 2:20; Acts 2:18; 4:29; Am. 3:7; Zech. 1:6) were sent by God "to call them that were bidden to the wedding: but they would not come" (Matt. 22:3). The Greek word for "call" being the same translated "bidden" , we have here an example of the interplay between predestination and the calling of God through the Gospel - the word of the prophets/apostles 'called them who were (already) called' in God's purpose. This class must primarily refer to the Jews. The refusal to attend the wedding obviously equates with the Jewish rejection of Christ's work. God pleaded, "I have prepared my dinner", i.e. the Kingdom (Matt. 22:2). This corresponds with the Kingdom 'coming nigh' to Israel through the first century preaching of the Gospel (Luke 10:9,11) and the primary fulfilment of the Olivet prophecy in the run up to A.D. 70 (Mark 13:29).

To call them that were invited- Literally, 'to call the called'. Israel and in a sense all God's people were called from the foundation of the world. The allusion may be to the way in which people were invited to banquets, gave their agreement to attend, and then a servant was sent to actually take them to the banquet. But we should be aware that the language of 'calling the called' doesn't necessarily mean that there is a list of called ones, established from the beginning of the world, and our preaching is a hit and miss affair, sometimes reaching the 'called' and sometimes not, in which case our words were wasted. 'Calling the called' could equally mean that whoever hears the call is therefore

and thereby 'called'. The invitation is to "whomsoever will", and the more people we call, the more are called. The urging of men to respond with the encouragement "whomsoever will..." is hardly appropriate if some cannot respond because they were not 'called' from the beginning, were never on the list. And yet in the bigger picture, there clearly is an element of predestination involved with calling; and Paul references this in Romans as the ultimate example of grace. In the final picture, not all have heard the call. Because God's servants didn't take the call to all, and so for whatever reason, some are not called- and in that is the element of predestination. And yet the parable gives some further insight into this question. The first group of servants 'call the called', but the last group of servants after the burning of Jerusalem are urged to drag in whoever they can find. It's as if in Old Testament times, the appeal was to all within Israel, the called people. But now, all men can be called.

To the marriage feast- An engagement banquet, or the actual wedding? In either case, the principle is established that the Messianic banquet of the Kingdom could have come in Old Testament times; it could have come when the second set of servants [the apostles] made their appeal [in the first century up until the burning of the city in AD70]; and it will come whenever we as the servants of God in this age have finally gathered in enough potential guests. This is the same idea as in the preceding parable, where the harvest was ready, the time had 'drawn near', at the time of every appeal to Israel through the prophets. God's purpose is taught, time and again, to be open-ended and dependant upon Israel's response and our efforts in witness. For *when* the Gospel has gone to all the world, *then* shall the end come (24:14). The whole idea of a royal couple being kept waiting, in fact kept waiting for centuries and a few millenia, is shocking and tragic. We feel sorry for them, just as we in a sense feel sorry for the Father and Son. This unexpected delay in the wedding banquet is developed in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins in chapter 25. Because of it, they all fell asleep when, according to the allusions to the parable in 1 Thess. 5, they should have stayed awake. It was a huge tragedy and shame all round, if we put the parables together.

But they would not come- The same words in 21:29 of the son who said "I will not" [work in the vineyard] but repented and went to work. The Lord wished to gather Jerusalem's children under His wings to save them from the great fire of destruction coming upon them, but they "would not" (23:37 s.w.). But in what practical way did they not want to come? The same words are used of how the Jews "would not" help their brother with the burden of human failure (23:4), or how the unforgiving debtor "would not" forgive his brother (18:30) and the older brother "would not" go in to the celebration banquet for the returned prodigal (Lk. 15:28). They "would not come" to Jesus in repentance (Jn. 5:40). Their refusal of the invitation to the Messianic banquet, to the Kingdom, was in terms of their attitude to others. Just as if we don't want a part in the church as the body of Christ, we don't want a part in Him.

22:4 *Again*- This and the use of the word "other" later in the sentence develops an impression of the King's continued effort with the guests.

He sent other servants, saying: Tell them that were invited- People are called to the Kingdom, and yet also called [s.w.] to repentance (9:13) and called to appear at judgment day (20:8). When we hear the call and respond, we begin our journey towards judgment day. That day, therefore, is not just for the baptized, but for any who heard the call and began the journey. The parable and teaching of Luke 14 show that we are those called, and yet we are also those who call others (Lk. 14:10,13). We are to reflect

the grace of how we were called by calling others. The Greek *kaleo,* "call", isn't a passive word when used in the sense of inviting persons. It's from*keleuo,* to command or urge onwards. Our calling of others, and God's calling of us, involves an urging towards response.

Look, I have made ready my dinner- The obvious unreality of the story is that the dinner sits on the table, as it were, for centuries. But this is indeed the strangeness of God's openness to us. The time has always been ready, if human response and the effort of His servants has been enough. John's mission had been to "prepare" the way for Messiah (3:3 s.w.), through 'preparing' a people for Him (Lk. 1:17,76 s.w.). Although it had indeed been prepared, Israel didn't want it. A unique place in God's Kingdom has been "prepared" for each of us from the foundation of the world (20:23; 25:34 "Them for whom it has been prepared of My Father"; Jn. 14:2 "to prepare a place for you"; 1 Cor. 2:9 "the things which God has prepared for those who love Him"; Heb. 11:16 "He has prepared for them a city"; 1 Pet. 1:5 our salvation is "prepared" for us). The tragedy of the story is that such a wonderful feast had been "prepared"- the same word is found later in :4 "All things are *ready*" and in :8 "the wedding is *ready*". Perhaps this helps us understand the otherwise enigmatic words of the Lord to the Jews in Jn. 7:6: "Your time is always *ready*" (s.w.)- the time of establishment of the Kingdom, the time of the harvest in the previous parable of the labourers, was always potentially prepared and ready, it just depended upon Israel's acceptance of it.

My oxen and My fatlings are killed- Perhaps a reference to the end of the Mosaic system, or perhaps an intensive plural referring to the one great sacrifice that had been made in the Lord Jesus. "Oxen" or bulls are specifically spoken of as the animals which prefigured the Lord's sacrifice (Heb. 9:13; 10:4 s.w.). "Killed" translates *thuo*, the word for sacrifice. We could also note that the Greek word translated "prepared" is used about 15 times in the Gospels for the preparation of the last Passover, which was typical of the Lord's death.

And all things are ready- The same word for "prepared". Absolutely all things were prepared for the Messianic banquet, it really could have come in the first century.

Come to the marriage feast!- "Come" translates *deute*, which is a summons in the imperative. It's the same word used in "Follow Me" (4:19), "Come unto Me" (11:28; 19:21), "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom" (25:34). The wonder of what has been prepared coupled with the tragedy of it having been refused means that the Father is eager to compel people to accept it. This intense desire of the Father is to be ours as we in our day appeal to men to "come". In no way is God somehow passive and disinterested in human response, even if His apparent silence in the face of the rejection of His Kingdom may appear that way. Behind that apparent silence is an intense desire for our response. "Come unto", using *eis*, really means 'Come into'. This isn't simply an offer 'for your information', it is a willing desire to compel men to enter into the Kingdom through their response to the Gospel call.

We are on our way to judgment day, and that day is rushing towards us (cp. Lk. 14:31); the hearing of the Gospel is in itself a call to go forth and meet the Lord.

There are ample hints that this parable should also be given some reference to the burning up of Jerusalem in the last days. The prophetic "servants" of :4 who call Israel to repentance are matched by a singular "servant" in the similar parable in Lk. 14:17. There can be no doubt that such differences are designed. 'Elijah' and his latter-day school of prophets will minister the word to Israel, which would explain the use in

the parables of "servant" and "servants" - the group of prophets being led by one particular prophet.

22:5 *But they made light of it*- The note of tragedy in "But..." mustn't be missed. This is the tragedy of human rejection of the Gospel of the Kingdom- the greatest things are prepared, but they are 'made light of' because the things of this life seem heavier. Israel's making light of the invitation is our warning, for Heb. 2:9 uses the same word here translated "made light": "How shall we escape, if we *neglect* such a great salvation". Paul uses the same word in urging Timothy not to "neglect" the gifts of potential service which he had been given (1 Tim. 4:14).

And went their ways- Albeit masked in translation, this one Greek word *aperchomai* is related to the word *erchomai* used in :3- "They would not *come*". Instead of going to the banquet, they went... to their various concerns. Two ways were therefore placed before them- to go the way to the banquet of the Kingdom, or go the ways of worldly cares. Although again concealed in most translations, this is the connection of thought with the unusual word *diexodos* translated "highways", literally 'the parting of the two ways', in :9. It was there, at the fork between two ways, that the appeal was to be made by the later servants.

One to his farm- Literally 'this one to his farm, this one to his trading'. We are thus invited to imagine these characters. Maybe the Lord was nodding His head towards passers by as He spoke these words. Banquets began in the evening [hence the man thrown out of it was thrown out into darkness, :13], and so this apparent element of unreality makes us interpret the Lord as meaning that *in their minds* they went off to their various secular concerns. For they would hardly be going off to those things in the evening. The farmer was presumably living at his farm when the servant came to take him to the banquet, so this going to his farm must be interpretted psychologically. Time and again we must remember that John's message, which had been primarily about the Lord and the need for repentance (Acts 19:4) had enjoyed amazing respone. But it was all surface level response- even the baptisms. In their hearts, people made light of it and went off in their secular worries and concerns. This has biting relevance to us, who can be fully and positively engaged with the call to the Kingdom as we consider it in reading about it or listening to it preached in church. But that enthusiastic agreement with the message can so quickly and easily be displaced by the cares of this world. The Lord's parable of the sower was initially His commentary upon how the people had responded to John's message about Him and the Kingdom, but the cares of the world and other factors soon choked the growth of that seed.

Another to his business- Again, trading isn't done in the evening, which was when the banquet would have begun. The only other time the Lord uses this idea of trading or 'merchant-ing' in the Gospels is in speaking of the merchant man who sold up all he had in order to buy the pearl of great price, and thus quit his trading (13:45). The parable is alluding to the way in which invitations were sent out, accepted, and then a servant came to escort the invited person to the banquet. This generation had accepted the invitation in that they had accepted John's preaching. But when it came to actually entering the Kingdom, they were instead dominated by the cares of secular life. And it is exactly this, rather than any logical or intellectual difficulty in accepting the message, which is the real reason people turn down the invitation. "They made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise" would imply that there was a period of crazy addiction to materialism among Jewry between the crucifixion

and A.D. 70. This is confirmed by the epistles to the Jewish believers, notably James and Peter; it also finds a counterpart in our present 'last days'.

22:6 *While the rest seized his servants*- "Took /seized" means to lay hands on by force, and has just been used about the Jews' desire to arrest the Lord (21:46 "They sought to *lay hands on* Him"). And it's used in that connection when they did finally 'take' Him to death (26:4,48,50,55,57).

Treated them shamefully- Again, the very word used about the Lord's final sufferings: "He shall be *treated shamefully*" (Lk. 18:32). The point is, that the Lord's final crucifixion sufferings were to be shared by His people as they took His appeal to the Jews. Paul seems to have grasped this, for he uses this same word in precisely this context: "We were *shamefully treated*" by the Jews when preaching the Gospel to them (1 Thess. 2:2; Acts 14:5). Paul saw himself in the parables- just as we should. Paul describes himself as having been "shamefully entreated" when he brought the Gospel to Philippi (1 Thess. 2:2)- using the Greek word used in Mt. 22:6 concerning how the messengers sent to the vineyard were "entreated spitefully". And maybe Paul was consciously aware that the Lord Himself had spoken of how He would be "spitefully entreated" (Lk. 18:32) during His final sufferings. Hence Paul could speak of filling up the measure of Christ's sufferings through what he suffered whilst preaching Christ's Gospel (Col. 1:24).

And killed them- To put to death, the same word used about the Lord's crucifixion (16:21; 17:23; 21:38). The killing or slaying [s.w.] of the Son sent to the vineyard in 21:39 was to be repeated in the slaying of the first century preachers of the Gospel. Even today, our sufferings for preaching the Gospel are a share in the Lord's crucifixion sufferings.

The question arises: Why the extreme treatment of the servants by those invited, and why does the King react so devastatingly in destroying their entire city? Marriages of King's sons were political statements. Often the King's son would be pronounced as heir to the throne when he got married. The guests were invited in order to test their political loyalty to the King and his son. To refuse an invitation to a King's banquet was therefore highly significant- it was tantamount to a declaration of disloyalty. Even worse was to accept it, to proclaim loyalty to him and his son, and yet in practice not follow through with that declaration of loyalty. Israel's widespread acceptance of John, whose message was largely about Jesus (Acts 19:4), had been a declaration of loyalty to God and His Son. To not take it seriously in practice and to in fact turn against His Son was therefore the ultimate betrayal. This explains the King's anger, the wrath of God against Israel as a whole.

The persecution of the prophets connects with the same thing happening in Rev. 11, where the two witnesses make a similar last-minute appeal amidst great opposition. We have commented elsewhere how the true prophets within Jerusalem at the time of the Babylonian invasion represented the Elijah ministry - and they too were persecuted. The servants were "entreated spitefully" (Mt. 22:6), as was our Lord on the cross (Luke 18:32). The righteous fellowship Christ's sufferings during the tribulation. The idea of persecuted servants occurs again in Rev. 11:18; 19:2, both of which passages have an application to latter-day persecution.

22:7- see on 22:11.

When the king heard- AV. When the news came to His ears. This may be just the furniture of the parable, or it may reflect the Old Testament impression given that God has a mechanism whereby He is informed of happenings on earth, e.g. of the

wickedness of Sodom or the building of the tower of Babel. That mechanism presumably involves the Angels. "When the king heard thereof" implies that as soon as Israel's rejection of Christ came to God's notice, "he sent forth his armies... and burned up their city". This is similar language to Gen. 6:12; 11:5 and 18:21 concerning God 'noticing' man's wickedness at the time of the flood, Babel and Sodom. The judgments with which He reacted on those occasions were typical of the second coming. As Babylon burnt Jerusalem with fire, so it seems certain from many other prophetic references that literal fire will be used by Israel's enemies to inflict her final punishment. The Arab armies will therefore be those of God and Christ, as were those of Israel's earlier Arab invaders. They are called 'sanctified' in Joel 3:9 (A.V. mg.), i.e. 'separated unto' God's specific purpose in punishing Israel.

The King was angry- "Wrath [s.w.] upon this people" was what happened in AD70 (Lk. 21:23). New Testament references to the wrath of God are often specifically about His wrath with Israel for rejecting His Kingdom and His Son. Of particular interest is Eph. 2:3, where Paul writes of how he had been one of those who were "by nature the children of wrath". I suggest this refers to his being part of the generation of Jews who had rejected the Son of God; but now Paul could rejoice that God has "delivered us from the wrath to come" in AD70 (1 Thess. 1:10). In 1 Thess. 2:16 he specifically defines that "wrath" as God's wrath upon Israel. The fact he speaks of this as a past status which he had now come out of would make it hard to interpret this as any global statement about what it means to be human. I don't think this passage means that the wrath of God is upon every bearer of human nature. God's own Son had human nature but the wrath of God was not upon Him. God's wrath comes upon "the children of disobedience" (Eph. 5:6). To be a child of wrath therefore has no reference to physical birth, but is parallel to being a child of disobedience.

And he sent- A reference to the common Old Testament concept of the court of Heaven, whereby God is presented as reviewing evidence and sending out His Angels, His "hosts", in response. Those Heavenly hosts have hosts of soldiers on earth which they can move and use as they wish.

His armies- The Roman armies were God's armies, just as the Babylonians had been. Josephus appealed to the Jews in Jerusalem in AD70 in these terms: "It is God, therefore, it is God Himself who is bringing on this fire, to purge that city and temple by means of the Romans, and is going to pluck up this city, which is full of your pollutions" (*The Jewish War* 6.2.1). The Romans being described as “his armies" connects with Dan. 9:26, where they are spoken of as "the people of the prince" - Jesus. We must take the lesson that we can be strongly used by God, but this is no guarantee at all that we are His people.

And destroyed those murderers- Using the word for "destroy" which the Jews had just used in 21:41, saying in response to the parable of the wicked labourers that they should indeed by "destroyed". Out of their own mouths they were to be judged. The 'destruction' of the Jews for persecuting and killing the Lord Jesus and His apostles was in AD70, when their city was burned up. But the same word is that used in John when the Lord taught that those who believed in Him would not "perish" or be destroyed (Jn. 3:15,16; 10:28). Whatever else may be referred to in this teaching, it could also have simply meant in the first context that those Jews who believed in Christ would not be destroyed in the destruction of the Jewish system in AD70. The same word is used by Peter in predicting the perishing / destruction of the Jewish 'heavens and earth' in AD70

(2 Pet. 3:6,9). This destruction, however, was not going to touch those who were in Christ. They would not "perish" or be destroyed. For in the terms of the parable, they were not the murderers.

And burnt their city- The burning of Jerusalem in AD70. The Roman soldiers who actually did this were directly moved and controlled by God to do so. Stephen used the same word when accusing the Jews of being Christ's "betrayers and murderers" (Acts 7:52). The Romans being described as "his armies" connects with Dan. 9:26, where they are spoken of as "the people of the prince" - Jesus.

22:8 *Then he said to his servants*- We are meant to imagine how they felt. The previous servants had been at best ignored, others beaten and killed. And now... it was for them to go out with the same message? We too should not fail to see the cost involved in the work of the Gospel, for we stand in direct continuum with the persecuted prophets and preachers who have gone before us. It may even be that by following the Lord's instructions to persuade all men, bad and good, to enter the Kingdom, simply on the basis of them saying 'yes', we will suffer isolation and rejection from our own brethren. And that too would be a sharing in His crucifixion sufferings, and taking our place in the sufferings of the Gospel. The work of the Gospel, if done properly, can never ultimately be 'fun' or purely pleasurable.

The wedding is ready...- This statement seems so obvious it doesn't need to be made. But it is made in order to motivate the servants in their efforts to get at least someone somewhere to say "yes". They were being asked to do something most unusual- to just grab anyone and urge them to come in to a King's banquet without a prior invitation and agreement, as was the norm. This appeal to secular people *without* the prior invitation was so wonderful and unusual that the very unusualness of it would be hard for both preacher and listener to accept. Surely there was a catch somewhere... And so often when we present the things of the Kingdom to people, their honest response is that 'Can that really be... it sounds just too fantastic'. This is the difficulty with the level and depth of grace we are asked to believe in and share. It is so unusual and out of our experience that we find it hard to believe for real.

But they that were invited were not worthy- John's appeal had been to bring forth fruit "worthy" [s.w.] of repentance (Lk. 3:8). They had initially agreed to this, but hadn't come up with the fruit. Paul surely had this part of the parable in mind when he turned away from preaching to the Jews and went to the Gentiles, because the Jews had "judged [themselves] unworthy [s.w.] of everlasting life" (Acts 13:46).

The parable of the marriage feast highlights the tragedy of Jewish rejection of what could have been theirs. There will be an ever-increasingly vigorous preaching campaign by the "servants", seeing that "they which were bidden were not worthy" (Mt. 22:8) - the Greek perhaps implying not enough numerically. As a result of this preaching, "the wedding was furnished ('filled' - numerically) with guests" (Mt. 22:10). This indicates that in some ways, God does work to a number. Once the required number of converts is made, then the supper can begin. Their appeal being to "the poor... maimed... halt and... blind" suggests that the marginal and desperate within society will be those who respond- and this is happening right now in the triumphant progress of preaching in our day. The servants are sent "into the highways" (Mt. 22:9), one possible meaning of the Greek is 'a market square'. This must be designed to recall the parable of the labourers standing idle in the market place at the 11th hour (Mt. 20:6,7). The very short

probation of those 11th hour workers will match that of the latter-day converts. And again, it was the old and weak who nobody wanted to hire. See on 28:20.

22:9 *Therefore, go*- Leading up to "go therefore and teach all nations".

To the main roads- AV "Highways". See on :5 *Went their ways.* The RV offers: "unto the partings of the highways". The point from which He foresaw us making our appeal was a fork in the road. We are to appeal to men and women with the message that there is no third road; that it truly is a case of believe or perish. The art of preaching seems to be to bring people to perceive that they stand at a fork in their life's journey, they can take the road to the Kingdom or the road of temporary absorption in the things of this life. The point from which He foresaw us making our appeal was a fork in the road. We are to appeal to men and women with the message that there is no third road; that it truly is a case of believe or perish. *Diexodos* can also be understood as the place of crossing the city boundaries, out into the countryside- a possible hint at taking the invitation beyond Jerusalem, for the work of the Gospel was to begin in Jerusalem and spread outwards (Lk. 24:47).

Another possible meaning for the term is 'a market square'. This would then be designed to recall the parable of the labourers standing idle in the market place at the 11th hour (Mt. 20:6,7). In the Septuagint this word *diexodos* describes "the *issues* from death" (Ps. 68:20), the *waters* of death (2 Kings 2:21), "*rivers* of water" (Ps. 1:3), "*watersprings*" (Ps. 107:35). If this usage was in the Lord's mind [and I am unsure it definitely was], then the idea would be that people were to be called from their seeking of water to seeking the water of life eternal; to exchange their secular passions and concerns for a concern about eternity.

And as many as- The phrase could possibly imply that there was a specific number that had to be found and invited. That certainly is the teaching of the parable overall. Therefore the more people we invite, the quicker the wedding begins. The repetition of the phrase in :10 suggests that the servants were obedient to the instruction, strange as it was- to scrap the idea of a guest list and invite people from the street, bad or good, to a royal banquet which was getting cold on the table, without any pre-invitation or agreement to attend having been given by the people.

You shall find, invite them to the marriage feast- The Lord Jesus is described as "finding" His people- the lost sheep, lost son, the idle workers in the marketplace (Mt. 20:6; Lk. 15:5,6,8,9); and yet He sends us out to "find" [s.w.] those who are to be invited into His Kingdom, just as the disciples 'found' fish when they obeyed the Lord's commission to fish (Jn. 21:6). We do the Lord's work for Him in this sense. And yet of course people "find" the narrow way themselves, they "find" the treasure and pearl of the Gospel (Mt. 7:14; 13:44,46); but only because we have gone out and 'found' them. The Lord's finding of us leads to us doing His work in finding others for Him and on His behalf. Thus Jesus "finds" Philip, and Philip's response is to go and 'find' Nathanael (Jn. 1:43,45). And so it must be ours too. Just as the disciples 'found' fish when they obeyed the Lord's commission to fish (Jn. 21:6). We do the Lord's work for Him in this sense.

It was totally scandalous that the majority of guests refused an invitation by the King (Mt. 22:9; Lk. 14:21-23), and that whilst the dinner was cold on the table, a desperately urgent expedition was sent to get people to come in and eat it. This is the urgency of our Gospel proclamation. And no King or wealthy man would really invite riff-raff off the street into his party; yet this is the wonder of God's grace in calling us through the Gospel. And such is the tragedy of humanity's rejection of the Gospel. To reject a royal invitation was tantamount to rejecting a royal command. It was unheard

of in the time of Jesus. Yet people just don't perceive the honour of being invited by the King. Notice too how it is the King Himself who makes all the arrangements- not, as the initial hearers would have expected, a senior steward or his wife. But the King Himself. And this reflects the extraordinary involvement of God Almighty in personally inviting each of us to fellowship with Him, through the call of the Gospel. Likewise that *all* the girls should fall asleep whilst awaiting the bridegroom (Mt. 25:5) is unusual- they must have been a pretty lazy, switched off bunch.

22:10 *And those servants went out into the highways*- The same word in Mk. 16:20 "They *went out* and preached everywhere", just as the sower "went out" to sow, with varying response (Lk. 8:5 s.w.).

And gathered together- Just as the net in the sea of nations gathered together fish "of every kind" (Mt. 13:47 s.w.)- here they are called "both bad and good". The suggestion may be that one intention of preaching is to gather people together into one. Hence the language of gathering together. The figure of the Lord's servants gathering together His called ones is exactly the figure of the gathering to the final judgment (s.w. Mt. 13:30; 25:32). By inviting people to Christ we are inviting them to the day of judgment. Knowledge of the Gospel thereby brings responsibility to the day of judgment. The moment we respond, we begin our journey to judgment. The Lord seems to have developed the thought of this parable in His later teaching in 25:35,38, where the same Greek word translated "gathered together" is translated 'to take in'; the Lord said that those who gathered together or took in a stranger had accepted Him, and those who refused to do so had rejected Him personally. 'Stranger' was understood to refer to a Gentile. The Lord might be saying that our gathering in of the Gentiles, the strangers, the despised, is related to our salvation; and if the early Jewish believers refused to gather in the Gentiles, then the Lord would take that as a personal rejection of Him. Those who refuse to gather in others because they consider them not to know enough or to not be appropriate material may well be under this threat of condemnation by the Lord.

All as many as they found- The specific use of the word "all" here adds nothing, surely, unless the idea is that there is a specific number who must "all" be gathered to the banquet. Rom. 11:25 says this in so many words, in talking of how the 'full number of the Gentiles' must "come in"- *ex-erchomai*. The same word *erchomai* is used in 22:3 about how the invited would not "come".

Both bad and good- This is quite radical for many Christian preachers today. There was *not* to be any thought about whether the persons being brought to the banquet were bad or good. The focus was upon simply persuading them to come in, to say yes to the most unusual invitation. Just as the servants of an earlier parable were told not to worry about dividing the wheat from the weeds, so here, the servants were not to worry about the impressions they had about the worthiness or sincerity of people. Their job was to persuade them to say 'yes' and to come on in. So much outreach today is tacitly concerned with what kind of person is being brought in to the community of believers. And even more concern is expressed about who exactly sits at the Lord's table. But according to this parable, the general public are to be encouraged to say "yes" to the Kingdom invitation, and come in and sit at the banquet table, the breaking of bread. Only then, once they are sitting there, does the Lord come and judge who is bad and good. The implication could possibly be that He comes to inspect us at the breaking of bread, both mystically every time we break bread, and literally in that His coming may

be at the breaking of bread.

And the wedding was filled with guests-When the wedding is “filled with guests” as a result of the final appeal to absolutely all men, ‘all you can see / perceive’, then the wedding starts (Mt. 22:9,10 Gk.). “Filled” translates *pletho*, which carries the sense of being filled up. When the full number of guests are seated, when a certain number of true converts to the Kingdom feast have been made, *then* the King comes in, and the wedding starts. This is what imbues our latter day witness with such a sense of urgency. Every baptism or invitation to the Kingdom could be the last. "They which were bidden were not worthy" (:8) - the Greek could imply not enough numerically. This indicates that in some ways, God does work to a number. Whilst there may be reference here to an appeal to Gentiles, the implication is that it will be to Jews in particular. The servants go "into the streets and lanes of the city" (Lk. 14:21), i.e. Jerusalem.

"Guests" are literally, recliners at the table. The word is usually translated like this in its 14 occurrences in the New Testament. In a sense, the banquet had begun- even before the King entered to review the guests. Just as the Kingdom experience, crystallized and epitomized in the breaking of bread, has begun for all who respond. Although this is no guarantee of ultimate acceptance by the King. The contrast between recliners at table and servants is brought out in Lk. 22:27: "For which is greater, he that reclines at table [s.w. "guest"], or he that serves? Is not he that reclines at table?". In the parable, we are asked to identify ourselves with the servants. Our audience are the recliners at table. In the context of preaching, of bringing people in to the banquet, we are to consider our audience greater than us and to approach them with every respect. Our witness to them, therefore, is a serving of them; not a showing off to them of our superior Bible knowledge, the superiority of our positions over theirs.

According to Luke's version of an earlier telling of the parable [with some differences], the King Himself invited beggars into His feast. This also stands out as strange... what kind of king is this? And what fortunate beggars. Immediately, we have the lesson powerfully brought home to us. And why ever would a guest refuse the wedding garment offered to him on entry to the feast (Mt. 22:11)? The element of unreality in the story makes it stand out so clearly. And yet ask people why they are not baptized, why they are refusing the righteous robes of Christ, the call of the Gospel... and it is anything from clear and obvious to them. The scandal of the parable hasn't struck them. And there's another strange element to the story. Whilst the supper is still getting cold, the King sends off a military expedition (Mt. 22:7,8), but this is incidental to his desire to get on with the feast with his guests. Surely the message is that what is all important for the Father and Son is our response to their invitation, our desire to be at that feast, our turning up there- and the punishment of the wicked is not that significant on their agenda, even though it has to be done.

22:11 *But when the king entered to see the guests*- The same words used about the Lord's 'coming in' to Jerusalem and looking around the temple, in His parody of a triumphant entry (21:10,12). This was the immediate context of this parable, and the point was that He had come to judge Israel and found them unworthy.

He saw there- We are set up by the story line to expect that the King will question "the bad" out of the "both bad and good" which have been gathered. But instead He focuses upon the lack of a wedding garment. Banquets functioned on the basis of the guests arriving, accompanied by a servant, who then gave them a wedding garment, which

they wore. This man obviously thought that his clothes were good enough, and he didn't need the wedding garment offered. This man would likely have been in what appeared to be "the good" category, the type who was well dressed and apparently appropriate for invitation to a King's banquet. It was exactly those types who will be ultimately rejected from the Kingdom banquet, because self righteousness, a refusal to be clothed in the white garment of imputed righteousness, is far worse than being an immoral street person.

A man who was not wearing a wedding-garment- Literally 'not clothed with the wedding clothing'. We are to 'put on' [s.w.] Christ; and "as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have *put on* Christ" (Gal. 3:27). But baptism only 'works' if we believe in what it represents- our clothing with His righteousness by the imputation of righteousness to us. Clearly enough, before the coming of the King, those without a wedding garment [obtained through faith and baptism] are sitting in the same place as those who have one. They sit at the same table- the division is only made by the Lord's coming.

22:12 *And he said to him: Friend*- Another element of unreality, because a King would hardly address a street person as "Friend". But this is how close the King of the Universe feels to any who have at least responded to the call, even if they have to be rejected. The Lord foretells the spiritual culture which He will show even to the rejected, when He mentions how He will call the rejected "friend" (Mt. 22:12), using the same word as He used about Judas (Mt. 26:50). Vine describes it as a word meaning "comrade, companion, a term of kindly address expressing comradeship". If this is how the Lord will address those who have crucified Him afresh- surely there is hope, abundant hope, for us. The suggestion is that there are Judases amongst us, although we can't identify them (and shouldn't try), just as the disciples couldn't. The evil servant who (in Christ's eyes) beat his brethren was a hypocrite, he didn't appear to men to be like that (Mt. 24:48-51); he was only cut asunder, revealed for who he was, at the judgment. He appeared to be an ecclesial elder who loved the flock.

How did you come in here without a wedding-garment?- Obviously a rhetorical question, rather like God's question to Adam: "Where are you?". The King knew. The purpose of the day of judgment is to explain to the rejected why they have been rejected- and it is this realization which is itself the punishment, for it will elicit from them weeping and gnashing of teeth in anger with themselves. Jude 12 speaks of false believers as being spots marring the love feast. There will be such persons at the breaking of bread meetings of the believers, but this parable teaches that it is the King who reveals and removes them, at the last day. It is our duty to simply gather men and women into the Kingdom, both bad and good, just as the net gathers both bad and good fish, but they are only separated from each other when the judgment sits at the last day.

Judgment day is not only for our personal education and humbling. It is for the enlightenment of us all as a community, in that there is fair evidence that in some sense the process of judgment will be public, and all the believers will see the true characteristics of those with whom they fellowshipped in this life. Thus the unworthy will be revealed as being without a wedding garment, and the faithful will see him (for the first time) as walking naked and in shame (Mt. 22:11; Rev. 16:15).

And he was speechless- Other pictures of the rejected describe them as having plenty

to say in self-justification ("When did we see you...", 25:44, "You are a hard man", Lk. 19:22). But in this picture, they are speechless. It's possible to put the various pictures of the judgment together and create a chronological impression of them initially knocking on the door pleading for acceptance, justifying themselves, and then being left speechless in the ultimate darkness and loneliness. Or it could be that different ones of the condemned respond in different ways, some with words, some in silence. 22:13 *Servant*s- In the Lord's other parables, it's the Angels who carry out he condemnation of the rejected. But in this parable, the prophets, Angels, apostles and Christian preachers are all called "servants", encouraging us to see ourselves as of equal significance and meaning in God's Kingdom plan as the other servants.

22:13 *Then the king said to the servants: Bind him hand and foot*- It is the reapers, who represent the Angels (13:39), who bind the rejected for destruction in 13:30. The 'binding' suggests that the rejected will desperately want to be in the Kingdom, to the point they would even forcibly push their way in. Nobody will be indifferent at the last day; all will want more than anything to be in the Kingdom. And this should be our view now.

And throw him- The Lord uses this picture three times, using the same words for 'casting out' and 'darkness' (8:12; 25:30). The implication is that these people were within the light of the Kingdom banquet, and then are taken out of it into the darkness outside. This is why having a positive feel and sense about our presence amongst God's people is not of itself any guarantee of our final salvation; for some will be ejected from that into the darkness of condemnation.

The language used here for the condemnation of the rejected ['bind... take away... cast away'] is also used about the Lord's final sufferings and death. He too was bound (s.w. 27:2; Jn. 18:24; and the only other Gospel reference to being bound hand and foot is to the dead Lazarus in Jn. 11:44, as the term implied 'death'). 'Taken away' translates the same Greek word used about the 'taking up' of the cross (16:24; 27:32) and the cry 'Away with Him [to the cross]!' in Jn. 19:15. 'Cast away / out' is the same word used to describe how the wicked husbandmen killed and then 'cast out' the Son, representative of the Lord Jesus (21:39); it is also used of how "the prince of this world" was to be 'cast out' at the crucifixion (Jn. 12:31). Whether or not that prince refers to the Lord Jesus is an open question, however. The 'outer darkness' would then connect with the darkness at the crucifixion, and the "weeping" with the weeping for the death and suffering of Christ (s.w. Mk. 16:10; Lk. 23:28; Jn. 16:20). Why this similarity between the language of the Lord's death, and that of condemnation? Surely because on the cross, the Lord was treated as if He were a condemned sinner, even though He personally never sinned. So close was His identity with sinners and their condemnation. He can identify, therefore, even with the rejected; He is not like a human judge, who hands down punishments which he has nowhere near experienced himself. The Lord carefully designed His parables and teachings; their various elements are clearly intended to dovetail with each other. It is therefore no accident that He uses the same language for His condemnation to death and the condemnation of the wicked at the last day. He consciously identified with them.

Outside into the darkness , where there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth- The rejected are described as being cast into outer darkness. This is even an Old Testament concept: "Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in the blackest darkness" (Prov. 20:20 RV). The rejected will be "pursued into darkness"

(Nah. 1:8 RV). It is doubtful whether this darkness is literal, unless there will be a specific geographical location into which they are driven which is totally dark. Mt. 22:13 might imply this by saying that "there", in the darkness into which the rejected are cast, there will be weeping. It perhaps more implies a depression so deep that everything loses its colour. There is no point in existence, no meaning to anything. It could be that "darkness" is to be understood as blindness, which is how it is sometimes used in Scripture. "The eyes of the wicked shall fail, and they shall have no way to flee. And their hope shall be the giving up of the spirit" (Job 11:20 RV). This is all the language of the final judgment. They will seek death and hope for it, because existence in the state of condemnation is simply unbearable. But remember that outside of Christ, mankind is likewise in such an unbearable state, if only he will perceive it. He is even now in a figurative furnace of fire.

22:14- see on 24:5.

For many are called but few chosen- When the Lord said that many are called but few chosen, He was actually alluding to a well known saying from 4 Ezra 8:3: “Many have been created, but few shall be saved”. He was as it were raising the bar. It was to be a minority of those called, not just a minority of all creation, who were to be saved. In the context of the parable, the servants call many; but only relatively few are chosen, in that few chose to really accept the gift of imputed righteousness in the garment of Christ. Although only one such person is detailed in the parable, this final observation could imply that the majority of those invited will be ejected. The language of 'chosen' is maybe used to emphasize that it is our duty to call people into the banquet; it is not for us to choose who will ultimately be accepted, because that is not our work.

22:15 *Then the Pharisees went and plotted*- The Greek suggests they went away from Him and held a conference. They found strength in numbers; we wonder how many were individually convicted of their position.

How they might trap him in his talk- The same word used of how *they* were to be entangled in condemnation (Lk. 21:35; Rom. 11:9). As they treated the Lord, so they were treated. Our attitude to Him is in a way our attitude to ourselves and our eternal destiny.

22:16 *And they sent to him their disciples*- The use of *apostello* ["sent out"] and *mathetes* ["disciples"] obviously recalls the use of these words concerning the Lord sending out *His* disciples. Just as the kingdoms of Babylon and Assyria are described in terms of *God's* Kingdom, thus making them anti-Kingdoms of God and their leaders antiChrists, so the Jewish system of the first century was a parody of God's Kingdom as it was exemplified in the Lord and His group of followers.

Along with the Herodians- The Pharisees and Herodians were sworn enemies. Herod was anathema to the Pharisees, who saw him as a false Jew and some kind of antiChrist figure. But a theme of the Lord's judgment and death was that His enemies were united together by a common hatred of Him.

Saying: Teacher. We know that you are true- Lk. 20:21 adds that they also said at this point: "You say and teach *rightly*", Gk. *orthos*, from whence 'orthodox'. They were thereby trying to lead Him to make a right wing, conservative answer, namely, that tribute should be given to God and not Caesar. And then the Herodians could legally swoop upon Him and have Him arrested for disloyalty to the empire.

And teach the way of God in truth- John the Baptist had attempted to prepare the way or path over which God's glory in Messiah could come to Zion. The only other occurrence of "the way of God" is when we read that Apollos, who knew only John's teaching, had to have "the way of God", i.e. John's message about the way, explained more fully to him (Acts 18:26). It may be that John had been so unworldly that he had not paid tribute to Caesar, or at least, he had been interpretted that way; and so now the Pharisees were commenting that if the Lord truly upheld John's teaching, then what was his answer about paying the tribute money? Because it was perceived, at very least, that John had advocated not paying it.

And care not for anyone- That was, in a sense, the impression which people took of Jesus. The same words and accusation about His not caring for people are to be found on the lips of the disciples, in the same words (Mk. 4:38 "Don't you care that we perish?"; Martha thought the Lord 'didn't care' that she was serving alone, Lk. 10:40). In reality, it was the hireling who cared not for the sheep (Jn. 10:13 s.w.), and the Lord was the one who cared for them so much that He died for them. That the most caring man of all time and space could be so misunderstood, even by His closest followers, is encouragement to us when we feel so globally misunderstood. We are thereby fellowshipping part of the Lord's sufferings and existential loneliness.

For you regard not the person of men- This again was an appeal to Jewish orthodoxy, whereby the righteous Jew was supposed to be obedient to God regardless of what others thought. They were trying to lead the Lord into a position whereby He said 'No' to the question about giving the tribute money. And the Herodians were ready to pounce on Him if He did. We can reconstruct how the Pharisees and Herodians worked together in this; the Pharisees were trying to lead the Lord by a path of theology and logic to a position whereby He denied the need to pay tribute- and then Herod's supporters could pounce on Him. The verisimilitude and internal agreement of the record is again strong encouragement to accept this as the inspired word of God, recording he actual words spoken rather than giving a mere summary or imagination of them from a distance of time and space.

22:17 *Tell us therefore, what you think*- If all the flattering things they had said in :16 were indeed true, then what on this basis was His view of the tribute money?

Is it lawful- This was purposefully vague, because they didn't clarify whether they meant the law of Moses or that of Rome. This was part of the trap. If the Lord said it was lawful according to Roman law, then they could accuse Him of breaking the law of Moses. If He said it was lawful according to the Law of Moses, and therefore that law must surely be obeyed, then He was breaking the law of Rome. But the Lord majestically rises above the trap, by (as usual) taking the whole issue to a far higher level.

To give tribute to Caesar, or not?- The word translated "tribute" was used by the Jews for the poll tax of Ex. 30:12-16; the argument was that this should be paid to the temple and not to Gentiles. By pushing the Lord for a yes / no answer, they thought they would force Him into an untenable position. Judas of Galilee had agitated about not paying the tribute money to the Romans (Acts 5:37) and had been executed for this in around AD6, in recent memory. The Lord as always appealed to higher principle- if it has Caesar's image, then give it to him; but what has God's image, your own body, then

give it to God. The giving of our entire person to God made paying an annual tax to the temple seem cheap and irrelevant.

22:18 *But Jesus perceived their wickedness and said: Why do you test me?*- The wickedness could be their hypocrisy, which the Lord goes on to comment upon. But their "wickedness" could refer to their personal sins, and because in that moment the Lord perceived those sins, He thereby perceived their hypocrisy and therefore challenged them about their hypocrisy. He may have been given that perception of their sins by some flash of Divine insight, or it could be that His supreme sensitivity to people led Him to imagine correctly the kind of stuff going on in their secret lives.

You hypocrites!- In what were they hypocritical in this matter? Perhaps they quietly paid the tribute money? Or perhaps it was because in order to answer the question, the Lord made them bring the coin through the temple courts, thus breaking their own laws- see on 22:19 *Shew me... they brought.* They should've been more concerned about the huge gap between their professions and their practice, rather than focusing upon finding error in another. And so it is to this day- fault finding in others over religious matters typically hides serious hypocrisy, the concern with personal sin is transferred into concern about others' sin. Our sense we ought to be self-examining is converted into an examination of others.

22:19 *Show me the tribute money. And they brought to him a denarius*- The Pharisees claimed that pagan coinage should not be brought into the temple courts. This is why the coin had to be brought to the Lord. By so doing, the Lord was purposefully provoking the Pharisees; likely the Herodians (:16) brought it, not the Pharisees. In any case, we see yet another powerful evidence that the historical records of the Gospels are true to the very smallest detail.

The tribute money had the inscription *Tiberius Caesar Divi Augusti Filius Augustus Pontifex Maximus*- "Tiberius Caesar, august son of the divine Augustus, High Priest". Pedants would've quickly assumed that such blasphemous language and appropriation of titles appropriate to the Lord Jesus would mean that such coinage should not be used, nor should such tribute be paid to any man on this basis. But the Lord saw a bigger picture. He was quite OK with such token behaviours, but the far bigger issue was giving to God our own bodies and lives which bear His image.

The coin bore an image which strict Jews considered blasphemous, denoting Tiberius as son of God, the divine Augustus. The Lord doesn't react to this as they expected – He makes no comment upon the blasphemy. He lets it go, but insists upon a higher principle. 'If this is what Caesar demands, well give it to him; but give what has the image of God, i.e. yourself, to God'. He didn't say 'Don't touch the coins, they bear false doctrine, to pay the tax could make it appear you are going along with a blasphemous claim'. Yet some would say that we must avoid touching anything that might appear to be false or lead to a false implication [our endless arguments over Bible versions and words of hymns are all proof of this]. The Lord wasn't like that. He lived life as it is and as it was, and re-focused the attention of men upon that which is essential, and away from the minutiae. Staring each of us in the face is our own body, fashioned in God's image – and thereby the most powerful imperative, to give it over to God. Yet instead God's people preferred to ignore this and argue over the possible implication of giving a coin to Caesar because there was a false message on it. Morally and dialectically the Lord had defeated His questioners; and yet still they would not see the bigger and altogether more vital picture which He presented them with.

22:20 *And he said to them: Whose is this image and superscription?*- He was setting them up for His point that whatever bears God's image and superscription is to

be given to Him (:21); and that refers to our body and whole lives. We have His signature on us; perhaps the Lord had in mind by this the idea that Israel were God's covenant people, His servants bearing His marks.

22:21 *They said to him: Caesar's. He then said to them: Therefore give to Caesar*- The Jews were looking for immediate deliverance from Caesar. The Lord's parody of a triumphal entry into Jerusalem was designed to show that He was not bringing that kind of a Kingdom, that sort of salvation. By saying that tribute must indeed be rendered to Caesar, He was further dashing their Messianic hopes concerning Him, and further demonstrating that He was not the Messiah they were looking for. Thus He was consciously bringing about a situation whereby His popularity was turned into hatred, because of the whole psychology of dashed expectations making love turn to hate. The accusation that "We found this fellow... forbidding to give tribute to Caesar" (Lk. 23:2) was so utterly untrue.

The things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's- What bears God's image, which is our whole body and mind (Gen. 1:26), is to be given to God. We have God's superscription written upon us, moreso if we are in Christ (Rev. 3:12; 7:3; 14:1). "It is he that hath made us, and [therefore] we are his" (Ps. 100 RV). We must be His in practice *because* He is our creator. So it is not that we merely believe in creation rather than evolution; more than this, such belief in creation must elicit a life given over to that creator.

The things which are God's are to be 'rendered' to Him. The Greek word means to pay back, to return; even giving our very bodies only giving back what He has given us. The same word had been used recently by the Lord in teaching that we have a huge debt to God which must be 'rendered' or paid back to Him (Mt. 18:25,26,28). We can read the Lord's words here as meaning that concerns about pedantic issues relating to coinage are irrelevant compared to the paramount issue- that we owe God everything. This would explain why the Lord says this after having accused them of being hypocrites, having perceived the sin they were involved with (see on :18). Because we are created in God's image, the structure of our very bodies is an imperative to give ourselves totally to His cause (Mt. 22:19-21). Whatever bears God's image- i.e. our very bodies- must be given to Him. "It is he that hath made us, and [therefore] we are his" (Ps. 100:3 RV). We must be His in practice *because* He is our creator. So it is not that we merely believe in creation rather than evolution; more than this, such belief in creation must elicit a life given over to that creator.

22:22 *And when they heard it, they marvelled and left him and went away*- The record is making a clear connection back to the use of the same word in the preceding parable, where the Jews "went their way" (:5) having been invited to the banquet, off to their immediate concerns. The Lord had challenged them to give themselves to God, seeing they were made in His image, and stop worrying about petty issues such as the writing on a coin. This challenge was another form of the invitation to the banquet. They perceived what He was saying- for they "marvelled". Just as the Jews heard the invitation to the banquet. But they went their way- and that way was the way to crucifying the Lord, killing the messenger of God. Going that evil way is thus paralleled with going the way of petty materialism.

Lk. 20:26 concludes that “They could not take hold of His words before the people”. The Greek for “take hold” is elsewhere used about the Jews finally taking hold of the Lord in arrest and crucifixion. The Jews are also recorded as not being able to do this physically to Him in public, “before the people”. But Luke speaks of the Jews doing

these things in relation to "His words". This is Luke's way of saying what John says in so many words- that the Lord Jesus was so identified with His words, which were God's words, that He was "the word made flesh", the living personification of His own words, in whom there was perfect congruence between His essential self and His words.

22:23 *The same day Sadducees*- Surely added to give the impression of intensity. The Lord came to His death at the point of mental as well as physical exhaustion.

That say that there is no resurrection- The obvious response to a question from such people about the resurrection would be 'But you don't believe in a resurrection!'. Lk. 20:27 says that they *antilego,* spoke against publically, the resurrection. Mark's record adds that they also said that "In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise…" (Mk. 12:23). But the Lord was not so primitive as to point out their obvious untruth. He took their position as they stated it, and worked to demonstrate that even given that position, they were woefully ignorant of Divine truth. Long term, His approach stood a chance of working. If He had simply denounced them as liars and self-contradictory, there was no chance He would've ever contributed towards their possible repentance and change of heart. This approach needs to be take to heart by us. For there are large numbers of believers who seem to think that their service to God involves cruising internet forums or endlessly arguing with their neighbours in order to prove them wrong and self-contradictory about doctrinal matters. This may give a slight ego rush for a moment, but it is not in fact any real victory. For the victory we seek is not to tie another up in mental knots, but to lead them to repentance, to the Lord Jesus, and to His Kingdom. We also need to note that recently the Lord had resurrected Lazarus, with the result that He appeared to have won over many who had previously supported the Jewish leadership. They were now trying to prove that resurrection doesn't happen. The Lord could've called many witnesses to the resurrection of lazarus, but instead He takes their argument and works from it.

It has been observed that the Sadducees were generally hedonistic- and this surely was a result of their denial of the future resurrection and judgment. Their belief was that only the Torah was inspired, and it was Israel's duty to live according to it in this life. They were a parade example of the effect of doctrine in practice.

Came to him, and they asked him- Over 100 times we read in the Gospels of various people coming to Jesus- His enemies, the crowds, His disciples, people in need. Each came with their various motivations, agendas and pre-understandings of Him. His invitation to 'come to Him' was to come *in faith*. The repeated repetition of the phrase 'came to Him' is perhaps to invite us to see ourselves likewise as amongst those who 'come to Him' as we read or hear the Gospel record, ensuring that we are truly coming to Him and not merely on a surface level as so many did.

22:24 *Teacher. Moses said*- Luke: "*Moses wrote* unto us". The Lord picks this up in His answer in :31: "Have you not read that which was *spoken* unto you by *God*". He is telling them that God and not Moses was the ultimate speaker to them; and that the word was not merely *written* but is a living word, actively *speaking* unto them. For all their much vaunted belief in Divine inspiration of the Scriptures, these men had failed to perceive that God was speaking to them personally through the human authors. And that criticism needs to be remembered today by those equally wedded to a declared belief in Divine inspiration of the Bible. It is to be to us a word *spoken* and not a dead letter written on paper.

That if a man dies having had no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up seed to his brother- The Lord could have replied that if they read the entire passage in Dt. 25:5-7, they would see that God actually made a concession in this matter; and the whole principle only applied to "brethren dwelling together". A man

did not *have to* marry his brother's wife. In any case, as most adult men were married, it would have usually been a case of polygamy. But again, the Lord didn't point out that expositional error, but goes on to develop a far greater and higher principle concerning the nature of His Kingdom, in which such casuistry about marriage will be simply irrelevant. And again, He sets an example to those who have spent their religious lives arguing about divorce and remarriage and fellowship issues. Their arguments could be demonstrated to be expositionally faulty. But the higher principle is that such issues shall be irrelevant in God's Kingdom; and we are to live the essence of the Kingdom life now as far as we can, in spirit at least. The Sadducees made a big deal of the fact that the word translated "raise up seed" is that used generally in the Septuagint for resurrection. Their idea was that resurrection is not of the body but through family life. To die childless was therefore tragic indeed. The same error is made by many today who effectively believe that family life is the ultimate form of spirituality. It is not, and God seeks to build a personal relationship with each of us, He is the personal God of Abraham, Isaac etc., and we shall experience a personal bodily resurrection at which we shall appear before God stripped of our family, and relate to Him as a single individual.

22:25 *Now there were with us seven brothers; and the first married and died having no seed, and thus left his wife to his brother*- This must have been a most unfortunate family. The Old Testament speaks of the failure to build up a house / family and the death of men in youth as being a curse from God for disobedience (Job 18:19; Ps. 107:38,39). Again, the Lord could have made capital of this- but He didn't. There was no element of personal attack, but rather an appeal to higher principle.

22:26 *In like manner the second also and the third, to the seventh*- As noted on :25, this was clearly not a true story.

22:27 *And after them all, the woman died*- She would have been judged to be a most unfortunate woman, likely under God's judgment (see on :25). But the Lord doesn't question the very unlikely story nor the contradictions within it- instead He works from what was presented to Him.

22:28 *In the resurrection therefore, whose wife shall she be of the seven? For they all had her*- The other records add "When they shall rise from the dead". The Lord could've pointed out that they were well known for denying / speaking against the resurrection. But He doesn't make that obvious point, instead focusing on the higher principles rather than point scoring.

22:29 *But Jesus answered and said to them: You are mistaken*- The same word used by the Lord in describing how He as the good shepherd was searching for the sheep of Israel who had "gone astray" (18:12,13). Exactly because He was searching for them with a view to saving them, He did not indulge in point scoring or exposing the numerous errors in their claims. The fact the Lord even tried with these types is a huge inspiration to us all to never give up with any group of people.

As you neither know- Time and again the Lord assaults their pride in knowing the text of Scripture. "Have you *never* read" is commonly on His lips. We can read, and yet never really read; know, but never know. Familiarity with Bible phrases is simply not the same as understanding them correctly.

The Scriptures, nor the power of God- The two are paralleled, with every relevance for the Sadducees who denied the Old Testament's inspiration apart from the Torah. Likewise in their audience the Lord pointed out that David in the Psalms spoke "in Spirit" (:43)- the Psalms were inspired as much as the Torah.

22:30 *For in the resurrection*- Why does the Lord speak of the Kingdom of God as "the resurrection"? Perhaps it is to pave the way for His teaching that "all live unto

Him", in the sense that here He is likewise raising the idea that time will have a different dimension then. The joy and freshness of resurrection will last eternally. The Kingdom will be as it were an eternal moment of resurrection, an eternal now, with no fading thrill but an "everlasting joy upon [our] heads" that will not fade and morph with familiarity and the passage of time.

They neither marry nor are given in marriage- Note the present tenses. They are more striking in Lk. 20:36: "Neither *can they die*… they *are* equal unto the Angels: and *are* the children of God, being the children of the resurrection". Greek tenses, unlike Hebrew tenses, are precise. We would expect 'They shall not die… shall be equal… shall be…'. But the present tenses are striking. The Lord is building up to His point that the question about marriage is inappropriate because God is outside of our kind of time; He sees the believers in Him as even now immortal, a point made more strongly in John's Gospel. This is not the same as having an immortal soul, nor does it imply conscious survival of death. Rather is it a reflection of how God from His perspective outside of time sees His children. Jn. 3:3-5 makes the same point, that we are born again of water and spirit even in this life, and thereby are living the life eternal. But that is from God's standpoint outside of time as we experience it. Lk. 20:37 says that Moses "calls" [present tense] God "the God of Abraham…". Not only does this imply a living word which speaks to us today, but again the point is made throughout the passage that God is outside of time. This choice of tenses in this passage is purposeful, for elsewhere we read of how Moses said or commanded things in the past tense (e.g. Mt. 8:4 "things which Moses commanded", "Moses wrote", Lk. 20:28; "Moses gave you…", Jn. 6:32).

But are like the angels in heaven- The Sadducees denied their existence (Acts 23:8). The Lord's teaching that Angels do not marry was surely additionally an attack on the Jewish myths becoming popular at the time concerning the supposed marriage of Heavenly Angels with the daughters of men in Gen. 6. These myths are deconstructed in Jude and 2 Peter, but the Lord here is also correcting them. We marvel at how apparently 'off the cuff' He could speak in such a multi-faceted and profound way, addressing various issues simultaneously. Although His intellectual and spiritual ability was doubtless capable of such instant responses, I prefer to imagine the Lord reflecting deeply upon God's word and preparing His ideas throughout the years of spiritual mindedness that preceded His ministry.

Lk. 20:36 adds that we shall be as "the children of God", thereby answering the Sadducees idea that it is a human duty to have children and thereby continue the race, for therein do we have our 'resurrection'. Again the Lord is lifting the whole question to a far higher level. Luke adds that the Lord first said that "the children of this world marry…". The Sadducees were assuming that the Kingdom of God would be a kind of continuation of this present life, just with eternity of nature. Whilst there are similarities and aspects of continuity between who we are and who we shall eternally be, we are mistaken in imagining the future Kingdom of God as some kind of ideal earthly situation, a tropical paradise holiday, which shall last eternally. This is the same mistake as thinking that we shall eternally be doing what "the children of *this* world" currently do. Instead of criticizing and exposing the faults in the argument presented, the Lord makes the point that the Kingdom of God will not be about marriage nor about casuistic arguments about the definition of marriage- the very arguments which have occupied the minds of far too many of His children. Paul uses the same logic in reasoning that arguments about food are irrelevant because the Kingdom of God will not be about such behaviour, but about love, peace and joy (Rom. 14:17). Paul, like the Lord here, could have exposed the fallacies of exposition being engaged with, but instead reasons on a

higher level- that seeing we shall not be arguing about such things eternally, let us not do it now.

22:31 *But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have you not read*- Of course they had, but the Lord is yet again making the point that we can read Scripture many times but not really read it as intended.

What was spoken to you by God, saying- Mk. 12:26 records the Lord saying: "…God spoke unto [Moses], saying". Surely the Lord said something like 'He spoke unto Moses, unto you, saying…'. What was spoken to Moses was spoken to them personally, just as the living word speaks to every generation. The Lord was equating each secular Jew with none less than Moses himself. This was unthinkable blasphemy in Judaistic thought, to see oneself as receiving God's words, having God reveal Himself directly to us, just as He did to Moses. God of course had wanted to reveal Himself like this to Israel, but they asked not to hear His voice directly, wanting Moses as a mediator. But the Lord says that now, through the medium of God's word, the voice of God comes directly to us too. In the new Israel and the new Judaism of the new covenant, in this sense we are each as Moses.

Luke adds: "That the dead are raised even Moses showed…". Sadducees believed only in Moses' writings, and denied the resurrection. The Lord takes that position and runs with it, instead of trying to assert the inspiration of the rest of the Old Testament.

22:32 *I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob?*- If the Lord was looking merely for a reference to God being the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He had many places He could have quoted from. I suggest He chose Ex. 3:6 partly to show that the supremely intimate, personal revelation of God to Moses was just the same now to all individuals within Israel. It was a living word spoken to them personally. But also because the Lord wants to make the point that God is outside of time- and that passage goes on to climax in the revelation of that same God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the "I am that I am" (Ex. 3:14). The God outside of time, witnessed by the way the tetragramaton somehow straddles past, present and future tenses, therefore sees the dead as alive "unto Him". The question put to the Lord was very much rooted in the assumption that time as we now know it is going to continue in the Kingdom of God, and the Lord is making the point that this is an immature way of looking at it; and therefore the question was irrelevant. The Exodus 3 passage also contains repeated assurance that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will receive what God has promised- which requires bodily resurrection for them. We need to ever remember that the Lord was not merely demonstrating intellectual prowess in all this reasoning and allusion. He considered them as the sheep who erred / were astray, and through all His teaching here He was merely seeking to steer them to Him and ultimate salvation.

He is not the God of the dead but of the living- This Greek construction could mean 'Not only the God of the dead, but also of the living'. But the context is the Lord demonstrating that the understanding of the Sadducees was very much a dead religion and their God was effectively dead. They denied the resurrection and considered that we have reward only in this life. In this case, God was the God of Abraham only in the past. The Greek phrase could literally mean 'Not the God the dead, but the living [God]', alluding to the well known phrase "the living God". If God only acted for Abraham etc. in the past, then the God Abraham knew effectively died when Abraham died. But the living God seeks to impart life to the faithful.

Lk. 20:38 adds: "For all live unto Him". The Lord is critiquing their division between this life and the life to come- by saying that the faithful live on now in God's memory as they will eternally; He speaks of things which are not as though they are (Rom. 4:17), and in this sense whether we live or die we are the Lord's (Rom. 14:8).

Although the soul is mortal, the spirit returns to God and will be eternally "saved" at the last day. And the spirit refers to who a man essentially is, his thinking and character. This is preserved by God in His memory, and in that sense the faithful dead "live" before Him now. John's Gospel puts this in so many words by saying that we can live the eternal life right now. Whilst bodily resurrection is so significant from our point of view, the God who is outside of our kind of time sees the dead as effectively living as He extends forwards into eternity from the present- in a way we cannot now do. I made the point above that recently the Lord had resurrected Lazarus, with the result that He appeared to have won over many who had previously supported the Jewish leadership. They were now trying to prove that resurrection doesn't happen. The Lord at that time had emphasized that the resurrection of Lazarus was a visual reminder of the new life which those who believed in Him could experience right now: "Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (Jn. 11:26). Luke's comment that "all live unto Him" is saying roughly the same thing. If our spirit is focused upon living and thinking the Kingdom life now, then this spirit is preserved by God upon death. And it is this which God sees after our death, and the sense in which we live unto Him.

22:33 *And when the crowds heard it*- Our debates with others are often not so much in order to convert them, but the listening audience and onlookers. And the Lord was ever aware of this. See on :42.

They were astonished at his teaching- Yet for all this, it was "the multitude" who were soon shouting for His blood. Mere intellectual persuasion of the truth of theology is no guarantee that a person is truly with the Lord.

22:34 *But when the Pharisees heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they gathered together*- The idea could be that the Pharisees and Sadducees, traditionally opposed to each other, were united together in their desire to again try to entangle the Lord. This unity of opposed persons and groups against Christ is a theme of the records. Just as He unites people together around Him, so He unites people against Him- thus creating the Biblical picture of how we are either in God's people or in the group actively against them. This division will come to its final term in the latter day tribulation before the Lord's return.

22:35 *And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, testing him*- Again we see the Lord's temptations being at the hand of the Jewish religious leaders, strengthening the case for thinking that the 'adversary' of the wilderness temptations was likewise somehow connected to the same group or thinking. *Peirazo* can mean both to test, and also to tempt to sin in a moral sense. If in the latter sense, we must ask in what the Lord was tempted to sin? Perhaps in exasperation, inappropriate anger, or to a giving up of effort with the Israel for whom He was dying.

22:36 *Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?*- It is often claimed that this means 'Which type of commandment?'. But the Lord's answer suggests that He saw it as meaning 'Which specific commandment'. Mk. 12:28 records them asking which is the greatest commandment "of all", which requires that they wanted Him to name one specific one. Again, the Lord lifted the question to a higher level, quoting two commandments and speaking of them as one single commandment; and demonstrating that the unity of God is a command rather than a mere piece of fundamental but dead theology (see on :37).

22:37 *And he said to him: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind*- Mk. 12:29 adds: "The Lord our God is one". That God is one is a command, an imperative to action. It underlies the whole law and prophets (Mt. 22:40)- it's that fundamental. If there were two Gods, Yahweh would only demand half our energies. Nothing can be given to anything else; for there is

nothing else to give to. There's only one God. There can be no idolatry in our lives, because there is only one God (2 Kings 19:18,19). Because "there is none else, thou shalt keep *therefore* his statutes" (Dt. 4:39,40). The Hebrew text of Dt. 6:4 suggests: "The Lord is our God, the Lord is one", thereby linking Yahweh's unity with His being our God, the sole Lord and unrivalled Master of His people. It also links the first principle of the unity of God with that of the covenant to Abraham; for "I will be their God" was one of the features of the covenant. The one God has only one people; not all religious systems can lead to the one Hope of Israel.

22:38 *This is the great and first commandment*- They had asked which was the greatest commandment, but the Lord adds that this commandment is not only "great" but also "first", and we can understand that as meaning first in importance in our lives. He earlier had talked about seeking *first* [s.w.] God's Kingdom.

22:39 *And the second is like it*- The Lord is thus putting two commandments together to form one. Hence Mk. 12:31 records Him concluding, having quoted the two commandments: "There is none other commandment [singular] greater than these [plural]".

You shall love your neighbour as yourself- This is indeed a challenge; not only to love ourselves, but to relate to our neighbour as to ourselves. It suggests a unique unity between us and our neighbour within the Israel of God. That humanly impossible unity is only achievable by loving the one God. To love God and our brother is all part of the same thing. It is indivisible; the two commandments are in fact one commandment in practice. To claim to love God but not love or even be involved with our brother means, therefore, that we don't actually love God. John makes this explicit in 1 Jn. 4:1, and much of the Lord's teaching does likewise. Yet our tendency is to isolate them, claiming to love God whilst ignoring our brother, and maintaining a strong sense of separation from him.

22:40 *On these two commandments*- Again, the Lord makes the point. They wanted *one* commandment isolated as the greatest, and He gave them two, with the further comment that "all the law", all the others, hung equally upon those two. The spiritual way of life is not a case of isolating one or two commandments and keeping them, but rather living a spirit of life and thinking. Loving God and our neighbour are seamlessly united, although so many try to do one without the other. On the one extreme is the person who sits at home in splendid isolation with their love for God, on the other is the person who thinks that love for neighbour- some neighbours, anyway- is quite enough, and needs no underpinning in a love for God, which involves keeping His commandments.

Hang the whole law and the prophets- The Lord surely had the Sadducees in view, with the differentiation they made between law and prophets. This would support the suggestion on :34 that they were somehow involved in this ongoing questioning. The achievement of love in practice between brethren, on the basis of their unity with each other elicited by their common connection to the one God, is what the entire Law was aiming at. The 613 commandments of Moses were not, therefore, to be seen as mere tests of obedience. They were designed to produce love and unity in practice.

22:41 *Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying*- The Lord had clearly done well in answering the questions, and it's easy to misinterpret this as Him now going onto the thrust of an offensive, having successfully parried the attacks. But remember His opening comment, that they 'erred' or were as sheep 'astray'. He was trying to steer them to Him, to repentance and salvation, and not to merely win an intellectual battle for its own sake. All the same, He capitalized upon their continued presence to seek to correct another major

misunderstanding. His desire to save them is breathtaking. The fact there were Pharisees who later converted to Christ is proof enough that His strategy worked, at least for some (Acts 15:5). And remember that Saul the Pharisee was living in Jerusalem at the time, and may well have been listening carefully.

22:42 *What do you think of the Christ*- The use of *dokeo*, to seem or think, may be a hint that Matthew is here combating at least the incipient beginnings of Docetism, the idea that Christ only appeared to be whoever He was, a kind of Divine image cast upon the earth. This came to full term in the theology of the Trinity some time later.

Whose son is he? They said to him: The son of David- They were surely aware that Jesus was a son of David, on both the sides of Mary and Joseph. For they would've done their homework as to His [apparent] family of origin. See on 22:45 *How is He his son.*

Lk. 20:41 records that the Lord addressed a question to the wider audience: "How say they that Christ is David's son?". Having let the Pharisees give the answer, He then asks others how this can be the case. Again, the Lord's dialogues with the Pharisees was not simply to try to convert them, but in order that the audience would learn. See on 22:33 *When the multitude heard this.* Mk. 12:37 concludes the section by observing that "the common people heard Him gladly", so again we see how the records seamlessly complement each other.

22:43 *He said to them: How then does David in the Spirit*- See on 22:29 *The Scriptures…*

Call him Lord- Judaism's concept of Messiah has always been vague and not commonly agreed, but there was and is the idea that the likes of Abraham, Moses and David are greater than Messiah. The Lord is pointing out that David considered Messiah to be his "Lord", just as Messiah was greater than Abraham (Jn. 8:58).

Saying- Another present tense, continuing the Lord's theme of God's word being a living word speaking to us today as if in an eternal present.

22:44 *The Lord said*- Clearly Yahweh. If the Divine Name was to be used in the New Testament, surely this would be the place for it. The fact it is not, when some Hebrew words are used (e.g. 'Sabaoth'), shows clearly enough that the literal usage of the tetragramaton is not something God sees as important or even required.

To my Lord- Biblically and historically, David's immediate 'Lord' was Saul. Ps. 110 was originally a revelation to David of the potential possible for Saul, who was an anointed 'Messiah' figure. But Saul failed, and so the fulfillment of the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied to the Lord Jesus.

Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies underneath your feet- The Lord's enemies stood around Him as He applied this Psalm to Himself.

22:45 *If David then calls him Lord, how is he his son?* - The "how" doesn't imply that David's Lord is not his son, but rather is a rhetorical question. How is the Messianic son of David, David's "Lord", to be his son or descendant? Mk. 12:37 says the Lord reinforced the question by asking "*From whence* is He his son?". The answer had to be: 'Through a woman in David's direct line giving birth to Him'. And the questioners were fully aware that Jesus was in the direct line of Mary (see on :42 *The Son of David*).

22:46 *And no one could say a word in reply. From that day nobody dared to ask him any other questions*- These very words are used of how the disciples after the resurrection dared not ask who Jesus was (Jn. 21:12), which is the very context here. The connection is clearly to show that they too through their being too influenced by Jewish thinking found themselves in the same category as the unbelieving Jews- the

difference being that they repented of it. Matthew was appealing to Jews to accept Jesus and repent of their willful misunderstanding, and he and John are holding themselves up as a role model, just as we should in our appeals for repentance. The Greek for "questions" isn't in the original; they dared not ask Him again. The implication from the context could be that they dared not ask Him 'Who are You?', for the answer was clear in their consciences. They knew, on one level, that He was Messiah, that He was the heir to the vineyard, whom they knowingly sought to murder.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 23

23:1 *Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples, saying*- The chapter is clearly in three parts. Verses 1-12 are spoken to the disciples and the crowds; then there are the seven woes against the Pharisees (:13-33), and finally a statement of the Lord's love toward Israel and the inevitable judgment of Jerusalem. The Lord's interchanges with the Sadducees and Pharisees in chapter 22 had been in the presence of the crowds, and He had thrown at least one question to them. Clearly He was seeking to use those dialogues to appeal to the watching audience. So often this is what happens in preaching work. It is those who are observing who are persuaded, rather than the protagonists of the discussion. The Lord realized this, and now consciously appeals to those onlookers.

23:2 *The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses seat*- This appears to some to be a past tense: They sat themselves in Moses' seat, the place from where Moses taught [Jewish teachers sat to teach], i.e. they had in the past appropriated to themselves the authority or seat of Moses. This retranslation avoids the apparent difficulty of the Lord otherwise claiming that they had equal authority to Moses. In this case, His command "That observe and do" (:3) would need to be rendered as His observation rather than His command- 'Whatever they tell you to do, that you observe and do'. But it is also possible to understand the Lord to be teaching submission, for the moment, to the religious leaders- rather than rank revolution against them. For the time to rise up in literal protest was still not yet, rather does the Lord's teaching urge that the revolt He has in mind is purely internal, deep within the human heart and psyche. By bidding obedience to those men, He would have been appealing to Dt. 17:11: "And you shall observe to do according to all that they (the religious leaders) shall teach you".

23:3 *Therefore*- Because they were in the place of Moses, the Lord advised obedience to them rather than quitting the synagogue system. He told His disciples that the time would come when they would be cast out of the synagogues (Jn. 16:2). He clearly had no conception of guilt by association, acquired through religious association with those who taught and lived wrongly. For He goes on to roundly condemn the whole system of Judaism. Perhaps He hoped that the presence of His people amongst that system would be an influence for good upon at least some and a witness to the leadership. Or perhaps He knew that until the more public founding of the Christian church, those people had no realistic alternative but to continue attendance. For outside of the religious system they would spiritually flounder. Whatever, we never hear Him making a direct command to come out from the system until in Revelation we hear His call to come out of the latter day Babylon, which was likely an extension of His teaching in the Olivet prophecy to leave Jerusalem when she was besieged in the very last days. But this was therefore more of a call to self preservation rather than of religious separation because of differing principles. If He had intended separation for religious

reasons, He surely would have called for it earlier. But He doesn't. The essential witness is made from our position embedded, at least externally, in this world.

Put together two scriptures in your mind: "You must obey [the Pharisees] and do everything they tell you"; and, "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees" (Mt. 23:3; 16:6). Surely the Lord is teaching that we should respect elders but never cease personally analysing what they teach for ourselves. Once we stop doing this, we start resigning our own personality and will be unable to follow our Lord personally, i.e. with our own persons. And then we will be ripe for being caused to stumble, if those elders we are listening to then offend us. For 'we', with all that we are, will have been dominated by them.

All things whatever they tell you, do and observe- But soon the Lord would be sending the disciples out with the commission to teach the world "to observe [s.w.] all things that I have commanded you" (28:20). And this command became programmatic for the early church, whose integrity was to be judged on the degree to which they had kept / observed [s.w.] the Lord's commands (1 Jn. 2:3-5; 3:22,24; 5:2,3; there are other allusions to the great commission in John's letters, e.g. 3 Jn. 7). So clearly enough *His* commands and the need for loyalty to *them* soon replaced His word here in Mt. 23:3 about observing / keeping the commands of the Scribes. He may be employing an element of sarcasm, as if to say 'It's OK, you don't have to put up with this much longer; in a day's time, I shall be dead, the Law of Moses will be completed, you will be free. But for just another 24 hours, endure their tyranny'. Only afterwards would the disciples have appreciated what the Lord meant.

But do not you copy their works, for they say and do not- The Lord is making a purposeful paradox. Their 'works' were a not doing or working. Their sins of omission were counted by Him as a work. They, of course, prided themselves upon their works. But the Lord is saying that they actually did nothing- in His book. In this lies the tragedy of Christianity as mere religion. The works can be done, and yet in the Lord's eyes, the essential works are not done. The Lord continues His play on this idea by going on to say that the works they do are done to be seen of men (:5). They did the works but because they were done towards men and not to God, they were not really done. If we have our reward of men, then we have no reward of God. Our works [s.w.] must be made manifest / revealed by the light of Christ, specifically in the cross, as to whether they are worked "in God" or not (Jn. 3:21). The mere doing of the work is not the basis of acceptability.

The Pharisees did all the works, but in their hearts they never knew God, and finally went and did His Son to death. The Lord plays on the fact that ultimately, in God's eyes, they did no works at all: "Do not ye after their works; for they say, and *do* not" (Mt. 23:3). We are left to imagine the anger of those zealous men. They *did* do works, as the Lord observed. But to Him, ultimately they did nothing at all. They had no genuine motives.

23:4- see on 23:25.

Yes, they bind heavy burdens- John appears to allude to this in saying that the true commandments are "not grievous" (1 Jn. 5:3, s.w. "heavy"). The fences created by men around God's law are in fact higher than the actual Divine law. God's laws have a creative intention, whereas human fences around them are totally negative in their intention. The Lord uses the same word later in the discourse, in stating that the 'heavier' matters of the law are justice, mercy and faith (:23). Yet even those things are not "heavy" (1 Jn. 5:3) in the sense that the regulations of the Pharisees were. The Lord's burden is light compared with the weight of carrying unforgiven sin (11:30). The parallel between sin and heavy burdens is also found in David's comment about

carrying the weight of his unforgiven sin with Bathsheba (Ps. 38:4). The burden of sin was thus tied upon people by giving them religious rules which they were unable to keep due to human weakness, and because sin is partly a matter of conscience, it was still counted to the people as sin if they broke it. Therefore to enforce such rules upon people was effectively lading them with sin. This principle needs to be considered by those who 'bind' isolation from other brethren upon believers, or who 'bind' them to a single life after divorce.

Hard to be carried- AV. The Lord sensitively commented that He had many things to command His disciples, "but you cannot bear / carry [s.w.] them at this time" (Jn. 16:12). In teaching others God's requirements, we must be sensitive to human weakness, rather than present them with a whole set of Divine standards as a package and demand their immediate acceptance of it. The Lord still accepted the disciples, even though He had not asked them to do all the things He would like to have asked them to do. And there are likewise levels of discipleship for us too. The same word is also used about carrying the cross of Jesus (Lk. 14:27; Jn. 19:17). This is the ultimately hard to be carried burden. If people have signed up to carry this, who are we to seek to add to it by our demands upon them. James surely had the Lord's teaching here in mind when he reasoned that neither the disciples nor the Jewish fathers had been able to carry the yoke of the Mosaic law (Acts 15:10). Any teaching that the Mosaic law must be obeyed [and there are plenty of Christians teaching this, sadly] is therefore seeking to bind a heavy burden upon men which will lead to their spiritual collapse and thereby to our own condemnation.

And lay them- The same word used about the cross being laid upon the Lord (Lk. 23:26), and the laying of the lost sheep on the shoulders of the shepherd (Lk. 15:5). As this is the Lord's only other reference to anything being laid upon the shoulders, we may be intended to understand that carrying the weight of the lost, seeking to save them, can be replaced by carrying the weight of worrying about obeying human regulations. So many spiritual lives and so much endeavor goes into keeping in with a social club based around the laws of men, when that energy could be far better used carrying the lost to salvation.

On men's shoulders- The laying of an unbearable weight upon the shoulders recalls exactly the language of the cross of Christ being laid upon Him. Instead of men carrying *this* burden, they can instead end up carrying the burden of obedience to human regulations. The focus changes to obeying human expectation rather than the effort involved in engaging with the crucified Christ. All such human laws, regarding fellowship practice, dress codes etc., are therefore likely to make men stumble and thereby bring condemnation to those who demand them. Legalism and human religion are a burden laid on men's shoulders. But the cross of Jesus is also a burden laid upon our shoulders (Mt. 23:4). The greatness of the demands of the cross free us from the burdens of man's legalism. But it's still a choice, between a cross and a cross. See on 3:11. As Moses "looked on their burdens" at age 40 (Ex. 2:11), so at the start of His ministry, our Lord assessed the weight of ours. His concern for our burdens in Mt. 11:30; 23:4 is perhaps a conscious allusion back to Moses' awareness of Israel's burdens, and his desire to deliver them, even though it cost him all that he had in this world.

But they will not move them- Gk. 'remove' them. In His earlier teaching about this in Lk. 11:46, the Lord said they would not "touch" the burdens. The Lord by contrast used touch frequently in order to connect with sinful people and their conditions, and to thereby heal them. The Pharisees would not touch them for fear of contamination; they would not associate or engage with sinful people and the results of their sins. The

Lord used His fingers to enter the ears of the deaf and touch the eyes of the blind, secreting unclean body fluid. This is the way to remove burdens- to engage with them. And yet closed table policies effectively do the same, by refusing association with those judged by latter day Pharisees to be too serious sinners. The fear of guilt by association is utterly selfish, and results in the burdens never being removed or made lighter for the person struggling to carry them.

With their finger- The contrast is between the weight of the burdens on the shoulders of men, so great it crushed them; and the ease with which the law-makers could remove them with their fingers, perhaps referring to their ability to write things with a few strokes of the fingers which would remove those burdens. This is ever more true today- a few taps with a finger on a keyboard to change traditional demands on fellow believers, and burdens can be removed.

23:5 *But they do all their works*- See on :3 *Their works… they do not*.

To be seen by men- The same Greek word and teaching as in 6:1; the Pharisees did good deeds "to be seen of men" and therefore have no reward. But the warning of 6:1 is to us all. Too easily we can feel that these woes against the Pharisees are not relevant to us, but they were merely giving in to the same tendencies as are common to us all. John's Gospel uses the same word for 'seeing' with regard to our 'seeing' Jesus in the sense of believing in Him. So the contrast is between those who look to Jesus, and those who want others to look to them. Widening and enlarging the religious symbols on their clothing was exactly in order to be seen by men. Our focus upon looking toward Jesus will make us less interested in how men look upon us.

For they make their phylacteries wide- Nearly all the descriptions here of what the Pharisees did are couched in language which is elsewhere used about spiritual things. The point being made is that they were living a religious life which was an inversion of what true spirituality, and especially the example of the Lord Jesus, are all about. The reason why so much attention is given to the Pharisees in the Gospel records is surely because their mentality is so typically human, and their failure is preserved as a warning to all who claim to be committed to the same God of Israel. The Greek word translated "enlarge" is elsewhere nearly always used about the need to "magnify" *God* rather than ourselves (Lk. 1:46 "My soul *magnifies* the Lord"; Acts 10:46; 19:17; Phil. 1:20).

And the tassels on their garments long- The same word translated "hem" is used elsewhere only about the hem of the Lord's garment which gave blessing and healing to others (9:20; 14:36).

23:6 *And they love the chief place at feasts*- The Lord had earlier used the very same words to describe how the attitude to places at feasts was directly relevant to placing at the Messianic banquet of the Kingdom. Those who now take the lowest places around the Lord's table will be exalted, and those who took the high places will be demoted in "shame", a term usually associated with rejection and condemnation (Lk. 14:7,8). Those who consider themselves as spiritually superior in the ecclesia will be demoted and that demotion may well be in terms of condemnation. Our attitude around the Lord's table now will be directly relevant to our placement at the Lord's table when He returns. Those who have taken for themselves the more glorious places will be rejected- that is the clear message.

And the chief seats in the synagogues- They wanted to be publically seen as spiritually superior. The whole structure of church life, whereby some must have public roles, is such that people can fall so easily into a love of publicity. The Lord realizes this, and often removes His beloved from such temptations. This explains the otherwise

inexplicable way in which the Lord allows some of His most talented and capable servants to be removed from the public eye to serve Him in human obscurity.

Note that the Lord here is repeating almost word for word what He has previously said about the Pharisees in Luke 11. To repeat so much text twice in the Gospel records, and for the Lord to give identical word-for-word teaching on two occasions, shows how important these warnings are for all readers. This consideration alone suggests that we each have the same tendency as the Pharisees; they are but epitomes of our own deepest tendencies and desires.

23:7 *And the salutations in the marketplaces*- The Lord's reason for going to the market was to invite men to work in the vineyard and receive the penny of salvation (20:3); and His people sitting in the markets sought to persuade others of the need to respond to the Gospel (11:16). The Pharisees went to the markets to simply flaunt their external spirituality. Again, note how their behaviour was the very inversion of true spirituality.

And to be called of men, Rabbi- This uses *kaleo,* the standard word translated 'call'. The Lord and His followers *call men* to the Kingdom from the markets (25:14; Lk. 14:16); rather than going to the markets to be *called something by men*. Again we see how the Pharisees' behaviour was a parody of true spirituality.

23:8 *But you are not to be called Rabbi*- The Lord was looking ahead to when those immature disciples would be the leaders of the new community He believed He was creating. He foresaw the day would come when their converts would naturally want to show them respect, and He warns against the use of titles as a sign of respect. But in this kind of thinking ahead, we have an insight into the great faith and hope the Lord had in His men; for they were so immature, and so far away from such positions of authority and leadership. But He has the same hopes for us too. His positivity is and was extraordinary. The whole vision was a huge challenge for the disciples- to learn that they would one day be the equivalent of the Rabbis in the new Israel the Lord was creating.

For one is your teacher- AV "Master". 'Rabbi' means 'master' and is from the Hebrew word *ab*, 'father'. This explains why having taught against using the title 'Rabbi', the Lord now speaks specifically about 'master' and 'father'. The greatness of Christ means that once it is perceived, then we will naturally perceive that in the light of His excellence, we have no pre-eminence over each other; we are brethren, in Christ.

And all you are brothers- Just because we are all brothers, actually something *more than physical brothers and sisters*, we are not to call any of us 'Master', because if we do, it will distract us from our personal looking to Jesus as Lord and Master. This is why anything that even suggests a personality cult built around leading brethren, no matter how wonderful they are or were, really must be avoided. For it takes us away from the one and only Lord and Master. Whatever leaders or organisers we have, we are to call nobody our 'father' in a spiritual sense. The wonder of our relationship with *the* Father ought to mean that we never do this. Above all, we are all brethren in Christ. John refers to himself as the brother of the congregation (Rev. 1:9), and the leading apostles were addressed as 'brother' just as much as anyone else in the ecclesia (Acts 21:20; 2 Pet. 3:15). There may be leaders among brothers (Acts 15:22), but we are still essentially brethren. The intimate inter-connectedness of the family must ever remain; which explains why Paul is called 'Paul' and not a longer form of address. Likewise I'd suggest that the practice of calling each other by our first names, with the prefix 'brother' or 'sister', is healthy; and, indeed, a privilege. Reference to a brother as 'Dr.' or 'Mr.' seems to me to be quite at variance with the family nature of our relationship. If the Lordship of Jesus is fully felt as it should be,

then even those who become leaders in the congregation [the disciples, in the first instance] are to feel themselves as brethren with those they are leading. This brotherhood between leaders and followers is essential for true functioning of the body of Christ.

23:9 *And call no one on the earth your father*- Although the twelve called Jesus 'Rabbi', they perhaps didn't respect Him initially as the *only* Rabbi -because the disciples were too influenced by Judaism. The Lord has to remind the disciples to call no man their rabbi or 'father' on earth, i.e. in the land, of Israel. The disciples were evidently still under the influence of Judaism and the religious world around them, and this background died hard for them. "Why say the scribes…?", they reasoned (Mk. 9:11), implying that their view was of at least equal if not greater weight when compared with that of the Lord Jesus [as they also did in Mt. 17:9,10]. He had to specifically warn them against the Scribes in Lk. 20:45,46. 'Father' was a common title for the rabbis, who referred to their disciples as their 'sons'. The disciples clearly respected the apostate rabbis far more than He wanted them to. We can easily overlook the deep and awesome significance of calling our fellow believers "brother" and "sister". As Paul so strongly stresses, the Lord Jesus created a new sense of family, of "social identity". We can easily miss how radical this was in first century Palestine; just as we can miss it in our own context. In the Mediterranean world of the first century, families were supremely important. The head of the family exercised total control. For the Lord to teach that His followers should call no man on earth their father was extreme; and yet He said it and expected it (Mt. 23:9).

For one is your Father- This appeal to the unity of God would've sat well with the Jewish audience. But like many who profess faith in the One God, they hadn't thought through the implications. If God alone and uniquely is our Father, then we are not to call men 'Rabbi', rooted as the word was in the Hebrew word *ab*, 'father'.

He who is in Heaven- If there is a Father in Heaven, we don't need a spiritual father upon earth. The implication is that they considered that although indeed there was one Father in Heaven, Heaven is distant and we need a father on earth. The Lord is implying that the King-dom, the rulership and essence of God in Heaven, is to be seen and felt on earth in our lives.

23:10 *Neither be called*- The Lord has warned His people not to call their spiritual leaders by titles such as father or master, and now He addresses those who would become leaders, the nervous and wavering disciples, and urges them not to allow others to call them by these titles. Again, He foresaw how those weak men would soon be in a position where others would wish to give them these titles, and in so doing we have a window upon His hopefulness and vision, at a time when the material in His hands seemed so weak and immature.

Masters- The root word is used about leaders in the church: "Them which *have the rule over* you" (Heb. 13:7,17,24); "He *that is chief*" amongst the believers should be as the servant (Lk. 22:26); Paul was "the*chief* speaker" (Acts 14:17), Barnabas and Silas were "*chief men* amongst the brethren" (Acts 15:22). So the Lord is not teaching that there are not to be leaders; it is practically impossible in any case to have any community wherein all are identical and without leadership. But the Lord's point is that those in such positions should not be named as such, and should stop others calling them by such names. All in the community of faith should perceive Christ as the one ultimate Lord and Master, and in the light of that deep sense, all should see themselves as

brethren on the same ultimate level with each other. One of the key factors in the apostasy of the early church was a failure to give due weight to the Lord's teaching here.

For one is your master, the Christ- Perhaps this was added by Matthew in brackets, as it were, seeing that the Lord never baldly calls Himself "the Christ" in so many words.

23:11 *But he that is greatest*- The Lord spoke distinctly in the singular. Not 'Those who are the great ones', but the specific individual who is the greatest. Surely He had Himself in view.

Among you- Again, this is distinctly relevant to the Lord Jesus personally. He was soon to repeat these words with specific reference to Himself: "He that is greatest among you... He that is chief, as He that serves... I am *among you* as He that serves" (Lk. 22:26,27). The idea of "among you" is an oblique reference to His humanity, as one of us.

Shall be your servant- The servant of Israel was the subject of Isaiah's servant songs, which came to their climax in the Lord's death upon the cross, prefigured by His washing the disciples' feet half naked as a servant, dressed as He would be at the time of His final death on the cross.

23:12 *And whosoever*- The singular "greatest" person in view in :11 was the Lord Jesus; He was speaking of Himself, and in a sense speaking obliquely to Himself as well as to His immediate audience. But He now teaches that all in Him must pass through the same path of humiliation and exaltation. The same words for 'abase' and 'exalt' are used about all believers, e.g. "Humble yourselves [s.w. 'abase'] in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up [s.w. "exalt"]" (James 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:6). The Lord gave a parabolic example of what He meant when He also used the same words together about how the proud Pharisee would be "abased" and the convicted sinner 'humbled himself' and would later be 'exalted' (Lk. 18:14). The Lord's path of humiliation and exaltation is therefore to be that of us all; and Phil. 2:4-12 clearly applies this to His whole life and supremely to His death on the cross and exaltation subsequently. "He *humbled Himself* (s.w. 'humble' and 'abase' here in Mt. 23:12)… unto death" (Phil. 2:8). He there is therefore no longer a mere historical event, but rather a living pattern with which we engage throughout the progressive humiliation which the Lord's hand brings upon us, so that we might be exalted in due time. This, in one sense, is what the paths of our lives are all about- progressive humiliation under His mighty hand, both pushing ourselves down and being pushed down.

Shall exalt himself- Again relevant to the Lord Jesus, who was highly exalted because of His servanthood. But He was exalted by God, not Himself (Acts 2:33; 5:31 s.w.). And the very same word is used of the Lord's lifting up on the cross (Jn. 3:14; 8:28; 12:32,34). This was the true exaltation.

Shall be humbled- This is the very same word used in the next clause: "He that shall humble [s.w. 'abase'] himself…". In the end, we are brought down. We are humbled by our own humanity and weakness. We either bring ourselves down, or God will bring us down. So we may as well humble ourselves so that we shall be exalted by God, rather than exalting ourselves so that God will eternally bring us down in condemnation at the last day. It's humility, bringing down, either way. So certain is the connection between humility and exaltation that James 1:9 can say that the brother who

is ‘abased’ (AV “of low degree”) *is*exalted- in the eyes of the God who sees outside of our time, for whom all live unto Him even now.

And whoever shall humble himself shall be exalted- God recognized Mary’s “low estate” [humility] and exalted her above all women (Lk. 1:48), just as He would exalt His Son among men. The same Greek word is used in Acts 8:33: “In his humiliation [‘low estate’] his judgment was taken away”. It occurs too in Phil. 2:8: “He *humbled himself*”. In the cross, indeed throughout the seven stage self-humiliation of the Lord which Phil. 2 speaks of, He was living out the spirit of his mother. She taught him the life and the way of the cross. Hence the way she insisted on being there at the end, and the comfort she would have given Him, and the love He showed by asking for the only one who really understood Him to be taken away, for her sake as well as His own. The Lord directly alluded to His mother’s pattern of humiliation and exaltation by using the same word again here in Mt. 23:12: “Whosever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself [s.w. be abased- we must either humble ourselves or be humbled, it’s such a powerful logic] shall be exalted”. Thus Jesus alludes to His mother's words in order to set her up as our pattern [“whosoever”]. And yet He Himself showed the ultimate obedience to her pattern in the death of the cross. For this and many other reasons, the Lord’s mind was upon His mother in His time of dying. And according to the Messianic Psalms, He even asks God to have mercy upon Him *for Mary’s sake* (Ps. 86:16; 116:16).

23:13 *But woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites!*- The Lord now utters seven woes, just as Isaiah had uttered seven woes after telling Judah the parable of the vineyard (Is. 5:8-6:5)- which the Lord had also recently done. Isaiah's woes were likewise uttered as a reflection of genuine Divine anger, but they were also a last ditch appeal to the Judah of Hezekiah's time to repent, lest the Assyrian invasion come and destroy them. Isaiah’s woes largely concerned the extremely fleshly behaviour of Judah at his time; the Lord’s woes concern religious hypocrisy of the apparently zealous, Torah-obedient Jews. The point is that religious hypocrisy, even if it involves careful obedience to some Divine principles, is just as wanton and fleshly as drunkenness and theft, the kinds of things criticized in Isaiah’s seven woes.
You lock up- The same figure of the door of the Kingdom being shut [but by the Lord, not men] is found in 25:10. The similarity is such that we may be intended to understand the foolish virgins are those who were locked out of the Kingdom because of the Pharisees. Their lack of oil, of personal spirituality, was because their religious leaders had not inculcated this in them, nor any sense of their own fallibility and frailty- in that the reason they ended up locked out of the Kingdom was because they had not considered that their oil would likely fail. The Pharisees had "the key of knowledge" (Lk. 11:52) in a spiritually ignorant and illiterate society which depended upon them for knowledge of God's word. Likewise if the elders / judges of Israel had been wise, the entire people would have entered the land (Dt. 16:20). The whole of Israel would’ve stayed in the wilderness and not entered the Kingdom / land if Gad and Reuben hadn’t initially gone over Jordan (Num. 32:15). Wrath would come upon all Israel if the Levites weren’t encamped around the tabernacle (Num. 1:53). We really can cause others to not enter God’s Kingdom by limiting their access to God’s word [a sin of omission], or by making demands on them in the name of His Kingdom which are too heavy for them to bear [a sin of commission]. This imparts an urgency and eternal importance to all our interactions with others. No longer can we see the community of believers as a mere social club, nor the world around us as simply the dead furniture of

our lives. We have their salvation or stumbling away from it within our power. This fact also denies us from assuming that whether we fail or not in our interactions with others, God will somehow make good our failures and save others anyway. He has delegated His work into our hands, and to some extent the degree to which it prospers or fails is our responsibility. Otherwise the whole language of delegation of His wealth into our hands is somehow meaningless.

You shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves- As if they slammed the door in the face of ones eager to enter the Kingdom. If we believe that we ourselves will be there, we will spark off an upward spiral of positive thinking in the community of believers with whom we are associated. Think carefully on the Lord's words to the Pharisees: "For ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in" (Mt. 23:13). If we don't believe we will be there, we end up discouraging others.

Nor allow those who would enter to go in- The Greek *aphiemi* translated "allow" more commonly carries the idea of loosing, setting free, and is translated 'forgive'. There may be a hint here at what the Lord also taught in chapter 18- that unforgiveness of others makes them stumble from entering the Kingdom. And the Pharisees with their endless demands upon men were indeed unforgiving. There is a sense in which we will enter the Kingdom at the last day (5:20; "Not every one that says Lord, Lord shall enter into the Kingdom", 7:21; 18:3; 25:10 s.w.), and yet in another sense we are entering now through the gates ("enter in at the narrow gate", 7:13; 19:17,24). Our lives now are on a path, a journey, which is entering the Kingdom. The significance of life and living could not be more intense.

Earlier when speaking these words, the Lord had said that the lawyers were 'hindering' those who were in the process of entering the Kingdom (Lk. 11:52). The same word is used about how the disciples 'forbad' children to come to Jesus (19:14) and about 'forbidding' baptism (Acts 8:36; 10:47). This is exactly how people can be hindered or not 'allowed' to enter the Kingdom today- by refusing them baptism because of some inadequacy of knowledge or behaviour, or because they are simply felt to be in a category [like "children" were by the disciples] who are inappropriate for the Kingdom. These reflections make us realize that the Pharisees were not a mere phenomenon in history, but have their direct equivalents today.

23:14 *Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites!*- They were totally fleshly people on the inside, but their acting involved the "pretence", the *prophasis* or actor's cloak, of making long prayers, appearing righteous on the outside. The Lord homes in upon such behaviour in the Sermon on the Mount- appearing to be spiritual when we are not is deeply angering to the Lord.

For you devour widow's houses- I mentioned earlier that the language used here about the behaviour of the Scribes and Pharisees is elsewhere used about the righteous behaviour of the Lord and His followers; the Jewish leaders were living a religious life, but it was but a parody of true spirituality. The same words for "devour" and "house" are used of how the Lord Jesus was 'eaten up' or 'devoured' with zeal for His Father's "house". But by contrast the Scribes thought only of how they could devour the houses of widows, scheming how to get the house of a vulnerable single old woman left to them, and how they could devour that wealth upon themselves. We note that Mark and Luke conclude this section with the account of the widow who gave her entire wealth

to the temple coffers (Mk. 12:42; Lk. 21:1). This was surely to add assurance that although her donation was misused, it was carefully noted by God to her eternal credit.

While for a pretence you make long prayers- See on *Hypocrites*. The word was used about an actor's cloak, and thus connects with the theatrical term 'hypocrites', play-actors. The Lord uses the same word in Jn. 15:22: "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no *cloak* for their sin". When did He come and speak unto the Jews about their hypocrisy? Surely here in Matthew 22. Although they did have a cloak for their sin before men, the Lord is saying in John 15 that they have no such cloak before Him.

Therefore you shall receive greater condemnation- There will be degrees of punishment, although it will be self-inflicted.

23:15- see on 17:12.
Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you compass sea and land to make one proselyte- Periago ("compass") is only elsewhere used in the Gospels of the Lord 'walking around' the villages around the sea of Galilee (4:23; 9:35). Again, their behaviour was a conscious inversion of His.

And when he has become so, you make him twofold more a son of Gehenna than yourselves- The condemnation of anyone is partly their fault, and partly the fault of others. They stopped people entering the Kingdom (:13) and thus made them inherit condemnation. This is the danger of legalism. Despite such huge missionary efforts and apparent devotion, imposing legalism upon others leads to their condemnation and the worse woe, therefore, upon the missionary. They made the person be condemned in that they had made him a proselyte. The same Greek word is used both times for "made". By becoming a proselyte, the person became responsible to judgment and would be condemned. Here is proof enough that knowledge makes responsible to judgment. The Jews didn't give men the good news of Christ and God's grace; rather they gave only partial knowledge of the whole picture, of God's demands upon men. They persuaded men to enter covenant relationship with Him, undertaking to keep His commandments, whilst not explaining grace and the love of God. And thereby they made those people condemned. This is just as easily done today in the preaching of a one-sided message which lacks any real Gospel, or good news of salvation by faith and grace.

In "twofold more" we again see the idea of degrees of punishment. The Lord has just said that the Pharisees would have greater condemnation than others (:14), and now He says that their converts would have double even that. Perhaps the implication of that is that these proselytes were not mere passive converts, but were inspired by the example of their teachers to be even more extreme in their legalism and lack of true faith. A case could be made that the Hellenistic Jews who persecuted Paul so fiercely were in fact Gentile proselytes. Reflect too how Saul was more obsessed against Christians than his teacher, the Pharisee Gamaliel. This is all so true to human observation, that the converts of legalists become typically even more fanatic than their spiritual fathers.

23:16 *Woe to you, you blind guides, who say: Whoever swears by the temple*- Their blindness was a major source of criticism (:16,17,24,26). Paul uses the language of blind guides of the blind to the Jewish Christian believers in Rom. 2:19- showing again that the mentality of the Pharisees is likely to be a problem for us all; we are failing to

get the point if we read these woes upon them and feel somehow isolated from those men by time and culture. Their blindness was self-inflicted, otherwise it would not have been cause for rebuke. If someone doesn't want to see God's ways, then they never can see them, because the darkness in which they have chosen to mentally move has blinded them.

It is nothing- They were saying that an oath could be taken but breaking it was no problem if one 'only' swore by the temple. Jews swore by the temple because of their belief at the time that the temple was eternal. Because they broke their oaths and considered the temple to effectively be dispensable, therefore the Lord goes on in chapter 24 to predict the destruction of the temple.

But whoever swears by the gold of the temple- On the basis that that men swore by the greatest thing they could (Heb. 6:13,16), we have here an insight into their mind. For them, gold was paramount, for they were materialistic (Lk. 16:14). And it was even more important than the temple and the God who dwelt there.

He is bound by his oath- This suggests that some oaths were binding and others were not. And thus a scale of honesty was created, whereby human words themselves were not significant, but were only given value according to how much they were underpinned by oaths. The Lord therefore taught that all such swearing was to be outlawed for His people (5:34-36). The word *opheilo* is used often in the Gospels but always in the context of the debt owed to God for human sin (18:28,34; Lk. 7:41; 16:7; 17:10), and the debt of others to us for their sin against us (18:30; Lk. 11:4). Instead of judging to what degree others are bound / obligated to us for their sins, we are to frankly forgive, just as God frankly forgives our debts.

23:17 *You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold, or the temple*- The idea was that men swore by the greatest thing they could, which means that if they are going to swear at all, they should swear by God (Heb. 6:13,16). However, Jews didn't like to swear by God, and so they had a whole range of things by which they swore- despite the fact that Dt. 6:13 clearly stated "You shall fear Yahweh… and shall swear by His Name". An oath by the temple was "nothing", but by the gold of the temple was even more. They were thereby effectively introducing a whole range of possible levels of honesty. Which the Lord had cut right through by insisting that our yes must be yes, without any oaths (5:34-36). James alludes to this by saying that "Above all things… swear not" (James 5:12). The importance of absolute truthfulness and not grading the honesty of our words is so important that James urges us to this "above all things". Truthfulness with God, with others and within ourselves, is paramount. It is a reflection of our experience of God's total and genuine forgiveness of us. In the forgiveness context, this spirit of truthfulness is what allows us to genuinely, from the heart forgive others not in word only but in feeling and reality.

That has made the gold sacred?- By so saying, the Lord reduced 'gold' to a mere metal of no intrinsic holiness outside the context of God's service. The Pharisees, as many believers today, had isolated aspects of their religion and glorified them in themselves, forgetting the wider context. Thus it may be that a sister focuses on one particular aspect of service until it is out of all context, a brother may obsess about a specific Bible teaching out of all perspective with the rest of God's revelation and intentions. But it's doubtful that the temple of itself sanctified the gold within it- that isn't a Biblical idea. See on :19 *The altar that sanctifies the gift*.

23:18 *And, Whoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing!*- Their desire to define everything led them to downplay the significance of the altar because they were so concerned with the value of the sacrifice placed upon it. And yet Ex. 29:37 pronounced the altar to also be holy. Their penchant for definition led them to ignore the clearest statements in the Law they claimed to read, study and love to obey. Having spoken three times in the same section about "the altar" and "the temple", it cannot be incidental that the Lord goes on to say that they had effectively slain Zacharias "between the temple and the altar" (:35). He is demonstrating that despite their hypersensitive interpretation of these things, they had committed sacrilege in those very places.

But whoever shall swear by the gift that is upon it, he is bound by his oath- Again we have an insight into how the Pharisees thought. Gifts to the temple were all important to them, because those gifts were effectively their income.

23:19 *You blind men! For which is greater: the gift*- The fact the Lord rebukes them for their blindness shows that blindness is in this sense their choice. I would suggest that much erroneous understanding is a result of people choosing not to understand, rather than having some genuinely excusable intellectual blockage.

Or the altar that makes the gift sacred?- The Lord had earlier taught that a gift brought to the altar was unacceptable if the offerer was not first reconciled to his brother (5:23,24). But as so often, He uses their reasoning and for a moment, argues as if it were true. If they considered that the altar sanctified the gift, then effectively there was a unity between the sacrifice and the altar. To draw a distinction between oaths made by the altar and those made by the sacrifice upon it was therefore utterly a false distinction. The Lord could have argued that oaths should only be made by God, in line with Dt. 6:13. Or He could have reiterated His position that our yes should mean yes, and therefore there was no need for any swearing by anything (5:34-36). But we note *how* He argues here- He uses their wrong ideas and works with them to demonstrate ultimately how they were misplaced and wrong. He does the same in using the language of demons. Instead of a bald declaration of truth, He worked with people from where they were. Far too often, bald declarations of truth are presented in a way which can only alienate, and is more for the benefit of the speaker than the audience. It all comes down to whether we genuinely wish to lead a person onwards, for their benefit; or whether we are involved in the whole interchange for our own self-justification and benefit.

23:20 *He therefore that swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it*- The Lord is criticizing the distinction made by the Jews between swearing by the altar, and swearing by the sacrifice; or swearing by the temple, and swearing by the gold placed in the temple treasury. If a man swore by the temple or by the altar, those things could not be taken up if he was found to be telling untruth. But if he swore by the sacrifice or donation of gold he had made, those things could be seized.

23:21 *And he that swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him*- The Lord's point here and in :22 was that effectively, the Pharisees were doing what they were trying hard not to do, i.e. swearing by God. And yet Dt. 6:13 had commanded that oaths should be sworn by God, and Lev. 19:12 implies that too, in warning against swearing falsely by God. There is no suggestion that oaths were to be sworn by anything else. This was the point of the commandment not to take the Name of God in vain (Ex. 20:7). Abraham

swore by God (Gen. 14:22,23); the formula was typically "as Yahweh lives" (Jud. 8:19). The Jews tried to avoid this, placing the sacrifice, gold, temple and altar in some kind of varied scale of solemnity. But the Lord's point is that effectively, they were swearing by God. The lesson is that all such careful, legalistic attempts to place a respectable distance between God and ourselves in the matter of honesty are foolish and irrelevant. In reality, the Jews were breaking one of the ten commandments, by taking God's Name in vain. And this was the very commandment they were so careful to apparently obey by not even mentioning or pronouncing the tetragrammaton. The Lord's earlier command in 5:34 not to swear could be read as meaning that people were not to swear by the things they were swearing by at the time (heaven, earth, Jerusalem, your head), but only by God. But seeing God knows all things, the Lord is saying that our yes should be yes, for effectively all that we say is said before God.

That dwells in it- The Lord goes on to say that the house of the Lord was no longer God's house but "your house", and it was 'left desolate' (:38). The glory had departed from it, just as God's shekinah presence is depicted in Ezekiel as progressively departing from the temple. And yet again the Lord is using their own beliefs against themselves. If they believed that God still dwelt in the temple, then the gold in its treasury, the altar and sacrifices were all equally connected with Him. Note that “Him that dwells” in the sanctuary / Most Holy (Mt. 23:21,35 RVmg.) could be a reference to an Angel who dwelt there- see Ps. 78:60.

23:22 *And he that swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by*- To draw a distinction between swearing by Heaven and swearing by God personally was purely academic. Earlier the Lord had clearly stated that there is practically no difference beween Heaven and God: "Heaven... is God's throne" (5:34). We note, however, that Matthew often uses "Heaven" as a synonym for God, using language in a way which makes concession to Jewish sensitivities, even though they were mistaken. The use of the language of demons for unexplained illnesses is another example. The Lord could have simply quoted from the Old Testament, as Stephen did: "Heaven is My throne" (Acts 7:49). But instead He works with the false distinction they were making to show it to be false, instead of head on confronting them with the error of their thinking by Biblical quotation. And in that He sets us an example. The Lord's point is that all oaths are before God because He sees all things. The distinctions being drawn by the Pharisees were pathetic efforts to distance man from God in terms of personal responsibility to Him. Whilst we may shake our heads at their intellectual vanity and desperation, we practically do the same within the deepest levels of human psychology. For we too can assume that somehow God is not present, we are not held to be utterly truthful, because of some get out clause of our own creation and imagination. But His omnipresence means that there are no such separations to be made, nor distances to be placed, between God and man. We are directly responsible to Him, in His presence. See on :26.

Him that sits on it- A clear invitation to conceive of God as a personal corporeal being having specific location.

23:23 *Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you tithe*- The Greek can equally mean to both take or receive tithes. They demanded and perhaps paid themselves tithes on absolutely everything.

Mint and anise and cumin- These plants grew on windowsills, and a tenth of their 'crop'

would've been very light in weight. The lightness of the 'crop' is contrasted with the 'heavier' things which were required of believers. Again, the Lord could've deployed convincing Biblical arguments that the tithe was to be paid from harvested crops, and given to the Levites / priests- not the Pharisees. For they were not the same as the priests. There is no hint in the Mosaic legislation that a tenth of such things was to be given to support the livelihood of the priests. But the Lord goes along with their position- and doesn't say they should not do this. Rather He lifts the issue to a higher and 'heavier' level. In engagement with those who wilfully misunderstand Scripture, it's easy to present a strictly Biblical case which demolishes their position. And the Lord could so easily have done this in the matter of tithing kitchen herbs. But He doesn't. He simply raises weightier issues and principles.

Yet have left undone- The Greek *aphiemi* occurs three times in this verse; clearly a word play is intended. For the Lord concludes the sentence by saying: "... and not to leave [*aphiemi*] the other undone [*aphiemi*]". And He uses it again at the end of His speech: "Your house is left [*aphiemi*] unto you desolate" (:38), and there would therefore not be left [*aphiemi*] one stone upon another in that temple / house (24:2); not one part of the masonry would be omitted or overlooked, every stone would be thrown down. They had omitted the weightier matters of justice etc., thinking they were justified in this because they did not omit to tithe kitchen herbs. But the Lord is saying that effectively they *had* omitted "the other", the tithing of kitchen herbs; they had omitted what they had omitted. The double use of *aphiemi* in the last clause is to give the sense of how totally they had omitted [*aphiemi*] "the other", the tithing of kitchen herbs. So although they did tithe them, effectively they had not done so. Because they had omitted the weightier matters of justice, mercy and faith. So they tithed, but they did not tithe. Just as we can pray, but not pray; think we believe, when we do not; forgive, when we do not really; read God's word, when we do not really do so [as the Lord often pointed out to them in saying "Have you never read...?", when clearly on one level they had read]. Omitting justice, mercy and faith meant that their tithing of the small stuff was also omitted, in God's final view of them. The spiritual life is intended to be all encompassing, it's not a case of a series of specific obediences to a long list of specific commandments, whereby our omission of the heavier issues is compensated for by our commission of the lighter issues. And this again is a challenge to us all; for surveying God's expectations of us, we can so easily cut ourselves slack in some areas because we feel we are being obedient in others. Thus the failure of the Pharisees in this becomes not something to merely shake our heads at, but a challenge to our deepest internal reasonings in our own walk before God.

The weightier matters of the law- The heavy burdens tied on men by the Pharisees were in fact relating to the lighter matters [s.w. :4 "heavy burdens"]. Clearly the Lord saw there was a variation in God's requirements, ranging from light to heavy. This of course was and is anathema to any legalistic mind, who sees obedience to specific statements as paramount. The Lord is trying to show that life before God is lived in a spirit of life in which omitting the weightier matters means that specific obedience to the lighter matters is thereby rendered void.

Justice, mercy- These were "matters of the Law", these were what the various specific commandments of the Mosaic Law sought to inculcate. Why these three matters? Mercy is part of justice, in that justice must be shown with mercy if we have any awareness of our own moral frailty (James 2:13); just as God integrates mercy with

justice in His judgment of men. Mercy and justice are what David praises God for (Ps. 89:14; 101:1). God's judgment of men is connected with His mercy (Is. 16:5; 30:18), and human judgment of situations must likewise be a mixture of justice and mercy (Hos. 12:6; Zech. 7:9). But to exercise these things requires faith- faith that God's judgment of us and others is mixed with mercy. For those like the Pharisees with no sense of their own sins and experience of God's judgment-mercy, this was all a foreign language, just as it is for the many self-righteous legalists of today. Our calling is to reflect God's mixture of justice and mercy on the basis of our own experience of it, and this was the intention of the entire legal apparatus of the Mosaic law.

And faith.These you ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone- Faith is something which ought to be 'done', the Lord is teaching. Faith never exists alone. James argues that there is no essential difference between faith and works. 'Faith' is not just credulity or a vague feeling of hope, but an active, driving force. There is "the work of faith" (1 Thess. 1:3; 2 Thess. 1:11). Knowledge and faith are paralleled in John's thought (Jn. 8:32 cp. 14:1; and 6:69 cp. 11:27)- in stark contrast to this world's emphasis upon works rather than faith. Hence Isaiah's appeals to *know* and *believe* Yahweh (43:10); and the Lord's parallel of 'little faith' with little understanding (Mt. 16:7,8). *Pistis*, one of the NT words for 'faith', is translated in the LXX as both 'faith' (e.g. Dt. 32:20; Prov. 12:22) and 'truth' (Prov. 12:17; 14:22; Jer. 5:1). Indeed, another word used in the LXX is 119 times translated 'truth' and 26 times 'faith'. There *is* a connection between true knowledge of the Gospel and faith. And this faith is the basis for our works. We don't just learn the propositions of the one faith before baptism, and forget them. The triumphant spiritual life *lives them out*.

23:24 *You blind guides*- That they were “guides” is a repeated reason why the Lord condemns them. This is because they were leading others to condemnation. We play a larger part than we currently can ever imagine in either the salvation or stumbling of others, and this fact of itself should impart to all our interactions a seriousness and intensity. On one hand, deeply sensitive to whether a course of action will cause another to stumble, and on the other, ever reaching out to others with the possibilities of the Kingdom and forgiveness.

That strain out the gnat and swallow the camel- Gnats lived on camels, so this is a picture of how extremely these highly religious men had utterly missed the point. And remember that they were members of the ecclesia of their day, the people of God. Amos 6:6 (LXX) condemns a similar Israel as those "which drink strained wine". The Pharisees would’ve been shocked by this direct association made between them and apostate Israel of Old Testament times. The context of Amos 6 is about the forthcoming destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the temple for the sake of the materialism of Israel’s leaders.

23:25 *Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you cleanse*- The Lord Jesus is described using the same word as making others clean (8:2,3; 10:8; 11:5). The Pharisees were concerned with making *themselves* look clean externally. Again, they are a parody of the Lord. He was concerned with making *others* clean, and really clean. This tension, between making ourselves look clean and making others clean, is highly relevant to us all. For there is such a thing as being spiritually selfish.

The outside- The tension between outside and inside, along with the idea of cleanliness, is to be found in the Lord’s earlier teaching in Mk. 7:15,18. Nothing on the *outside* can defile a man, it is the *inside* , the thoughts, which must be cleansed. If we ask *why* there is a desire for good appearances externally, the answer may not simply be ‘so as to look good to others’. It can also partly be a recognition of our own inner defilement and our sense that we ought to be doing something about it. Peter

explores the same tension in 1 Pet. 3:3, teaching that a woman should not focus on *outside* [s.w.] adorning, but not on *internal*attitudes. He's not saying that 'outward adornment' is wrong of itself, but rather that her focus should be on *inner* spirituality rather than focusing on the *external* to the exclusion of the *internal*. Thus obsession with external cosmetic issues, and literal cosmetics, can likely be a running away from internal issues which need serious addressing. So often pedantic attitudes to externalities conceal insecurity, and in spiritual terms, that insecurity is a reflection of disbelief that the inner conscience has been cleansed of sin in Christ.

Of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion- The plate and cup refer to the Pharisees personally. The picture is of silverware being cleansed and shining outwardly, whilst it contains unclean things within. "Even so *you also* outwardly appear righteous" (:28). And Lk. 11:39 is clearer: "*Your* inward part is full of ravening [Gk. 'extortion'] and wickedness [Gk. 'plots']". They were ever scheming how to get money out of people. But why choose these two items as examples? The presence of the article both times, *the* cup and *the* plate, suggest they have specific relevance. The Gospels were written as the handbook for the early Christian converts and ecclesias. They would largely have been recited or read at the breaking of bread meetings. It's hard therefore to avoid the reference to the memorial cup and plate of the communion meetings. And again, the warning comes so close to home. The memorial meeting is the time to look within, at the likely wickedness within us, rather than appearing in our Sunday best and making ourselves shine externally.

And excess- The Greek suggests complete lack of restraint. And here is the paradox. The most rule-governed people were actually without any sense of restraint. Obedience to rules, and elevating rules, does not of itself mean we are restrained. It can mean the very opposite.

Time and again Paul warns his brethren not to behave like the Pharisees did in various incidents in the Gospels (e.g. Mt. 23:4 = Acts 15:10; Mt. 23:25 Gk. = 1 Cor. 7:5, where Paul is saying 'If you lust inwardly but outwardly appear to have rejected marriage for the sake of the Gospel, you're like those condemned Pharisees). Let it be noted that the danger of Pharisaism, of spiritual hypocrisy, of adopting a hard line on issues which in essence we too fail in, was a great theme with Paul.

23:26 *You blind Pharisee! Cleanse first the inside of the cup and of the plate*- What was within them was a ravening (7:15) for material gain and plotting to obtain it (Lk. 11:39), extortion and lack of self-restraint (:25). There was of course no prescription in the Mosaic legislation for cleansing internal attitudes. But the Lord's command for them to cleanse these things surely suggests they were to think harder about what the sacrificial blood of cleansing might represent. The argument of Heb. 9:9-14; 10:2,22 is that the blood of Mosaic sacrifices could not cleanse from such internal conscience of sin- but the blood of Christ can. The Lord's command for them to "cleanse" their inner parts could therefore find no opportunity for fulfillment within their legal framework. But the language would've recalled David's need to be cleansed in the inward parts after his sins relating to Bathsheba (Ps. 51:2). His request for cleansing was met by God's direct operation on his heart, because as he was aware, there was no prescribed sacrifice which could address his need. The scribes and Pharisees were surely intended to realize that they must ask God for special cleansing; and yet they knew that blood played some role in cleansing. Therefore they were intended to come to the conclusion that God could indeed cleanse them, but through some special sacrifice. The priests and Pharisees who later converted to Christ perhaps followed this path of logic to where the Lord intended it to lead (Acts 6:7; 15:5). His hopefulness in people finally paid off-setting us a great example.

That the outside of it of it may become clean also- There is a jarring element of unreality here. Cleaning the inside of a cup doesn't make the outside clean. But that is the jump of faith required. The inside is the outside- in God's eyes. This reasoning continues the theme that 'God sees all things' which the Lord has developed in :22; see on 23:22 *By Heaven*.

23:27 *Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs*- A month before Passover, the graves were painted white so that the pilgrims coming to keep the feast would not be defiled. This was therefore something fresh in everyone's minds, for the Lord was speaking at Passover time. Earlier the Lord had used the opposite figure about them: "You are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them" (Lk. 11:44). It was as if they had not whitened / cleansed themselves before Passover as was required. And so again we see the idea that they led men into defilement.

Which outwardly appear- S.w. 6:16 "That they may *appear* unto men to be fasting".

But inwardly are full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness- The idea of being inwardly 'full' of unclean thinking is found likewise in :25: "*Full* of extortion and excess". Only from God's perspective is this apparent. We tend to perceive elements of spirituality and also of unspirituality co-existing within a person. But ultimately, in God's judgment, the inner heart is either fully for Him or against Him, dead or alive in spiritual terms. They are full of "*all*uncleanness". The language is in absolute, total terms.
Bones- Perhaps a reference to the spiritually dead house of Israel being likened to dead bones in Ez. 37:1-11, awaiting the coming of the spirit of the new covenant.

23:28 *Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men*- This is the language of 1 Sam. 16:7. Man looks on the outside, but God looks within. And within the Pharisees was not a pretty sight.

But inwardly you are full of hypocrisy- We would imagine that the language of hypocrisy was more relevant to their outward appearance than to their internal state. But they were hypocrites *within*, meaning that they deceived their own selves within, wearing masks within their own hearts to deceive themselves that they were actually righteous. The Lord Jesus perceptively commented that hypocrisy is something which is *within*- it's about acting out a role *inside* ourselves, a split personality *within* a person, whereby they kid themselves they are someone whom they are not. Their real self and their shadow self are in conflict deep within their minds, in their own self-perceptions they act one way when their real self is something different. And this all goes on *within* the human mind. Hence Paul speaks of hypocrisy being essentially a lie which is told within the mind, and parallels it with a conscience which no longer functions properly (1 Tim. 4:2). The Lord's definition of hypocrisy therefore concerned an internal state of mind- and He warned that this is a yeast which inevitably spreads to others (Lk. 12:1). Thus Barnabas was carried away into hypocrisy by the hypocrisy of others (Gal. 2:13). Although it's so deeply internal, the dissonance between the real self and the portrayed self that goes on *within* human minds somehow becomes a spirit which influences others. And that's how society has become so desperately hypocritical. James 5:12 gives some good practical advice in all this- our yes should mean yes and our no should be no, or else we will fall into hypocrisy (Gk.- AV "condemnation" is a terribly misleading translation). James seems to be saying that we can guard against

falling into the hypocritical life and mindset by ensuring that our words, feeling and intentions are directly and simply stated, with meaning to the words, with congruence between our real self and the words we speak.

And iniquity- The Greek *anomia* means literally 'not law', without law. These religious scrupulous legalists were in fact moral anarchists, with no law. This is the great paradox of legalism, to the point that it could be argued that legalism is in fact a cover for internal moral lawlessness. This would explain the otherwise staggering moral hypocrisy, double standards and depth of moral failure observed in the lives of so many legalists. Their external legalism is a cover for their own internal moral anarchy and lack of law and self-restraint.

23:29 *Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets*- *Oikodomeo* means not only to build but carries the sense of 'to confirm', and is also translated in the NT in this sense. On one hand, building the tombs of the prophets was a sign of respect, but the Lord read it negatively, as if by doing so they were confirming the decision to murder them made by their forefathers. We have here an example of where the same action can be judged positively or negatively by the Lord; and this of itself disproves the mentality of salvation by works. Because it depends with what motive or background attitude the works are done, and this decides whether the work was an act of righteousness or a sin. And this is a further warning against the impossibility of judging another's works. For we fail to see those background, internal attitudes behind the work. See on 23:30 *Our fathers*.

And garnish- The same word is soon to be used of how the temple was 'garnished' (Lk. 21:5), and the Lord predicted its utter destruction. In the Lord's teaching, it is the inner mind which must be "garnished" (12:44), the lamp of our own spirituality must likewise be "trimmed" (s.w.; 25:7). Again we see a tension between the Lord's focus upon the internal, and their attention to the external.

The tombs of the righteous- The same word has just been used in :28, where the Lord observes that the Pharisees tried to "appear righteous unto men". And they accordingly made a great show of tending the graves of "the righteous". The implication is therefore that they saw righteousness in terms of imitating 'the righteous' who had gone before them. The whole thrust of the New Testament is concerning imputed righteousness, not attaining righteousness in the eyes of others by our own imitations of men. The idea that righteousness involves modelling some past religious leader of our denomination is not at all dead in these days.

23:30 *And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers*- The Lord takes their use of this phrase and reasons that they were thereby calling themselves the descendants of those who had killed the prophets, and were therefore guilty. That may seem a very harsh analysis and judgment. But the Lord has the power to see meaning in words for good or for bad. All *we* hear are the words, and we cannot judge words alone, because we cannot see the background motivation behind them. See on 23:29 *You build*.

We would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets- Blood is here put by metonymy for 'death', and this explains how the term "The blood of Christ" refers not so much to the red liquid of His blood, but to His death.

23:31- see on 15:2.

Therefore you witness to yourselves- AV "Witnesses against yourselves". The rejected are witnesses against themselves (Is. 44:9). Herein lies the crass folly and illogicality of sin. Jeremiah pleaded with Israel: "Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls [i.e. yourselves], to cut off from you man and woman... that ye might cut yourselves off" (Jer. 44:7,8, cp. how Jerusalem cut her own hair off in Jer. 7:29). In the

same passage, Yahweh is the one who does the cutting off (Jer. 44:11); but they had cut themselves off. Likewise as they had kindled fire on their roofs in offering sacrifices to Baal, so Yahweh through the Babylonians would set fire to those same houses (Jer. 32:29). And note the present tense of the Lord's words here. In that the judgment process is now ongoing, we *are right now* witnesses against ourselves when we sin. And we are not only witnesses, but also the judge who pronounces the verdict of condemnation: for the sinner is condemned *of himself* (Tit. 3:11). In this lies the illogicality of sin and the utter blindness of man to the implications of his actions before God. They right now fulfil or live out the judgment of the wicked (Job 36:17).

You are the sons of them that slew the prophets- The idea of being a 'son of' someone or something meant to be in agreement with them, or to be a disciple of them. Again, this seems an example of imputing iniquity. Their usage of the term "our fathers" was taken by the Lord to mean that they 'allowed' or [Gk.] 'had pleasure in' the murder of the prophets (Lk. 11:48). But the same words "our fathers" are used by Paul to describe his faithless Israelite forbears- and he is not condemned for it (1 Cor. 10:1; Acts 28:25). Clearly, the same words can be used by men with different background meanings, and this is seen by God and His Son. But all we hear are the words- we cannot therefore judge them.

23:32 *Fill up*- The language of the iniquity of the Amorites filling up to a point where they would be cast out of Canaan (Gen. 15:16). The Lord is saying that the Jewish legalists were no better than the Gentile inhabitants of the land, and they would be cast out of the same land, to make way for a new Israel, largely comprised of Gentiles. God is not insensitive to sin; the account builds up to a point where He will openly act. The question is whether the Lord was commanding / encouraging them to 'fill up' this measure of sin by going ahead and crucifying Him, or whether He was merely commenting that they were filling up that measure of sin which would bring Divine judgment. If He is encouraging them to go ahead and fill up the measure of sin required of them, then we have here another insight into how the Lord as it were provoked His own final arrest and death, in the sense that He consciously gave His life rather than having it taken from Him. His parody of a triumphant entry into Jerusalem so broke and disappointed Jewish expectations of Him that it could be argued that He was purposefully moving the crowds to turn their misplaced love for Him into hatred, and join forces with the Jewish leadership in killing Him.

The comparison between them and the Gentile Amorites is part of a wider theme, in which those among God's people who break their covenant with Him, He sees as the world. Thus Moses prophesied of an apostate Israel: "They have dealt corruptly with [God], they are no longer his children because of their blemish; they are a perverse and crooked generation" (Dt. 32:5 RSV). These very words are used by Paul regarding the Gentile world (Phil. 2:15). Likewise Is. 42:1,2 concerning Christ's witness to the *Gentiles* is quoted in Mt. 12:19 regarding His witness to an apostate Israel. Israel were to be made like "the top of a rock" just as Gentile Tyre would be (Ez. 24:7; 26:4). Pharaoh's heart was hardened to bring about God's glory, but Paul uses the very same language, in the same context, to describe what was happening to an apostate, Egypt-like Israel (Rom. 9:17). Korah and his company were swallowed by the earth, using the very language which Moses so recently had applied to how the Egyptians were swallowed by the earth at the Red Sea (Ex. 15:12).

Then the measure of your fathers' iniquity- The Lord elsewhere uses the figure of a measure to describe final judgment. With the measure we measure, it will be measured to us in that day (7:2). So the Lord could be urging them to go ahead and fill up the

required level of sin to bring about on *them* the judgment due to their fathers. For this is His teaching in :35- that judgment for all the righteous blood shed by Israel's leaders was to come upon that generation. This may appear to contradict the principle that the sons shall not suffer for the fathers' sins. But the Lord seems to be saying that there is also another dimension to the picture, and that is the principle of imputed sin to those who repeat the sins of their fathers.

23:33 *You serpents, you offspring of vipers*- A clear reference to them as the seed of the serpent (Gen. 3:15).

How shall you escape the judgment of Gehenna?- The Lord's whole attitude to Israel showed that they could be saved from condemnation, even at the very last minute. And this was clearly His will. So rather than seeing this as spoken in anger as the final invective against a deeply wayward nation, I am inclined to see this as spoken with a voice cracking under the passion of wanting to save the beloved who hates their Saviour. And surely there was a rhetorical element to it. How they could escape it was to ditch their plans to crucify Him. And the Lord goes straight on in 24:16 to say that even when judgment started to come upon Jerusalem and the temple, they could "escape to the mountains" (s.w.). This was how they could literally escape the coming condemnation; which suggests that surely the Lord did have an appealing, rhetorical sense to His question here. The similarity with that clause in the Olivet prophecy is really a marvel of grace. They who deserved instant death were being given grace upon grace, every chance to change the outcome of their wicked ways. Further, the Lord is quoting here from the words of John the Baptist: "O generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee [s.w. "escape"] from the wrath to come?" (Lk. 3:7). "All Jerusalem", including the Scribes and Pharisees, had initially heard John approvingly. The Lord is surely saying that the way to escapee the coming condemnation was by doing what John had taught- to repent and accept Jesus as Messiah and Saviour from sin. Again, the Lord's quotation of John's words confirms that He is speaking rhetorically and seeking their repentance and salvation, even at that late hour.

23:34 *Therefore, look, I send to you prophets and wise men and scribes. Some of them you shall kill and crucify, and some of them you shall scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city*- This certainly sounds like a quotation from extant literature; Lk. 11:49 introduces it with: "Therefore also said the wisdom of God". The Lord Jesus was indeed "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24), and so it could be that the Gospel writers were pointing out that these words of Jesus were a proof text amongst their persecuted converts. Certainly the Lord's words here would've been a good mission statement for the early church. Or it could be that the Lord is quoting some now unknown text with approval. There can be no doubt that every part of the verse has direct relevance to the first century witness to the Jews. The source of the quotation is therefore of secondary importance; the Lord places it in His own mouth, at any rate, in predicting the outcome of the great commission. And yet clearly enough, at the time He spoke these words, that bunch of mixed up, largely secular men, who misunderstood so much, who knew so little, and whose ideals were so misplaced, were far from being the preaching machine which the Lord's words imply here. We can take one simple lesson from this- He had a profound hopefulness in people, a hopefulness which against all odds so often paid off. We, by contrast, tend to be highly cynical of people because we fail to see what they might turn into in spiritual terms.

"I send unto you" is a reference to the sending of the great commission. The Lord's desire was that the worldwide witness began at Jerusalem (Lk. 24:47), and Paul's interpretation of the commission was clearly that it involved being sent *firstly* to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles. The secular disciples were the equivalent of the prophets in the old Israel. There may be particular reference to the New Testament prophets, those who had the Spirit gift of prophecy. Lk. 11:49 adds: "Prophets and apostles". Clearly the witness of the early Christians is in view.

The Lord was talking to the scribes (:29), telling them that He was sending "scribes" to them. And those scribes were men amongst whom were the illiterate and who therefore didn't know the text of Scripture that well. Their qualification was that they had known God's Son. The Lord is here comparing and contrasting the old and new in the starkest possible terms.
You shall kill- As Stephen and James (Acts 7:59; 12:1,2).
And crucify- The Lord implied this would be Peter's fate.
Scourge- Fulfilled Acts 22:19-24; 2 Cor. 11:24,25.
In your synagogues- The punishment of synagogue scourging could only be applied by the Jews to official synagogue members. The fact Paul experienced synagogue discipline by beating with rods shows that he too chose to be a member (2 Cor. 11:24). The Lord spoke as if His followers would remain within the synagogue system until they were forcibly expelled (Jn. 16:2). In all this we see a distinct lack of any 'guilt by association' mentality with the Lord. He did not ask His followers to break religious association with those who were both morally and doctrinally astray, but rather to remain in those associations until they were cast out. Notice again how the Lord refers to *your* synagogues, just as *God's* house became "*your* house".
Persecute them- By Paul, who was himself later "persecuted" by the Jews (s.w. 2 Cor. 4:9; Gal. 5:11; 6:12).
From city to city- Fulfilled in Acts 14:19; 17:13.

23:35 *That upon you*- One would've expected God to be so hurt by the death of His Son that judgment came immediately upon those responsible. But instead, the Lord predicted that the judgment would come only after the Jews had further persecuted the apostles as they went out to fulfil the great preaching commission to the Jews. This apparent delay was not because God was not hurt or not angry. He was. But His patient love and desire for human repentance, to give them yet more chances, was simply greater. The delay was so that the Lord could send out the apostles of :34 to appeal to Israel for repentance. But they had been given final appeal after final appeal. And still God waited for their repentance. With what eagerness must He have watched for response to the preaching to them, and with what generous provision He would've provided for all those who wished to make that appeal to the Jews. And nothing has changed to this day. The idea of blood coming upon, *epi*, a person clearly meant 'guilt for their death'. Soon the Jews were to be using this very term in asking for the blood of Jesus to be 'upon' them (27:25). Because Jesus was the personification of God's prophetic word and thereby the summary of all the prophets, their desire for *His* blood to be upon them was effectively taking upon themselves the blood of the prophets.

May fall the guilt for all the righteous blood shed on the land- This stands for '*judgment for* all the righteous blood shed'. Note how language is being used here. The sin is put by metonymy for *the judgment for* the sin. Sin is its own judgment. To sin is to ask for judgment / condemnation. In this lies the utter lack of logic in any sin. And iniquity was

added to their iniquity (Ps. 69:27- a specific prophecy of the Jews who killed Jesus), just as righteousness can be imputed.

From the blood of Abel the righteous- If that generation were guilty of Abel's murder, this associates them with Cain. The Jewish false teachers are likened to Cain (1 Jn. 3:12; Jude 11); and the Lord says that the Jews seeking to kill Him are the sons of the one who was a "murderer from the beginning" (Jn. 8:44). Cain was the first murderer.

To the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah- Or, Baruk. The prophet Zechariah would fit this description, but there's no record of him being murdered. Josephus in *The Jewish War* 4.5.4 speaks of a Zacharias ben Baruch who was assassinated by the Zealots in the Sanhedrin. But he was not a prophet, and this event was still future. And he wasn't killed in the temple. However, there was a prophet Zechariah who was stoned to death in the temple (2 Chron. 24:19-22). He was the son or grandson of Jehoiada, so it's feasible he was the son of a Baruk. The Hebrew Bible ended with 2 Chronicles, and so the mention of this murder would form an appropriate inclusio with the first murder, of Abel. All the murders of the faithful, from the first to the last as recorded in the Hebrew Bible, were going to have their judgment exacted from the generation who crucified God's Son.

Whom you slew between the sanctuary and the altar- See on :18 *The altar.* The mention of this detail would perhaps be because the Lord has just spoken of their wrong attitude to both temple and altar (:20,21). He is saying that effectively they had desecrated temple and altar- when they claimed such deep reverence for them. Their mercenary focus upon the gold of the temple and the gifts placed upon the altar was to such an extent that they had robbed the actual temple and altar of their holiness. This was no better than killing a righteous prophet in the holy place.

"Whom *you* slew" shows that the murder was counted to them, in the sense that the blood of those martyrs was "required of this generation" (Lk. 11:51). Sin, like righteousness, can be imputed as part of the downward spiral which operates as the opposite of the upward spiral in spiritual life.

23:36 *Truly I say to you, all these things shall come upon this generation*- Even in this prediction of terrible judgment there is grace. Because the AD70 judgments didn't come until nearly 40 years afterwards. Male lifespans in first century Palestine were estimated at an average of 29 years by J.D. Crossan, basing his research on tomb inscriptions and analysis of bones from graves. So the actual 'elders' who were responsible for the Lord's death likely died in their beds rather than in the Jewish-Roman war or the final holocaust in Jerusalem. I can only explain this on the basis of God's grace prolonging that final coming of judgment, in the earnest hope that Israel would yet repent. In the context of AD70, this would appear to be the teaching of 2 Peter 3. We would expect those men to have fairly soon received their judgment in this life. They will be judged- at the last day. But it would seem that God's desire to judge them was in tension with His desire to give Israel the maximum opportunity for repentance. We can only draw a sharp breath at God's grace. Another approach would be to understand that the threatened judgment upon that generation simply didn't happen- in their lifetimes. The entire Divine program was delayed until the last days, when that generation shall be resurrected and receive their judgment. The events of AD70 were simply a foretaste and prefigurement of the final judgment at the Lord's second coming.

"This generation" is a phrase often used by the Lord in Matthew concerning those who heard and dealt with Him. It is surely the same generation in view in 24:34: “This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled”. *This* generation is used elsewhere by the Lord concerning those right in front of Him. It is the same “this generation” in 23:36 as in 24:34. The Lord doesn’t, therefore, mean ‘The future generation which shall exist and see these things will not pass until all is fulfilled’. He is saying that the generation, *this* generation, would not pass until all was fulfilled. The fact all wasn’t fulfilled simply in that generation shows that there was a major delay or change in the Divine program. And the reason for the delay was not simply that Israel hadn’t repented, but because God’s loving patience was still awaiting their repentance- and He so wished them to repent.

23:37 *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem*- It was “this generation” which killed the prophets (:35), so why does the Lord specifically talk here about the children of Jerusalem? “Daughter of Zion” was an Old Testament term used for the faithful remnant in Jerusalem. But the way the Lord talks of gathering Jerusalem’s residents under His wings is surely because He had a clear vision before Him of how the city would be burnt. For a hen typically gathers her brood under her wings to protect them from a barnyard fire; or perhaps with the intention of being burnt first to preserve the life of her brood as long as possible. And these were the Lord’s feelings to the “Jerusalem” which rejected Him and sought His life; He wanted to save them, to buy them some more time at least (as reflected in the parable of the worker who doesn’t want to cut the tree down immediately). But they didn’t want to know. It was and is all so tragic.

Which kills the prophets- The allusion is to the parable of the husbandmen, who killed and stoned the servants / prophets sent to them (21:35).

And stones those sent to her!- The punishment for apostasy (Dt. 13:10; Acts 7:59). It was their wilful religious misunderstandings which led them to such violence in practice.

How often would I have gathered your children together - He lamented over a Zion that sought only to hurt and murder Him. Yet not so many verses later in our Bibles we hear the Lord using the same word in saying that at His coming, the elect would be "*gathered together*" unto Him (Mt. 24:31). He so often had earnestly desired the coming of His Kingdom there and then; to gather His people unto Him. But they would not. It must have been unbearable to be such a sensitive person in such a hard and insensitive, dehumanizing world. “How often…” suggests that there were specific times in His ministry when it would have been potentially possible to gather together Zion’s children in one and begin the Kingdom. But they refused.

Even as a hen gathers her chickens- We see the Lord’s humility here in comparing Himself to a female, humble, farmyard animal- and not a proud lion. Many of the descriptions of Christ in the parables are taken from Old Testament passages describing the feelings of *God* towards Israel, showing the truth of this in the first century context when Israel were still God's people. Thus the Lord's description of Himself as a hen wishing to gather the chicks of Jerusalem is based on Is. 31:5: "As mother-birds flying, so will the Lord defend Jerusalem" (Heb.). Lk. 13:8 could suggest that Christ's attitude to Israel was even more patient than that of God Himself; yet because their feelings to Israel are identical, the implication is perhaps that the Son enables and thereby persuades the Father to be even more patient with us than He would naturally be! See on 15:13.

Under her wings- but you were not willing!- This is a classic Old Testament figure, of the faithful taking refuge under the wings of God's cherubic care. The gracious desire of the Lord to save even those who crucified Him is the essence of God's saving care in the Old Testament.

23:38 *Behold, your house*- The temple had always been called "The house of Yahweh". But now it is was theirs, as the "feasts of the Lord" become the "feast of the Jews". The Lord's table became *their* table (Ps. 69:25,22). They had hijacked God's institutions, just as men today have hijacked the Lord's table and imposed their own guest list and rejection policy upon it. Likewise the Lord called the law of God through Moses as now being "*their* law" (Jn. 15:25). The breaking of bread ritual practiced by the Corinthians was eating their *own* supper and therefore their gatherings were "*not* to eat the *Lord's* supper" (1 Cor. 11:20).

Is left unto you desolate- The Greek word is used many times and always in the sense of a wilderness. This is the fulfilment of Hos. 2:3, where God through Hosea had threatened to make His beloved "a wilderness". This is the link with the Olivet Prophecy in chapter 24, which develops this theme of the desolation of the temple and a desolating abomination which was to be placed there. Clearly, therefore, the primary intention of the Olivet prophecy was to the Jewish generation and temple in which immediate context the Lord was speaking. The fact the prophecy clearly has latter day applications and did not completely fulfil in AD70 shows that there was a change of plan, as has often happened in the Divine program, with prophecies being delayed and reapplied in their fulfilment.

23:39 *For I say to you, you shall not see me from this time forward, until*- The same words are used in 13:14, "You shall not perceive / see" Christ. Previously, they had 'seen' Christ as Messiah, realizing that this was the heir, and desiring therefore to kill Him. But now the Lord was giving them over to the blindness of their hatred. They would not knowingly crucify God's Son. But He was saying that He now was going to stop them 'seeing' / perceiving Him for who He was, so that they would crucify Him. And they would only again perceive Him as God's Son all too late, when at the day of judgment they uttered the words of Messianic welcome "Blessed is He that comes...". And yet even in this terrible judgment there was interwoven a possibility of hope. They would only perceive Him again as God's Son *when*, or, *until the time that*, they recognized Him as Messiah in the Messianic words "Blessed is He that comes...". Once they made that repentance, they would again perceive / see Him. However, it could be argued that that is axiomatic. The thrust of the Lord's words is surely that in the day of judgment, all too late, they would perceive Him again as He is in truth. But all too late.

You shall say- When they are appointed their portion with the hypocrites and there is wailing and gnashing of teeth, *then* shall the Kingdom be likened unto the five wise and five foolish virgins. *Then* the rejected will understand the principles of that parable, crystal clearly. Members of the ecclesia of Israel will say "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord"- but be rejected. Likewise the Egyptians, fleeing in the mud from Yahweh as they vainly hoped against hope that the returning waters wouldn't somehow reach them... they came to know Yahweh (Ex. 14:18). It could well be that this knowing of Yahweh involves a desperate recounting of their sins, seeing that one of the purposes of condemnation is to make men aware of their sinfulness and the depth of God's grace.

Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord- When Jerusalem sees Jesus again, they will be saying: "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord". This would suggest they are waiting for Him. And these words being taken from the Passover hallel,

it could be that the Lord returns to them at Passover time, when they traditionally expect Him. Indeed, Jerusalem will not see the Lord *until* they say "Blessed is he…"- as if the time of His return depends upon their 'seeing' / perceiving Him beforehand.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 24

24:1

Matthew 24: Introduction

Old Testament prophecy was conditional. There can be no doubt about that. Take these words: "Thus saith the Lord God unto the land of Israel: an end, the end is come upon the four corners of the land. Now the end is come upon thee, and I will send mine anger upon thee" (Ez. 7:2,3). But the ultimate end did not come then in Ezekiel's time and the Babylonian destruction of the temple. God's program delayed that ultimate end. Perhaps because of His mercy, the repentance of a remnant, or for other reasons as yet unknown to us and unseen from our earthly viewpoint. My approach to the Olivet prophecy is that it was intended to be fulfilled in the first century- because this was the intended time [or one of the intended times] for the Lord's second coming and the establishment of the Kingdom. Therefore those aspects of the predictions which depended upon God to fulfil, He did [e.g. earthquakes, famines]. But the essential preconditions of Israel's repentance and the spread of the Gospel worldwide were not fulfilled. And so the prophecy has been rescheduled and reapplied to some later time- and it would appear that time is now upon us. This approach may be new to some, for it involves understanding God as 'open', and more responsive to human behaviour than we might have thought. If this is something you feel the need to still get your mind around, then the digression about the nature of prophecy may be helpful. If you have no problem with the idea of God's prophetic word being delayed or rescheduled in its fulfilment, then the digression doesn't need to be read.

We need not get overly worried about the supposed discrepancies between prophecy and its historical fulfillment. Such differences don't negate the Divine inspiration of the original prophecy- rather do they show how God's intentions can be worked out in different ways because of the open-ended approach He takes to human response. Thus it's been observed that the siege of Jerusalem in AD66-70 doesn't exactly follow the descriptions in Lk. 19:41-44 and 21:20-24. This would be because there were within the Olivet prophecy a number of possible scenarios of what could happen *if* the believers fled the city as commanded; and of course, *if* Israel repented and accepted Christ at His AD70 'coming' in judgment. Additionally we must remember that this prophecy was only having its initial fulfillment in AD70- the final fulfillment will be in our last days.

Martin Hengel concludes that the early Gospel records were so radical that they would've been part of an "underground literature". He suggests that the Roman law forbidding oral or written prophecies about the fall of the Roman empire- on pain of death- was enough to make the Olivet prophecy alone a highly illegal document (Martin Hengel, *Studies In The Gospel Of Mark* (London: SCM, 1985) p. 28).

24:1 *And Jesus came out of the temple and was going on his way when his disciples*- This was a visual depiction of the Lord's previous statement that the house of the temple was now left desolate (23:38). The Lord surely had in mind how the glory of God, which was Him (2 Cor. 4:6; Col. 1:27; James 2:1), progressively left the temple in Ezekiel's time, until the Babylonians came and destroyed the temple (Ez. 10:18), and

how the loss of the ark (another symbol of the Lord Jesus) was the glory departing from Israel (1 Sam. 4:21,22).

Came to Him- We sense a separation between the Lord and the disciples. His hint that the temple was to be desolated (23:38) was hard for them to accept. They were probably embarassed that their teacher had spoken out against the quintessential symbol of Judaism, the temple; which would explain why they come to Him "privately" for more explanation (:3). And in :3 they again 'come to Him', as if they moved away from Him after His confirmation in :2 that He did indeed intend to be understood as saying that the temple would be cast down.

To show Him- Mark says that *one* of the disciples said: "Master, see what manner of stones, and what buildings!". This may well have been Peter, as Mark appears to be Peter's gospel. It was his response to the Lord's previous comment that this house was effectively desolate already (23:38), so sure was God's forthcoming judgment upon it. And Peter is perhaps saying 'What a shame that would be- it's such a wonderful building!'. In this we would see, therefore, another example of Peter, the leader of the early church, being somewhat out of sync with the Lord's intentions- another hint at the weakness of the disciples.

The buildings of the temple- These words are taken over in the later New Testament to describe the building up [often translated 'edifying'] of a new temple, comprised of the believers in Christ. The temple buildings were thrown down *in order that* a new and spiritual building comprised of believers could be built up through the Lord's work in the hearts of His people. The group of believers are "All the building [which] grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:21). Paul, writing before AD70, may have had this contrast indirectly in mind when he wrote that when the earthly house is destroyed, we should remember that we have a "house not made with hands" built by God (2 Cor. 5:1). The same struggle and angst at the loss of physical structures of our religion can be seen today; some find it hard to believe that relationship with God is ultimately personal, and that relationship continues even when surrounding, much loved traditional structures are removed.

24:2 *But he answered and said to them: Do you not see all these things?*- AV "See ye not all these things?". Read this carefully. He doesn't say 'Do you see all these things?'. He uses the negative- 'Do you *not* see all these things?'. This isn't mere style or literary convention. To not see something means you do not see it. Let's not assume that "all these things" refers to the temple building. The Lord has just used the term in 23:36: "All these things shall come upon this generation". And *pas tauta*, "all things", runs as a triple refrain throughout the Olivet prophecy, concerning the 'all things' of the predicted time of crisis coming upon Israel (24:8,33,34). If reading in context means anything, the "all things" must refer not to the temple buildings, but to the "all things" of Jerusalem's coming judgment. The Lord is asking them: 'Do you not see / perceive that all these judgments ["all things"] must come upon these wonderful buildings you're showing Me? No? Then OK, I will spell out those "all things" in gruesome detail. Don't look at the world as it stands before you at this moment, but remember the "all things" of judgment to come which are spoken about them". The Lord has previously condemned the Jewish world for 'not seeing' and He is warning the disciples that again they may be so influenced by Judaism that they don't 'see' the judgments to come with the eye of faith in His word. See later in this verse on *Left here*.

Truly I say to you. There shall not be left here- This again expands upon His previous

use of this word in 23:38: "Your house is *left* unto you desolate". He is asking the disciples to see with the eye of faith- that effectively, the great stones of the temple were already thrown down, the temple was already "desolate" (Gk. 'a deserted place').

One stone upon another- The judgment of the leprous house (Lev. 14:41). At the time of the final assault on Jerusalem in AD69, Titus commanded that the temple was to be spared. But the Lord's words came true, just as all prophetic words will, despite every human effort to deny their power. Josephus claims that the gold of the temple melted and therefore each stone was prized apart to remove the gold.

Which shall not be thrown down- There was a strong belief in Judaism that the temple would last eternally. Hence the disciples' question about "the end of the age" was because for them, any talk about the end of the temple meant the end of the world. They are not therefore asking about different chronological events when they ask when this shall be, and what sign would indicate the end of the age (:3). This prophecy of the destruction of the temple implied an ending of the Mosaic law. Hence the same word translated "thrown down" is ascribed to Stephen when he was accused of preaching that the Lord Jesus would "*destroy* this place and [therefore] change the customs which Moses delivered us" (Acts 6:14). Paul uses the same word about his 'destruction' of the things of legalistic dependence on the law for salvation, by preaching salvation by grace in Jesus (Gal. 2:18). It is also the word used in 2 Cor. 5:1, a passage which seems to have some reference to the impending destruction of the temple and its replacement with the spiritual house of God's building: "Our earthly house of this tabernacle be *destroyed* [s.w. "thrown down"], we have a building of God, an house not made with hands...". All this would suggest that there was a changeover period envisaged between the Lord's death and the final ending of the jurisdiction of the Mosaic law. Seeing the end Lord ended the Law on the cross, this again is to be seen as a concession to the conservatism of the Jews.

24:3 *And as He sat on the mount of Olives*- The word picture is painted of the Lord sitting alone, and then the disciples come to Him. Again we sense the separation between the Lord and His followers. Matthew gives much attention to the Lord sitting (13:1,2; 15:29; 22:44). This is what we would expect of a genuine eyewitness who recalled the Lord's body language and movements.

The disciples- Mk. 13:3 defines them as strictly Peter, James, John and Andrew. Hence they came "privately".

Came to Him privately- See on :1 *Came to Him*.

Saying: Tell us, when shall these things be? And what is the sign- They clearly expected one particular sign, and *semeion* is typically used of a miraculous wonder. Instead, the Lord gave them a series of signs which they were to discern. The fulfilment of these signs in our times is no less than a miracle- that such detailed predictions could start to come true before our eyes. Such fulfilment of prophecy is therefore itself a miracle. The disciples repeat the Pharisees' question about when the end will come- in almost the same words. They were clearly influenced by them (Lk. 17:20 cp. Mk. 13:4).

Of your coming- Without doubt, *parousia* is used in the NT and contemporary literature to refer to a literal and not an invisible presence (e.g. 1 Cor. 16:17; 2 Cor. 7:6; 10:10; Phil. 1:26; 2:12). Any 'coming' of the Lord in Jerusalem's judgment of AD70 was only at best a foretaste of His final coming. It's simply not good enough to claim that He 'came' invisibly or spiritually. The word *parousia* simply doesn't mean this. And yet the destruction of the temple and His 'coming' are linked together; hence my conclusion that His *parousia* was delayed and the prophetic program delayed and rescheduled.

And of the end of the age- See on :2 *Thrown down*. They saw this as parallel with His 'coming' and the destruction of the temple. There is no suggestion that they saw these as three different chronological events, and the Lord's answers give no hint that He saw them as distinct events. Quite simply, the Lord's second coming and the destruction of the temple were understood by them all, the Lord included, as simultaneous. The fact the Lord's coming didn't occur when the temple was destroyed can only therefore mean that the Divine program was rearranged. For preterism notwithstanding, the Lord has clearly not returned in glory yet, neither did He do so in AD70. "The end of the age" had been use by the Lord to describe the last day of judgment (Mt. 13:39,40, as also Dan. 12:4,7 LXX). The very same phrase used in 13:39,40,49 with clear reference to the Lord's second coming. In no way was the separation between true and false believers, and the punishment of all the latter class, achieved in AD70. The phrase is also used in 28:20, where the Lord sends out the disciples on their great preaching mission with the assurance that He will be with them "unto the end of the age". The implication could be that the end of the age is dependent upon the fulfilment of the great commission. The disciples failed in this, both in performing it [because of their initial hang up about preaching to Gentiles] and because of the paucity of response to their work. And so the end of the age, the second coming, is yet to come- when the Gospel really does go into all the world, then the end shall come (:14). Heb. 9:26 uses the phrase with reference to the situation in the first century- "now once in the end of the age has [Christ] appeared". It could have come then- but it did not. Rom. 9:28 speaks of how God will have to finally intervene in speeding things up- and Paul writes here in the context of Israel's final response to the Gospel: "He will end [s.w.] the work, and cut it short". And the word for "end" is also used to describe how God will end or finally execute the new covenant with Israel (Heb. 8:8)- when they accept that new covenant in responding to the Gospel. Clearly the global preaching of the Gospel and Israel's response to it are crucial requirements for the "end of the age" to come. And there is no lack of evidence that these signs are on the cusp of fulfilment.

Usually, the Lord didn't reply directly to questions (in this case, “When…?”); He gave answers which branched out into something altogether more comprehensive than the original question (Consider Mt. 13:10,11; 15:2,3; Mk. 10:4,5; Lk. 17:20; Jn. 3:4,5; 4:9,10; 6:28,29; 8:53,54; 11:8,9; 14:22,23). *Nearly every example of the Lord Jesus answering a question includes this feature.* To the disciples, the destruction of the temple meant the end of the age- it was a calamity. They assumed that if the temple was destroyed, it must be replaced immediately by their Jesus coming again with his Messianic Kingdom. Their minds were still not suitably distanced from their Judaist background. They asked *one* question: "When shall these things (the destruction of the temple) be? And what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?" (Mk. 13:4). Mt. 24:4 can make it seem that they asked two questions: "When shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the world?". But the parallel record in Mk. 13:4 makes it clear that actually these were parts of the same question concerning the temple's destruction. To the disciples, the coming of Christ, the end of the world and the temple's destruction were all the same event. It could be that the Lord answered their question by speaking of how there would be the destruction of the temple, but His real coming and the final ending of this world would be at a future date. His answer was therefore fundamentally relevant to his second coming, although built into it was some reference to the destruction of the temple in AD70. As He so often does, the Lord turned round the terms of the question. They

thought his "coming" would be at the temple's destruction, and so they asked for signs of His "coming". But Christ shows that this wasn't a correct view: His real "coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Mt. 24:30) would not be then, but after all the various signs he described were fulfilled. He was surely saying: 'OK the temple will be destroyed, and many of the signs I'm giving will have some application to that period; but the destruction of the temple isn't the sign of my coming. Note the signs I give you, and watch for their fulfilment: and *then* you'll know when to expect my coming'.

When the disciples asked "When shall these things be, and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?" (Lk. 21:7), the Lord didn't cut short the conversation by saying 'Well actually you can't know, so your question isn't appropriate'. He gave them just what they asked for: signs whereby the faithful would know "when these things shall come to pass". The primary application of all this was that the faithful knew exactly the approaching end of the Jewish age in AD70- everything went according to plan, for those who correctly understood the prophecies. Therefore James, Peter and Paul could assuredly teach that "the judge standeth before the door" (James 5:9) etc. And it is apparent that the situation in the run up to AD70 was typical of that in our last days. Likewise, the position of the faithful remnant in Babylon at the time of the restoration is another type of latter day events. And they too had an opening of their eyes to the prophetic word, resulting in an ability to clearly see where they were, and that the time of restoration of Israel's Kingdom was imminent. 'What will be the signs of the last days?' was indeed answered quite directly, but building up to a personal, incisive appeal to pray constantly that we will be preserved from those horrors and be accepted before the final judgment seat of God's Son (Lk. 21:7,36). It was as if the Lord was adding a powerful caveat- as if to say 'Now don't go and get obsessed and distracted trying to match these signs to current events- worry about how *you* will survive the last days, and whether, when you stand before Me in the very end, you will stand or fall before Me'. And 'Are you really the Messiah? Do you really fulfil all the Old Testament prophecies?' was met by an appeal to not stumble in faith (Lk. 7:21-23).

24:4 *And Jesus answered and said to them: Take heed that no one lead you astray*- Warnings against being deceived are a major theme in the Lord's message here (:5,11,24). Paul read the prophecy of deceivers arising in the last days as referring to deceivers arising within the ecclesia, i.e. people who were already baptized, consciously deceiving the majority of the ecclesia. He repeats this conviction at least three times (Mt. 24:4 = Eph. 5:6; Col. 2:8; 2 Thess. 2:3). The later NT writers make the same appeal using the same Greek words, with reference to not being deceived by the allurements of the fleshly life (1 Cor. 6:9; 15:33; Gal. 6:7; James 1:16). And warnings against "them that deceive you" are common, along with lament that many believers in the first century had indeed been deceived (s.w. 2 Tim. 3:13; James 5:19; 2 Pet. 2:15; 1 Jn. 2:26; 3:7; Rev. 2:20). Indeed, Revelation is full of warnings and judgment against "the devil" who deceives God's people (s.w. Rev. 12:9; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20; 20:3). Perhaps this is one reason why the Olivet prophecy was not fulfilled in AD70- the warning with which the Lord opened the prophecy was not heeded by the majority. “Be not deceived" (Lk. 21:8) is extensively quoted later in the NT concerning the need not be deceived by false teachers *within the ecclesia* (1 Cor. 6:9,15,33; Gal. 6:17; 2 Tim. 3:13, as Mt. 24:4 = 1 Jn. 3:7). The deceivers Christ spoke of were not just bogus Messiahs out in the world, but apparently Spirit-gifted brethren who will arise within the ecclesia.

24:5 *For many shall come in my name*- Coming in the name of the Lord was the formula used in Judaism to describe Messiah (21:9; 23:39). The false claims to be Jesus the Christ are hardly persuasive nor vaguely credible. That they should be a source of

mass falling away amongst the Lord's people seems hardly likely. We must assume, therefore, that such persons will have a credibility or a surrounding context which makes them far more attractive than they currently are. Revelation speaks of false miracles being done in the last days. Perhaps views of prophetic fulfilment will become so dogmatically held, suggesting that Christ *must* come once certain things happen in the world, that the believers will be open to easy deception. This scenario would be the more likely if a doctrine of *parousia*, the "coming" of Christ", is adopted which postulates that His coming will be somehow secret, invisible to the world and perceived only by the faithful.

Saying: I am the Christ, and shall lead many astray- The reader who pays attention to detail will note a significant use of pronouns in the Olivet prophecy: “ye" seems to refer to the faithful minority, who would (e.g.) understand, be persecuted, perish, lift up their heads, and finally endure to the end. "The many" (Gk. the majority) in the ecclesia would fall away. No fewer than four times does the Lord stress that "the majority" would be deceived by false prophets, be offended, and have their love wax cold (Mt. 24:5,10,11,12). Probably he connected this, at least in his own mind, with his earlier statement that "the many" would be called to his truth, but not chosen (Mt. 22:14). This difference between " the many / majority" in the ecclesia and the minority of suffering faithful is a theme in the parables which are an appendix to the Olivet prophecy.

The persecution of God's people was spoken of by the Lord as being one of the clearest signs. And he also emphasized that apostasy within the ecclesia would be the other major sign. When they asked him for the signs, Mk. 13:5 says that Jesus *began* by warning them of deception from false teachers. The way the NT writers allude to this passage indicates that they saw this deception as not coming from the crazy bogus-Messiahs of the world, but from false teachers *within the ecclesia*, sometimes supported by apparent possession of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:6; 2 Thess. 2:3; Tit. 1:10; 2 Jn. 7). A state of total ecclesial apostasy was the sign which Jesus *began* with, according to Mk. 13:5.

Josephus describes the period before AD70 as being when “The country was full of robbers, magicians, false prophets, false Messiahs and impostors, who deluded the people with promises of great events” [*Antiquities* 20.10.13 5,6].

24:6 *And you shall hear of wars and rumours of wars*- Gk. 'to come to the ears'. The dramatic growth of the media and communication will mean that everyone 'hears' of such things. And our generation as none before is in this situation. We can likewise understand the related word (in the Greek): "*rumours* of wars". Lk. 21:9 adds "and commotions", disquiet, mental upset and confusion. Hence the appeal not to be "troubled" within our hearts. Lk. 21:26 speaks of human hearts failing them for fear in worry and expectation (AV "looking after") about the world's future. This sign, therefore, is not so much concerning the proliferation of war, but of human worry about the geopolitical situation. And our generation has been the only one capable of fulfilling this situation. Note, however, that *you* shall hear these things- and the "you" was initially the listening disciples. Clearly the prophecy was intended to have fulfilment in the lifetime of the disciples, but this didn't happen. Because the Divine program was rescheduled.

Ensure you are not alarmed- The word is only used outside the Olivet prophecy in 2 Thess. 2:2, where Paul warns that believers should not be "troubled" by any idea that "the day of Christ is at hand", because the prophecy concerning the great falling away and the man of sin sitting in the temple of God must be fulfilled first. This connection

shows that the prophecy of 2 Thess. 2 must have a specific latter day fulfilment on the very eve of the Lord's visible return in glory when "the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to nothing by the powerful glory of His coming" (2 Thess. 2:8). The "day of Christ" is therefore the visible return of the Lord, and this, therefore, is the burden of the Olivet prophecy too. For Paul is taking that language and applying it to the second coming of Christ. And that did not happen in AD70. In Lk. 21:11 the Lord spoke of "fearful sights" being seen in latter-day Israel. During their tribulation, Israel will experience intense "terror" (Lev. 26:16), which would be enough to kill them (Dt. 32:24). This extraordinary level of fear will be modelled upon that of Jacob as he faced Esau- representing Israel's confrontation with the Arabs in the last days (Jer. 30:5,7). This state of fear will result in many Jews going to live in Jerusalem, as happened during the Babylonian and Assyrian invasions (Jer. 35:11). Ezekiel had prophesied of this time: "Terrors (perhaps an intensive plural - i.e. 'the one great terror') by reason of the sword shall be upon My people" (Ez. 21:12).

For this must happen- but the end is not yet- Quoting Dan. 2:28 LXX, as if the prophecy of Daniel 2 could have had its fulfilment at the time of the destruction of the temple in AD70. Again we encounter the idea of potential fulfilments of prophecy which in fact didn't happen when they could have done. The AV inserts in italics "all these things", but the Lord has only given the sign of worry about wars at this stage in the discourse. He used the identical phrase in predicting that the "all things" of the Mosaic system were to be fulfilled in His death on the cross (5:18). The same term is used in Jn. 1:3: "All things were fulfilled [AV "made"] in Him"- surely a reference to the fulfilment of the Mosaic law in Christ. The "old things" of the Mosaic system passed away, and in Christ "all things are fulfilled [AV "made"] new" (2 Cor. 5:17- same Greek words). There was a changeover period permitted between the Mosaic system and that of Christ, which finished when the temple was destroyed in AD70 and obedience to the Mosaic law thereby became impossible. If this line of interpretation is correct, then we have the Lord hinting that the Mosaic system would be ended, the temple destroyed, but the end was still not to be then. This would again indicate that the events of AD70 were not the "end" which the Lord had in view. "The end" (s.w.) would only come when the Gospel was preached in the entire habitable world (:14) and the believers had been persecuted of all men (Mk. 13:13). But again, the Lord had in mind the possibility that the disciples themselves would endure "unto the end" (10:22; 24:13). It could have come in their lifetime; but it didn't. John's Gospel replaces the Olivet prophecy with the upper room discourse, in which the Lord spoke of His spiritual presence in the hearts of believers through the Comforter. And John's equivalent of "the end" in that discourse is the comment that the Lord Jesus loved His people "unto the end" through dying on the cross (Jn. 13:1 s.w.). This is not to downplay the reality of the second coming, but it is a foil against a mindset that thinks solely in terms of fulfilling prophecy and the literal coming of the Lord. True and wonderful as that is, the essence of the Lord's presence is in His abiding presence in the hearts of spiritually minded believers in Him, and the "end" is His death for us, which in one sense is enough for us all regardless of when He will literally return. But again, Paul, like his Lord, felt that "the end" could have come in the first century; for he writes of how the believers then were living at "the end [s.w.] of the age" (1 Cor. 10:11), when God's wrath against Israel was about to burst "unto the end (AV "to the uttermost"; 1 Thess. 2:16). Likewise Peter: "The end [s.w.] of all things is at hand" (1 Pet. 4:7). Likewise Dan. 9:26 could then have had its fulfilment.

24:7 *For nation shall rise against nation*- Any first century fulfilment is unlikely

because the *Pax Romana* meant that the Roman empire was firmly in power and such a situation did not therefore occur. *Ethnos* is the word commonly translated "Gentiles". The picture of nations and kingdoms rising up against each other was simply not fulfilled in the run up to AD70- the Roman empire with their *Pax Romana* did not permit such a situation. And the system of world empires which disintegrated in the 20th Century likewise didn't permit much of this in recent times, especially in the area around Israel, or in the land promised to Abraham, which is the focus of all Bible prophecy. Only in our times has this become a reality, especially in the Arab world and amongst the nations located in the territory promised to Abraham. The language of 'rising up' in revolt is now common amongst them. The picture, however, is of the Gospel going into all those "nations" at this time (:14), all those nations persecuting the believers (:9), and the nations [AV "Gentiles"] taking Jerusalem and treading it down (Lk. 21:24); despite their internal struggles, these same "all nations" will be confederated under a latter Babylon (Rev. 17:15; 18:3,23). The overall picture is of Gospel preaching going on at a time when the nations are rising up against each other, and at the same time persecuting the believers. This scenario is developing- but is as yet unfulfilled on a global scale. But it is daily fulfilling in the nations surrounding Israel, who are persecuting Christians, rising up against each other, and to whom the Gospel is being powerfully preached. Never before has my own mission organization received such major expression of serious interest from the Moslem nations surrounding Israel, thanks largely to the growth of the internet and the growing disillusion with the existing social and religious situation. People from all nations will be gathered before the Lord for judgment (25:32) and people from every nation will be saved (Rev. 5:9; 7:9)- confirming that the Gospel will indeed spread to all nations before the Lord's return; it must at least be "proclaimed" to them all, thereby making people amongst them responsible to judgment (:14); the "fullness of the Gentiles" must "come in" to Christ before the end comes and Israel repent (Rom. 11:25). The Lord sent the disciples out to "all nations" (28:19 s.w.); the implication is that they failed to take the Gospel to them all, and therefore the intended scenario didn't fulfil as initially intended in the first century. Lk. 21:25 speaks of how there will be "upon the earth [land- that promised to Abraham] distress of nations", suggesting that the situation amongst the Gentile nations living within the land promised to Abraham is the particular focus of the prophecy. The same language is used of how there were devout Jews in "every nation under Heaven" (Acts 2:5)- and the list of nations in Acts 2 corresponds with the Middle Eastern Moslem world of today. We note that the promise that Abraham should be father of "many nations" was fulfilled in a literal sense in that Abraham is the ancestor of the Arab nations living in the land promised to him (Rom. 4:17). And it is those nations particularly who have stated their desire to take Jerusalem out of the hands of the Jews, as required in Lk. 21:24.

And kingdom against kingdom- It seems likely from Revelation that ‘Babylon’ of the last days will rise to political and military dominance in the territory promised to Abraham, the earth/ land of which the Bible speaks so much. The 10 nations / horns / leaders which exist in the land promised to Abraham- the “kings of the earth / land”- will give their power to Babylon, by force and by political manoeuvre, and this system will then invade Israel. The horns hating the whore implies there will be inter-Arab friction apparent in the beast system throughout its existence. "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (Mt. 24:7) will be a sign of the last days. In the AD70 context, this referred to friction between the Semitic peoples living around Israel; and the Lord's words are clearly an allusion to 2 Chron. 15:6, which specifically uses the phrase about inter-Arab friction. The fragile alliance between them will then be

broken by the Lord's return, the horns will hate the whore and destroy her. They give their power to the beast for but "one hour". Daniel seems to associate a covenant which is then broken with the latter day Antichrist. Is. 30:27-31 speaks of the latter day Assyrian as placing "a bridle in the jaw of the people causing them to err", referring to some kind of covenant / agreement which forces others to follow their direction. The Lord's especial fury will be against the individual latter day Nebuchadnezzar who leads the invasion. The future leader of Babylon, the whore riding the beast, will see themselves as Nebuchadnezzar. Isaiah and Micah describe the latter day invader of the land as "the Assyrian" (Is. 10:5; 14:25; 30:31; Mic. 5:1-6). This itself suggests we are to see the individual who heads up the invasion, the rosh / chief prince of Ez. 38:2, as an ethnic Assyrian / Iraqi. Dan. 8:24,25 invites us to see the same- the "king of fierce countenance" stands up out of the area of northern Iraq / northern Iran.

Famines- There was an acute famine in Israel during Elijah's ministry of three and a half years, as part of God's appeal for Israel to repent and respond to Elijah's message (Lk. 4:25). And so it will be in the final three and a half year tribulation. Likewise it was famine which led the prodigal to repent and return to the Father (Lk. 15:14,17), a clear prototype of Israel's repentance. And perhaps the greatest prototype of their repentance is in the coming of Joseph's brothers to bow before Him; and this too was provoked by famine throughout the region around Israel (Acts 7:11). There will be a purpose in all the sufferings which precede the Lord's return- and that purpose is to bring about Israel's repentance, which is the key condition required for His second coming. There were indeed major famines in the lead up to AD70 (Acts 11:28 "a great famine throughout all the world"); again, the signs which depended upon Divine intervention were fulfilled in the first century, but those which depended upon Israel and the believers did not, because they chose not to. And thus the second coming was delayed. "In the reign of the Emperor Claudius (AD41-54) there were four seasons of great scarcity. In the fourth year of his reign, the famine in Judea was so severe that the price of food became enormous and great numbers perished. Earthquakes occurred in each of the reigns of Caligula and Claudius" (R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2000: Baker Books), p. 36). Paul encourages his first century readers that famine and other elements of the Olivet predictions would not separate believers from the love of God- as if he expected those signs to be fulfilled in their lifetimes (Rom. 8:35). The seals of Revelation 6 are full of reference to the Olivet predictions, as if they could all have been fulfilled in the first century (Rev. 6:8 speaks specifically of "famine"). Famine can come quicker than ever in our modern world, where most countries depend upon imported food; and this is especially the case in the area around Israel, where the climate doesn't enable the support of the relatively large population living in the area without food being imported. This explains how Babylon's famine comes in one day (Rev. 18:8). This could never have been possible in the ancient world, where famine required a period of time to develop. Just as Israel initially experienced the early plagues upon Egypt, so it may be that the judgments poured out upon the [Arab?] world at the very end do initially affect Israel too, and lead them to repentance.

And there shall be famines and earthquakes- Just as there was at the crucifixion (Mt. 27:54), yet another reason for thinking that the tribulation of the last days will enable Israel to identify with the sufferings of their crucified Messiah. Again, earthquakes feature in the seals of Rev. 6:12; and in the judgments upon Israel's enemies in Rev. 11:13,19; 16:18. Again, it seems that Israel will initially experience the judgments upon

their enemies, just as they did in the lead up to their Passover deliverance in Egypt which also prefigures their final salvation. The fig tree nation- Israel- is to be shaken of a mighty wind (Rev. 6:13), and the word "shaken" is a form of that translated "earthquake". The forcing of fruit from the fig tree will be brought about by the experience of the earthquake.

In various places- The word "various" (AV "divers") is added by the translators to try to make sense of the otherwise obvious statement that earthquakes will occur in "places". There is no suggestion in the Greek text that earthquakes will occur in various places worldwide where they have not been known to occur. But maybe we have here an intensive plural- the one great place. The same word is used in :15 about "the holy*place*". There are rumours that an earthquake hit the temple area around AD70. But seeing that the temple mount is the bone of contention between Israel and her Arab neighbours, an earthquake splitting the mount would be appropriate. And of course this would link directly with the prediction of Zechariah 14, that when Christ returns there will be an earthquake which splits it. And yet this is used by the Lord as a sign of His coming, rather than a statement about what will happen at His return. It could be that this is an example of how the meaning of time will be somehow collapsed around the second coming; a sign of His return is in effect His return. Or it could be that the events described in the Olivet prophecy will all happen in a very short period of time, a matter of days rather than years or decades [as is assumed by those who seek to connect the predictions with current world events]. Mk. 13:8 and Lk. 21:11 speak of the earthquakes in *kata* places, but this doesn't necessarily mean 'various' places, but could equally mean 'around'- earthquakes around the holy place would then be signs and portents of the earthquake under the Holy Place which will happen when Christ returns. In Acts 6:13,14 Stephen's enemies appear to have twisted his quotations of the Lord's Olivet prophecy to mean that Christ would destroy the "holy place" [s.w. "places" here in Mt. 24].

24:8 *But all these things are the beginning of the birth pains*- The term is used of the Lord's suffering, which came to term in His resurrection (Acts 2:24)- another hint that the tribulation is intended to bring those who endure it to an identity with the Lord's sufferings, and thus to share in His resurrection. There is therefore a positive intention in the sufferings. They are not merely an angry Deity releasing pent up anger upon the world. The term is also used in 1 Thess. 5:3, in a section full of allusion to the Olivet prophecy: "When they shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them, as *travail* [s.w. "sorrows"] upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape". This suggests that the various trials and tribulations just listed by the Lord are going to come suddenly- they don't describe decades of such things leading up to His return. Rather do they therefore describe a sudden situation which comes at a time of "peace and safety". They may therefore describe the events of days rather than years. The Lord within the Olivet prophecy had spoken of the possibility of "escape" by fleeing, but "they shall *not* escape"- because they will be disobedient to His teaching. The intention of the birth pangs is to forge an identity between the sufferers and the crucified Christ, coming to birth in a resurrection like His. But for these people, the birth pangs are tragic, resulting in death rather than resurrection to life. See on :9 *To be afflicted*.

The Lord is surely alluding to the Rabbinic idea of "the birth-pangs of the Messiah" which they used in description of the traumatic situation in Israel before Messiah's appearance. The Jewish public had initially expected Jesus to be Messiah, and felt that their time was indeed the birth-pangs of Messiah. But the Lord is saying that that time

is yet to come. Seeing He did not come in AD70, we are again left to understand this as a reference to a situation *in Israel* which brings about the open manifestation of Messiah.

We frequently struggle to understand which verses apply to AD70 and which to the last days. I have suggested that forcing such a distinction is unwise because the entire prophecy was a conditional prophecy which began to have fulfilment in AD70 but was rescheduled in its final fulfilment. However it could be argued that Mt. 24:8-22 can be read as a parenthesis specifically concerning the events of AD70: the first seven verses and Mt. 24:23 ff. refer to events of both the last days and AD70.

24:9 *Then shall they deliver you up*- Just as the Lord was 'betrayed' [s.w. 10:4; 20:18,19; 26:2,15,16,21,23,24,25,45,46,48; 27:3,4; 17:22 "the Son of Man shall be betrayed"] to the Jews and 'delivered up' to the Gentiles [s.w. 27:18,26,2 "delivered Him to Pontius Pilate"] for suffering, death- and thereby to resurrection. Again, there is an attempt to make those enduring these things identify with Him in His time of suffering. They too would be delivered up to both Jews and Gentiles- to synagogues [Jews; 10:17; Lk. 21:12] and to prisons, rulers and kings [Gentiles; Lk. 21:12; Mk. 13:9]. Mark adds "They shall deliver you up to councils and in the synagogues you shall be beaten". Clearly the Lord had in mind a first century fulfilment of His words, but as we have seen, not all the signs fulfilled in the first century and the Lord's *parousia* did not literally happen when the temple was destroyed. We therefore have to look to a re-scheduled fulfilment of these words in the persecution of the disciples in the last days.

To tribulation- S.w. "great *tribulation*" (:21,29). The Lord was addressing the disciples, and yet their sufferings were not completely in line with the picture presented here, whereby their suffering was at the same time as Jerusalem was surrounded by armies. Clearly the intended program was delayed. John's equivalent of the Olivet prophecy is the upper room discourse, and the same idea as in :8 of a woman in the sorrows of labour is to be found there, and also this same word for 'afflicted' is found, translated "anguish" and "tribulation": "A woman when she is in labour has... *anguish*... in the world you shall have *tribulation*" (Jn. 16:21,33). The Lord seems to speak as if these experiences will be those of all His true followers, but just as His anguish and sorrow came to term in His triumphant resurrection, so for all who are in Him. John uses the language of the Olivet prophecy but seems to apply it in more general terms to the suffering of the believer in all ages. Surely this was consciously done as a response to the fact that the Olivet prophecy had been rescheduled in fulfilment. Again we find the idea of 'affliction' associated with the Lord's sufferings. Joseph, His clearest prototype, was 'afflicted' (Acts 7:10 s.w.), just as his brothers were 'afflicted' to lead them to repentance and acceptance of how badly they had treated Joseph / Jesus (Acts 7:11 s.w.). Stephen's use of the same word for the sufferings of both Joseph and his brothers was surely to teach that Israel's affliction was in order to teach them what they had done to Joseph, and to thereby identify with Him and repent. And this is exactly the purpose of Israel's latter day afflictions as outlined in the Olivet prophecy, and likewise the reason for the new Israel experiencing them- to help us identify with our crucified Lord. The same word is used in Rom. 8:35: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?". Here Paul lists the kinds of tribulation outlined in the Olivet prophecy and assures his first century readers that these will never separate them from God's love- he clearly expected the prophecy to have a first century fulfilment. Likewise the Lord foresaw the possibility of the "great tribulation" coming upon the first century church (Rev. 2:22), and uses the same term "great tribulation" to describe the experiences of those Jewish Christians who would finally be saved (Rev. 7:14).

And shall kill you- "Some of you shall they cause to be put to death... but there shall not an hair of your head perish" (Lk. 21:16) can only be reconciled by appreciating how miraculously the first century disciples were preserved in order to inspire and co-ordinate the rest of the body. Perhaps a similar group of elders ("the two witnesses"?) will be preserved in the last days too. *Apokteino*, 'to kill', is used many times in the Gospels, nearly always with reference to the killing of the Lord Jesus. Again there is the hint that the sufferings of the tribulation period are intended to create identity with the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. In John, the upper room discourse replaces the Olivet prophecy. The word is used there for how the believers would be put out of the synagogues [opposition from synagogues is specifically mentioned in the Olivet prophecy] and then "whoever kills you will think that he does God service" (Jn. 16:2). Only religious hatred could explain the mad hatred unto death of which we are reading here- persecution on the basis of thinking that they are doing God service. We can expect, therefore, religiously motivated persecution in the last days. With the collapse of secular Christianity and strong religious commitment in much of the modern world, the only religion likely to fulfil this picture is Islam- and there is no lack of evidence that a worldwide persecution of Jews and those who hold a Jewish rooted faith is absolutely on their agenda, and is already bursting upon us.

And you shall be hated by all nations- But the Gospel will then be preached to "all nations" (Mk. 13:10). It seems that the persecution will result in preaching, perhaps through highly publicized legal cases. If the Gospel is taken to all nations, then this will not need to happen.

For my Name's sake- The phrase rarely occurs outside of the Olivet prophecy; one other time is in the upper room discourse, which is John's parallel with the Olivet prophecy as recorded in the synoptic Gospels. Here we read again that the believers will be "hated… for My Name's sake" (Jn. 15:18,21). But in John 15 the Lord seems to be angling His words not just to the twelve, but to all in Him; for His reasoning is that the world's attitude to Him will be their attitude to us, and all in Him will suffer as He did. Again we can conclude that John, the latest of the Gospels, was re-adjusting the emphasis of the Olivet prophecy, knowing that it had been rescheduled and would not fully come true in an early coming of Christ in the first century.

You shall be beaten in the synagogues (Mk. 13:9). The Lord predicted that His people would be cast out of the synagogues (Jn. 16:2), as if He was happy that Christianity remained a sect of Judaism until such time as Judaism wouldn't tolerate it. His prediction that His people would be beaten in synagogues (Mk. 13:9) implies they would still be members, for the synagogues only had power to discipline their own members, not the general public. The Lord had no fear of 'guilt by association' with wrong religious views such as there were within Judaism.

Mark and Luke add "It shall turn to you for a testimony". Maybe the idea is that public trial for our faith will be a good public witness. Or it could be that the testimony in our favour is before the Heavenly throne room, where our human situations are as it were played out before the Lord. When the Lord said that His people would preach before rulers 'for a witness / testimony against them' (Mk. 13:9), we are left wondering when and how exactly this will be. It's hard to come to any other conclusion than that this refers to how our words of preaching will be quoted back to the hearers at the judgment. It's an incidental proof that it is hearing the word of the Gospel that makes a person responsible to the last judgment. But in our context, my point is that our words of preaching in this life will be quoted back to those who heard them, at the day of

judgment. The simple point is, our words aren't forgotten. They will be quoted back, in some form, at the day of judgment. And yet it appears we can speak and think how we like in this life. Indeed we can; but all these things will ultimately surface again in the last day.

Lk. 21:13 speaks of how when a believer is persecuted, "it shall turn to you for a testimony". Perhaps the Angels give a positive testimony of the faithful believer in the court of Heaven. And at the final judgment, these things will be 'gone through' with them at judgment as a testimony to their faithfulness. Or could it mean that the way we respond to our trials during the tribulation will determine our verdict at the judgment? It will be a testimony in our favour at the day of judgment. In view of this, "Settle it *therefore* in your hearts" to make this witness in God's strength (Lk. 21:14). "In the endurance of you (in the tribulation), ye will gain the souls of you" (Lk. 21:19 Marshall's Interlinear). The run up to the tribulation will provoke a "praying always, that ye may be accounted worthy... to stand before the Son of man" (Lk. 21:36). Peter describes the tribulation of the believers in the run up to AD70 (and therefore the last days too) as judgment taking place on the house of God, in which even the righteous are "scarcely saved" (1 Pet. 4:17,18). This suggests that the last generation of believers will only be saved due to their response to the tribulation which comes upon them; but even then, only by the skin of their teeth. Lot in Sodom and the parable of the virgins, among others, are hints that the last generation of believers will be in a weak state.

Lk. 21:15 adds at this point: "I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay". This is alluding to Ex. 4:12, where God tells Moses at the time of the Egyptian persecution of God's people, "I will be with thy mouth and teach thee what thou shalt say". This persecution lead to intensified prayer to God, resulting in the deliverance of the suffering saints at Passover time, after a period of especial distress and 'time of trouble' for the surrounding world due to the plagues. After this deliverance, God's people went into the wilderness and were declared God's Kingdom. We have earlier shown how all these events form a remarkable latter day prophecy. This verse also suggests that the gifts of the Spirit may be given to some in the Elijah ministry in order to enable them to make a more powerful witness (as in Rev. 11:6). The fact they are given personally by Christ would indicate that in some way, Christ is already back at this stage. Time and again we will see how the prophecies of events in the last days are ambiguous as to whether Christ is already back at the time of their fulfilment, or whether they herald his return. Seeing that we will never know the exact time of Christ's return, this is understandable. Similarly Joel 2 prophesies the pouring out of the gifts "before the great and terrible day of the Lord" (Joel 2:31). Malachi surely refers to this passage when prophesying the Elijah ministry "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5). This suggests that the 3.5 year Elijah ministry of the last days (James 5:17) will be accompanied by Spirit gifts, and will coincide with the time of persecution. Note that the gifts were given "before the day of the Lord" in AD70 too. It is possible that because of this possession of the gifts by 'Elijah', false teachers within the ecclesia at the end will also claim to possess them (Mt. 24:24), so convincingly that all but the elect within the ecclesia will be duped into following them. Yet it must be stressed that it is a feature of the gifts that they are unmistakable and obvious to identify (cp. Acts 4:16); it will be evident enough if and when they are poured out in the last days.

24:10 *And then shall many stumble*- To stumble, in its Biblical sense, implies those in view were once walking in the Faith. This is clearly how the Lord uses it in the parable

of the sower (13:21 s.w.). The majority [Gk.] will stumble out of the way in this final tribulation. Such a test of faith is logically required for that generation- because those who are alive at the time of the Lord's coming will be the only generation who never actually die. They will therefore require this particularly acute test of faith; and the majority will fail it, and stumble from the path. The language of betrayal which is then used would suggest that those who stumble will be like Judas who betrayed the Lord- and he was amongst the believers. It's a sorry picture, but we must let the Lord's words have their true weight and fairly obvious meaning. The cosy church environments of today will simply not be that way during the very last days before the Lord's return. The upper room discourse again has a connection with the Olivet prophecy at this point, because the Lord says that He was warning His followers ahead of time that they would be persecuted and cast out of the synagogues, and He was warning them ahead of time exactly so that they would not be offended (Jn. 16:1). The Olivet prophecy, if taken seriously, is therefore not mere prediction of future events, but rather specifically intended to stop the faithful stumbling as they behold every detail suddenly coming true in the very last days.

And shall deliver up one another- Again, the final sufferings of the Lord Jesus will be experienced within natural and spiritual Israel. Mic. 7:2-9 is a clear prophecy of Christ's sufferings. But embedded in it are words which are quoted in Lk. 21:16 and Mt. 10:36 concerning the latter day tribulation of the believers: "The son dishonours the father... a man's enemies are the men of his own house". In similar manner, some of the prophecies of Israel's latter day sufferings speak in the same context of those of Christ. Mic. 5:1 is an example: "...he hath laid siege against us: they shall smite the judge of Israel (Christ) with a rod upon the cheek". The whole of Amos 5 can be scanned for connections with both the future tribulation of Israel, and also the sufferings of Christ.

And shall hate one another- The same word just used for how the believers would be "hated of all nations" (:9). The spirit and religious position of the world will be adopted by some amongst the believers, and they will turn against their brethren as a result of this. This is in line with the language of betrayal just used, replete as it is with allusion to Judas, one of the twelve. Likewise "false prophets" (:11) suggest those located within the community of faith who are pushing a totally different agenda.

24:11 *And many false prophets*- A comparison of Mt. 24:11 and 24 suggests that there will be two particular periods of false prophet activity- at the outbreak of the persecution, and then immediately prior to the Lord's return. This latter group reason that Christ's second coming has already occurred in some non-literal form. Thus :27 speaks as if the clear return of Christ in the clouds will prove them wrong. These men would equate with Peter's description of some within the ecclesia of the last days saying "Where is the promise of His coming?". The language of false prophets suggests they arise from within the community of believers (see on :10). The "many" whom they deceive are presumably the same "many" who shall stumble from their faith (:10). The 'false prophets' of our age are hardly very credible. But if these false prophets have apparent access to Holy Spirit gifts and claim to do miracles, as passages in Revelation suggest, then they may well have more credibility. This particular sign was fulfilled in the first century, for "many false prophets [s.w.] are gone out into the world" (1 Jn. 4:1).

Shall arise- The reference is to the LXX of Jer. 29:15, where we read of false prophets arising amongst Israel whilst they were in Babylon. The message of those false prophets was that Judah would be saved from Babylon without repentance, and that in

practice, spiritual separation was not required from Babylon. And this will be the precise context for the false prophets in latter day Israel.

And shall lead many astray- False prophets of both Old and New Testaments were associated with immorality or at least, an easy, fleshly 'spirituality'. With harsh persecution and death sentences for true faith in Christ, the environment will be ripe for such false teachers; and false prophets are believed because people want to believe their message. Four times the Lord repeats this warning against being deceived, using the same word (:4,5,11,24). The words for deception and 'false prophet' recur in Revelation, again in a latter day context (Rev. 12:9; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20). The source of the deceit is 'Babylon', the latter day confederacy of anti-Israel and anti-Christian powers around Israel.

24:12 *And because iniquity shall be multiplied*- The LXX of Dan. 12:10 "The wicked shall do wickedly". This is last days language, describing the situation just before Daniel is resurrected. It cannot therefore have had any major fulfilment in the period before AD70. Thus "Because iniquity shall abound (within the ecclesia?), the love of many ("the many", R.V.- the majority) shall wax cold" (Mt.24:12). Bad spiritual standards will spread like cancer in the last days. Thus the ecclesial leaders of the last days must beware of the temptation to be over harsh on the faithful remnant, whilst eating and drinking with "the drunken", i.e. those elements in the ecclesia who will be unprepared for the Lord's coming. 2 Thess. 2:7,8 use the same word to describe how the "mystery [the Greek is a distinctly religious word] of *iniquity*" was already gathering momentum in the first century, leading to "the wicked one", the one of iniquity / lawlessness [s.w.] being revealed; again, we sense the possibility of a first century fulfilment which never came to its ultimate term. "Multiplied" translates *plethuno*, the noun of which is *plethos*, frequently translated "multitude". The idea is that because of the masses being without law, iniquitous, the love of the majority *amongst the believers* will become cold. They will be influenced by the lawlessness of the majority around them; the church will become as the world. And there is no lack of evidence that this is already happening.

The love- The love- *agape* – of the majority will be lost in the latter day community of believers, whilst peoples from all nations hear and accept the Gospel. Could this mean that the established groups of believers lose their *agape* whilst the real fire of the Truth spreads to the new converts made during the great tribulation, as spoken of in Rev. 7? The parables of Mt. 25 seem to refer specifically to the state of the latter day believers, and they speak of a beating of the fellow-servants.

Of the majority- The presence of the article, '*the* many', means that this refers to 'the majority'.

Shall grow cold- A related word is used in Rev. 3:15,16 in speaking of how the love of the early believers had decreased from hot to lukewarm, although not completely cold. Again we get the sense that this part of the Olivet prophecy was on its way to fulfilment- but had not come to full term.

24:13 *But he that endures*- The idea of enduring to the end and being saved is the spirit of the Lord's struggle on the cross (Heb. 12:2,3 s.w.). Again we see that the sufferings of the last days enable the faithful to fellowship the Lord's crucifixion sufferings. *Hupomeno* ["endure"] is a form of *meno*, the word used so often by the Lord in the upper room discourse for 'abiding' or remaining in Him. Again, it seems John has replaced the Olivet prophecy's call to endure to the end of the tribulation period with an appeal for the believer to abide / endure in Christ to the end of life. The language of the tribulation is applied to the entirety of the Christian's life. 'Enduring to the end' is paralleled with *agape* love not becoming cold; the real endurance is in continuing in

the thankless life of love, in the midst of a majority of believers who have lost their way. This is what is so difficult.

To the end- The end of the tribulation period is described with the same term as is used about the Lord's death on the cross being "the end" (26:58; Lk. 22:37; Jn. 13:1). Again we see that the experiences of the tribulation are intended to forge identity with the final sufferings of the Lord. 1 Thess. 2:16 speaks of Divine wrath coming upon Israel "to the end" (s.w.; AV "to the uttermost"), as if "the end" could have come in the first century. Peter was very clear: "The end [s.w.] is at hand" (1 Pet. 4:7). Constantly we see evidence for what could have happened- and yet did not. And yet it shall happen, ultimately. And the only conclusion can really be that the final "end" was deferred, the Divine program rescheduled.

The same shall be saved- In the first instance, "the end" was the end of the tribulation period, for he that endures to the end *shall be saved*, but :22 explains that unless the days [the 1260 days of the time periods?] are shortened, then even the elect will not be "saved" (s.w.).

24:14 *And this gospel of the kingdom*- We wonder what is the intention of the emphasis upon "this" Gospel being preached. We are assisted in understanding by the way Matthew uses the same terms in 26:13: "Wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, which this woman has done, be told for a memorial to her". The language is so similar that there is surely a connection. The Gospel records are transcripts of how those like Matthew originally preached the Gospel. Over time, the account they gave became written down, under inspiration. The Gospel message is, therefore, in the Gospel records. 'This Gospel' would therefore be a reference to Matthew's Gospel record, which it was the intention of Matthew and those who had been converted by it to spread worldwide. This would explain why each of the Gospel records includes the incident of the woman anointing the Lord; wherever the Gospel was preached worldwide, that testimony to her would be included. Matthew was therefore proactively attempting to fulfil the Lord's comment that the Gospel must be preached in all the world. He saw prophecy not so much as prediction but command. It could also be that the "this" connects with the end of :13, "shall be saved". Salvation is the good news of the Kingdom. "Ye shall be hated of all nations for My name's sake" connects with "this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached for a witness unto all nations" (Mt. 24:14). "My name's sake" and the Gospel of the Kingdom's sake are interchangeable expressions (Mt. 19:12,29; Mk. 10:29; Lk. 18:29).

Shall be preached- This could be read as a commandment, not a mere prediction. In this case, the idea is that *when* the Gospel is preached to all the world, then "the end comes". The marvel is that this amazing preaching will be undertaken by a minority within the believing community, since, according to the preceding verses, the majority will have fallen away. And even amongst those who remain faithful, some will be in prison, others killed. It could be argued that this Gospel preaching occurs specifically during the tribulation period. If we were to take the Gospel to the whole world now, then perhaps this would not be necessary. But in the first century, it was persecution which was necessary to get the disciples to obey their Lord's command to spread the Gospel outwards from Jerusalem to the world. And it was persecution which made the fleeing Jewish Christians rub shoulders with Gentiles, and thus share the Gospel with them.

In the whole world- The first century fulfilment of these words mentioned in Rom. 10:18 and Col. 1:6,23,26 was because there was the potential that the Lord could have

come in AD70. But the Greek word literally means 'the inhabited', and more naturally refers to the whole planet. He envisaged the possibility that the disciples would not have gone preaching over the cities of Israel before the end came (10:23). But He did come in AD70, and so the Lord's words here about a genuine worldwide witness must come true before He returns. Note the Gospel is to be preached "in", *en*, all the world, and not 'to' the whole world. This may envisage there being believers in all the world who preach where they are. This would nowhere near have been fulfilled in the first century. Also, Col. 1:6 speaks of the Gospel having gone to the *kosmos*, whereas Mt. 24:14 requires the Gospel to be preached in the *oikoumene*. *Kosmos* is frequently used in the NT with reference to the *Jewish* world. *Oikoumene* has a more global and universal context and sense. Mk. 13:10 says that the Gospel must be published "among all nations" (Gk. *ethnos*), and this hardly occurred by AD70. Some parts of the Olivet prophecy had a limited application in the first century (e.g. Mt. 24:14 = 10:18), but this doesn't mean that this is the *only* fulfilment of it. It is a feature of prophecy that it often has a short term fulfilment in order to validate the prophet in the eyes of his own generation. It would be strange indeed if the Olivet prophecy had *only* a short term fulfilment.

The great commission bids us go into all the world with Gospel; note the evident connection with Mt. 24:14: "This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come". This definitely suggests that the great commission will be mightily obeyed in the last days. There are many other Biblical implications that there will be an unprecedented spread of the Gospel to the whole planet in the last days. Thus Dan. 12:4 speaks of a time in the very last days when "many shall run to and fro (an idiom often used concerning response to God's word: Ps. 119:32,60; 147:15; Amos 8:11,12; Hab. 2:2; Jn. 8:37 RV; 2 Thess. 3:1 Gk.), and knowledge shall be increased [the context is of Daniel wanting to understand about the second coming of Jesus]... many shall be purified, and made white, and tried (in the tribulation); but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand" . This increase of knowledge of the Gospel is to be spread world-wide by many running to and fro in the last days. The great commission will be fulfilled then as never before. Dan. 11:32,33 speaks of how in the time of the end "The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits... instruct many". Before every 'coming' of the Lord there has been a period of persecution and zealous preaching: Noah preached righteousness before the flood, as Lot probably tried to before the Lord's coming down in judgment on Sodom (would God have wrought such wholesale destruction without giving the people a chance to repent? Cp. Nineveh and Jonah). The schools of the prophets preached from the street corners and temple steps to warn of the coming of the day of the Lord at the hand of the Babylonians and Assyrians. And of course the dramatic coming of the Lord in judgment upon Israel in AD70, was heralded by Paul and his committed band of zealots staging the greatest preaching campaigns this world has seen. The crucial question, of course, is whether the Gospel has truly gone into all the world. One perspective to bear in mind is that in the preaching of Paul, ecclesias which he founded are taken as representing a whole area- e.g. Philippi is called "Macedonia" (Phil. 4:15); Thessalonica is "Macedonia and Achaia" (1 Thess. 1:7); Corinth is Achaia (1 Cor. 16:15; 2 Cor. 1:1); Ephesus for Asia (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Cor. 1:8). In this sense Paul felt that he had fully preached the Gospel in a circle, moving from Jerusalem through Asia to Rome, and projecting onwards to Spain. Perhaps the Gospel goes into all the world in the sense that believers, however small in number, are to be found world-wide. And that seems to be where we're now up to in the 21st century.

Paul seems to have seen in Christ's prophecy that the Gospel would be fully known world-wide in the last as being a specific, personal command to him (Mt. 24:14 = 2 Tim. 4:17). He saw prophecy as command more than solely prediction; and this is why prophecy has a degree of variation in how and when it is fulfilled. The words of Mk. 16:15,16 are clear: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved". Commands to repent, all men, the Lord's resurrection... these ideas all recur in Acts 17:30, proving they are not solely relevant to those who first heard them; God now commands all men to repent, through our words. These words clearly don't apply to the first century only, for they are intended to be linked with Mt 24:14, which uses the same language about the preaching work of the very last days (even though the context may imply that as a community we will only be obedient to this command once egged on by major persecution). What all this means is that the great commission will be fulfilled in the last days. The connection with the great commission means that the Lord sent out the disciples in order to fulfil this aspect of the Olivet prophecy; but their failure to do the job fully meant that the prophecy had to be delayed and rescheduled in fulfilment.

For a testimony- The Gospel was to be preached for a witness to all nations (Mt. 24:14); and yet "*ye* are witnesses... *you* will be witnesses" (Lk. 24:27; Acts 1:8). The preacher of the Gospel *is* the Gospel; the man is the message, just as the very same word / message was made flesh in the Lord. Israel of old were taught this. They were to keep and do the commandments of God, and *this* would be the witness of their wisdom and understanding to the nations around them- who would thereby be brought to Israel's God (Dt. 4:6-8). The imparting of wisdom and understanding therefore didn't come so much through specific doctrinal exposition, as through living out those principles in daily life. But *marturion*, "witness", can simply be a legal term referring to testimony or witness in a prosecution. Perhaps the sense is that judgment will come upon all the world once the Gospel has been witnessed to them; it is their receipt of that information which gives them the knowledge which makes them responsible to Divine judgment. For once this witness has been made, then the end comes.

To all the nations- If every *ethnos* must at least have the Gospel of the Kingdom witnessed to them, it's impossible to understand this as having had final fulfilment in AD70. The fact there will be believers from every *ethnos* saved (Rev. 5:9; 7:9) means that this witness will succeed- against all odds, seeing that at the time, there will be mass persecution and hatred against believers. "Ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake" connects with "this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached for a witness unto all nations" (Mt. 24:39,14). "My name's sake" and the Gospel of the Kingdom's sake are interchangeable expressions (Mt. 19:12,29; Mk. 10:29; Lk. 18:29). Before every 'coming' of the Lord there has been a period of persecution and zealous preaching: Noah preached righteousness before the flood, as Lot probably tried to before the Lord's coming down in judgment on Sodom (would God have wrought such wholesale destruction without giving the people a chance to repent? Cp. Nineveh and Jonah). The schools of the prophets preached from the street corners and temple steps to warn of the coming of the day of the Lord at the hand of the Babylonians and Assyrians. And of course the dramatic coming of the Lord in judgment upon Israel in AD70, was heralded by Paul and his committed band of zealots staging the greatest preaching campaigns this world has seen. The word used in Mt. 24:14 for "witness to all nations" occurs in Mt. 10:18 concerning our being brought before judges etc. as a witness. Our behaviour during the final tribulation is the witness- perhaps the implication could be that there will be quiet believers world-wide before the final tribulation begins, and their witness under persecution will be the public proclamation of the Gospel world-

wide of which the Lord speaks here? In the spread of the true Gospel recently we perhaps see the way for this being prepared. The word also occurs in the parallel Lk. 21:13- our behaviour during the final tribulation will be the witness we make. The reluctance of the early church to throw their full weight behind obeying the command to " go into all the world and preach the Gospel" was only ended by the cosy ecclesias of Judea being persecuted, resulting in their increased appreciation of their hope, and preaching it to those previously neglected nations into which they were driven (Acts 11:19-22). Are the Christian heartlands in for something similar? That the mission fields are so white to the harvest but so chronically short of labourers indicates how nicely such a scenario would work to God's glory.

And then shall the end come- The Lord gave some signs which would be required but would not be the "end" (:6 "the end is not yet"). It would seem that the urgent spreading of the Gospel as a witness worldwide, perhaps in the context of well publicized legal cases against believers, will be the very final sign which heralds "the end". This witness to the Gospel worldwide would therefore be during the tribulation itself, or at least at some point between verses 6 and 14. The witness may therefore take a matter of days, rather than the gradual spread of the Gospel worldwide over a matter of decades. With the nature of the media and instant communication, such global penetration and persuasion of a minority could indeed happen in a matter of days. The high profile, globally covered testimony under tribulation or torture of even one believer could trigger the conversion of individuals literally worldwide. Perhaps the prophecy of the two witnesses in the last days in Rev. 11 provides more details, or will then be understood as being fulfilled. Even if we cannot quite imagine now how it will be fulfilled, when the time comes for it to be, it will be compellingly clear.

24:15 *Therefore, when you see*- Luke adds "Jerusalem compassed by armies". Jerusalem was truly "compassed with armies" in Hezekiah's time, and perhaps the Lord has this in mind when He predicted that Jerusalem would again be like this in the last days. His subsequent warning to those in the country areas not running into Jerusalem for refuge is also an allusion to the situation in Hezekiah's time- for this was exactly what happened then (Lk. 21:20,21 RV). The "therefore", *oun*, need not necessarily reference the previous clause. It may be setting up a condition upon which something must be done- in this case, fleeing (:16).

The abomination- The word is mainly used elsewhere about the abominations of the Babylon system (Rev. 17:4,5). I would suggest that once the rescheduling of Christ's return was decided by God, the Gospel of John was issued, with its more spiritual interpretation of the Olivet prophecy in terms of the Comforter, and the teaching that the principles of the tribulation are to be lived out throughout the lives of believers. And John was likewise inspired with the prophecy of Revelation, which is clearly based upon the Olivet prophecy and provides further details as to how the prophecy is to be fulfilled in the last days, with the events of AD70 being a partial fulfilment in order to give the prophecy credibility with the generation that first received it. This would be according to the Mosaic principle that a prophet could be judged as true if his words came true- requiring a primary fulfilment of all long term prophecies.

Of desolation- Luke records the Lord as saying that *when* Jerusalem was surrounded by armies, *then* His people should know that the "desolation" of it was near. The desolation is therefore of Jerusalem rather than specifically the temple (Lk. 21:20). The abominating desolation could therefore refer to the invading armies. Seeing *them* was the signal to flee. "Abomination" in the Old Testament typically refers to idolatry or paganism. One interpretation is that the desolator would place some pagan religious symbol in the temple. But this is the sign to flee, and this was only done by

the Romans after the city had fallen. That, therefore, doesn't really fit the requirements of the prophecy. The AD70 interpretation notes the pagan standards of the Roman legions, but even they were not placed in the temple. This was defended until the end, until the Romans forced entry, pulled it down and burnt it. As with many details of this prophecy, a future fulfilment is required. And yet we need to note that such desolation was only a visual reflection of the abomination the Jews had committed in the temple: "Because of the evil of your doings, and because of the *abominations* which ye have committed; therefore is your land a *desolation* and an astonishment, and a curse, without an inhabitant, as at this day" (Jer. 44:22). The abomination which caused desolation may not simply refer to some pagan symbols in the temple area. Josephus records that the Jewish zealots came into the Most Holy place, "placed an imposter in office as high priest, and ordained unqualified misfits to the priesthood" (*The Jewish Wars* 4.3.6–9; 4.5.4). The pagan Idumeans were invited into the Most Holy by the zealots in order to murder the chief priest Annas.

The word "desolation" is used again about the desolation of the Babylon system (Rev. 17:16; 18:17,19). Yet Babylon will be judged according to what it did to God's people- the judgment for 'desolating' will be 'desolation'. Yet the Olivet prophecy clearly intended the Roman armies to be the means of the desolation, but I suggest that Revelation extends the prophecy by giving more detail, and describing the system of desolation as 'Babylon'. And that system clearly has similarities with Rome- it could have been fulfilled in Rome, but because the fulfilment of the prophecy was rescheduled, we can look for another equivalent of the enigmatic 'Babylon' of the last days. The "desolation" referred to is clearly to be understood as the fulfilment of Dan. 9:26,27 LXX, which says that the abomination that desolates will come "after the cutting off of Messiah the Prince". Whilst how long "after" is not defined, we are surely intended to understand that the desolating abomination comes soon after the death of Messiah: "The people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and *the end* thereof ("then shall *the end* come", Mt. 24:14) shall be with a flood, ("as the days of Noah..."), and unto *the end* shall be war; *desolations* are determined . . . and upon the temple of *abominations* shall come one that makes *desolate* (cp. "your house is left unto you desolate", Mt.23:38), even unto the consummation, and that determined shall be poured out upon the desolated" (LXX). And yet note that that prophecy itself had had various potential fulfilments which didn't come true. So it is fair to think that it could have had a fulfilment in AD70, but this was again deferred- for the same reason as ever, Israel's lack of repentance (see the Digression 'Conditional Prophecy in Daniel').

Which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place- Mk. "where it ought not". "Holy place" is without the article, and could refer to any holy place. The contrast is with the Lamb who will descend to the temple mount and "stand" there [s.w. Rev. 14:1]. This will be the final showdown between the real Christ and the fake one, as likewise foreseen in the prophecy of the man of sin in 2 Thess. 2, where again the place of showdown is the temple. For this to be a sign to the believers to flee to the mountains, any application to the triumphant Roman legions placing their standards in the temple at the *end* of the Jewish war is precluded. And historically, it is doubtful whether that happened, as the temple was burnt with fire and the legions were told *not* to do this.

Let him that reads understand- The vast majority of first century believers were likely illiterate. So this may be an appeal to teachers to correctly understand and teach. The Lord speaks in a latter day context about "let him that readeth understand" Daniel's prophecies (Mk. 13:14)- referring to the special gift of understanding them which

Daniel himself was told would come in the very end time. But note the parallels in the Lord's teaching here: "Let him… understand… let him… not go down… let him… not return… let them… flee". The understanding He refers to is not merely academic. It is the understanding that will lead to concrete action.

The Lord's Olivet prophecy as recorded by Mark has so many allusions to the Maccabean revolt under Mattathias ("the abomination", flight to the hills, "let the reader understand" and many other phrases are all quotations from 1 Macc. 1-3). But in this context the Lord warns of false Messiahs- as if He considered the Maccabean heroes to be just that. And interestingly it is Mark more than any other Gospel writer who stresses the Messiahship of Jesus throughout the crucifixion record. A crucified Messiah was to the Jews a contradiction in terms. The idea of Jewish revolutionaries marching triumphantly to Jerusalem to liberate it was common in Jewish thought at the time- but Luke emphasizes that Christ's last journey to Jerusalem and triumphant entry to it was in fact in order to die the death of the cross there. The battle had been redefined by the Lord Jesus- not against Rome, but against internal sin and Jewish religious hypocrisy. Victory was by self-crucifixion, not military might. This was just too much for Jewish nationalism, just as legalists today end up baying for the blood of those who preach grace and not works.

There are a number of hints that there will be a progressive growth in Biblical understanding amongst the latter day faithful. In the spirit of Daniel 12:4, Habakkuk was told that the full understanding of his vision concerning the latter day judgment of Babylon was "yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie", and *at that time* the one who reads and understands it will "run" - using the same idiom as in Dan. 12:4 concerning the latter day believers 'running' in response to their understanding of God's word (Hab. 2:2,3). The Olivet prophecy repeatedly talks about 'seeing' or (Gk.) understanding things and then acting upon this knowledge. The English translation somewhat masks this. Thus Mt. 24:15 "Whoso *readeth*" uses a Greek word which really means to recognize, distinguish- and he who recognizes, understands, let him " understand" or, better, *meditate*. Or again, "When ye shall see (Greek, to know, perceive) the abomination that maketh desolate..." (Mt. 24:15). This might suggest that the "abomination" isn't necessarily something physical. The idea seems to be 'When you understand that the abomination that makes desolate is in place, then...', rather than 'When you see (physically) on the telly or in the newspaper an abomination in Jerusalem, then... do something about it'. "When ye shall see (Gk. perceive, understand) all these things, (then you will) know that it is near" (Mt. 24:33). "Behold (same Greek: perceive, comprehend) the fig tree..." (Lk. 21:29). The emphasis is undoubtedly on the need for understanding of the signs, not just observing them.

"Let him that reads understand" is inviting us to be like Daniel in Dan. 9:22-25, who also wanted to understand the meaning of the "abomination" prophecy. But he was told that the meaning of that vision about the abomination that desolates would only be revealed in the very last days, i.e. at the time of its fulfilment (Dan. 8:17,26; 12:9). The implication of all this is that there will be believing Jews living in the Jerusalem area at the time of the setting up of the abomination; and they will have special understanding of this prophecy which will lead them to flee. The importance of this for our present study is that this indicates that there will be believers in Israel just before the Lord returns. They will have "understanding" and will be motivated by this to respond. "*Let him*… understand" is paralleled with "*let him* that is on the housetop [flee immediately]… *let him* that is in the field not return". Understanding leads to action- both then and now.

In the spirit of Daniel, Habakkuk was told that the full understanding of his vision concerning the latter day judgment of Babylon was "yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie", and *at that time* the one who reads and understands it will "run"- using the same idiom as in Dan. 12:4 concerning the latter day believers 'running' in response to their understanding of God's word (Hab. 2:2,3). The Olivet prophecy repeatedly talks about 'seeing' or (Gk.) understanding things and then acting upon this knowledge. The English translation somewhat masks this. Thus Mt. 24:15 "Whoso *readeth*" uses a Greek word which really means to recognize, distinguish- and he who recognizes, understands, let him "understand" or, better, *meditate*. Or again, "When ye shall see (Greek, to know, perceive) the abomination that maketh desolate..." (Mt. 24:15). This might suggest that the "abomination" isn't necessarily something physical. The idea seems to be 'When you understand that the abomination that makes desolate is in place, then...', rather than 'When you see (physically) on the telly or in the newspaper an abomination in Jerusalem, then...do something about it'. "Let him that readeth understand" is yet another Olivet allusion back to Daniel (12:10); yet generations of believers have read those very words and *not* understood. Presumably the latter day remnant *will* clearly understand Daniel's enigmatic words about the abomination. Whilst we should live *as if* we expect the Lord's imminent return, it has to be said that we don't seem to have yet reached this level of understanding. "When ye shall see (Gk. perceive, understand) all these things, (then you will) know that it is near" (Mt. 24:33). "Behold (same Greek: perceive, comprehend) the fig tree..." (Lk. 21:29). The emphasis is undoubtedly on the need for understanding of the signs, not just observing them. The expansion of understanding may be not only of prophecies like Habakkuk, Daniel and Revelation. Because Revelation especially is so full of reference to other passages throughout the Scriptures, our comprehension of the whole Bible will go into another paradigm. It may be that in the last days, *all* the words of God will in some sense be fulfilled (Rev. 17:17)- we will realize that the whole Bible is especially speaking to us, the last generation. Many of the parables are specifically aimed at the last generation of believers- they have a very secondary application to believers of other ages. They are specifically about the attitudes of those who will be alive when the Lord comes in glory; e.g. the wise and foolish virgins, or the men given talents, or the servants left watching the household etc. The Lord's letters in Revelation speak of him being about to come, as do many other NT passages. They were written specifically for the last generation of believers! Their full meaning and relevance will therefore only be perceived by that generation. Take Rev. 3:20 as an example: "I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me". Whatever else this may be taken to mean, according to its connections with other passages, this is clearly relevant to the Lord's second coming; the believer who responds to the Lord's voice in the last days will be rewarded with the Lord's coming. Verses like this and the parables mentioned above are pre-eminently relevant to the last generation. No wonder there will be a growth in understanding in the last days!

24:16 *Then let those who are in Judea flee*- The same word was used by the Lord in introducing the Olivet prophecy in 23:33: "How can you *escape* the condemnation of Gehenna?". The way of escape was through obedience to His word. Clearly the Lord intended His words to be fulfilled in that immediate generation; but fleeing to the mountains did not bring ultimate salvation because the Lord did not return as intended. His coming has been rescheduled, and perhaps utter salvation for the Jewish remnant in the land will likewise depend upon 'fleeing'. The Old Covenant had specified that Israel would flee before their enemies if they broke the covenant; the command to 'flee'

may therefore be an invitation to accept guilt for their sin, and thereby be saved through the very act of recognizing the justice of their judgment. For this is the essence of the salvation of every man in Christ. It could be that Rev. 12:6 provides more details, in speaking of the faithful fleeing into the wilderness and thereby being saved. This was the way to flee the coming condemnation (23:33; Lk. 3:7). The Lord's words require[d] some faith to accept, because if Jerusalem were surrounded by armies, how could the faithful flee? Josephus explains that the Roman legions did in fact withdraw for a time, allowing civilians to flee (B.J.2.19.6,7).

To the mountains- Better, 'toward'. Clearly this was capable of fulfilment in the Jewish war, in a fairly literal sense. But what is the latter day equivalent? "The mountains" could be an intensive plural for the one great, special, obvious mountain. The same word is found earlier in the chapter- the Lord is saying these words sitting on "the mount" of Olives (:3). And it is to that mount that He will return, according to Acts 1:12 and Zechariah 14. It could be, therefore, in a literal or figurative sense, an appeal to move towards the mount of Olives to meet Him at His return. Perhaps in a literal, geographical sense, that area will be the only area left by the invading armies, and they will surround the faithful Jewish remnant on that mount- and then the Lord shall come. But such speculation is unhelpful, because the principle of prophecy is that when it happens, then we shall understand. I do not believe we are intended to work out a sequence of events ahead of time. Indeed, given the conditional nature of Bible prophecy, that is impossible to do anyway.

As the faithful remnant were miraculously allowed to leave Sodom for the mountains, immediately unleashing the Divine judgments by doing so, the faithful Christian remnant were allowed to leave Jerusalem just before the final Roman onslaught of AD70, doubtless spurred on by their Lord's command: "Let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it (Jerusalem) depart out" (Lk. 21:21). The reference to fleeing to the mountains would have suggested a conscious allusion back to the command to Lot to flee out of Sodom "to the mountain" (Gen. 19:17). "Then let them which be in Judaea flee to the mountains" may mean that there will be Jewish believers in Jerusalem in the last days, seeing the whole prophecy has yet to be totally fulfilled (the AD70 application of these words was at best limited). Dan. 12:1 says that in the final tribulation of Israel, those Jews who are "written in the book", i.e. who are acceptable saints (Ex. 32:32; Rev. 21:27) will be delivered. So there will be a minority in latter day natural Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal, as in Elijah's time- which is typical of the situation at the latter day Elijah ministry. This is certainly encouragement enough to make witness to and within Israel a priority.

24:17 *Let him that is on the housetop*- The idea is that flight could be taken by jumping from housetop to housetop, without going back into the house. Escaping that way would best be done in any case without carrying anything. This is clearly language relevant specifically to first century Palestine, and is a parade example of how the prophecy was ideally intended for fulfilment then. The latter day fulfilment of these words will therefore only be in essence, rather than in detail. That is a principle we must bear in mind when considering many other Bible prophecies; the essence but not necessarily the detail will be fulfilled in the rescheduled and delayed version of their fulfilment. The implication of the language here and in :18 is that the sign to flee will be momentary; the signs are not, therefore, to be perceived over decades or even years, leading slowly towards the Lord’s coming. Rather these signs, especially of the abomination, will appear suddenly, to the extent that the believer must flee immediately, quite literally without a moment to lose.

But this reflection leads us to wonder whether the fleeing away in a split second, be it from the field or housetop, is more likely a reference to the need to respond immediately to the call to leave secular life and go to meet the Lord. The example of a person in the field (:18) needing to leave immediately naturally connects with the words of :40 about the snatching away of the believers at the Lord's return: "Two shall be in the field, the one shall be taken, and the other left". This would dovetail well with the implication elsewhere that the immediacy of our response to the knowledge that 'He's back!' will effectively be our judgment. Those who themselves want to go to Him will be snatched away and meet Him, whilst those who delay will be rejected, as the foolish virgins who went first to buy oil.

Not go down to take out things that are in his house- The allusion is clearly to Lot fleeing Sodom, also "to the mountains" (:16). This is a type of the response of the believers to the call to judgment at the Lord's return. If we don't separate from the world, we will share their judgment. The immediacy of response is so stressed, and will be ultimately indicative of where our heart is. Any desire to gather any material possessions will reveal that our heart is not wholly and solely with the Lord. But the Greek could equally mean 'to take anyone [person] out of his house / family'. This again is a high demand- the demand of the Sermon on the Mount, to put family in second place behind personal loyalty to the Lord Jesus. All who love the Lord in spirit and in truth will respond to the sign or call to leave with immediacy. They will know that in any case, they are powerless to drag their unbelieving family members with them.

24:18 *And let him that is in the field not return back to take his cloak*- The immediacy of response is clear. Even grabbing an outer garment, equivalent of a jacket, would lead to unworthiness and destruction. The call to leave must be responded to immediately, with the faith that what clothing we have on is utterly irrelevant. This only really makes sense if the call or sign to escape is the call to judgment- and this verse connects with the words of :40 about the snatching away of the believers at the Lord's return: "Two shall be in the field, the one shall be taken, and the other left". See on :17.

24:19 *But woe to them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days!*- This may well match Paul's warning against marrying in the last days in 1 Cor.7. He understood the Olivet prophecy as having the real prophecy of fulfilment in his generation. As He hung on the cross, our Lord quoted this part of His Olivet prophecy to the women who stood by (Lk. 23:29 "blessed are [those] who never gave suck" = Mt. 24:19 "Woe to them… who give sick", s.w.), concerning the sufferings of the believers in the 'last days'. Here we see His matchless selflessness; going out of His own sufferings, to think, with anguish, how they would be experienced by His followers in the tribulation. "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves... for if they do these things (to) a green tree (the spiritually healthy Lord Jesus), what shall be done (to) the dry", the spiritually barren tree of Israel. This is a superb essay in the Lord's selflessness and minimizing of his own sufferings: he felt that what he was going through was less than what the spiritually weak would have to go through in the AD70 tribulation (and that of the last days). In the other 11 occurrences of "woe" in Matthew, the objects of the "woe" are clearly the unfaithful and the condemned; this category of those "with child" are therefore not amongst those who obediently 'flee'. Lk. 21:23 states that they would be amongst those who would suffer the "wrath upon this people". In Lk. 23:29 the Lord clearly envisaged the women of His generation, the ones who lined the road to Golgotha, as experiencing the trauma He predicted in the Olivet prophecy. And yet it is clear enough that the final fulfilment is yet to come- because His coming was rescheduled.

24:20 *And pray that your flight is not in the winter, nor on a Sabbath*- The "flight" refers to the opportunity given to the civilians of Jerusalem to flee. These opportunities were in October AD67 and in Spring AD70. "The Sabbath" refers more likely to the Sabbath Year rather than to the weekly sabbath. There would've been little food in the Sabbath year because the land was not to be planted that year. The sabbath year at the time was AD68/69 (the last Sabbath year ever observed in the land). So perhaps we can reason from these facts that the Lord's words were heeded, the faithful did pray as He recommended- and so they did not flee in Winter (but rather in Autumn 67 and Spring 70), nor in the Sabbath year.

The Lord's request for prayer indicates that the exact timing of events in the tribulation will be changeable in accordance with the fervency of our latter day prayers. Changeable time periods has been a feature of God's prophetic dealings with Israel (see the Digression 'Conditional Prophecy in Daniel'); and :22 is explicit that the [intended number of] days will be shortened. An AD70 application for this is hard to find; it may be that the exact timing of the Roman offer of amnesty was dependent on the intensity of prayer by the besieged Jerusalem ecclesia. That ecclesia, rent as they were by schism, false doctrine and materialism (if we accept the evidence that Hebrews was addressed to them) was a type of the faithful remnant of the last days. They were finally sorted out by the events of AD67 - 70, cp. the latter day tribulation.

Lk. 21:24 adds: "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled". The allusion is to Dan. 8:13: "The transgression of desolation gave both the sanctuary and the host (i.e. the people of Israel) to be *trodden underfoot"*. This part of Luke 21 is clearly alluding to Zechariah 14, a prophecy about the final desolation of Jerusalem:

	Luke 21		**Zechariah 14**
20.	Jerusalem surrounded by armies	2.	All nations against Jerusalem to battle
20.	The desolation of Jerusalem is near	2.	The city shall be taken
21.	Let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains	5.	You shall flee to the ... mountains
22.	Great distress in the land	2.	Houses ransacked, women raped.
24.	Led away captive into all nations	2.	Half the city shall go into captivity
24.	Jerusalem trodden down by the Gentiles.	12:3	LXX Jerusalem a stone trodden down by the Gentiles.

The context of Zechariah 14 is clearly concerning the last days and the literal appearance of Messiah in Israel. The way the Olivet Prophecy alludes to it, indeed is based upon it, shows that it too requires reference to the last days. Any limited

fulfillment in AD70 was only a partial foretaste of the final outworking of the prophecy. I have explained in the digression about 'Conditional Prophecy in Daniel' that Dan. 8:13 itself was a prophecy which had already had various possible fulfilments but had already had its fulfilment rescheduled a few times. It is therefore unsurprising if its intended, or possible, fulfilment in AD70 was again rescheduled.

24:21 *For then*- Mk., "in those days". Mk. 13:19 speaks of how "in those days" those in Judaea should flee to the mountains; "for *in those days* shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of creation... neither shall be (referring to Dan. 12:1 concerning our last days)... except that the Lord had shortened *those days... in those days*, after that tribulation... *then* shall they see the son of man coming". Surely "in those days" shouts for a continuous application to the same "days" - the days of the second coming, the days during which the obedient 'flee' (and I have suggested that may be in response to the Angelic invitation to go meet the returning Lord Jesus). At best, "those days" can have a primary reference to the events of AD70, but the *main* fulfilment of the whole prophecy must be in the last days. This point seems impossible to answer by those who disallow any reference to the second coming.

Shall be great tribulation- The LXX uses this same word for "tribulation" in several passages pregnant with latter day significance:
"The day of my [Jacob's] *distress*" at the hands of Esau (Gen. 35:3)
"The *anguish* of his [Joseph's] soul" at the hands of his half brethren and the Ishmaelites (Gen. 42:21)
"I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and *troubles* shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?" (Dt. 31:17)- a passage in the Song of Moses regarding Israel's latter day tribulations.
"Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of *trouble*, and of rebuke, and blasphemy" (2 Kings 19:3)"- Sennacherib's Assyrian invasion at this time was a clear prototype for the latter day invasion described in Ezekiel 38 and elsewhere.
"The time of Jacob's *trouble*" from which he will be delivered (Jer. 30:7)
The "day of trouble" in Hezekiah's time, when Jerusalem again was surrounded by armies (Is. 37:3), and saved by a visible 'coming' of the Lord against the Assyrian confederacy.

"There shall be a time of *trouble*, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book" (Dan. 12:1). This time of trouble is specifically for Israel in the last days. This verse would appear to be in the Lord's mind at this time. The same Hebrew phrase for "day of trouble" is repeatedly used about the traumas of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonian and Assyrian invaders (Is. 33:2; 37:3; 65:16; Jer. 4:31; 6:24; 14:8; 15:11; 16:19; 30:7; Obadiah 12,14; Zeph. 1:15). These historical situations were clearly intended to be understood as precursors of the final tribulation of Jerusalem, again at the hands of the neighbouring nations. The time of "trouble" [*tsarah*] in Dan. 12:1 is literally 'the time of the enemy / adversary', and the same word is used of the time (Esther 4:14) of the enemy and adversary [*tsar*] in Esther 7:4,6, when again the Jews were threatened with destruction at the hand of the Agagite / Gog of Haman.

Since the beginning of the world- Mk. 13:19 "From the beginning of creation". But the allusion is to Dan. 12:1, "Since there was a nation", and the context suggests the idea is 'Since *Israel* were ever a nation'. The "world" in view may therefore be the Jewish world, and "creation" is being used as Judaism sometimes used the term, to refer to the creation of the nation at Sinai. The use of the phrase "the beginning of creation"

rather than just "creation" would suggest that the creation of the world in view was an ongoing process, which is a beautiful insight into the nature of God's natural and spiritual work with the world of believers, with Israel, and even with the natural creation.

Until now, no, nor ever shall be- surely only applicable to the last days, the time of Jacob's trouble predicted in Jeremiah. Clearly the main fulfillment cannot be limited to AD70. The threat to "all flesh" in :22 likewise cannot be seriously applied to the situation of AD70. The language of Lk. 21:28 is also impossible to apply to AD70: "But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near". The allusion is obviously to Dan. 12:1: "A time of trouble such as never was". I have shown in the digression 'Conditional Prophecy in Daniel' that this particular prophecy had various possible fulfilments; and in harmony with that history, it could have been fulfilled in AD70, that was the intention, but the preconditions were not all fulfilled, and therefore its ultimate fulfilment was delayed until the final 'last days'. The "time of trouble" in Dan. 12:1 is after Michael 'stands up', after the visible manifestation either of the Lord Jesus personally, or the Angel Michael who represented Him in the court of Heaven. The "time of trouble" is therefore in the very last days, perhaps literally days, the "then" of this verse 21 in Matthew 24, the time when the faithful have already dropped their jackets and left their homes to go to meet the Lord. It is inappropriate, therefore, to describe our present times *before* that period as "the time of trouble such that never was". And it may be that Dan. 12:1 specifically refers to this unprecedented time of trouble as being for *Israel*- trouble such as never was since they were a nation.

24:22 *And except those days had been shortened*- The Babylonians besieged Jerusalem for a year before it fell, but the Roman siege lasted about five months- according to Josephus, from April 14 to September 8. God can shorten intended time periods at will, for time is seen by Him in a different dimension and context to our experience of it. According to 2 Sam. 24:15,16 LXX, it would seem that the three days of intended plague became one day, because of David's prayer and repentance, and God's pity; "the Lord repented Him of the evil". It seems this shortening happened- for 1 Cor. 7:29 RV says that "the time is shortened", in clear allusion to the Lord's words here. Perhaps this is why it was intended that there be 40 years from AD33 [the crucifixion] to the destruction of the temple; but this period was "shortened" by at least 3 years "for the elect's sake". And the situation in the 1st century is evidently typical of ours today in these last days. They were to pray that their flight be not on the Sabbath or in the Winter, i.e. that the abomination that made desolate would not be set up at those times. Clearly prayer affected the exact chronology of events and thereby the fulfilment of prophecy.

The Greek tense specifically means that the days had already been shortened. And yet the verse concludes with the future tense: "The days will be shortened". The Lord Jesus was confident that although the shortening was yet future, it had in essence been achieved. This may well have been by the Lord's intercession. In this case, Mk. 13:20 would be a comment inserted by the evangelist, referring to the Lord Jesus: "The Lord had shortened the days… He has shortened the days". See on *The elect* . According to the parable of Lk. 13:8, the Lord Jesus had persuaded the Father to extend an intended time period for Israel's repentance, and had gained at least another year or half year of patient waiting for spiritual fruit on Israel. It's quite possible, therefore, that the intended "days" of suffering had already been reduced by the Lord's intercession, because He foresaw the weakness of the latter day "elect"; and also, simply was heartbroken at the prospect of all the suffering He was predicting. 2 Pet. 3:12 says we

can hasten the coming of the day of the Lord- perhaps the Lord was speaking in faith that elect would indeed hasten it and thereby shorten the days. Hence He speaks in both past and future tenses concerning the shortening of the days. And yet on the other hand, it is the delay of judgment which allows opportunity for repentance and salvation (2 Pet. 3:15). Thus in the final algorithm controlling the coming of Christ, there are delay factors and hastening factors. The vision will in one sense "not delay / tarry" (Hab. 2:3 RV). And yet the same verse speaks of how it does "tarry". Perhaps in a human sense it delays, but not from God's perspective. "It hasteth toward the end" (Hab. 2:3 RV) could imply that things are speeded up in their fulfilment in the very end time; for the elects sake the days until the second coming are shortened (Mk. 13:20). And yet things are also delayed- the bridegroom tarries / delays, to the point that many realize that the Lord has delayed His coming, and begin to act inappropriately. One reconciliation of these paradoxes could be that some prophecies are speeded up in their fulfilment because of the elect would otherwise lose their faith; and yet other prophecies seem to be delayed in fulfilment because of the unspirituality of others. The possibility of changing the fulfillment of prophetic time periods is to be found in Hab. 3:2: "In the midst of the years revive..."- i.e. please, God, do it immediately rather than waiting until the end of days. The difference in tenses between "has shortened" and "will shorten" may also simply reflect how God conceives of time in a radically different way to how we do. The shortening of time in a sense hasn't take place, but in another sense it has. There can therefore be no trite explanation of how God can hasten the second coming in accordance with our prayers, and yet also have a set time to favour Zion.

With so many allusions to Daniel's prophecies, perhaps "the days" in view are those of Daniel's various prophecies. Perhaps this is the explanation of the 1260, 1290 and 1335 days in Daniel 12; and the otherwise difficult reference to 2300 days in Daniel 8. As suggested in the digression about 'Conditional Prophecy in Daniel', these time periods may have referred to potential periods which had the possibility of extension and reduction- in accordance with the strange mixture of Divine grace, the intercession of Jesus, the prayers of believers, the repentance of Israel… and perhaps other factors. In Daniel's own experience, the 70 years of exile was a period which was extended. "The days" are likened to "the days of Noah" (:37). In the days of Noah again there was the possibility that no flesh would have been saved. The 150 days of flooding is perhaps the basis of Rev. 9:10, where Israel is to have 150 days of tribulation at the hands of her Arab enemies in the last days. The connection between the passages would therefore seem to be teaching that the final 150 days tribulation will be shortened due to the repentance of the remnant.

No flesh would have been saved- "Saved" here may mean 'delivered'; it will appear that none of us will survive the tribulation, "but for the elects' sake those days shall be shortened" and we will be saved by the second coming. Thus 2 Pet. 3:12,15 reminds us that by our prayers and spiritual development, the days before the second coming will be shortened. If they were not, even the elect would lose their faith (Mt. 24:22)- showing how those of us who are alive at Christ's coming will *barely* survive the spiritual traumas of the last days. The virgins were sleeping when they should have been watching; and Peter says that the righteous in the last generation (see context) will *scarcely* be saved (1 Pet. 4:18). So it would appear that the days of the final tribulation will be shortened, although in another sense the coming of the Lord is delayed in order to allow our greater spiritual development (Mt. 25:5). This 'delay' is why the harvest will be "over-ripe" for reaping (Rev. 14:15 RV)- or is this a reference to the lack of zeal of preachers to Israel in the last days, not harvesting the ready fruit?

The Lord likens the final tribulation to the travail of a woman to bring forth her child. But we read in Is. 66:7,8 in this same context of Israel's latter day suffering: "Before she travailed, she brought forth: before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child. Who hath heard such a thing?... for as soon as Zion travailed she brought forth her children". This seems to imply that the expected period of Zion's travail will be cut short, and she will give spiritual birth far quicker than expected. Perhaps the Lord was alluding to this passage when He spoke of how "the days" [of Zion's labour?] shall be shortened.

But for the elect's sake- Both the Lord Jesus and Israel are called "the elect" (Is. 42:1; 45:4); both are fulfilments of the servant songs in Isaiah. 1 Pet. 2:4,6 call Jesus "the elect / chosen" and then the same word is used about the believers being an elect / chosen nation (1 Pet. 2:9). The days will be shortened for the elect's sake- and this may refer to either the Lord Jesus, or the believers in Him; the shortening will be for the sake of *Christ's* intercession, as well as ours. It's tempting to understand "the elect" in the Olivet prophecy as referring to the same group- of faithful believers [or perhaps specifically Jewish ones] who are alive and remain until the Lord's coming. They are the ones who resist the temptation to be deceived in the very last days (:24) and who are snatched away at the Lord's coming "from the four winds", suggesting they are located worldwide (:31). We note that Christ on the cross was called by the same word *eklektos*- "the elect / chosen of God" (Lk. 23:35). This group will indeed have identified with His crucifixion sufferings. Perhaps this is the group of believers who are also specifically called "the elect" who fight on Mount Zion alongside Jesus against the armies of Israel's enemies (Rev. 17:14). In the immediate context, the elect or chosen ones were perhaps intended by the Lord to refer to the listening disciples. Mk. 13:20 labours the point: "For the elect's sake [*eklektos*], whom He has chosen / elected [*eklegomai*]". The word is specifically used about the Lord's choosing of the twelve (Lk. 6:13; Jn. 6:70; 13:18; 15:16,19; Acts 1:2). He imagined them being scattered to "the four winds" in their obedience to the great commission, but thanks to them, the days would be shortened and they themselves would be gathered to Him at His return. That was the Lord's hope and ideal intention. It didn't happen in the first century, and thus has some element of reapplication in a different context in our last days.

Those days shall be shortened– see on Rom. 9:28,29; 2 Pet. 3:9; Rev. 9:10. This was typified in the Joseph story. "Then Joseph could not refrain himself..." (Gen. 45:1) implies he planned to drag out the process of spiritually refining his brothers, but his love for them caused him to cut it short. "For the elects sake the days shall be shortened" by Christ (Mt. 24:22).The same Hebrew word in Gen. 45:1 is used in Is. 42:14 about how God can no longer refrain Himself in the last days. The RV has: "had been shortened", suggesting that maybe the Lord had already been in dialogue with the Father and secured a decrease in the Father's original time period envisaged.

24:23 *Then if anyone shall say to you*- This again, spoken to the disciples, suggests that they were the ones who would see these things associated with the return of Christ. But they did not. And in any case, all twelve of them were being addressed, and one of them would turn away from Christ. So there was in any case a conditionality attached to the Lord's words.

Here is the Christ, or another, Here is the Christ- do not believe them!- "Lo" [AV] suggests the actual pointing out of a person. "Here… or there" [AV] is poor translation, because the same original word is behind both "here" and "there". The impression is given of people pointing out actual individuals and claiming that 'This is Christ'. The

faithful are to flee once the sign is obvious that Christ is about to be revealed, and in those days [and they may literally be days or hours] the world will know that Christ's return is imminent, and therefore all manner of charlatans will start claiming 'It's me!'. The relatively few claims to be Jesus Christ which are made today are hardly credible, no temptation at all for the faithful, and nearly always the person making the claim is mentally ill. But the Olivet prophecy suggests that these claims by false Christs will be so credible that even the faithful will be sorely tempted to believe them. The risk of deception would be so great that the Lord repeatedly warned against it. If there is some worldwide sign that Christ is about to return, perhaps literally in the sky, as "the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven", then in those days, such claimants will have far more credibility. It could be that one claimant is particularly persuasive, leading to the final show down on Mount Zion between the true Christ and the anti-Christ, the fake duplicate of Christ.

24:24 *For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, which shall show great signs and wonders*- The Lord is virtually quoting the words of Moses in Dt. 13:1: "When [Heb.; AV "if"] there arise among you a [false] prophet… and gives you a sign or wonder". Even if signs are given, they are not to be believed; apparent miracles are no proof that a man is of God. The Lord is here asserting Himself as the new Moses. The appearance of miraculous "signs" was important in Judaism in order to identify Messiah- hence they asked the Lord to produce such signs (12:38; 16:1; Jn. 2:18; 4:48; 6:30; 1 Cor. 1:22 "the Jews require a sign"). The Lord had refused to respond, even though He had done many miracles. He said that "no sign" would be given to that generation apart from that of Jonah- i.e., His resurrection. It was "a wicked and adulterous generation [that] seeks after a sign" (16:4). The disciples likewise assumed that there was to be such a "sign" predicting the Lord's coming (24:3). On one level it could be argued that the Lord's answer is actually a refusal to give them such a miraculous "sign" from Him; rather did He give them descriptions of what would happen in the world. He had said the same, in essence, to the Jews when they demanded such a miraculous "sign" of Him; He said they would be given no such sign, but rather they were to discern the "signs [s.w.] of the times" (16:3,4). And this effectively is how He answers the disciples when at the beginning of the Olivet prophecy they likewise ask for a "sign". He responds by giving them a list of "signs of the times". However, it would seem from :30 that there will in fact be the "sign" of Messiah visible in the sky- but only in the very last [few?] days before the forcible establishment of His Kingdom. This will be in opposition to the "signs' shown by the false prophets. More detail is given in Rev. 13:13,14; 16:14; 19:20 where we read of the beast system and false prophet doing signs by which they deceived the people in the earth / land. This is an expansion upon the Lord's warning against being deceived by such signs. And the same scenario is found in 2 Thess. 2:9, where we find the man of sin sitting in the latter day temple doing "signs and lying wonders" (same words as here in Mt. 24:24), to be destroyed in the final conflict with the real Christ.

There is ample evidence that in the lead up to the Babylonian invasion which typifies that of the last days, Jeremiah had to work amid considerable opposition from false prophets who mocked his prophecies of impending Arab victory and the need to repent; they will have their counterparts among the ranks of modern Judaism in the last days (Lam. 2:14; Jer. 20:6; 28:1-9; 29:24-26; Zech. 13:2-5). Perhaps it is such false prophets within Israel which our Lord spoke of in Mt. 24:24. But there's no need to speculate too much- when these things come to pass, it will be crystal clear to those aware of the prophecy that we've now reached that stage. In the A.D.70 possibility of fulfilment, these people operated under the umbrella of fundamentalist Judaism, as they

will in the last days. Their false bearing of the Lord's name (Mt. 24:5) alludes back to the pseudo-prophets of Jeremiah's time doing the same (Jer. 14:14). Zedekiah's trauma of being torn between wanting to accept the words of the false prophets whilst inwardly knowing the truth of Jeremiah's words, will perhaps be repeated in the leadership of latter-day Israel, to whom the Elijah ministry will teach the true word of God. The apparent mimicry of Jeremiah's style by the false prophets will perhaps be seen in the last days too.

So as to lead astray- if possible-even the elect- The possibility of deception may be precluded by the fact that the elect, by reason of being the elect, will not be deceived. But there may also be the suggestion that it is impossible to deceive the elect because they are preserved from such deception. The Father and Son are willing and able to "keep you from falling" by sealing or preserving the faithful from such deception. The element of God's work over and above human freewill effort is itself indicated by the very term "the elect"; those chosen, by God and not of themselves.

A major theme of the prophecy is the danger of being deceived (:4,5,11). As observed under :23 *Look, here is the Christ or here*, the need for this urgent warning requires that the claimants have far more credibility than such persons have today.

24:25 *Listen, I have told you beforehand*- The intention of prophecy is that when it is fulfilled, then all is clear to the believers and they are thereby guided and strengthened. This will be particularly true in those last few days when the sign of the Son of Man is in the sky (:30), everyone somehow knows Christ is about to come- and inevitably false claimants will arise, perhaps one particular one will claim to be Christ and will go to battle against the real Christ. Hence the repetition of the Lord's warning about not being deceived by this person or related claims.

24:26 *Therefore, if they shall say to you*- This appears to be a laboured repetition of the warning in :23- see notes there. The Lord is really underlining the possibility of deception by false claims to be Him in the very last days of the tribulation. He will not be hidden "in" anything nor anywhere- His coming will be as clear as lightning.

Look, he is in the wilderness! Do not go- These are the identical Greek words as used about how the people of Jerusalem 'went forth' into the 'desert' to see John the Baptist (11:7 "what *went you out* into the *desert* to see"; 3:1), and how the crowds went out to see the Lord Himself in the "desert place" (14:13,15). It will not be a question of going forth to see Jesus, as it had been until recently in the Lord's ministry. Now it will be too late for that- His coming will be evident to all. Yet the Lord has introduced the Olivet prophecy by saying that the house of the temple has been left unto them "desolate", the same word translated "desert" (23:38). He may be saying that any idea that He has appeared lurking around the desolated temple area will likewise be false; He will not be in any "secret chamber" of that temple. This would explain the parallel between "desert" and "secret chamber". Do not "go forth" uses the same word as the Lord goes on to use in :27- His coming will be as the lightning 'goes forth'. They will not go to Him, He will come to them. But He is talking here concerning the unbelievers. The faithful will have already 'fled', and I have suggested that their dropping all things, even their jackets, to respond to that call is nothing less than their response to the news that 'He's back'. The same word translated "go forth" is used in 25:1,6 about the need to "go forth" and meet Him, and how the unfaithful amongst the ecclesia will delay in response to that call. Again, Revelation provides more detail, using the same word to describe the latter day call to 'go forth out of' Babylon or else they will be destroyed along with her (Rev. 18:4).

Look, he is in the inner chambers! Do not believe it- Seeing they were sitting near the temple, the reference would contextually have been to the chambers of the temple; see on *In the desert*.

24:27 *For as the lightning comes from the east and is seen even to the west*- This is the "lightning" and earthquake associated with the return of Christ when His people, natural and spiritual, are at the nadir of persecution and tribulation (Rev. 4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18). Lightning doesn't do as described here. The reference is therefore to the Old Testament manifestation of lightning as part of the Cherubim, which flashed with lightning (Ez. 1:4,14). Ezekiel saw the Cherubim depart from the temple (24:1 has alluded to this already), go Eastward to the mount of Olives and then mount up to Heaven (Ez. 10 :19; 11 :22,23). This is why "the Glory", the lightning of the Cherubim chariot, was seen as returning to the Mount of Olives "by the way of the east" into the temple (Ez. 43:2-4).

The Lord had earlier used these very same words in Lk. 17:20-24: "The Kingdom of God comes not with observation [it wouldn't be as if a series of signs were fulfilled and people could see the Kingdom of God inching nearer over the decades]. Nor shall they say 'Look here!' or 'Look there!' [this is Mt. 24:23 " 'Look here!' or 'Look there!'"]. For the Kingdom of God [a title of Messiah] is amongst you... They shall say to you [in the final tribulation], 'See here' or 'See there' [this again is Mt. 24:23,26]; go not after them, nor follow them [Mt. 24:26 "Go not forth... believe it not"]. For as the lightning that lightens out of the one part of Heaven and shines unto the other part under Heaven, so shall also the Son of Man be in His day... they shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man". The connection would suggest that as the Lord stood amongst them, He was the Son of Man in His day. Those who accepted Him as Messiah were accepting His 'coming' to them. For those who did not, and who argued about whether or not He fulfilled all the prophecies they were analyzing ["with observation"], He would 'come' unmistakably, but in judgment.

So shall the coming of the Son of Man be- No more doubt can be allowed that the *parousia* is visible and not invisible. The Lord is here specifically warning against any idea that His *parousia* is somehow invisible. Jehovah's pseudo-Witnesses and preterists need to take this far more seriously. The point must be driven home that *parousia always* refers to the physical presence of a person. There is another Greek word frequently translated 'coming' which is more flexible in meaning, but *parousia* means 'a literal being alongside', and is always used in that way:-

- "As the lightning cometh out of the east... so shall also the *coming* (*parousia*) of the son of man be" (Mt. 24:27).
- "The day that Noe entered into the ark... the flood came... so shall also the coming of the son of man be" (:38,39).

24:28 *Wherever the carcase is*- This whole verse has various possible interpretations which each seem to me to have things to commend them and yet also their own problems. The key word is "For". This verse is an expansion upon the Lord's teaching that His coming will be visible, will be as the lightning of judgment upon those who have not "gone forth" to Him, and no credance should be given to any claims He has come invisibly. The Lord may be likening His coming to the coming down from the sky of eagles upon the carcase- of Israel. This could have had an AD70 fulfilment in the 'eagles' of the Roman legions, just as Yahweh's Old Testament 'comings' in judgment upon Israel were at the hands of the Babylonian and Assyrian armies. But the final coming of Divine judgment will be in the literal, personal coming of God's Son to earth in judgment. The same Greek word translated "where" is found in Mk. 13:14- the

abomination of desolation will stand "*where* it ought not". It could be that this location on the temple mount is what the Lord has in view. This is where He will come down in judgment. Upon the very location He was then standing upon with the disciples, the pride and glory of an apostate Judaism. It was already no more than a carcase in God's eyes. The temple was "where [s.w.] the Jews always resort" (Jn. 18:20). The carcase or dead body may not necessarily refer to Israel. If we take Rev. 11:8,9 as an expansion of the Olivet prophecy, we find the same Greek word used about the dead bodies of the faithful remnant who share their Lord's death in Jerusalem and lay exposed for three days- perhaps literal days. The metaphor of the eagles coming speaks of Divine judgment from Heaven, ultimately in the personal coming of Christ to earth. In this case, the eagles would come because of the dead bodies / carcase of those who had died the death of Christ in Jerusalem in the final tribulation. The Greek word for "carcase", *ptoma*, literally means 'a fallen one', and is from the verb *pipto*, to fall. And this word is used about the fall of Jerusalem- also in Revelation 11. The city "fell" (Rev. 11:13), just as Jerusalem was to "fall by the edge of the sword" (Lk. 21:24).

It's possible that the Lord intended us to understand the carcase as Jerusalem, and the vultures as the latter day invaders of Israel (Jer. 4:13). Or it has been suggested by Harry Whittaker that "If you (my disciples) show yourselves to be spiritually a carcase (as in Rev. 3:1), you will certainly find yourselves the prey of these "vultures," the false teachers". The question is similar to that in Lk. 17:37, where this is said is in answer to the question: "Where, Lord?". This may not necessarily mean '*to* where'. That the Roman invasion of AD67-70 was a detailed fulfilment of some parts of the Mosaic prophecies of curses for disobedience is well known and chronicled. Our Lord's quotation of Dt. 28:26 in here in :28 ("your carcases shall be meat unto the fowls of the air") is confirmation of this.

There will the eagles gather together- I suggested under *For where the carcase is* that this may refer to the coming of Christ down from Heaven in judgment upon either the carcase of Israel, or for the sake of the carcases of the slain believers. The Greek for "eagle", *aetos*, literally means 'one of the air [*aer*]', and *aer* is used of how the Lord Jesus will come in the "air" [*aer*] with the faithful in judgment (1 Thess. 4:17- note that this part of 1 Thessalonians is full of allusion to the Olivet prophecy). This would be the pouring out of the seventh vial into "the air" [*aer*], when finally "It is done" (Rev. 16:17).

The Lord's usage of similar language in Lk. 17:37 must, however, be given its due weight. There the Lord speaks of the gathering of the eagles in terms of explaining how His people will be gathered to Him and judgment. The same word for 'gather' is used repeatedly for the gathering of the faithful in the last days (3:12; 13:30; 25:26,32; Jn. 15:6). Most notably, we find it used in 1 Thess. 4:14, comforting the believers that God will at the last day 'gather' the dead believers at the last day (AV "will God *bring* with Him"). This will be the "gathering together unto Him" (2 Thess. 2:1 s.w.). This is all impressive evidence that the language of 'gathering' is used about the gathering of the believers to Christ at His coming, and according to 1 Thess. 4:16,17 this will involve a literal being snatched away [from persecution, according to the Olivet prophecy]. Just as the believers will be led / gathered to human judgment seats (Mk. 13:11, *ago*), gathered / lead / brought [*ago*] before human kings (Lk. 21:12), so they will be gathered to the judgment seat of Christ the King [*sun-ago*].

The Lord responds to the question about how we will get to judgment by saying that eagles fly to where the body is. It's possible to interpret eagles as Angels- e.g. Rev.

8:13 speaks of an Angel flying through the sky in the last day, crying 'woe'- the Greek *ouai* would've been understood as an imitation of the noise an eagle makes. And there are other links between Rev. 8 and Mt. 24. So perhaps the Lord's answer was that we are not to worry about getting there, as our Angels will take us to judgment. Zech. 14:5 speaks of the coming of the Lord Jesus "and all the holy ones with him". But it is applied to the believers in 1 Thess. 3:13 and to the Angels in 2 Thess. 1:7. In this sense, the believers come with their Angels to judgment; but because the process happens in a moment of time, it appears that in fact Jesus returns with the faithful. This is why elsewhere the Lord Jesus is described as returning both with Angels (Mt. 16:27; 25:31; Lk. 9:26) and with the saints (Rev. 19:14 cp. 17:14).

One of the well known shames of crucifixion was that the body was pecked by birds, even before death occurred. The idea of an uncovered body attracting birds (i.e. the believers) would have been readily understood as a crucifixion allusion. Whilst this may seem an inappropriate symbol, it wouldn't be the only time the Bible uses language which we may deem unfitting. Consider how Ps. 78:65,66 likens God to a drunk man awakening and flailing out at His enemies, striking them in the private parts. I always have to adjust my specs and read this again before I can really accept that this is what it says. So in Mt. 24:28, the Lord seems to be responding to the disciples' query about the physicalities of the future judgment by saying that in reality, His crucifixion would in essence be their judgment, and this is what they should rather concern themselves with. They would gather together unto it and through this know the verdict upon them, all quite naturally, as eagles are gathered by natural instinct to the carcass. The thief on the cross wanted the Lord to remember him for good at judgment day. Yet He replied that He could tell him today, right now, the result of the judgment- the thief would be accepted. It's as if the Lord even in that agony of mind and body… realized keenly that He, there, that fateful afternoon, was sitting in essence on the judgment throne. And for us too, the Lord on Calvary is our constant and insistent judge. It could even be that when the Lord told the Sanhedrin that they would see the son of man coming in judgment (Mk. 14:62), He was referring to the cross. For how will they exactly see Him coming in judgment at the last day?

24:29 *But immediately after the tribulation of those days*- The phrase *eutheos meta* doesn't necessarily have to mean 'and then, after that', in a chronological sense (although it can mean that). It could refer to things going on at the same time, *meta* the tribulation. The tribulation is that spoken of in :21 "Then shall be great tribulation". Verses 22-28 are therefore a parenthesis, developing the theme that false Christs shall appear, but we should not be taken in by them because the Lord's coming will be literally visible and crystal clear to all. The "tribulation" will be "immediately" followed by the Lord's return. Yet the "tribulation" of :21 was clearly initially relevant to the destruction of the temple in AD70. There was a rescheduling of the Divine program, just as has happened so often in prophetic history, not least in the promised restoration of the Kingdom not happening after the 70 years in Babylon.

"The tribulation" is explained in Luke's record as being Jerusalem being "trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Lk. 21:24). After this, in Luke's record, there are the signs in sun, moon and stars which Matthew's record also describes- as coming "immediately *meta* the tribulation". The "times of the Gentiles" (Lk. 21:24) appear to refer to the time of Gentile domination of Jerusalem, and yet it is reapplied to refer to the time of Gentile opportunity to learn the Gospel, according to how Paul alludes to it in Rom. 11:25. And yet the application to Jerusalem's tribulation may remain true ultimately, in the very last days. For the allusion is to Zech. 12:3:"In that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all

people (i.e. all around Israel, as this often means): all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it". The Septuagint renders the first phrase as "a stone trodden down by the Gentiles", clearly alluded to by Jesus in His description of Jerusalem being captured by the Gentiles (Lk. 21:24). Those who are 'gathered together' against Jerusalem must be the Arabs, according to the Zechariah context. The rejected likewise will be burdened with a heavy stone (Mt. 18:6), showing that they will share the judgments of Israel's enemies. It may well be that the "all" which will be fulfilled in Lk. 21:32 is to be equated with "the times of the Gentiles" being fulfilled (Lk. 21:24). "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles" for three and a half years, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. 'Jebus', the old name for Jerusalem, means 'downtrodden'. This hints that the liberation of Jebus at the beginning of David's reign was seen by Christ as typical of the time when He would liberate Jerusalem from downtreading, at his return. This suggests that the times of Gentile domination of Jerusalem are to be ended by the establishment of the Kingdom at Christ's second coming; we are yet to see, therefore, a Gentile domination of Jerusalem before Christ's coming.

The Lord predicted that the final tribulation- which He says is that prophesied in Daniel- would be followed "immediately" by His return. The evil man who places the desolating abomination meets his end in war (Dan. 11:45)- just as the same individual does in Daniel 8:23. And this leads in to the resurrection and judgment at the Lord's return (Dan. 12:1,2). So the Lord's own interpretation of Daniel 11 leaves us with no doubt that the whole section about the abomination and the individual responsible for it applies to our last days. Any partial fulfilment it may have had in Antiochus Epiphanes, Nero or Titus only makes those men prototypes of the final abuser yet to come.

It is at this time, *after* the fall of Jerusalem, that we read of "the sea and the waves roaring" (Lk. 21:25). There are many prophecies in Jeremiah and Ezekiel of Babylon being at war with the Arab nations who supported her in the attack on Jerusalem, e.g. concerning Ammon (Ez. 21:20) and Tyre (Ez. 26:7). Ammon is mentioned as *escaping* out of the hand of the king of the North during his invasion of Israel and Jerusalem (Dan. 11:41). This shows that there will be much inter-semitic conflict both before and during Israel's prolonged desolation period. "The sea and the waves roaring" at the time of Israel's final suffering (Lk. 21:25) is a figure taken from Jer. 49:23 concerning the nations around Israel being like the troubled sea in their fighting with each other. However, the outstanding conflicts will be temporarily forgotten in the last days to concentrate on a combined push against Jerusalem. But once this is captured, the old rivalries will suddenly violently surface, which is how God will destroy the invaders and save the righteous remnant who are still barely alive in the sewers and basements of Jerusalem. It seems that the beasts of Dan. 7 are only different aspects of the one great beast which finally emerges. Daniel sees them all come up together after the waves of the sea are troubled (Dan. 7:3), connecting with the Lord's description of the last day powers around Israel in the same way (Lk. 21:25).

The sun shall be darkened- After the tribulation, as it was when Jesus died (Lk. 23:45 s.w.). Israel's tribulation will make them understand what He went through. The context has been the Lord's insistence that His coming will be obviously visible, like lightening in the sky, and the reference to "the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven" / the sky (:30) would suggest that a literal sign in the sky is what the Lord has in mind. The allusion to the crucifixion would also require a literal element of fulfilment. The additional

information given in Rev. 8:12; 9:2 suggests that this darkening of sun and stars happens progressively, although that may be over a period of only a few literal days. There are reports of such signs being seen over Jerusalem in the lead up to AD70, the appearance of comets etc. However it seems to me that Josephus had access to the Olivet prophecy and some of the wording of his historical claims is so similar to the Lord's words that I personally doubt the degree of real fulfilment that was going on; rather do I suspect he was consciously alluding to the Lord's words and wishing to see them fulfilled in the history he was recording. That is not the same thing as AD70 actually fulfilling in detail the Olivet prophecy.

The sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light- Joseph's dream clearly identifies these symbols as representing Israel. The passages which make this same identification are many: Gen. 37:9,10; 15:5; 22:17; Amos 8:8-10; Micah 3:6; Song of Solomon 6:10; Is. 24:23; Jer. 33:20-26; JoeI 2:10,30-32; 3:15; Acts 2:20; Rev. 6:12; 8:12; 12:1. Jer. 31:35,36 is likely the Old Testament passage the Lord specifically had in mind: "Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divides the sea when the waves thereof roar; the Lord of hosts is his name. If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever". Only here do we find "sun, moon, and stars" combined with "sea and waves roaring" as in the Olivet prophecy in Luke 21. In Luke He spoke of "On the earth distress of *nations* (Gentile nations causing distress in the earth / land of Israel) with perplexity… men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth (or land, of Israel)". The Greek word translated "perplexity" is used in the LXX concerning the final tribulation of Israel (Lev. 26:16; Dt. 28:22; Is. 5:30; 8:20 LXX).

"Immediately after the tribulation... shall all the tribes of the earth (land- of Israel) mourn, and then shall they see the Son of Man coming" (:29,30) is followed immediately by the fig tree parable. The chronology seems clear- a tribulation, repentance of Israel (note the allusions to the mourning of Zech.12 and 13), and then the second coming, with the fig tree parable about the repentance of Israel added as a footnote to this part of the prophecy.

And the stars shall fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken- The Greek phrase is used only elsewhere in Rev. 6:13. This vision is clearly an expansion upon the Olivet prophecy. There, the stars fall "as a fig tree casts her unripe figs". This too is the language of the Olivet prophecy (24:32). The lack of spiritual maturity in Israel is related to the stars [of Israel- see on *Sun... moon... stars*] falling. The appearance of comets would certainly give the impression of falling stars, and I suggest that the main fulfilment will be in terms of things visibly seen in the sky, as hard proof to all the world that the Lord Jesus is returning.

The events of judgment day will be a 'shaking' of the world, including the faithful (Lk. 6:48 the house built on the rock could not be "shaken", s.w.). Heb. 12:26,27 surely allude here, saying that just as the earth shook when the old covenant was instituted, so the "heavens" would also be shaken. The suggestion of the context is that this day of shaking both heaven and earth was almost upon the readership- who were Hebrews, Jewish Christians.

24:30 *And then the sign of the Son of Man shall appear in heaven*- Matthew began his Gospel with the same word and idea, speaking of the 'appearance' of the star which heralded the coming of the Son of Man (2:7). The Lord has just used the same word in speaking of how His coming would be as the lightning shines or appears in the sky

(:27). This, along with the allusion to the star seen by the wise men, encourage us to think of this final "sign of the Son of Man" as a literal appearance in the sky, strengthening our suggestion that the signs in the sun, moon and stars in :29 are likewise to be interpreted literally. Jn. 1:5 perhaps puts all this in more spiritual terms by likening the Lord to a light shining [s.w. "appear"] in Jewish darkness, unperceived. Now is the day to perceive Him as He is, rather than too late at His return. These signs of the Lord's return will be in the sky for the world; the faithful will have already dropped all and fled, to Him, knowing He has come. How they will be called to go forth to meet Him isn't altogether clear, although 2 Pet. 1:19 uses the same word translated "appear" in speaking of how when the day of His coming dawns, i.e. begins, the day star will arise shining brightly in our hearts.

As noted earlier, it was exactly such a visible sign that the disciples and the Jews wanted in order to know Jesus was Messiah and that He had returned (see on :23). The Lord had explained at least twice that no such sign would be given. But now He is saying that all too late, such a sign would be given. For now, we are to believe without such signs written up in the sky. If "the sign of the son of man" which appears over Israel and leads the tribes of Israel to mourn in repentance is a literal vision of the Angel-cherubim, then this has a basis in Jacob seeing the Angelic vision in the time of his distress.

Then all the tribes of the earth- "Tribes", *phule*, is used exclusively of the tribes of Israel, until the references in Revelation to people of all nations, tribes and languages having representatives who were redeemed, being under the power of the beast etc. Even those references could be understood as referring to the tribes of Israel, along with the nations of the Gentile world. But "the earth" often refers to the land, of Israel. And the idea of tribes mourning is clearly referring to the prophecy of Zech. 12:10-14 that the tribes of Israel will mourn when they see the once crucified Christ, still with the marks in His body testifying to His crucifixion. Rev. 1:7 uses the same language. Israel will finally all repent when they see the sign of the Son of Man- and then, He will return literally and visibly in the clouds. The call of John the Baptist and the Lord's own preachers had been for Israel to "mourn" in repentance (11:17). This they had not done as intended, but they shall do so at His actual return. They who had laughed in this life will mourn then in rejection (Lk. 6:25; James 4:9); their repentance will be too late. Another possibility is that the impenitent amongst Israel will die in the final tribulation as outlined in Zech. 14, and these who mourn are those who repent and are accepted; for Zech. 12:14 adds the detail that the tribes who mourn will be those "that remain", who are [so the Hebrew means] 'the remnant'. But see below on *They shall see.*

Shall mourn, and they shall see- A play on words in the Greek: *kopsontai... opsontai* . The intention of this paronomasia is that Israel's repentant mourning is directly related to their seeing Him in the sense that His visible return only happens once they repent. When "all the tribes of the earth / land mourn [in repentance]… then shall they see the Son of man coming". Some in Israel must repent before Christ returns. The Lord refers to this in speaking to the Jews who crucified Him: "You shall see [s.w.] the Son of Man... coming in the clouds of Heaven" (26:64). They would see that all too late, as part of the process of their condemnation- to realize it was all true, and it is too late to do anything about it. This is why the pronouns change from "they" here to "you" when talking again to the faithful disciples in :33. The Lord had earlier used the same idea, in saying that that group would only "see" Him again when they said "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord" (Lk. 13:35). They would see that and say that

all too late. The Lord's words clearly suggest they of that generation would see His return in glory. But His coming was delayed, and they did not. But they will at the last day, for they will be resurrected to face judgment and condemnation. The chronological issues need not worry us too much- i.e. when will they be resurrected, at precisely what point on the timeline of these events. The meaning of time will surely be collapsed around the Lord's return. This will be the final fulfilment of the prophecy that they shall look upon Him whom they pierced and mourn (Rev. 1:7; Jn. 19:37; "look" is s.w. "see" here in Mt. 24:30). The invitation of course is to look upon the crucified Christ now and mourn in repentance; for we shall have to do this one way or the other, either now in repentance, or too late in condemnation.

The foolish virgins want to go to buy oil; they make a foolish excuse, seeing the shops were evidently shut. These are those who mourn and wail when they see the sign of the Son of Man (Mt. 24:30,31 cp. Rev. 1:7). They want to hide from Him, as Adam and the rejected of Rev. 6:16. Then they compose themselves and go to meet Him, persuading themselves that they will be accepted by Him (because later they are surprised).

The Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven - Dan. 7:14. The language of clouds and then Angels (:31) is reminiscent of the Lord's ascension, at which the Angels promised His return "in like manner"; and the same language is used of His return in Acts 1:7. This precludes any invisible 'coming' in AD70. Rather than thinking that the Lord somehow 'came' in AD70 in some metaphorical manner, I would suggest that the literal language is such that we can only conclude that His literal return has been delayed. Otherwise we end up forcing the obviously literal into the metaphorical.

The moment of the second coming (:27 *parousia*) is likened to a flash of lightning and the beginning of rain at the time of Noah's flood. This makes any application of *parousia* to the prolonged series of events in A.D. 69/70 at least tenuous when compared to the obvious application to the moment of the second coming. There are many links between Mt. 24,25 and 1 Thess. 4,5 which have been tabulated by several expositors. According to these connections, the Lord's 'parousia' mentioned in Mt. 24 is interpreted by Paul as referring to the literal second coming (Mt. 24:30,31 = 1 Thess. 4:15,16). In view of all this, it is desirable to interpret the 'coming' of the Lord in Mt. 24 as referring to the literal presence of Christ at His return, although this is not to rule out any primary reference to the events of A.D. 70. Indeed I would argue that since *parousia* means a literal presence, it's not the case that the prophecy received a primary fulfilment in AD70; rather is it that the literal return of Christ was intended then, but was rescheduled. At best, the *parousia* element of the predictions had no partial fulfilment in AD70. The flow of the prophecy is indicated by the repetition of words like "then" : "*Then* shall they deliver you up... *then* shall many be offended... *then* shall the end come... *then* let them which be in Judea... *then* shall be great tribulation... *then* if any man shall say unto you, Here is Christ... *immediately after the tribulation of those days* ("in*those days*, after that tribulation", Mk. 13:24)... *then* shall appear the sign of the Son of man... *then* shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the son of man coming" (Mt. 24). There is no suggestion here of any break in application, from AD70 to the last days. If the reference to Christ coming in glory with the Angels is accepted as referring to the last days, but the earlier verses of the prophecy to AD70 alone, we have to find the point where Christ breaks from AD70 to the last days. And I would suggest such a point cannot be found.

"In the clouds" clearly alludes to His ascension in clouds, and the promise that He would return "in like manner" (Acts 1:11), presumably meaning in clouds to the same Mount of Olives. Again we are invited to understand these as literal clouds, just as the

signs in the heavenly bodies of :29 are likewise to be understood. At His coming, the figurative will pass away and planet earth and those who dwell upon it will be faced with the ultimate reality- the personal, literal coming of God's Son to earth.

With power and great glory- The very words used by the Lord in the model prayer of 6:13 concerning the power and glory of the Kingdom of God. The coming of the Lord to establish the Kingdom is clearly yet future and did not occur in AD70. This is the time when "the Son of Man shall come in the glory [s.w.] of His Father with His angels, and then shall He repay every man according to his deeds" (16:27; 25:31). Likewise, this is "the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory [s.w.], [and] you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (19:28). Such a judgment and coming with Angels never occurred in AD70. John's equivalent of this is to emphasize that in essence, the believers behold Christ's glory now, insofar as they perceive the wonder and moral pinnacle of His achievement for us on the cross (Jn. 17:24). Col. 3:4 teaches that "When Christ who is our life [i.e. our basis of resurrection] shall appear, then shall [we] also appear with Him in glory". His coming in glory will be ours, in that we will have been snatched away to meet with Him and will come with Him to Zion. And yet the next verse speaks as if now, at this point, the Angels are sent to gather the elect. But these chronological discrepancies are no real issue for the believer if we accept that the meaning of time must be changed around the time of Christ's coming, as must the meaning of space [if Einstein's theory of relativity is correct]. This would explain all practical concerns about space and time issues relating to the day of judgment. Another window on the apparent chronological discrepancies is the consideration that there are various possible potential scenarios, which will work out according to the speed and nature of the spiritual response of both natural and spiritual Israel.

24:31 *And he shall send forth his angels*- The preachers of His Gospel are His messengers / 'angels' reaping in the harvest and proclaiming God's victory. And yet these are the very things which the Angels are described as doing in the last day (Mk. 13:27; Rev. 14:6-14). Yet we are doing it right now. In the preaching of the Gospel, we are sharing with the Angels in their work. We're in tandem with them. The nature of our response to the Gospel when we hear it in this life is essentially our response to the call to judgment at the last day. The very same Greek words translated "Send… Angels" are to be found in the description of John the Baptist being sent to gather men to the Lord Jesus: "I send My messenger before Your face" (Mt. 11:10). The idea is clearly that those who had responded to John's message of repentance and faith in Christ's forgiveness have in essence already been gathered for the Kingdom. And yet Israel generally had stoned those sent [s.w.] unto them (23:37- the Lord said this introducing the Olivet prophecy).

With a great sound of a trumpet- The trumpet associated with the Lord's second coming in Rev. 11:15? The trumpet associated with our change to immortality in 1 Cor. 15:52, "the trump of God" associated with the resurrection and gathering in 1 Thess. 4:16.

And they shall gather together his elect- Alluded to in 2 Thess. 2:1 "our gathering together unto Him". However, a case can be made that the believers are already with Christ when He comes in the clouds. Therefore the "elect" could possibly refer specifically to natural Israel rather than the believers. If the reference is to the believers, this creates a chronological issue- although see on Mt. 24:30 *Power and great glory*. The Angels will be sent out to gather together the elect, but Angels will also be 'sent forth' to "gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity" (Mt. 13:41). It seems that this 'gathering out' will be achieved by the more positive

'gathering together' of the faithful. The point of gathering is the point of division between good and bad; our response to the certain news that 'He's back' will decide the outcome of our judgment. Those wise virgins who go forth to meet Christ immediately are therefore those who will be "caught up together" with the faithful believers who will have been resurrected. Just as eagles mount up into the air and come down where the carcass is, so we will come to judgment. This will be when the Angels "gather together *his elect*" (Mt. 24:31). They then "meet the Lord in the air" literally, perhaps connecting with Rev. 11:12: "They (the faithful, persecuted saints of the last days) heard a great voice from heaven (cp. "the voice" of 1 Thess. 4:16) saying unto them, Come up (cp. "caught up...") hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud (cp. "caught up... in clouds"); and their enemies beheld them". It may well be that Rev. 11:12 is speaking of the faithful Jewish remnant of the last days, who will be snatched away along with us.

From the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other- "To the uttermost part of heaven" (Mk. 13:27). Is this a reference to the believers being "caught away in clouds, into the air, for the purpose of meeting the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17)? It seems also an allusion to the lightning of :27. The Lord's coming and His gathering of the elect is all in the same moment; and yet there are apparently various things which must occur all at the same time. The apparent contradictions in chronology need not worry us- see on :31 *Power and great glory*.

24:32 *Now from the fig tree learn her parable*- Lk. 13:6-9 records another parable of the fig tree, upon which that in the Olivet prophecy is based. Jesus, the dresser of God's vineyard of Israel, came seeking spiritual fruit on the fig tree, for the three years of his ministry. Because of the lack of it, the tree was cut down. Christ said "Now (i.e. towards the end of the tribulation period?) learn a parable of the fig tree" (Mt. 24:32). It is tempting to read this as effectively meaning 'Now learn *the* parable of the fig tree', seeing that the parable of the Olivet prophecy is so similar to the previous fig tree parable.

When her branch has become tender- The obvious connection in Jewish minds would be with Messiah as the pre-eminent branch of Israel (Is. 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Ez. 17:22; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). Lk. 21 adds the detail that we are to look also at "all the trees". A tender branch, all the trees, the Kingdom of God- these are all themes to be found in Ez. 17:22-24: "Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will also take of the lofty top of the cedar [the dynasty of the house of David], and will set it. I will crop off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it [the return of Christ to Mount Zion?]; and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar. Under it shall dwell all birds of every wing; in the shade of its branches shall they dwell [this is the picture of Christ's Kingdom- Mk. 4:32]. All the trees [cp. "the fig tree and all the trees"] of the field shall know that I, Yahweh, have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish. I, Yahweh, have spoken and have done it". This last verse was clearly in the Lord's mind as He was led out to Golgotha (Lk. 23:31). This clearly Messianic language is associated by the Lord with the beginnings of spiritual fruit on the fig tree of Israel. The fig tree has to identify with Him as Messiah, become itself the tender branch, before fruit can be seen upon it.

I mentioned earlier in this exposition the strong parallels between the Olivet prophecy and the upper room discourse. The equivalent of the fig tree parable is in Jn. 15:1-6 :"I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that carries no fruit, he prunes away; and every branch that carries fruit, he cleanses it, that

it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, so neither can you, except you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He that abides in me and I in him, the same carries much fruit. For severed from me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is thrown out as a branch and withers, and these are gathered and thrown into the fire, and they are burned". Rom. 11:19 in turn alludes here by associating the cut off, rejected branches with natural Israel. The branches are the tree, which is Christ. That same identification of the branch and Christ is made here in Mt. 24:32. Putting together these teachings, the implication would be that for the branches of Israel to again be fruitful, they must be grafted back in, seeing they have been cut off. And that is the very teaching of Romans 11. "When his branch is yet…" is an attempt to translate a difficult original text. The idea may be 'If, so long as… the branch is tender, it can yield fruit'. The broken off branches must be grafted back in and only 'so long as' that is the case, they can bear fruit. In the first century context, the Lord may be urging Israel to bring forth spiritual fruit- whilst the branch is still tender, whilst it was still connected to the tree, and had not been broken off and burnt as Romans 11 envisaged happening. And yet Israel would not. Hence the Lord's appeal to His listeners to *learn* this parable. And hence the manner in which He placed this teaching as the conclusion to the Olivet prophecy, because Israel's repentance is the key precondition in His return. Jn. 15 is saying the same thing by warning that once severed from Christ, then there would be no chance of bearing fruit.

And puts forth its leaves- The fig tree was to "shoot forth" (Lk. 21:30) or 'germinate' (Young), witnessed by its putting forth of leaves (Mk. 13:28) and tender branches (Mt. 24:32). When the fig tree puts forth leaves there are often immature, unripe figs amongst them. Thus Jesus inspected the fig tree outside Jerusalem to see if it had any fruit, and cursed it because it did not. It had "leaves only" (Mt. 21:19), but now the Lord seems to be saying that the presence of leaves will be a sign of His return. The obvious point of connection with 21:19 would suggest that He becomes more and more acceptant of *any* sign of spirituality and response in Israel; rather like the parable of the great supper features an increasing desperation on the part of the King to accept anyone who is willing to say "yes" to the invitation. "The time of *figs* was not yet", i.e. it was not reasonable to find fully developed fruit on it. The fig tree referred to the nation of Israel; Jesus expected to find at least the beginnings of some spiritual fruit, but due to the chronic dearth of response to his message, Jesus cursed the nation and dried it up (Mk. 11:13,14,20). This would lead us to interpret the putting forth of leaves on the fig tree as the signs of an initial repentance and indication that real spiritual fruit is developing. It may well be that the whole of the Olivet prophecy has reference to a final three and a half year tribulation of the believers just prior to the second coming, and that during this time there will be a period of zealous witnessing to both Jews and Gentiles. This fits into place with the fig tree parable; this preaching starts to produce some degree of response from Israel, and then "all (is) fulfilled" in the full manifestation of Christ's Kingdom. The parable says that as surely as Summer follows Spring, so those who see the blossoming of the fig tree in the parable, will see the Kingdom. Maybe this is to be taken literally; there may be a literal gap of a few weeks/months (as between Spring and Summer) between the first signs of Jewish repentance, and all being fulfilled. It may well be that the "all" which will be fulfilled in Lk. 21:32 is to be equated with "the times of the Gentiles" being fulfilled (Lk. 21:24). The Greek *kairos* translated "times" is also translated "opportunity"; the Gentiles' opportunity to hear the Gospel is fast running out. There will be a call to Israel to repent in the last days, and a remnant will respond. This Elijah ministry [and maybe our present

witness to Jewry prepares the way for this?] must occur "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord". We could interpret the putting forth of leaves on the fig tree as the signs of an initial repentance and indication that real spiritual fruit is developing.

You know- Lk. 21 "you know in your own selves". Seeing the repentance of Israel will lead to the faithful perceiving that the end is near. This perhaps alludes to the same idea as in 2 Pet. 1:19, that the day star shall arise in the hearts of the believers just before the Lord comes.

That the summer is near- One way to look at this is that summer stood for harvest, obviously so in this context of fruit on a fig tree. But harvest was clearly a metaphor for judgment upon Israel, which is the context and burden of the Olivet prophecy. The Lord has lamented that the fig tree of Israel has nothing but leaves- and because of that, He had uttered judgment upon her (21:19,20). So the Lord could be simply repeating this is parabolic terms. The judgment / harvest / Summer was to come upon the fig tree whilst she had only leaves [and not fruit] on her tender branch. And yet the language of 'shooting forth' [Gk. germinating] in Lk. 21:30 suggests that more than mere leaves are in view. Summer will only come once there is fruit to harvest. That seems the point.

The shooting forth of the fig tree is given as the special sign that the Lord will return (Lk. 21:30). This must be understood in the context of the Lord coming to the fig tree in Mk. 11; He sought for at least the beginnings of fruit shooting forth, but found only leaves. And therefore He cursed the fig tree. He evidently saw the shooting forth of the fig tree as a figure of Israel's acceptance of Him, however immaturely. Likewise the parable of Lk. 13:6-9 makes the same connection between fruit on the fig tree and repentance within Israel. "Learn a (the) parable of the fig tree" (Mt. 24:32) may suggest that we are to understand the fig tree parable in the light of these other fig tree parables. And there are several OT links between fruit on the fig and spiritual fruit in Israel (Mic. 7:1 cp. Mt. 7:15,16; Hos. 9:10; Hab. 3:17,18). When the branch of Israel "is now become tender", i.e. immediately this happens, we are to know that the eternal Summer of God's Kingdom is nigh (Mt. 24:32 RV). The tenderness of the branch is surely to be connected with the hard heart of Israel becoming tender through their acceptance of Jesus and the new covenant. When we see just the beginnings of Israel's repentance, through a remnant responding, we are to know that "He is near, even at the doors" (Mt. 24:33 RV). All this evidence steers us away from the idea that the fig tree became tender through the re-establishment of the nation of Israel- and towards an understanding that this is all about Israel's repentance.

24:33 *Even so you also, when you see all these things*- The structure of the argument suggests that "these things" specifically refers to the shooting forth of the fig tree:

Mt. 24:32	Mt. 24:33
When [Gk. *hotan*]	When [Gk. *hotan*]
His branch is yet tender and puts forth leaves	You see all these things
You know [Gk. *ginosko*]	You know [Gk. *ginosko*]
That summer is near [Gk. *eggus*]	That it is near [Gk. *eggus*]; Lk. 21:32 "That the Kingdom of God is near [Gk. *eggus*]".

The "Summer" meant 'harvest', and that was a metaphor for judgment. Verse 33 parallels this by saying that "it" is near. The "it" may well refer to the destruction of the

temple, which is the context of the whole discussion; although Lk. 21:32 supplies "the Kingdom of God". The Lord is bringing the discourse to a close by returning to the question which provoked it: ""When shall these things be?". And He appears to be saying in the first century context that so long as only leaves remained on the fig tree of Israel, then the Summer of harvest judgment upon her was going to come. And yet the Lord here is using language with two or more meanings, as Scripture often does. In the latter day context, He seems to be saying that once spiritual fruit is beginning on the Israel fig tree, then this is the ultimate sign that the ultimate end is near.

Know that he is near- at the doors- The idea of Christ at the door is repeated by the Lord Himself in Rev. 3:19,20- where it means that Jesus is asking others to repent and turn to Him. Opening the door means the Lord has granted forgiveness- His being at the door implies surely that He is asking for repentance. *Epi* the doors can carry the sense of 'about' or 'upon', perhaps an allusion to the Angels of Passover night, which is such a strong type of the second coming. That would explain the plural "doors". I suggested that Summer / harvest may refer to judgment; being 'upon the doors' may likewise suggest the Angel of Death in judgment. This would certainly fit the first century interpretation offered above- that while only leaves are on the fig tree branch, whilst it is still 'tender' and attached to the tree before it has been broken off in judgment, then Summer / harvest / judgment is coming for sure, in that very generation. But words have multiple meanings, and this fact is not ignored by God in the way the Bible is written, nor by His Son in the way He spoke. The allusion can equally be to the Passover Angel who as it were restrained the Angel of Death by hovering over the blood-sprinkled doors of the faithful. This would continue the 'other' usage of language by the Lord in the fig tree parable, which means that once there is some beginnings of spiritual fruit on the fig tree of Israel, then the repentance of that remnant will mean that the coming of the Lord is literally imminent and He stands *epi* the doors as the fulfilment of the Passover Angel.

24:34 *Truly I say to you, This generation shall not pass away*- This is similar to the Lord's teaching that some of His generation would not die until they had seen the coming of the Kingdom (Mk. 9:1; Lk. 9:27). His saying may not be linked directly to the fig tree parable, as if to say 'The generation that sees the fig tree fruit will not pass away until…'. Rather He may be concluding His message by again making clear that the entire prophecy was going to come true in that generation. Seeing that lifespans were not much over 40 years at that time, even AD70 would not have seen many of that generation alive. He says elsewhere that the actual people He was speaking with would see these things come true and see Him coming in glory. But this potential possibility was disallowed from happening in that generation by the refusal of Israel to repent and the weakness of spirituality and effort to spread the Gospel in those who did apparently believe into Christ. The transfiguration was hardly the main fulfilment of the Lord's words, even though the record of it directly follow the Lord's predictions. Like the events of AD70, it was at best a shadow fulfilment of the final coming of the Kingdom in visible power and glory. The use of "*this* generation" rather than "*that* generation" surely suggests the Lord hoped for and indeed intended a fulfilment of His words literally in that very generation. But that generation passed- because fruit on the fig tree was not found. Israel did not repent, and there was little spiritual fruit on those Jews who did accept Christ. All 38 NT occurrences of *genea*, "generation", clearly refer to the contemporary generation or group of listeners. Any attempt to interpret *genea* as referring to the race or nation of Israel becomes impossible because the text would require that the race or nation of Israel pass away at the Lord's second coming, but Israel are clearly envisaged as existing as a separate entity in the Millennial Kingdom.

Until- If the Lord had meant simply 'until' we would read simply *heos*. But here we have two Greek words- *heos an*, which together denote a sense of conditionality and uncertainty. This is understandable if we understand that the Lord is talking of how His coming *could be* in that generation- but that depended upon some conditions which were beyond Him to fulfil and which depended upon men.

All these things are accomplished- AV "Be fulfilled". There is surely a word play between *ginomai* ["fulfilled"] and *genea* ["generation"]. That generation would not pass until all has 'become'. This is not the usual word used for the fulfilment of prophecies. When Matthew writes of the fulfilment of prophecies (and he does this often), the word *pleroo* is used. But here a much vaguer and more general word is used. Mark's record brings this out- the disciples ask when "all these things" would be "fulfilled" (*sunteleo*), and the Lord concludes the fig tree parable by saying "all these things" would be *ginomai* (Mk. 13:4,30). That would appear purposeful; the Lord held out the definite possibility for His return in the first century and the fulfilment of all things He had spoken of. But He was surely aware that this could be rescheduled, and so He used a word pregnant with the possibility that "that generation" would see the 'coming into being' of the scenario He was presenting. That generation [*ginomai*] could have been the fulfilment [*genea*] of all things, or they could have been at least the coming into being of that fulfilment; even if they failed to respond, they would not be without significance in bringing into being the ultimate fulfilment.

24:35 *Heaven and earth may pass away*- This could simply be saying to the effect 'Even if heaven and earth could pass, which they cannot, there is even less possibility that My words shall not be fulfilled'. Mt. 5:18 seems to use the term in that sense- "Even until [*heos*, i.e. 'even if'] heaven and earth pass...". In this case, we are not to even bother trying to understand 'heaven and earth' as 'a system of things', although this is certainly how the term is used, especially in the context of the Jewish system. And yet later New Testament allusion to this passage seems to suggest we are justified in seeing some reference to the Jewish, Mosaic system of the first century. Heb. 12:26 speaks as if heaven and earth are to be so shaken by the blood of Christ and the new covenant that they will pass away just as Sinai shook at the inauguration of the old covenant. 2 Pet. 3:7-13 is perhaps the clearest statement- the 'heaven and earth' which "are now" in the first century were to pass away and be replaced by a new heaven and earth in which righteousness dwells. Clearly 'heaven and earth' are not literal, because righteousness already dwells in literal Heaven, and the earth shall not be literally destroyed; this passing of 'heaven and earth' is patterned after the destruction of sinful *society* in Noah's time (2 Pet. 3:5). We note that the Olivet prophecy concludes with a warning that society would become like it was in the days of Noah. Clearly this major changeover did happen in the first century in that the Jewish and Mosaic system did finally pass away in AD70 with the destruction of the temple. And yet Peter's words also seem to demand application to the second coming of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. Clearly the heaven and earth of the Kingdom could have come in the first century, but 'all' that happened was that the Jewish and Mosaic systems were ended; this was in itself created a requirement for a *new* 'heaven and earth' in which dwells righteousness, but that system has evidently not yet physically come on earth. In this sense, what happened in AD70 was a guarantee and a creation of the requirement for the new Kingdom to come- see on :34 *Be fulfilled*.

The Greek word *Ge* ["earth"] is used often for the ‘land’ of Israel in the NT. We must remember that although the NT is written in Greek, it strongly reflects Hebrew usage of words. Again, the word commonly refers to the land of Israel. Consider some

examples:
- “But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King” (Mt. 5:34,35). This is alluding to the Jewish habit of swearing by their own land.
- “What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers?” (Mt. 17:25). The rulers of the earth were those ruling over Israel.
- “That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation” (Mt. 23:35). The blood shed on the earth means that which was shed in the land.
- Heaven and earth passing away (Mt. 24:35) follows on the Lord speaking of how all tribes of the earth / land would mourn in repentance (:30). He was speaking in the common OT idiom that used ‘heaven and earth’ for Israel. The nation would pass away in AD70, but His words would not.

But my words shall not pass away- The Lord uses *logos* here rather than any other term for ‘words’, perhaps because He perceived that it was the essence of what He was saying that would be fulfilled, rather than necessarily the very letter.

There seems a parallel with :34. "My words shall not pass away" is parallel with "This generation shall not pass away"; "Heaven and earth shall pass away" is parallel with "All these things [being] fulfilled". 'Heaven and earth' passing is therefore in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth in fulfilment of all that was prophesied by the Lord. But there is then a parallel between "My words" and "this generation". The intention may be to show that that generation were to be identified with the Lord's words, and thereby with Himself. For whenever He elsewhere uses the term "My words", it is always in parallel to 'I Myself' (Mk. 8:38; Jn. 12:48; 14:23; 15:27). He was His words; He was the quintessential logos. And that generation were to be identified with them. If they did so, if the tender branch of the fig tree became one with the Messianic branch of the Old Testament prophecies, then all would be fulfilled in that generation (see on :32).

24:36 *But of that day and hour- Hemera* can refer to a period rather than a specific calendar day; it occurs often in the prophecy: “Those days” (:19), “those days should be shortened” (:22), “the tribulation of those days” (:29), “the days of Noah” (:37), “the days that were before the flood” (:38). So the Lord isn’t necessarily saying that there is a calendar day and hour within that day when He will return. He may even be implying that God has given us conditions to fulfil, and not a calendar date. There is no calendar date discernible from our side, because it is conditional. The Lord repeats this teaching in 25:13 when He says that we must watch exactly because “you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man comes”. When the disciples later asked to know this date, the Lord replied that “the times or seasons” have been “set within [the Father’s] own authority” (Acts 1:7 RV). This sounds like God has set up required preconditions, and the actual moment of the Lord’s return is somehow within frames of reference which His own authority alone has determined. But the Lord goes straight on to remind them of their calling to take the Gospel worldwide (Acts 1:8); for that was one of the major preconditions. Instead of trying to discern a specific date ahead of time, they were instead to refocus upon the spreading of the Gospel. If all the mental effort put into trying to discern the calendar date had been put into simply spreading the Gospel, then perhaps the Lord would be here by now. However, there is also the

possibility that in the very last days, the last generation *will* in fact know the day and hour- see below on *Knows no man*.

No one knows- There's a major theme of knowing / seeing / perceiving in the Olivet prophecy. *Eido*, translated "knows", carries the essential idea of 'seeing' or perceiving. We are to "see" / know / perceive the abomination of desolation (:15), and when we "see" / know / perceive "all these things, know that it is near" (:33). And yet, despite that, we can not know, at least at this stage, the day nor the hour of the Lord's coming. The reason is made crystal clear in :42: "Watch *therefore* because you do not know [s.w.] what hour your Lord comes". 25:13 repeats this: "Watch *therefore* because you do not know [s.w.] neither the day nor the hour in which your Lord comes". The 'watching', therefore, is the watching of ourselves and for the welfare of others; *not* the activity of seeking to match world events with Bible prophecies. So our watching is exactly because we do not know the day and hour. God in His wisdom made it like this- so that we should watch all the time. If we knew when the Lord were coming, then we would not watch for Him until that time. Such is human nature. If a man knows what day and hour the thief is coming, he will watch for him at that time (:43). But if he doesn't know, then he must watch all the time. So, looking at it from that point of view, it is absolutely necessary that we do *not* know the day and hour. And yet it seems so many have seriously misunderstood this. They think that they *can* work out the day and hour, and their 'watching' is not so much a personal readiness for the Lord's coming at any moment as an extended scouring of the media in an attempt to slot various international happenings into Bible prophecies. Indeed it is observable that personal watchfulness often apparently comes to be excused because of 'watching' the "signs of the times".

It is commonly thought that even the Lord Jesus doesn't know the time of his return, only the Father does. During his mortality, the Lord said exactly this (Mk. 13:32)- at the time he was speaking to the disciples, he himself didn't know. But after his resurrection and glorification, the Lord made two statements to the disciples which he surely intended to be connected: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth... it is not for you (the inquisitive eleven standing on Olivet) to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Mt. 28:18; Acts 1:7,8). But *all* the Father's power has been given to His glorified Son, and this therefore includes knowledge of the "times and seasons" of the second coming. In the exalted Lord "are hid all the riches of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3); it is thereby inconceivable that the Father would still keep back some knowledge from the Son. The point of all this is that when the Lord Jesus said that "of that day and that hour knoweth (present tense) no man, no, not the angels... neither the Son" he was not laying down a general principle for all time. He was speaking of the situation at that time: 'You can't know now, indeed at the moment even I don't know; but these are the signs which will tell the believers when I'll come'. By implication he was saying 'You can't understand them, although I'm giving them to you, but in the future some will understand them, because these signs will accurately pinpoint my return'. This was exactly the spirit of what the Angel told Daniel when he too wished to know when Messiah would come in glory; he was basically told 'It's not for you to understand, but in the last days understanding of these things will be increased among God's people; they will know the time, but you can't'. There are so many connections between the Olivet prophecy and Daniel that perhaps it is legitimate to think that the Lord was alluding to the Angel's refusal to tell Daniel the time of Messiah's coming. That the Lord was primarily

referring to the twelve when he spoke of them not knowing "when the time is" (Mk. 13:33) is confirmed if we appreciate that the Lord Jesus sometimes uses "the time" as a reference to the appointed time for his own death (Mt. 26:18; Mk. 14:35; Jn. 7:6,8). The disciples were fascinated with the time of his return, and the Lord was giving them the signs. But knowing his death was only days away, inevitably he had in mind "the time" of his passion. And he knew that as they didn't know the time of his return, so they didn't understand the time of his death. Having pointed out that they knew not "the time", in words surely reminiscent of his criticism of Jewry generally for not knowing "the time" of his coming and death (Mt. 16:3; Lk. 19:44), the Lord went on to tell the story of the man (himself) who left his household (the disciples) and told them to watch, with warnings as to what would happen if they didn't. Every one of those warnings, and some other language in the Olivet prophecy, came true of the disciples in the next few days, in the context of "the time" being the time of Christ's death:

They shall deliver you up to the councils	As Christ to the Sannhedrin
Beaten	Christ buffeted
rulers and kings for a testimony	Chief priests, Herod, Pilate
...brother shall betray the brother	Judas; Peter's denial?
...turn back to take up his garment	John Mark's linen garment
...false Christs...	An echo of 'Barabbas'?
the sun shall be darkened...	As at the crucifixion
Watch pray...	"Watch with me"; Gethsemane
at even...	Last Supper
at midnight...	Gethsemane
at the cock crowing	Peter's denials
in the morning	trials and crucifixion
find you sleeping	disciples in Gethsemane

And at the end of the prophecy, He hammered this home again: "When (the trees) now shoot forth, ye see it, and know of your own selves that Summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things... know ye" (Lk. 21:30,31 RV). The very personal feeling within us that Summer is near is likened to our knowledge of the imminence of the Lord's coming; you can't be told by anyone else that Summer's coming, you see the signs, and you know within your own self.

Not even the Angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father- A clear indication of their limited knowledge, which helps explain their ‘testing’ of God’s servants in some Old Testament incidents, apparently in order to obtain more knowledge about them.

24:37 *And as*- The similarity with Noah’s days is logically linked to the Lord’s word about not knowing the day nor the hour. In the digression about this, I suggest that the very last generation may in fact know the day and hour. And that would be similar to Noah. There is no indication that he knew exactly when the flood would come- until he was told right at the end of the period, that the time had come and he must enter the ark.

Were the days- “The days” are parallel with “the coming” of the Lord. The scenario outlined earlier in these notes is of the Lord ‘coming’ for the faithful, them consciously choosing to go to meet Him, and then their ‘coming’ along with Him in judgment upon

the unfaithful and Israel's immediate enemies. Therefore a period of time is made parallel with the Lord's "coming". See on :36 *That day*. The "days of Noah" may refer to the way in which God told Noah of the flood, but in Gen. 7:1,4 told him that now there were "yet seven days" until the flood actually came, and he must now enter the ark. The gathering of the animals was done within those seven days (Gen. 7:1-3). In this lies the similarity with the last days. We know the outline picture- that judgment will come, and there are reasons and signs of that. But only a few days before judgment breaks will the faithful be invited to go to meet the Lord, to enter the ark. And in that period the Gospel will be spread to all nations, the last final appeal will be made. Just as Noah filled the huge ark, which could have saved so many people, with any animal willing to agree to come onboard. The shutting of the door of the ark would then directly correspond with Mt. 25:10; Lk. 13:25: "The door was shut". Just as desperate people would've knocked on the shut door of the ark, so the unfaithful will knock on the door which the Lord has now closed. In this life we can knock on the closed door, recognizing our condemnation- and it will be opened (Lk. 11:7; Rev. 3:8). But after the Lord has 'come' in the sense of inviting us into the ark, to go forth and meet Him, the door will be shut.

Of Noah- A number of passages describe the AD70 judgments of Israel in terms of the flood; which suggests that they also have reference to the last days:
- 2 Peter 3 is a clear example, describing the destruction of the Jewish system in AD70 as being by fire as opposed to water used in Noah's time. Yet the chapter also has reference, e.g. through its links with the new Heavens and earth of Is. 65, with the destruction of the present age at the Lord's return.
- Nahum 1 describes the coming judgements on Israel in terms of mountains and hills splitting, and there being a great flood; all Genesis flood language.
- Dan. 9:26 describes the Romans in AD70 destroying "the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood", the LXX implying with a sudden flood, as in Noah's time.
- Is. 54:9 describes the judgments on Israel being "as the waters of Noah". The end of the flood, the end of Israel's judgments, therefore typifies the second coming.
- In the light of this the Lord's parable about the man building on sand whose house was destroyed when the heavy rain came (Mt. 7:25,27) must have primary reference (as so many of the parables do) to the judgement on the Jewish house in AD70. Those who built on sand as a result of not hearing Christ's words were the Jews- also described as shoddy builders in Mt. 21:42; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7; Mic. 3:10; Jer. 22:13.
- The flood waters were upon the earth for 5 months. The siege of Jerusalem in AD70 lasted for the same period, coming after 3 years of the Roman campaign against Israel which started in AD67. The three and a half year suffering of Israel which culminated in AD70 may well point forward to a similar period in the last days; in which case the flood would typify the final months of that period, during which the judgments will be poured out most intensely. The five month tribulation of Rev. 9:10 may also have some relevance here.

Thus the state of Israel in AD70 was typified by the world of Noah's time, which therefore looks forward also to the last days, in the light of the evident connections between that period and our last days which are made in 2 Pet. 3 and the Olivet prophecy.

So shall be the coming of the Son of Man- This commonly used phrase (16:28; 24:27,30,39; 26:64) clearly quotes from Dan. 7:13: "One like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven". This prophecy clearly speaks of the giving of the Kingdom to the Lord Jesus and His people at the end of the dominion of the fourth beast and its

related horns. The prophecy could have been fulfilled in the first century- but it was rescheduled. This is another example of the conditionality in Daniel's prophecies which we discussed in an earlier digression. Dan. 7:13 speaks of how the Son of Man comes with the clouds of Heaven *before the Ancient of Days* and is given the Kingdom. What is in view is not so much the coming of Christ to earth but His coming to receive the Kingdom from the Father. Dan. 7:26,27: "The judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it to the end. The kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole Heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High: His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him". "The Son of Man" is here interpreted as "the people of the saints of the Most High". The Son of Man, therefore, refers not just to the Lord personally but to all those in Him. Having chosen to go out to meet Him once they hear the trumpet call, they are snatched away to meet Him in the air and the Lord comes with them in judgment. This is the picture presented in 1 Thess. 4:16,17 and elsewhere. This is why His "coming" is parallel with a period of time- see on *The days*.

24:38 *For as in those days which were before the flood*- See on :37, perhaps a reference to the immediate seven days before the coming of the flood. *Pro* ("before") would suggest 'immediately before', something standing directly in front of something else. Perhaps those seven days were a period of feasting in the world around Noah, just as there will be a brief period of hedonistic prosperity in the world before Christ's coming, perhaps because of some international agreement which offers prosperity to the entire planet in return for some nominal acceptance of false religion [Islam?]. We note the period of "seven days" used for funeral celebrations (Gen. 50:10; 1 Sam. 31:13), wedding celebrations (Jud. 14:12,17) and general feasting (Esther 1:5; Job 1). The people around Noah were doing this right up until the last day of the seven days. Passover, a clear type of the final deliverance of God's people at the Lord's second coming, required a similar seven days preparation period (Ex. 12:19; 13:6) followed by a "day of the Lord", the actual feast, and "a solemn assembly" (Neh. 8:18). Indeed, the feasts of Yahweh all required a seven day period (Lev. 23), and each of them was in some way typical of the second coming.

They were eating and drinking- Lk. 21:34 is specific: "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, so that day come upon you unawares". It could fairly be asked 'Why is there this warning, if the believers of the last days are to be actively persecuted?'. This verse implies that the world will be in a materially prosperous state in the last days; it will be possible for us to become so preoccupied with it that we do not prepare for the time of tribulation, so that it comes as a sudden surprise. Of if "that day" is the day of Christ's coming, then it may be that by opting out of the persecution, we will be able to continue to enjoy the materialism of the world, in which case we will be caught unawares by the second coming. Thus while the saints are persecuted, the world enjoys a time of prosperity as it did in the times of Lot and Noah.

Marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark- Mt. 25:10 continues the Noah allusion by saying that the faithful 'enter in with Him' (s.w.), and the door is shut, just as it was with the ark.

24:39 *And they did not realize until*- The implication is that they did "know", but tragically too late. In the moment of their condemnation they saw it all, so clearly; just as the process of condemnation so often results in men 'knowing Yahweh', but all too late. They will proclaim blessing on Jesus as Messiah next time they see Him, i.e. at

judgment day (Lk. 13:35). But all too late. This is the basis for the gnashing of teeth in anger with oneself which :51 speaks of.

The flood came- Gk. *erchomai*. This is effectively the same word as used in :38 about Noah "entering" or 'coming into' the ark (*eis-erchomai*). The coming of the flood represents the coming of Jesus to the world-*erchomai* is so often used in the context in that connection (24:30,42,43,44,46,48; 25:6,10). The 'coming in' of Noah into the ark (cp. the response of the faithful to the call to go out and meet the returning Lord Jesus) is essentially the coming of the Lord, even if His public 'coming' may be a few days after the 'coming' to the believers. Keil translates Dan. 9:26,27: "The city, together with the sanctuary, shall be destroyed by the people of the prince who shall come, who shall find his end in the flood; but war shall continue to the end, since destruction is irrevocably decreed. That prince shall force a strong covenant for one week on the mass of the people, and during half a week he shall take away the service of sacrifice, and borne on the wings of idol abominations [cp. Ps. 18:10, where the true God is also borne on wings] shall carry on a desolating rule, till the firmly decreed judgment shall pour itself upon him as one desolated" (*Commentary* p. 373). Antichrist's destruction with *the* flood [note the definite article] comfortably connects with the Lord's usage of the flood as a symbol of the latter day judgment upon His enemies (Mt. 24:39). The person spoken about will be involved in war until the end of his days; he will die at the end of his military campaign against God's people. This was certainly not true of Titus in AD70.

And took them all away.So shall the coming of the Son of Man be- The 'coming' of the flood represents the 'coming' of the Lord; just as the unbelieving world were 'taken away', so :40 continues that theme, that one shall be "taken" and another left. The 'taking away' of the one in the field is therefore 'taking away' in condemnation rather than the snatching away of the faithful to meet the Lord. The Greek *airo* definitely means to be taken *up*. Upward movement into the air is definitely in view. It could be that the Lord has in view the responsible. Those who respond to the call and want to go and meet their Lord will be confirmed in that by being caught up to meet Him (1 Thess. 4:16,17). Those who delay, the foolish virgins who go to buy oil, will all the same be gathered to judgment by being snatched away- but just a short time later.

24:40 *Then two men shall be in the field. One shall be taken and one left*- The 'taking away' is in judgment / condemnation / destruction, just as the unbelieving world were 'taken away' (:39). The idea of not being 'left' is what the Olivet prophecy started with- not one stone would be "left" (s.w., 24:2). But there will not be the total destruction of all persons on the earth at this time. The unworthy responsible will be 'taken away'- see on :39 *And took them all away*- and those not responsible to judgment will be "left". The Greek has a wide range of possible meanings here- the word is translated 'forgiven', 'sent away', and perhaps there is here the hint that they will be preserved to hear the Gospel of the Kingdom. In this sense we must remember the Lord's definition that "the field is the word" (13:38). And earlier in the Olivet prophecy He has foreseen that the faithful who are called away will be "in the field" (:18). The parable of the prodigal son likewise features the two sons, both in a field (Lk. 15:15,25 s.w.). The prodigal leaves the field and goes to the Father. The older son refuses to ultimately leave the field and go in to the Father. Legalism and judgmentalism is therefore quite enough to warrant being 'taken away' to condemnation.

The present tense is used here. Therefore the RV gives "One is taken, the other is left". Perhaps this was to heighten our sense that the essence of judgment is now; the call of

the Gospel is a call to journey to judgment day. The same arresting use of the present tense [in the Greek] is to be found in :41 and :43- perhaps for the same reason.

24:41 *Two women*- So much of the Lord's teaching sensitively gives examples including men, and then including women. He was so very far ahead of His time in being so gender inclusive.

Shall be grinding at the mill. One shall be taken and one left- Using millstones, which are always used in the Bible as symbolic of condemnation. These people were working out their own condemnation. One [the responsible] would be taken away to destruction, the other [not responsible to Divine judgment] would be "left". See on :40.

24:42 *Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on what day your Lord comes*- Throughout Christ's discourses concerning his return, "watch / stay awake" is the key-word (Mt. 24:42; 25:13; Mk. 13:33-37; Lk. 12:37; 21:36). There are at least ten New Testament allusions to Christ's command for us to "watch" in the last days, and thus be found loving the appearing of Christ; this alone indicates how our lives should be characterized by this spirit of watching. I would go so far as to say that generally we seem almost unaware of this emphasis. "Watch... watch... watch" is the cry that comes out from our Lord himself. It seems almost unknown to us that we are *commanded* by the Lord Jesus Christ himself, with a great sense of urgency, to live in this spirit of watchfulness for His return. It is easy to think that the command to watch means that we should scan Bible prophecies and compare them with current world events, and thereby see the coming of Christ approaching. However, this is not the idea behind the word "watch". We are told to watch precisely because we do *not* know the time of Christ's appearing; therefore Jesus cannot be telling us (in this command) to watch political developments as pointers towards the date of His return. "Watch" nearly always refers to watching our personal spirituality, and concerning ourselves with that of others'. The Hebrew word translated "watch" carries the idea of defending, holding on as a matter of life or death, enduring with stamina, being awake. Thus Habakkuk speaks of "watching", i.e. being spiritually sensitive, to what God is going to tell him (Hab. 2:1). Doing a study of New Testament allusions to Christ's command to "watch" yields conclusions which may seem unpleasantly negative to some. In Greek, the verb 'to watch' is related to the noun 'watch', referring to soldiers guarding something, or the period of guard duty. The idea behind 'watching' is definitely defensive rather than aggressive. In the same way as the gate keeper of a large house has to watch, to guard and protect, so should we in the last days (Mk. 13:34-37). Lk. 21:36 defines watching as praying always, concentrating our faith upon the fact that ultimately we will stand acceptably before the Lord Jesus at the day of judgment, and by His grace be saved from the great judgments which will surely come upon this world. The ideas of watching and praying often occur together (Lk. 21:36; Mk. 14:38; Mt. 26:41; Eph. 6:18; 1 Pet. 4:7). Prayer for our forgiveness, for acceptance by our Lord, must therefore characterize our watching in these last days. We must " watch" in the sense of being on our guard against the possibility of personal and communal apostasy from the faith (Acts 20:31); "watching" is standing fast in the doctrines of the one faith (1 Cor. 16:31), exhorting and encouraging others in the household of faith (1 Thess. 5:6,11), holding fast in ecclesias swamped by apathy and apostasy, strengthening what remains (Rev. 3:2,3; 2 Tim. 4:3-5), keeping the oil of the word burning in our lamps even though others have let it burn out (Mt. 25:13).

The blessedness of the 'watching' is not that they have an accurate timeline in place; we must watch exactly because we *don't* and *can't* know the exact time of the Lord's return. We cannot, therefore, have a detailed timeline which tells us *for sure* that

Jesus will return after event x or y. We can speculate, of course, but we cannot say for sure. The message is to be ready, to love Him and His return, just because we*don't* know when exactly He is coming (Mt. 24:42; 25:13). 'Watching' means holding to our faith and repenting of our weaknesses in Rev. 3:3- not interpreting latter day prophecies. This of itself won't make us spiritual people. The Greek word translated "watch" is usually translated "imprison" - the idea is of guarding oneself and ones' faith, "vigilantly" watching out against the [Biblical] devil [same word in 1 Pet. 5:8], rather than searching for the understanding of latter day prophecy.

We do not know the exact calendar date of the appearing of Christ; and yet we should be watching for his coming with the same intensity *as if* we did know the day and hour. This seems to be the message behind Mt. 24:42,43, where Jesus reasons that if the manager of a wealthy house knew when the thief was coming, he would have watched carefully; 'And that', Jesus continued, 'Should be the intensity of expectancy *you* should have towards my return, even though you don't know the exact date'. Now this is quite something. If we knew the exact date of the Lord's return, we can imagine how we might behave the day before. It seems Christ is asking us to imagine that scenario; and then He asks us to live like this all the time. This is truly a high challenge. Our attitude to God's word, entertainment, hobbies, money, relationships; all these areas of life would probably be somewhat different to what they are now if we really took on board this idea: that we should live *as if* we expect the imminent return of Christ. This idea makes sense of two apparently contradictory strands in the Lord's teaching: that we do not know the exact time of His return (Mt. 24:36,42,44; 25:13; Acts 1:7), and yet He tells us clearly it will come "soon" (Rev. 1:1,3 and many other passages). Perhaps the implication is that we should read coming 'soon' as meaning 'as *if* you know He is coming soon'. For, we ourselves cannot know the exact time.

Am. 5:18 and Mal. 3:1,2 warn that just desiring the coming of the Lord isn't enough; for what end will it be, if we don't *truly* love His appearing? Yet Amos goes on to say that Israel "put far away" the reality of the day of the Lord, in their minds (Am. 6:3). And yet they desired it. We can study prophecy, but not really love His appearing in seriously preparing ourselves for that day. Indeed, we can subconsciously put it far from us. When we grasp for a fleeting moment how *very near* is the second coming for us; can we dwell upon it, retain that intensity? Or would we rather put it "far away"? This is surely why the Lord brings the list of signs of His coming to a close with some chilling parables concerning the need for personal watchfulness. It's as if He could foresee generations of believers straining to interpret His words carefully, correctly matching them with trends in the world... and yet missing the essential point: that we must watch and prepare ourselves for His coming, whenever it may be for us. Having given so many indicators of His soon appearing, the Lord then says that His coming will be unexpected by the believers (Mt. 24:36,44). He wasn't saying 'Well, you'll never properly interpret what I've just said'. He meant rather: 'OK you'll know, more or less, when my return is imminent; but all the same, *in reality* it will be terribly unexpected for most of you unless you prepare yourselves. You need to make personal changes, and be watchful of yourselves; otherwise all the correct prophetic interpretation in the world is meaningless'.

24:43 *But know this!*- Our focus should be on 'knowing' that we don't 'know' the time of His coming; and therefore watching at all times, living *as if* His return is imminent. This would be one explanation of why Paul and Peter write in their letters as if the Lord's return is imminent when in fact He did not return in the first century.

That if the master of the house had known in what watch- The Lord is drawing a parallel between the householder watching, and the disciples / believers watching, being aware of the possibility of the Lord's return at any moment. He will only come unexpectedly, as a thief, to those who are not watching and are caught unprepared. But almost every usage of *oikodespotes* in the parables is concerning the Lord Jesus (10:25; 13:27; 20:1,11; 21:33; Lk. 13:25). As so often, the Lord was speaking to the disciples but not forgetting to speak also to Himself. He was soon to ask them in Gethsemane to watch and pray *with Him* (26:38); as if His watchfulness was to be theirs. In 13:52 He does also use this term about every scribe instructed in the things of the Kingdom. We are all the master of the house in the sense that we are to all be watching out for the household as a whole; the work of the Lord Jesus is to be our work. 'Watching' is thereby defined as not only watching ourselves, but watching out for the rest of the household. This is being presented here as the supreme way of not becoming unwatchful. By watching out for others we are watching for the Lord's return, living with the imminence of His coming over before us.

The thief was coming- Gk 'is coming'. See on 24:40 *Taken… left*.

He would have stayed awake- The point is surely that if we were to know when the Lord is coming, then we would watch for Him *at the time of His coming*; just as a householder would watch out for a thief if he knew ahead of time when the thief was coming. Because we do not know when the Lord is coming, we must watch for His coming all the time, living *as if* He is coming imminently even though we do not *know* for sure whether He is or not. Therefore our living as if He is about to come is to be done independently of any hunches we may have that He is about to return, based as they usually are upon prophetic interpretations. Lk. 12:35-38 repeats the same teaching, but with the metaphor of men keeping watch all night so that they might open to the Lord immediately.

And would not have let his house be broken into- This is the key; recognizing that the household of God is in fact our household, and we are to watch out for it as we would for our very own family. Indeed, it *is* our family. The connection is to 23:38 "*Your house* is left unto you desolate". Here, "*his house*" is "broken up". The Lord is saying that they were in the status of condemnation already. The physical breaking up of the temple would be the result of the elders of Israel not 'watching' as intended.

24:44 *Therefore you also must be ready*- The Lord was initially speaking to the disciples, the future elders of the church. The elders, represented by "the goodman of the house", have a special responsibility in this watching, so that the Lord's return is not thief-like to the 'house' of their ecclesia (Mt. 24:43). They "watch for your souls" (Heb. 13:17). But in a sense, the duty of watching falls to each of us: we're all elders (Lk. 12:41-46). All believers are called to watch, and that watching involves watching for others. The connection with 1 Thess. 5:2,6 therefore suggests that one of the reasons for the unworthy experiencing the second coming "as a thief" will be the lack of awareness by their elders concerning the spiritual trials of the last days. The reverse is also true. A good latter-day elder will have to give his very soul to the work of watching over the flock, fully aware of the many dangers they face in the last days. It is difficult to see how this vital role can be filled by those who have sold their souls to demanding employers. This work can't be simply left to others. This passage teaches that the servant who must feed the household with appropriate food represents each of us; he must watch for the Lord's return and be diligent in feeding the household; yet (it must be stressed), this parable is intended for each of us (cp. Mk. 13:37). If he doesn't do this, he is rejected. We are set a high standard here. Christ is "the goodman of the house" (Mt. 20:11), but here "the goodman of the house" represents each of us (Mt. 24:43; Lk.

12:39,40). We are in Him, and therefore we must try to share his level of concern for his household. He carried his cross for us, for our salvation. And he asks us to share His cross, i.e. His devotion to the body of believers, even unto death. If we are in Him, we too must devote ourselves to the saving of the body.

The very same word and idea for "ready" is repeated in 25:10. Those who were "ready" and responded immediately to the news of the Lord's return were accepted. The 'readiness' is in being constantly ready to leave all and go to be with the Lord. We shouldn't be so surprised, therefore, that life in this world is so unbearable for the believers; for we are being led to a point where we will be ready and eager to leave all for the sake of being with the Lord.

For the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect- The fact we do not know the date of the Lord's return is what makes us live in a spirit of constant readiness for His coming. The point is that we should be "ready" even when we "think not" that the Lord's coming is near. The contrast is being drawn between on one hand our 'readiness', and on the other, our 'thinking', our computing, our calculations, the seeming to us, that the return of Christ is near.

"The Son of Man comes" uses the present tense, whereas "Be… ready" would properly require the future tense. There may be here a hint that the future coming of the Son of Man in essence is ongoing in the life of the believer.

24:45 *Who then*- Translated "What manner of man?" in Mk. 4:41; Lk. 1:66.

Is the faithful and wise servant- The Lord has just likened us to the master of the house, but now He explains further. We have responsibility for the house and act in the role of the householder because He has given us that responsibility. Our 'watching' is to be expressed in terms of ensuring that all the household have their food at the appropriate time. In Mk. 13:34,35 the Lord expands on this parable in saying that each of the servants are given a different work, but He wants us to be like the doorkeeper [AV "porter"], whose job it was to simply watch- and "You, watch, therefore!". Putting together the various images, we see that we are likened to the very master of the house; then to the chief steward who was to provide food for the household; and then to the lowest doorkeeper. We are thoroughly representative of the Lord Himself, the steward of the household, and the lowest servant, the doorkeeper. But throughout the analogies, we are to above all mirror the way in which they watched / looked out for the wellbeing of the household. Being occupied with this is what makes a person ready and watching for their Lord's return.

This is the "good and faithful [s.w.] servant" of 25:21,23 who is commended for trading his Lord's goods and making increase of them. Here, the duty of the faithful servant is to care for the household. These are different metaphors for the same reality- spiritual care for others is a way of increasing the overall wealth of the Lord and the progress of His household. We have been delegated a huge amount, and the Lord is 'absent', not in the sense that He is not spiritually with us, but in that He will not intervene in how we carry on His work. The salvation and spiritual prosperity of others is therefore in our hands. By laziness and unwise behaviour we can seriously damage them and limit the progress of the Lord's business; and He being 'absent' will not forcibly intervene to stop us, in this life. The "wise servant" is likewise to be connected with the "wise [s.w.] virgins" of the very next parable (25:2,4,8,9). The connection is, however, slightly odd. The wise servant is to provide food for the others in the household. The wise virgins were unable to provide oil for the weaker members of the household, because they were themselves weak and had fallen asleep when clearly they were intended to remain awake. If the connection with the next parable is indeed

purposeful, then we are left with the picture of the wise virgins being wise only in that they *intended* to provide for others, although in reality they were too weak themselves to follow through with that intention in practice. But their intention to do so was counted to them as wisdom.

Whom his lord has set over his household- This parable is repeated with the same Greek words in Lk. 12:42,43 but with a change in tense: "Who then is the faithful and wise steward whom his master shall set over his household to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his master, when he comes, shall find so doing". The idea is surely that if we are doing that now, we shall do it eternally. If we are found 'doing' care and provision for the household, then we shall be empowered to eternally do this in essence. The important thing is that when the Lord comes, He finds us engaged [at least mentally] with what we shall eternally be doing, living the essence of the Kingdom life now. We have been made ruler over the household now; we shall be set over it eternally if when the Lord comes He finds us doing what He has appointed us to do. See on 24:47 *Shall make him ruler*.

To give them their food in due time?- When the Lord comes, He finds the servant either smiting the servants (:49), or feeding and caring for them (:45). Our attitude to our brethren in the moment of our Lord's coming will decide our eternal future. The structure of the parable allows of no half way position. The purpose of any authority given to any of us within the household is in order to feed others. If that, in the end, is not being done, then we are abusing the trust and authority given us by the Lord. The "food" is called their *sitometron* in Lk. 12:42, their "portion of food", or ration. The impression is given of a steward providing the right food ['nourishment'] for the right persons at the right time. This is the essence of all care for others. *Kairos*, "due season", means literally 'time', and is often used about 'the time' of the Lord's return (8:29; 13:30; 16:3; 21:34). Indeed it is used in the Olivet prophecy for this moment: "You know not when the time is" (Mk. 13:33). The idea seems to be that instead of worrying about calculating "the time" of the Lord's coming, we are instead to be concerned with feeding others in the household at that *kairos* or time. This is the sign of our preparedness and watchfulness, and not our [apparent] skill in matching world events to Bible prophecies.

24:46 *Blessed is that servant*- The only other reference by the Lord to blessed servants is in Lk. 12:37,38,43 where He teaches the blessedness of the servant who is found awake / watching when his Lord returns. 'Watching' is a major theme here in Mt. 24, but the blessing in view here is for "doing", actually providing nourishment for the household. Again we see the parallel between watching and doing. Watching can never be an academic interest in Bible prophecies. It has to be active, or else it isn't 'watching' in the sense intended.

Whom his lord when he comes shall find so doing…- Again we find emphasized the eternal importance of our attitude of mind at the moment of the Lord's coming. Those who want to go to the Lord are confirmed in their desire by being snatched away to meet Him, whereas those who don't have that immediacy of desire will be left behind, to be forcibly gathered to Him later.

24:47 *Truly I say to you, that he will set him over all that he has*- See on :45 *Has made ruler*. If we are doing what we have been empowered to do for the household now, then we shall be appointed to eternally do this.

The state of perfection in the Kingdom is described as us (the complete church of all ages) having reached, "a perfect man... the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ", having grown up into Christ, who is the head of the body (Eph. 4:13,15). When Christ comes, we will each individually be made ruler over *all* that He has, we will each

individually be fully righteous, fully manifesting the Lord Jesus. There seems to be marked connection with the fact (brought out in the parable of the talents) that we will each have *all* the Master's goods, and the description in the next parable of those goods being distributed between us in this life (Mt. 24:47; 25:15). In the Kingdom we will no longer know partially, as a result of seeing parts of the whole picture; we will see face to face (1 Cor. 13:9,12 Gk.).

In this life, the servant was 'made ruler over' [s.w.] the household, his job was to feed his fellow servants. If he is found so doing at the Lord's return, he will be made ruler over literally all that his master owns, "all his goods" (AV) is literally 'all that He has'. This is a profound insight into the nature of eternity. All that God has will be put under us. God has not subjected the world to come to the Angels but to us (Heb. 2:5). This is because "all things" are to be put in subjection under the Lord Jesus (Heb. 2:8), and all that is true of Him is true of us. But that being part of Him is dependent upon our serving of our brethren within the household. See on :43 *The householder*- He is the householder, but we also are, because we are in Him.

24:48 *But if that evil servant*- The next parable likewise features two types of servant; the "faithful" servant [s.w.], and the equivalent of this "evil servant" is the "wicked and lazy servant… the unprofitable servant" (25:26,30). That servant who did nothing is paralleled with the servant who proactively got drunk, thought his Lord delayed, and beat his brethren. Despite all that bad behaviour, the real issue was that he did nothing positive for his Lord. So often, the fellow servants are effectively beaten because of the sins of omission, inaction, refusal to stand up for the abused.

Shall say in his heart- The Bible knows nothing of a personal, cosmic Satan. Rather the real adversary is presented as the human heart, and therefore a huge amount of attention is given to the state of the human heart and the significance of our self-talk. Nobody consciously says 'The Lord is delaying, great, now I can drink and abuse my brethren'. But the Lord puts His finger on the self-talk that goes on in our deep subconscious, and He does so in the context of warning against having a specific date in mind for the second coming.

My Lord's coming- There is no turning to atheism or rebellion against the Lord, but rather the root cause of the misbehavior is placed by the parable upon the man's mentality that because he knows the date of his Lord's coming, he can just ensure he's behaving properly when He comes. And this is the purpose of the parable- to challenge that idea and explain why the date must be left unknown by us. This is the same idea as the foolish virgins not taking oil with them in the next parable. The idea is simply that the foolish take no oil because they are certain they know the day and hour of the bridegroom's coming; whereas the wise recognize that they do not know the exact day and hour, and therefore act accordingly by taking more oil in case there is a delay. This is exactly the point being made in the Lord's teaching at the end of chapter 24. Those who are convinced they know the day and hour, for whom the idea of flexibility or delay in the Lord's purpose is anathema, are in fact those who fall asleep and are caught unprepared.

Is delayed- The Lord Jesus / bridegroom "tarries" (Mt. 25:5), the same Greek word translated 'delay' in "my Lord delays His coming". The Lord *does* delay His coming- the man's mistake was in acting inappropriately because of this. God's judgments likewise "waited", or delayed, in Noah's time (1 Pet. 3:20)- presumably for the 120 year period of Gen. 6:3. In a similar way, the judgment on Nineveh preached by Jonah also delayed- it came in the end, but their repentance meant that it delayed at that time. In the first century, all things were ready for the Supper- supper time had come.

But the start of the supper has been delayed 2000 years by Israel's rejection of the invitation to participate (Lk. 14:17). The evil servant misbehaved because he thought the Lord had delayed and therefore he could misbehave, so long as he got his act together at the time of the Lord's coming. This parable is therefore an explanation of why we must recognize that we don't know the date of the Lord's return; if we do think we know it, then this will lead us into misbehaviour. Those with a determinate, black and white view of God and His prophetic style have often shown us the truth of this parable. They thought the Lord would return at a certain date, or once certain conditions had been fulfilled. These things happened, and the Lord didn't come- and their behaviour went seriously downhill.

Moses' sprinkling of Israel with blood and then going away for forty days (the period of probation), returning after a perceived delay to a people lost in revelry with only a faithful minority, must point forward to our Lord's ascension to the Father's presence after the blood sprinkling of the cross, and His subsequent return. Christ's words of Mt. 24:48,50 suggest he read this incident along these lines: "That evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming (cp. "Where is the promise of his coming?" and the people feeling Moses had delayed to return); and shall begin to... eat and drink with the drunken (cp. "the people sat down to eat and drink", 1 Cor. 10:7); the Lord of that servant shall come... in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder" - recalling the Levite's sudden massacre of the people on Moses' return. If the return of Moses from the mount is indeed typical of the second coming, then it would follow that the majority of the new Israel will be unprepared at the Lord's return also.

"The Lord (Jesus- v.15,18) is not slack concerning his promise (to return- of Jn.14:3,18,28), as some men (in the ecclesia) count slackness" , but is longsuffering (2 Pet. 3:9). The Greek for "slack" here means 'delay'; this is assurance that God is not 'delaying' as men dilly-dally in the execution of their plans, but is rather postponing this for a good reason. There's an allusion here to Is. 30:17-19, which records how Israel would suffer for their sins, but then God would wait for a certain time until they cried to Him in repentance, before bringing about a time of blessing on the earth based around the Lord's presence in Jerusalem: "One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one (Dt. 28 language)... till ye be left as a tree bereft of branches (how Paul describes what happened to Israel in the first century, Rom. 11)... and therefore (i.e. because you are such sinners) will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted (through your repentance), that He may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for Him. For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: thou shalt weep no more (the language of Is. 65:17-25, quoted in 2 Pet. 3:13): He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry (of repentance): *when* He shall hear it, He will answer thee". Not only is God delaying the Kingdom until there is repentance in Israel, but such is His *mercy* that He will not bring it about until such repentance. His purpose should not be seen, therefore, just in terms of the cold equation 'Repentance in Israel= second coming', but the supreme *mercy* and *love* which this arrangement shows should be appreciated. "And *therefore* will He be exalted" Isaiah comments- by those who understand these things. Rom. 11:32-36 is a marvellous example of this.

24:49 *And shall begin*- The idea is that only soon after he has begun his misbehaviour, the Lord comes. This highlights the point that because the man was sure that he knew the exact time of the Lord's coming, and that time was not right now, *therefore* he did these bad things. The whole point of the parable is to explain *why* we do not and should not ever think we know the date of His coming. For

it is this which is portrayed in the parable as the root reason why he begins beating the fellow servants and being self-indulgent, mixing with the unbelievers rather than the believers.

To beat his fellow servants- Smiting the fellow servants is related to keeping other company- with the drunken. It could be that this parable is intended to have a specific latter day fulfilment, in that it speaks of the last few days or little while before the Lord's return. For the evil servant has only just begun to beat, eat and drink, when his Lord comes. The 'smiting' might suggest that the evil servant joins in the persecution of the Lord's servants which will be ongoing in that final period of tribulation.

The idea of the steward of the house smiting the fellow servant (Mt. 24:49) is referred to by Paul (in the Greek text) in 1 Cor. 8:12, concerning *wounding* the conscience of weak brethren. Paul's vision of the latter day ecclesia was therefore that materialistic elders would act with no thought as to their effect on the consciences of the flock, and thereby many would stumble. The Lord's only other reference to fellow servants is in 18:28-33, where the deeply indebted servant 'beat' a fellow servant who owed him a relatively small amount. The beating of the fellow servants may therefore be intended to be understood in terms of refusing to forgive, and demanding what is due.

And shall eat and drink with the drunkards- His duty was to feed his fellow servants, but instead he became obsessed with feeding himself. The Lord has just spoken of 'eating and drinking' as characterizing Noah's world (:38)- and also Lot's world (Lk. 17:28). There's nothing wrong with any of the things Noah's world were doing in themselves, but they were indulged in to the point of obsession. The man called to go in to the ark and care for those within it had instead gone outside into the world and engaged with them in their way of life. The next verse continues allusions to Noah's time.

Lk. 12:45 adds that the man himself becomes drunk; he is influenced by the company he now keeps. Mt. 24:49 is alluded to in 1 Thess. 5:3-7, where the picture is graphically created of a man who has been hard drinking for a whole evening, now at home stupefied, late at night. It is then that the thief comes; whilst dimly aware of his coming, the man is quite unprepared to meet him and keep his (spiritual) house intact. This will be the tragic position of those who through belief and practice are unready for their Lord. It seems that a materialistic eldership, uncommitted to the real needs of the household, indifferent to guarding the house, will contribute to our latter day apostasy as a community. And note the correspondence between those who are harsh on their brethren being those who are also caught up in the things of the world. The drunken servant starts to beat the fellow servants, using a Greek word which means to punish (Lk. 12:45). This creates the picture of a worldly ecclesial elder over-disciplining others. No wonder there will be so much friction and disunity amongst spiritual Israel of the last days.

24:50 *The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he does not expect him and in an hour*- The implication is that the unfaithful servant should have 'known' and 'been aware of' his Lord's coming. He should have lived every moment as if *this* were the day and hour of the Lord's coming; even whilst recognizing that he does not finally know it. There is another possibility, discussed in a separate digression- and that is simply that the faithful in [literally] the very last few days *will* in fact know that the day and hour. The language of the Olivet prophecy brims with certainty as to the

faithful *knowing* the time: "When ye shall see these things come to pass, *know* that it is nigh... ye *know* that Summer is near... *when* ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then *know* that the desolation thereof is nigh... when ye therefore shall *see* (same Greek translated "know") the abomination of desolation... when ye *see* (Gk. know, understand, perceive) all these things come to pass, *know* ye that the Kingdom of God is near". The idea is that we will understand clearly certain signs, and know *therefore* that the Lord is imminent. This all seems in marked contrast to the Lord's conclusion to the prophecy: "of that day and that hour *knoweth* no man". There is a marked connection here with the fact that he has just been saying that it will be possible to know once the signs are seen and understood. Surely he must be talking specifically to the twelve; *they* didn't *then* know the time, neither could they; but those who saw the signs by implication *would* know. In the context of these words about them not *then* knowing the day and hour, the Lord said that the believer *at the time of his return* who didn't know the day and hour of his coming would be found unprepared (Mt. 24:50). This is surely proof enough that the last generation *will* in some way know the day and hour, i.e. the appointed time (cp. Rev. 9:15), of the Lord's return. This point is a very powerful one.

When he does not know- This is *ginosko*, used of how the world of Noah's day did not "know" until all too late (:39). We are to "know" the time (:33 "know that it is near", "know this" :43; Lk. 21:31). And yet we cannot know the time in terms of a calendar date. Therefore we are to "know" the time in living according to the principle that the Lord *could* come imminently, at this very moment.

24:51 *And will cut him in pieces*- Gk. 'to cut him in two', literally 'to dichotomize'. This unreal and severe punishment- to cut a slave in half as punishment- emphasizes the extreme nature of the wrongdoing. This may also allude to the idea of cutting a covenant. The parties to the covenant passed between the pieces of the covenant sacrifice and thereby proclaimed that they should be cut in two if they broke the covenant. These condemned persons, in this particular teaching, would therefore refer to those who had already entered covenant with God and are being judged for it. And the hint is that they broke that covenant because they preferred to be hypocrites, to look good in the eyes of men when their heart was somewhere else. The evil servant will be "cut asunder", i.e. his hypocrisy will be openly revealed for the first time (remember, he was an ecclesial elder in mortal life, according to the parable). There will be a public dimension to the judgment process, for the whole purpose of it is for the learning of those present at it, rather than for God's benefit. What we have spoken in the Lord's ear will be revealed by him openly ("from the housetops") at the judgment (Lk. 12:3). When the righteous receive their inheritance (i.e. at the judgment), then the fool will be held up to shame (Prov. 3:35 NIV).

And put him with the hypocrites- AV "Appoint him his portion with the hypocrites". Christ "will appoint (the wicked servant) his portion with the unbelievers" (Lk. 12:46), his portion with the hypocrites (Mt. 24:51), reminiscent of a "goat" in the later parable being told to go to the group of goats at the left hand side- "the unbelievers", i.e. those responsible but lacking in real faith (the word is used concerning this group in Jn. 20:27; Mt. 17:20; Rom. 11:20; Heb. 3:12; Tit. 1:15; Rev. 21:8). Note the parallel between hypocrisy and faithlessness. It is faith which is the real power against hypocrisy; if we believe that the Lord sees and knows all things, we will not act in the eyes of some. We will be ourselves, because we believe in Him and His grace and love

towards us. The Lord's self-indulgent servant will be cut asunder at judgment day- revealed for who he really is- and then be appointed his portion with the [other] hypocrites (Mt. 24:41). The Lord used almost identical words earlier in His ministry, but with the conclusion that such a servant would be appointed his portion with *the unbelievers* (Lk. 12:46). The rejected servants, who appeared to believe but who only play-acted, are in fact unbelievers. They have as little faith as the unbelieving world, although they think they believe and serve the Lord.

Just as the man had chosen to be "with [*meta*] the drunken" (:49), so the Lord's judgment of him will reflect the decisions he himself made, and the position in which he was found at the Lord's coming- he will be "with" [*meta*] the hypocrites.

There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth- This phrase is recorded seven times on the Lord's lips, but six of them are in Matthew (8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30). The awful prospect clearly gripped Matthew, and in presenting the Gospel he felt it his duty to remind people graphically of the future they might miss, and the eternal consequence of rejecting God's Son.

The Olivet prophecy doesn't finish at the end of Mt. 24; the chapter break with chapter 25 is unfortunate. The context runs straight on. The Lord spoke a number of parables at the end of the prophecy, which teach us the need for watchfulness against his coming. Each of them speak of his "coming" and the state of his ecclesia. They refer back to various parts of the Olivet prophecy. *Without any doubt* their main relevance is to the second coming; whatever minor relevance they may have to AD70, when they speak of the Lord coming and judging us, they speak of his second coming. They are a further elaboration on the things of which he had been speaking in the prophecy: and therefore the prophecy must basically concern his second coming and the state of the ecclesia at the time of the end.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 25

25:1- see on Mt. 13:19.

Then- Immediately after the judgment, we are told, "the Kingdom... will be likened unto ten virgins...", the implication being that *then* we will perceive the truths contained in that parable; only then will we fully appreciate the result of watchfulness and keeping oil in the lamps. "*Then* shall ye return, and discern [judge] between the righteous and the wicked" (Mal. 3:18) is spoken to the "ye" of Malachi 3 (e.g. v. 14) who refused to repent. God had asked them to repent, but their response was: "Wherein shall we *return*?" (Mal. 3:7). But in their final rejection, they would repent, all too late, and appreciate the basis of the Lord's condemnation: *they* will discern the crucial chasm between the righteous and the wicked, just as "*then* shall the Kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins..." (Mt. 25:1). Then, the wicked will understand the judgments of God. But it is our wisdom to learn and appreciate them now. The chapter division between Matthew 24 and 25 is unfortunate. The description of the rejected at the judgment given in Mt. 24:51 is followed straight on by Matthew 25:1: "Then shall the kingdom of heaven (i.e. entry into it) be likened unto ten virgins...". This may suggest that the rejected will have time for reflection - *then* they will see the 'likeness' between their position and the parable of the virgins. This parable follows that of the negligent steward who will be rejected at the judgment (Mt. 24:45), implying that a lack of proper spiritual care by the elders of the latter-day ecclesias results in the lack of oil in the lamps of the rejected.

If the judgment is in time as we now know it, we must be judged before Christ is enthroned, i.e. the Kingdom is established. But Mt. 25 teaches that we will come before Him *already enthroned* for judgment. The idea of "meeting" Christ at judgment employs a Greek phrase which distinctly means to go out to welcome a respected visitor. Its three Biblical occurrences are all in this context (Acts 28:14,15; 1 Thess. 4:16,17; Mt. 25:6,10). This would suggest that the faithful go out to meet the Lord and accompany Him to the judgment. But this is rather difficult to square with the idea of good and bad coming together before the judgment and being separated from each other *there*. It is almost as if these descriptions are designed to push the thoughtful reader away from seeing the judgment as occurring in real time! The Lord comes with the saints to save Israel from their enemies. Unless there is a secret coming of the Lord to gather and judge the saints and then he is revealed to the world, this just isn't possible. And the idea of a secret coming of the Lord of glory just cannot be reconciled with the clear descriptions of his coming in the NT. The coming of the Lord in glory with the saints with him to establish the Kingdom *is* the coming of Christ. Therefore it would be fitting if the whole process of Christ coming, resurrecting and judging his people, all happens in a moment of time as we know it. Depending how one reads the Hebrew text of Zech. 14:6,7, this idea of collapsed time at the Lord's return is Biblical: "It shall come to pass in that day, that it shall not be clear in some places, and dark in other places of the world; but the day shall be one, in the knowledge of the Lord, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light" (AV mg.). The RVmg. speaks of "the planets shall contract"- the times and seasons they control would somehow contract. Is. 21:12 RV has a similar idea, again in the context of a judgment day: “The morning is come and also the night”. This collapsing of time would also explain why it is impossible to construct a chronology of events in real time for the coming of Christ; the various prophecies of the last days just don't seem to fit together in chronological sequence.

Shall the kingdom of heaven be likened to ten virgins- Ten men were required for a synagogue to be formed. The Lord may be consciously subverting this idea, implying that in the new Israel He was creating, the congregations would be comprised of believing individuals, whose gender was unimportant.

Who took their lamps- Gk. ‘they received’. The same word is used throughout the chapter, also of the servants receiving their talents (:16,18,20,22,24).

And went to meet the bridegroom- Our calling to the Kingdom is effectively a calling to go and meet the Lord. However, the parable seems to be specifically about the response of the faithful immediately prior to the Lord’s coming, once they know He is ‘back’ and must of their own volition go out to meet Him. This would then follow straight on from the teaching of chapter 24. The same Greek word translated “meet” is that in 1 Thess. 4:17. The faithful who are alive at the time of Christ’s coming will be snatched away to “meet” Him. But they will have gone forth to meet Him of their own volition, and those who delay going to meet Him will not meet Him in that way.

25:2 *And five of them were foolish and five were wise*- Dan. 12:3 speaks of “they that be wise... they that turn many to righteousness”. This group of people are defined in Dan. 12:10 as “the wise” amongst latter day Israel who are purified and refined in the latter day time of Jacob’s trouble such as never was for Israel. The very same phrase occurs in Dan. 11:35, where we read that some of these wise and understanding ones will perish during “the time of the end... the time appointed” (RV)- of the three and a

half year tribulation? One wonders if the Lord had these “wise” in mind in His parable of the “wise virgins” of the latter days. This would all suggest that some amongst Israel will repent and zealously preach in the last day tribulation, even if it costs them their lives. And Rev. 11 seems to be saying something similar.

Foolish- The Lord uses the same word in saying that we are not to call anyone ‘foolish’ because it implies that we are condemning them (Mt. 5:22). Clearly enough, the people of God are divided between those who will be saved, the wise, and those who will be condemned. But that division will only be apparent in the last day, and will be made apparent by varying responses to the knowledge that the Lord has finally come. Likewise the parable of the two builders shows that the difference between the wise and foolish will only be apparent when the flood comes, i.e. at the Lord’s return. The foundation they built is invisible to those around them- nobody can see whether they dug down through the sand onto the rock, or just built in the sand.

25:3 *For the foolish, when they took their lamps, took no oil with them*- The ten virgins each having lamps may connect with the parable of the ten servants each having the talents of the true knowledge of God (Lk. 19:13). Those who were "wise" had oil in their lamps; our Lord earlier defined "the wise" as those who truly obeyed the word (Mt. 7:24). By contrast, the "foolish" without oil are those who only superficially respond to it (Mt. 7:26). The parable of the talents following on from that of the oil lamps suggests that the talents- symbolic of our appreciation and application of the word- are to be equated with the oil. Those whose spiritual lamps go out during the tribulation "took no oil with them" after the first intimation that the second coming is about to occur (Mt. 25:3). Thus during the delay period they will rely on the feeling of hope that this intimation gives rather than on genuine spirituality. These contrasting attitudes are perhaps hinted at by the wise taking their oil first, *then* their lamps; whilst the foolish grabbed their lamps but discounted the need for more oil (Mt. 25:3,4). Thus those who presume too much upon their own personal worthiness, thinking that they are spiritually in "peace and safety" (1 Thess. 5:3), fail to properly apply themselves to the oil of the word.

However, it’s quite likely that the oil has no particular significance. The idea is simply that the foolish take no oil because they are certain they know the day and hour of the bridegroom’s coming; whereas the wise recognize that they do not know the exact day and hour, and therefore act accordingly by taking more oil in case there is a delay. This is exactly the point being made in the Lord’s teaching at the end of chapter 24. Those who are convinced they know the day and hour, for whom the idea of flexibility or delay in the Lord’s purpose is anathema, are in fact those who fall asleep and are caught unprepared.

25:4 *But the wise took flasks of oil along with their lamps*- The fact the lamps of the foolish ‘went out’ means that they all had oil in their lamps. The difference was that the wise thought there might well be a delay, and so they took oil with them. The wise took lamps plus vessels; the foolish only took their lamps. The only other time the Greek word translated “vessels” occurs in the New Testament is also in Matthew and also on the lips of Jesus in a parable, in Mt. 13:48. There, the faithful are likened to good fish which the judge casts into “vessels” whilst the bad fish are cast away. The telling paradox is that the wise, those ultimately saved, are those who have “vessels” exactly because they suspect the oil of their own spirituality will not be enough. It is their awareness of their own likelihood of failure which is their salvation. And further, they recognize that the outworking of God’s purpose is changeable- there may be delays, such is His sensitivity to human spirituality. The foolish, by contrast, think that

all will be well with them because they accurately know the time of the bridegroom's coming, and cannot think that their own oil may not be enough. Personal spirituality [oil] is therefore related to our perception of God's sensitivity and openness.

25:5- see on Mt. 22:9.

Now while the bridegroom was delayed- The same word translated 'delay' in 24:48 (see note there). Without doubt, there is a delay in the Lord's return. Beyond question, the fact not all will work out as expected in terms of chronology means that some will stumble. This is a sober warning to the very many who hold dogmatic views about the interpretation of end time Bible prophecy. Rev. 10:6 uses a related word to speak of how there will finally be no more delay. And yet 'delay' is to some extent metaphor- the same word is used in Heb. 10:37 "He that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (s.w. "tarried", Mt. 25:5). In one sense there will be a delay, in another sense there will not be. God on one hand foreknows all things, and in that sense there is no delay; in another sense, He does in real terms delay His program in response and sensitivity to human behaviour. This paradox is at the root of Hab. 2:3, which is being quoted in Heb. 10:37: "The vision is yet for an appointed time [the Hebrew could mean 'Will still not happen for another year / *moed* / until the next feast / until the time appointed]… though it tarry, wait for it… it will not tarry". Despite the delay, it will fulfil, and so it must be waited for. It tarries in one sense, but in another sense "it will not tarry".

They all became drowsy and slept- The word is used figuratively of 'delaying'. The only other NT usage is in 2 Pet. 2:3, where it clearly means 'delaying': "Their condemnation *slumbers* not". Because the bridegroom delayed, so did they. Here again is the Lord's commentary upon the dangers of assuming a fixed date for His return. Spiritual life grinds to a halt when it is perceived [wrongly] that God's purpose has ground to a halt. The delay in the Lord's coming means that there is a delay in the spiritual life of those who waited for Him on a particular day. By slumbering, they were assuming that He too is slumbering. But the God of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps (Ps. 121:4). David had sworn not to slumber nor sleep until God was enthroned in Zion (Ps. 132:4). Regardless of delays in the program, it is the end result which must ever be kept in view- the coming of the Lord to Zion. The fulfilment of prophecy is not an end in itself, but it is the end result which must be our desire- rather than merely seeing the vindication of our own pet interpretations.

Both wise and foolish "*all* slumbered and slept". This slumbering can only be seen in a bad light. The exhortation at the end of the parable is to "watch", i.e. to keep awake rather than be sleepy (Mt. 25:13). We have earlier commented on the many parallels between 1 Thess. 5 and Mt. 24 and 25. 1 Thess. 5:2,6,7 speaks of the unworthy in the last days as being surprised by the midnight coming of Christ due to their being asleep. Their being "drunken in the night" (1 Thess. 5:7) matches the similar description of the weak elements of the latter-day ecclesias in Mt. 24:49. And yet 1 Thess. 5 goes on in this context to say that Christ died for us so that whether we wake or sleep, we may be accepted with Him. This is positivism beyond measure; He *wants* to save even those who slumber. Clearly enough, the very last generation of believers will all be weak, and those of them who shall be saved will only be 'ready' because of their own admission of their weakness and lack of oil.

That *all* the girls should fall asleep whilst awaiting the bridegroom is unusual- an element of unreality in the story. They must have been a pretty unenthusiastic, switched off bunch. And yet immediately we are led by the Lord to pass judgment upon ourselves- which is quite a feature of the parables, e.g. Mt. 21:31; Lk. 7:43 (as it is elsewhere- consider 2 Sam. 12:5; 14:8; 1 Kings 20:40). Note how there is surely a similar element of unreality in the Lord's description of *all* those invited to the dinner

refusing the invitation (Lk. 14:18,24). Would really *nobody* respond to such a gracious invitation? This was the obvious question that He begged in the minds of His hearers. The intention being that each hearer would reflect: “Is it I…?”… maybe at least *I* could respond to the call of the Gospel… Christ's low expectations of us are clearly demonstrated when He told the parables of the weddings. When you put them together, you get this picture: God made the wedding between Christ and us. The invited guests didn't bother coming, for very trivial, mundane reasons that they put in front of the honour of being invited to His wedding. Only tramps and beggars come to it, motivated selfishly by the thought of a free meal (cp. a penny for the day). But we, the bride, aren't ready (although Christ graciously doesn't mention that in the parable), and so He delays to come to the wedding. Back home, His most trusted household servants realize that He's delaying His return, and start to get drunk and beat each other. The excited young bridesmaids lose their enthusiasm and go to sleep. Eventually, the wedding happens, but some of the guests don't bother to turn up in a wedding garment, just in their filthy rags. The impression is clearly this: *the whole thing's a mess!* Yet this is the marriage of the Son of God to His dearly purchased bride, for whom He died, and lived a life of total self-control. Yet He *knew* the whole thing would be such a mess. See on Mt. 13:25.

25:6 *But at midnight*- Israel both kept Passover and went through the Red Sea at night. Indeed, it is stressed six times in Ex. 12 that it was “night", and hence Dt. 16:1 reminds them to carefully keep the Passover (i.e. at night), "for... thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night". Other latter day prophecies speak of the events of the second coming being at "night": Lot left Sodom in the very early hours of the morning; and it was "at midnight (that) there was a cry made" informing the virgins of their Lord's return (Mt. 25:6). There can be little doubt that the parable is intended to have a specific latter-day application. And yet there is a general application of the parable to all believers who at the time of their baptism have oil in their lamps- which needs continual topping up by our freewill effort. The virgins "took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom" (Mt. 25:1), but settled down to slumber due to his unexpected delay. Then "at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him" (Mt. 25:6). The whole of the believer's probation should therefore be in the spirit of a journey to the judgment / wedding, believing that Christ is at the door. The 'arising' of the virgins in Mt. 25:7 would then refer to the resurrection.

There was a cry- This is surely representative of some specific indication given to the latter day believers that the Lord is back and they must now exercise their freewill in going to meet Him. It may be in the form of a trumpet blast. The book of Revelation often uses the same word for the ‘crying’ of Angels in their various proclamations. So this may refer to the “voice of an Archangel” (1 Thess. 4:16) with which the Lord returns. This great cry also equates with the "shout" of 1 Thess. 4:17 at the Lord's return and the resurrection. From this it follows that the faithful will have a separate gathering to judgment than the unworthy; Christ "shall gather together his *elect*" (Mt. 24:31), the unworthy then wish to be with those who have oil, putting their noses in a Bible for a change, and *then* come to the judgment. The wise trim their lamps and go to meet Jesus. The same Greek word translated 'trim' is rendered 'adorned' in Rev. 21:2, concerning the bride of Christ (the wise virgins) "coming down from God out of Heaven (a literal descent from the sky, having been snatched away in clouds?), prepared as a bride *adorned* for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). The intimation that the second coming is imminent could be due to a number of factors:

- The open presence of 'Elijah'. The cry of the watchman would be in the spirit of the Elijah prophet.
- The possible possession of the miraculous spirit gift by the Elijah ministry.

- The onset of active persecution
- The Arab domination of Israel
- Possibly the appearance of a literal sign in the heavenly bodies heralding the Lord's coming; the sign of the Son of man.

Look! The bridegroom [comes]! Come out to meet him- "Comes" translates *erchomai* and "go out" is *ex-erchomai*. The coming of Christ must be greeted by our 'coming out' to meet Him. The idea is that we cannot be merely passive. The whole parable is designed to debunk the idea that we can know the exact date of the Lord's return, with the implication that we are just waiting for things to happen to us. But God's purpose involves us having a hand in the outworking of it; He is responsive to our freewill attitudes and decisions. His coming / going out to us cannot just be waited for by us; we have to go out to Him. The virgins had all 'gone out' to meet the bridegroom (:1 s.w.), but now they actually go out to meet Him after the delay. And it is the response to how the Lord delays which is effectively the division between wise and foolish, worthy and unworthy.

The same Greek word translated "meet" in Mt. 25:6 concerning the wise virgins going out to "meet" Christ occurs also in 1 Thess. 4:17: "We which are alive and remain shall be caught up... in the clouds to *meet* the Lord in the air". The picture is therefore presented of the righteous obeying the call of their own volition, and then being confirmed in this by being 'snatched away' to meet Christ in the (literal) air. We will then travel with Christ "in the clouds" (literally) to judgment in Jerusalem. In no way, of course, does this suggestion give countenance to the preposterous Pentecostal doctrine of being 'raptured' into heaven itself. Every alternative interpretation of 1 Thess. 4:17 seems to run into trouble with the phrase "meet the Lord *in the air*". 1 Thessalonians is not a letter given to figurative language, but rather to the literal facts of the second coming.

25:7 *Then all those virgins arose and*- In the general application of the parable, this invites interpretation as resurrection. But the burden of the parable is clearly specifically for those who live in the last days, those who are "alive and remain" and are called to meet their Lord, but find there is a delay. The more obvious picture, however, is that the call will grab all by surprise, and will lead to them arising and taking stop of their lives, and coming to terms with who they really are. Again, this is relevant to the closing section of the Olivet prophecy- the Lord's point is that even if they think they know the day and hour of His coming, it will be a shock which can in no way be prepared for. And knowing the day and hour is not the essential thing, but rather being willing to immediately go to Him and leave the things of this world.

Trimmed their lamps- This is the same word translated "garnished" in the Lord's parable about how response to John the Baptist's teaching left a house "garnished" (12:44). And his teaching was about Jesus as Christ and the need for repentance and faith in His grace. Those who properly responded to it would be ready for the Lord's second coming. The whole language of Jesus as bridegroom was surely intended to recall John, for he had used the very same figure for the Lord. The introduction to the Olivet prophecy had noted that the temple was "garnished" (s.w. "trimmed"; Lk. 21:5), and the Lord is surely saying that that was irrelevant, for the true garnishing is of personal preparedness for His coming. The bride herself is to be "adorned [s.w.] for her husband", the bridegroom (Rev. 21:2).

25:8 *And the foolish said to the wise: Give us some of your oil*- Those who thought they knew the day and hour of the Lord's coming are revealed here as actually having no personal spirituality. They could have just gone to meet their Lord for joy of wanting to see Him, throwing themselves upon His grace. A bridegroom wants to see His bride

and would rather see her without some piece of jewelry, than find she turns up very late. Their request for oil from others indicates they have no personal love of Him, no personal relationship with Him, and a group mentality whereby they thought others' spirituality could count for theirs. All they had was their conviction that they knew the day and hour of His coming. So it's no surprise when finally the Lord tells them "I know you not" (:12). This puts all obsession about figuring out Bible prophecy into correct perspective.

For our lamps are going out- Apparently the "lamps" which the parable is based upon had to be replenished every 15 minutes or else they went out. The "wise" (relative to the foolish, anyway) can therefore be pictured as dozing for five or 10 minutes, then jolting back into consciousness and refilling their lamps, while the foolish snored on. This presents a powerful picture of the frail spirituality which will characterize the faithful remnant just prior to the second coming. The Lord asks the faithful remnant to "look up, and lift up your heads" (Lk. 21:28) when the signs of the last days just *begin* to come to pass. There seems a designed connection with this parable of the virgins, spoken only minutes later: in actual fact, he foresaw that *even at His coming*, even the faithful would be sleeping. Even now our real faith is but as candles in the wind. There is an urgent need for us each to analyze and appreciate what real spirituality is, to spotlight the few times and ways in which we show it, and to work on these. Such self-knowledge and realization will be worth its weight in diamonds during the delay period. This said, it will ultimately be the midnight cry which reveals our true spiritual state to us. Each virgin arose and with heightened awareness analyzed the state of their oil. The wise will have the faith to quickly prepare themselves to meet Christ- they "trimmed their lamps", pulling out the burnt strands in the wick and adding oil. The foolish panic- "Give us of your oil"! In that moment it will be evident to all in the ecclesia who has been wise and who foolish. Those who are spiritually empty will then realize their folly; the parable even suggests that they desperately try to associate themselves with those they know to be spiritually stronger, somehow hoping that they might be covered by their spirituality. "Our lamps are going out" (Mt. 25:8 R.V.) shows that they are not totally without oil, but they feel the oil- what faith they had- ebbing away as the reality of Christ's return and the judgment dawns upon them.

25:9 *But the wise answered: Perhaps there will not be enough for us and you*- AV "Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you". The translation is problematic, as reflected by the way the AV puts "not so" in italics. This has been added in a valiant bid to make the difficult Greek have at least some kind of sense. The idea seems to more accurately be: 'In any case there is not sufficient for us, let alone for you too'. The only other time *arkeo ou* occurs it is translated "not sufficient" (Jn. 6:7); and there, the idea is 'We cannot possibly have sufficient of ourselves, only God's grace can provide the sufficiency'. As it is translated in most English versions, the sense is somewhat selfish- as if the wise are too concerned for their own acceptance by the bridegroom to worry about anyone else. But I suggest the sense of the original is rather 'We ourselves hardly have any oil, we are woefully unprepared ourselves, we are going to throw ourselves onto His grace when we meet Him. It's not about how much oil we have. It's about loving Him enough and trusting His grace enough to just want to go immediately and be with Him. But if you're so worried about oil, well, presumably you will have to go and get some- a hard job, in the middle of the night, when the shops are all closed'.

Instead, you should go- The Greek really means 'to depart', and significantly, the very same word is used by the Lord in this same context when condemning people at

judgment day in :41: “Depart [s.w. “go”] from Me, you cursed”. So the point is again established that in their response to the news of His return, the rejected have their judgment. They are asked to go and meet Him, but they depart, to try to make themselves prepared by relying upon others [“them that sell”]. Their departing from the Lord was in essence their condemnation, for condemnation is all about departing from the Lord.

To them that sell oil and buy some for yourselves- This may well be obeyed by the foolish in the form of getting their noses down to some serious, personal Bible study for a change; or going looking for *people* who could sell them oil. But again, they go to others- rather than immediately to the Lord Himself. Hence His comment in :12 that they do not know Him, and therefore He doesn’t know them. There is simply a lack of personal relationship with Him, despite their confidence that they knew the day and hour of His coming. "Go... and buy" is surely rhetorical- the rejected know it's too late for them to actually rectify their position, but the process of judgment day will show the rejected how it would have been possible to enter the Kingdom. Likewise the Lord will tell the one talent man: 'Why didn't you, for example, put the money into the bank...?'. I mentioned under *Not so…* that the only other time *arkeo ou* [“not enough”] occurs is when the amount of bread required was described as “not sufficient” (Jn. 6:7). The advice to *go and buy for yourselves* is also alluding to that same feeding miracle. The lesson then had been that no amount of bread was enough / sufficient, nor was it possible to go and buy for oneself- rather must there be total reliance upon God’s grace in Christ. I feel the allusion or similarity is purposeful, because lack of oil didn’t have to mean rejection by the Bridegroom. They could simply have thrown themselves upon His grace. If they were ready and eager to go and meet Him at any moment, regardless of whether they felt or externally appeared ready, then this was enough for salvation. And that, really, will be the struggle of every spiritual heart when we know the Lord has returned; our love for Him and trust in His grace must be greater than our awareness of our own unworthiness, lack of preparation and poor external appearance. Those who thought they knew the day and hour [and we must ever remember that this is the context of the parable] couldn’t cope with things working out other than they had expected, needed to run to others for help, rather than to the Lord personally; and had no sense of His grace nor, in fact, any overpowering desire to simply be with Him. Rather was their own correctness of expectation the most significant self-defining issue for them. And it would appear so many ‘Christians’ have fallen into this trap, becoming obsessed with chronologies of events and accuracy of prophetic interpretation, at the expense of true spirituality and direct personal relationship with the Lord.
Buy for yourselves- Literally, ‘redeem yourselves’. The whole point is that we were bought / redeemed by the Lord and not by ourselves.

25:10 *And while they went away to buy*- There seems no reason to think that the Bridegroom would have rejected them because their lamp was not burning. They could have just gone along anywhere, motivated by the joy that comes from love. But they were too convinced by their need to *appear* ready externally. I have spoken elsewhere of a collapsing of time [as we understand it] in the period around the Lord’s return and judgment. But let us not think that such collapsing of time only means that what would otherwise take a long time actually takes a short time. It may be that what is in fact a very short time feels like much longer. Thus we read here of the rejected as foolish virgins going to get oil, and it taking so long that the door was shut and they were eternally outside the marriage. In time as we know it, this may just be a momentary desire to have been more filled with the Spirit in the day of opportunity. But the whole process of realising this will *feel* to them as if it takes a long time to work out.

The bridegroom came- and they that were ready- "You- be also ready" (24:44) uses the same word. This parable is the definition of what 'readiness' means. The wise virgins were hardly ready. They fell asleep when they should have stayed awake; and they recognized that they didn't really have enough oil. They hadn't calculated the day nor hour of their Lord's return. They were 'ready' only in the sense that they wanted above all to be with their Lord, and this sense was far stronger than their deep awareness of their own shameful unpreparedness. But this is what 'readiness' is about.

Went in with Him to the wedding- This is another hint that the faithful come with Jesus to judgment. The Lord entering into the wedding feast is the exact picture of His coming in judgment (22:11 "the King *came in*" s.w. "went in"). But in that same parable, we 'come in' to the wedding feast at our response to the Gospel in this life (22:12 s.w.). The nature of our initial response is highly significant. "Went in" translates the same Greek word found in 24:38: "Noah *entered into* the ark". The next comment that "the door was shut" continues that allusion to the ark.

Went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut- The very same words are used in Lk. 11:7 concerning how although the door is shut in this life, yet it can be opened by prayer and beseeching. We as sinners are condemned here and now, the door is shut- but we can repent and pray, and the door shall be opened. But like the shutting of the door of the ark, once this is done at the day of judgment, it is too late. Now is the day to change the verdict, then will be too late.

25:11 *Afterward came also*- We may be intended to imagine some details of the story. They would have searched for oil sellers in the middle of the night, and finding none, they came without oil to their Lord. I suggested earlier that the issue is readiness, a love for the Lord, rather than having oil; they could have gone immediately and thrown themselves on His grace. But they didn't do that and chose instead to try to get human help; resulting in their rejection.

The other virgins- If the Lord literally meant 'the others', He would have used a Greek word like *heteros* [or the Aramaic equivalent]. But *loipoi* definitely has the sense of that or those which remain; it is elsewhere translated "the things which remain" (Rev. 3:2). The foolish virgins are those who remained, those who didn't go immediately in response to the call. Yet again, attitudes to the Lord's coming will decide our eternal futures.

Saying: Lord, Lord- The Lord had warned that saying "Lord, Lord" would not guarantee "entry" into the Kingdom (7:21). And here He is speaking about exactly such "entry"- the same word is used here in :10 "they that were ready *went in* with Him to the wedding". The category in view are those who considered themselves believers, who thought that externally correct forms of address would impress the Lord Jesus. The "Lord, Lord" contingent indeed had "done many wonderful works" (7:22), but they had never known and loved *Him*. Whilst organized church life is a necessary part of our present experience and the Lord's intention, the danger is that it can exalt such "works" and public appearances to the point that personal relationship with the Lord is totally eclipsed.

Lk. 13:25 adds the detail that they 'knocked'. Knocking is sometimes used as a figure for prayer (Mt. 7:7; Lk. 11:7). The basis for these foolish virgins is surely in Prov. 1:28,29: "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer... they shall not find me: for that hated knowledge". The foolish virgins realize the need for prayer all too late; they knocked on the door with great zeal, asking for it to be opened; seeking but not finding. They were so convinced they knew the day and hour that prayer for the

Lord's return, and prayer to Him generally, somehow was overlooked or felt to be unnecessary.

Open to us- The foolish virgins, for all their initial spiritual confidence shown by not taking oil with them, lacked that true love for Christ's appearing which enabled the wise to immediately go forth to meet him. This accords with the description of the righteous as opening the door *immediately* in response to the 'knock' of the second coming (Lk 12:36). "Lord, Lord, open to us" is met with the response "I know you not"; and this connects with an earlier picture of the rejected at judgment day: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not... in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you" (Mt. 7:22,23). Thus there is the implication that when the foolish virgins delay their going to meet Christ, they amass a list of "many wonderful works" which they hope will impress their Lord. This would explain the indignation of the rejected at Christ's rebuke of their lack of suitable works (Mt. 25:41-45). These people would probably not have appeared reprobates in this life; works are so impressive to ones' fellow believers. Jesus did not tell this parable about five hookers and five virgins; *all* of them were 'virgins' in the parable, having an appearance of purity from being in Christ. By contrast, "the wise", whose love for Christ makes them respond immediately to the call, are unconscious of their works of faith (Mt. 25:35-40). "Lord, open to us" is therefore to be read as a confident demand by the unworthy for entry into the Kingdom, based upon trust in their "wonderful works". "I know you not" is paralleled with a lack of oil. The Lord knows His people through their attitude to the oil; whether they have enough or not, or whether they think they do or think they do not, is all so irrelevant. The essence is in wanting the Lord's return.

25:12 *But he answered and said: Truly I say to you, I do not know you*- Lk. 13:25 adds "From whence you are", from what nation or ethnicity. They were complete strangers, speaking another language. The intended paradox is in that those who were so confident they knew the day and hour actually did not know it (:13), and did not know Christ. They thought knowing the day and hour was the same as knowing Christ; or at least, they put the two together in their minds as one and the same. But they are not. And that is the point of this parable, which is sandwiched in between warnings that we do not and cannot know the day and hour- but we are invited to know Christ personally.

25:13 *Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know the day nor the hour*- "Let us watch and be sober" (1 Thess. 5:6) matches our Lord's "Watch, therefore" (Mt. 25:13). This command to watch seems to have a conscious connection with the Lord's urgent plea to the sleepy disciples in Gethsemane to "watch and pray" (Mt. 26:38), indicating that they at that time typify the latter day believers; about to fellowship their Lord's sufferings during the tribulation period, confused, failing to see the urgency of the situation. The disciples doubtless started to obey their Lord's command to watch and pray, but then drifted off into sleep. Watching and praying are often associated; a real *knowing* of God through dynamic prayer is the real way to be watchful for the second coming. The foolish virgins realize this all too late; they knocked on the door with great zeal, asking for it to be opened; seeking but not finding. Knocking is sometimes used as a figure for prayer (Mt. 7:7). The basis for these foolish virgins is surely in Prov. 1:28,29: "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer... they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge".

It cannot be accidental that Matthew's Gospel twice records Christ's plea for us to watch (Mt. 24:42; 25:13); and then goes straight on to describe how in Gethsemane, Christ pleaded with the disciples to join Him in watching and praying, lest they fall to temptation (Mt. 26:38-41). He was evidently deeply, deeply disappointed that they

could not share this with Him. Surely the reason for this further mention of watching is to suggest that in the pain of our latter day watching, we will be at one with our suffering Lord in Gethsemane, as He too watched- not "signs of the times", but His own relationship with the Father, desperately seeking strength to carry the cross rather than quit the race.

25:14 *For it is as when a man, going into another country*- The same word is used in the parable of the tenants (21:33), and also at the end of the Olivet prophecy in describing the Son of Man travelling into a far country and leaving His servants to watch, not knowing exactly when He shall return (Mk. 13:34). This parable is a response to the call to "watch" and be ready for His return in :13. We will keep awake by working for Him, investing our lives with His return as the time of payback. The parables of Matthew 25 are an extension of the Olivet prophecy and appear to comment particularly upon the fact we do not know the exact time of the Lord's return but are to live as if He is coming any moment. The key phrase in this parable, in this connection, is the idea of the Lord returning to assess the servants "after a long time" or delay (see on :19). It may be that the Lord foresaw the rescheduling of His intended return in the first century, and wanted to teach that regardless of the delay, His servants were to keep 'ready' and watching by trading the goods He entrusted them with, and progressing His work on the earth. In one sense, the Lord Jesus is very present. The teaching of the Comforter passages in Jn. 14-16 is that through the Spirit, He is as good as personally present with us. And yet He is apparently absent, in that we no longer possess the miraculous gifts, and it visibly appears that He is far away. The metaphor of a man travelling into a far country is a sign of His recognition that on one level, that is indeed how it will appear to us. And clearly the idea is based upon the experience of absent landlords, who left their estates in the hands of their servants and went away to enjoy the good life in some better part of the Roman empire. Such landlords were despised as non-patriotic and disinterested in the welfare of their people. And yet the Lord consciously employs this image concerning Himself. He is not ultimately like that, but through this choice of imagery He gives a nod of recognition towards the fact that indeed this is how it will appear to some. Joseph likewise appeared tough and disinterested to his brothers, when beneath that mask his heart was bursting for them; His whole plan of action was simply to lead them to repentance.

Called his own servants- A picture of how the Lord considers us to be His very own. The element of unreality is that the master gives so much wealth to his slaves- the Greek *doulos* is the word for slave rather than servant. The translations have generally translated this wrongly as "servant" because of the unreality of owned slaves being given so much wealth to use at their own initiative. Responsibility for trading was given to servants, but not to slaves. Servants were hired, slaves were owned. But that is the point. Five times in the parable the word *doulos* is used, to labour the point. We have been given so much, and are required to use an unusual amount of initiative. Owned slaves typically lacked initiative, and so do we. But the Lord calls us, through this parable, to use initiative to do His work alone and on our own account. This is where the way of religious churchianity is so unhelpful- because all it requires is church attendance, with the work of the ministry left to the full time professional ministers. Or at least, to the leadership. Martin Luther pointed out that the idea of the priesthood of all believers doesn't obviate the need for pastors, but their job should be to inspire each believer to do priestly work.

If we were entrusted with a huge sum to invest, we would likely just go online and open various investment accounts. But such huge sums couldn't easily be invested in such ways. To make a double return, the slave would have had to invest in things far

from his competence; like buying some boats and setting up a fishing business, buying property and developing it and renting it out. The master gives them no guidance as to how to use such astronomical sums, and this is an element of unreality- flagging up the extreme delegation of His work to our initiative. He was away in another country without communication. We too are called to do the Lord's work and further His interests in ways far from our qualification or experience, with Him in one sense present in our lives, but in another, far away on a journey with the initiative left to us. We live in a world where we are taught that you only get involved with business that you are trained and qualified to be involved with.

Investment requires knowledge of a time frame, but no time frame is given- and that is another element of unreality. Investments depend upon whether one is looking for a medium or long term return. But just as we have no idea of the timing of our Lord's return, neither did they. Likewise, in such a case, the master would surely have told the slaves what kind of return he was looking for- and over what time. Remember that the sums given to them were astronomical in a society where there wasn't much capital anyway. We likewise are left without such guidance- but we are asked to trade the Lord's wealth to multiply it. With the same, or more, fervor and sharp wit that would be used by a capitalist accumulator of wealth, driven by greed. Another element of unreality is that the incredibly wealthy master [for whom such astronomical sums are but "a few things"] gives such huge amounts to only three slaves. Surely a man of such wealth had many slaves. Why not give a smaller sum to each of them? Perhaps an answer to this is forged by seeing the link to another parable- of the labourers in the vineyard. There, the master couldn't find enough workers and his harvest therefore was spoiling. He too comes over as desperate for maximum return, in terms of fruit. But it is the fruit of the Spirit. So maybe dividing such a fortune between only three slaves was because there just weren't other slaves available. We are presented with a master who has huge resources, effectively unlimited- but for some reason, very few workers. Just as it is with the Lord.

The slaves start the work immediately and do well. The story teaches that the Lord values initiative far more than expertise, experience and technical qualification. He doesn't, e.g., give money to a slave who is an experienced baker to start a bakery business. He gives a fortune to single slaves and leaves them to get on with investing it. Their lord had commanded them to trade at profit. We get the impression that they and he assume success. We too cannot go wrong in devoting ourselves to His service. It has to succeed. The word will not return void of achievement. The first two servants got on with the job immediately, as if they understood this. They were enthusiastic for the master to make money and prosper, unlike typical slaves- because they believed in him, in his work and they believed in the prospering of the household and all it stood for. Unlike the third slave, they identified totally with their master's interests. This is what thrills the master- not the amount of profit they made. For he is presented as totally wealthy anyway. They knew they were not just further enriching a selfish man who would spend the profits they made on his own luxury and spoiling his kids yet further.

The parables all have an assumption that the mission will succeed. The shepherd and the woman search until they find the lost thing; when we all know that coins and sheep at times are lost permanently. The father is watching for the younger son to return. The parable of the sower and mustard seed assumes that some of the seed sown will definitely produce a huge harvest, quite out of proportion to the smallness of the seed sown. The parable of the labourers assumes there's a huge harvest out there waiting to be gathered. The Lord speaks of a huge harvest being there, but the labourers being few. Likewise the Lord's servants who are given talents assume that they are going to

trade and gain, not trade and lose. The Lord seems to assume that also. God's word will not return void. All our efforts have to end in victory. Attempts to get people to join some particular denomination, attend some specific church building or accept some highly defined quirk of Biblical interpretation- these will have limited success. But there is a huge harvest out there waiting to be gathered. Most believers have rarely if ever actually preached the cross of Christ and repentance to other people, baldly and clearly and in so many words; nor have they challenged people to be baptized. But they complain 'Nobody's interested'. The true word of Christ crucified has to have a harvest.

And delivered to them His goods- The same word is used about how all things have been delivered unto the Son by the Father ("All things are delivered to me from My Father", Lk. 10:22). The totality of the action is the element of unreality- that this Master would share out all He had amongst His servants, when He Himself was not present to oversee their work. Again, this is metaphor. He is present. But He is 'absent' in the sense that He will not forcibly intervene to ensure that His work prospers in our hands. He has left us with absolute freewill and self-determination. In a different metaphor, Paul likens the community of believers to the body of Christ. we are Him, and without us, He is not. We each have part of His work, some aspects of His characteristics, which we are to develop and reveal in the world. The most common usage of *paradidomi* concerning what has been delivered to us is in the context of "That form of doctrine" which has been "delivered" to us (Rom. 6:17; 1 Cor. 11:2,23; 15:3 2 Pet. 2:21; "the faith which was once delivered to the saints", Jude 3)- not to simply keep buried, but to develop in various ways, to the glory of the Lord who gave it. Thus the basic doctrines of the Faith were "delivered" to us at our conversion, as the talents were delivered to the servants. We are asked to use that understanding of basics to develop our own character. It doesn't mean we're each given different doctrines; but we all have different characters and areas of spiritual growth, and we must each use the same doctrines we are "delivered" to develop these. This would explain why it's so easy to see others' lack of spiritual development in some areas, whilst being so sure that we have grown spiritually in other areas. Our observation is correct; this *is* the case. But it's nothing to be proud or critical about; we ourselves have our blind spots. This approach to the parables of the pounds and talents may also explain why brethren of past generations seemed so strong in some areas (e.g. defence of the Faith and preaching) but so weak in others (e.g. compassion).

"His goods" follows on from the Lord's word that "He shall make him ruler over all his goods" (24:47 s.w.). What we are faithful with now will be in some sense eternally given to us in the Kingdom age. We will each have *all* the Master's goods, and the description in the next parable of those goods being distributed between us in this life (Mt. 24:47). In the Kingdom we will no longer know partially, as a result of seeing parts of the whole picture; we will see face to face (1 Cor. 13:9,12 Gk.). The talents here are the pounds of the similar parable in Luke 19, His very *own* (Lk. 19:23). Here in the parable of the talents we read of the servants as “His own”. The Lord’s personal identity with His servants and His goods could not be more stressed. This is no disinterested business transaction. The goods of Christ are those which He took from the devil (Mt. 12:29), the absolute righteousness which is possible once sin is bound. I would suggest the goods of Christ refer to the ultimate spirituality which He has, the various aspects of His character. The ten pounds are delivered to the ten servants, who are to be compared with the ten virgins of Mt. 25. The ten servants and ten virgins represent the body of Christ, each of whom has been given a part of Christ's "own" to develop; we are called to develop His likeness, and I am suggesting that each of us has been given a certain amount and aspect of His perfectly righteous character to develop.

The unworthy calls what he has been given "...yours" (Mt. 25:25)- when it was intended to be *his* personally (cp. Mt. 20:14). He just didn't let himself see the wonderfully personal nature of what God had given him.

25:15 *And to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one*- This is one of the most programmatic, persistent and widespread translational problem in the New Testament. A talent is a weight, a measure. The Lord did not have in view 'talent' as in the natural ability in a particular area which a person may have. These talents are given to us by Him when we are called to Him; they are not something we had of ourselves. A Roman talent weighed 71 pounds or 32.2 kg. The servants were given *His* goods; something they previously did not have was given to them. And to each servant was weighed out a different amount, suggesting that gold or silver is in view. The use of *argurion* in :18 confirms it is silver. The suggestion that the one talent could have been left with the bank in order to receive interest confirms that a precious metal is in view. The figures are large- 32 kg. of silver for the one talent man. The story line of the parable suggests he thought he had not been given much- but 32 kg. of silver is a huge amount. The sheer weight and bulk of the gifts was considerable- to bury 32 kg. of silver was no small job, it was not just a few coins. And 5 talents means 160 kg. of silver. Just looking after it and keeping it safe was a considerable job. It has been claimed that one talent was 6,000 denarii, and labourers worked for a penny / day in harvest time. The annual pay of a Roman legionnaire was 225 denarii; a shepherd earnt 180 / year. 6000 days work meant something like 30 years work. Just for one talent. People spent what they earnt on food, there was little concept of saving from excess income. There was no excess income. And one servant was given five talents. Even if we think we have little or no capacity for service, we need to consider that in fact we have been given a huge amount. And the five talent man was given 160 kg. of silver. As I write this in 2025, 1 kg. of silver is worth around 1400 US$. The one talent man was therefore given the equivalent of around 45,000 $. And he considered it not enough to do anything much with. The story line suggests that many of us have been given far more than one talent. The five talent man was therefore given something like 225,000 $. This is all a picture of the great riches in Christ which are given to us- each one of us. The relative lack of guidance they were given, with their Lord leaving immediately and leaving them to get on with it, is an insightful picture into how *so* much has been delegated to us to get on with according to our own initiative, and how we are tempted to think we have not really been given that much. And it's a powerful statement of what huge potential we have.

The parable concludes with the one talent being taken from the third slave and given to the first slave. The comment is "For to everyone that has shall be given, and he shall have abundance, but from him that has not, even what he has shall be taken away" (Mt. 25:29). This directly connects with the Lord's earlier statement about His gifts to His people: "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been *given* to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him" (Mt 13:11,12). New Living Translation: "To those who are open to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge". This makes the talents refer to the knowledge of the Kingdom which has been given to us. Mt. 13:44-46 describe the Gospel of the Kingdom as the treasure found hidden in a field [by the likes of the third slave of the talents parable?], the pearl of great price. Some have more ability to multiply and develop the power of that knowledge. Some have more, or more accurate, knowledge. But each slave has been given a huge amount. The allusions to the parable in Corinthians lead to the same conclusion. 1 Cor. 4:1,2 is clear:

We are "entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful", as the slaves were "good and faithful". 1 Cor. 4:7 continues the allusion to the talents parable: "For who makes you to differ? And what have you that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?". The Corinthians failed to perceive they had been given something, and acted as if they had not received it. And the underlying reason appears to be that they failed to accept God had made each of them differing from each other, thereby receiving different gifts. Likewise 2 Cor. 8:12 may allude to this parable, encouraging the Corinthians that it is accepted according to what a man had, and not according to what he doesn't have. Paul had begun the letter by reminding them of the wealth of gifts which they had all received, although they didn't appreciate them.

The parables several times speak of the relationship between our Master and ourselves. They do so in somewhat unreal and arresting terms. It would've made everyone think when the Lord spoke of how a master handed over a total of eight talents to His servants and told them to use them as best they could. This was, humanly speaking, a huge and unreal risk for a master to take. He *so* trusted those servants! And so much has the Lord delegated to each of us, entrusting us with the Gospel. And we can imagine His joy when they lived up to the trust He placed in them. We can also imagine them walking away from their meeting with Him, wondering why ever He had entrusted so much to them, feeling nervous, praying for strength to act responsibly and zealously. The talent was worth 6,000 denarii, i.e. 20 years' wages for the workers in the parable of the labourers (Mt. 10:1-16). In 2014 the average annual income in the USA was 50,000$- 20 years wages would therefore be $1 million in dynamic terms. For one talent. But most of the Lord's servants are given more than one talent. Looked at in this way, the church is a millionaire's club. The element of unreality in the story is that this is a huge and unrealistic amount to give to a servant to have responsibility for! But this is the huge responsibility which passes to us in having been called to the Gospel. Likewise, what human Owner of a vineyard who give out his vineyard to *other* tenants, after the first lot had proven so wicked, and killed not only His servants but His beloved Son? But this speaks of God's amazing desire to keep on delegating His affairs to frail mortals. And just as people typically fail to manage large sums of money which they are unaccustomed to, so we too miserably mismanage the Lord's wealth. But it was and is His will that we should use our own initiative in progressing His work and managing His wealth.

Note how valuable just one talent was- equivalent to 20 years earnings of a working man. This seems to me to be an element of unreality in the story, that flags up a lesson. The point is, we have been entrusted with a *huge* amount. We tend to see it as something ordinary; that we have a faith, a denomination, just like many others do. But the personal, individualized gift which we have been given is simply *huge*. Imagine if you were given say $1 million to use for the Lord's service. You'd be quite busy working out how to spend it all. But the point is, we have each been given *far more* than this. The parable has specific application to our witness; for it was just prior to the Lord's departure that He gave us the great preaching commission, corresponding to how in the parable, the Master leaves His servants but just beforehand, gives His servants the talents to go and trade with. Hence the one talent man is criticized for not having lent the talent on usury, a practice which Jews could only practice with Gentiles. He should've taken his talent, the riches of the Gospel, to the Gentiles. And yet I'd suggest that 21st century disciples aren't one talent people. We have been given *so* much- not least literacy and having the Bible in our own native languages.

The ratio 1:2:5 may allude to how Herod split his income stream between three of his sons: Philip (100 Talents), Antipas (200 talents), Archelaus (500 talents). The implication would be that God's Kingdom was a parody of the current kingdom of men, and the powerful rulers were in fact the servants of the Lord Jesus.

To each- Absolutely every believer in Christ is given some gift of the Spirit. None are exempt. And we are to use what we are given. This idea is repeated and alluded to so often in the New Testament. Each man shall be judged individually according to his works because to each servant something has been given, and he must answer for its usage (16:27). This parable leads on from the Olivet discourse, which concluded with the Lord's teaching about the household which "the Son of Man" departed from, "and gave authority to his servants, and to every man [s.w.] his work" (Mk. 13:34). In a culture where religious specialists were thought to be God's workers, this was a radical teaching- that each and every one of us has been given specific work to do. And the culture of our present age is a no less difficult one into which to introduce this teaching. Our fear of responsibility, our desire to retreat deep within ourselves, to live only semi-aware lives in an age of abstraction and minimalism… all this makes it difficult to accept that we have been given specific work to do, for which we shall be judged at the last day. 'Every man… each of you' is a very common term in the New Testament, seeking to persuade people of their personal connection with God and Jesus, and not to rely on mere group membership. Hence "Be baptized *every one of you*… in turning away *every one of you* from his sins" (Acts 2:38; 3:26) would appear redundant until we realize this personal appeal that was necessary against a culture of group mentality.

Analyzing the later NT allusions to this term "to every man", we have an insight into what in practice the talents may represent. God has "dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3); we have each been given a specific ministry, and according to Romans 12, we are to develop that ministry. If we have no idea what that ministry is, what hopes the Lord has for us, we need to earnestly ask Him to reveal it to us. But if we're not perceiving it, this may well be because we don't want to perceive it. On a more obvious level, it may be that faith itself is a gift of God, and different people are given different amounts of it- but we are to develop whatever we are given and not leave the potential dormant. This would explain the great diversity of spiritual levels and of faith which there clearly is within the body of believers. Life and especially psychological and spiritual life is not experienced by each person on an even playing field. There are background factors which affect how easy it is for a person to believe; and the Lord is aware of this and will judge accordingly.

When we read of how "the Lord gave to each man" (1 Cor. 3:5 s.w.) we have a very clear allusion to the parable. But the context is of how the Lord 'gave' converts to both Paul and Apollos. This too is a gift which we must use. Some make much brave effort to preach and never win a single convert. Others seem to keep stumbling across folks eager to hear and respond to the message. But that is all a gift from the Lord, for us to use and develop. And so the testing of 'each man's work' in the day of judgment will be a testing of the quality and extent to which they have worked with people (1 Cor. 3:8,10,13). Another allusion to this part of the parable is in 1 Cor. 7:7, where singleness or marital situation is described as "every man has his *idios* gift [s.w. "his own / *idios* ability / power"]… one [this way]… one [that way]". This is the same wording used in speaking of how this one was given five talents, that one was given two talents. As God has distributed to and called every man, so we are to develop our lives in that calling (1 Cor. 7:17), whether as slaves, single people, married or whatever.

Many lament their marital situation, considering that if only it were otherwise, they would be able to serve God better. But it is in fact a gift from God, to be used for Him.

1 Cor. 12:7,11,18 again allude to the parable in saying that the gift of the Spirit "is given to every man… the Spirit… dividing to every man *idios* , personally". The talents therefore refer to the Spirit, spiritual gifts to be used within the body of Christ- so the passage continues. Likewise "unto every one of us is given grace" (Eph. 4:7). "Grace", *charis*, does indeed mean simply a gift. But it is so often used in the context of God's forgiveness that we can overlook the obvious fact that the gifts of God to us are His recurrent acts of patient forgiveness, given so freely to "every man" in Christ. These gifts of grace, and so many other such gracious gifts, are to not merely be *accepted* but developed and used. Again in allusion to this parable, Peter pleaded: "As every man [s.w.] has received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Pet. 4:10).

According to his abilities- The Lord recognizes that we each have unique abilities in some areas- and thereby unique inabilities in others. And He gives us work to do according to those abilities and not according to our inabilities. It may be that understanding of 'correct doctrine' is a gift given to one and not another; because not all are wired as Bible students. The giving of such different gifts, in different amounts, suggests that there can never be uniformity of spiritual level or achievement in the church. And yet so much church structure, hope, intention and expectation is geared towards achieving such uniformity. We each start at a different point and much more is expected of those who start further down the road. *Kata… dunamis* is the very phrase Paul uses in 2 Cor. 8:3 in commending some brethren for responding to others' needs "according to their ability [*kata… dunamis*], yes, and beyond their ability". Surely this is an allusion to the Lord's words here. The point is that the Lord understands our ability and asks us to work according to that; but those brethren excelled themselves in that they responded beyond what the Lord even expected or hoped for from them.

The goods are distributed "to every man according to his several (Gk. *idios*, individual, s.w. "private") ability" (Mt. 25:15). We each have our own private spirituality which we must develop in our own private way. The talents parable is alluded to in 1 Cor. 12:7-12: "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each man (RV) to profit withal". In the first century, this was seen in the way in which different believers were given different gifts of the Spirit. In our dispensation, each of us is called to manifest a different aspect of the Lord Jesus, the Lord the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18 RV). But the principle of 1 Cor. 12:7-12 remains true, as indicated by the way Paul reasons that we each have a different aspect of the Spirit to manifest because "by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body... and have been all made to drink into one Spirit". In principle, these words are true of our baptisms. At baptism we were given our talents, our different aspects of the Spirit / mind of Christ to manifest. We are all in the Christ body, and manifest His spirit / mind in different aspects. And as the manifestation of different aspects of the Spirit in the first century caused frictions, so too today.

However, there is no equivalent of the pronoun "his" in the Greek text here. *The Lord* gave the talents to the three servants "according to his own power and immediately took his journey". The 'he' in view could quite easily be the Lord, and the 'His… ability / power' would then refer to that of the Lord. This is rather confirmed by the recurrence of *kata… dunamis* in Paul's writings [which allude once every three verses at least to the Lord's words in the Gospels, especially His parables]. "*Kata* the gift… given unto me *kata*… His power [*dunamis*]" (Eph. 3:7)… that He would give you, *kata*… the might [*dunamis*] through His Spirit" (Eph. 3:16). "He that is of power

[*dunamai*]… *kata* the power [*dunamis*] that works in us" (Eph. 3:20). Each of these verses associates *kata… dunamis* with the *gift* of the Lord, and the same word is used as in the parable for the giving of the talents to believers. Note too 2 Tim. 1:8 "*Kata* the power [*dunamis*] of God".

I suggest there is a purposeful ambiguity of meaning here. We are given some aspects of the Lord's goods according to *our* power / ability, and in order to develop them and use them we are given *His* power / ability. For His Spirit is to be merged with our spirit. Maybe Paul appreciated this when he wrote: "I also labour *kata* His working, which works in me with power [*dunamis*]" (Col. 1:29).

And he went on his journey- Perhaps an element of unreality in the story. For we would expect Him to train them and explain to them how He intends the wealth to be used. The one talent man's response at the end suggests that he had not been given any clear commands by his Lord as to how to use his one talent. But this is the point. We have been given the talents we have, and we are to use them- at our initiative, and not in response to a legal code which defines how we use them. And therefore one believer will make more than another out of what God gives.

The same word for 'took his journey' has just been used by the Lord at the end of the Olivet prophecy in saying that the Son of Man 'took a far journey' and "left His house" (Mk. 13:34). The leaving of His house surely connects with the introduction to the Olivet prophecy, in which the Lord stated that "Your house is left unto you desolate" (23:38). It was no longer His house, but theirs. And in departing from the temple, He was leaving the house of Israel. The structure of Judaism was no longer going to be used- instead, He would give His wealth to a few individual servants and leave it to their initiative what they did with it. And this is what was and is so hard for so many- to serve the Lord on our initiative, without religious, legalistic structures. And these are [re]built exactly because people generally struggle with the calling to take ownership and responsibility for what the Lord has given them.

This idea of using one's own initiative was more startling then than it is now. Today, students are 'trained' to think for themselves, be creative, develop their own opinions, push forward their own independent research, using question / problem-based learning as a paradigm for their education. 'Education' in the first century wasn't like that at all. The idea was that "every one when he is fully taught will be like his teacher" (Lk. 6:40). The idea was that a person born into a certain social situation was trained to take their place in society, given that 'station and place' into which they had been born. Initiative in that sense was not encouraged; it was all about training up a person to correctly fulfill societies' expectation of them. The idea of being personally taught by the invisible Master / teacher Jesus, becoming like Him rather than like the person whom society expected, being given talents by Him which we are to trade and multiply at our initiative (Mt. 25:15-28)... this was all totally counter-cultural stuff. What was so vital in the Mediterranean world was that a person achieved conformity to accepted values. Cicero advised that in any good presentation of a legal case or encomium, emotions and passions shouldn't be referred to. Individualism was seen as a threat to tradition and the collective society. The huge New Testament emphasis on becoming disciples, learners, of an invisible Lord, Master and teacher located in Heaven, serving Him alone, worried about *His* standards, perceptions and judgment of us- that was and is so totally opposite to the expectations of society. People were educated to be embedded in society, rather than to come out of their world and live in the new world in which Christ was the light, and all things were made new in a new creation, a new set of values.

Several times Paul alludes to the parable of the talents; in Rom. 12:6 he suggests that this parable has an application to each having a different gift within the ecclesia; whilst in 1 Cor. 12:11 and Eph. 4:7 he implies that he saw the talents as representing miraculous Holy Spirit gifts. This shows how Paul applied the basic principles of Christ's teaching to local situations, even though it may seem strictly to be slightly out of context. He does the same with Christ's commands concerning personal offences in Mt. 18; he applies them, strictly out of context, to dealing with doctrinal problems at Corinth. But this, presumably, is how we are to read the Gospels; understanding the basic principles, and applying them in different situations in practice.

As will be discussed on :24, the master is presented as ambitious for the acquisition of wealth. He goes away, presumably to conduct yet more money making business, and entrusts His slaves with wealth. Travelling abroad was nearly always associated with trading... the English word "traffic" means both to trade and also has associations with travelling. They are to grossly increase the wealth given to them, and then they will be rewarded for how much wealth they generated. Then they will be entrusted with even more wealth, in order to go and repeat the cycle. Just as our trading of talents now will in essence continue in the Kingdom, although we will be given far more to trade with and the talents will be "our own", we will as it were have our own independent business. And any slave who doesn't perform will be punished, mocked and rejected. This was exactly the kind of wealthy man that the Lord's poor, rural, working class audience despised. But as always with the Lord's parables, He turns expectations around. The equation of the Lord with this master would have been unreal for the audience- at first hearing. It would have caught their attention, and made them think it through. The shrewd, sharp, relentlessly ambitious, success oriented master who wants an ever multiplying increase and return on investment is indeed the Lord. This is indeed how He is, in the furtherance of His wealth and household. But His wealth is of spiritual things, of converts, to the glory of God. His obedient servants perceive this, and want this master and his household to prosper- because this is the one Master and Household that is worth totally supporting in the mission.

25:16 *Immediately he that received*- Immediate response characterizes both of the faithful slaves. "Yes straight away" is to be our attitude. And possibly they got to work immediately because they assumed that their Lord was going to return quite soon. He comes "after a long time", but they lived and worked for Him as if His return was imminent- just as we should.

This continues Matthew's common theme of immediacy of response. We have freely received [s.w.], and are to freely give (10:8). The context is of giving the things of the Gospel to others. This is the incredible wealth of silver we have been entrusted with. We “receive” [s.w.] the seed / word of the Gospel (13:31,33), just as in the previous parable the virgins receive [s.w. “took”] their lamps (25:1) when we “received the knowledge of the Truth” (Heb. 10:26). The emphasis upon their ‘receiving’ the talents (:16,18,20,22,24) shows that the talents are not natural abilities, but what is given by the Lord. And straight after this teaching, the Lord uses the same word to urge His followers to take or [s.w.] ‘receive’ the bread and wine, the symbols of His life given to us (26:26,27). But that is ongoing- we receive [s.w.] “of His fullness” (Jn. 1:16), all that He is, He has divided amongst us His servants; different aspects of His personality and work in this world. This is achieved practically through the medium of the word and the Spirit- for again He uses the word about us ‘receiving’ the Father’s words (Jn. 17:8) and receiving the Holy Spirit (Jn. 20:22). There are specific things we

are called to do- Paul surely alludes here when he speaks of how what he “received of the Lord Jesus” was the ministry of testifying to the good news of His grace (Acts 20:24).

The five talents went- This may seem a superfluous word, until we perceive a connection with the great preaching commission, to *go* into all the world with the Gospel.

And traded- The same word is translated "work" in the parable of the sons working in the vineyard (21:28). Whilst salvation is on the basis of grace and not works (Rom. 4:4,5), there is all the same a fundamental call to "work" in response to that grace. If we do not, then we have to remember that "faith without works is dead, being alone" (James 2:17). And this is a severe temptation. To believe, to assent to Christian and Biblical ideas, but not to respond further, thinking that the mere possession of the ideas is enough. This was the one talent man; his faith remained "alone". The "work" was to be done within the vineyard. The ecclesia of Christ, the body of Christ, is merely a structure enabling our response in practice. The "work" was to harvest the fruit of the vine- to work with others bringing them in to the final harvest of salvation. In another metaphor, we ourselves are to bring forth fruit on the vine; but the metaphor of harvesting used in 21:28 and in other parables of the vineyard surely speaks of harvesting others for the Kingdom. The same word has just been used by the Lord in saying that the Son of Man has left his house and given to each man in the household his "work" (Mk. 13:34). We each have a specific work or trading to do, tailored personally to what the Lord has given us. Sadly, the structure of church life has often become so developed and defined that the average church member assumes that the work is being done by the specialists. "Get professional help" is the comment made on so many cases of personal need encountered; "Read the book... come to the seminars... to the meetings" can all be a passing up of our personal responsibility to work. The judgment seat is largely about presenting to the Lord our work in this life. And yet John uses the same word in recording the Lord's comment that the deeds ['trading', s.w.] of the faithful are even now "made manifest that they are wrought in God" if we come to the light of the cross which is the basis of all self-examination and self-understanding (Jn. 3:21).

Literally, the slaves "worked on them", on the talents. We find the word used to describe how in the day of judgment, God will “render to every man according to his works” (Rom. 2:5). We can indeed prove / examine our own work [s.w.] even in this life (Gal. 6:4). People are never better than when they perceive clearly their calling and the work they are intended to do- and give their lives to doing it. Barnabas and Saul were 'called' just as the servants here were 'called' (:14) to do the 'work' [s.w. 'trading'] of spreading the Gospel (Acts 13:2), and experienced the Spirit confirming them in the "work" [s.w.] they were 'fulfilling' (Acts 14:26). The idea of 'fulfilling' a work given suggests that they were fulfilling God's intention for them. And again we note that the work was related to bringing others to Christ. Just as the servants 'went' to 'trade', so Paul talks of 'going' to "the work" [s.w. 'trade'], again in the context of missionary work (Acts 15:38). God will render to every man according to his "works" (s.w. Rom. 2:6). Our trading is the basis upon which we will be judged. The gift has been given by pure grace, as it was to the servants; but we have to respond to that grace, lest we have believed and accepted in vain. It is the works *of the law* [of Moses] which will not justify (Rom. 3:20); rather our works are to be those in response to the Lord's great gifts to us. 1 Cor. 3:13-15 uses this same word for 'working / trading' and again applies it to our work in building others up- and the day of judgment will declare the quality of that work. The Corinthians were therefore Paul's "work in the Lord" (1 Cor. 9:1), even

though he baptized virtually none of them, his efforts for them were his attempt to trade / work with the talents given him. God clearly has intended works / trading for each of us, "Good works [s.w.] which God has before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). And the NT usage of the idea of works / trading is nearly always in the context of preaching or caring for others. Paul may well have himself in mind when he promises the Philippians that "He who began a good work in you [Paul's initial preaching at Philippi] will work at finishing it right up to the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6 cp. 22). The key is to be open to God's leading. Thus Paul urged Timothy to purge himself from bad company so that he might be prepared or ready "unto every good work" (2 Tim. 2:21), and to devote himself to the Scriptures that he might be "equipped unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:17). These works are surely those "Good works [s.w.] which God has before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). And we should be "ready to every good work... thoughtful to be ready for good works" (Tit. 3:1,8), thoughtfully open to God's leading in response to our prayer to be shown what exactly is the work / trading intended for us. A functional church will be a place where the members are all devoted to this principle personally, and thus will "consider one another to provoke unto love and good works" (Heb. 10:24). And God will confirm our openness and willingness; He will "frame you in every good work to do His will" (Heb. 13:21 Gk.).

We cannot be passive on receiving the opportunity to serve God. We will urgently seek to do something with what we have been enabled to do for the Lord: “The servant who got five bags *went quickly* to invest the money and earned five more bags” (Mt. 25:16 NCV). The law of the peace offerings was designed so as to encourage the person who decided to make such a freewill offering to execute immediately- they were to eat it the same day they offered it, and the sacrifice would be totally unacceptable if it was killed but left for some days (Lev. 19:5-7). If we have an impulse to respond to the Lord, we should respond to it immediately. This isn’t mere impetuosity. It’s a spirit of always having an immediacy of response, which empowers us to overcome the procrastination which holds us back so much.

With them- The idea surely is that we are to trade / work with what the Lord gives us to do, with those same things; rather than decide that our natural talents, which were not given at conversion but rather are an outcome of our own environment and experience, are to be developed just as everyone in the world does- and then claimed as work for the Lord.

And made another five talents- “Made” translates *poieo*, a very common word; but it has just been used by the Lord, again in talking about His servants, in saying that the faithful servant will be found ‘doing’ care to his brethren (24:46). And the word is twice used later in this chapter about ‘doing’ good unto the least of Christ’s brethren, and this being the basis for our judgment (:40,45). Again we see that our work / trading involves fruitfully sharing the spiritual riches we have received with others. It’s worth noting that this teaching is followed by the record of the woman anointing the Lord’s feet; and all the records of it use the same Greek words to describe it. She “did it” (*poieo*, 26:12,13), she “worked” (s.w. “traded”) a good work [‘trading’] on the Lord (26:10). It’s as if her humanly senseless pouring out of her wealth for the Lord was in fact smart trading in the spiritual sense. The story line implies that we can add to the total wealth of the Lord Jesus. Yet the extension of His glory, the progress of His work, depends upon us, and we are left to our own initiative in this. This is the meaning of the element of ‘absence’ of the Lord, and the immediacy of His leaving the servants with such huge amounts of silver without instructing them specifically how to use them.

25:17 *In like manner he also that received the two gained other two*- The word is used regarding 'gaining' others for the Kingdom: "You have gained your brother" (Mt. 18:15), Paul was sensitive to his presentation of the Gospel "that I might gain the more" (1 Cor. 9:19,20,21,22); unbelieving husbands are "gained" by the example of the believing wife (1 Pet. 3:1). Clearly enough, the trading and gain of talents refers to what we do for others on the basis of what the Lord Jesus has personally given us. Not having oil to give light to others in the house [the ecclesia] and to the world is made parallel with not gaining more talents, which matches not ministering to the least [the word often refers to the spiritually least] of Christ's brethren. This shows the primacy of preaching & pastoral work / effort for others, especially in the last days. Oil burning is giving light to others. Going to sleep / not tending the lamps in the last generation is therefore lacking in love to the household, not keeping ourselves awake to give light to others. Lack of care for others in the last days results in lamps going out and our generation slumbering. Does this imply that in the last days there will not be the care for the least of Christ's needy brethren which there should be? The last generation will be slumbering when shouldn't be, i.e. not giving light to the world and brotherhood as they should. And could it be that the spiritually "least" whom they despise are the new converts made in the last days tribulation, whom they somehow disregard?

25:18 *But he that received the one went away and dug in the earth and hid his lord's money*- It cannot be incidental that the man with the smallest grant of wealth didn't use it. He had been given a huge amount, but he was perhaps miffed he had not been given as much as others. He assumed that they would do the work; even if he doubled his talent, he would only have made one talent. The first slave made five talents. Perhaps we have an insight here into the way that many consider that the Lord's work is better done by the more visibly endowed.

The tragedy is that the Gospel is hid from the majority anyway (s.w. 11:25; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:26). It is treasure hid in a field which must be found (13:44). And it is hid now by one to whom it was revealed in order to share with others, put back in the earth from which the Lord Jesus had extracted it. By hiding it, the man effectively was placing himself in the same position as the unbelieving world. The allusion is clearly to Achan, hiding God's talents in the earth, for himself. In this connection we perhaps have an insight into the man's mentality. Can we infer that the man reasoned that the Lord might in fact never return, and therefore, his Lord's talents would become his? His excuses about the Lord being unreasonably demanding and "therefore" he did nothing with the talent all seem rather illogical, as if he was just saying it for the sake of mumbling at least something. His real motivation, surely, was to keep the talent for himself- on the basis that his Lord would not return. And this is the context of the parable. The fact we know that Christ will return, even if we do not know when exactly, will guard us against such an assumption- that we can take what is His as ours.

The fact it was not his ("his Lord's money") meant that he had no right to simply not use it. The fact we have been given so much by the Lord is undeniable; and we are to use it for Him and not hide it. Because it's not ours to do that with.

25:19 *Now after a long time- Chronos*, "time", can as a word imply delay or an interval. If time has 'length', as it does here, this can only be in the expectation of human beings. It would be fair to interpret this phrase, even simply on the basis of the original Greek, as meaning 'after a long delay'. And this would admirably fit the context- for the parables of Matthew 25 are a commentary upon the closing warning of the Olivet prophecy, that there is indeed a delay to the Lord's coming (24:48; 25:5). Our sufferings now are only for a moment compared to the glorious eternity of the Kingdom (Ps.

37:10; 2 Cor. 4:17), and yet the language of the Bible also expresses God's appreciation that from our perspective, our time of probation is "a long time" (25:19). See on 20:16.

The lord of those servants came and made a reckoning with them- The Lord's coming was surely not in AD70 because He did not reckon up with all His servants then; there was no resurrection of the faithful in order to reckon with them. The Greek text here is *sunairo logos*- He reckons the *logos* with them, He considers the thought behind their actions. It wasn't so much a reckoning on a simply utilitarian, mercenary level. Rather was it an examination of their inner *logos* and motivation, as demonstrated by the discussion with the one talent man concerning his inner thoughts about his Lord. *Sunairo* is only used elsewhere in 18:23,24 where the Lord's reckoning with His servants begins now in this life. And they had miserably failed in money management. Yet He still wanted relationship with them, and frankly forgave them, whilst assuming they would on that basis forgive any of their own far smaller debtors. But even that didn't work out. Putting the Lord's parables together, so many of them are about servants; and the servants often behave in an incredibly bad way to Him. And we are those servants.

25:20 *And he that received the five talents came*- This is *proserchomai,* and the word used for the Lord's coming is *erchomai* (:19). He comes to us and the faithful come to Him. As outlined earlier, this will have a literal element to it. When we know for sure that the Lord has come, we will have the choice as to whether to go to Him immediately or delay. Those who go immediately will be confirmed in that by being snatched away to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:16,17). One of the great themes of Matthew's gospel is that various men and women 'came to Jesus' at different times and in a variety of situations. The Lord uses the same term to describe how at the last day, people will once again 'come unto' Him (Mt. 25:20-24). The same Jesus whom they 'came before' in His ministry is the one to whom they and we shall again come at the last day- to receive a like gracious acceptance. He will judge and reason the same way He did during His mortality. Likewise we know what kind of judge Christ is, and so the meeting of Him in final judgment need not be for us something so terribly unknown and uncertain. We know that He is the judge who 'justifies' sinners- the Greek word means not so much 'making righteous', but 'acquitting, declaring righteous' in a legal sense. It's unthinkable that a human judge treats the guilty as if they are righteous and innocent, just because they are "in" Christ. It's also unheard of that a judge also is the counsel for the defence! But this is the kind of judge we have, day by day- to those who believe. Will He be so different in the last day?

And brought another five talents, saying: Lord- He offered / presented the talents to his Lord. Only in the day of judgment will we achieve final self-knowledge and be able to perceive what we have done and achieved with what He has given us. Our trading / work is clearly with the Lord's people. The presentation of the wealth gained therefore refers to what we have done for others. Paul spoke of how he would 'present' his converts to Christ at the last day; hence his concern about their development, "that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2).

You gave me five talents. Look, I have gained another five talents- This is the word used for the 'delivering' to believers of the body of doctrine comprising the Gospel message (1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Pet. 2:21; Jude 3). Again we see that the talents refer to what is specifically given to us by Christ at the time of our calling by the Gospel, and not to any latent natural ability within us.

25:21 *His lord said to him: Well done, good and faithful servant*-

We sense the lord's absolute joy in this slave. His joy was not in the accumulation of wealth, but in the performance of the slave. This looks forward to the Lord's attitude

to us at the last day. We note that this lord, who clearly represents the Lord Jesus, calls His slave "good". When addressed as "good master", the Lord Jesus had refused this accolade, saying that none is good except God (Mk. 10:18). He clearly is lavishing praise upon the slave.

The term used in the previous parable (24:45). There, the “faithful servant” was faithful in that he provided food for the other servants within the household, and didn’t beat the fellow-servants. Here, the faithful servant trades his Lord’s wealth for a profit. The metaphors refer to the same essential activity- sharing the wealth we have in Christ for the benefit of our brethren. To cut them off, waste their energy and attention with empty arguments and pedantic concerns, ignore them… is to not trade the talents, to be unfaithful.

You have been faithful over a few things- The equivalent parable in Lk. 19:17 says “in a very little” (*elachistos*). This very same word is found later in Matthew 25, when we read that the final judgment will be based around how we have treated “the least” of the Lord’s brethren (25:40,45). The talents we have been given relate to them- how we have used them, what we have done for them, how we have served them with the riches given us by the Lord. There is obviously a connection between the manner in which we rule over the “few things”, and how we shall be given “many things” to rule over in the Kingdom age. Clearly what we are doing now is in essence what we shall eternally be doing, but on a greater level. If our lives are centered merely around ourselves and doing what we want, developing ourselves, rather than developing the Lord’s work and doing *His* work, then we will be out of step with the life eternal. We are to start living that now. And then we shall live it eternally.

The talents represent the things of the Kingdom, of eternal life. "For to everyone that has shall be given, and he shall have abundance, but from him that has not, even what he has shall be taken away" (Mt. 25:29). This directly connects with the Lord's earlier statement about His gifts to His people: "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been *given* to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him" (Mt 13:11,12). Just one talent was a huge amount- 6000 pennies, when a labourer earnt a penny a day during harvest and a Roman legionary earned 225 pennies / year. Equivalent of a lifetime's salaries. But even eternity in God's Kingdom, which is so valuable to us now, will be revealed as only a few things. This same Lord, according to another parable, had a servant who owed him 10,000 talents. And the Lord therefore had plenty more than that. He could afford to easily forgive that man a debt which was equivalent to all the wealth in the world at the time. What awaits us is so glorious that it will make eternity in God's Kingdom seem just a very small thing. As Paul encouraged the Ephesians, God will lavish His grace upon us throughout the ages of eternity. Wow. Really, just "wow". We must give our whole heart and soul to these things now, and devote our lives to sharing this amazing good news [and "good news" even seems inadequate language] with all we can persuade of it.

So I will set you over- The preceding parable says that we have already been made ruler in the Lord’s household in order to feed the members (24:45 s.w.). Our whole church experience, our relations with others and efforts for them, is to prepare us for being made ruler over all the Lord’s goods (24:47). We cannot of course accurately imagine what new dimensions await us, but all we can say is that we are in training for them, and that training involves the care of others within the household now. To separate ourselves from that household, or cast others out of it, is to deny both ourselves and others the environment required for us to prepared for eternity.

Many things- The Lord gave a related teaching in Lk. 16:10-12: "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?". What is given to us now is to test our faithfulness. If we don't perceive what we have been given, and so many believers tell me they are unsure about this, *then you need to ask the Lord to show you*. Urgently. And give your life to developing those things. The Luke 16 passage appears to say that in this life, we are stewards of the Lord's wealth; but if we manage that well, then we will be rewarded with wealth which is actually and personally our own. For eternity. That 'wealth' will be of the same nature as that given to us by the Lord initially. Here we have a rare insight into the nature of our eternity. "Many things" is equivalent to "all His goods" (24:47; Lk. 12:44). There is nothing that is the Lord's which will not be shared with us and in some sense give to us to exercise our initiative over.

Enter into- This is *eis-erchomai*, and is the Lord's confirmation of how the servant responded to the call to come to Him by 'coming' to Him, *pros-erchomai* (:20). Once again we meet the teaching that our initial response at the Lord's return, our willing desire to go to Him, will be confirmed by Him bringing us closer to Him. The same word has just been used about the wise virgins 'going in' to the wedding (25:10) having initially responded to the call without delay. The same word is used of Noah entering the ark (24:38), and these parables in chapter 25 appear to be an expansion upon that.

The joy of your Lord- The joy of the Lord Jesus as revealed in His own teaching is specifically His joy at the repentance of others. He speaks of Himself as the shepherd rejoicing over the lost sheep (Mt. 18:13; Lk. 15:5) and the repentance of any sinner (Lk. 15:7), at the return of the prodigal (Lk. 15:32), joyful that the disciples believed in Him (Jn. 11:15), joyful at finding the believers in the world (Mt. 13:44). The reasons for the Lord's joy were all related to the salvation and spiritual blessing *of others*. He went on to say soon afterwards that His joy was to become the joy of the disciples even in this life (Jn. 15:11; 17:13). This will ultimately happen at the point of entry into the Kingdom at the day of judgment, but the essence of it is to begin now. And it can indeed begin now, if the Lord's joy at others' repentance, growth and salvation becomes *our* joy, and our joy is no longer in ourselves and material things. There is also here a Joseph allusion- "They were merry with him" (Gen. 43:34). He would fain have them enter into the joy of their Lord.

The master of the servants is modelled upon a master eager for gain and acquisition. His joy was in the profits. The slaves are invited to enter that joy, to have his joy at the profits as their joy. I will discuss on :28 how the story ends with the slaves becoming more than slaves and actually having ownership in the household business. This is hinted at in this language of entering the master's joy. We will rejoice when we see things going well for His business, because this is not about accumulation of material capital, but the prospering of the things of the Kingdom and God's Name and glory. The initial audience would have been expecting the industrious slave to have been rewarded with freedom, or given some money for himself. And he is, in a way, but the parable expresses it strangely- the reward was to enter into the master's joy. It was reward in terms of relationship. To identify with the master, to share His ownership of the household, not as a slave but as a co-owner. And it now becomes apparent that the master was not in fact a hard man, a capitalist obsessed with acquisition. He did the whole exercise because He wanted to reward the slave with equal relationship with Him. He didn't do it to make money- he had plenty. He did it to reward the slaves with

equal relationship with Him. It was the third slave who remained with the misunderstanding that the master was a hard man.

We can also interpret the invitation into the master's joy as an invitation to a joyful celebration feast. 'Enter into my joy' is a phrase attested in classical writings for an invitation to share in a feast of celebration. This is the eschatological marriage supper of the lamb, which in prospect we attend in the breaking of bread. This "marriage feast" has just been mentioned in the preceding parable (:10).

25:22 *And also he that had received the two talents came and said: Lord, you gave me two talents. Look, I have gained another two talents*- Paul uses the same word for "received" in 1 Cor. 4:7: “For who makes you to differ? And what have you that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”. All that we have spiritually including the knowledge of the Lord Jesus in truth, is a gift we received. And yet we can easily act as if we did not receive it, suggesting instead that we found the Lord ourselves by our own searching. Many people have a spiritual search all their lives and never find much if anything. What we have got is a gift we received, and we must ever be humbled by that.

25:23 *His lord said to him: Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things*- Gk. "over a little". But the slaves had been given huge wealth, with just one talent equivalent to 20 years' earnings. Especially in a pre-capitalist culture where capital was in short supply. And it was bulky- 160 kg. of precious metal for the five talent slave. But the wealth of the master is huge- this was to Him just a few things. This is the same master we met in the parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Mt. 18:23-34) who is owed 10,000 talents- a mind boggling amount.

A "faithful" slave was commonly understood as one that didn't steal. Petty theft by slaves was so common, and Paul specifically warns Christian slaves against doing this. Yet the one talent slave was also "faithful" in this sense; he returned the money and didn't steal a penny, not one of the 6000 pennies that made up the one talent. But he is condemned. This shows the Lord giving a new definition to what 'faithfulness' meant. It didn't mean to simply keep what was given and not steal. That wasn't faithfulness in His book. Faithfulness is now redefined as proactively doing something with what we are given. Likewise there is no record that the master actually specifically tells the slaves to trade the talents [although there is in the similar parable in Lk. 19:13, where the slaves are told "Occupy till I come", using the word 'pragmatize', be pragmatic]. The parable teaches that merely possessing this amount of wealth means axiomatically that you have been given it in order to trade it and increase your master's wealth. But that too was a new idea for first century Palestinian slave society. It required a huge amount of initiative.

The "Truth" we have now (and it is that) is "a very little... a few things". We mustn't see it as an end in itself. Yet because of our humanity, our limited vision, the way we are locked up in our petty paradigms, we tend to think that the Kingdom will be rather similar to our present experience of "the Truth". Yet the Lord emphasizes, at least twice, that what we have now is pathetically limited compared to the infinitely greater spiritual vision of the Kingdom. We (personally) will then be made ruler over *all* that Christ has (Mt. 24:47; the "many things" of Mt. 25:23); and in him are hid *all* the riches of spiritual wisdom (Col. 2:3).

So I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord!- The figure of judgment would suggest a grim faced judge, with all the dignity and soberness of the courtroom, whatever the verdict is. But there are elements of unreality in the pictures of judgment which are put before us in the parables. This judge is emotionally involved in each case (unheard of in a human court); and He is also the advocate and the witness

who finds nothing bad to say; and He exalts: "Well done... enter into the joy of your Lord". The picture is of the happy judge, breaking down in joy at the verdict, inviting the hesitant believer to share his joy in their victory. The picture seems so imaginable; "you, enter into the joy of thy Lord" suggests a reticence, an unbelief, at the outcome. Compare this with the one hour labourers receiving a day's pay (Mt. 20:9), and the faithful almost remonstrating with their Lord that they have not done the things He reminds them of (Mt. 25:38-40). But we will overcome our reticence; we *will* enter our Lord's joy; for we shall stand before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy (Jude 24). “Enter into the joy of your Lord!" sounds like the Lord may have to encourage us to get over our weeping, and enter into the sheer joy which He has, that we've finally made it. "*Come…!!* You blessed of my Father! Enter the Kingdom…!" sounds like something similar. Now all these things are highly emotional. Yet we will have God's nature. He therefore has the same kind of emotional capabilities as we will have. And, He exercises them right now.

The similar parable in Lk. 19 has slaves given far less than these slaves, receiving power over cities. The reward was way out of proportion with their efforts. And so we too shall eternally reflect...

25:24 *And also he that had received the one talent came and said*- The judgment of the righteous comes before that of the rejected. The faithful respond first to the news that ‘He’s back’, and their willingness to go and be with Him is effectively their judgment. Those who delay are the unworthy and are therefore judged slightly later.

Lord- The man considers himself one of the Lord’s servants, within the household. He clearly felt he had been given too little to do anything much with; but actually the talent was worth a huge amount, especially for a slave. He didn’t appreciate the greatness of what he had been given.

I knew you- In reality, he didn’t know his Lord. For those who ‘know the Lord’ will be saved, and it is the unbelieving world who do not know Him (s.w. Jn. 17:3,25). Because that isn’t at all how the Lord is (hard, unreasonable, etc.). But the Lord doesn’t correct the false understanding, thereby justifying Himself. Rather does He [as so often] reason with the man upon the basis of the man’s professed belief system. We see this so often in the Lord’s teaching style, and in the way the Gospels use the language of demons. Error is not baldly exposed and corrected, rather are those who believe it worked with according to their understandings, and gently brought to a realization that those views are unhelpful and not the correct reality. The focus, therefore, was upon people, upon the persons holding the ideas, rather than the error of the ideas in themselves. And this has much to teach us; for so many Protestant groups have become obsessed with exposing intellectual error for its own sake; whereas our focus must be upon the individuals who hold those misbeliefs.

Are a hard man- One reason for the slave's failure was because he misunderstood his master. The Lord Jesus presents Himself as “kind” and His “yoke is gentle” (Mt. 11:28-30). But He was aware that some would wilfully misunderstand Him as a hard man.

The problem was the man’s wrong attitude and laziness to do anything. The prodigal son was given much of his Father’s wealth, and he wasted it rather than trading it. But he recognized the Father’s grace and was prepared to work just as a servant. And this attitude was his salvation. So this man’s rejection wasn’t simply because he had failed to do any trading.

Another take on this is that there is a sense in which the Lord is indeed a “hard man”, a demanding Lord, His expectations were (and are) high. And yet His parables reveal an

immense sympathy and empathy with our weakness. In a normal human situation, it would be difficult to build a relationship with someone who had such apparently contradictory trends in His character. Perhaps we have the same problem in our struggle to know the Lord. He never denied that He came over in some ways as "a hard man" with high expectations; all He said was that seeing this was the case, we ought to act accordingly (Mt. 25:24). And yet He is also a man of grace and understanding far beyond anything reached by anyone else. He is truly the Jesus who understands human weakness. And note that He is described even now as “the man Christ Jesus”, able to feel the pulse of our humanity. This, in passing, opens a window into what Divine nature will be like: we will be able to completely feel the human experience, to the extent of still bearing the title ‘men’ even in immortality.

Reaping where you did not sow- The moment of conversion is the beginning of the gathering to judgment (Lk. 11:23; Jn. 4:36). The one talent man didn't appreciate this; he objected to the Lord reaping and gathering him (Mt. 25:24). But whatever human objections, the responsible from all nations *will be gathered* to judgment (Mt. 25:32). The servants are called to receive their talents, and then called again to account (Lk. 19;13,15); there is something in common between the calling to know the Gospel, and the calling to judgment. If reaping refers to judgment [which it clearly does in the Lord’s teaching], then the man could hardly claim to have known the Lord on the basis of how He reaps. Because the man hadn’t experienced the Lord’s reaping. The man says he ‘knows’ [*ginosko*] the Lord is like this; the Lord answers that if indeed the man has ‘known’ [*eido*- which more means to see / experience] that He is like this, then he should have acted accordingly. The suggestion may be that even if a person’s understanding of the Lord Jesus is slightly wrong, the important thing is to live within and according to that understanding, even if it involves breaking some Divine principles [lending for interest]. If the desire to respond to the Lord’s gift was there, the desire to progress His work, then although such response was not ideal and not as good as that achieved by the other two servants, then the Lord would accept it. The language of sowing, reaping and gathering is all described using the same Greek words in the Lord’s comment that the birds don’t do these three things, and yet God still feeds them (Mt. 6:26). Perhaps the man was making a garbled, incoherent attempt to say that he had understood those words of the Lord to mean that He was somehow going to be an unreasonable judge with unreal expectations, therefore he had done nothing, although he had not spent the talent [unlike the prodigal son- who desperately wanted to be with the Father]. We may be intended to understand his reasoning as being ‘You created birds who don’t sow, reap nor gather into barns, they just expect food. And God thinks that’s good. So, He is like what He creates’. And perhaps the man also had in view Jn. 4:38: “I sent you to reap that whereon you bestowed no labour. Other men laboured…”. The harvest of people was reaped by those who hadn’t fully worked for it, and the man desperately tries to turn that around to justify his own lack of action. Such desperate twisting of Bible verses can be seen at every hand today, as people wriggle by all means to justify their inaction and selfishness.

And gathering where you did not scatter seed- The Lord is clearly the sower of seed, the seed of the word of the Kingdom (13:3). But the man is complaining that the Lord ‘reaps’ or calls to judgment those who had not received that seed. That is not the case- for knowledge of the Gospel is what makes responsible to judgment. The Lord could have corrected him by reminding him of the sower parable. But He doesn’t. He reasons with the man according to the belief system which he claims to have, assuming for a moment that it is in fact true. His whole style ought to be programmatic for us in our frequent encounters with those who misuse Scripture and the Lord’s words. The

Lord does *not* expect a harvest from ground He has not sown; and in any case, the man had heard the word, received the talent. He was ground which had been sown, and the Lord could therefore expect a harvest from him. Like many people today, he started to raise philosophical questions about the fate of those who have not heard, and justified his own inaction [as one who definitely *had* heard and been called] on the basis of his doubts as to the Lord's justice in dealing with those who had *not* been called. Truly these ancient teachings speak to the heart of postmodern man today.

"Gathering" was highly relevant to the man, for the language of 'gathering' is often used about the gathering of God's servants to judgment (3:12; 13:30; 25:32). The man was implying that his 'gathering' to judgment was unreasonable because the Lord had not sown in his land, had not strawed where he has. He felt he was being gathered to give an account when the Lord had given him nothing to account for. And yet the obvious fact was, the elephant in the room, that the Lord had given him a talent, a huge amount of money for a slave. And yet the man reasoned as if he had not been given anything to account for. He totally refused to perceive the immense value of what he had been given. And this is so true for us- we for whom Christ died, the blood of God's Son shed, we who have been called to eternity, who by status are "saved" and showered with all spiritual blessings… can complain that we have not been given anything. Because in our minds we have buried it away, and reason as if we never received it. Here again, the Lord's ancient words pierce to the core of modern Christian self-perception.

The Greek *diaskorpizo* can mean 'to scatter' and can therefore be used about sowing; but it also has the specific meaning 'to winnow'. In this case, the picture would be of a man who has not winnowed and yet expects to come and gather up wheat. Again, the man may be attempting to twist the Lord's words about 'gathering wheat into His barn' (13:30, repeating John's words of 3:12). His idea would be 'You expect the wheat to be waiting for You without even winnowing it'. But of course the point was that winnowing represented judgment, and this was exactly what the Lord had come to do. But in His grace, the Lord doesn't make that obvious point, but runs with the man's words and reasoning and shows him that however wrong his imaginations were about the Lord, he should have acted according to them if he truly loved his Lord. But he hadn't done so; because he was selfish and lazy.

The third servant comes over as rude and 'bravely' calling out his master for who he thinks he is. The burial of the talent was an act of protest at the master's activities and the development of the household; rather like a slave refusing to work on the plantation because he is furious to think that his hard work is making huge profit for his lazy self-indulgent owner. In the eyes of the world, especially the working class, impoverished audience of the Lord, they would have seen him as a hero. He was the one who refused to go along with the capitalist master getting his slaves to make even more money for him. The Lord crafted the story fully aware of this. But the Lord [as so often in the parables] turns their expectations and sympathies upside down. The third servant is characterized as "evil" at the end of the story. The Lord wished to show that the man thought of as bravely refusing to do the master's work... was in fact a fool who would weep and gnash his teeth. Because he didn't accept that *this* master was not your typical master. The wealth of the household, the master's profit, was in fact for a good cause. The only good cause. The real problem was that the man was lazy, and failed to see that his work was for the advancement of a truly wonderful master and household. In a society where the majority were peasants and many were slaves, profit-making was generally considered evil and immoral. The peasant mentality was that wealth couldn't be created and was limited; therefore one person getting a larger share meant

a smaller share for someone else. That view is expressed by thinkers like Aristotle, Jerome and Plutarch. So the Lord is using the profit driven master as a flag for attention- and showing that, unreal to experience, this profit driven master is in fact the only good one ever in the whole world. And his slaves knew him to be such.

The end stress of the parable is upon the third servant, just as the prodigal son parable ends with the stress upon the older brother. Just as the stereotype of the selfish, avaricious master is turned on its head, so is the stereotype of slaves as unscrupulous, lazy and criminal. The first two slaves were unusually zealous for the master's will- because they knew him and his principles and wanted to see that household prosper, the things of the Kingdom be glorified further.

25:25- see on Mt. 25:14.

And I was afraid- Money was often buried in the earth in times of war and instability- which is the context of Matthew 24. The man thinks he might lose the talent, and so he buries it. The burial of the talent is thus related to his fear. But that fear was surely also related to the fear of failure to perform and trade as expected. The parable shows a very harsh judgment upon timidity and conservatism; the master's anger against the third slave is an element of unreality in the parable. But this is how seriously the Lord takes lack of proactive response to what He has given us. There is a list of major sins for which men are left outside the city of God in Revelation 22; and within that list is "the fearful". Fear of the judgment of others is a source of false guilt. It is this which militates against the true and free life of which the Lord speaks so enthusiastically. We fear showing ourselves for who we really are, because we fear others' judgments. This fear makes us uncreative, not bearing the unique spiritual fruits which the Lord so eagerly seeks from us and in us. The Lord said this plainly, when He characterized the man who did nothing with his talents as lamely but truthfully saying: "I was afraid" (Mt. 25:25). Think about this: What or whom was he afraid of? His fear was not so much of his Lord's judgment, but rather perhaps of the judgments of others, that he might do something wrong, wrongly invest, look stupid, mess it all up... And thus John writes that it is fear that leads to torment of soul now and final condemnation. The Lord's words in the parable are almost exactly those of Adam. The rejected one talent man says 'I was afraid, and so I hid *my talent*'. Adam said: 'I was afraid, and I hid *myself*'. The talent God gave that man was therefore himself, his real self. To not use our talent, to not blossom from the experience of God's love and grace, is to not use ourselves, is to not be ourselves, the *real* self as God intended.

And went away and hid your talent in the earth- Just as Adam was afraid and hid, and just as Achan did, hoping that what was not his would somehow become his in time. In line with our earlier suggestions that the man was alluding to the Lord's words, one wonders if here he has in mind the Lord's teaching about the Kingdom as treasure hid in a field [i.e. in the ground] which must be found (13:44). Of course, it's terribly out of context. But that's the way so many people use the Lord's words, as if sharing the same lexical items with Him somehow adds legitimacy to their doing just precisely what *they* want to do- rather than serving Him. The Lord Jesus was the man of 13:44 who sold all that He had to buy / redeem the field in which the treasure was buried. By returning the treasure into the earth, the man was effectively undoing the work of the Lord on the cross; for the field is the world (13:38), and the price of the field's redemption was the Lord's blood. But by laziness and a vague hope that the wealth would by default become his own, the Lord's work on the cross was undone for this man. The connection with 13:44 is surely purposeful.

Burying money in the ground was a common practice, as testified by the archaeological discoveries of such hordes. It was seen as a wise thing to do, and some

of the rabbis taught that this was wisdom. But such secular prudence is interpreted by the Lord [within the story line of the parable] as nothing but fear and laziness. And the slave was simply disobedient- he had been ordered to go and trade, and instead he just followed secular wisdom and played safe. He didn't trust the implication of his Lord that success was inevitable, it was going to happen. He feared the risk, feared losing- instead of trusting his lord's command to go and trade like the other slaves did, confident of success.

We must be aware that wealth was in the hands of around 2 % of the population in Palestine. Wealth was not created so much as transferred, by inheritance or some other agreement. The parable therefore again features an element of unreality for those of the time- wealth was created. And lots of it. By trading, by effort, by sharp investment. This is a common enough idea to our generation, but it wasn't at all in first century Palestine. Again, the element of unreality highlights the need for initiative, in a society that didn't take initiative and just accepted their station and their place. Against this backdrop, not stealing a penny of the wealth and burying it was not that unreasonable. But the Lord condemns it in the strongest terms.

He perhaps considered that he didn't need to do anything because he hadn't been given as much as the other slaves. Yet he had been given a huge amount, and it was 'according to [his] ability'. He had ability to use it, admittedly five times less than the first slave, but he did have ability. Many of us will almost find ourselves in that last slave, wrongly considering we lack abilities and lack resources- and therefore do nothing. But in our work for the Lord, His word never returns void, it always achieves. In the end.

It's possible to understand the third servant as those who refuse to take the Gospel to others but just preserve it, so they think, intact. In disobedience to their Lord's command to take it to others, to even give it to Gentile bankers in order to get some profit. The parables of Matthew 25 are all in the context of Matthew 24, the signs of the Lord's coming. They seek to explain how we can be ready for His return; and rather than trying to match world events of Bible prophecies, His method is that we should be working proactively for Him in increasing His wealth in the things of the Kingdom. This matches His own precondition for His return, that the Gospel must be preached in all the world before the end comes.

It could even be an element of unreality that a slave, given such a huge amount of cash, didn't steal a penny of it. When slaves were known to be thieves. And this unusual integrity serves to point up how the master was so furious with him for doing nothing with it all.

Here, have what is yours- So many of the parables build up to a final climax which is the essence of the point the Lord was trying to get across; and this ‘end stress’ is also seen in the talents parable. The warning is not to be like the man who didn’t have the vision to do anything with his talent, but buried it and returned it unused to the Lord. This perhaps is our greatest temptation in our postmodern age of passivity, of staring at computer screens and clicking a mouse. “Lo, there You have what is Yours” suggests an air of confidence in this man; he really didn’t get it, that he was asked to trade what he’d been given. The fact he had retained it pristine appears to have been his reason for thinking that he ought to be accepted, or at least, didn’t ought to be condemned. The story line penetrates deep into the mentality of many small time Protestant sects, according to which the ultimate test of loyalty to the Lord is whether we have retained our understanding of whatever curious or specific interpretations were entrusted to us via the charismatic founder of the sect. This man thought that that was all there was to it. He didn’t spend it on himself, he wasn’t like the prodigal son. But too late he was to

learn that sins of omission are the ground for condemnation. To do nothing with God's Truth is described by the Lord as 'wickedness'. The grammar emphasizes personal possession: *You* have what *belongs to You*. As if to say 'I didn't steal it! It's yours, and it remains yours'. But the whole point was that the Lord had given the talents to the servants and gone away- they had to trade in their own name, as if they were theirs. Thus the other two servants speak somewhat differently, of the talents which had been "delivered" to them. We're not simply receptacles of intellectual truths which are to be preserved for the sake of it until the end of our days. That would be of itself pointless, a kind of mind game played between God and man for no ultimate purpose. We are given God's Truth, the riches of Christ, in order to use it for others; the whole talk of 'preserving the Truth in its purity' is dangerously close to inculcating the mentality of the one talent man- the mentality that led to his condemnation. See on :29 *Taken away*.

Perhaps we have never seriously thought of being generous to someone else [even if it's a few pennies from our poverty]; of actively telling an acquaintance about the Gospel; of doing acts of kindness for someone 'out of the blue', thinking up something nice for them which will make them feel 'Wow!'; doing mission work; reconciliation with our enemies; seeing beyond our immediate emotions of hurt, pleasure, anger, passion. When we step out in faith and do these things, we start living a totally new kind of life. We find God setting us up with situations, working with and through us- and we feel it. We will see beyond the steely silence of the skies to know the reality of Angelic existence. One of my favourite Bible stories is that of Elisha and his frightened servant. Elisha asks God to open the man's eyes so that he might see the Angelic armies surrounding them; Elisha [and I so love this] didn't ask for his own eyes to be opened to see them; he was so certain they were there.

25:26 *But his lord answered and said to him: You wicked and slothful servant*- The accusation of "wickedness" suggests that the slave was lying when he excused himself on the basis of fear. It was not fear so much as rank disobedience and distrust of the master, and total disrespect. The 'lazy' aspect of the Lord's criticism highlights the huge importance to Him of sins of omission. Slaves were stereotypically thought of as lazy, and yet the Lord appears to go ballistic in judgment upon this typical characteristic. The sin of omission is likewise brought out in the next parable (Mt. 25:46), where men are condemned for omitting to have served the least of the Lord's brethren.

The Lord's only other reference to a wicked servant is in the parable of the wicked servant who runs up a huge debt, is forgiven, and then refuses to forgive a far smaller debt, putting the debtor in prison (18:32). The two men are clearly intended to be compared. The one of 18:32 was dishonest with his Lord's money [for how else did he amass such a huge debt to his Lord? Was it not that he was found out for dishonesty?]; he was materialistic in the extreme; and he was incredibly ungrateful and unforgiving. He committed many sins. The "wicked servant" of 25:26 does nothing wrong, is not overtly materialistic; but his sin of omission, his laziness [AV "slothful"], meant that in reality he had done just the same as the man who committed so much wrong.

The Lord's parable was clearly alluding to a contemporary Jewish rabbinic parable later recorded in the Zohar Chadash, folio 47: "A certain king gave a deposit to three of his servants: the first kept it; the second lost it; the third spoiled one part of it, and gave the rest to another to keep. After some time, the king came and demanded the deposit. Him who had preserved it, the king praised, and made him governor of his house. Him who had lost it, he delivered to utter destruction, so that both his name and his possessions were blotted out. To the third, who had spoiled a part and given the rest to another to keep, the king said, Keep him, and let him not go out of my house, till we see what the other shall do to whom he has entrusted a part: if he shall make a proper

use of it, this man shall be restored to liberty; if not, he also shall be punished". The point of contrast is that the Lord is far more demanding. The Jewish story praised the man who simply preserved the deposit. The Lord Jesus condemned the same man for doing nothing positive with it. The third man in the Jewish parable was given the possibility of repentance. But the third man in the Lord's parable was condemned with no possibility of changing the verdict- for this life is our sole time of responsibility. The Lord is purposefully alluding to this parable, and deconstructing it. Passivity, 'holding on to the faith' in a passive sense, much glorified by both Judaism and Protestant Christianity, is what may be glorified in human religion; but it's exactly this attitude which will be the ground of condemnation.

You knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not scatter seed- See on :24 *I knew you*. There are different words used. Here, *eido* means more 'to see'. The Lord's response could actually be translated as a question: 'You [really?] saw Me reap where I did not sow…?'. The process of reaping definitely refers to the last judgment, and so the man had no basis upon which to make this claim, because he had never actually 'seen' the Lord act like that. But I prefer to understand the Lord as taking the man's ideas and working with them, without specifically correcting them- and saying that even if the man's understanding of Him was correct, then He expected him to act appropriately to that understanding. Instead of doing nothing.

25:27 *You should-*

Possibly the emphasis is upon the word "You". He should have done as the other slaves did, and lent the money to Gentiles for interest. Because the point has been made that money lending was about the only away that such a vast amount of gold or silver could possibly have doubled in value; and the money was returned to the master in cash, as coins or metal- not in some other form. Interest rates were notoriously high in Palestine at the time. To make that amount of gold or silver in profit, and to have it ready to give to the lord at a moment's notice, when he suddenly reappeared- money lending was about the only option. This confirms the idea that the parable is about the giving of the Lord's wealth to the Gentiles, and they thereby multiplying it. And the third slave didn't like dealing with Gentiles, we could assume. Fitting exactly the position of the Jews to whom God's wealth had been given. "You [he] *too* should" have lent the wealth to the Gentiles, just as it had been lent to him.

Explaining how the man could have entered the Kingdom is surely the basis for the gnashing of teeth. To have it explained like that… is harder than any hell fire of classical imagination. He ought to have given the talent to the exchangers. Either he should've given it to the Gentiles, or he should have at least done something, in lending it to his Jewish brethren- even against the Law. "Oughtest", *dia,* means you must have , you had to- very possession of the talent meant we have to, we must, share it with others in some way- we are all preachers. I have often pondered what we are to learn in our generation from the strict statement that males without the ability to procreate were barred from the Lord's congregation during the Old Covenant (Dt. 23:1). Perhaps the point is that all those who are the Lord's people must recognize their ability to procreate for Him, in the bringing forth of yet others in their Lord's image.

The man being told how he could have entered the Kingdom is after the pattern of rejected Adam and Eve having the way to the tree of life clearly shown to them after their rejection (Gen. 3:23,24). Again, notice how the judgment is for the education of those judged and those who witness it. He will shew them how they should have given their talent, the basic Gospel, to others, and therefore gained some interest. This has to be connected with the well known prohibition on lending money to fellow Israelites for

usury; usury could only be received from Gentiles (Dt. 23:20). Surely the Lord is implying that *at the least* this person could have shared the Gospel with others, especially (in a Jewish context) the Gentile world. This would have at least brought some usury for the Lord. This would suggest that issues such as apathy in preaching, especially the unwillingness of the Jewish believers to share their hope with the Gentiles, will be raised by the Lord during the judgment process. Of course, the Lord hadn't told the servant (in the story) to lend the money to Gentiles; he was expected to use his initiative. The overall picture of the story is that at least the man should have done *something!*

Alternatively, it could be that we are intended to understand that the Lord would even have accepted him if he lent money on usury, something which the Law condemned; if he'd have done *something*, even if it involved breaking some aspects of God's will... Instead, his attitude was that he had been given the talent of the Gospel, and he saw his duty as to just keep hold on it. He was angry that the Lord should even suggest he ought to have done anything else! We really must watch for this attitude in ourselves. He justifies himself by saying that he has "kept" the money (Lk. 19:20), using the word elsewhere used about the need to *keep* or hold on to the doctrines of the One Faith (1 Tim. 1:19; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:13; Rev. 6:9). He had done this, he had held on, he hadn't left the faith. And he thought this was enough to bring him to the Kingdom. Sadly, many understandings of spirituality has almost glorified this very attitude. Any who show initiative have been seen as mavericks, as likely to go wrong. The emphasis has been on holding on to basic doctrinal teaching, marking your Bible with it, attending weekly meetings about it (even if you snooze through them), regularly attending... And, son, you won't go far wrong. The Lord, in designing this parable as he did, had exactly this sort of complacency in mind. In view of the man's beliefs about the Lord, he still should've acted accordingly.

Have deposited my money with the bankers-

To make money from usury, from simply giving money to "bankers" and earning interest, was seen as 'harvesting where you have not sown'. It was seen as making money without working. And that is just what the rejected servant accused the master of doing. It's as if he is saying 'If I were a hard man, harvesting what I didn't sow, then yes I'd have just given my money to bankers and received the interest. If I were a man who reaps what he doesn't sow, who just puts his money into a bank for interest- then why didn't you do that?'. The point is thereby made that the man was really totally lazy and idle. His excuse sounds so obviously wrong and contradictory. Just as the excuses in the parable of the spurned wedding invitations. Any excuse to not serve the Lord will ultimately be shown to likewise be so foolish.

The Lord probably means that the man should have done at least something, putting the money into "the bank" (Lk.), doing something effortless [in line with his lazy character], but at least doing something. And yet just possibly the Lord may also have in view the money exchangers whom He so despised and whose tables He overthrew in 21:12. It's as if the Lord is saying that He was willing to make major concessions to the man- if he had done at least something, even if that 'something' was far less than ideal. A Rabbinic teaching claims that bankers should never be trusted and therefore "Money can only be kept safe by placing it in the earth" (*b. B. Mes'ia* 42A, quoted in R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) p. 954). The Lord is consciously deconstructing Rabbinic views. If we had more access to such contemporary texts, we would likely understand many of the more enigmatic and

difficult passages of Scripture- probably they are alluding to and deconstructing contemporary writings.

So that on my return I would have collected my own money with interest- The Lord will *receive or* collect back His own. Strong defines this as "to carry off, away from harm" (the same word is used in Heb. 11:19 about Abraham *receiving* Isaac from the dead). There is the suggestion that the Truth which the Lord has given us is valuable to Him, and He fears our losing it; those who lose the faith lose the personal possession of the Lord Jesus. But at the judgment, when we hand it back to the Lord, He (not to say, we) will have that deep knowledge that now we can't fail Him any more, we no longer have the possibility of causing harm and loss to the treasured wealth which has been entrusted to us. We need to remember, however, that there was no banking system as we have today. Lending money to exchangers was a highly risky business and often resulted in the loss of money; money was safer stored in the earth, as the man did. So the Lord's point was that he should have taken a risk; indeed, all such trading requires risk taking which may leave us looking foolish. But the Lord may be implying that if he had taken that risk for the right reasons, all ultimately would have worked out well.

Lk. 19:23 says at this point that the Lord will "require" of us our use of wealth (Lk. 19:23). The man who did nothing with his pound should have at least lent it out on usury, the Lord said- even though this was illegal according to Moses. He should have done at least *something* with his money, even if it involved taking a lower level of service than the Lord ideally expects. The Greek means to exact regularly, in an ongoing sense (s.w. Lk. 3:13); Strong defines it as meaning "to perform repeatedly... not a single act". When the Lord examines our achievements at the judgment, He will expect to keep on receiving the result of what we have achieved for Him in this life. This is the ultimate encouragement for us in our preaching and encouraging of others, as well as ourselves; what we achieve now will yield eternal, continual fruit to the Lord.

"My own money" reminds us of the fact that He is Lord *of all* . This means He is owner of absolutely everything to do with us (Acts 10:36). At the judgment, this fact will be brought home. The Lord will ask for "my money... mine own"; we will be asked what we have done with our Lord's money (Mt. 20:15; 25:27). All we have is God's; it is not our own. Therefore if we hold back in our giving and trading, we are *robbing God*. Israel thought it was absurd to put it like this: But yes, God insisted through Malachi (Mal. 3:8-12), you are *robbing me* if you don't give back, or even if you don't give your heart to Him in faith. *And will a man rob God?* Will a man...? We must give God what has His image stamped on it: and we, our bodies, are made in His image (Mt. 22:21); therefore we have a duty to give ourselves to Him. We are not our own: how much less is 'our' money or time our own! Like David, we need to realize now, *in this life*, before the judgment, that all our giving is only a giving back to God of what we have been given by Him: "Of thine own have we given thee" (1 Chron. 19:14). The danger of materialism is the assumption that we are ultimate owners of what we 'have'.

25:28 *So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents*-

As noted earlier, the parable presents a household based upon the passion for acquisition. If the slave had traded well, he would then be entrusted yet more money in order to repeat the cycle and make yet more. But we must place the parables together. Lk. 16:21 speaks of how indeed all we have in this life is the Lord's and not ours. But "if you have not been faithful in what is another's, who will give you that which is your own?". Putting the parables together, we are to understand that the gift of the talent to the first servant was a gift to him personally. We have here a window into the nature of

our eternal existence and being. In some sense, we will be given the Lord's wealth as our very own, and will trade as independents, as it were. Progressing the same path and agendas as our Lord and Master did through us in this life- but with the difference that we, as it were, are owners of our own firm. Of course we are at the very frontier of how we can understand our eternal being, but we certainly get at least a whiff of it by appreciating this connection. As discussed earlier, these ideas are also hinted at in the invitation to the slaves to enter their master's joy, to have the same joy he had at the success of the household.

We note that this parable is very similar to the earlier parable of the minas in Lk. 19:13-25. But the amounts of money are different. There were 60 minas to one talent. But in that earlier parable, 10 servants were given a total of 10 minas (Lk. 19:13), one mina each [see GNB] and again, three of the servants are called to give an account of their trading when their Lord returns with His Kingdom. The third servant had been given only one mina to trade with. The third servant in Mt. 25 was given one talent, 60 minas, 60 times as much. The first, five talent servant in Mt. 25 was given the equivalent of 300 minas. But the first servant in Lk. 19 was given just one mina to work with. The first servant in Lk. 19 was more prolific in his trading- his one mina became 10 minas (Lk. 19:16 GNB). His ten fold increase contrasts with the first servant in Mt. 25 achieving 'only' a double return- his 5 talents [300 minas] became 10 talents [600 minas]. Perhaps the progression was to suggest that over time, more of the Lord's spiritual wealth is entrusted to us. Putting the parables together, we are to assume that the Lord expected the profitable servants to keep investing their profits to achieve yet more for the firm or household- classic capitalism. "To everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance" is again, classic capitalism and spiritually repugnant, at apparent variance with the Lord's teaching to the rich young man to sell what he had and give to the poor. The idea of course is that the zeal of the capitalist must be applied by us to the multiplication of the things of our Lord's household and kingdom. In the spiritual world, indeed the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. But when He returns, we are rewarded by being given that wealth as our very own, we enter what Paul calls the glorious liberty of God's dear children, the final freedom of being ourselves and not simply slaves, of owning our own firm or household, in the terms of the parable. This would be faithful to the storyline of the parable- for it was quite normal that a slave could be freed by a master in return for outstanding service.

The faithful will have enough self-knowledge to be able to say: 'You gave me these basic doctrines and these characteristics to develop with them, and I can now present you with this...'. That part of the character and mind of Christ which was given to the unfaithful servant to develop is taken away and given to the faithful. The unfaithful receive the riches of Christ but do nothing with them; they don't let them impact their character.

The man having ten talents as his own is in sharp contrast with the way the one talent man speaks of how the talent is not his but the Lord's: "Here You have what is Yours" (:25). The Lord is making the point that the faithful will now personally own the talents they were first given, plus they will be allowed to keep for their personal, eternal possession what talents they made during the trading of this life. The progress achieved in this life will be kept eternally. Yet words like 'achievement' are almost dirty words in the vocabulary of grace which some insist on. The Lord's teaching here must be given its due weight.

25:29 *For to everyone that has shall be given, and he shall have abundance*- This repeats the Lord's earlier teaching in 13:10-12 about the giving of understanding to those who have some: "And the disciples came and said to him: Why do you speak to

them in parables? And he answered and said to them: To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whoever has, to him shall be given and he shall have abundance, but whoever has not, from him shall be taken away even what he has". Clearly there is an upward spiral in spiritual life, and this will come to ultimate term in the outcomes of judgment day.

But from him that has not, even what he has shall be taken away- This is a paradox. Does the rejected man have talents, or not? He did, of course, have a talent; but as far as the Lord is concerned, we only have what we have developed. If we don't develop, we have nothing; the fact we received the talent at baptism won't save us. It's only what a man has developed from that in the service of others which counts as truly "his". This likewise is the sense of "To him that has shall be given"; all we have is what we have developed.

"Taken away" is perhaps a special reference to the Kingdom of God being "taken away" [s.w.] from Israel and given to the Gentiles (21:43). The same Greek word is used about the taking away of the rejected individuals at judgment day (22:13; 24:39). But here, it is the unused talent that is "taken away". The man was therefore to be identified with the talent- it was to be him. And yet he is most careful to speak of the talent as not his, but the Lord's: "Here you have what is yours" (:25). The Lord intended that we identify with the talent, rather than see it merely as His. See on :25 *You have what is yours.*

25:30 *And cast out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There, shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth*- There is an element of unreality here, in that this punishment seems excessive for simply doing nothing with the talent. After all, the third servant had not stolen it. He had kept it safe. The unreality is to signal how deeply and passionately the Lord expects us to do our work, to trade what we have been given. The mustard seed and leaven, along with the seed on the good ground, produced incredible results and multiplication, beyond all normal secular expectation. The servants were expected to get into this spirit and do the same. With all this potential growth possible, to do precisely nothing is indeed a huge sin that merits condemnation. Even if it is the sin of omission. And there has never been an age like ours when there is such potential for the Gospel. Ask people you know if they'd like to be baptized into Jesus... you will be surprised at the response. Replace vacations with following your vocation... don't get to the end of your life and leave 70% of what you ever earnt to someone else... use it. For Him. Apply the avarice, hard work and investment of the master in this parable... to the work of multiplying God's wealth. The talents represent simply opportunities to serve the Lord... not specifically money or natural talent. The third slave may represent the scribes and Pharisees, who carefully kept the talent of God's truth but did nothing with it.

Unless we are going to actually achieve something for the Lord, then we are unprofitable. But of course the same words for "unprofitable servant" are found in Lk. 17:10- after we have "done all" that we could, we are to recognize that we are still in this category of "unprofitable servant". Salvation itself is still by grace. The story of the slave who worked all day in the field and was then expected to come home and cook for his master without a word of thanks to him seems to be more realistic, lacking the element of unreality usually seen in the parables. But the Greek word "*charis*", usually translated "grace", is the one used for "thank" there (Lk. 17:9). The point is that we don't receive grace because of our going the extra mile, as we are inclined to think. We receive grace, but not as a result of all our special efforts; these are what are expected of us, on account of the fact that we have become salves to our Master, the Lord Jesus. At the end of all our special efforts (in whatever sphere), we must consciously make an

effort to recognize that we are "unprofitable servants" (Lk. 17:10). This must surely connect with Mt. 25:30, which describes the rejected at the day of judgment as unprofitable servants. If we judge / condemn ourselves, we will not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). This is just one of many examples of where the Lord's parables seem intended to be linked with each other- which further proves that they are not stories with a deeper meaning, whose storyline is not intended to be carefully considered. We must recognize not only that we are unprofitable servants, but that we have only done what was our "duty" or debt to do- the implication being that we were sold into slavery on account of an unpayable debt. This is exactly the figure used by the Lord to describe us in Mt. 18:25.

25:31

In Mt. 25:31-46 we have a parable depicting the last judgment, where the Lord sits as judge and we come before Him. Usually, a person comes before a judge regarding things which they have committed wrongly. But our expectations, which are set up by the story of a judge and people coming before him in judgment, are shattered. The issues the people are judged about aren't acts of commission. It's all about what they *omitted* to do, continuing the theme of the preceding parable of the talents, which concludes with the one talent man being condemned for what he omitted to do. We tend to be all so freaked out about our committed sins, rather than realizing the tremendous importance the Lord attaches to our *omissions* of acts of kindness and thoughtful love, and perceiving the image of Christ in our brethren. It's rather like how Paul starts writing to the Corinthians. He doesn't start as we might have done with their gross immorality, false doctrine, perversion of the Lord's supper into a drunken orgy [although he comes to those things]… rather, he begins with and spends most time discussing their lack of love, their divisiveness etc.

It is worth observing the very simple fact that the New Testament is essentially a missionary document- all the expressions and articulations of doctrine / theology found there are all in the context of the preaching of the Gospel and the immediate problems of men and women in responding to it. This is why we aren't given a cold statement of faith or catechism in the New Testament, but rather the history of the mission of Christ at its first beginning. Even parables like that of Mt. 25:31-46 were relevant in a missionary context- regarding the perils of not supporting the itinerant missionaries in the first century. And this is why the power of the early Christian witness lay in who they were- for this was the real advertisement for the doctrine they preached.

But when the Son of Man shall come in his glory- A clear allusion to Dan. 7:13, which is interpreted later in Daniel 7 as referring to the coming of Jesus with the accepted believers with Him. There is a sense in which we will be involved with judging others; thus the men of Nineveh will condemn the first century Jews at the day of judgment (Mt. 12:41). In this case, the judgment of the nations could be a judgment of people from all nations concerning how they have treated the faithful who were recently under tribulation in all nations. This would make good sense of the allusion to Joel 3:2 "I will gather all nations… into judgment" which we have in :32. The nations gathered to judgment in Armageddon or at least, in Israel somewhere, would then be judged according to how they have treated God's people. However, the stubborn problem for this interpretation is the reward given to some of these unbelievers- eternal life in the Kingdom just for helping God's people under persecution. Such salvation is surely predicated upon faith in Christ, rather than the doing of good works.

And all the Angels with Him- If all the Angels accompany the Lord Jesus and relocate from Heaven to earth, then we can better understand why the Kingdom of God on earth is described as "the Kingdom of Heaven". The future Kingdom of God seems

to involve Heaven, including God Himself, ultimately, descending from Heaven to earth. This is certainly the scene presented in the final chapters of Revelation.

Then he shall sit on the throne of his glory- The Lord's throne is the restored throne of David, in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is called the throne of God's glory (Jer. 14:21, and Mt. 23:22 may have the same reference), and the Lord's glory is ultimately God's glory. But His glory is ultimately His character and personality- God's revelation of His glory to Moses was the revelation of His Name and character. Yet the Son attained that glory through His own perfectly God-like character, and this is the basis upon which He shall be enthroned as King of the cosmos. There is surely here also a reference to Zech. 6:13, where the Messianic "Branch" sits upon a throne of glory and rebuilds the temple. But that prophecy was clearly intended to have had a fulfilment in Zerubbabel's intended rebuilding of the temple when the exiles returned. But the exiles who returned, and their leadership especially, dropped the baton. The intended temple outlined in Ezekiel 40-48 was not built by them. And so the prophecy was rescheduled in fulfilment. Not every detail needs to be literally fulfilled [e.g. the rebuilding of a temple], but the essence will be fulfilled in the second coming of Christ to earth. The Lord spoke of how the disciples would sit with Him in His throne of glory (Rev. 3:21), judging the twelve tribes of Israel (19:28). This would support our earlier suggestion that the Son of Man coming in judgment is in fact a picture of the Lord Jesus along with the faithful coming in judgment. This is why there are thrones [plural] of judgment (Rev. 20:4). The contrast is with the man of sin, who at that time will also be sitting upon a throne in the temple (2 Thess. 2:4 s.w.); the Lord Jesus shall come and depose him.

"The son of man" is juxtaposed with His great glory and enthronement, clearly alluding to the pictures of Daniel 7. But as John's Gospel records, His glory is a reflection of His humanity, and on this basis He alone is able to judge men, because He was human. Or as Psalm 8 has it, He who was made lower than the Angels, the son of man, is now crowned with glory and honour.

25:32 *And before Him- Emprosthen* could just as well mean 'against' Him, referring to the gathering of the nations against Christ which is spoken of in Joel 3, Zechariah 14 and Psalm 2. But the sense is likely the more obvious one, of being gathered in front of Him.

Shall be gathered- See on :31 *The Son of Man shall come in his glory*. This is a figure used about the gathering of individuals to judgment and both to condemnation and salvation (3:12; 13:30; 24:28; Jn. 15:6 "men gather them and cast them into the fire"; "bring / gather here, and slay them before Me", Lk. 19:27). And yet right now the gathering is going on as the net of Gospel preaching gathers in people (13:47; 22:10; the fragments are gathered that no man be lost, Jn. 6:12, the other sheep are brought / gathered into the fold, Jn. 10:16). Our first steps in responding to the Gospel call are in fact our first steps towards meeting the Lord at judgment. The Lord has just been falsely accused of gathering where He did not sow, and therefore I suggest that those gathered are those from all nations who have received the seed of the Kingdom message. When we are called to judgment, the immediacy of our response will be a summary of how we have progressively responded to that call to go to Jesus. But the word for 'gather' is used extensively by the Lord in this section of His teaching. The one talent man has complained that the Lord is unreasonably gathering him to judgment (25:24), and the Lord now goes on to say that indeed people from all nations will be gathered to Him. And He goes further to say that the basis of acceptability with Him is whether we 'gathered' [AV "took me in"] *Him* in this life, when He was manifested to us in the least of His brethren (:35,38). Again we see the idea of mutuality. We gather Him, He gathers

us. And this will be literally, visibly manifest in that when the call comes, those who voluntarily, immediately gather towards Him will be confirmed in that by being snatched away towards Him, and will thereby come with Him in glory to His throne (1 Thess. 4:16,17). The nations will gather themselves together against Christ at the last day (Rev. 16:14,16; Psalm 2, s.w. Acts 4:26).

All the nations- Frequently, New Testament references to “all men” really means “all true believers” or those who have become responsible to God. Hebrews 2:14 states that Christ killed the devil (the power of sin) on the cross; but this is only true for those in Christ. Those who are ignorant of the saving power of God’s Truth are under the active control of sin- the Biblical devil. Revelation 20:5 speaks of “the dead” as those responsible to judgment, whereas many other Bible passages show that not all the dead will be raised. Only those who have heard the Gospel will be resurrected to judgment. Thus “the dead” in God’s usage does not refer to everyone who has ever died. 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 speaks of “the dead” as those in Christ. Matthew 25:32 describes “all nations” coming before Christ for judgment. This indicates that to God, the world He sees is comprised of those who are responsible to Him; not literally “all nations” will come before Christ, only those people from them who are responsible to Him. We must surely read in an ellipsis here, 'People from all nations', because the Gospel will have gone to all nations before the Lord returns (24:14). The great commission to take the Gospel to all nations (28:19 s.w.) will finally have been fulfilled. Knowledge of the Gospel is the basis of accountability to judgment, and that fact alone means that if people from all nations come to judgment, then the Gospel must have gone to all nations; the believers [spiritual Israel] will be persecuted in all nations (24:9 s.w.) at the same time as Jews [natural Israel] are lead away captive into all nations (Lk. 21:24) and this likely will be the basis of our witness to all nations, just as the early church needed persecution to make them take the Gospel to the Gentiles. If we do that now in this day of opportunity, maybe that final persecution by "all nations" will be unnecessary. The whole scenario could have been allowed a first century fulfilment in that Jews from all nations were converted at Pentecost (Acts 2:5 s.w.), but clearly they did not return home and take the Gospel further to the Gentiles of literally all nations. it took Peter until the Cornelius incident to realize that people from literally all nations could be accepted (Acts 10:35 s.w. "all nations"), but the church generally struggled with that understanding. Rev. 14:6 explains that only in the last days will the Gospel go to all nations, during the tribulation period; only when God's judgments are revealed in maybe literally the very last days before the Lord's coming will people from "all nations" come to Him (Rev. 15:4).

And he shall separate them- The separation between sheep and goats is not, therefore, ultimately visible now. Mt. 13:49 uses the same word to describe how "the Angels" shall do this work of separation. And yet the essence of separation does go on in this life, insofar as men "shall separate [s.w.] you from their company" (Lk. 6:22; Acts 19:9). The final judgment will be a confirmation of processes which have been ongoing in our lives today. Likewise, separating ourselves from our brethren as Peter did in weakness due to political pressures (Gal. 2:12 s.w.) is effectively separating ourselves from the sheep, and placing ourselves with the goats. Significantly, the only other occurrence of the phrase “from one another” is in Acts 15:39, where Paul and Barnabas “departed asunder the one from the other”. The Greek translated "separate" in these passages means to set a boundary, a limit. And in this lies the danger of the misuse of

Statements of Faith and legalistic fellowship boundaries. Any drawing of a line in the wrong place can lead to our condemnation, so it's better to be open to all our brethren.

One from another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats- Sheep and goats were similar looking. The sheep of the first century would typically have been dirty and with dark patches, making it possible to separate them from goats only by an experienced shepherd who knew his flock. The point may have been that from a distance, sheep and goats looked quite similar. The Lord Jesus was the shepherd during His ministry, and commented that "I know My sheep" (Jn. 10:14). He knew who were the goats and who the sheep. But His judgment will only be made manifest in the last day. But the purpose of the last judgment is not, therefore, to gather information about us; for the judgment in essence is ongoing now as we live our lives before the shepherd of our souls.

The way the Lord speaks of dividing the sheep from the goats and not vice versa could suggest that there are far fewer sheep compared to goats (Mt. 25:32). This would imply that the majority of those who are responsible are in the goat category. The word used for 'goat' here strictly means a kid, and the purpose of the division may well have been because the goats were to be killed for meat.

Goats are more sensitive than sheep and were not left out in the field over night. We perhaps have the picture of both sheep and goats being called into the fold at the evening, and then divided. The picture of division at sunset may be appropriate to the sun going down on this world, the world's last night, as C.S. Lewis put it, eclipsed in another metaphor by the rising of the Lord Jesus as the sun of righteousness.

25:33 *And he shall set*- Gk. 'to stand'.

The sheep on his right hand- The paradox is that seeing the Lord will be facing the people, His right hand is their left hand. Those who place themselves at His left hand from their perspective, those who condemn themselves, are thereby on His right hand, and saved. The Lord Himself was rewarded with a place on the right hand (of the Father), and He shares that reward with His people by likewise placing them on the right hand.

And the goats on the left- The Greek *euo-numos* means literally the good named or good omened. The Greeks understood the left hand as being the side of good fortune. The Lord turned this idea upside down. His culture is radically different to that of the world.

Initially, it does not appear that there will be much compulsion to come to the judgment. After a meeting of the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17), both sheep and goats eventually appear before the judgment seat. The point has been made that when the Angels first come to call us to judgment at the second coming (Matt. 13:39), there will be an element of choice as to whether we immediately accept the call to go and meet Christ. "In that day" we will have the choice to go and take our goods from the house, or to go immediately with the Lord (Lk. 17:31). Under the law, the trumpet sounded and Israel had to gather themselves together (Num. 10:4); yet Paul says in Thessalonians that the Lord comes with a trumpet to gather His people together. If this is indeed based upon the Old Testament pattern, then there is an element of choice as to whether we gather ourselves unto Him- at least initially. Noah and Lot were invited, not forced, to leave the world. Those who respond to Christ's return "immediately" will be accepted, implying that the unworthy delay. This means that the response is optional in the first instance (Lk. 12:36). There are other indications of this. The most obvious is in the parable of the virgins, where the wise go out to meet their Lord immediately, whilst the

foolish delay in order to spiritually prepare themselves. Our attitude in that split second is so vital. The rejected will mourn and wail, in anticipation of their future condemnation, when they see the sign of the Son of man indicating His imminent coming (Mt. 24:30,31). And this is why there is the implication that effectively, the division between sheep and goats happens in the gathering process (Mt. 25:33); our response to the gathering is our judgment. The parables invite us to see the Lord gathering the wheat to one place and the tares to another, as if the gathering is the judgment (Mt. 13:30); the wheat is gathered to the garner, and the chaff to the place of burning (Mt. 3:12). The Angel who reaps for judgment 'thrusts in' his sickle, and 'casts out' the wicked in rejection (Rev. 14:19). But 'thrust in' and 'cast out' in that verse both translate the same Greek word *ballo*- the implication being that the gathering-to-judgment process is in fact the separation process. Likewise the net is "cast" into the sea in order to gather people for judgment, and then the rejected are "cast" away (Mt. 13:47,48).

25:34 *Then*- If indeed the Lord comes to judgment with the faithful with Him (in line with the allusions to the Son of Man of Daniel 7, the faithful saints, coming in judgment), then we would have a chronological problem- if the sheep here represent the responsible from all ages standing before Him. We note too that He speaks to them of "the least of these My brethren" (:40), as if His brethren are standing somehow in another group. These considerations have led some to think that the group now being judged are those who have ministered to the Lord's people during their final tribulation. The nakedness, being in prison etc. is exactly the language of persecution found in Rom. 8:35. But I think this is unnecessary, and this suggestion in turn raises problems when analysed further- for will unbelievers in the world enter eternal life and the Kingdom simply on the basis of good works? And the whole language of gathering and separation [as demonstrated above] is elsewhere used about the judgment of all the responsible at the judgment seat of Christ. It seems to me that there is abundant evidence for a collapse of time and space at the period around the Lord's coming. This means that such chronological issues need not concern us. Another possibility is that there are various possible chronologies of events in the last days, and there may be different scenarios for the gathering and judgment of the Lord's people.

The King shall say to those on his right hand: Come- The invitation to come to Him is what we respond to now, in this life, in daily situations (11:28; 19:21; 22:4; Mk. 10:21 s.w.). The judgment seat will simply be a continuation of that principle. Perhaps "*Come*" suggests a hesitancy of the faithful to enter the Kingdom. Ps. 36:8 says that God will "make us" partake of the blessings of the Kingdom of God. It reminds us of how the Lord Jesus said that in his Kingdom, He will "make us" sit down at a table, and He will come and serve us (Lk. 12:37), knowing full well that he who sits at meat is greater than he who serves (Lk. 22:27). It isn't so difficult to imagine this scene: the Lord of glory wanting us to sit down to a meal, and then *He* comes and serves us. He *will* have to "make us" sit down and let ourselves be served. And perhaps the way the Lord had to 'make' the healed blind man look up and use his new sight was some kind of foretaste of this. There is even the suggestion in Rev. 7:15 that after the judgment process, the Lord will come down off His throne and mix with us, after the pattern of Joseph.

Blessed of my Father- The Greek means literally those who are praised. The Greek *eu-logeo* is literally those who are spoken well of. And this is exactly what the Lord proceeds to do. He praises the righteous, bewildered as they appear to be, for their

good works. Righteousness is imputed to them. This connects with other New Testament pictures of the righteous being praised by the Father and Son at the last day.

These words are spoken collectively: "Come, *ye* (not 'thou', singular) blessed... *ye* [plural] gave me meat... then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, When saw *we* thee an hungered...". Yet we know that there must be an individual judgment. These words sound as if we are all judged together, at the same time. Again, the reconciliation of this is in appreciating that the meaning of time will be collapsed. In similar vein, the rejected going off to try to get oil and then turning up later at the judgment (Mt. 25:10) probably describes a process that occurs in the minds of the people, rather than something which occurs in real time- although it may *feel* like real time to them. The existence of these two groups at the judgment explains how the men of Nineveh and Sheba will "rise up in the judgment" and condemn the rejected Jews; if they are in the group of sheep facing the group of goats in which the faithless Jews will be. The wicked will walk naked, and the accepted believers will then see their shame (Rev. 16:15). The rejected will experience "shame and everlasting contempt" at the judgment (Dan. 12:2). Shame and contempt must be in the eyes of others- i.e. the group of 'sheep'?

"My Father" suggests that the King is therefore the Lord Jesus. Yet He judges as God because God has given Him authority to do this, because He is the Son of Man (Jn. 5:27).

Inherit the kingdom- 'Be heirs of'. But we are right now "heirs of the Kingdom" (James 2:5 s.w.). What we are now by status will be realised in a more physical sense. Note that inheriting the Kingdom parallels inheriting the earth (5:5), inheriting eternal life (19:29), inheriting incorruption (1 Cor. 15:50), inheriting salvation (Heb. 1:14), inheriting the promises (Heb. 6:12) and "all things" (Rev. 21:7). In no way could these things have been inherited in AD70. These words of Jesus at the judgment, inviting the faithful into the Kingdom (Mt. 25:34), rung in Paul's mind: Acts 20:32; Gal. 3:29; 4:7; Eph. 1:11; Col. 1:12; 3:24; Tit. 3:7.

Prepared for you- We each have a specific, unique role being prepared for us in eternity; and the process of that preparation is ongoing now, and is the reason for all our current experiences. This brief life prepares us for eternity, who and what we shall eternally be; this is why life is so intense now, even if at times it seems so repetitious. We prepare ourselves (Lk. 12:47 "that servant.... prepared not himself", "His wife has prepared herself", Rev. 19:7; 21:2 s.w.), and God works through this in preparing us. This perhaps explains the irregular dative translated "for you"- it could equally mean 'prepared *by* you'. The 'preparation' of God's people for that eternity was a major theme of John the Baptist, and it involved repentance (Lk. 1:76; 3:4). The cross was a major part in that preparation (Jn. 14:2,3 s.w.); each of us was somehow represented in Christ then. We are now being "prepared unto good works" (2 Tim. 2:21)- which we shall eternally do. For the Kingdom of God will not be a passive state. We will be active in the good works for which we are now being prepared. I have made the point that the parables of Matthew 25 all address the issue of preparedness for the Lord's coming with which He concluded the Olivet prophecy in Matthew 24. He concluded it with an appeal to be "ready", the same word as "prepared" here (24:44). If we have this sense of being prepared for an eternity of service, then we will be prepared for His coming even though we don't know the day nor hour.

The parable of the pounds describes the reward of the faithful in terms of being given ten or five cities (Lk. 19:17). This idea of dividing up groups of cities was surely

meant to send the mind back to the way Israel in their wilderness years were each promised their own individual cities and villages, which they later inherited. The idea of inheriting "ten cities" occurs in Josh. 15:57; 21:5,26; 1 Chron. 6:61 (all of which are in the context of the priests receiving their cities), and "five cities" in 1 Chron. 4:32. As each Israelite was promised some personal inheritance in the land, rather than some blanket reward which the while nation received, so we too have a personal reward prepared. The language of inheritance (e.g. 1 Pet. 1:4) and preparation of reward (Mt. 25:34; Jn. 14:1) in the NT is alluding to this OT background of the land being prepared by the Angels for Israel to inherit (Ex. 15:17 Heb.; 23:20; Ps. 68:9,10 Heb.) . We must be careful not to think that our promised inheritance is *only* eternal life; it is something being personally prepared for each of us. The language of preparation seems inappropriate if our reward is only eternal life.

From the foundation of the world- In a literal sense, perhaps, our unique genetic structure has been under preparation from the beginning. We were intended to be who we are and to do something specific for the Lord, to be someone unique, throughout eternity. For we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), our names / personalities written from the foundation of the world (Rev. 17:8).

25:35 *For I was hungry and you gave me to eat*- The Lord was hungry (21:18; Lk. 6:3), wanting to be satiated by fruit on the fig tree, the repentance of Israel.

I was thirsty and you gave me drink- The Lord was thirsty, and satiated by the food and drink of the Samaritan woman's interest in the Gospel (Jn. 4:13,14). She 'gave Him to drink' (Jn. 4:7); the same words are used here. And He thirsted on the cross (Jn. 19:28) and was 'given to drink'- the same words are used (Mk. 15:36). Hunger, thirst, prison and nakedness are all part of the sufferings of Gospel preachers (1 Cor. 4:11; 2 Cor. 11:27). It may be that Matthew is making this connection because he sought to remind his converts of the need to support the itinerant preachers who were going around reciting the Gospel of Matthew at his time. Further, the spread of the Gospel worldwide is one of the preconditions for the Lord's return, according to the preceding Olivet prophecy. And the point is being made that those who do this are to be supported.

The Lord's focus on the positive is shown by the way He quotes Job 22:7 in the parable of the sheep and goats: "Thou hast not given water to the weary to drink, and thou hast withholden bread from the hungry". These words are part of Eliphaz's erroneous allegations against Job- for Job was a perfect man, and not guilty on these counts. Yet the Lord extracts elements of truth from those wrong words, rather than just contemptuously ignoring them. Likewise Job 22:25 speaks of God being our "treasure… our precious silver" (RV). Surely the Lord had this in mind when saying that our treasure must be laid up "in heaven", i.e. with God (for He often uses 'Heaven' for 'God'). And James follows suite by approvingly quoting Job 22:29 about the lifting up of the humble (James 4:6).

A stranger I was a stranger and you welcomed me- The Lord was buried in the place of "strangers" (27:7 s.w.); He was treated as a Gentile especially in His death on the cross. "Welcomed" is the same word translated "gathered" in :32. As they gathered Him, so He now gathers them.

25:36 *Naked*- The Lord Jesus was naked or at least without clothing on the cross.

And you clothed Me- As the believers clothed Him, so He will clothe them (Rev. 3:5; 7:9; 19:8; being clothed upon with immortality is definitely a picture of salvation). He will act spiritually to us, in terms of salvation, as we have acted materially to His brethren as they in their lives, as the body of Christ, experience various aspects of His

life, sufferings and death.

Sick- Gk. 'weak'. "He was crucified in *weakness*... we also are *weak* in Him" (2 Cor. 13:4). His crucifixion 'weakness' is manifest in all who are in Him, part of His body. Both in His life and supremely in His death, the Lord carried our weakness / sickness (Mt. 8:17, quoting from the prophecy of the crucifixion of Jesus in Isaiah 53). He fully shared in "our infirmities" (Heb. 4:15 s.w.) and was "compassed with infirmity / weakness" (Heb. 5:2 s.w.). Clearly the weakness / sickness of the Lord is to be found in all those in Him, and we are to minister to that as we would minister to Him personally.

1 Cor. 8:9 is one of several passages which warn us not to make “the weak” to stumble. There are weak members amongst every group of believers, and therefore we should watch our behaviour, because it will have an effect upon whoever is weak. But this doesn't mean that *we* actually know who the weak ones are. Because we don't know who is especially weak we must always be careful in our behaviour, *whoever* we are with. Indeed, we have to adopt the perspective that in a sense we are *all* weak. The Greek word translated "weak" usually means one of two things: physical illness, or spiritual weakness. Sometimes these two senses are combined (e.g. when James speaks of praying for the "sick" brother, or when Jesus talks of how pleased he was that brethren had visited the "sick" brother in Mt. 25:36). Paul often uses the word in his letters to Corinth. He says that we are *all* weak because of our natures (1 Cor. 15:43), and that Christ died on account of the fact that we are weak (2 Cor. 13:4 Gk.). Because of this, Paul reasons, we're all weak, because Christ died for every one of us. He therefore says that to sin against a weak brother is to sin against Christ; because Christ has associated himself with our spiritual weakness, in order to save us from it (1 Cor. 8:12). Thus he says that when we visit a weak brother (spiritually? it's the same word), we visit *him*. He so closely associates himself with the weak brother. Christ on the cross carried the sins of "the weak" (i.e. all of us), and thereby left us an example of how we should behave towards the "weak". In this context, Paul says that we should likewise love our neighbour (in the ecclesia; Rom. 15:1-4). What he seems to be saying is that we should understand that we are *all* weak, and therefore try to help each other, in the same spirit as Christ died for the weakness of each of us. If we recognize that we are *all* weak, we'll avoid two common mistakes: 1) Thinking that some brethren aren't weak and should therefore be followed blindly; and 2) Thinking that some believers are "weak" whilst the rest of us are "strong". Paul didn't want the Corinth ecclesia to think he was wagging the finger at them and implying: 'You lot are so weak, but I'm strong'. Several times he speaks of his own weakness, and he glories in the fact that although he is so (spiritually) weak, God works through him so mightily; indeed, he comes to the conclusion that God's strength is perfectly expressed through his spiritual weaknesses (2 Cor. 11:30; 12:5,9,10). He says that he preached to Corinth in the first place in (spiritual) "weakness" (1 Cor. 2:3)- because it seems that when he first got to Corinth, he wasn't spiritually strong enough to grasp the nettle of witnessing to the city as he should have done (Acts 18:9,10). Having admitted to Corinth that he himself was weak, he can say that whenever one of them is weak, he feels weak too; in other words he's saying that he can totally empathize (not just sympathize) with a weak brother's feelings (2 Cor. 11:29).

And you visited Me- The idea is not really to pop around to someone's house or hospital ward. The idea really is of identity, with a view to salvation. Thus God visited us in Christ to save us (Lk. 1:68,78; 7:16 "God has visited His people"; Acts 15:14 God "visited the Gentiles to take out a people"; Heb. 2:6 "what is man that You visit him").

This is the 'visiting' in view. As He ultimately 'visits' us to save, crossing the huge distance between God and man to do so, likewise we are to 'visit' our brethren. Again, what we do materially for those in Christ is a reflection of what He spiritually does for us. This is to be the motivation; to perceive that their poverty, their imprisonment, all of which may be their fault, is a reflection of our spiritual need and poverty, as we like them miss chance after chance to pull ourselves out of our poverty, and fall down too easily into survival and coping mechanisms that bind us to our poverty. And we are to show the same compassionate care to them as the Lord does to us.

I was in prison and you came to me- The Lord Jesus was taken from prison to His death, according to Is. 53. Nobody is recorded as coming to Him then with any small bit of food or water. But perhaps someone did, unrecorded, but alluded to by the Lord here. Prison is a metaphor for where sin and spiritual debt leads us. We are all hopelessly in spiritual debt and therefore in the debtors' prison (18:30). The Gospel which saves us is of freedom for the spiritual prisoners. And we are to reflect that experience in visiting others in prison, even if it is their fault they are there, just as it's our fault that we too are imprisoned spiritually. And "prison" was understood by Peter as a fair description of the Lord's sufferings, "to prison and to death" (Lk. 22:33). In His death, the Lord went to the "spirits in prison", He was with them / us there (1 Pet. 3:19). But "prison" wasn't necessarily understood as a building with "Prison" written on it. Legion was 'bound', imprisoned, with fetters (Lk. 8:29 s.w.); and yet still free. Likewise Paul was 'bound' or 'imprisoned' to a soldier (Acts 28:16 s.w.). The Lord's binding could therefore be fairly understood as an imprisonment. And He was imprisoned at least for 24 hours before His death. The wonder of all this is that those imprisoned even by the effect of their own sin are thus still fellowshipping the Lord's crucifixion sufferings; and we are to minister to them as we would have done to Christ on the cross. Would we not have rushed to provide something in response to His plea "I thirst"? Of course. But we are to do so in response to the need of His brethren. Even "the least" of them, who are suffering for their sins.

So we can say that hunger, thirst, being a stranger, naked, weak and imprisoned are all things which the Lord experienced during His life and especially in His death. His brethren, His body, share His sufferings. We are to minister to them as we would have done were we there beholding the sufferings of Christ on the cross. We should emerge from such 'beholding', as we do it at the memorial meeting, practically resolving to reflect it to His brethren. And we are the more motivated by realizing that all those situations of hunger, thirst, imprisonment, weakness and nakedness are in fact metaphors for our own spiritual poverty, which the Lord through the cross responded to, in utter grace. As He has done spiritually to us, so we are to do, spiritually and materially, to others. All those symptoms of poverty are often (although far from always) the result of mismanagement, weak motivation, unhealthy coping patterns, chronically missed chances… and yet in spiritual terms, those things are the story of our lives. In the materially poor we see exact reflections of ourselves, of our spiritual poverty and failures. As the Lord has graciously responded to us in our weakness and self-inflicted poverty, so we are to do so to His people.

25:37 *Then the righteous shall answer him, saying: Lord*- The parable implies the day of judgment will be such a surprise. Both righteous and wicked will find that they are criticized and commended for things which surprise them. There are several indications that because of this, the rejected will begin to argue back with Christ (e.g. Mt. 7:22), until eventually they realize their errors, stop speaking (Mt. 22:12) and gnash

their teeth in anger against themselves (Mt. 22:13). This should truly be a sobering thought to us all. We must strive, really, to examine ourselves, to know ourselves, to try to see our motives and actions a little more from God's perspective; because it is His perspective, not ours, which is ultimately important; and it is this lesson which the day of judgment will ultimately teach each of us.

When did we see you hungry and fed you? Or thirsty and gave you drink?- "See", *eido*, means effectively 'to know'. The Lord has just used the same word in warning that He will have to tell the foolish virgins "I know you not" (:12). Here He explains that this is in fact because they knew *Him* not, in that they didn't recognize His brethren. To not recognize His brethren means that He will not recognize us. It becomes crucial, therefore, to recognize the Lord's brethren- and upholding a statement of faith as a basis of brotherhood seems to be a sure way *not* to do that. Such a system may work well in secular life, but in spiritual terms, we end up creating fellowship boundaries which effectively treat others as not the Lord's brethren because we do not recognize them as *our* brethren, seeing they fail to meet some curious criteria of theology or practice.

One major characteristic of the judgment will be *surprise*- for both rejected and accepted (Mt. 25:37,44). Firstly, incomprehension (Mt. 25:37) and surprised anger, then realisation of the Lord's verdict. Both sheep and goats register their surprise at their Lord's comments on various specific actions of theirs which he discusses with them- "When saw we thee...?" (Mt. 25:44). The judgment will be a surprise for all. The thought that at least some of our deeds will be discussed with us at the judgment should surely make some impact on our present behaviour. Lk. 19:23 implies not only that there will be a discussion with our judge, but that Jesus will point out to the rejected what they should have done to be accepted: "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee... wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank?". The rejected are to be cut in two, shown as the two faced hypocrites which they were. But the idea of cutting in two was immediately associated in the Jewish mind with making a covenant. When Abraham placed the sacrifices in two parts and the Lord passed between them, the idea was really that God would cut in two the man who broke the covenant. Hence the Jews spoke of 'cutting a covenant'. Those who have made the covenant with God but not kept it will be cut in two, as they initially agreed. God will keep His side of the covenant.

We need to observe that the goats are rejected not so much for their lack of actions, but for failing to discern Christ in the least of His brethren. Then, the rejected will finally see their good works in context. They will realize how little works really meant. The faithful already knew that- for they objected when the Lord told them all the good things they had done. The list of works in Mt. 25:35,36 include the following: giving food to the hungry, clothes to the naked, a bed to the homeless, help to the sick. Yet these are the very things which Job claims he had done, when he clears himself from all his accusers (Job 31:17-20). But the voice in the whirlwind soon reduced him to realize "I am vile"; all his good works became as filthy rags before the supremacy of salvation by grace alone. The connection with the parable isn't merely incidental. Surely the Lord is saying that the self-righteous in the ecclesia may seem as righteous as Job was before his conversion; but they must either in this life realize the totality of grace, or the whirlwind of judgment condemnation will reduce them to the same realization. Job seems to oscillate between believing and not believing in the resurrection (consider Job 14:7-15). At the end, Job confesses he has not spoken the right things; and Yahweh then says that he has only spoken that which was right. The friends likewise said some true things and some false things; and yet because they did not repent, their bad words were remembered against them. The final revealing of Yahweh in Job was some kind

of judgment day for all concerned. Job, the righteous, had only his good deeds and words remembered; whereas the wicked friends had only their bad words remembered. It seems it will take a while for the penny to drop for the rejected- that they're "out", and actually never were "in". This Jesus, in whose presence they had broken bread (although note the difference between this and Jesus breaking bread with us, Lk. 13:26 cp. Mt. 26:29), actually doesn't know them. The Lord has to repeat the very same words twice to the rejected: "I know not whence you are" (Lk. 13:25,27)- as if they are dumbfounded and slow to comprehend the eternal implications of His words.

The righteous gave to the poor, the sick, the hungry- without even realizing they had done it. They will confidently deny it when Jesus points it all out to them. They served with no expectation of reward; so much so that they even forgot what they did. And *every* one who is accepted at the judgment, all the sheep, will have been like that. Giving without any thought of getting anything back is a *must* for all of us who seek to truly manifest God: for this is exactly what He does and has done, minute by minute, down through the millennia of indifferent, unresponsive human history (Lk. 6:35,36). The accepted will feel so certain of all this that they will almost argue with the Lord Jesus at the day of judgment that he hasn't made the right decision concerning them (Mt. 25:37-40). It's only a highly convicted man who would dare do that. Thus the Father will have to comfort the faithful in the aftermath of the judgment, wiping away the tears which will *then* (see context) be in our eyes, and give us special help to realize that our sinful past has now finally been overcome (Rev. 21:4). We will be like the labourers in the parable who walk away from judgment clutching their penny, thinking "I really shouldn't have this. I didn't work for a day, and this is a day's pay". Therefore if we honestly, genuinely feel that we won't be in the Kingdom, well, this is how in some ways the faithful will all feel.

There is surely an intended contrast between the accepted denying the righteous acts that the Lord reminds them of, and their telling Him how much they have gained (spiritually) by trading (Mt. 25:37-39 cp. 20,22). These quite different attributes of the accepted are recorded within the same speech of the Lord. He frames those parables as if He is getting over global lessons rather than describing the response of different people. Perhaps the point is that first of all, the accepted feel as if they have done no righteous acts, and feel their unworthiness so strongly that they even dare to genuinely disagree with the Lord's praise of them. But then they come to accept themselves as He sees them, and later on in the judgment dialogue, He teases out of them a realistic self-assessment of their spiritual growth. There is a similar intended contrast in the attitude of the rejected; they begin by denying the Lord's criticism of their spiritual barrenness, and later in the conversation claim that well, He is being unreasonable, looking for fruit which He can't reasonably expect. Their tone changes from a loving 'Lord, Lord...' to a more bitter, critical spirit (Mt. 25: 4 cp. 25).

25:38 *And when did we see you as a stranger and welcome you? Or naked and clothed you?*- They were commendably unaware that they had done these things. Or perhaps the focus is upon the word "You". Their genuine surprise is because they had never realized the degree to which their actions to their brethren were done directly to their Lord.

We note the surprise of all involved at how their Lord judged them. Surprised at the degree to which deeds done not self consciously were given huge priority by Him. At how sins of omission counted so heavily with Him. At how much He has noticed. At how significant was every thought and action. The rejected elsewhere are presented as remonstrating that they had eaten and drunk with the Lord. But despite that, He

looked more at how they had treated those who represented Him. This is the problem with the idea that a 'personal relationship with Jesus in the heart' is all that is needed. It has to go beyond that, to the perception that our love of Him is necessarily reflected in our love for all those in Him. Otherwise we do not in fact "know" Him, we are not in relationship with Him. For He is His people. We recall His words to Saul on the Damascus road, "You persecute *Me*"; and His clear teaching that "He who receives you, receives Me" (Mt. 10:40).

25:39 *And when did we see you sick, or in prison and came to you?*- The parable of the sheep and goats clearly suggests that after the judgment, the worthy and unworthy will be in two distinct groups to the right and left hand side of the Lord. The group of "sheep" then enter the Kingdom all together, at the same moment. This explains how the Lord will address the faithful and unfaithful as groups (note "ye" in Mt. 25:37,39); how the men of Nineveh stand together in a group, as the men of Sodom and Gomorrah will (Mt. 12:41; Mk. 6:11). In some way, there will be a collective sense at the day of judgment, as well as an individual one. If there will be a collective sense then, before the presence of His glory... there ought to be now.

At judgment day, the Lord will commend the righteous for feeding Him etc.- and they will reply in genuine surprise, feeling that they truly have *not* done any of those things for which He commends them. The point is, their way of life was an unconscious doing of good; it is the mindset which legalistically remembers every act of righteousness which will be finally rejected.

25:40 *And the King*- The day of judgment was an important theme with the Lord. There is an element of unreality in the way he speaks of the King as being the judge (Mt. 25:40); the implication is that our judgment will be an extremely important event; the King himself is the judge (actually, the King of heaven and earth). This indicates that the Lord wishes to put before us the picture of those who have been called to the Kingdom but reject His offer.

Shall answer and say to them- They answer to Him (:37), and He likewise to them.

Truly I say to you, inasmuch- The Greek suggests an exact correspondence. Whatever is done to the Lord's brethren is done to Him. This is the point of the Lord's teaching. He is not simply saying that if we do good practical works we shall be saved, and if we don't, then we shall not be. He is saying that it is what is done or not done *to Him* which is significant. So the point of the teaching is an appeal to recognize and serve His brethren, rather than to simply do good works. The rejected of Mt. 7:22 "*did* many wonderful works"- and the same word is used here, "you *did it* unto one of the least of these my brothers". It's not so much works that are being appealed for, as recognition of the Lord in His brethren. It's the same word used in :16 for the faithful man who 'made' talents for his Lord. The making of talents is therefore parallel with serving the Lord's brethren. It's also the word used in 24:46 [which introduces the parables of chapter 25]- the watching servant will be found 'doing' care for his brethren.

As you did it to one of these my brothers- This word may seem superfluous until we realize that 'one of the least of these' is an invitation to look at the group of sheep and focus upon any one of the faces. This is a unique insight into the day of judgment. We are enabled to imagine ourselves there. The Lord is inviting us to imagine the colossal importance of perceiving Him in His brethren, and treating them as Him. If only this principle were understood in church life now, the church would be a beacon of light in this world's darkness. All rejection, spitefulness, hard speaking against other believers… would disappear. We are to treat others in Christ as if they were Him. And that is the basis of our acceptance or rejection.

Even the least, you did it to me- See on :34 *Then*. The 'little ones' in the Lord's earlier teaching are believers in Him (Mt. 10:40-42; 12:48-50; 18:6,10,14**)**- and weak believers. It is our attitude to them which is our attitude to the Lord Jesus. He in His spiritual supremacy on the cross is manifest in the most spiritually weak of His brethren. How we treat them is how we treat Him there. This is nothing to do with general philanthropy. It is about the least of His brothers. This is the measure of a man, of a soldier, of an army: How he treats the weak and the wounded. In the spirit of Him who did not break a bruised reed nor quench a smoking flax. This view is in line with other teachings of the Lord, that our attitude to others, to our debtors, is going to be the cardinal issue in His final and eternal judgment of men. The Lord has a special interest in the weak, carrying the lambs who can't walk the journey and holding them close to His heart, gently leading those who can't keep up the pace. He leaves the 99 who went not astray to search all night for the one who did. Mt. 10:42 is strikingly similar: "And whoever gives one of these *little ones* even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple; truly I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward". The least of the Lord's brethren refer to His disciples, and not to needy humanity generally. The purpose of the parable is to continue the theme of watchfulness which began at the end of chapter 24. There the Lord taught that watchfulness and readiness for His return will be achieved by feeding the household, and here that is defined in terms of practical care for His brethren. Careful reflection on the parable surely indicates that the Lord doesn't condemn people for not doing acts of kindness; that would be salvation by works. Rather is the basis of their condemnation whether or not they perceived the Christ in the least of the Christ's brethren. The Lord's point is that things were done or not done *to Him*. If He meant 'If you feed the hungry, you're a sheep; if you don't, you're a goat', He would have expressed it otherwise. He's not teaching salvation by works, but rather the crucial importance of perceiving Himself in His brethren and not denying their connection with Him. This lifts the whole issue to a far more personal and demanding level than doing a few acts of kindness to needy folks.

The 'least' of the Lord's brethren are those who are spiritually weak. The "least in the Kingdom" are those who break commandments and teach others so (5:19 s.w.); Paul felt "the least of the apostles" (1 Cor. 15:9 s.w.), "the least of all saints" (Eph. 3:8 s.w.). The parable describes those on whom the righteous expend effort as sick, hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, in prison: *every one of which* is a description used elsewhere in Scripture concerning our spiritually weak state. Therefore the parable is teaching that one of the grounds upon which we will be rejected or accepted relates to how we have treated spiritually weak brethren. The wondrous, wondrous thing is that the Lord of glory identifies himself with the spiritually *weakest* of his brethren: and structures his judgment seat around how others have behaved towards them. Yet the description of "the least" brethren exactly match the Lord's own experience in His death- one who is imprisoned (Mt. 26:50), sick (according to Isaiah 53, the Lord on the cross was acquainted with sickness), naked (Mt. 27:35), thirsty (Mt. 26:29; 27:48), friendless like a stranger (Mt. 26:56). In responding to "the least" of the Lord's brethren, we are responding to His cross. For our brethren, in their poverty, nakedness and imprisonment, are fellowshipping the sufferings of their Lord.

When Paul lists his weaknesses, he alludes to the sufferings of the "least of the brethren" in Mt. 25:34-36: hunger (1 Cor. 4:11), thirst (1 Cor. 4:11; 2 Cor. 11:27), living as a stranger or an itinerant (1 Cor. 4:11, "we are homeless"), naked (1 Cor. 4:11; 2 Cor. 11:27), sick (1 Cor. 4:10, "We are weak" s.w.), imprisoned (2 Cor. 11:23; Philemon 9). Paul saw himself as the least of his Lord's brethren, in fact "less than the least of all saints". The attitude of baptized believers to Paul was their attitude to his Lord.

As the Lord says "Of these [My weak brethren]", we imagine a nod towards the crowd of sheep, with an invitation to focus upon "one" of those faces. There will be a public element to the judgment process. This is why the rejected shall walk naked and have their shame seen by others (Rev. 16:15). The purpose of judgment is to teach us all, to prepare us for eternity together as we behold each other's lives revealed and perceive the same patterns of God's amazing grace. This is why hypocrisy is pointless; we shall then be revealed for who we really are before all.

25:41 *Then he shall also say to them on the left hand: You who are cursed, depart from me*- The same word has just been used about the foolish virgins when they were told to "Go [s.w. 'depart']" to buy more oil (:9). The rejected will be told: "Depart from me" (Lk. 13:27); and yet in their lives, they will have already departed themselves. In time of temptation some *fall away* (s.w. "depart from"; Lk. 8:13). Some *depart* (s.w.) from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:12). Demas departed (2 Tim. 4:10), as the rejected will depart (s.w. here in Mt. 25:41). The same word is used about how the seed sown among thorns *goes forth*, it departs (Lk. 8:14) to condemnation. They departed, and so He tells them to depart. Now they willingly absent themselves from the Lord, but then they will not want to depart from Him. God will gather up the nations to thresh them, but they gather themselves to Him (Mic. 4:11,12).

To the perpetual fire which is prepared for the Devil and his messengers– Clearly alluding to the Gehenna myth. This is a phrase taken straight from Jewish apocalyptic thinking and literature. It was the worst category of punishment conceivable in Judaism. And yet Jesus in the context is talking of the way that religious people who claim to believe in Him will not go unpunished for ignoring the needs of their poor brethren. This all too easy to commit sin... The Lord uses Judaism's toughest language to condemn. But this doesn't mean that He actually believed in the literal existence of either "eternal fire" nor a personal Devil. The Devil's angels are those who ignore their needy brethren. It's a powerful and telling juxtapositioning of ideas by the Lord Jesus. The warning that the wicked will be cast into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil (Mt. 25:41) was referring to the apocryphal fate of supposedly 'wicked angels' as recorded in 1 Enoch 54. The references to Tartarus and sinful angels in 2 Peter and Jude are also clear references to wrong beliefs which were common in Jewish apocryphal and pseudo-epigraphical writings. These wrong ideas- and they *are* wrong- are not corrected directly, but rather a moral lesson is drawn from the stories. This is the point of the allusion to them; but there is no explicit correction of these myths in the first instance. It is the Angels of Jesus, and not of the Devil, who punish the wicked (Mt. 13:42–50). A wresting of Scripture to make out that the Devil is the tormentor of the wicked simply runs in straight contradiction to these plain statements of the Lord Jesus.

It is a common theme that the wicked snare themselves, falling into their own pit, rather than God specifically snaring them (e.g. Ps. 7:15; 9:15; 57:6; Prov. 26:27; 28:10; Ecc. 10:8). Their condemnation, the nature of their punishment, will have been specifically "prepared" for them (Mt. 25:41). The bitter self-hatred and ineffable regret of the rejected will be their punishment; and in accordance with the specific, personal way they mistreated and neglected God's Truth in this life, so they will mentally torture themselves. From their own mouth and words men will be judged (Mt. 12:37; Lk. 19:22 cp. 2 Sam. 1:16).

25:42 *For I was hungry and you did not give me anything to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink*- The ideas of being hungry, thirsty and in prison connect with the picture we have in the sermon on the mount (Mt. 5:5-11)- where those very categories of people are those who are blessed by the Gospel. The implication of the connection may be that their being

given food, water and comfort is articulated through the body of Christ today. And those who refuse to be the channel for those things are thereby showing themselves to not be part of the body of Christ.

25:43 *I was a stranger and you did not welcome me. Naked and you did not clothe me. Sick and in prison and you did not visit me*- "Welcome me" translates the same Greek word used for welcoming others into salvation. It is translated "assemble together" in the context of church meetings (Jn. 20:19; Acts 4:31; 11:26; 14:27; 15:6,30; 1 Cor. 5:4), and specifically of gathering together to break bread (Acts 20:7). Clothing the naked likewise has connections with accepting the otherwise spiritually unacceptable. It is all a sober warning to those inclined to "not welcome" some at the Lord's table.

25:44 *Then they shall also answer, saying: Lord*- The figures of judgment can be taken literally to an extent. However, the actual process will be slightly different for each of us. Thus for some, Christ gives his verdict immediately and then discusses it with them (Mt. 25:33,34,41). Others are apparently given the reasons for the verdict first, and then explicitly told the verdict (Mt. 25:27). Others tell the Lord of their spirituality and are then told his comment (Mt. 25:20). Others don't realize the spiritual growth they've achieved (Mt. 25:37), others see it quite clearly (Lk. 19:16). To some, Jesus speaks first; in other cases, the believer starts the dialogue (Mt. 25:41-44 cp. 11,12,24-26). Some sense their rejection coming and plead to be let in to the Kingdom (Mt. 25:11,12); others complain at their Lord's apparent unfairness, as if they're sorry, but they just have to make their point to him (Mt. 25:44).

The Lord points out their failings, then they give an explanation of their behaviour (Mt. 25:24), justifying themselves (Mt. 25:44). There is an intended contrast in the attitude of the rejected within the Lord's parables of judgment in Mt. 25; they begin by denying the Lord's criticism of their spiritual barrenness, and later in the conversation claim that He is being unreasonable, looking for fruit which He can't reasonably expect. Their tone changes from a loving 'Lord, Lord...' to a more bitter, critical spirit (Mt. 25:44 cp. 25). According to the type of Cain, he was questioned by God, answered back, and then changed his tune and begged for mercy (Gen. 4:9). Adam likewise began by answering back, blaming the woman and the fact God gave her to him (Gen. 3:12). So they go through three mood swings: 'Lord, Lord', assuring Him they have never omitted to serve Him (Mt. 25:44), then a more bitter feeling that He is unreasonable (Mt. 25:25), and now a desperate begging for mercy.

When did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to you?- This is the word commonly used about people ministering to Jesus, and the ministering women at the cross. Again the point is established that the language used about ministrations to the historical Jesus is applied to ministration to the least of His brethren. The shock of both sheep and goats reflects their shock at the degree to which their brethren really had been the very same as the Lord Jesus. The parable suggests that we shall never in this life appreciate the degree to which He perceives His brethren as Himself, and our actions to them are our actions to Him. Any exclusion or spitefulness towards them is directly felt as action against Him. The thought of not ministering unto the crucified Christ is unthinkable, and is so clearly expressed by the goats in their denial of having been guilty of this. And yet to ignore our brethren who are part of Christ, who are Him to us, is to do the same. We wish to minister to the Lord in His time of need. But He is not here personally. And yet effectively He is, insofar as His brethren are His body, and are right before our eyes.

25:45 *Then he shall answer them, saying: Truly I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of these least, you did not do it to me*- See on :40 *The least*.

Many of those who ungraciously storm out of fellowship with the rest of the body, do so because they complain that other believers are weak, unloving, hypocrites, don't practice what they preach etc. And in many ways, their complaints are true (seeing that the Lord came to heal those who need a doctor rather than shake hands with the healthy). And again, Paul has a comment on this situation. He says that those parts of our bodies "that seem to be weaker... that we think are less honourable... the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty... with special honour" (NIV). The private parts of our bodies are the parts we are most sensitive to, although on the outside they seem weak and hidden. And so Paul reasons that the weaker parts of the ecclesial body should be treated the same. The Greek for "feeble" (1 Cor. 12:21) is used (notably in Corinthians) to describe spiritual weakness: Mk. 14:38; Rom. 5:6; 1 Cor. 8:7,10; 9:22; 11:30; 1 Thess. 5:14. And in some ways, we are all "weak" (1 Cor. 1:27; 4:10). So those we perceive ("that seem to be... that we think") to be spiritually weak in their external appearance, we should be especially sensitive towards. Significantly, the "sick" (s.w. "feeble") in the parable of Mt. 25:44 are the "least" of Christ's brethren, the spiritually weakest; and at the day of judgment, the rejected are condemned because of their attitude towards these spiritually weakest of Christ's brethren. As John realized the tendency of some to think they could love God without loving His Sons, so Paul tackled the same problem at Corinth. He reasons that "the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee... if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if they were all one member, where were the body?" (1 Cor. 12:21). He knew that some would want to go off on their own, and he shows that such behaviour would suggest that they alone were the whole body. He knew that some would think that they had no need of other parts of the ecclesial body; he saw that some would feel that they were so inferior to others that they had no place in the body. All these are reasons why believers push off on their own. But notice that Paul doesn't actually say 'the eye *shouldn't* say to the hand, I have no need of thee'; but rather "the eye *cannot* say to the hand...". Although some may say or feel this, ultimately, from God's perspective, it's simply not valid. Christian disillusion with Christianity mustn't lead us to quit the body. The same logic applies to those who think that the body of Christ is divided; ultimately, there is one body, and from God's perspective this is indivisible. The divisions only exist in the minds of men. Those who say that they don't need fellowship with their brethren "cannot say" this, according to Paul. If they continue on this road, ultimately they declare themselves not of the one body of Christ; although I trust there are many brethren who have done just this who may still receive God's gracious salvation.

"Of these" suggests that the righteous are present and visible at the time of the verdict given to the goats. Again we see the public dimension to the judgment process.

A telling chronology is suggested by putting together a few Scriptures. The foolish virgins will knock on the door, as it were, and be told by the Lord "I know you not" (Mt. 25:12). Lk. 13:27 says that He tells the rejected *after* they have justified themselves to Him: "I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity". Mt. 7:22,23 describes a dialogue in which the rejected justify themselves by listing their good works, and the Lord will profess unto them: "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity". All their good works He will see as works of sin, because they were not of faith. Mt. 25:41-45 gives more information: the rejected are told "Depart from me", but they argue back with self-justification, and then they are told that they had not shown love to the least of Christ's brethren, and are sent away to punishment.

25:46 *And these shall go away into eternal punishment; but the righteous into eternal life*- After the pattern of Cain and Adam (Gen. 3:24; 4:14), and also the idea of the wicked being *cast* into the darkness of condemnation, it seems that the rejected will be forcibly driven away. Cain was driven out from the faces, the presence of the land of Eden, where the Lord's presence was (Gen. 4:14). Presumably this driving out was done by the Angels. We are left to imagine the ultimate tragedy of Cain going forth from the presence of the Lord (Gen. 4:16 s.w. "face" 4:14), and the rejected 'going away into...' (Mt. 25:46). The tragedy of rejection is well reflected in the way the Lord speaks of how "great was the fall" of the poorly built house (Mt. 7:27). We are invited to see worthy and unworthy walking away from the throne *into* different futures. The sheep will enter *into* the city (Rev. 22:14), *into* the temple (Rev. 15:8), *into* their rest (Heb. 4:11), *into* the Kingdom (Acts 14:22; Jn. 3:5; Lk. 18:24; Mt. 18:3); *into* life (Mk. 9:45; Mt. 18:9; 19:17); *into* the joy of Christ (Mt. 25:23).

The rejected going away into... (Mt. 25:46) is only a reflection of the position they themselves adopted in their lives. They thought that they could flee away from the judgments of God (Rom. 2:3 Gk.)- and so they will flee from His judgment seat, although so, so unwillingly. The man who refuses to immediately respond to the Lord's call to service says that he must first *go away* from the Lord and bury his father (Mt. 8:21); the young man *went away* in sorrow (Mt. 19:22); people hear the Gospel and then *go away* to all their petty businesses of this life (Mt. 22:5). Those who couldn't handle the demanding Lord *went away* from Him (Jn. 6:66); and Judas *went away* of himself to hang himself (Mt. 27:5). He condemned himself. These are all the same words as in Mt. 25:46- those who of their own choice went away from the Lord now, although that isn't maybe how they saw it, will then go away from Him into condemnation. This point is made even within Mt. 25. The foolish virgins *went away* to buy oil- they didn't want to immediately go to their Lord (:10); the one talent man *went away* and buried his talent (:18,25). And then at judgment day they again *go away from* the Lord (:46). Their going away from the Lord is simply being confirmed by Him.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 26

26:1 *And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these words, he said to his disciples*- The same rubric as in 19:1, suggesting that this was a way of dividing up the material to assist in memorization. The earliest converts would have memorized the good news preached to them by e.g. Matthew, and then the material was written up under inspiration as 'the Gospel of Matthew' which we now have.

26:2 *You know*- The knowledge can refer to both the subsequent clauses in the sentence. The Lord said that they knew that Passover was coming, and that He must be handed over to crucifixion. Yet the disciples did not 'know' of His crucifixion in that clearly they had shut their minds to it. And the Lord knew that. But He is still trying to get them to understand. His effort in teaching the disciples is admirable; we would likely have sought to focus solely upon personally getting through with the trauma of death over the next few days. But He perceived that His perfection involved love for His chosen to the end.

That after two days the Passover comes, and the Son of Man will be- A present tense, when we expect a future. The essence of the Lord's function as the Paschal lamb was lived out throughout His life. Perhaps the Lord used this unusual tense because He wanted to prepare the disciples for the fact they were going to keep the Passover a day

earlier than usual; but they need not worry about that, because the essence of Passover was ongoing in the Lord's life. John the Baptist had perceived that when commenting that the Lord was "the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29,36) even when it wasn't Passover time. See on :28 *Is shed* and on :30 *They went out*. Luke says "the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover". "Called the Passover" might suggest that it was only called Passover, but was not so in reality. This would connect with the theme of the feast being called a "feast of the Jews" rather than of Yahweh, and the temple becoming "your house" rather than God's.

Delivered up to be crucified- Literally, 'is being betrayed'. The next verse shows what was going on in justification of this statement. The Lord could have known of it through direct Divine revelation, but I prefer to think that His sensitivity was such that He perceived it of His own perception. The Greek can mean to be handed over, and also to be betrayed, with reference to Judas. The obvious double meaning indicates that the Lord did purposefully use words and ideas with more than one meaning, realizing that after His death, the other meaning would be made apparent. This means that we are quite justified in perceiving multiple meanings and intentions in inspired words, the Olivet Prophecy being a classic example, with its various possible applications. "Is betrayed" reflects a present tense in the Greek. The Lord's handing over to death, indeed His death itself, was in essence lived out throughout His life. His life was a form of ongoing death.

26:3 *Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered at the court of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas*- The record may wish to give the impression that it was because of the Lord's prediction of His death that the Jews assembled and arranged it. He certainly planned His death consciously, and the Jews responded to His provocations. The gathering or assembling together of the Lord's enemies is a major theme (:57; 27:17,27,62; 28:12); and uses the same word for the gathering together of the rejected to condemnation at the last day. Coming before Christ in His time of dying was and is a foretaste of the last judgment. The Lord Jesus causes people to gather together either for or against Him. This is the fundamental divide- not between brother and brother, but between the believer and the world, light and darkness.

The word translated "court" or "palace" is used 12 times in the New Testament, and eight of them refer to the court of the High Priest. It's tempting, therefore, to think that the Lord may well have had this same court / palace in mind when He spoke of how an armed strong man "keeps his palace" [s.w., Lk. 11:21], but the Lord Jesus through His death on the cross would overpower him, and take his goods and share them with His people. The strong man who kept the palace may have had some reference, therefore, to the Jewish High Priest; the good things of the temple were inaccessible to God's people, until the Lord overpowered that entire system. The Lord also spoke of how He has a "fold", the same word translated "palace" or "court", into which He must gather His sheep (Jn. 10:1,16). He had to take over the whole temple system, and replace the Jewish religious leadership with His own bad of secular men, prostitutes and hangers on.

26:4 *And they plotted together how they might seize Jesus using trickery and kill him*- The Greek specifically means to jointly decide. The collective guilt of Jewry is being emphasized, because their judgment was likewise collective. The same word is used four times later in this chapter about the 'taking hold' of the Lord Jesus in Gethsemane (:48,50,55,57). This 'laying on of hands' against the Lord is likewise strongly noted by Mark (s.w. Mk. 14:44,46,49,51). The sight of it was burnt into their

memories. There are likewise parts and aspects of the Lord's sufferings, and words associated with them, which are likewise burnt in the consciousness of all those who truly love Him.

"Trickery" is as AV "*By subtilty"*- an allusion to the Lord's Jewish opposition as the seed of the serpent at whose hands the seed of the woman was wounded (Gen. 3:15).But the word literally refers to a bait, implying some plan to deceive Him into a position in which they could arrest Him. But what were these plans? The Lord fell for no bait. Perhaps the idea was that Judas would come and kiss Him, and lead Him into some isolated ambush or compromising situation. When the Lord made it clear to Judas that He knew what Judas was up to, the plan fell apart and the soldiers simply grabbed the Lord. And they ended killing Him "on the feast day", which was exactly what they had planned to avoid (:5).

The plan made ahead of time to kill Him was clearly typified by the brothers' plans to kill Joseph.

26:5 *But they said: Not during the feast*- But they did crucify the Lord during the feast, at the same time as the Passover lambs were being killed. Their plan went wrong- see on :4 *By subtilty*. Try as they might to not kill Him then, the Lord wanted to die as the Passover lamb, and this happened despite the Jews *not* wanting that. The Lord had control over the time of His death, because He gave His life rather than having it taken from Him.

Lest a riot arise among the people- This indicates the popularity the Lord enjoyed even at that stage, and the fact He was crucified with the general goodwill of the masses is therefore an essay in the fickleness of human nature. And yet the careful plans of the leaders didn't work out- there was "a tumult" about it, the same Greek word translated "uproar" (27:24), and likewise they did end up killing Jesus "on the feast day" when it was not their intention to.

26:6 *Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper*- The anointing recorded in Mark 14 is clearly the same as that here in Matthew 26. But the anointing in Luke 7 appears to have occurred in the house of a Pharisee called Simon somewhere in Galilee. The anointing recorded in John 12 is very similar, but occurred six days before the Passover and one day *before* the triumphal entry (Jn. 12:12), whereas the anointing recorded here in Matthew and Mark occurred *after* that. There are other differences, too. In Jn. 12:3 Mary uses "a pound of spikenard" whereas the anointing in Matthew seems to emphasize the use of spikenard as a liquid, in an alabaster flask that had to be broken to release the liquid. The spikenard was worth *more* than 300 pence (Mk. 14:5), whereas that of Jn. 12:5 was worth 300 pence; it was used to anoint the Lord's *feet* (Jn. 12:3), whereas that of Mt. 26:7 was used to anoint His *head*. In Jn. 12:4 it is Judas who complains at the apparent waste of the money, whereas in Mt. 26:8 it is the disciples. Mt. 26:11,12 record the Lord's word about "You will always have the poor with you" and goes on to record His explanation that the woman had done this for His burial; whereas in Jn. 12:7,8 these two sayings are the other way around. The wiping of His feet with her hair is stressed in Jn. 12:3, but Matthew and Mark are silent about this. Jn. 12 clearly identifies the woman as Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus; whereas Matthew and Mark are careful to preserve her as a nameless "woman" who "came unto Him" (26:7). I therefore have no doubt that Jn. 12 and Mt. 26 / Mk. 14 speak of two separate anointings, both in Bethany, separated from each other by four days. The anointing in Luke 7 is clearly framed as a similar incident, also in the house of a man called Simon.

The question, of course, is why these three anointings are described in such similar

language. Higher critics immediately speak of textual dislocation and mistakes made by the writers in their chronology of events. These kinds of approaches arise from a focus upon the text before our eyes, rather than having a wider perspective on Scripture earned by years of careful Bible reading of the entire Bible text. Those who read the entire Scriptures over a period of time cannot fail to be impressed by the repetition of situations and events. The way Joseph is called out of prison to interpret a King's dream and is then exalted to rulership in a pagan land is clearly the basis for the language used about Daniel's experience in Babylon. This is not to say that text got dislocated, that Daniel was Joseph or vice versa. Rather do we perceive a single Divine mind behind the production of the Bible as we have it; and God's intention was clearly to show that circumstances repeat within and between the lives of His people. And the language He uses in recording history seeks to bring out those repetitions. This is why the lament of Jeremiah in depression is so similar to that of Job in his depression. And of course we are free to assume that Biblical characters were aware of and took inspiration from those who had gone before them. I suggest that this is what we have going on in the records of these three anointings of the Lord by despised and misunderstood women. They were inspired by each other- for the Lord comments that what the women did was to be told worldwide. This was a command, and it was surely obeyed. Mary of Bethany was inspired by the woman of Luke 7, and the anonymous woman of Matthew 26 was inspired by Mary's anointing of four days previously. Mary had given spikenard worth 300 pence; this woman used even more expensive ointment. And in this is our lesson- to be inspired by the devotion of others to their Lord. Heaven's record of our response is as it were recorded in similar language, in recognition of the inspiration provided by earlier acts of faithfulness by those we know or who have gone before us.

26:7 *A woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it*- The Greek *bar-utimos* uses a term, *utimos*, elsewhere used about the precious, costly blood of Christ. Matthew uses it about the "price" of the Lord's blood (27:6,9), as does Paul (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23) and Peter (1 Pet. 2:7). The point is simple. The Lord's blood shed for us was and is the most valuable thing in existence, in the entire cosmos; and we should feel that when we take the cup which symbolizes it. And our response is to give our most valuable things, materially and otherwise, for Him.

On his head as he reclined at table- The woman anointed the Lord's head in order to reflect her belief that He really was the Christ, the anointed one. She gave her life savings for this belief. It can be apparently painless to believe that Jesus is Christ, and yet the implications of accepting this simple fact can transform a life. What she did was surely rooted in her understanding of Song 1:12, where Solomon's lover has spikenard (s.w. LXX Jn. 12:3) which sends forth its smell "While the king sitteth at his table". Clearly enough she saw Jesus right there and then as the King- even though His Kingdom was not of that world. Her love for Him, her reflection upon the Old Testament, and her perception of Him as her future Lord and King to the extent that she even then treated Him as such, so certain was her faith in His future victory and worthiness… this all motivated her to give the quintessence of her life's work for Him. And it should for us too.

26:8 *But when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying*- Mk. 14:4 adds that the indignation was within themselves, and so the words they are here recorded as saying were likely within themselves. We wonder how many other times when we read of people 'saying' something, the 'saying' was within their own minds. For self-talk is understood by the Lord as our actual words. Whether or not we hold our tongues back is not the ultimate issue. The words have been said within us. See on 26:10 *When Jesus understood*. If the reconstruction of events I offered is correct, we can better understand

their frustration. They would have seen an identical 'waste' of wealth in the anointing of four days previously in the same village, perhaps in the same home; and they had seen it in Galilee at the incident recorded in Luke 7. And they were doing their math and calculating the total cost 'wasted'.

To what purpose?- The Greek *eis tis* could equally mean 'For whom?', the implication being that the poor could have been benefitted far more than the Lord Jesus. Hence the Lord replies that the purpose of the anointing was to embalm Him ahead of time for burial. Just as the woman was inspired by the generous anointing of Mary four days previously and the Galilean prostitute of Luke 7, so the huge amount of spices purchased by Nicodemus in Jn. 19:39 was likely motivated in turn by her example. Critics claim that the amount of spices ("one hundred pound weight") bought was more than used in the burial of the Caesars. The woman here used a pound of spikenard, worth more than the 300 pence at which Mary's anointing liquid was valued. And in turn, Nicodemus was motivated yet more- 100 times more. She gave one pound, he gave 100 pounds' weight. This is the reason for the deja vu of our lives, of how experiences repeat between human lives- it's so that we may be inspired to greater service than even those who went before.

Is this waste- This is the same Greek word used nearly 20 times in the NT for destruction and condemnation; it is the same word used in describing Judas as "the son of *perdition*". The tragedy of condemnation is the waste of what could have been. This is the sadness with which God sees condemnation. We note that four days before, it had been Judas who complained about the 'waste'. His attitude had spread to the disciples. But the paradox was that he was thereby the son of waste, he was condemning himself by complaining about the waste of devotion towards the Lord Jesus. The idea could even be that they were so angry that they thought that the woman was condemning herself by what she had done, because she could have given the money to the poor. This is seen so often in religious experience- those who stand on the sidelines become so bitter at how others actively express their devotions to their Lord that they go so far as to condemn them. We think of how Michal despised David for dancing before the Lord, and was punished with barrenness; and of the Lord's observation: "Is your eye evil, because I am good / generous?" (20:15). The world's wealthiest individuals are often very generous to charitable causes- and yet they do so to a chorus of criticism from those who have given little or nothing to such causes.

26:9 *For this might have been sold for much and given to the poor*- The very words used by the Lord to the rich ruler, telling him to sell what he had and give to the poor (19:21). Their idea in saying this may have been to accuse the woman of disobedience to the Lord's teachings. We see here how deep are the feelings aroused by spiritual jealousy. This woman had made a stellar commitment to her Lord; and quite unspoken, her devotion challenged the other disciples. And so by all means they had to condemn her, and were happy to misquote the Lord's words to achieve that. This is one simple reason why those most active and sacrificial in church life are often the most viciously attacked by their fellow disciples.

26:10 *But Jesus perceiving it, said to them: Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a*- This translation is misleading; the idea of the Greek is that the Lord perceived the situation immediately. But the fact He perceived it confirms the suggestion that the words the disciples apparently spoke were in fact spoken within their minds and not out loud- see on 26:8 *Indignation, saying*.

Good work- The Greek has the idea of beauty. The same Greek phrase rendered "a good work" is found in 1 Tim. 5:10 as something required of a mature spiritual woman, and for which she must be "reported"- clearly alluding to how this woman's "good work" was to be told / reported worldwide. She thus became a model for other sisters to follow, in the same way as she herself had copied the examples of Mary four days previously, and the sinful woman of Luke 7. This is the intended power and purpose of good works- they serve as inspiration for others to likewise glorify the Lord. The Greek expression 'to work a [good] work' is used elsewhere regarding the Lord's working of miracles (Jn. 6:28; 9:41; 10:33). Her response was no less significant than the working of a miracle.

Upon me- The Greek *eis eme* could as well mean 'in Me', as if the woman's work gave the Lord huge encouragement within Himself.

26:11 *For you always have the poor with you*- Christ's love for us, His Father's spiritual house, was typified by His being likened to the poor slave under the Law who perpetually dedicated himself to serve his master's house. An extension of this idea is revealed by a connection between the Lord saying "Ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always" (Mt. 26:11) and Dt. 15:11 "For the poor shall never cease out of the land". Thus Jesus is associating himself with the "poor man... of thy brethren" of Dt. 15:7. Note how Jesus calls himself a "poor man", especially on the cross: Ps. 34:6; 35:10; 37:14; 40:17; 69:29,33; 70:5; 86:1; 109:22; 113:7 cp. 2 Cor. 8:9- an impressive list. Christ exercised the rights of the poor to glean in the cornfield on the Sabbath (Lk. 6:1); Dt. 15:7 warned the Israelites not to be hard hearted and refuse help to such a poor brother. Christ is alluding to this passage by saying that the disciples should not be hard hearted by stopping Mary give her rich ointment to Him, the poor. The following Dt. 15:12-17 is also concerning Jesus. Thus Jesus was spiritually poor and hungry, and was so grateful for Mary's encouragement.

Note that the Law also taught that if Israel were obedient, then there would be no poverty. And yet the same Law tacitly recognized the reality of human weakness in noting that "the poor shall never cease out of the land" (Dt. 15:11). God's law therefore also reflects His grace and understanding of human failure to be fully obedient.

But you will not always have me with you- We would likely have been tempted to expose the root of the immediate problem- Judas was a thief, and wanted the cash because he would keep some of it and only distribute part to the poor. But the Lord as ever, was wiser than to confront issues in such a primitive way. He brushes past the complaint that this woman had ignored His principle of selling what we have and giving to the poor, and doesn't expose the core reason for Judas' trouble stirring about the issue. Rather He focuses upon what the woman *had* achieved, and bids the disciples look closer at His death and how they should be responding to it.

"Always" *is* literally, 'at all times'. There would always be opportunity, times of opportunity, to do good to the poor.

26:12 *For in that she poured this ointment upon my body*- A different word from that used to describe how she poured the ointment on His head (:7). Perhaps her focus was upon anointing Him- but because the ointment dripped from His head onto His body, the Lord imputed to her an understanding of His upcoming death and saw it as an embalming of Him, in line with the oft repeated idea that His life was in effect His death; as He sat at the meal table, it was as if He were already dead.

She did it to prepare me for burial- The RV has "to prepare me for burial". This could be read as the Lord saying that what she did inspired Him to go forward in the path to death which He was treading. The Greek means specifically embalming. It was as if the woman perceived that the Lord was effectively the slain lamb of God even

whilst He was alive. It is used only once more in the New Testament, describing the embalming of the Lord's body (Jn. 19:40).

26:13 *Truly I say to you: Wherever in the whole world this gospel is preached, what this woman has done shall also be spoken of*- Her generosity was set up as a cameo of the response to the Lord which all who believe the Gospel should make. The Gospel is not just a set of doctrines to be painlessly apprehended. It is a call to action after the pattern of this woman. The good news was to be of the Lord's death and burial, and yet integral to that message was to be the pattern of response which was seen in her- to give our all, our most treasured and hoarded things, for His sake.

There is evident connection with the Lord's prophecy of how the Gospel would be preached in all the world (Mt. 24:14; Mk. 16:15). He seems to have seen the 'Gospel' that would be preached as a re-telling of His life and incidents in it, such as the woman's anointing of Him. It is significant that her anointing is mentioned in all four Gospel records. In Mk. 14:9 we read that wherever the gospel was to be preached, what she had done would be narrated in memory of her. So 'preaching the Gospel' is defined there as a narration of the events and sayings of the Lord Jesus in His ministry. The Gospel records are transcripts of the Gospel preached by e.g. Matthew. The Gospel is therefore in the Gospels. The rest is interpretation and theology, necessary and helpful, but there is no avoiding the fact that the Gospel itself is in the records of the Gospel which we have in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The Lord foresaw that transcripts of His work and words would indeed be made, and He envisaged how the supreme devotion of this anonymous woman would be part of that message. The language is very similar to that of 24:14: "This Gospel... shall be preached [*kerusso* again] in all the world... and then shall the end come". Matthew may have had in view how his version of the Gospel needed to be spread into all the world.

As a memorial of her- The language of 'memorial' is typically used in contemporary literature about memorials to the gallant deeds of *men*. But the Lord was challenging such thinking by saying that the Gospel would include a memorial of an anonymous *woman*. And her humanly senseless pouring out of her wealth in a ten minute act of devotion to Him was none less than the bravest or noblest act of any man.

26:14 *Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests*- In all the Gospel records, the decision of Judas to betray the Lord follows on from the anointing incidents. The [apparent] waste of money in senseless devotion obviously irked Judas. People who are obsessed with money as he was often find such things unbearable to be part of. Judas is repeatedly called "Simon's son" at this time. And the anointing took place in Simon's house (:6). It could well be that Judas was a member of the family, possibly even a brother of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. To see the family wealth 'wasted' in this way was unbearable for him. The reasons for his betrayal were surely multi-factorial, but attitudes to money played a large part. "What will you give me, and I will betray Him...?" clearly suggests a financial motive; and the records seem to give the impression that the apparent waste of money, especially if it was money he thought might be coming to him in the inheritance, was the final straw for him. After that, he went to the Jews and opened discussions about betraying the Lord. The way he threw the thirty pieces of silver down on the ground reflects his final realization of how foolish he had been. And yet the lesson is so often never learnt; men and women effectively betray their Lord for money; accumulation of wealth, development of career, take precedence over devotion to Him, and finally lead to betrayal.

26:15 *And said: What are you willing to give me*- The financial aspect was important to Judas. He, like so many after him, was prepared to betray the Son of God

purely for money. The decision of Judas to make this offer is recorded as coming straight after the record of the woman anointing the Lord's feet with the expensive ointment. Judas's heart cried out as he saw all that money wasted; he knew that the perfume could have been sold for much and the money entrusted to him as the treasurer, and therefore he would have had the opportunity to take some for himself. As I read the records, the motivation of Judas was *fundamentally* financial, whatever we may like to speculate about his other reasons. It's almost too farfetched to believe; that a man who walked in the company of the Son of God, who entered into deep spiritual conversation with him, who is even described by the Spirit of Christ as "a man mine equal, my guide and mine acquaintance" (Ps. 55:13,4), could steal the odd few dollars (in our terms) out of the bag of those 12 travelling men. It couldn't have been any great sum that he notched up in those three years. And yet this led Judas to betray the Lord of all grace, for a sum no more than at most a few thousand US dollars (in our terms). They valued the Son of God at 30 pieces of silver (Mt. 27:9)- and *all it could buy was a field*. And Judas was happy with that. The way he later hurled those coins down and stalked off to hang himself suggests that he saw the essence of his failure as being tied up with that money. "The reward of iniquity" was what Peter contemptuously called it (Acts 1:18).

If I will deliver Him to you?- The Lord had predicted this, using the very same words, concerning how He would be delivered over to the "chief priests" (20:18). The Lord had only just used the word translated "deliver" in predicting His betrayal (:2). And Judas did it. The Lord surely knew the power of self-fulfilling prophecies; to some degree He psychologically set up this situation so that this would indeed happen. For ultimately the Lord 'gave Himself', He handed Himself over [the same Greek word] for us (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2,25; 1 Pet. 2:23). It is not at all unbelievable that Judas would do the very thing which the Lord had predicted the betrayer would do. It is true to human experience; people do the very thing they know they should not, performing to the letter the very situations which they have been clearly warned about. Yet through all this, it must be remembered that the same word for deliver up / betray is used about how *God* 'delivered up' His Son for us all (Rom. 8:32). Although Judas was without question guilty and did what he did of his own volition, God's hand was somehow in it, working through the freewill of men. And this is the great comfort to all those who suffer evil at the hands of evil men; the evil of the men and their actions doesn't mean that we have been forsaken by God, nor that His far higher hand is not in it all, working as He does for our ultimate good in the latter end.

We noted earlier that the very language of betrayal into the hands of the religious leaders and thence to the power of the Gentiles (20:18,19) was used about the experience of the faithful in the final tribulation (24:9,10). In the very last few days, the last generation will pass through the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, identifying with His death so that they might live with Him. This will be especially appropriate if the last generation are the only human beings to never taste of death. And even for those believers who do not live at that time, they too find that their experiences of betrayal are a part in their fellowship of their Lord's sufferings. For the same word is used in speaking of how we are all "delivered unto death for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:11). For the sake of being in Him, identified with Him, we must all share in His sufferings and betrayal experience.

They paid him- They weighed [Gk.] the money, fulfilling Zech. 11:12 "They weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver". The legalism of all concerned shines through. According to Mark 14:11, this was really an advance payment. The money was perhaps

weighed out because the shekels were the temple shekels, those used in the temple.

Thirty pieces- The legal price of a slave (Ex. 21:32). The money intended for purchasing the temple sacrifices (see on *They covenanted*) was used to buy the Lord at the time when He appeared supremely "in the form of a servant".

Of silver- They were "the price of [Christ's] blood" (27:6), "the price of [Christ]". We are surely intended to use this identification to interpret the parable of the pieces of silver [s.w.] given to the Lord's servants (25:18,27). He calls it "My money" [s.w. "silver pieces", Lk. 19:23]. The money of Christ was the money paid to get His blood. Perhaps those to whom more silver pieces were given are those who had sinned the more, whose redemption was the more costly; or those who appreciate the price of their redemption the more.

26:16 *And from that time onward he sought opportunity to betray him*- One with the Lord's sensitivity would easily have realized what was happening. Yet He was so far above it all; for He was going to hand Himself over, and not be handed over by anyone.

26:17 *Now on the first day of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying: Where do you want us to*- This is noted so often, as if the Lord was alone, presumably in prayer to the Father, and wasn't with the disciples all the time.

Prepare the Passover for you to eat?- Lk. 22:8 adds the detail that actually this was said in response to Peter and John being told to go and prepare the Passover. Mk. 14:15 brings out the paradox that the Lord directed them to an upper room that was already "prepared" (s.w.), and there they prepared the Passover. The Lord had taught that the festal meal was already prepared for His people (22:4 s.w.). The Lord was surely using the language of Passover preparation in saying that He was going [to the cross] to prepare a place for us (Jn. 14:1-3)- and He said that at the very time Passover was being prepared. His request that *they* prepare Passover was therefore asking for a mutuality in response from them.

26:18 *And he said: Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him*- Mark and Luke add that he was a man bearing a pitcher of water (Mk. 14:13; Lk. 22:10). This water was carried upstairs into the upper room, and became, as it were, the wine of the new covenant. Carrying water was woman's work, and the Lord surely arranged this special sign in order to show how at His table, there was gender equality. He was so far ahead of His time. The vague "such a man" is perhaps to conceal the identity of the householder, given that the Gospels were distributed at a time of persecution. Or perhaps it was in order to avoid the identifying of the house and turning it into some kind of shrine, or special honour being given to the householder.

The Teacher said- The anonymous man, unnamed perhaps for security reasons, was presumably a believer for this title to mean anything to the man. Likewise the reference to the Lord's time being at hand would've only been understandable by a disciple. The Lord wishes to assume that the man will appreciate that if the Lord's time of death was at hand, then He must first keep the Passover.

My time is at hand- The Lord used similar language in teaching how in the very last days of the tribulation, we will likewise know that the Lord's time is at hand (24:32,33). This is another one of many suggestions that we who live in the last days will go through the essence of the Lord's sufferings.

I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples- The use of *meta* carries the

sense of amongst, in the midst of, and not simply 'together with'. Heb. 2:12 perhaps alludes to this by quoting and applying to Jesus the Old Testament passage which says "I will declare Your Name unto My brothers, in the midst of the church will I sing praise". This is quoted in the context of a sustained argument in Hebrews 2 that the Lord shared our nature. His breaking of bread with the disciples therefore was an essay in His humanity and solidarity with us- and that is the intention of the breaking of bread meeting to this day. The intended meaning is so much enhanced by correctly appreciating how the Lord shared our nature.

26:19 *And the disciples did as Jesus directed them, and they prepared the Passover*- The same rubric is used about Moses' obedience to all commanded him. Those secular men were being painted in terms of Moses, who was seen as without equal in Judaism. But the Lord often paints His secular followers in the very terms of the most stellar Old Testament heroes of Judaism.

26:20 *Now when evening had come, he was dining with the twelve disciples*- "Dining" is "reclined". Joachim Jeremias gives a whole string of quotes from Rabbinic and historical writings that indicate that "At the time of Jesus the diners sat down" to eat. Yet the Gospel records are insistent that Jesus and the disciples *reclined* at the last supper (Mt. 26:20; Mk. 14:18; Lk. 22:14; Jn. 13:12,23,25,28). Yet at the Passover, it was apparently common to recline, because as Rabbi Levi commented "slaves eat standing, but here at the Passover meal people should recline to eat, to signify that they have passed from slavery to freedom". The breaking of bread is thus stressed in the records as being a symbol of our freedom from slavery. It should not in that sense be a worrying experience, taking us on a guilt trip. It is to celebrate the salvation and release from bondage which has truly been achieved for us in Christ our Passover.

"With the twelve" doesn't mean that only the twelve partook or were present. Matthew's record may simply be focusing upon them. There are reasons to think that there were others present too.

26:21 *And as they were eating, he said: Truly I say to you: One of you shall betray me*- The Lord had repeatedly predicted that He would be 'betrayed' or 'handed over'. But He had not defined who would do it, indeed the form in which He had spoken of being 'handed over' was vague and didn't necessarily require that one individual would do it. We must remember that *paradidomi* means literally 'to hand over' and doesn't carry the sense of personal betrayal which the English word 'betray' is loaded with. They were there shocked when He stated that "one of *you*" would do this.

26:22 *And they were exceedingly sorrowful*- It is commendable that their dominant emotion was of sorrow rather than anger. We perhaps would have expected anger more than sorrow. But their sorrow is a reflection of the degree of their love for the Lord, and their sorrow for the person who would face the awful consequences of doing so.

And all began- The idea is that they all burst out with the same question at the same time. And yet Mk. 14:19 records that they asked this "One by one". The scene is imaginable- after initially all bursting out with the same question, they try to ask Him the same question personally in order to get an answer. Which is why Judas asks the question somewhat later (:25). Again it is commendable that their very first reaction was to wonder whether they personally could be the betrayer- rather than 'Lord, is it *him*?'. But after realizing that it was not them personally, naturally they began to look at one another, wondering whom He was speaking of (Jn. 13:22). Although "doubting of whom He spoke" (Jn. 13:22) really means they were at a loss to know. Clearly they

had absolutely no suspicion that it was Judas. And when Judas is told "What you are doing, do quickly" and Judas exits (Jn. 13:27-29), they still assume that he must have been sent out to minister to the poor [suggesting there were beggars around the feast, again hinting that the last supper was not held behind closed doors]. This again speaks to us who replicate the last supper week by week. Some will indeed betray their Lord, but we have absolutely no idea who they are.

To say to him: Is it I, Lord?- The negative implies the answer 'No, you are not the one'. It was more than a question- it was a declaration of innocence. This is the basis for self-examination at the Lord's table; we should be able to do it and conclude that we are not the Lord's betrayer. Some who sit at that table will betray Him, and we are to realize the very real possibility of our own ultimate failure, the eternity of the future we may miss. Perhaps "every one of them" excludes Judas, because he apparently asked the question later (:25), and replaces 'Lord' with "Master"[Gk. 'rabbi'] when he asks: "Master ['rabbi'], is it I?" (:25). His usage of 'rabbi' to address the Lord may reflect how influenced he was by Judaism, and how he failed to appreciate the utter Lordship of Jesus. Judas maybe persuaded himself that this Jesus was just another itinerant rabbi, who Judaism would be better off without. Note that "Is it I?" is *eimi ego*, literally 'Am I?'. This is one of many examples of where *ego eimi* means simply 'I am', and [contrary to Trinitarian claims] the words do not mean that the speaker of them is claiming to be God.

26:23 *And he answered and said: He that dipped his hand with me in the dish*- The past tense is important, for if the Lord was predicting a future event, then all the disciples would be looking carefully at the dish. "Dipped", *em-bapto*, carries the suggestion that there was liquid or water within the dish. Lamb is greasy, and there would have been dishes of water on the table in which the diners dipped their hands. The Lord had done that at the same time as Judas, and must have pressed His fingers against those of Judas. But none of the others had noticed. Jn. 13:26 says that "It is he to whom I gave the morsel of bread after I dipped it"- perhaps meaning that the Lord had put a crumb of bread into Judas' fingers whilst their hands touched in the bowl. Any other reading of the incident faces the obvious difficulty that if indeed the Lord publically pointed Judas out as the betrayer, there would have been no confusion as to why he went out into the darkness. And we would expect to read of an outcry amongst the 11 against Judas; but the record instead stresses that they totally didn't suspect Judas until he was out of the room. Mk. 14:20 adds that the Lord said that the man was "One of the twelve" who had dipped his hand with the Lord in the dish. This suggests there were others apart from the twelve eating at the table and dipping their hands in the dish. It was not therefore a closed communion. There would have been no need for such a "large" room (Lk. 22:12) if only the twelve were present.

The same shall betray me- The Greek word translated "betray" really means 'to hand over'. This was yet future for Judas. The 'betrayal' in the English sense of that word had already happened.

26:24 *The Son of Man goes*- The Lord's 'going' was His going to the cross. The Lord used the same word in Mt. 13:44 in describing Himself as the man who 'goes' *with joy* and sells all that He has in order to buy / redeem [s.w.] the field (representing the world) in order to gain for Himself the treasure (the redeemed). His 'going' to the cross was therefore done with some form of "joy". Even when the only visible representative of the treasure were that band of mixed up men and a few doubtful women. He uses the

word again in telling Peter to 'go' behind Him and carry His cross (Mt. 16:23). Yet the Lord looked beyond the cross; He saw Himself as 'going' to the Father (Jn. 7:33; 8:14,21,22 s.w.), in the same way as we do not only 'go' to our death, but ultimately even death itself is part of an onward journey ultimately towards God and His Kingdom. The Lord's attitude to His death was that He *knew* that He was now 'going to the Father' (Jn. 13:3; 14:28; 16:5,10,16,17 s.w.). This unique perspective upon death and suffering is only logical for those who have a clear conception of future resurrection and personal fellowship with the Father in His future Kingdom.

Even as it is written of Him- Jn. 13:18 is specific: "But the scripture must be fulfilled: He that eats my bread lifted up his heel against me". The reference to the heel naturally suggests the Gospel promise of Gen. 3:15. But it seems the wrong way around- it is the seed of the woman who lifts up a bruised heel with which to crush the seed of the serpent. There is no lack of evidence that on the cross, the Lord identified totally with sinners, to the point that He felt forsaken just as sinners are forsaken. Or perhaps Judas justified his actions by deciding that Jesus was a false Messiah, the seed of the serpent, and the righteous thing to do was to crush the serpent with his heel.

But woe to that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed! - The Lord typically pronounced 'Woe' upon the Jewish world and their religious leaders. He classes Judas along with them, because his actions had been inspired by them. The devil, in this context referring to the Jewish opposition to Jesus, had put the idea of betrayal into the heart of Judas (Jn. 13:2). "Woe" translates *ouai*, an intensified form of *ou*, "no". Perhaps in His word choice the Lord was still desperately saying to Judas 'No! No! Don't do it!'. He knew that He had to be betrayed, but His appeals for Judas to repent were therefore rooted in an understanding that the Bible prophecies would come true in some other way than through Judas. For otherwise, Judas would have had no real possibility of repentance, and no real choice but than to do what he did.

It would have been better if that man had not been born- "Better" shows how the Lord is sympathetically looking at things from the perspective of Judas. For in Jn. 14 He reasons that His departure is good for all concerned. The Lord foresaw Judas' agony at the last day. But the Greek can bear a retranslation: 'It would be virtuous for that man if he did not conceive / gender'. In that case, there would be yet another appeal for Judas to stop dead in his heart the conception of sin. The Lord elsewhere uses words with two [or more] meanings in order to deliver a specific message to an individual, within a statement of general truth which appeared intended for others. The messages He sent back to the imprisoned John the Baptist are a clear example. The Lord's last ditch attempts to save Judas, rather than allow himself to be so hurt by him that He just ignored him, are a powerful encouragement to us in dealing with those who harm us and willfully do evil.

26:25 *And Judas, who betrayed him, answered and said: Is it I, Rabbi?*- See on :22 *Lord, is it I?* If Judas openly asked the question and was told 'Yes Judas, it's you I'm referring to', then there is no easy explanation for why no reaction from the disciples is recorded, nor any attempt by them to persuade him otherwise or limit his actions. Likewise we must give full weight to the fact that when Judas exits, they assume he has gone to buy something for the feast or to minister to the poor (Jn. 13:27-29). This leads to the conclusion that Judas asked the Lord this quietly and received a hushed reply. John likewise leaned on the Lord's chest and asked Him quietly who it was (Jn. 13:24-

26). Is it possible that Judas also at this stage also lay on the Lord's chest, so close to Him that he could whisper to Him out of earshot of the others? It was a "large upper room", and so it may well have been possible. In this case, Judas was indeed the Lord's "familiar friend in whom I trusted", and the closeness of Judas and Jesus would explain why the disciples were completely not suspicious of Judas. If the Lord had publically answered Judas, then surely events would not have unfolded as they did. The Lord knew exactly what Judas was planning, more by His premonition and sensitivity to Judas' feelings than by a bolt of Divine revelation. The Lord freely gave His life, it was not taken from Him by betrayal and murder. He therefore set the situation up, on one level, to happen as it did. And He didn't want to stop it happening. And yet on the other hand, He so wished for Judas' repentance on a personal level. And this is how He works with men to this day.

He said to him: You have said it- This is exactly the style the Lord adopts with Pilate in answering the question as to whether He is King of the Jews: "You said it" (Mt. 27:11). He allows people to come to a point where they state the truth out of their own mouths, rather than Him putting words into their mouths. And He works likewise today.

26:26 *As they were eating*- Eating the Passover lamb. The bread and wine were accessories, side dishes, and the Lord takes these things and makes them so significant. He doesn't, e.g., take some lamb and divide it between the guests with the message that "This represents My body". Even though the lamb was the more obvious symbol of Himself than the bread was. He wanted the last supper to be repeated by poor and ordinary people, who had bread but not lamb each week; He used common, readily available bread because that spoke more of His humanity, His ordinariness. He used what was to hand, just as we can for the breaking of bread.

Note that Judas was still present at this point. Jn. 13:18 makes the point concerning him that "He that eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me". If Judas broke bread with the Lord, this surely indicates that there is nothing intrinsically sinful in breaking bread with sinners. The quotation from Psalm 41 is interesting in the LXX: "the man of my peace, on whom I set my hope". There was special potential in Judas, and the Lord on one hand had hopes for him. It has been argued that the giving of the "sop" to him was the sign of special love and fellowship. Jn. 13:20 goes on to say: "He that receiveth whomsoever I shall send, receiveth me". The 'receiving' in this context is receiving at the Lord's table. To reject others from His table is to reject the Lord.

Jesus took bread- Taking bread, blessing and breaking it and giving to the disciples was exactly what the Lord did at the feeding of the 5000 and 4000 (14:19; 15:36), and we are thereby justified in seeing what He did then as having a religious dimension, practicing thereby an extremely open table. To 'take bread' can mean [although not always] to actually eat bread. Consider: "The disciples had forgotten to take bread,*neither* did they have with them more than one loaf" (Mk. 8:14)- the force of "neither..." is that they had not eaten bread, rather than that they had forgotten to bring any with them. Philip complained that there would not be enough bread for each of the crowd to 'take' even a little, i.e. to eat just a little (Jn. 6:7). So it could be that the Lord took and ate bread, blessed it, and then asked the disciples to eat it. This sequence of events would then make the eating of bread a more conscious doing of what Jesus had done. He took the bread, and then He asks them to take the bread ("Take, eat"). He is inviting them to mimic Him.

And blessed it- It was usual to bless a meal, especially the Passover lamb, but here the Lord offers a special prayer for the accessory to the meal, the side dish of bread. He

wanted to highlight the significance of the most ordinary thing on the table and show that it represented Him.

And he gave it to the disciples, saying: Take, eat- The use of *didomi* is set in the context of all the talk about how the Lord would be *para-didomi*, betrayed / handed / given over to the Jews. The idea is that what happened was ultimately the Lord's choice. He gave Himself, to God and to His people, rather than being given over to death against His will. Lk. 22:29 says that the Lord then used the word *didomi* again: "This is My body, which is given for you". The giving of the bread to them was symbolic of how He would give His body to crucifixion, and how the 'giving over' of Jesus by Judas was not something outside of the Lord's control. It was not a misfortune which changed plans, rather was it precisely in line with the Lord's own giving of His body.

This is my body- See on *Gave it*. He said "This is My body which is given for you" (Lk. 22:29), and also "This is My body which is broken for you" (1 Cor. 11:24). He surely said both, repeating the words as the disciples ate the bread. He chose bread and not lamb to represent His body because He wished to emphasize His ordinariness and thereby His presence in the human, daily things of life. To give ones' body is a very intimate statement, almost to the point of being sexual. This is the sober intensity and extent to which the Lord gave Himself for us.

When Jesus said "this is My body" we are to understand that 'this *represents*, this is [a symbol of] my body'. Jesus was clearly referring to what was usually said at the Passover: "This is the bread of affliction which our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt". It wasn't of course literally the same bread. "This is" clearly means 'this represents' in Zech. 5:3,8; Mt. 13:19-23,38; 1 Cor. 11:25; 12:27. In some Bible versions, when we read the word 'means', it is simply a translation of the verb 'to be' (Mt. 9:13; 12:7; Lk. 15:26; Acts 2:12). 'This is' should be read as 'this means / this represents'. The deftness of the way He broke that bread apart and held the cup comes out here in Mt. 26:26. He knew what that breaking of bread was going to mean.

26:27 *And he took a cup*- This was by no means easy for Him, because in Gethsemane He struggled so deeply in order to take it. Surely Matthew was aware of this and wishes us to remember it every time we break bread. He *did* take the cup- the cup we go on to read about, that was so difficult for Him to accept. Luke's record records the taking of the cup twice. This could be a reference to multiple cups of wine drunk at the Passover; or it could be that Luke simply records the incident twice. Or perhaps the Lord was simply drinking from the common table wine, and more than once drew out the symbology.

And gave thanks and gave it to them, saying- Here *eucharisteo* is used, but *eulogeo* for the 'blessing' of the bread. The difference may be in that the Lord took the bread, an accessory to the meal, and turned that which was so ordinary into something of spiritual symbolism; and His blessing of the bread was necessary for this. But *eucharisteo* includes the idea of grace, *charis*, and suggests more thankfulness for grace- a thought appropriate to the meaning of the Lord's blood shed for us by grace. And naturally we wonder whether the wine that was taken was one of the Passover cups, or simply some of the table wine, an accessory to the meal just as the bread was. Whilst there was a taking of four cups of wine at the Passover, this may not be the only explanation for Luke recording the taking of two of them. It could simply be that as they were eating the Passover lamb, they ate bread and drunk weak wine as part of the accompaniments which went with every Palestinian meal. And the Lord twice passed comment on the wine, that it represented His blood. This would be similar to the manner

in which He chose the bread, the *artos*, the ordinary word for bread rather than one referring specifically to unleavened bread, as the symbol for His body- rather than the meat of the Passover lamb. He could have made use of the blood of the Passover lamb as a symbol in some way- e.g. He could have asked a servant to bring the blood of the lamb and asked the disciples to all dip their fingers in it. But instead He uses wine as a symbol of His blood. My hunch is that the wine was the ordinary table wine accompanying the meal, just as the bread was, and was not the ritually significant Passover cup. In any case, the tradition of drinking cups of wine at Passover was non-Biblical, and somehow out of keeping with the original spirit of Passover, which was to remember the haste with which the first Passover was eaten. 1 Cor. 10:16 speaks of "the cup of blessing which *we* bless", with the emphasis on the "we". We are to do what the Lord did that night- not be mere audience figures, but actually do what He did.

All of you, drink it- The appeal for all to drink it was surely said because some were doubtful as to whether they should take it. Perhaps there were others in the room apart from the twelve. But most likely this was yet another appeal to Judas- to drink the cup of salvation and forgiveness. He gave the reason in :28- "For", or because, this was the symbol of the means for the forgiveness of sins. The Lord's attitude to Judas leaves us realizing we should never give up with the lost. Even the very worst of them. And given the Lord's eagerness that Judas break bread, we can hardly conclude that any sinner is thereby unworthy of participation at the breaking of bread. It is after all His table and not ours. This isn't to say that forms of discipline may not be required at times, but welcome at the Lord's table should never be withdrawn.

26:28 *For this is My blood*- Given Jewish obsession with blood and ritual uncleanness arising from contact with it, such language was surely purposefully challenging and radical, just as He had spoken of eating His flesh and drinking His blood in Jn. 6:53. This made many turn away when He said it, but the Lord realized that His followers had to make a total break with Judaism. The drift of some Christian believes back towards the mentality of Judaism is totally missing the Lord's point- He was speaking in such challenging terms to make His followers realize that there was no middle path of compromise between Him and Judaism. Although He never commanded them to leave the synagogue system, and assumed they would remain in it until they were thrown out of it, all the same the Lord stated His principles in such a way that it would've been effectively impossible for His followers to remain within that system.

Of the covenant- The promises to Abraham were effectively the new covenant, even though they were given before the old covenant [the law of Moses] was given. The Lord's death confirmed those promises made to the Jewish fathers (Rom. 15:8). But God's word is true as it stands and in that sense needs no confirmation, no guarantee of truthfulness. But in an effort to persuade us of the simple truth and reality of the promises of eternity in the Kingdom which were made to Abraham, God confirmed it through the death of His Son. This was foreseen in the horror of great darkness which Abraham experienced in Genesis 15. Abraham did nothing to confirm his side of the covenant; it was God who passed between the pieces of the slain animal, during a time of Divine darkness as there was on the cross, in order to demonstrate to Abraham and to us all how serious He was about keeping His promise. Through the death of Christ, God commended His love to us (Rom. 5:8), He confirmed the covenant; not that He needed to do so, nor that His love needs any more commendation to us. But He did, in order to seek to persuade us of the truth of the promises which comprise the Gospel (Gal. 3:8). In this sense "the promise was made sure [s.w. 'confirmed'] to all the seed"

(Rom. 4:16); the extra element of making sure or confirming the promise was in the death of God's Son. Our hope is therefore "sure *and* confirmed [AV "steadfast"]" (Heb. 6:19). Heb. 9:17 puts it another way in saying that a will or legacy is only confirmed [AV "of force"] by the death of the one who promised the inheritance, and the death of Christ was God's way of confirming the truth of what He had promised. This same word meaning 'confirmed' is used by Peter in writing of how we have "the word of prophecy made sure / confirmed" (2 Pet. 1:19). The prophesied word is the word of the Gospel, the promise of the Kingdom which began in Genesis, and this has been confirmed to us, made even more sure, by the Lord's death. Peter isn't referring to prophecy in the sense of future events being predicted in the arena of world geopolitics; the prophesied word is the word of our salvation, of the Gospel- which is how Peter elsewhere uses the idea of "the word". God can save who He wishes, as, how and when He wishes. He was not somehow duty bound, left with no option, forced by an unpleasant logical bind to suffer the death of His Son. He gave His Son, according to His own plan from the beginning. But He did it that way in order to persuade us of His love and simple desire to give us the Kingdom He has promised from the beginning of His revelation to men. The Lord's blood is "of the new covenant" not in that it *is itself* the new covenant, but rather in that it is the blood associated with the confirmation of that covenant as true. And so it is understandable that the Lord should wish us to understand His blood as the blood of the new covenant, the supreme sign that it is for real, and desire us to regularly take that cup which reminds us of these things. Heb. 6:17,18 carries the same idea- that in order to demonstrate the utter certainty of the things promised to Abraham's seed, God confirmed it by an oath so that we might a strong consolation and persuasion of the certainty of the promise. The death of God's Son was not therefore unavoidable for Him; He could save us as He wishes. But He chose this most painful way in the ultimate attempt to persuade men of the reality of His Son. With this understanding we can better appreciate the tales of the old missionaries who went to pagan and illiterate tribes and reported a strange response to their message once they explained the idea of the Son of God dying on a cross to show us God's love. It must be persuasive to us too, week by week as we reflect on the blood of the covenant.

"Covenant" literally means that which is to be disposed of or distributed, and was used about the distribution of property upon decease. The Lord's parables about the Master who distributes all His wealth and possessions to His servants were surely looking forward to His death, at which He gave us all He had- and that was and is visually symbolized in the breaking of bread, the division even of His body and life blood amongst us, for us to trade with.

Which is poured out for many for the remission of sins- He perhaps followed this by saying "Shed for you" (Lk. 22:20). This is often the way with Biblical statements- the general and global is stated, and then the scale is focused down to you personally. His blood was shed for many... but for you. However we may also have here a similar idea to that expressed in the parable of the man [Christ] who finds treasure [us] in the field of the world, and therefore gives all in order to redeem the field, in order to get us as His own (13:44). Likewise His blood was shed for many, the redemption price was paid for humanity, that He might redeem us. Putting Lk. 22:20 and Mt. 26:28 together, the Lord may have said: "... My blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins of you / for the remission of *your* sins". One wonders whether the Lord actually was pouring out the wine as He spoke the word "shed". The same word for "shed" is used of how the new wine put into old bottles "runs out". The idea may be that if we don't change, then we crucify Christ afresh. But the Lord may also have in mind that if Israel

had accepted the wine of the new covenant which He preached, then the shedding of His blood could have been avoidable. The fact it could have been avoidable- for Israel didn't *have* to crucify their King- doesn't mean that God was not behind it, using it to confirm the covenant with us, nor that Christ did not of Himself give His own life. "Poured out" is ongoing, Gk. 'is being shed', another hint at the ongoing nature of His death.

26:29 *But I say to you, I shall not drink of this fruit of the vine from this time forward, until*- An allusion to how the priest on duty was not to drink wine during his service. The Lord foresaw His work from then on, beginning with the cross, as an active doing of priestly work for us. This would imply that the essence of His work on the cross is the essence of His work for us today; there is a continuity between Him there and His work for us now, with elements of the same pain and passionate focus upon us and the achievement of our salvation. He is not waiting passively in Heaven for the time to return; He is actively busy for us. There is also the implication in His words that His future 'drinking' will be literal- He was holding literal wine in His hand, and He said He would not again drink it until the Kingdom. This suggests that at very least, He invites us to understand His future Messianic banquet as being in some ways a literal feast.

The Lord clearly taught the continuity between the breaking of bread and the future marriage supper by observing that He would not again drink the cup until He drinks it with us in the Kingdom. The parables of how the Gospel invites people as it were to a meal are suggesting that we should see the Kingdom as a meal, a supper, of which our memorial service is but a foretaste. We are commanded to enter the supper and take the lowest seat (Lk. 14:10), strongly aware that others are present more honourable than ourselves. Those with this spirit are simply never going to dream of telling another guest 'Leave! Don't partake of the meal!'. But this is the spirit of those who are exclusive and who use the Lord's table as a weapon in their hands to wage their petty church wars. The very early church didn't behave like this, but instead sought to incarnate and continue the pattern of the meals of the Lord Jesus during His ministry. And this is one major reason why their unity drew such attention, and they grew. To exclude someone from the Lord’s table is to judge them as excluded from the Kingdom banquet. And those who make such judgment will themselves be rejected from it.

That day when I drink it anew with you- This is not 'new' in the sense of freshly made (a different word is used for that), but new in terms of quality, not time. It speaks of a new quality, a freshness, rather than something 'new' in chronological terms. The new wine represented the blood of the new covenant which was shed on the cross. It could be argued that the drinking of this new wine became possible not simply at the last day, but in this life too, in the experience of the church after the Lord's shedding of that blood on the cross.

In my Father's Kingdom- The reference is primarily to the literal Kingdom to be established on earth at His return (Lk. 22:29,30 goes on to speak of the disciples eating and drinking in the Kingdom as they sit with Christ on His throne judging Israel), but there is a sense in which His word is fulfilled in the breaking of bread service, where He drinks wine with us as the invisible guest. For His parables of the Kingdom all speak of the experience of God's reign / Kingship as a present experience in the lives of His people. Lk. 22:16 adds with reference to the bread: "Until it be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God". The fulfiment of Passover deliverance is finally in the last day, and yet the fulfilment of Passover is also to be seen in the breaking of bread service. Note in passing that the Lord's prediliction for the term 'Kingdom of God' or 'Father's Kingdom' was

perhaps to counterbalance the Jewish emphasis upon the Kingdom as being that of *our* father *David* (Mk. 11:10). The Kingdom was God's, "*Yours* is the Kingdom", rather than simply and solely the re-establishment of Israel's Kingdom.

26:30 *And when they had sung a hymn*- Probably the Passover hallel of Ps. 115-118. It's worth reading those Psalms imagining them on the lips of the Lord at the last supper; they are pregnant with relevance for His forthcoming death, especially the reference to "I will take the cup of salvation". Heb. 2:12 surely has the scene in mind, quoting "In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto You" as being proof of the Lord's absolute humanity. The fact He sung praise to *God* surely reveals a human and not Divine Christ. But doing so amongst His brethren, "the church", as one of them, is an essay in His unity with us, both in nature and experience.

They went out to the Mount of Olives- The Passover ritual required that nobody should go out of the house until morning (Ex. 12:22). This is clearly teaching that the Passover deliverance had already begun, even before the Lord's blood had been shed, and would connect with the usage of present tenses concerning the Passover and shedding of the Lord's blood (see on :2,28). This sets the scene for the Lord's comment in :32 that He would go before them, and they should follow Him. He was as Moses and as the Angel which went before Israel on Passover night. The allusion to Ex. 12:22 shows that the old legislation had passed away, and in any case the type of Passover being kept by the Lord was not strictly the Mosaic one- for it's likely He was celebrating it a day earlier than stipulated. But the point perhaps was that the true Israel of God were now 'going out' from Egypt; so certain was the Lord that He would achieve deliverance that He could speak of that deliverance as already being achieved. He didn't, therefore, see His work on the cross as something which He might or might not successfully achieve- as we should, He went ahead in the certainty of ultimate success and victory.

26:31 *Then Jesus said to them: You will all fall away because of me this night*- They would spiritually stumble and fall because Zech. 13:7 predicted this would happen. But the Lord goes on to urge them to watch and pray so that they do not succumb to temptation (:41). He saw Biblical prophecy as being open ended in fulfilment- the prophecy of spiritual failure didn't have to come true. They could resist, sin and failure is never inevitable. He spoke to them in the upper room specifically so that they would *not* be offended (Jn. 16:1 s.w.); the prophecy didn't have to come true in the disciples, and the Lord did His utmost to provide the potential for it not coming true for them.

For it is written: I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad- His death was to be as that of Moses, which left the Israel of God as sheep without a shepher (Num. 27:17). And yet the Lord's death would gather together the scattered [s.w.] people of God (Jn. 11:52), His death was as a shepherd giving His life for the sheep (Jn. 10:11). His death and resurrection was to be the means of reviving the lost faith of the disciples- when they meditated upon it. The people of Israel at the Lord's time had had no true shepherds and were therefore as scattered sheep (Mt. 9:36). The Lord's death would therefore temporarily leave the disciples just like the rest of Israel- they would return to the mentality of Judaism, the 'satan' of the Jewish system and its thinking would tempt them and they would give in. The wolf of Judaism would scatter the sheep (Jn. 10:12). The disciples were therefore as sheep who scattered because of the thinking of the Jewish world around them, who saw death on a cross as the final defeat for a man; and yet were to be gathered by that very death. Peter was one

of those disciples, even though he insisted that *he* would not be scattered even if others were. He surely had this in mind in appealing to other believers who were falling under the influence of Judaism: "You were as sheep going astray, but are now returned [s.w. 'converted'- just as he was 'converted' to strengthen his brethren] unto the Shepherd... of your souls" (1 Pet. 2:25). Peter was therefore appealing to others to follow his own pattern- of revival and conversion after spiritual failure. This is the basis for all powerful pastoral appeal.

26:32 *But after I am raised up*- There is no equivalent of "after" in the Greek text. This is an insertion by translators in order to try to give sense to the three brief Greek words which simply say "And I rise again". The idea is that 'By My rising again, I will go before you...'. The Lord's plan was that His resurrection would re-ignite faith in His disciples, and He would go before them as a shepherd leads His sheep, into Galilee.

I will go ahead of you into Galilee- This is the language of the shepherd going before the sheep (Jn. 10:4), in obedience to His voice. The Lord is saying that although they will stumble and lose faith, His resurrection will provide them with a credible word from Him which they would obey by following Him into Galilee. This is why the resurrected Lord's first instruction to the women was to "Go tell My brothers that they go into Galilee; there shall they see Me" (28:10). But it actually didn't work out like that. His meeting with them in Galilee was in fact the third time He revealed Himself to them (Jn. 21:14). He appeared to them twice before that. And the picture we have of the disciples fishing in Galilee in Jn. 21 is of them still relatively faithless, depressed and having returned to their fishing; they are hardly pictured as eagerly awaiting the Lord's promised appearance in Galilee. So it seems to me that the Lord changed His intended program with them. Their faith was so weak that He appeared to them in Jerusalem twice, whereas He had originally planned for the women to tell them His word- to go before Him into Galilee, and there He would reveal Himself to them. But in His love for them, His own desire to see them, His awareness of their weakness in faith... He appeared to them twice *before* Galilee. And even then, we sense from the fishing incident of John 21 that they were still floundering in their faith, and may well have returned to Galilee in order to return to their fishing business, rather than in obedience to His word. Why did He so wish to meet them in Galilee, rather than in Jerusalem? Their journey to Galilee would've been a test of obedience for them, for sure. But surely the Lord reflected by this choice the paramount importance He placed upon the conversion of families. He wanted to appear to them there, surely, because that was where most of them were from, and where their families were. He wanted them too to be persuaded once and for all time of the reality of His resurrection.

26:33 *But Peter answered and said to him: If they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away*- Peter three separate times states that he will not fail the Lord (also in Lk. 22:33; Jn. 13:37). Literally, 'not at any time', i.e. 'not even once'. Hence the Lord's comment that Peter would deny Him not once but three times. Yet he denied the Lord three times, and it was on the Lord's third appearance to him (Jn. 21:14) that the Lord undid the three denials by His three questions concerning whether Peter really loves Him, and three times (again by a charcoal fire) re-enstates Peter in the work of strengthening his brethren. These tripilisms and repetitions serve to make the record memorable, and also reflect how somehow the Lord worked through Peter's failures with some overarching plan; there was a higher hand at work through all of the failure, reflected in these tripilisms which could only have been effected by a Divine, higher

hand. The Lord's question to Peter "Do you love Me more than these?" surely has reference to the other disciples, whom Peter had thought himself spiritually superior to. He was sure that even if they stumbled, he would not. And the Lord paid special attention to undoing this attitude in Peter and specifically bringing him to realize that he was no better than his brethren. Any sense of spiritual superiority over others is so obnoxious to the Lord. And He will work in our lives to remove it from us, as He did with Job, Jonah and many others. Peter continually alludes to his denials throughout his appeal for Israel's repentance in Acts 2 and throughout his pastoral letters; it is our own failures and receipt of such utter grace which serve as the basis for our credible and persuasive appeal to others to repent. He spoke in 1 Pet. 2:8 of how the Lord Jesus is a stone of stumbling ['offence', s.w.] to those who do not believe- and yet he said this fully aware that he had been one of those who stumbled over Jesus. Mt. 21:44 offers us to the choice- to stumble upon the stone and be broken, or for the stone to fall upon us and grind us to powder, in the figure of judgment and condemnation used in Daniel 2. We either stumble in failure upon Christ and rise up as Peter did, broken men and women, to do our best in serving Him- or that stone shall crush us in condemnation. That is the choice before us, and Peter is the parade example in this to all.

26:34 *Jesus said to him: Truly I say to you, that this night*- Much of the Lord's knowledge and foreknowledge of events ahead of time can be explained in terms of His incredible sensitivity to others, His understanding of human psychology and behaviour patterns. But there are times when it seems He was given direct foreknowledge from the Father. And this seems one of them- to predict the exact number of denials that would be made that night, and to predict they would happen before the cock crew. This leads to the possibility that whenever He prefaces His words with "Truly I say unto you...", He is stating something received by direct revelation. Another example is when He uses this rubric to introduce His prediction of how Peter would die (Jn. 21:18). This would be His equivalent of how the Old Testament prophets introduced their directly inspired words with the rubric "Thus says the Lord". "Truly" (AV "verily") is literally 'amen', as if the Lord Jesus is saying that He is aware of the words of His Father and in uttering them from His lips, is giving His personal agreement, stamp or 'Amen!' to them.

Before the cock crows- There is no article in the Greek. 'Before cock crow' is the idea, before the earliest sign of morning when the first cock crew, that very night, before that night even began to come to a close.

You shall deny me three times- See on :35 *Deny You*.

26:35 *Peter said to him: Even if I must die with you*- Gk. 'If I must die' or 'If it be necessary that I die, I will'. And yet the Lord had taught that He was going to die on the cross, and that all who would truly follow Him should likewise die with Him. When the Lord stated this in Mt. 16, Peter had earnestly sought to dissuade the Lord from that course of action because He didn't want to die with Him. Peter had a problem accepting the inevitable reality of the cross and its demand that we likewise lose our lives for Him. He considered it the most extreme possibility, rather than an obviously necessary sacrifice which is part and parcel of being a true follower of Jesus. We likewise can consider that extreme self-sacrifice is something we might possibly be called to make. But in fact if we are truly signed up to carrying the Lord's cross, it is exactly such radical self-sacrifice which is indeed required of us. The Lord said that Peter was not yet able to die for Him, he would deny Him rather than follow Him, but one day he would be strong enough, and *then* he would follow Him to the end (Jn. 13:36,37). Peter thought he was strong enough then; for he followed (s.w.) Christ afar off, to the High Priest's

house (Mt. 26:58). But in ineffable self-hatred he came to see that the Lord's prediction was right.

I will not deny you- Surely the allusion is again to 16:24, where the Lord has urged Peter to accept that he must deny *himself* and take up the Lord's cross and die with Him. But instead, because Peter didn't want to do that, he would end up denying Jesus. This is the intensity of our choice- if we will not deny ourselves, then we shall deny Jesus. The Lord had clearly taught that whoever denied Him before men would be denied by Him at the last day (10:33), and Paul repeats this (2 Tim. 2:12). Peter stood condemned by that denial, and yet we can be condemned in this life and change the verdict if we repent. It is this which releases such fervency into our lives if we go through the experience of condemnation but perceive that the verdict has been mercifully changed. Peter appealed to Israel to recognize that they had denied Jesus (Acts 3:13,14 "You denied Him in the presence of Pilate"); and he made that appeal a stone's throw and only a few weeks after his own denials of Jesus in the presence of all. And yet this was why his appeal was so credible, as was his later appeal to believers not to do the worst imaginable thing, namely to deny the Lord who had bought them- for that was exactly what, as everyone knew, Peter had himself done (2 Pet. 2:1). John speaks of denying Christ as the hallmark of the antichrist (1 Jn. 2:22 "He that denies Jesus... is the antichrist"), and he wrote this knowing full well that Peter was the rock upon whom the early church had been built. His point, therefore, is that even those who had done that, the antichrist, could still repent as Peter had done.

Likewise said all the disciples- AV "Likewise also". Two words are used when one would suffice, such is the emphasis upon the fact that they all said the same. Peter was the one who went furthest in seeking to live out his claim, and yet he it is whose failure is the most emphasized. And that is how it is often is amongst God's people. But it is because we are asked to identify specifically with Peter.

26:36 *Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane*- The Lord often went to this garden (Jn. 18:2), but the record at this point emphasizes its name, meaning 'oil press', a common metaphor for judgment. There the Lord as it were passed through His judgment, and there the disciples had their judgment- and ran away into the darkness condemned. Even though through repentance they were later saved out of that condemnation.

And he said to his disciples: Sit here- The Greek can equally mean 'stay here'. The separation between the Lord and His people, to go away and pray with His senior followers with Him, clearly was based upon Moses going up into the mountain to pray to God, taking Joshua with him, leaving Israel behind. And like Israel, the disciples failed miserably, and were met with the Lord's rebuke on His return from prayer. The Lord is clearly making the point that He now replaces Moses, and that the new Israel were comprised of those 11 mixed up men of weak faith and very limited understanding. The Greek text here has the Lord saying to the disciples: "Sit in this place [*kathisate autou*] until going away, I pray there", and then He takes along with him [*paralambanein*] Peter. These are the very words used in the Gen. 22 LXX account of Abraham taking Isaac to 'the cross'. Jesus is seeking to encourage Peter to see himself as Isaac, being taken to share in the cross. Now whether Peter discerned this or not, we don't know. But the Lord gave him the potential possibility to be inspired like this.

While I go yonder and pray- Literally, 'there', as if the Lord was pointing out a location not far distant. He was seeking to help them perceive the similarity with Moses

going away to pray, hence His warnings for them *not* to give way to temptation were asking them to consciously make the effort to not be like the Israel whom Moses left behind when he went away to pray. Of course the Lord could have baldly drawn the similarities between Himself and Moses, but He acted in this way in order to provoke in them the association with Moses, and to realize that they were as Israel, tempted to fall away. And this is His style to the present day. Instead of flashing red lights and words dropping from Heaven, instead we find ourselves set up in situations which recall Biblical situations, and appeal to us to perceive ourselves within that history. That is why daily Bible reading and continual familiarity with the recorded histories of the Bible is so essential, it is all part of the Lord's way of working with us.

26:37 *And he took with him-* As Moses took Joshua with him.

Peter and the two sons of Zebedee and began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed- This was the fulfilment of Is. 53:3, "a man of sorrows", an intensive plural, implying 'great sorrow'. The fact He 'began' to feel this suggests that the prophecy of Is. 53 is specifically about the Lord in His time of sufferings, rather than generally in His life. It was there, at the end, that there was no beauty that He should be desired. And yet Is. 53:4 defines those 'sorrows' as the sorrows of our sins. His sorrow was therefore in that He felt His identification with our sins, our sorrows. And He felt that identification very intensely as He prayed. Likewise the weight He felt, in that He began to feel heavy, refers to the weight of human sin which He felt Himself carrying.

Mk. 14:33 adds that He was “amazed”. The amazement was perhaps because He came to realize that His subconscious hopes for a deliverance, akin to Isaac’s at the last minute, were not going to come true. This element of surprise is reflected later in His desperate question “Why have You forsaken Me?”. This crisis of understanding contrasts strongly with His calm assurance and assumption that He must now die and resurrect. And yet to be tempted just as we are, He had to go through the experience of things not working out as expected, of crisis and desperate desiring to understand. For these things are what are at the root of our hardest human experiences.

26:38 *Then he said to them: My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even to death-* The Lord’s psychological struggle was so intense that it was almost killing Him. Yet Peter had said that he was ready to go with the Lord even unto death (Lk. 22:33). But he failed to perceive that the Lord’s death involved huge psychological suffering- and Peter opted out of that by falling asleep. To physically die was not so much the issue as sharing the psychological trauma of carrying the cross.

The fullness of the Lord's humanity is of course supremely shown in His death and His quite natural fear of that death. Perhaps on no other point do human beings show they are humans than when it comes to their reaction to and reflection upon their own death. I would go further and suggested that the thought of suicide even entered the Lord's mind. It's hard to understand His thought about throwing Himself off the top of the temple in any other way. His almost throw away comment that "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (*heos thanatou*) is actually a quotation from the suicidal thoughts of Jonah (Jonah 4:9) and those of the Psalmist in Ps. 42:5,6. Now of course the Lord overcame those thoughts- but their very existence is a window into the depth and reality of His humanity.

Heb. 5:7,8 clearly refer to the Lord’s prayer in Gethsemane. The Lord had a quite genuine "fear of death" (Heb. 5:8). This "fear of death" within the Lord Jesus provides a profound insight into His so genuine humanity. We fear death because our human life is our greatest and most personal possession... and it was just the same with the Lord

Jesus. Note that when seeking here to exemplify Christ's humanity, the writer to the Hebrews chooses His fear of death in Gethsemane as the epitome of His humanity. Heb. 5:7 comments that Christ prayed "with strong crying and tears". These words are certainly to be connected with Rom. 8:26, which speaks of Christ making intercession for us now with "groanings which cannot be uttered". Rom. 8:26 says that his groaning is so intense that it cannot be audibly uttered; the physicality of sound would not do justice to the intensity of mental striving. The point is that the same agonizing depth of prayer which the Lord achieved for us is what he now goes through as he intercedes for us with the Father.

Oscar Cullmann translates Heb. 5:7: "He was heard in his fear (anxiety)". That very human anxiety about death is reflected in the way He urges Judas to get over and done the betrayal process "quickly" (Jn. 13:28); He was "straitened until it be accomplished" (Lk. 12:50). He prayed to God just as we would when gripped by the fear of impending death. And He was heard. No wonder He is able therefore and thereby to comfort and save us, who lived all our lives in the same fear of death which He had (Heb. 2:15). This repetition of the 'fear of death' theme in Hebrews is surely significant- the Lord Jesus had the same fear of death as we do, and He prayed in desperation to God just as we do. And because He overcame, He is able to support us when *we* in our turn pray in *our* "time of need"- for He likewise had the very same "time of need" as we have, when He was in Gethsemane (Heb. 4:16). Death was "the last enemy" for the Lord Jesus just as it is for all humanity (1 Cor. 15:26). Reflection on these things not only emphasizes the humanity of the Lord Jesus, but also indicates He had no belief whatsoever in an 'immortal soul' consciously surviving death.

"Exceeding sorrowful" uses the same word used about the exceeding sorrow of the men of the world (Herod- Mk. 6:26; the rich young man, Lk. 18:23,24). Those who will be rich pierce themselves through with sorrows, they go through the crucifixion pains for the sake of this world (1 Tim. 6:10). So it's a cross either way, and it may as well be in identification with the Lord, leading unto eternal life, than unto eternal death. The same point is made in 2 Cor. 7:10, where the same word translated "sorrowful" is found- the sorrow of the world leads to death, but Godly sorrow leads to salvation. The disciples fell asleep, and yet by pure grace the record says that they slept for "sorrow" (Lk. 22:45), using a related but less intense word as used here for the Lord's *exceeding* sorrow; and the Lord attributes such "sorrow" to them repeatedly at this time (Jn. 16:6,20-22). But the point is that His sorrow was of an altogether more intense and higher order than theirs, and yet by grace they are counted as having some part in His sorrow. We speak and read of our sharing in the Lord's sufferings, and yet our sufferings are nothing compared to His; yet by grace they are counted as a sharing in those sufferings.

Stay here- This is *meno*, the word the Lord has just used multiple times in the upper room discourse, translated "abide". Now He leads them out of the upper room into the real world, and gives them the concrete outworking of abiding in Him- to enter into His struggles, to watch and pray with Him, to share His intensity with the Father. And they fell asleep.

And watch with me- The Greek means to literally keep awake, but is used about watching in prayer. The fact the disciples physically fell asleep, and three times, is a clear statement of their failure. And it is used by the disciples here in their own account and preaching of the Gospel, of which the Gospel records are transcripts, as if to emphasize their own failure, and on that basis appeal to others to likewise accept the

Lord's forgiveness and salvation by grace. It is the same word used repeatedly by the Lord in appealing for watchfulness in the very last days before His coming (Mt. 24:42,43; Lk. 12:37 etc.), as if the disciples in Gethsemane were going through their judgment, their last days. Likewise the sufferings and experiences of the very last generation will give them the opportunity to uniquely identify with the Lord's crucifixion sufferings. Seeing that generation will never taste of death, this identification with His death will be necessary for them as for no other generation, and the tribulation will be designed to elicit that identification. We are therefore invited to enter into Gethsemane and not repeat the failures of the disciples- the same words are used by Paul in encouraging us all to 'pray and watch' (Col. 4:2). "Let us not sleep as others, but let us watch" (1 Thess. 5:6) could be asking us to not be as the disciples there, but rather to learn from their failure and watch. And yet the comfort of grace is that whether we watch [s.w.] or sleep, we shall be accepted by Him (1 Thess. 5:10), just as the disciples were saved by grace despite their failure. Likewise we are asked to watch and keep our garment (Rev. 16:15), unlike the disciple present in Gethsemane who did not watch and fled naked having lost his garment (Mk. 14:52).

26:39 *And he went forward a little and*- Lk. 22:41 “About a stone’s cast”, pointing us back to David’s conflict with Goliath as a type of the Lord’s final conflict with sin.

Fell on his face and prayed, saying: My Father- Paul's description of himself on the Damascus road falling down and seeing a Heavenly vision, surrounded by men who did not understand, is framed in exactly the language of Gethsemane (Acts 22:7 = Mt. 26:39); as if right at his conversion, Paul was brought to realize the spirit of Gethsemane. His connection with the Gethsemane spirit continued. He describes himself as "sorrowful" (2 Cor. 6:10), just as Christ was then (Mt. 26:37). His description of how he prayed the same words three times without receiving an answer (2 Cor. 12:8) is clearly linked to Christ's experience in the garden (Mt. 26:44); and note that in that context he speaks of being “buffeted” by Satan’s servants, using the very word used of the Lord being “buffeted” straight after Gethsemane (2 Cor. 12:7 = Mt. 26:67).

To fall on the face is used in the Old Testament to describe men like Abraham and Moses falling on their face in the visible presence of God, e.g. before an Angel (Gen. 17:3; Num. 16:4; 22:31). Yet there was no visible manifestation of God’s presence at this time; so we are to assume that the Lord Jesus intensely perceived the Father’s presence even though there was no visible sign of it. It could be that the Angel from Heaven strengthening the Lord had already appeared, but this appears to come *after* the Lord had fallen on His face.

If it be possible, let this cup pass away from me- This may not simply mean 'If it's possible, may I not have to die'. The Lord could have meant: 'If *it*- some unrecorded possible alternative to the cross- is *really* possible, then let *this* cup pass'- as if to say 'If option A is possible, then let the cup of option B pass from me'. But He overrode this with a desire to be submissive to the Father's preferred will- which was for us to have a part in the greatest, most surpassing salvation, which required the death of the cross. “Such *great* salvation" (Heb. 2:3) might imply that a lesser salvation could have been achieved by Christ, but He achieved the greatest possible. "He is able also *to save them to the uttermost* that come unto God by him" (Heb. 7:25) may be saying the same thing. Indeed, the *excellence* of our salvation in Christ is a major NT theme. It was typified by the way Esther interceded for Israel; she could have simply asked for her own life to be spared, but she asked for that of all Israel. And further, she has the courage (and we sense her reticence, how difficult it was for her) to ask the King yet another favour- that the Jews be allowed to slay their enemies for one more day, and also to hang Haman's sons (Es. 9:12). She was achieving the maximum possible redemption for

Israel rather than the minimum. Paul again seems to comment on this theme when he speaks of how Christ became obedient, "*even* to the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8), as if perhaps some kind of salvation could have been achieved without the death *of the cross*. Perhaps there was no theological necessity for Christ to die *such* a painful death; if so, doubtless this was in His mind in His agony in the garden.

The Lord had taught more than once that "with God all things are possible" (19:26; Mk. 9:23), and yet He inserts here a condition: "If it be possible". He recognized that God's plan was possible of fulfilment by any means, and yet He recognized that there was a condition to that. This issue is not really resoluble, at least not by any intellectual process. If, or rather when, we struggle with these issues, this balance between God's ultimate possibility and the fact there appear to be terms and conditions attached- then we are there with the Lord in Gethsemane. But we need to note that it was God who was being pushed to the limit here as well- for literally all things are indeed possible to Him, and He could have saved the world any way He wished. In His allowing of this chosen method we see the degree to which the cross was indeed His plan that He so wanted to see worked out.

"Let this cup pass" is interpreted in Mk. 14:35 as "That the hour might pass". He saw the cup and His "hour" of death as the same thing. The challenging thing is that He invites us to drink His cup, to share in His final hour… even when He Himself found this so hard to drink.

Paul uses the same Greek term "from me" in describing how also three times he asked for the thorn in the flesh to "depart *from me*" (2 Cor. 12:8). He saw his prayers and desires as a sharing in the Lord's struggle in Gethsemane, just as we can too.

Nevertheless- The saying of these brief words lasted long enough for the disciples to fall asleep. "Could you not watch with Me for one hour?" (:40) suggests not 'even just for one hour' but rather 'We've been here an hour, and you couldn't watch with me even for that short period of time'. So it took the Lord an hour to say the words recorded here, which can be spoken in a few seconds. We have a window here into the essence of prayer; the words can be spoken quickly, but saying with meaning can take far longer. There may well have been many minutes in between each word here. And doubtless He said the same words and repeated the ideas several times, which would explain the slight differences in wording at this point between the Gospel records.

Not as I will, but as You will- Trinitarians need to note that the Lord's will was not totally the same as that of His Father.

26:40 *And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter: What!*- "Comes… and finds" are the very words used of the Lord's coming in judgment to 'find' the state of His people (21:19; 24:46 "whom his Lord when He *comes* shall *find* so doing"; Lk. 18:8 "When the Son of Man comes, shall He find faith…?"). And His 'coming' to the disciples found them asleep and unprepared. This was exactly the picture of Mk. 13:36 (and Lk. 12:37), using the same Greek words: "Watch… lest coming suddenly, He find you sleeping". We can be condemned in this life, as Peter was when he denied his Lord, and yet be saved out of it by repentance.

Could you not watch with me for one hour?- Peter later urged his converts to "be watchful" (1 Pet. 5:8 RV), watching unto prayer as the end approaches (1 Pet. 4:7), as Peter had *not* been watchful in the garden and had earned the Lord's rebuke for going to sleep praying (Mt. 26:40,41). They were to learn from his mistake. Their watchfulness was to be because the devil was prowling around, seeking whom he could desire (1 Pet. 5:8). This was exactly the case with Peter: Satan desired to have him, he should have prayed for strength but didn't do so sufficiently (Lk. 22:31). He was

warning his brethren that they were in exactly the situation he had been in, a few hours before he went into that fateful High Priest's house.

Paul was deeply moved by the Gethsemane record: 1 Thess. 5:6,7 = Mt. 26:40,41; Eph. 6:18 = 26:4;1 Acts 22:7= 26:39; 2 Cor. 6:10 = 26:37; 2 Cor. 12:8 = 26:44; Rom. 5:6 = 26:41; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6 = Mk. 14:36.

26:41 *Watch and pray*- The repeated emphasis upon their lack of watching contrasts with the Lord's stress upon the need to watch in the last days, and how lack of watching would lead to condemnation (24:42,43; 25:13). Their lack of watching meant they were condemned- and yet they were redeemed by their recognition of their state, as evidenced in the Gospel records.

That you may not enter into- These words are addressed to Peter in the singular, and yet the "you" here is plural. The Lord is telling Peter that he is no different to the rest of the disciples, despite his assertion that even if they all denied the Lord, he would not do so. Peter's sense of spiritual superiority was especially displeasing to the Lord.

Temptation- Each statement of the apparently simple model prayer needs careful reflection. The Lord told the disciples in Gethsemane to earnestly pray the simple saying: "Pray not to fail in the test" (Mt. 26:41 cp. 6:13). The prayer that they could gabble mindlessly must be prayed with intense attention to every phrase. They presumably did pray as directed, but the Lord later warns them: "Why do you sleep? Get up and pray, so that you will not enter into temptation". He intended them to keep on praying, as He spent an hour praying the same words; and not just rattle off a few words and think we have done our praying. Just as the tribulation of the last days seems to be conditional upon our faith, so the Lord may imply that entering into the time of trial or testing was avoidable by their prayer and faith. Again we see the final time of tribulation as reflective of the Lord's sufferings, enabling the very last generation to identify with the Lord's death so that they might share in His resurrection.

The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak- The question is whether the Lord is making a general observation about human nature, or whether He is specifically criticizing them for being spiritually weak at that specific time. He could be saying that they underestimated the power of human nature, and needed to pray that they would not enter into the temptation posed by their own flesh, their humanity. This is a clear demonstration of the source of spiritual weakness- our own flesh, rather than any superhuman being. Or it could be that the Lord has in view the specific weakness of the flesh- to disown Him in the face of opposition and the risk of arrest and death.

The word "weak" is often used about spiritual weakness. Paul describes all of us as having been saved although we were weak, using the same word used about the disciples asleep in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:41 "weak" = Rom. 5:6 "without strength"). He saw the evident similarity between them and us, tragically indifferent in practice to the mental agony of our Lord, failing to share His intensity of striving- although we are so willing in spirit to do this. And yet, Paul implies, be better than them. Don't be weak and sleepy as they were when Christ wanted them awake (Mt. 26:40,41 = 1 Thess. 5:6,7). Strive for the imitation of Christ's attitude in the garden (Mt. 26:41 = Eph. 6:18). And yet in Romans 7, a depressed but realistic Paul laments that he fails in this; his description of the losing battle he experienced within him between flesh and spirit is couched in the language of Christ's rebuke to the disciples in Gethsemane (the spirit was willing, but the flesh weak).

26:42 *Again a second time he went away and prayed, saying*- This is saying the same thing twice. We are enabled to imagine the Lord again walking away from them, as if Matthew's camera is located amongst the disciples and focused upon the rear view of the Lord Jesus.

My Father, If- The Lord in Gethsemane took a long time to pray the simple words: "Father, if ....". It was long enough for the disciples to fight a losing battle against drowsiness and fall fast asleep (the Greek implies). But how do you pray? With simple, staccato words and phrases like His? Or do you desperately seek for words, any words, just to make it seem you prayed, trying to be like the more mature brethren you hear praying at gatherings? Or after many years of prayer, can I ask, are you just churning out the same old phrases and ideas, with little meaning put into the words...? If the Son of God Himself prayed in such simple terms, surely we ought to likewise.

This cup- The use of "this…" suggests the Lord had so clearly in mind the course of events which were to follow. '*The* cup' would have been less specific, as if He simply knew that an ordeal was ahead. But "*this*cup" suggests He knew what the cup was specifically, and was holding that understanding in His mind as He prayed to the Father.

Cannot pass, except I drink it- The same word translated "possible" in :39 "If it be possible". Both Father and Son clearly were aware that all things are possible for the Father, and yet those who seek to do His will must accept that He will not use that possibility in a boundless sense. The contrast is between the Father's will / desire on one hand, and His boundless potential possibility on the other. If we seek to do His will or desire, to please Him, as the Lord did, then the fact He can potentially do anything for us somehow recedes in significance. We above all wish to please Him. Therefore the fact He could save us from any pain no longer weighs so heavily with us. It is primitive indeed to complain that God could have stopped a certain painful course of events. He indeed could have done. But the issue is, whether or not we wish to do His will, to please Him, to do His work in this world. This is the significance of the Lord saying "Your will be done".

Your will be done- He had the authority to call down legions of Angels to change the course of events- implying the Father would have allowed that. All things were possible to God. The fact this possibility remained for the Lord suggests that the prayers in Gethsemane were really the Lord coming to the conclusion that He Himself wished to go ahead with the cross. It wasn't so much that He asked for the cross to be taken away from Him, and the Father said "No", and He meekly accepted it. Prayer functioned for Him as it often does for us- a means of dialogue with God and thereby with ourselves, the process of which in itself provides the answers to our deepest questions. The will of the Father is never presented in Scripture as immutable and some predestined code which we are to follow. Rather is God open to change in response to the cry of His beloved people. So the Lord's conclusion "Your will be done" is not a shrugging acceptance that in this case, He couldn't change some preordained will of God; but rather a willing desire on His own part to do the ideal wishes / will of the Father. The Lord's statement was therefore His own conclusion, His own decision to continue in the way of the cross, even though the practical realities of what it meant were now becoming more practically apparent to Him than ever before. No wonder the Father sent an Angel to strengthen His beloved Son in this fine resolve. See on 26:54 *But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled?*

26:43 *And he came again and found them sleeping*- See on :40 *Comes… and finds*.

For their eyes were heavy- It's clear from all the allusions to the need for watchfulness and the moral failure associated with sleeping, that there was really no adequate excuse for their failure. And yet the record gracefully takes note of the human weakness they were facing. We should not dismiss circumstantial ethics too quickly. Whilst sin remains sin, there is every reason for thinking that God does take circumstance into account in His final judgment of human failures. The only other time the Greek word translated "heavy" occurs in the Gospels is in Lk. 9:32, where again it

is used of heaviness with sleep, and again about Peter, James and John sleeping whilst the Lord was involved in active dialogue with the Father about His forthcoming death: "Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep". Mk. 14:40 adds that "They did not know what to answer Him", and this likewise was the situation at the transfiguration (Mk. 9:6 s.w.). The events of the transfiguration were to prepare Peter, James and John for the events of Gethsemane; they were supposed to see the similarities, and learn. But they didn't. Likewise circumstances repeat in our lives, as the Father seeks to teach us, hoping we shall learn from one event which is then in essence repeated later. The way the situation here repeats three times, and each time they fail and fall asleep, is another example of how circumstances repeat in the hope that we will learn.

26:44- see on :39.

And he left them again and went away and prayed- The language of leaving to be with the Father and coming again to the disciples is very much the language of the Lord's ascension and return (Jn. 16:28 has just recorded the Lord using this language in the Upper Room). His coming to them and finding them sleeping is therefore an enactment of the condemnation of the last day- but we can be condemned in this life, but be saved out of it by repentance.

A third time- The three failures of Peter to keep awake were clearly meant to portend his forthcoming triple failure. The Lord was seeking to educate him as to his own weakness. But he failed to perceive it. After each failure he would've urged himself not to fail again, and he would've gone through the same thoughts as time after time he denied his Lord later that night. We gasp with wonder at how the Lord was not so focused upon His own struggles that He had no thought for desperately trying to educate his beloved Peter. This is surely the mark of spiritual maturity- being able to never be so obsessed with our own struggles that we forget our responsibilities to our brethren. So often we reason that we must sort out our own issues before we can help others, but this kind of self-centredness would've meant that the Lord failed Himself to be the One He needed to be, both for Himself and for others.

Saying again the same words- If the idea was simply that He repeated again the previous words, another word would've been used. *Hautou* definitely means something like 'His own words', 'The words of Himself'. And in this we see a powerful picture of what prayer to the Father really is- praying our very own words to the Father. The intimacy of the Son with the Father is thus brought out.

26:45 *Then he came to the disciples and said to them: Sleep on now*- The Lord spoke this to them whilst they were asleep, because in :46 He asks them to arise. A lesser man than the Lord would've been bitterly disappointed, full of fear that His entire mission was open to failure if the material He had so especially focused upon saving was so incredibly weak. But instead in tenderness He speaks to them as a loving parent speaks to their sleeping children. For this seems the only credible interpretation of His words- for immediately afterwards He tells them to awake.

And take your rest- Seeing the Lord proceeds to immediately awake them from sleep, He must have had some other idea in view apart from taking literal rest. Surely He had in view His earlier invitation to His followers to find rest in Him (11:28); He knew that He was dying so that they might have this ultimate rest to their souls.

The hour is at hand- Gk. 'is approaching'. Perhaps the Lord noticed the approach of

Judas and the soldiers. Mk. 14:41 has "the hour is come". 'It is approaching... it has come' would be an appropriate thing to say in soliloquy as the Lord saw the men approaching closer. *Eggizo*, "is at hand", is the very word used specifically about Judas in :46: "He is at hand that betrays Me".

And the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners- Remember that the Greek word behind 'betrayal' means simply to be handed over. Earlier the Lord had spoken of being handed over into the hand or power of men (17:22), to the chief priests (20:18), to the Gentiles (Mk. 10:33). But now the Lord introduces a moral dimension- He was to be handed over into the power of sin, but would break that power by His resurrection. For the resurrection of the Lord was not simply a vindication of Himself against men, but against the power of sin. And this is what opens up the path to deliverance for all likewise under the power of sin. Surely Heb. 2:14 had this in mind when speaking of how the Lord destroyed "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil"- sin manifested in the powers of Rome and Judaism.

26:46 *Arise!*- See on :45.

Let us be going- If this were the simple sense of the Greek, another construction would've been used. The sense is definitely 'Let us lead on'. Although going into the hands of sinners, the Lord was in control- for He insisted that His life was not taken from Him, but rather He gave it of Himself.

He that betrays me is nearby- See on :45 *The hour is at hand*.

26:47 *And while he yet spoke*- This, along with the repeated use of "Behold" or "Lo" (:45,46,47,51) encourage us to play Bible television with these events. The scene was clearly etched upon the memory of the Gospel writers. Mk. 14:43 puts it all in the present tense: "There comes Judas…", to encourage us to re-live the incident.

Judas, one of the twelve- Emphasized in all three synoptics.

Came, and with him a great crowd- This was a tacit recognition of the fanatic loyalty of the eleven; Judas reckoned that they could put up enough of a fight to require this great multitude.

With swords and staves, from the chief priest and elders of the people- This little detail accords well with the reality of the situation. Although the Chief Priests had some authority to use the Roman guards to control difficult situations in the temple area, they surely didn't have use of Roman soldiers to arrest a civilian in a garden at night. So these were ruffians rustled up by Judas and the Jewish leaders, which explains why they had staves as well as swords. Staves were hardly the military equipment of professional soldiers, but it fits the idea that the leaders gathered together a crowd of hoods to do this dirty work. And it was only later that the Jews handed the Lord over to Gentile power. "Staves" translates *xulon*, the word meaning 'stake' or 'tree' which is used about the cross. See on :48 "That is He".

26:48 *Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying*- These are the very words more commonly used together about signs being given to the Jewish world by the Lord. Judas was in every way a fake Christ, acting as the real disciple and the true Christ, when in fact he was the very opposite. This is why he as the "son of perdition" becomes the prototype of the antichrist figure in 2 Thess. 2. Note that 'anti-Christ' doesn't mean so much one who is*against* Christ as one who mimics the real Christ but is in fact a false one and not the original, despite all appearances.

Whomsoever I shall kiss- The Greek *phileo* literally means 'to love'. I have mentioned several times the essential similarity between the betrayals of Judas and Peter that same night. When the Lord later asks Peter whether Peter has *phileo* for Him

(Jn. 21:17), He is as it were asking 'Do you kiss Me, as Judas did?'. He is probing Peter to see the similarities between himself and Judas, and to recognize that he was not in fact more loyal and devoted to Jesus than any of the others [as Peter had once claimed]- and that included even Judas.

That is He. Take him- The Lord was a well known public figure, having taught openly in Jerusalem in the presence of huge crowds. The need to identify Him indicates that the crowd of hoods being used didn't know who He was, because they were not the types to attend teaching sessions in the temple, or perhaps they weren't locals, or maybe not even Jews. Again we find the ring of truth in how these records are written; if they were anything other than Divinely inspired, there would be all manner of lack of congruence in the details and information given.

26:49 *And immediately he came to Jesus, and said, Greetings, Rabbi; and kissed him*- Most of the 74 NT occurrences of *chairo*, "hail", are translated "rejoice". Perhaps the Lord was reminded of His recent words about the cross being His "joy". But why did Judas address Him in this way? It could be that the crowd of armed men were still hidden, and he came alone to make this act of identification of Jesus- again suggesting that the crowd of hired hoods were unclear as to which one of the group of disciples was Jesus. This is why :50 says that after the kiss, "then came they"- Judas was alone when he first approached the Lord. Although the Lord later protests that He had been with 'them' in the temple teaching, presumably that comment was directed only at the leadership of the group. Or perhaps it was simply because in the darkness it was not clear who was who, and Judas needed to make the identification for that reason. He needed to be alone to make that identification- he would've been unable to do it if he had approached Jesus and the disciples with the crowd of men next to him.

26:50 *And Jesus said to him: Friend*- During the few seconds between the kiss and the appearance of the armed men. See the reconstruction suggested at :49.

Do what you came to do- AV "Wherefore". The Greek *epi hos* doesn't simply mean 'Why?'. In this a word like *tis* would have been used. 'For what' is a reasonable translation. RV "Do that for which thou art come"- confirming a wicked man in the evil way he had chosen to take. And yet it seems to me that the Lord tried to save Judas to the last. This rhetorical question asked Judas to consider *why* he was doing this. One reason which the record gives is that he was interested in the money. He was a chronic materialist. He enquired how much he could receive for the job of betraying, and only then did he do it. The way he flung the coins down before committing suicide surely indicate how significant the money was to him. And the Lord knew that, and was asking him, even at this late moment, to consider *why* he was doing this- just for coins, pieces of metal. The Lord really was the good shepherd who searched for the lost until the very end, and sets a supreme example to us all.

'For whom' would be another possible translation of *epi hos* ["Wherefore...?"]. But why say this, when it was obvious? The Lord clearly knew what was happening- He knew the armed men were with Judas although hidden, and that they would now appear. He also knew that at least Peter had a sword and was keen to use it. In the crucial few seconds between the identification of Jesus with the kiss and the appearance of the armed men from the trees, the Lord knew that Peter could easily have killed Judas. The Lord may have been playing for time- to preserve Judas' life. Primarily this would've been in order to give Judas the possibility of repentance; but it was also to enable the foreseen sequence of events leading to the cross to happen. This makes sense of the

Lord's statement at His trial, that if His Kingdom was immediate, then His servants would fight (Jn. 18:36). They wanted to fight, as Peter's rash action with his sword made clear, but the Lord disallowed them from doing this. We marvel at how conscious the Lord was on so many levels in bringing forward God's purpose, whilst allowing men the maximum possible opportunity to display faith, loyalty and repentance.

Then they came - See the reconstruction suggested at :49.

And laid hands on Jesus- The Lord uses the same expression about the sufferings of the faithful in the very last generation (Lk. 21:12), as He seeks to bring them to know the essence of His death, seeing that that generation will not taste of death but be given immortality at the judgment seat.

And took Him- Literally, they had power over Him. The same word is used in Heb. 2:14 about how the Lord overcame the 'devil' who had the 'power' of death. They had the power, apparently, externally. But the paradox was that by willingly giving Himself over to it, He had power over the 'devil' of sin, both abstractly as sin, and also in all forms of its political manifestation, in this case, the Roman and Jewish authorities.

26:51 *And one of those with Jesus*- Peter.

Stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear- The camera, as it were, is zoomed in close upon Peter. Perhaps the detail is provided as backdrop for the Lord's response- that whoever *takes* the sword shall perish by it (:52). Peter did indeed take the sword- but by grace was saved from the consequence. He clearly aimed to strike off the man's head, but he ducked and Peter only caught his ear.

The material from Mark is about the same as in Matthew, but Luke and John add various details. Here is Matthew's account of the arrest in the Garden, with the details from Luke 22 and John 18 (on which see commentary) added in square brackets:

"The hour is at hand and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise! Let us be going. He that betrays me is nearby. And while he yet spoke, Judas, one of the twelve, came; and with him a great crowd with swords and staves, from the chief priest and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying: Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is he. Take him. [Lk. 22:47,48 He drew near to Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus said to him: Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?] And immediately he came to Jesus, and said, Greetings, Rabbi; and kissed him. And Jesus said to him: Friend, do what you came to do. [Lk. 22 And when they that were about him saw what would follow, they said: Lord, shall we strike with the sword?]. Then they came. [Jn. 18:4-9 Jesus knowing all the things that must come upon him, went forward and said to them: Whom do you seek? They answered him: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them: I am he (Judas, the one who betrayed him, was standing with them). When he said to them: I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them: Whom do you seek? And they said: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered: I told you that I am he. If therefore you seek me, let these go their way- that the word might be fulfilled which he spoke: Of those whom you have given me I lost not one]. [then they] laid hands on Jesus and took him. And one of those with Jesus [Jn. 18 Simon Peter] stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear [Jn. 18 his right ear. Now the servant's name was Malchus]. Then said Jesus to him: [No more of this Lk. 22:51] Put away your sword into its place, [into its sheath, Jn. 18] for all that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Do you think I cannot ask my Father and He shall, even now, send me more than twelve legions of

Angels? [Jn. 18:11 The cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?] [Lk. 22:51 And he touched his ear and healed him]. But how then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way? In that hour Jesus said to the mob: Have you come out as against a robber with swords and staves to seize me? I sat daily in the temple teaching and you did not take me. [Lk. 22 But this is your hour, and the power of darkness]. But all this is happening so that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples left him and fled. [Lk. 22 And they seized him and led him away, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed from a distance]".

26:52 *Then said Jesus to him: Put away your sword into its place*- When Peter speaks of how the Lord Jesus will 'turn away' sinners from their sins (Acts 3:26), he is using the very word of how the Lord Jesus told him to "put up again" his sword (Mt. 26:52), thereby turning Peter away from his sin. Whether Peter's allusion was conscious or unconscious isn't clear; we tend to use language which has recently been used to us even in other contexts, especially if we have meditated upon it and feel it personally relevant to us. Again we see that Peter's appeal to Israel to repent in Acts 2 and 3 was so successful because it was shot through with reference to his own failures and experience of repentance, conversion and forgiveness. Peter's appeal for repentance and conversion was evidently allusive to his own experience of conversion (Lk. 22:32 cp. Acts 3:19; 9:35). In this he was following the pattern of David, who sung his 'Maschil' (teaching) psalms after his forgiveness in order to convert sinners unto Yahweh (Ps. 51:13). Like Peter, David did so with his sin ever before him, with a broken and contrite heart (Ps. 51:3,17). He invited them to seek forgiveness for their denial of their Lord, just as he had done. He dearly wished them to follow his pattern, and know the grace he now did. The same word used of how Judas "brought again" his pieces of silver to the Jews (27:3). This is part of a series of similarities between Judas and Peter at this time. They both in essence did the same thing, but Peter repented and trusted in the Lord's grace, whereas Judas didn't know the Lord's grace.

For all that take the sword- Peter was the one who had literally just put forth his hand and taken a sword (:51). So it was by grace that he didn't "perish" by the sword at this time. Again, we see how grace ran through the Lord's actions at this His greatest moment of personal stress. The same word *lambano*, "take", is used of how Judas had 'received' a band of men armed with swords in order to capture Jesus (Jn. 18:3). Again, the similarities are being developed between Peter and Judas; both in essence made the same mistakes and committed the same sins, in this case, taking the sword. But Peter repented and trusted in the Lord's grace.

Shall perish with the sword- Not particularly in this life, but at judgment day, because "perish" is repeatedly used about final condemnation (e.g. 5:29,30; 10:28,39; 16:25; 22:7). The word is specifically used of the 'perishing' of Judas (Jn. 17:12, AV "lost"; 18:9). Again, the warning to Peter was not to be like Judas, even though the similarities between them were great at this time.

Jn. 18:11 adds: "The cup which My Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?". If Peter had entered into the Lord's struggle in Gethsemane concerning the cup, then he wouldn't have made this mistake of attempting violent resistance. But he fell asleep, and as with us so often, failure or laziness at one point leads to failure in others later on.

26:53 *Do you think I cannot ask my Father and He shall, even now*- The word "now"

is all significant. Even then, the Lord could have changed the nature and sequence of events which lay ahead of Him, and this possibility was uppermost in His mind, the temptation He struggled with. This factor must be given due weight in seeking to understand His struggle in Gethsemane. It wasn't a case that He Himself didn't want to drink the cup, but the Father insisted He must, and therefore He resigned Himself to the Father's will. There was another way, indeed there were multiple ways forward. He could have called down legions of Angels. But He made the Father's will His own, He willingly agreed to do it, because He wanted to fulfil the Scriptures, to be obedient to them rather than merely bring about a neat correlation between them and events. He rose up from the final prayer in Gethsemane having committed Himself to do this, even though there were other options. So His willing giving of Himself over to death wasn't merely an iron-willed submission to the Father's will, in the spirit of 'islam' [submission]. Rather did He arise from the final prayer resolved to do the Father's will as His will, and this meant turning His back upon all the other possibilities before Him. This makes His decisions and death even more awesome, knowing that there could have been other legitimate ways to bring about the plan of salvation- indeed, it could be argued that God's hands were not tied, and He could forgive and save who He wished with no requirement for the cross. But the cross was powerful in order to persuade others of the need to respond to it, and therefore the Lord died as He did for our sakes, in order to persuade us. And we should therefore allow the cross its full and maximum persuasive power in our lives. See on :28 *The new testament*.

Send me more than twelve legions of Angels?- But the Lord had learnt the lesson of Elisha, who could have himself seen legions of Angels but chose not to, so certain was he that they were potentially there (2 Kings 6:17). "Give Me", *paristemi*, has a wide range of meaning, and it is used of how Peter was one of those who "stood by" the Lord in Gethsemane (Mk. 14:47); the Lord is saying that as Peter stood by Him with drawn sword, just one man against so many, so in fact there were legions of Angels standing by or 'given' to assist the Lord; but He was not going to make use of them. The same word is used of the officers who "stood by" Jesus and struck Him at His trial (Jn. 18:22; Acts 4:26 s.w.); the Lord must have reflected that actually there were legions of Angels standing by / given unto Him. His self-restraint in not using them is remarkable, and highlights the way in which His life was not taken from Him but He willingly gave it. The reference to "twelve" legions of Angels was perhaps therefore in contrast with the twelve disciples; even if all twelve of them had stood up to fight for the Lord's deliverance, actually He had not twelve men, but twelve *legions* of Angels at His disposal. But He was not going to use them, and so He would not make use of the twelve disciples. The use of "legions" naturally contrasts with the Roman legions who were ultimately going to be used by the Jews to destroy the Lord. Peter's letters are absolutely full of his reflections upon these incidents, and this is why he could write of how the Angels are not subject unto the Lord Jesus (1 Pet. 3:22).

The Lord Jesus could've called upon legions of Angels to help Him; but He chose not to (Mt. 26:53); He could have taken power there and then in His ministry and declared Himself King- but He walked off to the hills instead (Jn. 6:15). In these examples we see what we could call a renunciation of power. Time and again we are called upon to decide whether we will renounce what power we have, or use it or abuse it for our own selfish ends. A parent faces this issue so often with a young child. The parent has more power; but how and for what reasons should she / he use that power? We can use 'power' in many ways in the trivia of daily life; but actually in most of those micro

level decisions we are challenged with a choice as to what level of spirituality and unselfishness we are going to show.

26:54 *But how then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?*- See on :42 *Your will be done*. The Father was willing to allow another way- legions of Angels could have been sent to change the course of events. In this lay the intensity of the temptation, and the height of the Lord's achievement in rising up to the highest level. Scriptural prophecy has all kinds of possible fulfilments, as we noted in discussing the Olivet prophecy. There is not only one possible fulfilment. I suggest therefore that the Lord saw the Scriptures as speaking to Him by way of personal commandment, and He knew that to fulfil them was to obey them. To be disobedient to those Scriptures would not have falsified them, because another way of fulfilment could have been found. But the Lord felt strongly the need to make the word become flesh to utter fullness and perfection.

26:55 *In that hour Jesus said to the mob*- The size of the crowd of armed men is an indirect indication of the fierce loyalty of the eleven disciples to the Lord. Judas expected that they would or at least could put up major resistance.

Have you come out as against a robber with swords and staves to seize me?- The same word used about Jesus and the disciples 'going out' from the Upper Room to Gethsemane (:30; Jn. 18:1), and Jesus 'going forth' to meet the crowd of armed men (Jn. 18:4). The impression is given of a head on meeting between the forces of light and darkness.

I sat daily in the temple teaching and you did not take me- The Lord was addressing the leadership of the group, who had sat daily in the temple over the past week and heard Him. They knew what He looked like, He had sat *pros humas,* "with you" (AV), not so much "with you" as 'directly facing you', sitting down in front of them and therefore at close range. Therefore the need for Judas to identify the Lord with a kiss, to prove "that same is He", was because the mass of armed men didn't know who He was, and had therefore not sat in the temple. Again we see the Lord recognizing that men are only who they are, the hired thugs were no more than hired thugs acting in ignorance; but the leaders who were present were the ones He wanted to address. This is confirmed by Lk. 22:52 stating that "Jesus said to the chief priests and captains of the temple and elders that had come against him: Have you come as against a robber, with swords and staves?". The priests and elders were in that large crowd, and the Lord directly addresses them. So although He addressed "the multitudes", His message was aimed at specific individuals within the crowd. This is true of much of Scripture; perhaps those parts we personally fail to understand are speaking to a particular group in need of that message, perhaps in a previous age, and it may not be as directly intended for us as it was to them. The correspondence between the narratives is detailed and deeply credible. Uninspired writers would surely not only contradict themselves, but lack this artless congruence between each other which we find in the inspired Gospel records. Lk. 22:53 adds that the Lord continued to say: "But this is your hour, and the power of darkness". The sense is surely that in broad daylight they dared not lay hold on Him- they had to do it under cover of darkness, because they were of the darkness.

26:56 *But all this is happening so that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled*- This can be read as part of the Lord's words, or the comment of Matthew. "Is happening" is translated "was done" in the AV. See on :54; the emphasis upon the fulfilment of Scripture is not merely noting a correspondence between New Testament event and Old Testament scripture. Rather I suggest is the idea that the Lord chose to be obedient to God's word and will, to make it His own, to the highest possible extent,

to the point of total personal identification with it; when by its nature, God's prophetic word has various possibilities of fulfilments on different levels, some of which would have enabled the Lord to bypass the cross. The specific reference may be to Ps. 31:11. This refers to how David's family appear to have later disowned him during Saul's persecution, fleeing from him, as the Lord's friends also did.

John inserts at this point that the Lord was revealed in glory and the crowd of armed men fell to the ground; He asked them to let the disciples "go their way". And yet He had earlier lamented that their scattering from Him would be related to their lack of faith: "You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written: I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad". This has to be compared with John's account in Jn. 18:4-9: "Jesus knowing all the things that must come upon him, went forward and said to them: Whom do you seek? They answered him: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them: I am he (Judas, the one who betrayed him, was standing with them). When he said to them: I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them: Whom do you seek? And they said: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered: I told you that I am he. If therefore you seek me, let these go their way- that the word might be fulfilled which he spoke: Of those whom you have given me I lost not one". The scattering from the Lord was part of their falling away. And yet the Lord sets them up to flee, he apparently urges them to do so, in order that He would not spiritually lose any of them. We see here a profound principle- that there are times when it would be better to allow disciples to follow a lower principle, to even fail, to run away from the highest principle of dying with Christ; lest otherwise the height of the demand means they become lost totally. The church of my youth forbad divorce and remarriage, and yet by forcing disciples who divorced to never remarry, they ended up causing many of them to be lost to Christ's cause. And there are multiple other examples.

Then all the disciples left him- Although the Lord had set up the opportunity for them to flee by stunning the armed men and telling them to allow the disciples free exit, they were still forsaking Him by doing so. And it still hurt the Lord. He simply knew their spiritual capabilities, and was giving them a lower level escape route. One size simply doesn't fit all; He didn't deal with them on a legalistic level of demanding obedience to a certain standard, failing which they were rejected. Neither does He work like that today. Their forsaking of Him sets the scene for His final agonized cry to the Father: "Why have *You* forsaken Me?" (27:46). His disciples had, the inner circle of ministering women and His own mother had walked away from the cross- and now He felt even the Father forsaking Him, despite earlier having said that "He that sent Me is with Me: the Father has not left Me alone [s.w. 'forsake']" (Jn. 8:29).

And fled- Their action is emphasized by the usage of both words, forsake and fled. Typically the Gospel writers emphasize their own weakness and failures, all as part of their compelling appeal to others to respond to the message they themselves had been so slow to grasp.

26:57 *And they that had taken Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes*- There is great emphasis on the Lord being *led* (Mt. 26:57; 27:2,31; Mk. 15:16; Jn. 18:13,28; 19:16). And notice how Acts 8:32 changes the quotation from Is. 53 to say that Christ was *led*(this isn't in the Hebrew text). His passivity is another indication that He was *giving* His life of His own volition, it wasn't being taken from Him.

And the elders- Sometimes a technical term for the Sanhedrin.

Were gathered together- This word is often used in connection with the Lord's opponents being gathered together against Him at His death (Mt. 26:3,57; 27:17,27,62; 28:12; Lk. 22:66; Acts 4:26,27); and yet it is also used of the gathering together of the

faithful, especially at the breaking of bread, around the symbols of the Lord's death (Acts 20:7,8; 1 Cor. 5:4). The cross becomes the essence of the division between the believers and the world; each group gather together around it. The cross and the person of the Lord Jesus therefore divide the believer from the world; and this is where the line really is, rather than between believer and believer. To make the breaking of bread service and the emblems of the crucified Jesus the means of dividing between believers is therefore extremely serious; at best, it totally fails to perceive the intention of the Lord Jesus and His death. His suffering, He there in His time of torture, is intended to be the focal point of the gathering together of the believers for Him, and likewise it becomes the focal point of the unbelieving world's gathering together against Him.

26:58 *But Peter followed Him afar off*- This is recorded in the same words by all three Synoptics. It impressed them all as perhaps typical of so much of their 'following' the Lord; it was a following, but far off from Him. His challenge to Peter had been to not just physically follow Him, but to pick up His cross and walk behind Him on His way to His cross (16:24 s.w.). Following Jesus in the shadows and avoiding identification with Him was hardly the kind of following which He intended. Yet Peter recognized this, because his appeal for repentance describes his audience as likewise "afar off" (Acts 2:39 s.w.); he is asking them to make the conversion which he did, and he thereby considers his 'following afar off' as not really following at all, and being in a 'far off from Christ' position from which he repented and thereby 'came near' to Christ in conversion. The Greek words for 'followed' and 'afar off' are also used about how the few remaining disciples stood 'afar off' from Christ on the cross. The sense is perhaps that the Gospel writers recognized how far they were from co-crucifixion with Christ, and this sense is one we can identify with. And we are those likewise described in Ephesians as "far off" as Peter was, but are now likewise reconciled.

To the court of the high priest; and entered in- The same word used by the Lord in warning Peter not to "enter into" temptation (Lk. 22:46). And it is used again of how Satan entered into Judas (Jn. 13:27), again drawing a parallel between the path of both Peter and Judas- the difference finally being simply that Peter believed in the Lord's grace whereas Judas could not.

And sat with the officers- The presence of the definite article suggests that "the servants" [the Greek also means "officers"] are a group which has already been mentioned, and surely they are the "servants" who comprised the crowd of armed men who arrested Jesus in the Garden. The same word is used three times about them in Jn. 18:3,12,18. The risk Peter was taking was considerable, seeing he had visibly been with the Lord in the Garden and had tried to kill one of the servants. We must give due weight to this- his devotion to his Lord was incomplete but all the same must be recognized for what it was as far as it was. So often those who aim higher than others in their spiritual devotions are those who fall the most publically, and yet their devotion to their Lord should not be forgotten- for it is higher than the mass of other disciples.

To see the end- Critically, we could say that the Lord had called His men to participate in His "end", to die with Him, to carry His cross, and Peter (like us) wished merely to observe His end, rather than participate in it personally. I have thought the same about myself often in self-examination at the breaking of bread. And yet Peter's love for the Lord cannot be questioned, for it was not mere curiosity that led him to take the risk he did of sitting amongst "the servants". The only other time the Greek phrase occurs is in James 5:11, where James says we have all seen the end of the Lord [the Lord Jesus?], that He is very pitiful and of tender mercy. Writing as James was in the context of an

early church led by Peter, it is not impossible that he is hinting that we are all in the place of Peter, and have an experience of pity and tender mercy none less than he experienced.

26:59 *Now the chief priests and the whole council*- Gk. 'the Sanhedrin'. All of them participated in desiring or requiring [Gk.; AV "sought"] false witness against Jesus. And yet within that group was Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews (Jn. 3:1- and "all" the Jewish leaders condemned Jesus to death, 27:1); and Joseph, who is specifically called a member of the Council (Mk. 15:43; Lk. 23:50). Perhaps this is an example of where "all" is used in Biblical languages in a general but not strictly literal sense. Lk. 23:51 says that Joseph had not "consented" with the Council. The Greek can mean specifically to vote, but also to simply 'agree'. Perhaps he voted against their decision; or perhaps his lack of consent was deeply internal. In any case, it seems that it was only after the Lord was pronounced dead that he 'came out' publically in open identification with the Lord (note "after this...", Jn. 19:38). We see here the grace of God, in not holding against those men the way that they passively went along with the decision to crucify God's Son. Their strong internal disagreement was noted. We are reminded of how not all Joseph's brothers went along with the plan to kill him, but their silence meant that the plan went ahead. We likewise should show grace to those who go along with decisions which are deeply wrong and hurtful. This is not to say that they were correct in their lack of commitment, but we may well have done the same. And we can take a lesson from the Father's gracious attitude to those who would not immediately stand up and be counted for the Lord's cause. This affects our decision making in terms of disciplining those who do things like responding to military call up, voting under duress or other things which are against the Lord's will, which are failures... and yet ultimately God may very well extend the same grace to them as He did to Joseph and Nicodemus. And He tends to use circumstances to make a person finally come out in the open about their views, because secret discipleship is an oxymoron and His desire is that we are as a city set on a hill which cannot be hid.

Sought false witness against Jesus, that they might put him to death- The word is only used elsewhere in the Gospels about the way that the faithful will experience being 'put to death' in the final tribulation (10:21; Mk. 13:12; Lk. 21:16). The sufferings of the tribulation will enable the last generation to identify with the sufferings of Christ, and thus to share His resurrection life.

26:60 *And they did not find any, though many false witnesses came*- This is twice emphasized in this verse. Yet there were many false witnesses made. Presumably their legalistic minds insisted on giving the Lord 'a fair trial'; part of their minds were clouded by hatred and wickedness, and yet another part of their minds was set on strict legalistic obedience to God and the principles of legal integrity. In this we see the schizophrenic nature of the human mind. No matter what heights of devotion and understanding we may reach, we can never assume that we are totally with the Lord. And likewise we should not assume that others are either perfectly, totally spiritual or totally unspiritual. Sadly the human mind is capable of operating in different directions at once.

But afterwards came two- The semblance of legal integrity they were following required that at least two and preferably three witnesses made the same accusation. The legalism of the Jews is emphasized, not least in their fear of ritual defilement at Passover time (Jn. 18:28). They held themselves to legal obedience and integrity, whilst

committing the ultimate sin, of condemning the Son of God to a cruel death. The hatred they unleashed upon Him was done by men who were rigorously obedient to commandments; their abuse of Him would therefore have been justified by them as some form of obedience to Divine principle. And this is why religious people can be the most abusive and cruel of any- if the principles they are wedded to are wrong, and if they have not perceived grace.

26:61 *And said: This man said, I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days*- They were misquoting Him, and their witness did not agree, each of the two men reported His words differently (Mk. 14:59). And this lack of agreement between witnesses, "many" of them, was what had delayed proceedings to this point. But finally these evil men gave up all semblance of legal integrity- for time was running out. They thus condemned themselves even by the legal standards they were holding themselves to. The technical reason for His death sentence, therefore, was a supposed plan to destroy the temple, to commit the ultimate sacrilege. But what the Lord had said was that *they* would destroy the temple, referring to Himself, but after three days He would raise it up (Jn. 2:19). It was in fact they and not Him who were guilty of the crime of destroying the temple; indeed, the literal temple was finally destroyed exactly because of them. They condemned Him for what they themselves were guilty of. Legalists are so often led by the Lord to positions wherein they condemn themselves by their own standards, words and demands. The trial of Jesus is the ultimate expose of legalism.

26:62 *And the high priest stood up and said to him*- As a judge arises to give the verdict.

Do you answer nothing?- One reason for the Lord's silence was in order to allow them to condemn themselves- see on :61. But His self-control at His trials caused marvel amongst those who observed it, and it should to us too. For when justice and truth are so obviously not being upheld, all that is within us as humans cries out against it. Campaigns against injustice always gather mass support- it's very much a part of our human nature. But the Lord in this context said nothing. He let the unjust condemn themselves.

What is it that these testify against you?- The Greek could equally be translated 'Who are these that these testify against you?'. We wonder whether one of them was Judas, and whether the other was some other former disciple. The High Priest's point would therefore have been 'Come on, these are Your own men who are testifying You said this. And you remain silent?'. The pain of betrayal would have been intense. Surely the deal with Judas had involved his being a legal witness at the trial. But the fact his witness did not agree with the other man's witness showed yet again that their careful plans simply didn't work out; see on :5. The Lord Jesus freely gave His life, rather than having it taken from Him by the working out of carefully laid clever plans. Those plans failed. But He gave His life.

26:63 *But Jesus held His peace*- The High Priest 'answered' to this silence. Silence is itself a statement, a word. Is. 57:11 reasons with Israel that despite their sins, God had 'held His peace' in not judging them, and yet they still did not respect Him. Perhaps the Lord held His peace because all He could really speak in response was judgment against them. And He did not want to do that overmuch, He wanted to give them the maximum time for repentance before having to speak the inevitable judgment upon them. The

answer He finally gives is not an answer to the accusations, but rather a pronouncement of judgment. And this is why, it seems to me, that He 'held His peace'- in order to give them the maximum opportunity to repent, and He was counting almost every second now. This desire for human repentance is a fundamental part of the Lord, as it should be part of our basic personality in Christ. This same Lord works moment by moment with us likewise, to bring us to repentance. This is His earnest desire.

And the high priest said to him: I bind you under oath to the living God, tell us whether you are the Christ, the Son of God- The technical reason for condemning Him was a supposed plot to destroy the temple building, but now the judge moves on to make another accusation, the issue which was most important to him and the Jews, but which was not of itself a criminal accusation which could be then transferred to Roman judgment with a request for a death penalty. But *contra* this there is the possibility that because Caesar declared himself to be the son of God and the anointed one, any man claiming to be that could be reported to the Romans and be condemned to death. In terms of legal procedure, their behaviour was wrong. The accusation shifted from one count to another, reflecting the clear desire of the judge to secure a condemnation regardless of procedure or witnesses. If this line of thought is correct, then it follows that confession of faith in any person as being "the Christ, the Son of God" was a criminal offence worthy of death. The crucifixion of the Lord for making this claim was therefore creating a legal precedent for the death by crucifixion of anyone else who believed there was such a person alive within the Roman empire. And the Gospels are studded with examples of confession of faith in "the Christ, the Son of God" (16:16; Lk. 4:41; Jn. 6:69; 11:27). The whole intention of the Gospel records was to bring people to make that same profession of faith in "the Christ, the Son of God" (Mk. 1:1; Jn. 20:31). Those parchments and the rehearsing of them would therefore have been forbidden material. In our age it may appear painless to confess faith in "the Christ, the Son of God", but it is no less radical in the separation it requires from the spirit of the societies in which we live.

26:64 *Jesus said to him: You have said it; nevertheless I say to you, from this time forward*- "You have said" shows how again, the Lord sought to elicit confessions from men in their own words.

You shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven- The allusion is clearly to Daniel's vision of the Son of Man coming in glory to judge the Gentile world. And the Lord is saying that those hyper religious Jews were effectively condemned Gentiles before God. But those men to whom He spoke died in their beds. Lifespans were short in first century Palestine, most males were dead by 40. Most of them wouldn't even have lived to experience the calamity of AD67-70. They will only therefore "see the Son of Man sitting..." at His return, when they are resurrected and see Him in His glory. And this will be of itself their condemnation- to see Him there enthroned in glory, and themselves not in His Kingdom. This was exactly His teaching to them in Mt. 23:39: "You shall not see Me from this time forward, until you shall say: Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord". They will then bless Him- but all too tragically late.

At His trial, the Lord warned them that He would come again as judge (Mt. 26:64,65), as if He realized that they were living out a foretaste of the final judgment. The thief likewise understood the Lord's presence as being the presence of the judge who would finally judge him (Lk. 23:44). Harry Whittaker points out that the cross

divided men: there were women who followed and mourned insincerely, and the women who really followed. There were soldiers who gambled over the Lord's clothes, and one who really repented. There was a thief who repented and one who wouldn't. There were those who mocked and others who watched and believed.

26:65 *Then the high priest tore his garments, saying*- Declaring the end of his priesthood, to be replaced by the Lord Jesus. The Lord was crucified for blasphemy; this was the charge on which He was found guilty at His trial by the Jews, and the basis upon which they demanded His crucifixion. The Mishnah claims that this was only possible if someone actually used the Yahweh Name. *Sanhedrin* 7.5 outlines the protocol for condemning someone for this, in terms which have accurate correspondence with the Lord's trial: "The blasphemer is not guilty until he have expressly uttered the Name... When the trial is over... the judges stand up and rend their clothes" (Quoted in F.F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame (*Grand Rapids: Eerdmans*,* 1995 ed.), p. 53). So when the Lord responded to their question as to His Messiahship by saying "I am", and went on to appropriate the Messianic words of Dan. 7:13 and Ps. 110:1 to Himself, He must have explicitly used the Yahweh Name about Himself. This is why they were so quick to accuse Him of blasphemy, and why the High Priest rent his clothes. The Lord died because He declared the Yahweh Name, unashamedly, knowing that His declaration of it would take Him to the cross. Our declaration of the essence of Yahweh, by truthfulness, forgiveness... this may cost us, although maybe not so dearly. Yet we can be inspired by the Lord's example.

He has spoken blasphemy. What further need have we of witnesses? You have now heard the blasphemy- Again, legal procedure, which they had tried so carefully to follow, was made a mockery of. They began with a conviction of plotting to destroy the temple buildings, then turned that into an accusation that He was a "Christ, the Son of God", a rival to Caesar; and now they jump on the charge of blasphemy, for which they gave Him the death penalty. And yet the Jews had no legal power to execute people; they had to present their case to the Roman authorities. And blasphemy was not a capital offence under Roman law. Their careful attempts to follow legal integrity broke down in pathetic collapse, and thereby they condemned themselves. The same word, *blasphemeo*, is then used of how the Jews "reviled" or blasphemed the Lord as He hung on the cross (27:39; Lk. 22:65). They had earlier accused the Lord of blasphemy at least twice during His ministry (Mt. 9:3; Jn. 10:36 s.w.). So they should have thought of that earlier in the trial, seeing they themselves were the witnesses of that supposed crime. We are left with the impression of a judge and jury increasingly desperate to find the Lord guilty, progressively throwing their integrity and legalism to the winds in their obsession to make Him guilty of death. Little wonder that Pilate later remonstrated with them that Jesus was simply not legally guilty of any capital offence. But the more he made that point to them, the more they screamed for His death.

26:66 *What is your judgement? They answered and said*- No note is made of Joseph or Nicodemus speaking out against it. The mob ruled, despite all the appearances of jurisprudence, spiritual and legal integrity. And yet the record speaks so positively of those two men. Perhaps this is because the Gospel records were encouraging those who had offered a pinch of incense to Caesar, or in some other way been silent in the Roman world when they should have stood up and been counted, that God's grace was still with them- even though ultimately, providence tends to overrule circumstances so that we do have to stand up openly.

He is worthy of death- The Lord had earlier taught that whoever calls their brother

'Raca', worthless, would be "guilty" [s.w.] before "the Council", the Sanhedrin (5:21,22). He had in mind that the Sanhedrin of the Jews was not the ultimate court of judgment for God's people, but rather the Heavenly council of Angels, presided over by God Almighty. The Lord must surely have been aware of this as the men of that human Sanhedrin condemned and abused Him. Human committees, courts or even groups of friends and family members are not the ultimate Sanhedrin; judge us as they may, the ultimate court is in Heaven. The same word for "guilty" is found in 1 Cor. 11:27, where Paul urges us to self-examination at the Lord's table lest we be guilty of His body and blood. The allusion shows that we as baptized believers can be no better than those evil men- unless we perceive Him and His death for what they really are.

26:67- see on :39.

Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists- This was done by men who just minutes beforehand had been carefully upholding some isolated principles of Divine law and general legal integrity. Their appearance of culture vanished. They only could have been so crude and cruel if they first justified it in terms of their religion; spitting and beating would have been justified by them as the punishment due to a heretic. But here we see how they were justifying their own natural anger and jealousy by taking a tiny shard of Biblical precedent- for only in Dt. 25:2 do we have any justification for legal beating, and once it was finished, then there was to be no other punishment. The beating was to be on his back and not on his face; and there was no talk of spitting. But the Jews took that and used it to justify spitting in the Lord's *face*, beating Him with their fists and then further condemning Him to death. The only command to spit in the face of a man was if he refused to raise up children for his dead relative (Dt. 25:9); but this was totally irrelevant to the Lord Jesus. He in any case was the ultimate example of a man who did build up His Father's house. There is anger in each of us, and religious people at times give full vent to that anger by justifying it as righteous anger, grabbing hold of the vague implication of some Bible verse and taking it way beyond the obvious meaning of the verse. In doing so, they are behaving no better than these the very worst of men who have ever lived, committing the worst ever crime ever committed in the cosmos. The face of Jesus shone at times with God's glory; He was the face of God to men. And they spat in that face, and beat it. The wonder was that the Lord had specifically foreseen this- He had predicted that they would spit at Him (Mk. 10:34). He foresaw how they would fuel their anger against Him with their persuasion that He was a heretic.

And some slapped Him with the palms of their hands- A Semitic insult to a heretic. Again, their anger was fuelled by and excused by their religious convictions. This slapping (whilst He was blindfolded, Lk. 22:64) was connected to their question: "Prophesy to us, you Christ! Who is he that struck you?" (:68). Clearly they were seeking to test His claim to be the Christ. They thought that the Christ could demonstrate supernatural knowledge; and He had already demonstrated that multiple times. They clearly had in mind a section from the uninspired Psalms of Solomon, where false Messiahs were to be tested in this way. The warning to us is to never allow fragments of Scripture or our religious tradition or beloved writings to justify us in expressing our anger in this way.

26:68 *Saying: Prophesy to us, you Christ! Who is he that struck you?*- They had blindfolded Him, and were challenging Him to exercise the prophetic gift of discernment by saying the name of the soldier who had struck Him. We note that 'prophesy' is not to be understood solely as the prediction of future events. The fact is, the Lord did know who had struck Him. They were clearly alluding to the fact that the

Jews had concluded the Lord was a false prophet and false Christ and were punishing Him as such.

26:69

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Accusation 1	Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a maid came to him, saying: You also were with Jesus the Galilean.	And as Peter was downstairs in the courtyard, there came one of the maids of the high priest. And seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said: You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus!	And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat among them. And a certain maid seeing him as he sat in the light of the fire and looking earnestly upon him, said: This man also was with him.	Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest; and he entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest. But Peter was standing outside the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the maid who kept watch at the door. The maid keeping

				watch at the door said to Peter: Are you also one of this man's disciples?
Denial 1	But he denied before them all, saying: I do not know what you say.	But he denied it, saying: I neither know, nor understand what you say; and he went out into the porch; and the cock crew.	But he denied it, saying: Woman, I do not know him.	He said: I am not!
Accusation 2	And when he went out to the entrance, another maid saw him and said to the bystanders: This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.	And the maid saw him and began again to say to them that stood by: This is one of them!	And after a little while another person saw him and said: You also are one of them.	Now the servants and the officers were standing there, having made a fire of coals. For it was cold, and they were warming themselves; and Peter also was with them, standing and

				warming himself... Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said to him: Are you also one of his disciples?
Denial 2	And again he denied with an oath: I do not know the man.	But he again denied it.	But Peter said: Man, I am not.	He denied and said: I am not!
Accusation 3	And after a little while they that stood by came and said to Peter: Of a truth you also are one of them, for your dialect makes you known.	And after a little while, again they that stood by said to Peter: Of a truth you are one of them; for you are a Galilean.	And after the space of about one hour another confidently affirmed, saying: Of a truth, this man also was with him. For he is a Galilean.	One of the servants of the high priest, being a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said: Did I not see you in the garden with him?
Denial 3	Then he began to curse and to swear: I do not know the man! And	But he began to curse and to swear under oath: I do not know	But Peter said: Man, I do not know what you say. And immediat	Peter denied again; and immediately the cock crew.

	immediately the cock crowed.	this man of whom you speak. And immediately the second time the cock crew	ely, as he spoke, the cock crew.	
Peter's response 1	And Peter remembered the words which Jesus had said: Before the cock crows, you shall deny me three times.	And Peter remembered what Jesus had said to him: Before the cock crows twice, you shall deny me three times.	And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord that he had said to him: Before the cock crow this day, you shall deny me three times.	
Peter goes out	And he went out and wept bitterly.	And as he thought upon it, he wept.	And he went out and wept bitterly.	

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard- But likely within earshot. "Outside" translates *exo*, and the idea of being 'outside' from the Lord Jesus, especially in the context of Him being in a court, is exactly the picture of the rejected- Jesus at the day of judgment, with the rejected 'outside', away from Him. The term is used of the rejected being "cast out" (5:13), the rejected 'standing without' seeking entrance with the door closed (Lk. 13:25), the Jews "thrust out" of the Kingdom (Lk. 13:28), saltless salt 'cast without' (Lk. 14:35), the rejected 'cast out' (Jn. 6:37; 15:6). The word is used again to describe how Peter finally "went out[side]" into the final darkness (:75). He was living out the very picture of condemnation. We too can sin and be condemned in this life, yet

the verdict can be changed. And that explains the intensity of zeal and desire in responding to such grace with all our hearts. If we do not perceive our condemnation nor the gracious change of verdict, there can be no real flame of zeal in response, no true humility, no deep seated motivation to service, forgiveness and grace to others.

And a maid- Gk. 'a servant girl', "one of the servant girls of the High Priest" (Mk. 14:66). Her claim that "You also were with Jesus" may specifically refer to Peter's presence with Jesus in Gethsemane, for "the servants" of the High Priest had been there. Perhaps she was one of them. She describes Peter as being *meta* Jesus ["you were with Jesus"], and the same phrase *meta* Jesus is used to described the disciples being *meta*Jesus in Gethsemane (:36,51). Or since the Lord was a public figure in Jerusalem, it would be likely that Peter was known as one of those ever to be seen hanging around Him. Jn. 18:17 gives further information about her: "The maid keeping watch at the door said to Peter: Are you also one of this man's disciples? He said: I am not!". The only other time we read of a servant girl who was a door keeper is in Acts 12:16, where the servant girl [s.w.] called Rhoda was the door keeper at the home of the disciples in Jerusalem, and is thrilled when she realizes that it is Peter knocking at the door asking her to let him in. Note that "door keeper" is likely a technical term, a kind of profession. This heightens the similarity between the two characters. The similarities with the scene in Jn. 18:17 are too strong to be passed off as unintentional; for here Peter has to have the door to the courtyard opened by the servant girl, and it is at the gate that she recognizes him. Peter's failure, his denials, were the basis of his successful appeals for Israel to follow his pattern of repentance. Thousands heard him make those appeals in Jerusalem, for if a few thousand were baptized in one day, we can be sure that many others heard the message and didn't act upon it. It's highly likely that that servant girl was in the crowd, and was one who responded. I suggest that Rhoda was that servant girl, converted by Peter's failure, repentance and experience of forgiveness. She converted from serving the Jewish High Priest to serving the Heavenly High Priest, the Lord Jesus; from being one of the crowd who went out to arrest Jesus, to being one who glorified His resurrection.

Came to him- Jn. 18:17 says that the girl was keeping the door and let Peter through. As the door keeper she would have looked carefully at his face in the light of a torch. And then she came to him as he was sitting by the fire (Lk.), say some minutes later, as she realized who he was. This again has the ring of congruence about it, indicating how perfectly the records dovetail.

Saying: You also were with Jesus the Galilean- Another passing evidence of the Lord's utter humanity; He spoke like a Galilean and was clearly a man brought up there, and not a pre-existent Divine being that came to earth.

26:70 *But he denied before them all, saying*- Again, Peter was living out the scene of condemnation at the last day, where the verdict likewise will be manifest "before all". The Lord had used the same word in saying that whoever denied Him "before men" [cp. "before all"], He will deny before the Father at the last day (Mt. 10:33). Peter appealed for Israel to repent on the basis that they had "denied" Christ (Acts 3:13,14 s.w.)- he is appealing for them to realize that they had done what he had done, and yet they could repent, convert and experience the same grace he had done. His appeal, made a stone's throw from where the denials were made and only 6 weeks later, was therefore so powerful. Peter likewise used his failure in his pastoral work with his converts,

warning them that to even deny the Lord who redeemed us is the worst possible thing we can do (2 Pet. 2:1). Likewise 1 Jn. 2:22,23 speaks of denying Christ as being the characteristic of the AntiChrist. And John wrote in the context of the early church having Peter as its first leader, and John of course was fully aware of Peter's failure that night.

Peter in this life denied his Lord *in front of men* (Mt. 26:70)- and the record of his failure intentionally looks back to the Lord's warning that whoever denies Him *before men* will be denied by Him at judgment day (Mt. 10:33). He sinned, and in the court of Heaven was condemned. There is a passage in Proverbs 24:11,12 which has a strange relevance to Peter's self-condemnation. Having spoken of those being led away to death (the very context of Peter's denial), we read: "If thou sayest, Behold we know not this man: doth not he that weigheth the hearts consider it? And shall not he render to every man according to his works?". This last phrase is quoted in Rev. 22:12 about the final judgment. Paul seems to consciously link Peter's church hypocrisy and legalism with his earlier denials that he had ever known the Lord Jesus. He writes of how he had to reveal Peter's denial of the Lord's grace "before them all" (Gal. 2:14), using the very same Greek phrase of Mt. 26:70, where "before them all" Peter made the same essential denial.

I do not know what you say- Again, Peter was acting as the condemned, to whom the Lord will say "I know you not" (Mt. 25:12; Lk. 13:25). The whole idea of 'I don't know Him' must, sadly, be connected with the Lord's words in Mt. 7:23 and 25:41, where He tells the rejected: "I never knew you". By denying knowledge of the Saviour, Peter was effectively agreeing that the verdict of condemnation could appropriately be passed upon him. In one of his many allusions to the Gospels, Paul wrote that "If we deny him, he also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2:12). Peter in this life denied his Lord *in front of men* (Mt. 26:70)- and the record of his failure intentionally looks back to the Lord's warning that whoever denies Him *before men* will be denied by Him at judgment day (Mt. 10:33). He sinned, and in the court of Heaven was condemned; and yet he could change the verdict by repentance.

26:71 *And when he went out to the entrance, another maid saw him*- John says that a group of men made the second accusation; see the parallel texts at the commentary on :69. Luke says that Peter replied to the second accusation [which Matthew says was made by a *woman*] by saying "*Man*, I am not". Clearly the accusations and denials were in groups- the second 'denial' involved a number of people [a man, a woman and plural men] making accusations and Peter denying them all. If we put together the various records of Peter's three denials, it seems clear that a number of accusations were made, and he replied slightly differently each time. But there were three groups of accusations and denials. We can imagine the scene- there was a whole group of men and women present, all within earshot, and once one person made the accusation, others would've chimed in. But the account is stylized to group the denials in three groups, and Peter obviously perceived this after his final oath of denial. But in fact it seems that each denial was a series of separate denials. Indeed the tense of the verb "denied" in :70 suggests he kept on and on denying.

And said to the bystanders: This man was with Jesus of Nazareth- Peter overheard her talking to the men about him, and jumped in with a denial (:72). This is absolutely psychologically credible. By "with Jesus" she meant, 'There in the Garden', for *meta* Jesus is how the disciples are described there. See on :69 *A maid*.

26:72 *And again he denied with an oath*- Not an expletive, but rather a Jewish oath. Many of them wished condemnation on the person making the oath if it were not true.

Again, Peter is entering into condemnation, signing himself up for condemnation. James wrote to the very early church, probably to the Jerusalem ecclesia, who were clearly led by Peter. He urged them "Above all things, my brethren, swear not… neither by any other oath" (James 5:12). He was clearly saying, in effect: 'Don't be like Peter'. The weakness of Peter, and the way he had repented and been forgiven, was the basis of his success as a preacher and also of his special commission to feed the lambs of the early flock. He did not present himself as the flawless pastor, and neither did his fellow elders like James present him as such. But as with his Lord, it was his humanity which was the basis of his exaltation.

I do not know- See on :70 *I know not.*

The man- As if he didn't even know Jesus' name. He protested too much, for Jesus was a well known public figure in Jerusalem at the time (Lk. 24:18,19).

26:73 *And after a little while*- Luke says it was after an hour.

They that stood by came and said to Peter- Luke says it was one individual who made the third accusation, and John says it was specifically a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off. The three episodes of accusation and denial were therefore each comprised of a series of accusations and a series of denials. See on :71 *Another maid*. This means that the Lord was being generous in saying that Peter would deny Him three times before the cock crowed. Each episode of denial contained many separate denials.

Of a truth you also are one of them, for your dialect makes you known- This implies that the band of disciples were perceived as a group of Galileans. Matthew has earlier recorded the first accusation as being that "You also were with Jesus the Galilean". Mark is explicit that they now said: "You are a Galilean". And Luke records the statement of their simplistic logic: "Of a truth, this man also was with him. For he is a Galilean". The fact Jesus was a Galilean and Peter was clearly a Galilean didn't, surely, have to mean that therefore Peter had to have been with Jesus as one of His disciples. But their reasoning shows to what extent they perceived Jesus and His followers to be all from Galilee. Remember that Galilee was despised as the most backward and least spiritually 'Jewish' of all of Palestine; their accent was noted and perceived as harsh and crude, full of grammatical mistakes. But it was from the larynx of a Galilean Jew that there came the words of God Almighty, clothed as they were in the country accent and provincial style which was so despised. Christianity began as a peasant religion, a group of men perceived as simpletons. And it is in such communities or those perceived as such that the true spirit of Christ has often prospered most. Christianity has become a culture, and often the culture of the Western wealthy. But that is not at all how it began, and 'Christianity as culture', merely following the faith of our fathers, churchianity, is not the real, raw Christianity of Jesus and His Galileans.

26:74 *Then he began*- The implication could be that he began to call down the curses of eternal condemnation and rejection at judgment day upon himself, but the crowing of the rooster made him stop.

To curse- Not with expletives, but a declaration of himself as anathema to God and Messiah if he was on the side of Jesus. The Greek *kata-anathematizo* means just that; to declare oneself anathema, to exclude oneself from the body of God's people.

And to swear- Peter was in total disobedience to the Lord's teaching: "Swear not at all" (5:34,36 s.w.). See on 26:72 *With an oath*.

I do not know the man! And immediately the cock crowed- See on :70 *I know not.*

26:75 *And Peter remembered*- The letters of Peter urge his readers to "be mindful of the words which were spoken before" (2 Pet. 3:2). Yet this is evidently alluding to the frequent references to the disciples being slow to "remember" [s.w. "mindful"] the words which their Lord had "spoken before" (Lk. 24:6,8; Jn. 2:17,22; 12:16). Indeed,

the same word is used about Peter 'remembering' [s.w. "be mindful"] all too late, the words which his Lord had "spoken before" to him (Mt. 26:75). So Peter was aware that his readers knew that he had not 'remembered' the words his Lord had "spoken before" to *him*- and yet, knowing that, he exhorts his readers to 'remember' or 'be mindful' [s.w.] of words which had been previously spoken. His readers likely had memorized the Gospels by heart. And yet Peter asks them to learn from his mistake, not to be as slow to remember as the disciples had been, and he especially. This is the basis of powerful exhortation- a repentant life, not an appearance of sinlessness.

Mk. 14:72 adds that Peter "thought thereon", using the Greek word usually translated 'to lay hands upon'. We can hear the Lord's word but not really engage with it. This in fact is likely the status of so much of God's word which we have read, heard and stashed away in our memory cells. We heard it, we are reminded of it as Peter was by the first cock crow after the first denial episode, but we fail to lay hands on it, to bring it to mind ['remember' it], to engage with it until it is paramount in our consciousness.

The words which Jesus had said: Before the cock crows- The problem is that Mark says that the cock crowed after the first denial; and it is Mark who says that the Lord's warning was that "Before the cock crows *twice*, you shall deny Me three times". Matthew and the others seem to speak of only one cock crow. There are various solutions. One is that we give full weight to the fact we are dealing with three episodes or groups of denials- see on :71 *Another maid*. If the first 'denial' involved three separate denials, then this fulfilled the prediction that there would be three denials before the cock crew. And the third episode of denials occurred before the second cock crow, this fulfilling the Lord's word as recorded by Mark "Before the cock crows *twice*, you shall deny Me three times". Another is to go with the NIV footnotes on Mk. 14:30,72, which claim that earliest manuscripts omit the word "twice" and "second time". Another textual approach is to reflect that the record of the cock crowing after the first denial (Mk. 14:68) is omitted by most later translations after the AV. The text also could be suspect at that point. But I am distinctly uneasy at resolving apparent difficulties by claiming that verses are spurious and uninspired. Issues of translation, however, are of another order. I submit that Mk. 14:72 is capable of another translation. Most versions have to the effect that "Before the cock crows twice, you shall deny Me three times". But it could equally be translated 'You shall deny Me three times for each two crows of the cock'. This would make a total of six denials. I believe I established beyond doubt in commenting on :71 *Another maid* that there were multiple denials by Peter. I suggest therefore that there were three denials from Peter during the first denial episode, before the first crowing of the cock; then another one or two denials during the second denial episode, and then another one or two during the third denial episode- and then the cock crew a second time. Another possible reconstruction was offered by Michael Cortright:

First denial:
A girl at the door to the courtyard (John 18:17).
Second denial:
A servant girl, by the fire in the courtyard (Matthew 26:69, Mark 14:66, Luke 22:56).
Third denial:
A man by the fire in the courtyard (Luke 22:58).
First crow.
Mark 14:68 (King James Version).
Fourth denial:
Another girl, at the gateway (Matthew 26:71) or entryway (Mark 14:68,69).

Fifth denial:
Some anonymous (standing) people by the fire in the courtyard (Matthew 26:73, Mark 14:70, John 18:25).
Sixth denial:
Another man who happens to be a male servant of the high priest (Luke 22:59, John 18:26).
Second crow.
Matthew 26:74, Mark 14:72, Luke 22:60, John 18:27.

You shall deny me three times- Pliny records how Christians were asked to make a threefold denial of Christ (*Epistles* 10.97). It has been suggested that the account of Peter's threefold denials of Christ has been included in the Gospel records as an encouragement to those whose faith failed them that still there was a way back to restoration with the Lord Jesus, just as there had been for Peter. When Peter encourages his persecuted brethren to resist the "roaring lion" of Roman / Jewish persecution (1 Pet. 5:8), he is therefore to be seen as writing against a background in which he had actually failed the very test which his brethren were facing. Yet he can therefore even more powerfully encouraged them, because he had also experienced the Lord's restoring grace.

And he went out and wept bitterly- There are connections between Peter's position at this time and that of the rejected before the judgment seat. His bitter weeping connects most obviously with the weeping and gnashing of teeth of the rejected. He was 'remaining outside' of the Palace where the Lord was (Mt. 26:29 AV "sat without"). Yet the Greek *exo* translated "without" or "outside" is elsewhere used about the rejected being "cast out" (Mt. 5:13; 13:48), 'standing without' with the door shut (Lk. 13:25,28), like a fruitless branch cast out into the fire (Jn. 15:6). When we read that Peter "went out" from the Lord's presence (Mt. 26:75), the same Greek word is used. The oaths which Peter used would probably have included 'Before God!'. He was anticipating the judgment seat: before God he admitted he did not know His Son. But in this life we can be condemned- and yet be reprieved through repentance. But remember that Judas likewise "went out" into the darkness. Judas is described as "standing with" those who ultimately crucified Jesus in Jn 18:5. Interestingly the same idea occurs in Jn. 18:18 where Peter is described as standing with essentially the same group; point being, that Judas and Peter in essence did the same thing, they both denied their Lord and stood with His enemies. But one repented real repentance, whereas the other couldn't muster the faith for this. Lesson: We all deny the Lord, but the two paths before us are those of either Peter or Judas. Peter of course is our pattern. Perhaps Peter was encouraged towards repentance by recalling that just hours before, the Lord had predicted that the disciples would weep [s.w.], but their sorrow would be turned to joy (Jn. 16:20), in harmony with the Lord's earlier teaching of blessedness for those who weep now. His weeping was intense, and he must've wondered how ever such weeping could be turned to joy. The only answer was that Jesus would have to die for Peter's sin, be resurrected, forgive Peter and restore fellowship with him, even using him again in His service. It was upon this, then, that Peter desperately set his hope and faith- and it was rewarded.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 27

27:1 *Now when morning had arrived*- Trying a man through the night was hardly transparent or in accordance with the most basic standards of integrity. And yet on some issues, at this very same time, those men sought to carefully uphold their integrity and

obedience to Divine principles. In this we see the tragic, cruel dualism of the human mind- and we understand again the call of God's word to give ourselves to Him with our *whole* heart.

All the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death- We sense their nervousness and conscious desire to try to spread the responsibility for their decision as wide as possible. We can imagine the learned, pseudo-spiritual shaking of heads amongst those men, arguing that they had, sadly, no option but... struggling, somewhere, with their own consciences, and desperately seeking support from others.

27:2 *And they bound him and led him away*- Israelites binding a man and delivering him over to Gentiles sounds very much like what Israel did to Samson. The Lord must've reflected how easily He likewise could have burst those bands and destroyed them all. The similarity with Samson is surely to remind us that He had those possibilities, but He was consciously choosing to give His life. The great paradox was that by accepting those bonds, He was thereby binding the strong man of sin and sin as manifested in the Jewish system (12:29). For "Led Him away" see on 26:57 *Led Him away.*

And delivered him up to Pilate the governor- The Lord knew that He was the Messianic "Governor" (2:6 s.w.), just as He was in fact the judge rather than the accused. He had only the previous evening pointed out that He was "the chief", the same word used for "Governor", but chose to be the servant (Lk. 22:26). The whole scenario was a total inversion of what was actually the case.

27:3 *Then Judas, who betrayed him*- "Betrayed" is the same Greek word as translated "delivered" in :2. Judas handed Him over to the Jews, and the Jews handed Him over to the Romans. We see here a reflection of the unity between Judas and the Jewish system, which is why both of these entities are called 'satan' or 'the devil'. Satan entered into Judas in the sense that he was taken over by the spirit of Judaism, the world system around him, just as we can be. The Lord foresaw all this; He realized that He must die by crucifixion, and therefore since the Jews didn't have the power to do it, He knew they would have to hand Him over to the Romans. There were elements of His sufferings which were clearly revealed to Him by the Father, but many of His predictions are also explicable in terms of His sensitivity and intense perception of the nature of human behaviour.

When he saw that he was condemned- Perhaps the emphasis should be upon the "he". I speculated earlier that part of the deal with Judas was that he was to be the key witness for the prosecution at the Sanhedrin trial. He surely would have been present, and seen Jesus condemned. But he perceived that actually Jesus was the judge, and it was he that was condemned by the Lord's condemnation at the hands of men. He was in the same position as Peter, who also at that same time realized that he was condemned, weeping the bitter tears of the rejected. But Judas simply didn't trust the Lord's grace.

Changed his mind- Literally, 'to care again / afterwards'. A different word is used for repentance in a moral sense. This word suggests that Judas was selfish to the last, and realized the best way to care for himself was to commit suicide. Faced with our sin, we have the option of responding either as Peter, in sincerity and vowing our loyalty again to our Lord, or as Judas did- caring for ourselves, trying to make the most of a bad situation, taking what we perceive to be the lesser of various evils which now face us. This latter option does of course involve an element of re-thinking, but that is not of itself repentance in the Biblical sense. As with all facets of spirituality, there is the true

repentance and the false one, just as there is true peace and false peace, sincere love and feigned love, faith unfeigned and faith which is merely hoping for the best, prayer from the heart and prayer as a form of words. The Jews left in the land just after the Babylonian invasion had a sense of guilt, a knowledge that they were sinners and were suffering for their sin; but they had to be exhorted to truly *repent*: "This is what you are saying: 'Our offences and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?'. Say to them... I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (Ez. 33:10,11 NIV). Like so many a prisoner, so many a Christian, like Judas and Achan, like you and me, they had the sense of desire to come back to God, the detailed realization of wherein they had failed; but not enough real strength of purpose to seriously repent.

And brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders- The same word ["brought back"] used for how the Lord bade Peter put again his sword into the sheath (26:52). Again the similarity between the positions of the two men is being developed. The concern of Judas for the money surely reflects how financial motives had played a large part in his decision to betray the Lord. "What will you give me, and I will betray Him unto you?" makes clear that he was obsessed with money. The record here emphasizes his attitude to the money- he brought it again to the Jews and then cast it down on the floor. Clearly he felt that the money had been a large part in his motivation. And again we should be aghast at what men will do for money, how strong is our love of it, our desire for it... and this led Judas to commit the greatest sin ever committed in the cosmos.

27:4 *Saying*- As if he was speaking, admitting that "I have sinned", whilst holding the silver pieces in his hand. Again the impression is given that quite simply he did what he did from the love of money.

I have sinned- The very words of the repentant prodigal son, Job, Micah and David (Lk. 15:18,21; 2 Sam. 12:13; 24:10; Job 7:20; Mic. 7:9). But instead of going back to the Father, Judas went and killed himself. Again we see that recognition of sin and regret for it are one thing, but this is not at all the same as repentance and conversion. Peter, who was in the same position as Judas, truly repented and converted. Instead of going to his own death, Peter went to the cross to see the death of God's Son, and perceived in that the possibility of his own forgiveness. "I have sinned" were likewise the words of Pharaoh (Ex. 9:27; 10:16), Balaam (Num. 22:34), Achan (Josh. 7:20) and several times of Saul (1 Sam. 15:24,30; 26:21). But although these men all said the same words as the prodigal son, Job, Micah and David- they all perished in condemnation. Recognition of sin, therefore, is not the same as true repentance. To admit that we are, of course, sinners… is not the same as repentance and conversion. And so it was with Judas.

In that I have betrayed innocent blood- Judas at his final end recognized that Jesus was sinless; and he refers to Jesus not by His name, but as "the innocent blood". He had a good theoretical grasp of the principles of the atonement and the nature of Jesus. But that didn't help him. He recognized the ultimate innocence of Jesus. Correct knowledge concerning Jesus and recognition of personal sin is not enough to save us. There has to be the faith in grace which Peter had, and because Judas lacked this, he remained condemned. This highlights the fact that appreciation of grace is not just a cosmetic issue, but is fundamental to the Gospel and our personal salvation. The Greek word for "innocent" means literally 'not guilty'; Judas recognized that the Lord's trial at the

hands of the Jews had been nothing but farcical, and the innocent had been condemned as guilty.

But they said: What is that to us? See to it yourself- Maybe their idea was that Judas had given his testimony in court and it could not now be retracted. Again we note their strict legalism on one hand, whilst behaving in the most unconscionable way on the other.

27:5 *And he threw the pieces of silver into*- The Greek *rhipto* literally means to disperse and is used in classical Greek for depositing money; it may be a technical term for a donation to the poor, or some sort of charitable donation. Perhaps this was his final repentance for stealing what had been intended as donations for the poor. This would explain why he didn't give the money back to the priests and elders, but rather took it to the temple and cast it / dispersed / donated it there; hence they decided that it could not remain in "the treasury" (:6). He now gave it back, even though he had no personal hope of salvation because he didn't trust the Lord's grace.

The temple- Judas presumably had been at the High Priest's palace for the trial, and it was a fair walk from there to the temple. His visit to the priests and elders may have been at the High Priest's palace, not at the temple. So he went to the temple purposefully, to throw his money down in the temple, perhaps throwing it into the 'trumpets' into which people poured their money, and where the Lord had commented upon the widow throwing in her two last pennies. It would seem, therefore, that he did repent of his materialism, in the sense that he realized he had done wrong and wished to give those thirty pieces of silver at least to God's house and work. And yet he did not ultimately repent. See on :4 *I have sinned.* It is one thing to recognize our sin of materialism and to even give the wealth to the Lord's cause, but true repentance is another matter. It is a state of heart, and is modelled in Peter as opposed to Judas. It seems Judas did externally what was appropriate for someone who 'repented'; he returned the money to God, but this is still not enough. All that 'putting things right' was rather irrelevant compared to the need for faith in the Lord's grace and forgiveness.

And departed, and he went away and hanged himself- Adam attempted to hide from God's presence, the Hebrew implying 'to drawn oneself back'. Judas went away (Gk. he retired away), from the house of God, the temple, to try to hang himself, once he knew his condemnation (Mt. 27:5). He went to the Potter's field (Acts 1:18), which was in the Valley of Hinnom. He went to Gehenna, the place of condemnation, of his own accord. His own legs carried him there. Ps. 112:10 has echoes of the scenario: "The wicked shall see it (the Kingdom) and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth (judgment day language), and melt away". In similar vein the apostle speaks of the rejected as those who even now "*draw back* unto perdition" (Heb. 10:39). The implication is that by our attitude now, we effectively judge ourselves; if we draw back from Christ in this life, we will slink away from him in the day of judgment. The types of judgment also stress this slinking away. As there will be a slinking away at the final judgment, so there was at the cross, which was "the judgment of this world". Early on in the crucifixion, the people hurled confident insults at Him. But we get the impression that this died out over the hours; until "*all* the people that came together to that sight... smote their breasts, and returned" (Lk. 23:48). They slipped away, one by one, as those who brought the adulterous woman to the Lord (this was another type of the judgment; they slipped away from Him, self-condemned- (Jn. 8:9). All this was a foretaste of how there will be an ashamed slinking away from the judgment seat by the rejected, being "ashamed from before him at His coming", the Greek suggesting the idea of slinking away in shame (1 Jn. 2:28 Gk.). The wicked will melt away from the Lord's presence (Ps. 68:2). Rejected Israel are described as being "ashamed away" (Joel 1:12)- the same

idea. This is the idea behind Heb. 12:15 RVmg: "…man that falls back from the grace of God". What they did in this life in slinking away from the reality of pure grace will be what is worked out in their condemnation experience. There seems a certain similarity between this and how the combined Gospel records imply that men initially mocked Jesus on the cross, and then eventually slipped away in silence (Heb. 6:6).

27:6 *And the chief priests took the pieces of silver and said*- See on :5 *Cast down.* I suggested there that Judas actually put the silver pieces into the trumpet-like collection bowls, and thereby into the temple treasury. But the priests literally had to fish them out of there because of their legalistic obsession with not having blood money in the temple treasury. Even though they had likely taken that money out of the treasury themselves in the first place. Their self-contradictory legalism is a great theme of the record here.

It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is the price of blood- "Put" here translates *ballo*, to throw. Although it is a different word to that used about Judas 'casting' the silver pieces in the temple [I suggested, into the collection containers], the idea is similar. They were now trying to find fault with Judas- and were claiming that he had acted incorrectly by 'casting' blood money into the temple treasury. Their idea that it was not lawful was based around their extension of the commandment of Dt. 25:18 "You must not bring the hire of a prostitute or of a male prostitute into the house of Yahweh your God". But there was not actually any direct Divine law which forbad those pieces of silver going into the temple treasury. Their extension of the *implication* of a Divine law had become, in their minds, itself a law which they had to obey. This is the problem with legalistic attitudes- more laws are spawned. Their concerns about what was lawful and "not lawful" run throughout the Gospel records (12:2,10; 19:3; 22:17 etc.). The Law of Moses was intended for the time and place it was given, and was part of an ongoing dialogue between God and His people; and the legal code given by Moses in places contradicts itself, or allows various options for obedience or various outcomes for disobedience [e.g. adultery]. It wasn't intended to be used in a casuistic sense, and parts of it were overridden or abrogated even before the Lord Jesus came. If it is used in a casuistic, black and white sense, then like any law, it logically spawns hosts of other requirements. What 'logically follows' becomes the deciding issue, rather than the spirit of loving God and doing what He wishes.

27:7 *And they took counsel*- As in :1. They were eager to spread responsibility for their actions in the entire business of killing the Lord; human beings feel safer beneath the umbrella of a committee, a group. And yet those men, like us, will each have to meet the Lord personally and face the consequence of their actions.

And bought with them the potter's field- Acts 1:18 says that Judas "obtained it with the reward of his iniquity" (RV). And yet the thirty pieces of silver were still in his hand right up to the end of his life. Purchase of property was a slow business in Palestine, and nobody would have been doing business over the Passover feast. Neither is there any time in the narrative for Judas to have bought or obtained the field. And yet Acts 1:18 states that Judas "obtained" the field with the silver pieces, the reward of his iniquity, and killed himself there. I suggest the reconciliation is that the Jews bought the place where Judas had committed suicide *in Judas' name*, even though he was dead. This again would've involved a fair amount of fiddling books and behaviour of low integrity. And yet it was ostensibly done in strict and careful obedience to the idea that money earned by dishonest means should not be brought into the temple; this was based on Dt. 25:18 "You must not bring the hire of a prostitute or of a male prostitute into the house of Yahweh your God". Again and again we see how these men who committed the worst possible sin in the entire universe… were strictly legally obedient to some

Divine laws and the principles arising from them. This is a powerful warning to all of us religious people; we can so easily serve God with only part of our mind, one half of our brain. And the results are disastrous. Nothing less than the entire heart and soul and mind must be given over to Him.

The Potter's field was in the Valley of Hinnom, Gehenna; Judas went to Gehenna to kill himself, the ultimate proof that all who shall finally be condemned will in essence have condemned themselves.

To bury strangers in- Thus through the death of Christ it became possible that Gentiles could have a place within Jerusalem, the city of God.

27:8 *Therefore that field is called to this day, The field of blood*- This was surely not what the Jewish leadership wished it to be called. Time and again we see that their careful plans didn't work out. Likewise they bribed the soldiers guarding the tomb to say that the Lord's body had been stolen- and the news of their bribery became widespread. "Unto this day" suggestis an early date to the Gospels.

27:9 *Then was fulfilled what was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, saying: And they took the thirty pieces of silver*- The quotation is from Zechariah (Zech. 11:12). The standard explanations are that the volume of the prophets in which Zechariah was included began with Jeremiah and was therefore referred to as "Jeremiah"; or that in fact Jeremiah wrote Zechariah 9-11 and this was included in the prophecy now known as Zechariah. For more on this, see on :10 *The potter's field.* Given the very detailed congruence between reality and the Gospel records, it would be unlikely that such an obvious error was made. We who believe in an inspired Bible should rather, in any case, say with humility "I am still searching for more light on this question" rather than assume that here we have an evidence of a fallible Bible. If one part is inaccurate, what about the rest... The context of Zech. 11:12,13 is significant- note the pronouns in the Hebrew text, in that the money was cast to the potter by the same prophet who had been valued at the low price of 30 pieces of silver: "If it seem good to you, give me my wages; but if not, let it alone: and they weighed me as wages thirty silverlings. Then Jehovah said to me, Throw it to the potter, the splendid price at which I am valued by them; and so I took the thirty silverlings, and threw it into the house of Jehovah to the potter". Throwing it to the potter was a response of sarcasm [as was the reference to "the splendid price"], in that this was the price of a dead slave (Ex. 21:32), and far below what a prophet should have been valued at, let alone the Son of God. Just as Judas threw the coins into the temple treasury, so the Jews threw them to the potter. Judas and the Jewish leadership are thereby once again connected, they were part of the same 'satan' system which was the adversary to the Lord. Those learned Jews, steeped as they were in the text of Scripture, surely closed their minds to these words as they so clearly fulfilled them. We too can know Scripture, and yet the flesh has a way of hiving off the part of our minds that is aware of them. And according to the prophecy, it was the undervalued prophet himself who threw the coins to the potter. The action of the Jewish elders was therefore directly controlled by the risen Lord. This connection between the prophet (Jesus) and the Jews is surely reflected by the way in which the Hebrew text speaks of the prophet himself throwing the coins to the potter, whereas that is quoted here in Matthew as if they, the children of Israel, cast them to the potter. See on :10 *As the Lord appointed Me.* If they had thought upon Zechariah 11 with open minds, they would have seen in their own actions the very evidence that He was alive and working through them to their own condemnation. And the context of Zech. 11:12,13 is God's breaking of His covenant with Israel because of their undervaluing of His prophet. This is precisely what happened in that the new covenant was confirmed to the extent that

the old covenant was abrogated.

The price of him on whom a price had been set- The implication is that the Lord's price was 30 pieces of silver. This is strong evidence against the suggestion often made that the 30 pieces were a down-payment made to Judas. That suggestion is perhaps so frequently offered because 30 pieces of silver seems such a low price. But Judas had asked: "What will you give me, and I will betray Him unto you?", and the price agreed was 30 pieces of silver. But we need not be so surprised. Because surely we have all seen people make the most unwise and sinful decisions for the sake of money, even relatively small amounts of it. And the more I reflect upon these records, the more convinced I am that the crime of the cosmos, of all time in eternity, the worst action at any point of infinite time and space, was committed for love of money. And so pathetically little of it. It truly is the root of all evil. And such a pathetically small amount, the compensation price of a dead slave, that could only buy a piece of ground in the despised valley of Hinnom, the Potter's field, muddy and useless for building, from which much of the clay had already been dug out by the potters, surrounded by the smell of burning bodies and garbage that remained constantly in the valley of Hinnom. In these reflections is surely the most powerful warning which there could be against petty materialism. Peter had surely reflected upon all this when he wrote of "the precious blood of Christ... unto you therefore who believe He is precious" (1 Pet. 1:19; 2:7), using the same word translated here as "valued". Indeed, that family of Greek words is used around 12 times by Peter in his letters; the tragedy of how the Lord was not "valued" by Judas and Israel was a tragedy to Peter, and he wanted the church to compensate for it. *We* are to value Him and His blood, far more than Judas and the Jews did.

By some of the sons of Israel- Jesus was “Him… whom they priced on the part of the sons of Israel” (Mt. 27:9 RVmg.). The reference to “the sons of Israel” is surely an allusion to the sons of Jacob selling Joseph for his value.

27:10 *And they gave them for the potter's field*- We cannot miss the fact that the potter is a clear Old Testament symbol for God (Is. 41:25; 64:8; Jer. 18:6; 19:11; Rom. 9:21). And "the field is the world" (Mt. 13:38). The price of the Lord's blood bought the potter's field, God's field, the world, as a resting place for faithful Gentiles who had come on pilgrimage to Jerusalem and died there. We noted on :9 *By Jeremiah* that Zech. 11:12,13 was likely written by Jeremiah. And that now makes sense. Because it was at "the potter's house" that Jeremiah had uttered his prophecies, stating that God was the potter, He was manifest in that potter to whose field Jeremiah had 'gone down' (Jer. 18:2; 'going down' implies it was in a valley, as was the Potter's Field bought by the Jews). The money being cast to the potter therefore suggests that ultimately, all returns to God. No silver pieces are ours for ever, as they were not the Jews' nor Judas's. It was ultimately thrown to the potter in the Potter's Field, the very place where Jeremiah had prophesied and explained that that potter was in fact representative of God.

As the Lord directed me- See on :9 *By Jeremiah*. The throwing of the coins to the potter by "the children of Israel" was in fact done by the undervalued prophet, the Lord Jesus. Their purchase of the field was surely done after Passover had finished- after the Lord's resurrection. And actually He was controlling what they did. If they had compared their actions against Zechariah 11, a passage they knew well, then they would have perceived this.

27:11 *Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him*- This is Matthew’s preferred term for Pilate. Perhaps he doesn’t name Pilate because he wants

to draw out the similarity between how the Lord stood before a governor, and how those in Christ (especially in the last days) will likewise be brought before "governors" (10:18; Mk. 13:19; Lk. 21:12 "You shall be brought before governors"). This is yet another example of how the faithful in the very final days of the tribulation will share in the spirit of Christ's passion; even if they do not literally die, they will be led by the tribulation experience to identify with the spirit of the suffering Christ, so that they can legitimately share in the spirit of His resurrection life.

Are you the King of the Jews?- Out of the various Jewish accusations against the Lord, this was the only one which directly affected the Romans, and was the technical reason for Pilate agreeing to the death penalty; it was this reason which was written over the Lord's head on the cross. The irony of the situation must have rubbed hard upon the Lord; He was dying as the King of a people, not one of whom would openly show loyalty to Him. In any suffering we may have because of feeling utterly alone, betrayed, having lived life to no end, not being shown loyalty by those we expect it of- we are connected with the spirit of the cross.

And Jesus said to him: You say it- Jesus before Pilate said just one word in Greek; translated "You say it". Paul speaks with pride of how the Lord Jesus "before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession" (1 Tim. 6:13). Paul's saying: 'Lord Jesus, your self control, your strength of purpose, was great. I salute you, I hold you up to Timothy as the supreme example'. As He witnessed in His ministry, so must we (Rom. 2:19 cp. Mt. 4:16). As He witnessed before Pilate, so must we witness (1 Tim. 6:12,13).

27:12 *And when he was accused by the chief priests and elders*- The accusations were of course false (as Pilate himself pointed out, Lk. 23:14), making the chief priests and Jewish system the 'devil', the false accuser. In my *The Real Devil* I demonstrated at length that the terms 'satan' and 'devil' often refer specifically to the Jewish system in the first century. The paradox was that it was those very Jews who were standing in the dock before God, accused by the writings of Moses (Jn. 5:45). And yet we must give Jn. 12:42 its due weight- many of the chief rulers believed in Jesus as Christ but were fearful of the Pharisees and exclusion from the synagogue. So it has so often been- fear of religious excommunication leads believers to crucify their Christ brethren. Their behaviour is explained by the repeated descriptions of the Jews 'gathering together' to take their decisions about killing the Lord. In company, men adopt positions far beyond those they personally hold, and even strongly against their own personal convictions. Reading the account of Jewish treatment of Jesus, it seems incredible, at first blush, that some or even "many" of those men "believed in Him". But this is the power of group think and the fear of appearing strange to others, or being rejected by others, especially from their religious fellowship.

He said nothing- Perhaps for the same reason that He remained silent during the Jewish trial (see notes on 26:63). His only answer would be to speak judgment against them, and He wished to delay this until the last possible moment, in order to give them the chance for repentance. So many times in the Gospel records, in Matthew especially, we read that during His ministry the Lord "answered and said...". The same Greek word is used. He had given His answer to their accusations and positions throughout His ministry, and now the time for providing fresh evidence was over. They knew His answers.

27:13 *Then Pilate said to him: Do you not hear how many things*- The implication was 'Are you deaf?'. The Lord was fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies that Messiah would be as deaf before His accusers (Ps. 38:13 "I as a deaf man don't hear"; Is. 42:19

"Who is blind, but My servant? Or who is as deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is as blind as he who is at peace, and as blind as Yahweh's servant?"). The quotation from Psalm 38 is from one of the Psalms David wrote concerning his failure with Bathsheba and subsequent sufferings. Many other of these Psalms, especially Psalms 22 and 69, are full of material relevant to the Lord's sufferings. We observe therefore that through suffering for his sin, David came to know the sufferings of his future Messiah. We marvel at how God works through sin. He doesn't ignore it, nor simply punish men for the sake of needing to punish them. Those sufferings and the very experience of sin are somehow worked through by God in order to bring men to His Son and to His cross. We likewise should not turn away from sinners but rather seek to work with them to bring them to know Christ, knowing that this is indeed God's game plan with them too. The allusion to Is. 42:19 must be understood likewise in the context of that passage. The preceding verse has appealed to the blind and deaf within Judah at that time: "Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind" (Is. 42:18), and then goes on say that sinless Messiah likewise was deaf and blind. We see here a principle that was to be worked out throughout the Lord's passion- He identified with sinners. They were deaf and blind, and He now acted as deaf and blind, He identified with sinners to the point that He felt as a sinner. His silence to the accusations was therefore also capable of being understood as the silence of a guilty man before His accusers. Not that the Lord was guilty, but He identified with sinful man to the extent that He felt that way, and this all came to its final term in His genuine feeling that He had been forsaken even by God (:46). Not that He was, for God only forsakes sinners and never forsakes the righteous (see notes on :46). But He so identified with sinners that the Lord felt as one of us, although He was not a sinner. Yet as the Lord stood before His accusers silent, He knew great peace; so Is. 42:19 assures us: "Who is blind, but My servant? Or who is as deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is as blind as *he who is at peace*, and as blind as Yahweh's servant?".

They testify against you- The Greek is used only four times in the New Testament; twice at this point (in Mk. 15:4 also) and twice in the comment of the High Priest at the Lord's earlier trial (Mt. 26:62; Mk. 14:60). Circumstances repeated. The Lord learnt silence at the first trial, and there was the same reaction from the judge; and now the situation repeated itself, although Pilate had not been present at the first trial. He overcame that first test, and repeated the victory. We have seen how in contrast to this, Peter was given various tests which he failed the first time and then subsequent times when they were repeated (e.g. the three failures to keep awake in Gethsemane, and the triple failure to not deny the Lord later that evening).

27:14 *And he gave him no answer, not even one word, so much so that the governor was astonished*- This is the same response by the judge as at the Lord's earlier trial (26:62,63; see on 27:13 *They testify against you*). Pilate had presided over many such cases of men being falsely accused. He was astounded at how a man in the face of such blatantly false accusation could be so self-controlled. This, in spiritual terms, was our Lord at one of His most supreme moments. He sets a supreme example to all those falsely accused. Pilate was also staggered at how the Lord had a good human chance of getting off the hook by answering what was blatantly false. But the Lord's mission was to give His life- it was not taken from Him, He gave it. And therefore He made no attempt to get Himself off.

27:15 *Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd*- The Greek is also translated 'to forgive', and there was within the 'release' the idea that the

crime had been forgiven. This was not, therefore, completely appropriate for the Lord Jesus, who had done no wrong. The same word is used in Acts 2:24 of how God "loosed" Jesus from the pangs of death. The Lord's temptation would have been to hope against hope that each of the human possibilities of release would come true. But He had resolutely decided to do God's will unto the end, and therefore He knew that the only ultimate release would be in resurrection, and that would be performed by the Father rather than by any human power. The language of loosing or releasing [s.w.] is used about what the Lord achieved by His death (He 'loosed' the works of the devil, 1 Jn. 3:8; loosed the middle wall of partition, Eph. 2:14; loosed the seals on the book of life, Rev. 5:5). As ever, the paradox was that this release, this form of salvation, falsely appeared to be in the power of those who crucified the Lord. But the Lord saw through it all. Likewise, they appeared His judges and He appeared the guilty; when the opposite was the case.

Any one prisoner whom they wanted- In essence, they had made their choice earlier. The Lord had used the same word in 12:7: "But if you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not [s.w. "wanted"] have condemned the guiltless". The Lord perceived that the essence of the cross, the essence of all that was happening to Him, had already happened during His ministry. They had already condemned the guiltless. This would have helped Him not to hang too intensely on the possibility of the outcome of events changing suddenly at the last minute through some failure in their legal process. And we perceive too that there was no great divide between His final intense sufferings, and what He went through during His life. Our carrying of the cross likewise is a daily matter, rather than a few moments of intense choice which occur during our lives. The same Greek word translated "wanted" occurs three times in describing how they 'wanted' to condemn Jesus and 'wanted' Barabbas (:15,17,21). Lk. 23:25 concludes the section by saying that Pilate "delivered Jesus to their will". It is the same word which the Lord had agonized over in Gethsemane- "Not as I *will*, but as You *will*" (26:39). Even though it appeared that the will of evil, conniving men was being done, it was in fact the Father's will. And we can take similar comfort when it appears that the will of evil men is being done. Ultimately, there is the Father's will far over and above them, working on a far higher level, although we cannot see the final picture of His purpose in specific moments. It can be painless of itself to pray the Father's will be done (6:10), but this is what it meant for the Lord. It took Him an hour [long enough for the disciples to fall asleep] to pray for the Father's will to be done, and not His (26:42). In the Lord's ministry, He had sought to do not His own will but the Father's (Jn. 5:30; 6:38), and this came to its ultimate moment in His situation in Gethsemane facing the cross. Again we see that the essence of Gethsemane and of the Lord's choice to die on the cross was not simply in these final intense moments, but was an outflow of a life daily lived by that principle, in which to do the Father's will was the food He ate and the air He breathed (Jn. 4:34). John doesn't record the Lord's struggle in Gethsemane concerning doing the Father's will rather than His own will, but [as so often] John has made the same point in other ways earlier in his Gospel; John has shown the Lord making this choice throughout His life, and inviting His followers to do likewise (Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38). This is John's way of showing that the essence of Gethsemane and the cross was to be found throughout the Lord's life.

27:16 *And they had then a notable prisoner called*- The Greek *epi-semos* literally means 'one of sign'; we are thereby invited to see the name 'Barabbas' as signifying something. Before the Jews were two men claiming to be sons of Abba, and they chose the false one. The Lord's claim to be Son of God was the reason why the Jews particularly wanted to kill Him.

Barabbas- Son of Abba, the father. This man was clearly an anti-Christ, a fake Christ, a man set up in appearance as the Christ, the son of God, when he was the very opposite. And Israel chose him. His similarity with the Lord is made even more interesting by the fact that some early manuscripts (such as the Caesarean, the Sinaitic Palimpsest and the Palestinian Syriac) here read 'Jesus Barabbas' (Referenced in Craig A. Evans, *Matthew (New Cambridge Bible Commentary)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012 p. 453.). The four gospel records only occasionally all record the same incident. When they do all mention the same thing, it seems that the Spirit intends us to see an especial significance in this. The fact that the crowd chose Barabbas rather than the Lord of glory is one of those aspects of the Passion which is recorded by all four writers. There is much information given about Barabbas, emphasizing the kind of criminal he was (Mt. 27:16; Mk. 15:7; Lk. 23:19; Jn. 18:40). That men would reject the righteousness of God, the Spotless Lamb of God, for such a man... this is the tragic story of our race and our nature. And it was the ecclesia of those days which made this dastard choice, and crucified the Lord Jesus. The same nature, the same blindness, is in us all.

27:17 *Therefore, when they were gathered together, Pilate said to them: Who do you want me to*- See on 26:57. The way the Jews were "gathered together" at this time, literally 'synagogued', is significant in that we see how the Lord's passion gathered men together, either for or against Him. And it is the same today.

Release to you- This word is used of how Paul could have been released or "let go" because after examination by the Romans, "there was no cause of death in me" (Acts 28:18). Paul's trials are full of connection with those of the Lord, and Paul (like us) took special comfort in any similarity between the Lord's sufferings and his own. For this is indeed why we have such a mass of detail about the Lord's final sufferings- we are to see endless points of connection between His experiences and our own. And as Paul says, if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. It was to this process which we signed up to at baptism, in which we dedicated ourselves to a life of dying and living with Him.

Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?- Not 'who claims to be Christ' or 'is called by some 'the Christ". Pilate is reminding them Jesus was the Christ, and they had stated that they thought this was a capital offence. Pilate was offering them the choice between Barabbas and Jesus exactly because he knew they would choose Barabbas. He had a conscience about the matter of this Jesus of Nazareth, and he wanted the choice to crucify Him to be theirs and not his. He cleverly reasoned that he had pronounced Jesus innocent, but the choice to kill him would effectively have been the choice of the Jews if they chose Barabbas over Jesus. This is all the sense of the following explanatory comment "For he knew that they had delivered him up out of envy".

27:18 *For he knew that they had delivered Him up out of*- See on :17 *Jesus which is called Christ*. Pilate was encouraging them to choose Barabbas over Jesus so that the guilt of Jesus' crucifixion would be upon them and not him. Bible critics have pointed out that this was unusual behaviour for Pilate, renowned as he was for being a brutal and apparently conscienceless man. Indeed he was that- but the point is that the Lord Jesus in His time of dying can touch even the person whose conscience appears to be otherwise untouchable. This was and is the power of the cross of Christ. I suggest we are mistaken in reading this as if Pilate wanted them to choose Jesus for release and

was mystified they chose Barabbas. He asked them to choose, knowing they had delivered Jesus to him out of envy. He wanted them to take the choice, in an attempt to assuage his own conscience.

Envy- James 4:5 reminds us that "The spirit that dwells in us lusts to envy" (s.w.). Envy is a basic human tendency which we must restrain. In the whole process of the Lord's betrayal, abuse and crucifixion we see the end result of basic human tendencies when they are let go unrestrained. The crucifixion of God's Son is where they lead. This is the shocking message of the whole process the Gospels record concerning the Lord's death at the hands of the Jews. The point is that we have the same nature, and unrestrained, we shall end up in essence doing the same.

27:19 *And while he was sitting on the judgment seat*- This may not be strictly chronological. The AV offers: "When he was set down…", as if he had no sooner sat down to consider the case when the message came from his wife, implying that Jesus was a righteous man and should not be crucified with Pilate's involvement. In any case, I suggest that this piece of information is given to explain why Pilate acted as he did in offering the Jews a choice between Jesus and Barabbas, knowing full well that "they had delivered [Jesus] out of envy" and therefore blindly wanted his destruction. Although usually conscienceless, Pilate's own nagging conscience was confirmed by the message from his wife, and therefore he came up with this idea of trying to offload responsibility onto the Jews, forcing them to effectively chose that Jesus should be crucified. Of course, the power was ultimately with Pilate, and this was but a desperate ploy to avoid ultimate guilt; but the fact he did it reflects the degree to which the Lord Jesus can touch even the hardest consciences.

His wife- It seems it was Origen who started the tradition that she later became a Christian thanks to a dream given her about Jesus.

Sent a message to him, saying: Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him- These are the very same Greek words used at least four times to record the Lord's prediction of His crucifixion as being a 'suffering of many things' (Mt. 16:21; Mk. 9:12; Lk. 9:22; 17:25). This sensitive woman had a correct premonition of what was to happen to the Lord, and dreamed about it; and sensing His innocence and origin from God, she didn't want her husband to be involved in bringing those sufferings about. Again this claim has the ring of truth to it the more it is meditated upon.

27:20 *Now the chief priests and the elders*- The Greek *deh* translated "Now" is often untranslated in English, it's a connecting word meaning 'Now… And…'. The idea is not so much that Pilate wanted to release Jesus *but* the priests worked against that. Pilate knew they envied Jesus and were intent on having Him executed, and wished to place the decision as far as he could in their hands in order to not have the Lord's blood on his hands. Such were his attempts to ease his conscience.

Persuaded the crowds that they should ask for Barabbas, and destroy Jesus- It could be that the Jewish leadership also had an uneasy conscience. Pilate wanted to shift the responsibility onto them, and they in turn wanted the crowd to be the ones who made the decision. Because it seems that the person to be released at Passover was not usually chosen by mass decision or request, rather the decision was made by Pilate. But in this case, he gets the Jewish leadership to choose between Jesus and Barabbas. And they in turn get the crowd involved in the choice, just as they kept 'consulting together' before each decision regarding Jesus. This all indicates how conscience was being touched in

all those concerned. It is a powerful insight into the degree to which the Lord Jesus and His death can touch the most hardened conscience; and even those who appear to have absolutely no conscience do in fact have one, which can be touched by Christ. We see too the fickleness of the crowd- those who once welcomed Jesus as Messiah just a few days before, were so soon turned around against Him. And then turned back again a few weeks later by Peter's preaching.

27:21 *But the governor answered and said to them: Which of the two do you want me to release to you? And they said: Barabbas!*- Putting together the Gospel records at this point, it is clear that Pilate first asked the Jewish leadership which of the two they wanted, and then he asked the crowd; and it would seem Pilate asked each group the same question at least twice, whilst emphasizing that he did not consider that Jesus was worthy of death and would be happy to release Jesus to them. At first blush this may appear as if Pilate was seeking to persuade first the leaders and then the crowd to allow him to release Jesus to them- and failed to get their agreement. I take a slightly different position. We have noted that Pilate gave the choice to them exactly because he knew that the leaders had delivered Jesus to him *because they envied Jesus* and therefore wanted Him dead. I would understand Pilate's offers to release Jesus as carefully calculated to produce the obvious result- each time the offer was made, the leaders and then the crowd shouted yet louder to destroy Jesus. Those outcomes were not hard to predict. Pilate knew they would respond like this, and he was playing the crowd, rather than simply making the same appeal to them and being shouted down ever louder each time. But the point to note is surely that he was doing all this to assuage his own conscience; he wanted the Jews to take absolute, widespread and public responsibility for the death of Jesus, and therefore once he had the crowd worked up into a frenzy of desiring Barabbas rather than Jesus, he solemnly washed his hands before them all, claiming that this was totally their choice. Of course, it was ultimately his choice, and he was indeed concerned to hear himself being called 'not Caesar's friend'. My point is that this conscienceless man did in fact have a conscience, which was touched by Jesus and the prospect of His crucifixion. And that is to me the only satisfactory explanation of his long drawn out psychological game with the Jews, and even then it was not ultimately succesful nor convincing in distancing himself from the decision to crucify Jesus. See on :22 *What then shall I do to Jesus*.

27:22 *Pilate said to them: What then shall I do to Jesus who is called Christ? They all said: Let him be crucified!*- This is asking an obvious question, seeing that the record has noted that Pilate knew they had delivered Jesus to him out of envy, and they had made it abundantly clear that they sought the death penalty for Him. Pilate asked the question knowing full well the answer they were going to give. But he wanted to elicit from them in clear, specific and public terms that it was *their* wish that Jesus be crucified. See on :21 *Which of the two do you want me to release to you?* It was all part of an extended psychological game Pilate was playing with them, leading them to so clearly take the blame for the Lord's crucifixion. But he only bothered doing this because his conscience was troubling him, and in this we see a powerful insight into the way the Lord's death can touch the hardest of consciences. This is the very reason why reflection upon the Lord in His time of dying leads on naturally to true self-examination. And in this lies the connection between self-examination and the breaking of bread service.

27:23 *And he said: Why, what evil has he done?*- Pilate knew that they had delivered Jesus to him from envy, and that there was no legitimate reason for the death sentence.

But in line with my commentary on :21 and :22, I suggest he is not so much seeking to change their minds, but rather purposefully seeking to elicit from the Jews a clear statement that they wanted Him crucified.

But they cried out exceedingly, saying: Let him be crucified!- When people are pressed for a reason for their unreasonable positions and behaviours, they simply say the same thing again, but more loudly (in various ways). This is the classic example- they repeated their cry "Let Him be crucified!". Surely Pilate knew that they would respond like this, and I see him as stage managing the entire crowd, purposefully leading the crowd to cry out ever louder, in order to set the stage for his public washing of his hands. But he played this elaborate game because he had a conscience, and wanted to try to separate himself from the decision to crucify the Lord.

27:24 *So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying*- I do not take this as meaning that Pilate tried to prevail upon the crowd to change their mind, but now gave up. Rather do I take this as meaning that he realized that he had played his psychological game with the crowd long enough (see commentary on the previous three verses), and saw that if he played it any longer, then a riot could break out. And so he brought his game to an end, having successfully elicited from them a clear taking of responsibility for the decision to crucify Jesus, and now he washes his hands publically. But this of course did not take away his ultimate responsibility- for he could have simply thrown the case out of court. But he correctly perceived that if he were to do that, then there would be major rebellion against him.

I am innocent of this man's blood- The historical Pilate is recorded as killing men for any or even no reason, and being apparently conscienceless. But he is clearly concerned with declaring his own innocence, using a Greek word which means 'without penalty'. He realized there was going to be a penalty paid for crucifying Jesus. Surely he wasn't fearful of his Roman overlords or Caesar himself demanding a penalty for crucifying Jesus. Pilate was clearly aware that there was someone who was going to execute a penalty upon those who crucified Jesus; and Pilate wanted to publically declare his innocence and to protest that he at least should be without penalty. That someone was the one true God. Pilate could not see the death of God's Son without realizing that men are held accountable by God for their part in it. Again we see the power of the cross in touching even the most callous and concealed conscience. We are left to reflect that of course Pilate was not ultimately without responsibility in the decision making- he could have refused. And we therefore reflect further that no man can just declare himself right or innocent before God; that declaration can only be made by God. This is the whole idea of justification, of being counted right. But this requires faith in God and Jesus.

Guilt for the Lord's blood was placed clearly upon the Jews (23:35 "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth", "You intend to bring this man's blood upon us", Acts 5:28). Acts 3:14 condemns Israel for desiring a murderer and rejecting "The Just", the same word used by Pilate "this *just* person". These Scriptures, and many others, clearly place the blame for the Lord's crucifixion upon the Jews rather than Pilate and the Romans, even though Pilate was clearly not innocent. Hence the Lord's observation to Pilate that "he" who had handed Him over to Pilate had "the greater sin" (Jn. 19:11). The "he" was the Jewish system. We marvel at the Lord's grace to Pilate, who clearly was weak and didn't do what he knew he should have done; it's as if He

perceived Pilate's struggle of conscience and felt sorry for him about it, and as it were comforts Pilate that although he is sinning, the greater sin was being committed by the Jews. In this again we see how grace and pity ran through all the Lord's actions at this time; facing death, who He essentially was became revealed the more intensely. And He was and is grace, pity and love to their utmost.

This just person- AV. Even the deeply immoral Pilate perceived the Lord's sinlessness. He uses the same word as used by his wife in :19 "Have nothing to do with that *just man*". The immoral Herod likewise perceived that John was "a just man" (Mk. 6:20 s.w.). The Centurion echoed Pilate's words as he beheld the Lord's death: "Certainly this was [as Pilate had famously said] a righteous / just man" (Lk. 23:47 s.w.). If Pilate was purely dealing with this case with no conscience, then he would not have used this term, involving as it does a moral judgment and commendation of Jesus. And we wonder at how Pilate insisted upon writing on the inscription over the cross "Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews", rather than as the Jews wished, 'He *claimed to be* King of the Jews'. Is it too much to think that Pilate had indeed grasped the elemental truth about Jesus and even believed it? Perhaps at that moment, he did- but didn't maintain his faith.

See to it yourselves- The very phrase just recently used by the Jews to Judas (:6). It's as if Pilate was aware of how they had treated Judas, and is quoting their own words back to them. It's as if Pilate perceived the Jews as Judas. God certainly saw the Jews and Judas as connected, for they are both termed the great satan / devil / adversary to the Lord Jesus. Pilate' perception and insight at this point is significant, hence my suggestion above that Pilate on one level almost became a believer in Jesus through being exposed to Him close up and by reflecting upon His death. There is indeed something in the death and cross of Christ which brings men to faith. There is surely some truth to the old missionary stories of unresponsive, illiterate tribes becoming strangely responsive when the cross of Christ was explained and portrayed to them.

27:25 *Pilate washed his hands*- AV. Do we feel that our conscience is so dysfunctional and our heart so hardened in some places that nothing much can touch us and motivate us like it used to? The cross can touch and transform the hardest and most damaged heart. Apart from many real life examples around of this, consider the Biblical case of Pilate. Jewish and Roman historians paint a very different picture of Pilate than what we see in the Biblical record. Philo describes him as “ruthless, stubborn and of cruel disposition", famed for “frequent executions without trial". Josephus speaks of him as totally despising the Jews, stealing money from the temple treasury and brutally suppressing unruly crowds. Why then does he come over in the Gospels as a man desperately struggling with his conscience, to the extent that the Jewish crowds manipulate him to order the crucifixion of a man whom he genuinely believed to be innocent? Surely because the person of the Lord Jesus and the awfulness of putting the Son of God to death touched a conscience which appeared not to even exist. If the whole drama of the death of Jesus could touch the conscience and personality of even Pilate, it can touch each of us. Just compare the words of Philo and Josephus with how Mark records that Pilate was “amazed" at the self-control of Jesus under trial (Mk. 15:5); how he almost pleads with his Jewish subjects for justice to be done: “Why, what evil has he done?" (Mk. 15:14). Compare this with how Philo speaks of Pilate as a man of “inflexible, stubborn and cruel disposition", famous for “abusive behaviour… and endless savage ferocity". Mt. 27:25 describes how Pilate washes his hands, alluding to the Jewish rite based in Deuteronomy, to declare that he is innocent of the blood of a

just man. But Josephus records how Pilate totally despised Jewish religious customs and sensibilities, and appeared to love to commit sacrilege against Jewish things. And in Luke's record, Pilate is recorded as pronouncing Jesus innocent no less than three times. I so admire the way the Lord attempted even as He faced death in the face, to appeal to Pilate's conscience. I'd paraphrase Mk. 15:2 like this: 'Pilate: 'You are King of Israel?'. Jesus: 'You're saying it''. Why did the Lord put it like that? Surely because He knew that Pilate, in his conscience, did actually know that Jesus was King of Israel, and the very words [in the original] 'You are King of Israel' came out of his lips, as a kind of psychological slip. This small incident not only indicates how the suffering Jesus could touch even Pilate's conscience; but that the Lord was eagerly seeking the response of men, even the toughest and unspiritual, right to His very end. And He is the same today. May our feeble responses give Him pleasure and glory.

And all the people answered and said: His blood is on us and on our children- The Jews perceived that Pilate was genuinely concerned about his own guilt in the matter, hence their attempt to assure him that it was indeed their choice and responsibility. Again we see how Pilate's conscience was visibly at work. In both his and their attitudes, they wrongly assume that human beings can ascribe and decide guilt. It is impossible for us to do this. The guilt for the Lord's death is apportioned by God and not man. This provides insight into the question of whether the children or descendants of the Jews involved are indeed carrying the guilt for the Lord's blood. It is God who decides individual human guilt; He doesn't punish the children for the sins of their ancestors. Whether or not the ancestors asked for their children to suffer is in this sense irrelevant- it hardly means the descendants will suffer just because of a statement made generations ago. And we should note that the rubric 'We and our children' often refers only to the immediate generation, not to longer distance descendants. Further, there were likely no more than a few hundred people at most who shouted these words; they did not speak them as official representatives of anyone, and they cannot surely refer to the children of any other people [e.g. the rest of Israel] apart from their own. To explain the Holocaust and anti-Jewishness as a fulfilment of these words seems to me quite mistaken. Such things occurred and do occur because of faults within the minds and cultures of those performing them, and not because of any particular guilt in the individual Jews who suffered. Many racial groups have suffered because of baseless aggression from other groups; but it would be facile to posit that the individuals who suffered were somehow guilty as charged by their obsessive attackers. The simple reason for anti-Jewishness is jealousy and the nexus of thinking and action which accompanies it. The fault for murdering and abusing Jewish people is solely with the abusers, and not because of the emotional cry of some members of the Jewish race many generations ago. This verse is a classic example of where although the record of the Bible is inspired, the words recorded as having been on the lips of men are not always true in their content. Sennacherib's claims outside the walls of Jerusalem would be another example.

In reality, the people screamed the words they did because they became increasingly obsessed with the conviction that Jesus was guilty. They were so sure that He was *not* innocent blood, that they were able to confidently ask for any possible guilt to be upon them and their children. Their conviction on this point was therefore very great, and yet it was elicited by the repeated reminders from Pilate that Jesus was *not* guilty; both Herod and Pilate had concluded the same about Him. Everyone knew the trials were a farce and the case had collapsed from lack of evidence. And yet the more conscience was prodded, the blinder these people became to the evidence. Again we have a telling

insight into human nature. Blindness descends upon people the more they are led to the light- unless they respond to it. The Lord's crucifixion is the parade example. This is where human psychology and human nature leads when it is confronted by God's Son, unless there is an acceptance of Him.

Peter addressed this same group just six weeks later, very close to the spot where they shouted this out. And he alludes to their words "our children", by saying that the gift of the Holy Spirit is available to them and to their children (Acts 2:39). I have suggested in *Bible Basics* that in its first context, the gift which the Holy Spirit enabled or gave was that of forgiveness of sins and turning away from sin. In this case, Peter was directly addressing those words of the crowd, willing the Lord's bloodguilt upon them and their children. For those words would be ringing like an echo in the memories of everyone in Jerusalem. Not just for those who had been in the crowd, but for all Jewish people, as they wondered whether God would in fact honour the words of those men upon all Israel. And Peter speaks [as we should in our preaching] directly to those fears of his audience, both spoken and unspoken. The simple fact was that instead of a curse upon them and their children, they and their children could be cleansed in the blood of Christ and find [as Peter had] the blessed gift of forgiveness.

27:26 *Then he released Barabbas to them, but Jesus he scourged*- As soon as the sentence was pronounced: You shall be crucified, the victim was stripped naked and fastened to a post about as high as the waist and then flogged. Josephus twice mentions that the body was stripped naked and flogged until the flesh hung down in shreds. 13 stripes were against His breast, 26 on the back. They probably chanted them. He may have had a slab of iron between His teeth to grit against. Men were known to have bitten their tongues in two during the whipping. John Pollock explains that the victim was stretched with hands above his head, whipped by naked slaves with a device of three leather thongs laced with pieces of sharpened bone, whilst a clerk stood with a slab on which to take down confessions (John Pollock, *The Master* (Victor Books, 1985), p. 160).

Scourging was usually "accomplished by tying the victim's wrists to an iron ring set about knee level, so that he would be bent over; or, facing or backed to a column, the wrists would be tied overhead. There were probably two scourgers, standing on each side, each with whips five or six feet long ending in two leather thongs tipped with metal. As the scourging whips fell across the victim's back they would wrap around his body at times lacerating his body front and back, so that scourge marks soon covered all of his body except the head, feet, and forearms... It was uncommon for the Romans to both scourge and crucify a person. Why was it done to Jesus? It has been conjectured by some scholars that Pilate thought by excessive scourging and beating of Jesus the Jewish council would be satisfied. They weren't" (Frank C. Tribbe, *Portrait Of Jesus* (New York: Stein and Day, 1983)).

Significantly, very few actual details are given by the Gospel writers of both the scourging and the crucifixion. It could be that they felt it impossible to dwell upon these things; or it could be that they and their readers knew what was involved in these practices, and we are left to dwell upon them in our own imagination. We are intended to reconstruct in our own minds what may have happened… We have a solemn duty towards Him to do this. This is perhaps why the tenses change so dramatically in the records. Take just Mk. 15:23-26: “They offered… they crucify… and part… casting lots… crucified… was written". These arresting changes are surely to encourage us to re-live it all. Mark speaks of “they crucify him", going on to say that “then are there

two crucified with him" (Mk. 15:38 RV), whereas Luke records the act in the past tense. Mark's present tenses are arresting: "plaiting…they clothe him…they smote…" (:17,19 RV). Perhaps Mark is seeking consciously to make us imagine it all as going on before our eyes. Mt. 27:38 RV has a similar dramatic change: "Then are there crucified with him…".

All men usually screamed out something, anything, in the hope that the lashing would therefore be shortened. The Lord's silence at this time would have been yet one more thing which awed His tormentors. There were runnels, Pollock says, in which the blood drained away. The scourging would already have been done twice for the thieves. The Angel watchers of the skies would have peered down into that blood, as they did in cherubic form into the blood on the mercy seat. The blood of the Son of God was treated by men as something ordinary, thoughtlessly mixed with that of criminals, and was trodden under foot. Perhaps it was to this aspect of the Lord's sufferings and insult that Heb. 10:29 refers to, in describing the crucifixion (and the Lord's *re-crucifixion* by fallen believers) as counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and thereby treading underfoot the Son of God (cp. Heb. 6:6 RV mg "*while* they crucify the son of God", suggesting that once this ongoing re-crucifixion stops, men can be forgiven). The despising and treading under of that blood in a literal sense only occurred at the scourging. It was observed by some first century writers that the length of time it took a crucifixion victim to die was related to the severity of the scourging. The Lord's relatively quick death may therefore (although not necessarily) reflect the brutality with which He was treated at this time. When Peter speaks of how we are healed by Christ's "stripes" (1 Pet. 2:24), uses an especially intense word to describe the scourging. It could be that he somehow saw or heard about the scourging, and saw it as parallel to Christ suffering for us "on the tree". The Lord's bloody sweat in Gethsemane has been identified as hemohidrosis, an extreme nervous state in which there is haemorrhage into the sweat glands, and therefore the skin becomes fragile and tender. This would have meant that flogging, the carrying of the cross and the constant friction between His back and the rough wood would have been agonizing. Hemohidrosis also produces severe chills. The Lord would have been shivering in the cold darkness of His final hours, with every involuntary movement causing agony to the nerves which the nails purposefully transfixed.

And delivered to be crucified- Having been flogged until the skin was left hanging in bloody shreds (Josephus), His clothes would have stuck to the skin. Taking the clothes off would have ripped some shreds away. The process of dressing and undressing would have done the same. And then the cross was laid on that bare back. The word translated "delivered" or "betrayed" is commonly used in the records. Judas handed over the Lord to the Jews, the Jews handed Him over to Pilate and the Romans, and they handed Him back to the Jews to crucify. All this was only how things seemed on earth, because all was in the Father's hands. The Lord must surely have meditated upon this- that He was giving Himself, and they were merely the process He was using to do that.

The moment of the Lord being delivered over by Pilate is so emphasized. There are few details in the record which are recorded verbatim by all the writers (Mt. 27:26; Mk. 15:15; Lk. 23:25; Jn. 19:16). The Lord had prophesied this moment of handing over, as if this was something which He dreaded (Mk. 9:31; 10:33); that point when He was outside the legal process, and must now face His destruction. The Angels reminded the disciples: "Remember *how* he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men" (Lk. 24:6,7). The emphasis

is on "*How*", with what passion and emphasis. Rom. 4:25 makes this moment of handing over equivalent to His actual death: " Who was *delivered* (s.w.) for our offences, and raised again for our justification". So much stress is put on this moment of being delivered over to crucifixion. The Gospel records stress that Pilate delivered Him up; but in fact God did (Rom. 8:32); indeed, the Lord delivered Himself up (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2,25). Always the same word is used. These passages also stress that He delivered Himself up, and was delivered up, *for us*. It was *our salvation* which motivated Him at the moment of being delivered up. Perhaps it was at that moment that He had the greatest temptation to walk through the midst of them and back to Galilee. As the crowd surged forward and cheered, knowing they'd won the battle of wills with Pilate..."take ye him and crucify him" ringing in His mind... this was it. This was the end. How He must have been tempted to pray again His prayer: "Let this cup pass from me...". Jerusalem was a small town by modern standards, with no more than 10,000 inhabitants. There must have been faces in that crowd which, through swollen eyes, He recognized; some whose children had benefited from His miracles, whose ears had heard His discourses with wonderment. The emphasis on this moment of delivering up is so great that there must have been an especial sacrifice on the Lord's part. But He "gave himself up" to *God* not men (1 Pet. 2:23); He knew He was giving Himself as an offering to *God* as the crowd came forward and the soldiers once again led Him. The almost terrifying thing is that *we,* for the sake of our identity with Christ, are also "delivered up to death" (2 Cor. 4:11). We are asked to share, in principle, the height of devotion that He reached in that moment. Analyzing 2 Cor. 4:10,11 in more detail, we find a number of parallels:

v. 10	v. 11
Always	For we which live are alway
bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus	delivered unto death for Jesus' sake
that the life also of Jesus	that the life also of Jesus
might be manifest in our body	might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

The second parallel is significant. To be delivered unto death for Jesus' sake is to bear about in an ongoing sense His crucifixion. This means that His being "delivered over" was seen by Paul as a cameo of His whole sufferings on the cross.

27:27 *Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium*- Being Roman soldiers, these were likely Gentiles from many different nations within the Roman empire. The Lord was abused not only by Jews but by a wide range of Gentiles- the very ones for whom He was dying. When we do things in love for those who are in the throes of hatred against us (and many are in domestic situations where this has to be done by the believer in Christ)- then we are fellowshipping His sufferings at this time in this way.

And the whole battalion gathered around him- Similar to the way the record repeatedly stresses that *all* the chief priests, the *whole* Sanhedrin, condemned the Lord to death. The point is that group mentality is far more powerful than we think, and leads even good men like Nicodemus and Joseph, and perhaps the Centurion who came to confess that "Truly this was the Son of God", to do things which are far beyond the evil intention within any one individual mind. Again, we see in the crucifixion of Jesus where human

nature leads in its ultimate end. It comes to full term in nothing less than the crucifixion of God's Son. One of the ways in which our nature operates is in tandem with others. Many have noted that the sum total of human evil in this world is likely more than the sum of all the individual 'evil' of every human being combined. The 'extra' factor in the equation is provided by the way in which humans in group mode can end up thinking and acting far more extremely than all the individual 'evil' within each of them as individuals. This is why the New Testament parable of 'satan' uses the term not only for individuals and for abstract human sin, but for sinful organizations and group entities. I have commented upon this several times throughout my *The Real Devil*.

"Gathered around Him" continues the theme of the Lord's passion causing men to gather and unite, either for Him or against Him. We note how John adds that Herod and Pilate were reconciled together- over the issue of Jesus. And this is what response to the fact of His suffering and death continues to do today. If we as believers are *not* united around Him, we are allowing our own traditions to become an obstacle to the process of unity which the Lord's death is intended to achieve. Our refusal to unite, e.g. by forbidding brethren from communion and remembrance of Him, is to work against the intention of the cross.

27:28 *And they stripped him and put on him a scarlet robe*- Stripped naked? To be undressed is used by Paul as a metaphor for human death (2 Cor. 5:4 s.w.), and to be clothed upon is used by Paul to mean a change of nature. The Lord may have seen in this mockery a strange foretaste of the death and change of nature which awaited Him. Through all His sufferings, the hand of providence was giving Him encouragement. And that happens in our lives too. The Lord would've thought of His own story of the wounded man who was stripped (Lk. 10:30 s.w.). He was both the Samaritan Saviour and the wounded man, in that He identified so fully with us in our moral tragedy. The same LXX word is found in "They stripped Joseph out of his coat" (Gen. 37:23); was Joseph naked in the pit?

27:29 *And they plaited a crown of thorns and put it upon his head and a reed in his right hand, and they knelt down before him*- The thorns were growing between the cobbles of the courtyard? Or were they using thorns on their courtyard fire? The thorns on the head would have reminded Him that He was being temporarily overcome by the result of the curse in Eden. As with several aspects of His mocking, His tormentors unknowingly gave Him spiritual stimulus by what they did. His mind was certainly in Eden, for He spoke of the Kingdom as "paradise", with evident allusion to Eden (Lk. 23:43). Note that the Lord was beaten up at least three times: by the Jewish guards, by Herod's men and by the Roman soldiers. In a literal sense He was bruised for our iniquities, and chastised for us to obtain the peace of sin forgiven (Is. 53:5). And the Father surely foresaw all this back in Gen. 3:15, where the promised seed was to be *bruised*. He willed (*not* "pleased", as AV) this bruising, and this putting to grief (Is. 53:10). The parallel here between the bruising, beating and putting to grief may suggest that the beatings up ('bruisings') really grieved the Lord. And note that the final sacrifice of which Is. 53 speaks was not *only* achieved by the hours spent hanging on the cross. This earlier beating and abusing was just as much a part of His final passion, as, in essence, His whole life was a living out of the principles of the cross. It has been suggested that the crown of thorns was not only a mockery, but a significant part of the physical torture of crucifixion. If the net of nerves and veins under the skin of the scalp are pierced, profuse bleeding and stunning head ache would occur. His hair would therefore have been bloody. It would have been a wreath, a *stephanos* similar to that

worn by Tiberius. The mock homage to the crowned Saviour-Lord was surely in the Lord's mind at His ascension, when all the Angels of God bowed before Him in true worship (Heb. 1:6).
A reed- This is the same word translated "pen". The hint was that the Lord was taking note. All was written and would be judged when the books are opened.

And mocked him- The Lord had foreseen that the Gentiles would "mock" Him (20:19 s.w.). Matthew gives more attention to the repeated mocking of the Lord than the other Gospels (27:29,31,41).

Saying: Hail, King of the Jews!- "Hail" is literally, 'Be happy'. J.D. Crossan mentions a Jewish tradition, quoting Mishnah passages to support it, that the bruised scapegoat had scarlet wool tied to it, and that the Jews spat on the scapegoat in order to place their sins upon it (J.D. Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994)). It could be that the Roman soldiers were doing all this in mockery of this tradition. It would have given the Lord something more to fill His holy mind with. He knew that He was actually doing what they were mockingly suggesting- carrying Israel's sins. God worked even through the spitting and mocking of men to work out the finest details of our redemption. The spitting is in the context of their mocking His Kingship. "Hail, King of the Jews!"was in parody of 'Ave, Caesar'. It was customary to give a kiss of homage to royalty. Their parody of this was to spit at Him, in the face, according to the type of Job 30:10. Earlier, at the trial, the Jews had spat in His face (Mt. 26:67). Now He tasted Roman spittle. And this was the face from which the glory of God had shone (Mk. 9:15?). One of the themes of the crucifixion records is that the same abuse and suffering was repeated to the Lord. Hence the frequent usage of the continuous tense. During the trial by Pilate, the Lord underwent mock worship and spitting (Jn. 19:3). Then later it was mock worship, spitting, hitting on the head (Mt. 27:29,30). And then hitting on the head, spitting, mock worship (Mk. 15:19,20). It seems they alternated bruising / spitting on Christ with bruising / kneeling before Him in mock homage. The reed was used as a mock diadem, although instead of touching His shoulder with it they hit Him on the head with it. They put it in His hand as a sceptre and then snatched it back to hit Him on the head with it. Wave after wave of the same treatment. Notice how many times the word "again" features in the Greek text (*palin*). This is the essence of our temptations. And it was a big theme in the Lord's final human experience. Likewise a comparison of the records shows that "Come down..." was clearly said more than once, the continuous tenses notwithstanding (Mt. 27:40 cp. Mk. 15:30). However, it is worth cataloguing the use of continuous tenses in this part of the record: The crowd *kept on* crying out (as demons did), "Crucify him" (Mt. 27:23); the soldiers *kept on* clothing Him (Mt. 27:28), *kept on* coming to Him and kept on saying... (Jn. 19:3 Gk.), Pilate *kept on seeking* (imperfect) to deliver the Lord (Jn. 19:12), thereby agitating the tension in the Lord's mind. They *kept on* kneeling (27:29), *kept on* spitting (v.30), *kept on* passing in front of Him on the cross and *kept on* shaking their heads (v. 39), *kept on* saying "...save thyself", *kept on* mocking and asking Him to come down from the cross (vv. 40,41), the soldiers *kept on* coming to Him and offering Him their vinegar in mock homage (Lk. 23:36), they *kept on* offering Him the pain killer. They *kept on and on and on*. This is an undoubted theme.

The events of the crucifixion were so packed with fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy and shadows that the Lord's discernment of them must have given Him a wonderful boost of strength, in knowing who He was and where He was destined. For

example, when they put a broken reed in his hand as a mock sceptre, His mind would have flown to the Messianic Is. 42:3: "A bruised reed shall he not break... he *shall* bring forth judgment", as they mocked Him for His apparent inability to do.

27:30 *And they spat upon him and took the reed and struck him on the head*- The question is to why Gentile soldiers would unleash such hatred upon Jesus, when the crucifixion of a Jew was just another job for them to do. We somehow do not imagine them doing this to the thieves or other crucifixion victims. I conclude that there was something in the Lord which forced men to either respond to Him, or go the other way in assuming that unless He was as He claimed, then He must be the worst of all and worthy of all hatred. We see the same effect upon men today, even if social norms mean that we express the passions [both for and against Him] in less dramatic and more restrained terms.

27:31 *And when they had mocked him, they took the robe from him and dressed him in his own garments*- The record that they put the Lord's own clothes on Him and then led Him to crucifixion conflicts with contemporary records of the victim being led out naked, or certainly without his own outer clothes. Christ was revealed, or 'revealed himself' (Gk.) on the cross, when He took away our sins (1 Jn. 3:5). This may be John referring to how he had witnessed Christ crucified naked. Yet we know that the Lord wore His outer robe right up to the impaling. It may be that the whipping and abuse He had suffered was far beyond what the soldiers had the right to minister. There were special directives concerning the need for the victim to die by crucifixion, not at the hands of the soldiers. It may be that they wanted to cover up the illegal marks on the body by making the Lord go to the cross fully dressed. In which case, again we see how He suffered the very *worst* of man's machinations. The Lord having His own clothes put back on Him meant that He would have been dressed in blood sprinkled garments for the walk to Golgotha. Again His holy mind would have been on the Messianic prophecies of Is. 63 about a Messiah with blood sprinkled garments lifted up in glorious victory. Or perhaps He saw the connection to Lev. 8:30, where the priests had to have blood sprinkled garments in order to begin their priestly work. This would have sent His mind to us, for whom He was interceding. Likewise when He perceived that His garment would not be rent, He would have joyfully perceived that He was indeed as the High Priest whose garment was not to be rent (Ex. 39:23).

And led him away to crucify him- The Greek word translated "led away" is used about 10 times in the Gospels for the leading away of Jesus to death. It occurs in another context, in 7:13,14, where the Lord spoke of how wide and common is the way that 'leads away to' destruction compared to the way which 'leads away to' eternal life. He was being led away to destruction; He was sharing the path of all condemned sinners. This is a great theme of the crucifixion accounts- that the Lord identified totally with the position of condemned sinners. The logic is that by living the life of the flesh, we are led away to destruction; and yet by being led away to destruction with the Lord, in sharing His death, we are in fact being led away to life.

Tradition has it that the victim had to hold their hands out to receive the stake, which they then had to carry. The Lord's prophecy of Peter's crucifixion thus describes it as Peter stretching out his hands and being led to his death (Jn. 21:18). Yet the Lord emphasized in His teaching that we must *take up* the cross, as He did (Mk. 8:34; 10:21). This might just suggest that in line with the Lord's willing death, giving up of His life rather than it being taken from Him, He bent down and picked up the stake before the soldiers had the chance to offer it to Him. I imagine doing this in a deft manner. The deftness of the way He broke that bread apart and held the cup comes out in Mt. 26:26.

He knew what that breaking of bread was going to mean. His willingness would have been such a contrast to the unwilling hesitation of the thieves and other victims. The soldiers must have been blind indeed to still mock Him, despite all these indications that He was more than mere man. That piece of wood that was laid upon Him by the Father, however the Lord physically took it up, represented our sins, which were laid upon Him (Is. 53:6); your laziness to do your Bible readings early this morning, my snap at the woman in the bus, his hatred of his mother in law... that piece of wood was the symbol of our sins, every one of them. This is what we brought upon Him. It was our laziness, our enmity, our foolishness, *our weak will*... that necessitated the death of Jesus in this terrible way. He went through with it all "to make an end of sins" (Dan. 9:26). Will we do our little bit in responding? The marks of His sufferings will be in Him eternally, and thereby we will be eternally reminded of the things we now only dimly appreciate (Rev. 5:6; Zech. 13:6).
The walk from the courthouse to Golgotha was probably about 800m (half a mile). One of the soldiers would have carried the sign displaying the Lord's Name and crime. The thieves were probably counting the paces (maybe the crowd was chanting them?). You know how it is when doing a heavy task, 'Just three more boxes to lug upstairs... just two more... last one'. But the Lord was above this. Of that I'm sure. Doing any physically strenuous task that takes you to the end of your strength, there is that concentration on nothing else but the job in hand. Hauling a heavy box or load, especially in situations of compulsion or urgency, it becomes irrelevant if you bump into someone or crush a child's toy beneath your heavy feet. But the Lord rose above. He turned and spoke to the women. Luke as a doctor knew that suffering makes one self-centred. It is perhaps because of this that he especially seems to concentrate on the wonder of the way in which the Lord looked out of His own agony to be so concerned with that of others. A.D. Norris has commented (*The Gospel Of Mark*): "It is he who reports the Lord's prayer for Simon Peter (22:31); who recounts the Lord's sympathetic warning to the women of Jerusalem (23:27-31); and who speaks of the Lord's forgiveness for His crucifiers, and remission for the penitent thief (23:34,43)" .

27:32 ***And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name-*** **Cyrene was where there was a strongly orthodox Jewish community (cp. Acts 6:9). Simon was probably dark skinned, a countryman, a simple man, who had perhaps come up to Jerusalem in his zeal to keep Passover. What a comfort it was to the Lord to see a black man carrying His cross; for He had earlier said that *all* His true followers would carry the cross behind Him (Mt. 10:38; 16:24). The Hebrew writer seemed to see Simon as typical of us all when writing of how we must go out of the city with the Lord, "bearing his reproach" (Heb. 13:12,13, probably using 'reproach' as a parallel to 'the cross'). He would have seen in Simon a prototype of all His future, suffering, humiliated followers; "impressed" by the predestined calling, almost against our will, to carry His cross (Mt. 27:32 RV mg.). And was it accident that this prototype was almost certainly a black man, when perhaps ultimately it may appear that a large proportion of the faithful body of the Lord Jesus will have been black people? If indeed Simon was a black Jew (cp. modern Falashas) who had come up to keep the Passover, it would have been annoying beyond words for him to be made unclean by the blood of the Lord, which was inevitably on the stake after His first attempt at bearing it after His flogging. Not to mention the shame for a zealous Jew in having to carry the cross of this Jesus of Nazareth. Yet it would seem that he was later converted, and he in turn converted his wife and son (Mk. 15:21 cp. Rom. 16:13). Mark rarely records proper nouns, but he makes a special effort to mention that Simon was the father**

of Alexander and Rufus. It would therefore seem that these men were well known in the early church. Simon may be the "Simeon called Niger" ('the black one') of Acts 13:1. He is listed there next to Lucius, who was also from Cyrene. The thief and the centurion were likewise converted, and the faith of Joseph, Nicodemus and probably others was brought out into the open by the cross. Like Samson, the Lord won victories even in His death. The spiritual turn-around in Simon is a type of what is experienced by all whom the Lord compels to carry His cross. He was passing by, going somewhere else, full of his own plans, going about to establish his own righteousness... and then, out of the blue, he was called to what he much later realized was the greatest honour a man could be called to: to accompany the Son of God and carry His cross, right to the end. We are left to imagine him plonking it down, as if to say to Jesus 'Now you've got to do the rest', and then slipping off into the crowd.

Another reading of Simon is possible. Simon is a Greek name, and the names of his sons are Greco-Roman. The way he is described as "coming out of the field" (Lk. 23:26) could imply that he was working, doing what was improper on a feast day, because he was a Gentile. It could be that he simply lived and worked near Jerusalem, he wasn't a religious guy, and like Saul out looking for lost cattle, he was going some place else…until the Lord as it were arrested him with the message of the cross.

Whom they forced to carry the cross-"The crossbar was carried... weighing 34 to 57 kg., was placed across the nape of the victim's neck and balanced along both shoulders. Usually the outstretched arms then were tied to the crossbar" (W.D. Edwards, *On The Physical Death Of Jesus Christ*, JAMA March 21 1986, Vol. 255 No. 11). This means that the Lord would have had His shoulders bowed forward as He walked to Golgotha, with both His hands lifted up against His chest. He evidently foresaw this in some detail when He described His mission to man as a shepherd carrying His lost sheep on both shoulders. Let's forever forget the picture of a happy, quiet lamb snugly bobbling along on the shepherd's shoulders. We are surely meant to fill in the details in the parables. The sheep, his underside covered in faeces and mud, would have been terrified; in confusion he would have struggled with the saviour shepherd. To be carried on His shoulders would have been a strange experience; he would have struggled and been awkward, as the shepherd stumbled along, gripping both paws against His chest with His uplifted hands. This was exactly the Lord's physical image as He stumbled to the place of crucifixion. He evidently saw the cross as a symbol of us, His struggling and awkward lost sheep. And every step of the way along the Via Dolorosa, Yahweh's enemies reproached every stumbling footstep of His anointed (Ps. 89:51). It was all this that made Him a true King and our unquestioned leader- for on His shoulders is to rest the authority of the Kingdom (Is. 9:5), because He bore His cross upon the same shoulders.

John says that the Lord went out bearing His cross. Luke says that Simon was asked to carry the hinder part of the cross behind Him. Matthew and Mark say Simon carried the cross. Mk. 15:22 (Gk.) says that the soldiers carried Jesus to Golgotha. J.B. Phillips renders it: "They got him to a place Golgotha" . It would seem that the Lord collapsed, perhaps fainting. If He was crucified on an olive tree (excavations of crucified men suggest this is what was used), it would not have been simply because of the weight of the stake. Take a picture of Him lying there, with the face that was marred more than the children of men pressed into the hot dust of that Jerusalem street. And some human fool probably said something like 'Come on, get up' (doubtless with embellishments).

If indeed He did faint, there would have been that sense of 'coming round', the "Where am I?", the memory and consciousness flooding back. "Have I died and been resurrected?" No, as some nameless soldier kicked Him and told Him to get up.

John's statement that "He went out, bearing the cross for Himself" as He walked to Golgotha is a real emphasis, seeing that it was *as* He came out that it was necessary for them to make Simon carry the cross. John takes a snapshot of that moment, and directs our concentration to the Lord at that moment, determined to carry it to the end, even though in fact He didn't. It is this picture of following the Lord carrying *His* cross which the Lord had earlier asked us to make the model of our lives. We are left to assume that the two criminals followed Him in the procession. They were types of us, the humble and the proud, the selfless and the selfish, the two categories among those who have been asked to carry the cross and follow the Lord in His 'last walk'.

The word John uses for 'bearing' is translated (and used in the sense of) 'take up' in 10:31. It was as if John saw as significant the Lord's willingness to take up the cross Himself, without waiting for it to be forced upon Him as it probably was on the other two. And there is a clear lesson for us, who fain would carry something of that cross. And yet the similarity of meaning within this word for 'taking up' and 'bearing / carrying' is further instructive. The Lord picked it up and was willing to carry it, but didn't make it to the end of the 'last walk', through understandable human weakness. Amidst the evident challenge of the cross, there is interwoven comfort indeed (as there is in the Lord's eager and positive acceptance of the thief, Joseph and Nicodemus, and the wondrous slowness of the Father's punishment of those ever-so-evil men who did the Lord to death).

The Lord had foreseen most aspects of His death: the handing over, the picking up of the cross, the carrying it, the being lifted up. In Lk. 15:5 the Lord spoke about how He as the good shepherd would carry the lost sheep on His shoulders, *rejoicing*. It is tempting to connect this with the way Christ spoke of His *joy* (Jn. 17:13) just hours before He was arrested. I am not suggesting there was *any* joy at all for the Lord in His carrying of the cross- not in the way we understand joy. But perhaps to Him, in His vocabulary, " my joy" meant something else; as for Him, 'eating' meant not eating food but doing the Father's will (Jn. 4:34). Whatever "rejoicing" , " my joy" meant for the Lord, He had that sense as He carried the cross on His shoulder.

27:33 *And when they came to a place called*- He didn't carry His cross all the way to Golgotha; He went out of the guard room with His face set towards Golgotha, as it had been so visibly set on Jerusalem a few weeks before. Note the emphasis on "unto", "to", "the place". They arrived. They stopped there. This was it. They arrived at the destination. "Outside the city walls was permanently located the heavy upright wooden stipes, on which the patibulum [which Christ carried] would be secured" (Edwards *op cit*). The Lord would doubtless have meditated upon it. The cross was waiting. All He had to do was carry the cross bar. His invitation to men to carry the cross to the place where the other part of that instrument of death was already prepared must be seen in this light. The way for our self-crucifixion is prepared. We carry but the cross bar.

Golgotha, that is to say, the place of a skull- Possibly meaning 'The skull of Goliath'. In this case, we have opened up a detailed typological meaning to David's victory over

Goliath. He was there as the Lord Jesus fighting sin, and then burying the head of Goliath, the 'man of sin', near Jerusalem.

Luke adds that He turned and spoke to the women on the walk to Golgotha; He looked out of His own agony to the needs of others. This is another theme of the cross. He was even thoughtful for weak Pilate (Jn. 19:11); for the thief, for the forgiveness of those mocking soldiers, for His mother, for John, for those women lining the Via Dolorosa... And those women, He said, would be destroyed in the condemnation of Jerusalem in AD70. Phil. 2:2-4 makes the point that the essence of the cross is in the way the Lord's mind was so full of concern for *others* throughout the whole wretched process. The Lord's Bible-filled mind would have been aware of Jer. 9:20-22, which prophesied special woe to women in the holocaust of AD70. Those women were condemned. Yet the Lord turned, in His desperate agony, to speak to them. I admit, as I must through every stage of the cross, that I wouldn't have done this. I wouldn't have bothered with them. But He made such effort to at least try to get them to change their minds. They were weeping for Him, but He knew they would not obey His command to leave Jerusalem when it would be surrounded by armies. Neither would their children. On a human level, they must have been so annoying. Young women (if they were alive in AD70 40 years later), probably passively in love with Him, moved to tears at His passion but with no regard for His words and the real implications of His cross. Yet still He tried for them, running the risk of cat calls of 'You can't carry your own cross but you can talk to the girls'.
"If they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" is packed with allusion to O.T. Scriptures (Ez. 17:24; Jer. 11:16,19; Ps. 1; Jer. 17:5-8). His preceding words to the women were likewise; his quotation from Hos. 10:8 is set in a context so appropriate to the situation He was in. If they did these things to Him, the green and healthy shoot, what would be done to the dry dead wood of Israel…? His concern was always with the sufferings others would experience rather than being lost in His own introspection. Without getting too deeply involved in the actual exposition, a simple lesson emerges: He was not so overpowered by the terrible physicality of His human situation that He ceased to be spiritually aware. His mind was full of the word, not just out of place quotations flooding His subconscious, but real awareness of the spirit of the Father's word and its' intensely personal relevance to Himself. In this He sets a matchless example.

If the crossbeam was tied to the nape of the Lord's neck, it would have been impossible for Him to turn round and talk, as it is specifically stated that He did. I would reconstruct that the Lord collapsed, and Simon was forced to carry the cross, whilst the Lord followed on, scarcely conscious. Before collapsing again, with the result that He was carried to the cross, He used His last and final energy at the time to speak to those women. He used His last bit of mental and physical strength to preach- to women whom He knew were not going to really respond. For He said they should weep for themselves, He knew they would not listen to His warning to flee Jerusalem in AD70. But such was His hopefulness for people, that He still made the effort to communicate rather than get lost within Himself and His own thoughts as I would have tended to.

27:34 *They gave him wine to drink mingled with gall. And when he had tasted it, he would not drink it*- To give strong drink to those ready to perish was a well-known custom at crucifixion. The fact victims survived two or three days was only because they were given drink. The Lord didn't simply refuse the pain killer. He took it, tasted it, and then refused it. Why did He first taste it? Surely He knew the custom, and He

knew what it was. Various alternatives arise in the mind, each a source of devotional inspiration:

- Was it that His eyesight was damaged by the punches and He didn't see what it was until He tasted it? "When Jesus therefore saw his mother..." may suggest that He didn't initially recognize her. The Messianic Scriptures mention the affliction of eyesight in Messiah's final suffering. Early crucifixion art shows the Lord with His right eye damaged (as does the Turin shroud). The mucous membrane (the thin slippery tissues which lubricate the human body) would have dried so that "they rip layers of tissues from the eyes every time the pupil is moved or blinked" (C.M. Ward).
- Maybe He realized as He had the cup on His lips that they were giving this to Him in the spirit of Jer. 23:15: to show that He was a false prophet. In this case, for the sake of His respect for the implications of Holy Scripture, He endured a far higher degree of pain.
- Another explanation is that He wanted to speak out loud, saying (several times?) "Father, forgive them", and to perhaps recite Psalm 22. He was so parched from thirst (He had lost body fluid in Gethsemane) that He knew He couldn't speak out loud without some liquid. The dehydration would have made His tongue thicken so that speech was eventually almost impossible. But He only drank enough to moisten His throat, not to deaden any pain. This shows the majestic self-mastery within the Lord; He knew just when to stop, even though it must have been so tempting to keep on drinking.
- Taking the pain killer would not have been a sin, neither would it have theologically damaged the atonement. Perhaps the Lord took it, as doubtless the others did, and then had the self-control to think better of it and give it back. Such was His devotion to the absolute height of identity with us. It makes His action all the more poignant if He first tasted and then refused, rather than just refusing outright.

He was *repeatedly* offered the pain killer, the tense implies. Men offering Him myrrh in (mock) homage would have sent His mind back to the story dear Mary had told Him about the wise men bringing myrrh. And inevitably her tortured mind would have gone back there too. But I have another suggestion. When we read that "someone" offered him a sponge with wine mixed with myrrh (Mk. 15:36; Mt. 27:48), we recall the use of myrrh in preparing bodies for burial (Mk. 14:3; Lk. 23:56; Jn. 12:3; 19:39). Pliny (*Natural History* 14.15.92,107) records: "The finest wine in early days was that spiced with the scent of myrrh… I also find that aromatic wine is constantly made from almost the same ingredient as perfumes, from myrrh". This alerts me to the real possibility that the unnamed bystander who did this was Mary Magdalene. Earlier she had anointed the Lord's body with myrrh "to the burial". And now she has prepared the most expensive form of wine as some sort of pain killer. Perhaps the Lord was so touched by this that He accepted it, but didn't drink it. His doing this is otherwise very hard to understand. Her love was on one hand inappropriate, and yet the Lord still accepted it, even though He couldn't use it. He could have felt angry with her for tempting Him to the easier way. But He didn't. And in so doing He showed her that the essence of the cross is that there is no easy way. The principles of all this are to be reflected in our cross carrying.

Another alternative presents itself from the Hebrew text of Ps. 69:21: "They gave me also gall". The Hebrew can stand the translation 'poison' (see RSV). Given the extended, agitated torture of crucifixion, there was a custom for close friends to get close enough to the cross to lift up a poisonous substance which the crucified would lick, and thereby die quickly. It is just possible that a friend (or even his mother?) or a sympathetic soldier did this. Again, in this case it would seem that the Lord chose the

highest level; our salvation would surely have been theologically achievable if He had taken it. But He chose to attain for us not only salvation, but "such *great* salvation" (Heb. 2:3) by always taking the highest level. He became obedient not only to death, but "even the death of the cross".

One feels that the Lord would have been justified in accepting the pain killer that was offered Him in His final agony; but He refused it, it seems to me, in order to achieve the *greatest* salvation for us. He never once used what I have called the principle of Jephthah's vow. In the same spirit, some faithful men of old refused legitimate deliverance from torture so that they might obtain "a better resurrection" (Heb. 11:35). The record of the cross is full of examples of where the Lord in physical terms rejected legitimate comforts in His final hours. Yet throughout His life, He was ever ready to concede to the weakness of those who would genuinely follow Him. The way He spoke about demons without giving His hearers a lecture about the folly of such belief is proof of this. He could have insisted, as we do, on the rejection of such superstitions. But this was not His way. I am not suggesting that *we* have the right to make such concessions in our preaching and baptizing. But He did.

27:35 *And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots*- "And it was the third hour and (not 'when') they crucified Him" (Mk. 15:25) suggests they were waiting for the hour to come. It was in their brief to do it at the third hour. It may be that they got there a little early, and there was an agonizing wait for the third hour. Mark 15 has so many usages of the word "and"; circle them in your Bible (especially AV). This is to emphasize the relentlessness of it all, the repetition of everything, the way it droned remorselessly on. This is a feature of the cross, which we must carry. The crucifixion of Christ was at 9 a.m. He would have willingly laid Himself down on the stake, whereas most victims had to be thrown down on the ground by the soldiers. He gave His life, it wasn't taken from Him. Likewise He *gave* His back to the smiters when they flogged Him; He gave His face to them when they spoke about pulling out His beard (Is. 50:6). Men usually clenched their fists to stop the nails being driven in, and apparently fingers were often broken by the soldiers to ease their task. Not a bone of the Lord was broken. We can imagine Him willingly opening His palms to the nails; as we, so far away from it all, should have something of a willing acceptance of what being in Him demands of us. It may be that He undressed Himself when they finally reached the place of crucifixion. In similar vein, early paintings of the flogging show the Lord standing there *not* tied to the flogging post, as victims usually were. As He lay there horizontal, His eyes would have been heavenwards, for the last time in His mortality. Perhaps He went through the business of thinking 'this is the last time I'll do this...or that...'. How often He had lifted up His eyes to Heaven and prayed (Jn. 11:41; 17:1). And now, this was the last time, except for the final raising of the head at His death. "While four soldiers held the prisoner, [a Centurion] placed the sharp five inch spike in the dead centre of the palm…four to five strokes would hammer the spike deep into the rough plank and a fifth turned it up so that the hand would not slip free" (C.M. Ward, *Treasury Of Praise*). If it is indeed so that a Centurion usually did the nailing, it is a wondrous testimony that it was the Centurion who could say later that "truly this was the Son of God". The very man who actually nailed the Son of God was not struck dead on the spot, as a human 'deity' would have done. God's patient grace was extended, with the result that this man too came to faith.

The Hebrew language so often reflects the character of God. And His artless self-expression is no clearer seen in the way He inspired the records of the death of His Son. The record of the death of God's Son is something altogether beyond the use of devices

as primitive as adjectives. The way in which the actual act of impaling is recorded as just a subordinate clause is perhaps the clearest illustration of this. The way Mary thinks the risen Lord is a gardener is another such. Or the weeping of the women, and Joseph, and Nicodemus (presumably this happened) when the body was taken from the cross, as the nails were taken out: this isn't recorded. Likewise, only Matthew records the suicide of Judas; the Father chose not to emphasize in the records that the man who did the worst a man has ever done or could ever do- to betray the peerless Son of God- actually went and took his own life (and even made a mess of doing that). If it were my son, I would have wanted to emphasize this. But the Almighty doesn't. In similar vein, it is almost incredible that there was no immediate judgment on the men who did the Son of God to death. The judgments of AD70 only came on the next generation. Those middle aged men who stood and derided the Saviour in His time of finest trial: they died, as far as we know, in their beds. And the Roman / Italian empire went on for a long time afterwards, even if God did in fact impute guilt to them for what their soldiers did.

Another hallmark of God's Hand in the record is that what to us are the most obvious OT prophecies are not quoted; e.g. Is. 53:7: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth". A human author would have made great capital from such detailed fulfilments. But not so the Almighty. Hebrew, along with all the Semitic languages, has no superlatives. God doesn't need them. And the record of the cross is a classic example. The record of the resurrection reflects a similar culture. The actual resurrection isn't ever described [in marked contrast to how it is in the uninspired 'gospels']. Instead we read of the impact of His resurrection upon His disciples. The spiritual culture of Almighty God is also shown by the way in which although *all* the Council (Mk. 14:64), including Joseph, condemned Christ to death by crucifixion, God overlooks Joseph's lack of boldness in not contesting this, and speaks of him in such glowing spiritual terms. His 'not consenting unto' Christ's death was deep within him. I would be inclined to say: 'The *least* you could have done was to have abstained from the vote'. But the record is far more positive than that.

For want of a better way of putting it, the spiritual culture of God comes through so sublimely in these records. He began His written revelation with the comment, as an almost throw-away clause, that "He made the stars also" (Gen. 1:16). The vastness of that creation, far more wondrous and extensive than just this planet, is treated *en passant*. The actual resurrection of the Lord Jesus is likewise not recorded; we only learn of it from the recorded witness of those who went to the tomb, and who later met the Lord. The uninspired *Gospel of Peter* 39-42 does record the actual arising of the Lord's dead body; but immediately it becomes evident that this isn't inspired, simply because of the lack of spiritual culture which we are accustomed to in the inspired writings. Likewise it has been observed that God uses "an economy of miracle" when He has acted openly. The record of the disciples' baptism, whether and how the Lord met His mother after the resurrection (for surely He did), Saul changing his name to Paul, Aaron's repentance after the golden calf- all these things are left unrecorded. The Gospel writers do not praise the majestic temple and city of Jerusalem in any way, unlike the uninspired contemporary writers. And that same spiritual culture comes out especially in the account of the crucifixion. It makes a good exercise to read through one of the records, especially John 19, and make a list of the adjectives used. There are virtually none. Read a page of any human novelist or historian: the pages are cluttered

with them. Hebrew is deficient in adjectives, and because of this it often uses 'Son of...' plus an abstract noun, instead of an adjective. Thus we read of a "son of peace" (Lk. 10:5,6), or "a man of tongue" (Ps. 140:11 RVmg; AV "an evil speaker").

Divided His garments- There seems to have been something unusual about the Lord's outer garment. The same Greek word *chiton* used in Jn. 19:23,24 is that used in the LXX of Gen. 37:3 to describe Joseph's coat of many pieces. Josephus (*Antiquities* 3.7.4,161) uses the word for the tunic of the High Priest, which was likewise not to be rent (Lev. 21:10). The Lord in His time of dying is thus set up as High Priest, gaining forgiveness for His people, to 'come out' of the grave as on the day of Atonement, pronouncing the forgiveness gained, and bidding His people spread that good news world-wide. The robe was not to be torn, *schizein*. There was to be no schism in it. Ahijah tore his garment into twelve pieces to symbolize the division of Israel (1 Kings 11:30,31). The Lord's coat being unrent may therefore be another reflection of how His death brought about unity amongst His people (Jn. 11:52; 17:21,22). Before Him, there, we simply cannot be divided amongst ourselves. Likewise the net through which the Lord gathers His people was unbroken (Jn. 21:11). Note how all these references are in John- as if he perceived this theme of unity through the cross.

It is likely that the Lord was crucified naked, thereby sharing the shame of Adam's nakedness. The *shame* of the cross is stressed (Heb. 11:26; 12:2; Ps. 31:17; Ps. 69:6,7,12,19,20). And we are to share those sufferings. There *must*, therefore, be an open standing up for what we believe in the eyes of a hostile world. Preaching, in this sense, is for all of us. And if we dodge this, we put the Son of God to a naked shame; we re-crucify Him naked, we shame Him again (Heb. 6:6). He was crucified naked, and the sun went in for three hours. He must have been cold, very cold (Jn. 18:18). Artemidorus Daldianus (*Oneirokritika* 2.53) confirms that the Romans usually crucified victims naked. Melito of Sardis, writing in the 2nd century, writes of "his body naked and not even deemed worthy of a clothing that it might not be seen. Therefore the heavenly lights turned away and the day darkened in order that he might be hidden who was denuded upon the cross" (*On the Pasch* 97). The earliest portrayals of the crucified Jesus, on carved gems, feature Him naked. There is reason to think that the Jews put the Lord to the maximum possible shame and pain; therefore they may well have crucified Him naked. T. Mommsen *The Digest Of Justinian* 48.20.6 reports that "the garments that the condemned person is wearing may not be demanded by the torturers"- the fact that they gambled for His clothes shows that the Lord was yet again treated illegally (quite a feature of the records) and to the maximum level of abuse. We not only get this impression from the Biblical record, but from a passage in the Wisdom of Solomon (2:12-20) which would have been well known to them, and which has a surprising number of similarities to the Lord's life amongst the Jews (Susan Garrett lists several Greek words and phrases found in the Gospel of Mark which are identical to those in this section of the Wisdom of Solomon. It would seem that Mark was aware of this passage in the Wisdom of Solomon, and sought to show how throughout the Lord's ministry, and especially in His death, the Jews were seeking to apply it to Him in the way they treated Him. See Susan Garrett, *The Temptations Of Jesus In Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) p. 68):

"Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man, since he annoys us and opposes our way of life, reproaches us for our breaches of the law an accuses us of playing false... he claims to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a son of the Lord. Before us he stands, a

reproof to our way of thinking, the very sight of him weighs our spirits down; His way of life is not like other men's... in His opinion we are counterfeit...and boasts of having God as His father. let us see if what he says is true, let us observe what kind of end he himself will have. If the virtuous man is God's son, God will take his part and rescue him from the clutches of his enemies. *Let us test him with cruelty and with torture, and thus explore this gentleness of His and put His endurance to the proof. Let us condemn him to a shameful death* since he will be looked after- we have his word for it".

The idea of the Lord being subjected to the maximum pain and mocking must, sadly, be applied to Seneca's description of how some victims of crucifixion were nailed through their genitals (*Dialogi* 6.20.3). In this sense the paradox of Is. 53 would have come true- through losing His ability to bring forth children, the Lord brought forth a huge multitude of spiritual children world-wide. It's an honour to be one of them. *By casting lots*- Did they throw the die on top of His outer garment? Note the focus of the soldiers upon the dividing up of the clothes, whilst the Son of God played out the ultimate spiritual drama for human salvation just a metre or so away from them. And our pettiness is worked out all too often in sight of the same cross. As those miserable men argued over the clothes at the foot of the cross, so when Israel stood before the glory of Yahweh at Sinai, they still suffered "disputes" amongst themselves (Ex. 24:22 NIV cp. Heb. 12:29). So pressing and important do human pettinesses appear, despite the awesomeness of that bigger picture to which we stand related.

The sheer and utter reality of the crucifixion needs to be meditated upon just as much as the actual reality of the fact that Jesus actually existed. A Psalm foretold that Jesus at His death would be the song of the drunkards. Many Nazi exterminators took to drink. And it would seem almost inevitable that the soldiers who crucified Jesus went out drinking afterwards. Ernest Hemingway wrote a chilling fictional story of how those men went into a tavern late on that Friday evening. After drunkenly debating whether "Today is Friday", they decide that it really is Friday, and then tell how they nailed Him and lifted Him up. "When the weight starts to pull on 'em, that's when it gets em... Ain't I seen em ? I seen plenty of 'em . I tell you, he was pretty good today". And that last phrase runs like a refrain through their drunken evening. Whether or not this is an accurate reconstruction isn't my point- we have a serious duty to seek to imagine what it might have been like. Both Nazi and Soviet executioners admit how vital it was to never look the man you were murdering in the face. It was why they put on a roughness which covered their real personalities. And the Lord's executioners would have done the same. To look into His face, especially His eyes, dark with love and grief for His people, would have driven those men to either suicide or conversion. I imagine them stealing a look at His face, the face of this man who didn't struggle with them but willingly laid Himself down on the wood. The cross struck an educated Greek as barbaric folly, a Roman citizen as sheer disgrace, and a Jew as God's curse. Yet Jesus turned the sign of disgrace into a sign of victory. Through it, He announced a radical revaluation of all values. He made it a symbol for a brave life, without fear even in the face of fatal risks; through struggle, suffering, death, in firm trust and hope in the goal of true freedom, life, humanity, eternal life. The offence, the sheer scandal, was turned into an amazing experience of salvation, the way of the cross into a possible way of life. The risen Christ was and is just as much a living reality. Suetonius records that Claudius expelled Jewish Christians from Rome because they were agitated by one Chrestus; i.e. Jesus the Christ. Yet the historian speaks as if He was actually alive and actively present in person . In essence, He was. All the volumes of confused theology, the senseless theories about the Trinity. would all have been avoided if only men had

had the faith to believe that the man Jesus who really died and rose, both never sinned and was also indeed the Son of God. And that His achievement of perfection in human flesh was real. Yes it takes faith- and all the wrong theology was only an excuse for a lack of such faith.

Several crucifixion victims have been unearthed. One was nailed with nails 18c.m. long (7 inches). A piece of acacia word seems to have been inserted between the nail head and the flesh. *Did the Lord cry out in initial pain and shock?* Probably, as far as I can reconstruct it; for He would have had all the physical reflex reactions of any man. But yet I also sense that He didn't flinch as other men did. He came to offer His life, willingly; not grudgingly, resistantly give it up. He went through the panic of approaching the pain threshold. The nailing of the hands and feet just where the nerves were would have sent bolts of pain through the Lord's arms every time He moved or spoke. The pain would have been such that even with the eyelids closed, a penetrating red glare would have throbbed in the Lord's vision. Hence the value and intensity of those words He did speak. The pulling up on the nails in the hands as the cross was lifted up would have been excruciating. The hands were nailed through the 'Destot gap', between the first and second row of wrist bones, touching an extra sensitive nerve which controls the movement of the thumb and signals receipt of pain. They would not have been nailed through the palms or the body would not have been supportable . It has been reconstructed that in order to breathe, the crucified would have had to pull up on his hands, lift the head for a breath, and then let the head subside. The sheer physical agony of it all cannot be minimized. Zenon Ziolkowski (*Spor O Calun*) discusses contemporary descriptions of the faces of the crucified, including Jehohanan the Zealot, whose crucifixion Josephus mentions. Their faces were renowned for being terribly distorted by pain. The Lord's face was marred more than that of any other, so much so that those who saw Him looked away (Is. 52:14). That prophecy may suggest that for the Lord, the crucifixion process hurt even more. We suggest later that He purposefully refused to take relief from pushing down on the 'seat', and thus died more painfully and quicker. Several of the unearthed victims were crucified on olive trees. So it was perhaps an olive tree which the Lord had to carry. He would have thought of this as He prayed among the olive trees of Gethsemane (perhaps they took it from that garden?). I would not have gone through with this. I would have chosen a lesser death and the achieving of a lesser salvation. I would have had more pity on myself. But the Lord of all did it *for me*, He became obedient *even* to death on a cross (Phil. 2:8), as if He could have been obedient to a lesser death, but He chose this ultimately high level. I can only marvel at the Father's gentleness with us, that despite the ineffable trauma of death, the way He takes us is so much more gentle than how He allowed His only begotten to go.

Presumably there were many soldiers around. The temple guard which was seconded to the Jews (Mt. 27:65) was doubtless there in full force, lest there be any attempt to save Jesus by the crowd or the disciples. And yet Jn. 19:23 suggests there were only four soldiers, each of whom received a part of His clothing. This must mean that there were four actually involved in the crucifixion: one for each hand and foot. He had signs of nails (plural) in His hands. We are left to meditate as to whether He was nailed hand over hand as tradition has it (which would have meant two very long nails were used); or both hands separately.

Despite much prior meditation, there perhaps dawned on the Lord some 'physical' realizations as to the nature of His crucified position: the utter impossibility of making the slightest change of position, especially when tormented by flies, the fact that the

hands and feet had been pierced in the most sensitive areas; the fact that the arms were arranged in such a way so that the weight of the body hung only on the muscles, not on the bones and tendons. The smell of blood would have brought forth yelping dogs, circling birds of prey, flying insects…an incessant barrage of annoyances, things to distract the Lord's mind. As we too also face. He would have realized that the whole process was designed to produce tension in every part of the body. All His body, every part of it, in every aspect, had to suffer (and He would have realized the significance of this, and seen *all* of us as suffering with Him). The muscles were all hopelessly overworked, cramps due to the malcirculation of blood would have created an overwhelming desire to move. All victims would have writhed and wriggled within the few millimetres leeway which they had, to avoid a splinter pushing into the back lacerated from flogging... But my sense is that the Lord somehow didn't do this. He didn't push down on the footrests for relief (see 54), He didn't take the pain killer, He didn't ask for a drink until the end, when presumably the others accepted. Every muscle in the body would have become locked after two hours or so. Every part of His body suffered, symbolic of how through His sufferings He was able to identify with every member of His spiritual body- for "we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones" (Eph. 5:30). He had perhaps foreseen something of all this when He likened the killing of His body to the taking down of a tent / tabernacle- every bone and sinew, like every pole and canvass, had to be uprooted, 'taken down' (Jn. 2:19,21).

The moment of lifting the stake up vertical, probably amidst a renewed surge of abuse or cheering from the crowd, had been long foreseen and imagined by the Lord. "If, if I be *lifted up*..." (Jn. 12:32). He foresaw the physical (and spiritual) details of the crucifixion process in such detail. Recall how He foresaw that moment of handing over to death. And yet still He asked for the cup to pass, still He panicked and felt forsaken. If the theory of the cross was so hard to actually live out in practice for the Lord, then how hard it must be for us. The Lord's descriptions of Himself as being 'lifted up' use a phrase which carried in Hebrew the idea of exaltation and glory. As He was lifted up physically, the ground swaying before His eyes, His mind fixed upon the Father and the forgiveness which He was making possible through His sacrifice, covered in blood and spittle, struggling for breath... He was 'lifted up' in glory and exaltation, to those who have open eyes to see and hearts to imagine and brains to comprehend.

Imagine yourself being crucified. Go through the stages in the process. The Lord invited us to do this when He asked us to figuratively crucify ourselves daily. Consider all the language of the sacrifices which pointed forward to the final, supreme act of the Lord: poured out, pierced, parted in pieces, beaten out; the rock smitten... and this is the process which we are going through, although the Father deals with us infinitely more gently than with His only Son.

It is one of the greatest internal proofs of inspiration that this climactic act is recorded by each of the Gospel writers as a participial or subordinate clause. The concentration is on the splitting up of the clothes, which happened, of course, after the impaling. It is as if the record at this point is from the perspective of the soldiers. Get the job done, and *then*, on with the important bit!- the dividing of the clothes! No human author would ever have written like this. It's rather like the way Mary thinks that the risen Lord is a gardener. There is something artless and utterly Divine about it all. The record is full of what I would call spiritual culture. It has the hallmark of the Divine. This may be why some of the 'obvious' fulfilments of prophecy aren't mentioned, e.g. Is. 53:7

concerning the Lamb dumb before her shearers. Likewise there is no record of the faithful women weeping, or moaning as the body was taken down.

27:36 *And they sat there*- "And they sat down" after symbolically killing Joseph. "Sitting down *they* watched *him* there". Mark particularly has an abnormal number of pronouns throughout the record. The emphasis is on " he... him... his" ; also " they" occurs more than average. The contrast is being established between the crucified Christ and the world. If we are to identify with His cross, it is axiomatic that there must be a thorough separation from this world (Gal. 1:4).

And watched him- In the sense of guarding Him, rather than simply staring at Him. Matthew and Mark discuss the placing of the placard out of sequence, in order to emphasize how they did the Son of God to death, and then got on with splitting up His few clothes. The petty materialism of man was played out just a metre or two from the suffering Saviour, while He saw saying (repeatedly, the Greek could imply), "Father, forgive them"; with all the pain of speech which the crucified position involved. There were four soldiers, and they each took a part of His clothing: His head covering, belt, inner coat, His sandals. Those Galilean sandals, that had walked so many miles. He went about doing good, and healing... They kneeled on His chest and nailed Him, slung the mallets back into their packs, and straight away got on with arguing about who was going to keep those worn out shoes. One wonders whether the soldier wore them or sold them. Or kept them. And we must look at our petty materialism in the light of the cross, reflecting on the power of mammon: to eclipse the vision of the cross, to silence men from speaking of the wonder of the resurrection (Mt. 28:14)- to entice a man to betray the Lord of all grace (Mt. 26:15 implies Judas' motivation was financial, first and foremost). Long hours, demanding hours, striving for well-paid careers... all so we can have a nice car, a house, not a flat, in a nice area, so we can wear nice fitting clothes, so we can eat food which tickles the taste buds, rather than food which gives the basic proteins and vitamins etc. We do all this. Almost all of us. At the foot of the cross. Ignoring what it really means. And even worse: we excuse ourselves rather than admit our guilt. The records of the writing of the inscriptions may also be out of place in order to create the picture of all the people sitting watching the Lord Jesus, with that title over Him. The other two were there, but the people all watched Jesus. He was lifted up, and He drew all men (all men's eyes, in the primary sense) unto Him (Jn. 12:32). And the cross has that same magnetism today.

27:37 *And over his head they put the written accusation against him, which read*- This is out of sequence; the inscription was placed at the actual impalement (according to the other Gospels). Luke seems to imply that the mocking was because of this placard; it must have been a very unusual crime to die for, contrasting sharply with the usual reasons for death which were displayed on crosses.

This is Jesus, the King of the Jews- Not only was the Lord's death ongoing during His life. It was normal to write over the crucified 'This *was...*'. But over the Lord it was written: 'This *is* Jesus', as if for all time, this was His memorial to all generations.

Did Pilate write it in his own handwriting? Did they use the same ladder to place the inscription which Joseph later used to retrieve the body? Why do the records suggest that the inscription was placed after the stake had been erected? Was there initial resistance from the Jews? Was He impaled with the placard around His neck, and then the ladder was put up, and a soldier lifted it off and nailed it above His head? "Jesus of

Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would have used words whose first letters created the sacred Name: YHWH. Perhaps this was why there was such opposition to it. "King of the Jews" would have been understood as a Messianic title. Either Pilate was sarcastic, or really believed it, or just wanted to provoke the Jews. In any case, somehow the Yahweh Name was linked with the Messiah: King of the Jews. The Name was declared in the Lord's death, as He had foretold (Jn. 17:26). Forgiveness of sins is through baptism into the Name (Acts 2:38), as even in OT times forgiveness was for the sake of the Name (Ps. 79:9). And yet through the cross and blood of Christ is forgiveness made possible. His blood and death therefore was the supreme declaration of God's Name; through His cross the grace and forgiveness, love, salvation and judgment implicit in the Name was all enabled and revealed in practice. Ps. 22:22 prophesied that "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation [*ekklesia*, LXX]". It was to us His brethren that the Name was declared; in the eyes of an unbelieving world, this was just another crucified man, a failure, a wannabe who never made it. But to us, it is the declaration of the Name. It was and is done in the midst of the ecclesia, as if the whole church from that day to this beholds it all at first hand. And our response is to in turn "Declare His righteousness" (Ps. 22:31), in response to seeing the Name declared, we declare to Him…in lives of love for the brethren. For the Name was declared, that the love that was between the Father and Son might be in us.

Ps. 40:9,10 speaks of how the Lord Jesus would proclaim righteousness to the *ekklesia* and declare God's faithfulness and salvation, i.e. the things of His Name. Yet this passage is quoted in Heb. 10:5-7 about the cross. It was there above all that "thy law is within my heart" and He "preached righteousness". This is why Paul can talk of "the preaching [which is] the cross". He as He was there is the ultimate witness. And this was why the Yahweh Name was written up over Him.

Note that Lk. 22:36,38 record that the inscription on the cross was "also" written- connecting with how the soldiers "also" mocked Him. The inscription was intended as another mockery; but it was a vital part in declaring God's glory. The incident is typical of how those things which seem the most negative and unspiritual are used by the Father to His and our glory in the end.

27:38 *Two robbers were crucified with him*- Mt. 27:38 RV has a dramatic change of tense: "Then are there crucified with him…". Mark's present tenses are also arresting: "plaiting… they clothe him… they smote…" (:17,19 RV). Perhaps Mark is seeking consciously to make us imagine it all as going on before our eyes. Take just Mk. 15:23-26: "They offered… they crucify… and part… casting lots… crucified… was written". These arresting changes are surely to encourage us to re-live it all. Mark speaks of "they crucify him", going on to say that "then are there two crucified with him" (Mk. 15:38 RV), whereas Luke records the act in the past tense. Significantly, very few actual details are given by the Gospel writers of both the scourging and the crucifixion. It could be that they felt it impossible to dwell upon these things; or it could be that they and their readers knew what was involved in these practices, and we are left to dwell upon them in our own imagination. We are intended to reconstruct in our own minds what may have happened… We have a solemn duty towards Him to do this. This is perhaps why the tenses change so dramatically in the records.

One on his right hand and one on his left- The crucified Christ is portrayed as King of criminals, King of the basest sort, enthroned between them, taking the place of their leader Barabbas, who ought to have been where the Lord was. Both Barabbas and the

thieves are described with the same Greek word, translated "robber" (Jn. 18:40; Mk. 15:27). The Lord uses the same word when He points out that His persecutors were treating him as a "robber" (Mt. 26:55; Mk. 14:48; Lk. 22:52); He seems to be aware that what the experience He is going through is setting up Barabbas as a kind of inverse type of Himself, the true 'Son of the Father' (= 'Barabbas'). Those low, desperate men, the dregs of society, were types of us. Barabbas especially becomes a symbol of us all. According to Jewish tradition at the time (*Pesach* 8.6) "They may slaughter the Passover lamb…for one whom they [the authorities] have promised to release from prison". The Passover amnesty freed a man justly condemned to death- on account of the death of the lamb. We can imagine the relief and joy and almost unbelief of Barabbas, as he watched or reflected upon the crucifixion of Jesus- that he who rightfully should have been there on the cross, was delivered from such a death because of the cross of Christ. The image of condemned prisoners being released due to the death of Messiah is an undoubted Old Testament figure for our redemption from slavery. Some of the legal terms used in the NT for our redemption imply that Christ redeemed us from slavery through His death. And yet one could redeem a slave by oneself becoming a slave (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Gal. 3:13; 4:5). This is why the crucified Jesus is typified by the suffering servant / slave of Isaiah's prophesies. And Paul seems to have risen up to something similar when he speaks of giving his body to be branded, i.e. becoming a slave (1 Cor. 13:3 Gk.).

27:39 *And they that passed by*- The idea of crucifixion was that it was public. The invitation to carry the Lord's cross is an invitation to likewise be public and open in our identification with Him. But these people repeated the false accusation raised in the Sanhedrin trial, that the Lord had planned to destroy the temple (:40). One wonders, therefore, whether these people were indeed passers by. To have access to that information means they may have been close to the Jewish leadership. Perhaps they simply made out that they were 'passers by', and the Biblical record is at times written from the standpoint of how things appear to men, even if that is not the actual case [consider the language of demons]. Or it could be that these people continually passed back and forth in front of the Lord in order to try to provoke Him repeatedly with their blasphemy.

"Those that passed by" were not only comprised of casual passers-by who thought "Hey, there's a crucifixion, let's go and have a look". Golgotha was a little way out of the city. The size of the crowd must have been considerable; "crowds came to the spectacle" (Lk. 23:48 Gk.). It seems more reasonable that the reference is to those who passed by, back and forth (the Greek could imply), 'passing along' (Mk. 15:29) in front of the cross, taunting the Lord, as if they were making a wave offering in front of the presence of God in the crucified Christ. The connection between Ps. 22:7 and Mt. 27:39 would suggest that these 'passers-by' were there with the express intent of taunting Him. Because His eyes were inevitably downward, it would have been difficult for the Lord not to look at them. Their words were exactly those of the Sanhedrin (Mt. 26:61), so presumably they came from there- the work colleagues of Joseph and Nicodemus.

Derided him, wagging their heads- The reproach broke the Lord's heart (Ps. 69:20). It could even be that He suffered a heart rupture, a literal broken heart, some hours prior to His death- hence when His side was pierced, blood flowed out- and corpses don't usually bleed. It has been commented that severe emotional trauma is enough to cause such a rupture. He wasn't hard and impervious to it all. He knew who He was, and where He was going. To be treated as He was, was such an insult to the God of all

grace. And He keenly sensed this. Heb. 12:2,3 parallels the Lord's enduring of the cross with His enduring "such contradiction of sinners against Himself". These mockings were therefore part of "the cross". The "cross" process began before His impalement; in the same way as some verses which evidently concern the crucifixion are applied to the Lord's earlier life. His was *a life* of cross carrying. And we are asked to live the same life, not just the occasional 'cross' of crisis, but a life embodying the cross principles. As "the cross" means more than the impalement which epitomized it, likewise "the blood of Christ" means far more than the red liquid. These concepts found their physical epitome in the crucifixion process, but there is so much more to these things than the physical. The blood of the covenant, the Son of God and the Spirit of grace are bracketed together in Heb. 10:29. The Lord *was* His blood. The pouring out of blood from His side, the trickles down His cheeks from the crown of thorns, quickly drying in the hot dust beneath... this was *Him*. We take the wine in memory of *Him*; not just His blood. And He *is* the Spirit of God's grace. By Himself He purged our sins (Heb. 1:3); and yet this purging was through His blood (Heb. 9:14). He was His blood; His cross was the essence of all He was.

27:40 *And saying: You that would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days*- This would have reminded Him that He was doing this to Himself, they weren't doing it to Him. He knew that the temple would be ripped apart stone by stone. And so He knew the temple of His body must be, for in that body He bore our sins on the tree. He had foretold that the tabernacle of His body would be 'taken down' as that in the wilderness was, taken apart piece by piece. In that lengthy procedure He had seen foretold the excruciating nature of His death, as every aspect of humanity was taken apart. "...and buildest it in three days" would have taken His mind forward to that certain future. So their taunt would have aided His efforts to remain spiritual. Likewise their allusions to Ps. 22 ("He trusted in God...") served to steer the Lord's mind there, and to take comfort from the rest of the Psalm and the context of their mocking quotations. Yet even in the mocking, the Lord's Bible mind would have found some sort of encouragement. For the Lord was so clearly bearing the judgment of Israel's sins: "All who pass along the way clap their hands at you: they hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem" (Lam. 2:15). And note too Jer. 48:27 (LXX 31:27): "Is Israel a laughing stock? Was she caught between thieves that you wag your head?". This is exactly the Lord's position, between thieves, and mocked- but by Israel. These prophecies imply it was the Gentiles who would mock Israel; thus by treating the Lord as they did, they declared themselves to be no longer God's people but Gentiles. The darkness that came down would have recalled Jer. 33:19-21- when day and night no longer follow their normal sequence, God is breaking His covenant. Israel's condemnation would be that "even at midday you will grope like a blind man in the dark" (Dt. 28:29). And yet the Lord would have known that He was suffering for Israel, treated as an apostate Israel, and thus He was the more inspired to pray for their ultimate forgiveness and salvation, seeing He had borne their condemnation. The Lord suffered "for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due" (Is. 53:8 RVmg.). There are therefore elements of the crucifixion sufferings of Jesus in every suffering of natural Israel.

Save yourself- All the emphasis on save *yourself* was a temptation for Him to forget *us*. He would have reflected that He was saving Himself and us by staying where He was; coming down from the cross wouldn't lead to salvation. What the flesh understands by salvation and what the spirit understands by it are vastly different.

If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross- A repeat of the wilderness temptation to come down from the temple pinnacle. This temptation was at the hands of the Jews, and there is every reason to think that the wilderness temptations likewise were somehow involved with the Jewish satan. The Lord had likened His death on the cross, His giving of His flesh for the life of the world, to the coming down of manna from Heaven (Jn. 6:50,51,58). 'Coming down' was the classic language of theophany and God manifestation; the Lord's ascension was on the very basis that He had indeed 'come down' (Eph. 4:10). And He was indeed 'coming down', not a mere meter or so from the stake to the ground, but from Heaven to earth- for their salvation. Time and again the situations associated with the Lord's suffering were full of reference to His earlier teachings and beliefs. He was thus confirmed by the hand of providence in the path He had taken, realizing that this was not at all 'bad luck' or a suffering to simply be endured, but rather every detail of it was under God's hand controlled to confirm Him in His path to glory.

"Come down from the cross" was a repeat of the second temptation: Come down from the temple tower; throw yourself to death in Gehenna below, and perhaps the Angels will even then save you. This had been a temptation to commit suicide, to give up life without giving it for His friends, and hope that somehow the Angels would save Him personally. Victory in one temptation leads to victory again and again. All the wilderness temptations recurred during the crucifixion. Notice how the three temptations of Jesus in the desert are repeated in the three mockeries of Him on the cross recorded in Matthew and Luke. The comment that the devil departed from Him "for a season" may imply 'he' returned at the cross. And clearly enough, the temptations at the end were internal, even if voiced by an external person.

27:41 *In like manner also the chief priests with the Scribes and elders mocked him, saying*- Matthew and Mark record the same incident. The priests said among themselves (Mk.); Matthew implies they said it to Him. They spoke in mock whispers, huddled in their group, but loud enough for Him to hear. Many of "the elders" believed in Him (Jn. 12:42), but were led to this awful behaviour by the need to keep up appearances and the fear of exclusion from the synagogue.

27:42 *He saved others*- A tacit recognition that His healing miracles and the resurrection of Lazarus were undeniable. "He saved others" would have been a reference to Lazarus. His was a well-known case among the Jews (was Lazarus there? It would have been strange if He had not been). The Lord's mind would have choked at the memory of dear Lazarus, Martha, Mary, the now shattered family whom He had loved and still loved.

He cannot save himself. If he is the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in him- RV "He is the King of Israel..." - His claims to Kingship, and the claim of His placard, was a repeated jibe. It must have seemed so incongruous that this wretchedly suffering man actually thought Himself to be a King. "If... let him come down" may have been followed by a pause: is He going to do anything? In their hearts they must have known that He had had the ability to pull off this kind of thing. Those silent pauses must have been an agony for the Lord. There were probably many in that crowd half sympathetic to His wretched cause, who, on the surface, really might have believed if He had come down. But He had learned the lesson in the Galilee days, that impressive miracles didn't really instil faith (Pentecostals etc. still fail to realize this).

The mocking Jews fall strangely silent in the crucifixion accounts. The Lord had plainly foretold that when they had lifted up the Son of man, then they would know

“that I am he", and would recognize His Divine Sonship (Jn. 8:27). There was something about the vision of Christ crucified which convicted them of their folly and of the Divinity of God’s Son. And that power burns on today.

27:43 *He trusts in God*- As in :42 "He saved others", a tacit recognition that He had indeed trusted in God.

Let Him deliver him now- Perhaps mocking the Lord's model prayer, "Deliver us from evil". If so, this is an indication of how well known the Lord's teachings had become. Even the elders knew the content of His model prayer.

***If He desires him*- They were alluding to the LXX of Ps. 18:19 and 91:11. God cannot be tempted, otherwise He would have responded. 'If God *likes* Him', is what they were really implying.**

For he said: I am the Son of God- The Lord is never recorded as actually saying that in so many words. He preferred to leave His works and character to show that fact. And these learned men showed ignorance of the most basic Bible teaching- that God does not immediately deliver His children from their crises, nor does His apparent silence mean that He does not love them.

27:44 *And the robbers also that were crucified with him cast upon him the same reproach*- The same word is used of how these reproaches were actually against God, but they as it were fell upon the Lord (Rom. 15:3). In this we see the intensity of God's manifestation in his crucified Son. Paul quotes this in the context of appealing for our patience with the weak, knowing we are living out the spirit of the crucified Christ in our patient bearing with them (Rom. 15:1). Perhaps Paul specifically has in mind how the Lord was patient with the thieves, the weak, who reproached Him; and that patience paid off, in that one of them was converted to such an extent that he was assured of final salvation.

The intellectuals in concentration camps were often mocked and hated by the other inmates until they came down to their level. It is, apparently, an almost natural reaction. It explains another concentration camp phenomenon- that victims often cooperate with their persecutors in crimes against other victims; the weak join with the strong to persecute others who are weak. This, on a psychological level, helps to explain why the later-repentant thief should speak like this. And yet the Lord bore with him, and His patience led to the man’s conversion and salvation. They were men at the very limit of human experience. The self-respect of Jesus would have been most unusual; the purpose of the crucifixion process was to drive this out. He knew Who He was, and where He was going. Josephus describes how those on trial with the threat of crucifixion hanging over them did all that they could to appeal for mercy. The thieves probably did this. This is why the Jews were so scandalized when the Lord refused to answer for Himself, and then calmly stated that He was the Messiah who would come to them in judgment at the last day (Mt. 26:64,65); He was speaking the very blasphemy which they were trying so unsuccessfully to convict Him of. We can be sure that they and the soldiers tried especially hard to drive the self-respect from Him: which in His case would have meant resigning His belief that He was the spotless Son of God. This would explain why the soldiers mocked Him as they did, and why the onlooking Jews did so: unconsciously, they wanted to bring Him down to their level. The fact the Lord didn't descend to their level is yet another mark of the extent of His victory. It was the same temptation as 'Come down from the cross'; 'Come down to our level, the level of desperate men, just concentrating on hanging here and shifting the weight around between hands and feet, hands and feet, hands and feet...'. You know how it is when

you are carrying a very heavy load. You just concentrate on carrying it. You pant and sweat and don't care if you bump into somebody or tread on a child's toy. Those men were on that level. The Lord was in the same physical situation, but somehow He rose above, He didn't descend to the animal, mindless level. Thank you, Lord, that for *my* sake You didn't.

27:45 *Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour*- The only other Biblical reference to the sixth and ninth hours together is again in Matthew, and again on the lips of the Lord. It is when He spoke of how the householder went out at the sixth and ninth hours to desperately appeal for labourers to come and work for Him (20:5). This connection surely cannot be so arbitrary. The Lord intended that each waypoint or landmark in the crucifixion process would be an appeal to us to break out of our lethargy and come forward and serve Him in practice.

Darkness is often associated in the OT with mourning. Am. 8:9,10 speaks of earthquake and darkness at noon because "I will make it as the mourning for an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day", i.e. a funeral. The darkness was a sign of *Almighty God mourning for His Son*.

27:46 *And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice: Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*- The Greek seems to mean "Why *did You* forsake me", perhaps implying that He had already overcome the feeling of being forsaken. Mark records "Eloi"; Matthew "Eli". Why? There *is* a difference. Did He say "Eli, Eli, Eloi, Eloi" ? Four times calling upon God? We are going to suggest that these words indicate a crisis in the mind of the Lord Jesus. We would wish to write in almost every sentence of this study that the Lord Jesus was utterly sinless. Yet as one tempted to the limit, He must have come close to the edge. One of the superlative marvels of the Lord in His death was the way He never seems to have lost His spiritual composure, despite every physical and mental assault. Yet in these words we have Him perhaps nearer to such a breakdown of composure than anywhere else. Another example of His being 'close to the edge' was when He was in the Garden, asking for the cup to be taken away from Him. Compare those words with His clear understanding that He would have to die on a cross and later be resurrected. The clarity of His understanding is to be marvelled at. He went to the cross “knowing all things that should come upon him" (Jn. 18:4). He not only foresaw His death by crucifixion and subsequent resurrection, but many other details besides. Thus He spoke of how He was like a seed which would be buried in a *garden* (as He was) and then rise again (Lk. 13:19). But compare all this with His plea for another way to be found in Gethsemane, and also the cry "Why hast thou forsaken me?". There is only one realistic conclusion from this comparison: those words indicate a faltering in the Lord Jesus, a blip on the screen, a wavering in purpose. One marvels that there were not more such occasions recorded.

The first blip on the screen was in Gethsemane. The second one was when He cried "Why have You forsaken me?". We should remind ourselves of the chronology of events around the crucifixion (1):

14th Nissan	**9p.m. Last Supper**
12p.m.	Arrest
9a.m. (the third hour")	Crucifixion

12a.m. - 3p.m. ("sixth to the ninth hour")	Darkness	
3p.m. ("the ninth hour")	Death; Passover lambs killed	
15th Nissan	9p.m.	Israel eat Passover
16th Nissan	6p.m.	Passover Sabbath ends
5a.m.	Resurrection?	
6a.m.	Women at the tomb	
3p.m.	Walk to Emmaus	

The fact is, Christ died "at the ninth hour". It was at the ninth hour that he cried "It is finished" and "Father into thy hands I commend my spirit". Yet it was also *at* the ninth hour that He said "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mk. 15:34). The conclusion is that *at the very last moment* our Lord faltered. It was 11:59, and He faltered. Enter, *please*, into the sense of crisis and intensity. This is the only time that he prays to God as “God" rather than “Father" / *abba*. This itself reflects the sense of distance that enveloped Him. For He was your Lord and your Saviour hanging there, it was your salvation which hung in the balance. There is a very telling point to be made from Mt. 27:46. There we read that at "*about* the ninth hour, Jesus cried" those words about being forsaken. Mark says it was at the ninth hour, and we know it was at the ninth hour that Christ uttered His final words of victory. Yet it must have been only a few minutes before the ninth hour when Christ faltered; hence Matthew says that it was "*about* the ninth hour". What is a few minutes? Only a few hundred seconds, only moments. Only moments before the sweetness of the final victory, "It is finished" or accomplished, the Son of God was faltering. The more we appreciate this wavering at the last minute, the more fully we will appreciate the power and sense of victory behind Christ's final two sayings on the cross, uttered only moments later.

And so we come to the crux of the problem. How and why was Christ forsaken by the Father? Ultimately, of course, the Father did not forsake the Son in His time of greatest need and agony. I would suggest that Christ only *felt* forsaken; although if you *feel* forsaken, in a sense you are forsaken. The prototype of Christ feeling forsaken was in David feeling forsaken by God when he fled from Absalom (Ps. 42:9; 43:2; 88:14); but clearly he was not actually forsaken. But *why* did our Lord falter like this, at 11:59, one minute to twelve, at this agonizing last moment? Seeing the Father did not forsake the Son, there seems to have been some kind of intellectual failure in the Lord’s reasoning. In the terrible circumstances in which He was, this is hardly surprising. Yet such genuine intellectual failure, a real, unpretended failure to correctly understand something, usually has a psychological basis. The Lord, it seems to me, *feared death more than any other man*. He knew that death was separation from God, the wages of sin. Different people have varying degrees of fear of death (e.g. the unrepentant thief was totally resigned to it). It would seem that the Lord had the highest conceivable level of unresignation to death, to the point of being almost paranoid about it- even though He knew He must die. Two prototypes of the Lord had similar experiences. Abraham

suffered “an horror of great darkness" (Gen. 15:12), in an event rich in reference to the crucifixion. And Job’s sufferings were the very things which he “greatly feared" (Job 3:25). The Lord stood as a lamb dumb before His shearers; and the lamb is struck dumb with fear. This all makes the Lord’s death *for us* so much the more awesome.

We have elsewhere commented concerning the possibility that Christ felt that although He would be tied to the cross as Isaac was, yet somehow He would be delivered. Gen. 22:22 LXX speaks of Abraham not withholding his son- and the same word is found in Rom. 8:32 about God ‘not sparing’ His own son. Clearly the offering of Isaac is to be understood as prophetic of the Lord’s sacrifice. The Lord's growing realization that the entangled ram represented Him rather than Isaac would have led to this sense of panic which He now expressed. There is more evidence than we sometimes care to consider that Christ's understanding was indeed limited; He was capable of misunderstanding Scripture, especially under the stress of the cross. Earlier, in the garden, He had panicked; He was "sore amazed" (Mk. 14:33, s.w. "greatly wondering", Acts 3:11).

This desire for personal deliverance from the cross would have been there within our Lord throughout the six hours He hung there. And yet His only other earlier utterances which are recorded are all concerned with the welfare of others; us, the Jews, the thief, His mother. He supremely mastered His own flare of panic and desire for His personal salvation and relief, subjecting it to His spiritual and practical concern for others.

A study of Psalm 22 indicates deeper reasons why Christ felt forsaken. He had been crying out loud for deliverance, presumably for some time, according to Ps. 22:1-6, both during and before the unnatural three hour darkness. He felt that His desire for deliverance was not being heard, although the prayers of others had been heard in the past when they cried with a like intensity. The Lord Jesus was well aware of the connection between God's refusal to answer prayer and His recognition of sin in the person praying (2 Sam. 22:42 = Ps. 2:2-5). It is emphasized time and again that God will not forsake those who love Him (e.g. Dt. 4:31; 31:6; 1 Sam. 12:22; 1 Kings 6:13; Ps. 94:14; Is. 41:17; 42:16). Every one of these passages must have been well known to our Lord, the word made flesh. He knew that God forsaking Israel was a punishment for their sin (Jud. 6:13; 2 Kings 21:14; Is. 2:6; Jer. 23:33). God would forsake Israel only if they forsook Him (Dt. 31:16,17; 2 Chron. 15:2). It may be helpful to summarize the two strands of Bible teaching concerning being forsaken:

God will not forsake His people if they are righteous
"When thou art in tribulation... and shalt be obedient unto his voice... he will not forsake thee" (Dt. 4:18,19)
"The Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Dt. 31:6)
"The Lord will not forsake His people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people" (1 Sam. 12:22)
"If thou wilt walk in my statutes... and keep all my commandments to walk in them... I will not forsake my people" (1 Kings 6:12,13)
"Blessed is the man (Messiah) whom thou chastenest... for the Lord will not cast off his people, neither forsake his inheritance... all the upright in heart" (Ps. 94:12-15)
"When the poor and needy seek water... I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them" (Is. 41:17); i.e. God not forsaking was shown in His answering of prayer (cp. Ps. 22:1-11).

God will forsake His people if they sin
"Now the Lord hath forsaken us" because of Israel's disobedience at the time of the Judges (Jud. 6:9,13)
"Because Mannaseh hath done these abominations... I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies" (2 Kings 21:14)
"Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people... because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers and they please themselves" (Is. 2:6)
"I am against the (false) prophets... (therefore) I will even forsake you" (Jer. 23:33)
"If ye seek him, he will be found of you; but ye forsake him, he will forsake you" (2 Chron. 15:2)
"This people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the land... and will forsake me... then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them" (Dt. 31:16,17).

Knowing all this, He cried out: "*Why* have You forsaken me?". He felt forsaken by God, and Biblically, without a doubt, being forsaken by God means you are a sinner. "*Why* (oh *why*) have You forsaken me?" is surely the Lord Jesus searching His conscience with desperate intensity, finding nothing wrong, and crying to God to show Him where He had failed, why the Father had forsaken Him. It may be that initially He assumed He had sinned (Ps. 69:5), going through the self-doubt which David went through at the time of Absalom's rebellion (Ps. 3:2). As David had felt then that God had cast him off, even though "My lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail", so the Lord felt (Ps. 89:33,38). But then with an unsurpassedly rigorous self-examination, He came to know that He really hadn't. This means that once over the crisis, our Lord died with a purity of conscience known by no other being, with a profound sense of His own totality of righteousness. Again, this enables us to better enter into the intensity of "*It* is finished".

The Lord understood His death as drinking a cup from God. But that cup was, in Old Testament language, the cup of God's wrath against a disobedient people. The Lord knew that His death was a bearing of their judgment- which is not to say, of course, that the Lord's murderers, as any sinners, have to also answer for their sins. He so wished to gather the "chicks" of Jerusalem under His wings, but they would not, and thus the house of the temple would be left desolate. The image seems to be of a farmyard hen in a fire, gathering the chicks under wings as the house burnt down, so that afterwards, beneath her charred and destroyed body, her brood would be found alive. The Lord so wished the burnt offering of the cross to result in the salvation of the Israel of His day- but they would not. This was His level of love for those who baited Him, irritated Him, dogged His every step.

Christ knew from Isaiah 53 that He was to bear Israel's sins, that the judgments for their sins were to fall upon Him. Israel 'bore their iniquities' by being condemned for them (Num. 14:34,35; Lev. 5:17; 20:17); to be a sin bearer was therefore to be one condemned. To die in punishment for your sin was to bear you sin. There is a difference between sin, and sin being laid upon a person. Num. 12:11 brings this out: "Lay not the sin upon us… wherein we have sinned". The idea of sin being laid upon a person therefore refers to condemnation for sin. Our sin being laid upon Jesus therefore means that He was treated *as if* He were a condemned sinner. He briefly endured within Him the torment of soul which the condemned will feel. It seems that even our Lord did not

appreciate the extent to which He would be identified with sinful Israel, the extent to which He would have our sins imputed to Him, the weight of them, the degree to which He would be made sin for us, although knowing no sin (2 Cor. 5:21). And if He found this hard to come to terms with, no wonder we do too. The fact that the judgment for sin is sometimes equated with the sin itself was doubtless appreciated by the Lord (cp. 2 Kings 15:23); but the extent of this principle was what seemed to have been unappreciated by Him until the cross. Likewise, He would have meditated upon the way righteous men had taken upon themselves the sins of their people. Thus Jeremiah speaks as if he has committed Israel's sins; Ezra rends his clothes and plucks off his hair, as if *he* has married out of the Faith (Ezra 9:4 cp. Neh. 13:25; the Lord received the same sinner's treatment, Is. 50:6). Moses' prayer for God to relent and let him enter the land was only rejected for the sake of his association with Israel's sins (Dt. 3:26). But the *extent* to which the Lord would bear our sins was perhaps unforeseen by Him. And indeed, through His sin- bearing and sin-feeling, He enabled God Himself to know something of it too, as a Father learns and feels through a son. Thus God is likened to a man who goes away into a far country (Mt. 21:33)- the very words used by the Lord to describe how the sinner goes into a far country in his departure from the Father (Lk. 15:13). “My servant" was both Israel and the Lord Jesus; He was their representative in His sufferings. Which may well explain why in an exhibition of prisoners art from the Auschwitz death camp, there were so many crucifixes and ‘stages of the cross’ drawn by Jews, even in the wood of the huts, etched with their finger nails. They saw then, and will see again, the extent to which Jesus of Nazareth, through His cross, identifies with the suffering servant of Israel. Isaiah brings this point out Biblically-early in his prophecy he speaks of how “my servant" Israel will be wounded, bruised, tormented with “fresh stripes" (Is. 1:6 RVmg)- exactly the language Isaiah later uses about the sufferings of the Lord Jesus in His death.

Christ died to save Israel rather than everyone in the Gentile world (Is. 49:5; 53:8; Gal. 4:4,5), He was “a servant to the circumcised" (Rom. 15:8), " the consolation *of Israel*" , unto *them* was born a saviour (Lk. 2:11,25), and therefore He had to be exactly representative of them. For this reason it was theologically necessary for Jesus to be Jewish in order to achieve the work He did. We are only saved by reason of becoming in Christ and therefore part of the Israel of God (Gal. 3:27-29). The Jewish basis of salvation is absolutely fundamental to a correct understanding of the Gospel.

Consider the following evidence that fundamentally, Christ died to save Israel:
"For unto us (Israel) a child is born, unto us a son is given" (Is. 9:6)
"The Lord formed me in the womb to be His servant, to bring Jacob again to Him" (Is. 49:5)
"For the transgression of my people was he stricken" (Is. 53:8)
“God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law" (Gal. 4:4,5)
The good news of Christ’s birth was for “all the people" of Israel, primarily (Lk. 2:10 RV).
The Lord laid down His life “for the sheep" of Israel (Jn. 10:15,16).

Both Peter and Paul appealed to the Jews to repent because it was for them that Christ had died: "Ye are the children...of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying.... And in thy seed shall all the kindreds (tribes) of the earth (land) be blessed. Unto you first (i.e. most importantly) God, having raised up his son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities... God raised unto Israel

a Saviour… men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham... to you is the word of this salvation sent... we declare unto you glad tidings (the Gospel), how that the promise (of salvation in Christ) which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children" (Acts 3:25,26; 13:23,26,32,33).

"For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision (Rom. 15:17) has reference to Isaiah's Servant prophecies of the crucifixion. But it is also, as so often in Paul, a reference to the Lord's words; in this case, Mt. 20.26-28: "It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many". The 'becoming a servant' refers to His death; and He became a servant, Paul says, to the Jews above all.

Because of all this, the sufferings of Christ on the cross have connections with the punishments for Israel's sins (e.g. being offered gall to drink = Jer. 8:14; Lam. 3:5). Israel were temporarily forsaken by God because of their sins (Is. 49:14; 54:7), and therefore so was Christ. Christ was chastened with the rod of men "and with the stripes of the children of men", i.e. Israel (Is. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24; Mic. 5:1), in His death on the cross. But punishment with rod and stripes was to be given if Messiah sinned (2 Sam. 7:14). Yet Christ received this punishment; because God counted Him as if He were a sinner. His sharing in our condemnation was no harmless piece of theology. He really did feel, deep inside Him, that He was a sinner, forsaken by God. Instead of lifting up His face to Heaven, with the freedom of sinlessness, He fell on His face before the Father in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:39), bearing the guilt of human sin. There are times when we may feel that the righteousness of Christ makes Him somehow inaccessible to us. Even among contemporary brethren and sisters, there are some who I feel somehow distanced from, simply because I know they are far more righteous than I. And I know that there are many of us who feel the same. We feel that they just don't know what it feels like to be spiritually down and out, to feel and deeply know the dirt of our own nature. And if we have this problem with each other, we will surely have it with the Lord Jesus too. For this reason many of us lack the dynamic, close personal relationship with Christ which we should have.

And yet here on the cross, we see our Lord with all the panic of the sinner who knows He is facing judgment and death, feeling every bit, right throughout His very being, the alienation from God which sin brings. He knew the agony of separation from God because of sin. He was a sin bearer (Is. 53:11); and the idea of sin bearing was almost an idiom for being personally guilty and sinful (Num. 14:34; Ex. 28:43). The Lord was our sin bearer and yet personally guiltless. This is the paradox which even He struggled with; no wonder we do, on a far more abstract level. Is. 63:2,3 explains how in the process of obtaining salvation, the Lord's clothing would be made red. Red clothes in Isaiah suggest sinfulness that needs cleansing (Is. 1:18). He was completely identified with us, to the point of feeling a sinner even although He never sinned. Perhaps this was why Pilate marvelled so greatly at Christ's silence when under false accusation (Mk. 15:5); Pilate knew Jesus was innocent, and he had seen many innocent men being condemned in that court situation. Innocent men usually protest their innocence, desperately. But this innocent man didn't. Perhaps the paradox is explained by the fact that Jesus felt so closely identified with sinful, guilty humanity that He didn't do the natural thing, which would've been to loudly proclaim His own innocence.

The Greek word translated "forsaken" occurs also in Acts 2:27, where Peter quotes from Psalm 16 concerning how Christ was always aware of His own righteousness, and therefore confidently knew that God would not "*leave* (forsake) his soul in hell". In Ps. 22:1, our Lord was doubting His previous thoughts, as prophesied in Ps. 16:10. He now feared that God had forsaken Him, when previously He had been full of confidence that God would not do so, on account of His perfect character. Because Christ felt such a sinner deep within Him, He even doubted if He really was the Messiah. This is how deeply, how deeply, our Lord was our representative, this is how thoroughly He bare our own sins in His own body on the tree, this is how deeply He came to know us, to be able to exactly empathize with us in our spiritual weakness; this was how He became able to have a fellow feeling with those who are out of the way, who have lost the faith, "for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity" (Heb. 5:2). The way the Lord felt as a sinner without being one is possibly reflected in the way He framed the parable of the prodigal son. For like it or not, the prodigal is portrayed in terms which are elsewhere applicable to Jesus- the beloved son of the Father, given the Father's wealth as His inheritance, He who was rich becoming poor, going into the Gentile world, accused of companying with prostitutes, bitterly rejected by the elder brother [cp. the Pharisees], accused of wasting wealth [by Judas], received with joy by the Father. Of course, the Lord Jesus did not sin. But why is the sinner framed in the story in the very terms which are applicable to the sinless Son of God? Surely the Lord did this to reflect the degree to which He felt His identity with sinners, although He never sinned.

The greatest fear within a righteous man is that of sinning. There are many Messianic Psalms in which David, in the spirit of Christ, speaks of His fear of being forsaken by God:
"Leave me not, neither forsake me, *O God of my* salvation" (Ps. 27:9; cp. "*My God*, Why hast thou forsaken me")
"Forsake me not, O Lord: *O my God* be not far from me" (Ps. 38:21)
"Hide not they face from thy servant... hear me speedily" (Ps. 69:17)- implying that a lack of response to prayer (as He experienced on the cross) was perceived by the Lord as rejection.
"Forsake me not... *O God*, forsake me not" (Ps. 71:9,18)
"I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not" (Ps. 119:8)
"Forsake not the works of thine own hands" (Ps. 138:8).

This points forward to how our Lord had this lifelong fear of being forsaken by God as a result of sin. Under the extreme pressure of the cross, amidst His constant self-examination, it is understandable that Christ's greatest fear, perhaps almost His paranoia, appeared to become realized. The crowd had been trying to brainwash our Lord with the idea that He had sinned; and because of His humanity and sensitivity of His personality, the Lord Jesus was perhaps subconsciously influenced by all this. He was no hard man, insensitive to the jeers of men. Remember how He was laughed *to scorn* both on the cross and in the home of Jairus, and how He did not hide His face from the *shame* which He was made to feel by men (Mt. 9:24; Ps. 22:7; Is. 50:6). Job's sufferings were another type of Christ's, and his sufferings (cp. Christ's experience on the cross) was the thing which He had greatly feared all his life (Job 3:25). The thing which Christ greatly feared, according to the Psalms, was being forsaken by God. And true enough to the Job type, this came upon Him.
Because Christ truly felt a sinner, He felt forsaken by God. This is to me the explanation

of one of Scripture's most enigmatic verses: "Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but my servant? Or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? Who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant?" (Is. 42:18,19). The Lord Jesus, as the servant, was to share the blindness and deafness of an obdurate Israel. He identified with us even in our sinfulness; and yet He was the blind who was perfect; and this is the very thing that empowers the spiritually blind to see. When God made His soul sin on the cross [AV "offering for sin" is not in the Hebrew text- it's an interpretation], *then* He saw [Heb. to perceive / discern] His seed (Is. 53:10). This all seems to mean that it was through this feeling as a sinner deep within His very soul, that the Lord Jesus came to 'see', to closely identify with, to perceive truly, us His sinful seed / children. And He did this right at the very end of His hours of suffering, as if this was the climax of His sufferings- they led Him to a full and total identity with sinful men and women. And once He reached that point, He died. The total identity of the Lord with our sinfulness is brought out in passages like Rom. 8:3, describing Jesus as being "in the likeness of sinful flesh" when He was made a sin offering; and 1 Pet. 2:24, which speaks of how He "his own self…in his own body" bore our sins "upon the tree". Note that it was at the time of His death that He was especially like this. I believe that these passages speak more of the Lord's moral association with sinners, which reached a climax in His death, than they do of His 'nature'. The Greek words *charis* [grace] and *choris* [apart] differ by one very small squiggle. This is why there's an alternative reading of Heb. 2:9: "So that apart from God [*choris theou*] he [Jesus] tasted death for us" (2). This would then be a clear reference to the way that the Lord Jesus felt apart from God at His very end. Not that He was, but if He felt like that, then this was in practice the experience which He had. Thus even when we feel apart from God- the Lord Jesus knows even that feeling.

In every other recorded prayer of His in the Gospels, the Lord addressed the Almighty as "Father"; but now He uses the more distant "My God", reflecting the separation He felt. But therefore His mind flew to Ps. 22:1, and He quoted those words: "My God, why hast thou forsaken me". But the fact His mind went to the Scriptures like that was His salvation. There is reason to think that in His last few minutes, the Lord quoted the whole of Ps. 22 out loud. Thus He asked for a drink " that the Scripture might be fulfilled" , or finished, and then His words "It is finished" followed- which are actually an exact quote from the Septuagint of the last verse of Ps. 22. Psalms 22 and 69 can be clearly divided into two halves; the first half speaks of the confused thoughts of the Lord Jesus as He hung on the cross, but then there is a sudden rally, and His thoughts become clearly more confident and positive, centred around the certainty of our future salvation. As Christ quoted or at least thought through Psalm 22, He came to the glorious conclusion: Of course this is how Messiah must feel, He *must* feel forsaken, as Ps. 22 prophesied, but He would go on to save God's people! Just because Messiah would *feel* forsaken didn't mean that He Himself had sinned! We can almost sense the wave of reassurance that swept over our Lord, that deep knowledge of His own good conscience. And therefore how desperate He was, despite that ravaging thirst, to utter to the world that cry, "It is finished"; to show to us all that He had achieved God's work, that He *had* perfectly manifested the Father, and that thereby He really had achieved our redemption.

Notes

(1) This chronology is my preferred one. Yet it presents the problem (for some) of reading "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Mt. 12:40) as an idiom rather than a literal time period. This problem is well handled in H.A.Whittaker, 'Three

days and three nights', in *Studies in the Gospels*. (2) A reading justified at length in Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977) pp. 87-97.

27:47 *And some of them standing there, when they heard it, said: This man calls Elijah*- They were confusing "Eliyahu" with "Eloi, Eloi". With teeth loose or missing, throat parched from the fever induced by the iron nails in the blood stream, the difficulty of speaking because of being suspended by the arms... this confusion isn't surprising.

27:48 *And immediately one of them ran and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink*- John defines the reed as a hyssop, which is not more than 50 cm. long. We conclude that the Lord was not lifted up that high above the earth. His knees would have been at head height for those standing by the cross.

27:49 *And the rest said: Let him be. Let us see whether Elijah comes to save him*- They grudged even temporal relief for the Lord, because they were intent on testing whether He was indeed a true prophet. They felt justified in subjecting Him to the worst torture and indignity because they thought they were testing a false prophet.

27:50 *And Jesus cried again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit*- "Again"- after "It is finished". The Diaglott of Mt. 27:50 suggests that this cry *was* the giving up of the spirit: "Then Jesus crying out again with a loud voice, expired". For the huge significance of this, see on Lk. 23:46. The Lord gave His life, it was not taken from Him (Jn. 10:18); He consciously controlled the giving out of His last breath.

27:51 *And the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom; and the earth quaked*- The way into the most holy was now open to all, the veil torn from top to bottom because this was done by God. The High Priest's garments had been torn by him, and now the veil itself was open. Judaism was effectively over. Direct fellowship with God was now made possible through the Lord's death. We note by contrast how the same word is used to describe how the Lord's garment was *not* rent (Jn. 19:24). "From the top" indicates that this was done by God. He was no longer hidden behind ritual, stones and sacred space..

And the rocks were split- "Rocks" translates *petra*, the Lord's special name for Peter. According to the reconstruction of events offered earlier, Peter was present at the crucifixion, a witness to the Lord's sufferings (1 Pet. 5:1), and what he saw there was the basis of his conversion. Perhaps we are therefore intended to imagine the rending of Peter's heart as part of his conversion process; and his path is to be ours, if we allow the cross the same power in our hearts.

Job said that if he justifies himself, he will be condemned out of his own mouth (Job 9:20- he understood the idea of self-condemnation and judgment now). Isaiah also foresaw this, when he besought men (in the present tense): "Enter *into the rock*, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty", and then goes on to say that in the day of God's final judgment, "[the rejected] shall go *into* the holes of *the rock*... for *fear of the Lord and for the glory of His majesty* when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth" (Is. 2:10,11,19-21). We must find a true, self-condemning humility now, unless it will be forced upon us at the judgment. The LXX of Is. 2:19 speaks of a rending of the rocks, exactly the same phrase as occurs in Mt. 27:51 about the crucifixion. Rending of rocks is common judgment day language (Nah. 1:5,6; Zech. 14:4), and consider too how this happened in the theophany of 1 Kings 19:11,12, in which the still small voice would be comparable to the message of the cross.

27:52 *And the tombs were opened and many bodies of the saints that had fallen asleep were raised*- Not in order to let the bodies climb out, for they were already

decayed; but rather as a visual witness to the fact the Lord had conquered death. Likewise at His own resurrection, the Angelic rolling away of the stone was not simply so that the Lord could walk out into the open air, as if He was otherwise trapped behind the rock. He could pass through walls at ease. Rather was it again a visual witness to men.

27:53 *And coming forth out of the tombs after his resurrection*- The graves were open for three days, and the bodies only came out of them when the Lord rose from the dead. The message was that His resurrection meant the resurrection of others, if we identify with Him. This latter point suggests to me that these people were likely known followers of the Lord who had died during His ministry and would've been well known to those who saw them.

They entered into the holy city- That sinful city is called “the holy city", even though this will only be Jerusalem's title in the Kingdom age, after her repentance (Is. 1:26). What imputation of righteousness! Again, we see how the record *breathes* the spirit of grace. The fact those mocking Jews died in their beds, that judgment didn't immediately come, that the repentant thief was saved and not made to apologize, that Joseph the secret doubter who voted for the Son of God's crucifixion should be spoken of so highly... there are so many examples of God's pure grace to man.

And appeared to many- The idea of the Greek is not a mere appearance but an explanation or giving of information. These persons were therefore actually preaching something, which supports my suggestion above that they were believers in Jesus.

27:54 *Now the centurion and those that were with him watching Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that happened*- There is great emphasis on people "beholding" (Mt. 27:36,54; Lk. 23:35,47-49). He drew the eyes of all men unto Him (Jn. 12:32). There was (and is) a magnetism about the cross.

The point has been made that the sight of the crucifixion process divided people into the only two categories which exist in God's sight:
- The repentant thief and the bitter one
- The soldiers who mocked and the Centurion who believed
- The Sanhedrin members who believed and those who wouldn't
- The women who lamented but didn't obey His word, and those whose weeping isn't recorded, but who stood and watched and thought
- The people who beat their breasts in repentance, and those who mocked as to whether Elijah would come to save the Lord.

This is why recollection of the Lord's agony is to be associated with serious self-examination and humbled, zealous response (1 Cor. 11:28,29). And this is where our study must lead us.

Were terrified, saying- Not just the Centurion but the soldiers with him all made the confession that "This was the Son of God". This is the confessional formula used in the Gospels and Acts. They feared because it was exactly that batallion of soldiers who had just hours before so cruelly abused and mocked the Lord. They came very quickly from that extreme of hating Him to a public confession of faith in Him at the foot of His cross. This is the power of the cross in convicting men. I suggest that psychologically, they could only have made this step of faith because they believed that somehow He would forgive them. They perceived a connection between His death there, and the forgiveness of the greatest human sin, the sin of the cosmos, the worst sin ever committed in the infinity of time and space- to abuse and crucify God's Son. Even that could be forgiven. If those soldiers did not have that conviction, then it seems

to me that they simply would have cursed their luck and lived the rest of their days with a "certain fearful looking for of judgment".

Truly this was the Son of God- He said it twice: "This was a righteous man (Lk.), truly this man was the son of God" (Mk.). And he might well have added in his own thoughts: “And I’ve crucified him".

27:55 *And many women were there watching from afar*- There is great emphasis on people "beholding" (Mt. 27:36,54; Lk. 23:35,47-49). He drew the eyes of all men unto Him (Jn. 12:32). There was (and is) a magnetism about the cross. Lk. 23:48 says that there were people 'coming together to that sight'. This might imply that the crowd which was milling around came clustering around the cross once the Lord uttered His final cries and so evidently died. The women also beheld His dead corpse from afar. This seems to be encouraging us to imagine the picture of the Lord just at that point; the dead body on the cross, the victory achieved. It was only at this stage that the curse of Dt. 21 came into effect: "Cursed (Heb. a curse; the Hebrew is *always* translated this way) is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Dt. 21:22,23). These words have been misunderstood as meaning that the Lord as a living being was under one of the Law's curses of condemnation. This cannot be. It must be remembered that crucifixion was a Roman, not Jewish method. The Deuteronomy passage was not written with reference to crucifixion, but rather to the custom of displaying the already dead body of a sinner on a pole as a witness and warning (cp. the display of Saul's body). Sin brought the curse; and so every sinful person who died for their sin was bearing the curse of God. They were to be buried quickly as a sign of God taking no pleasure in the death of the wicked. The Lord died the death of a sinner; He bore our sins, and therefore our curse (Gal. 3:13,14). Every condemned sinner whose body had been displayed had been a type of the sinless Son of God. He was exhibited there for one or two hours (until Joseph got the permission to take the body), totally, totally united with sinful man. And then, because God had no pleasure in this condemnation of sin, the body was taken and buried.

Luke adds that people smote their breasts and ‘returned’, the same word used about repentance. Smiting the breast connects with the sinner smiting his breast in repentance (Mt. 11:17 RVmg.). The thoughts of many hearts are revealed by meditation on the cross (Lk. 2:35). It leads us to repentance. The prophecy that the Jews would look on His they pierced and mourn in repentance may have had an incipient fulfilment at the crucifixion.

John notes that all the ‘beholding’ of the crucified Christ was a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy about Israel beholding the one whom they had pierced. Simeon had prophesied that a sword would pierce Mary's heart as it also pierced that of Christ her son (Lk. 2:35). This is one reason for thinking that Mary may still have been at the cross when the Lord died. It could be that John took her to his home, arm round her shoulders as she wrestled with the desire to take one last motherly look back, and then returned himself to the cross; and then Mary crept back, almost hot on his heels, or perhaps choosing another route, and hiding somewhere in the crowd where neither her son nor John, her new son, would see her. To me, this has the ring of truth about it. Simeon's prophecy, as that sweet baby in cheap cloths lay cradled in his arms, seems to imply that *as* the Lord's heart was pierced, so would his mother's be. Are we to conclude from this that there was a heart-piercing groan within her, as she saw the spear head enter and the blood flow out? Each time they called out ‘Come down from the cross!’,

her heart must have been in her mouth. Would He? She had learnt the lesson of Cana, not to pressurize Him for convenient miracles; not to catch His eye as if to say 'Go on, do it, for my sake'. But nonetheless, because she was only human, she would have hoped against hope. But now, the finality of death forced itself upon her. And her heart was pierced in that moment. Yet Yahweh Himself had prophesied, years before: "They shall look upon *me* whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for *him*... and shall be in bitterness for *him*" (Zech. 12:10). The use of pronouns here seems to mean that God was in Christ on the cross, reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). When the Son was pierced, so was the Father. And so at the moment of that sword-thrust, we see the connection of both parents with their suffering Son. As He was pierced, so were the Father and mother. Here we see the wonder and yet the tragedy of the Divine family. We have a very rare insight into the relationship between the Father and Mary. The notion of personal pre-existence and total Deity of Christ destroys this beauty and mystery. Indeed, the whole relationship between the Lord and His mother and Father is surpassingly beautiful, once His nature is correctly understood. There is so much one could speculate and yet dares not hardly think or say (e.g. whether the Lord appeared to His mother after the resurrection; what their relationship will be in the Kingdom).

Those who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him- The women who stood afar off and watched in helplessness and hopelessness and lack of comprehension *also followed* the Lord and ministered to Him in the Galilee days. Their standing there like that was still reckoned to them as active following and ministry to Him. They also serve, who merely stand and wait.

27:56 *Among whom were Mary Magdalene*- Mary Magdalene was perhaps named after the town of Magdala. But named Magdalene may mean the Lord gave her that Name just as He gave names to His other disciples. The name derives from the Hebrew *migdol*, 'tower'. So the repeated description of her as the Magdalene could be implying: Mary the tower- Magdalene. Just as the shaky Simon was described as 'the rock', Simon-the-rock, so the shady Mary was surnamed 'Mary-the-tower'. It was common for Jewish rabbis to give their followers names, and it seems the Lord did this too- but the names He gave reflected the potential which He saw in His men and women. And the name He gives us likewise is a reflection of the potential we can live up to. Mary Magdalene is the most frequently named person in the passion narratives. Clearly the Gospel writers, under inspiration, perceived her as the central figure amongst those who were witnesses of it all. In doing so they turned on its head the prevailing idea that the witness of a woman was worthless. They saw her as the main witness. The Gospel writers clearly see Mary Magdalene as of prime importance amongst the women who followed the Lord. Luke twice places her first in his lists of the ministering women (Lk. 8:2; 24:10). Matthew likewise focuses on how she was at Calvary, at the burial and at the empty tomb (Mt. 27:56, 61; 28:1,9). She clearly captured the attention of the gospel writers.

And Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee- The Torah required "two or three witnesses" (Dt. 19:15); yet Roman law disallowed women as witnesses. Significantly, the Torah didn't. The fact it doesn't, and therefore accepted women as witnesses, was actually quite a radical thing. The records of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus are carefully framed to show that there were always two or three witnesses present- and they are all *women*:

Cross	**Burial**	**Resurrection**

Matthew	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and Joseph, Mother of the sons of Zebedee	Mary Magdalene, "the other Mary"	Mary Magdalene, "the other Mary"
Mark	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and Joses, Salome	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of Joses	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, Salome
Luke			Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary mother of James

The emphasis is surely deliberate- women, the ones who were *not* witnesses according to the world, were the very witnesses chosen by God to testify the key truths concerning His Son. And His same approach is seen today in His choices of and amongst us.

Jn. 19:25 speaks of "His mother's sister". It is entirely possible that the sister of Jesus' mother mentioned in the account of the crucifixion is to be identified with the woman named Salome mentioned in Mark 15:40 and also with the woman identified as "the mother of the sons of Zebedee" mentioned in Mt 27:56. If so, and if John the Apostle is to be identified as the beloved disciple, then the reason for the omission of the second woman's name becomes clear; she would have been John's own mother, and he consistently omitted direct reference to himself or his brother James or any other members of his family in the fourth Gospel. Therefore "behold your mother" meant he was to reject his mother and take Mary as his mother, to alleviate the extent of her loss. Finally Mary came to see Jesus as Jesus, as the Son of God, and not just as her son. This was her conversion- to see Him for who He was, uncluttered by her own perceptions of Him, by the baggage of everything else. And so it can be with us in re-conversion. We each must face the reality of who Jesus really is, quite apart from all the baggage of how we were brought up to think of Him: the Sunday School Jesus, the Jesus of the apostate church, the Jesus we have come to imagine from our own human perceptions…must give way when we are finally confronted with who He really is. This line of thought is born out by a consideration of Mk. 15:40,41: "There were also women beholding from afar: among whom were both Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the little and of Joses, and Salome; who, when he was in Galilee, followed him and ministered unto him: and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem". Jesus had two brothers named James and Joses (Mt. 13:55). If the principle of interpreting Scripture by Scripture means anything, then we can fairly safely assume that the Mary referred to here is Mary the mother of Jesus. It was perhaps due to the influence and experience of the cross that His brother James called himself "the little", just as Saul changed his name to Paul, 'the little one', from likewise reflecting on the height of the Lord's victory. So within the crowd of women, there were two women somehow separate from the rest- "among whom were both Mary Magdalene, and Mary". Mary Magdalene was the bashful ex-hooker who was almost inevitably in love with Jesus. The other Mary was His mother. Understandably they

forged a special bond with each other. Only Mary Magdalene had fully perceived the Lord's upcoming death, hence her annointing of His body beforehand. And only His Mother had a perception approaching that of the Magdalene. It's not surprising that the two of them were somehow separate from the other women. These women are described as following Him when He was in Galilee; and the mother of Jesus is specifically recorded as having done this, turning up at the Cana wedding uninvited, and then coming to the house where Jesus was preaching. The description of the women as 'coming up' (the idiom implies 'to keep a feast') with Him unto Jerusalem takes the mind back to Mary bringing Jesus up to Jerusalem at age 12. But my point is, that Mary is called now "the mother of James…and of Joses". The same woman appears in Mk. 16:1: "Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James…had bought sweet spices that they might come and anoint him". Earlier in the Gospels, Mary is always "the mother of Jesus". Now she is described as the mother of her other children. It seems to me that this is the equivalent of John recording how Mary was told by Jesus at the cross that she was no longer the mother of Jesus, He was no longer her son. The other writers reflect this by calling her at that time "Mary the mother of James" rather than the mother of Jesus. The way that Jesus appears first to Mary Magdalene rather than to His mother (Mk. 16:9) is surely God's confirmation of this break between Jesus and His earthly mother.

27:57 *And when evening had come, there came a rich man*- The Greek term is found elsewhere in the Lord's parables of the rich fool and of the rich man who refused to believe the testimony of Moses and the prophets about Messiah's resurrection (Lk. 12:16; 16:19). Perhaps Joseph had reflected upon those teachings and vowed not to be like those rich men, but rather to give up his wealth.

From Arimathaea, named Joseph- Perhaps Old Testament 'Ramah', birthplace and home of Samuel.

Who also was a disciple of Jesus- He was 'also' a disciple, in God's eyes, in the same category as the women disciples who were so public about their discipleship (:56). Whilst secret discipleship is not the Lord's intention, and He will arrange circumstances so that we 'come out' publically, it is not for us to say that He doesn't count secret disciples as also His disciples, just as He did Joseph.

27:58 *This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded it to be given him*- The body was sometimes granted to very close relatives. Joseph is now showing his open affinity with this crucified man. At that time, he didn't firmly believe in the resurrection. For sheer *love* of this crucified man, he was willing to sacrifice his standing in society, his economic position, risk his life, grovel before the hated Pilate to beg (Lk.), crave (Mk.) the body. This was something which only the close relatives of the crucified could presume to do. But he felt already that new relationship to the Lord, and whether or not He would ever be raised he wanted to show openly to the world his connection with Him, come what may. This was the effect of the Lord's death upon him.

The text records that the Jews desired Pilate for the death of Jesus; but the very same Greek words are used to describe how Joseph desired Pilate to let him have the body of Jesus (Mt. 27:58)- as if to show how Joseph openly undid his request for the crucifixion, by requesting the body. It is twice stressed that Joseph was on the Sanhedrin council.

So was Nicodemus (Jn. 3:2). Yet the whole council unanimously voted for the crucifixion (Mk. 14:64). "The whole Sanhedrin" (Mk. 15:1 NIV) agreed the High Priests' plan of action. They *all* interrogated Him and “the whole multitude of them" led Jesus to Pilate (Lk. 22:66,70; 23:1). This is some emphasis. Joseph “was not in agreement" with them, we are told, but it seems this was a position held within his own conscience; indeed, “many” of the elders actually believed in Jesus (Jn. 12:42). It was only the actual cross which brought faith into the open. “You shall not be in agreement with the wicked as an unjust witness" (Ex. 23:1) probably tore out his heart. It may be that these men weren't present and that the Jews broke their own law, that the death sentence must be unanimously agreed. However, I have an intuitive sense (and nothing more) that these men voted for the Lord's death; and that they went along with the discussion in which " all" the council were involved, as to which incidents in His life they could remember for which they could condemn Him (Mk. 14:55) . They may not have consented to what was done in their hearts, but they still went along with it all on the surface. Acts 13:28,29 is at pains, almost, to associate Joseph, Nicodemus and the rest of the Sanhedrin: "*They* have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though *they* found no cause of death in him, yet desired *they* Pilate that He should be slain... *they* took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre".

They were secret disciples, fearing the loss of standing among the Jews. It was only after the Lord's death that they came out in the open. It seems to me that they voted for the Son of God to die. But in His grace, the Father emphasizes in the record that Joseph was a good man, and a just; a disciple, although secretly. The grace of God shines through the whole record. Thus only Matthew speaks about the suicide of Judas; the other three records are silent. A human god would inevitably have stressed that the betrayer of His Son went out in shame and took his own life. But the God of all grace is higher than reflecting vindictiveness in His word.
If the Lord died at 3p.m. and sunset was at 6p.m., there were only three hours for Joseph to find Pilate, gain a hearing, make his request, for Pilate to verify that the body was dead, and then for Nicodemus to buy the spices and for the burial to be done. Joseph and Nicodemus must have decided almost immediately what they were going to do. And the lesson for us: Beholding the cross makes us see what we ought to do, it becomes urgently apparent, and then we give our all, with the spirit of 'nothing else matters', to achieve it as far as we can. But we can enter into their thoughts: I wish I'd done more for Him while He was alive, and now, even now, because of the pressure of time, I just can't bury and honour this body as I'd like to. All these things are against me. The self hate and loathing and regret would have arisen within them, mixed with that love and devotion to the Lord of all grace. And there would have been an earnest desire for God to accept what little they could do, with time, the surrounding world, the Jewish culture, the unchangeable past, and their own present natures, all militating against the height of devotion they fain would show.

John gives the additional detail about the concern that Jesus might not be fully dead, and the piercing of His side. It is difficult to tell if a body is dead or not. But there was something about the Lord's corpse which somehow shone forth the message that He had given up His life. " He that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe" (Jn. 19:35). Do we not get the sense here of a man, even under inspiration, grasping for adequate words and finding there are none? This is an experience beyond the paradigm of verbal description. The description of blood and water flowing has raised the question as to whether the Lord had been fasting,

or had emptied His bowels in Gethsemane, before the crucifixion. It has been suggested that for this to have happened the Lord would have been pierced from the right hand side above the fifth rib, piercing the right auricle of the heart (from which the blood came) and also the pericardium, from where the serum came which appeared like water. However there are critics of these suggestions, which leaves the possibility that the flow of blood and water was in fact a miracle- hence John's insistence that yes, he actually saw this happen. And he says that he records it so that we might believe. The implication is that meditation upon the cross is what inspires faith, as well as conviction of sin and repentance. The way the Lord's blood flowed out from His heart is highly evocative of powerful lessons. He gave out from the very core and foundation of His being. We may serve God in good deeds, in writing books, in labouring for Him, without any real demand being made on our innermost self. The challenge of the cross is to give from the very centre and fountain of our life, our very selves, our person, our most vital soul.

Josephus records that victims usually lingered for two days or so before death. The Lord died so quickly. And the legs were broken so that the victims would die quickly (not, as has sometimes been supposed, to stop them running away). These things are harmonized by realizing that there was a support on which the victim could seek temporal relief in order to keep himself alive. Werner Keller explains: "There was often a small support attached called a "sedile" (seat). If the victim hanging there eased his misery from time to time by supporting himself on this, the blood returned to the upper half of his body... when the torture of the crucified man was finally to be brought to an end, the "crucifragrum" was proceeded with: his legs were broken. That meant that he could no longer ease his weight in the footrests and heart failure quickly followed" (Werner Keller *The Bible As History* (New York: Bantam Books, 1983 ed.) p. 356). It seems to me that in keeping with His refusal of the pain killer, His not requesting a drink until the very end, His willing giving of His life... that the Lord didn't press down on the seat, so that effectively He tortured Himself to death. If the victim did not press down on the sedile, the dead weight of the body would cause the intercostal muscles that facilitate inhaling to become too weakened to function. The lungs, unable to empty, would become full of carbon dioxide and death would result from asphyxia. The fact the Lord was making the effort to talk to people and yet, it seems, not pressing down on the sedile… is simply an essay in His self control, in His love, to bother to talk to others… which should inspire us to rise out of our introspection and make the effort likewise to connect with others. Seneca (*Dialogue 3*) writes: "Is it worth to weigh down on one's own wound and hand impaled on a gibbet to postpone something which is... the end of punishment [i.e. death]?" (Quoted in Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion In The Ancient World* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977)). In practice, the victim was only prolonging his own agony by pressing down on the rest. If the Lord didn't do this, He must have been extremely faint. Keller also comments: "In the case of a person suspended by his two hands the blood sinks very quickly into the lower half of the body. After six to twelve minutes blood pressure has dropped by 50% and the pulse rate has doubled". The Lord must have felt His every heartbeat, and therefore been able to sense when He was approaching death (see 38). Yet amidst the faintness, the knowledge that His heart was about to give out, the Lord remained, I am convinced, completely intellectually consciousness. Deep within Him, that perfect mind was centred on the Father and His word. Several Psalms take on a literal reference to the Lord's final agony: "My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me... my flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever" (38:10; 73:26).

The physical sufferings of the cross were an especial cause of spiritual temptation to the Lord; just as physical pain, illness, weakness etc. are specific causes of our temptations to sin. Heb. 2:9 defines the Lord's 'sufferings' as specifically "the suffering of death", the sufferings associated with His time of dying. Heb. 2:18 RVmg. then goes on to say: "For having been himself tempted in that wherein he suffered". The sufferings of death were therefore an especial source of temptation for Him. Truly did He learn obedience to the Father specifically through the process of His death (Heb. 5:8). Let's seek to remember this when we or those close to us face physical weakness, illness and pain of whatever sort.

27:59 *And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth*- Luke's record that Joseph himself took the body down invites us to imagine him using a ladder, perhaps that used to place the title. However, Acts 13:29 suggests that the Roman soldiers on behalf of Jewish people (i.e. Joseph) took the body down; Pilate "commanded the body to be delivered", implying he gave a command to underlings. So in what sense did *Joseph* take the body down and wrap it? Are we to imagine him humbling himself before the crowd to assist those soldiers in the physical act of taking the nails out and lowering the body down? Or it could be that he attracted so much attention to himself and had to humble himself so much to ask the soldiers to do it, that it was effectively as if he did it. But there is no reason to think that he himself didn't walk out in that no man's land between the crowd and the cross and humble himself to take it down, hearing the gasp from the crowd as he touched the blood and dead body which would make him unclean for the feast. His act was a tremendous mental sacrifice as well as a social and physical one. He is described as "honourable", literally 'well-formed / bodied', as if to emphasis his deportment befitting a leader of men. But he humbled himself before that stake. "He took it down" may imply that the stake was left standing. Or was it laid backwards and lowered down horizontal, with Joseph's anxious hands guiding it down? His contact with the body meant that he couldn't keep the Passover (Num. 9:9,10). The people would have watched incredulous as one of the leaders of Israel openly showed his preference for the crucified Nazarene as opposed to keeping the Mosaic Law. The obsession with cleanliness at Passover time would have meant that everyone was extremely sensitive to what Joseph did.

27:60 *And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a great stone as the door of the tomb, and departed*- This apparently needless detail is added because Matthew's camera is as it were focused on the closed tomb, with Joseph now walking away from it.

27:61 *And Mary Magdalene was there*- They didn't stay there long, but Matthew's camera is focused on Joseph, sealing the tomb and walking away from it, but in the background the camera picks up (blurred and out of focus, as it were) the women sitting there.

And the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb- The crucifixion record describes Mary the mother of Jesus as Mary the mother of James and Joses (Mk. 15:40 cp. Mt. 13:55)- not Mary the mother of Jesus. It's as if the record itself seeks to show that separation between mother and Son which occurred there. Both Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James- i.e. the mother of Jesus too (Mk. 16:1 = Mk. 15:40 = Mt. 13:55) came to the sepulchre, but Jesus chose to appear to Mary Magdalene first (Mk. 15:9), and not His own dear mother. Mt. 27:61 almost cruelly rubs the point in: "There was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre", but the

Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene first. Indeed, there is no record that He ever appeared to His mother. This would presumably have been to help her in realizing that she must relate to Him as her Lord and Saviour now, like any other woman had to, and not as a woman with special maternal privileges in her relationship with her now Almighty Son. It must have so pained the Lord to do this- to not appear to his dear mother first. But as He oftentimes acts with us, so He did with her- doing something which even in Divine nature must have been so painful for Him, in order to help her in her growth. We read in Mk. 15:40 that "Mary the mother of James the little one and of Joses" stood by the cross (RVmg.). I take this Mary to be Mary the mother of Jesus, for Mt. 13:55 records that James and Joses were brothers of Jesus and thus children of Mary. Remember that Mark is writing under inspiration a transcript of the preaching of the Gospel by the apostles, as they recounted the message of Jesus time and again. Could it not be that in the preaching of that Gospel, when it came to the cross, James asked to be surnamed "the little one", remembering his earlier rejection of Jesus his brother? Now it is not at all surprising that Saul of Tarsus too decides to call himself 'the little one', through sustained meditation upon the cross.

27:62 *Now the next day, which is the day after the Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together before Pilate*- Matthew wants to present the day of the Lord's death as being the day upon which the Passover lambs were killed. "Came together" again shows how the Lord's cross both gathered together and divided people, as it does, or is intended to do, today.

27:63 *Saying: Sir, we remember that that deceiver said when he was still alive, After three days I will rise again*- They were capable of accurate quoting the Lord's words, which means their frequent misquotations of His words were the more culpable and consciously done.

27:64 *Therefore, command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples come and steal him away and say to the people, He is risen from the dead; and so the last error will be worse than the first*- The Greek for "error" is the same basic word as that translated "deceiver" with reference to the Lord (:63). The first deception would therefore refer to the Lord's [supposedly deceptive] claim that He was Son of God and would therefore rise from the dead; the last error / deception would then be the distribution of the idea that He had indeed risen from the dead. And of course it was exactly this which happened; yet again, we see how the careful, cunning plans of the Jews concerning the Lord's destruction never really worked out. They ended up crucifying Him at Passover, exactly when they did *not* want to do it; their plan with Judas backfired when he recanted and killed himself; their attempt to bribe the soldiers became an openly known secret. Quite clearly, the Lord's death was arranged by the Father and was the Lord's own will, and was in no way merely the result of the clever plots of wicked men.
But there is another possibility regarding the first and last errors. It could be a reference to Mary and Jesus claiming that He was the result of a virgin birth- this, as far as the Jews were concerned, was the "first deception".

27:65 *Pilate said to them: You have a guard. Go make it as secure as you can- The Jews had access to detachments of Roman soldiers with which they policed and protected the temple. These would have been the same soldiers who arrested, guarded and mocked the Lord, and perhaps were also present at the crucifixion. Surely many of them came to believe.*

27:66 *So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard*- Absolutely all was done to make the tomb tamper proof, making the Lord's resurrection all the more powerful.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 28

28:1 *Now after the Sabbath*- AV "In the end of the Sabbath". This could be another hint that the ordinances of Judaism had now come to an end with the Lord's death; the Sabbath was now "past" (Mk. 16:1).

Toward the dawn of the first day of the week- AV "as it began to dawn toward the first day". The language hints very much at a new creation beginning. And yet it began in darkness, not only literally, but also in the darkness of the disciples' disappointment, misunderstanding and weak faith. From all this, great light was to arise.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went- The Lord's mother. Inevitably there would have been jealousy between the two Marys, not least because Mary Magdalene apparently saw the Lord first and appears to have been closer to Him than His own other. This is perhaps reflected in the other records focusing on Mary Magdalene going to the tomb as if she went alone.

To see the tomb- The same word has just been used about the same women 'beholding' the crucified Christ (27:55). The impression presented [as so often] is that the Lord's followers fiercely and deeply loved Him, but with such little understanding. And perhaps that is the abiding impression we are left with of the body of Christ, despite all our strife over 'understanding correctly'.

28:2 *And there was a great earthquake, for an Angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came*- Two earthquakes happened, three days apart (27:54). A "great earthquake" is associated with the Lord's return (24:7; Rev. 6:12; 11:19; 16:18). And there is plenty of other language used about the second coming which also occurs here in the record of the Lord's resurrection. A descent from Heaven, an Angel [Angels will come with the Lord at His second coming], lightning, glistering white clothing, fear and great joy- this is all the language of the second coming and the resurrection from the dead. The connection is clearly because the Lord's resurrection is to be understood as the basis for the resurrection of all in Him- see on 27:52,53. The women went to the tomb in the immediate aftermath of a great earthquake; or perhaps it happened whilst they were on their way there. Their love of their Lord, purely as love for Him as a person, as they had little firm expectation of a resurrection, is amazing. The earthquake didn't faze them.

And rolled away the stone and sat upon it- The Angel descended and did this before the women arrived; for on the way, they had worried about how they would roll the stone away, but when they got there, they found it done already (Mk. 16:2,4). Women unable to roll away a stone recalls the scene when Rachel and her girls were unable to roll the stone away from the well until Jacob did it (Gen. 29:3,10). The idea would therefore be that the Lord's tomb was in fact a well of living water which would flow for God's people after and on account of His resurrection; and this idea is elsewhere stated specifically by the Lord in John's Gospel.

28:3 *His appearance was as lightning and his garment white as snow*- This is the language used elsewhere about the Lord Jesus, especially at the transfiguration and later

in Revelation. The similarities were intentional. The women were being shown that the Lord's representative Angel [perhaps Gabriel] was visible and active, and this was to encourage them to believe that He Himself was now alive.

Of course Mary was scared. But note the contrast with the soldiers guarding the tomb. They were *so* scared by the sight of the Angel that they lost consciousness (Mt. 28:4). The women saw the same Angel, were scared, but not to the same extent. They looked at His face- for it was presumably they who told Matthew what the Angel's face looked like: "As lightning, and his raiment white as snow". Their love for their Lord, their searching for Him, the very deep, unarticulated, vague hope they had in Him… drove away the worst part of their fear, whereas the unbelieving soldiers simply passed out from fright. Indeed, it appears that Mary was so distracted by the deep grief that only comes from love, that she perhaps didn't even notice the Angel's glory, or at least, didn't pay too much attention to the two Angels sitting where the head and feet of the Lord had been. They ask her why she's crying, and she simply turns away from them, muttering 'Because they've taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they've put Him'. That was how deep her grief and distraction was; for that was how deeply she loved Him. Again and again one salutes the decision of the Father, in choosing Mary to be the first one of us to see His risen Son.

28:4 *And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men*- They shook along with the earth, which shook at the earthquake. Their association with the earth is therefore made apparent. The women came to the tomb, therefore, to find the stone moved away, the Angel sitting upon it, and the soldiers laying on the ground like corpses. The women had come expecting to find the dead body of Jesus, slain as He had been by Roman soldiers. Instead they find the situation reversed; the soldiers are lying there dead, as corpses [*nekros*], and an Angel who is clearly representative of Jesus tells them that He has risen from the dead.

28:5 *And the angel said to the women*- AV "Answered and said". The fear of the women was not verbalized, but the Angel responded to it, just as God often responds to our unexpressed fears.

Do not be fearful- The idea is '*You* do not need to be fearful, unlike these soldiers who are paralyzed by their own fears'. Their weakness is still apparent in the record, because :8 says that they left the scene "with fear...".

For I know you seek Jesus, who has been crucified- The women had come to anoint the Lord's dead body, with apparently no expectation that He would indeed rise the third day as He had predicted. And yet the Angel generously counts this to them ('I know / perceive / accept / count it') as if they were actively looking for Jesus. Their obvious error- that they assumed Him to still be dead- is not rebuked because the good news is simply so much greater. The resurrection records are full of such imputed righteousness. Lk. 24:5 enquires why they are 'seeking the living amongst the dead'. They were not seeking the living- they had come to anoint a dead body. Yet they are graciously counted as seeking Jesus as if they were seeking for a living person. John's record has the Lord asking Mary *whom* she is 'seeking', and this is how John's Gospel opens, with the Lord enquiring of His followers *whom* they were seeking (Jn. 1:38; 20:15). This question as to the Lord's identity echoes down to us, for we too can feel a devotion and identity with the idea of 'Jesus' without perceiving that He really is alive and active. The Lord counted righteousness to them, they are commended by the Angels

for ‘seeking the Lord’- even though that seeking was deep in their subconscious. Yet the record notices that even incipient faith and understanding in those women, and counts it to them. Would that we would be so generous in our perception of others. The weeping, helpless standing afar off at the cross are described as still following the Lord Jesus and ministering to Him, as they did in the happier Galilee days (Mk. 15:41). Their essential spirit was understood and credited to them, even though their actions seemed to belie this. Likewise our essential desires are read as our prayers, even if the words we use seem quite different.

Mk. 16:6 adds: "Jesus of Nazareth", as if emphasizing the Lord's humanity and death as compared to the wonderful reality of His resurrection.

28:6 *He is not here, for he is risen, even as he said*- The idea may be 'Not here in a tomb, in a place for the dead', in the spirit of Lk. 24:5 "Why do you seek the living amongst the dead?".

Come see the place where the Lord lay- There is no hint that the women obeyed. They had arrived at the tomb and had gone in and found the body missing (Lk. 24:3,23), and then the Angel[s] appeared to them. Now the Angels are inviting them to go into the tomb again and behold the place where the Lord's body had lain- perhaps because now there were Angels sitting at the head and feet of where the Lord's body had lain (Jn. 20:12). Along with imputed faith and righteousness, the disobedience of the disciples is also emphasized by the records. They struggle to believe His clear predictions of resurrection, are disobedient to the various commands to witness about it, disbelieve the women, and still appear depressed and sceptical that it is really Him when He appears to them for the third time in Galilee. Or it could be that they did go and see the place where the Lord lay, and yet found the body missing and were confused (Lk. 24:3,23)- even with an Angel standing there telling them the Lord had risen as He had said!

28:7 *And go quickly and tell his disciples*- The urgency required was partly because the wonder of the good news does itself impart an urgency to our presentation of it. And we need to analyze our own approach to witness and discern whether there is any sense of urgency to it; the record of baptisms in the early church was of immediate baptism, the very moment the person had believed, rather than waiting as many do today until a convenient time and place. But the urgency was also to tell the disciples before they totally lost their faith. The Lord was clearly concerned that they would lose faith entirely; and this explains His change of plans concerning revealing Himself to them in Galilee.

That he has risen from the dead, and that he goes ahead of you into Galilee. There you shall see him- This addresses their obvious although unspoken question: 'Where's the body? When can we see Him?'. The answer was 'As He explained before, you must show your obedience to Him by going into Galilee and there you will see Him'. But this plan, explained by the Lord earlier and now repeated by the Angel, was cut short by the Lord Himself. For right after this, He appears to Mary and the women. Right there, and not in Galilee. And soon afterwards He appears to the eleven in Jerusalem; and when He does finally meet the disciples in Galilee, this was the third appearance He had made to them, the earlier two having been in Jerusalem (Jn. 21:14). This change of plan was perhaps partly quite simply from the excitement of love, emotions which are still possible even within Divine nature. But partly it may have been because of the very weak state of the disciples' faith, and the Lord's sense that He must act urgently so that

they did not lose faith permanently; see on *Go quickly and tell...*. The idea of the Lord going before them into Galilee is based upon the Lord's teaching in 26:31,32: "I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you into Galilee". The 'going ahead' is also a sheep and shepherd allusion; although the sheep would be scattered, the Lord would go ahead of them into Galilee and like sheep obedient to the shepherd's voice, they would follow Him there. But perhaps the Lord now realized that their faith and obedience was just not enough for them to do that, and so He appeared to them anyway. Indeed, according to John, the disciples appeared to have finally returned to Galilee in order to return to their fishing business, despite having met the risen Lord in Jerusalem. They were very slow to really grasp the reality of His resurrection. The Gospels are their own account of their preaching, and it's as if they are telling the world how slow they had been to believe and were urging the world to do better than them, and to believe more quickly.

Look, I have told you- This could be in order to encourage their obedience. But see my suggestions above, that the disciples simply failed to have that level of obedience. Angelic unity with the risen Lord Jesus is brought out by a comparison of the words spoken to the women after the resurrection. Mk. 16:7 has the Angels telling the women: "He is going before you to Galilee; they you will see him, as he told you". But Mt. 28:7 has the Angel saying: "He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. Lo, I [the Angel] have told you". Perhaps what the Angel said was: "… as he told you… Lo, I have told you", thus bringing out the new unity between the risen Christ and the Angel who now appeared as Him and represented Him.

28:8 *And they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy*- In apparent obedience to the command to "quickly" tell the disciples (:7). But again the record is imputing righteousness to them, for Mk. 16:7,8 says that they fled in fear and said nothing to anyone: "Go tell His disciples, and Peter, that He goes ahead of you into Galilee. There shall you see Him, just as He told you. And they went out and ran from the tomb. Trembling and astonishment had come upon them, and they said nothing to anyone. For they were afraid". It was only later that they told the disciples, once their fear subsided and joy began to be their dominant emotion. We recall how the shepherds were told not to fear but to focus upon the joy of the Lord's birth (Lk. 2:10). Fear and joy do not remain coexistent for long, and to their credit, the women's joy became greater than their fear. See on :10 *Fear Not*. But putting meaning into words, what were they fearful about? Surely they now realized that they had so failed to believe the Lord's clear words about His resurrection; and they knew now that since He was alive, they must meet Him and explain. So their fear related to their own sense of unworthiness; and yet it was paradoxically mixed with the "great joy" of knowing His resurrection. And there is reason to understand that those women are typical of all those who are to fulfil the great commission.

The accounts of the Lord's resurrection and the imparting of that good news to others are studded with the idea of speedy response. "Go quickly and tell his disciples… and they departed quickly… and did run to bring his disciples word" (Mt. 28:7,8). The accounts show how Mary "quickly" told the disciples, the women did likewise, the two on the way to Emmaus ran back to town and urgently told the others that the Lord had risen… and then the record climaxes in bidding us take that very same good news of the resurrection to the whole world. But the implication from the context is that it is to be done with the same spirit of urgency. We are merely continuing in the spirit of those who first spread that good news.

And ran to bring this message to his disciples- Running and sharing God's word are associated to the point that running is almost a metaphor for preaching. Thus Paul writes of his preaching among the Gentiles as 'running' (Gal. 2:2; 1 Cor. 9:26; Phil. 2:16 s.w. cp. Dan. 12:2). The clearest example would be in 2 Thess. 3:1: "Pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly" (s.w.). The running of the women with the fresh news of Christ's resurrection then becomes the pattern for all Christian preaching; we are continuing to run with the message. And the content of the message, 'the word of / about the Lord', is the word that He has risen. We should recall that this very first obedience to the great preaching commission was not met with success- but rather the words were mocked as madness and disbelieved.

28:9 *And Jesus met them, saying: Greetings!*- Having changed His plan of meeting the women in Galilee, see on :7 He goes ahead of you into Galilee. "Greetings!" is otherwise translated "Joy" or "Rejoice!". The last two times the Lord had heard it, it had been addressed to Him sarcastically by His abusers (26:49; 27:29). But it is the word also used of how the shepherd 'rejoices' on finding the lost sheep (18:13). This perhaps was the sense of the Lord's joy upon meeting them; the whole process of death and resurrection had been in order to seek and find the disciples. And surely the Lord was consciously aware of His prediction of Jn. 16:22: "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice" [s.w. "greetings!"]. But again it was as if He had to get them to rejoice, rather than them doing so on their own initiative; their weakness is so emphasized.

And they came and took hold of his feet and worshipped him- The Lord appeared to them from a slight distance and did not go up to them and initiate physical contact. Rather did He announce Himself and leave them to come to Him. The Lord, straight after His resurrection, repeats verbatim the Angels words to Mary: “Woman, why are you weeping?” (Jn. 20:13,15). Likewise, when He appears to the women in Mt. 28:9,10, He repeats the Angel’s words of Mt. 28:5,7. This indicates the unity which He felt with them especially after His resurrection.

Is "took hold of his feet" to be connected with how Mt. 18:29 describes casting oneself down at another’s feet implying a desperate request for mercy? Or at least, a desperate request (Mk. 5:22; 7:25; Lk. 8:41), as Mary had made herself earlier (Jn. 11:32). Their experience of the death and resurrection of the Lord elicited within them a sense of their unworthiness. Or was it simply because they feared He would disappear, as in Jn. 20:17? The same Greek words for falling down at the feet and worshipping are used about how Cornelius worshipped Peter (Acts 10:25) and how the believers at Philadelphia will be worshipped (Rev. 3:9). Trinitarians therefore display their Biblical ignorance and paucity of Biblical scholarship by making any claim that the fact Jesus was worshipped by the feet therefore means He was God. That is simply not the case.

28:10 *Then Jesus said to them: Fear not*- See on 28:8 *They departed quickly.* Their fear was wrong, the Angel had urged them not to fear, and yet they still feared.

Go tell My brothers- Mk. 16:7,8 says that initially their fear was so great that they were resolved not to tell anyone anything, i.e. to be disobedient to the commission to tell their brethren the good news. And so the Lord Himself intervenes to urge them to go tell their brethren. Note how the Lord uses the term "My brothers". He was anxious to demonstrate that His resurrected, glorified status did not mean that His human brethren were not His brethren any longer; just as in Jn. 21 He addresses the disciples with a slang word, ‘guys’ [AV “children”, *paidos*], to emphasize His humanity, urging them that His God and Father is theirs (Jn. 20:17,18). We note that it was fear which held

them back from obeying the commission to preach, and it is fear which likewise stymies so much of our obedience to the great commission. Fear of consequence, of what others may think of us, of our own unworthiness, fear that we may have misunderstood... all these fears are what stop obedience to the clear, simple command to take the good news directly and personally to others.

"Go tell my brothers" is quoting from the LXX of Ps. 22:23, where in the context of predicting the Lord's death and resurrection, we read that therefore "I will tell of Your name to my brothers". The "I" is clearly Jesus Himself; and yet, as we have elsewhere shown at length, when His people preach in His Name, this is effectively Him preaching. And so the first preacher of the Lord was to be those women. They were to tell His brethren the good news of His resurrection, or, as Ps. 22 puts it, to declare the Name of Yahweh to them. For His resurrection was the declaration and glorification of that Name to the full. Thus Acts 4:10-12 definitely connect the Lord's resurrection and the declaration of the Name. The "things concerning the name of Jesus Christ" would have been those things which concern His death and resurrection. "I will *declare* thy name unto my brethren" (Heb. 2:12) uses the same Greek words as in Mt. 28:10, where Mary is told to go tell her brethren of the resurrection. Rom. 15:8,9 speaks of how it is the Lord Jesus personally who was to fulfil those words through His death, which confirmed the promises of God: "Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises *made* unto the fathers: And that the Gentiles might glorify God for *his* mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name". And yet these words are applied by the Lord to Mary! She was to be Him, in the fulfilment of the great commission to tell the world.

The women were told by the risen Lord to "tell My brethren…". In Acts 12:17 the same Greek words are used by Peter: "Go show these things… to the brethren". Peter felt that his deliverance from prison was like the Lord's resurrection, and perhaps consciously he used the Lord's words to Mary Magdalene. Peter then went "to another place" just as the Lord did on saying those words. He saw that his life was a living out of fellowship with the Lord's mortal experiences, every bit as much as our lives are too. The same words occur also in 1 Jn. 1:2,3: "That which we have seen and heard [the teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus] declare we unto you", our brethren. It's as if John is acknowledging that the Lord's commission to Mary was in fact binding upon us all; for we are represented by her.

To go to Galilee and there shall they see Me- The initial plan had been that the women also would need to go to Galilee before meeting the Lord (:7). The Lord changed that plan and appeared to the women immediately; but His plan was still that He would reveal Himself to His male disciples for the first time in Galilee. But He soon changed that plan too, for the other records make it clear that the Lord twice appeared to them in Jerusalem (Jn. 21:14).

Put together the following passages:
- The disciples' return to Galilee after the resurrection was a result of their lack of faith (Jn. 16:31,32)
- But the Lord went before them, as a shepherd goes before His sheep, into Galilee (Mt. 28:7). Even in their weakness of faith, He was still their shepherd, they were still His sheep, and He led them even then.
- The Lord told them to go to Galilee (Mt. 28:10). He accepted their lower level of faith. And He worked through that and led them through it.

The return to Galilee is seen in an even worse light once we reflect on the circumstances surrounding the first calling of the disciples, nearly four years earlier.

John's Gospel implies that they were called at Bethany; whereas the other Gospels say they were called whilst fishing at the sea of Galilee. This is usually, and correctly, harmonized by concluding that they were called as John says in Bethany, but they then returned to their fishing in Galilee, and the Lord went there to call them again. So returning to their fishing in Galilee had already been shown to them as being a running away from the call of their Lord. And yet still they did it. And yet John's inspired record is so positive; he speaks as if the disciples were called at Bethany and unwaveringly responded immediately. The point that they actually lost their intensity and returned home is gently omitted from specific mention.

Mary Magdalene is always noted first in the appearance lists in the gospels. It is unusual that the first appearance would involve women as in that culture their role as witnesses would not be well accepted. It is a sign of the veracity of the account, because if an ancient were to create such a story he would never have it start with women. But inspiration disregards this. The Lord so wanted those women to be His leading witnesses. Joachim Jeremias quotes extensively from Jewish sources to show that "a woman had no right to bear witness, because it was concluded from Gen. 18:15 that she was a liar". And Josephus (*Antiquities Of The Jews* 4.219) concurs: "Let not the testimony of women be admitted because of the levity and boldness of their sex". And so it should not surprise us that He chooses today the most unlikely of witnesses, indeed, those who somehow shock and arrest the attention of others.

28:11 *Now while they were going, some of the guard came into the city and told the chief priests all the things that had happened*- The impression is given of two parallel groups of people running back to Jerusalem from the Lord's grave. Both were fearful, both carried the news that the tomb was now empty. The one group went to tell the disciples, the other group went to the chief priests; both groups of messengers were ful of an urgent need to tell what had happened. One group were women, the other were men. The suggestion may be that they all carried the same message- Angels had appeared, the body was not there any more, the grave was now open. Something Divine, supernatural and unstoppable by men had happened. See on 28:15 *Did as they were told.*

28:12 *And when they were assembled with the elders*- Again, as with every stage of the whole process, the Jews tried to take comfort in numbers, always meeting together in a vain attempt to spread the responsibility.

And had taken counsel- Matthew especially notes this feature of the Lord's Jewish enemies (12:14; 22:15; 27:1,7- all using the same Greek word).

They gave much money to the soldiers- Circumstances repeat under the hand of Providence, but wicked men never learn. They had given money to Judas but he had made a huge mess of it- in that he had not provided the incontrovertible legal evidence they had hoped for, the Lord's trial had been an obvious farce, and then he had come out on the Lord's side and killed himself. But they still tried to use money to get around the problem. We note that the Jewish leadership did not seek to discredit the soldiers as liars nor did they produce a corpse and claim it was that of Jesus. Their policy had to take account of the simple fact that the body of Jesus was missing from the tomb, despite the seal, the soldiers, and every effort to ensure that something like this did in fact *not* happen.

28:13 *Saying: You are to say that His disciples came by night and stole Him away while*

we slept- The desperation of the story is self-apparent; if the soldiers were really asleep then they would not know it was the disciples who had come, nor would they have any explanation as to how the corpse disappeared. Theft, after all, was only one possibility. The story shows every sign of having been thought up too quickly, and then those who wished to believe it were left to justify it for evermore. There was no recorded attempt to arrest or try the disciples for grave breaking or stealing a corpse- a serious offence under Roman law. There should at least have been a semblance of effort to do this if indeed the story were true.

28:14 *And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and keep you out of trouble*- The same word translated "persuade" in 27:20. They had persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and crucify Jesus, and they thought they could deal with Pilate in the same way. Their power over Pilate was assumed; it is doubtful whether they had that much power over a man who was consistently written into history as a conscienceless man- in every matter apart from that of the Lord Jesus.

28:15 *So they took the money and did as they were told*- The Greek *didasko* means 'taught' [as AV], and is an unusual word choice here. Perhaps the idea is that they were taught an official explanation which they memorized and were to trot out each time the issue of the empty tomb was raised. Early Christian converts had to memorize a Gospel record by heart- they were taught [*didasko*] the message of the empty tomb and repeated it. The same word is used just five verses later in :20, where the disciples are commanded to go and teach [*didasko* again] the good news of the empty tomb to the whole world. And the soldiers did the same, spreading the same reality [an empty tomb] but with a different explanation. This connects with the observations made on :11 *While they were going* that there were two groups of people telling the same message- the tomb was empty. But the Gospel preachers were paralleled, as it were, by another group of messengers whose message was identical but freighted with concern that it *not* be believed.

And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day- This is another allusion to the great commission; see on *Did as they were told*. As the story [Gk. *logos*] of the empty tomb was spread by the soldiers "among the Jews", so was the Christian account of the empty tomb spread "among the Jews to this day". The Greek word for "spread" is only elsewhere used about the spreading of the *fame* of Jesus. This is perhaps an allusion to the spreading of Matthew's Gospel record amongst the Jews right up until the day when it was written down- "this day".

28:16 *But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go*- This continues the theme of the resurrection accounts imputing righteousness to the disciples. The Lord's intention had been that they went into Galilee *before* they saw Him, in order to test their obedience to their Lord's words. But sensing their weakness of faith, the Lord dramatically changed plans and appeared to them whilst still in Jerusalem; see on :7 *He goes ahead of you into Galilee*. And according to John 21, they returned to Galilee to return to their fishing business, rather than out of obedience to the Lord. The disciples "went [away from Jerusalem] to the mountain [in Galilee]"; this may not mean that they actually went where He told them, but rather that they left Jerusalem in that direction. For the whole plan of meeting in Galilee was abandoned; the Lord appeared to them before then, in Jerusalem. And yet the record here speaks so positively of their obedience.

28:17 *And when they saw Him*- His appearance to the disciples in Galilee was the third time He had appeared to them (Jn. 21:14). And even then, they doubted. The disciples were the ones preaching the Gospel records, and truly were they emphasizing their own fallibility and slowness to believe the very message which they urged people to *quickly* believe and accept in instant baptism.

They worshipped him; but some doubted- The idea may not be that some believed but others doubted. It may rather be that they worshipped him and yet doubted at the same time. 'Doubted' translates a word essentially implying to be double minded, wavering between the two positions. The Lord was either dead or alive, and amazingly, they still wondered whether His appearances were tantamount to Him being alive. Even after the resurrection, they *all* saw Him and *all* worshipped Him; but some of them "doubted". You can worship, see the evidence of the Lord with your own eyes, as Israel daily saw the manna, and yet still doubt. Despite having seen the risen Jesus before, they *still* doubted. We really have to reflect on this and be challenged by the weakness of our natures.

28:18 *And Jesus came to them and spoke to them, saying: All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth*- Mark and Luke suggest the great commission was given in Jerusalem or on the mount of Olives. So this verse 18 may now be talking about the Lord's next appearance to them in Jerusalem. Or it may be that He gave them the commission twice, and this was the first time He gave it to them. If this latter possibility is correct, then we would have the Lord's triple commission to Peter concerning feeding His sheep given at the same time as the great commission. This commission to Peter was therefore part of the commission to go and make disciples of all the world; with Peter taking special responsibility for the pastoral care of the converts.

All power- The Lord's promised presence with His preachers is capable of being backed up by "all power". The assurance is that insofar as we give our lives to follow the great commission, all power will be potentially available to us in order to help us achieve that work. This is the force of the "therefore" in :19; because the Lord has all power, we are therefore to go and teach all nations. It is commonly thought that even the Lord Jesus doesn't know the time of his return, only the Father does. During his mortality, the Lord said exactly this (Mk. 13:32)- at the time he was speaking to the disciples, he himself didn't know. But after his resurrection and glorification, the Lord made two statements to the disciples which he surely intended to be connected: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth... it is not for you (the inquisitive eleven standing on Olivet) to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Mt. 28:18; Acts 1:7,8). But *all* the Father's power has been given to His glorified Son, and this therefore includes knowledge of the "times and seasons" of the second coming. In the exalted Lord "are hid all the riches of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3); it is thereby inconceivable that the Father would still keep back some knowledge from the Son. The point of all this is that when the Lord Jesus said that "of that day and that hour knoweth (present tense) no man, no, not the angels... neither the Son" He was not laying down a general principle for all time. He was speaking of the situation at that time: 'You can't know now, indeed at the moment even I don't know; but these are the signs which will tell the believers when I'll come'. By implication He was saying 'You can't understand them, although I'm giving them to you, but in the future some will understand them, because these signs will accurately pinpoint my return'. This was exactly the spirit of what the Angel told Daniel when he too wished to know when Messiah would come in

glory; he was basically told 'It's not for you to understand, but in the last days understanding of these things will be increased among God's people; they will know the time, but you can't'.

The Lord gave a reason for His great preaching commission: "Go ye *therefore*". "*Therefore*". Because of what? Mt. 28:18 provides the answer: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye *therefore*". Because of this, we must spread the Gospel of Christ to the whole planet, because His authority is over the whole earth. He has that power just as much now as He did in the first century; and *therefore* the command to spread the Gospel world-wide still stands today. Indeed, His words here in Mt. 28 have evident reference to Dan. 7:14, where the Son of Man is given authority and power over all *so that* people of all nations, races and languages should serve Him. We must remind ourselves that out of the 5,000 or so languages in the world, only about half of them have the Bible in their own language. Peter preached in and about the name of Jesus- this is emphasized (Acts 2:31,38; 3:6,16; 4:10,12,17,18,30; 5:28,40,41; 10:43). The excellence of knowing Him and His character and the wonder of the exalted Name given on His ascension (Phil. 2:9; Rev. 3:12) lead Peter to witness. Because of His exaltation, we confess Jesus as Lord to men, as we later will to God at judgment (Phil. 2:9). According as we confess Him before men, so our judgment will reflect this. Lifting up Jesus as Lord is to be the basis of giving a witness to every man of the hope that lies within us (1 Pet. 3:15 RSV). The knowledge and experience of His exaltation can only be witnessed to; it can't be kept quiet. 3 Jn. 7 refers to how the great preaching commission was obeyed: "For his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing (material help) from the Gentiles" (Gentile believers). For the excellence of knowing His Name they went forth in witness, and moreover were generous spirited, not taking material help to enable this. The knowledge of the Name of itself should inspire to active service: for the sake of the Lord's Name the Ephesians laboured (Rev. 2:3). The great preaching commission is therefore not so much a commandment as an inevitable corollary of the Lord's exaltation. We will not be able to sit passively in the knowledge of the universal extent of His authority / power. We will have to spread the knowledge of it to all (note the way 1 Tim. 3:16 alludes to the preaching commission as having already been fulfilled the moment it was uttered, so strong is the imperative). There may be some similarity with the way in which the exaltation of Israel / God's people was so that all men would be witnessed to (Dt. 4:6).

The great preaching commission is therefore not so much a commandment as an inevitable corollary of the Lord's exaltation to having "all power". We will not be able to sit passively in the knowledge of the universal extent of His authority / power. We will have to spread the knowledge of it to all. There may be some similarity with the way in which the exaltation of Israel / God's people was so that all men would be witnessed to (Dt. 4:6). Jehu was exalted from amongst his brethren as was Christ (2 Kings 9:2 = Dt. 18:18; Ps. 45:7) and taken up into a chamber within a chamber (AVmg), cp. Heaven itself. There Jehu was anointed, made Lord and Christ, and then the people placed their garments underneath him (v. 13) and proclaimed him to the world as King of Israel. This symbolic incident teaches a clear lesson- the exaltation of Jesus should lead us to be witnesses for Him. The wonder and joy of it alone, that one of us, one of our boys, a man like us... should be *so* exalted.

Rev. 14:6 describes the great latter fulfilment of the great preaching commission in terms of an Angel flying in Heaven with the Gospel of the Kingdom to be preached to all nations and languages. Surely the implication is that the latter day preachers of the Gospel are walking on earth in league with an Angelic system above them, empowering and enabling them. An Angel may be given a mission to preach

somewhere, and success may be arranged by Him in prospect, but it is for us to put the work into practical effect, without which the converts will not be produced, despite the Angels preparatory work, although of course ultimately this is all foreknown by God Himself. Thus we read in Rev. 14:6 of an Angel being sent "having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth (same word as 'land'- i. e. the land of Israel), and to every nation, kindred and tongue and people "(i. e. the whole world as well). However, this actual work of preaching to the Jews and to the world will be done by the saints; thus they will work out in practice what was achieved by the Angel in God's plan. In this context it is worth considering how the great commission as recorded in Mt. 28:18,19 is set in the context of other references in Matthew to world-wide preaching. We are to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations; and yet it is the Angels who will gather the harvest from "the world" (Mt. 13:38), Angels who will "repay" us for our work at the last day (Mt. 16:27), Angels who gather the elect from "the four winds" (Mt. 24:31) and gather [converts from] "all nations" to judgment (Mt. 25:32). The implication surely is that in our preaching work, the Angels are with us and will gather in the converts which we have made.

28:19 *Therefore go*- This evidently connects with the Lord's command in the parable: "*Go ye*" into the highways and "gather together *all*", as many as were found. And this in turn is an extension of an earlier parable, where the net of the Gospel is presented as *gathering* "every kind"- every *genos*, every "kindred / nation / stock / generation", as the word is elsewhere translated (Mt. 28:19; 22:9,10; 13:47). The work of the Gospel described in those earlier parables was now specifically delegated to the Lord's men. Through the work of the Lord's followers over the generations, there would in every nation and generation be some who were gathered in, of as many social classes as one finds walking along a street [highway / byway]. The net of Gospel preaching is filled (*pleroo*), and then pulled to shore for judgment. When the Gospel has been preached in all the world (with response), then the end will come. Elsewhere Paul uses the same word to describe how the Gospel is fulfilled by preaching it (Rom. 15:19; Col. 1:25). To have the Gospel is to have an imperative to preach it.

The victorious truth that "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" is purposefully juxtaposed against the next clause, which seems to contradict it: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations..." (Mt. 28:18,19). Through teaching and baptising all nations, the extent of that universal power is made known. But it depends on the freewill obedience of the believers to this commission. The Lord had the Spirit without measure, and yet He "could not" do many miracles in Nazareth because of their unbelief.

And make disciples- The aim of our fulfilling the great commission is above all to "make disciples", to get more followers behind Jesus, more learners of Him, a greater bride for Him. Grammatically in Mt. 28:19-20,*mathateusate* ("make disciples") is the main verb, and *poreuthentes* ("while going"), *baptizontes* ("baptizing"), and *didaskontes* ("teaching") are subsidiary participles. In other words, the focus of our work must be upon making disciples for Christ, on thereby bringing about His glory. All the baptizing and teaching which we do is subsidiary to this aim, and they can therefore never be ends in themselves.

Matthew's record of the great commission draws on earlier themes and passages in his Gospel. The Lord told His men to go out and make disciples of men (Mt. 28:19 RV). In the immediate context, there are many references to the disciples (Mt. 27:64; 28:7,8,13,16). And the term "disciples" occurs more often (73 times) in Matthew than in any of the other Gospels (e.g. only 37 times in Luke). The Lord is telling His men: 'Go out and make men like you- disciples, stumbling 'learners', not experts'. Thus they were to witness from their own experience, to share this with others, to bring others to

share the type of relationship which they had with the Lord. In this sense preaching is seen by Paul as a bringing forth of children in our own image. John likewise was “the beloved disciple”, the *agapetos*. And yet this is the very term which he uses in his letters to describes his “beloved children” (1 Jn. 2:1; 4:11). He saw them as sharing the same relationship to his Lord as he had. The nature of our relationship with the Lord will be reflected in that of our converts. He tells His men to go to the lost sheep, and yet in that same context He calls them sheep, in the midst of wolves (Mt. 10:6,16). They were sheep sent to rescue sheep- to plead with men and women as men and women, to witness to humanity through their own humanity. Likewise the Lord spoke of how the extraordinary unity of His men would convince others that “thou didst send me” (Jn. 17:23), having just commented how they had surely believed “that thou didst send me” (:8).

The command to ‘make disciples’ of all men in Matthew is framed in such a way as to make ‘...baptising them...’ a subordinate clause. Baptism is only part of the work of making disciples. In Mt. 28:19-20*mathateusate* ("make disciples") is the main verb, while *poreuthentes* ("while going" or "when [you] go"), *baptizontes* ("baptizing"), and *didaskontes* ("teaching") are subsidiary participles. The focus clearly is upon making disciples- all the other things, the teaching, baptizing, our effort in travelling and preaching, are incidental to this main aim. This is why responsibility to those we may convert only begins at baptism; it’s a beginning of a man or woman being fashioned into the image of Christ, not the end. This is why Paul often uses the language of preaching about his pastoral efforts with his brethren [e.g. his desire to ‘preach the Gospel’ to the believers at Rome to whom he was writing]. He sees himself as preaching Christ to them still, in so doing warning them, “that we may present every man perfect” (Col. 1:28). Thus Paul parallels being a minister of the world-wide preaching of the Gospel, and being a minister of the church (Col. 1:23, 25). He saw his continued work amongst his baptized readership as *fully preaching* the word of God (Col. 1:25 AVmg.). So Paul said in Gal. 4:19 “I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you”. How do we see our responsibility to those to whom we have preached the gospel?We should continue to nurture and feed them well after the time of their baptism. It seems that this is not a general responsibility which falls on the shoulders of all of us. Rather we have a personal responsibility to those we have begotten through the gospel (1Cor. 4:15).

Of all the nations- A reference to Gen. 18:18.The Lord twice told the disciples: "Go ye... go ye" (Mk. 16:15 cp. Mt. 28:19 and contexts). He was encouraging them to do the natural corollary of what they had experienced. The Lord commissioned us to go into all the world and make disciples of all; but He describes this in other terms as being witnesses of Him to the world (Mt. 28:19; Acts 1:8). Our witness must fundamentally, therefore, be Christ-centred.

If we say that we are *not* commanded to obey the command to go into all nations, then we must also conclude that we are not commanded to baptize people. And if these words about baptism don't apply to us today, then there is no command of the Lord Jesus to be baptized. The connection between the command to preach and the command to baptize is made clearer by the parallel record: "Go ye therefore, and teach (make disciples of, AVmg.) all nations, baptising them... and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Mt. 28:19,20), i.e. Christ will be with us in our preaching right to the ends of the world. The special closeness of the Lord in preaching work has been widely commented upon by preachers. The commission of Mt. 28:19,20 is alluded to in Acts 14:21 AVmg. concerning the work of Paul and Barnabas, neither of whom were among the twelve: "And when they had preached the Gospel to that city, and had

made many disciples..." . This in itself disproves the idea that the great commission was intended only for the twelve.

Baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit- As Harry Whittaker put it many years ago, there is a 'trinity' with a small 't' in the New Testament; Father, Jesus and Spirit occur together several times. It's the relationship between them which is proposed by the "Doctrine of the Trinity" which is wrong. Baptism does connect us with the Father, with Jesus and with the work of the Spirit. That however is no reason to think that Father = Son = Holy Spirit, as the doctrine of the Trinity seems to wrongly imply. Baptism connects us with God, the Lord Jesus and the Spirit, which is given at baptism. We should also note that "in the name" is singular and not plural, "names". The baptizer is working as an agent of God, Jesus and the Spirit in baptizing people.

28:20 *Teaching them to observe all things whatever I commanded you; and I am with you always, even to the end of the age*- The Lord will support the work of the great preaching commission right up to the end of the age- which means that once the commission is completed, and the whole world has indeed been told the good news of the resurrection, then this age shall finish and the Lord shall return. He said the same very clearly in teaching that once the Gospel goes into all the world, then the end shall come. Matthew clearly saw his own Gospel record, the testament to his life's work, as playing a part in bringing about "the end". The further it could be distributed, the faster the end would come. And that challenge remains with us as with no other generation.

There are some definite links between the Greek text of Matthew's record of the commission, and the LXX of the end of Daniel 12:

	Daniel 12:13
Matthew	**LXX**
Go ye into all the world (Mt. 28:20)	Go thou thy way
"…then shall the end come" (when the Gospel has been preached to all the world)	till the end
I am with you all the days (28:20 Gk.)	for still there will be days
unto the end of the world	to the end of the world.

These connections suggest that the great commission to preach worldwide will be powerfully fulfilled in the last days- see on 24:14.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: MARK

MARK

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Duncan Heaster

MARK CHAPTER 1

1:1 *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*- This may simply mean that Mark is beginning at the beginning, with the account of John the Baptist. Given the intensity attached to words used in the Gospels, which are highly abbreviated records anyway, that would appear somewhat superfluous. It's likely he also meant to suggest that the events of the Gospel record were only a beginning, and in the lives of all future disciples, the Gospel story continues. John begins his Gospel with the same word- "In the beginning was the word". Luke uses a related word when he says that his Gospel was the record of all that Jesus "began to do" (Acts 1:1), with the implication that it was not being continued. So we are to see the Gospel records as a beginning of the work and word of Jesus, which continues into our lives. Matthew uses the same word in saying that Jesus "began to preach" (Mt. 4:17). Indeed, this word is later used by Matthew concerning how Jesus 'began' to do and teach things (Mt. 11:7,20; 16:21; 18:24); we are

to understand that this beginning implies a continuation, and that continuation is in our lives. Mark's Gospel opens with Jesus going around preaching, appealing for people to repent and believe the Gospel (and this is described as "the beginning of the Gospel"). Mark concludes with *us* being asked to do the same, thereby directly continuing the work of the Lord, because we are in Him. The only other occurrence of the phrase "beginning of the Gospel" is in Phil. 4:15, where it means the beginning of the preaching of the Gospel. Mark's gospel is a transcript of how he or Peter used to teach the Gospel; it was written down under inspiration so that it would be preserved for future generations. We learn from this that the Gospel is in the gospels. The good news is essentially the biography and teachings of the Lord Jesus. The rest is interpretation.

The Greek text in Mark often has a rhythm and rhyme to it created by similar sounding words- because the early church aimed for new converts to memorize Mark's Gospel. Just one example from Mk. 1:1:
Ar-khay tou you-ang-ge -lee-ou Yay-sou Khrees-tou whee-ou the -ou.
The 'ou' endings are somehow rhythmical. Especially do we see this rhythmical quality in the phrase used for "Jesus Christ the Son of God" in Mk. 1:1: "*Ieso-u Christo-u huio-u Theo-u*".

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

He will prepare your way- This was John's intended mission, and he certainly tried to achieve it. But ultimately his mission failed in that Israel were generally like the children sitting in the marketplace with John as it were weeping to them- and they didn't

respond. There was the possibility that if John's mission had succeeded, then Messiah could have come to Zion in glory over the made up way or road. But they didn't respond as needed- despite being baptized and approving his message in crowds. This is a sobering thought- that such response alone is not the same as really responding to the call for radical preparation for the coming of the Christ.

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

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

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

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

That one purpose of our calling to the Gospel is to assist others is brought out by the way John the Baptist prepared a highway in the desert through baptizing repentant people (Mk. 1:3,4). This highway was to be a path *to* Christ as well as the one He would travel. And it's worth reflecting that Christ can only come once the way for Him is prepared- as if His coming depends upon a certain level of response to our preaching, especially to the Jews of the very last days.

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

that surely belief of the Gospel comes before repentance. And so it does very often- but there is another option here- that the repentance is ongoing. Life after conversion is a life of believing the basic Gospel which led us to conversion and repentance in the first place.

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

John the Baptist's audience responded to his preaching by being baptized "with the baptism of repentance" (Mk. 1:4); and yet the Lord Jesus built on this by appealing to people to repent because the Kingdom was at hand (Mk. 1:15; Mt. 3:2). Their repentance was therefore only surface level. The Lord cursed the fig tree (cp. Israel) because they had only leaves, an appearance of repentance and spiritual fruit, but actually there was not even the first sign of real fruit on that tree when it was really analyzed. Earlier, Israel had appeared to have fruit, when actually, they didn't have any at all (Hos. 10:1). The man in the parable built his spiritual house, but in fact he didn't get down to the real nitty-gritty of obedience to the Lord's words; and so it miserably, pathetically fell at judgment day. The seriousness of sin becomes de-emphasized in our lives, until repentance comes to mean a vague twinge of guilt. This, again, was the problem of Old Testament Israel. "They return, but not to the Most High" (Hos. 7:16); they had the sensation of regret, of turning back- but it wasn't real repentance. A few verses earlier God had commented: “They do *not* return to the Lord their God” (7:10); but they on a surface level *did* return to Him. Hosea continues his theme: “Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself” (Hos. 10:1). Did they or did they not bring forth fruit? They did- but only in their own eyes. They felt they had repented, and brought forth spiritual fruit. But not in God’s estimation. And we too can have the sensation of spirituality and even spiritual growth, but only in our own eyes. “Though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him” (Hos. 11:7) in the way which true repentance requires. "Judah hath not turned unto me with her *whole* heart, but feignedly" (Jer. 3:10). They did turn back to Yahweh- but not in their heart. Israel rejoiced in the light of John’s teaching- and he taught real, on-your-knees repentance. They thought they’d repented. But the Lord describes John as mourning, and them not mourning in sympathy and response (Lk. 7:32). They rejoiced in the idea of repentance, but never really got down to it.

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

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

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

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

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

heralding Messiah, but he presented himself as Messiah, knowing that Messiah's representatives were effectively Him to the world. We are in the same position. What John failed to realize, just as his father had failed to, was that Messiah had the possibility of being rejected, and the promised salvation and Kingdom of God could well be long after His initial exposure to Israel.

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

He that is mightier than I- The Greek is that translated 'stronger' and the idea of Jesus as the one 'stronger / mightier than' recurs in Lk. 11:22, where Jesus is 'mightier than' the 'strong man' who had previously posessed the house of Israel. That there is a connection of thought here cannot be denied, but the existence of such a connection doesn't of itself mean that there is a detailed semantic connection. Perhaps John's words had simply left a subconscious impression upon the word choice of the Lord.

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

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

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

1:8 *I baptized you in water, but he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit*- The Greek grammar could just as well mean 'I baptize you with water, but He will baptize you with that *as well as* with the Holy Spirit'. The structure 'I [this], but He [that]' is used in a number of languages in this way- meaning effectively 'He [this + that]'. Indeed the Greek *de* translated "but" is also translated "also". For water baptism was clearly practiced by those following Jesus in the early church; they understood His baptism to involve water baptism. John's version of this material is in the record of the discussion with Nicodemus, where He says we must be "born of water and of the Spirit" (Jn. 3:3-5- this is one of many examples of where John repeats the essence of the material chosen by the other Gospel writers). If John the Baptist's words here apply generally and not just to

the disciples, then we note that every baptism is therefore effectively the Lord Jesus baptizing the person. The human baptizer who holds our shoulders as we are immersed is therefore irrelevant- we are baptized by none less than the Lord Jesus. Just as literally as John baptized people, so Jesus baptizes us to this day. The reference to water and spirit is repeated, with the same Greek words being used, when just two verses later we read of the Lord Jesus arising from the baptismal water and the Spirit descending (1:10). This cannot be incidental. The idea is clearly that the baptism of water and Spirit is the baptism Jesus Himself experienced, and His baptismal experience becomes ours in Christian baptism- for the act identifies us with Him, with His death and resurrection. It cannot be denied, however, that the reference to a future baptism in Spirit has reference to the specific experience of the disciples; Acts 1:5 records the Lord Jesus stating clearly to them that John had truly baptized them with water, but soon they were to be baptized by the Holy Spirit. And this was fulfilled at Pentecost, when the Spirit as tongues of fire fell upon them. Matthew and Luke add that the Lord's baptism was to be of Spirit and fire (Mt. 3:11; Lk. 3:16)- which was clearly fulfilled at Pentecost. But the impression is given that the general principle remains for all time- Christian baptism is a participation in the baptism of Jesus, which involved water and Spirit. Peter reasoned that if people had received the Spirit then they must also be baptized in water (Acts 10:47), suggesting he understood the promise of water-and-spirit baptism as relevant to believers of all ages. Indeed, in explaining his actions here Peter says that he was inspired by the Lord's own teaching that John baptized with water, but His followers were to be baptized by the Spirit (Acts 11:16). This means that Peter's insistence that there must be water baptism too shows that he didn't believe that water baptism had been superceded by a Spirit-only baptism. Rather did he understand John's words and those of the Lord as suggested above- that John baptized with water, but Jesus would baptize not only with water but also with the Spirit.

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

1:9 *And it came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee*- The idea is that the Lord Jesus came forth from the obscure, despised north of Israel and began His public ministry at His baptism. John's Gospel puts this in more abstract, spiritual terms in saying that Jesus came down or came forth from God. This language, therefore, does not speak of any literal descent from Heaven to earth of a pre-existent being.

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

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

God, which represents the church- the Angels ascended and descended upon that place.

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

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

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

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

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

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

1:13- see on 1 Cor. 15:45.
And he was in the wilderness forty days- See on 1:12 *Drives Him*.

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

And he was with the wild beasts- Suggesting He was as it were in Eden, and is compared favourably against Adam who failed his test when amongst the wild beasts. Paul in Philippians 2 and 1 Cor. 15 likewise compares the Lord's strength against temptation against Adam's weakness. Yet *therion* is the word repeatedly used in Revelation about the Lord's struggle with "the beast", and again we there encounter the motif of the wilderness. Indeed, the parallel between 'beast' and 'satan', the adversary, is found both here in Mk. 1:13 and in Revelation- and hardly anywhere elsewhere. The Lord's struggle and victory against the beasts in the desert was therefore what is being repeated now in

His struggle against the various beasts of political and spiritual opposition to His work, and His victory in the desert looks ahead to His final victory against the beast in the last day.

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

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

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

Jesus came into Galilee- He had come down from Nazareth to be baptized by John near Jerusalem at the Jordan, and now He returns into Galilee. He took John's imprisonment as the cue to begin His public ministry. His 'coming' can be understood as the fulfilment of the idea of Messiah as 'He that shall come' (Lk. 7:19; Jn. 6:14; 7:28); Legion likewise speaks with that perception of His 'coming' (Lk. 4:34). The many references in John to the Lord's 'coming down' from Heaven would therefore refer not to any literal descent of a pre-existent being from Heaven to earth, but of His 'coming' in the sense of His public manifestation to Israel as their Messiah. Jn. 4:54 seems to describe the beginning of His public ministry as when He 'came' [s.w.] out of Judea into Galilee, which is precisely the same moment being described here by Mark. The Lord 'came' because He had been 'sent' (Jn. 7:28); that sending was therefore into Galilee to begin His public ministry, rather than a sending from Heaven to earth. He was sent from Heaven, i.e. from God, in that His sending was Divine; not in any literal sense. It would be literalism's last gasp to read this as meaning that Jesus personally was in Heaven and was literally sent all the way 'down' to earth. He 'came' [s.w.] into the Jewish world not at His birth but at the beginning of His public ministry (Jn. 9:39); this was when light 'came' into the Jewish world (Jn. 3:19). He 'came' when He 'spoke' the word of the Gospel to Israel (Jn. 15:22 "If

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

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

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

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

And the kingdom of God is at hand- In the sense that Jesus as King of the Kingdom could be called "the Kingdom of God". His life was the Kingdom life; to accept the offer of His life was therefore, in John's gospel, to receive the eternal life, the kind of life we shall eternally live in God's Kingdom. John's message was that the Lord was about to be

revealed; "the Kingdom" was therefore "at hand". This was good news for all men because this message was of the forgiveness of sins; the imminent arrival of God's political Kingdom on earth is not good news for sinners, nor for anyone unprepared for it. The essential good news is of forgiveness in the Lord Jesus. Thus the good news of *potential* deliverance from Babylon is quoted as the good news of salvation from sin (Is. 52:7-10 = Mk. 1:15; Mt. 10:7,8; Rom. 10:15; Eph. 6:15; Is. 61:1,2 = Lk. 4:16-21). Therefore the response to this good news was intended to be repentance.

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

Mark gives no prior definition of what the Gospel of the Kingdom is (:14). And the LXX only contains the word once (2 Sam. 4:10). Is this an example of Mark assuming that his readers know what 'the Gospel' is? Or did the Lord speak in this way in order to beg the question from His audience: 'And what is your good news?'- and the rest of the Gospel record is the answer to that question. Another approach is possible; although the Greek *euangelion* is not used, the LXX of Is. 40:9; 52:7 and 60:1,2 clearly envisage a Messianic figure proclaiming the "good news" of Israel's freedom from oppression and sin. The Lord seems to assume that His audience would know what 'good news' He had in view. Perhaps He was alluding to those Servant Songs in Isaiah, and saying that the good news is of "the Kingdom of God". And He goes on in Matthew to explain that this good news is of the life of forgiveness and grace lived out now, under the rulership of God, and coming to its material climax in His second coming and the literal establishment of God's Kingdom on earth.

1:16 *And passing along by the sea of Galilee*- The Greek could mean that He walked around the entire lake. But He waited to call them, it seems, until the most inconvenient

moment, just as the nets were in mid-air. And His call likewise comes to us in the midst of daily life.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mending the nets- Which were presumably damaged. The implication was that the Lord would give them nets which would not break- the work of the Gospel will always

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

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

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

1:22 *And they were astonished at his teaching, for*- The "they" may refer to the newly called disciples. They had not had previous exposure to His teaching; all they had received was the message of John the Baptist. Their immediate response was therefore on a fairly slender knowledge base. The Gospel records twelve times record astonishment at the Lord's teaching. How could the passage of mere ideas from the larynx of a Palestinian Jew be so utterly astonishing, no matter how profound the content of the message? The Old Testament prophets likewise spoke God's word, but they were met with cynicism and mocking. Surely there was another factor which elicited such astonishment at His teaching, and I suggest it was in the way that His person was so perfectly congruent with the amazing ideas He was teaching. He was after all the word made flesh.

He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes- As noted above, this authority was based upon something. And I suggest it was not His miracles, but rather the congruence between His person and His word. The scribes indeed claimed authority. But the teaching of Jesus somehow had that authority within itself. It was not therefore just the nature or profundity of the ideas and content itself which were authoritative. The astonishment at the Lord's teaching in :27 was because of the actions of Jesus, in that case, in curing a man. The emphasis is perhaps to be placed on the

word "having". He really did have authority, and He didn't need to make any claim to having it. The amazing challenge is in the parable of Mk. 13:34, where the Lord gives His authority to us His servants... We are not merely standing on a street lamely holding out tracts, offering them to anyone willing to come up and take one. We have an element of His authority if we are teaching His word in His Name; and thus Paul uses the word when speaking of his 'authority in the [preaching of] the Gospel' (1 Cor. 9:18; 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10; 2 Thess. 3:9). And in our personal standing before the Father, we likewise have been given authority by the Lord Jesus to be the sons of God (Jn. 1:12). Paul realized we have each been given this authority, and uses the same word when warning believers not to let their "authority" (AV "this liberty of yours") cause others to stumble (1 Cor. 8:9).

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

1:24 *Saying: What have we to do with you, Jesus, you Nazarene? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are- the Holy One of God*- Notice the changes of pronouns from plural to singular. The supposedly spirit-possessed man was what we would call a man suffering from multiple personality disorder or a schizophrenic. Perhaps the dominant personality of the man was that which could say "I know who you are- the Holy One of God". "You Nazarene" may suggest this man had met the Lord previously, and was one of the few who during the Lord's carpenter years had perceived that He was God's Holy One. Despite his affliction, in his deepest heart and most fundamental personality, the mentally ill man perceived what few others did- that Jesus was the Son of God. The man's less dominant personalities feared condemnation and destruction from this Son of God, and wanted Him to leave. The dominant personality recognized Him as Son of God, and maybe we are to imagine him saying "I know who you are..." said in a totally different tone of voice, as if another person was speaking compared to the ones who feared condemnation and didn't want closer engagement with Jesus. That same struggle, in essence, goes on in the mind of every person as they come to Jesus; a desire to pull back before it gets too serious and risky, and yet another desire to accept Him for who He is, the saviour Son of God. The Lord's apparent exorcism of the other personalities therefore left the man with who he really was in his heart of confused hearts- a believer in Jesus as God's Holy Son.

1:25 *And Jesus rebuked him, saying: Hold your peace and come out of him*- If as suggested on :24, the man had multiple personalities, the Lord is rebuking the less dominant personality. He speaks of course in terms which the man would have related

to- of demon possession. The language of "rebuke" is appropriate to rebuking a personality; for one could hardly "rebuke" a person for being mentally disturbed. That is not a moral issue.

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

1:27 *And they were all amazed, so much so they questioned each other, saying: What is this? What a new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him!*- See on 1:22 *He taught them as one having authority*. We can see here one reason why the Lord 'went along' with their misunderstanding about evil spirits. They were left with the impression, within their albeit incorrect worldview, that His *teaching* had the power to change radically, and to cause a spirit or mindset to depart from a person permanently. They thereby perceived that His words had power; the ideas in His teaching were of themselves powerful.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And the fever left her, and she served them- The response to the Lord's healing was and must still be to serve Him through serving His people. Again we note her immediacy of response, such a theme in the gospels [Mark especially] and the Acts. The healing had been done on a Sabbath, and so they only carried their sick to the Lord after sunset. We see here the power of religious tradition and fear of religious leaders and infringement of their traditions. There would have been urgently sick people, who needed healing as soon as possible. The people believed the Lord could heal them; but their fear of infringing sabbath traditions was even greater. And we see the same in essence today.

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

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

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

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

Because they knew Him- It was the mentally sick who were the main group to 'know him to be the Christ' (Mk. 1:34 RVmg.). And it was a woman, and one with a history of mental illness, who was chosen as the first and leading witness of His resurrection. And women had no legal power as witnesses. The Greek here can be translated to the effect that the Lord did not allow them to preach, which they wanted to do because they knew / recognized Him. In this case, knowing Him naturally leads to a desire to witness to Him. It's the kind of knowledge which cannot be merely theoretical. The Lord had to command those who knew Him not to speak out that knowledge (Mk. 1:34 cp. 44)- because people knew Him, they quite naturally wanted to preach it. One cannot truly know the Lord and not tell others of Him. This is the power of true knowledge, believed as it should be believed. But at this stage the Lord did not wish for yet further mass publicity. His focus was upon training the twelve and others who wished to understand His teachings. The miracles were it seems largely done when people came to the Lord for them, or when in the course of His preaching work, He encountered need [such as the hugry crowds who had listened to Him and were starving, even fainting, from lack of food].

1:35 *And in the morning, a great while before daybreak, he rose up and went out, and departed into a deserted place; and there prayed*- Is. 50:4 prophesies of the Lord Jesus that morning by morning, God awoke His ear "to learn as a disciple". That last phrase is surely to signal the intended similarities between the Lord's path of growth, and that of

all disciples. The next two verses go on to predict that because of this morning-by-morning teaching process, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting" (Is. 50:5,6). Thus we come to the cross, the life of cross carrying, as the end result of our morning reflections. It was from His own experience that the Lord could bid us take up our cross- *His* cross- each morning. The Lord's attitude to prayer was radical in itself. The observant Jew prayed three times / day, the first and last prayers being merely the recital of the *shema*. Yet Jesus spent hours in those morning and evening prayers (Mk. 1:35; 6:46). Perhaps He was motivated in His prayers by the lengthy implications of the fact that Yahweh is indeed one, and this demands so much of us.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Faith is inculcated by an appreciation of the height of Christ's exaltation. He now has all power in Heaven and in earth, and this in itself should inspire us with faith in prayer and hope in His coming salvation. On the basis of passages like Ex. 4:7; Num. 12:10-15; 2 Kings 5:7,8, "leprosy was regarded as a "stroke" only to be removed by the Divine hand which had imposed it" (L.G. Sargent,*The Gospel Of The Son Of God*, p. 28). The leper of Mk. 1:40 lived with this understanding, and yet he saw in Jesus nothing less than God manifest. Inspired by the height of the position which he gave Jesus in his heart, he could ask him in faith for a cure: "If You will, You can [as only God was understood to be able to] make me clean".

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

1:41 *And being moved with compassion*- It has been observed that oral performance of texts like e.g. the Gospel of Mark was designed towards producing an emotional impact upon the hearers. We who read the same text and seek [quite rightly] to understand from it doctrine and practical commands for living somehow miss much of this; we inevitably subject the text to intellectual analysis, whereas the first century audience would have felt from their performance an appeal to convert, to accept, to feel

something in response towards the Man Jesus who was presented there. Perhaps this is why a reading of the Gospels produces less response in us than that from a first century group hearing the same Gospels read / performed to them. Thus a first century reciter / listener would have paid special attention to the way Mark indicates the emotional state of Jesus as He said His words- angry (Mk. 3:5), compassionate (Mk. 1:41), snorting like a horse (Mk. 1:43 Gk.), troubled and distressed (Mk. 14:33). Likewise Mark's constant use of the term "immediately..." in his early chapters would've created a sense of urgency, fast flowing narrative, perhaps matched by the reciter speaking quickly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MARK CHAPTER 2

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

And after some days, when he entered again into Capernaum, it became known that he was in the house- The "that" is recitative, so the sense is 'It was reported- He is in the house!'. This was the level of gossipy attention paid to the Lord, which must have been so irritating: "He has gone into the house, and is there!". Again we get the impression that the Lord was not interested in mass public meetings and healings; His focus was upon training the twelve and teahing the Gospel. It seems He was almost hiding away in the house. Not surprisingly, because He left there because of the

attention caused by His miracles, and He had been hunted down even in the deserted places by those eager for a miracle (1:45).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

mentality. But the essence is, do we *know* on a personal level that the Lord Jesus really has the power to forgive *our* sins?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Lord was sensitive to the situation of those He healed or converted. Just as He commanded the resurrected girl to be given something to eat, so He realized the

pressure that would be on the healed man- and so He told him to go home immediately and thus avoid the limelight.

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

2:13 *And he went out again by the sea side; and all the crowd went to him and he taught them*- The imperfect tenses mean they kept on coming to Him, and He kept on teaching them. The interest in miracles had given way to interest in His teaching, just as the Lord had intended. His location by the lake side was perhaps in order to require some effort by the people to come to Him; and there were no houses large enough to hold the crowds coming to Him anyway.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2:17 *And when Jesus heard it, he said to them*- The way the Lord Jesus 'knew' things because of His extreme sensitivity, rather than necessarily by some flash of Holy

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

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

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

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

2:18 *And John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and they came, and said to him: Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?*- Implying they didn't even do so at the Day of Atonement, the one Biblical command for fasting? The Lord's disciples were mostly secular men whom He was trying to turn into spiritual people. And this continues to be the thrust of His work with people. The focus of our preaching should likewise be on getting unspiritual, secular people to believe, rather than focusing on trying to persuade those who already believe in Him to change their understandings of some points. I don't say

we shouldn't do this, but far more will be achieved to His glory by bringing unbelievers to faith, rather than correcting misbelievers. Another reason why John's disciples thought the Lord's men didn't fast could have been because they took seriously His command to not appear to others to fast. And John's disciples proclaiming their fasting meant they were overlooking the Lord's clear teaching *not* to do this in the Sermon on the Mount. But in His gracious way, the Lord didn't point out the obvious *faux pas* in their reasoning. He could've said 'John told you to obey Me. I teach not to proclaim your own fasting. Why aren't you obedient to My teaching?'. But instead He reasoned with them on their own ground. And again, we see a pattern for our engagement with others- not to always baldly confront misunderstanding and reduce it to a right / wrong, black and white issue, but to lead the person further by accepting for a moment that their faulty assumptions are true; for they are true to the person who holds them, and the Lord recognized that.

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

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

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

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

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

But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them. In that day, they will fast- The Gk. *apairo* is a form of the Greek *pairo* which has just been used ("*take up* your bed" Mt. 9:6) and which is now used in the next verse about the new cloth 'taking from' the old garment (Mt. 9:16). What exactly the connection of thought might be is hard to say. But clearly the 'taking of Jesus from' the disciples was to be at the same time as when the new wine and new cloth were available, which would 'take from' the old cloth in destroying it. This time was surely the death of the Lord Jesus, at which the new wine of His blood confirmed the new covenant and thus ended the old. It was then of course that the disciples mourned (s.w. Mk. 16:10 "they *mourned* and wept"); and the same Greek word for 'taken from' occurs in Jn. 19:15 where the Jews cry "Away with Him!"- to the cross; in Jn. 19:31,38 where the body of Jesus is 'taken from' the cross and in Acts 8:33 "His life is *taken from* the earth". Significantly, Col. 2:14 uses the word to describe how on the cross, Christ 'took away' the old covenant. This is the idea of its usage in Mt. 9:16, that the new wine and new garment would 'take from / away' the old. And it was achieved by the 'taking away' of Jesus at the cross. Through the grace of Jesus, He is in love with us; He has called us to be His bride. He sees us in an extremely positive light. He counts us as righteous to a degree that is a real struggle to believe- even during His ministry, "when we were yet sinners", and when the only example He had of His bride were those faltering 12. He tells the Jews that His people will fast and mourn for His absence after His departure, with the intensity that the friends of the bridegroom would have if the groom suddenly collapsed and died at the wedding (this seems to be the picture of Mt. 9:15, seeing "taken away" as an idiom for sudden death). This is surely a positive view of the sorrow of the body of Christ for their Lord's absence. Even if we see in this mini-parable only a description of the disciples' sorrow after the Lord's death, He is giving a very positive description of the disciples' joy, saying that they didn't fast for joy of being with Him; He describes their joy as the joy of the friends of the groom at the wedding. Yet the Gospels paint the twelve as a struggling, uncertain group of men, eaten up with the petty arguments of this life, unused to the self-control of fasting. Peter, for example, had until very recently been a possibly immoral young fisherman (1 Pet. 4:3). The happiness of the disciples is explained in terms of them being at a wedding. The happiness of the wedding is normally associated with alcohol, and the context of Mt. 9:15 goes on to explain that Christ's new covenant is symbolised by new wine. The difference between John's disciples and Christ's was that Christ's were full of the joy of the new covenant. But there is

ample reason to think that they were heavily influenced by Judaist thinking; they didn't go and preach to the Gentile world as Christ commanded, and even Peter was marvellously slow to realize the Jewish food laws had been ended by Christ, despite the Lord's strong implication of this in Mk. 7:19 (not AV). Yet the grace of Jesus saw His men *as if* they had grasped the meaning of the new covenant, *as if* they had the joy of true faith in and understanding of His work; and He spoke of them to the world in these terms. We can take untold comfort from this; for we dare to believe that the Lord does and will confess our name (character) in a like exalted manner to the Father and His Angels.

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

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

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

To get a piece out of a new garment, that new garment would be spoiled; and the old one likewise would be rent further (Mt., Mk.). "New" cloth refers to cloth which hasn't yet been washed; on first washing of the repaired garment, it would shrink, and

thus make a tear. The tragic waste envisioned here is like the new wine running away on the ground from the burst old skins. Likewise the old wine skins would've had to have the old wine poured out from them to have this new wine put into them. Mixing the old life and the new covenant, a bit of the one here and a bit of the other there, results in this tragic wastage all around. The parables make it seem so obvious that this isn't the way to go; but in reality, we find it hard to be so complete in our devotion to the new covenant.

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

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

"Made worse" in its NT usage has a moral sense. The division is made more evil. In the context, the Lord was addressing John's disciples who had come under the influence of the Pharisees (:18). He is saying that they must fully commit to Him, or else the schism between them and the Jews and them and Himself will only become worse and more destructive. There could be no middle way between Christ and

orthodox Judaism; the early church tried it, as the NT letters demonstrate, but in the end, it came to a sad and bitter end, and the permanent division of the garment. And this is how all schisms go- unless there is a wholehearted acceptance of Jesus and His teachings, the end finally will be a bitter, destructive rending. The pre-existing, initial schism between persons (cp. that between John's disciples and Christ in :18) will only be made worse unless there is a total surrender to the Lord's ways. In all the unhappy church history which most of us have experienced, that is proved true time and again. Likewise there are those who seek to hide their faith in societies and social situations where it is costly to go Christ's way; but ultimately, they have to choose one way or the other. The rent is made worse. A city set on a hill cannot be hid by its nature.

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

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

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

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

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

2:23 *And it came to pass, that he was going on the Sabbath day through the grain fields; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of grain*- Luke says they rubbed them in their hands; Matthew says they ate. Here we have a superb example of the Gospel writers being in artless agreement with each other, in a manner which would not have been achieved by an uninspired record. The force of "began..." might be because the Pharisees came and stopped them. This shows how closely the Lord and His men were under the critical eyes of others, even from a distance.

The very poor were allowed to do this by the Law (Lev. 19:9; Dt. 23:24,25), and so we see in this a picture of the deep poverty of the Lord's followers; He later parallels the urgent hunger of David's men at the time of 1 Sam. 21 with that of His

followers. It would seem that He Himself did not make use of the concession, because the criticism was focused upon His disciples rather than Himself. W.D. Davies lists evidence that Judaism forbad fasting on the Sabbath (Jubilees 50:12) (W.D. Davies *Matthew* p. 312). In this case, the record is showing how the legalism of the time would've condemned the disciples- and the poor generally- either way: for fasting on the Sabbath, or for 'threshing' on the Sabbath to get food so as not to fast. The Lord therefore takes the whole argument to a level far above such petty legalism.

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

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

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

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

We need to reflect upon the implications of the fact that the vast majority of the early Christians were illiterate. Literacy levels in first century Palestine were only 10% at the highest estimate. Some estimate that the literacy level in the Roman empire was a maximum of 10%, and literacy levels in Palestine were at most 3%. Most of the literate people in Palestine would have been either the wealthy or the Jewish scribes. And yet it was to the poor that the Gospel was preached, and even in Corinth there were not many educated or "mighty" in this world within the ecclesia.

Notice how the Lord said to the Pharisees: "Have you not *read*?" (Mk. 2:25; Mt. 12:5; 19:4), whilst He says to those who responded to Him: "You have *heard*" (Mt. 5:21,27,33). His followers were largely the illiterate. As the ecclesial world developed, Paul wrote inspired letters to the ecclesias. Those letters would have been *read* to the brethren and sisters. Hence the great importance of 'teachers' in the early churches, those who could faithfully read and transmit to others what had been written.

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

2:26 *How he entered into the house of God when Abiathar was high priest and ate the showbread, which it is not lawful to eat except for the priests, and gave also to those that were with him?*- For non-Levites to enter the Sanctuary was also not 'lawful', quite apart from eating the bread which only the priests could lawfully eat. This prepares the way for the Lord's later parable about God urging unclean street people to 'enter [His] house' because Israel had rejected the invitation (the same words are used- Lk. 14:23). The psychological magnitude of the Lord's new system of thinking is hard to appreciate. Non-Levites could now enter it- and even the worst of the Gentiles. But the magnitude of the new thinking in Christ for anyone, not least secular people of the 21st Century, is no less.

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

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

2:27 *And he said to them: The Sabbath was designed for man, and not man for the Sabbath*- Mark alone records this. The allusion is surely to the fact that at creation, man was made [NEV "designed"] just before the Sabbath; the Sabbath was made

afterwards, so that man could rest. The Sabbath, the seventh day, came *after* man's creation on the sixth day. It was therefore for man. It was for man's blessing, and therefore it was wrong to add legislation to it which made it an utter pain for man rather than a blessing. We can almost read in an ellipsis- the Sabbath was made for man's [blessing]. Man was not made in order to keep a pre-existing legal code about the Sabbath. The laws and institutions of God were intended for human *blessing*; and yet human legalism has meant that so often, they become a curse and frustration to man. Man is not made or designed to keep legal codes- man was not made to keep "the Sabbath" as it was being presented by Judaism at that time. The Sabbath was made for man's blessing, not in order to trap him. This same argument can be applied to so many of the trappings of religion, from dress codes to statements of faith.

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

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

MARK CHAPTER 3

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

3:2 *And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the Sabbath day- so that they would have an excuse to accuse him*- "Would heal" is literally 'Will heal'; this

typical change of tense is to encourage us to see the situation played out live before our eyes, as it were; entering into the question as we do when watching a movie: 'Will He heal him... or not?!?'.

An "excuse to accuse" is a legal term. They wanted to get Jesus in court over this issue. But there's no evidence they actually did, and there was no recorded mention of Sabbath breaking in His final trial- so well and profoundly did He answer them.

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

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

He said that if Had omitted to heal the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath, this would have been 'doing evil' and even 'killing' (Mk. 3:4). That's how seriously He took omitting to do good when it's in our power to do it. See on Mk. 7:11.
The Lord said that He had a choice of saving life or destroying life, were He to prefer to keep the Sabbath laws above the need for preserving life. Clearly He saw failing to act to save life as tantamount to destroying life. We must give our Lord's words their due weight here in our decision making. To not act to save life, to excuse ourselves for whatever reason, is effectively destroying life, or, as Mark's record puts it, "to kill" (Mk. 3:4; Lk. 6:9). We can't therefore be passive in this matter. The context of the Lord's statement was in response to questions about whether something was "lawful" or not; it was the age old question, 'Is it is a sin to do X, Y or Z?'. His answer was as ever in terms of a principle- that our guiding principle must be the saving and healing and preservation of human life. The attitude of the Pharisees was that the Lord was infringing a letter of the law and therefore was guilty of death. They murdered Him on the sabbath days; and thus they chose to destroy life rather than save it. The word for "to kill" in Mk. 3:4 is so often used in the Gospels about the killing of Jesus. They failed to take His exhortation. The crucifixion of God's Son was thus a result of legalism; it was because of His attitude to the man with the withered hand that the Pharisees first plotted to kill Jesus (Lk. 6:11). Whatever our individual conscience, let us not "be filled with madness" as the Pharisees were at the fact the Lord approached human behaviour in terms of principles, rather than reducing everything to a common right / wrong scenario. The principle is clearly the saving and preservation and enriching of others' lives. Surely we should each allow each other to articulate this fundamental issue as we each have occasion to do so.

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

And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man- The way the Lord didn't just ignore the Jewish leaders, as we might ignore trouble makers at a public meeting or correspondence course students who ask

endless questions... this is really quite something. He grieved for the hardness of their hearts, and finally broke down and wept over Jerusalem, in an agony of soul that they would not respond. The apparently foolish catch questions of Mk. 3:21-29 are answered in some depth by the Lord, and He concludes with pointing out that they are putting themselves "*in danger* of eternal damnation" (although, notice, not yet condemned). One senses the urgency with which He put it to them. He was angry [i.e. frustrated?], "being grieved for the blindness of their hearts" (Mk. 3:5). Are we just indifferent or evenly smugly happy that men are so blind…? Or do we grieve about it to the point of angry frustration? Remember how Moses and Paul would fain have given their eternal life for the conversion of Israel, this is how they felt for them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

miracles were performed in three small villages in Galilee. That also must provide some context to the comment here that He healed 'all' the multitudes on this occasion; He healed 'all' amongst the crowds who were in need of healing, not every member of the crowd.

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

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

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

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

3:12 *And he strictly ordered them not to make him known*- The Lord charged the healed people to not make Him known, in the sense of not advertising their experience of healing, because He wanted to focus on teaching without the distraction of the crowds who sought only healing. Yet His commands about this were disobeyed. Clearly if He were addressing literal spirits, then He failed to have power over them. For they were disobedient, in going around praising Him for His healing. The whole insistence upon reading the "unclean spirits" literally simply breaks down. For evil spirits are not supposed to utter the praise of the Lord Jesus. The language only really makes sense if were read the "spirits" as referring to persons who were once ill but whom the Lord healed.

3:13 *And he went up into the mountain and called to himself whomever he would; and they came to him*- In the same way as Moses was called up into the mount to receive his Divine commission, so the Lord Jesus called up to the mount His disciples- implying that they, who represent all of us, were now a new Moses (Mk. 3:13). Moses was thus an example that challenged those from a Jewish background especially. He

was no longer to be gazed at with incomprehension as to his greatness and intimacy with God; he was to become the realistic pattern for all followers of the Lord Jesus, who would meaningfully emulate His closness to God.

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

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

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

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

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

3:18 *And Andrew and Philip and Bartholomew and Matthew and Thomas and James the son of Alphaeus and Thaddaeus and Simon the Cananaean*- Bartholomew is apparently the same as Nathanael, also mentioned with Philip in Jn. 1:46-51. "Simon the Cananaean" doesn't mean 'from Canaan' but a *kananites*, a zealot. We see the wide range of men the Lord called into His band; Matthew the tax collector would've been seen as a traitor, whereas the zealots were at the other end of the

political spectrum. The way the 12 didn't break up as a group after living together under extreme psychological conditions is a testament to the unifying power of the person of Jesus. The composition of the Lord's body is the same today, including "all [types of] men". Sadly denominationalism and churchianity has led to churches often being clusters of believers having the same socio-economic, racial and personality type positions, rather than being conglomerations of literally all types of person, of whatever accent and formation.

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

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

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

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

As Paul wrote to his unspiritual Corinthian brethren, he was doubtless hurt at the thought of their opposition to him; yet his mind flew to the similarities between himself and his Lord being rejected by *his* brethren (Mk. 3:21 = 2 Cor. 5:13). When she stands outside the house asking to speak with Jesus, Mary is identified with her other children who considered Jesus crazy. Jesus says that His mothers are those who hear the word of God and do it. This must have so cut her. There is a rather unpleasant connection between Mk. 3:32 “they stood without” and Mark 4:11 "unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables”. And further, Lk. 13:25 speaks of how the rejected shall stand without [same words] knocking and asking to speak with the Lord. Mk. 3:19,20 RVmg. says that Jesus came home- i.e. to the family home, and it turned out that the interested visitors took the house over, with His relatives, mother, brothers, sisters etc. left outside (Mk. 3:21 RVmg.). No wonder the point was made that He now had a new family; and His natural family, Mary amongst them, resented it.

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

This is such a tragic difference from the young, spiritually minded woman who was so convinced that her Son was indeed Messiah and the uniquely begotten Son of God. And it happened simply because she was influenced by what others thought of Jesus, rather than what she had learnt from the word and experienced herself. It's a powerful warning to us.

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

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

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

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

They were driven to assume that the Lord was in league with some higher power in order to perform His miracles. If it wasn't the Holy Spirit of God- it had to be by some other power, and the only option in their theology was some form of the Satan myth. Their logical desperation is a reflection of the undeniable nature of the Lord's miracles (as in Acts 4:16). Any who claim to be able to do miracles through the Holy Spirit should likewise be producing healings which even their most sceptical opponents cannot deny are miracles; but that feature is not seen in many claims of healings today. When accused of being in league with 'satan', the Lord didn't read them a charge of blasphemy. He reasoned instead that a thief cannot bind a strong man; and

likewise He couldn't bind 'satan' unless He were stronger than Satan (cp. Mk. 3:23-27). He doesn't take the tack that 'Satan / Beelzebub / demons' don't exist; He showed instead that He was evidently stronger than any such being or force, to the point that belief in such a concept was meaningless. Faith must rather be in Him alone.

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

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

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Judaism had taken over the surrounding pagan notion of a personal 'Satan'. And the Lord Jesus and the Gospel writers use this term, but in the way they use it, they redefine it. The parable of the Lord Jesus binding the "strong man" – the Devil – was really to show that the "Devil" as they understood it was now no more, and his supposed Kingdom now taken over by that of Christ. The last Gospel, John, doesn't use the term in the way the earlier Gospels do. He defines what the earlier writers called "the Devil" as actual people, such as the Jews or the brothers of Jesus, in their articulation of an adversarial ['satanic'] position to Jesus.

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

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

3:25 *And if a family be divided against itself, that family will not be able to stand*- The Lord is teaching that the breakup of a Kingdom, even Satan's, must start

on the household level and progress higher. Perhaps this is a hint at the growth of *God's* kingdom beginning with the household conversions and house churches with which Christianity started.

3:26 *And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end*- The Jews accused the Lord of being in league with the prince of the demons, Beelzebub. His comment was that if the family / house of Satan was so divided, then Satan "has an end" (Mk. 3:26). His approach was 'OK you believe in demons, Beelzebub etc. Well if that's the case, then according to the extension of your logic, Satan will soon come to an end, will cease existence. That's the bottom line. As it happens, I am indeed 'binding the strong man', rendering Satan powerless, making him 'have an end', and so whichever way you look at it, believing in demons or not, the bottom line is that My miracles demonstrate that effectively Satan is powerless and not an item now'. The way the New Testament is written reflects the same approach. When the Lord was alone with His disciples, He explained further: "If they have called the Master of the House [i.e. Jesus] 'Beelzebub', how much more shall they call them of his household?" [i.e. the disciples] (Mt. 10:25). By saying this, the Lord was clarifying that of course He didn't *really* mean that He was part of the Satan family, working against Satan to destroy the entire family. Rather was He and His family quite separate from the Satan family. But He didn't make that clarification to the Jewish crowds – He simply used their idea and reasoned with them on their own terms. Note in passing how the Jews actually thought Jesus was Beelzebub, or Satan. This would be one explanation for their mad passion to kill Him; for those labelled 'Satan' were hunted to their death in such societies, as seen later in the witch hunts of the middle ages. The Jews say Jesus as a false miracle worker, a false Messiah, a bogus Son of God – all characteristics of their view of 'Satan'. Some centuries later, the Jewish sage Maimonides described Jesus in terms of the antichrist: "Daniel had already alluded to him when he presaged the downfall of a wicked one and a heretic among the Jews who would endeavour to destroy the Law, claim prophecy for himself, make pretences to miracles, and allege that he is the Messiah" (*Maimonides' Epistle to Yemen*). It's been suggested that the way the Jewish rabbinical writings call Him *Yeshu* is an acronym for the Hebrew expression *yemach shemo vezichro* – "May his name and memory be obliterated". This was the very Jewish definition of Satan. They saw Jesus as Satan himself; hence they were so insistent on slaying Him. Yet by the deft twist of Divine providence, it was through the death of Jesus that the *real* Devil (i.e. the power of sin) was in fact slain (Heb. 2:14). To those with perceptive enough minds to see it, yet once again the Jewish ideas had been turned back upon them to reveal the real nature of the Devil to them, within their own frames of reference and terminology. Likewise Beelzebub means literally 'the lord of the house'; and the Lord Jesus alludes to this in describing Himself as the Master of the House of God.

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

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redefine it. The parable of the Lord Jesus binding the “strong man” – the Devil – was really to show that the “Devil” as they understood it was now no more, and his supposed Kingdom now taken over by that of Christ. The last Gospel, John, doesn’t use the term in the way the earlier Gospels do. He defines what the earlier writers called “the Devil” as actual people, such as the Jews or the brothers of Jesus, in their articulation of an adversarial [‘satanic’] position to Jesus.

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

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

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

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

We have elsewhere shown that these goods refer to the various aspects of the supreme righteousness of Christ which are divided between the body of Christ. The spoils divided to us by the Lord are the various aspects of righteousness which He took for Himself from Satan. The picture of a bound strong man having his house ransacked before his eyes carries with it the idea of suspense, of daring, of doing something absolutely impossible. And so the idea of Christ really taking the righteousness which the Satan of our very natures denies us, and giving these things to us, is almost too much to believe. It is normally the fellow-soldiers who share the spoils (cp. Heb. 7:4). But we didn't even fight; the spoils are divided amongst the bound ones (Is. 53:12 Heb.). Satan in general is still unbound (cp. Rev. 20:2). Christ bound the Satan within Himself personally, and took the spoils of victory for Himself. Col. 2:15 says that Christ "spoiled" as a result of His victory on the cross; and the Greek specifically means 'to completely divest *for oneself*'. He is being painted as the lone hero who took it all for Himself; of the people there was none with Him in His great battle on the cross (Is. 63:3). And indeed, He was the lone hero. But the point is that He has shared with us the spoils of righteousness which He took for Himself as a result, even though we are not worthy to receive them. Seeing the teaching of the Lord is just outline principle, it is evident that through His death He gained possession of absolute righteousness, and then shared this with us. In the first century, the outward demonstration of this was in the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. "He led captivity captive (more language of the heroic victor), and gave gifts unto men", the miraculous gifts, in the first century context (Eph. 4:8,11). But what was taken away from Satan was not only power over illness. If this was the main meaning of Satan being bound and his spoils shared with us, then it would follow that the effect of Christ's binding of

Satan was only in the first century; for those miraculous gifts of the Spirit are no longer available; illness still triumphs over God's people. The spoils of Satan refer to the righteousness which Satan limits and denies. It is this which has been taken from him, and divided to us all as a result of the cross. The miracles of the first century were a physical reflection of this, just as the rending of the temple veil and resurrection of some dead saints was a physical foretaste of the spiritual possibilities opened up by the Lord's death. There are many references to the spiritual blessings which are even now mediated to us (as the whole body of Christ) on account of the Lord's death; we (as a community) are given peace and "eternal life" (Jn. 14:27; 17:2; 1 Jn. 5:11), knowledge (2 Cor. 4:6), wisdom (Eph. 1:17; James 1:15), peace (2 Thess. 3:16), understanding (1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:7), love in our hearts (Rom. 5:5), grace (Eph. 4:7), comfort (2 Thess. 2:16), righteousness (Rom. 5:16,17), confidence (2 Tim. 1:7), sexual self-restraint (1 Cor. 7:7). All the different aspects of the 100% righteousness of our Lord, *all* His goods, the spoils He personally took from Satan, are divided up amongst ourselves, some having spiritual possibilities in one area, others in another. As a community we are counted as if we have overcome the world, overcome Satan, as Christ did, although on a human level we are still bound (Jn. 16:33 cp. 1 Jn. 2:13,14; 5:4). Only at the day of judgment will we have overcome all (Rev. 21:7 cp. Lk. 11:22 s.w.), but we are treated as if we have already done so.

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

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

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

alive, for that sin he was in God's eyes condemned and dead. But that verdict for that case was changed by his change of the situation. See on Rev. 3:17.

People were forced to a choice. Jesus of Nazareth had access to superhuman power, far more than anyone had ever had. Which power was it, within the framework of their dualistic view of the cosmos- of Satan or God? Was He God's supreme agent on earth- or Satan's? There was no middle ground. All had to choose. The miracles were good. Therefore, it was Satan who had been bound. Jesus was therefore of God. To insist He was from Satan was to wilfully refuse to believe the evidence God had placed before them. There was no forgiveness for this choice- whilst it continued. If anyone wanted to repent and accept that Jesus was of God, to gather with Him, to be with Him rather than against Him- then that was always possible. Note that there is no statement that *repentance* is impossible, rather that *forgiveness* is impossible whilst a person is in the position of so strongly rejecting Christ as God's Son. For those who did accept Christ as of God rather than of Satan, then "all manner of sin" could be forgiven them, including even at times speaking against Him personally (Mt. 12:32). From one viewpoint, the only way we cannot be saved is to wilfully refuse to participate in the new covenant. The Lord laboured the point that the "unforgivable sin" was to "blaspheme the Holy Spirit" (Mk. 3:28-30; Mt. 12:31-37; Lk. 12:10). But it's been demonstrated that this is a reference to Jewish writings and traditions such as Jubilees 15:33 "where not circumcising one's child is unforgivable, because it is a declaration that one does not belong to the covenant people".

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3:35 *For whoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother and sister and mother*- Another allusion back to the crunch line of the Sermon on the Mount, that the true community would be comprised of those who did the will of the Father in Heaven. The Lord spoke of Himself as 'doing the will' of the Father, supremely in His death on the cross. Heb. 10:7,9 speaks of the Son 'doing the will' of God in dying on the cross, and the passage then goes on to appeal to us likewise to do that same will (Heb. 10:36). And it is God who will work in us through the Spirit to empower us to do that will- if we ourselves so wish (Heb. 13:21). The very fact the Lord calls us brethren here is seen by the Hebrew writer as proof of Christ's humanity (= Heb. 2:11).

MARK CHAPTER 4

4:1 *And again he began to teach by the sea side. There gathered to him a very great crowd*- "Gathered together" is the Greek *sunago* from whence 'synagogue'. The idea is that there in the open air, on the sea shore, and *not* in a building, was the synagogue- with the Lord as rabbi, sitting in a fishing boat to teach whilst the

audience *stood* instead of sitting (as they did in a Jewish synagogue, James 2:2,3). The whole scene is a radical inversion of orthodox Jewish values and culture. The true synagogue was now in the open air, and beyond the imagination, frames and culture of orthodox religion.

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

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

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

As noted on 3:9,10, an offshore boat was required because of the huge press upon the Lord in order to get a miracle. In order to get the people to listen to Him, it must have been necessary for Him to ignore human need for the time being and not do any more miracles- in order that His word might be spread. This was His priority, far more than addressing human material need.

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

According to the parallel in Matthew 12, this was the Lord's first parable; and it marked a turning point. Now He was intentionally using parables exactly so that the majority of Israel would not understand. The Lord seems to have concluded that the contemporary generation was wicked and bound for condemnation; they had rejected John's message after having initially responded to it, and had rejected Him. This is now the first time that we read in Matthew of the use of "parables", and it seems to be in direct context with what He has said to Israelite society at the end of Matthew 11. He is now speaking to them in this form so that they will be confirmed in their disbelief. The Kingdom principles which He had so clearly expressed in the Sermon on the Mount now become "mysteries" of the Kingdom (Mt. 12:11); instead of the Kingdom which could then have been established had Israel accepted Jesus as

Messiah, the Kingdom principles would work quietly from within until such time as the Kingdom were to be politically established at a far future date. No longer do we read of the Kingdom coming 'near' and being 'heralded'. And the themes of most of His subsequent parables in Matthew include Israel's rejection of the Gospel. He spoke *things* to them, but in parables. This of itself suggests that He used parables so that people would *not* understand, as is made explicit in Mt. 12:11,12. His parables were not, therefore, simple stories with an obvious meaning. They may appear that way to us who have some understanding of their interpretation, but that was clearly not how they were understood by most of the initial audience. Even if they thought they understood them, it's made clear in Mt. 12:11 and :12 that they didn't. The change in style is due to His conclusion that that generation were condemned and had refused John's ministry and therefore Christ's message. From now onwards He would not be giving them any more- He was cloaking the message in parables, and explaining them only to the minority who had properly responded.

4:3 *Listen! Behold, the sower went forth to sow*- The Lord's teaching in Mt. 12:43 that the Jews had not responded to John the Baptist lays the basis for the parable of the sower, which was told the same day (Mt. 13:1)- the seed initially experienced some growth, but then the 'evil one', the Jewish system, stunted that growth. Who is the sower? The preacher, or the Lord Jesus? Some Greek texts read "*a* sower" (followed by the AV), others "*the* sower" (cp. the Diaglott). Perhaps the Lord said both: 'A sower, the sower, went out...'. Surely the sower is the Lord Jesus, but in *our* work of witness we are *His* witnesses. For we represent Him to the world. This is why "the Spirit (the Lord the Spirit, Jesus) and the bride (the ecclesia) say, Come"; ours is a united witness with Him.

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

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

but it is also effectively 'Jesus'. For He personally is the essence of the Gospel message. This parable of the types of ground is explaining to the disciples why the majority of Israel were failing to accept Him, and thus had rejected the ministry and message of John.

4:4 *And it came to pass, as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside*- The Greek *hodos* means simply 'the way'. It is the very word used about John the Baptist seeking to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus (Mt. 3:3). If Israel had responded as envisaged in the Isaiah 40 passage which speaks of this, then the way or road would have been prepared and the glory of Yahweh would have travelled over it to establish God's visible Kingdom in Jerusalem. On one hand, the fact the sower sowed even on the 'way' is an element of unreality in the parable which simply points to the extreme enthusiasm of this sower, casting the seed onto all types of human personality, including those who appear hopeless cases. The seed of God's word would have made the rough way smooth for the King of glory to ride over to Zion. But instead the seed was despised and even condemned, trampled underfoot - an idiom meaning it was despised and even condemned. And then the birds came and took it away altogether. The way was not prepared by response to the seed because of the Jewish leadership stopping others responding. We note the usage of the same word to describe how some despised individuals sitting in 'the way' were in fact persuaded to respond to the Kingdom invitation (Mt. 22:9,10); Bartimaeus was likewise sitting in the way [s.w.] and responded, following Jesus "in the way" (Mk. 10:46,52). The 'way [side]' could have responded to the seed- but it didn't. Because men came and trampled it under foot, and the birds came and took it away. It wasn't as if there was no chance at all that it could have responded.

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

The picture of fowls coming down to take away the seed is firmly rooted in a host of Old Testament passages which speak of fowls descending on apostate Israel (Is.18:6; Jer.7:33; 15:3; 16:4; 19:7; 34:20). These birds taking away the seed are interpreted as "the wicked one" (the Biblical devil) 'catching away' the word. There must be a thought connection here with Jesus' comment that from him who would not understand the sower parable "shall be *taken away* even what he has" (Mt. 13:12). Those who would not make the mental effort to grapple with Christ's parable had what understanding they did have snatched away by the Jewish devil. "The wicked one" responsible for this easily connects with "the devil" of the parable of the tares

which follows; this parable has frequently been interpreted with reference to Jewish false teachers of the first century. "The wicked one... catches away" the seed/word, as the Jewish wolf "catches" the sheep (Mt. 13:19; Jn. 10:12). This association of the first century Jewish system with the wolf/ wild beast/ devil/ wicked one is probably continued by some of the beasts of Revelation having a similar Jewish application in the first century.

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

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

4:5 *And other fell on the rocky ground, where it had not much earth*- The Greek *petrodes* is a form of *petra*. The Lord had taught that the wise man who heard and did His sayings developed his spiritual house upon a *petra*, a rock (Mt. 7:24). And of course Peter was the *petra* upon which the church would be built (Mt. 16:18). So again we see that it was not impossible for the seed on the rock to prosper. The problem was that some who began their growth upon rocks stopped growing because of persecution and tribulation (Mt. 12:21)- which in the first instance was from the Jews.

And immediately- The immediacy of response is not wrong; immediate response is a great theme of Mark. The good ground also features immediate response. The problem with many is that they do not continue that immediacy of response. When you perceive an opportunity to do the Lord's service, *respond immediately*. See it as another opportunity for "redeeming the time". This is a major Biblical theme. Israel were not to delay in offering their firstfruits to God (Ex. 22:29), lest their intentions weren't translated into practice. The disciples *immediately* left the ship, simply put their nets down and followed (Mt. 4:20,22); Matthew left his opened books and queue of clients in the tax office and walked out never to return (Lk. 5:17,18 implies). There is a marked theme in the NT of men and women hearing the Gospel and *immediately* responding by accepting baptism. In this spirit Cornelius immediately sent for Peter (Acts 10:33), and the Philippian jailer was immediately baptized, even though there were many other things to think about that night (Acts 16:33). Joseph was twice told in dreams to “arise” and take the child Jesus to another country. Both times he

“arose” in the morning and just did it, leaving all he had, responding immediately (Mt. 2:13,14,20,21). Paul and Luke immediately went to preach in Macedonia after seeing the inviting vision (Acts 16:10); Paul "straightway" preached Christ after receiving his vision of preaching commission (Acts 9:20). Indeed, the records of the Lord's ministry are shot through (in Mark especially) with words like "immediately", "straightway", "forthwith", "as soon as...". He was a man of immediate response, Yahweh's servant *par excellence*. He dismissed the man who would fain follow Him after he had buried his father, i.e. who wanted to wait some years until his father’s death and then set out in earnest on the Christian life. The Lord’s point was that we must immediately respond to the call to live and preach Him, with none of the delay and hesitancy to total commitment which masquerades as careful planning. Note how the Lord told another parable in which He characterized those not worthy of Him as those who thought they had valid reason to delay their response to the call (Lk. 14:16-20). They didn't turn Him down, they just thought He would understand if they delayed. But He is a demanding Lord, in some ways. What He seeks is an immediacy of response. If we have this in the daily calls to service in this life, we will likewise respond immediately to the knowledge that 'He's back' (Lk. 12:36, cp. the wise virgins going immediately, whilst the others delayed). And whether we respond immediately or not will be the litmus test as to whether our life's spirituality was worth anything or not. All this is not to say that we should rush off in hot-headed enthusiasm, crushing the work and systematic efforts of other brethren and committees under foot. But when we see the need, when we catch the vision of service, let's not hesitate in our response, dilly dallying until we are left with simply a host of good intentions swimming around in our brain cells. Instead, let's appreciate that one aspect of the seed in good soil was that there was an *immediacy of response* to the word, a joyful and speedy 'springing up' in response (Mk. 4:5).

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

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

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

And because it had no root, it withered away- The sun arising and withering the seed is a symbol of tribulation arising in the life of the believer (Mk. 4:6). But the sun arising is also a clear symbol of the day of the Lord’s return. Thus whenever we

encounter tribulation, our response to it is in some sense a preview of our response to the Lord's coming in judgment. Trials and reproofs from God are Him "entering with thee into judgment", here and now (Job 22:4).

The same word for "withered" is used by the Lord about how Israel were the fig tree who had once had promise of fruit (in their initial response to John) but was now withered (Mt. 21:19,20). Those who initially accept Christ but do not abide in Him are likewise "withered" (Jn. 15:6). John's emphasis upon 'abiding' in Christ likely has reference to the need to accept John's message about Christ and abide in it, rather than wandering off and back to Judaism. Both James and Peter seem to allude to this point of the parable in their teaching that the word of God stands forever, whereas flesh withers away (James 1:11; 1 Pet. 1:24). As we will note on 13:22, the seed is to become the person. Those who do not wither are those who have the seed within them, the power of eternal life which endures. "Because they had no root, they withered away" (Mt. 13:6) is alluded to in Jn. 15:6 concerning the branches of the vine withering as a result of God's word not abiding in them. The connection between the plants of the sower parable and the branches of the vine is further evidence that the sower parable mainly concerns the response to the word of those *within* the ecclesia.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Every believer who truly strives to bring forth fruit to God's glory, both in preaching to others and in personal character development, will find this promise constantly true.

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

The sower parable has 75% of the seed sowed on bad ground, due to the almost fanatic way the sower throws the seed so far and wide, evidently without too much attention to whether it lands on responsive soil or not. His emphasis was clearly on broadcasting the seed far and wide, rather than sowing like any normal sower would do. This taught that even if some preaching work appears not to bear fruit, this shouldn't discourage us from the essentially outgoing spirit we should have in spreading the word far and wide. To reach “all men” must be our brief; all types of men and women, including those who are obviously going to respond poorly. Yet the parable talks of one grain of corn that yields one hundredfold (Mk. 4:8). Any farmer would pick up on this impossibility. An average yield in 1st century Palestine was about ten fold (This has been carefully worked out by R.K. McIver ‘One Hundred-Fold Yield’, *New Testament Studies* Vol. 40 (1994) pp. 606-608). What kind of response was *this*? What kind of grain of corn? Clearly, the Lord Jesus- who described Himself in John's record as the grain of corn that was to fall into the ground and bring forth much fruit. But the other grains of corn yielded 30 and 60 fold. This was quite amazing response too, totally unheard of in practice. Was it not that the Lord was trying to show us just how radically His Gospel can transform human life? Amazing fertility was a feature of the future Messianic Kingdom (Amos 9:13; Jer. 31:27; Ez. 36:29,30)- it’s as if the Lord is saying in the sower parable that the abundance of the future Kingdom can begin in human life now.

Jeremias claims that a yield of tenfold was considered good in first century Palestine (Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Scribner’s, 1972) p. 150). Even if that is somewhat conservative, the point is that the seed on good ground yielded amazingly. This element of unreality speaks of how each person in the ‘good ground’ category will experience growth and blessing out of proportion to their tiny

spiritual beginnings. The parable of the mustard seed makes the same point. Amazing harvests is the language of the Messianic Kingdom, both Biblically and in Judaism. The beginning of the Kingdom experience is in our response to God's word in this life. The one hundred fold response is huge- but then so is the loss. It's as if the Lord is trying to encourage the disciples after the conclusions drawn about the general failure of the ministry of John- and therefore the Lord's also. His point is that despite all the failure, *some* will respond, and their response and blessing will be so huge that this more than counterbalances all the failure of others. If we can bring one person towards eternity, this is so wonderful that all the rejection of our message is worthwhile.

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

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

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

4:9 *And he said: Who has ears to hear, let him hear-*

Seeing that the next verses show the Lord considered Israel generally to no longer have ears to hear (see Matthew), this would seem an appeal to the disciples to

perceive what He is saying, even though the majority of Israel cannot. Therefore He asks them later to "*Hear* the parable" (Mt. 12:18)- for He knows they do have ears to hear. But even they had to make a conscious effort to hear- those with ears are asked to hear. Understanding, in the sense Jesus uses the idea, doesn't come naturally but requires effort.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4:13 *And he said to them: Do you not understand this parable? And how will you understand all the parables?*- Not understanding was characteristic of those sown by the wayside, according to the interpretation we have in Matthew 13. We can therefore imagine a note of deep concern in the Lord's voice at this point. For the Lord has just made clear that not understanding Him is a conscious, wilful intellectual act; and people shut their eyes so that they will not understand, lest it demand too much from them personally (Mt. 13:15). The wayside category are not, therefore, merely predestined not to understand. It's not that they were just in the wrong place, exposed to the wrong teachings and religious culture, and therefore they did not understand. For anyone who hears the word or seed of Christ, refusal to understand it is a conscious choice. It may not appear like that, but the Lord has said in Mt. 13:15 that it

is. By 'understanding', the Lord means the understanding which brings forth fruit. He is here redefining 'understanding the word', making it refer to something fruitful in practice. He spoke against a religious culture in which spirituality was seen in terms of being a microscopic student of the Old Testament and word by word, verse by verse, coming to the right theological interpretation. Many of us were raised in a similar environment. And the Lord here is redefining 'understanding the word' away from the sense of 'correct exposition' towards 'responding faithfully in practice, bringing forth fruit'. The bad ground, therefore, involved an element of choice to be like that. We showed on Mt. 13:4 that there were 'wayside' persons who *did* respond; our location in terms of culture, environment, psychology etc. is *not* an inevitable barrier to responding to the word which we hear. This proves that sin, in its various manifestations as a 'devil', can be resisted through an understanding of the word. *When* there was no understanding of the word, *then* the devil came. Likewise 1 Jn. 5:18-20 teaches that those who are born again by a true understanding of the word are not even touched by the "wicked one", the Jewish satan. In his justification of confusing the Jews through the sower parable, the Lord twice lamented that they did not *understand* (Mt. 13:13,14). He was basically saying that the Jews were the bad ground in the parable; the fowls snatched away the seed because they did not *understand* (Mt. 13:19). By contrast, those on the good ground *did* understand (Mt. 13:23). Those who heard the word "and immediately with joy receives it" only to later fall away (Mt. 13:20,21) approximate to the Jews who initially rejoiced at the word of Christ preached by John and later Jesus himself (Jn. 5:35). And the Lord was concerned that the disciples were in the same category.

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

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

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

the Lord (Jesus) will help us in keeping the word in our hearts, if we allow him to; he saw that the power of God is greater than our low nature.

Which has been sown in them- Clearly the types of ground represent types of heart or mind. In addition to the elements of unreality in the parables, there are other features which shout out for our attention. Often details are omitted which we would expect to see merely as part of the story. For example, the parable of the ten girls says nothing at all about the bride; the bridegroom alone is focused upon, along with the bridesmaids. Where's the bride in the story? Surely the point is that in the story, the bridesmaids are treated as the bride; this is the wonder of the whole thing, that we as mere bridesmaids are in fact the bride herself. Another example would be the way in which the sower's presence is not really explained. No reference is made to the importance of rain or ploughing in making the seed grow. The preacher is unimportant; we are mere voices, as was John the Baptist. But it is the type of ground we are which is so all important; and the type of ground refers to the type of heart we have (Mt. 13:19). The state of the human heart is what is so crucial. Yet another example is in the way that there is no explanation for exactly why the tenants of the vineyard so hate the owner and kill His Son. This teaches of the irrational hatred the Jews had towards the Father and Son. And why would the owner send His Son, when so clearly the other servants had been abused? Why not just use force against them? Here again we see reflected the inevitable grace of the Father in sending the Son to be the Saviour of the Jewish world.

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

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

It is quite possible that our Lord's sad prophecy of the disciples being offended because of having to identify with his sufferings looked back to this parable,

concerning those who impulsively respond to the word in joy, but are offended because they have no deep root (Mk. 4:17 = Mk. 14:27; Mt. 26:31). The fact that the disciples became good ground after this encourages us that we can change the type of ground which we are on initially receiving the seed.

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

Thorns were symbolic of false teachers in the Old Testament ecclesia (Ez. 2:6; Is. 33:12-14). It is a repeated theme that thorns are devoured by fire (Ex. 22:6; Ps. 118:12; Ecc. 7:6; Is. 10:17), looking ahead to the destruction of all false elements of the ecclesia. The thorns easily equate with the tares of the next parable, which represent false teachers (primarily the Judaist infiltrators of the first century ecclesia). It would seem from this that some members of the ecclesia are never right with God, but exist purely for the spiritual trial of others; although it cannot be over-emphasized that it is quite wrong to attempt to label individuals as this 'thorn' element. Thus Jesus pointed out that grapes (the true Israel) and thorns can be apparently similar (Mt. 7:16), but "Ye shall know them by their *fruits*". The thorns of the sower parable and those they influenced were "unfruitful". However, seeing that "the thorns sprang up *with it*" (Lk. 8:7), there was some genuine spiritual growth, matched by the appearance of this among the thorns too. Heb. 6:8 likewise speaks of the thorns as believers who grew up within the ecclesia. This indicates the dual-mindedness of those who only partially commit themselves to the word; knowledge like this should play an active part in our self-examination. Because the thorns outwardly look like true believers, having an outward appearance of spiritual growth even more zealous and strong than that of the plants which they choke, it is impossible to personally identify the "thorns"; but there can be no doubt that, according to the parable, they *must* be present among the ecclesia. The seed "fell *among* thorns" (Mt. 13:7), showing that this thorn category were already within the ecclesia when the person who was to be choked was converted. We have shown that Biblically the thorns are false teachers; yet Jesus interprets them as "the care (Gk. 'divisions'- the double mindedness of serving two masters) of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches" (Mt. 13:22). The conclusion to be drawn is that the false teachers are responsible for the new convert being choked by these things. Mk. 4:19 says that these lusts enter into the convert's heart. Therefore the thorns must influence the person's thinking, so that he follows after these things until "he becometh unfruitful". The Greek for "choked" is from a root meaning 'association, companionship'. Marshall's Interlinear renders the Greek text of Lk. 8:7 in keeping with this idea: "Growing up with the thorns choked it". Thus it is through close association with the thorn element already in the ecclesia, that the new convert who enters it is corrupted.

4:19 *And the cares of the world*- In our age as never before, given more possibilities and knowledge of possible futures and what could go wrong, we have as never before the temptation to be full of such care. The same word is used in Lk.

21:34 about the "cares" which will be a feature of the last days- both of AD70 and today. But in the first instance, the 'world' in view was the Jewish world.

And the deceitfulness of riches and the lusts of other things entering in- There are not a few Bible passages which present materialism as *the* besetting temptation of every human soul, and which confirm that therefore our attitude to materialism, serving God or mammon, is the litmus test of our spirituality. The parable of the sower teaches that for those who begin well in the Truth, who don't fall away immediately or get discouraged by persecution, "the deceitfulness of riches... the cares and pleasures of this life" will be their temptation. I would have expected the Lord to either speak in more general terms about the flesh, or to reel off a list of common vices. But instead He focuses on the desire for wealth as the real problem. The love of wealth is the root of *all* evil behaviour (1 Tim. 6:10). And I would go further, and suggest that so many of the excuses we hear which relate to "I haven't got time" (for reading, preaching, meeting, writing...) are related to this desire for material improvement. The desire for advancement takes an iron grip on a man's soul. As we move through life, our thinking is concerned with prices, with possibilities, with schemings... what *ought* to be the surpassingly dominating aspect of our life, the Son of God and His Truth, takes a poor second place. The connection between the desire for riches and the devil (our nature) is powerful. The devil is a deceiver. And 'riches' is also a deceiver (Mt. 13:22). That we know for sure. The desire for material things, for the false security of bank balances, the excuse that we are allowing ourselves to be so preoccupied for the sake of our families, the idea that we are only human beings and so God will let us be dominated by these worries... all this is the deception of the flesh. God *does* remember that we are dust, and yes, of course we *must* provide for our own, some thought (but not *anxious* thought) must be given to tomorrow (Mt. 6:25,31,34). But these facts must never make us push God's Truth into *second* place. The lilies of the field are fed and dressed by God without anxiously worrying about it. Israel on their wilderness journey were miraculously provided with food *and clothing,* surely to prefigure God's basic material care of His spiritual Israel of later years. David, all his life long, never saw the seed of the righteous begging bread (Ps. 37:25).

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

And it becomes unfruitful- Mt. 13:22 has "he becomes unfruitful". The types of ground represent the hearts of various categories of people. We expect to read that *the seed* becomes unfruitful. But the seed never does, it never of itself loses its power and life. The seed of the word, of Jesus who is *the* seed, becomes the person. The word is to be made flesh in us as it was to perfection in the Lord (Jn. 1:14). See on 13:6 *withered*. The word becoming unfruitful in Mt. 13:22 is matched by it yielding "no fruit" (Mk. 4:7) and no fruit being perfected in Lk. 8:14. The conclusion from this is that spiritual fruit which is developed but does not remain is not really fruit at all.

There is the constant temptation for us to recognize just a bit of apparent 'growth' within us, and feel satisfied with it- rather than taking on board the concept of the word having a fullness of effect upon every part of our lives. Given the lesson of the thorns, there is no doubt that one must watch their friends even within the ecclesia. "Thorns and snares are in the way of the forward: he that doth keep (the Hebrew for "keep" is often used in Proverbs about keeping the word) his soul shall be far from them" (Prov. 22:5). The language of thorns must connect with the curse upon Eden; the ecclesia, the paradise of God, must always have its thorns in order to spiritually exercise Adam, the spiritual gardener. As our brother's keeper, we need to be aware that after conversion, a whole gamut of new temptations face the convert. *After* he has heard the word, he is choked with the cares, riches and pleasures (Lk. 8:14). Yet these things existed before he heard the word; the point is that they became new temptations after his response to the word. A concerted effort to understand, with Biblical guidance, the pressures upon new converts might help save a few more of the many which are being lost.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Greek article in "the lamp / lamp stand / candlestick" refers to the specific candlestick, and to Jewish minds this would surely have referred to the candlestick in the Holy Place (s.w. Heb. 9:2). This continues the theme of the Lord teaching a new form of Judaism, for His sermon on the mount is full of allusions to previous Mosaic practice, but redefining it. The implication of :16 is that ordinary men are present in the Holy Place too, who will see our light. Or it could be that Jesus has in mind how it was the priests who alone entered the Holy Place- and He is saying that the light from those who followed Him would illuminate the Jewish priesthood. The light of the candlestick is both the believer (Mt. 5:15) and the Gospel itself (Mk. 4:21). We are to be the Gospel. We must burn as a candle now, in shedding forth the light, or we will be burnt at the judgment (Mt. 5:15 and Jn. 15:6 use the same words). This is but one of many examples of the logic of endurance; we must burn anyway, so why not do it for the Lord's sake and reap the reward.

The story of the candle that was put under a bucket brings out an issue related to that of the desire to root up the tares: the candle was put there (presumably) on account of an almost paranoiac fear that the wind would blow it out; but this over-protection of the lamp in itself caused the light to go out (Mt. 5:15). Time and again, preaching the light, holding up the beacon of the word of Christ's cross, has been impeded or stifled in the name of preserving the truth, strengthening what remains (words taken out of context). And because of this lack of witness, this lack of holding

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

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

For there is nothing hid, save that it should be manifested; neither was anything made secret but that it should come to light- The ecclesias, groups of believers, are lampstands (Rev. 2:5 cp. Ps. 18:28). We must give forth the light, not keep it under a bucket, letting laziness (under a bed) or worldly care (a bushel) distract us; because "there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad" (Mk. 4:21,22). In other words, the very reason why God has hidden the things of His word from the world and some aspects of them from our brethren, is so that we can reveal them to them. The whole process of covering truths before revealing them is not because God plays hard to get. It is because the process of discovery is for our beenfit.

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

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

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

But the 'abundance' is not of material things, but of understanding of and thereby relationship with the Lord.

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

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

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

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

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

4:28 *The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear*- As noted on :25, these comments are added as caveats to the parable of the

sower, lest the impression should be given that all is required is correct exposition of God's word. For this was the great fallacy of Judaism. He who "has" in hearing / understanding / obedience is "given" the more (:25); the hand of grace is a major element in achieving that person's salvation, rather than their own unaided intellectual efforts. And so here, there is an element of mystery to spiritual growth, which even the Lord Himself did not understand; the earth "by itself" appears to produce the fruit. It is not simply a case of receiving the seed into good ground. There is another element in the whole business of spiritual fruition.

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

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

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

It is like a grain- Gk. 'a kernel'. The element of unreality is that a farmer would not consciously sow one tiny seed in a field. But the Lord does this, knowing the potential power within that one tiny seed. He 'takes' this one tiny seed [in his palm, we are to imagine] out into the field and sows it. And the mustard bush was perceived as a weed, a wild bush, not a crop. But it grows into a tree, it grows far greater and more majestically than could ever be expected. Here again is the Lord's encouragement to His disillusioned preachers- the growth of the Gospel, rather like the unreal increase on the good ground, is out of all proportion to what it initially is. Preaching appears 'foolish' (1 Cor. 1:18,21); that by sharing the Gospel with others, the vast majority of whom ultimately reject it, something so wonderful and eternal can really come. This parable thereby highlights the faith of the Father and Son, the sowers, that the word of the Kingdom really would survive and grow out of all proportion to its beginnings. This was exactly the encouragement which the disciples needed to hear, disillusioned as they were by the pathetic response to John’s ministry and the Lord’s real spiritual demands upon people.

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

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

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

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

And becomes greater than all the herbs, and puts out great branches so that the birds of the sky can lodge under the shadow of it- Not 'grows into' a tree. The tiniest seed was only supposed to grow into a bush, but this unusual seed 'became' a tree, *ginomai* carrying the sense of being 'caused to become'. This was another element of the unreal- a shrub became a tree. It is (Mt. 13:32) "the greatest"; but the mustard bush is not the greatest herb and it is far from the tallest tree. The emphasis is on the word "it"- when *this* particular tiny seed grows… The point is that this particular tiny seed had extraordinary growth. This on one hand speaks of the amazing growth experienced by the believer from the apparently tiny beginnings of the Gospel. And yet the specific language of *the greatest* suggests the entire parable may refer to the Lord Jesus, the ultimate seed, tiny and despised, yet who grew to become the Kingdom of God under whose branches the Gentile world would find blessing. For 'the Kingdom' was a legitimate title for Jesus, the King of the Kingdom who embodied it in His very person (Lk. 17:21). If here the Lord (as elsewhere) is speaking parables to and about Himself, it would in this context be in encouraging others as to the huge extent of growth possible. For Jesus is the parade example of how something which began so small- an egg within the womb of a barefoot unmarried teenager- could become so great.

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

Mark records that the Lord emphasized that the branches were "great", *megas* (Mk. 4:32). The *mikro* seed became *mega*; but the greatness of the tree

was because of the greatness of the individual branches. A mustard bush doesn't have 'great' branches, but in this unreal story, it does have them. According to the Lord's parable of Jn. 15:5, the branches represented the disciples: "I am the vine, you are the branches". The total greatness of the Lord Jesus depends to some extent upon the degree to which we grow into great branches. The disciples were depressed at the lack of response to their message, and the failure of John's ministry in first century Palestine. The Lord is encouraging them personally that from their *mikro*, tiny beginnings, they would become great branches, and be able to provide shelter for the birds of the Gentiles; although the "birds" in the earlier parable of the sower were representative of the Jewish religious leaders. When the disciples later baptized priests and Pharisees, the Lord's ambitious vision began to come true.
There are a number of insights throughout the parables into how the Lord perceived His future Kingdom. Significantly, His emphasis in the parables of the Kingdom is upon our spiritual status then, rather than on the physical wonders which His reign will bring on the earth. He foresaw how although our faith is so puny now, as a mustard seed, we will be those who will be as a solid tree, a real place of refuge, to the nations of the Millennium (Mt. 13:31,32 = Ez. 17:23,24).

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

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

There is tendency, it seems to me, for brethren particularly to insist on flaunting their knowledge, to have to correct others who have inferior knowledge or less mature interpretations. The Lord taught men the word "as they were able to hear it" (Mk. 4:33), not as He was able to expound it. If we ask where He obtained this humility and ability from, it is clearly an inheritance from His dear mother, who stored up things in her heart and didn't reveal them to others, just quietly meditating over the years. He spoke the word to men "as *they* were able to *hear* it"- He didn't always relay to men the maximum level of understanding which He Himself possessed .
There is a tendency amongst some personality types to turn every disagreement over interpretation of Scripture into a right : wrong, truth : error scenario. Matters relating to basic doctrine are capable of being dealt with like this. But to turn the interpretation

of every Bible verse into a conflict area is a recipe for ecclesial disaster. So often the debate becomes personal, with a brother sure that *he* is right and the other wrong, and the other must be shown to be wrong. This leads inevitably to pride, and there is the possibility that the other party is degraded and feels abused by the other. We simply have to accept that much of Scripture is open to various levels of interpretation, which if placed side by side would appear to be contradictory. Consider, for example, how many different applications the NT gives to Psalms 2 and 110.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Greek for 'sleep' could also stand the translation 'lying down to rest'. But how could He appear to be resting or asleep in such a situation? I suggest He did this to elicit their desire for Him. Likewise He made as if He would walk by them during another storm, and acted as if He would go on further on the walk to Emmaus. It was all in order to elicit their urgent desire for Him. And so it is with His apparent silence to us; that silence or lack of immediate response is in order to heighten our final sense

of His grace and action. We see it in how He delayed going to Lazarus; it is the principle of Is. 30:18: "Therefore Yahweh will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you, for Yahweh is a God of justice. Blessed are all those who wait for Him".

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

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

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

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

snakes, scorpions, and all their enemies (Lk. 10:17–20). The image of a victorious god trampling his foes and snakes underfoot was well established in the surrounding cultures, and had entered Judaism. The Lord is teaching those fearful men that OK, if that's your perception of things, well, in your terms, you have ultimate victory through working 'in My name'.

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

All three of the Synoptics use the same phrase for "a great calm" (Mt. 8:26; Mk. 4:39; Lk. 8:24). It would've been a profound experience. The whole experience looks ahead to the calm of God's Kingdom being brought about by intense latter day prayer during a tribulation so intense that unless it were shortened, the faithful would die. When the Lord calmed the raging sea into a still calmness, He was consciously replicating what happened when Jonah was cast into the sea. He said plainly that He understood Jonah's willing submission to this as a type of His coming death. Therefore He saw the stilled sea as a symbol of the peace His sacrifice would achieve. And yet even during His ministry, He brought that calmness about; for in principle, His sacrifice was ongoing throughout His life. His blood is a symbol both of His cross and of the life He lived.

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

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

It seems to me that all the Lord's servants are taught by increments, progressively, being given tests as to the degree to which they have grasped what the Lord has sought to teach them previously. And the Lord Jesus used a similar

structured approach with the training of the twelve disciples. When the Lord commented “Have you not yet faith?” (Mk. 4:40 RV) it becomes immediately apparent that He was working with the twelve according to some program of spiritual development, and He was frustrated with their lack of response to it and slow progress. He surely has a similar program in place, and makes similar patient efforts, with each one of us. It is apparent to any reader of the Greek text of the Gospels that Jesus almost always left the verb “believe” without an object (e.g. Mk. 4:40; 5:34,36; 9:23). The question naturally arose: ‘Believe *in what or whom*?’. And seeing the speaker of the words, the answer was there before their eyes.

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

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

Jesus does not proclaim Himself, and yet He expects us to base our lives around Him. This is yet another paradox. Clearly we are intended to reconstruct Him from our repeated and sensitive readings of the Gospels. We in our day must read the Gospel records, portraying Him as they do from four different angles, and seek to reconstruct Him in our own minds as a person. His actions spoke loudly [and in this He is a pattern to us in our witness]. When He stilled the storm, the disciples marvelled:

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

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

MARK CHAPTER 5

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

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

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

5:2 *And when he got out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit*- "Immediately" suggests the man was waiting for Him;

although :6 says that Legion ran to the Lord from far away, which would make the "immediately" here relative, and intended to create an impression of fast moving action. From his isolated hideouts on the cliffs, he had seen the boat traversing the lake so many times. And he was convinced that within it there was the Son of God. "With an unclean spirit" appears to contradict the idea that he had a legion of such spirits within him- until we accept that this is just the language of the day for mental illness. We are not reading here about literal spirits. See on :7. But when we meet a similar situation in Acts 8:7 of unclean spirits crying out, the Eastern (Aramaic) text reads: "Many who were mentally afflicted cried out". This is because, according to George Lamsa, ""Unclean spirits" is an Aramaic term used to describe lunatics" (George Lamsa, *New Testament Commentary* (Philadelphia: A.J. Holman, 1945) pp. 57,58). It should be noted that Lamsa was a native Aramaic speaker with a fine understanding of Aramaic terms. He grew up in a remote part of Kurdistan which had maintained the Aramaic language almost unchanged since the time of Jesus. It's significant that Lamsa's extensive writings indicate that he failed to see in the teachings of Jesus and Paul any support for the popular conception of the devil and demons- he insisted that the Semitic and Aramaic terms used by them have been misunderstood by Western readers and misused in order to lend support for their conceptions of a personal Devil and demons.

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

- Israel were “A people... which remain among the tombs, and lodge in the monuments” (Is. 65:3-4).

- Legion was always “in the mountains”- the "high places" where Israel sinned (Is. 65:7; Hos. 4:13).

- The man's name, Legion, suggests he was under the ownership of Rome. The miracle occurred in Gentile territory, suggesting Judah in the Gentile dominated world.

- ‘What is your name?’ is the same question asked of Jacob

- Legion's comment that ‘we are many’ is identical to the words of Ez. 33:24 about Israel: “Son of man, they that inhabit those wastes of the land of Israel speak, saying, Abraham was one, and he inherited the land: but *we are many*; the land is given us for inheritance. Wherefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Ye eat with the blood, and lift up your eyes toward your idols, and shed blood: and shall ye possess the land?”.

- Legion had often been bound with fetters and chains (Mk 5:3,4)- just as God's

people had so often been taken into captivity in "fetters and chains" (2 Chron. 33:11; 36:6, 2 Kings 24:7).

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

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

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

5:5 *Always, night and day, in the tombs and in the mountains, he was crying out and cutting himself with stones*- A psychological approach to the self-mutilation [which is a classic symptom of mental illness] would be to understand it as him trying to stone himself, convinced he was unworthy and deserving of condemnation. No surprise, in this case, that the presence of Jesus lifted that sense of condemnation from him, and the miracle of the pigs was therefore performed to assure him that his sin really had been removed and condemned by drowning in the sea [a figure of condemnation in Mt. 18:6 and Rev. 18:21. 33]. The French social scientist René Girard commented at length upon the curing of the demoniac. He took the gashing of himself with stones as being representative of the man's desire to stone himself, and he observes the phenomena of "autolapidation" (self-stoning) as being common within the mentally disturbed. But he observes further that the pigs running over the cliff has "ritual and penal connotations" in that both stoning and being thrown over a cliff were common methods of execution in primitive societies (René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) p. 176. The same points are made in Jean Starobinski, "The Gerasene Demoniac", in Roland Barthes et al, eds., *Structural Analysis and Biblical Exegesis* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1974) pp. 57-84). We recall how the townspeople tried to execute Jesus by throwing Him off a cliff (Lk. 4:29). And yet Jesus turned the man's fears on their head; for the pigs, representing the crowd who wished to stone the man and throw him off the cliff, are the ones who are thrown over the cliff by Jesus. The crowd therefore suffer the execution which they wished to inflict upon the victim. Thus "the miracle of Gerasa reverses the universal schema of violence fundamental to all societies" (*Ibid* p. 179). Now we understand why Jesus declined Legion's request to follow Him on His mission, but insisted he instead return to his own society and live at peace with them. For Jesus had taught the man that the crowd he feared were no more, the lynch mob he obsessively feared had themselves been lynched over the cliff. The man begged that the demons *not* be cast into the sea (Lk. 8:31) in the sense that he himself feared being cast over the cliff into the sea by the mob. But that fear was taken away by

Jesus; for it was the demons, the lynch mob which he feared, the Roman Legions, which he saw represented by the pigs, hurtling to their own destruction over the cliff.

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

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

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

"Torment *me* not" (Mk. 5:7) = "Are you come to torment *us*?" (Mt. 8:29). "*He* [singular] besought him" (Mk. 5:9) = "*the demons* besought him" (Mk. 5:12) The man's own words explain his self-perception: "*My* name [singular] is Legion: for *we* are many (Mk. 5:9)". This is classic schizophrenic behaviour and language. Thus Lk. 8:30 explains that Legion spoke as he did because [he thought that] many demons had entered into him.

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

5:8 *For Jesus had said to him: Unclean spirit, come out of the man!*- The man's fear of condemnation ["torment"] was triggered or restimulated by the command to the 'unclean spirit' to come out of the man. Legion assumed that he personally was going to be condemned if the "unclean spirit" was condemned which he supposed was within him. But the Lord was seeking to help the man see a difference between himself personally, and his mental illness, the "spirit" or mind within him which was paranoid about condemnation. And so the Lord went along with the man's self perception, and in terms the man understood, showed beyond doubt that that spirit of

fear had been cast out. Perhaps John reflects on this incident when he writes that perfect love casts out fear, because fear is associated with "torment" (1 Jn. 4:18), which is just what the man was obsessed with fearing (:7).

5:9 *And he asked the spirit: What is your name?*- The Lord focused the man's attention upon the man's beliefs about himself- by asking him "What is your name?", to which he replies "Legion! For we are many!". Thus the man was brought to realize on later reflection that the pig stampede was a miracle by the Lord, and a judgment against illegal keeping of unclean animals- rather than an action performed by the demons he thought inhabited him. The idea of transference of disease from one to another was a common Semitic perception, and it's an idea used by God. And thus God went along with the peoples' idea of disease transference, and the result is recorded in terms of demons [which was how they understood illness] going from one person to another. Likewise the leprosy of Naaman clave to Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27). God threatened to make the diseases of the inhabitants of Canaan and Egypt to cleave to Israel if they were disobedient (Dt. 28:21,60). Here too, God is accommodating the ideas of disease transference which people had at the time.

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

of the Legion of pigs running into the sea was surely teaching the same thing. In passing, I note the apparent discrepancy between the fact that a Roman Legion contained five or six thousand people and yet there were two thousand pigs drowned. I found the comment on an internet forum, by an unbeliever, that "the governor of Judaea only had 2000 legionaries at his disposal". I have searched Josephus and other sources for confirmation of this, but can't find any. If it were to be found, it would be marvellous confirmation of the thesis I'm presenting here- that the pigs were to be understood as representative of the Roman Legions, who in their turn were responsible for the man's mental illness. In any case, there is evidence to believe that there were Roman troops stationed in Gadara, and the pigs were likely being kept in order to provide food for them (Michael Willett Newheart, *"My name is Legion": The Story and Soul of the Gerasene Demoniac* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004) p. 14). "Pigs for the pigs" would've been the common quip about that herd of swine.

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

I suggest that the man's mental illness was related to the possession of his country by the Roman Legions. Perhaps he found huge power within himself to smash the chains with which he was restrained because he imagined them as symbolizing the Roman grip upon his soul and his country. In this case, his self-mutilation, gashing himself with stones (Mk. 5:5), would've been from a desire to kill the Legions within him, the 'demons' of Rome whom he perceived as having possessed him. He saw himself as representative of his people; Walter Wink sees the man's gashing himself with stones as a result of how he had "internalized [Judah's] captivity and the utter futility of resistance" (Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) Vol. 2 p. 46). So often the mentally ill internalize their abusers; they act and speak as if their abusers are actually them, within them. This is why the abused so often end up abusing others; it's why Israel treat some Palestinians in a way strangely similar to how they were treated at the hands of the Nazis; and it's why Jesus urges us to pray for those who persecute us, to the end we might place a psychological distance between them and us, be ourselves, and not become like them. Jesus recognized this long before modern psychiatry did; hence he asks the sick man his name, "Legion". The man's reply really says it all- as if to say 'I am my abusers. I have internalized them'. Hence one commentator writes of how Legion "carries his persecutors inside

him in the classic mode of the victim who internalizes his tormentors" (Robert G. Hammerton-Kelley, *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1994) p. 93).

Frantz Fanon was a psychiatrist who analyzed the psychological damage done to those living under repressive regimes. Taking case studies from the French colonization of Martinique and Algeria, Fanon demonstrated that many darker skinned local people came to see themselves as second rate and dirty, and that when these darker skinned natives interacted with the white colonizers, they often experienced a tension between who they really were, and who they had to act as in secular life with the white masters. One of his books says it all in its title: *Black Skin, White Masks*. Having listed the various types of mental illness and multiple personality disorders which he attributed to French colonialism, Fanon concluded that there was brought about "this disintegrating of personality, this splitting and dissolution... in the organism of the colonized world" (Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963) p. 57. See too his *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967)). Similar observations have been made, in a white-on-white context, about the psychological damage done by the Soviet occupation to the ethnic Baltic population, perhaps explaining why the tiny countries of Latvia and Lithuania have some of the highest suicide and mental illness rates in the world. The point is, however exaggerated these studies may be in some areas, there is indeed huge psychological damage caused by occupying, colonial powers; and this was the case in first century Palestine, and I submit that Legion with his multiple personalities was an example of mental illness caused by such a scenario. Paul Hollenbach likewise interprets the case of Legion, commenting in that context that "mental illness can be seen as a socially acceptable form of oblique protest against, or escape from, oppressions... his very madness permitted him to do what he could not do as sane, namely express his total hostility to the Romans; he did this by identifying the Roman legions with demons. His possession was thus at once both the result of oppression and an expression of his resistance to it" (Paul Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* Vol. 99 (1981) p. 575). Richard Horsley takes the idea further: "The demon possession of the manically violent man among the Gerasenes can be understood as a combination of the effect of Roman imperial violence, a displaced protest against it" (Richard Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) p. 145). By asking the sick man for his name, the Lord Jesus was surely seeking to help the man clarify the fact that his real issue was with Rome, and the man actually need not fear supposed 'demons'. This refocusing upon the real problem is a common feature of how the Bible deals with the whole subject of Satan and demons, as we've often seen in the course of this book. Horsley is right on target in his conclusion: "The casting out and naming of "Legion" is a demystification of demons and demon possession. It is now evident to Jesus' followers and to the hearers of Mark's story that the struggle is really against the rulers, the Romans" (*Ibid* p. 147). Newheart writes in very similar terms: "Jesus... demystified the demons, showing that the real culprit was Rome" (Newheart, *op cit* p. 84).

5:10 *And he pleaded earnestly with him not to send them out of the country*- This is the man's fear of condemnation, noted on :8. Note that the sick man is paralleled with the demons. "*He* begged him earnestly not to send *them* out of the country" (Mk. 5:10) parallels "he", the man, with "them", the demons. And the parallel record speaks as if it were the demons who did the begging: "*They* begged him not to order them to go into the abyss" (Lk. 8:31). This is significant in that the record doesn't suggest that

demons were manipulating the man to speak and be mad; rather are they made parallel with the man himself. This indicates, on the level of linguistics at least, that the language of "demons" is being used as a synonym for the mentally ill man. There's another example of this, in Mark 3:11: "Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, “You are the Son of God!”". Who fell down on their knees and who shouted? The mentally disturbed people. But they are called "unclean spirits". James 2:19 likewise: "The demons believe and tremble". This is surely an allusion to the trembling of those *people* whom Jesus cured, and 'belief' is appropriate to persons not [supposed] eternally damned agents of Satan. Clearly James is putting "demons" for 'mentally disturbed people who believed and were cured'. And thus we can better understand why in Mk. 5:8 Jesus addresses Himself not to these supposed spirits; but to the man himself: "Jesus said to *him,* Come out of the man, you unclean spirit". He doesn't say to the *unclean spirit* "Come out of the man". Jesus addresses Himself to "the man". The demons / unclean spirits never actually say anything in the records; it's always the man himself who speaks. Josephus records that when the first century Rabbis cast out demons [as they supposed], they first had to ask for the name of the demon. The Lord Jesus doesn't do this; He asks the man for *his* personal name. The difference is instructive- the Lord wasn't speaking to demons, He was speaking to the mentally sick man, and going along with the man's belief that he had demons within him. The 'demons' plead with Jesus not to torment them, and back this up by invoking God. 'They' believed in God and honoured Him to the point of believing He was the ultimate authenticator of oaths. 'They' hardly fit the classical idea that demons are anti-God and in conflict with Him. Clearly enough, when we read of demons and spirits in this passage we are not reading of the actual existence of 'demons' as they are classically understood, but simply of the mentally ill man himself.

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

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

Jesus. He realized that meeting Him was meeting his judge. And he ask that the pigs bear his condemnation. And the Lord agrees- which meant that once Legion had as it were received his condemnation, he had passed from death into life.

Legion believed he was demon possessed. But the Lord didn't correct him regarding this before healing him; indeed, one assumes the man probably had some faith for the miracle to be performed (Mt. 13:58). Lk. 8:29 says that Legion "was driven of the devil into the wilderness", in the same way as the Lord had been driven into the wilderness *by the spirit* (Mk. 1:12) and yet overcame the 'devil' in whatever form at this time. The man was surely intended to reflect on these more subtle things and see that whatever he had once believed in was immaterial and irrelevant compared to the Spirit power of the Lord. And yet the Lord 'went along' with his request for the demons he thought were within him to be cast into 'the deep', thoroughly rooted as it was in misunderstanding of demons and sinners being thrown into the abyss. This was in keeping with the kind of healing styles people were used to at the time – e.g. Josephus records how Eleazar cast demons out of people and placed a cup of water nearby, which was then [supposedly] tipped over by the demons as they left the sick person [*Antiquities of the Jews* 8.46–48]. It seems to me that the Lord 'went along with' that kind of need for reassurance, and so He made the pigs stampede over the cliff to symbolize to the healed man how his disease had really left him.

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

5:13 *So he gave them permission*- Why did the pigs run over the cliff, and why did the Lord Jesus agree to the man's request for this? Because mental illness features intermittent episodes, it's understandable that the Lord sought to comfort those cured that the change He had brought was permanent. Thus the Lord tells the 'spirit' assumed to be tormenting the mentally afflicted child: "I command you, come out of him, *and enter no more* into him" (Mk. 9:25). It's in the same vein that He drove the pigs into the lake as a sign that Legion's cure was permanent. I suggest that it was a kind of visual *aide memoire*, of the kind often used in the Bible to impress a point upon illiterate people. I suggest that's why in the ritual of the Day of Atonement, the scapegoat ran off into the wilderness bearing Israel's sins. As the bobbing animal was watched by thousands of eyes, thousands of minds would've reflected that their sins were being cast out. And the same principle was in the curing of the schizophrenic Legion- the pigs were made to run into the lake by the Lord Jesus, not because they were actually possessed by demons in reality, but as an *aide memoire* to the cured Legion that his illness, all his perceived personalities, were now no more. Mental illness is typically intermittent. Legion had met Jesus, for he recognized Him afar off, and knew that He was God's Son (Mk. 5:6); indeed, one assumes the man probably had some faith for the miracle to be performed (Mt. 13:58). He comes to meet Jesus

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

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

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

The desire to see the disease return to the herds of swine probably stemmed from a need to know that his affliction had been cured in a rather permanent sort of way. And the Lord went along with this. The idea of transference of disease from one to another was a common Semitic perception, and it's an idea used by God. And thus God went along with the peoples' idea of disease transference, and the result is recorded in terms of demons [which was how they understood illness] going from one person to another. Likewise the leprosy of Naaman clave to Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27). God threatened to make the diseases of the inhabitants of Canaan and Egypt to cleave to Israel if they were disobedient (Dt. 28:21,60). Here too, as with Legion, there is Divine accommodation to the ideas of disease transference which people had at the time.

And the unclean spirits came out, and entered the pigs; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the hill into the sea and were drowned in the sea- Death in the sea was seen as condemnation; the same figure is used of Babylon's final condemnation. The Legion incident "proves too much" if we are to insist on reading it on a strictly literal level. Do demons drown? Presumably, no. And yet the story as it stands requires us to believe that demons drown- if we are talking about literal 'demons' here. Clearly, Legion was mentally ill. We therefore have to face the hard question: Was that mental illness caused by demons, or, as I am suggesting, is the

language of demon possession merely being used to describe mental illness? If indeed mental illness is caused by demons, the observations of T.S. Huxley are about right: "The belief in demons and demoniacal possession is a mere survival of a once universal superstition, its persistence pretty much in the inverse ratio of the general instruction, intelligence, and sound judgment of the population among whom it prevails. Demonology gave rise through the special influence of Christian ecclesiastics, to the most horrible persecutions and judicial murders of thousands upon thousands of innocent men, women, and children... If the story is true, the medieval theory of the invisible world may be and probably is, quite correct; and the witchfinders, from Sprenger to Hopkins and Mather, are much-maligned men… For the question of the existence of demons and of possession by them, though it lies strictly within the province of science, is also of the deepest moral and religious significance. If physical and mental disorders are caused by demons, Gregory of Tours and his contemporaries rightly considered that relics and exorcists were more useful than doctors; the gravest questions arise as to the legal and moral responsibilities of persons inspired by demoniacal impulses; and our whole conception of the universe and of our relations to it becomes totally different from what it would be on the contrary hypothesis" (T. S. Huxley, *Science and Christian Tradition* (New York: Appleton, 1899) p. 225).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5:20 *And he went his way and began to publish in Decapolis the great things Jesus had done for him, and all men marvelled*- This preaching in Decapolis rather than to his family could be read as disobedience. The Gospels are transcripts of the twelve disciples' own preaching and obedience to the Lord's commission for them to go into all the world and tell the news of what they had seen and heard of Him. Yet there is a theme in the Gospels, consciously included by the writers and speakers, of men being disobedient to the preaching commission which the Lord gave them. When

some were told to say nothing, they went and told many others (Mk. 7:36). And as Acts makes clear, the disciples themselves were disobedient, initially, to the commission to go tell the Gentiles the good news of their salvation. Legion's disobedience is especially instructive for us:

Mk. 5:19	Mk. 5:20
Go to your *house*	He goes to the *ten cities* [Decapolis]
unto your *friends* [relatives]	He goes to *strangers*
tell them [Lk. 8:39 "*show* them"- by personal demonstration to individuals]	He "*publishes*"
how great things	how great things
the *Lord [i.e. God]* has done for you	*Jesus* had done for him
and how he had mercy on you.	[ignored]

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

5:21 *And when Jesus had crossed over again by boat to the other side, a great crowd was gathered to him; and he was by the sea*- Just as Legion "immediately" met the Lord on His arrival on the shore (:2), so on going back to "the other side", there was a great crowd waiting for the Lord "by the sea", on the shore. Jairus must have had to push himself to the front of that crowd (:22). According to the parallel in Mt. 9:18, the Lord began teaching the crowd immediately. Again we see that teaching was the primary focus of His ministry, for surely the crowds were expecting healings. The impression is given in Matthew that the ruler was begging the Lord for the healing of

his daughter, but instead the Lord delayed responding in order to complete the teaching He was giving about the vital need for total transformation if we have received the new wine. He felt His message was that important. We also notice something which we see several times in the Gospel records- the Lord appears to not respond to human need, to even be deaf to it. For a while. The reason for that, both then and now, was surely to pique the intensity and urgency of the requests.

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

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

And seeing him, he fell at his feet- This kneeling (Mt.) was in worship; just as Legion had done on the sea shore the other side of the lake. The same formula is used in Mt. 8:2- the leper worshipped Jesus in that he expressed faith in His power to cleanse (also in Mt. 15:25). The Greek *proskuneo* is not used (as some Trinitarians wrongly claim) exclusively of worship of God. It is used in the LXX, classical Greek and in the later New Testament for worship of men- e.g. Cornelius worshipped Peter (Acts 10:25), men will worship faithful Christians (Rev. 3:9), the beast is worshipped (Rev. 13:4).

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

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

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

with the woman who is taking up the Lord's time, when for him, every second counted so crucially.

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

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

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

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

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

Focus	Distraction	Resumed Focus

The sick woman touches His clothes, and He turns around to see her. He wants to talk to her.	The disciples tell Him that this is unreasonable, as a huge crowd is pressing on to Him	"He looked round about [again] to see her that had done this thing" (Mk. 5:30-32). He talks to her.
He says that the dead girl is only sleeping; for He wants to raise her.	"They laughed Him to scorn"	"But..." He put them all out of the house and raised her (Mk. 5:40,41).
He was moved with compassion for the crowds, and wants to feed them and teach them more.	The disciples tell Him to send the people away as it was getting late	He tells the disciples to feed them so that they can stay and hear more (Mk. 6:35-37)
Again He has compassion on the hunger of the crowd	The disciples mock His plan to feed them	He feeds them (Mk. 8:3-6)
He explains how He must die	Peter rebukes Him	He repeats His message, telling them that they too must follow the way of the cross (Mk. 8:31-34)

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

records the link between faith and Jesus' decision to heal in the same chapter (Mk. 6:5). When we fear there is interest in our message only for what material benefit there may be for the hearers, we need to remember this. To identify wrong motives doesn't mean that we turn away; we must look deeper, and hope more strongly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'nicespeak' which results in judgment from others unless it's used. There will be a congruence between what we feel and think within us, and what we actually show. And thus we will avoid the dysfunction which is so apparent in so many, as they forever struggle to control their outward expressions, hiding their real self, with the real self and the external self struggling against each other in a painful dis-ease.

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

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

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

5:38 *And they came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue*- Again we have the impression of the camerman following Him, shooting from behind. Mt. 9:23 "When Jesus came into... He saw...He said". This is the process of usual human experience, perception and response to perception. It's yet another evidence of the Lord's humanity. The Greek phrase for "came into" is used so often in the Synoptics. Just in Matthew 9, Jesus came into His own city (9:1), came into the ruler's house (9:23) and came into a house (9:28). Consider the other usages of the phrase in Matthew alone: He came into Israel (Mt. 2:21), came into Nazareth (2:23), came into Capernaum (4:13), came into Peter's house (8:14), came into the land of the Gergesenes (8:28); came into a synagogue (12:9), came into a house (13:36), came into His own region (13:54), came into the land of Gennesaret (14:34), came into Magdala (15:39), came into Caesarea (16:13, came into Capernaum (17:24), came into the borders of Judea (19:1), came into Bethphage (21:1), came into the temple (21:23), came into Gethsemane (26:36), came into the place called Golgotha (27:33). Mark and Luke record even other cases of His 'coming into' various towns, areas and situations. It is a huge emphasis. John's Gospel uses the term, but frequently in the more abstract sense of the Lord Jesus 'coming into' the (Jewish) world. The prologue uses the Greek phrase three times alone in describing how Jesus 'came into' the world and into "His own" (Jn. 1:7,9,11). He was the light and prophet that "came into the world" (Jn. 3:19; 6:14). John's references to the Lord Jesus coming "into the world" (Jn. 12:46; 16:28; 18:37) are therefore not to be read as implying that He literally came down out of Heaven into the world; but rather they are John's more abstract equivalent of the Synoptics' direct and repeated statements that the Lord came into the Jewish world of His day, into human situations. His sending of us out "into" the world is therefore inviting us to go forth and enter into our world and its various situations just as He did. We are to replicate His ministry in our world and situations.

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

in order for that peak of need to be reached. Mk. 5:38,39 emphasizes the extraordinary agitation.

5:39- see on Acts 21:13.

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

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

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

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

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

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

get up out of bed. His gentleness, His faith, His calmness, His certainty that the Father heard Him- are all wondrous.

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

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

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

MARK CHAPTER 6

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

have gone through all the gut feelings one does when they are mugged: the initial shock, the obvious question that skates through the mind 'How much harm are they gonna do me...?', the bad taste left in the mouth afterwards, the way one keeps on re-living every moment of what happened. He would have known those feelings.

6:2 *And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue; and many who heard him were astonished, saying: Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom given to him? What mighty works are done by his hands!*- To my mind, one of the most artless and surpassing things about the Lord was that He lived a sinless life for 30 years, and yet when He began His ministry those He lived with were shocked that He could ever be the Messiah. He was "in favour" with men (Lk. 2:52), not despised and resented as many righteous men have been. He was the carpenter, a good guy- but not Son of God. Somehow He showed utter perfection in a manner which didn't distance ordinary people from Him. There was no 'other-wordliness' to Him which we so often project to those we live with. We seem to find it hard to live a good life without appearing somehow distasteful to those around us. In fact the villagers were scandalized [*skandalizein*] that Jesus should even be a religious figure; they had never noticed His wisdom, and wondered where He had suddenly gotten it from (Mk. 6:2,3). This suppression of His specialness, His uniqueness, must have been most disarming and confusing to Mary. Her son appeared as an ordinary man; there was no halo around His head, no special signs. Just an ordinary guy. And this may well have eroded her earlier clear understanding that here in her arms was the Son of God. Until age 30, the Lord was "hidden" as an arrow in a quiver (Is. 49:2). So profound was this that Mary may have come to doubt whether after all He was really as special as she had thought, 30 years ago. 30 years is a long time. We also need to bear in mind that opposition to Jesus both from the other siblings and from His home town was significant. A fair case can be made that He actually moved away to Capernaum, perhaps before the start of His ministry. Mk. 2:1 RVmg. describes Him as being "at home" there; Mt. 4:13 NIV says He lived there; Mt. 9:1 calls it his "own city" (cp. Mk. 2:1). Don't forget that the Nazareth people tried to kill Jesus early on in His ministry- this was how strong the opposition was. And Mary had to show herself for or against... and it seems she at least on the surface didn't exactly show herself for Him.

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

According to Talmudic writings like *Yebamot* 78b, Dt. 23:3 was interpretted as meaning that a fatherless man wasn't allowed to enter the temple or marry a true Israelite. The reference to Jesus as "son of Mary" (Mk. 6:3) rather than "son of Joseph" is, apparently, very unusual. It reflects the Lord's lack of social identity in first century Israel; He had no father's house to belong to. In passing, the jibe in Mt.

27:64 “the last deception shall be worse than the first” is likely a reference to Mary and Jesus claiming that He was the result of a virgin birth- this, as far as the Jews were concerned, was the “first deception”.

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

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

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

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

6:4 *And Jesus said to them: A prophet is not without honour, save in his hometown*- We need to ask *why* this is so true. In the first century Palestinian world, a person wasn't defined so much by 'who they were' as by 'whom they belonged to and where they originated from'. Hence their problem with seeing that the Lord had access to wisdom and power which they did not have as a group. He didn't get that from them- and this confused them and their lack of understanding it turned to anger with Him. He had become different to them, therefore He was not of them- so they reasoned. And yet He *was* of them- the record stresses that they were His natural *patris*("country") and *oikos* ("family"). This is the same problem as Trinitarians have- they can't see that the Lord could have what He had, and yet be one of us, of our human nature. And perhaps that partly explains their frequently observed anger with non-Trinitarian Christians. This proverb is quoted again in Jn. 4:44 but in a different sense. The Lord is recorded as leaving Judea and going to Galilee exactly because a prophet has no honour in "His own country". Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, not in Galilee. It could be that He went to Galilee from Judea because the "country" He had in mind here in quoting this proverb was Bethlehem, rather than Nazareth. And yet in Mt. 13:57 He uses this proverb about Nazareth. Perhaps this explains His deep amazement at His rejection now in Nazareth- see on Mt. 13:58.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6:8 *And he instructed them that they should take nothing for their journey, except a staff. No bread, no wallet*- Mark is picking out the picture of Israel as they were on Passover night, as an illustration of how His disciples should be on their preaching mission. "He called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth... and commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse: but be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats" (AV). All this is couched in the language of Israel on Passover night. His next words for them appear to be stating the obvious, unless they allude to Israel remaining at whatever place they reached until the fire and cloud moved them on: "In what place soever ye enter... there abide till you depart from that place" (Mk. 6:8-10). It must be remembered that God intended Israel to be a missionary nation, teaching the surrounding world of His ways by their example of obedience to His law. As Israel left Egypt with the gold and jewels of Egypt, so, Jesus implied, the disciples were to carry the precious things of the Gospel.

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

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

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

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

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

6:11 *And whatever place shall not receive you and they will not hear you, as you leave there, shake off the dust that is under your feet for a testimony against them*- The disciples were to shake off the dust of their feet against unbelieving Israel (Mt. 10:14; Mk. 6:11; Acts 8:51), in allusion to the Rabbinic teaching that the dust of Gentile lands caused defilement. Israel who rejected the Gospel were thus to be treated as Gentiles. Indeed, John's immersion of repentant Israelites would have recalled the way that Gentiles had to be likewise dipped before being accepted into

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

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

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

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

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

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

And therefore do these powers work in him- The Greek could more likely mean ‘the powers’, a reference to the popular beliefs in various ‘powers’ rather than one God.

Jn. 10:41 is plain that “John did no miracle”, and yet such was the evident spirituality of John that the theory quickly arose that the miracles of Jesus were really being done by John *redivivus*.

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

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

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

6:17 *For Herod himself had had John arrested and thrown into prison to please*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6:27 *And immediately the king sent a soldier of his guard and commanded that he bring John's head. And the soldier went to the prison and beheaded John*- The

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

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

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

6:30 *The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught*- The same Greek words are found in Jn. 20:18 of Mary going and telling the disciples. Here, after the 'taking up of the body' of the Lord Jesus and 'burying' it, just as had been done to John's corpse, Mary "went and told" the disciples. The disciples "went and told Jesus" of John's death; now, Mary goes to tell the disciples of the Lord's resurrection. The similarity of language and yet the inversion of the ideas is all surely intentional. The intention is to show that the tragedy of John's death was vindicated and gloriously reversed in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

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

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

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

6:33 *Now many saw them going and recognised them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them*- This is added to demonstrate their commitment to hearing Him teach. Why were they so keen to make such effort to get to Him? Mt. 13:54-58 records how the Lord taught in the synagogue but didn't get a good response, nor did He do many miracles there because of their unbelief. But now He leaves, and the people flock after Him. This may be understandable just in terms of basic psychology- when a wonderful offer is not taken up but appears to be receding, people then desperately grab onto it. Perhaps that's why the Lord seems well disposed to these people- healing and feeding them (see on Mt. 14:22). But we also get the impression that the Lord was not constantly available for teaching and healing. I have previously remarked that the intensity of some of the days which the Gospels record was surely not repeated every day of His ministry. It seems He spent most of His time training the twelve and only occasionally made public appearances to teach and heal.

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

about eternal life was “sealed” / validated by God. Do we believe this? Yes. So, what He said is utterly true.

6:34 *And when Jesus came ashore, he saw a great crowd*- Or, 'came forth', as Mt. We could picture Him hiding away in some cave or bush, noticing the crowds combing the area, having spotted the abandoned boat. And then battling with a desire to retreat further into the bush away from them, or to send them away- but instead having compassion on them and going out to meet them with teaching and healing. But that is unlikely the right reading, because :33 notes that some of the people who ran around the lake got to the destination before they did. The ‘coming forth’ would therefore have been coming forth from the boat to land. That moment is perhaps noted because the obvious inclination would have been to sail further and find a better resting place, far from this irritating crowd.

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

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

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

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

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

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

- The Lord told the disciples to feed the crowd, when they had nothing to give them. He was actually quoting from 2 Kings 4:42, where the man of God told his servant to do the same. He gave what bread he had to the people, and miraculously it fed them. The disciples don't seem to have seen the point; otherwise, they would have realized that if they went ahead in faith, another such miracle would likely be wrought. We too are given Divine nudges towards seeing Biblical precedents for our situations; but we may not always grasp them. Familiarity with the Bible text through regular re-reading is a great help here. But it seems that God almost over-ruled them to make the response of the faithless servant of 2 Kings 4:43: "Shall we... give them to eat?". They were almost 'made' to do this to make them later see the similarity with the 2 Kings 4 incident. If they had been more spiritually aware at the time, the Lord's quotation would have been a fillip for their faith.

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

According to Jn. 6:5, the Lord also asked: "From whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?". Even if money was no issue, the village shops simply had nowhere near the amount of food required. So in "You give them…", the stress was not only on the word "you". Perhaps it was more so on the word and concept of "give", standing as it does in contrast to the disciples' unrealistic and harsh expectation that these poor people go to a village and *buy* food. Surely the Lord had in mind Is. 55:1,2: "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come,

buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food". He intended the disciples to see the connection and to figure that He would even provide them with free food, because they were seeking His word. We are confirmed in this idea by the way that He appealed to the crowd in the same discourse: "Labour not for the food which perishes" (Jn. 6:27), which is surely an allusion to Is. 55:2. Perhaps the disciples got the point- perhaps not. Often the Lord sets us up with situations in which we are intended to have our minds sent back to a Biblical verse or precedent as encouragement and guidance for us in our decisions. Whether or not we grasp it is a matter partly of our familiarity with the text of Scripture, but more significantly, our openness to this kind of spiritual prompting, and the idea of God's word being part of a living, two-way dialogue between Him and ourselves.

6:38 *And he said to them: How many loaves have you? Go and see. And when they knew, they reported: Five loaves and two fishes*- He calmly bid them feed a huge crowd with just a few loaves. We are left to imagine those men, almost paralysed and certainly gobsmacked by the extent of the demand, awkwardly going away to count their few loaves. He could be seen as a demanding Lord. The Lord Jesus said many "hard sayings" which dissuaded people from seriously following Him. He kept speaking about a condemned criminal's last walk to his cross, and telling people they had to do this. He told them, amidst wondrous stories of flowers and birds, to rip out their eyes, cut off their limbs- and if they didn't, He didn't think they were serious and would put a stone round their neck and hurl them into the sea (Mk. 9:42-48). He healed a leper, and then spoke sternly to Him (Mk. 1:43 AV mg.). We sense something of the Lord's same style to this day as He works in our lives. They were asked to number their loaves, but they perhaps sarcastically add: "And two [small] fishes".

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

The very human perspective of the disciples is almost predictably brought out by their response to the Lord's question to them about where to get bread to feed the hungry crowd. "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient" was Philip's response (Jn. 6:7 AV). Andrew's comment that they had five loaves and two fishes surely carried the undertone that '…and that's not even enough for us, let alone them- we're starving too, you know!'. The disciples wanted the crowd sent away, to those who sold food, so that they might buy for themselves (Mt. 14:15). As the Lord's extended commentary upon their reactions throughout John 6 indicates, these responses were human and selfish. And yet- and here is a fine insight into His grace and positive thinking about His men- He puts their very words and attitudes into the mouth of the wise virgins at the very moment of their acceptance at the day of

judgment: “The wise answered [the foolish virgins] saying, Not so, lest there be not enough [s.w. “not sufficient”, Jn. 6:7] for us and you; but got ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves” (Mt. 25:9). Clearly the Lord framed that parable in the very words, terms and attitudes of His selfish disciples. He counted even their weakness as positive, and thus showed His desire to accept them in the last day in spite of it. Another reading of the connection would be that the Lord foresaw how even in the final moment of acceptance into His Kingdom, right on the very eve of judgment day, His people would still be as hopelessly limited in outlook and spiritually self-centred as the disciples were that day with the multitude. Whatever way we want to read this undoubted connection of ideas, we have a window into a grace so amazing it almost literally takes our breath away.

6:39 *And he commanded that all should sit down in groups upon the green grass*- "In groups" is a technical term for how in the Roman empire, large groups sat at groups of three tables forming three sides of a square, with divans or couches on which they reclined as they ate. The open end of the square was entered by the servants who waited on the guests. But there no tables nor couches. They were bidden imagine them. For this was set up as a banquet; with the Lord as host. It was a foretaste of the Messianic banquet. And all and any present were invited to recline and eat. So the people sat down as it were in table-companies but without tables, in companies of a hundred and others of fifty, waited upon by the disciples. Who you ate with had religious meaning in their society; it was a sign of religious fellowship. And here the Lord opened His table to any who wished to hear His word, be they clean, unclean, Jew, Gentile, women or children. We must recall Lk. 22:27: "For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table?". But the disciples here are the servants, and the curious, poorly motivated, opportunistic crowds of people 'sit at table'.

"The green grass" suggests March or April, Passover time; and Jn. 6 is specific that Passover was near. The feeding miracle was therefore a kind of mass Passover, but open to all and sundry, even those many who clearly were motivated by curiosity or a desire for free food (John 6 is specific about this).

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

"Groups" or "ranks" is a military term; "Hundreds and fifties" may allude to the divisions within a unit of Roman soldiers, and 5000 was the number of soldiers in a Roman legion (Mk. 6:40). The idea may be that the Lord was forming a new army out of this rag tag bunch of people fascinated in His teaching, and fed by Him with rations which didn't run out. But the war of occupation was spiritual. The Lord is hereby subverting the expectation that Messiah would raise a literal army to fight the Romans. A general was seen as having personal responsibility for feeding his soldiers; and the Lord takes that responsibility by feeding this rabble of people.

Perhaps this is why Jn. 6:15 notes that after this miracle, the people tried to forcibly make the Lord Messianic king. The feeding miracle played directly to their Messianic expectations: "When the people saw the sign which he did, they said: This is of a truth the prophet that comes into the world!" (Jn. 6:14).

However it has also been suggested that the 'hundreds and fifties' means "Two long rows of 100, a shorter one of 50 persons. The fourth side remained, after the manner of the tables of the ancients, empty and open". In which case, the spirit of an 'open table' was visibly shown.

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

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

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

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

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

6:43 *And they collected twelve basketfuls of leftovers, and also of the fish*- The twelve baskets presumably belonged to the 12 disciples. These smaller baskets [not the larger wicker baskets of the miracle of feeding the 4000] were used by Jews when

travelling to store their own food. This was to avoid having to eat unclean, contaminated or Gentile food. The disciples went on their way with such food in their lunchboxes, which had been contaminated by all and sundry. They were thus being led away from legalism and were being taught that all previous boundaries and conceptions of uncleanness were now broken by the Lord's open table fellowship.

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

Why did the Lord do that, and why make the disciples pick up all those crumbs? Surely to give them an object lesson in how God delights in abounding to us. He didn't just give the people food; He abounded to them. The record of each of the feeding miracles, in each of the Gospels, uses this word translated "remained" in commenting about the fragments that were left over- although the real meaning is 'to abound'. Each of the Gospel writers was therefore deeply impressed by the fact that the Lord not only provided food- but such an abundance. All this sets the background for Paul's use of the very same word to describe how God's grace has "abounded" to us in Christ (Rom. 3:7; 5:15; Eph. 1:8).

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

6:45 *And immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and to go without him to the other side to Bethsaida*- Jn. 6:15 says that the crowds wanted to "take him by force to make Him a king". Yet these were the same folk, it seems, who had showed little real faith in Him previously- see on Mt. 14:13 *on foot*. They were so fickle. They evidently saw the connection between the feeding miracle and Him being Messiah, but their understanding of Messiah was that He was to be a King offering

immediate salvation. Ecclesiastes Rabbah 1:9 claimed that "...as the former redeemer caused manna to descend... so will the latter redeemer cause manna to descend". We get the impression that the Lord felt under a sense of great urgency- He "constrained" the disciples to get into the boat and leave, whilst He sent the crowd away. Perhaps He felt that the crowd intended to make Him King and the disciples the leaders of their new *junta*, but by sending the disciples away, He was greatly reducing the chances of them doing this. However the other reason was simply that the disciples themselves were looking for an immediate kingdom and glory, and He knew the temptation would be too great for them. He likewise works with us so often to deliver us from temptation He knows is too great for us.

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

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

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

6:46 *And after he had taken leave of them, he departed into the mountain to pray*- Mt. "by himself". The term *kata idios* ["by himself"] is used about 16 times in the Gospels, covering around 12 different occasions. The need to be alone with the Lord or with the Father is therefore a significant theme. The Lord had departed to the deserted place because of this need to be *kata idios* (Mt. 14:13), but His plans were thwarted by the unexpected tenacity of the crowd in following Him there. In this we see another picture of His humanity. But ultimately, God granted Him the need He felt to be *kata idios*, to be alone with God. Perhaps one reason He so insistently sent

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

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

6:47 *And when evening had come, the boat was in the midst of the sea*- People at that time had a strong association between the sea and the forces of evil and condemnation; beginning with the condemnation of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, the Bible itself speaks of condemnation as being swamped at sea by the waves. The Egyptians perished "in the midst of the sea" (Ex. 14:23,27; Ez. 29:3); Jonah drowned "in the midst of the sea" (Jonah 2:3) as does the fool of Proverbs (Prov. 23:34), as did Tyre and the Gentile nations (Ez. 26:12; 27:26,27,32; 28:8; Ps. 46:2) and Babylon (Jer. 51:63). The disciples doubtless felt condemned. For there were these 12 Old Testament references to condemnation ringing in their Jewish ears. Their cry for salvation was therefore not merely for physical deliverance, but a cry for deliverance out of condemnation. They were "tossed with waves"- the very term used for the torment of the rejected (Rev. 14:10; 20:10). The disciples had earlier seen people who were tormented [s.w. "tossed"] being delivered by the Lord- to pave the way for them personally crying out for that same deliverance (s.w. Mt. 8:6).

And he was alone on the land- This is a pointed repetition of the information that the Lord was there *kata idios*- alone apart, by Himself. His aloneness with God is being brought to our attention. Prayer in one sense has to be a lonely experience. This is all surely why the Lord Himself is frequently pictured by the Gospel writers as making an effort to be alone in prayer to the Father (Mk. 1:35; 3:13; 9:2; Mt. 14:13,23; 17:1; Lk. 6:12; 9:28; 22:39,41). This is all some emphasis. Be it rising in the early hours to go out and find a lonely place to pray, or withdrawing a stone's throw from the disciples in Gethsemane to pray… He sought to be alone. Jn. 6:15 emphasizes this repeated feature of the Lord's life: "He departed again into a

mountain himself alone". The fact He often ["again"] retreated alone like this is emphasized by three words which are effectively saying the same thing- departed, himself, alone. Much as we should participate in communal prayers or in the prayers of our partner or our children, there simply has to be the time for serious personal prayer in our lives. And I have to drive the point home: *Are you doing this?* Putting it in other terms- are you alone *enough.* Incident after incident shows the Lord doing something alone, and then the disciples somehow being presented as doing the same. Take the way He departed "himself alone" when the crowd wanted to make Him king; and then soon afterwards we read that the crowd perceived that the disciples had likewise departed 'themselves alone' [same Greek phrase and construction, Jn. 6:15,22]. The point is that the world is presented as perceiving the disciples in the same terms and way as they did Jesus, even when, in this case, Jesus was not physically with them. And we too are to be "in Him" in our work of witness for Him.

6:48 *And seeing they were having difficulty rowing, for the wind was against them, about the fourth watch of the night he went to them, walking on the sea; and he would have passed by them*- The Greek strictly means that He departed, He left to walk over the sea to them, in the fourth watch of the night (Mt.). Mark adds the detail that "He would have passed by them". This is often His style to this day- it's not that He plays hard to get, but He wants to elicit in us a sense of our desperation for Him. Likewise He often asked sick people what He could do for them, when it was obvious what they wanted. For the same reason on the road to Emmaus, He made as if He would have gone further- to elicit in those disciples an urgent desire for fellowship with Him. The same word translated "passed by them" had just been used by the disciples in saying that "the time is now *past*" and so the Lord should send the crowd away to feed themselves. The disciples likely realized that they were being corrected for their desire to turn away the crowds of people from the Lord; admittedly their motivation was poor, as the Lord seems to explain to them in John 6, but it was seriously wrong to turn them away.

Mk. 6:48 says that "He saw them toiling in rowing" and then, later, He went to them. He didn't literally see them rowing; but in His sensitive mind, He imagined just how it would be for them, and so He went to them.

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

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

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

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

But he immediately spoke to them and said to them: Be of good courage! It is I! Be not afraid- They had at least twice heard the Lord comfort others with those words "be of good courage" before healing them (Mt. 9:2,22). According to their recollection of His words, so their comfort would have been. And that principle applies to us today. "Be not afraid" was a phrase so often on the Lord's lips to the disciples. They so often feared (Lk. 8:25; 9:34,45; Mk. 4:40; 6:50; 10:32); despite the Lord repeatedly telling them not to be afraid (Lk. 12:4,32; Jn. 14:27). Despite His high demands on the one hand, on the other, He was and is ever assuring His people of His total and saving love for them. Peter uses the same phrase when he in his turn urges us to not be afraid nor 'troubled'- the very word used about the troubled disciples on the water that night (1 Pet. 3:14; Mt. 14:26). The Lord likewise leads each of us through situations in order that we might then strengthen others in those situations. Paul's teaching in 2 Cor. 1:4-8 would seem to go as far as saying that in fact *all* we experience is in order that we might later give strength to others in similar situations. And this enables us, in broad terms at least, to attach meaning to event in a way which the unbeliever simply cannot.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

towards human need; or it could be that the Lord was happy to reward faith when He saw it, even if it was based upon somewhat wrong interpretation of the Father's word.

MARK CHAPTER 7

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

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

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

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

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

Often Paul sees similarities between the Pharisees' behaviour as recorded in the Gospels, and that of people he brushed against in his life (e.g. Mt. 15:2 = Gal. 1:14; Col. 2:8; Mt. 15:9 = Col. 2:22; Tit. 1:14; Mt. 16:6 = 1 Cor. 5:6,7; Gal. 5:9; Mt.

23:31,32 = 1 Thess. 2:15). We too are to translate the Gospels into our own life situations.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7:8 *You leave the commandment of God and cling to the tradition of men*- The contrasts are between 'leaving' and 'clinging'; between "commandment" and "tradition"; and finally, between "of God" and "of men". "Leaving" is literally 'to put away' and is used of divorce. The marriage contract between God and Israel was the Mosaic law. But they were putting that away, and thereby effectively divorcing God; His action in divorcing Israel was therefore only confirming them in what they

themselves wished to do. "Cling" or 'cleave to' is likewise a marriage allusion; they had applied 'leave [Father] and cleave to [wife]' to their relationship with God. They had left Him and cleaven to men, with human tradition as their marriage contract with them. This is how serious it is to become enslaved to following tradition. God "commands", from God to man, whereas "tradition" is that which is passed on from men to man. The acceptance of tradition is therefore effectively a playing God.

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

The tension is between human *tradition*, and Divine *commandment*. There is a tendency to assume that tradition passed down over a period of time is in fact from God. Even the most protestant of Protestant churches have this tendency. And it is in all of us. The Lord goes on to demonstrate that God's *command* is transgressed not only by bold faced disobedience, but equally by seeking to get around its real force and by *omitting* to do what that command implies. Accepting the real implication of God's inspired word means that we will fearlessly break with tradition when necessary, and will examine whether our response to His word is direct obedience or rather a mirage, 'getting around' the direct requirement. All this is the practical outcome of believing the Bible to be inspired.

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

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

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

7:11 *But you say*- The saying of God (note the word "saying" in :4) was overridden by

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

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

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

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

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

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

Or we can understand "effect" as just that- effect. The command to honour and practically care for elderly parents had an "effect". God's laws are not simple tests of obedience for the sake of it. The process of obedience has "effect"; disobedience therefore robs us of the positive effect which obedience will bring. Caring for elderly parents, putting "honour" into practice rather than leaving it as mere words, is designed to teach us something. In Matthew we read of the "commandment" (*entole*)

of God, but in Mk. 7:13 of the "word" (*logos*) of God. What did the Lord say? Perhaps: 'You make the commandment, that is, the intention (*logos*) of God, of no effect". God's word of command is a *logos*, an intention. See on :9 *in vain*.

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

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

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

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

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

The Lord replies by expanding upon what He has said earlier about a man being defiled by what comes out of him, rather than by what he eats or touches. And yet the Lord's teaching was hardly parabolic. Perhaps it was too much for the disciples to believe that the Lord had declared void the entire conception of becoming unclean by what you eat; and they assumed He must be talking in parables. Peter in Acts 10 was still convinced that defiled food should not ever be eaten. But it could also be that the "parable" Peter wanted explained was what the Lord had just spoken about the blind leading the blind and falling into a ditch; Lk. 6:39 specifically calls this saying a "parable". In this case, the Lord didn't oblige, at least not specifically. He went on to expand on His previous teaching that we are defiled by our own thoughts and words, rather than by what we eat. Perhaps the Lord meant that once that point was truly grasped, then it would be apparent that the Pharisees with their concept of ritual defilement by food were blind leaders- and should not be given the status of leaders.

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

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

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

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

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

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

7:21 *For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts*- Matthew's parallel record uses the same Greek word for "thoughts", but different ones for "proceed" and "evil", although the meaning is similar. The Lord likely said the same thing twice, repeating phrases in sentences, and repeating whole sentences with slight differences. This was inevitable in speaking without speech reinforcement and with much background noise. Further, given the illiteracy of the audience and the newness of the ideas being presented, any teacher would have repeated the ideas several times over, using slightly different words. I have often found myself doing this when

speaking in a missionary context to illiterate people. Once I replayed a recording of my preaching, and noticed myself doing this. From then on, I never had much problem with the fact that the parallel records in the Gospels often use different words and phrases for the same ideas. And of course it's highly likely the Lord spoke in Aramaic, and Matthew and Mark are as it were translating that Aramaic into literary Greek. It's absolutely legitimate to translate an original spoken word in various ways, indeed it would appear suspicious, forced and unnatural if the Gospel writers used precisely the same Greek to translate the Lord's original Aramaic.

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

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

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

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

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

turned away from the crowds towards the minority who had responded. But whatever the reason, His responsiveness to human need and potential was amazing.

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

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

7:26 *Now the woman was a Greek, a Syrophoenician by race*- Matthew says she was a "Canaanite". Canaanite women are presented in the Old Testament as very much Israel's *femmes fatales*. Nobody else is described in the New Testament as a person "of Canaan" (see note on Mt. 10:4). Indeed it would appear a term not commonly in use at the time. It is therefore used in order to create associations in Biblically aware minds that here was a woman whom classically, a believer should beware of and give a wide berth to. This fits with the inversion of stereotypes and shattering of expectations which this incident presents. For the Lord had gone to this Gentile area expecting to get a break from engagement with people, because His mission was not to the Gentiles (see on Mt. 15:21 *Tyre and Sidon*).

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

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

of God, how even through human rejection of the Gospel, the final purpose of God towards salvation is still furthered.

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

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

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

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

We can too easily assume that she is considering the Jewish children sitting at the table as the masters of the Gentiles. But she uses *kurios* for ‘master’, and I noted on Mt. 15:22 that she is recorded three times here as addressing Jesus as *kurios,* “Lord”. There is no Biblical nor spiritual warrant for thinking of Jews as ‘masters’ or ‘lords’ of the Gentiles. Her triple use of *kurios* regarding the Lord Jesus surely suggests that she is thinking of *His* table, with the bread of Israel’s salvation placed upon it *by Him*, as the lord of the house and the feast- with the Jewish children sitting disinterested and disrespectfully at the table, throwing the food to the eager dogs beneath the table. It was exactly the attitude of the Lord Jesus to table fellowship, His eating with

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7:32 *And they brought to him one that was deaf and had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand upon him*- Many of the Kingdom prophecies of healing were it seems consciously fulfilled in the Lord's healings: Is. 35:6 LXX the stammerer healed = Mk. 7:32-35; Is. 35:3 = Mk. 2:3-12; 3:1-6; Is. 35:8,10 = Mk. 11:1 Bartimaeus following on the Jerusalem road. The Kingdom prophecy of Zech. 14:21 that there will no longer be a trafficker in the Lord's house was fulfilled by the Lord's casting out the traders from the temple. This doesn't mean that these passages will not have a glorious future fulfilment. But in the person of Jesus and in the record of His life we see the "Kingdom come nigh", as He Himself said it did. We can so focus on the future fulfilment that we can forget that He was the Kingdom in the midst of men; the essence of our eternal future, of the coming political Kingdom of God, was and is to seen in Him. Satan fell from Heaven during His ministry ((Lk. 10:18), as it will at the second coming (Rev. 12).

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

to be written by God on human hearts (Heb. 8:10; 10:16). And by grace, the Lord takes the initiative in doing this to people, leaving them to respond further.

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

There is however another take on the passage, which the grammar does allow. It is the paraphrase suggested by Adam Clarke: "And Jesus took him aside from the multitude: and [the deaf man] put his fingers into his ears, intimating thereby to Christ that they were so stopped that he could not hear; and having spat out, that there might be nothing remaining in his mouth to offend the sight when Christ should look at his tongue, he touched his tongue, showing to Christ that it was so bound that he could not speak: and he looked up to heaven, as if to implore assistance from above: and he groaned, being distressed because of his present affliction, and thus implored relief: for, not being able to speak, he could only groan and look up, expressing by these signs, as well as he could, his afflicted state, and the desire he had to be relieved. Then Jesus, having compassion upon him, said, Be opened: and immediately his ears were opened, so that he could hear distinctly; and the impediment to his speaking was removed, so that he spake properly".

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

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

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

7:35 *And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly*- Again, the language of the day is used; the idea that dumb people were literally tongue-tied is alluded to. The more essential idea is that the Lord through His word, His saliva, His spirit, had broken the ties that bind, that seem

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

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

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

MARK CHAPTER 8

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Where can" is literally "Whence can a man…". Their reasoning was that no *man* could meet this huge need, and so therefore, they naturally couldn't meet it- for they were only men. Man can't, therefore we can't. And so our reasoning goes so often. Something is humanly impossible, therefore it is impossible to me, because I am human. The life and person of the Lord Jesus challenged this thinking very deeply. For He was fully human, of our nature, our representative, and yet did super-human things. With God's manifestation and involvement in human life, then human beings can achieve that which is humanly impossible. And this was exemplified supremely in

the Lord Jesus, once we appreciate He was of our nature and not some Divine puppet playing a mere role- as required by Trinitarian theology.

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

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

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

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

The Lord gave the broken bread to the disciples, eloquently speaking of the gift of His life. They in their turn "did set before the people" (Mk. 8:6). We must pass on that which was given to us by the Lord. Paul is our example in this (1 Cor. 11:23). We must, of course, have a valid relationship with the Lord in the first place, feeling we have definitely received something from Him, if we are to pass it on. The Greek term for "set before" recurs in 1 Tim. 1:18 and 2 Tim. 2:2 concerning how we simply *must* pass on the word which has been given to us. Quite simply, if we've really heard it, really received it, we must pass it on.

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

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

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

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

"What was left over" is Gk. 'super-abounded'. This is noted in all five records of the feeding miracles. The poor notice wastage of food, and this was the wastage of food *extraordinaire*. But such super generosity is the hallmark of God's activity, as it should be a feature of our spirit too. The prodigal recalled how there was always 'an abundance of loaves' with the Father (Gk. "bread to the full", AV; Lk. 15:16).

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

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

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

8:10 *And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went into the region of Dalmanutha*- There is no contradiction with Mt. 15:39 which says they came into the region of Magdalla; Dalmanutha would have been a village within the region of Magdalla. Different words for "region" are used by Matthew and Mark. Perhaps

Matthew focuses on "Magdalla" because he may be wishing to say that this was the area from which Mary of Magdalla [Magdalene] was from.

8:11 *And the Pharisees came and began to question him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, testing him*- This was exactly the situation in the wilderness temptations, strengthening the impression that the source of the temptation was the 'Satan' or adversary of Jewish thinking and the Jewish system. This appears an exact repetition of the situation in Mt. 12:38,39- the same words are used. The point is simply that the same requests and answers were given at different times throughout the Lord's ministry. That seems to me to have the ring of truth- for anyone with any missionary experience will nod their head and recall how often that has been their experience. And yet the critics love to make elaborate claims based on the similarity with Mt. 12:38,39. It simply depends with what spirit we come to the records- those who believe in inspiration will see circumstantial evidence for veracity in such things, whereas those bent on downgrading the Gospels to human, fallible records will use the same material to find fault.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8:16 *And they reasoned one with another, saying: It is because we have no bread*- Every one of the 16 NT usages of *dialogizomai* (and they are all found in the Gospels) is in a negative context, of the reasoning of the flesh against the spirit, or of legalism against faith. The flesh prefers the way of internal debate rather than simple action in faith, because the longer we keep ourselves talking (as it were), the greater the chance we shall be finally disobedient. They "reasoned among themselves", and the Lord perceived that they so "reasoned" (:8). This double usage of the word is to be found in an earlier Gospel incident, where the Scribes "reasoned in their hearts", "among themselves", and the Lord likewise "perceived... that they so reasoned amongst themselves" (Mk. 2:6,8; Lk. 5:21,22). The point is that the disciples were acting like the Jewish religious leaders- which is precisely the context here, for in the preceding verse the Lord has warned them not to become mentally influenced by these people. This part of the Lord's ministry has rightly been described as His "crisis in Galilee"- the disciples present themselves here in the Gospel records as far from Him in understanding and spirit.

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

8:17 *And Jesus perceiving it said to them: Why do you so reason, because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart so hardened?*- Clearly the Lord was carefully working out a plan of spiritual education for them- an

d they failed to respond well to it. He does the same in our lives, although we may be barely perceptive that the process is even running.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8:28 *And they told him, saying: John the Baptist*- Literally, *the* John the Baptist. "Some..." is simply translating *ho*, the definite article. "The John the Baptist" would therefore appear to be the main opinion- after that, some thought Jesus was Elijah, others thought He was another of the prophets. There was a strong belief in dead people reappearing in the form of others, *redivivus*, a kind of reincarnation. This had been Herod's view of Jesus, that He was the resurrected John the Baptist. None of the opinions they list include the possibility that Jesus was Messiah. The disciples' answer is therefore a tacit recognition of the failure of John's ministry. He was known even at that early stage as "John the Baptist" because his baptism of so many people was what

he was noted for. But that baptism, that recognition of sin, had not led people to accept Jesus as the Christ. It happens so often, that we can have a temporary conviction of sin, and even do something about it- but to fully come to Christ is a different question, and it seems that few go on to make that vital connection.

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

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

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

The false notion that the Lord Jesus literally pre-existed and was then somehow incarnated, or re-incarnated, was a pagan idea that had become popular in Judaism around the time of Christ. In fact the road to the Trinity began with Justin and other 'church fathers' coming to teach that Jesus personally pre-existed- even though they initially denied that He was God Himself. The Qumran sect, some of whose followers became the first Christians, believed that the "Teacher of Righteousness" pre-existed as the former prophets and would be an incarnation of them. This explains why they thought Messiah had previously been incarnated as Moses, Elijah and the prophets. In this lies the significance of the account here. Jesus enquires who the people think He is- and the disciples answer that the popular view is that Jesus of Nazareth is Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets reincarnated. But this was exactly who first century Judaism thought Messiah would be. So the crowd view was indeed that Jesus was Messiah- but "Messiah" as they understood Messiah would be. The significance of the incident lies in Peter's affirmation that Jesus, whom he accepted as Messiah, was not a re-incarnation of a pre-existent prophet but was the begotten Son of God. Note in passing that the false doctrine of pre-existence is connected to the pagan myth of incarnation and re-incarnation. If, for example, Jesus really was existing in Old Testament times, then somehow He would have had to have been re-incarnated in Mary's womb.

8:29 *And he asked them: But who do you say that I am?*- The effort required in interpreting Jesus is, it seems to me, designed by God, whose word it is which we are discussing. The intention is to make us think about Jesus, struggle with the issue of His identity and nature, in order that we should understand Him better, and thereby love and serve Him the more intently. Perhaps that is why so little is recorded of Jesus- all the speeches and actions of Jesus found in the Gospels would've occupied only three weeks or so of real time. The rest of His life, words and actions we are left

to imagine, given what we do know of Him. He wants us to reflect, as He did the disciples, "Whom do *you* think I am?" (Mk. 8:29). Perhaps that is why at least in Mark's Gospel there is the theme of Jesus not wanting men to be told in point blank terms that He was Messiah.

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

Peter answered and said to him- Peter is set up as our example and pattern. The records portray him in such a way that we see so clearly the similarities between him and us. The good intentions, the flashes of zeal, the miserable failures, the essential loyalty to the Man who was better than he. The Gospels also portray Peter as the representative of the group of disciples. It is Peter who answers when the Lord asks a question of them all (Mk. 8:29 cp. the other accounts). The way Jesus looks upon all the disciples as He speaks to Peter makes Peter some kind of representative of them all in the Lord's eyes (Mk. 8:33). In Mt. 16:17 Peter is commended for having had the Father reveal Jesus to Him. Yet Mt. 11:27 says that the Father reveals the identity of His Son to *all* who truly come to Him. Thus Peter is representative of all who have truly perceived the Son's identity in Jesus of Nazareth. In one Gospel, all the disciples ask a question, while in the parallel passage Peter is stated to have asked it (Mk. 7:17 cp. Mt. 15:15 and Mt. 21:20 cp. Mk. 11:21). Even outsiders considered Peter to be representative of all the disciples (Mt. 17:24). "Peter and those with him" is how the group is described (Mk. 1:36; Lk. 8:45 Gk.; 9:32). Peter's crucial confession that he believed that Jesus was the Son of God is repeated almost verbatim by all the disciples, sometime later (Jn. 6:69; 16:30). He is truly the representative disciple.

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

Peter's proclamation of Jesus as Messiah half way through Matthew and Mark's records of the Gospel (Mk. 8:29) is presented by them as a climax of understanding. And yet according to Jn. 1:41, Andrew and Peter had known this right from the start. The implication is surely that they, as simple working men, probably illiterate, had

merely repeated in awe words and phrases like “Messiah” and “Son of God” with no real sense of their import. Yet again, the Lord gently bore with their misunderstandings, and Peter of his own initiative, 18 months later, came to gleefully blurt out the same basic ideas but with now far deeper insight- although he still incorrectly perceived the Messiah as one who would not suffer but provide instant glorification. Thus the spiritual growth of the disciples is revealed.

Rarely in the Gospels does someone actually declare Jesus to be the Christ, the anointed one, Messiah. This of course was the thrust of John's teaching, denying that he was the Christ but saying that he was heralding Him. Despite all the surface level response to John, with so many baptized that he was known as "the Baptist" very soon after His death, it seems that only the disciples really grasped his essential message about Jesus. See on Mt. 16:14. Peter had made the same confession of faith in the same words ("You are the Christ, the Son of the living God") some time previously, after the feeding of the 5000 (Jn. 6:69). It would seem that "the Christ, the Son of God" is therefore being presented as a formula for confession of faith. Martha likewise confesses faith in Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of God" (Jn. 11:27). The connection between the words "Christ" and "Son of God" is found elsewhere. Mark's Gospel is a proclamation of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (Mk. 1:1); Luke begins his Gospel predicting that Messiah would be "called... Son of God" (Lk. 1:32,35), not by being named "Son of God" by Mary (He was named 'Jesus'), but called on as Son of God by those believing in Him. Indeed it was the whole intention of John's Gospel to bring people to faith in "the Christ the Son of God" (Jn. 20:31). Therefore the Eunuch's confession before baptism that he believed that "Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37) can be seen as a triumph of the Gospel- Philip likewise preached towards the same end as John did through his Gospel. Paul likewise preached the "Christ... is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20). A 'Christ' was simply an 'anointed one', someone anointed or commissioned for a specific task- and there had been many people anointed in this way. The uniqueness about Jesus the Christ was that this Christ was the uniquely begotten Son of God. This explains why there is such a strong emphasis upon believing that Jesus was the Christ who was Son of God. And to this day, it is this uniqueness which differentiates the real Christ from a mere understanding that He was a good man who did indeed historically exist and die. The question is how much more, if anything, was required from people in terms of understanding before a person was considered to have believed 'in Christ'. The evidence of Acts and the Gospels would appear to indicate that 'belief in Christ' meant simply believing that He was Son of God and identifying with Him. The centurion (Mt. 27:54), healed persons (Mk. 3:11) etc. are all examples of this.

Twice in Mark, Jesus is addressed as "Messiah" but He replies by calling Himself "the Son of man" (Mk. 8:29-31; 14:61,62). If this was His preferred self-perception, should it not be how we perceive Him?

8:30 *And he ordered them that they should tell no one about him*- The Greek word is used five times in Mark, but never in the other Gospels. This has the ring of truth to it- a group of people observing one man would each be struck by different things He did, and their records would reflect that. And that's just what we see in the Gospels. "Tell" translates *epo*, to say, and it has just been used in recording how Peter *said* that Jesus was the Christ. The Lord is progressing with the revised plan of operation which He began to make public at the end of Matthew 12. He was effectively giving up on the masses, and instead focusing upon the disciples as the method through which He would after His death be able to appeal to the masses. In order to not be distracted, to spent time more intensely with them, He asks them not to

fuel the kind of Messianic speculation which was then rife in Palestine.

Matthew has: "That he was the Christ", or as AV "Jesus the Christ"- an unusual phrase. 'Jesus' was one of the most common names in Palestine at the time. The Lord's idea was perhaps that they were not to tell people that He, the man named with the common name 'Jesus', was in very truth the Christ. They were allow people to continue to merely see 'Jesus' rather than 'the Christ'. By the very silence of the disciples about what they firmly believed and so wanted to share, they would have been driven to discuss the Messiahship of Jesus *amongst themselves* and also to reflect personally within themselves about the Lord's Messiahship.

8:31 *And he began to teach them that*- The sense of *hoti* in the context is definitely causative. The idea is that He showed them *why* these things must happen. He didn't just foretell the events of the passion, but explained why they must be.

The Son of Man must suffer many things- The phrase is used elsewhere of the sick woman who had "suffered many things" at the hands of "many physicians" (Mk. 5:26), and yet is used elsewhere about the Lord's 'many' sufferings at the hands of the Jewish leaders (also in Mk. 9:12). Surely the Lord perceived in her someone who was sharing something of His final sufferings. All our sufferings are likewise part of His crucifixion sufferings, and if we suffer with Him, we shall also therefore experience His resurrection. That woman was therefore set up as an example of us all.

And be rejected- The same word is used about the stone of Christ being "rejected" by themselves, the builders (Mt. 21:42). The word carries the sense of legally condemning. They rejected the sinless Son of God as a condemned sinner and demanded His death. If nothing else we learn some basic psychology- that when a person touches the conscience of less spiritual people, they are likely to intensely slander the person and effectively demand their death, which in our day may be the social death of rejection.

By the elders- *Presbuteros* is specifically used of the Sanhedrin members. The Lord's predictions here are highly specific and detailed.

And the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again- Literally, 'High Priests'. There was only supposed to be one High Priest, but the position was so lucrative and argued over that there were a group called the 'High Priests'- so far had Judaism fallen away from basic Biblical teachings, despite their zeal to keep the details.

Mark, who as we have suggested was effectively Peter writing, records three instances of where the Lord's prediction of the cross was met by the disciples' misunderstanding, and His subsequent efforts to teach them the real meaning of discipleship, and the paradoxes which this involves:

	Mark 8	Mark 9	Mark 10
Geographical description	Mk. 8:27	Mk. 9:30	10:32
Note that the incident took place whilst they were on the road walking	8:27	9:31	10:33,34
Misunderstanding by the disciples	8:32,33	9:32	10:35-41

Jesus calls the disciples to Him, implying they were no longer following behind Him	8:34	9:35	10:42
Teaching about true cross-carrying discipleship	8:34-9:1	9:33-37	10:42-45
Paradox	Save life / lose life	First / last	Great / least

The point is, that following Jesus in the way involves picking up and carrying His cross. But this repeatedly wasn't understood by the disciples, and they seem to have stopped walking behind Him as they should've done. Be aware that Mark is a transcript of Peter's preaching of the Gospel message; He's surely pointing out how terribly slow he had been himself to pick up the fact that walking behind Jesus is a call to carry a cross. And of course a glance back at our own discipleship and walk behind Jesus indicates just the same with us; and perhaps we should admit that more freely in our preaching, in order to like Peter make a stronger appeal for men to follow Jesus with no misunderstanding of what this involves.

Qualms of conscience about 'wasting time' can so often be part of a guilty fear of not having 'done' enough. The Lord Jesus was not beset by guilt, and a sensitive reading of the Gospels reflects the way that this ultimately zealous servant of the Lord never appeared to be in hurry. He had ample time to speak to the woman He met at the well (Jn. 4:1-26), to take time out with the disciples (Mk. 8:27), He had the leisure time to admire wild flowers (Mt. 6:28), comment upon a sunset (Mt. 16:2), to go through the lengthy process of washing the feet of His men (Jn. 13:5) and to be able to answer their naieve questions without the slightest hint of impatience (Jn. 14:5-10)… and of course to walk some distance to find a place conducive to prayer (Lk. 5:16).

8:32 *And he spoke these things openly*- Mk. 8:32 adds to Matthew's record in saying that "He spake that saying openly". But He has just given the impression in Mt. 16:20 that these things were private; He showed them "to His disciples". "Openly" in Mk. 8:32 is a poor translation; the word is elsewhere rendered 'boldly' or 'confidently'. The words He spoke about His forthcoming death and resurrection He spoke with a boldness of spirit that came only from total faith.

And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him- When He spoke of the cross and His sacrifice, His followers either changed the subject or turned away. They were even against the idea of crucifixion (Mk. 8:32; 9:32-4; 10:35-40). They failed to see the centrality of the cross. And these reactions can characterize our response to the cross, both in terms of turning away from considering its physicalities, and also in our own cross-carrying. And yet there is a sense of inevitability about the cross. We *must* face these things. Circle all the times in John 19 words like "therefore" occur (and cp. Acts 2:23). Consider how Luke records the indefatigable determination in the Lord's face during the final journey up to Jerusalem. There is the same inevitability about our cross carrying; even if we flunk it all the way through our lives, we eventually come to death. My name chiselled by some disinterested artist on a gravestone, with the radio playing in the background as he sits hunched up in his workshop.

If Peter understood that Jesus was the Old Testament Messiah, he surely understood, in theory at least, that the Old Testament required a suffering Messiah. For him, of all men, to discourage Jesus from fulfilling this was serious indeed; hence Christ's stiff rebuke, likening him to the satan of His wilderness temptations, in that Peter too misquoted Scripture to provide an easy way out. If, as we have discussed elsewhere, Mark is really Peter's Gospel, it is surely significant that Mark especially emphasizes how Peter especially didn't understand the need for Jesus to suffer crucifixion (Mk. 8:17-21,27-33; 9:6,32; 14:37). Showing the chinks in our own armour is surely the way to be a credible warrior for the Gospel.

Mark's record brings out the sustained mutuality between the Lord and Peter- for Peter rebukes the Lord, and then the Lord rebukes Peter (Mk. 8:32,33). About twenty times in the Gospels we read of the Lord rebuking or charging (s.w.); but whenever the disciples do it, they seem to rebuke the wrong person over the wrong issues. Again, the Gospel writers bring out the distance and mismatch between the disciples and their Lord.

8:33 *But he, turning about and seeing his disciples*- The very same words are used in Lk. 22:61 where the Lord turns and *looks* upon Peter. The repetition of such visual images serves to teach how circumstances are repeated in human lives, each bearing the same Divine hallmark. The way the Lord "turned" and addressed people is recorded often in the Gospels, especially noticed by Luke (Lk. 7:9,44; 9:55; 10:23; 14:25; 22:61 ; 23:28; Jn. 1:38). Again this is exactly what we would expect from eyewitness testimony- a certain physical characteristic or aspect of body language noticed, remembered and reflected in a write up of those memories.

The Gospel records, Luke especially, often record how the Lord turned and spoke to His followers- as if He was in the habit of walking ahead of them, with them following (Lk. 7:9,44,55; 10:23; 14:25; 23:28; Mt. 9:22; Jn. 1:38). As we saw above, Peter thought that following the Lord was not so hard, because he was literally following Jesus around first century Israel, and identifying himself with His cause. But he simply failed to make the connection between following and cross carrying. And we too can agree to follow the Lord without realizing that it means laying down our lives. The Lord brought Peter to face this with a jolt in Mt. 16:22-25. Peter was following Jesus, after He had predicted His crucifixion (for Jesus "turned, and said unto Peter"). He thought he was following Jesus. But he was told: "Get thee *behind me*… if any man will come *after me* (s.w. 'behind me'), let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and *follow me* (s.w.)". The italicized words are all the same in the original. Peter didn't want the Lord to die by crucifixion at Jerusalem, because he saw that as a follower of Jesus this required that he too must die a like death. Peter needed to get behind Jesus in reality and really follow, in the sense of following to the cross, although he was there physically behind Jesus, physically following at that time. The Lord was saying: 'Don't think of trying to stop me dying. I will, of course. But concentrate instead on *really* getting behind me in the sense of carrying my cross'. John's record stresses that the key to following Jesus to the cross is to hear His word, which beckons us onwards (Jn. 10:4,27). All our Bible study must lead us onwards in the life of self-sacrifice. But Peter loved the Lord's words; but, as pointed out to him at the transfiguration, he didn't hear those words of Christ deeply. And so he missed the call to the cross. He had just stated that Jesus was Messiah; but soon afterwards he is recorded as saying that it was intrinsic within Jesus' Messiahship that He *mustn't* die or suffer.

Rebuked Peter, and said to him: Get behind me, Satan!- When the Lord said He was going up to Jerusalem to die, Peter asked him not to. "Get behind me, Satan" was

not the Lord wishing temptation to get behind him. He was telling Peter, whom He here calls ‘Satan’, to get behind Him and follow Him up there to Jerusalem, carrying His cross with Him (Mt. 16:23). Peter didn’t want the Lord to go up there, to die like that, because he knew that this meant that he too must carry the cross. Here lies the reason for our recoiling at the cross. We realize that it implies all too much for us, if this is truly what the Lord went through.

"Get" is the same word translated "Get hence [Satan]" in Mt. 4:10. The temptation here was to take Peter's position and think that the Kingdom was possible without the death of the cross. And clearly the situation here is reminiscent of the wilderness temptation, which was in essence the same- to think of ways around the cross. And again, the Lord told the Satan to "get hence". In essence, this is the sum of all human temptation, hence the Lord's very clear statement in the next two verses about the absolutely unavoidable necessity of the cross. The Lord was therefore speaking to Himself when He envisaged a person wishing to "save his life", to avoid death, yet wanting to "gain the whole world". This had been exactly the temptation of 4:8, to try to take "the whole world" without the death of the cross (Mt. 16:26). The command to 'get away behind' the Lord and follow Him is expanded upon in Mt. 16:24,25 to mean 'to follow to the cross'. But by the time of His death, the Lord knew that Peter just wasn't going to make it. For the Lord uses the same word translated "Get" here in Jn. 13:36 in telling Peter: "Where I am now *going* [s.w. "get"], you cannot follow Me [s.w. Mt. 16:24 "follow Me"] now". It seems it was the Lord's particular desire that Peter should die with Him on the cross - Peter's willingness to do this was therefore partly a desire to follow his Lord's intention for him, rather than the mere language of bravado. But finally He realized that Peter wasn't going to make it, at least not at that time: "But you shall follow Me eventually" (Jn. 13:36). We can usefully meditate upon the Lord's intentions for us, and at what times He intended us to rise up to them... and how even when we fail to mature as we should, He still holds out hope that we shall eventually get there. And this is to be reflected in our patience with our likewise developing brethren.

″Behind Me" is the same word translated "come after Me" in Mt. 16:24. This is a command to Peter to stop trying to dissuade Christ from the cross, but rather to get behind Him and carry that cross. Note how following behind the Lord and carrying His cross are identified in Mt. 10:38; Lk. 9:23; 14:27. Instead of just literally walking behind Him, the Lord is saying that real discipleship is to carry a cross behind Him.

The Lord “rebuked” Peter for seeking to stop Him die on the cross. But the very same Greek word has occurred just prior in the narrative, when Peter has just declared Jesus to be “the Christ of God”. The Lord responded by commending Peter for his blessed insight, but the record continues: “And [Jesus] straitly charged them [s.w. “rebuked”] them, and commanded them to tell [i.e. preach to] no man that thing”, and He goes on to underline to them how He must suffer on the cross (Lk. 9:21). Why did the Lord both commend and rebuke Peter for discerning that He was indeed the Christ of God? Surely because, in the context, Peter understood Messiah to be someone who would there and then bring salvation without the cross. Again we see how there was something in Peter as there is in us all which somehow revolted at the idea of real cross carrying. And it was for the same reason that the Lord “straitly charged” [s.w. rebuked] those who wanted to blaze around the news that He was Messiah- because they didn’t perceive that the Messiah must first suffer and rise again before being declared in fullness “Lord and Christ”.

For you are mindful of the things of men instead of the things of God- Being a 'satan' referred therefore to a state of mind, centered upon human rather than Godly things. The idea of 'Satan' is therefore part of a huge parable, presenting carnal thinking as the great satan / adversary of men.

8:34- see on Gal. 6:10.

And he called to him the crowd with his disciples, and said to them: If any of you wants to be my follower, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me- The Lord was addressing all, but He clearly had Peter particularly in mind. For Peter was the one who was going to deny the Lord, rather than deny Himself (s.w. 14:30,31,72). The Lord may have intended them to understand that carrying the cross, dying with Him, was going to mean in practice not denying Him, but rather denying themselves. And Peter failed to perceive this; and Mark is Peter's account of how he preached the Gospel, always pointing out his own failings.

8:35 *For whoever would save his life shall lose it, and whoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, he shall save it!*- I find it hard to avoid the conclusion that it is the process of our engagement with God's word, our love of it, our integrity in considering it etc., which is more important to God than our grasping the final 'truth' of each clause in a final, Euclidean sense. By saying this I take nothing away from the fact that "the truth" is "in Jesus", that there is a wonderful personal reality of salvation for each of us in Christ, a living personal relationship with Him. My point is simply that God's intention in giving us His word is surely not to relay to us a heap of individual specific truths- for the written word isn't the best way to convey such things to simple, illiterate folk, nor indeed to computer-assisted students of our own times. Rather does He seek us to enter into *relationship* with Him and His Son, and He uses His word and its ambiguities as a way of achieving this. The Lord Jesus used language like this- consider how He uses the word *psuche*, life, in Mk. 8:34-37. We are to lose our life in order to find life... and "what does a man gain by winning the whole world at the cost of his true self? What can he give to buy that self back?" (NEB). The ambigious usage of *psuche* is surely in order to get us thinking about our relationship with Him. And thus the Lord's parables often end with questions which have open-ended, ambiguous answers, through which we reveal and develop our relationship with Jesus- e.g. "What will the owner of the vineyard do?" (Mk. 12:9- kill them? be gracious to them? give them yet another chance? keep them as His people anyway?). I am not saying that correct interpretation of Scripture doesn't matter; rather am I saying that in *some* ways, in some places, in some aspects, interpreting the Lord's words is designed by Him to be open-ended rather than intended to lead us all to identical conclusions.

The Lord Jesus paralleled "my sake and the gospel's" with "me and my words" (Mk. 8:35,38). He Himself thus understood the Gospel to be His words. Preaching, in whatever form, is not glamorous. It is a sacrifice of self, a not saying and doing as we feel, a surrendering of our own rights- for the sake of others' salvation, both in the preaching of the Gospel and in helping our brethren to salvation. To lose life is paralleled with the Lord to unashamedly witnessing to Him in an unbelieving world; and He calls us each one to lose our lives in this way (Mk. 8:35).

8:36 *For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his life?*- As noted on :35, the context is of carrying the cross in preahing the Gospel. The world to be won is the world for Christ, rather than seeking to gain the world for ourselves.

Mt. 16:26 records the Lord as teaching: “What will it profit a man [i.e. at the future judgment], if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?”. Mk. 8:36 has: “What does it [right now] profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?”. Could it be that the Lord said both these things at the same time- to make His point, that the essence of judgment day is being decided right now by our decisions today? And the Lord’s next words make the same point: “What shall [at judgment day] a man give in return for his life?” (Mt. 16:26) is matched by Mk. 8:37: “What can [right now] a man give in return for his life?”. The question we will face at judgment day, the obvious issue between winning for a moment and losing eternally, or losing now and winning eternally… this is being worked out right now. The choice is ours, hour by hour, decision by decision.

8:37 *For what should a man give in exchange for his life?*- Having spoken of the need to take up the cross daily, the Lord Jesus employed this form of logic to encourage people to really take on board what He was suggesting: " Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross... *for* whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, and the gospel's, the same shall find it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own life (AV " soul")? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mk. 8:34-37). If we follow Christ, we must lose our natural life. If we don't, even if we gain the whole world, we will lose our natural life. *I must lose my life, one way or the other*. We need to go through life muttering that to ourselves. God asks our life, our all. If we hold it back in this life because we want to keep it for ourselves, He will take it anyway. The cross was a symbol of shame (Heb. 12:2 speaks of the shame of the cross). In this context verse 38 continues: " Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed" at the day of judgment. We either go through the shame of carrying the cross now, especially in our personal witnessing to those around us; or we will suffer the eternal shame of rejection (Dan. 12:2); our shame will then be evident to all (Rev. 16:15).

8:38 *For whoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man also shall be ashamed of him, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels*- See on Rom. 1:16. Being ashamed of the Lord's words doesn't just apply to not speaking up for the Truth when someone invites us to a topless bar after work. It's equally true, and the punishment for it just the same, in the context of not speaking out Christ's word in the ecclesia, to our very own brethren (Mk. 8:38 = 2 Tim. 1:8).

The Lord Jesus will be ashamed of the rejected when He comes in the glory of the Father. There is a telling juxtaposition of ideas here- shame and glory. Amidst the utter glory of the Father's throne, surrounded by Angels, the Lord will be sitting there with eyes downwards in shame as the rejected stand before Him and walk away. The Proverbs speak of how shame is to be the ultimate end of the wicked, and glory the end of the righteous. Yet it is *the rejected who* go away "into shame". *They* will be "ashamed before him at his coming". Yet the Lord will so feel for even the rejected, that He feels for them and reflects their feelings. This is no stern-faced judge chasing away those He is angry with. This is a window into the Lord's ineffable love and feelings even for those for whom it truly is too late, for whom the way to the tree of life is now barred.

The way the Lord Jesus says that He will be "ashamed" of those He has to reject (Mk. 8:38) opens an interesting window into what it means to have Divine nature. It

doesn't mean that we will not then know the range of emotions which we have as humans today- for we are made in God's image. To think of the Lord of Heaven and earth, on the throne of His glory, sitting or standing there "ashamed"... because of His people. And shame is really a concept relevant to the presence of others- and the others who will be present will be the Angels and ourselves. Before us, we who are ourselves *so* weak and saved by His grace alone, He will feel shame because of those He has to reject. But there's another way of looking at the Lord's 'shame'. It is the rejected who will have shame in that day (Dan. 12:2). Such is the nature of the Lord's love and empathy that He will somehow feel their shame, feel embarassed for them as it were. Which thought in itself should banish for ever any idea that we are coming before an angry Master. The Lord of grace is the One who will be, and is, our judge. And even in His condemnation of men, His essential love shines through. His condemnation of Israel involved them wandering for years in the wilderness; but during that wandering, "in all their affliction, he was afflicted" (Is. 63:9). God shared in their feelings and suffering of rejection; just as the Lord Jesus will share in the shame of those who walk away from Him at the last day in shame. God's being with Israel during their wilderness wanderings is cited in Am. 2:10 as an example of His especial love for His people.

MARK CHAPTER 9

9:1 *And he said to them: Truly I say to you: There are some standing here, who shall in no way taste death, before they see the kingdom of God come with power*- The Lord will essentially be the same as the Gospels present Him when we see Him again. This is why Jesus even in His earthly life could be called "the Kingdom of God", so close was the link between the man who walked Palestine and the One who will come again in glory. “They see the Kingdom of God come” (Mk. 9:1) is paralleled by “They see the Son of man coming” (Mt. 16:28). Indeed it would seem that the references in the Synoptic Gospels to the ‘coming’ of the Kingdom are interpreted in the rest of the New Testament as referring to the personal ‘coming’ of the Lord Jesus (e.g. 1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20). In that very context of referring to Himself as "the Kingdom of God", the Lord speaks of His return as 'the days of the Son of man'- the human Jesus. And yet He also speaks in that context of how after His death, men will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, i.e. how He had been in His mortal life (Lk. 17:20-26). As He was in His mortal days, so He will essentially be in the day of His final glory.

"Kingdom" means literally the dominion of the King. We are now in a limited sense beneath God's dominion, and thereby part of His "Kingdom". Those beneath His dominion are worked upon by Him, through His Spirit, through His Son. That influence of the Spirit is powerful. And this is why the ideas of "Kingdom" and "power" are so often placed in parallel (1 Chron. 29:11; Dan. 2:37; Rev. 12:10). Truly, "the kingdom of God is not in talk but in power" (1 Cor. 4:20). Being "in" or "under" God's Kingly dominion is not just a status, a matter of words. It means that He powerfully works in us, in our hearts, in our lives, through the Holy Spirit. And in turn, we "will speak of the glory of Your kingdom, and talk about Your power" (Ps. 145:11). Col. 1:13 contrasts unbelievers under the "power" of sin, and believers who by contrast are in the Kingdom of the Lord, i.e. under His power and influence: "Who delivered us out of the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the

Son of His love". This understanding may provide insight into the Lord's comment that "there are some standing here, who shall in no way taste death, before they see the kingdom of God come with power" (Mk. 9:1). This would then be a reference to the disciples living to see the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

9:2 *And after six days*- Lk. 9:28 speaks of "about an eight days after", reckoning inclusively and perhaps wishing to express the idea of 'About a week later'.

Jesus took with him Peter, James and John- Peter is mentioned first. An over-reaction against Catholic views of Peter can lead us to under-estimate the undoubted supremacy of Peter in the early ecclesia. He was in the inner three along with James and John, and in incidents involving them he is always mentioned first, as the leader (Mt. 17:1,2; 26:37; Mk. 5:37). He is the first to confess Jesus as Messiah (Mt. 16:13-17), the first apostle to see the risen Christ (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5), the first to preach to the Gentiles. Being given the keys of the Kingdom is language which would have been understood at the time as the Lord making Peter the Chief Rabbi of His new ecclesia. The Acts record without doubt gives primacy to Peter as the leader and chief representative of Christ's fledgling church. But, humanly speaking, he was the most unlikely choice. The one who in the eyes of the world and brotherhood should have sat a fair while on the back burner, done the honourable thing… in fact, many honourable things, in just keeping a respectful and bashful silence. And there is no lack of evidence that Peter himself would have preferred that. But no, he was commissioned by the Lord to specifically lead the church. The early church was to be built on the rock of Peter. Whether we like to read this as meaning the rock of Peter's confession that Christ was the Son of God, or as simply meaning Peter's work as the manifestation of Christ, *the* rock, the Acts record shows clearly that the early church was built upon the specific work of Peter.

And brought them to a high mountain where they could be alone- Being led up [Gk.] a high mountain by the leader to be present at a theophany is very much the language of Moses taking Joshua and earlier another trio of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu) with him part way up Mount Sinai, and likewise experiencing a shining face (Ex. 34:29-35) and God's voice from a cloud (Ex. 34:5). Moses returned from the Mount with shining face and the people were afraid- just as happened here (Mk. 9:6). Perhaps Peter vaguely comprehended all this when he wanted to build 'tabernacles', because this was the task given to Moses for Israel to complete. Lk. 9:32 speaks of the *exodus* which the Lord was to make at Jerusalem- a reference to His death. It was the Passover lamb which died at the Exodus- the implication is that now God's people were free to leave Egypt. Again, those secular fishermen were being shown (through the obvious parallel) that they were none less than Joshua in this new Israel which was being created; and after the Lord's departure, they were to take His place and lead God's Israel into the Kingdom.

The idea seems to be that just as He had taken the twelve into Gentile areas for a period of intense teaching of them, so even within the twelve He focused upon these three and wanted to spend time alone with them. He "took" them means to desire association with, to come close to. This was His intention, and one wonders whether the transfiguration was therefore unexpected for Him. Previously when He had tried to get the twelve away by themselves, there had been unexpected events which hampered that, such as the crowds following them, and even in Gentile areas the Lord seems to have been surprised by the faith and need to perform miracles which He encountered. In this case, it would be unintentional that the transfiguration is recorded as following straight after His words about His coming in His Kingdom; it wasn't as if the Lord said those words knowing that some would witness the transfiguration.

According to Lk. 9:28, the Lord's intention was to go up the mountain "to pray", but whilst He prayed, the transfiguration occurred. See on 16:28.

Luke mentions that the Lord took Peter, James and John, started praying and then there was a theophany; but in their human weakness they missed much of it because they fell asleep. This was exactly the situation in the Garden of Gethsemane, with the same three involved; it was as if He was seeking to train them for it. They were "heavy" with sleep (Lk. 9:32), and the word is only used elsewhere in the Gospels to describe how the same three were "heavy" with sleep in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:43; Mk. 14:40). Even if Jesus Himself wasn't consciously doing this, we have here an example of how the Divine hand leads us through experiences in order to prepare us for others which are to come later in similar form.

And he was transfigured before them- The Lord's transfiguration was a cameo of the change that should be apparent deep within us, for Paul says that *we* should likewise be transformed (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18 s.w.), and he uses a related word in speaking of how Christ is to be "formed" within us (Gal. 4:19). *Metamorphoo* means a change of *morphe*; not necessarily of essential nature, because we too are to be transformed in this life, and have a new *morphe* develop in us (Gal. 4:19). But it could be that the 'other form' in which the Lord now appeared was in the form in which He will be in the Kingdom. The idea of a change of *morphe* of the Lord Jesus recurs only one other time- in the hymn concerning the Lord's death in Phil. 2:6,7 where we read that although Had the *morphe* of God, He went through a seven stage progressive humiliation until He took on the *morphe* of a slave in the final death of the cross. One purpose of the transfiguration was for Moses and Elijah (who had both had Divinely arranged deaths or departures from ministry) to encourage the Lord concerning His upcoming death (Lk. 9:31). And yet He appeared as He will in the Kingdom, with shining Kingdom glory. The suffering and the glory were thereby manifested to and upon Him at the very same time, to show how inextricably linked they are. Perhaps too the point was being made that when He would hang there with the *morphe* of a dying and rejected slave, in Heaven's eyes, He was in Kingdom glory. John's equivalent of this is to record how the Lord spoke of His death as a 'lifting up', an idea which in Hebrew has connotations of 'glory'. The shame of the cross was only from the world's viewpoint, whereas from a spiritual viewpoint, His death was the very acme of spiritual glory. The blood drenched garment became in God's eyes a glistering white raiment (Lk. 9:29). This would explain why in one sense the transfiguration was a Kingdom vision, and yet it was also about the Lord's death. Peter later reflected that he could preach with conviction about the coming of Christ because he was present at the transfiguration (2 Pet. 1:16-18). The Kingdom element of the experience cannot be divorced from the fact it was also an encouragement from Moses and Elijah concerning the cross. Note that John was also powerfully inspired by the transfiguration, opening his Gospel with an allusion to it in saying that "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father" (Jn. 1:14). James likewise appears to reference the transfiguration when he writes of how the Lord's glory is so surpassing that there should be no jostling for human glory amongst us His people (James 2:1). The descriptions of the Lord Jesus are very similar to the language used about the scene at His resurrection- Angels in shining garments (28:3; Lk. 24:4), frightened and uncomprehending disciples (28:5). And yet the theme of the conversation was the Lord's death (Lk. 9:31)- but it took place with a preview of the resurrection scene.

9:3 *And his garments became radiant, exceedingly white, whiter than any launderer could whiten them*- The same word used about the white clothing of the

Angels at the resurrection ("white as snow", Mt. 28:3, just as in Mk. 9:3; Mk. 16:5; Jn. 20:12). In the midst of the conversation about His upcoming death (Lk. 9:31), there was the encouragement of what the resurrection glory would be like. The same word is also used about the Lord's current appearance in Heavenly glory with clothes "as white as snow" (Rev. 1:14- the very phrased used in Mk. 9:3). Indeed, the description of the risen Lord in Rev. 1 has many connections with the language used about His appearance at the transfiguration. Again the idea was to show Him how He would be after His glorification, to motivate Him to go through with the *exodus* at the cross which He must fulfil at Jerusalem. "As the light" (Mt.) is hard to understand, but the Codex Bezae reads "as the snow", in line with Mk. 9:3.

Mark adds that the Lord's clothing was "white as snow, such that no fuller on earth can white them". The Hebrew mind would have obviously thought of the clothing of God Himself, the "ancient of days" of Dan. 7:9, which is described likewise. The comment that no *man* could ever make them so white is also a hint in that direction. He was clothed with the clothing of God. This doesn't make Him God, for Revelation has many descriptions of the faithful having the same kind of clothing. Against this background, the promise of Is. 1:18 becomes the more awesome- that even although our sins are red as crimson, yet they can become white as snow. This can only be achieved by the wearing of God's own clothing, the gift of His imputed righteousness, which Paul extensively glories in throughout Romans 1-8. Rev. 7:14 speaks of plunging our robes in the blood of the lamb, and them becoming white. It's all so paradoxical- that this whiteness cannot be achieved by man, no fuller on earth could do this, but by plunging [surely an allusion to baptism] into the red blood of Christ. This is the challenge of faith- to believe that the promised whiteness can be achieved through Christ. It was possible even in Isaiah's time, on the basis that God looked ahead to the work of Christ which as it were enabled Him to do this. Therefore the reference to "no fuller on earth" suggests that there is a fuller in Heaven who can do this. And Mal. 3:2 is specific that the Messiah heralded by the Elijah prophet, John the Baptist, would be like "fuller's soap" in cleansing men through the judgment of their sins. David in the depth of his sin appealed to God to 'full' him ("wash me", but s.w. 'fuller'- Ps. 51:2,7); and this was done for him, on account of the future work of Christ which the Father then held in view. The Lord's glistering garments are therefore available for all of us. And it is with that connection that the scene there becomes no mere spectacle to behold in awe from afar, but a real picture of our own possibility before God.

Luke adds that the disciples "saw his glory" (Lk. 9:32). This is absolutely the language of Moses and the Old Testament heroes seeing Divine glory in theophanies, and like the disciples, hearing God's voice (Ex. 33:18 Heb. – "shew" is the same word translated 'to see'' Isaiah- Jn. 12:41; Ezekiel- Ez. 1:28). Yet again the Lord was seeking to show those secular men that they were called to work on the level of Moses and the prophets in the new Israel which the Lord Jesus was creating out of manual labourers, prostitutes, tax collectors, swindlers and sinners. See on Mt. 17:5 *cloud*.

9:4 *And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus*- It was a "vision" (Mt. 17:9). They appeared "in glory" (Lk. 9:31), as the Lord did- this is clearly a vision of the Kingdom. The Lord Jesus was the firstfruits from the dead, who opened the way to immortality. So there is no way that they were already glorified before His death and resurrection. It was a vision (Mt. 17:9), of the Kingdom. Just as Jesus was not then glorified Himself at that time, neither were they.

They spoke of how the Lord was going to "fulfill" the *exodus* in His death at Jerusalem (Lk. 9:31). It was Moses who could supremely explain this to the Lord, having himself slain the Passover lamb and experienced the *exodus* made possible thereby.

The transfiguration follows straight on from the Lord's talk about the Kingdom at the end of chapter 8. It was a foretaste of the Kingdom. Yet the Kingdom is fundamentally a *relationship* with God. Thus the foretaste of the Kingdom presented at the transfiguration was of faithful men in spiritual conversation with the glorified Lord Jesus, with His face shining as the sun as it will in the Kingdom, as the "sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2).

Luke adds that the disciples' eyes were heavy and they fell asleep at the critical moment. But earlier, "having remained awake", the same disciples were blessed with a vision of the Lord's glory (Lk. 9:32 RVmg.). If they had remained awake in the garden, they would have seen the Lord being glorified by Angelic visitation. But they didn't perceive how the circumstances were repeating, and thus didn't find the strength and inspiration which was potentially prepared for them through the similarity of circumstance.

9:5 *And Peter said to Jesus: Rabbi, it is good that we are here! Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah*- Peter, who appears to be the one behind Mark's gospel, is not emphasizing his own superiority here, but rather commenting upon his own distance from the Lord's spirituality. For he presents his offer to put up a tent as being so inappropriate, now he perceived the glory of God which tabernacled in the flesh of the Lord Jesus.

Throughout the Lord's ministry, Peter had a mental barrier to the idea of his Lord suffering and dying. It could be argued that his desire to build tents and remain in the mountain of transfiguration was rooted in this- Moses and Elijah had just spoken with the Lord Jesus about the path He must take to death, and Peter somehow wants the Lord to stay there in the mountain (Mk. 9:5). And yet Peter's later preaching has so much to say about the Lord's death. And his letters contain quotations and allusions from Isaiah's suffering servant prophecies (1 Pet. 2:21 etc.). Further, if we accept the idea elsewhere discussed that Mark's Gospel is a transcript of Peter's preaching of the Gospel, it becomes significant that Mark's version of the Gospel likewise emphasizes Jesus as the suffering servant. Thus what Peter was once blind to, he made a special point of preaching. The content of his witness reflected his deep awareness of his past blindness- and therefore his appeal to others to 'get it' was the more powerful seeing that he himself had patently 'not got it' for some years. And it shouldn't be hard to translate his example into our daily experience, speaking of our weaknesses and former blindnesses rather than coming over as the self-congratulatory religious guy.

It may have taken much of the day to climb the mountain, and Peter was maybe thinking of where they were going to sleep for the night. Or was did he also have in mind a celebration of the feast of Tabernacles at that time? Later, Peter came to see his death as a taking down of a tent (2 Pet. 1:13), using the same word for the tabernacle he had wanted to build for his Lord at the transfiguration. Then, he had wanted the tent to be set up so that the time of the Lord's departure wouldn't come; so that the Lord would stay with them there, with Moses and Elijah, in what must have seemed like the Kingdom of God. Again, Peter didn't want the cross, neither for his Lord nor for himself. But by the time he wrote 2 Peter, he had learnt his lesson; he saw that his tent must be taken down. The vision of the glory of the Lord Jesus, the words of His coming death and future Kingdom, these were quite enough. There had

been no need of the tent on the mountain, and now he saw there was no need for the tent of his body either. We are all the same. Our death will literally be a death with the Lord, in that our resurrection will be after the pattern of His (Rom. 6:5). Peter learnt this lesson from the transfiguration because he describes his coming death as his *exodus* (2 Pet. 1:15), just as Moses and Elijah had spoken then of the Lord's coming death (Lk. 9:31).

9:6 *For he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid*- It is also possible to understand Peter's suggestion simply as the kind of inappropriate thing a man would say who wants to make a response to spirituality, but doesn't know how to. He wanted to do something material and physical- he simply didn't know what to say. The response was the voice from Heaven telling Peter to *hear* Jesus, to respond to His word, rather than run around doing inappropriate works just because we feel we have to *do* something.

9:7 *And there came a cloud overshadowing them*- Moses had previously entered the cloud of glory, seen God's glory and heard God's voice- on the top of a mountain. Moses' ascent into the mountain and into the very cloud of Divine glory was understood in Judaism as the very zenith of human spiritual achievement of all time, coming so close to the very personal presence of God, never to be repeated amongst men. And now, three fishermen were having the very same experience. No wonder they feared as they themselves entered into that cloud (Lk. 9:34).

And there came a voice out of the cloud: This is My beloved Son. Hear him- This was literally the word of God, and yet it was actually a string of three quotations from God's word in the Old Testament: "You are My Son" (Ps. 2:7), "In whom My soul delights" (Is. 42:1), "Hear Him" (Dt. 18:15). It must have been a profound evidence of the Bible's Divine inspiration. The very voice of God repeating His own words as found in the Law, Psalms and Prophets- the three divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures. "Hear him" was intended to take the mind back to Dt. 18:15, where it was written that Messiah would be 'heard' by the faithful. But Peter fell down paralyzed with fear; he didn't really hear the son of God then. Yet in Acts 3:22, Peter quotes Dt. 18:15 and asks his hearers to obey the passage by hearing Jesus, through his preaching of Him. He was asking his audience to do what he himself hadn't done.

9:8 *And suddenly, looking round about*- "Looking round" is in Matthew "lifting up their eyes". 'Lifted up', *epairo*, is surely intended to resonate with *egeiro* ["arise" / 'get up'] of Mt. 17:7. The picture is given of the Lord bending down and touching them, as if they are children, and urging them to rise up. Instead, they just raise up their eyes, and see only Jesus. We really are invited to play 'Bible television' here. The scene is so imaginable. And again, the Gospel writers and speakers were emphasizing the weakness of even the three leading disciples. Peter spoke inappropriately, offering to make booths when instead God wanted him to 'hear' His Son; their fear is likened to the fear of unspiritual Israel at the theophany on Sinai; they are scared to get up in obedience to Jesus' touch, raising their large childlike eyes to Him instead… Indeed the record of the transfiguration really stresses the disciples' weakness, exhibited in the face of the Kingdom glory of their Lord and the earnest encouragement of Him by more spiritual men to go through with the cross- whilst they slept.

They no longer saw anyone with them, except Jesus- In the Greek as well as in translation, this is really labouring the point. The "save / only", *monos*, is redundant- they saw 'nobody except Jesus' is a statement which needs no further qualification, indeed grammatically it almost *cannot* be given further qualification, and reads awkwardly because of the *monos*, "only", that is added. But the word "only" is added

to emphasize that their focus was solely upon Him. That was the purpose of the event, and it had been achieved. Christ centeredness is the ultimate, final and total issue of our experience of Him, the Law and the prophets. The transfiguration ends with this total focus *monos* upon Christ; this was the practical effect of the theophany. John's Gospel doesn't record the transfiguration, but as so often, it is indeed alluded to. For John's Gospel is full of references to seeing glory, to hearing the Son. It's as if John presents Jesus to us a constant theophany, not one that three of the best disciples go up a mountain to see for a short period, but one which is continually before each of us, and which according to Paul's allusions to it, draws us into its very process. For we too are transfigured as we like the disciples behold the Lord's transfiguration (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18 s.w.).

9:9 *And as they came down from the mountain, he ordered them that they should tell no one about the things they had seen, until the Son of Man should have risen from the dead*- The things "seen" are called a "vision" in Mt. 17:9. Whilst this literally means 'the thing seen', the transfiguration was indeed a vision. Seeing that Christ is the firstfruits from the dead and that there is no conscious survival of death, it follows that at best Moses and Elijah were resurrected especially for the occasion. But they "appeared in glory" (Lk. 9:31), as if they were in the Kingdom. The Greek translated "appeared" has the strong sense of 'being seen / observed'. This is how they were seen- another hint at a vision. When the event finished, Lk. 9:36 says that Jesus was "found alone"- but that is a poor translation of *heurisko*. He was seen, perceived alone- again hinting that the entire experience was a vision rather than occurring in reality. The way that "Suddenly, when they had looked round about" they saw only Jesus, finding Moses and Elijah had disappeared (Mk. 9:8) would also hint at a visionary experience. Note that there is no suggestion that Moses and Elijah went off anywhere, let alone 'returned' to Heaven. The vision of them simply abruptly ended. They saw nobody "except Jesus only with themselves" or "they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus" (Mk. 9:8) would suggest that they were as it were looking at themselves from outside of themselves- again, ideas appropriate to a visionary experience rather than an actual personal encounter. And this is how the incident with Moses and Elijah began, for "there *appeared unto them* Moses and Elijah talking with Him". It was an appearance *unto them*, a vision which ended when they saw themselves from outside themselves and realized they were actually alone with Jesus. The language of 'appearance' used throughout the records of the transfiguration would also suggest that the incident with Moses and Elijah was an appearance *to them*, in their eyes and perception, rather than necessarily in reality.

"To no one" maybe connects with the fact that they saw "no man" except Jesus (:8); and so they are asked to tell the vision to "no man" until after the Lord's resurrection. It could be that the Lord wanted them to retain their focus upon Him by not telling others but instead meditating personally upon what they had seen. The vision had been of the Lord's resurrection glory- we noted above the similarities in language to the shining garments of the Angels at the resurrection scene. The Lord didn't want people to think that He had already attained that glory without the cross. Even though in prospect He had that glory, He was insistent that no impression be given that He could attain it without passing through the cross. This was particularly important for Peter to appreciate, who several times entertained a hope that glory was possible for the Lord without the cross.

The Synoptics each record the transfiguration. But did John? He saw it, and here he was commanded to tell it to others after the resurrection. It would be almost

impossible for his Gospel record to not mention it. I have suggested that he actually begins his Gospel with the recollection of how he had seen the Lord's glory at the transfiguration (Jn. 1:14 "we beheld His glory"), and that the whole Gospel presents Jesus in "glory" and being "beheld" or 'seen' in that glory.

9:10 *So they kept these words to themselves, questioning what the rising from the dead meant*- As noted on :1, Peter is again bringing out his own slowness to understand the Lord's most obvious teaching about His death; and on that basis, appeals to his audience to do better than him, and comprehend and respond far quicker than he had. This comment indicates how secular they were; for the idea of bodily resurrection was well known within Judaism- the Pharisees believed that the dead would rise, although the Sadducees denied it. But the disciples were clearly unfamiliar with the idea, because they simply hadn't been seriously religious people. The word for 'questioning' is used 10 times in the NT and always in a negative sense, mainly of the unbelieving Jews questioning the things of Christ. Thus it is used twice later in Mk. 9 (Mk. 9:14,16) about the Jews questioning about Jesus. Such questioning is so often an excuse for lack of faith, pressing for over-definition of everything as an excuse for disbelief. Instead of focusing on the glory of Jesus, they got distracted (willfully) by semantics, words and meanings.

Their question provides another insight into the shallowness of their understanding. The transfiguration had persuaded them, at least for the moment, that Jesus was Messiah. But they were confused as to why the Elijah prophet hadn't come first. John the Baptist, whom they had followed and believed, had clearly cast himself in the role of Elijah. But it seems that they hadn't really grasped the significance of John's ministry at all.

9:11 *And they asked him: Why do the scribes say that Elijah must first come?*- The disciples were evidently still under the influence of Judaism and the religious world around them, and this background died hard for them. "Why say the scribes…?", they reasoned (Mk. 9:11), implying that their view was of at least equal if not greater weight when compared with that of the Lord Jesus [as they also did in Mt. 17:9,10]. He had to specifically warn them against the Scribes in Lk. 20:45,46; He had to specifically tell them not to address the Rabbis as 'father' (Mt. 23:8,9), implying they had too much respect for them. The way the disciples speak of the Scribes as if they have such a valid theological position reflects their upbringing and respect for the ruling elite of the synagogue (Mt. 17:10), with whom the Lord was at such total variance. They were concerned that the Pharisees had been offended by the Lord's words (Mt. 15:12). We again see here how the disciples were out of step with the Lord's thinking, pursuing their own mental agenda, and not doing that they had just been told- to 'hear Him'. For the Lord has just told them very seriously ("charged them") to not say anything about this experience until He was resurrected. But instead they are grappling with another issue- if this Jesus was really Messiah, well why hadn't Elijah come first, as the Scribes taught? Clearly we see them pursuing a line of thought which precluded their attention to what the Lord was so earnestly seeking to tell them.

9:12 *And he said to them: Elijah indeed comes first*- There can be no doubt that 'Elijah' will come in some form: "I will send you Elijah the prophet before the *coming* of the great and dreadful day of the Lord... lest I *come* and smite the earth" (Malachi 4:5,6). The coming of the Lord must therefore be preceded by Elijah's work. His mission will be to direct Israel's attention to God's Word, "lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Malachi 4:4,6). This was evidently not totally fulfilled by John the Baptist, seeing that the land was smitten after A.D. 70 due to Israel's failure

to repent. "Lest I come..." is clearly referring to God's manifestation in Christ's second coming - it is associated with the arising of "the sun of righteousness" (Malachi 4:2,6). Whilst John fulfilled the role of the Elijah prophet to those who truly repented (Mt. 11:14), he emphatically denied that he was 'Elijah' (John 1:21,23). This can only mean that the Elijah prophet is yet to come. Our Lord silences all doubt about this: "Elijah truly shall first come, and restore all things". Elijah's work will be to turn the hearts of Israel back to the patriarchs in repentance (Malachi 4:6 cp. 1 Kings 18:37), so that Christ comes to an Israel who have turned away from unGodliness (Is. 59:20). John being a mini-Elijah prophet, it is to be expected that the broad features of his ministry will be repeated in the work of the final Elijah prophet. John was called "the Baptist", so evident was his emphasis on water baptism. Indeed, the name 'John' and the image of water baptism are hard to separate. There is fair reason to think that 'Elijah' will also literally baptize. "That (Christ) should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water" (Jn. 1:31) seems to make baptism a pre-requisite for accepting Christ. Indeed, Jewish theology expects baptism to be associated with the coming of Messiah and the Elijah prophet. Therefore the Jews asked John: "Why do you baptize then, if you are not that Christ, nor Elijah?" (Jn. 1:25).

And restores all things- The restoration of the Kingdom is ultimately Messiah's work (Acts 1:9-11). The restoring referred to here would therefore mean spiritual restoration. Mark's account of John's activities clearly alludes to the Malachi passages about the Elijah prophet, and the descriptions of Elijah's clothing, appearance and diet are clearly intended to help us identify him with a prophet like Elijah. The LXX in Mal. 4:5 speaks of how the prophet will *restore* the hearts of the fathers to the children. This confirms that the restoration to be achieved by the Elijah prophet is largely spiritual, psychological and internal. The more physical restoration of the Kingdom on earth is Messiah's work. But the Lord is placing Elijah's work in the future- because Israel had failed to respond to it. And yet what are we to make of the repeated descriptions in the Gospels of "all" Israel going out to John and repenting? My suggestion is that they were eager for a Messiah to come and save them from the Romans; John appeared looking like and alluding to Elijah, and so they were eager to accept him as an Elijah prophet, knowing that this heralded Messiah. They 'repented' because there was a clear connection made in Judaism between Jewish repentance, and the Elijah prophet and Messiah's coming. Thus: "Israel will fulfil the great repentance when the Elijah of blessed memory comes" (Pirqe R. Eliezer 43 [25a]); and many other examples are quoted by Walter Wink (*John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (Cambridge: C.U.P. 2006) p. 3). The Qumran documents even claim that the faithful would go out into the wilderness to the Elijah prophet and separate themselves from the unholy in Israel (1 QS 8:12-16) (More examples are given in Carl Kazmierski, *John the Baptist: Prophet and Evangelist* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999) p. 26). Hence the intended sarcasm of the idea that in fact "all" Israel went out to the wilderness to John! Therefore their repentance was as it were self-induced and merely symbolic, because they believed it was part of a sequence of events which would lead to Messiah's coming and liberation from Rome. This would be a classic example of surface level spirituality and response to God's word, when in fact the response was motivated by selfish and unspiritual motives. No wonder John appealed to them to *really* repent. The Lord says that Elijah comes "first", *proton*, above all, most importantly, to achieve this restoration- the implication being that the fact John's ministry had failed to bring "all" Israel to this position, meant that there must therefore be another Elijah ministry

which would succeed before Messiah could come in glory. And this would indeed "restore" the *hearts* of Israel, as Mal. 4:5 LXX requires.

And how is it written of the Son of Man, that he should suffer many things and be set at nothing?- Significantly, the same Greek word is used in Lk. 23:11 to describe how Herod "set at nought" Jesus at His trial; and it was the same Herod who had John the Baptist murdered.

9:13 *But I say to you, that Elijah came, and they have also done to him whatever they wanted, even as it is written of him*- The Lord accused the Jews of rejecting John the Baptist (Mt. 17:12; Lk. 7:32–35), and on other occasions He commented on the fact that they had accepted his teaching, with the result that spiritually their house was swept and garnished (Mt. 12:44; Jn. 5:35). We can conclude from this that their *appearance* of accepting John's message was spoken of by Jesus as if they had accepted it. Likewise Christ called the Jews both children of hell (Mt. 23:15) and children of the Kingdom (Mt. 8:12); the latter was how they perceived themselves. The things "done" to John surely include his death for the Lord goes on to say that He will "likewise suffer of them", "of this generation" (Lk. 17:25). But it was the despised Herod who had John murdered. And yet Jesus here says that that generation had done that to John- despite the fact that he remained, it seems, immensely popular amongst that generation. Again the Lord is stressing that all the apparent response to John had not been sincere- the Jews who had seemingly responded to him were in fact as bad as apostate Herod and it was effectively *they* who had killed him. Naturally such language begged the response that no, it was Herod and his courtiers who killed John, not the mass of people. But the Lord is saying that effectively, it was that generation who had locked John up and killed him.

His question (as it is framed in Matthew) was (as so often with Him) in answer and response to their unexpressed question- that surely Elijah is to have a successful ministry and then the Messiah would begin His Kingdom in glory. The Lord was asking them the question about the prophesied sufferings and rejection of Messiah in order to answer the question He could see in their minds. So often "He answered and said…" something, when no question was verbalized. But He perceived the question in the minds of His audience, such was His sensitivity. Only a week or so ago He had told them how messiah must "suffer many things" (Mt. 16:21) and now he uses the same phrase again- although it seems they had forgotten or not appreciated what He had then told them.

Mk. 9:12 adds to Matthew by adding: "As it is written of him". There seems no specific prophecy stating that the Elijah prophet would be unsuccessful, unless one really reads between the lines of Malachi's prophecy about the Elijah prophet. More likely is that the "him" refers to the historical Elijah. All that was written of *him* had come true of John the Baptist, in that the alliance between Ahab and the manipulative Jezebel which led to Elijah's persecution was mirrored in that between Herod and the equally manipulative Herodias, which led to John's demise.

9:14 *And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd about them, and scribes arguing with them*- This meeting with the crowd occurred the day after the transfiguration (Lk. 9:37)- presumably they slept up the mountain for the night. The transfiguration record is replete with references to the theophany on Sinai. Moses' return from the mount was to a faithless people of God, and the same is found here, in that the disciples had been unable to perform a healing which they had potentially been given the power to do.

Note how the three accounts dovetail so nicely: Jesus and the three with Him moved towards the crowd (Mt.), Jesus having noticed them from a distance (Mk.),

and the crowd came towards them (Lk.). And as Jesus came (*erchomai*) towards the crowd, there came out of the crowd towards Him (*pros-erchomai*) the man who wanted a healing for his son (Mt.). Mark records that the people ran towards Jesus when they saw Him (Mk. 9:15- presumably His face was shining after the encounter, after the pattern of Moses), which explains why Luke says that the man had to 'cry out' from out of the crowd (Lk. 9:38- Gk. 'to holler', to get attention amidst the rush of all the others towards Jesus) and that Jesus firstly asked the Scribes what they were questioning His disciples about. We really can powerfully reconstruct the scene by putting the three different viewpoints together. Matthew focuses upon the man who came to Jesus wanting healing for his son. The best analogy is to cameramen. Matthew focuses close up upon one man; Mark is taking a broader view of the crowd as a whole, and therefore picks up the brief question to the Scribes first of all- they made no answer that is recorded, and the Lord's answer to whatever questions they were asking was given in the healing miracle. That there are no actual contradictions of fact or chronology is to me a profound internal evidence of an inspired record, with a common Divine hand behind all the authors. If these were three uninspired men writing their recollections some time after the event, or uninspired people writing down what had been passed down to them as originating with those men, then for sure there would be contradictions. Because misremembering of detail is just part of our human condition, and the supposed lengthy process of oral tradition would inevitably have meant there was further corruption and unclarity added. The lack of contradiction in the accounts and the way they complement each other so perfectly has to me the hallmark of the Divine. Even witnesses who agree together to lie in court and rehearse their stories many times over- still end up contradicting each other. But that is not the case with the Gospels.

9:15 *And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed; and running to him saluted him*- They ran up to Him- and He had Peter, James and John with Him. Perhaps His face was shining with the glory He had been exposed to, as the face of Moses did. It is therefore commendable that the people ran to Him rather than shying away from Him as they did from Moses when His face shone, and as the soldiers did when His face likewise shone at His arrest in Gethsemane. This sentence in Greek is intentionally similar to the account of Acts 3:11, where again "All the people [cp. "all the crowd"] ran [s.w. "running to Him"] together unto them… greatly wondering [s.w. "greatly amazed"]. The response of the crowd to Peter and John in Acts 3:11 could not possibly have been contrived by them. Their experience at the return from the transfiguration was to prepare them for their own later witness, when without the physical presence of Jesus, they were Him to the world. And the same kind of carefully, sensitively planned education of us is ongoing now. Not only do situations occur and then repeat in essence later in our lives, but what we go through in this life will only have understood meaning in the Kingdom, when we shall put into eternal practice what we are learning now. But for now, there is an inevitable difficulty in attaching meaning to event, because we cannot foresee the billion situations in our eternities where we will put into practice what we are now learning.

9:16 *And he asked them: What are you arguing about with them?*- The Lord knew, but He wanted to highlight the inappropriacy of any arguments when in the presence of the Father's glory reflected in His Son. And we can take that lesson. The Greek for "arguing" occurs ten times in the New Testament, nearly always in the context of argument with the Jews. All such legalistic argument ought to fade away in the context of the Lord's glory and the certain hope of the Kingdom, of which the

transfiguration had spoken- with the intimation of present transformation towards that end right now.

9:17 *And one of the crowd answered him: Teacher, I brought to you my son, who has a dumb spirit*- When the father of the dumb child brought him to *the disciples*, he tells Jesus that "I brought to *you* my son", but the disciples couldn't cure him; he perceived Jesus as His followers, just as folk do today. The Lord had earlier given them power over "unclean spirits" (Mt. 10:8)- but still they couldn't heal him. The power given to them was therefore potential power, but it was no guarantee that they would actually do the works. Alternatively, we could conclude that that power was only given to them temporarily. Or, that there is a difference between the twelve, and the more general "disciples" / followers of Jesus. However it would have been strange indeed if the man had not brought his son to the group of the twelve in the hope of healing. And it is the disciples, presumably the twelve, who then come to the Lord and ask why they could not perform the cure (:28).

9:18 *And wherever it takes him, it dashes him down and he foams and grinds his teeth and pines away*- Descriptions of the rejected as gnashing teeth, cast into fire and water, wallowing helpless... is all the language of the demoniac (Mk. 9:18-22). The child was obsessed with fear of condemnation, just as we noted Legion had been. His problem was therefore psychologically rooted, and the language of demons is simply the language of the day to describe his actions and their apparent cure. This connection shows at least two things: that there will be a madness in the rejected, the tragic aimlessness of the demented. And secondly, that because the demoniac was cured, it is possible for a man whose behaviour leads to his condemnation *now* to still repent, before it's too late. And yet although the rejected may appear demented, they may well not feel like this. They will gnash their teeth with anger, not least against themselves. Being cast into fire or water (Mt.) were both figures of condemnation. The young man felt he was worthy of condemnation- hence conviction of the Lord's saving mercy would have been enough to cure him of the deep sense of unworthiness which he had.

And I spoke to your disciples that they should cast it out, and they were not able- They had no *dunamai* (possibility), in Matthew's record; Mk. 9:18 uses a different word- according to Mark, the man said that they "could not" using *ischuo* (more carrying the sense of physical power). The man therefore bewailed at least twice that the disciples couldn't help; and he asks the Lord Jesus to help "if You can" (Mk. 9:22- *dunamai*). They did have the possibility; but they lacked the faith to actualize it (Mt. 10:8; Lk. 10:19,20 "I give unto you power… over all the power of the enemy… the spirits are subject unto you"). We too have been given potentials which require faith to exploit, and our failures to do so leave people with the impression that the Lord Himself is limited- for, like the disciples, we are His representatives in this world, and people coming to us are effectively coming to Him.

9:19 *And he answered them saying: O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I tolerate you?*- As noted on :17, the "faithless" here were the disciples, not the man; for he had some measure of faith. The disciples were at this point caught up in the faithless spirit of their generation, the world around them; just as we can be. When the Lord returned from the Mount of Transfiguration, He found that the disciples had failed to do a cure because of their lack of faith. He describes them as [part of] a "faithless generation" again indicating how the disciples were all too influenced by Judaism, the "generation" or world around them. The disciples and

Judaism / the Jewish world are paralleled in Jn. 7:3,4: “Let your disciples see your work… show yourself to the world”.

An example of the Lord’s perhaps unconscious usage of His Father’s words is to be found in this exasperated comment. Of course the Lord would have spoken those words and expressed those ideas in Aramaic- but the similarity is striking with His Father’s Hebrew words of Num. 14:27: “How long shall I bear with this evil congregation…?”. As a son comes out with phrases and word usages which ‘Could be his father speaking!’, so the Lord Jesus did the same thing. What I am saying is that the Lord was not merely quoting or alluding to the Father’s Old Testament words, in the way that, say, Paul or Peter did. As the Father’s Son, He was speaking in the same way as His Father, no doubt saturated with the written record of the Father’s words, but all the same, there were those similarities of wording and underlying thinking which are only seen between fathers and sons. And His words of Mt. 17:17 = Num. 14:27 seem to me to be an example of this. It was the disciples who were faithless. In Matthew chapters 12 and 13, the Lord had drawn a clear difference between the disciples, and the unbelieving surrounding generation. It seems that He now despaired of whether that distinction was valid; He sees them, in the heat of that moment of bitter disappointment, as no better than the masses who did not believe. The "faithless" will be condemned (Lk. 12:46 "his portion with the unbelievers", s.w.), and this is the term used about the world generally (1 Cor. 6:6; 7:12); or as the Lord puts it, this "generation". And yet the Lord uses it here about the disciples and again in Jn. 20:27. The very phrase "perverse generation" is used by Paul about the unbelieving world (Phil. 2:15). To use this term about the disciples is therefore significant; the Lord really felt that His faith and hope that they were different from the Jewish world had been misplaced. After His encounter with Elijah and Moses, he doubtless expected more of God's people.

This fits in with a Biblical theme- of people being confronted with acute spiritual temptation immediately after a highly spiritual experience. And this is true to life- so often, merely hours after a highly intense spiritual experience [e.g. at a breaking of bread meeting] we find ourselves assailed by temptation and spiritual depression. It's not that we are encountered by a physical person called 'Satan' immediately after our spiritual 'high'; rather it is a feature of human nature that the closer we come to God, the stronger is the tidal backwash of *internal* temptation immediately afterwards. Consider some examples:

- Noah walks off the ark, a superb triumph of faith, into a cleansed and pristine world, with the rainbow arch of God's grace above him- and gets dead drunk (Gen. 9:21-24).
- Moses renounced greatness, stood up for God's people and then left Egypt by faith, "not fearing the wrath of the king" (Heb. 11:27); and yet ended up fleeing in fear from Pharaoh (Ex. 2:14,15).
- Moses returned from the awesome meeting with God on Sinai and gave in to a flash of anger, during which he smashed the tables of the covenant- a covenant which had also been made with him personally.
- Israel were ecstatic with joy and confidence in God as they stood on the other side of the Red Sea- but very soon afterwards they were giving in to temptation in the wilderness, accusing God of intending to kill them and being careless for them.
- Judas went from the spiritual height of being present at the first "breaking of bread" meeting with the Lord Jesus, just prior to His death, directly into temptation from "the Devil" and then went out into the darkness of that night (Lk. 22:3).
- Soon after his spiritual triumph on Carmel, Elijah is to be found suicidal and bitter

with God, and considering that the other faithful in Israel are in fact also apostate (1 Kings 19:4-11).
- Samson's life was full of giving in to spiritual temptation immediately after he had been empowered by God to do some great miracle.
- Immediately after having been saved by God's grace from a huge invasion (2 Sam. 11), David sins with Bathsheba and murders Uriah (2 Sam. 12).
- After the wonder of having a terminal illness delayed by 15 years in response to prayer, Hezekiah gives in to the temptation to be proud and selfish in the events of Is. 39.
- Soon after the wonder of the miracles of the loaves and fishes, the disciples hardened their heart to it and accused Jesus of not caring for them (Mk. 4:38; 6:52).
- Paul straight after his wonderful vision of "the third heaven" finds himself struggling with a "thorn in the flesh", a term I have elsewhere suggested may refer to a spiritual weakness or temptation (2 Cor. 12:7).
- After the wonder of baptism and the confirming voice from Heaven, Jesus was immediately assaulted by major temptation in the wilderness.

This is surely the most graphic and intense expression of frustration in the entire recorded history of the Lord Jesus. His frustration was with how His disciples were not living up to their potential, and how faithless they were. And we daily exhibit the same terribly disappointing characteristics. But *how long* may not necessarily be a cry of exasperation- although it could be that. There can also be the sense of 'Until when?', and the time in view was the Lord's death. John's Gospel records the Lord several times speaking of how His hour or time had not yet come, and how He agonized until it did. That end point was clearly the moment when He cried from the cross "It is finished".

Bring him to me- The man had brought [s.w. "bring"] his son to the disciples, they couldn't heal him, and so the Lord asks for the child to be brought to Him personally. And yet He had taught that in their witness, the disciples were Him to this world. Coming to them was coming to Him. But He despaired that in this case, there was now a difference between them and Him. They were unable to manifest Him as they should because of their lack of faith. And there are times when our status as 'brethren in Christ' likewise fails, and we fail to be Him to this world and He has to intervene and reveal Himself more directly to men.

Mk. 9:19 records how He asked for the son to be brought *pros* Me, literally, 'here with Me'; but this is the same term used in the Lord's lament: "How long shall I be with [*pros*] you?". The Lord's physical presence was required for this miracle- the son must be "here" (Mt.), "with Me" (Mk.). But the Lord was making the point that He would not always be literally with them, and then such cures would have to be done by the disciples without His physical presence. And it seems He despaired as to whether they were ready for this.

9:20 *And they brought him to him, and when he saw him, immediately the spirit tore at him grievously and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth*- As noted on :18, the young man was obsessed with fear of condemnation. When he realized he was in the presence of the Lord, his condition therefore worsened considerably; he felt he really had arrived at judgment day, and wanted to destroy himself. Again we note that the underlying problem with him was psychological and spiritual, rather than being literally attacked by a demon.

9:21 *And he asked his father: How long has this been happening to him? And he said: From a child*- See on Mt. 20:32. This question was perhaps to provoke the man

to remember back through those difficult and tragic years, in order to elicit stronger faith and desire from him.

9:22 *And often it has cast him both into the fire and into the waters to destroy him; but if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us*- Descriptions of the rejected as gnashing teeth, cast into fire and water, wallowing helpless... is all the language of the demoniac (Mk. 9:18-22). This connection shows at least two things: that there will be a madness in the rejected, the tragic aimlessness of the demented. And secondly, that because the demoniac was cured, it is possible for a man whose behaviour leads to his condemnation *now* to still repent, before it's too late. And yet although the rejected may appear demented, they may well not feel like this. They will gnash their teeth with anger, not least against themselves.

9:23 *And Jesus said to him: Rather, if you can! All things are possible to him that believes*- The father of the child was asked whether he could believe [i.e., that Jesus could cast out the demon]. The man replied that yes, although his faith was weak, he believed [that Jesus could cast out the demon]. His faith was focused on by Jesus, rather than his wrong beliefs. Faith above all was what the Lord was focusing on *in the first instance*. We frequently commit the horror of limiting God in our attitude to prayer. All too often we see ourselves in the man who believed and yet still had unbelief: "If thou (Jesus) canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible" (Mk. 9:22,23 AV). The man thought that Christ's power to help was limited: 'If you can do anything to help, well, please do'. The Lord Jesus turned things right round: 'If you can believe, anything's possible' - in other words, God can do anything, but His ability to directly respond to some particular need is limited by our faith, not by any intrinsic lack of ability within Himself. The man hadn't thought about this. He saw God as sometimes able to help a bit; Christ turned the man's words round to show that God's power is infinite, limited only by our faith. The same message is taught by putting together the fact that with God nothing is impossible (Lk. 1:37), and the fact that nothing is impossible *unto us* (Mt. 17:20). God's possibility is our possibility; and this is what the Lord was teaching the man who thought that it all depended upon the Lord's possibility alone. There are other instances where the extent and nature of the Lord's healing seems to have been limited by the faith of the recipient (Mt. 8:13 "as...so"; 9:29 "according to" ; 12:22 "inasmuch").

The word "believe" is omitted from many texts and from the NEV. Thus we could paraphrase: "Regarding that " If you can..." which you said- as regards that, well, all things are possible". This is the view of F.B. Meyer and Marvin Vincent. The RV reads: "And Jesus said unto him, If thou canst! All things are possible to him that believeth".

It is clear enough that God at times limits His power. He *could* save everybody, indeed He wishes to do this, yet He allows human freewill to be genuine and meaningful, to the extent that not all will be saved. Israel in the wilderness "limited the Holy One of Israel". He was left by Israel as a mighty man powerless to save. The Greek word *dunatos* translated 16 times "mighty" is also 13 times translated "possible". God's might is His possibility. But our freewill can limit that might. All things are possible to God, and therefore all things are possible to the believer- but if the believer has no faith, then, those possibilities of God will not occur (Lk. 1:49; Mk. 9:23; 10:27). And so I have no problem with a God who limits His omniscience.

9:24 *Immediately the father of the child cried out, and said: I believe! Help my disbelief!*- See on Lk. 1:13. It is a feature of our nature that we can believe and yet disbelieve at the same time. The father of the epileptic boy is the clearest example. He had asked: "help us" (:22), i.e. 'cure the child'. But he understood that this "help" depended partly upon his faith; he believed, as we should, that the faith of third parties can radically affect others (see on 2:5). And yet he realized that his faith was weak, and he asked the Lord to "help" that faith to be stronger than the native "unbelief" which is part of the human condition. Even faith itself can be "helped". We are not left unaided in climbing the mountain of belief. Faith in that sense is partially a gift from the Lord through the gift of His Spirit (Eph. 2:8; 2 Thess. 3:2). The Lord can succour [s.w. "help"] (Heb. 2:18), through the gift of His Spirit.

9:25 *And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it: You dumb and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter no more into him*- There are a number of parallels between the language used of 'casting out' demons, and that used about healings. Jesus "rebuked" demons in Mk. 9:25, and yet He "rebuked" a fever (Lk. 4:39) and the wind (Mt. 8:26). Demons are spoken of as having "departed" (Mt. 17:18), yet we read of leprosy 'departing' (Mk. 1:42) and diseases 'departing' after cure (Acts 19:12). I'd go so far as to say that every case of a person being spoken of as demon possessed has its equivalent in diseases which we can identify today– e.g. epilepsy, schizophrenia.

The peoples of the first century, and their predecessors, believed that demons and the Satan monster were somehow associated with water- that was why, they figured, the water mysteriously kept moving, and at times blew up into storms. When we read of God 'rebuking' the waters and making them calm or do what He wished (Ps. 18:16; 104:7; 106:9), we're effectively being told that Yahweh of Israel is so infinitely superior to those supposed demons and sea monsters that for God's people, they have no effective existence. The Lord Jesus taught the same lesson when He 'rebuked' the sea and wind during the storm on the lake (Mt. 8:26). The same Greek word is used to described how He 'rebuked' demons (Mt. 17:18 etc.). I have no doubt that the Lord Jesus didn't believe there was a Loch Ness-type monster lurking in Galilee which He had to rebuke in order to save the disciples from the storm; and likewise He spoke of 'rebuking' demons as a similar way of teaching others that *whatever* ideas they had about demons, He was greater and was in a position to 'rebuke' them. Likewise He assured His men that they had the power to tread on snakes, scorpions, and all their enemies (Lk. 10:17-20). The image of a victorious god trampling his foes and snakes underfoot was well established in the surrounding cultures, and had entered Judaism. The Lord is teaching those fearful men that OK, if that's your perception of things, well, in your terms, you have ultimate victory through working 'in My name'. It must be noted that the man had previously described the boy's condition as being due to how "A spirit seizes him… and it *departs* from him with great difficulty" (Lk. 9:39). The condition was intermittent (consistent with viewing the condition as epilepsy rather than actual, literal manipulation by a spirit or demon). Trying various remedies, probably including beating him, the condition 'departed'. The Lord's cure is described in the same terms, with the implication that it was total and permanent, rather than partial and temporary, as their 'healings' were. The Lord said that the 'spirit' would never again enter the boy (Mk. 9:25).

9:26 *And having cried out and torn him much, it came out; and the boy became as one dead. So much so that the many said: He is dead*- I suggested on :18 and :20

that the young man was obsessed with fear of condemnation at the last day. He now is as it were dead. He goes very still. He feels as if he has died. An then the Lord as it were resurrects him (:27). The whole essence of baptism was being lived out in him at this moment; he was dying to sin, taking its condemnation; and then arising with the Lord Jesus to new life.

9:27 *But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him up, and he arose*- See on :26. This is exactly what He had done to the terrified disciples on the mount of transfiguration (Mt. 17:7 s.w.). By doing so, it was made apparent that the disciples (even the three best of them) needed healing themselves rather than being in a position to perform the miracles, as the Lord had hoped they could; and as indeed they could.

9:28 *And when he had come into the house, his disciples privately asked him: Why could we not cast it out?*- They were surprised at their inability, which suggests they had performed such cures before and had faith that they could do miracles. The Lord's explanation in the next verse (in Matthew's record) that they had no faith ("unbelief", *a-pisteo*, no faith) would therefore have been hard for them to initially accept. His idea was that we either believe or do not believe, and often what seems to us as faith, even if it is admittedly small faith, is ultimately not faith. John's Gospel even more clearly presents faith as something one either has or doesn't have. And yet in reality there are gradations of faith, and the Bible recognizes this. The Lord's next comment [in Matthew] that "*If* you [really, as you think] have faith as a grain of mustard seed..." was therefore speaking to their assumption that although their faith was small, they did actually believe. Again we see how the Lord sees to the inner, unexpressed thoughts and positions of His audiences, and addresses them. This presentation of faith as an absolute, a black or white position (and John's Gospel stresses this even more), is a huge challenge to examine our faith.

9:29 *And he said to them: This kind*- This kind of demon? In this case, the Lord is again using their wrong ideas (in this case, about some demons being stronger than others) without really believing them, talking to them in terms which they understood.

Can come out by nothing except by prayer and fasting- They tried to do miracles without even praying about it. Only intense prayer could send forth this kind of answer from God; He does not act on emotional grounds, just because He feels sorry for somebody. It needs to be noted that initially the man's child was not cured because the disciples didn't have the faith to do it. This teaches that God's activity for others is partly dependent on the prayers of a third party and the extent of their faith- both that of the man, and of the disciples.

The Lord wasn't naive, although He was so positive. He told the disciples quite frankly here that they were full of "unbelief", and couldn't do miracles which He expected them to because they didn't pray and fast (Mt. 17:19-21). And yet when quizzed by the Pharisees as to why His disciples didn't fast, He said it was because they were so happy to be with Him, the bridegroom (Mt. 9:15). Here surely He was seeing the best in them. They come over as confused, mixed up men who wanted the Kingdom there and then and were frustrated at the Lord's inaction in establishing it. But He saw that they recognized Him as the bridegroom, as Messiah, and He exalted in this, and saw their lack of fasting as partly due to the deep-down joy which He knew they had. Perhaps they tried to do this miracle without even praying about it. Or maybe they prayed only on a surface level, and it was not counted as real prayer. Only intense prayer could send forth this kind of answer from God; He does not act on emotional grounds, just because He feels sorry for somebody. It needs to be noted that initially the man's child was not cured because the disciples didn't have the faith to do

it. This teaches that God's activity for others is partly dependent on the prayers of a third party. These words are applied to us all in 1 Cor. 7:5, the only other place in the NT where they occur together; we are to give ourselves to prayer and fasting in domestic married life with the passion and intensity required to perform a miracle.

9:30 *And they went from there and passed through Galilee; and he did not want anyone to know it*- See on Mt. 27:26; Lk. 9:44. He earnestly wanted time alone with the disciples in order to explain His death to them. This is why when He saw a crowd gathering, He quickly cured the child in order to stop further distraction (:25). We sense throughout the Gospels the Lord's dislike of crowds and His desire to privately teach those who wished to be close to Him; and how the essential burden of His message was of the need to share in His death, rather than getting cures and seeing miracles.

The note that He reminded them about His passion whilst they were still in Galilee is another hint at the Lord's structured approach to training the twelve. Before they went back to Jerusalem, He wanted them to be aware well ahead of time that He was going to His death. Mark adds that He didn't want people to know of His presence because He was teaching the disciples about His death. Once again we encounter the theme of the Lord intensely focusing upon His disciples rather than upon the masses of Israel. It could be argued that He could have healed far more people had He not had this policy; but His long term intention was to create a solid body of followers who would bring His message to the world after His death. And we must likewise achieve a balance between good deeds for the world, and the need for strengthening the body of believers.

9:31 *For he taught his disciples, and said to them: The Son of Man is delivered up into the hands of men*- Matthew uses the present tense- He *is* betrayed / delivered [s.w.]. The Lord likely said both- He shall be betrayed, [in fact] He is being betrayed / delivered. His sufferings were ongoing, His crucifixion sufferings were a seamless continuance of His whole way of life and being during His ministry. This is the sense recorded in John, of "the time comes but now is" (Jn. 4:23; 16:32). He knew that the essence of the delivering over to the Jews / Romans was happening right then, although the final delivering / handing over was when in Gethsemane He said that "the hour is come… the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners" (Mk. 14:41). The word for 'betrayed' means literally to be handed over or delivered, and so the Lord's statement wouldn't have necessarily implied to them that there was to be a betrayal from amongst their own number.

And they shall kill him, and when he is killed, after three days he shall rise again- Clearly the rising again was at a specific moment, "the third day". This is proof enough that the Bible intends us to see the Lord's rising again as bodily resurrection and not some spiritual reincarnation over a period of time.

9:32 *But they did not understand the saying and were afraid to ask him*- Luke notes that the saying about the cross was "hidden" from them (Lk. 9:45), in confirmation of their own refusal to understand it because it demanded that they too suffer with their Lord. And yet in prayer to the Father, He rejoices that these things are not hidden from them (Lk. 10:21,23). This gives insight into the Lord's present mediation for us in prayer- speaking of us as far better than we are. The message of Christ crucified was "hid" from them (Lk. 9:45; 18:34)- and Paul surely alludes to this when he says that this message is hid by the veil of Judaism from those who are lost (2 Cor. 4:3). Luke adds that straight afterwards, "there arose a dispute among them, which of them was the greatest" (Lk. 9:46). Time and again we see this in the Gospels- when the

Lord speaks of His upcoming death, the disciples change the subject. This explains our own problem with mind wandering at the breaking of bread or in the study or even reading of the crucifixion accounts. This difficulty on focusing upon Him there is likely because His death requires our death and suffering, and subconsciously we realize that- and would rather not.

9:33 *And they went to Capernaum, and when he was in the house he asked them: What were you reasoning about on the way here?*- The Lord knew already; He had very keen natural perception as well as God's Spirit without measure. Lk. 5:22 records another incident where the Lord asked men what they were reasoning about exactly because He "perceived their thoughts". He realized the value of verbalizing things. He wanted them to confess; to admit that in the light of Him explaining His death, they had been arguing about who should be the greatest, and who was the greatest. Perhaps the Lord's obvious interest in Peter led them to discuss whether Peter was in fact the greatest, commenting upon his evident impetuosity and other human weaknesses.

9:34 *But they kept quiet. For they had disputed one with another on the way about who was the greatest*- Whenever the Lord taught them about His death, they always seem to have started arguing amongst themselves; the tremendous significance of what He was saying was evidently lost on them (Mk. 9:31-34; 10:34-38). The power of the cross is likewise lost on the hearts of many because of their obsession with petty argument.

9:35 *And he sat down and called the twelve; and he said to them: If anyone would be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all*- This 'sitting down' may have been some time later than the discussion in :33,34, because at this point Matthew says (Mt. 18:1) that it was they who came to the Lord with the question about who should be the greatest. The Lord had asked what they had been talking about, knowing this had been the topic. They were silent. And He remained silent. That mutual silence was deafening. They thereby knew that He knew, and that they were wrong. And it was that lack of response from Him which prompted them to finally bring the question out into the open. He was indeed the master psychologist.

He was the "servant of all" because He *desired* to be the greatest in the Kingdom. It was this ambition which motivated His endurance of the daily cross of His life: "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: *even as* the Son of man came... to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:27,28). He was drawing on the ideas of Hos. 13:1, where Ephraim exalted himself when he humbled himself to speak to God with the trembling of a true humility. The Lord Jesus was not esteemed by men in His death (Is. 53:3); the same word occurs in Dan. 4:17, concerning how Yahweh will exalt the *basest*, the least esteemed, to be King over the kingdoms of this world. That made-basest man was a reference to the Lord Jesus. He humbled Himself on the cross, that He might be exalted. Peter had his eye on this fact when he asks us to humble ourselves, after the pattern of the Lord, that we might be exalted in due time (1 Pet. 5:6). The Lord desired greatness in the Kingdom, and so can we; for the brighter stars only reflect more glory of the Sun (1 Cor. 15:41). This very thought alone should lift us up on the eagle wings of Spirit above whatever monotony or grief we now endure.

The Lord Himself on the cross was the ultimate "servant of all", and therefore was the first of all. This may explain the Lord's comment that the last shall be first and the first last (Mt. 19:30)- He may have intended us to read in an ellipsis to the effect that he who *wants to be* first shall be last, and he who *wants to be* last shall be

first. There was to be a glorying in being the last, the servant of all- exemplified in the Lord's washing of the disciples' feet.

9:36 *And he took a little child and set him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them-* In *Against Celsus* 3.55, Origen defends Christianity against the allegation that it requires men to leave the world of men and go mix with women and children in "the washerwoman's shop"- presumably a house church Celsus knew. Lucian of Samosata even mocked Christianity as being largely comprised of children and "old hags called widows". Marcus Cornelius Fronto likewise mocked the way "children" [and by that term he would've referred to teenagers too] participated in the breaking of bread [*Octavius* 8-9]. The teaching of the Lord Jesus was attractive to children / young people. They like women were treated as of little worth; the Greco-Roman world considered that children had to be taught, and couldn't teach a man anything. But the Lord Jesus repeatedly set children up as examples of discipleship (Mk. 9:36,37; Lk. 9:47,48; as Heb. 12:5-9). So we can understand the appeal of early Christianity to young people, teenagers, especially girls. O.M. Bakke has written a fascinating study entitled *When Children Became People*. The thesis is that the teaching of Christianity gave disenfranchised people an identity and meaning as persons- women and slaves are obvious examples- but this also applied to children / young people. They too were disregarded as people in Mediterranean society; and yet in Christ they were given their value as people. In the house church setting, we can imagine how this happened. Celsus mocks how teenage boys go to Christian house churches to be taught by women- reflecting how attractive Christianity was for young people.

The disciples soon afterwards are framed as doing exactly the opposite to what the Lord had done, when they forbad the little children [s.w.] to come to Jesus (Mt. 19:13)- whereas the Lord actually invited them to Him. Again we note how the Gospel writers present the disciples as so often out of step with their Lord.

The Greek for "set" means to stand, not to sit- this is how it is usually translated. Mk. 9:35,36 says that the Lord *sat* but He *stood* the child in their midst. But *histemi*, often translated "set" in Mt. 18:2, has the strong connotation of standing up or setting someone up in a position. "The midst" suggests the disciples were in a closed circle, and the Lord stood the child within the circle. If you call an onlooking child into the midst of a group of unknown adults, they will typically not want to come. We see the powerful attraction of the Lord to children in that this child came, although likely with much nervousness, wanting to come to Jesus, but not into that closed circle of men- just as so many today. Almost certainly the child came to the Lord and He held the child close to Himself; for He goes on to urge the disciples to "receive" such little ones, implying they were reluctant to have the child amongst them. That closeness to the Lord was what was being set up as an example. The scene is portrayed graphically if we put the Gospel records together- the Lord *sat* with the men in a circle around Him, He calls the child to Him, stands him up "by Him" (*para* Him means close by Him, Lk. 9:47) and then 'takes' him, cuddling the child to Himself "in His arms" (Mk. 9:36)- whilst He is sitting down. The natural response of the child who had been stood would be to want to sit down, holding on to Jesus, and not to stand above those men with their attention focused upon him. This natural desire to come down, to humble self, is what is being memorialized by the Lord as the pattern for all who wish to enter His Kingdom. Perhaps we can imagine the scene even further- the child would've wanted to come to Jesus personally, but the circle of disciples with their apparent superiority and judgmentalism would've been offputting. But still the child came, and the Lord in Luke's record urges the disciples to allow the child to join the circle and

"receive" him. This scenario is seen so often in the body of Christ in our days. In the early church, there soon developed a problem about 'receiving' others, not least children, women and Gentiles- and the Gospel records through this incident show how seriously wrong the disciples were not to do so. Luke's record goes on to record the incident with John's disciples where the Lord's disciples didn't want to "receive" them- implying they did not immediately grasp the teaching themselves.

"In the midst of them" is a phrase used several times about the Lord Jesus Himself standing in the midst of His followers (Lk. 24:36; Jn. 1:26; 8:9; 20:19,26). The supreme "child" was the Lord Jesus. This connection between Him and that child was it seems perceived by Peter later, when he uses the same word to describe the Lord Jesus as God's "holy child" (Acts 4:27,30). If as suggested the Lord held the child to Himself, the identification would have been visually powerful and the image would've remained with the disciples. The Lord Himself clinches the connection by saying that whoever becomes as that child will be the greatest in the Kingdom- and He clearly was and is the greatest in the Kingdom. Lk. 9:48 makes the connection beyond doubt in recording that the Lord then said that "Whosoever shall receive this child... receives Me". His subsequent comment there that "For he that is least among you all, the same is great" is surely a reference to Himself, rather than urging them to be the least so that they might be the greatest. The Lord's answer as to who was greatest in the Kingdom was therefore to indirectly point out that He is the greatest, and we should simply seek to be like Him, using the little child as a template to that end. The antidote to division, therefore, is to be focused upon Christ and to seek to simply enter the Kingdom- the things of the Kingdom and of the Name (Acts 8:12).

So the Lord took a child and set him in the midst of those rough fishermen and tax collectors. He said that they must become like that child; and further, they must receive that child as a representative of Himself, and thereby, of God Himself.
In probable allusion to this, Paul teaches that in malice we should be children, but in understanding: men (1 Cor. 14:20). The child in the midst of men, wide eyed, simple and sincere amidst men full of cynicism and human wisdom and self-righteousness and the gruffness of the flesh... This was a symbol of every true believer, of the Lord Himself, and of Almighty God, as they were and as they are in the midst of a world and even a brotherhood that, like the disciples, so often stares on uncomprehending. The aptness was not in the child's humility [if indeed a child can be humble], but in the purity of the innocence and sincerity and unassuming directness.

9:37 *Whoever shall receive one of such little children in my name, receives me. And whoever receives me, receives not me but Him that sent me*- To not offend others we must "receive" them (Mt. 18:5). It is written of Jesus that when crowds of materialistic, fascinated people followed Him, "He received them, and spake unto them of the Kingdom" (Lk. 9:11). He didn't just turn round and read them a lecture about the Kingdom. "He *received* them". Presumably Luke means to reflect how he perceived something in the Lord's body language that was receiving of that crowd of peasants- whom we would likely have written off as just dumb groupies with no more than surface level interest. And we too must receive one another, even as the Lord has received us (Rom. 15:7)- and this includes receiving him who is even weak in the faith (Rom. 14:1). We should be looking for every reason to receive and fellowship our brethren, rather than reasons not to.

The disciples would've had to open their closed circle to allow the child to enter. As the child settled down in the arms of the Lord Jesus, he was effectively added to the circle of disciples. Children were counted as non-persons in first century society,

along with women, serious sinners, the mentally ill and lepers. The Lord is powerfully teaching that our attitude to such persons is our attitude to Him and therefore to God (Mk., Lk.). The challenge comes down to many of us too, who come from closed table communities. The Lord foresaw that to form a tight circle around Him was the natural response of those who followed Him, but He is saying that unless we open that circle, we are in danger of actually not having received Him at all. Our not receiving of such persons is going to make them stumble ("offend them"), and this warrants eternal condemnation. The Lord had bidden the disciples 'humble themselves', and now they are given an opportunity to do so- by 'receiving' amongst themselves, as one of them, into their circle, a little child. Opening our circle and accepting amongst us those who do not share (at least, at this time) our level of faith, understanding or even culture- this is indeed a humbling experience. All that is in us cries out to keep them excluded, and to keep our circle tightly closed against them. But the argument for a closed circle, or a closed table, is ultimately one which originates in pride and a refusal to humble self.

The little child was to be identified with the Lord Jesus personally. See on Mt. 18:2. To not receive the little ones is to not receive Jesus personally. The issue is of eternal importance, as the next verse emphasizes. We cannot simply go along with such rejections and refusal to receive others just because it is the policy of a church or fellowship to which we have belonged or grown up in. Social death and rejection by our brethren is nothing compared to the painful rejection at the last day which the Lord speaks of.

9:38 *John said to him: Teacher, we saw one casting out demons in your name and we forbade him, because he does not follow with us*- Mark inserts at this point the question about a man casting out demons although 'not following us' (Mk. 9:38-42). The Lord rebukes them for this and goes on to warn them about not offending little ones. In Matthew, that warning follows straight on from the teaching about the need to receive little ones- as if refusing to receive them is what makes them stumble. The case raised by the disciples, as it were in protest at His teaching about receiving little ones, was presumably one of John's disciples. Although they had a different spiritual culture, history and even doctrinal understanding, the Lord had earlier likened both His and John's disciples to children in the marketplace working in parallel, presenting the same message in different ways. They were admittedly immature in some ways and in parts of their doctrinal understanding, but the Lord is teaching that this is what made John's disciples "little ones", and they must still be accepted. The Lord warns twice in that section in Mk. 9:38-42: "Forbid him not". This is the same as saying 'Receive him, do not forbid him from entering your circle'. It is the same word which the Lord will go on to use in Mt. 19:14 about not forbidding another group of "little children". The Jewish world was to be condemned exactly because they hindered or forbad [s.w.] men to enter the Kingdom (Lk. 11:52- see on 18:7 *Woe to the world*). Peter surely alludes to the Lord's teaching when reasoning: "Who can forbid water" that Gentiles be baptized (Acts 10:47). Refusing baptism to those not considered good, ready or mature enough is surely a way of forbidding and not receiving little ones.

9:39 *But Jesus said: Do not forbid him. For there is no one who shall do a mighty work in my name and then be able straight afterwards to immediately speak evil of me*- The preceding section has sternly warned against forbidding the little ones, and

now we have a worked example. The little ones in view were John's disciples (:38); although seeing "John did no miracle" we wonder whether the miracle claimed was legitimate. But the Lord is not only gentle, He seeks to accept even such misunderstanding and misguided ones. For He alludes without doubt to Num. 11:28,29: "Joshua… answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them. And Moses said unto him, Are you enviious for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them". He considered this misguided miracle worker in John's group as all the same one of God's new Israel. As noted on :38, the disciples tended to "forbid" those whom the Lord wished to accept. And that same tension is seen time and again with the way closed, denominational mindsets seek to exclude and "forbid" others who differ and are immature. But the allusion to Numbers 11 seems to be saying that all in whom the Spirit is working should be accepted; and the litmus test is whether they shall "speak evil of me". If they do not, then they are not against Him but for, despite their misunderstanding. An alternative reading however is "Shall not lightly speak evil of me" (as AV). In this case, the Lord is comforting His sceptical disciples that if such a person does is in fact against Him, then this is no light matter and will be dealt with by the Lord's judgment; but not by theirs. This incident is surely alluded to by Paul when he warns against some who claimed to possess the Spirit who 'call Jesus accursed' (1 Cor. 12:3). There were such, and it was their attitude to the Lord Jesus personally which proclaimed them against Him. What people think of Christ is the critical issue when it comes to deciding whether a person is for or against Him; and that is obvious really, but the natural tendency to "forbid" those who interpret differently to ourselves is strong.

9:40 *For he that is not against us, is for us*- See on :39. If a person is not against the Lord personally (:39), then he is not against "us", the body of Christ. And so even if that person will not mix with us, from God's wider point of view he is "for us", "on our part". Here on earth, sectors of the Lord's body are against each other. But from the Lord's perspective, those who are not against Him are on His part. But speaking evil of the Lord personally (:39) is parallel here with not being against *us*. And here we have a worrying implication. Attitudes to those in Christ are attitudes to Him. To be "against" any of them is to be against Him.

And so the Lord's attitude to John's disciples is very telling. He saw those who "follow not us" as being "on our part", not losing their reward, as being the little ones who believed in Him; and He saw wisdom as being justified by *all* her children, be they His personal disciples or those of John (Mk. 9:38-41; Lk. 7:35). John's men had a wrong attitude to fellowship- they should have 'followed with' the disciples of Jesus; and it would seem their doctrinal understanding of the Holy Spirit was lacking, although not wrong (Acts 19:1-5). Indeed, they are called there "disciples", a term synonymous with all believers in Luke's writing. And the Lord too spoke in such an inclusive way towards them. No wonder His disciples had and have such difficulty grasping His inclusiveness and breadth of desire to fellowship and save.

9:41 *For whoever shall give you a cup of water to drink, because you are Christ's- truly I say to you, he shall in no way lose his reward*- Giving a cup of cold water to the little ones doesn't necessarily refer to sticking banknotes in a collection for charity. The Hebrew writer took it as referring to our love for Christ's little ones, within the ecclesia (Mt. 10:42 = Heb. 6:10). And the context says the same. The Lord was inviting the disciples to see themselves as none less than the likes of Elisha, who were supported in their work by various well-wishers.

According to Mt. 10:41, these "little ones" refer to the disciples. But why "*these* little ones" and not "you"? I suggest that verse 41 could effectively be a

soliloquy, perhaps spoken out loud in the presence of the disciples, but all the same, it is Jesus speaking to Himself. Or maybe the Lord is saying that the mistaken disciple of John would be accepted as one of the Lord's followers, and therefore any who supported him in his slightly misplaced ideals as a missionary for John would therefore still be rewarded. I say this because offering a cup of cold water was how travellers were assisted by local people along the road.

9:42 *And whoever shall cause one of these little ones that believe in me to stumble*- The "little ones" of the context could refer to John's disciples, with their limited belief and understanding in the Lord, who perhaps refused to follow after Jesus because they disagreed with the worldly ways of His disciples. And so the Lord urges the twelve not to cause stumbling to those ones little in faith and understanding. See on Mt. 18:6.

It would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea- The very language of Babylon's judgments at the last day. The believer who makes another to stumble by not receiving them is therefore no better than Babylon, the archenemy of God and His true people. And Rev. 18:21 speaks of how *Babylon* shall be cast into the sea as a millstone- such 'believers' will at the last day face Babylon's judgments, they will be "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32), sent back into it from the judgment seat of Christ to share the world's fate. Even though externally they had been so separate from the world, so separate that the refused to receive the "little ones". But this attitude is in fact a worldly attitude; by having it, we are showing that we are of the world.

9:43 *And if your hand causes you to stumble*- The context has spoken of not offending the little ones, and of the terrible condemnation awaiting those who cause others to stumble. There are two legitimate meanings of the words here. The idea could be ‘If these things cause you to stumble others’; or, ‘If these things cause you yourself to stumble’. But the ambiguity is surely intentional. If we make others to stumble then we have made ourselves stumble, for if we make others stumble out of the way to the Kingdom, then we shall not be there ourselves. The point is clear- we are to go to absolutely any length, paying any personal cost, in order not to cause stumbling to a little one.

Cut it off- I suggest the Lord is parodying the orthodox Jewish idea of cutting off members of the community in order to preserve the rest of the body of believers- an idea equally common today amongst some in the new Israel. The Lord is saying that in order to avoid personal condemnation, we are to cut off our own limbs if necessary- in order to avoid causing a little one to stumble. The cost of not causing the little ones to stumble is therefore very personal; because communities, both secular and religious, tend to cause little ones to stumble by their policies, it follows that individuals will pay a high price for stepping out of line by insisting that we will not cause them to stumble. The preceding verse has explained how “the world”, the Jewish religious system of the Lord’s time, the *ekklesia* of the day, lead others to stumble, and that individuals must take personal responsibility for this. In the same way as the whole system was destroyed in AD70, so personal condemnation at the last day awaits the individuals who make others stumble.

It is good for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having your two hands and to go into Gehenna- into the unquenched fire- The lame, blind and maimed were those not acceptable for service in God’s tabernacle (Lev. 21:18; Dt. 15:21; 2 Sam. 5:8). The Lord surely has this in mind. He seems to be saying that to avoid offending little ones, it is better to be unacceptable for priestly service now, and yet therefore enter God's Kingdom. The implication, therefore, is that by *not* being seen as fit for

priestly service, we avoid offending little ones. The only interpretation which makes sense of this to me is that the Lord foresaw that by fellowshipping the little ones, we may well be excluded from public priestly service in the house of God in this life, because those running the show generally exclude those who think in terms of an open table. But that is a cheap price to pay for entering the Kingdom. And we will be miserable excluded from His Kingdom if we make others stumble by acting in such a way as merely keeps us in with the religious powers that be, that keeps us fit *in their sight* for service. And this again is absolutely true to observation in the body of Christ. Those who are inclusive of little ones tend to be sidelined from public service by those who are decision makers within the ecclesia. But that is a cheap price for entrance to the Kingdom.

It's better to limp into the Kingdom than be rejected for self-righteousness. Surely there is an invitation here to see the limping Jacob, walking away from the encounter with the Angel, as our role model. The personality we will be in the Kingdom will reflect the struggles we have personally endured in this life. Relationships in the Kingdom of God will reflect these. Thus those who had consciously chosen to be eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom are comforted that in the Kingdom they will be given a name and place in God's temple better than of children in this life (Is. 56:5). All the faithful will be given a name and place in the temple; so what especial consolation was this to those eunuchs? Surely the point is that the name (personality) they will then have will gloriously reflect the self-sacrifice and personal Biblical understanding which they went through in this life. This alone proves that the reward will be individual. The Lord's picture of men entering the Kingdom without limbs is surely making the same point (Mk. 9:47); the result of our self-sacrifice in this life will be reflected by the personality we have in the Kingdom. And there is evidence that the Man we follow will still bear in His body, throughout eternity, the marks of the crucifixion (Zech. 13:6; Rev. 5:6).

9:44 *Where their worm does not die and the fire is not put out*- Gehenna was the ravine south of Jerusalem where ‘little ones’ had been sacrificed to Moloch (Jer. 7:31; 10:5,6; 39:35). So there is an appropriacy in this particular picture of condemnation. Those who stop others entering God’s Kingdom and lead them to condemnation will share the same condemnation; what they did to others will be done to them.

9:45 *And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is good for you to enter into life lame, rather than having your two feet and to be cast into Gehenna*- Mk. 9:43-47 spells out the details of the condemnation in laboured detail- if our eye offends, or causes us to offend others, then cut it off, for it is better to be without an eye in this life than to be condemned in Gehenna, where the worm and fire are 'eternal'. And this is repeated concerning the hand and foot. We read of eye, hand and foot together in only one other context- of "eye for eye... hand for hand, foot for foot" being the punishment for damaging a 'little one' within the womb of a woman (Ex. 21:24; Dt. 19:21). Nowhere else in Scripture do these three words occur together. By not receiving a little one, despising them and thus causing them to stumble, we are doing the equivalent of the Old Covenant sin of beating up a pregnant woman and causing handicap to the 'little one' within her. It could be that the Lord is saying that we can be responsible for damaging those who have not yet come to spiritual birth, to the point that if they are born, then they will be born with serious defects which are our fault. And such defects will have been the result of not receiving them, even in their immature state. Thus the table practice of the Lord was to accept people at His table at whatever stage of their spiritual growth or journey, even those not as yet born again, not yet converted, not yet repentant... in order to try to bring them to that point.

The Lord Jesus spoke several times of taking up the cross and following Him. This is the life you have committed yourself to by baptism; you have at least tried to take up the cross. The full horror and shock of what He was saying doubtless registered more powerfully with the first century believers than with us. They would have seen men in the agony of approaching death carrying their crosses and then being nailed to them. And the Lord Jesus asked men to do this to themselves. Our takings up of the cross will result in damage- the plucked out eye, the cut off foot. And notice that the Lord says that we will enter lame into the eternal life, or enter the Kingdom with just one eye (Mk. 9:45-47). Surely this means that the effects of our self-sacrifice in this life will in fact be eternally evident in the life which is to come. The idea of *taking up* the cross suggests a conscious, decided willingness to take on board the life of self-crucifixion. Taking up the cross is therefore not just a passive acceptance of the trials of life.

9:46 *Where their worm does not die and the fire is not put out*- The Jews believed that 'hell' had three sections: Gehenna, a place of eternal fire and worms for those Jews who broke the covenant and blasphemed God; 'the shades', an intermediate place similar to the Catholic idea of purgatory; and a place of rest where the faithful Jew awaited the resurrection at the last day). This distinction has no basis in the Bible. However, it's significant that the Lord Jesus uses 'Gehenna' and the figure of eternal fire to describe the punishment of people for what the Jews of His day would've considered incidental sins, matters which were far from blasphemy and breaking the covenant – glancing at a woman with a lustful eye (Mk. 9:47), hypocrisy (Lk. 12:1,5; Mt. 23:27–33), not giving a cup of water to a "little one", forbidding a disciple of John the Baptist to follow Jesus (Mk. 9:39–43); not preaching the Gospel fearlessly and boldly (Mt. 10:25–28). These matters were and are shrugged off as of no eternal consequence. But just like the prophets of Israel did, the Lord Jesus seizes upon such issues and purposefully associates them with the most dire possible punishment which His Jewish hearers could conceive – Gehenna. Time and again, the Bible alludes to incorrect ideas and reasons with people from the temporary assumption those ideas might be true. The language of demons, as we will show later, is a classic example. And it's quite possible the Lord is doing the same here with the concept of Gehenna – the punishment for the Jew who breaks the covenant and blasphemes. The Lord was primarily teaching about behaviour, not giving a lecture about the state of the dead. And so He takes the maximum category of eternal punishment known to His audience, and says that this awaits those who sin in matters which on His agenda are so major, even if in the eyes of the Jewish world and humanity generally they were insignificant.

9:47 *And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out. It is good for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes and to be cast into Gehenna*- The personality we will be in the Kingdom will reflect the struggles we have personally endured in this life. Relationships in the Kingdom of God will reflect these. Thus those who had consciously chosen to be eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom are comforted that in the Kingdom they will be given a name and place in God's temple better than of children in this life (Is. 56:5). All the faithful will be given a name and place in the temple; so what especial consolation was this to those eunuchs? Surely the point is that the name (personality) they will then have will gloriously reflect the self-sacrifice and personal Biblical understanding which they went through in this life. This alone proves that the reward will be individual. The Lord's picture of men entering the Kingdom without limbs is surely making the same

point (Mk. 9:47); the result of our self-sacrifice in this life will be reflected by the personality we have in the Kingdom. And there is evidence that the Man we follow will still bear in His body, throughout eternity, the marks of the crucifixion (Zech. 13:6; Rev. 5:6).

There's a radical in each of us, even if the years have mellowed it. The way to express it is surely through radical devotion to the Father's cause. On one hand, Jesus spoke to men as they were able to hear it, not as He was able to expound it. Yet on the other, He gave His radicalism free reign. The Sabbath miracles seem to have purposefully provoked the Jews. When He encouraged His men to rub the corn heads and eat them like peanuts as they walked through a field one Sabbath, He knew full well this was going to provoke confrontation. And he said what was anathema to the Jews: "The Law was made for man and not man for the Law". Where there is human need, the law can bend. This was a startling concept for a Jew. Jesus described the essence of His Kingdom as mustard seed, which was basically a weed. It was like a woman putting leaven [both symbols of impurity] into flour. Surely the Lord was trying to show that His message was not so Heavenly that it was unrelated to earthly life. It was real and relevant to the ordinary dirty business of life. The woman who have everything she had was noted by the Lord as His ideal devotee. He taught that it was preferable to rid oneself of an eye or a limb and to sacrifice sex if that is for us the price of entry into the Kingdom (Mk. 9:45-47). The parable of the man who built bigger barns taught that in some senses we should in His service like there's no tomorrow. He expected His followers to respond immediately, to pay the price today rather than tomorrow, with no delay or procrastination. There is an emphasis in His teaching on immediacy of response, single-mindedness and unrestrained giving. This is radical stuff for 21st century people in the grip of manic materialism.

9:48 *Where their worm does not die and the fire is not put out*- This threat is repeated several times here. The Lord is emphasizing that condemnation is for real; there is not only an eternal future we may miss, but the experience of condemnation, whilst not eternal, is a significant factor to bear in mind and be influenced by.

9:49 *For everyone shall be salted with fire*- Having spoken of the destruction of the unworthy in Gehenna fire, the Lord went straight on to comment: "For every one shall be salted with (Gk. 'for the') fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted" (Mk. 9:48,49 AV). Unless we become a living sacrifice, wholly consumed by God's fire, laying ourselves down upon the altar, then we will be consumed by the figurative fire of Gehenna at the day of judgment. Again, there's no real choice: it's fire, or fire. See on Mt. 3:11; Lk. 15:24.

9:50 *Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its saltiness, with what will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another*- See on Rom. 12:18. The need for peace amongst ourselves as a community is brought out in the parable of the salt that lost its saltiness. Straight away, we're faced with a paradox- for true salt can't lose its saltiness, seeing that sodium chloride is a stable compound, free of impurities. Salt was a symbol in the Lord's teaching for having peace with one another. If we don't have this, we're not salt. If we're not any influence upon others, we're not salt. It's as simple as that.

The Lord realized that it was easy to have an apparent love and peace with our brethren, when actually we have nothing of the sort. In the context of His men arguing with John's disciples, the Lord told a small parable, in which He made having salt in ourselves equal to having peace with our brethren (Mk. 9:38-40; 49,50). He warned that salt which has lost its saltness looks just the same as good salt; but salt

that has lost its saltiness is *nothing*, it's just a lump of substance. Surely He's saying: 'You may think you have peace and love for your brethren, when actually you don't; and if you don't have it, you're nothing, just a lump'. Not without relevance He mentioned that every sacrifice had to have good salt added to it. His point was that all our devotion and sacrifice is meaningless if it lacks the *real* salt of true love for our brethren. Which is exactly the teaching of 1 Cor. 13. Love is a matter of deep attitude as shown in the small things of life, not the occasional heroism of (e.g.) giving our body to be burned. The command to have salt and therefore peace with each other (Mk. 9:50) is specifically fulfilled, Paul saw, by watching our words (= Col. 4:6).

MARK CHAPTER 10

10:1 *And he left there and went into the regions of Judea on the other side of the Jordan. Crowds gathered around him again, and as was his custom he taught them*- The significance is that this was the beginning of His journey to Jerusalem and death. The emphasis is upon the location of these mass healings- "there", in Judea "beyond Jordan" (Mt. 19:1), a semi-Gentile area. The suggestion grows stronger and stronger that the future of His work is with the Gentiles.

10:2 *And there came to him Pharisees, who asked him*- Presumably "there", beyond Jordan. They had maybe heard that He was there because of the rumors of great miracles, and yet they made the effort to go to Him there with their legalistic questions. Their petty legalism contrasts sharply with the wonder of His teaching and extent of His miracles. They tagged along with the crowds, for they "also" came unto Him.

Is it lawful for a man to send away his wife?- The parallel record in Matthew 18 has the material arranged according to a chiasmic structure [see note there]. Within that structure, this teaching about divorce is parallel with the Lord's teaching about not despising little ones but rather unconditionally forgiving them (see notes on Matthew 18). It cannot therefore be accidental that there is a word play in the usage of the word *apoluo*, to "put away", because the word is also used concerning forgiveness, the sending away of the sin of another, and releasing them from debt to us. The word has just been used in Mt. 18:27, where the gracious Lord "loosed" the wicked servant from his huge debt without repentance. And so the question here is whether a man could put away / forgive / release his wife "for every cause". In a sense, the man was indeed to release / forgive his wife for every cause, for everything. But of course the Pharisees had in view the sense of sending away in divorce, and not forgiveness. The Lord surely means them to understand that they should send her away- in forgiveness.

For any cause?- The standard interpretation is that the Pharisees were seeking to draw the Lord into taking a position behind either the school of Hillel (that a man might divorce his wife for any reason) or that of Shammai (divorce was allowable only for unfaithfulness). The Hillel school had justified Herod Antipas recent marriage on this basis, and he was likely to crack down on anyone teaching otherwise- this was obviously one reason they sought to lead the Lord into this whole minefield. But if so, the question arises as to why they should raise this issue with Him so apparently 'out of the blue'. If the question was simply as to which rabbinic school the Lord supported on this issue, then it would seem that He quite clearly came down on the side of Shammai- 'for unfaithfulness'. But whenever the Lord was given such questions, He always avoided giving such direct answers but rather elevated the

issues to a much higher and yet more essential level. I suggest that what they found so shocking was His teaching about unconditional forgiveness regardless of the sincerity of repentance, and so they came to Him with the case of adultery in marriage- where surely, so they thought, there could be no forgiveness for adultery and in fact Moses commanded that a man divorce his wife in this case. Whichever rabbinic school the Lord supported, He would surely have to admit that there were some sins which could not just be forgiven but must be acted upon in terms of divorce and exclusion from the marriage. Their use of *apoluo*, to "put away", was therefore a conscious allusion to the Lord's usage of the word in 18:27, where the gracious Lord "loosed" [s.w.] the wicked servant from his huge debt without repentance. So I would read the Pharisees here as implying: 'You claim a man must forgive his brother anything without checking out his repentance; but OK, can a man really forgive his *wife* "every cause"? And Moses surely did sanction divorce for some reasons, whether you go with Hillel ['every or any cause'] or Shammai [for adultery]". In terms of connection with the Lord's previous teaching, the Lord had taught that if someone sins against you, i.e. a personal offence, then you can drag them through the synagogue discipline system ["tell it to the *ekklesia* / assembled meeting"]- although the higher level was unconditional forgiveness. For many listeners and readers, that teaching begs the very same question: "OK, so far so good, Jesus… but really, literally, for every cause, in every case…?". The Pharisees are asking this question, assuming that they have the Lord trapped because Moses teaches divorce for some things. Of course, Moses doesn't 'teach divorce'- there was a higher level. If your wife sinned against you, you could do as Hosea did, and simply forgive her, rather than making use of Mosaic concessions. Hence the Lord's answer is basically that any verses in the Law which might appear to teach divorce are in fact concessions to human weakness and not the ideal standard.

They asked this to test him- Another hint that the source of 'testing' in the wilderness which returned to the Lord later in His ministry was from the Jewish satan / adversary.

10:3 *And he answered and said to them: What did Moses command you?*- As noted on :4, the emphasis may be on "command"; they were citing a concession for human weakness, "for the hardness of your hearts"; but the Lord is perhaps arguing that a concession is not a command in the legalistic sense they wished to interpret it. Their legalism is reflected in how they don't simply say that Moses 'commanded' divorce, but rather than Moses commanded a bill of divorce and then divorce. The legal aspect was all important to them.

10:4 *And they said: Moses permitted a man to write a bill of divorcement and to send her away*- They had missed the point, that a concession ["for the hardness of your hearts"] is not a command. Their legalism required that if something was in the teaching of Moses, then this must be done. But they missed the point that there were actually levels of response within the Mosaic law. Adultery could be simply forgiven, dealt with through the trial of jealousy in Numbers 5, become the basis for divorce, or result in the woman being killed. Such a position is very hard for legalists to cope with, desiring as they do clear definition for every situation in life. Hence the Lord emphasized twice in this dialogue that divorce was a concession for their hard hearts.

"A bill of divorcement", Gk. *Biblion apostasion*, literally this could be understood as 'A Bible / writing of apostasy'. The 'lower level' option of divorce for adultery was all part of a law which was "holy, just and good", but it could so easily be misused and thus lead people into moral apostasy.

10:5- see on Dt. 31:9.

But Jesus said to them: For your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment- Moses allowed divorce for the hardness of Israel's hearts and yet Moses himself appears to have divorced his wife (Ex. 18:2)- for the hardness of his heart? See Dt. 20:14. This appears to be the second time in this discourse that the Lord talks about the way Moses had made a concession to their weakness- see on Mt. 19:4 *Have you not read?*

10:6 *But from the beginning of the creation: Male and female made He them*- It was Moses who wrote Genesis, under Divine inspiration. So the Lord was saying that actually, Moses within his own writings laid down a principle and yet also recorded a concession to weakness. This idea is so hard for the legalistic mind to accept- that within Divine law there are different levels, all is not black and white.

10:7 *For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cling to his wife*- The cleaving or clinging spoken of in Genesis is a process; this is an example of how God can work directly upon the heart and psychology of persons to unite them. To give up on the process is therefore to go against what is potentially possible. And those who seek to interfere in and block that intended process, be they parents or extramarital lovers, are equally guilty. The clinging together is part of how God joins married, believing couples together (:9).

10:8 *And the two shall become one flesh; so that they are no more two but one flesh*- This appears to be a status, referring to marriage rather than solely to the sexual act. Because it is paralleled with “what God has joined together” and is not to be sundered.

10:9 *What therefore God has joined together*- As a couple "cleave" to one another, so they become one flesh (Gen. 2:24). But this becoming one flesh is interpreted by the Lord Jesus as meaning that God actively joins the couple together; as *they* cleave to each other in the process of their relationship, so *God* joins them together. Clearly the Lord understood Gen. 2:24 as speaking of the process of marriage, rather than simply the ceremony of a wedding. In passing, note that the Hebrew idea of two becoming one had already been used in Genesis- the morning and evening, the day and night, were fused by God into one day (Gen. 1:5- the same Hebrew phrase is used). Similarly we read of the waters becoming, or being made one, by God (Gen. 1:9). It's as if the immense power of God in creation is unleashed in His bonding of man and wife together. To put that asunder is to fight against the very creative power of God.

Do not let man- By sundering relationships, we are pitting ourselves against the intentions and processes of God’s Spirit and His actions amongst men. But of course we can indeed put asunder what God joined. He does not force His ways and processes upon people. The parallel [see on :1] is with how we can refuse acceptance to the ‘little ones’ by despising and not forgiving them. God’s processes intend to create unity between His people as well as between marriage partners; but we can chose to disallow the effect of His work, both in our own lives and those of others. By rejecting people, the Lord had taught in the previous section of the chiasmus, we make them stumble and damage the “little ones”. And those same principles apply in marriage- the little ones are made to stumble, and the rejection of a marriage partner often leads them into sin, i.e. they are made to stumble. This I think is the sense of Mt.

5:32, that divorcing a partner causes her to commit adultery- i.e. we will lead her to a sinful life.

Divide- See on :7. The dividing can be by other parties in addition to the two parties to the marriage. We are not to "let" them do that. The same Greek word is used in 1 Cor. 7:10,11,15 of how Paul allows for a wife to “depart” or ‘sunder’ from her husband. Clearly, therefore, the Lord is presenting here an ideal state. But that presentation doesn’t mean that God will not tolerate lower levels of living before Him. Man can put asunder what God has joined not simply in our own marriage. It can just as much be done by parents seeking to keep their children within the sphere of the family of origin, not letting go; by pressurizing one side of a marriage to adopt a position against their partner, etc. Especially is this true of those who demand that a believing husband or wife not have fellowship with their believing partner because of theological or ‘fellowship’ differences.

10:10 *And in the house the disciples asked him about this matter*- We have recently read how again "in the house" the Lord had explained things further to His disciples (9:28,29, 33-37). This was His style; to provide deeper teaching to those who really wanted it.

10:11 *And he said to them: Whoever shall send away his wife and marry another, commits adultery against her*- The parallel in Matthew 19 includes the exception "for *porneia*", adding that not all can accept His standards here. The Lord here seems to have in view a situation where a man proactively takes the decision to send his wife away. The implication could be that if he has to send her away, then she actually wishes to remain with him. The language of sending away surely implies she was still living with him. Therefore what is in view is a situation of unforgiveness on the part of the husband, and that is the entire context of this section of teaching which began in Matthew 18. The adultery was therefore a temporary situation and didn't involve the wife moving in with another man. In such a case, this whole passage is not directly relevant. The more general idea in Matthew 18 of dealing with personal sins against us is now focused down to the classic personal offence, the sin against us of a partner committing adultery. And let us note that the whole passage beginning in Matthew 18 is speaking of ideal standards, whilst the Lord is prepared to accept lower standards. Let's remember that in 1 Cor. 7 we are challenged that the single life of devotion to the Lord is the highest level, and marriage in itself is a concession to human weakness which most of us have made use of. And overarching all our thinking about this matter, especially in terms of our response to those who may divorce for not very solid reasons, we have the parable at the end of chapter 18. We are to see ourselves as chief of sinners, with an unpayable and huge debt to the Lord, compared to which all sin against us is of small account. We also need to remember that others' behaviour to each other is not a sin against us. The teaching here is very personal- about how we are to respond to personal sin against us, and here the specific example of adultery within marriage is raised. This teaching is not really about how we should respond to the sins of others (e.g. divorce for the wrong reasons) which we observe from a distance.

10:12 *And if she herself shall send away her husband and marry another, she commits adultery*- The Rabbis in the Lord’s time were split into two schools on the question of divorce. One school taught that divorce was available for any reason, whilst the other said that it was only for sexual impurity. The question was put to Jesus as to when He thought divorce was possible. It seemed that He was going to be forced to take sides with one of the two contemporary attitudes. But He cut clean through the whole thinking of first century Israel by basing his argument on the

principles of Eden: God created man and woman, and joined them together; therefore, He reasoned, the ideal standard is that there should be no divorce for any reason, including adultery. This is typical of His teaching; through radical and fundamental recourse to the Old Testament, His teachings cut right through all the conceptions and expectations which were present in the mind of first century Jewry as a result of their cultural conditioning. We too must cut through the cultural conditioning of our era. In the time of Jesus, Roman law allowed women to divorce their husbands; some of the women of Herod's family got divorces like this. The Lord was aware of this, and commented upon this local social attitude, roundly condemning it: "If a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she commits adultery". If the Lord was so unafraid to challenge local cultural attitudes towards women, why should we think that He merely went along with those local contemporary attitudes?

10:13 *And they were bringing to him little children*- This continues the connection with the beginning of this section in Matthew 18, which began with a little child being brought to the Lord and Him making the disciples open their closed circle in order to accept the one whom they considered so far beneath them spiritually. He taught then, and teaches again here, that they were to see in the children symbols of themselves, in all their weakness and misunderstanding. In the same way as here the children are "brought" to Jesus, so we often read in the Gospels of people [including the disciples] being "brought" to Him. Their [and our] salvation depends partly upon others having brought us to Him.

That he should touch them- The Lord agrees to the request, blessing little ones for the sake of the efforts of third parties who bring them to Him (as in Mk. 2:5 and so often in the work of saving and curing men). As the children 'received' this blessing, so the Lord urges the disciples to 'receive' the things of the Kingdom- for Mk. 10:15 records the Lord's further comment that "whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no way enter into it". Those children receiving His grace and blessing, all the more gracious because they received it thanks to others bringing them to it, represent each disciple who receives the grace and blessing of the Kingdom.

And the disciples rebuked them- This is such a theme, of the disciples barring those who wanted to come to the Lord. We think of the Syro-Phoenician woman and other children, and the "little ones" of John's disciples. Such attitudes provoke the Lord's anger with us (:14). And they were doing this yet again despite the Lord's sober warning that turning away little ones is making them stumble, and will lead to eternal rejection from God's Kingdom. The disciples in their preaching, of which the Gospels are transcripts, were stressing how they had so failed to grasp this vital teaching.

10:14 *But when Jesus saw it, he was moved with indignation, and said to them: Permit the little children to come to me; forbid them not. For to such belongs the kingdom of God*-

The Lord rebuked the disciples for 'forbidding' John's disciples and the little ones to come to Him (Mk. 9:38); and yet He uses the same word to describe how the lawyers hindered [s.w. 'forbad'] people to enter the Kingdom. There's a very clear parallel here between the disciples and their Jewish teachers who had so influenced their thinking. But they finally got there- for Peter insisted that Gentiles should not be forbidden [s.w. 'hinder'] baptism (Acts 10:47); and he uses the same word again when he says that now, he will not "withstand [s.w. 'hinder'] God in hindering people to come to Him (Acts 11:17). The awfulness of the disciples' attitude is brought out by

the use of the word in 1 Thess. 2:16, where Paul says that the way the Jews 'forbad' or hindered the preaching of the Gospel was cause for the wrath of God to come upon them "to the uppermost". And the disciples initially followed their Jewish elders in this kind of behaviour. In passing, there is a sober warning here to those who would likewise 'forbid' baptism to those who sincerely seek it, and who will not allow ‘little ones’ to the Lord’s table.

Mk. 10:15 adds: “Whoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no way enter into it”. This is exactly how the whole section began in Matthew (18:3). The Greek for “receive” is often used about people accepting the Gospel. The implication is that one can receive the Gospel of the Kingdom of God- and yet not enter it, because we didn’t receive it as a child. We didn’t accept that we are the ‘little ones’, accepting we know so little, and just marvelling at the special grace being shown us which we accept in awed wonder. The language of ‘entering the Kingdom’ is used both of our final entry into the Kingdom when Christ returns (Mt. 25:10,21; Jn. 3:5), and of our current entering the Kingdom. The rich man can enter the Kingdom right now if he sheds the load of his wealth (Mt. 19:23,24). The Scribes stopped and hindered those who were entering the Kingdom from entering, locking the door through which the Kingdom could now be entered, all because they chose not to enter themselves (Mt. 23:13; Lk. 11:52). So it’s a case of ‘Now but not yet’. We do *now* enter into God’s rest, and yet we are promised that we *will* enter that rest at Christ’s return (Heb. 4:1-11). The Lord had warned that our righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes, or we will likewise not enter the Kingdom (Mt. 5:20); but that righteousness is in accepting the blessing of righteousness as a little child; for without *that* we shall not enter the kingdom. Those who do the will of the Father will enter the Kingdom (Mt. 7:21)- and that will is to be as little children and accept gifts without seeking to justify ourselves or earn them.

The value of persons felt by the Lord is made very obvious when we notice His attention to women, children, Gentiles and the mentally ill / deformed. These three groups often occur together in the Rabbis’ teaching. The very people who were not counted as persons, the Lord went out of His way to express value for. And in this He sets us an example. Children were counted as of little value- but the Lord spoke about salvation for children (Mk. 10:14), and of the need to become like a child if we are to enter His Kingdom (Mt. 18:3). This purposeful recognition of the value of *all* human persons was a radical and difficult thing in His surrounding culture. And so it can be in ours too.

10:15 *Truly I say to you, whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no way enter into it*- The Greek word for "receive" is different to that used in Mt. 19:12, where the Lord bids those able to "receive" the highest standard concerning remarriage to do so. But the idea is surely the same. How do we 'receive' His high standards and challenges in personal decision making? By receiving them as those children received His blessings, not arguing back, accepting whatever comes from His hand, not considering that we are in any position to do anything other than receive what He gives us. Note that the children *receiving* His blessings become, therefore, the pattern for our *receiving* His demands upon our personal living, our forgiveness even of adulterous partners, our rejection of legitimate options of remarriage [in some cases] in order to follow His higher standards. This is nothing less than profound.

10:16 *And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them-*

His blessing was and is mediated without physical contact. The need for physical contact in order to receive blessing was embedded in the religious mentality of the time, and is seen to this day in so many rituals and traditions of the Catholic and Orthodox churches. The sick woman thought to herself that if she could only *touch* Jesus, she would be made whole; but He responded that He made her whole because of *her faith* (Mt. 9:21,22). He was gently correcting her mistaken understanding of the power of touch. And yet the Lord made a concession to this misunderstanding by indeed touching the children as requested.

10:17 *And as he was proceeding along the road, a man ran to him and kneeled before him, and asked him: Good Teacher, what shall I do-* This young man (Mt. 19:20) was a "ruler" (Lk. 18:18). To come to Jesus in a public place ["in the way"] and running- when rulers were supposed to never run in public but maintain decorum- all positively indicates a genuine belief in Jesus. Kneeling before Him was also a public sign of acceptance of Jesus as Lord. But he failed as so many do with respect to his wealth. He was a yuppy, a high flier, a rich young man who was also a "ruler". And he wasn't going to give that up; his 'sincerity' is shown by his sadness [RV "his countenance fell"] and his going away "grieved" (:22). This walking away is an anticlimax, not the expected outcome of all the devotion displayed. But the account is structured in this unexpected way to highlight the extraordinary significance of a person's attitude to wealth, and how this can make all their other devotion meaningless.

The man was clearly influenced by the Jewish idea that one supreme good deed (Mt. "good thing") could assure the doer of salvation. This was particularly popular amongst the zealots, who considered that suicidal attacks on the Romans could assure them of salvation; the same mentality is to be found in Islamic suicide bombers today. But in His typical manner, the Lord doesn't address the misunderstanding but rather works with it. He ends up telling the man that if he sells all he has and gives to the poor, then he will have "treasure in Heaven". This, therefore, isn't a global command to every Christian. It was designed especially for this young man who thought that just one great act of obedience would secure salvation. The Lord went along with this by giving him such an example; but added: "And come and follow Me", thus gently correcting the idea that one great act is enough for salvation.

Rom. 7:19 is Paul's allusion here, where he laments that like the young man, the good that he would do [same Greek words] he finds himself unable to do because of the sin that dwells within him. But instead of walking away from the Lord as this man did, Paul threw himself upon the Lord's grace. This zealous young man was also understood by Peter as representative of us all; for he clearly alludes to him in 1 Pet. 3:10,11: "He who would love life and see good days [cp. the young man wanting to "have eternal life"]… let him… do good" (same Greek words).

That I may inherit eternal life?- But Jesus had taught that the Kingdom of God on earth would be 'inherited' by the poor and meek (Mt. 5:5). If the man had thought that one through, he would've known the answer ahead of time. If he was rich and young, the chances are he had inherited his wealth- and he wanted to know how he could inherit eternity as well. He likely figured that money can buy everything- and in a strange way, the Lord was saying that the giving of wealth and inheriting eternity *are* in fact related, although actually ultimate 'goodness' and acceptance with God can't come from any such work of obedience.

"Inherit" eternal life suggests he considered eternity a right that he must receive if he does only one great deed. The disciples heard the Lord assuring His people that those who follow Him will "*have* eternal life", enter the Kingdom, enter into life, etc.

But having heard all that, Peter asked: "We have left all… what shall we *have*?" (Mt. 19:27). The irony of it all is tragic. They'd just been promised they would "have" eternal life. But that wasn't enough. Their focus was very much on this life; what shall we have *here and now*? They couldn't see very much beyond the present, past the curvature of their earth. Ruth's unnamed relative could have been her redeemer; but when he realized he would have to marry her and have children, and split up his fields into more strips so as to give those children an inheritance along with that of his existing children- he pulled out. He wouldn't 'mar his inheritance'. He saw ahead to his death, to the next generation. His horizon was 20 years at most. But Boaz who didn't think like this established his spiritual inheritance eternally, and is therefore mentioned in the Lord's genealogy. Whilst the short sighted man passed off the page of history anonymously; his name wasn't preserved.

10:18 *And Jesus said to him: Why do you call me good? None is good save one- God-* The extent to which this man from Nazareth, who sneezed and slept and thirsted as we do, was really God manifest in the flesh... this needs sustained personal meditation. That from the larynx of a Palestinian Jew really came forth the words of Almighty God; to the extent that it had to be said that never man spake like this man; and He Himself could assure us that heaven and earth would pass, but not His words (note the links with Ps. 102:25-27; Heb. 1:10-12)... that this man died for us... rose again, ascended... and now works His saving work for us, hour by hour. Mark records how a man once in an offhand way addressed the Lord Jesus as "good master". The Lord's response was to say that if the man *really* accepted Him as 'good' he ought to share His cross, and sell what he had and give to the poor. The real extent of Jesus' goodness will move us to deep personal response, if we truly perceive it.
10:20 "From my youth"- but he was a "young man" (Mt. 19:20). Note the Lord's grace- instead of being turned away by the man's youthful arrogance, instead the Lord perceives the positive in him and loves him for it (:21). See on Mk. 10:40.

The Greek of the subsequent sentence may not mean that the Lord was implying 'Only God is good- I am not good'. Translators have added a number of words to try to flesh out the meaning of the words. The sense could just as well be 'None is as good as the one God'- and therefore, we should keep *His* commandments. In other words, the Lord is not so much saying that He Himself is not 'good' but rather refocusing the man's direction away from Himself towards the Father. For the man had come running to Him asking what he should do in order to inherit or rightfully have eternal life. And the Lord is refocusing the man upon the Father and the Father's commandments. The Lord may therefore have a rhetorical sense in His question '*why* do you call Me good?'. His sense would have been: 'Why are you so keen to call me "good", setting me on a level with God? Instead, focus on obeying God's commandments and tackle your hardest challenge- to give away your wealth, and then follow Me in the itinerant life towards the cross'. The man's overly high and unrealistic view of Jesus, as if He were God Himself, was really an excuse for his own refusal to face the challenge of living the Christian life. Every false doctrine has a psychological basis, and the idea that Jesus is God and the Trinity are no different. To accept Jesus as less than God, as totally human, is a far deeper challenge to our living than accepting Jesus as being God Himself. If Jesus was human, sharing our own flesh, in which there dwells no good thing (Rom. 7:18), and yet was able to be perfect- this lays down a huge challenge to each of us. It's far less challenging to accept Jesus as God and therefore good and perfect by nature. This is why I suggest the Lord is probing *why* the man called Him "good"- and redirected him towards the

need for keeping the commandments and living the committed life in practice. So we have here a passage of deep significance for discussions about the Trinity. The Lord cites the unity of God as meaning that He alone is ultimately 'good', and challenges the man who wanted to treat Him as God as to whether this was not just an excuse for not doing the hard work of following Him in practice.

10:19 *You know the commandments*- The question of course is why the Lord chose to repeat the last six commandments of the ten commandments. Perhaps He perceived that they had special relevance to this rich young ruler. Harry Whittaker makes an interesting but not totally convincing case that the rich young man here was Barnabas and these commands were very relevant to him as a Levite- see *Studies in the Gospels* chapter 148.

Do not kill. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Do not defraud. Honour your father and mother- Paul's references to the Gospels suggests that he had carefully meditated upon the passages to which he consciously alludes. The fact and way in which he *alludes* rather than quotes verbatim reflects the fact he had thought through and absorbed the teaching of the passages rather than learning them parrot fashion. Here the Lord Jesus combines two quotations from the Law: Ex. 20:12-16 followed by Lev. 19:18. Paul, in a different context, to prove a different point, combines those same two passages, although separating them by a brief comment (Rom. 13:9). This surely indicates that he had meditated upon how his Lord was using the Law, and mastered it so that he could use it himself.

10:20 *And he said to him: Teacher, all these things have I observed from my youth*- The record stresses the incongruity and inappropriacy of the young man's self-righteousness: "The *youth* answered, all these have I kept from my *youth* up" (Mt.). He was young- and he says that since a young man he had kept all the commands. Now the Lord doesn't lecture him about self-righteousness, nor does He point out that the young man is way over rating his own spirituality and obedience. Instead, the Master focuses on the positive- as if to say 'You are zealous for perfection? Great! So, sell what you have and give to the poor. Go on, rise up to the challenge!'.

10:21 *And Jesus observing him, loved him; and said to him: One thing you lack. Go, sell whatever you have and give it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven. And come [AV: "take up the cross and"] follow me*- "You lack" is s.w. to be destitute of. In response to the man's question "What do I still lack?" (Mt. 19:20). He lacked nothing materially, but therefore he lacked the important thing- treasure in Heaven. The word play involving 'lacking' suggests that spiritual wealth and material wealth are opposites; likewise to give away treasure on earth is to as it were transfer it to Heaven. All this underscores the point that we can't have both. All our material wealth is to be given away in order to get spiritual treasure (Mt. 13:44). "What you lack" is parallel to the phrase Mt. 19:21 records: "If you will be perfect / complete". The man could still have had a relationship with the Lord if he hadn't sold all; but he wanted perfection and went away from Jesus because he couldn't face up to the fact that he wasn't perfect, would be saved by grace and now by his own obedience. And so many 'perfectionists' have done likewise. It's perhaps because of the man's tendency to perfectionism that the Lord prefaced His answer to the question by saying that even He wasn't completely "good" as God alone is "good" (10:18). The humanity of Jesus is therefore, in a way, an answer to 'perfectionism'. Not that there is ultimately any such thing as 'perfectionism', for it cannot be in man to be perfect. Perfectionism is merely an arrogant illusion. The record in Mt. 19:16,17 brings this

out clearer- "*Good* Master, what *good* thing shall I do... why do you call me "*good*"? There is none "*good*" but one, that is, God". The man thought that by his "good" deeds he could become as "good" as God, the only "good" One. And He walked away from Jesus because he was unable to accept that this is not in fact the case, and that even Jesus Himself stood as 'not good' compared to God; He stood 'perfect' with God by reason of the relationship He had with God, not solely on the basis of His good works. However, even total generosity and giving away of wealth will not bring total completeness. 'You lack one thing' appears to be an allusion to Ps. 23:1 LXX: "The Lord is my shepherd; not one thing is lacking to me". To take up the cross and follow the Lord Jesus as our shepherd, with the loss of material wealth this implies, is the essence of lacking nothing. For walking with Him is perfection, completeness, our everything.

The very fact that we want to rise up to the heights commends us to God. When the rich young man, in his zeal for righteousness, claimed: "Master, all these have I observed from my youth", the Lord didn't rebuke him for self-righteousness; instead, He beheld Him (with His head cocked to one side?), He took a long wistful look at Him, and *loved him* (Mk. 10:21). The Lord had a wave of warmth come over Him for that arrogant young man, simply because He appreciated the evident spiritual ambition which was within him. It was for this reason that the Father so loved the Son. God caused the Lord Jesus to approach unto Him; "for who would dare of himself to approach unto me?" (Jer. 30:21 RSV). The Father confirmed the Son in His spiritual ambition, recognizing that very few men would rise up to the honour of truly approaching unto God.

The “one thing” lacking was to distribute his wealth, and to follow the crucified Christ. The two things seem therefore related; it was the wealth which was stopping the following of Christ. The man had come to the Lord asking what great deed he must do to obtain eternal life, and so he was aware of his obedience to the commandments. He obviously felt that obedience to Mosaic law was not going to be the basis of eternal life, and he sensed that there was some great deed he must yet achieve. Therefore “What do I still lack?” shouldn’t be read as an arrogant statement that he lacked nothing because he had been legally obedient. Rather is it a genuine question, seeking a concrete, clear and achievable answer.

We note that the Lord treated each person differently. Jesus approved Zacchaeus' distribution of only half of his possessions- whilst demanding that the rich young man give away literally all. And He never seems to have demanded that those of His followers who owned houses should sell them. See on Mt. 19:16 *What good thing.* The same principle is seen in His preceding teaching about divorce and remarriage- His ideal standard is not ‘given’ to everyone, just as it is not a requirement of everyone that they sell and they have and give to the poor. The Lord taught that we receive the Lord's goods [s.w. "what you have"] on conversion to Him (Mt. 25:14). We resign all, but receive all. By giving away our earthly wealth, we directly receive wealth in Heaven. Lk. 12:15,33,44 make a sustained play on this Greek word: "A man's life doesn't consist in the abundance of the *things which he possesses* [s.w.]... sell *what you have* [s.w.] and give alms... [the Lord] will make [such a man] ruler over all *that he has* [s.w.]". Whilst the specific command to the young man to sell all he had and give it to the poor was not in one sense universal, i.e. not a command to every believer, yet the spirit of it (according to Luke 12) is indeed to be followed by us all. We must at least "forsake ['to bid farewell to'] all that [we] have [s.w.]" (Lk. 14:33). The early believers did not 'say' that anything they possessed [s.w.] was their own (Acts 4:32)- Luke surely intends us to connect this with his

earlier record of how the Lord had taught that our attitude, at very least, must be that we do not really 'own' those things which we apparently 'have'.

The rich young man would fain have followed Jesus. But he was told that he must sell all that he had, give to the poor, and take up the cross to follow Christ (Mk. 10:21). Notice how the ideas of following Christ and taking up the cross are linked. The man went away, unable to carry that cross, that sacrifice of those material things that were dearest to him. Peter responds with the strong implication that he *had* done all these things, he was following the Master, and by implication he felt he was carrying the cross. Notice the parallels between the Lord's demand of the young man, and Peter's comment (Lk. 18:22 cp. 28; Mk. 10:21 cp. 28):

	"We have left all
"Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor	
…and come, take up the cross	[no comment by Peter]
and follow me"	…and have followed you"

Peter seems to have subconsciously bypassed the thing about taking up the cross. But he was sure that he was really following the Lord. He blinded himself to the inevitable link between following Christ and self-crucifixion; for the path of the man Jesus lead to Golgotha. We have this same tendency, in that we can break bread week after week, read the records of the crucifixion at several times / year, and yet not let ourselves grasp the most basic message: that we as followers of this man must likewise follow in our self-sacrifice to that same end.

"Take up *the* cross, and follow me" is inviting us to carry Christ's cross with Him- He speaks of "*the* cross" rather than '*a* cross'. The Greek translated "take up" is that translated 'to take away' in the context of Christ taking away our sins. Strong says that it implies "expiation" (of sins). This connection, between *our* taking away / up the cross, and Christ's taking away our sins, suggests that the efficacy of His cross for us depends upon our daily 'taking up the cross'. It is vital therefore that we "take up the cross" if our sins are to be taken away by Him. Of course we cannot literally take up the Lord's cross. Taking up the cross must therefore refer to an attitude of mind; it is paralleled with forsaking all that we have (Lk. 14:27,33), which is surely a command to be obeyed in our *attitudes*. "Take up" is translated 'take on' when we read of 'taking on' the yoke of Christ, i.e. learning of Him (Mt. 11:29). To take up the Lord's cross, to take on His yoke, is to learn of Him, to come to know Him. Yet do we sense any *pain* in our coming to know Christ? We should do, because the cross was the ultimate symbol of pain, and to take it up is to take on the yoke, the knowledge, of Christ. Consider the contexts in which the Lord spoke of taking up His cross:

(1) In Luke 9:23-26 He tells the crowds that they have come to His meetings because of the intriguing miracles of the loaves and fishes. The Lord is saying: 'Don't follow me because of the loaves and fishes; take up my cross'!
(2) The rich young man was willing to be obedient in everything apart from parting with his wealth. In this context, of asking the most difficult thing for him to do, Christ spoke of taking up His cross - in the man's case, giving up his wealth.
(3) The command to take up the cross in Matt. 10:38 is in the context of Christ's description of the family problems which would be caused by responding to His word. Presumably some were willing to follow Christ if they didn't have to break with their families; but Christ asks them to take up the cross in this sense.

In all of these cases people were willing to follow Christ- but only insofar as it didn't hurt them. They were unwilling to take on board the idea of consciously deciding to do something against the grain of their natures and immediate surroundings. Yet this is what taking up the cross is all about, and it is vital for our identification with the Lord. It is very easy to serve God in ways which reinforce the lifestyles we choose to have anyway; it is easy to obey Divine principles only insofar as they compound our own personality. By doing so we can deceive ourselves into thinking that we are spiritually active when, in reality, we have never walked out against the wind, never picked up the cross of Christ. Israel were an empty vine, without fruit in God's eyes- because the spiritual fruit they appeared to bring forth was in fact fruit to themselves (Hos. 10:1).

10:22 *But this teaching saddened him, and he went away sorrowful*- Walking away from Jesus in sorrow is a picture from the scenes of the final judgment. In this case, the man rejected himself, he chose to walk away- just because he couldn't accept that he wasn't perfect. Literally the Greek means that he became overcast, as the sky clouding over. His joy, therefore, was because he had wrongly assumed that he could do some simple dramatic act well within his comfort zone, and thus attain an assurance of salvation. But his face clouded over when he realized that he was being called outside of his comfort zone. This is an exact picture of the disillusion which clouds so many once they perceive that the call of Christ is not to a mere social club or to surface level religion.

"He went away" is significant because the entire section starting from Mt. 18:1 is purposefully framed so that the incidents connect with each other. The Lord had welcomed the little children to come to Him, and rebuked the disciples for forbidding them. This young man- also a 'little one'- went away from the Lord. The implication is that the little children had more spirituality and devotion to Christ than this man. The exhortation to become like little children therefore meant that whatever stops us coming to Him must be jettisoned- and for this 'young one', it was his wealth.

The man walked away, whereas if he had cast himself upon the Lord's grace, or better still, sold what he had and given to the poor, then he could have right then begun to enter into the Kingdom. We begin entering the Kingdom right now; we are, according to another teaching, walking on the road to the judgment, and must get right with our brother who walks on the way there with us. The parable of the camel (i.e. the rich would-be believer) being unloaded of its wealth before it enters the city (Mt. 19:23,24) represents a rich man entering the Kingdom (the city = the Kingdom, as in Rev.22:14; 21:2; Heb.13:14; 11:16; a city can also represent believers). If he sheds his riches now, it follows he is then able in some sense to enter the Kingdom now. This mini parable is in the context of Mt. 19:21: "Sell that thou hast... and thou shalt have (now) treasures in (the Kingdom of) Heaven". This is the same idea as in Mt. 18:4: "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child (which necessitates parting with riches etc.), the same is (now) greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven". In these few words is our highest challenge.

For he was one that had great possessions- Again Luke's record of the early church alludes here, speaking of how possessions were sold and the money distributed to the poorer believers (Acts 2:45; 5:1 s.w.).

10:23 *And Jesus looked around, and said to his disciples: How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!*- "Have wealth" is paralleled, or expanded, in 10:24, with "them that trust in riches". To have wealth is to trust in it. Hence the danger of it- wealth militates against faith. Hence Paul warned "them that

are rich in this world that they... *trust not* in uncertain riches but in the living God" (1 Tim. 6:9,10).

The sense is not simply that it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom, but that he shall enter with difficulty. The Lord goes on to say that such shall enter the Kingdom only by God's grace and possibility of saving those who do not rise up to the higher levels that He bids us to (Mt. 19:26). In what, then, is the hardness or difficulty- if God is willing to accept our living on lower levels? The difficulty is in not walking away from Christ as the young man did, because of our pride; what is hard is to be like a child, the model throughout this entire discourse, and simply accept God's grace in Christ.

10:24 *And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus continued and said to them: Children! How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!*- The disciples were so immature that they thought wealth was a sign of Divine blessing. And were astonished to hear that it's really hard for wealthy people to be saved. Hence, in loving pity at their immaturity, the Lord addresses them as "Children...". See on Lk. 18:24.

10:25 *It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God*- I go with the old explanation that this is an allusion to a loaded camel needing to be unloaded of its 'wealth' so that it could squeeze through the pedestrian gate- a call to become human, to realize we are naked before God, and our wealth adds nothing to us. Mark's record uses a term for "the eye of a needle" which the Septuagint always uses for "the holes of the rocks" (e.g. Jud. 6:2; 15:8,11; Jer. 13:4; 16:16), from whence we see the idea of a hole in the rocky city walls.

This is such a powerful lesson. And it's so simple. It doesn't need any great expositional gymnastics to understand it. Like me, you can probably remember a few things very vividly from your very early childhood. I remember my dear dad showing me this as a very young child, with a toy camel and a gate drawn on a piece of paper. And I saw the point, at four, five, maybe six. It is *so clear*. But what of our bank balances now, now we're old and brave? It's easier for a camel, the Lord said. Why? Surely because someone else unloads the camel, he (or she) has no say in it. But in the story, surely we must be the camel who unloads himself, who shakes it all off his humps, as an act of the will. And as we've seen, the spirit of all this applies to every one of us, including those without bank accounts.

The camel must shed its load of riches and goods, so that it can pass through the gate into the Kingdom. But we are doing that right now! We will pass through the gate into the Kingdom when the Lord returns (Rev. 22:14), and yet through shedding our materialism, we do it now. John puts it more bluntly and yet more absolutely: now, through the life of faith, we have the eternal life, in that we begin to live now the type of life which we will eternally live. We receive the Kingdom of God here and now, in that we receive the Gospel of the Kingdom; and if we accept it as a little child, we begin to enter it, now- in that the lives we live determine whether or not we will enter it at the Lord’s coming. We are on our way into life! We have received the Kingdom, our names were written from the foundation of the world, and only our falling from grace can take that away. This is almost too good news to believe.

10:26 *And they were astonished exceedingly, saying to him: Then who can be saved?*-

They were really so shocked that wealth made it hard to enter the Kingdom, implying they were strongly persuaded that wealth was a gift from God and a sign of

His approval of a man. This of course was quite foreign to the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount and other teaching of the Lord, and Matthew uses this strong term to highlight how far they had been from understanding His most basic teachings.

"Who *can* be saved?" translates the same word the Lord uses in the next verse to say that with God, even the saving of the wealthy who don't quit their wealth is "possible"- on the basis, therefore, of His willingness to accept a lower standard of achievement to that He ideally requires. And this is in the context of His offering a lower standard to unconditional forgiveness in Mt. 18 (you can not do this if your brother sins against you, and instead drag him through the synagogue disciplinary process), and His demand for forgiveness of adultery (although if you fail in this you can take the lower level and divorce your partner- if it is not 'given' to you to accept that standard).

10:27 *Jesus, observing them, said*- The Lord maintained eye-contact with His listeners: Mt. 19:26; Mk. 3:5,34; 5:32; 8:33; 10:21, 23,27; Lk. 6:10; 20:17; 22:61; Jn. 1:42. These are all separate occurrences; the fact is really being emphasized. This paying appropriate attention with eye contact is also a good strategy for matching the silences that occur from time to time in any serious conversation. Most of us can tell when another is thinking by observing the eyes, and when they are not their eyes will tell you. The way the Lord Jesus had of lifting up His eyes was something which evidently struck the Gospel writers (Lk. 6:20; Jn. 6:5; 11:41; 17:1 cp. the emphasis upon the eyes of the risen Lord in Rev. 1:14; 2:18; 5:6; 19:12).

With men it is impossible, but not with God- The status of *para* God is often applied to the Lord Jesus (Lk. 2:52; Jn. 6:46; 8:40; 16:27; Acts 2:33). The suggestion could be that because of the status of the Lord Jesus with the Father, such gracious salvation is possible which would be impossible if men simply had to have the steel will to obey the Father's ideal principles.

For all things are possible with God- Lifted from the Septuagint of the word to Sarah about the birth of Isaac (Gen. 18:14). Those Old Testament heroes were not merely stained glass figures- our own belief in salvation regardless of wealth is as dramatic as the belief of an old woman that she could have a child. The context here, however, is talking of how those who choose a lower level- in this case, *not* selling their wealth and giving to the poor- can still be saved by God's gracious possibility. This harmonizes with the whole theme of :12, that to some is 'given' the possibility of living on the idea level regarding divorce and remarriage, but if that cannot be attained to, then God will still accept us.

There are at least two instances in the Gospels where the Lord Jesus is quarrying his language from the book of Job, and shows a certain identification of himself with Job. Here the Lord explains the irrelevance of riches to the spiritual good of entering the Kingdom, saying that "with God all things are possible"- without money. This is almost quoting Job 42:2, where Job comes to the conclusion that all human strength is meaningless: "I know that You can do everything". It may be that Jesus is even implying that through the tribulation of his life he had come to the same conclusion as Job. See too Mt. 5:27-30.

Having said that it is so hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom- as hard as for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle- the Lord comments that 'what is impossible with man, is possible with God' (Mk. 10:27). In first century Palestinian Judaism, this saying was a kind of figure of speech for describing a miracle. If any rich person gets into the Kingdom- it will be a miracle. That's what the Lord is

saying. And He says it to us today. Generosity alone, of course, won't bring us into the Kingdom. It's not as if we can buy our way in. But there are major implications that our attitude to wealth is in fact a crucial indicator of whether or not we will be there.

Having explained "how hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom", the Lord went on to comment: "With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible" (Mk. 10:25,27). It is impossible for a rich man to be saved, He seems to be saying. And as we seek to convert the rich and self-satisfied in the societies in which we live, this does indeed seem the case. But although on one hand it *is* an impossibility, yet not with God: for He desires to seek and save the rich too. And indeed He does, achieving what with men is impossible. And the Father seeks to impress His positive attitude upon us.

10:28 *Peter began to say to him: We have left all*- The family based structure of the first century is hard to fully empathize with from our distance. Family was all. Peter comments that the disciples had "left our own homes" (Lk. 18:28 RVmg.), and the parallel here says "left *all*". Your home was your all. To have to leave it for the sake of Christ was the most fundamental thing you could do. Hence the real meaning in the first century of the Lord's response that such converts would receive families in this life, i.e. in their relationships in the ecclesia. And yet the radical call of Christ is no less demanding and intrusive as men and women meet it today, the only difference being that the starkness of the choices is less pronounced today- but just as essentially real.

I have repeatedly mentioned that the material here is strongly related to that in Mt. 18. The Greek here for "left / forsook all" is identical to that in Mt. 18:32: "I *forgave* you *all*". Peter had balked at the idea of 'forgiving all'. It is easier to 'forsake' [s.w. 'forgive'] all material things than to *forgive* all. This explains why the incident of the rich young man follows the teaching about the need to forgive all. He would not forsake all, just as some would not forgive all. Peter claims to have forsaken all, and yet it's apparent that he struggled with the idea of *forgiving* all, thinking that seven times / day was more than generous enough of him. Likewise one wonders whether Peter had really forsaken all materially- he still had a wife, and apparently his fishing boats back in Galilee, to which he returned after the Lord's resurrection.

Was Peter really correct to say that he had really "left all"? He evidently had in mind how he had left his nets and walked away, following Jesus (Mk. 1:18). Then he thought he was following Jesus in the way the Lord demanded. For some time later, the Lord "entered into one of the ships, which was (i.e. still, at that time) Simon's…" (Lk. 5:1). Peter had been fishing all night in Jn. 21:3- strange, for a man who had so dramatically left his nets to respond to the Lord's call. But after the miraculous catch of fishes, Peter "forsook all, and followed him". Note that Mark's [Peter's] Gospel omits many incidents, but also uses the device of repetition to stress what the writer considers significant. Thus in Mk. 1:16 Peter tells us twice that he *was* a fisherman [cp. 14:68]. By the time of Lk. 18 and the conversation with the rich young man, Peter was confident he had forsaken all. But "I go a fishing" (Jn. 21:3) would suggest that even this forsaking of all had not been so dramatic. The boats were still there. Peter still carried his fishing tackle round with him in his pack (Mt. 17:27). The Lord had taught that following Him meant not just leaving behind for a moment, but selling up and giving the money to the poor. This Peter had not done. But he assumed that because he was physically following Jesus, well therefore what the Lord demanded of

the rich young man, he had as good as done; for that young man wouldn't follow Jesus, but Peter would. It is easy to understand how Peter reasoned- for the fact we are apparent followers of the Lord in a world which chooses to reject Him, can lead to an assumption that we must of course be following just as He asks of us.

And have followed You- Just as Peter's claim to have "left all" was perhaps questionable, likewise Peter seems to have under-estimated what 'following Christ' really meant- for the idea of carrying the cross is strongly connected with following Christ (Mt. 10:38; 16:24). And Peter failed to carry that cross to the end, for he denied the Lord when the going got tough.

Peter had the impression that by forsaking all and following the Lord, he would somehow benefit. He still had to learn that the carrying of the cross is not to be motivated by any desire for personal benefit, spiritual or otherwise. We live in a world in which religion, like everything else, is seen as a means toward some personal benefit. If we love the Lord, we will follow Him, wherever the life in Him leads us; purely for love of Him, and recognition that His way is the way to glorifying the Father. Peter had left all, but expected something back. For the excellency of fellowshipping the sufferings of the future Saviour, Moses gave up all the riches of Egypt. The Lord responded by saying that nobody who had left all *for His Name's sake* would go unrewarded (Mt. 19:29). The riches, the surpassing excellence of Christ, all the things tied up in His Name, these were not appreciated at that time by Peter. They are enough, purely of themselves, to make a man count all things as dung. Later, he understood this. He told the lame man that the silver and gold which he had was the salvation possible in the Name of Jesus (Acts 3:6). Peter rejoiced that he was counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name, and he preached in that Name. There is quite some emphasis on this: Acts 2:21,28; 3:6,16; 4:10,12,30; 5:41. Now he had learnt his mistake, or rather he realized the poverty of his understanding of the Lord. He now found the excellency of the Lord's Name an imperative of itself to witness to it. Likewise "for his name's sake they went forth" in obedience to the great preaching commission (3 Jn. 7; Rev. 2:3).

19:28 *And Jesus said to them: Truly I say to you: You who have followed me*- This is in response to Peter's claim that they had "left all and followed You" (:27). The Lord doesn't include Peter's claim that they had "left all", but rather focuses upon the 'following Me'. This may well have been because He knew that Peter had not in fact "left all" to the degree that Peter thought he had (see on :27). They hadn't then grasped the idea of what really following involved; they hadn't in one way or another laid down their lives with Christ. And then there is the problem of "twelve". Judas didn't follow to the end, and will not sit upon a throne in the Kingdom. The Lord surely means, therefore: "You who will have followed me…". Or is that He spoke of "the twelve" as a title for the group of disciples, and what He meant was that even at that early stage He counted their desire to follow Him to the cross as if they had done it? We must see our failing, following brethren likewise. He counted His sheep as following Him (Jn. 10:27) even then, although he knew they were not then strong enough to follow Him to the end (Jn. 13:36). The risen Lord especially wanted the women to tell Peter that He was 'going before him' to Galilee (Mk. 16:7)- with the implication that even in his weakness and dejection, He wanted Peter to still try to follow Him and re-live the cross in his life.

10:29 *Jesus said: Truly I say to you. Whoever leaves house, or brothers, or sisters, or mother, or father, or children, or lands for my sake and for the gospel's sake*- This list of things to be forsaken recalls the language of the Levites forsaking these things in order to serve God (Ex. 32:26-29; Dt. 33:8-10). The secular disciples

again are encouraged to see themselves as the Levites of the new Israel the Lord was creating. Mt. 19:27-30 has a series of extended allusions to the fact that we are now the priesthood. The Lord speaks of how His followers will each have left mother, brother etc. to serve Him, referring to how Moses blessed Levi for forsaking these very things so as to God's service (Dt. 33:9). But He also spoke of how they would forsake houses and lands for His sake and the Gospel's- a reference to the way the Levites resigned their right to physical inheritance in the land for the sake of their relationship with God and the work they were called to. In the same way as Moses predicted that the Levites would be materially blessed even now as a result of their dedication (Dt. 33:11), so the Lord made the same promise. And there is no Christian who has heart and soul committed themselves to the Gospel's work, either in the world or amongst their brethren, who has not lived to see the truth of this definition of priesthood.

"For My Name's sake" is parallel with "The kingdom of God's sake" (Lk. 18:29). The things of the Name and the things of the Kingdom were therefore not two different things, rather were they different ways of referring to the same realities.

10:30 *Will receive in return, in this present season, a hundredfold houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, and with them persecutions; but in the age to come, eternal life*- The Lord's prophecy that the believer receives fathers, mothers, houses, lands etc. only has its fulfillment insofar as the ecclesia is willing to share these things and relationships with its members. But the condition of the fulfillment was not explicitly stated. We forsake all human relationships to follow the Lord Jesus. And He promises to compensate for this even in this life. But it depends to what extent we are willing to accept and perceive it. Through meaningful fellowship with our brethren we will find those relationships which we have given up compensated for, even if we aren't physically close to our brethren. In reference to Israel's deliverance from Egypt we read: "God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains" (Ps. 68:6). To be set in a new family is paralleled with being brought out from slavery. Part of the process of our redemption is that we are set in a new ecclesial family. This must be a reference to how Israel were brought out on Passover night, where the families and lonely ones had to join together into households big enough to kill a lamb for. The implication of Ps. 68 could be that it was in these family groups that they travelled through the wilderness. The N.C.V. reads: "God is in his holy Temple. He is a father to orphans, and he defends the widows. God gives the lonely a home. He leads prisoners out with joy...". The very house / family of God becomes the house / family of the lonely. Hence the ecclesia *is* the house of God (1 Cor. 3:16). We find true family in the new family of God. By baptism we are "added together" with those others who are likewise saved in Christ (Acts 2:47 RVmg.). We will live together eternally with the other members of this new body and community which we enter. The links between us within that new family are even stronger than those with our natural family; and hence any division amongst the family of God is the greatest tragedy. What this means in practice is that we must fellowship each other. Even if we are isolated from other believers, one can always write letters, make phone calls, invite others to visit them, attempt to meet others…

"Inherit eternal life" are the very words of the rich young man (Mk. 10:17). The answer to that man's question was that we have to lose now, if we are to win eternally; we must forsake material things if we are to inherit the life eternal. As he was only a young man, it's likely that his wealth had been inherited. He was being told that the greatest inheritance was of life eternal, but this didn't come easily nor by

good luck or circumstance, but in response to a lifetime of following Jesus. The things which were to be forsaken include [putting the records in Mark and Luke together with Matthew]: family, brothers, sisters, father, mother, lands, houses etc. These were all the things which the young man had received by inheritance, and to forsake association with his family, on behalf of whom he had received his wealth, would've been crazy and social suicide. It was as crazy as trashing a winning lottery ticket and walking away the same you were before you bought it. But this is the radical calling of those who must forsake materialism in order to inherit eternity. Therefore all seeking for material advantage in this life is surely inappropriate if in fact we are to forsake it even if it comes to us without our seeking it.

10:31 *But many that are first shall be last and the last, first*- The context is of the Lord having taught that a rich man *must* shed his wealth in order to enter the Kingdom, *but* God's grace is such that He is prepared to save the rich who *don't* do that. With God this is "possible". Chapters 18 and 19 have demonstrated the idea of living on different levels. The Lord had told the rich young man that if he "would be perfect", then he should sell all he had and give it to the poor. In this amazing comment at the conclusion of the section, we learn that in fact "many" who are first in this life *and choose to remain first* shall still be saved, although they will be "last" in the Kingdom. The same word for "last" is used in the parable which speaks of believers having to take the "last" or 'lowest' place around the Lord's table (Lk. 14:9,10). There are and will be gradations between the Lord's people, both now and eternally. Those who are "first" in this brief life, retaining their wealth when they should not, shall be saved by grace but will be the least in the Kingdom. Whereas those who are the least in this life, or make themselves the least, will become the first in God's Kingdom.

10:32 *And they were on the road heading up to Jerusalem; and Jesus was walking ahead of them*- This could refer to the uphill journey, but 'going up' was a technical term used for going up to Jerusalem, particularly to keep a feast- Passover, in this case. They were going "up" from Jericho, Mt. 19:15. Hence they went "up", uphill to Jerusalem. These small details all support the position that the Gospels were written by eye witnesses and were not created many years later by people who were not present. They were going the opposite direction of man in the parable of the Good Samaritan, who went *down* from Jerusalem to Jericho. We may be able to infer that the Lord intended us to read that man as one who was not going in the way of the cross, who was going away from Jerusalem rather than towards it- and who was still saved by the grace of the Samaritan / Jesus.

And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve aside- The implication is that there were others travelling with them, and the Lord wished to explain the reality of the cross to the disciples alone.

He began to tell them what was to happen to him- Tragically He so often sought to explain to the disciples about the cross; and yet always they met His efforts either with silence, or with irrelevant changing of the subject, or even protest, in Peter's case. The tragic mismatch between the Lord's cross and the mind of the disciples is brought out in Mk. 10:32-40. Having set His face to go up to Jerusalem, the Lord "went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid". The words imply that He took the lead and walked forcefully a few paces ahead of them in a startling manner. "If anything in the Gospels has the stamp of real and live recollection upon it, it is this". His mind was evidently dwelling in His forthcoming death, in which He may well have foreseen that He would be crucified with sinners on

His right and left. But then two of the disciples respond to His prediction of the cross by asking that *they* should sit on His right and left hand in glory over the others. Here we see, on the Gospel writers own admission, the paucity of their effort to grasp the real message of the cross. May it not be so with us. May we at least strive to enter into His struggle, and be moved to a true and unpretended humility by it.

There was something in His body language during His last journey to Jerusalem which was nothing short of terrifying to the disciples: "They were amazed; and as they followed Him, they were afraid" (Mk. 10:32-34). All this came to a climax in His extreme sweating in Gethsemane as the great horror of darkness began to actually descend on Him (Mk. 14:33-42). Contrast this with the calmness of suicide bombers or other religiously persuaded zealots going to their death. The Lord- *our* Lord- was too sensitive to humanity, to *us*, to His *own* humanity, to His own sense of the possibility of failure which His humility pressed ever upon Him... than to be like that. See on Heb. 5:7,8.

10:33 *We will go up to Jerusalem*- This was stating the obvious, but He wanted them to perceive their part in the journey to the cross which He was making; for His path to death and resurrection was to be theirs, as it is ours too. Or perhaps we are to conclude that like Abraham, they were following their Lord not knowing where they were going.

And the Son of Man shall be delivered- The Greek means literally ‘to hand over’; the idea of betrayal was maybe implicit, but not as explicit as in the English word ‘betrayed’. The word is very common on the lips of the Lord, as if He saw the moment of ‘handing over’ as the quintessence of all His sufferings- the hand over from God’s Providential protection to the powers of darkness.

To the chief priests and the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death- Exactly fulfilled, using the same Greek words, in Mk. 14:64.

And shall deliver him to the Gentiles- The Lord foresaw that the Jews would have to deliver Him to the Romans if their death sentence was going to be legally inflicted.

10:34 *And they shall mock him and shall spit upon him and shall scourge him, and shall kill him; and after three days he shall rise again*- The Lord's predictions of His sufferings are detailed. The question arises as to whether this knowledge was beamed into Him by Divine revelation, or whether He worked it all out from Old Testament anticipations and prophecies of Messiah's sufferings. All the details could indeed have been understood from the Old Testament. And yet the Lord gave His life, it was not taken from Him; He as the master psychologist and chess player knew the moves which His chosen actions would elicit, and that may have been why He could predict these particular events in such detail.

10:35 *And there came near to him James and John, the sons of Zebedee, saying to him: Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we shall ask of you*- So often, the Lord’s predictions of the cross are responded to in most unspiritual ways, as if the message really failed to penetrate. As with us today, people turned off at the message of the Lord’s death. Whenever this happens, we must enquire as to *why* we turn off; for it surely has a psychological basis. Why does out attention wander so easily when reading or hearing discussed the crucifixion passages? The psychological, subconscious reason may well be that we realize that whatever is true for the Lord is to be true for us; His death there is the pattern for our death to self today. And we would far rather not be reminded of that.

Matthew places these words on the lips of their mother, Salome. But effectively the words were those of James and John. Divine inspiration reflects how God

understood that completely. They tried to manipulate the Lord through the use of a female. Here is a classic example of where reading the entire Bible gives us a wider and fuller perspective. But a caveat needs to be sounded about such intertextuality, as it is called- the practice of interpreting a text in the light of other Bible texts. Of course, to get the wider and truer picture, this is a quite necessary and legitimate way of studying the Bible. But remember that the vast majority of believers over history have been illiterate. They heard the Gospels read to them. The text as it stands spoke to them- there are no Divinely inspired footnotes which signpost us to one of the parallel Gospels for the fuller picture. The easy use of computer-assisted analysis of the Biblical text is unique to our age, but one downside of this is that it can too easily be assumed that such endless chasing of connections with other Scripture is in fact how the text was originally designed to be read. It clearly was not. The fact the text of the entire Bible stands up to such analysis and indeed glows with glory under it- doesn't mean that this is the only nor even the intended way to receive the text. The ability to perform such detailed intertextuality just wasn't there for the illiterate; they heard the text of the Gospels as it was read, and there was a message within the text as it stands which they were intended to perceive.

Mark records the brothers asking: "Master, we would that you should do for us whatsoever we shall desire"- presumably trying to tie the Lord to His words in Mt. 18:19 about the successful prayer of “two… who should agree as touching anything they should ask”. But of course the Lord’s context there was quite different. It was about restoring the lost to the way to the Kingdom. So often we likewise can seize hold of the Lord’s words and try to twist them to as it were manipulate God into response. This sort of thing goes on *ad nauseam* in many Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, taking Bible phrases out of context and aggressively holding God to words He never uttered in the context required of them by the audience. They had the focus all wrong- they wanted to be in the Kingdom "for us". Our motive for wanting to be in the Kingdom needs to be analyzed. Is it for God manifestation, or mere human salvation from death that we are interested in [to paraphrase a well known quote from John Thomas]?

10:36 *And he said to them: What would you wish that I should do for you?*- Matthew has: ″What do you desire...". These are the very words the Lord goes on to use to the blind men in Mt. 20:32 as He left Jericho, and to the blind man He met as He approached Jericho (Lk. 18:41). The similarity in the stories of the blind men He spoke to is surely for the same reason as His repetition of "What do you want?" both to them and to Salome and again to her sons. It's all to build up the impression that He is asking people to focus upon what their dominant desire really is. And such an approach is not unknown in depth psychology today. The Lord uses the same word for "want" in asking the crippled man if he 'wanted' to be made whole (Jn. 5:6). Of course he did, and the Lord knew it. So His question was to elicit in the man a sense of what his dominant desire really was. The Lord raised him up, and went on to comment that as the Father raises up people, so His Son enlivens whom *He* wants [s.w.- Jn. 5:21]. The 'want' of the man and the 'want' of God's Son coincided, just as can happen for us all- if our dominant desires are His. Therefore later in Jn. 15:7 the Lord almost comments on the incident with Salome by saying that if His words abide in us, then we shall ask what we wish [s.w. "want"] and it shall be done [s.w. 'do']. There was no blank cheque promise, as Salome and her sons had wrongly implied. It was often His style to focus people on what they were asking for, encouraging them to verbalize and thus define their deepest desires. This is why He made as if He would go further on the way to Emmaus, why He appeared to be sleeping during the storm,

and in another storm appeared to intend to walk past the disciples (Mk. 6:48). All this was to elicit from His people an awareness of their need for Him. He works the same today, through providential circumstance in our lives, to make us ask ourselves what we really and essentially want. He has just spoken in detail of His sufferings, and so His question was rhetorical. 'If I am going to do all that for you- what else could you ask for?'. The wonder of salvation for us as sinners is such that we should see all our other requests in that context.

He had just been speaking of how He would die for them. James and John evidently didn't appreciate the wonder, the blessing, the honour of the fact that the Son of God would love them unto the end. All they wanted was the human blessing, in this life, of being able to tell their brethren that they would be *the* greatest in the Kingdom. "What would ye that I should do for you" - in addition to loving you unto the death, of loving you with a love greater than that of *anyone* else? Their minds were all too set on the present, the petty glory of here and now. But when they actually beheld the cross (Lk. 23:49 suggests James also did), they would have learnt their lesson. And so it was with Job. Throughout the core of the book, he consistently addresses God as 'Shaddai', the fruitful one, the provider of blessing. But in the prologue and epilogue, he calls God 'Yahweh'. It may be that He came to *know* the wonder of God's Name to the extent that he quit his perception of God as only the provider of material blessing.

10:37 *And they said to him: Grant to us that we may sit, one on your right hand and one on your left hand, in your glory*- This confirms that she had Mt. 19:28 in mind, where the Lord had promised a sitting on thrones when He sat "in the throne of His glory". The mother of James and John wanted them to have great reward in the Kingdom. The Lord's basic answer was: 'Take up my cross, follow my example, focused as it is on getting others to the Kingdom' (Mt. 20:21,27,28). They were to be to others examples of selflessness. In the parable of the labourers, the hard, all day workers came expecting their pay; they were sent away, it could be, in rejection. But those whom the parable appears to commend worked having made no agreement nor mention of the reward they would receive. Thus when James and John clamoured for a reward in the Kingdom, they were told instead to go away and serve; this was what it was all about, being the minister of others, serving for nothing- not badgering the Lord for a reward in the Kingdom (Mt. 20:20-26).

When the Lord Jesus promised those who overcome that they would sit down with Him in His throne (Rev. 3:21), He was surely casting a glance back at the way His men had asked to sit at His right and left hand, in His glory (Mk. 10:37). He knew He was promising a future glory far above what to them must have been the heights of their spiritual ambition.

They surely had in mind the Lord's recent assurance that the twelve would sit upon twelve thrones judging the tribes of Israel (Mt. 19:28). But even that wasn't enough. She wanted even more. The record leaves us gasping at her: 'What? Even that promise, and the prediction of the Lord's death for you- still not enough for you??!'. This is intended to put all our requests and dominant desires in a different context. If we have been promised the Kingdom and the Lord has died for us- then what other dominant desires should we have? Surely none. For those things should be the dominant issues within us.

10:38 *But Jesus said to them: You do not know what you ask*- The statement that men 'know not' is usually and extensively on the Lord's lips in a negative sense. We can

therefore read Him here as deeply disappointed in her. Note how the Lord uses the plural 'you'; He clearly saw that the question was being asked by the sons through their mother, and the parallel records show Him asking them directly what *they* really wanted. "We know not what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom. 8:26) seems to be some kind of allusion back to the mother of Zebedee's children asking Christ to get her two sons the best places in the Kingdom (Mt. 20:22). He basically replied 'You know not what you pray for', in the sense of 'you don't appreciate'. It may be that Paul in Rom. 8 is saying that in our desire for the Kingdom, in our groaning for it, we don't appreciate what we ask for as we ought, yet Christ nonetheless makes powerful intercession for us to this end.

Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?- The Lord's death was therefore His cup, and also His 'baptism'. He asks us to be baptized with His baptism and to regularly drink His cup in the memorial meeting. These things are easily performed, and yet they are an agreement to die His death. We too can far too easily say "I am able...", when like the disciples, we fail to perceive the horror of the cross and what is being asked of us. We therefore participate in these symbols, these metaphors, with bowed head, deeply aware of our likely failure to carry the cross to the end, but grateful for our participation in *His* cup and baptism, the One who did in fact die the death of the cross.

Or to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?- Note the present tense compared to the future tense of "the cup that I [shall] drink of". And yet in Lk. 12:50 He speaks of the baptism that He must still be baptized with in crucifixion. His death on the cross was in essence lived and died by Him throughout His life. This is why the prophecy of His death in Isaiah 53 is also quoted about experiences during His life. And there is an ongoing element to baptism, just as Israel were baptized "in the cloud and in the sea" as they passed through the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1), and yet lived beneath the cloud throughout their wilderness journey- as if their baptism was ongoing. We likewise die and resurrect with Christ in an ongoing sense as we die to the flesh and progressively experience His new life breaking through into our mortal experience (2 Cor. 4:11). Note too how Paul speaks of baptism in the present tense in Rom. 6:4- we *are* buried with Him by baptism, although Paul has just said in Rom. 6:3 that we *were* baptized as a one-time past even. If Paul were simply referencing the point of their baptism in Rom. 6:4, he would have said 'We *were* buried with Him'. The sense of Col. 2:12 and 1 Cor. 12:13 may be similar- "By one Spirit we are all [present tense] baptized into one body". The whole language of baptism by the Spirit surely suggests a process rather than a one time event of immersion in water.

In Gethsemane He spoke of drinking the cup of His final death and suffering. But earlier He had spoken in the present tense: “the cup that I drink of... the baptism that I am baptized with" (Mk. 10:38). The drinking of the cup of death was ongoing. Likewise there are several verses in Psalms 22 and 69 which are evidently relevant to both the Lord's life and also His final hours on the cross. "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" is in the context of the cross, but is applied to an earlier period of the Lord's life (Ps. 69:9 cp. Jn. 2:17). "I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children" is another example (Ps. 69:8); it is a prophecy about the final sufferings of the Lord in crucifixion, and yet it is elsewhere quoted about the experiences of His ministry.

James and John pestered the Lord to give them glory in His Kingdom. He didn't refuse their request; He simply turned the question round to them: 'Can you really carry my cross? Don't be so obsessed with getting salvation out of me. Concentrate

instead on carrying my cross, being baptized with my baptism, and then the corollary of that- sharing my resurrection- will follow in its own time'.

10:39- see on Gal. 3:27.

And they said to him: We are able! And Jesus said to them: The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized-

The Lord surely remembered their childlike over confidence when He Himself prayed for that cup to be "able" (AV "may" s.w.) to pass from Him so that He didn't have to drink it (Mt. 26:42). Yet the Lord is so generous spirited to them. He says that they will indeed be "able" to drink His cup (:23)- but the places of honour in the Kingdom were solely for the Father to give. He alludes to this in telling Peter that he was not "able" (s.w.) to follow Him to death on the cross at that time, "but you shall follow Me afterwards" (Jn. 13:36). We would likely have told them to take more seriously the Lord's predictions of His death by crucifixion which He had just uttered, and be more realistic about their own failure to suffer and die like that. But He is so more positive and gracious.

The Lord Jesus Christ's sensitivity to our thinking that we really have borne His cross comes out here. Those men, with all their unspirituality, could quite coolly state that they wanted the highest place in the Kingdom, and could say with confidence that they could shoulder the cross of Christ. The Lord's reply was gracious and generous spirited indeed: "Ye shall indeed drink of my cup" - 'when you're a lot more spiritually mature', He could have added. We *sense* rather than are explicitly told His sensitivity to men thinking they can shoulder His cross; for He alone knows what the cross of Christ entailed and entails. And in speaking of our own sufferings, we too need to learn these lessons, and compare our sufferings against Christ's with the utmost caution, with the sensitivity to *His* feelings, recognizing that we must act as men and women who have been *counted as if* we shared His death, and not as those who have actually "resisted unto blood (in our) striving against sin". To confidently identify some of our brethren as tares is only one example of the way in which we can hurt our Lord's feelings, by acting and thinking in ways which are only appropriate for He who did actually carry the cross.

Seeing even the Lord baulked at drinking that cup in Gethsemane, saying that they would drink His cup is an incredibly positive comment to make. But none of us, including the twelve, die the death of the cross as Jesus did. He may have seen this as true insofar as by baptism into His death, His personal death and resurrection are counted to us, as if we have participated in it. As we reconstruct in our own minds His death, every fibre in our being cries out: 'I would not have endured that'. The wonder is that by baptism into Him, His death, that death, even the death of the cross, is counted to us. And with that we should be content, rather than seeking for grandeur in the resurrection age as the disciples were doing. When it came to actually giving the twelve His cup to drink, the Lord invited them: "You- drink all of it" (Mt. 26:27). The force of *pas* there appears to refer to all of the cup, the whole cup- rather than inviting all of the disciples to drink, because it was surely axiomatic that they were to all drink it. The Lord was saying that He counted them as having fully drunk His cup- a cup which He Himself flinched to take. This is the degree to which we are in Him and counted as participating in His death by reason of our status "in Him". Another possibility is that the Lord spoke these words specifically to the twelve and envisaged that each of them would die through crucifixion- although whether they did is not historically confirmable.

John's equivalent of this is the Lord's word that unless we drink His blood and eat His flesh, we can have no salvation (Jn. 6:53). This therefore has reference to our participation in His death, and our symbolic acceptance of this in the breaking of bread. To drink the Lord's cup is parallel with partaking at the Lord's memorial table in 1 Cor. 10:21. The breaking of bread means many things, and each time we do it we may likely focus on different aspects. But it is not easy for us, or it should not be easy for us. To drink that cup can never be done in a blasé spirit of 'Yes, we are able'. Rather with humbled hearts do we accept that our being counted as having participated in it is by grace alone. Peter was amongst those who thought he was able to drink the Lord's cup, and yet the Lord had to rebuke Peter for seeking to deter Him from drinking it- "Put up your sword... the cup which My Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" (Jn. 18:11). Peter's desire for the Lord not to drink it was psychologically rooted in his recognition that the Lord's cup was to be his cup.

10:40 *But to sit on my right hand or on my left hand*- When the disciples foolishly sought to have what they thought were to be the favoured places at His right hand and His left, the Lord could have answered: 'You foolish people! Those on my left hand will be condemned!'. But He graciously didn't comment on their glaring error. He pushed a higher principle- that we should not seek for personal greatness, seeing that God is the judge of all (Mt. 20:23). Yet sadly, so much of our preaching has been solely concerned with pointing out the errors of others without being sensitive to what little faith and understanding they *do* have, and seeking to build on it.

Is not mine to give- A profound rebuttal of the primitive and mistaken equation of Jesus with God which is found in Trinitarian theology.

But it will be given to them for whom it has been prepared-

A specific future is being prepared for each of us in God's Kingdom (22:4; 25:34; 1 Cor. 2:9; Heb. 11:16 "He has prepared for them a city"), a unique place prepared in the Kingdom for us by the Lord's death (Jn. 14:2,3) and yet *we* are likewise being "prepared" (s.w. Lk. 1:17,76; 12:47; 2 Tim. 2:21; Rev. 19:7; 21:2 "His wife has *prepared* herself"). God is preparing a unique destiny and role for each of us in His Kingdom, but that preparation work is in terms of how we are being prepared in this life. Therefore all our present experiences are specifically intended to prepare us for the kind of person and role we shall eternally have. In this lies the ultimate significance and meaning to human experience if we are indeed Kingdom people. A huge amount of intense preparation is being packed into a very short space of time in this life. The lack of meaning and significance attached to even is what causes the depression which dogs each secular person, especially as they grow older. The Lord's point was that He was going to the cross to prepare places for them all in the Kingdom (Jn. 14:2,3 s.w.). He had just predicted His death. This was where their focus was to be, rather than seeking something for themselves.

It's often been commented that God is beyond or even outside of our kind of time. God pre this present creation may have been like that, and He of course has the capacity and possibility to be like that. But it seems to me that particularly in connection with those with whom He is in relationship, He chooses to not exercise that possibility. Instead, God Almighty throws Himself into our experience, by limiting Himself to our kind of time- with all the suspense, hope, excitement, joy, disappointment which this involves. Time and again we read of how God says He is "shaping evil against you and devising a plan" against His enemies (Jer. 18:11; Jer. 26:3; Jer. 49:20,30; Jer. 50:45; Mic. 2:3; 4:12). For the faithful, He says that He is making plans for them for good and not for evil, "to give you a future" (Jer. 29:11).

The Lord Jesus had this sort of thing in mind when He spoke of how the Kingdom will have been being *prepared* for the faithful from the beginning of the world (Mt. 25:34; Mt. 20:23).

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

The altogether lovely manner of the Lord is shown in how He dealt with immature understanding and ambition amongst others. James and John wanted to sit on either side of the Lord in His Kingdom glory. Instead of telling them to be more humble, the Lord gently went along with them- so far. He said that this great honour would be given to "them for whom it is prepared" (Mk. 10:40). And whom is this? *All* those redeemed in Christ have that place "prepared" (Mt. 25:34). The immediate context speaks of the cross (Mk. 10:33,45), and it is this which prepared the places in the Kingdom (Jn. 14:1,2). Thus the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world, and the Kingdom was prepared from the foundation of the world (Mt. 25:34). Actually, all those redeemed in Christ will sit down with Him in His very throne- not just on the right and left side of Him (Rev. 3:21). Indeed, the Lord's subsequent parable about the places prepared in the Kingdom, and people being on the right *and left* hand of Him at judgment, with the rejected on the left hand, was perhaps His gentle corrective to James and John. But my point is that He was so gentle about the way He corrected their error. Actually twice before in Mark 10, the Lord had shown this spirit. The arrogant young man told Him that he'd kept all the commandments from his youth [and, get it, he was only a young guy anyway…]. And yet "Jesus beholding him, loved him" (Mk. 10:20). And then moments later in the record, Peter starts on about "Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee"- and the Lord so gently doesn't disagree, even though Peter's fishing business and family were still there for him to return to it seems, but promises reward for all who truly do leave all (Mk. 10:28-30). So just three times in one chapter, we see the gentle patience of the Lord with arrogant, small minded people, who thought they understood so much and were so righteous. They were nothing compared to Him. But the way He deals with them is indeed "altogether lovely".

10:41 *And when the ten heard it, they began to be moved with indignation concerning James and John*- This suggests that the favour asked was asked secretly. The Lord sensed or overheard their anger, and called the group to Him (:42). The ebb and flow of the disciples to and from Jesus is noted especially in Matthew, probably another indication of their own weakness which formed such a major part of their witness. For the ideal was to abide in Him, to constantly follow Him, and not come to Him and then go from Him in squabbles and jealousies amongst ourselves.

10:42 *And Jesus called them to him, and said to them: You know*- This is in response to the anger of the ten against the self-seeking manipulation of the two. He now taught them the spirit of absolute servanthood as an answer to feeling resentful against the unspirituality of our brethren. Even if they are indeed so terribly wrong and simply 'don't get it', as the two brethren clearly didn't, our response should not be anger but rather servanthood towards them.

That they who are considered rulers of the Gentiles- The *archon*, literally, 'the first'. The Lord had just taught in the parable of the labourers that a principle of His Kingdom was that the first were to be last.

Lord it over them- Gk. *katakurieuo*. Literally, to be *kurios* over, to be as Lord over. His idea was that if He is our *only* Lord, then there can be no lording it over others even when they are clearly unspiritual as the two brethren were at this time. This is where our belief in the Lordship of Jesus really cuts deep. For we naturally would like to think that we are superior to those who 'don't get it' about the spirit of Christ. But we are to see Him as total Lord, and ourselves as servants. Our natural anger and indignation at others' weakness is to be replaced by servanthood. And yet the body of Christ is littered with the wreckage of believers angry with others who refused to serve them but rather stormed out from them or rejected them- rather than staying to serve them, realizing that they are under the Lordship.

The style of leadership / control known in this world isn't to be exercised by the elders of God's flock (Mt. 20:25,26; 1 Pet. 5:3); ecclesial organization shouldn't reflect the structures and practices of big commercial organizations. Leadership is to be based upon spiritual attributes and the ability to change and convert the lives of others, rather than secular skills such as fund raising, computer literacy, management etc. Yet sadly many ecclesias and Christian organizations seem to confuse the difference between management skills and spiritual leadership. The two things aren't the same. An executive director of a company may very well not be the right brother to lead an ecclesia. The Greek language is full or words containing the compounds *kata*- and *arch*-, implying power over others, as part of a hierarchy. The leaders of the Roman world used these terms (Mt. 20:25), as did the synagogue leadership. But never does scripture use these kind of words about those who are 'elders' in the true ecclesia. It's a pointed omission. On the other hand, there are many *sun*- prefixes: fellow-worker, fellow-citizen, fellow-soldier, fellow-heir etc. The New Testament emphasis is certainly on what we have in common rather on the fact that in practice some are more capable of organizing, or deserve especial respect for their evident spirituality and "for their work's sake". And the teaching of the Lord Himself was more concerned with how to follow Him than how to lead others. Likewise, there were many contemporary Greek words used to describe religious gatherings, e.g. *heorte, synodos, koinos*. But instead the word *ekklesia* is used, meaning a gathering together of town citizens with equal rights to discuss a matter. This is how the word was understood at that time.

And their great ones- The *megas*, the mighty, the strong, the superior. The context is the sense of spiritual superiority felt by the ten against the spiritual weakness of the two brethren and their mother.

Exercise authority over them- They have *exousia*, power, control, over their inferiors. It is the Lord Jesus who is *the* Lord, and who has this *exousia* uniquely over His followers and indeed the whole world (Mt. 7:29; 9:6; 21:24; 28:18 etc.). For us to be indignant and superior against the unspirituality of our brethren is thus to usurp the unique role of the Lord Jesus. Quite rightly should we refer to Him as "the Lord", for this is who He must be in daily life and thought. The failure of others does give us in a human sense this *exousia*, this control, power and superiority- but the Lord goes on to say that it must *not* be so amongst us (:26), we are to resign this for servanthood. The Lord repeated His teaching here almost verbatim in Lk. 22:25- and He states it there immediately after predicting that one of the twelve would betray Him. He did so

because He did not want them to be angry and superior over even Judas- He wanted them to instead resign those feelings for servanthood.

10:43 *But it is not to be so among you; but whoever would become great among you*- This is in the singular- for "let *him* be your minister". The Lord may not be intending 'If any of you wants to be the greatest, then be the servant'. He may instead be developing the theme of His absolute and unequalled Lordship by saying that *the one* who shall be great shall be the minister- and He had solely Himself in view. He knew that He was to be the greatest in the Kingdom, the one with ultimate and total *exousia* (see on Mt. 20:25). And the path to that was through servanthood, and He invited His men to likewise participate in that servanthood.

When the disciples argued about who should be the greatest, the Lord replied in the present tense that "it *is* not so among you: whosoever will be great among you shall be your minister" (Mk. 10:43 R. V.). He expected them to live up to the righteousness which He imputed to them.

Shall be your servant- The idea may be an appeal for the disciples to allow the Lord to be their minister. This appeal had to be repeated at the last supper, when He wished to wash their feet, to be the ultimate servant, and Peter didn't want to "let Him" be his minister. So instead of thinking about what they could personally get out of the Kingdom [as the two brethren], or being spiritually superior over their weaker brethren [the ten], they were to instead accept the Lordship of Jesus and His ministration to them. And the form in which He was supremely a servant was in His death on the cross. And yet as so often, the Lord is speaking to Himself on one level, as well as to the disciples on another level. He is the one who to be great had to make Himself a minister of all, and yet He invites all those in Him to pass through the same process. For all that is true of Him is to be true of us. Hence He goes on to say that "Even as" He ministered, so should they.

One of the commonest allusions to priesthood in the NT is the idea of ministry. Time and again, the Old Testament speaks of the priests *ministering* in the priest's office. The priests are specifically called God's ministers (Is. 61:6; Jer. 33:21; Ez. 45:4; Joel 1:9,13; 2:17). The early Christians would have heard and read many of the New Testament references to ministers and ministry as invitations to see themselves as a new priesthood. The Lord said that we should aim to be a minister, a priests, to every one of our brethren, not expecting them to minister to us, but concentrating on ministering to them (Mt. 20:26). This is exactly against the grain of our nature, and also of the concept of religion we find in the world. People *expect* to have others spiritually ministering to them. They expect a priest-figure to do all their thinking for them. But our Lord said that we are each other's priests, we're not here to be ministered ('priest-ed') to, but to minister, and give our lives in service to each other.

When James and John asked to have the senior positions, the Lord didn't rebuke them; he just told them that the greatest would desire to be a servant (Gk. *diakonos*) of all (Mt. 20:20-28). The utter degradation of the cross, and the Lord's willing humbling of Himself to accept it, is a pattern for all who would take up His cross. The "servant of all" would make no distinctions concerning whom or how he would serve; such servanthood was a complete and unqualified act of surrender. And this is taken by the Lord as a cameo of His mindset on Calvary. In conscious allusion to this, Paul could speak of how he had become a slave of all men, that he might help some to Christ (1 Cor. 9:19). He was a slave of the Gospel, a slave of the kind who was lower than the least of all others, i.e. a slave of all (Eph. 3:7,9). He didn't preach himself, but rather preached that he was a servant to all his brethren, for the sake of the fact that he was in Christ, the servant of all (2 Cor. 4:5). Thus he almost advertised his

servant status; he preached himself as a slave. Paul wished to be perceived by his brethren and the whole world as merely a slave of Jesus (1 Cor. 4:1). In our talking to each other, or in our writing, it does us good to analyze how many personal pronouns we use; how much we are preaching ourselves rather than Jesus Christ. Any who may appear to be leaders or organizers are serving *Him*, who debased Himself to that depth. There can be no room *at all* for any sense of superiority amongst us. We are servants *of all*, not just of those individual brothers or ecclesias whom we happen to get on well with.

10:44 *And whoever would be first among you*- The *protos* (chief) amongst the disciples was clearly the Lord Himself. So again, the Lord may not necessarily be inviting His followers to seek greatness in the future Kingdom, but rather inviting them to focus upon His Lordship and achievement through His upcoming death. Instead He may have Himself in view- the One who is to be chief is to be the servant of the disciples, which the Lord did through His death on the cross. And it is His death there which is the context for this whole teaching, seeing He has just given a detailed prediction of it. However, the Lord's teachings often have reference to both Himself and to the disciples, and we have noted a number of times where He seems to have specific reference to Peter. For Peter was the *protos*, the chief disciple, according to Mt. 10:2 [s.w.]. And within the Lord's words there is the nod to Peter that he must learn the spirit of servanthood if he is to be worthy of that special calling as the leader of the pack which the Lord clearly had in mind for him. The Lord has just had a lot to say about the *protos* being last in the preceding parable of the labourers, using the word three times in 20:8,10,16. He is perhaps answering the question which arises from that parable: How practically can we be the last? The answer is by serving as He served, by identifying ourselves with the "last" labourers rather than the "first" who thought they were spiritually superior over their weaker fellow labourers.

The Lord Jesus was the supreme example of spiritual ambition in daily life. When the disciples debated about who would be greatest in the Kingdom, Christ said that "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be... servant of all" (Mk. 9:34,35). Christ was the "servant of all" because He *desired* to be the greatest in the Kingdom. It was this ambition which motivated His endurance of the daily cross of His life: "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: *even as* the Son of man came... to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:27,28). He was drawing on the ideas of Hos. 13:1, where Ephraim exalted himself when he humbled himself to speak to God with the trembling of a true humility. The Lord Jesus was not esteemed by men in His death (Is. 53:3); the same word occurs in Dan. 4:17, concerning how Yahweh will exalt the *basest*, the least esteemed, to be King over the kingdoms of this world. That made-basest man was a reference to the Lord Jesus. He humbled Himself on the cross, that He might be exalted. Peter had his eye on this fact when he asks us to humble ourselves, after the pattern of the Lord, that we might be exalted in due time (1 Pet. 5:6). Christ desired greatness in the Kingdom, and so can we; for the brighter stars only reflect more glory of the Sun (1 Cor. 15:41). This very thought alone should lift us up on the eagle wings of Spirit above whatever monotony or grief we now endure.

Shall be servant of all- Consider the influence of Christianity on the Greek language of humility. The Lord taught that the leaders, the great ones, in His Kingdom, would be the humble servants (Mt. 20:27). Christ spoke of himself as a humble King, which would have been a contradiction in terms to the first century

Greek mind. Consider the following commentary by Alan Hayward: "The ancient Greeks had no time for humility. In fact, their language didn't even have a word for it until well into the first century... the early Christians evidently had to coin a word for it. It's a clumsy, long word, made by sticking together the Greek word 'low-down' and the Greek word 'mentality'. The sudden appearance of this new word in Greek literature during the first century is generally attributed to the influence of the early church" [Alan Hayward, *The Humble King*, 'The Bible Missionary' No.131, January 1994].

See on Phil. 2:7. It is a great NT theme that we are the bond slaves of the Lord Jesus. And yet we are also to be slaves to all His people (Mk. 10:44), for the Lord Jesus *is* His people: they are His body. To serve our brethren is to serve the Lord Himself. The Lord Jesus *expects* us to relate to Him as bond slaves. He speaks of how a bond slave can be working in the field all day, come home tired, and then be immediately commanded by the master to prepare his meal and only then get his own meal- and the master won't thank him, but just expects it of him. And the Lord Jesus applies this to His relationship with us. The Lord of all grace is, by absolute rights, a demanding Lord. He commented that we call Him Lord and Master, and we say well, for so He is (Jn. 13:13). If we are truly the bond-slaves of the Lord Jesus, we have no 'free time' for ourselves. Neither will we expect to have time for ultimately our 'own thing'. The craze for personal and social freedom which sweeps the modern world will leave us untouched. Ultimate freedom and total independence is not for us.

10:45 *For the Son of Man came*- If the Lord was speaking of Himself as the One who was to be the minister so that He might be great, it is possible that this is a commentary from Matthew rather than the words of the Lord- pointing out that in fact the Lord had Himself in view in the preceding verses.

Not to be served by others- Surely the Lord develops this teaching when He characterizes the rejected as insisting that they had never missed an opportunity to minister unto Him personally (Mt. 25:44). Putting these teachings together, perhaps the Lord means us to understand that He did not come to be personally served, but rather does He 'come' to us in the form of His needy brethren, each encounter with them is an encounter with Him. People did of course minister to the Lord in His life (Mt. 27:55; Mk. 1:31; 15:41; Lk. 8:3 s.w.), but He surely means that He didn't come *so much as to be ministered to* as to Himself minister to others. In this the exquisite beauty of His Lordship. He is indeed Lord, but He didn't come to be personally treated as Lord but rather His psychological focus was upon what He could do for others. And this is His comment upon the desire of the two brethren to have a grand place in the Kingdom "for us", they were seeking something for themselves, whereas the example of the Lord which they were to follow was of focusing upon serving, rather than having an eye upon the reward.

But to serve- The Lord is the same yesterday, today and forever. His focus in His life was upon serving others, and yet the word is used of how He who served at the last supper shall also 'come forth' [s.w. "the Son of Man *came*", Mt. 20:28] to "minister" to His people at the future Messianic banquet (Lk. 12:37).

And to give his life as a ransom for many- The Greek *lutron* is only used in this place in the NT, although the LXX uses it for the Hebrew *pidion*, the ransom payment for human life (Ex. 21:30; Num. 3:49-51; Num. 35:31). The word means literally 'to loose'. The idea may be that something [a life, an eternal life] was potentially prepared for the "many" which was tied up [by human sin], which the Lord's death would unloose and make available. But why use this particular term in this context? The connection is clearly with the idea of being a servant, a slave of the lowest order.

And what did they loose? The sandals of the guests at meals, after which they washed their feet. There is clearly a connection of thought between the Lord's teaching here and His washing of the disciples' feet at the last supper, whereby He visually fulfilled the picture of being a servant and not being ministered unto, despite Peter's objections. His unloosing of the disciples' sandals and cleansing their feet, dressed as He was on the cross, having laid aside His outer garment and being clothed only with a loincloth, was all a prefigurement of His death on the cross. He invited us all to do as He had done- to participate in His death by dying for others that they might live. And that has various fulfilments day by day, in self control, not demanding from our brother, forgiving, rebuking, caring for, teaching... telephoning, emailing, and so forth.

In all ways, the Lord is our pattern. He was a servant of all, and so should we be. His servanthood dominated His consciousness. He said that He came not [so much as] to be ministered unto, but so as to minister, with the end that He gave His life for others (Mk. 10:45). In His death for Israel, He was "a minister [lowly servant] of the circumcision", i.e. the Jews (Rom. 15:8). Yet we *are* His ministers, His slave / servants. The same word is used for how the women and Angels ministered unto Him (Mk. 1:13,31; 15:41), and how He anticipated men would minister to Him (Jn. 12:26 Gk. cp. 2 Cor. 11:23; Col. 1:7; 1 Tim. 4:6). But both then and now, He came and has come in order to minister / serve us, rather than to be served by us; even though this is what we give our lives to doing. Yet He is still all taken up with ministering to us. He came more to serve than to be served. We are slaves, all of us, of the lowest sort. It's hard for us to realize the lowliness of being a Roman slave; and the sheer wonder of being made a free man, purely by grace. This is what *each and every one of us* has experienced. Servanthood / slavery should be the concept that dominates our lives; for we cannot be a servant of two masters (Mt. 6:24). We are to be wholly dedicated to the service of the Lord Jesus and those in Him. See on Lk. 17:10.

10:46 *And they arrived in Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho*- Matthew's account of the healing of the two blind men as they left Jericho must be compared with the healing of Bartimaeus as He left Jericho (Mk. 10:46), and the healing of a blind man as He approached Jericho (Lk. 18:35). These accounts are not in contradiction. One of the two blind men was Bartimaeus, and he is the one Mark focuses on. The healing of the first blind man is indeed described in the same terms as the healing of the other blind men, but the similarity of the language is in order to demonstrate how the Lord worked in the same way in different lives at slightly different times. And there are other examples of incidents repeating in Biblical history but being described in similar language. We are left with an abiding impression that what happens in our lives has been in essence repeated in other lives. And surely the healing of the first blind man inspired the others to take the same leap of faith, just as we are to be inspired by the way others have responded to the Lord's hand in their lives.

If indeed there are major bloomers in the Gospels and in the Bible generally [as the critics suggest regarding these incidents of healing the pairs of blind men], then naturally the question arises as to how reliable the Biblical text really is. Liberal Christians tend to argue that some is, other parts aren't. But no basis is given for deciding which parts are reliable and which are not. Nor does there seem any reason why God would inspire some parts of the Bible but not others. But the wonder is that the Bible, and the Gospels particularly, can be analyzed at depth and found not to contradict but rather to dovetail seamlessly in a way in which no human piece of writing ever could. This is particularly seen in the four Gospels, and it is this

seamlessness and lack of contradiction which led sceptics like Frank Morrison in *Who Moved the Stone?* to become committed believers in the bodily resurrection of Christ. In musical terms, the whole united record reads as a symphony. There is no need to remove one note from it, or a few notes here and there. The overall wonder is lost by doing so, to the point that it is a desecration of the Divine product. If there are passages which we cannot reconcile, the way of humility is surely to accept that we are still waiting for more insight and understanding- rather than arrogantly insisting that Divine inspiration somehow faltered at that point.

With his disciples and a great crowd- The section began with the idea of the Lord now being on His journey to death in Jerusalem, and bidding the disciples follow Him on that path. The crowd followed, but not in that deeper sense. The same term is used of the healed blind men- they too "followed Him" (Mt. 20:34), but the implication is that they followed Him with understanding. The parallel Mk. 10:52 records that one of the men, Bartimaeus, "followed Jesus in the way". That last phrase would surely be redundant unless it was pregnant with some deeper meaning, and that meaning surely rests in the idea of following the Lord in the way of the cross which led to Golgotha.

Bartimaeus the son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside- Mk. 10:52 speaks of how at least one of these blind men followed Jesus "in the way", using the same word *hodos* as used here for "the way". Their sad position, sitting maybe for years day by day *para* or by, next to "the way", was in fact putting them in a position when at the right time, they could get up and follow the Lord along that "way".

We note the parallels between the rich young ruler and the blind beggar. The young man came to Him "as he was proceeding along the road / way, a man ran to him". The Lord then teaches that they must follow Him on the way / road to Jerusalem and the cross (:32 "they were on the road heading up to Jerusalem"). The young man turned away from that road, but the beggar followed Him "in the way", on that road. The beggar also ran to Him (:50) after likewise encountering Jesus as He walked along the road / way- for he was "sitting by the roadside" (:47). He was ready to go; his disability and poverty had placed him on the way / road, he just had to be activated. We recall Mark's Gospel opens with John the Baptist preparing the way / road for the Lord, and it would seem this man by the way / road had been prepared by John's ministry. Both men ask the Lord for what they deeply wanted- the young man wanted to live for ever, the blind man wanted to see. The beggar cast away his cloak, his only possession (:50), but the rich young man refused to give up all that he owned. The contrast is there to exemplify the Lord's words to the rich young man- that those who have wealth will find it difficult to follow Him.

10:47 *And when he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out, and say: Jesus! You Son of David, have mercy on me!*- These were exactly the words of the two blind men of Mt. 9:27, who were likewise cured as the Lord "departed" from a town, just as here the cure happened as He departed from Jericho. The similarity and connection is obvious. From God's side, we see how He works according to pattern in the lives of people. And humanly, the blind men had somehow passed on to other blind men the truth that there was mercy / grace in the Son of David, which could be manifested in the restoration of sight. In this lies the significance of the fact that according to Lk. 18:35, another blind man had very recently said exactly these words and made exactly this request as the Lord *approached* Jericho. Far from being [as supposed by the critics] a jumbling up of material by uninspired writers, we see rather the development of a theme- that

blind men at various places and times approached the Lord with the same words, and made the same connection between His mercy and Him being the Son of David. They may simply have thought that as the Son of David, He had the characteristics of David- which included remarkable mercy and grace to his enemies. We also see how once a community is broken into with the Gospel, it spreads within that community, expressed in the words and concepts which that community understands, and in the style which originated with the first ones in the community who accepted the Gospel. I have seen this happen in communities of the deaf, Gypsies, HIV patients, ethnic minorities under persecution, language groups etc. And so it happened amongst the blind beggar community in Palestine. Such communities have amazing links to each other and paths of communication.

The connection between "the son of David" and "mercy" is surely rooted in the description of the promises to David as "the mercies [*chesed*] of David" (Is. 55:3; Acts 13:34; 1 Kings 3:6; 2 Chron. 1:8; Ps. 89:49 "The mercies which You promised unto David"; Is. 16:5 "In mercy shall the throne be established... in the tent of David"). These promises were utter grace; "mercy" translates *chesed*, which is about the closest the OT comes to the NT concept of grace. David rejoiced in this *chesed* / mercy shown to him (2 Sam. 22:51; 2 Chron. 7:6; Ps. 101:1). Solomon pleaded for grace on the basis of the fact that God had shown such covenant mercies to David (2 Chron. 6:42 "Remember the mercies of David"). The mercies of David surely also refer to God's mercy, the mercy of grace, shown to David in forgiving him the sin with Bathsheba and Uriah- he begged for forgiveness on the basis of God's "tender mercies" (Ps. 51:1). It could be argued that David's forgiveness was on account of his pleading for the mercies shown to him in the Davidic covenant to be continued to him. For in that covenant God had promised that *chesed* would not depart from David (2 Sam. 7:15), and David therefore begs for forgiveness on the basis that grace / *chesed* would indeed not be withdrawn from him (Ps. 51:1). From all this, David pleaded in crisis towards the end of his life to fall into God's hands because "His mercies are great" (2 Sam. 24:14). In response to the *chesed* ["mercy", or grace] shown David, he too was characterized by humanly senseless *chesed* to his enemies in the family of Saul (s.w. 1 Sam. 20:15; 2 Sam. 2:5 "you have shewed this kindness / *chesed* unto Saul"; 2 Sam. 3:8; 9:1,7) and to Hanun his Ammonite enemy (2 Sam. 10:2 "I will shew kindness / *chesed* unto the Hanun"). What is so impressive is that the network of blind men, from Galilee to Jericho, had figured this out, or at least part of it. They saw the connection between grace and David, and were inspired to throw themselves upon the grace of David's Messianic Son. There was in those times [as there is in much of the world today] a deep belief that blindness was the direct result of sin (Jn. 9:2). These blind men almost certainly felt that their blindness was a result of their sin, and so they felt a moral need for forgiveness, so that the blindness would be lifted. According to Mk. 10:46, one of the blind men was called Bartimaeus, literally 'Son of the unclean'- doubtless this was what he had been dubbed by others, for no Hebrew mother would have named her son that. And they believed that Jesus could indeed cleanse them, morally forgive them, and thereby restore their sight. This would explain why they screamed [Gk.] "Have mercy on us!". This was a moral request; they didn't simply call out for healing.

10:48 *And many rebuked him*- This is yet another example of where the Lord is presented as eager to accept, when men [including disciples] are more eager to reject. The same word has just been used in 19:13 for how the disciples rebuked the little ones from coming to the Lord- and were in turn rebuked. The impression is that in the

disciples' exclusivity, they weren't being [as they supposed] more spiritual than the world around them, but rather were they being simply as that world. Soon afterwards, the Pharisees told the Lord to "rebuke" His disciples, and He replied that it was impossible for them to "hold their peace" (Lk. 19:39,40). These are all words and phrases taken from this incident. Now it is the disciples who refuse to be quiet, and it is the Pharisees who want them to be quiet. Again the point is made that the desire to silence and exclude others is from the world, and not of Christ. The Lord's acceptance of people is consistently painted by the Gospels as being far more inclusive and extensive than that of men. The human tendency to reject and erect barriers is simply not there in Christ.

Saying that he should hold his peace. But he cried out more zealously: You, Son of David, have mercy on me!- This could be seen as the result of the Lord's piquing their sense of urgency for Christ by not responding immediately. This is also a factor in some of His delayed responses to our own needs.

10:49 *And Jesus stood still and said: Call him. And they called to the blind man, saying to him: Be of good courage! Rise, he calls for you!*- The Lord could have walked up to the man as He did to others when curing them. But on this occasion He wished to teach that His calling of men to Him for healing often uses a human mechanism. The "call" comes through people. Through us. Their obedience to the command to go call the man is emphasized. The Lord "calls" just as the people "called" the man. The Lord's calling and our calling of men are thereby paralleled. The experience of being called by the Lord is not to be seen as an onerous call to responsibility before Him; rather is it the source of "courage". His calling is because He wants to do something good for us, rather than saddle us with the weight of responsibility to judgment.

Note the joy of the man when he knows the Lord has called him to Himself. But we have each been called by the same Lord. The man's joyful, eager response is a pattern for all.

10:50 *And he, casting away his garment, sprang up and came to Jesus*- His garment was likely all he owned. And he is therefore presented as being willing to forsake all in response to the call of Jesus, just as the disciples immediately forsake all and followed Him. 'Coming to Jesus' is the phrase just used of how the little children came to Him (10:14); and again, there was a desire to forbid them. This native tendency we have to forbid others to come to the Lord must be watched carefully; and never allowed to be given formal expression in church policies which exclude some from ever coming to the Lord Jesus.

We imagine the crowd parting and the tight circle around Jesus also opening to allow the blind beggar to come to the Lord. Just as He opened the circle around Him to let the little child come to Him.

10:51 *And Jesus said: What will you have me do for you? And the blind man said to him: Rabbi- that I may receive my sight*- The Lord had just used the same words to James and John in :35,36: "We want you to do for us whatever we shall ask of you. And he said to them: What would you wish that I should do for you?". Compared to the enormity of salvation which the Lord was planning to 'do' for man on the cross, the requests seem mundane- sight, and glory over others. His death, and His teaching about it, should've obviated any request for 'doing' things for us. All that matters has been done by Him.

The Lord had a way of focusing men upon their need. Thus He would have passed by the desperate disciples as they struggled in the storm, He would have gone

further on the road to Emmaus, and He asked the blind men the obvious question: "What will ye that I shall do unto you?" (Mt. 20:32). He only partially cured another blind man, to focus that man's mind on the faith that was needed for the second and final stage of the cure (Mk. 8:23-25). He elicited from the father of the epileptic child the miserable childhood story of the boy- not that the Lord needed to know it, but to concentrate the man on his need for the Lord's intervention (Mk. 9:21). He wanted them to focus on their need: in this case, for sight. He let Peter start to sink, and only then, when Peter's whole heart and soul were focused on the Lord, did He stretch forth His hand. The Lord deliberately delayed going to see Lazarus until he was dead and buried; to elicit within His followers the acuteness of their need. And was He *really* sleeping in the boat with the storm all around Him? Was He not waiting there for them to finally quit their human efforts and come running to Him with faith in no other (Mk. 4:38,39)? Only when men were thus focused on their desperate need for the Lord would He answer them. The Lord further focused men's need when he asked the lame man: "Wilt thou be made whole?" (Jn. 5:6). Of course the man wanted healing. But the Lord first of all focused his desire for it.

The one thing he wanted was to see. The healed blind man is a type of us. True understanding (seeing) should be the one thing we want. "Wisdom is the *principal* thing; therefore get wisdom" Prov. 4:7). This was obviously a rhetorical question, and it succeeded in the intention of making the men verbalize their dominant desire. Likewise the Lord works with us to make us focus and understand what is our dominant desire- and then seeks to reposition that focus. In this section He has done that by placing all human desires and requests in the shadow of His death for us. For how could we want anything 'extra' after He has done that for us, with all it enabled.

10:52 *And Jesus said to him: Go your way. Your faith has made you whole. And immediately he received his sight and followed him in the way*- The context is that the Lord had spoken of how He was going His way to Jerusalem and death on a cross (:33,34 "we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over..."). The suggestion is that the man followed in the way of cross carrying. He "Followed Him *in the way*". But He told the man "Go *your* way". The man's way was now the Lord's way, the way of the cross. There's surely a play on words here, for *akoloutheo* translated "followed" means literally 'to be in the same way with'. The Lord told the man to go *his* way, but the man followed Jesus in *His* way, the way which has been defined in Mt. 20:17,18 as the way to the cross. Our way is His way, not in that He dominates and subsumes our individuality beneath His own, but in that we each follow Him in our own particular and unique way. That is not to say that we each have our way in life and that journey must of itself be the right one. It's axiomatic that every man has his own path in life. As believers in Christ, our path must be *following Him*, and not just wandering around in life; but each one in Christ follows their Lord in their own unique path.

MARK CHAPTER 11

11:1- see on Mk. 7:32-35.

And when they drew near to Jerusalem- This might suggest that the gospel author was not with them at the time. I suggest he was, but in the analogy of the cameraman, he has as it were shifted his camera to Jerusalem and records the group approaching.

To Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives- 'The house of figs'. There is likely a connection to the incident later in this section when the Lord curses the fig

tree. Perhaps we are to assume that He hoped for figs in Bethphage too, and was likewise disappointed. Bethphage has even been given the meaning 'House of unripe figs', which would confirm this impression (See Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (Jerusalem: Horeb, 1903, reprint) p. 1132).

He sent two of his disciples- The question arises as to why He didn't simply take the two animals Himself. The practical answer would be that if He had gone further into Jerusalem to get them, then he would as it were have entered Jerusalem but not in the way He intended to, which was to consciously fulfil the prophecy about the humble King entering Jerusalem on a donkey. But that explanation throws the question one stage further back. Why was it specifically a donkey from that village and person which was required? Could He not have found one in Bethphage? The effort required to send two disciples ahead of Him to get the animals and then bring them back to Bethphage seems considerable, when donkeys were common enough. The answer is not clear, but it could be that there was an anonymous person who specifically wanted to give those animals to the Lord in order to fulfil that prophecy. The Lord knew this and had obviously discussed it with the owner previously, because the owner would recognize Him as "the Lord" (:3), and would provide them once he perceived the Lord wanted them. In this little incident we see therefore the extent the Lord will go to, now as well as then, in order to take up the initiative of those who love Him. If we take that initiative in service, the Lord will surely use it, and make every effort to do so.

11:2 *Instructing them: Go into the village in front of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here*- The Greek words translated "tied" and "loose" occur together several times, usually rendered 'bind' and 'loose'. Earlier, the idea of binding and loosing has been used about the way that the decisions and actions of believers can have eternal consequence upon others, and our bind and loosing is to some extent reflected in and confirmed by Heaven (Mt. 16:19; 18:18). This conception of binding and loosing was surely intended by the Lord. Verse 4 makes clear that all this was done in order to fulfil the prophecy of Zech. 9:9 that Messiah would come to Zion riding on a donkey and her foal. But that prophecy had to be consciously fulfilled. Whether or not the Messianic prophecies were fulfilled was therefore left to the initiative of the Lord and His followers. And it's the same in our last days- if, e.g., we choose to fulfil the prophecy that the Gospel must go into all the world before the end comes, then in that sense the actual time of Christ's coming is left in our hands. There are other Messianic associations with a donkey- Abraham took Isaac to be sacrificed on a donkey (Gen. 22:3,5); Solomon rode to his coronation on David's donkey (1 Kings 1:33-44).

The question arises as to why both a donkey and foal were required, according to Matthew. He surely didn't straddle both at the same time. He rode on the donkey whilst the colt followed. Perhaps this has reference to the way that the Lord's final entry into His Kingdom would be on the backs of both Jews and Gentiles; the immature foal with no rider would therefore look forward to the Gentiles. Another possibility is that "A donkey, *and* on a colt, the foal of a donkey" is a Semitic parallelism effectively meaning 'A donkey, actually, a foal of a donkey'. If that's the case, then the Lord rode the foal of a donkey, not yet broken in. It would've been hard to ride, probably trying to throw Him; His journey into the city would've been almost comical, because He would nearly have been thrown and would've hardly made a

sedate, solemn procession. The parallel records stress that no man had ever sat upon it (Mk. 11:2; Lk. 19:30). This would've spoken clearly of the difficulty of the Lord's entry to His Kingdom whilst riding on Israel. However, :2 speaks in the plural, of loosing the animals and bringing *them* to the Lord. It may simply be that a donkey nursing her foal, distracted by this, was the most unmilitary, non-glorious form upon which the Lord could've entered Jerusalem. Perhaps it was a parody of how triumphal entries require a King to be on a charger pulling a chariot. The Lord had a donkey instead of a charger, and instead of a chariot being pulled by the charger, the foal was in tow behind the donkey.

11:3 *And if anyone says to you: Why are you doing this? You are to say: The Lord has need of him; and immediately he will send him back here*- God in a sense is in need of man, just as Jesus was, or allowed Himself to be. "Send" here translates *apostello*, and naturally we think of the apostles, those sent forth with the Gospel. And as so often taught by implication, the Lord is in need of man, the harvest needs workers and without them, in His wisdom, it will not be harvested. We are surely being invited to see these animals as representative of those upon whom the Lord will ride in order to enter Jerusalem in glory. But He rode upon the bucking, difficult colt which had not yet been broken in. This hampered His triumphal entry. And there was the donkey itself with nobody sitting upon it. Just as the Lord consciously tried to fulfil Zech. 9:9 by obtaining these animals, so the hint surely is that His final triumphal entry will be on the basis of us His people carrying Him in.

11:4 *And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it*- Gk. "a place where two ways met". This translates the word *amphedon* which in the LXX (e.g. Jer. 17:27) is used for a palace. Herod had a palace on the Mount of Olives and maybe this is what is being referenced. It could be that the donkey and foal were provided by Herod's servants, because Joanna was a disciple of Jesus who provided for Jesus from her "substance"- and she was the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward (Lk. 8:3). In this case, the Lord was further parodying a King's triumphant entry by riding upon Herod's donkey.

11:5 *And those that stood there said to them: What are you doing, untying the colt?*- This may have been part of a pre-arranged plan by the Lord. If indeed as suggested on :4 this was Herod's palace and colt, we can understand why the Lord wished to shield the participants in the plan. Perhaps He was seeking to irritate Herod by appearing to have stolen his colt, and appearing to usurp Herod's authority by entering Jerusalem upon it. For He gave His life, of His own device, so that He died at the time and place He did, and by crucifixion. His life was not taken from Him (Jn. 10:18), nor was He overtaken by events; He was the master of the scene.

11:6 *And they said to them just as Jesus had said, and they let them go*- See on :5. For them to respond so immediately is unusual and unrealistic until we perceive that this was all part of a prearranged plan.

11:7 *And they brought the colt to Jesus, and put on it their garments; and he sat upon it*- Using their garments as saddles. The fact both animals were saddled (according to Matthew) was to make the point that one rider was missing. For according to the other Gospels, the Lord sat upon the colt. The mother donkey was saddled, but without a rider. This added to the strangeness of the spectacle. The missing rider was perhaps a reference to how Israel had not as a whole responded in bringing Messiah to Zion. Maybe it referred to the Gentiles who had yet to be converted. Or perhaps to the fact that Israel had rejected John the Baptist and he had been killed- and therefore there was no Elijah prophet bringing Messiah into Zion. Elijah was the great horseman of the Divine chariot (2 Kings 2:12; 13:14; he is called

the “horsemen” plural, but this is an intensive plural for ‘the one great horseman’). Elijah was the chariot horseman, the one who was to ride on the horse which pulled the chariot in which there was Messiah [this was a Rabbinic understanding of the Elijah prophet]. But he was strangely absent in this acted parable. The saddle was there for him, provided by the few disciples who had responded to John / Elijah; but he wasn’t there. This absence of the Elijah prophet was surely indicative of the fact that John had not been the Elijah prophet for most of Israel- they hadn’t responded properly to his message. Therefore the true triumphant entry of Messiah was yet future. This is why the phrase “bringing salvation” is excluded from the quotation of Zech. 9:9. It was not so much a ‘triumphant entry’, but a *parody* of a triumphant entry.

11:8 *And many spread their garments upon the road, and others spread branches which they had cut from the fields-*

Paul speaks of how Israel were cut off branches because of their rejection of Jesus (Rom. 11:17,19). The crowds who accepted Him in the wrong way very soon rejected Him; so in a sense, they cut themselves off. And they did this because they misunderstood Him, expecting Him to give immediate deliverance.

Jn. 12:13 says they were palm branches. But palms and the shout of "Hosanna" are associated with the feast of Tabernacles. And this was Passover, not Tabernacles. All the way through this brilliant visual stunt by the Lord, there was the message that He was not as they had imagined, He had come to die as the Passover Lamb, not to immediately give them the Tabernacles celebration which they wanted to see there and then.

The behaviour in this verse was exactly that associated with the triumphant entry of a victorious king. The much laboured account of the Lord’s obtaining a donkey and her foal and thus riding into the city was really a studied parody of that whole conception of Messianic victory. For Him, the victory would be to hang lifeless upon a cross. True greatness was in humility. And instead of beaming with pride, Lk. 19:41 adds the detail that He wept over the city, knowing how they had rejected Him. According to Harry Whittaker, *Studies in the Gospels, "*The rabbis had a saying: "If Israel be worthy, Messiah comes with the clouds of heaven (Dan. 7:13); if unworthy, riding upon an ass" (Zech. 9:9)". So the entire triumphant entry was indeed a parody which sooner or later the Jews came to grasp. Hence their anger- for the whole incident declared them unworthy.

Whilst what the Lord arranged was indeed a parody of a triumphant entry, designed to highlight the importance of humility and sacrifice, He was surely conscious that He was acting out, however dimly, the prophesied future and ultimate triumphal entry of Messiah into Jerusalem and the temple, coming from the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4; Is. 62:11).

11:9 *And they that went ahead and they that followed, cried, Hosanna! Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord!-*

Hosanna means ‘Save now’. This obsession with ‘Salvation now’ was their equivalent of today’s prosperity Gospel, which is a similarly false understanding of the Lord.

Matthew records here that the people cried ‘Hosanna’ at Christ’s entry into Jerusalem. Seeing that first century Israel spoke Aramaic, this is doubtless what did actually come out of their lips. But Luke says that the same group of people shouted “Glory” (Lk. 19:38). Luke’s Gospel seems to be designed for the Greek speaking world, and so he uses the Greek equivalent of ‘Hosanna’, even though they did not actually say that word. The way the New Testament quotes the Old with slight changes without

pointing this out is another example of how God's word mixes interpretation with direct transmission of facts (e.g. Ps. 32:1-2 cp. Rom. 4:6-7). God has inspired His word in order to interpret certain facts to us. This is further proof that we are not intended to insist on a strictly literal meaning to everything we read (for example, that the sun literally rises). This fact is not irrelevant to the issue of demons. The accounts of demons being cast out are framed in such a way as to show the supremacy of God's power over the vain traditions of the first century world.

"He that comes" was a clearly Messianic title. They accepted Jesus as Messiah, but their understanding of Messiah was so wrong. They assumed He would bring 'salvation now', and immediate freedom from the Romans and economic hardship.

11:10 *Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!*- They liked to believe that the Messianic Kingdom was now coming. But the Lord's parables and teaching about the Kingdom had repeatedly emphasized that the full establishment of that Kingdom was some way off, and the message of the Kingdom was to be lived in our attitudes whilst this secular life continues. Hosanna "in the highest" suggests that because the people wanted 'Save *now*' and immediate deliverance from Rome, they assumed that God shared their view. Thus they assumed that their cry of 'Salvation now!' was being uttered in Heaven too. This assumption that God is of course in tune with our wishes is very dangerous- the dashing of this expectation was what unleashed the fury and gross misjudgement in these people which lead to their very soon screaming for the death of God's Son.

11:11 *And he entered into Jerusalem and went into the temple, and when he had looked at everything, it being now evening, he went out to Bethany with the twelve*- This again was a conscious parody of Judaism's Messianic hopes. Their idea was that Messiah would enter Jerusalem in triumph against their Gentile enemies, and enter the temple. This was based upon their reading of Mal. 3:1: "The Lord whom you seek shall suddenly come to His temple". But the context of Malachi 3 required a positive response by Israel to the herald of Messiah, i.e. John the Baptist. And this had not been forthcoming. And the next verse goes on to suggest that this coming of Messiah will not be of much blessing to Israel- "But who may abide the day of His coming [i.e., "to His temple"]? And who shall stand when He appears?" (Mal. 3:2).

Mark's record appears to state that the Lord first entered the temple, looked around and walked out (Mk. 11:11) and the next day returned to cleanse the temple of traders. It could be that He cleansed the temple twice. Or it could be that this silent looking around and walking away, returning to Bethany, 'the house of the poor', was another intentional creation of an anti-climax. The Jews expected Him to do something dramatic- and He simply looked around in sadness and left for 'the house of the poor'- to return and cast out the traders and thus make the performance of sacrifice impossible there.

His 'going out of the city' is allusive to the language of Ezekiel, in that the glory begins within the city but progressively lifts up and goes out of it. Going to Bethany continues the radical subversion of Jewish Messianic expectations. They had expected a glorious entry into Jerusalem by Messiah, and His entering the temple in order to fulfil the hopes of Ezekiel's temple visions- that Messiah in glory would enter the temple. Instead, the Lord enters Jerusalem on a rider-less donkey, Himself sitting awkwardly on a wayward foal, enters the temple and castigates the Jews, throwing them out of it. And now He leaves the city and goes to Bethany, "the house of the poor". Rather like a pretender to the Presidency mounting a not very serious coup attempt, and going to spend the night in a low cost housing area, perhaps in an apartment in a run down tenement block known as 'the house of the poor'. Or perhaps

a night shelter would be the most dynamic equivalent. That is not to say that the home in Bethany was actually poor, my comment is on the meaning of 'Bethany' as 'house of the poor'. The use of *eis*, "into", rather than a word carrying the sense of *unto*, serves to heighten the sense of anti-climax. He ended this parody of a triumphal entry by entering into 'the house of the poor'.

The Lord being the psychologist *extraordinaire* that He was, it could almost seem that He was engineering a situation which would turn public opinion against Him and lead to His betrayal to the Romans. And yet on the other hand, He had made all these points multiple times in His teaching, beginning in the Sermon on the Mount. He had explained as clearly as could be that His Kingdom was not at that time a political one, rather was it about service of others and internal transformation. He had so often elevated humility above anything else. But all His teaching had been skim listened to; people had taken what they wanted from Him, and decided that He was who they wanted and needed Him to be, rather than who He said He was. And so through this parody of a triumphal entry, He was visually and very publically explaining what He really stood for. And thereby very powerfully exposing their hopes as mere selfishness, their ideals as misplaced, their understandings as faulty. I wouldn't say that He did this with the express intention of bringing about His death, but rather motivated by the hope that His one last appeal might still trigger response amongst the true "daughter of Zion". His predictions of His death, however, indicate that He knew what would happen. A psychologist weighing up the situation as it stood at the triumphant entry, even if he didn't know how the story would end, would likely be able to predict accurately what would've happened. The Jews would become deeply angry with Jesus, their hopes in Him would have turned to hatred and anger, they would desire to kill Him, and being unable to legally do so, would hand Him over to the Romans to execute. Indeed, Judas had already trodden this road one step ahead of the masses.

11:12 *And the next day, when they left Bethany, he felt hungry*- Hungry in the morning, having spent the night at Mary and Martha's home? Had Martha failed in providing food for some reason? More likely the Lord had been fasting for Israel's repentance. And His hunger spoke of His desire to see even the beginnings of spiritual fruit on the fig tree of Israel. His fast was for fruit on Israel; if He had found it, He would have eaten it and thus broken His fast.

11:13 *And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves- for it was not the season for figs*- God is in search of man, and so is His Son. We surely all at times get depressed, feeling we are nothing and nobody, just used rather than needed. But just as we have our need to be needed, so does God, seeing we are made in His image and likeness. We see it all worked out visually when the Lord Jesus was starving hungry (Gk.), and saw a fig tree far away. He walked towards it, fixing His mind upon the tree. It wasn't the time for figs, but the tree had leaves, and He was so hungry, He'd have been been prepared to eat the most immature, unripe figs (Mk. 11:12,13). This is an acted parable, of His search for man, for fruit upon us. The same imagery of a fig tree bearing fruit is used by the Lord in Lk. 13:6 to speak of His hope of spiritual fruit from Israel. But when the Lord finally arrived at the leafy fig tree, He found no fruit at all, and so He cursed it, and it withered. The same word is used about the withering of those rejected at the last day by the Lord Jesus- they will be withered, and then gathered up and burnt (Jn. 15:6). So as the Lord Jesus strode the long way towards the fig tree, focused upon it with all the focus and hope of a hungry man, so eager and

hopeful to find fruit... so He is striding towards us with the same hope in us, of finding at least something, however immature, however unripe. But at least something. The shortening of the days for the sake of a remnant is predicted in Is. 65:8,9: “As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants’ sakes, that I may not destroy them all. And I will bring forth a seed [Jesus] out of Jacob… and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there”. The “elect” are paralleled with “my servants”. Because of them, the minority of faithful fruit, the whole tree is not destroyed. This is exactly the image of the fig tree parable; because of the beginnings of spiritual fruit on the tree of Israel, the whole nation will not be cut off and they will be saved by the coming of the Kingdom.

The fig tree was symbolic of Israel (Jer. 24:1-8; Hos. 9:10,16; Is. 28:4 RV; 34:2,4,8; Rev. 6:13; Lk. 13:6-9; 17:6; 19:6; Mic. 7:1 RV). Israel were seen by the Lord as the tree by the roadside, whose fruit should have been for all that passed by (Dt. 23:24). But because there was not even the glimmer of this kind of giving of fruit, they were condemned by the Lord. His disappointment was great because of His earlier parable about Himself and the fig tree, in which He had put these words in His own mouth: "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well; but if not, after that thou shalt cut it down". He looked over and around the tree, desperate to see at least some signs of fruit. He realized that the tree of Israel had to be cut down. "Leaves only" recalls the inadequate covering for sin with which human history began in Eden.

11:14 *Jesus addressed it: Henceforth, no one will eat fruit from you again. And his disciples heard it*- Mk. 11:14,21,22 imply that Peter was amazed that something the Lord had predicted about the fig tree had actually come true.
Sometimes God speaks as if He has rejected Israel, and other times as if they will eternally be His people. Such is the extent of His passionate feelings for them. And the Son of God entered into this- He said that no man would eat fruit of the tree of Israel for ever (Mk. 11:14), when in fact Israel one day will fill the face of the earth with fruit (Is. 27:6). We too, in the spirit of the prophets, are to enter into these feelings of God. God’s threats to punish His people and His desire to forgive them don’t somehow cancel each other out as in an equation. They exist within the mind of God in a terrible tension. He cries out through Hosea of how His many ‘repentings’ are “kindled together” as He struggles within Himself to give up His people as He has threatened (Hos. 11:8). The fig tree would never bear fruit (Mk. 11:14). But Israel will blossom and bud and fill the earth with fruit (Is. 27:6); hence the fig tree bearing fruit when it has been condemned never to bear fruit is such a dramatic sign (Lk. 21:29,30.). The Lord spoke His words about Israel's future budding with full knowledge that He (and several OT passages) had condemned her to eternal barrenness. He knew, however, the paradox of grace.

If the fruit on the fig tree represents spiritual fruit, does this suggest that now the possibility of repentance was taken away from them? It was as if judgment day had really arrived for them even in this life; for there will be no possibility of repentance then. Or it could be that the Lord was annulling the prophecies about *Israel* filling the face of the earth with fruit. His emphasis then would have been on "May no fruit grow *on you*". The tree of Israel was to be cut down, and the fruit was to come from the fig tree "and all the trees" of the Gentile nations. This is the connection with the Lord's later sign of the fig tree and all the trees (Lk. 21:29); when spiritual fruit is

seen on all of them, when the Gospel has gone into all the world, to all the trees / nations, then shall the end come (Mt. 24:14).

Matthew says there would be no fruit from the fig tree "For ever", for the *aion*, the age. He could mean throughout the new age which was to start, for Israel are prophesied as finally blossoming and filling the face of the earth with fruit (Is. 27:6). Or it could be that that prophecy about Israel was conditional, and the Lord is accepting that their rejection of Him meant that it and other such prophecies were now disallowed from fulfilment in themselves by what they were going to do to Him.

11:15 *And they came to Jerusalem, and he entered into the temple and began to throw out those that sold and those that bought in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money exchangers and the seats of those that sold the doves-*

This again was a conscious parody of Judaism's Messianic hopes. Their idea was that Messiah would enter Jerusalem in triumph against their Gentile enemies, and enter the temple. This was based upon their reading of Mal. 3:1: "The Lord whom you seek shall suddenly come to His temple". But the context of Malachi 3 required a positive response by Israel to the herald of Messiah, i.e. John the Baptist. And this had not been forthcoming. And the next verse goes on to suggest that this coming of Messiah will not be of much blessing to Israel- "But who may abide the day of His coming [i.e., "to His temple"]? And who shall stand when He appears?" (Mal. 3:2).

Mark's record appears to state that the Lord first entered the temple, looked around and walked out (Mk. 11:11) and the next day returned to cleanse the temple of traders. It could be that He cleansed the temple twice. Or it could be that this silent looking around and walking away, returning to Bethany, 'the house of the poor', was another intentional creation of an anti-climax. The Jews expected Him to do something dramatic- and He simply looked around in sadness and left for 'the house of the poor'- to return and cast out the traders and thus make the performance of sacrifice impossible there.

Throwing out or [Mt.] 'casting out' is a verb elsewhere used by the Lord about condemnation (Mt. 8:12 and soon after this incident, in Mt. 21:39; 22:13; 25:30). Instead of bringing salvation to Israel's temple, He entered it and condemned the orthodox, casting them out of God's house and forbidding them to enter it to carry things through it (Mk., Lk.). Instead of them, the Lord in their place welcomed children and the handicapped into God's house. Sacred space was a major concept in Judaism; the Lord's expulsion of the Orthodox from it and replacing them with those considered unworthy of entry was a highly significant thing to do.

Those who sold and bought in the temple refers to Zech. 9:8: "And I will encamp for the sake of thine house as a garrison that none pass through or return; and no exactor shall pass through them any more: for now I have seen with mine eyes". This would allude to the Lord's looking around the temple and walking out of it; He banned carrying things through the temple (Mk. 11:16), and all exaction of money. The Lord had not long earlier described Sodom as the place where the wrong kind of buying and selling went on, and He had likened His generation to Sodom (Lk. 17:28). This, again, was hardly what the crowds expected to hear- a likening of their most sacred place to Sodom, and a prophecy of its destruction at the hands of the Gentiles. The ban on carrying things through the temple referred to the practice of taking a short cut through the court of the Gentiles rather than having to walk all around the temple complex. The Lord was thereby proclaiming the court of the Gentiles as holy as the rest of the temple building. Note that the Lord also expelled those who were *buying* the animals for sacrifice- ordinary Jews wanting to offer sacrifice. This surely hinted at an ending of the Mosaic law in view of the Lord's upcoming sacrifice.

This was all so much what the Jewish masses did *not* want to hear.

The overthrowing of the tables was not done in simple anger. The Lord's motive was still their reformation. He had entered the temple in allusion to their expectation that Messiah would triumphantly enter Jerusalem and proceed into the temple. They had based that idea upon Malachi 3. But that prophecy continued: "Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple . . . *and he shall purify the sons of Levi*" (Mal. 3:1,3). This 'cleansing' of the temple was His attempt to purify the sons of Levi. His hopefulness was simply amazing. And it is a strong pattern for we who give up so easily with people.

The traders were the sons of Annas, the High Priest. This deepened the anticlimax- the Lord entered Jerusalem and the temple- and cast out the sons of the High Priest. Instead of entering the temple in glory, fulfilling the hope of Ezekiel's vision of the temple where Messiah enters the temple from the East, instead the Lord entered the temple- and in a huge anti-climax, castigates the Jewish religious leadership, throwing them out of the temple, and being acclaimed only by those excluded from Judaism: children, the lame and blind.

11:16 *And he would not permit anyone to carry any merchandise through the temple*- Instead of bringing salvation to Israel's temple, He entered it and condemned the orthodox, casting them out of God's house and forbidding them to enter it to carry things through it (Mk., Lk.). Instead of them, the Lord in their place welcomed children and the handicapped into God's house. Sacred space was a major concept in Judaism; the Lord's expulsion of the Orthodox from it and replacing them with those considered unworthy of entry was a highly significant thing to do. For all their claims that God's temple was holy, they were treating it like a public street by allowing porters to carry their goods through it rather than around it. It could be that the Jews permitted the carrying of goods through the court of the Gentiles, but not elsewhere. It's as if the Lord is saying that that court was to be treated as being as holy as the rest of the structure.

11:17 *And he taught and said to them*- The Lord several times quoted an OT passage which if quoted further would have made a telling point. Thus He quoted Is. 56:7: "My house shall be called an house of prayer", leaving His hearers to continue: "...for *all* people". He recited Ps. 8:2: "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise", leaving them to complete: "...that thou mightest still [through their witness] the enemy and the avenger". For the Bible minded, these things ought to have taught them. There is reason to think, in the subsequent response of a Jewish minority after Pentecost, that at least some did make these connections. They made use of the spiritual potential they had been given.

Is it not written- The Lord quotes from Is. 56:7, but the surrounding context of the quotation is relevant to the Jewish leadership who were present and deeply critical of the Lord's actions. Is. 56:10,11 condemns Israel's elders as "blind watchmen... dumb dogs... greedy dogs which can never have enough, shepherds that cannot understand, every one looking for gain". "Dogs" was understood as a reference to the Gentiles- and the Lord is saying that they are effectively Gentiles. Significantly, Is. 56:6 has spoken of "the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord... taking hold of His covenant". This is often how God works- for those who are sensitive to His word, the quotations given speak far more deeply. The potential for greater understanding is thereby given to those

familiar with His word. This is one reason why I encourage perseverance in reading the Bible even if at the point of reading we feel we are not understanding much and simply building up a familiarity with the text. That familiarity can be a basis for later revelation to us.

My house shall be called- Luke uses the present tense, "*is* called". The Lord surely said both, His point being that prophecies of the future Kingdom are to be lived out by us in essence today.

A house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of thieves!- The Kingdom prophecy of Zech. 14:21 that there will no longer be a trafficker in the Lord's house was fulfilled by the Lord's casting out the traders from the temple. Many of the Kingdom prophecies of healing were it seems consciously fulfilled in the Lord's healings: Is. 35:6 LXX the stammerer healed = Mk. 7:32-35; Is. 35:3 = Mk. 2:3-12; 3:1-6; Is. 35:8,10 = Mk. 11:1 Bartimaeus following on the Jerusalem road. This doesn't mean that these passages will not have a glorious future fulfillment. But in the person of Jesus and in the record of His life we see the "Kingdom come nigh", as He Himself said it did. We can so focus on the future fulfillment that we can forget that He was the Kingdom in the midst of men; the essence of our eternal future, of the coming political Kingdom of God, was and is to seen in Him. Satan fell from Heaven during His ministry (Lk. 10:18), as it will at the second coming (Rev. 12).

This invites us to see the thieves who robbed the man in the Samaritan parable as the Jewish leadership, whose priests and Levites refused to help people after the damage they themselves had caused (Lk. 10:30). The thieves "stripped him of His clothing" just as they later did to the Lord Jesus. The Lord uses the same figure of thieves for the Jewish leadership in Jn. 10:1,8. The Lord quotes here from Jer. 7:11, which speaks of the temple being profaned by adultery and Baal worship, resulting in the Babylonian invasion. He is saying that Israel's hypocritical piety in His day was none less than Baal worship, and therefore the Gentiles would come and destroy that place.

Some of the Bible's 'prophecies' are command more than prediction. The Lord Jesus criticized the Jews for trading in the temple because "Is it not written, My house *shall be* called of all nations the house of prayer" (Mk. 11:17). We can easily read this as meaning that one day, a 'house of prayer for all nations' was to be built in Jerusalem. But in that case, why should not the Jews trade in the temple there and then, well before this was to happen, say, 2000 years later? The Lord surely means that the prophecy that the temple "shall be called…" a house of *prayer* was a command more than a prediction. It "shall be" a place for *prayer* and not *trading*. The 'fulfilment' of this statement was dependent upon them praying there and encouraging all nations to pray there; yet they could limit the fulfilment of the 'prophecy' by stopping Gentiles praying there, and by discouraging prayer there because of their trading policies. Thus the Lord saw the prophecy as more of a command than mere prediction. 'Prophecy' really means the speaking forth of God's word, rather than the foretelling of the future. The closer one looks, the more conditional prophecies and Divine statements there are. "My house shall be called a house of prayer" had the extent of its possible fulfilment limited by the Jews turning the temple into a trading centre (Mk. 11:17).

11:18 *And the chief priests and the scribes heard it, and sought a way to destroy him. For they feared him, for all the crowd were astonished at his teaching*- Despite all this, they would very soon be screaming for His blood. Their increased passion to destroy the Lord was, I suggest, exactly the response He had intended to elicit by parodying a triumphal entry.

11:19 *And every evening he left the city*- His 'going out of the city' is allusive to the language of Ezekiel, in that the glory begins within the city but progressively lifts up and goes out of it. He repeatedly did so to try to get the perceptive minority to realize what was really happening.

11:20 *And as they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away from the roots*- This meant the ground was cursed- the land of Israel. And the roots may refer to the ending of the Mosaic law. "Ephraim ['fruitful'] is smitten, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit... My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him: and they shall be wanderers among the nations" (Hos. 9:10,16,17).

This incident of the withered fig tree is an example of where Jesus didn't want us to perceive Him as too different from us. The disciples are amazed at the faith of Jesus in God's power. He had commanded the fig tree to be withered- but this had required Him to pray to God to make this happen. As the disciples looked at Him, wide eyed with amazement at His faith, very much into the "Wow!" experience, the Lord immediately urged *them* to "have faith in God... *whosoever* [and this was surely His emphasis] shall [ask a mountain to move in faith, it will happen]... therefore I say unto *you*, Whatsoever things *you* desire [just as Jesus had desired the withering of the fig tree], when *you* pray [as Jesus had done about the fig tree], believe that *you* receive them, and *you* shall have them". I suggest His emphasis was upon the word *you*. He so desired them to see His pattern of faith in prayer as a realistic image for them to copy. How sad He must be at the way He has been turned into an other-worldly figure, some wonderful, kindly God who saves us from the weakness and lack of faith which we are so full of. Yes, He *is* our Saviour, and the "Wow!" factor leads us to have a burning and undying sense of gratitude to Him. But He isn't *only* that; He is an inspiration. It is in this sense that the spirit of Christ can and does so radically transform human life in practice. Of course, we have sinned, and we continue to do so. For whatever reason, we are not Jesus. But our painful awareness of this [and it ought to be painful, not merely a theoretical acceptance that we are sinners]... shouldn't lead us to think that His example isn't a realistic pattern for us.

11:21 *And Peter, remembering, said to him: Rabbi, look at the fig tree which you cursed. It is withered away!*- See on Mk. 8:29; Jn. 21:7. After the denials, Peter again "remembered the word of the Lord". And it seems that Mark is Peter's gospel. This has the ring of truth to it, in that Peter is portrayed, for all his impetuosity, as one who meditated upon the Lord's words. Perhaps the Lord had in mind His parable of the seed which sprung up and "withered" (Lk. 8:6 s.w.); Israel's initial response to John's preaching had withered. They were the withered branches which were now cast out of the tree (Jn. 15:6 s.w.). Peter is presenting himself as being somewhat foolish and unspiritual, in being surprised that the Lord's word had come true. He implies that he ought not to have been surprised at all.

11:22 *And Jesus answering said to them: Have faith in God*- We are asked to be perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect (Mt. 5:48); to have the faith of God (Mk. 11:22 AVmg.). By faith in the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, we can attain these heights; but not in our own strength. In our every spiritual struggle and victory against the flesh throughout the day, we are playing out the finest and highest heroism that any playwright could conceive: the absolute underdog, the outsider without a chance, winning, at the end, the ultimate victory against impossible odds. Dear Peter exemplified how we so often behave, when he gasped at how deep was Jesus' faith, as he saw the fig tree withered in exact accord with the Lord's earlier words. But the

Lord turns on Him immediately: "[*You*] have faith in God… *you* must believe, and whatever *you* ask in faith will happen, if you like me, see it as if it has happened at the point of asking for it".

11:23 *Truly I say to you, Whoever shall say to this mountain: Be removed and thrown into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart but shall believe that what he said will happen- he shall have it* - See on Rev. 8:8. It was the Lord's radical usage of language which led to the huge, seething anger which He provoked, culminating in the demand for His death. He seems to have purposefully reinterpreted and reapplied symbols and ideas which spoke of Jewish national pride, and applied them to something quite different. His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on an ass, not a war horse, and in order to die... led to so much anger exactly because He had subverted such a familiar and longed for hope and symbol. We have to remember the huge value of symbols in the first century, living as we do in an age when the written word has become paramount. For the illiterate, symbols and acted parables were of far greater importance than the written word. We may think of 'Jesus' in terms of His teachings recorded at a specific chapter and verse of our Bibles. To the illiterate first century Jew, they thought of Him in terms of what He *did*- His cleansing of the temple, His image of the temple mount being plucked up and cast into the sea. The Lord's teaching about the temple was especially subversive- for the temple played a "decisive role... in resistance toward Rome". It was "the focal point of the hope of national liberation, and hence was regarded as a guarantee of security against the pagans". But what does Jesus teach about the temple? It will be destroyed, His body shall be greater than the temple, it was to be a place of blessing for pagan Gentiles, because of Israel's wickedness the abomination would be set there, every place was hallowed ground, He was the true priest, etc. According to the *Mishnah Berakoth* 9.5, the faithful were to wash the dust from their feet before entering it- and Jesus washed His disciples feet in likely allusion to this before they say down in a private room and broke bread with Him (Jn. 13:1-20). As the Lithuanian Jewish Rabbi Jacob Neusner commented about Jesus' institution of the 'breaking of bread': "The holy place has shifted, now being formed by the circle made up of the master and his disciples". The Lord Jesus used the term "the blood of the covenant" at the last Supper, with reference to how Zech. 9:9-11 prophesied that the restoration of Israel's fortunes would be because of this "blood of my covenant". Yet the restoration / redemption which the Lord had in mind was not politically from Rome, but from sin and death through His blood. The temple had no great role in the Lord's teaching. By driving out traders from the temple, the Lord was effectively suggesting that the Kingdom prophecy of Zech. 14:21, of how in the restoration there would be no Gentile traders there, was coming true in Him. And the elders of the Jews are thus paralleled by Him with the Gentiles. He speaks of how "this mountain"- and He must've been referring to Zion, the temple mount- was to be plucked up and cast into the sea of Gentiles (Mk. 11:23). And He was alluding to Zech 4:6,7, which spoke of how the mountain of Babylon would be cast into the sea at the restoration- with the 'splash' expressed in the words "Grace, grace". This was to associate the Jewish temple system with Babylon- just as Revelation 17 likewise does. The Lord opened up a new universe of symbols; in an almost kaleidoscopic way, He twisted all the well loved symbols around. And when you mess with symbols, people get angry. Having lived in the Baltic States many years, I observed how inflammatory is the issue of messing with war memorials. Russians and Balts can slag each other off verbally all they wish, and people shrug. But mess with symbols, remove or rededicate a war memorial- and the crowds are on the streets. And this was, partially, what led to the fury with Jesus which led to His

lynching. He who proclaimed non-violent revolution, the radical transformation of the inner mind into God's temple, Israel's true Messiah, was seen as the ultimate threat to all that it meant to be Jewish- all because His language and actions subverted the beloved symbols of the social club. When we experience this... we are sharing something of His sufferings.

There is a clear semantic connection between the cursing of the fig tree and the moving of the mountain into the sea. The mountain in view was the temple mount. The Lord is comforting them that not only would the tree of Israel be withered, but the whole mount Zion, the most sacred space in Judaism, would be cast to the Gentiles [the "sea"]. This kind of thing was what His parody of a triumphal entry had been all about, and His casting out of the religious Jews from the temple and replacing them with kids and cripples, those formerly excluded from the sacred space. The faith to move the temple mount to the Gentiles was the very faith which Peter was later required to have in preaching to the Gentiles represented by Cornelius. The Lord recognized that this paradigm shift was a matter of faith, and He urged the disciples to realize their psychological problem and accept it needed special help from God to get over. This incident obviously had huge relevance for the first century communities of believers who were baptized as a result of Mark's Gospel; for acceptance of the end of the Jewish system and the acceptance of the Gentiles was the live issue for the early churches. Mk. 11:25 adds: "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses". The motivation in accepting others into fellowship, in accepting the casting of the sacred space of Mount Zion to the Gentiles, was to be from realizing their own urgent need for forgiveness and their moral frailty. Those faced with similar struggles about accepting others, or allowing previously rejected categories into Christian fellowship, need to take this advice.

To be removed and cast into the sea was a word picture of condemnation. And yet *airo*, to remove or take away, surely reflects the Hebraism of 'taking away' with reference to taking away sin (s.w. Jn. 1:29; 1 Jn. 3:5 "takes away the sin of the [Jewish] world"). This was a phrase with two possible meanings. The disciples could achieve this in that their preaching would give mount Zion both the possibility of sin being taken away [if they responded] and of condemnation, being cast into the sea like Gentile Babylon [if they rejected their message]. The same words and ideas are found in Rev. 18:21, where Babylon is 'taken up' [s.w. "removed"] and cast into the sea. However, the Lord soon uses the same word in telling the Jews that the Kingdom was to be "taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits [of the Kingdom]" (:43). This reference to fruit connects with the Lord's teaching about the fig tree which was cursed for not bearing fruit. The rejected servant was likewise to be 'taken away' in condemnation (22:13), just as the flood "took them all away" (24:39), the talent was 'taken away' from the rejected (25:28,29). Significantly, the Lord had used this same word for 'remove' or 'take away' in the first cleansing of the temple, when He commanded the traders to "Take these things away" (Jn. 2:16); and likewise it is used about the 'taking away' of the branches of the tree of Israel (Jn. 15:2). The Lord is telling the disciples that they too will be able to make such a removing of the unclean from the system of Judaism, and likewise cause the withering of Israel's tree. In fact it was the Romans who "took away our place and nation" (Jn. 11:48 s.w.) but this was on account of Israel's rejection of the disciples' preaching. In that sense, therefore, it was they who had caused the temple Mount to be taken away and cast into the sea of Gentiles. This too is the power of our preaching. We are not merely discharging a responsibility to evangelize so that we feel better, let alone doing a PR

exercise for our local church or denomination. Our presentation of the message to others has eternal consequence for them- to their salvation or condemnation. Significantly, the same word is used for how on the cross, the Lord 'took away' the Mosaic Law (Col. 2:14).

"Cast into the sea" were the very words used by the Lord in describing the fate of the Jews who made the little ones stumble (Mk. 9:42). The little ones had been brought into the temple to replace the Jewish religious leaders. Those leaders had previously refused to accept those little ones. Their judgment was to be cast into the sea as Babylon (Rev. 18:21 same words). But this would only happen once the disciples had preached to them after the resurrection- they were given chance after chance, despite the Lord's cursing of the fig tree with immediate effect.

The Lord's utter confidence in the power of prayer is reflected in the way He speaks to lepers, to waves of the sea, to blind eyes and deaf ears, commanding them to do things. Yet clearly this was a result of His own prayer to the Father. Yet He was so confident that what He had requested would really come true. And in Mk. 11:23 He challenges us to tell mountains to be removed. He doesn't tell us to ask God to move a mountain; rather does He teach us to talk directly to the mountain. It's been observed that Biblical Hebrew has no word for 'yes'; instead, in order to show agreement, the preceding words of the speaker are repeated. Examples are in Esther 5:7 Heb. and Gen. 18:15. Seeing that Biblical Hebrew reflects to us something of the mind of God, it seems to me that we're being taught by this to believe that what we ask for from God, we will receive; our request is the nature of the answer. Hence the need for care in formulating *what* we ask for, believing that God's 'yes' will be effectively a repeating back of our words to us.

Consider how the Lord taught ambition in prayer- He put before His men the real possibility of moving a mountain into the sea, if that was what was required (Mk. 11:23). This example wasn't off the top of His head; He was consciously alluding to Job 9:5, where Job says that God alone, but not man, can do something like moving a mountain into the sea. And the Lord is saying: 'Yes, God alone can do it; but such is the potential power of prayer, that He will hearken to your requests to do such things- and do them'. The whole process of Nazariteship was to encourage the normal Israelite to have the ambition to rise up to the spirit of the High Priest himself; the restrictions governing Nazariteship were a purposeful echo of those regarding the High Priest. The way God describes Himself as depriving Israel of "wine or strong drink" (Dt. 29:6) throughout the wilderness journey is Nazarite language: as if in all their weakness and profligacy, God still sought to inspire them to rise up to the heights.

The Christian must "believe that what he says comes to pass" - present tense. He is to visualize the immediate fulfilment of what he asks for in the court of Heaven. Compare the RV and AV of Ps. 92:11 in this connection: "Mine eye also shall see [RV 'hath seen'] my desire… and mine ears shall hear [RV 'have heard'] my desire". The confusion in the tenses is surely intentional- David really felt he had already received that which he prayed for. He shows this again by the way in which he uses tense moods perhaps purposefully ambiguously in Ps. 56:13. The AV has: "Wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling…?", whereas the RV renders it: "Hast thou not delivered my feet from falling?". Another example is in Ps. 18:44,47: "The strangers *shall* submit themselves… God [right now, by faith in prayer] subdueth the peoples".

David perhaps perceived that the requests of prayer must also be some sort of statement that the prayer was answered already.
The Lord taught that we should believe that "what [we] say [in prayer] shall come to pass" (Mk. 11:23 RV). This is very much the language of God's word- what *He* says, comes to pass for sure. And so we're being invited to see *our* words in prayer as effectively like God's words; for if we pray according to His word, surely we will be heard. See on Jn. 15:7.

But there's another take on "this mountain". As the disciples first heard the Lord's words, they'd have wondered: 'Which mountain?'. Having set up that question in our minds, He goes straight on to talk of the non negotiable need to forgive lest we remain unforgiven. And we all balk at that. Struggle to forgive is a huge mountain for all of us. But by faith it can be cast into the sea, the apparently impossible can be achieved. If we ask, according to God's will [which it clearly is] for the power to do it.

11:24 *Therefore I say to you: All things, whatever you pray and ask for, believe that you will receive them- and you shall have them-* This evidently has some context and limitations, because there is no reason to think that we literally receive whatever we ask. Even the Lord didn't. The context is the ability to change, the ability to accept paradigm shifts, to have the courage to preach; the mindset which can cope with a previous worldview coming to an end. This is exactly why people are so unwilling to change cherished beliefs and practices- because their conservatism is more powerful in their own minds than God's word. We need to accept we have this problem, and rejoice that whatever we ask for in this psychological and at times practical battle will indeed be granted to us.

The experience of answered prayer inspires us to pray yet more. "What things soever ye desire, believe that ye [did] receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mk. 11:24 Gk.) can be read as meaning that we should remember how we received things in the past, and therefore we should have faith that the things we now desire really will be likewise granted. It is for this reason that the prayers recorded in the Psalms constantly look back to previous experiences of answered prayer as a motivation for faith and Hope: Ps. 3:4,5; 44:1-4; 61:5; 63:7; 66:18-20; 77:4-16; 86:13; 94:5,7-19; 116:1; 120:1,2; 126:1,4; 140:6,7. Jeremiah likewise (Lam. 3:55,56). And even the fact other believers had received answers to prayer inspired David's faith in prayer (Ps. 74:11-15; 106).
The close link between thought and prayer is developed in the Lord's teaching in Mk. 11:23,24: "Truly I say unto you, Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be taken up and cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he says comes to pass; he shall have it. Therefore I say unto you, All things you pray and ask for, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them". Our self-talk is to be fantasy about the fulfillment of our prayers. Yet how often do we hit 'send' on our requests to God, like scribbling off a postcard, and hardly think again about them?

Even in His mortal life, the Lord was eager to as it were close the gap between Himself and His followers, so that they didn't feel He was an unattainable, distant icon to admire, but rather a true friend, leader, King and example to realistically follow. Thus when He cursed the fig tree, having prayed about it and firmly believing that what He had asked would surely come about, Peter marvelled: "Master, behold, the fig tree you cursed is withered!". The Lord replies by urging Peter to "Have faith in God. For truly I tell you, *whosoever* (and this is the stress, surely) shall say unto this mountain (far bigger than a fig tree) , Be removed be cast into the sea (a far greater miracle than withering a fig tree overnight), and shall not doubt in his heart,

but shall believe that those things which he says will come to pass (referring to how the words of Jesus to the fig tree were effectively His prayer to God about it); he shall *whatever* he says. Therefore I say unto *you*, Whatever *you* desire (just as I desired the withering of the fig tree), when *you* pray, believe that you receive them, and *you* shall have them (just as I did regarding the fig tree)" (Mk. 11:21-24). Peter's amazement at the power of the Lord's prayers was therefore turned back on him- '*You too* can do what I just did, and actually greater things are possible for you than what I just did'. That was the message here- and He repeated it in the upper room, in encouraging them that "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believes on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do" (Jn. 14:12).

11:25 *And whenever you stand praying, forgive those you have something against; so that your Father who is in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses*- The Lord assumed that whenever we pray, we will include a request for forgiveness. Not only is this one of the few requests in His model prayer, but Mk. 11:25 reflects the same assumption: "*Whensoever* ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any one; that your Father… may forgive you" (RV). *Whenever* we pray we should be seeking forgiveness. And the Lord also implies that whenever we pray, we will almost always have something against someone else. For He knew well that human society is inevitably filled with misunderstandings and bad feelings against each other.

11:26 *But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your trespasses*- The conditions on which God's love and forgiveness operate was likewise stressed by Christ: "When ye stand praying, forgive... that your Father... may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses" (Mk. 11:25,26). God's eagerness to forgive us is therefore reflected in His eagerness to see us forgive others. His desire to make all grace abound towards us is something beautiful, something wondrous.

11:27 *And they arrived in Jerusalem. And as he was walking into the temple, there came to him the chief priests and the scribes and the elders*- Matthew notes he "entered" the temple. "Entered" is *erchomai* , and is matched by the priests and elders 'coming' to Him, *proserchomai*. The impression is created of direct confrontation, head on.

11:28 *They said to him: By what authority do you do these things? Who gave you authority to do these things?*- Presumably they thought they had Him caught out, because *exousia* was supposedly solely with Rome. He could hardly say the Romans had given Him such authority. And yet if He said anything other than 'Rome', then He could be reported to the Roman authorities. However, their reference may have been to what we noted at 21:14- the Lord had held back the temple guard from arresting Him and stopping His forceful overthrowing of the temple traders. This question was quite to be expected of a man who had recently used violence to overthrow tables and force men off the premises. Who had given Him such authority? To this day this question is heard. People, especially religious people, find it so hard to accept that somebody can have a personal relationship with God which enables and empowers them to operate as sovereign free agents amongst mere men. This cry is especially heard from those who themselves think they have authority and seek to hold on to their petty power at all costs. It is the typical cry when someone obeys their Lord's command to baptize people, takes the initiative to extend fellowship to another etc.

11:29 *And Jesus said to them: I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things*- It is not necessarily wrong to avoid answering a question- although few of us could do so in the spiritually and logically

flawless way the Lord did here, let alone at a moment's notice. The sense of the Greek is not "If you tell me, I will tell you". The sense rather is: 'If you answer this question, then in that answer you will have My telling you the answer to your question'. They finally answered that 'We cannot know' (AV again is unhelpful by offering here "We cannot tell"- the Greek words for AV "tell" are all different in this section).

11:30 *The baptism of John*- Perhaps John's message was so centred around the appeal for baptism that "the baptism of John" is being put for 'the teaching and ministry of John'. Or maybe the Lord has in view His own baptism by John. In this case, His reasoning would be that His authority came from the fact that He had been baptized by John. Seeing John's work was from God and had Divine authority, this meant therefore that the Lord was empowered by that baptism to operate with God's authority. If that is indeed what the Lord intended, then we have another window onto the perplexing question of why the Lord was baptized by John.

Was it from Heaven, or from men? Answer me- Gamaliel uses the same logic in Acts 5:38,39 in urging the Jews to boil all the personal feelings and doubts down to a simple issue: Are these men and their work of God or man? This approach is helpful to us too, assailed as we are by unclarity about others. Is a man in Christ or not? Does God work through him or not? Is he of God or men? There is no middle ground here. This is what I submit concerning myself to those who doubt me, and it is the approach I seek to take with others with whom I have to engage in spiritual life. And Gamaliel rightly concluded that if something is of man and not of God, then we have little to worry about. Finally it will come to nothing. We should be concerned rather with the eternal consequence of refusing those who are clearly of God. If of God, we must accept them.

The 'naturalness' of Jesus becomes all the more powerful when we grasp Biblically that Jesus is our representative; exactly because He was really, genuinely human, He is such a natural and powerful imperative to us in our behaviour. Take, for example, His perception of His own baptism. Surely why He went through with it was to show His solidarity with us, who would later be baptized. He lined up along the banks along with big time sinners, nobodies, dear old grannies, weirdos, starry-eyed youngsters, village people stuck in the monotony of a hand-to-mouth existence, all of them standing there probably half-naked... and took His turn to be baptized. When asked later to account for His authority, Jesus asked whether His questioners accepted John's baptism as from Heaven or from men (Mk. 11:30). This wasn't merely a diversionary question; it was dead relevant. His authority was [partly] because He had been baptized by John. This was how much John's baptism inspired Him. It meant so much to Him, to have been thus identified with us. And it was that very identification with humanity, as the "son of Man", that gave Him His authority.

11:31 *And they reasoned among themselves, saying: If we shall say: From Heaven- he will say: Why then did you not believe him?*- This could imply they withdrew for discussion amongst themselves. But such a withdrawal would've been a sign of weakness. More likely we have here an insight into their own internal reasonings. In this case, the statement in :33 that "They answered... and said, We cannot tell" was uttered by each of them in turn as the Lord asked them individually.

11:32 *But if we say: From men- they were in fear of the people. For all truly held John to be a prophet*- Although we would all agree that the Bible is the inspired word of God, it is quite possible that we fail to *feel* this as we might when we read it. The people "verily held John to be a prophet" (Mk. 11:32 RV) but they rejoiced only for a

short time in the light of his words. They rejected his most essential message- whilst still believing he was an inspired prophet. Or, thinking they believed he was.

11:33 *And they answered Jesus, saying: We do not know. And Jesus said to them: Neither shall I tell you by what authority I do these things*- See on :31. They knew in their hearts the answer to both their question and the Lord's question. Their sin in having Him crucified was therefore the greater; for they recognized His Divine authority, and perceived that "This is the heir...". Likewise the Lord rarely stated that He was the Christ or God's Son; He left that to be worked out by inference from His words and works. And this is why God's revelation to us in His word the Bible is as it is. There is no set of 20 bullet points to be grasped, no statement of faith preserved. We are to work things out by inference, for thereby our personal conviction of them will be the more powerful and personal.

MARK CHAPTER 12

12:1 *And he began to speak to them in parables*- The Lord's hopefulness at their response is remarkable; He makes a continued appeal to those who in other teaching He has stated have gone too far and are even now condemned. His hopefulness for human response is outstanding and a huge encouragement for us.

There are strong similarities between the Lord's parable and the song of the vineyard of Isaiah 5:1-7, especially in the LXX:
"*Let me sing for my well beloved a song of my beloved about His vineyard* [The genre is significant; what begins as a joyful, idyllic harvest song turns into bitter disappointment and declaration of judgment]. *My beloved had a vineyard on a very fruitful hill* [The environment was ideal]. *He dug it up* [to dig was the work of the lowest servant, but God did this]*, gathered out its stones* [the effects of the curse were ameliorated]*, planted it with the choicest vine* ["the men of Judah"]*, built a tower in its midst, and also cut out a wine press therein. He looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, please judge between Me and My vineyard. What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it?* [Absolutely all has been done to enable our fruitfulness. The Father wants fruit above all- in the Mt. 21 parable, the owner seeks the actual fruit, rather than cash payment. This element of unreality serves to show His passionate interest in fruit] *Why, when I looked for it to yield grapes, did it yield wild grapes? Now I will tell you what I will do to My vineyard. I will take away its hedge, and it will be eaten up. I will break down its wall of it, and it will be trampled down* [The downtreading of the temple at the hands of the Gentiles]. *I will lay it a wasteland. It won't be pruned nor hoed, but it will grow briers and thorns* [The language of the curse in Eden. The land was as the Garden of Eden, but Israel sinned "as Adam"]. *I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it* [the language of Elijah, prototype of John the Baptist]. *For the vineyard of Yahweh of Armies is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant: and He looked for justice, but, behold, oppression; for righteousness* [the fruit required was justice and righteousness- instead, as Isaiah 5 goes on to explain, there was materialistic selfishness]*, but, behold, a cry of distress*".

A man planted a vineyard- The language of planting a vineyard and eating the fruit of it is used in 1 Cor. 3:6; 9:7 about *our* work of preaching. Paul was unafraid to interpret the parable on multiple levels. We are to be fruitful; but in our work of sharing the Gospel with others we are also the planters who come seeking fruit on our

converts. The suggestion could be that the owner personally did the planting and preparing. I say this because Isaiah 5, upon which the parable is based, includes this feature- of the owner doing so much personally. All has been done so that we can produce spiritual fruit; but so often we excuse our lack of fruitfulness by blaming environment factors. The situation in our country, our town, workplace, marriage, family, health etc. And we can put huge effort into trying to change environment because we consider that we can be more fruitful for God in a different environment. But whilst passivity and fatalism are just as wrong, it must be accepted that our environment in the bigger picture has been uniquely and thoughtfully prepared by God so that we might be fruitful. For it is clear from the parable that our fruitfulness is God's most passionate desire and intention for us. He would hardly place us in any other environment, therefore, than one ideally prepared by Him in order to enable and enhance our fruitfulness.

And set a hedge about it- The same word is used for the Law of Moses as the "wall of partition" (Eph. 2:14). Although the vineyard was to be given to others, it was itself destroyed and dismantled by the owner; which involved the taking away of the Law of Moses. The vineyard functioned differently, on the basis of fruit being produced in the vine of Christ (Jn. 15).

And dug a pit for the winepress- This was the place where the grapes were trodden to produce wine. It features in all record of this parable. What does it represent? Perhaps the temple, designed to be the means of producing the wine of covenant relationship with God. The targums on Isaiah 5, the song of the vineyard upon which the parable is based, interpret it as a reference to the destruction of the temple. But the Lord only elsewhere uses the term when three times using it as a symbol of God's final judgment of condemnation (Rev. 14:19,20; 19:15). This is typical of the structure of God's plans with men. What is designed for our blessing can also be for our condemnation, just as a cup of wine is used as a symbol of both blessing and condemnation. Time and again we are left with nothing but two choices before us- of acceptance or condemnation. Israel were the vine of God's planting which produced bad fruit (Jer. 2:21; Dt. 32:32,33; Hos. 10:1). The lack of good grapes on the vine was because of Israel's unspirituality (Jer. 8:13) and allowing the wonderful vineyard to become overgrown (Jer. 5:17). The reason why the workers beat and killed the servants was surely because actually they had no fruit to give them, even though the environment was perfect for good wine. The land of Israel was an environment and climate ideally suited to producing good vines (Dt. 8:7). There was supposed to be joy at the gathering of the vine harvest- and that connection is frequently made in the Old Testament. Indeed, the pictures of joy and wine at harvest are the pictures of the Messianic Kingdom. It could have come- but Israel didn't produce the good grapes. Likewise, believe it or not, God has created an ideal environment for each of us to produce spiritual fruit. The song of the Vineyard in Is. 5:1-7 is clearly the basis of the Lord's parable here, and this is the thrust of that story- that all had been done by God for the viticulture to flourish, but it didn't because of Israel's refusal to respond and to work. Isaiah 5 goes on to condemn Israel for drunkenness (Is. 5:11-13,22), as if they had used the vine for their own selfishness, rather like the Jews had made the "feasts of Yahweh" the "feast of the Jews", His house had become "your house", and just as we can use the structure of God's working with men, the body of Christ, the mystical temple, as a social club for our own pleasure. God therefore withheld rain so that in any case, fruit was now impossible for Israel (Is. 5:6); and that is exactly the Lord's message in Mt. 21. The Isaiah 5 passage is in turn developed in Is. 27:2-6, where we find that Yahweh

Himself guarded the vineyard, watered and weeded it, such was His almost obsessive interest in this project (Is. 27:3). The fruit hoped for was righteousness and justice (Is. 5:7); human injustice usually arises from passivity, going along with a group situation which hurts individuals and denies them justice. And this was the lack of fruit which led to condemnation. Is. 5:5 and Ps. 80:13 say that the judgment of the vineyard is in terms of having its walls broken down and it being destroyed; the Lord's parable doesn't deny that, but doesn't specifically mention it- rather does He focus upon fruit being produced by different workers. Jn. 15 uses the imagery of the vine to suggest that fruit now comes from being branches within the vine of Christ- which grows with no reference to any vineyard, freestanding in the world.

And built a tower- It may be that the emphasis upon the tower and winepress is simply to show the degree of effort God went to so that the vineyard could produce fruit. The details of the allegory fall away compared to the supreme point- that God did all possible to provide an environment which would produce fruit. And He likewise provides us with an optimal environment for spirituality, much as we are tempted to think He has it wrong on some points.

And rented it to husbandmen. Then he went into another country- Not necessarily the ascension of the Lord Jesus. It could be a reference to God's entry of covenant with Israel, at which "God came down on mount Sinai" (Ex. 19:20; 20:19) and then "ascended up on high" (Ps. 68:18). The Greek specifically means to go into a foreign, i.e. Gentile, country. It is used of the prodigal son going into a far country (Lk. 15:13). Let us remember that the Son in the parable represents the Lord Jesus, the owner is clearly God. This going away is not therefore representative of the Lord's ascension to Heaven, although it appears to be used that way in 25:14,15; Mk. 13:34 ["the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey", s.w.]. This may just be the furniture of the parable, alluding to the common experience of absentee landlords. These were often characterized by being uncaring for their land; but this owner was particular careful for his project to the point of obsession. He wanted the fruit, not money. It therefore may be part of the impression given, that the owner appears to be absent and disinterested- but in reality He is passionately interested. And this is exactly the position with God, who is perceived as somehow distant and passionless about His project on earth. There may also be the hint that even before He considered giving His precious vineyard to the Gentiles, which appears at the end of the parable, He had in fact initially envisaged this, and had in some form gone to the Gentiles right from the start of His project with Israel.

Initially, the parable would've got the hearers on the side of the labourers; because it was a frequent complaint that absentee landlords abused their tenants, who worked hard just to send cash off to the landlord in another country. But the parable twists around, so that after initially identifying with this group, the people came to see that it was they who stood condemned.

12:2 *And at the season*- Matthew: "And when the harvest season drew near", a phrase used by Matthew about the drawing near of the Kingdom at Christ's time (3:2; 4:17). But by the end of His ministry, the Lord was warning that false teachers would wrongly claim that "the time draws near" (Lk. 21:8). Clearly He taught that the time had drawn near, but not come. He taught at the end of His ministry how He was as a man who had gone to a far country for a long time. This invites us to understand that with each appeal of the prophets, and of John as the last prophet, the time potentially could have come. God's purpose is thus open ended. Peter uses the same word to speak of how the end of all things is drawing near (1 Pet. 4:7), and Paul likewise

(Rom. 13:12). It could have come in AD70- but again, a great delay, until our last days. This is why setting any date for the second coming is inappropriate- for it is a case of fulfilling preconditions, rather than awaiting a day fixed on a calendar. "The season" for fruit (Mk. 12:2) had indeed come, many times- all was potentially ready for it, but human failure meant there was no harvest.

He sent- The Greek *apostello* again encourages the apostles to see themselves as the equivalent of the Old Testament 'sent ones'- the prophets.

To the husbandmen a servant, so he might receive from the husbandmen the fruits of the vineyard- The prophets are God's servants (2 Kings 9:7 and often). Note that the prophets were sent from God, as the Lord Jesus was; but this doesn't imply they were in Heaven with God before their sending, and neither was the Lord. But we wonder whether there was one initial prophet in view here? Matthew says there were two groups of servants, and this is perhaps an allusion to the Jewish distinction between the “former prophets” and the “latter prophets”.

12:3 *And they took him and beat him, and sent him away empty handed*- Paul several times uses the word to express his fear that his preaching and pastoral labour had been "in vain" [s.w. "empty"], e.g. 1 Cor. 15:14. His aim, as our aim, was spiritual fruit in people, to see the fruits of the Spirit revealed in a convert. Where this is lacking we come away empty handed as it were, just like the Old Testament prophets. The parable suggests that the more Israel were asked for spiritual fruit, the more angry and abusive they progressively became towards the servants who required that fruit from them. And so often, those who call others on their real spirituality are hated and finally destroyed by them.

12:4 *And again he sent to them another servant- and him they wounded in the head and handled shamefully*- When the world reviled him, Paul saw himself as the beaten prophets Jesus had spoken about (2 Cor. 11:24,25 = Mt. 21:35). Mk. 12:4 adds that the last servant was “wounded in the head”, surely a reference to the beheading of John the Baptist and shameful treatment of his severed head. "Handled shamefully" is s.w. Is. 53:3 LXX "despised". The Old Testament prophets suffered aspects of what the Lord suffered at their hands.

12:5 *And he sent another- and him they killed; and many others, beating some and killing some*- Matthew adds stoning to these insults. There are few accounts of Old Testament prophets being killed or stoned. But beating, stoning and killing are Mosaic punishments for apostasy, and so the idea may be that Israel excused their lack of spiritual fruitfulness by judging as apostate the prophets who demanded this of them. This is typical- the unspiritual transfer their own anger with themselves and awareness of their own coming judgment onto others, whom they condemn as worthy of judgment and punishment.

12:6 *He had one other, a beloved son. He sent him last to them, saying: They will reverence my son*- The owner comes over as unusually patient and desperately eager for fruit, sending so many servants [Matthew's account says he sent many] and then sending his son. It is noteworthy that the parable of Mk. 12:6 has Jesus describing Himself as both a servant- the last servant- and the only beloved son of the vineyard owner.

Lk. 20:13 adds "It may be that...". The Greek *isos* is tantalizingly hard to understand. It could mean 'Perhaps'; or equally it could mean 'They will, surely'. Lk. 20:13 adds “My beloved Son”. Thus the joyful harvest song of Is. 5:1, the "song of my beloved”, becomes the tragedy of "My beloved son". The invitation "O inhabitants of Jerusalem… judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard" (Is. 5:3) is matched

by the rhetorical question: "What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do unto them?" (Lk. 20:15). This too was addressed by the Lord to Jerusalem's inhabitants. We wonder of course how the Father could truly feel like this if He is omniscient. My suggestion is that He limits His omniscience in order to enter fully into our human experience; which means that His expressions of shock and disappointment are legitimate reflections of how He actually feels.

"Surely they will reverence my Son" is the thought imputed to Almighty God in the parable, as He sends His only Son to seek for spiritual response in Israel. The parable frames God as almost naive in believing that although Israel had killed the prophets, they would reverence the Word made flesh, and the speaking of God to them in Him. Yet of course God knew what would happen; but in order to express the extraordinary, unenterable extent of His hopefulness, He is framed in this way. Just as the Father thought that His people "surely" would reverence His Son, so He was 'certain' that if His people went to Babylon in captivity, "surely then shalt you be ashamed… for all your wickedness" (Jer. 22:22). But the reality was that they grew to like the soft life of Babylon and refused to obey the command to return to God's land. Such was and is the hopefulness of God. The Father had the same attitude to Israel in Old Testament times: "I thought that after she had done all this, she would return to me, but she did not" (Jer. 3:7 NIV). The Lord Jesus reflected the Father's positive spirit in the way He framed the parable of the prodigal son to feature the Heavenly Father as running out to meet the returning son, falling on his neck and kissing him… in *exactly* the language of Gen. 33:4 about Esau doing this to Jacob. The connection can't be denied; but what was the Lord's point? Surely He was willing to see something positive in the otherwise fleshly Esau at that time, He as it were took a snapshot of Esau at that moment… and applied it to God Himself, in His extravagant grace towards an unworthy Jacob. This was how positive minded the Lord was in His reading of even the darkest characters.

12:7 *But those husbandmen said among themselves*- That is, they conspired. This is quoting the LXX of Gen. 37:18. And the allusion is also to *"When they shall see him,* there is no beauty that they should desire him" (Is. 53:2)

This is the heir!- The leaders of first century Israel initially recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (Mt. 21:38 cp. Gen. 37:20; Jn. 7:28). They saw (i.e. understood, recognized) him, but then they were made blind by Christ (Jn. 9:39). It was because they "saw" Jesus as the Messiah that the sin of rejecting him was counted to them (Jn. 9:41). This explains why the Roman / Italian nation was not held guilty for crucifying Christ, although they did it, whereas the Jewish nation was. And yet there is ample Biblical evidence to suggest that these same people who "saw" / recognized Jesus as the Christ were also ignorant of his Messiahship. "Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am... Ye neither know me, nor my Father... when ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he" (Jn. 7:28; 8:19,28) were all addressed to the same group of Jews. Did they know / recognize Jesus as Messiah, or not? As they jeered at him on the cross, and asked Pilate to change the nameplate from "Jesus, King of the Jews", did they see him as their Messiah? It seems to me that they didn't. In ignorance the Jewish leaders and people crucified their Messiah (Acts 3:17 RV). And yet they knew him for who he was, they saw him coming as the heir. I would suggest the resolution to all this is that they did recognize him first of all, but because they didn't want to accept him, their eyes were blinded, so that they honestly thought that he was an impostor, and therefore in ignorance they crucified him. And yet, it must be noted, what they did in this ignorance, they were seriously accountable for before God.

Come, let us kill him and the inheritance shall be ours- Their assumption therefore was that the landlord must have died, for otherwise, killing the son would not have given them the inheritance. They acted, as we can, as if God is dead; although they would never have admitted that. The apparent non-action of God can likewise lead to the wrong impression that He is effectively dead. Seizing a vineyard for personal possession reminds us of Ahab's actions in 1 Kings 21:15,16- making Naboth a type of Christ, and associating the Jewish religious leadership with wicked Ahab. However, Ahab did repent- and one wonders whether the Lord built in this allusion in reflection of His amazing hopefulness for Israel's repentance. The allusion to Ahab may have been born in the Lord's Bible-saturated mind by the way that Isaiah 5:6 spoke of rain being withheld from the vineyard, as happened in Ahab and Elijah's time. The confirmation of Israel in their evil way was brought to its climax in the crucifixion of Christ. The leaders of first century Israel initially recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (Mt. 21:38 cp. Gen. 37:20; Jn. 7:28). They saw (i.e. understood, recognized) him, but then they were made blind by Christ (Jn. 9:39). It was because they "saw" Jesus as the Messiah that the sin of rejecting him was counted to them (Jn. 9:41). This explains why the Roman / Italian nation was not held guilty for crucifying Christ, although they did it, whereas the Jewish nation was. And yet there is ample Biblical evidence to suggest that these same people who "saw" / recognized Jesus as the Christ were also ignorant of his Messiahship. "Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am... Ye neither know me, nor my Father... when ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he" (Jn. 7:28; 8:19,28) were all addressed to the same group of Jews. Did they know / recognize Jesus as Messiah, or not? As they jeered at him on the cross, and asked Pilate to change the nameplate from "Jesus, King of the Jews", did they see him as their Messiah? It seems to me that they didn't. In ignorance the Jewish leaders and people crucified their Messiah (Acts 3:17 RV). And yet they knew him for who he was, they saw him coming as the heir. I would suggest the resolution to all this is that they did recognize him first of all, but because they didn't want to accept him, their eyes were blinded, so that they honestly thought that he was an impostor, and therefore in ignorance they crucified him. And yet, it must be noted, what they did in this ignorance, they were seriously accountable for before God.

The Lord was from Galilee, where the zealot movement was popular amongst the landless tenant farmers. Viticulture was profitable as demand for quality wine grew amongst the elite, especially in Rome. The workers were those who had lost their land and were now working on the plantations, with the wine exported and only receiving low pay. To kill the young owner of a vineyard when the father had died overseas, declare it ownerless and take possession of it, was not unknown. It was seen as a heroic thing to do, putting land in the hands of the people who had originally owned and farmed it. But the Lord's parable is reversing this. Actually this was a shameful thing to do in this case because it is associated with the murder of God's Son their Messiah. The owner has all the external appearance of the typically awful, uncaring absentee owner- just as God may appear. Until more careful thought and reflection shows him to be actually very different and passionate for fruit.

12:8 *And they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard*- Surely a reference to the Lord being crucified outside Jerusalem. In this case, the vineyard specifically speaks of Jerusalem and the temple. Mk. 12:8 appears in English to suggest a different order to Matthew: Took, killed, cast out of the vineyard. But the Greek text doesn't have to be read strictly chronologically. Strictly, they "took Him, killed and cast out of the vineyard". The killed-and-cast-out need not be

chronological. Or it could be that the Lord is teaching that effectively, they had killed Him before casting Him out and crucifying; the essence of the cross was ongoing in His life. That is clear enough in a number of Gospel passages.

"Cast Him out" has obvious connection to the way in which the Lord was crucified outside the city limits of Jerusalem. But 'cast him out' is parallel with the stone being "rejected" by the builders (:10). The 'casting out' therefore speaks of religious rejection from the community. The same word is used of how the Lord was cast out of Nazareth (Lk. 4:29), and how believers would be cast out from Judaism (Lk. 6:22) and the synagogue (Jn. 9:34); and even from the legalistic church (3 Jn. 10 "casts them out of the church"). Any who experience being cast out of the visible body of God's people are thereby fellowshipping the Lord's crucifixion sufferings. Yet sadly the experience destroys many- when it can be taken as a share in His sufferings, knowing that if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. It is the same word used for the casting out of the rejected from the Kingdom to final condemnation (8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk. 13:28); those who cast out of the vineyard, the Kingdom (Mt. 21:43) will themselves be cast out of the Kingdom at the last day.

12:9- see on Mk. 8:34-37.

What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do?- This is typical of how men are invited in this life to work out their own condemnation. So that it is man who is self condemned rather than being condemned by a vindictive God. "Out of your own mouth will I judge you, you wicked servant. You thought that I am a hard man, demanding back what I did not deposit, and reaping that which I did not sow?" (Lk. 19:22). And we think of how Nathan led David to self judgment. We are therefore to infer that the following words "He will come..." were said by the audience in response to the Lord's question. The Lord's parable of the vineyard is shot through with allusions to the vineyard parable of Is. 5. When the Lord asks "What will the lord of the vineyard do?", those who picked up the Isaiah 5 allusions would have found the answer in Is. 5:4,5: "What… to do… what I will do".

He will come- The Lord Jesus said this with the cry still echoing in His ears concerning Himself: "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord" (Mt. 21:9). He clearly has Himself in view, 'coming' in behalf of His Father. His parody of a triumphal entry into Jerusalem was really an entering of Jerusalem in judgment upon them. His entry into Jerusalem and the temple was in essence the Lord of the vineyard coming. He certainly uses the language of the Lord coming with reference to Himself (23:39; 24:42,46,48; 25:19; Lk. 12:36).

And destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard to others- The Lord spoke of how the owner Himself would "come and destroy the husbandmen". This is a shocking change in tempo- the owner has appeared impotent, distant and naive, to the point that the husbandmen considered He was effectively dead. They reasoned that if they killed the Son, then the vineyard would be theirs. But this is exactly the nature of Divine judgment. The God who appears effectively dead, at least impotent, distant and naïve, will suddenly reveal Himself in direct judgment. We believe that now by faith, but it shall surely happen.

12:10 *Have you not read in the scripture*- They spent their whole lives reading Scripture, and Ps. 118 was a well known Passover Hallel. But we can read and yet never really read as God intends.

The stone which the builders rejected- The Lord would be "rejected of the elders, chief priests and scribes" (Mk. 8:31 s.w.); indeed, "rejected by this generation" (Lk. 17:25). In the metaphor, the builders were supposed to use the stone, to manipulate it and use it as important material; and build a temple upon it. But they rejected the

cornerstone, and so they didn't build a temple. That is what the metaphor implies. The Jews considered that the building of a temple was the work of Messiah; but they refused to build it, because they rejected Jesus as Christ. And so the Messianic Kingdom didn't come; there was no Messianic temple built by them, because they rejected the cornerstone.

The same was made the head of the corner?- If the builders rejected this stone, the implication is that another set of builders used it in another building, which became the temple of God. This is precisely the situation with the vineyard being taken away from the Jewish tenants and another group of workers being taken on. The quotation is seamlessly in context with the parable.

12:11 *This was from the Lord and it is marvellous in our eyes?*- In whose eyes would the elevation and acceptance of the stone [a similar Hebrew and Aramaic word to "son"] be marvellous or miraculous / praiseworthy? The quotation is from Ps. 118:23. This Psalm is a dialogue between the speaker, who is in suffering and rejection and yet has hope of resurrection and glorious acceptance, and another group of people who sing or speak their response. This is why there are statements in the first person e.g. "The Lord is *my* strength... *I* will praise you", and then responses of the group: "It is marvellous in *our* eyes... *we* will rejoice and be glad... *we* have blessed you... the Lord has showed *us* light". Who is this group? The Psalm opens with instruction to "The house of Aaron... Israel... them that fear the Lord" to respond to the Messiah figure in praise (Ps. 118:2-4). The priesthood are often paralleled with all Israel, because it was God's intention that eventually all Israel should be a priestly nation. The significance of the quotation is that it was to be the intended response of the "house of Aaron", Israel's religious leaders, to the acceptance of the rejected stone / son of God. But it was the Lord's disciples who would make this response. They, therefore were the new "house of Aaron"- yet another hint that the Lord was creating a new Israel with another priesthood.

12:12 *And they sought to arrest him; but they feared the crowd. For they perceived that he had spoken that parable against them; and they left him and went away*- The connection with Isaiah 5 was so clear, and that song of the vineyard was a well known passage understood as the justification for the destruction of the first temple. Their "seeking" to arrest Him is the very language of Herod seeking to destroy God's son (Mt. 2:13,20). They were no better than the despised Herod. The Greek for "Lay hands on / arrest" is likewise used for what Herod did to John the Baptist (Mt. 14:3). The Lord uses the same word soon afterwards to describe how His servants will likewise suffer (Mt. 22:6 "The remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully and killed them"). The Lord intends us to see all our sufferings as part of His. Matthew repeatedly uses the word to describe how the Jews laid hands on the Lord to arrest and kill Him (Mt. 26:4,48,50,55,57). We see the fickleness of the crowd. They were soon crying for the Lord's blood.

12:13 *And they sent to him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, that they might catch him out in his teaching*- The same word used of how *they* were to be entangled or caught up in condemnation (Lk. 21:35; Rom. 11:9). As they treated the Lord, so they were treated. Our attitude to Him is in a way our attitude to ourselves and our eternal destiny. The Pharisees and Herodians were sworn enemies. Herod was anathema to the Pharisees, who saw him as a false Jew and some kind of antiChrist figure. But a theme of the Lord's judgment and death was that His enemies were united together by a common hatred of Him.

12:14 *And when they arrived, they said to him: Teacher, we know you are truthful and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God*- See on Jn. 10:13. Lk. 20:21 adds that they also said at this point: "You say and teach *rightly*", Gk. *orthos*, from whence 'orthodox'. They were thereby trying to lead Him to make a right wing, conservative answer, namely, that tribute should be given to God and not Caesar. And then the Herodians could legally swoop upon Him and have Him arrested for disloyalty to the empire. John the Baptist had attempted to prepare the way or path over which God's glory in Messiah could come to Zion. The only other occurrence of "the way of God" is when we read that Apollos, who knew only John's teaching, had to have "the way of God", i.e. John's message about the way, explained more fully to him (Acts 18:26). It may be that John had been so unworldly that he had not paid tribute to Caesar, or at least, he had been interpretted that way; and so now the Pharisees were commenting that if the Lord truly upheld John's teaching, then what was his answer about paying the tribute money? Because it was perceived, at very least, that John had advocated not paying it.

Not caring about others' opinion was an appeal to Jewish orthodoxy, whereby the righteous Jew was supposed to be obedient to God regardless of what others thought. They were trying to lead the Lord into a position whereby He said 'No' to the question about giving the tribute money. And the Herodians were ready to pounce on Him if He did. We can reconstruct how the Pharisees and Herodians worked together in this; the Pharisees were trying to lead the Lord by a path of theology and logic to a position whereby He denied the need to pay tribute- and then Herod's supporters could pounce on Him. The verisimilitude and internal agreement of the record is again strong encouragement to accept this as the inspired word of God, recording he actual words spoken rather than giving a mere summary or imagination of them from a distance of time and space.

Is it lawful- This was purposefully vague, because they didn't clarify whether they meant the law of Moses or that of Rome. This was part of the trap. If the Lord said it was lawful according to Roman law, then they could accuse Him of breaking the law of Moses. If He said it was lawful according to the Law of Moses, and therefore that law must surely be obeyed, then He was breaking the law of Rome. But the Lord majestically rises above the trap, by (as usual) taking the whole issue to a far higher level.

To give tribute to Caesar, or not?- The word translated "tribute" was used by the Jews for the poll tax of Ex. 30:12-16; the argument was that this should be paid to the temple and not to Gentiles. By pushing the Lord for a yes / no answer, they thought they would force Him into an untenable position. Judas of Galilee had agitated about not paying the tribute money to the Romans (Acts 5:37) and had been executed for this in around AD6, in recent memory. The Lord as always appealed to higher principle- if it has Caesar's image, then give it to him; but what has God's image, your own body, then give it to God. The giving of our entire person to God made paying an annual tax to the temple seem cheap and irrelevant.

12:15 *Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them: Why do you test me?*- Matthew has "their wickedness". The wickedness could be their hypocrisy, which the Lord goes on to comment upon. But their "wickedness" could refer to their personal sins, and because in that moment the Lord perceived those sins, He thereby perceived their hypocrisy and therefore challenged them about their hypocrisy. He may have been given that perception of their sins by some flash of Divine insight, or it could be that His supreme sensitivity to people led

Him to imagine correctly the kind of stuff going on in their secret lives. In what were they hypocritical in this matter? Perhaps they quietly paid the tribute money? Or perhaps it was because in order to answer the question, the Lord made them bring the coin through the temple courts, thus breaking their own laws. They should've been more concerned about the huge gap between their professions and their practice, rather than focusing upon finding error in another. And so it is to this day- fault finding in others over religious matters typically hides serious hypocrisy, the concern with personal sin is transferred into concern about others' sin. Our sense we ought to be self-examining is converted into an examination of others.

Bring me a denarius, that I may look at it- The Pharisees claimed that pagan coinage should not be brought into the temple courts. This is why the coin had to be brought to the Lord. By so doing, the Lord was purposefully provoking the Pharisees; likely the Herodians brought it, not the Pharisees. In any case, we see yet another powerful evidence that the historical records of the Gospels are true to the very smallest detail.

The tribute money had the inscription *Tiberius Caesar Divi Augusti Filius Augustus Pontifex Maximus*- "Tiberius Caesar, august son of the divine Augustus, High Priest". Pedants would've quickly assumed that such blasphemous language and appropriation of titles appropriate to the Lord Jesus would mean that such coinage should not be used, nor should such tribute be paid to any man on this basis. But the Lord saw a bigger picture. He was quite OK with such token behaviours, but the far bigger issue was giving to God our own bodies and lives which bear His image.

The coin bore an image which strict Jews considered blasphemous, denoting Tiberius as son of God, the divine Augustus. The Lord doesn't react to this as they expected – He makes no comment upon the blasphemy. He lets it go, but insists upon a higher principle. 'If this is what Caesar demands, well give it to him; but give what has the image of God, i.e. yourself, to God'. He didn't say 'Don't touch the coins, they bear false doctrine, to pay the tax could make it appear you are going along with a blasphemous claim'. Yet some would say that we must avoid touching anything that might appear to be false or lead to a false implication [our endless arguments over Bible versions and words of hymns are all proof of this]. The Lord wasn't like that. He lived life as it is and as it was, and re-focused the attention of men upon that which is essential, and away from the minutiae. Staring each of us in the face is our own body, fashioned in God's image – and thereby the most powerful imperative, to give it over to God. Yet instead God's people preferred to ignore this and argue over the possible implication of giving a coin to Caesar because there was a false message on it. Morally and dialectically the Lord had defeated His questioners; and yet still they would not see the bigger and altogether more vital picture which He presented them with.

12:16 *And they brought it. And he said to them: Whose is this image and inscription? And they said to him: Caesar's*- He was setting them up for His point that whatever bears God's image and superscription is to be given to Him; and that refers to our body and whole lives. We have His signature on us; perhaps the Lord had in mind by this the idea that Israel were God's covenant people, His servants bearing His marks.

12:17 *And Jesus said to them: Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled greatly at him*- The Jews were looking for immediate deliverance from Caesar. The Lord's parody of a triumphal entry into Jerusalem was designed to show that He was not bringing that kind of a Kingdom, that sort of salvation. By saying that tribute must indeed be rendered to

Caesar, He was further dashing their Messianic hopes concerning Him, and further demonstrating that He was not the Messiah they were looking for. Thus He was consciously bringing about a situation whereby His popularity was turned into hatred, because of the whole psychology of dashed expectations making love turn to hate. The accusation that "We found this fellow... forbidding to give tribute to Caesar" (Lk. 23:2) was so utterly untrue.

What bears God's image, which is our whole body and mind (Gen. 1:26), is to be given to God. We have God's superscription written upon us, moreso if we are in Christ (Rev. 3:12; 7:3; 14:1). "It is he that hath made us, and [therefore] we are his" (Ps. 100 RV). We must be His in practice *because* He is our creator. So it is not that we merely believe in creation rather than evolution; more than this, such belief in creation must elicit a life given over to that creator.

The things which are God's are to be 'rendered' to Him. The Greek word means to pay back, to return; even giving our very bodies only giving back what He has given us. The same word had been used recently by the Lord in teaching that we have a huge debt to God which must be 'rendered' or paid back to Him (Mt. 18:25,26,28). We can read the Lord's words here as meaning that concerns about pedantic issues relating to coinage are irrelevant compared to the paramount issue- that we owe God everything. This would explain why the Lord says this after having accused them of being hypocrites, having perceived the sin they were involved with. Because we are created in God's image, the structure of our very bodies is an imperative to give ourselves totally to His cause (Mt. 22:19-21). Whatever bears God's image- i.e. our very bodies- must be given to Him. "It is he that hath made us, and [therefore] we are his" (Ps. 100:3 RV). We must be His in practice *because* He is our creator. So it is not that we merely believe in creation rather than evolution; more than this, such belief in creation must elicit a life given over to that creator.

12:18 *And there came to him Sadducees (these say that there is no resurrection)*- The obvious response to a question from such people about the resurrection would be 'But you don't believe in a resurrection!'. Lk. 20:27 says that they *antilego,* spoke against publically, the resurrection. Mark's record adds that they also said that "In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise…" (Mk. 12:23). But the Lord was not so primitive as to point out their obvious untruth. He took their position as they stated it, and worked to demonstrate that even given that position, they were woefully ignorant of Divine truth. Long term, His approach stood a chance of working. If He had simply denounced them as liars and self-contradictory, there was no chance He would've ever contributed towards their possible repentance and change of heart. This approach needs to be take to heart by us. For there are large numbers of believers who seem to think that their service to God involves cruising internet forums or endlessly arguing with their neighbours in order to prove them wrong and self-contradictory about doctrinal matters. This may give a slight ego rush for a moment, but it is not in fact any real victory. For the victory we seek is not to tie another up in mental knots, but to lead them to repentance, to the Lord Jesus, and to His Kingdom. We also need to note that recently the Lord had resurrected Lazarus, with the result that He appeared to have won over many who had previously supported the Jewish leadership. They were now trying to prove that resurrection doesn't happen. The Lord could've called many witnesses to the resurrection of Lazarus, but instead He takes their argument and works from it.

It has been observed that the Sadducees were generally hedonistic- and this surely was a result of their denial of the future resurrection and judgment. Their belief

was that only the Torah was inspired, and it was Israel's duty to live according to it in this life. They were a parade example of the effect of doctrine in practice.

And they asked him- Over 100 times we read in the Gospels of various people coming to Jesus- His enemies, the crowds, His disciples, people in need. Each came with their various motivations, agendas and pre-understandings of Him. His invitation to 'come to Him' was to come *in faith*. The repeated repetition of the phrase 'came to Him' is perhaps to invite us to see ourselves likewise as amongst those who 'come to Him' as we read or hear the Gospel record, ensuring that we are truly coming to Him and not merely on a surface level as so many did.

12:19 *Teacher, Moses wrote to us*- The Lord picks this up in His answer in Mt. 22:31: "Have you not read that which was *spoken* unto you by *God*". He is telling them that God and not Moses was the ultimate speaker to them; and that the word was not merely *written* but is a living word, actively *speaking* unto them. For all their much vaunted belief in Divine inspiration of the Scriptures, these men had failed to perceive that God was speaking to them personally through the human authors. And that criticism needs to be remembered today by those equally wedded to a declared belief in Divine inspiration of the Bible. It is to be to us a word *spoken* and not a dead letter written on paper.

If a man's brother dies and leaves a wife behind him and leaves no children, then his brother should take his wife and raise up seed to his brother- The Lord could have replied that if they read the entire passage in Dt. 25:5-7, they would see that God actually made a concession in this matter; and the whole principle only applied to "brethren dwelling together". A man did not *have to* marry his brother's wife. In any case, as most adult men were married, it would have usually been a case of polygamy. But again, the Lord didn't point out that expositional error, but goes on to develop a far greater and higher principle concerning the nature of His Kingdom, in which such casuistry about marriage will be simply irrelevant. And again, He sets an example to those who have spent their religious lives arguing about divorce and remarriage and fellowship issues. Their arguments could be demonstrated to be expositionally faulty. But the higher principle is that such issues shall be irrelevant in God's Kingdom; and we are to live the essence of the Kingdom life now as far as we can, in spirit at least. The Sadducees made a big deal of the fact that the word translated "raise up seed" is that used generally in the Septuagint for resurrection. Their idea was that resurrection is not of the body but through family life. To die childless was therefore tragic indeed. The same error is made by many today who effectively believe that family life is the ultimate form of spirituality. It is not, and God seeks to build a personal relationship with each of us, He is the personal God of Abraham, Isaac etc., and we shall experience a personal bodily resurrection at which we shall appear before God stripped of our family, and relate to Him as a single individual.

12:20 *There were seven brothers; and the first took a wife and died leaving no seed*- This must have been a most unfortunate family. The Old Testament speaks of the failure to build up a house / family and the death of men in youth as being a curse from God for disobedience (Job 18:19; Ps. 107:38,39). Again, the Lord could have made capital of this- but He didn't. There was no element of personal attack, but rather an appeal to higher principle.

12:21 *And the second took her, and died leaving no seed behind him, and the third likewise*- As noted on :20, this was clearly not a true story.

12:22 *And the seven left no seed. Last of all the woman also died*- She would have been judged to be a most unfortunate woman, likely under God's judgment (see

on :20). But the Lord doesn't question the very unlikely story nor the contradictions within it- instead He works from what was presented to Him.

12:23 *In the resurrection, whose wife shall she be? For the seven had her as wife*- The Lord could've pointed out that they were well known for denying / speaking against the resurrection. But He doesn't make that obvious point, instead focusing on the higher principles rather than point scoring.

12:24 *Jesus said to them: Is not the reason you err that you do not know the scriptures, nor the power of God?*- Time and again the Lord assaults their pride in knowing the text of Scripture. "Have you *never* read" is commonly on His lips. We can read, and yet never really read; know, but never know. Familiarity with Bible phrases is simply not the same as understanding them correctly. The scriptures and God's power are paralleled, with every relevance for the Sadducees who denied the Old Testament's inspiration apart from the Torah. Likewise in their audience the Lord pointed out that David in the Psalms spoke "in Spirit" (Mt. 22:43)- the Psalms were inspired as much as the Torah.

12:25 *For when they shall rise from the dead*- Why does the Lord speak of the Kingdom of God as "the resurrection" (Mt.)? Perhaps it is to pave the way for His teaching that "all live unto Him", in the sense that here He is likewise raising the idea that time will have a different dimension then. The joy and freshness of resurrection will last eternally. The Kingdom will be as it were an eternal moment of resurrection, an eternal now, with no fading thrill but an "everlasting joy upon [our] heads" that will not fade and morph with familiarity and the passage of time.

They neither marry, nor are given in marriage- Note the present tenses. They are more striking in Lk. 20:36: "Neither *can they die*… they *are* equal unto the Angels: and *are* the children of God, being the children of the resurrection". Greek tenses, unlike Hebrew tenses, are precise. We would expect 'They shall not die… shall be equal… shall be…'. But the present tenses are striking. The Lord is building up to His point that the question about marriage is inappropriate because God is outside of our kind of time; He sees the believers in Him as even now immortal, a point made more strongly in John's Gospel. This is not the same as having an immortal soul, nor does it imply conscious survival of death. Rather is it a reflection of how God from His perspective outside of time sees His children. Jn. 3:3-5 makes the same point, that we are born again of water and spirit even in this life, and thereby are living the life eternal. But that is from God's standpoint outside of time as we experience it. Lk. 20:37 says that Moses "calls" [present tense] God "the God of Abraham…". Not only does this imply a living word which speaks to us today, but again the point is made throughout the passage that God is outside of time. This choice of tenses in this passage is purposeful, for elsewhere we read of how Moses said or commanded things in the past tense (e.g. Mt. 8:4 "things which Moses commanded", "Moses wrote", Lk. 20:28; "Moses gave you…", Jn. 6:32).

But are as the angels in heaven-

The Sadducees denied their existence (Acts 23:8). The Lord's teaching that Angels do not marry was surely additionally an attack on the Jewish myths becoming popular at the time concerning the supposed marriage of Heavenly Angels with the daughters of men in Gen. 6. These myths are deconstructed in Jude and 2 Peter, but the Lord here is also correcting them. We marvel at how apparently 'off the cuff' He could speak in such a multi-faceted and profound way, addressing various issues simultaneously. Although His intellectual and spiritual ability was doubtless capable of such instant responses, I prefer to imagine the Lord reflecting deeply upon God's

word and preparing His ideas throughout the years of spiritual mindedness that preceded His ministry.

Lk. 20:36 adds that we shall be as "the children of God", thereby answering the Sadducees idea that it is a human duty to have children and thereby continue the race, for therein do we have our 'resurrection'. Again the Lord is lifting the whole question to a far higher level. Luke adds that the Lord first said that "the children of this world marry…". The Sadducees were assuming that the Kingdom of God would be a kind of continuation of this present life, just with eternity of nature. Whilst there are similarities and aspects of continuity between who we are and who we shall eternally be, we are mistaken in imagining the future Kingdom of God as some kind of ideal earthly situation, a tropical paradise holiday, which shall last eternally. This is the same mistake as thinking that we shall eternally be doing what "the children of *this* world" currently do. Instead of criticizing and exposing the faults in the argument presented, the Lord makes the point that the Kingdom of God will not be about marriage nor about casuistic arguments about the definition of marriage- the very arguments which have occupied the minds of far too many of His children. Paul uses the same logic in reasoning that arguments about food are irrelevant because the Kingdom of God will not be about such behaviour, but about love, peace and joy (Rom. 14:17). Paul, like the Lord here, could have exposed the fallacies of exposition being engaged with, but instead reasons on a higher level- that seeing we shall not be arguing about such things eternally, let us not do it now.

12:26 *But concerning the dead, that they are raised, have you not read in the book of Moses*- Of course they had, but the Lord is yet again making the point that we can read Scripture many times but not really read it as intended.

In the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him- Comparing with Matthew's record, surely the Lord said something like 'He spoke unto Moses, unto you, saying…'. What was spoken to Moses was spoken to them personally, just as the living word speaks to every generation. The Lord was equating each secular Jew with none less than Moses himself. This was unthinkable blasphemy in Judaistic thought, to see oneself as receiving God's words, having God reveal Himself directly to us, just as He did to Moses. God of course had wanted to reveal Himself like this to Israel, but they asked not to hear His voice directly, wanting Moses as a mediator. But the Lord says that now, through the medium of God's word, the voice of God comes directly to us too. In the new Israel and the new Judaism of the new covenant, in this sense we are each as Moses.

Saying: I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob?- If the Lord was looking merely for a reference to God being the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He had many places He could have quoted from. I suggest He chose Ex. 3:6 partly to show that the supremely intimate, personal revelation of God to Moses was just the same now to all individuals within Israel. It was a living word spoken to them personally. But also because the Lord wants to make the point that God is outside of time- and that passage goes on to climax in the revelation of that same God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the "I am that I am" (Ex. 3:14). The God outside of time, witnessed by the way the tetragrammaton somehow straddles past, present and future tenses, therefore sees the dead as alive "unto Him". The question put to the Lord was very much rooted in the assumption that time as we now know it is going to continue in the Kingdom of God, and the Lord is making the point that this is an immature way of looking at it; and therefore the question was irrelevant. The Exodus 3 passage also contains repeated assurance that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will receive

what God has promised- which requires bodily resurrection for them. We need to ever remember that the Lord was not merely demonstrating intellectual prowess in all this reasoning and allusion. He considered them as the sheep who erred / were astray, and through all His teaching here He was merely seeking to steer them to Him and ultimate salvation.

12:27 *He is not the God of the dead but of the living*- This Greek construction could mean 'Not only the God of the dead, but also of the living'. But the context is the Lord demonstrating that the understanding of the Sadducees was very much a dead religion and their God was effectively dead. They denied the resurrection and considered that we have reward only in this life. In this case, God was the God of Abraham only in the past. The Greek phrase could literally mean 'Not the God the dead, but the living [God]', alluding to the well known phrase "the living God". If God only acted for Abraham etc. in the past, then the God Abraham knew effectively died when Abraham died. But the living God seeks to impart life to the faithful.

Lk. 20:38 adds: "For all live unto Him". The Lord is critiquing their division between this life and the life to come- by saying that the faithful live on now in God's memory as they will eternally; He speaks of things which are not as though they are (Rom. 4:17), and in this sense whether we live or die we are the Lord's (Rom. 14:8). Although the soul is mortal, the spirit returns to God and will be eternally "saved" at the last day. And the spirit refers to who a man essentially is, his thinking and character. This is preserved by God in His memory, and in that sense the faithful dead "live" before Him now. John's Gospel puts this in so many words by saying that we can live the eternal life right now. Whilst bodily resurrection is so significant from our point of view, the God who is outside of our kind of time sees the dead as effectively living as He extends forwards into eternity from the present- in a way we cannot now do. I made the point above that recently the Lord had resurrected Lazarus, with the result that He appeared to have won over many who had previously supported the Jewish leadership. They were now trying to prove that resurrection doesn't happen. The Lord at that time had emphasized that the resurrection of Lazarus was a visual reminder of the new life which those who believed in Him could experience right now: "Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (Jn. 11:26). Luke's comment that "all live unto Him" is saying roughly the same thing. If our spirit is focused upon living and thinking the Kingdom life now, then this spirit is preserved by God upon death. And it is this which God sees after our death, and the sense in which we live unto Him.

You do err greatly- The same word used by the Lord in describing how He as the good shepherd was searching for the sheep of Israel who had "gone astray" (Mt. 18:12,13). Exactly because He was searching for them with a view to saving them, He did not indulge in point scoring or exposing the numerous errors in their claims. The fact the Lord even tried with these types is a huge inspiration to us all to never give up with any group of people.

12:28 *And one of the scribes came and heard them arguing; and knowing that he had answered them well, he asked him: What commandment is the first of all?*- It is often claimed that this means 'Which type of commandment?'. But the Lord's answer suggests that He saw it as meaning 'Which specific commandment'. Mk. 12:28 records them asking which is the greatest commandment "of all", which requires that they wanted Him to name one specific one. Again, the Lord lifted the question to a higher level, quoting two commandments and speaking of them as one single

commandment; and demonstrating that the unity of God is a command rather than a mere piece of fundamental but dead theology (see on Mt. 22:37).

12:29 *Jesus answered: The first is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one*- The Lord Jesus taught that the command that God was one and therefore we must love God *included* the second command: to love our neighbour as ourselves. The first and second commands were in fact one command; they were inseparably part of the first commandment (Mk. 12:29-31). This is why the 'two' commandments, to love God and neighbour, are spoken of in the singular in Lk. 10:28: "*this* do…". See on Mt. 22:40.

The Lord was asked which was the first (i.e. the most important) commandment; we would expect Him to just recite one of them, and to say 'Well, there you are, that's my answer; that's the first one, either numerically, or in terms of importance'. But in reply to this request to name just one of the ten commandments, He actually quotes two of them. There is no greater command (singular) than these *two*. So the Lord saw those two commands as one, the greatest, most important principle of our life before God. Yet He begins by speaking of the unity of God as expressed in His memorial Name, Yahweh your elohim, and says that *this* is what will lead to us loving God with all we have, and also to our loving our neighbour as ourselves. The Lord is saying that if we really appreciate this idea of the unity of God, that Yahweh is our God, then we will *therefore* love God, and also our neighbour. So what does it mean, to love our neighbour as ourselves? In the context of the Decalogue, the neighbour of the Israelite would have been his fellow Israelite, not the Gentile who lived next door to him. The command to love our neighbour as ourselves is elsewhere given an equivalent under the new Covenant: to love our brother or sister in the ecclesia as ourselves. Gal. 5:14 and James 2:8 quote this command in the context of ecclesial life.

The Lord said that the first, the most important, of the commandments was that God is one Yahweh. He didn't see this as an abstract doctrine. He saw the doctrine of the unity of God as a command, it demands behaviour in response to it. He saw the unity of God as part and parcel of the command to love our neighbour as ourselves. Why? Surely He saw that the facts that God's Name is one, and all His people are in some way *in* His Name, mean that we must love others in that Name as much as we love ourselves and as much as we love God. Now apply this to the phenomena of Christian disillusion with the church. We are *in* God, and God is one. So we are all one with each other. Loving our neighbour in Christ as ourselves is placed parallel with loving God with all our heart, strength etc. This means that the main drive of our service to God should be devoted to loving our brother, our neighbour. All those who are baptized into the Name must be loved as we love ourselves. This in itself sinks the possibility of a 'desert island' existence. We just can't live alone. We can't quit on the brotherhood if we want to love God. And this tough, far reaching conclusion comes from knowing that God is one, and all in Him are therefore one.

12:30 *And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength*- See on 1 Thess. 1:2. That God is one is a command, an imperative to action. It underlies the whole law and prophets (Mt. 22:40)- it's that fundamental. If there were two Gods, Yahweh would only demand half our energies. Nothing can be given to anything else; for there is nothing else to give to. There's only one God. There can be no idolatry in our lives, because there is only one God (2 Kings 19:18,19). Because "there is none else, you shall keep *therefore* his statutes" (Dt. 4:39,40). The Hebrew text of Dt. 6:4 suggests: "The Lord is our God, the Lord is one", thereby linking Yahweh's unity with His being our God, the sole Lord and unrivalled Master of His people. It also links the first principle

of the unity of God with that of the covenant to Abraham; for “I will be their God" was one of the features of the covenant. The one God has only one people; not all religious systems can lead to the one Hope of Israel.

12:31 *The second is this: You shall love your neighbour as yourself*- This is indeed a challenge; not only to love ourselves, but to relate to our neighbour as to ourselves. It suggests a unique unity between us and our neighbour within the Israel of God. That humanly impossible unity is only achievable by loving the one God. To love God and our brother is all part of the same thing. It is indivisible; the two commandments are in fact one commandment in practice. To claim to love God but not love or even be involved with our brother means, therefore, that we don’t actually love God. John makes this explicit in 1 Jn. 4:1, and much of the Lord’s teaching does likewise. Yet our tendency is to isolate them, claiming to love God whilst ignoring our brother, and maintaining a strong sense of separation from him.

There is no other commandment greater than these- Again, the Lord makes the point. They wanted *one* commandment isolated as the greatest, and He gave them two, with the further comment that “all the law”, all the others, hung equally upon those two. The spiritual way of life is not a case of isolating one or two commandments and keeping them, but rather living a spirit of life and thinking. Loving God and our neighbour are seamlessly united, although so many try to do one without the other. On the one extreme is the person who sits at home in splendid isolation with their love for God, on the other is the person who thinks that love for neighbour- some neighbours, anyway- is quite enough, and needs no underpinning in a love for God, which involves keeping His commandments.

12:32 *And the scribe said to him: Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, that He is one and there is no other but He*- In the same way as we cannot choose to live in isolation from the Father and Son, so we cannot separate ourselves from others who bear the same Name. The Scribe well understood all this: "There is one God... and to love him... and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mk. 12:32,33). Those whole offerings represented the whole body of Israel (Lev. 4:7-15). The Scribe understood that those offerings taught that all Israel were unified together on account of their bearing the same Name of Yahweh. We must love others who bear that Name "as ourselves", so intense is the unity between us. In some ways, we should lose the sense of our own self interest; we should somehow be able to have the same spiritual interest in others (for this is true love) as we do for ourselves. So this sense of true selflessness which we would dearly desire is connected with an appreciation of the doctrine of the intense unity of God and of His Name, and of the glorious principle of God manifestation. By sharing the one Name, we are one together. See on Jn. 5:23.

12:33 *And to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is much more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices*- The Scribe said that the most important commandment to love God “with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly (Gk. ‘in an intellect-having way’), He said unto him, Thou art not far from the Kingdom”. Notice how ‘understanding’ with the intellect is put higher in the list than loving one’s neighbour. The fundamental thing is to correctly understand, and this will naturally lead to a life of practical love. Our surrounding ‘Christian’ world has inverted this

order; love of neighbour has been placed above correct understanding of God. Because the Scribe answered in an intellect-having way, the Saviour said that He was near to the Kingdom. To reach the Kingdom therefore involves correct understanding. The words of Mk. 12:33 allude to a number of OT passages which likewise show the superiority of knowledge and practical service over sacrifices (1 Sam. 15:22; Hos. 6:6; Mic. 6:6-8). Putting them together we find the following parallels:

To obey God's word	is better than sacrifice
To listen to God's word	is better than sacrifice
To show mercy	is better than sacrifice
To know God	is better than sacrifice
To be humble and just	is better than sacrifice
To understand God	is better than sacrifice

Understanding God, hearing His word, knowing God (all acts of the intellect) are therefore paralleled with practical things like loving out neighbour, showing mercy, justice etc. These practical things are an outcome of our correct knowledge of God.

12:34 *And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him: You are not far from the kingdom of God. And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions*- A correct *understanding* of the Law and the sacrifices meant that a man was near the Kingdom (Mk. 12:34). The principles of the Lord's Kingdom, His rulership over men, were taught throughout the Old Testament. These very words about asking no more questions are used of how the disciples after the resurrection dared not ask who Jesus was (Jn. 21:12), which is the very context here. The connection is clearly to show that they too through their being too influenced by Jewish thinking found themselves in the same category as the unbelieving Jews- the difference being that they repented of it. Matthew was appealing to Jews to accept Jesus and repent of their willful misunderstanding, and he and John are holding themselves up as a role model, just as we should in our appeals for repentance. The Greek for "questions" isn't in the original; they dared not ask Him again. The implication from the context could be that they dared not ask Him 'Who are You?', for the answer was clear in their consciences. They knew, on one level, that He was Messiah, that He was the heir to the vineyard, whom they knowingly sought to murder.

12:35 *And Jesus asked, as he taught in the temple: Why do the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?*- They were surely aware that Jesus was a son of David, on both the sides of Mary and Joseph. For they would've done their homework as to His [apparent] family of origin. Lk. 20:41 records that the Lord addressed a question to the wider audience: "How say they that Christ is David's son?". But Matthew says He asked the Pharisees. Having let the Pharisees give the answer, He then asks others how this can be the case. Again, the Lord's dialogues with the Pharisees was not simply to try to convert them, but in order that the audience would

learn. Mk. 12:37 concludes the section by observing that "the common people heard Him gladly", so again we see how the records seamlessly complement each other.

12:36 *David himself said in the Holy Spirit: The Lord said*- Clearly Yahweh. If the Divine Name was to be used in the New Testament, surely this would be the place for it. The fact it is not, when some Hebrew words are used (e.g. 'Sabaoth'), shows clearly enough that the literal usage of the tetragrammaton is not something God sees as important or even required.

To my Lord- Biblically and historically, David's immediate 'Lord' was Saul. Ps. 110 was originally a revelation to David of the potential possible for Saul, who was an anointed 'Messiah' figure. But Saul failed, and so the fulfillment of the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied to the Lord Jesus.

Sit on My right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet- The Lord's enemies stood around Him as He applied this Psalm to Himself.

12:37 *David himself calls him Lord; and how is he therefore his son? And the common people heard him gladly*- Judaism's concept of Messiah has always been vague and not commonly agreed, but there was and is the idea that the likes of Abraham, Moses and David are greater than Messiah. The Lord is pointing out that David considered Messiah to be his "Lord", just as Messiah was greater than Abraham (Jn. 8:58). The "how" doesn't imply that David's Lord is not his son, but rather is a rhetorical question. How is the Messianic son of David, David's "Lord", to be his son or descendant? The Lord reinforced the question by asking "*From whence* is He his son?" (AV). The answer had to be: 'Through a woman in David's direct line giving birth to Him'. And the questioners were fully aware that Jesus was in the direct line of Mary

12:38 *And in his teaching he said: Beware of the scribes, who desire to walk in long robes and to have salutations in the marketplaces*- The Lord's reason for going to the market was to invite men to work in the vineyard and receive the penny of salvation (Mt. 20:3); and His people sitting in the markets sought to persuade others of the need to respond to the Gospel (Mt. 11:16). The Pharisees went to the markets to simply flaunt their external spirituality. Again, note how their behaviour was the very inversion of true spirituality.

12:39 *And the chief seats in the synagogues and chief places at feasts*- They wanted to be publically seen as spiritually superior. The whole structure of church life, whereby some must have public roles, is such that people can fall so easily into a love of publicity. The Lord realizes this, and often removes His beloved from such temptations. This explains the otherwise inexplicable way in which the Lord allows some of His most talented and capable servants to be removed from the public eye to serve Him in human obscurity. Note that the Lord here is repeating almost word for word what He has previously said about the Pharisees in Luke 11. To repeat so much text twice in the Gospel records, and for the Lord to give identical word-for-word teaching on two occasions, shows how important these warnings are for all readers. This consideration alone suggests that we each have the same tendency as the Pharisees; they are but epitomes of our own deepest tendencies and desires.

12:40 *They that devour widows' houses*- The language used here about the behaviour of the Scribes and Pharisees is elsewhere used about the righteous behaviour of the Lord and His followers; the Jewish leaders were living a religious life, but it was but a parody of true spirituality. The same words for "devour" and "house" are used of how the Lord Jesus was 'eaten up' or 'devoured' with zeal for His Father's "house". But by contrast the Scribes thought only of how they could devour

the houses of widows, scheming how to get the house of a vulnerable single old woman left to them, and how they could devour that wealth upon themselves. We note that Mark and Luke conclude this section with the account of the widow who gave her entire wealth to the temple coffers (Mk. 12:42; Lk. 21:1). This was surely to add assurance that although her donation was misused, it was carefully noted by God to her eternal credit.

And for a pretence make long prayers- They were hypocrites. The word was used about an actor's cloak, and thus connects with the theatrical term 'hypocrites', play-actors. The Lord uses the same word in Jn. 15:22: "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no *cloak* for their sin". When did He come and speak unto the Jews about their hypocrisy? Surely here in Mark 12. Although they did have a cloak for their sin before men, the Lord is saying in John 15 that they have no such cloak before Him.

These shall receive greater condemnation- There will be degrees of punishment, although it will be self-inflicted.

12:41 *And he sat down over against the treasury*- There was no seating in the temple. It was not like a church building today, with benches and seating. The Rabbis made a great deal of the fact that God alone was seated in the temple, and in line with their targum on 2 Sam. 7:18, only Messiah would sit there in the same way as His ancestor David had sat in the temple in gratitude for the Messianic promises ("David the king went in and sat before Yahweh; and he said, Who am I, Lord Yahweh, and what is my house, that You have brought me thus far?"). The Lord sitting in the temple, and sitting in judgment, was therefore a Messianic claim. But His judgment is shown for what it really is- a searching of hearts and motives, and a positive noticing of obscure people and their obscure acts of devotion.

And watched how the crowd threw money into the treasury; and many that were rich threw in a lot- The many small coins they threw in make a loud clanging noise in the collection trumpets. They were literally trumpeting their good deeds before men in God's house. The widow threw in the same kind of coins which they threw in in abundance. What she threw in was scarcely audible to men; but the Lord noticed. The only other references to the Lord sitting are to Him sitting in judgment. And that judgment was ongoing even then; it does and will finally take into account the things not audible to men.

We must be ever aware of our tendency to come to the Biblical text with our mind already made up about what it means, viewing it through the lens of our pre-existing images of what we are going to read. The incident of the poor widow is a classic case. We tend to imagine the Lord "sitting opposite the treasury" as meaning He sat opposite the 'trumpet' into which people poured their coins. But the Lord taught the people "in the treasury" (Jn. 8:20 cp. 2 Kings 23:11; Ezra 10:6; Neh. 10:38,39), so the reference is to the chamber called "the treasury". And we too easily assume that she was an old, wizzened woman, leaning heavily on a cane. But seeing male life expectancy in Palestine was so low, the image of a "widow" would more likely refer to a woman around 30 years old, with dirty children in tow, looking malnourished. Likewise we assume an overall positive image, in spiritual terms: 'What a wonderful example of poor people being generous!'. And that cannot be denied. But there is also a strongly negative image evoked by the incident, when we bear in mind that the Gospel records have just noted that the Jews were covetous and avaricious; and built their wealth through "devouring widows' houses" (Mk. 12:40). The image, in this case, is negative; we are intended to contrast her with the wealthy, public donors- and be incensed that she had been so spiritually abused and mentally manipulated that she

believed that giving her two coins to those men was in fact serving God. We leave the incident lamenting spiritual abuse, rather than simply being inspired to generosity. And yet without doubt, the image of total sacrifice must be given its due weight. Mark's record appears to use this incident to unite the two halves of his Gospel; Mark 1-12 concern the Lord's public ministry, and Mark 13-16 focus upon the events in the last week or His life. But those sections are linked with this picture of total sacrifice, as if to preface what we will go on to read about the Lord's total sacrifice. We note that we are provided with the context about how the religious leaders were "devouring widows' houses" (Mk. 12:40). It could even be that we are to conclude that this woman's poverty was because she had been financially abused by the scribes. The Lord condemns the temple as a den of robbers (Mk. 11:17), with specific reference to the treasury. And yet she returns to the temple to give her pennies to them. In this case, she is being held up as an example of a woman who still served God despite spiritual abuse, and didn't allow her bad experience with church to stop her serving God. And we see too how despite her loyalty to and membership of a corrupt system, the Lord still noticed her sincerity and did not at all reject her for the sake of any kind of guilt by association. This is ultimate comfort for many who laboured beneath spiritual abuse and corrupt systems. The incident is the prelude to the Olivet prophecy- of destruction of the temple and all its wealth. Criticism of the temple cult is therefore a big factor in the story.

From what we know of the second temple, there were several 'trumpets' for financial offerings. The offerer told the priest what the offering was for; and there are records of the offerer being told that their offering couldn't be accepted as it was too small for the purpose stated. What is noteworthy, therefore, is that the priests allowed the woman to make such a tiny offering. Perhaps we are to imagine the priest not noticing her as she crept up to one of the "freewill" offering trumpets and threw in her coins; but the Lord did notice her. The sound of the coins in the trumpets apparently indicated to the priest the size of the gift. Her coins would have made no recognizable noise; but the Lord noticed, and the Gospel records immortalized the otherwise imperceptible sound of her offering. As the Lord taught, our giving is to be by its nature unnoticed by men, in order for it to be noticed by God. And we must examine ourselves as to when we last did this. The record goes straight on to mention that the temple was adorned with costly gifts (Lk. 21:5)- which were all to soon be destroyed. Exactly because of the systemic abuse of people like that widow. We note that her giving was at Passover time- which was the time for almsgiving to the poor and widow. The clear irony is that she gave what little she had, and got nothing from the temple cult.

Mark's record stresses how the focus of the record zooms in upon the widow; from the crowd casting in money, to the rich doing so, and then to the poor widow. His use of tenses assists the effect. Literally 'the crowd are throwing money [present tense]... the many rich were throwing [imperfect tense]... the widow threw [aorist tense, a completed, once and for all action]' (Mk. 12:41). The idea may be that the rich were regularly throwing money into the trumpets; but the widow made just her one offering at one point in time, because she was not accustomed to go there and make offerings. The suggestion, therefore, is that their 'giving' was a regular religious observance; but her giving was of all that she had, and so by nature could only occur once. Likewise the focus upon the woman is achieved by speaking of "the crowd" (Mk.), then the "many that were rich"- whereas the woman comes alone, literally "one widow, a poor one" (Mk. 12:42). Her giving was not therefore inspired by any crowd

mentality or herd psychology, giving because others give. Just as our giving must be a totally personal response to God's grace in Jesus, inspired by Him alone.

The two *lepta* ["small coins"] were the smallest coinage in the Roman system. They amounted to 1/64 of a denarius, the "penny" paid for a day's work in harvest time. They could buy a handful of flour, seen as the measure of a meagre meal. Eight lepta made one ass, and inscriptions from Pompeii show that daily bread for four people cost around four asses or 32 lepta coins. Cheese for four people for one meal cost one ass or eight lepta. Remember that as a "widow" she may well have had young children to provide for as well. Her gift, which is held up as our pattern, was ultimately insignificant in secular terms. And this is the point. Our giving is of itself insignificant, but the spirit behind it is eternally important. The woman likely thought that she may as well not offer her tiny gift. But she did so. Exactly because she understood that she was giving of her spirit, giving her all, symbolized in sacrificing at best a day's food. The Lord understood that she who gave least actually gave most- because His scale of measurement is of the spirit and not of the external. He commends her for giving all- in that going to the effort to give that tiny amount reflected how she wanted to give her all. She likely had a few material things somewhere and a place where she slept. But she is not recorded as giving these. But her attitude of giving is seen as reflective of a desire to give, and a total surrender of herself to God.

The impression we get is that these were her last coins, all that she had. The same idea is found in Lk. 12:59, where the man who will not settle things with his brother must pay all that he had, down to the last *lepton*. That is a picture of condemnation. The man will pay his last "mite" / *lepton*, but still not be saved. The woman gave her last mite to the Lord now. It's bankruptcy, giving all, right now, for His sake- or the loss of all things at the day of judgment. There is an absolute logic to the path of total devotion.

12:42 *And there came a poor widow, and she threw in two small copper coins, which make a penny*- The Lord taught that one must forsake all that he has in order to truly be His disciple (Mt. 13:44; Lk. 14:33). But at the end of His ministry, He as it were chose to exemplify this aspect of discipleship by drawing attention to a woman who gave to God “all the living that she had” (Lk. 21:3). Putting the passages together, the Lord is saying that she is to be the model for us all in this aspect of devotion. She could have kept one of the coins; but she threw both of them in.

12:43 *And he gathered his disciples, and said to them: Truly I say to you, this poor widow threw in more than all they that are throwing money into the treasury*- See on 2 Cor. 8:11,12. They were needed to be gathered together to hear this teaching; they had not noticed it, or not been impressed by what the woman did. So clearly, God accounts not as man does. We are judged according to our possibilities and not according to volume of achievement. She threw in "more", literally she 'exceeded', that the others had thrown in. The same word is used of how our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (Mt. 5:20). She is again presented as the model disciple. The word has just been used in :33 of how love of God and neighbour is "more" than all sacrifices. She achieved that love not by volume of achievement but in her attitude.

12:44 *For they threw in money they didn't need, but she though needy threw in all that she had- all her livelihood*- The Lord condemned the Pharisees for devouring widow’s houses (Mk. 12:40), but then goes on to show how the widow who threw in all her wealth to the treasuries of the corrupt Pharisees had actually gained great approval in God’s eyes by doing so (Mk. 12:44). Out of evil, good came. The Lord

didn't just lament the cruel selfishness of the Jewish leadership. He pointed out how God worked through even this to enable a poor woman to please Him immensely. There is a wondrous ecology in all this; nothing is lost. Nothing, in the final end, can be done against the Truth, only for the Truth.

The Lord pointed out to the disciples how the extreme generosity of the widow, giving the two pennies of her business capital, her "living", to the Lord, was worth far more than the ostentatious giving of the wealthy Jewish leadership (Mk. 12:44); but the next incident recorded by Mark is the disciples marvelling at the ostentatious buildings of the temple, and the Lord explaining that all this needed to be thrown down (Mk. 13:1,2). Their slowness to perceive is such a theme of the gospel records.

MARK CHAPTER 13

13:1 *And as he left the temple*- This was a visual depiction of the Lord's previous statement that the house of the temple was now left desolate (Mt. 23:38). The Lord surely had in mind how the glory of God, which was Him (2 Cor. 4:6; Col. 1:27; James 2:1), progressively left the temple in Ezekiel's time, until the Babylonians came and destroyed the temple (Ez. 10:18), and how the loss of the ark (another symbol of the Lord Jesus) was the glory departing from Israel (1 Sam. 4:21,22).

One of his disciples said to him: Teacher, look what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!- These words are taken over in the later New Testament to describe the building up [often translated 'edifying'] of a new temple, comprised of the believers in Christ. The temple buildings were thrown down *in order that* a new and spiritual building comprised of believers could be built up through the Lord's work in the hearts of His people. The group of believers are "All the building [which] grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:21). Paul, writing before AD70, may have had this contrast indirectly in mind when he wrote that when the earthly house is destroyed, we should remember that we have a "house not made with hands" built by God (2 Cor. 5:1). The same struggle and angst at the loss of physical structures of our religion can be seen today; some find it hard to believe that relationship with God is ultimately personal, and that relationship continues even when surrounding, much loved traditional structures are removed.

13:2 *And Jesus said to him: Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another. All will be thrown down*- This again expands upon His previous use of this word in Mt. 23:38: "Your house is *left* unto you desolate". He is asking the disciples to see with the eye of faith- that effectively, the great stones of the temple were already thrown down, the temple was already "desolate" (Gk. 'a deserted place').

The judgment of the leprous house was to be thrown down, stone by stone (Lev. 14:41). At the time of the final assault on Jerusalem in AD69, Titus commanded that the temple was to be spared. But the Lord's words came true, just as all prophetic words will, despite every human effort to deny their power. Josephus claims that the gold of the temple melted and therefore each stone was prized apart to remove the gold.

There was a strong belief in Judaism that the temple would last eternally. Hence the disciples' question about "the end of the age" was because for them, any talk about the end of the temple meant the end of the world. They are not therefore asking about different chronological events when they ask when this shall be, and what sign

would indicate the end of the age. This prophecy of the destruction of the temple implied an ending of the Mosaic law. Hence the same word translated "thrown down" is ascribed to Stephen when he was accused of preaching that the Lord Jesus would "*destroy* this place and [therefore] change the customs which Moses delivered us" (Acts 6:14). Paul uses the same word about his 'destruction' of the things of legalistic dependence on the law for salvation, by preaching salvation by grace in Jesus (Gal. 2:18). It is also the word used in 2 Cor. 5:1, a passage which seems to have some reference to the impending destruction of the temple and its replacement with the spiritual house of God's building: "Our earthly house of this tabernacle be *destroyed* [s.w. "thrown down"], we have a building of God, a house not made with hands...". All this would suggest that there was a changeover period envisaged between the Lord's death and the final ending of the jurisdiction of the Mosaic law. Seeing the end Lord ended the Law on the cross, this again is to be seen as a concession to the conservatism of the Jews.

13:3 *And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately*- The private enquiry was because the Lord had just stated something dangerously illegal. Martin Hengel concludes that the early Gospel records were so radical that they would've been part of an "underground literature". He suggests that the Roman law forbidding oral or written prophecies about the fall of the Roman empire- on pain of death- was enough to make the Olivet prophecy alone a highly illegal document.

13:4 *Tell us, when will these things occur, and what shall be the sign when these things are about to happen?*- They clearly expected one particular sign, and *semeion* is typically used of a miraculous wonder. Instead, the Lord gave them a series of signs which they were to discern. The fulfilment of these signs in our times is no less than a miracle- that such detailed predictions could start to come true before our eyes. Such fulfilment of prophecy is therefore itself a miracle. The disciples repeat the Pharisees' question about when the end will come- in almost the same words. They were clearly influenced by them (Lk. 17:20 cp. Mk. 13:4). The disciples (in their childish way) showed the Lord the greatness of the temple, and he commented that soon it would be destroyed. They asked the obvious question: When? Usually, the Lord didn't reply directly to questions; he gave answers which branched out into something altogether more comprehensive than the original question (Consider Mt. 13:10,11; 15:2,3; Mk. 10:4,5; Lk. 17:20; Jn. 3:4,5; 4:9,10; 6:28,29; 8:53,54; 11:8,9; 14:22,23). *Nearly every example of the Lord Jesus answering a question includes this feature.* To the disciples, the destruction of the temple meant the end of the age- it was a calamity. They assumed that if the temple was destroyed, it must be replaced immediately by their Jesus coming again with his Messianic Kingdom. Their minds were still not suitably distanced from their Judaist background. They asked *one* question: "When shall these things (the destruction of the temple) be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?" (Mk. 13:4). Mt. 24:4 can make it seem that they asked two questions: "When shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of they coming, and of the end of the world?". But the parallel record in Mk. 13:4 makes it clear that actually these were parts of the same question concerning the temple's destruction. To the disciples, the coming of Christ, the end of the world and the temple's destruction were all the same event. The Lord answered their question by speaking of how there would be the destruction of the temple, but his real coming and the main ending of this world would be at a future date. His answer was therefore fundamentally relevant to his second coming, although built into it was some reference to the destruction of the temple in AD70. As He so

often does, the Lord turned round the terms of the question. They thought his "coming" would be at the temple's destruction, and so they asked for signs of His "coming". But Christ shows that this wasn't a correct view: His real "coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Mt. 24:30) would not be then, but after all the various signs he described were fulfilled. He was surely saying: 'OK the temple will be destroyed, and many of the signs I'm giving will have some application to that period; but the destruction of the temple isn't the sign of my coming. Note the signs I give you, and watch for their fulfilment: and *then* you'll know when to expect my coming'.

13:5 The persecution of God's people was spoken of by the Lord as being one of the clearest signs. And he also emphasized that apostacy within the ecclesia would be the other major sign. When they asked him for the signs, Mk. 13:5 says that Jesus *began* by warning them of deception from false teachers. The way the NT writers allude to this passage indicates that they saw this deception as not coming from the crazy bogus-Messiahs of the world, but from false teachers *within the ecclesia*, sometimes supported by apparent possession of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:6; 2 Thess. 2:3; Tit. 1:10; 2 Jn. 7). A state of total ecclesial apostacy was the sign which Jesus *began* with, according to Mk. 13:5.

13:9 When the Lord said that His people would preach before rulers ‘for a witness / testimony against them’ (Mk. 13:9), we are left wondering when and how exactly this will be. It’s hard to come to any other conclusion than that this refers to how our words of preaching will be quoted back to the hearers at the judgment. It’s an incidental proof that it is hearing the word of the Gospel that makes a person responsible to the last judgment. But in our context, my point is that our words of preaching in this life will be quoted back to those who heard them, at the day of judgment. The simple point is, our words aren’t forgotten. They will be quoted back, in some form, at the day of judgment. And yet it appears we can speak and think how we like in this life. Indeed we can; but all these things will ultimately surface again in the last day.

13:5 *And Jesus began to say to them*- The persecution of God's people was spoken of by the Lord as being one of the clearest signs. And he also emphasized that apostasy within the ecclesia would be the other major sign. When they asked him for the signs, Mk. 13:5 says that Jesus *began* by warning them of deception from false teachers. The way the NT writers allude to this passage indicates that they saw this deception as not coming from the crazy bogus-Messiahs of the world, but from false teachers *within the ecclesia*, sometimes supported by apparent possession of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:6; 2 Thess. 2:3; Tit. 1:10; 2 Jn. 7). A state of total ecclesial apostasy was the sign which Jesus *began* with, according to Mk. 13:5.

Take heed that no one lead you astray- “Be not deceived" is extensively quoted later in the NT concerning the need not be deceived by false teachers *within the ecclesia* (1 Cor. 6:9,15,33; Gal. 6:17; 2 Tim. 3:13, as Mt. 24:4 = 1 Jn. 3:7). The deceivers the Lord spoke of were not just bogus Messiahs out in the world, but apparently Spirit-gifted brethren who will arise within the ecclesia.

13:6 *Many shall come in my name, saying, I am he*- Coming in the name of the Lord, the "I am", was the formula used in Judaism to describe Messiah (Mt. 21:9; 23:39). The false claims to be Jesus the Christ are hardly persuasive nor vaguely credible. That they should be a source of mass falling away amongst the Lord's people seems hardly likely. We must assume, therefore, that such persons will have a credibility or a surrounding context which makes them far more attractive than they currently are. Revelation speaks of false miracles being done in the last days. Perhaps

views of prophetic fulfilment will become so dogmatically held, suggesting that Christ *must* come once certain things happen in the world, that the believers will be open to easy deception. This scenario would be the more likely if a doctrine of *parousia*, the "coming" of Christ", is adopted which postulates that His coming will be somehow secret, invisible to the world and perceived only by the faithful.

Josephus describes the period before AD70 as being when "The country was full of robbers, magicians, false prophets, false Messiahs and impostors, who deluded the people with promises of great events" [*Antiquities* 20.10.13 5,6].

And shall lead many astray- Warnings against being deceived are a major theme in the Lord's message here (Mt. 24:5,11,24). Paul read the prophecy of deceivers arising in the last days as referring to deceivers arising within the ecclesia, i.e. people who were already baptized, consciously deceiving the majority of the ecclesia. He repeats this conviction at least three times (Mt. 24:4 = Eph. 5:6; Col. 2:8; 2 Thess. 2:3). The later NT writers make the same appeal using the same Greek words, with reference to not being deceived by the allurements of the fleshly life (1 Cor. 6:9; 15:33; Gal. 6:7; James 1:16). And warnings against "them that deceive you" are common, along with lament that many believers in the first century had indeed been deceived (s.w. 2 Tim. 3:13; James 5:19; 2 Pet. 2:15; 1 Jn. 2:26; 3:7; Rev. 2:20). Indeed, Revelation is full of warnings and judgment against "the devil" who deceives God's people (s.w. Rev. 12:9; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20; 20:3). Perhaps this is one reason why the Olivet prophecy was not fulfilled in AD70- the warning with which the Lord opened the prophecy was not heeded by the majority.

13:7 *And when you shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be disturbed. These things must take place, but the end is not yet*- The dramatic growth of the media and communication will mean that everyone 'hears' of such things. And our generation as none before is in this situation. We can likewise understand the related word (in the Greek): "*rumours* of wars". Lk. 21:9 adds to the other records "and commotions", disquiet, mental upset and confusion. Hence the appeal not to be "troubled" within our hearts. Lk. 21:26 speaks of human hearts failing them for fear in worry and expectation (AV "looking after") about the world's future. This sign, therefore, is not so much concerning the proliferation of war, but of human worry about the geopolitical situation. And our generation has been the only one capable of fulfilling this situation. Note, however, that *you* shall hear these things- and the "you" was initially the listening disciples. Clearly the prophecy was intended to have fulfilment in the lifetime of the disciples, but this didn't happen. Because the Divine program was rescheduled.

They were not to be terrified / disturbed. The word is only used outside the Olivet prophecy in 2 Thess. 2:2, where Paul warns that believers should not be "troubled" by any idea that "the day of Christ is at hand", because the prophecy concerning the great falling away and the man of sin sitting in the temple of God must be fulfilled first. This connection shows that the prophecy of 2 Thess. 2 must have a specific latter day fulfilment on the very eve of the Lord's visible return in glory when "the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to nothing by the powerful glory of His coming" (2 Thess. 2:8). The "day of Christ" is therefore the visible return of the Lord, and this, therefore, is the burden of the Olivet prophecy too. For Paul is taking that language and applying it to the second coming of Christ. And that did not happen in AD70. In Lk. 21:11 the Lord spoke of "fearful sights" being seen in latter-day Israel. During their tribulation, Israel will experience intense "terror" (Lev. 26:16), which would be enough to kill them (Dt. 32:24). This extraordinary level of fear will be modelled upon that of Jacob as he faced Esau- representing Israel's confrontation

with the Arabs in the last days (Jer. 30:5,7). This state of fear will result in many Jews going to live in Jerusalem, as happened during the Babylonian and Assyrian invasions (Jer. 35:11). Ezekiel had prophesied of this time: "Terrors (perhaps an intensive plural - i.e. 'the one great terror') by reason of the sword shall be upon My people" (Ez. 21:12).

These things were necessary (Mt.), they must happen (Lk.), must take place (Mk.). Quoting Dan. 2:28 LXX, as if the prophecy of Daniel 2 could have had its fulfilment at the time of the destruction of the temple in AD70. Again we encounter the idea of potential fulfilments of prophecy which in fact didn't happen when they could have done. The AV inserts in italics "all these things", but the Lord has only given the sign of worry about wars at this stage in the discourse. He used the identical phrase in predicting that the "all things" of the Mosaic system were to be fulfilled in His death on the cross (5:18). The same term is used in Jn. 1:3: "All things were fulfilled [AV "made"] in Him"- surely a reference to the fulfilment of the Mosaic law in Christ. The "old things" of the Mosaic system passed away, and in Christ "all things are fulfilled [AV "made"] new" (2 Cor. 5:17- same Greek words). There was a changeover period permitted between the Mosaic system and that of Christ, which finished when the temple was destroyed in AD70 and obedience to the Mosaic law thereby became impossible. If this line of interpretation is correct, then we have the Lord hinting that the Mosaic system would be ended, the temple destroyed, but the end was still not to be then. This would again indicate that the events of AD70 were not the "end" which the Lord had in view. "The end" (s.w.) would only come when the Gospel was preached in the entire habitable world (:14) and the believers had been persecuted of all men (Mk. 13:13). But again, the Lord had in mind the possibility that the disciples themselves would endure "unto the end" (10:22; 24:13). It could have come in their lifetime; but it didn't. John's Gospel replaces the Olivet prophecy with the upper room discourse, in which the Lord spoke of His spiritual presence in the hearts of believers through the Comforter. And John's equivalent of "the end" in that discourse is the comment that the Lord Jesus loved His people "unto the end" through dying on the cross (Jn. 13:1 s.w.). This is not to downplay the reality of the second coming, but it is a foil against a mindset that thinks solely in terms of fulfilling prophecy and the literal coming of the Lord. True and wonderful as that is, the essence of the Lord's presence is in His abiding presence in the hearts of spiritually minded believers in Him, and the "end" is His death for us, which in one sense is enough for us all regardless of when He will literally return. But again, Paul, like his Lord, felt that "the end" could have come in the first century; for he writes of how the believers then were living at "the end [s.w.] of the age" (1 Cor. 10:11), when God's wrath against Israel was about to burst "unto the end (AV "to the uttermost"; 1 Thess. 2:16). Likewise Peter: "The end [s.w.] of all things is at hand" (1 Pet. 4:7). Likewise Dan. 9:26 could then have had its fulfilment.

13:8 *For nation shall rise against nation*- Any first century fulfilment is unlikely because the *Pax Romana* meant that the Roman empire was firmly in power and such a situation did not therefore occur. *Ethnos* is the word commonly translated "Gentiles". The picture of nations and kingdoms rising up against each other was simply not fulfilled in the run up to AD70- the Roman empire with their *Pax Romana* did not permit such a situation. And the system of world empires which disintegrated in the 20th Century likewise didn't permit much of this in recent times, especially in the area around Israel, or in the land promised to Abraham, which is the focus of all Bible prophecy. Only in our times has this become a reality, especially in the Arab world and amongst the nations located in the territory promised to Abraham.

The language of 'rising up' in revolt is now common amongst them. The picture, however, is of the Gospel going into all those "nations" at this time (Mt. 24:14), all those nations persecuting the believers (Mt. 24:9), and the nations [AV "Gentiles"] taking Jerusalem and treading it down (Lk. 21:24); despite their internal struggles, these same "all nations" will be confederated under a latter Babylon (Rev. 17:15; 18:3,23). The overall picture is of Gospel preaching going on at a time when the nations are rising up against each other, and at the same time persecuting the believers. This scenario is developing- but is as yet unfulfilled on a global scale. But it is daily fulfilling in the nations surrounding Israel, who are persecuting Christians, rising up against each other, and to whom the Gospel is being powerfully preached. Never before has my own mission organization received such major expression of serious interest from the Muslim nations surrounding Israel, thanks largely to the growth of the internet and the growing disillusion with the existing social and religious situation. People from all nations will be gathered before the Lord for judgment (Mt. 25:32) and people from every nation will be saved (Rev. 5:9; 7:9)- confirming that the Gospel will indeed spread to all nations before the Lord's return; it must at least be "proclaimed" to them all, thereby making people amongst them responsible to judgment; the "fullness of the Gentiles" must "come in" to Christ before the end comes and Israel repent (Rom. 11:25). The Lord sent the disciples out to "all nations" (Mt. 28:19 s.w.); the implication is that they failed to take the Gospel to them all, and therefore the intended scenario didn't fulfil as initially intended in the first century. Lk. 21:25 speaks of how there will be "upon the earth [land- that promised to Abraham] distress of nations", suggesting that the situation amongst the Gentile nations living within the land promised to Abraham is the particular focus of the prophecy. The same language is used of how there were devout Jews in "every nation under Heaven" (Acts 2:5)- and the list of nations in Acts 2 corresponds with the Middle Eastern Moslem world of today. We note that the promise that Abraham should be father of "many nations" was fulfilled in a literal sense in that Abraham is the ancestor of the Arab nations living in the land promised to him (Rom. 4:17). And it is those nations particularly who have stated their desire to take Jerusalem out of the hands of the Jews, as required in Lk. 21:24.

And kingdom against kingdom- It seems likely from Revelation that ‘Babylon’ of the last days will rise to political and military dominance in the territory promised to Abraham, the earth/ land of which the Bible speaks so much. The 10 nations / horns / leaders which exist in the land promised to Abraham- the “kings of the earth / land”- will give their power to Babylon, by force and by political manoeuvre, and this system will then invade Israel. The horns hating the whore implies there will be inter-Arab friction apparent in the beast system throughout its existence. "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (Mt. 24:7) will be a sign of the last days. In the AD70 context, this referred to friction between the Semitic peoples living around Israel; and the Lord's words are clearly an allusion to 2 Chron. 15:6, which specifically uses the phrase about inter-Arab friction. The fragile alliance between them will then be broken by the Lord’s return, the horns will hate the whore and destroy her. They give their power to the beast for but “one hour”. Daniel seems to associate a covenant which is then broken with the latter day Antichrist. Is. 30:27-31 speaks of the latter day Assyrian as placing “a bridle in the jaw of the people causing them to err”, referring to some kind of covenant / agreement which forces others to follow their direction. The Lord’s especial fury will be against the individual latter day Nebuchadnezzar who leads the invasion. The future leader of Babylon, the whore riding the beast, will see themselves as Nebuchadnezzar. Isaiah and Micah describe

the latter day invader of the land as “the Assyrian” (Is. 10:5; 14:25; 30:31; Mic. 5:1-6). This itself suggests we are to see the individual who heads up the invasion, the rosh / chief prince of Ez. 38:2, as an ethnic Assyrian / Iraqi. Dan. 8:24,25 invites us to see the same- the “king of fierce countenance” stands up out of the area of northern Iraq / northern Iran.

There shall be earthquakes- Just as there was at the crucifixion (Mt. 27:54), yet another reason for thinking that the tribulation of the last days will enable Israel to identify with the sufferings of their crucified Messiah. Again, earthquakes feature in the seals of Rev. 6:12; and in the judgments upon Israel's enemies in Rev. 11:13,19; 16:18. Again, it seems that Israel will initially experience the judgments upon their enemies, just as they did in the lead up to their Passover deliverance in Egypt which also prefigures their final salvation. The fig tree nation- Israel- is to be shaken of a mighty wind (Rev. 6:13), and the word "shaken" is a form of that translated "earthquake". The forcing of fruit from the fig tree will be brought about by the experience of the earthquake.

In various places- The word "various" is added by the translators to try to make sense of the otherwise obvious statement that earthquakes will occur in "places". There is no suggestion in the Greek text that earthquakes will occur in various places worldwide where they have not been known to occur. But maybe we have here an intensive plural- the one great place. The same word is used in Mt. 24:15 about "the holy *place*". There are rumours that an earthquake hit the temple area around AD70. But seeing that the temple mount is the bone of contention between Israel and her neighbours, an earthquake splitting the mount would be appropriate. And of course this would link directly with the prediction of Zechariah 14, that when Christ returns there will be an earthquake which splits it. And yet this is used by the Lord as a sign of His coming, rather than a statement about what will happen at His return. It could be that this is an example of how the meaning of time will be somehow collapsed around the second coming; a sign of His return is in effect His return. Or it could be that the events described in the Olivet prophecy will all happen in a very short period of time, a matter of days rather than years or decades [as is assumed by those who seek to connect the predictions with current world events]. Mk. 13:8 and Lk. 21:11 speak of the earthquakes in *kata* places, but this doesn't necessarily mean 'various' places, but could equally mean 'around'- earthquakes around the holy place would then be signs and portents of the earthquake under the Holy Place which will happen when Christ returns. In Acts 6:13,14 Stephen's enemies appear to have twisted his quotations of the Lord's Olivet prophecy to mean that Christ would destroy the "holy place" [s.w. "places" here in Mt. 24].

There shall be famines- There was an acute famine in Israel during Elijah's ministry of three and a half years, as part of God's appeal for Israel to repent and respond to Elijah's message (Lk. 4:25). And so it will be in the final three and a half year tribulation. Likewise it was famine which led the prodigal to repent and return to the Father (Lk. 15:14,17), a clear prototype of Israel's repentance. And perhaps the greatest prototype of their repentance is in the coming of Joseph's brothers to bow before Him; and this too was provoked by famine throughout the region around Israel (Acts 7:11). There will be a purpose in all the sufferings which precede the Lord's return- and that purpose is to bring about Israel's repentance, which is the key condition required for His second coming. There were indeed major famines in the lead up to AD70 (Acts 11:28 "a great famine throughout all the world"); again, the signs which depended upon Divine intervention were fulfilled in the first century, but those which depended upon Israel and the believers did not, because they chose not

to. And thus the second coming was delayed. “In the reign of the Emperor Claudius (AD41-54) there were four seasons of great scarcity. In the fourth year of his reign, the famine in Judea was so severe that the price of food became enormous and great numbers perished. Earthquakes occurred in each of the reigns of Caligula and Claudius” (R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2000: Baker Books), p. 36). Paul encourages his first century readers that famine and other elements of the Olivet predictions would not separate believers from the love of God- as if he expected those signs to be fulfilled in their lifetimes (Rom. 8:35). The seals of Revelation 6 are full of reference to the Olivet predictions, as if they could all have been fulfilled in the first century (Rev. 6:8 speaks specifically of "famine"). Famine can come quicker than ever in our modern world, where most countries depend upon imported food; and this is especially the case in the area around Israel, where the climate doesn't enable the support of the relatively large population living in the area without food being imported. This explains how Babylon's famine comes in one day (Rev. 18:8). This could never have been possible in the ancient world, where famine required a period of time to develop. Just as Israel initially experienced the early plagues upon Egypt, so it may be that the judgments poured out upon the [Arab?] world at the very end do initially affect Israel too, and lead them to repentance.

These things are the beginning of the birth pains- The term is used of the Lord's suffering, which came to term in His resurrection (Acts 2:24)- another hint that the tribulation is intended to bring those who endure it to an identity with the Lord's sufferings, and thus to share in His resurrection. There is therefore a positive intention in the sufferings. They are not merely an angry Deity releasing pent up anger upon the world. The term is also used in 1 Thess. 5:3, in a section full of allusion to the Olivet prophecy: "When they shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them, as *travail* [s.w. "sorrows"] upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape". This suggests that the various trials and tribulations just listed by the Lord are going to come suddenly- they don't describe decades of such things leading up to His return. Rather do they therefore describe a sudden situation which comes at a time of "peace and safety". They may therefore describe the events of days rather than years. The Lord within the Olivet prophecy had spoken of the possibility of "escape" by fleeing, but "they shall *not* escape"- because they will be disobedient to His teaching. The intention of the birth pangs is to forge an identity between the sufferers and the crucified Christ, coming to birth in a resurrection like His. But for these people, the birth pangs are tragic, resulting in death rather than resurrection to life.

The Lord is surely alluding to the Rabbinic idea of "the birth-pangs of the Messiah" which they used in description of the traumatic situation in Israel before Messiah’s appearance. The Jewish public had initially expected Jesus to be Messiah, and felt that their time was indeed the birth-pangs of Messiah. But the Lord is saying that that time is yet to come. Seeing He did not come in AD70, we are again left to understand this as a reference to a situation *in Israel* which brings about the open manifestation of Messiah.

13:9 *But be warned. For they shall deliver you up to councils, and in synagogues they shall beat you, and before governors and kings shall you stand for my sake, to bear witness before them*- The Lord predicted that His people would be cast out of the synagogues, as if He was happy that Christianity remained a sect of Judaism until such time as Judaism wouldn’t tolerate it. His prediction that His people would be beaten in synagogues (Mk. 13:9) implies they would still be members, for the synagogues only had power to discipline their own members, not the general public.

The Lord had no fear of 'guilt by association' with wrong religious views such as there were within Judaism. They were to be "delivered up" just as the Lord was 'betrayed' [s.w. 10:4; 20:18,19; 26:2,15,16,21,23,24,25,45,46,48; 27:3,4; 17:22 "the Son of Man shall be betrayed"] to the Jews and 'delivered up' to the Gentiles [s.w. 27:18,26,2 "delivered Him to Pontius Pilate"] for suffering, death- and thereby to resurrection. Again, there is an attempt to make those enduring these things identify with Him in His time of suffering. They too would be delivered up to both Jews and Gentiles- to synagogues [Jews; 10:17; Lk. 21:12] and to prisons, rulers and kings [Gentiles; Lk. 21:12; Mk. 13:9]. Clearly the Lord had in mind a first century fulfilment of His words, but as we have seen, not all the signs fulfilled in the first century and the Lord's *parousia* did not literally happen when the temple was destroyed. We therefore have to look to a re-scheduled fulfilment of these words in the persecution of the disciples in the last days.

13:10 *And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations*- This could be read as a commandment, not a mere prediction. In this case, the idea is that *when* the Gospel is preached to all the world, then "the end comes". The marvel is that this amazing preaching will be undertaken by a minority within the believing community, since, according to the preceding verses, the majority will have fallen away. And even amongst those who remain faithful, some will be in prison, others killed. It could be argued that this Gospel preaching occurs specifically during the tribulation period. If we were to take the Gospel to the whole world now, then perhaps this would not be necessary. But in the first century, it was persecution which was necessary to get the disciples to obey their Lord's command to spread the Gospel outwards from Jerusalem to the world. And it was persecution which made the fleeing Jewish Christians rub shoulders with Gentiles, and thus share the Gospel with them.

"All the nations" is "in the whole world" in Matthew. The first century fulfilment of these words mentioned in Rom. 10:18 and Col. 1:6,23,26 was because there was the potential that the Lord could have come in AD70. But the Greek word literally means 'the inhabited', and more naturally refers to the whole planet. He envisaged the possibility that the disciples would not have gone preaching over the cities of Israel before the end came (Mt. 10:23). But He did come in AD70, and so the Lord's words here about a genuine worldwide witness must come true before He returns. Note the Gospel is to be preached "in", *en*, all the world, and not 'to' the whole world. This may envisage there being believers in all the world who preach where they are. This would nowhere near have been fulfilled in the first century. Also, Col. 1:6 speaks of the Gospel having gone to the *kosmos*, whereas Mt. 24:14 requires the Gospel to be preached in the *oikoumene*. *Kosmos* is frequently used in the NT with reference to the *Jewish* world. *Oikoumene* has a more global and universal context and sense. Mk. 13:10 says that the Gospel must be published "among all nations" (Gk. *ethnos*), and this hardly occurred by AD70. Some parts of the Olivet prophecy had a limited application in the first century (e.g. Mt. 24:14 = 10:18), but this doesn't mean that this is the *only* fulfilment of it. It is a feature of prophecy that it often has a short term fulfilment in order to validate the prophet in the eyes of his own generation. It would be strange indeed if the Olivet prophecy had *only* a short term fulfilment.

The great commission bids us go into all the world with Gospel; note the evident connection with Mt. 24:14: "This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come". This definitely suggests that the great commission will be mightily obeyed in the last days. There are many other Biblical implications that there will be an unprecedented spread of the

Gospel to the whole planet in the last days. Thus Dan. 12:4 speaks of a time in the very last days when “many shall run to and fro (an idiom often used concerning response to God's word: Ps. 119:32,60; 147:15; Amos 8:11,12; Hab. 2:2; Jn. 8:37 RV; 2 Thess. 3:1 Gk.), and knowledge shall be increased [the context is of Daniel wanting to understand about the second coming of Jesus]... many shall be purified, and made white, and tried (in the tribulation); but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand" . This increase of knowledge of the Gospel is to be spread world-wide by many running to and fro in the last days. The great commission will be fulfilled then as never before. Dan. 11:32,33 speaks of how in the time of the end "The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits... instruct many”. Before every 'coming' of the Lord there has been a period of persecution and zealous preaching: Noah preached righteousness before the flood, as Lot probably tried to before the Lord's coming down in judgment on Sodom (would God have wrought such wholesale destruction without giving the people a chance to repent? Cp. Nineveh and Jonah). The schools of the prophets preached from the street corners and temple steps to warn of the coming of the day of the Lord at the hand of the Babylonians and Assyrians. And of course the dramatic coming of the Lord in judgment upon Israel in AD70, was heralded by Paul and his committed band of zealots staging the greatest preaching campaigns this world has seen. The crucial question, of course, is whether the Gospel has truly gone into all the world. One perspective to bear in mind is that in the preaching of Paul, ecclesias which he founded are taken as representing a whole area- e.g. Philippi is called "Macedonia" (Phil. 4:15); Thessalonica is "Macedonia and Achaia" (1 Thess. 1:7); Corinth is Achaia (1 Cor. 16:15; 2 Cor. 1:1); Ephesus for Asia (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Cor. 1:8). In this sense Paul felt that he had fully preached the Gospel in a circle, moving from Jerusalem through Asia to Rome, and projecting onwards to Spain. Perhaps the Gospel goes into all the world in the sense that believers, however small in number, are to be found world-wide. And that seems to be where we're now up to in the 21st century.

Paul seems to have seen in Christ's prophecy that the Gospel would be fully known world-wide in the last as being a specific, personal command to him (Mt. 24:14 = 2 Tim. 4:17). He saw prophecy as command more than solely prediction; and this is why prophecy has a degree of variation in how and when it is fulfilled. The words of Mk. 16:15,16 are clear: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved". Commands to repent, all men, the Lord’s resurrection... these ideas all recur in Acts 17:30, proving they are not solely relevant to those who first heard them; God now commands all men to repent, through our words. These words clearly don't apply to the first century only, for they are intended to be linked with Mt 24:14, which uses the same language about the preaching work of the very last days (even though the context may imply that as a community we will only be obedient to this command once egged on by major persecution). What all this means is that the great commission will be fulfilled in the last days. The connection with the great commission means that the Lord sent out the disciples in order to fulfil this aspect of the Olivet prophecy; but their failure to do the job fully meant that the prophecy had to be delayed and rescheduled in fulfilment.

13:11 *Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial*- The very language of the Lord's final sufferings, which will be fellowshipped / experienced in the latter day tribulation (s.w. Lk. 22:54; 23:1,32; Jn. 18:28; 19:4,13).

Do not worry beforehand about what to say- A major theme of the Sermon on the Mount is not to be anxious; the same word occurs in Mt. 6:25,27,28,31,34. Here the Lord is surely saying that the general principles He had taught there would have specific fulfillment in time of persecution.

Say whatever shall be given you in that hour- "Given you" is language appropriate to Moses and prophets like Jeremiah; it is here applied to the Lord's generally secular followers (Ex. 4:10-12; Jer. 1:6-10). He was continually encouraging them to see that ministries which they had never considered possible of realistic emulation were in fact to be their pattern. Time and again, the Lord is saying that His experience under persecution will be ours. For it was *given* Him what to *speak* (Jn. 3:34; 12:49 same words) and He wants us to know that if we preach Him and seek to replicate His ministry in our own, then God likewise will strengthen us as He did His own Son. We note that it was likewise *given* to the apostles what to *speak* in Acts 2:4; 4:29. They misunderstood the great commission- they twisted it to mean that they must preach to all Jews rather than to all the Gentiles; but by grace, God still kept this aspect of the promise to support obedience to the commission given; even if it was misunderstood.

For it is not you that will speak but the Holy Spirit- Even although "we do not know how to pray for as we ought, the Spirit himself intercedes for us" (Rom. 8:26). The Spirit of the Father and Son speaks in us when we pray (Rom. 8:15), if our will / spirit is theirs. To put this in more technical but I think very telling terms: "The subject-object scheme of 'talking to somebody' is transcended; He who speaks through us is he who is spoken to" (Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* Vol. 3 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963) p. 192). It's perhaps the thought behind this idea of not us by the Spirit speaking.

Mt. 10:20 says that the Spirit will speak "in you", not, as we might expect, 'through you'. It may be that the Lord is hinting that if we have the Spirit of God within us, if we are thinking in a spiritual way generally in life, then in times of crisis that Spirit which is in us will guide us to say the right things when under pressure. If we are *now* spiritually minded, with our spirit being God's Spirit, then in that future time of crisis we will know how to speak, the words will come out right, because we have lived now in a spiritually minded way. The idea of the Spirit of God speaking in a person, so that their words are not theirs but God's, was language which Jews would've associated with the Old Testament prophets. Again we see the Lord inviting His secular, immature followers to see themselves as the prophets, those whom they had been taught were in a class of their own, and to whom they as mere secular men could in no way pretend. But the Lord's followers were to be a new Moses, new prophets, a new priesthood, a new Israel.

Luke adds here: "For I will give you the words and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to withstand or to contradict" (Lk. 21:15). This is alluding to Ex. 4:12, where God tells Moses at the time of the Egyptian persecution of God's people, "I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say". This persecution lead to intensified prayer to God, resulting in the deliverance of the suffering saints at Passover time, after a period of especial distress and 'time of trouble' for the surrounding world due to the plagues. After this deliverance, God's people went into the wilderness and were declared God's Kingdom. We have earlier shown how all these events form a remarkable latter day prophecy. This verse also suggests that the gifts of the Spirit may be given to some in the Elijah ministry in order to enable them to make a more powerful witness (as in Rev.11:6). The fact they are given personally by Christ would indicate that in some way, Christ is already back

at this stage. Time and again we will see how the prophecies of events in the last days are ambiguous as to whether Christ is already back at the time of their fulfilment, or whether they herald his return. Seeing that we will never know the exact time of Christ's return, this is understandable. Similarly Joel 2 prophesies the pouring out of the gifts "before the great and terrible day of the Lord" (:31). Malachi surely refers to this passage when prophesying the Elijah ministry "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5). This suggests that the three and a half year Elijah ministry of the last days (James 5:17) will be accompanied by Spirit gifts, and will coincide with the time of persecution. Note that the gifts were given "before the day of the Lord" in AD70 too. It is possible that because of this possession of the gifts by 'Elijah', false teachers within the ecclesia at the end will also claim to possess them (Mt. 24:24), so convincingly that all but the elect within the ecclesia will be duped into following them. Yet it must be stressed that it is a feature of the gifts that they are unmistakable and obvious to identify (cp. Acts 4:16); it will be evident enough if and when they are poured out in the last days.

13:12 *And brother shall deliver up brother to death, and the father his child, and children shall rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death*- Again, the final sufferings of the Lord Jesus will be experienced within natural and spiritual Israel. Mic. 7:2-9 is a clear prophecy of Christ's sufferings. But embedded in it are words which are quoted in Lk. 21:16 and Mt. 10:36 concerning the latter day tribulation of the believers: "The son dishonours the father... a man's enemies are the men of his own house". In similar manner, some of the prophecies of Israel's latter day sufferings speak in the same context of those of Christ. Mic. 5:1 is an example: "...he hath laid siege against us: they shall smite the judge of Israel (Christ) with a rod upon the cheek". The whole of Amos 5 can be scanned for connections with both the future tribulation of Israel, and also the sufferings of Christ.

"Deliver up" is a term used about the Lord's delivering to death, just as 'to cause to be put to death' is used of His death (Mt. 26:59; 27:1; Mk. 14:55; 1 Pet. 3:18). Our sufferings in the final tribulation, and for preaching the Gospel generally, grant us a fellowship with our Lord's sufferings. Given the close knit nature of Middle Eastern families, the language of family breakup used here would've been far harder for the initial hearers to accept than it is for many of us. The family was seen as sacrosanct, somehow your family would always be there for you. But the Lord is teaching that the dislike of Him and His message would be such that it would unleash a social and psychological force of hatred such as had not been known previously. Judaism taught that it was only Gentile families which were like this- only Gentiles betrayed their brother, their parents and their children. But the Lord is teaching that through Israel's rejection of Him and His people, Israel were acting like Gentiles and thus becoming as them in God's sight.

This prophecy did not have major fulfilment in AD70, at least not betrayal "unto death". The scale of the rift within families, unto death, was not seen then within the Christian community. We are left to envisage a situation where family members are pressurized to hand over their other family members to death for the sake of their loyalty to Christ. This sounds like Islamist domination of areas, with this demand made; and that is developed further in Revelation.

13:13 *And you shall be hated by all for my name's sake; but he that endures to the end, the same shall be saved*- Matthew: "hated by all nations". But the Gospel will then be preached to "all nations" (Mk. 13:10). It seems that the persecution will result in preaching, perhaps through highly publicized legal cases. If the Gospel is taken to all nations, then this will not need to happen. "For my Name's sake" is

a phrase which rarely occurs outside of the Olivet prophecy; one other time is in the upper room discourse, which is John's parallel with the Olivet prophecy as recorded in the synoptic Gospels. Here we read again that the believers will be "hated… for My Name's sake" (Jn. 15:18,21). But in John 15 the Lord seems to be angling His words not just to the twelve, but to all in Him; for His reasoning is that the world's attitude to Him will be their attitude to us, and all in Him will suffer as He did. Again we can conclude that John, the latest of the Gospels, was re-adjusting the emphasis of the Olivet prophecy, knowing that it had been rescheduled and would not fully come true in an early coming of Christ in the first century. Those who endure the tribulation to the end will be saved in that they will be part of that unique generation which shall never die, but shall be "saved" by being changed to immortality at the Lord's return.

The Olivet prophecy as recorded in Mark 13 has many allusions to the sufferings of our Lord, thereby suggesting that our sufferings during the coming tribulation will make us fellowship the cross as never before. The whole idea of darkness, earthquake, open graves, rocks shaking etc, which we read of in the Olivet and other last day prophecies is evidently the langauge of the crucifxion. The description of suffering before "the end" comes (Mk. 13:7,13; Mt. 24:14) invites connection with Christ's death also being described as " the end" , coming as it did after a period of suffering (Mt. 26:58; Lk. 22:37; Jn. 13:1). This connection is strengthened by the way in which each record of the Olivet prophecy leads straight on into the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. There is to be a "little while" between the death of those persecuted in the last days, and the coming of the Lord; using the very same word which John uses for the "little while" of the three days of the Lord's death (Rev. 6:11; Jn. 16:16-19). Rev. 12 speaks of how the dead bodies of the tribulation victims will rest for three and a half days, just as the Lord's body did. They will fully fellowship His death and therefore His resurrection. Similarly, the idea of all God's word being fulfilled by the Lord's death (Lk. 24:44; Jn. 19:28; Acts 3:18) follows on from the prophecy that all will be fulfilled at the time of suffering which heralds the second coming (Lk. 21:22). Mt. 24:13 commenends those who endure to the end- of the great tribulation. The same word occurs in Heb. 12:2,3 about Christ enduring the cross- we fellowship the cross during the last day tribulation. The word in Mt. 24:29 for "the tribulation" is used in Col. 1:24 about the afflictions of Christ. And as the Lord's critics could not find a way to answer Him, so in our tribulation, all our adversaries will not be able to gainsay us (Lk. 21:15). The Lord in Jn. 16:2,4,32 used the term "the hour" to refer both to the 'hour' of His own sufferings, and the 'hour' of tribulation for His people. He clearly saw what He was about to endure as being repeated in the latter day tribulation of those for whom He was about to die.

The other tribulation prophecies, notably in Revelation, are also shot through with allusions to Christ's passion.

"They shall deliver you up to the councils...	As Christ to the Sannhedrin
beaten...	Christ buffeted
rulers and kings for a testimony...	Chief priests, Herod, Pilate
brother shall betray the brother...	Judas; Peter's denial?
turn back to take up his garment...	John Mark's linen garment

false Christs...	Barabbas 'son of the father'
the sun shall be darkened...	As at the crucifixion
watch and pray...	"Watch with me"; Gethsemane
at even...	Last Supper
at midnight...	Gethsemane
at the cock crowing...	Peter's denials
in the morning...	Trial and crucifixion
find you sleeping"	Disciples in Gethsemane

13:14 *But when you see the abomination*- The word is mainly used elsewhere about the abominations of the Babylon system (Rev. 17:4,5). I would suggest that once the rescheduling of Christ's return was decided by God, the Gospel of John was issued, with its more spiritual interpretation of the Olivet prophecy in terms of the Comforter, and the teaching that the principles of the tribulation are to be lived out throughout the lives of believers. And John was likewise inspired with the prophecy of Revelation, which is clearly based upon the Olivet prophecy and provides further details as to how the prophecy is to be fulfilled in the last days, with the events of AD70 being a partial fulfilment in order to give the prophecy credibility with the generation that first received it. This would be according to the Mosaic principle that a prophet could be judged as true if his words came true- requiring a primary fulfilment of all long term prophecies.

Of desolation- The placing of the abomination is what will bring about the desolation. On Revelation 17 and 18 I suggest that the whore Babylon will enthrone herself in Jerusalem, through the building of some Islamic and blasphemous religious building or capital there. And this will lead to her desolation. Luke records the Lord as saying that *when* Jerusalem was surrounded by armies, *then* His people should know that the "desolation" of it was near. The desolation is therefore of Jerusalem rather than specifically the temple (Lk. 21:20). The abominating desolation could therefore refer to the invading armies. Seeing *them* was the signal to flee. "Abomination" in the Old Testament typically refers to idolatry or paganism. One interpretation is that the desolator would place some pagan religious symbol in the temple. But this is the sign to flee, and this was only done by the Romans after the city had fallen. That, therefore, doesn't really fit the requirements of the prophecy. The AD70 interpretation notes the pagan standards of the Roman legions, but even they were not placed in the temple. This was defended until the end, until the Romans forced entry, pulled it down and burnt it. As with many details of this prophecy, a future fulfilment is required. And yet we need to note that such desolation was only a visual reflection of the abomination the Jews had committed in the temple: "Because of the evil of your doings, and because of the *abominations* which ye have committed; therefore is your land a *desolation* and an astonishment, and a curse, without an inhabitant, as at this day" (Jer. 44:22). The abomination which caused desolation may not simply refer to some pagan symbols in the temple area. Josephus records that the Jewish zealots came into the Most Holy place, "placed an imposter in office as high priest, and ordained unqualified misfits to the priesthood" (*The Jewish Wars* 4.3.6–9; 4.5.4). The pagan Idumeans were invited into the Most Holy by the zealots in order to murder the chief priest Annas.

The word "desolation" is used again about the desolation of the Babylon system (Rev. 17:16; 18:17,19). Yet Babylon will be judged according to what it did to God's

people- the judgment for 'desolating' will be 'desolation'. Yet the Olivet prophecy clearly intended the Roman armies to be the means of the desolation, but I suggest that Revelation extends the prophecy by giving more detail, and describing the system of desolation as 'Babylon'. And that system clearly has similarities with Rome- it could have been fulfilled in Rome, but because the fulfilment of the prophecy was rescheduled, we can look for another equivalent of the enigmatic 'Babylon' of the last days. The "desolation" referred to is clearly to be understood as the fulfilment of Dan. 9:26,27 LXX, which says that the abomination that desolates will come "after the cutting off of Messiah the Prince". Whilst how long "after" is not defined, we are surely intended to understand that the desolating abomination comes soon after the death of Messiah: "The people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and *the end* thereof ("then shall *the end* come", Mt. 24:14) shall be with a flood, ("as the days of Noah..."), and unto *the end* shall be war; *desolations* are determined . . . and upon the temple of *abominations* shall come one that makes *desolate* (cp. "your house is left unto you desolate", Mt.23:38), even unto the consummation, and that determined shall be poured out upon the desolated" (LXX). And yet note that that prophecy itself had had various potential fulfilments which didn't come true. So it is fair to think that it could have had a fulfilment in AD70, but this was again deferred- for the same reason as ever, Israel's lack of repentance.

Standing where it should not- In Jerusalem, on the temple mount; "in the holy place" (Mt.). On Revelation 17 and 18 I suggest that the whore Babylon will enthrone herself in Jerusalem, through the building of some Islamic and blasphemous religious building or capital there. And this will lead to her desolation. The contrast is with the Lamb who will descend to the temple mount and "stand" there [s.w. Rev. 14:1]. This will be the final showdown between the real Christ and the fake one, as likewise foreseen in the prophecy of the man of sin in 2 Thess. 2, where again the place of showdown is the temple. For this to be a sign to the believers to flee to the mountains, any application to the triumphant Roman legions placing their standards in the temple at the *end* of the Jewish war is precluded. And historically, it is doubtful whether that happened, as the temple was burnt with fire and the legions were told *not* to do this.

(Let him that reads understand)- The vast majority of first century believers were likely illiterate. So this may be an appeal to teachers to correctly understand and teach. The Lord speaks in a latter day context about "let him that reads understand" Daniel's prophecies- referring to the special gift of understanding them which Daniel himself was told would come in the very end time. But note the parallels in the Lord's teaching here: "Let him… understand… let him… not go down… let him… not return… let them… flee". The understanding He refers to is not merely academic. It is the understanding that will lead to concrete action.

The Lord's Olivet prophecy as recorded by Mark has so many allusions to the Maccabean revolt under Mattathias ("the abomination", flight to the hills, "let the reader understand" and many other phrases are all quotations from 1 Macc. 1-3). But in this context the Lord warns of false Messiahs- as if He considered the Maccabean heroes to be just that. And interestingly it is Mark more than any other Gospel writer who stresses the Messiahship of Jesus throughout the crucifixion record. A crucified Messiah was to the Jews a contradiction in terms. The idea of Jewish revolutionaries marching triumphantly to Jerusalem to liberate it was common in Jewish thought at the time- but Luke emphasizes that Christ's last journey to Jerusalem and triumphant entry to it was in fact in order to die the death of the cross there. The battle had been redefined by the Lord Jesus- not against Rome, but against internal sin and Jewish religious hypocrisy. Victory was by self-crucifixion, not military might. This was just

too much for Jewish nationalism, just as legalists today end up baying for the blood of those who preach grace and not works. See on Heb. 5:6.

There are a number of hints that there will be a progressive growth in Biblical understanding amongst the latter day faithful. In the spirit of Daniel 12:4, Habakkuk was told that the full understanding of his vision concerning the latter day judgment of Babylon was "yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie", and *at that time* the one who reads and understands it will "run" - using the same idiom as in Dan. 12:4 concerning the latter day believers 'running' in response to their understanding of God's word (Hab. 2:2,3). The Olivet prophecy repeatedly talks about 'seeing' or (Gk.) understanding things and then acting upon this knowledge. The English translation somewhat masks this. Thus Mt. 24:15 "Whoso *reads*" uses a Greek word which really means to recognize, distinguish- and he who recognizes, understands, let him " understand" or, better, *meditate*. Or again, "When you shall see (Greek, to know, perceive) the abomination that makes desolate..." (Mt. 24:15). This might suggest that the "abomination" isn't necessarily something physical. The idea seems to be 'When you understand that the abomination that makes desolate is in place, then...', rather than 'When you see (physically) on the telly or in the newspaper an abomination in Jerusalem, then... do something about it'. "When you shall see (Gk. perceive, understand) all these things, (then you will) know that it is near" (Mt. 24:33). "Behold (same Greek: perceive, comprehend) the fig tree..." (Lk. 21:29). The emphasis is undoubtedly on the need for understanding of the signs, not just observing them.

"Let him that reads understand" is inviting us to be like Daniel in Dan. 9:22-25, who also wanted to understand the meaning of the "abomination" prophecy. But he was told that the meaning of that vision about the abomination that desolates would only be revealed in the very last days, i.e. at the time of its fulfilment (Dan. 8:17,26; 12:9). The implication of all this is that there will be believing Jews living in the Jerusalem area at the time of the setting up of the abomination; and they will have special understanding of this prophecy which will lead them to flee. The importance of this for our present study is that this indicates that there will be believers in Israel just before the Lord returns. They will have "understanding" and will be motivated by this to respond. "*Let him*… understand" is paralleled with "*let him* that is on the housetop [flee immediately]… *let him* that is in the field not return". Understanding leads to action- both then and now.

Then let them that are in Judea flee to the mountains- This is the equivalent of the plea in Revelation to flee out of Babylon, the latter day Islamic complex to be built in Jerusalem on the temple mount.

The same word was used by the Lord in introducing the Olivet prophecy in Mt. 23:33: "How can you *escape* the condemnation of Gehenna?". The way of escape was through obedience to His word. Clearly the Lord intended His words to be fulfilled in that immediate generation; but fleeing to the mountains did not bring ultimate salvation because the Lord did not return as intended. His coming has been rescheduled, and perhaps utter salvation for the Jewish remnant in the land will likewise depend upon 'fleeing'. The Old Covenant had specified that Israel would flee before their enemies if they broke the covenant; the command to 'flee' may therefore be an invitation to accept guilt for their sin, and thereby be saved through the very act of recognizing the justice of their judgment. For this is the essence of the salvation of every man in Christ. It could be that Rev. 12:6 provides more details, in speaking of the faithful fleeing into the wilderness and thereby being saved. This was the way to flee the coming condemnation (Mt. 23:33; Lk. 3:7). The Lord's words require[d] some

faith to accept, because if Jerusalem were surrounded by armies, how could the faithful flee? Josephus explains that the Roman legions did in fact withdraw for a time, allowing civilians to flee (B.J.2.19.6,7).

"To the mountains" is better, 'toward'. Clearly this was capable of fulfilment in the Jewish war, in a fairly literal sense. But what is the latter day equivalent? "The mountains" could be an intensive plural for the one great, special, obvious mountain. The same word is found earlier in the chapter- the Lord is saying these words sitting on "the mount" of Olives (Mt. 24:3). And it is to that mount that He will return, according to Acts 1:12 and Zechariah 14. It could be, therefore, in a literal or figurative sense, an appeal to move towards the mount of Olives to meet Him at His return. Perhaps in a literal, geographical sense, that area will be the only area left by the invading armies, and they will surround the faithful Jewish remnant on that mount- and then the Lord shall come. But such speculation is unhelpful, because the principle of prophecy is that when it happens, then we shall understand. I do not believe we are intended to work out a sequence of events ahead of time. Indeed, given the conditional nature of Bible prophecy, that is impossible to do anyway.

As the faithful remnant were miraculously allowed to leave Sodom for the mountains, immediately unleashing the Divine judgments by doing so, the faithful Christian remnant were allowed to leave Jerusalem just before the final Roman onslaught of AD70, doubtless spurred on by their Lord's command: "Let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it (Jerusalem) depart out" (Lk. 21:21). The reference to fleeing to the mountains would have suggested a conscious allusion back to the command to Lot to flee out of Sodom "to the mountain" (Gen. 19:17). "Then let them which be in Judaea flee to the mountains" may mean that there will be Jewish believers in Jerusalem in the last days, seeing the whole prophecy has yet to be totally fulfilled (the AD70 application of these words was at best limited). Dan. 12:1 says that in the final tribulation of Israel, those Jews who are "written in the book", i.e. who are acceptable saints (Ex. 32:32; Rev. 21:27) will be delivered. So there will be a minority in latter day natural Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal, as in Elijah's time- which is typical of the situation at the latter day Elijah ministry. This is certainly encouragement enough to make witness to and within Israel a priority.

13:15 *And let him that is on the housetop*- The idea is that flight could be taken by jumping from housetop to housetop, without going back into the house. Escaping that way would best be done in any case without carrying anything. This is clearly language relevant specifically to first century Palestine, and is a parade example of how the prophecy was ideally intended for fulfilment then. The latter day fulfilment of these words will therefore only be in essence, rather than in detail. That is a principle we must bear in mind when considering many other Bible prophecies; the essence but not necessarily the detail will be fulfilled in the rescheduled and delayed version of their fulfilment. The implication of the language here and in :18 is that the sign to flee will be momentary; the signs are not, therefore, to be perceived over decades or even years, leading slowly towards the Lord's coming. Rather these signs, especially of the abomination, will appear suddenly, to the extent that the believer must flee immediately, quite literally without a moment to lose.

But this reflection leads us to wonder whether the fleeing away in a split second, be it from the field or housetop, is more likely a reference to the need to respond immediately to the call to leave secular life and go to meet the Lord. The example of a person in the field (Mt. 24:18) needing to leave immediately naturally connects with

the words of Mt. 24:40 about the snatching away of the believers at the Lord's return: "Two shall be in the field, the one shall be taken, and the other left". This would dovetail well with the implication elsewhere that the immediacy of our response to the knowledge that 'He's back!' will effectively be our judgment. Those who themselves want to go to Him will be snatched away and meet Him, whilst those who delay will be rejected, as the foolish virgins who went first to buy oil.

Not go down, nor enter in to take anything out his house- The allusion is clearly to Lot fleeing Sodom, also "to the mountains". This is a type of the response of the believers to the call to judgment at the Lord's return. If we don't separate from the world, we will share their judgment. The immediacy of response is so stressed, and will be ultimately indicative of where our heart is. Any desire to gather any material possessions will reveal that our heart is not wholly and solely with the Lord. But the Greek could equally mean 'to take anyone [person] out of his house / family'. This again is a high demand- the demand of the Sermon on the Mount, to put family in second place behind personal loyalty to the Lord Jesus. All who love the Lord in spirit and in truth will respond to the sign or call to leave with immediacy. They will know that in any case, they are powerless to drag their unbelieving family members with them.

13:16 *And let him that is in the field not return back to take his cloak*- The immediacy of response is clear. Even grabbing an outer garment, equivalent of a jacket, would lead to unworthiness and destruction. The call to leave must be responded to immediately, with the faith that what clothing we have on is utterly irrelevant. This only really makes sense if the call or sign to escape is the call to judgment- and this verse connects with the words of Mt. 24:40 about the snatching away of the believers at the Lord's return: "Two shall be in the field, the one shall be taken, and the other left".

13:17 *But alas for women who are pregnant, and for those who are nursing infants in those days!*- This may well match Paul's warning against marrying in the last days in 1 Cor. 7. He understood the Olivet prophecy as having the real prophecy of fulfilment in his generation. As He hung on the cross, our Lord quoted this part of His Olivet prophecy to the women who stood by (Lk. 23:29 "blessed are [those] who never gave suck" = Mt. 24:19 "Woe to them… who give suck", s.w.), concerning the sufferings of the believers in the 'last days'. Here we see His matchless selflessness; going out of His own sufferings, to think, with anguish, how they would be experienced by His followers in the tribulation. "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves... for if they do these things (to) a green tree (the spiritually healthy Lord Jesus), what shall be done (to) the dry", the spiritually barren tree of Israel. This is a superb essay in the Lord's selflessness and minimizing of his own sufferings: he felt that what he was going through was less than what the spiritually weak would have to go through in the AD70 tribulation (and that of the last days). In the other 11 occurrences of "woe" in Matthew, the objects of the "woe" are clearly the unfaithful and the condemned; this category of those "with child" are therefore not amongst those who obediently 'flee'. Lk. 21:23 states that they would be amongst those who would suffer the "wrath upon this people". In Lk. 23:29 the Lord clearly envisaged the women of His generation, the ones who lined the road to Golgotha, as experiencing the trauma He predicted in the Olivet prophecy. And yet it is clear enough that the final fulfilment is yet to come- because His coming was rescheduled.

13:18 *And pray that it is not in the winter*- The Lord's request for prayer indicates that the exact timing of events in the tribulation will be changeable in accordance with the fervency of our latter day prayers. Changeable time periods has been a feature of

God's prophetic dealings with Israel; and Mt. 22:22 is explicit that the [intended number of] days will be shortened. An AD70 application for this is hard to find; it may be that the exact timing of the Roman offer of amnesty was dependent on the intensity of prayer by the besieged Jerusalem ecclesia. That ecclesia, rent as they were by schism, false doctrine and materialism (if we accept the evidence that Hebrews was addressed to them) was a type of the faithful remnant of the last days. They were finally sorted out by the events of AD67 - 70, cp. the latter day tribulation.

13:19 *For those days shall cause distress, such as there has never been similar, from the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never shall be again*- The LXX uses this same word for "distress" or "tribulation2 in several passages pregnant with latter day significance:
"The day of my [Jacob's] *distress*" at the hands of Esau (Gen. 35:3)
"The *anguish* of his [Joseph's] soul" at the hands of his half brethren and the Ishmaelites (Gen. 42:21)
"I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and *troubles* shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?" (Dt. 31:17)- a passage in the Song of Moses regarding Israel's latter day tribulations.
"Thus says Hezekiah, This day is a day of *trouble*, and of rebuke, and blasphemy" (2 Kings 19:3)- Sennacherib's Assyrian invasion at this time was a clear prototype for the latter day invasion described in Ezekiel 38 and elsewhere.
"The time of Jacob's *trouble*" from which he will be delivered (Jer. 30:7)
"There shall be a time of *trouble*, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time your people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book" (Dan. 12:1). This time of trouble is specifically for Israel in the last days.

Mk. 13:19 speaks of how "in those days" those in Judaea should flee to the mountains; "for *in those days* shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of creation... neither shall be (referring to Dan. 12:1 concerning our last days)... except that the Lord had shortened *those days*... *in those days*, after that tribulation... *then* shall they see the son of man coming". Surely "in those days" shouts for a continuous application to the same "days" - the days of the second coming. At best, "those days" can have a primary reference to the events of AD70, but the *main* fulfilment of the whole prophecy must be in the last days. This point seems impossible to answer by those who disallow any reference to the second coming.

13:20 *And except the Lord had shortened the days, no flesh would have been saved*- "Saved" here ("there should no flesh be saved") implies 'delivered'; it will appear that none of us will survive the tribulation, "but for the elects sake those days shall be shortened" and we will be saved by the second coming. Thus 2 Pet. 3:12,15 reminds us that by our prayers and spiritual development, the days before the second coming will be shortened. If they were not, even the elect would lose their faith (Mt. 24:22)- showing how those of us who are alive at Christ's coming will *barely* survive the spiritual traumas of the last days. The virgins were sleeping when they should have been watching; and Peter says that the righteous in the last generation (see context) will *scarcely* be saved (1 Pet. 4:18). So it would appear that the days of the final tribulation will be shortened, although in another sense the coming of the Lord is delayed in order to allow our greater spiritual development (Mt. 25:5). This 'delay' is why the harvest will be "over-ripe" for reaping (Rev. 14:15 RV)- or is this a reference to the lack of zeal of preachers to Israel in the last days, not harvesting the ready fruit?

The Lord likens the final tribulation to the travail of a woman to bring forth her child. But we read in Is. 66:7,8 in this same context of Israel's latter day suffering: "Before she travailed, she brought forth: before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child. Who hath heard such a thing?... for as soon as Zion travailed she brought forth her children". This seems to imply that the expected period of Zion's travail will be cut short, and she will give spiritual birth far quicker than expected. Perhaps the Lord was alluding to this passage when He spoke of how "the days" [of Zion's labour?] shall be shortened.

But for the elect's sake, which He chose, He shortened the days- Both the Lord Jesus and Israel are called "the elect" (Is. 42:1; 45:4); both are fulfilments of the servant songs in Isaiah. The days will be shortened for the elect's sake; for the sake of *Christ's* intercession, as well as ours. It's tempting to understand "the elect" in the Olivet prophecy as referring specifically to the group of faithful believers [or perhaps specifically Jewish ones] who are alive and remain until the Lord's coming. They are the ones who resist the temptation to be deceived in the very last days (Mt. 24:24) and who are snatched away at the Lord's coming "from the four winds", suggesting they are located worldwide (Mt. 24:31). We note that Christ on the cross was called by the same word *eklektos*- "the elect / chosen of God" (Lk. 23:35). This group will indeed have identified with His crucifixion sufferings. Perhaps this is the group of believers who are also specifically called "the elect" who fight on Mount Zion alongside Jesus against the armies of Israel's enemies (Rev. 17:14). In the immediate context, the elect or chosen ones were perhaps intended by the Lord to refer to the listening disciples. Mk. 13:20 labours the point: "For the elect's sake [*eklektos*], whom He has chosen / elected [*eklegomai*]". The word is specifically used about the Lord's choosing of the twelve (Lk. 6:13; Jn. 6:70; 13:18; 15:16,19; Acts 1:2). He imagined them being scattered to "the four winds" in their obedience to the great commission, but thanks to them, the days would be shortened and they themselves would be gathered to Him at His return. That was the Lord's hope and ideal intention. It didn't happen in the first century, and thus has some element of reapplication in a different context in our last days.

The vision will in one sense "not delay / tarry" (Hab. 2:3 RV). And yet the same verse speaks of how it does "tarry". Perhaps in a human sense it delays, but not from God's perspective. "It hasteth toward the end" (Hab. 2:3 RV) could imply that things are speeded up in their fulfilment in the very end time; for the elects sake the days until the second coming are shortened. And yet things are also delayed- the bridegroom tarries / delays, to the point that many realize that the Lord has delayed His coming, and begin to act inappropriately. One reconciliation of these paradoxes could be that some prophecies are speeded up in their fulfilment because of the elect would otherwise lose their faith; and yet other prophecies seem to be delayed in fulfilment because of the unspirituality of others. The possibility of changing the fulfillment of prophetic time periods is to be found in Hab. 3:2: "In the midst of the years revive..."- i.e. please, God, do it immediately rather than waiting until the end of days.

The Lord's description of the shortening of the days uses some rather odd past tenses: "Except the Lord had shortened the days, no flesh would have been saved: but for the elect's sake… he shortened the days" (Mk. 13:20 RV). One wonders if we have here an allusion back to the days of Noah, where again there was the possibility that no flesh would have been saved. The 150 days of flooding is perhaps the basis of Rev. 9:10, where Israel is to have 150 days of tribulation at the hands of her Arab enemies in the last days. The connection between the passages would therefore seem to be

teaching that the final 150 days tribulation will be shortened due to the repentance of the remnant.

For the elects' sake, the days to the second coming *will be* shortened (Mt. 24:22); but the Lord also said, perhaps in the same sentence, that the days *have already* been shortened (Mk. 13:20). This shows that God conceives of time in a radically different way to how we do. The shortening of time in a sense hasn't take place, but in another sense it has. There can therefore be no trite explanation of how God can hasten the second coming in accordance with our prayers, and yet also have a set time to favour Zion. See on Rom. 9:28,29; 2 Pet. 3:9; Rev. 9:10. This was typified in the Joseph story. "Then Joseph could not refrain himself..." (Gen. 45:1) implies he planned to drag out the process of spiritually refining his brothers, but his love for them caused him to cut it short. "For the elects sake the days shall be shortened" by Christ (Mt. 24:22).The same Hebrew word in Gen. 45:1 is used in Is. 42:14 about how God can no longer refrain Himself in the last days. The RV has: "had been shortened", suggesting that maybe the Lord had already been in dialogue with the Father and secured a decrease in the Father's original time period envisaged.

13:21 *And then if anyone shall say to you*- This again, spoken to the disciples, suggests that they were the ones who would see these things associated with the return of Christ. But they did not. And in any case, all twelve of them were being addressed, and one of them would turn away from Christ. So there was in any case a conditionality attached to the Lord's words.

Look, here is the Christ! or Look! There he is!- do not believe them- "Lo" [AV] suggests the actual pointing out of a person. "Here… or there" [AV] is poor translation, because the same original word is behind both "here" and "there". The impression is given of people pointing out actual individuals and claiming that 'This is Christ'. The faithful are to flee once the sign is obvious that Christ is about to be revealed, and in those days [and they may literally be days or hours] the world will know that Christ's return is imminent, and therefore all manner of charlatans will start claiming 'It's me!'. The relatively few claims to be Jesus Christ which are made today are hardly credible, no temptation at all for the faithful, and nearly always the person making the claim is mentally ill. But the Olivet prophecy suggests that these claims by false Christs will be so credible that even the faithful will be sorely tempted to believe them. The risk of deception would be so great that the Lord repeatedly warned against it. If there is some worldwide sign that Christ is about to return, perhaps literally in the sky, as "the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven", then in those days, such claimants will have far more credibility. It could be that one claimant is particularly persuasive, leading to the final show down on Mount Zion between the true Christ and the anti-Christ, the fake duplicate of Christ.

13:22 *For false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray (if possible) the elect*- The Lord is virtually quoting the words of Moses in Dt. 13:1: "When [Heb.; AV "if"] there arise among you a [false] prophet… and gives you a sign or wonder". Even if signs are given, they are not to be believed; apparent miracles are no proof that a man is of God. The Lord is here asserting Himself as the new Moses. The appearance of miraculous "signs" was important in Judaism in order to identify Messiah- hence they asked the Lord to produce such signs (Mt. 12:38; 16:1; Jn. 2:18; 4:48; 6:30; 1 Cor. 1:22 "the Jews require a sign"). The Lord had refused to respond, even though He had done many miracles. He said that "no sign" would be given to that generation apart from that of Jonah- i.e., His resurrection. It was "a wicked and adulterous generation [that] seeks after a sign" (Mt. 16:4). The disciples likewise assumed that there was to be such a

"sign" predicting the Lord's coming (Mt. 24:3). On one level it could be argued that the Lord's answer is actually a refusal to give them such a miraculous "sign" from Him; rather did He give them descriptions of what would happen in the world. He had said the same, in essence, to the Jews when they demanded such a miraculous "sign" of Him; He said they would be given no such sign, but rather they were to discern the "signs [s.w.] of the times" (Mt. 16:3,4). And this effectively is how He answers the disciples when at the beginning of the Olivet prophecy they likewise ask for a "sign". He responds by giving them a list of "signs of the times". However, it would seem from Mt. 24:30 that there will in fact be the "sign" of Messiah visible in the sky- but only in the very last [few?] days before the forcible establishment of His Kingdom. This will be in opposition to the "signs' shown by the false prophets. More detail is given in Rev. 13:13,14; 16:14; 19:20 where we read of the beast system and false prophet doing signs by which they deceived the people in the earth / land. This is an expansion upon the Lord's warning against being deceived by such signs. And the same scenario is found in 2 Thess. 2:9, where we find the man of sin sitting in the latter day temple doing "signs and lying wonders" (same words as here in Mt. 24:24), to be destroyed in the final conflict with the real Christ.

There is ample evidence that in the lead up to the Babylonian invasion which typifies that of the last days, Jeremiah had to work amid considerable opposition from false prophets who mocked his prophecies of impending Arab victory and the need to repent; they will have their counterparts among the ranks of modern Judaism in the last days (Lam. 2:14; Jer. 20:6; 28:1-9; 29:24-26; Zech. 13:2-5). Perhaps it is such false prophets within Israel which our Lord spoke of in Mt. 24:24. But there's no need to speculate too much- when these things come to pass, it will be crystal clear to those aware of the prophecy that we've now reached that stage. In the A.D.70 possibility of fulfilment, these people operated under the umbrella of fundamentalist Judaism, as they will in the last days. Their false bearing of the Lord's name (Mt. 24:5) alludes back to the pseudo-prophets of Jeremiah's time doing the same (Jer. 14:14). Zedekiah's trauma of being torn between wanting to accept the words of the false prophets whilst inwardly knowing the truth of Jeremiah's words, will perhaps be repeated in the leadership of latter-day Israel, to whom the Elijah ministry will teach the true word of God. The apparent mimicry of Jeremiah's style by the false prophets will perhaps be seen in the last days too.

The possibility of deception may be precluded by the fact that the elect, by reason of being the elect, will not be deceived. But there may also be the suggestion that it is impossible to deceive the elect because they are preserved from such deception. The Father and Son are willing and able to "keep you from falling" by sealing or preserving the faithful from such deception. The element of God's work over and above human freewill effort is itself indicated by the very term "the elect"; those chosen, by God and not of themselves.

A major theme of the prophecy is the danger of being deceived (Mt. 24:4,5,11). The need for this urgent warning requires that the claimants have far more credibility than such persons have today.

13:23 *But be warned, I have told you all things beforehand*- In place of the Olivet prophecy, John's gospel has the message about the Comforter. Through the gift of the Spirit, the Lord is present in our hearts with such reality that it is as if He were with us. All calls to go out and see Him here or there will therefore intuitively be found false by us. And the connection with the Comforter passages continues in this verse, with a clear link to Jn. 14:29: "And now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe". The Lord was referring to the predictions of His

sufferings and death; but here, the context is of the latter day tribulation. Those tribulations are to enable those who pass through them to fellowship with the sufferings and death of the Lord, that they might share in His immortality.

The intention of prophecy is that when it is fulfilled, then all is clear to the believers and they are thereby guided and strengthened. This will be particularly true in those last few days when the sign of the Son of Man is in the sky (Mt. 24:30), everyone somehow knows Christ is about to come- and inevitably false claimants will arise, perhaps one particular one will claim to be Christ and will go to battle against the real Christ. Hence the repetition of the Lord's warning about not being deceived by this person or related claims.

13:24 *But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened*- After the tribulation, as it was when Jesus died (Lk. 23:45 s.w.). Israel's tribulation will make them understand what He went through. The context has been the Lord's insistence that His coming will be obviously visible, like lightening in the sky, and the reference to "the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven" / the sky (Mt. 24:30) would suggest that a literal sign in the sky is what the Lord has in mind. The allusion to the crucifixion would also require a literal element of fulfilment. The additional information given in Rev. 8:12; 9:2 suggests that this darkening of sun and stars happens progressively, although that may be over a period of only a few literal days. There are reports of such signs being seen over Jerusalem in the lead up to AD70, the appearance of comets etc. However it seems to me that Josephus had access to the Olivet prophecy and some of the wording of his historical claims is so similar to the Lord's words that I personally doubt the degree of real fulfilment that was going on; rather do I suspect he was consciously alluding to the Lord's words and wishing to see them fulfilled in the history he was recording. That is not the same thing as AD70 actually fulfilling in detail the Olivet prophecy.

And the moon shall not give her light- Joseph's dream clearly identifies these symbols as representing Israel. The passages which make this same identification are many: Gen. 37:9,10; 15:5; 22:17; Amos 8:8-10; Micah 3:6; Song of Solomon 6:10; Is. 24:23; Jer. 33:20-26; JoeI 2:10,30-32; 3:15; Acts 2:20; Rev. 6:12; 8:12; 12:1. Jer. 31:35,36 is likely the Old Testament passage the Lord specifically had in mind: "Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, who divides the sea when the waves thereof roar; the Lord of hosts is his name. If those ordinances depart from before me, says the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever". Only here do we find "sun, moon, and stars" combined with "sea and waves roaring" as in the Olivet prophecy in Luke 21. In Luke He spoke of "On the earth distress of *nations* (Gentile nations causing distress in the earth / land of Israel) with perplexity… men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth (or land, of Israel)". The Greek word translated "perplexity" is used in the LXX concerning the final tribulation of Israel (Lev. 26:16; Dt. 28:22; Is. 5:30; 8:20 LXX).

13:25 *And the stars shall fall from heaven and the powers that are in the heavens shall be shaken*- The Greek phrase is used only elsewhere in Rev. 6:13. This vision is clearly an expansion upon the Olivet prophecy. There, the stars fall "as a fig tree casts her unripe figs". This too is the language of the Olivet prophecy (Mt. 24:32). The lack of spiritual maturity in Israel is related to the stars [of Israel- see on *Sun... moon... stars*] falling. The appearance of comets would certainly give the impression of falling stars, and I suggest that the main fulfilment will be in terms of things visibly seen in the sky, as hard proof to all the world that the Lord Jesus is returning.

The events of judgment day will be a ‘shaking’ of the world, including the faithful (Lk. 6:48 the house built on the rock could not be “shaken”, s.w.). Heb. 12:26,27 surely allude here, saying that just as the earth shook when the old covenant was instituted, so the “heavens” would also be shaken. The suggestion of the context is that this day of shaking both heaven and earth was almost upon the readership- who were Hebrews, Jewish Christians.

13:26 *And then shall they see the Son of Man*- In Matthew, when “all the tribes of the earth / land mourn [in repentance]… then shall they see the Son of man coming”. Some in Israel must repent before Christ returns. The Lord refers to this in speaking to the Jews who crucified Him: "You shall see [s.w.] the Son of Man... coming in the clouds of Heaven" (Mt. 26:64). They would see that all too late, as part of the process of their condemnation- to realize it was all true, and it is too late to do anything about it. The Lord had earlier used the same idea, in saying that that group would only "see" Him again when they said "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord" (Lk. 13:35). They would see that and say that all too late. The Lord's words clearly suggest they of that generation would see His return in glory. But His coming was delayed, and they did not. But they will at the last day, for they will be resurrected to face judgment and condemnation. The chronological issues need not worry us too much- i.e. when will they be resurrected, at precisely what point on the timeline of these events. The meaning of time will surely be collapsed around the Lord's return. This will be the final fulfilment of the prophecy that they shall look upon Him whom they pierced and mourn (Rev. 1:7; Jn. 19:37; "look" is s.w. "see" in Mt. 24:30). The invitation of course is to look upon the crucified Christ now and mourn in repentance; for we shall have to do this one way or the other, either now in repentance, or too late in condemnation.

Coming in the clouds- Dan. 7:14. The language of clouds and then Angels (Mt. 24:31) is reminiscent of the Lord’s ascension, at which the Angels promised His return “in like manner”; and the same language is used of His return in Acts 1:7. This precludes any invisible ‘coming’ in AD70. Rather than thinking that the Lord somehow ‘came’ in AD70 in some metaphorical manner, I would suggest that the literal language is such that we can only conclude that His literal return has been delayed. Otherwise we end up forcing the obviously literal into the metaphorical.

The moment of the second coming is likened to a flash of lightning and the beginning of rain at the time of Noah's flood. This makes any application of *parousia* to the prolonged series of events in A.D. 69/70 at least tenuous when compared to the obvious application to the moment of the second coming. There are many links between Mt. 24,25 and 1 Thess. 4,5 which have been tabulated by several expositors. According to these connections, the Lord's 'parousia' mentioned in Mt. 24 is interpreted by Paul as referring to the literal second coming (Mt. 24:30,31 = 1 Thess. 4:15,16). In view of all this, it is desirable to interpret the 'coming' of the Lord in Mt. 24 as referring to the literal presence of Christ at His return, although this is not to rule out any primary reference to the events of A.D. 70. Indeed I would argue that since *parousia* means a literal presence, it’s not the case that the prophecy received a primary fulfilment in AD70; rather is it that the literal return of Christ was intended then, but was rescheduled. At best, the *parousia* element of the predictions had no partial fulfilment in AD70. The flow of the prophecy is indicated by the repetition of words like "then" : "*Then* shall they deliver you up... *then* shall many be offended... *then* shall the end come... *then* let them which be in Judea... *then* shall be great tribulation... *then* if any man shall say unto you, Here is Christ... *immediately*

after the tribulation of those days ("in *those days*, after that tribulation", Mk. 13:24)... *then* shall appear the sign of the Son of man... *then* shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the son of man coming" (Mt. 24). There is no suggestion here of any break in application, from AD70 to the last days. If the reference to Christ coming in glory with the Angels is accepted as referring to the last days, but the earlier verses of the prophecy to AD70 alone, we have to find the point where Christ breaks from AD70 to the last days. And I would suggest such a point cannot be found.

"In the clouds" clearly alludes to His ascension in clouds, and the promise that He would return "in like manner" (Acts 1:11), presumably meaning in clouds to the same Mount of Olives. Again we are invited to understand these as literal clouds, just as the signs in the heavenly bodies are likewise to be understood. At His coming, the figurative will pass away and planet earth and those who dwell upon it will be faced with the ultimate reality- the personal, literal coming of God's Son to earth.

With great power and glory- The very words used by the Lord in the model prayer of Mt. 6:13 concerning the power and glory of the Kingdom of God. The coming of the Lord to establish the Kingdom is clearly yet future and did not occur in AD70. This is the time when "the Son of Man shall come in the glory [s.w.] of His Father with His angels, and then shall He repay every man according to his deeds" (16:27; 25:31). Likewise, this is "the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory [s.w.], [and] you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Mt. 19:28). Such a judgment and coming with Angels never occurred in AD70. John's equivalent of this is to emphasize that in essence, the believers behold Christ's glory now, insofar as they perceive the wonder and moral pinnacle of His achievement for us on the cross (Jn. 17:24). Col. 3:4 teaches that "When Christ who is our life [i.e. our basis of resurrection] shall appear, then shall [we] also appear with Him in glory". His coming in glory will be ours, in that we will have been snatched away to meet with Him and will come with Him to Zion. And yet the next verse speaks as if now, at this point, the Angels are sent to gather the elect. But these chronological discrepancies are no real issue for the believer if we accept that the meaning of time must be changed around the time of Christ's coming, as must the meaning of space [if Einstein's theory of relativity is correct]. This would explain all practical concerns about space and time issues relating to the day of judgment. Another window on the apparent chronological discrepancies is the consideration that there are various possible potential scenarios, which will work out according to the speed and nature of the spiritual response of both natural and spiritual Israel.

13:27 *And then shall he send the angels*- The preachers of His Gospel are His messengers / 'angels' reaping in the harvest and proclaiming God's victory. And yet these are the very things which the Angels are described as doing in the last day (Mk. 13:27; Rev. 14:6-14). Yet we are doing it right now. In the preaching of the Gospel, we are sharing with the Angels in their work. We're in tandem with them. The nature of our response to the Gospel when we hear it in this life is essentially our response to the call to judgment at the last day. The very same Greek words translated "Send… Angels" are to be found in the description of John the Baptist being sent to gather men to the Lord Jesus: "I send My messenger before Your face" (Mt. 11:10). The idea is clearly that those who had responded to John's message of repentance and faith in Christ's forgiveness have in essence already been gathered for the Kingdom. And yet Israel generally had stoned those sent [s.w.] unto them (Mt. 23:37- the Lord said this introducing the Olivet prophecy).

The preachers of His Gospel are His messengers / 'angels' reaping in the harvest and proclaiming God's victory. And yet these are the very things which the Angels are described as doing in the last day (Mk. 13:27; Rev. 14:6-14). Yet we are doing it right now. In the preaching of the Gospel, we are sharing with the Angels in their work. We're in tandem with them.

And shall gather together his elect- Alluded to in 2 Thess. 2:1 "our gathering together unto Him". However, a case can be made that the believers are already with Christ when He comes in the clouds. Therefore the "elect" could possibly refer specifically to natural Israel rather than the believers. If the reference is to the believers, this creates a chronological issue- although see on Mt. 24:30 *Power and great glory*. The Angels will be sent out to gather together the elect, but Angels will also be 'sent forth' to "gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity" (Mt. 13:41). It seems that this 'gathering out' will be achieved by the more positive 'gathering together' of the faithful. The point of gathering is the point of division between good and bad; our response to the certain news that 'He's back' will decide the outcome of our judgment. Those wise virgins who go forth to meet Christ immediately are therefore those who will be "caught up together" with the faithful believers who will have been resurrected. Just as eagles mount up into the air and come down where the carcass is, so we will come to judgment. This will be when the Angels "gather together *his elect*" (Mt. 24:31). They then "meet the Lord in the air" literally, perhaps connecting with Rev. 11:12: "They (the faithful, persecuted saints of the last days) heard a great voice from heaven (cp. "the voice" of 1 Thess. 4:16) saying unto them, Come up (cp. "caught up...") hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud (cp. "caught up... in clouds"); and their enemies beheld them". It may well be that Rev. 11:12 is speaking of the faithful Jewish remnant of the last days, who will be snatched away along with us.

From the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven- Is this a reference to the believers being "caught away in clouds, into the air, for the purpose of meeting the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17)? It seems also an allusion to the lightning of :27. The Lord's coming and His gathering of the elect is all in the same moment; and yet there are apparently various things which must occur all at the same time. The apparent contradictions in chronology need not worry us- see on Mt. 24:31 *Power and great glory*.

13:28 *Now from the fig tree learn its lesson*- Lk. 13:6-9 records another parable of the fig tree, upon which that in the Olivet prophecy is based. Jesus, the dresser of God's vineyard of Israel, came seeking spiritual fruit on the fig tree, for the three years of his ministry. Because of the lack of it, the tree was cut down. Christ said "Now (i.e. towards the end of the tribulation period?) learn a parable of the fig tree" (Mt. 24:32). It is tempting to read this as effectively meaning 'Now learn *the* parable of the fig tree', seeing that the parable of the Olivet prophecy is so similar to the previous fig tree parable.

When its branch becomes tender- The obvious connection in Jewish minds would be with Messiah as the pre-eminent branch of Israel (Is. 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Ez. 17:22; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). Lk. 21 adds the detail that we are to look also at "all the trees". A tender branch, all the trees, the Kingdom of God- these are all themes to be found in Ez. 17:22-24: "Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will also take of the lofty top of the cedar [the dynasty of the house of David], and will set it. I will crop off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it [the return of Christ to

Mount Zion?]; and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar. Under it shall dwell all birds of every wing; in the shade of its branches shall they dwell [this is the picture of Christ's Kingdom- Mk. 4:32]. All the trees [cp. "the fig tree and all the trees"] of the field shall know that I, Yahweh, have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish. I, Yahweh, have spoken and have done it". This last verse was clearly in the Lord's mind as He was led out to Golgotha (Lk. 23:31). This clearly Messianic language is associated by the Lord with the beginnings of spiritual fruit on the fig tree of Israel. The fig tree has to identify with Him as Messiah, become itself the tender branch, before fruit can be seen upon it.

I mentioned earlier in this exposition the strong parallels between the Olivet prophecy and the upper room discourse. The equivalent of the fig tree parable is in Jn. 15:1-6 :"I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that carries no fruit, he prunes away; and every branch that carries fruit, he cleanses it, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, so neither can you, except you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He that abides in me and I in him, the same carries much fruit. For severed from me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is thrown out as a branch and withers, and these are gathered and thrown into the fire, and they are burned". Rom. 11:19 in turn alludes here by associating the cut off, rejected branches with natural Israel. The branches are the tree, which is Christ. That same identification of the branch and Christ is made here in Mt. 24:32. Putting together these teachings, the implication would be that for the branches of Israel to again be fruitful, they must be grafted back in, seeing they have been cut off. And that is the very teaching of Romans 11. "When his branch is yet…" is an attempt to translate a difficult original text. The idea may be 'If, so long as… the branch is tender, it can yield fruit'. The broken off branches must be grafted back in and only 'so long as' that is the case, they can bear fruit. In the first century context, the Lord may be urging Israel to bring forth spiritual fruit- whilst the branch is still tender, whilst it was still connected to the tree, and had not been broken off and burnt as Romans 11 envisaged happening. And yet Israel would not. Hence the Lord's appeal to His listeners to *learn* this parable. And hence the manner in which He placed this teaching as the conclusion to the Olivet prophecy, because Israel's repentance is the key precondition in His return. Jn. 15 is saying the same thing by warning that once severed from Christ, then there would be no chance of bearing fruit.

And puts forth its leaves, you know that the summer is near- The fig tree was to "shoot forth" (Lk. 21:30) or 'germinate' (Young), witnessed by its putting forth of leaves (Mk. 13:28) and tender branches (Mt. 24:32). When the fig tree puts forth leaves there are often immature, unripe figs amongst them. Thus Jesus inspected the fig tree outside Jerusalem to see if it had any fruit, and cursed it because it did not. It had "leaves only" (Mt. 21:19), but now the Lord seems to be saying that the presence of leaves will be a sign of His return. The obvious point of connection with 21:19 would suggest that He becomes more and more acceptant of *any* sign of spirituality and response in Israel; rather like the parable of the great supper features an increasing desperation on the part of the King to accept anyone who is willing to say "yes" to the invitation. "The time of *figs* was not yet", i.e. it was not reasonable to find fully developed fruit on it. The fig tree referred to the nation of Israel; Jesus expected to find at least the beginnings of some spiritual fruit, but due to the chronic dearth of response to his message, Jesus cursed the nation and dried it up (Mk. 11:13,14,20).

This would lead us to interpret the putting forth of leaves on the fig tree as the signs of an initial repentance and indication that real spiritual fruit is developing. It may well be that the whole of the Olivet prophecy has reference to a final three and a half year tribulation of the believers just prior to the second coming, and that during this time there will be a period of zealous witnessing to both Jews and Gentiles. This fits into place with the fig tree parable; this preaching starts to produce some degree of response from Israel, and then "all (is) fulfilled" in the full manifestation of Christ's Kingdom. The parable says that as surely as Summer follows Spring, so those who see the blossoming of the fig tree in the parable, will see the Kingdom. Maybe this is to be taken literally; there may be a literal gap of a few weeks/months (as between Spring and Summer) between the first signs of Jewish repentance, and all being fulfilled. It may well be that the "all" which will be fulfilled in Lk. 21:32 is to be equated with "the times of the Gentiles" being fulfilled (Lk. 21:24). The Greek *kairos* translated “times” is also translated “opportunity”; the Gentiles’ opportunity to hear the Gospel is fast running out. There will be a call to Israel to repent in the last days, and a remnant will respond. This Elijah ministry [and maybe our present witness to Jewry prepares the way for this?] must occur “before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord”. We could interpret the putting forth of leaves on the fig tree as the signs of an initial repentance and indication that real spiritual fruit is developing.

One way to look at this is that summer stood for harvest, obviously so in this context of fruit on a fig tree. But harvest was clearly a metaphor for judgment upon Israel, which is the context and burden of the Olivet prophecy. The Lord has lamented that the fig tree of Israel has nothing but leaves- and because of that, He had uttered judgment upon her (Mt. 21:19,20). So the Lord could be simply repeating this is parabolic terms. The judgment / harvest / Summer was to come upon the fig tree whilst she had only leaves [and not fruit] on her tender branch. And yet the language of ‘shooting forth’ [Gk. germinating] in Lk. 21:30 suggests that more than mere leaves are in view. Summer will only come once there is fruit to harvest. That seems the point.

The shooting forth of the fig tree is given as the special sign that the Lord will return (Lk. 21:30). This must be understood in the context of the Lord coming to the fig tree in Mk. 11; He sought for at least the beginnings of fruit shooting forth, but found only leaves. And therefore He cursed the fig tree. He evidently saw the shooting forth of the fig tree as a figure of Israel's acceptance of Him, however immaturely. Likewise the parable of Lk. 13:6-9 makes the same connection between fruit on the fig tree and repentance within Israel. "Learn a (the) parable of the fig tree" (Mt. 24:32) may suggest that we are to understand the fig tree parable in the light of these other fig tree parables. And there are several OT links between fruit on the fig and spiritual fruit in Israel (Mic. 7:1 cp. Mt. 7:15,16; Hos. 9:10; Hab. 3:17,18). When the branch of Israel “is now become tender”, i.e. immediately this happens, we are to know that the eternal Summer of God’s Kingdom is nigh (Mt. 24:32 RV). The tenderness of the branch is surely to be connected with the hard heart of Israel becoming tender through their acceptance of Jesus and the new covenant. When we see just the beginnings of Israel’s repentance, through a remnant responding, we are to know that “He is near, even at the doors” (Mt. 24:33 RV). All this evidence steers us away from the idea that the fig tree became tender through the re-establishment of the nation of Israel- and towards an understanding that this is all about Israel’s repentance.

13:29 *So you also, when you see these things happening, you will know that he is near- at the doors*- Lk. 21 "you know in your own selves". Seeing the repentance of Israel will lead to the faithful perceiving that the end is near. This perhaps alludes to the same idea as in 2 Pet. 1:19, that the day star shall arise in the hearts of the believers just before the Lord comes.

The structure of the argument suggests that "these things" specifically refers to the shooting forth of the fig tree:

Mt. 24:32	Mt. 24:33
When [Gk. *hotan*]	When [Gk. *hotan*]
His branch is yet tender and puts forth leaves	You see all these things
You know [Gk. *ginosko*]	You know [Gk. *ginosko*]
That summer is near [Gk. *eggus*]	That it is near [Gk. *eggus*]; Lk. 21:32 "That the Kingdom of God is near [Gk. *eggus*]".

The "Summer" meant 'harvest', and that was a metaphor for judgment. Verse 33 parallels this by saying that "it" is near. The "it" may well refer to the destruction of the temple, which is the context of the whole discussion; although Lk. 21:32 supplies "the Kingdom of God". The Lord is bringing the discourse to a close by returning to the question which provoked it: ""When shall these things be?". And He appears to be saying in the first century context that so long as only leaves remained on the fig tree of Israel, then the Summer of harvest judgment upon her was going to come. And yet the Lord here is using language with two or more meanings, as Scripture often does. In the latter day context, He seems to be saying that once spiritual fruit is beginning on the Israel fig tree, then this is the ultimate sign that the ultimate end is near.

The idea of Christ at the door is repeated by the Lord Himself in Rev. 3:19,20- where it means that Jesus is asking others to repent and turn to Him. Opening the door means the Lord has granted forgiveness- His being at the door implies surely that He is asking for repentance. *Epi* the doors can carry the sense of 'about' or 'upon', perhaps an allusion to the Angels of Passover night, which is such a strong type of the second coming. That would explain the plural "doors". I suggested that Summer / harvest may refer to judgment; being 'upon the doors' may likewise suggest the Angel of Death in judgment. This would certainly fit the first century interpretation offered above- that while only leaves are on the fig tree branch, whilst it is still 'tender' and attached to the tree before it has been broken off in judgment, then Summer / harvest / judgment is coming for sure, in that very generation. But words have multiple meanings, and this fact is not ignored by God in the way the Bible is written, nor by His Son in the way He spoke. The allusion can equally be to the Passover Angel who as it were restrained the Angel of Death by hovering over the blood-sprinkled doors of the faithful. This would continue the 'other' usage of language by the Lord in the fig tree parable, which means that once there is some beginnings of spiritual fruit on the fig tree of Israel, then the repentance of that remnant will mean that the coming of the Lord is literally imminent and He stands *epi* the doors as the fulfilment of the Passover Angel.

13:30 *Truly I say to you: This generation shall not pass away*- This is similar to the Lord's teaching that some of His generation would not die until they had seen the coming of the Kingdom (Mk. 9:1; Lk. 9:27). His saying may not be linked directly to the fig tree parable, as if to say 'The generation that sees the fig tree fruit will not pass away until…'. Rather He may be concluding His message by again making clear that the entire prophecy was going to come true in that generation. Seeing that lifespans

were not much over 40 years at that time, even AD70 would not have seen many of that generation alive. He says elsewhere that the actual people He was speaking with would see these things come true and see Him coming in glory. But this potential possibility was disallowed from happening in that generation by the refusal of Israel to repent and the weakness of spirituality and effort to spread the Gospel in those who did apparently believe into Christ. The transfiguration was hardly the main fulfilment of the Lord's words, even though the record of it directly follow the Lord's predictions. Like the events of AD70, it was at best a shadow fulfilment of the final coming of the Kingdom in visible power and glory. The use of "*this* generation" rather than "*that* generation" surely suggests the Lord hoped for and indeed intended a fulfilment of His words literally in that very generation. But that generation passed- because fruit on the fig tree was not found. Israel did not repent, and there was little spiritual fruit on those Jews who did accept Christ. All 38 NT occurrences of *genea*, "generation", clearly refer to the contemporary generation or group of listeners. Any attempt to interpret *genea* as referring to the race or nation of Israel becomes impossible because the text would require that the race or nation of Israel pass away at the Lord's second coming, but Israel are clearly envisaged as existing as a separate entity in the Millennial Kingdom.

Until- If the Lord had meant simply 'until' we would read simply *heos*. But here we have two Greek words- *heos an*, which together denote a sense of conditionality and uncertainty. This is understandable if we understand that the Lord is talking of how His coming *could be* in that generation- but that depended upon some conditions which were beyond Him to fulfil and which depended upon men.

All these things happen- AV "Be fulfilled". There is surely a word play between *ginomai* ["fulfilled"] and *genea* ["generation"]. That generation would not pass until all has 'become'. This is not the usual word used for the fulfilment of prophecies. When Matthew writes of the fulfilment of prophecies (and he does this often), the word *pleroo* is used. But here a much vaguer and more general word is used. Mark's record brings this out- the disciples ask when "all these things" would be "fulfilled" (*sunteleo*), and the Lord concludes the fig tree parable by saying "all these things" would be *ginomai* (Mk. 13:4,30). That would appear purposeful; the Lord held out the definite possibility for His return in the first century and the fulfilment of all things He had spoken of. But He was surely aware that this could be rescheduled, and so He used a word pregnant with the possibility that "that generation" would see the 'coming into being' of the scenario He was presenting. That generation [*ginomai*] could have been the fulfilment [*genea*] of all things, or they could have been at least the coming into being of that fulfilment; even if they failed to respond, they would not be without significance in bringing into being the ultimate fulfilment.

13:31 *Heaven and earth may pass away*- This could simply be saying to the effect 'Even if heaven and earth could pass, which they cannot, there is even less possibility that My words shall not be fulfilled'. Mt. 5:18 seems to use the term in that sense- "Even until [*heos*, i.e. 'even if'] heaven and earth pass...". In this case, we are not to even bother trying to understand 'heaven and earth' as 'a system of things', although this is certainly how the term is used, especially in the context of the Jewish system. And yet later New Testament allusion to this passage seems to suggest we are justified in seeing some reference to the Jewish, Mosaic system of the first century. Heb. 12:26 speaks as if heaven and earth are to be so shaken by the blood of Christ and the new covenant that they will pass away just as Sinai shook at the inauguration of the old covenant. 2 Pet. 3:7-13 is perhaps the clearest statement- the 'heaven and

earth' which "are now" in the first century were to pass away and be replaced by a new heaven and earth in which righteousness dwells. Clearly 'heaven and earth' are not literal, because righteousness already dwells in literal Heaven, and the earth shall not be literally destroyed; this passing of 'heaven and earth' is patterned after the destruction of sinful *society* in Noah's time (2 Pet. 3:5). We note that the Olivet prophecy concludes with a warning that society would become like it was in the days of Noah. Clearly this major changeover did happen in the first century in that the Jewish and Mosaic system did finally pass away in AD70 with the destruction of the temple. And yet Peter's words also seem to demand application to the second coming of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. Clearly the heaven and earth of the Kingdom could have come in the first century, but 'all' that happened was that the Jewish and Mosaic systems were ended; this was in itself created a requirement for a *new* 'heaven and earth' in which dwells righteousness, but that system has evidently not yet physically come on earth. In this sense, what happened in AD70 was a guarantee and a creation of the requirement for the new Kingdom to come- see on :30 *Be fulfilled*.

The Greek word *Ge* ["earth"] is used often for the 'land' of Israel in the NT. We must remember that although the NT is written in Greek, it strongly reflects Hebrew usage of words. Again, the word commonly refers to the land of Israel. Consider some examples:
- "But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King" (Mt. 5:34,35). This is alluding to the Jewish habit of swearing by their own land.
- "The kings of the earth take custom or tribute" (Mt. 17:25). The rulers of the earth were those ruling over Israel.
- "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth" (Mt. 23:35). The blood shed on the earth means that which was shed in the land.
- Heaven and earth passing away (Mt. 24:35) follows on from the Lord speaking of how all tribes of the earth / land would mourn in repentance (:30). He was speaking in the common OT idiom that used 'heaven and earth' for Israel. The nation would pass away in AD70, but His words would not.

But my words shall not pass away- The Lord uses *logos* here rather than any other term for 'words', perhaps because He perceived that it was the essence of what He was saying that would be fulfilled, rather than necessarily the very letter.

There seems a parallel with :30. "My words shall not pass away" is parallel with "This generation shall not pass away"; "Heaven and earth shall pass away" is parallel with "All these things [being] fulfilled". 'Heaven and earth' passing is therefore in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth in fulfilment of all that was prophesied by the Lord. But there is then a parallel between "My words" and "this generation". The intention may be to show that that generation were to be identified with the Lord's words, and thereby with Himself. For whenever He elsewhere uses the term "My words", it is always in parallel to 'I Myself' (Mk. 8:38; Jn. 12:48; 14:23; 15:27). He was His words; He was the quintessential logos. And that generation were to be identified with them. If they did so, if the tender branch of the fig tree became one with the Messianic branch of the Old Testament prophecies, then all would be fulfilled in that generation.

13:32 *But of that day or that hour- Hemera* can refer to a period rather than a specific calendar day; it occurs often in the Olivet prophecy: “Those days” (Mt. 24:19), “those days should be shortened” (Mt. 24:22), “the tribulation of those days” (Mt. 24:29), “the days of Noah” (Mt. 24:37), “the days that were before the flood” (Mt. 24:38). So the Lord isn’t necessarily saying that there is a calendar day and hour within that day when He will return. He may even be implying that God has given us conditions to fulfil, and not a calendar date. There is no calendar date discernible from our side, because it is conditional. The Lord repeats this teaching in Mt. 25:13 when He says that we must watch exactly because “you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man comes”. When the disciples later asked to know this date, the Lord replied that “the times or seasons” have been “set within [the Father’s] own authority” (Acts 1:7 RV). This sounds like God has set up required preconditions, and the actual moment of the Lord’s return is somehow within frames of reference which His own authority alone has determined. But the Lord goes straight on to remind them of their calling to take the Gospel worldwide (Acts 1:8); for that was one of the major preconditions. Instead of trying to discern a specific date ahead of time, they were instead to refocus upon the spreading of the Gospel. If all the mental effort put into trying to discern the calendar date had been put into simply spreading the Gospel, then perhaps the Lord would be here by now. However, there is also the possibility that in the very last days, the last generation *will* in fact know the day and hour.

Knows no one except the Father, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son- There’s a major theme of knowing / seeing / perceiving in the Olivet prophecy. *Eido*, translated “knows”, carries the essential idea of ‘seeing’ or perceiving. We are to “see” / know / perceive the abomination of desolation, and when we “see” / know / perceive “all these things, know that it is near”. And yet, despite that, we can not know, at least at this stage, the day nor the hour of the Lord’s coming. The reason is made crystal clear in Mt. 24:42: “Watch *therefore* because you do not know [s.w.] what hour your Lord comes”. Mt. 25:13 repeats this: “Watch *therefore* because you do not know [s.w.] neither the day nor the hour in which your Lord comes”. The ‘watching’, therefore, is the watching of ourselves and for the welfare of others; *not* the activity of seeking to match world events with Bible prophecies. So our watching is exactly because we do not know the day and hour. God in His wisdom made it like this- so that we should watch all the time. If we knew when the Lord were coming, then we would not watch for Him until that time. Such is human nature. If a man knows what day and hour the thief is coming, he will watch for him at that time (Mt. 24:43). But if he doesn’t know, then he must watch all the time. So, looking at it from that point of view, it is absolutely necessary that we do *not* know the day and hour. And yet it seems so many have seriously misunderstood this. They think that they *can* work out the day and hour, and their ‘watching’ is not so much a personal readiness for the Lord’s coming at any moment as an extended scouring of the media in an attempt to slot various international happenings into Bible prophecies. Indeed it is observable that personal watchfulness often apparently comes to be excused because of ‘watching’ the “signs of the times”.

13:33 *Be warned, watch and pray. For you do not know when the time is-* This could be taken as a criticism, rather than stating a truism. It is true that we do not know the time of the Lord's return and therefore we should watch constantly. But we should consider the possibility that the last generation, as they pass through the tribulation, will in fact see prophecy fulfilling so accurately that they can foresee the Lord's coming. It is commonly thought that even the Lord Jesus doesn't know the time of his return, only the Father does. During his mortality, the Lord said exactly this

(Mk. 13:32)- at the time he was speaking to the disciples, he himself didn't know. But after his resurrection and glorification, the Lord made two statements to the disciples which he surely intended to be connected: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth... it is not for you (the inquisitive eleven standing on Olivet) to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Mt. 28:18; Acts 1:7,8). But *all* the Father's power has been given to His glorified Son, and this therefore includes knowledge of the "times and seasons" of the second coming. In the exalted Lord "are hid all the riches of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3); it is thereby inconceivable that the Father would still keep back some knowledge from the Son. The point of all this is that when the Lord Jesus said that "of that day and that hour knoweth (present tense) no man, no, not the angels... neither the Son" he was not laying down a general principle for all time. He was speaking of the situation at that time: 'You can't know now, indeed at the moment even I don't know; but these are the signs which will tell the believers when I'll come'. By implication he was saying 'You can't understand them, although I'm giving them to you, but in the future some will understand them, because these signs will accurately pinpoint my return'. This was exactly the spirit of what the Angel told Daniel when he too wished to know when Messiah would come in glory; he was basically told 'It's not for you to understand, but in the last days understanding of these things will be increased among God's people; they will know the time, but you can't'. There are so many connections between the Olivet prophecy and Daniel that perhaps it is legitimate to think that the Lord was alluding to the Angel's refusal to tell Daniel the time of Messiah's coming. That the Lord was primarily referring to the twelve when he spoke of them not knowing "when the time is" (Mk. 13:33) is confirmed if we appreciate that the Lord Jesus sometimes uses "the time" as a reference to the appointed time for his own death (Mt. 26:18; Mk. 14:35; Jn. 7:6,8). The disciples were fascinated with the time of his return, and the Lord was giving them the signs. But knowing his death was only days away, inevitably he had in mind "the time" of his passion. And he knew that as they didn't know the time of his return, so they didn't understand the time of his death. Having pointed out that they knew not "the time", in words surely reminiscent of his criticism of Jewry generally for not knowing "the time" of his coming and death (Mt. 16:3; Lk. 19:44), the Lord went on to tell the story of the man (himself) who left his household (the disciples) and told them to watch, with warnings as to what would happen if they didn't. Every one of those warnings, and some other language in the Olivet prophecy, came true of the disciples in the next few days, in the context of "the time" being the time of Christ's death:

	As Christ to the Sannhedrin
They shall deliver you up to the councils	
beaten	Christ buffeted
rulers and kings for a testimony	Chief priests, Herod, Pilate
...brother shall betray the brother	Judas; Peter's denial?
...turn back to take up his garment	John Mark's linen garment
...false Christs...	An echo of 'Barabbas'?
the sun shall be darkened...	As at the crucifixion
Watch and	"Watch with me";
pray...	Gethsemane
at even...	Last Supper
at midnight...	Gethsemane
at the cock crowing	Peter's denials
in the morning	trials and crucifixion

find you sleeping disciples in Gethsemane

13:34 *Like a man going on a journey; on leaving his house, he puts his servants in charge, each according to his assigned tasks. He also commands the gatekeeper to stay awake*- Each has his or her calling, and therefore we should each have a sense of authority because we realize this. We have a job to do, a mission to accomplish, and we have authority from the Lord Himself. For the Son of man gives to *each* of His servants both "authority" and his or her specific work to do (Mk. 13:34). See on Mt. 21:41.

His enthusiasm for us comes out in Christ's description of Himself as 'taking a far journey' away from us to Heaven. The Greek strictly means 'to leave one's own native people to go abroad'; with the implication that the Lord feels closer towards us than to the Angels. He is somehow away from home whilst absent from us. This is exactly the line of argument of Hebrews 1 and 2: Christ didn't come to save Angels, He came to save us, therefore He had exactly our nature and feelings, not theirs.

The "porter" was commanded to watch; and he represents us all (:37). Watching over God's household is an idea taken from Ez. 3:17; as the prophets in the Old Testament parables of judgment were the watchmen of the house of Israel, so each of us are. When the Lord had earlier told this parable, Peter (like us) asked the obvious question: "Do you speak this parable to us (the twelve in the first century), or even to all?" (Lk. 12:41). The Lord's basic reply was "To all", although He didn't say so explicitly. Instead He said that if the Lord of the servant was away and came back unexpectedly, late at night, what a joy it would be to him if he found the lights on and the servant working diligently in caring for the others; *any* servant doing that is going to give his Lord joy; 'So, Peter, don't think about whether others are called to do the job, this is the ideal servant, you're all servants, so you get on and try to be like this ideal servant!'. The porter's job was to keep out wolves; the Greek for "porter" literally means 'the watcher' (s.w. Jn. 10:1, another example of how the parables fit together). An apathy in looking out for false teachers means we aren't doing the porter's job well, we are sleeping rather than looking after the household. Mt. 24:43-45 define watching for Christ's return as tending to the needs of our brethren; this is what will lead our hearts towards preparedness for the second coming, rather than the hobby of trying to match current events with Bible prophecy.

13:35 *Therefore stay awake. For you do not know when the lord of the house comes, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning*- The motivation for watching, being away at the Lord's coming, is because we have a duty to the rest of the household. Pursuit of personal salvation is not of itself a very strong motivator. And we must be ever alert because we do not know when He shall return; for Bible prophecy is to be understood after the event, or whilst the event occurs, and is not intended to provide a timeline of future events.

The Lord says that we are *all* the watchers of the door of the house of the ecclesia (Mk. 13:34,35; Lk. 12:39,40), as the prophets were the watchmen over the city of Zion, God's Old Testament ecclesia. We *all* therefore have a responsibility to guide and warn the ecclesia, not just to scrape out of condemnation for ourselves, but from a genuine, earnest desire to help others to the Kingdom road.

We must speak the word as others are able to hear it, expressing the truths of Christ in language and terms which will reach them. There are some differences within the Gospels in the records of the parables. It could be that the different writers, under inspiration, were rendering the Lord’s Aramaic words into Greek in different styles of

translation. Also, we must bear in mind the different audiences. Mark speaks of the four watches of the night which would have been familiar to Romans (Mk. 13:35 cp. 6:48), whereas Lk. 12:38 speaks of the Jewish division of the night into three watches (cp. Jud. 7:19). See on Lk. 6:47.

13:36 *In case he comes suddenly finding you asleep*- The suddenness of the Lord's coming will only be felt by those who are asleep and as it were disturbed from their sleep. For those who are alert, His coming will not have this 'sudden' and 'unepected' aspect to it. The connection is clearly with the parable of the virgins; and yet despite this exhortation to stay awake, they are slumbered. The "wise" were only saved by their awareness that they were likely to run out of oil, their spirituality was not so solid, and they recognized that.

13:37 *What I say to you I say to all: Stay awake!*- Mt. 24:43-45 define watching for Christ's return as tending to the needs of our brethren; this is what will lead our hearts towards preparedness for the second coming, this is the result of our awareness of the imminence of the Lord's return.

“Watching" is not only a guarding of one's own spirituality; the idea of guarding a house and the people and goods inside it suggests that our watching is of our brethren and sisters too. Elders "watch for your souls" (Heb. 13:17) in this sense. Christ's parable about the gate-keeper might at first suggest that the duty of watching is only with the elders; it is for *them* to watch and feed the flock, in the same way as it was the duty of the house manager to guard the house and feed the other servants (Mt. 24:43-51; Mk. 13:33-37). But that parable is intended for *all* of us; "Watch *ye* therefore (as intensely as that manager)... and what I say unto you, I say unto *all*, Watch" (Mk. 13:37). In other words, we are all elders, the command to watch for each other extends to each of us. And yet how really concerned are most of us about each other’s salvation?

MARK CHAPTER 14

14:1 *Now it was two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread; and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might arrest him using trickery and kill him*- This could imply that they tried to arrest Him before the feast, but decided to delay their plans until after the feast (:2). But the Lord was master of the situation. His life was not taken from Him but He gave it, and pychologically arranged the situation so that He would die as the Passobver lambs were slain. He therefore arranged the situation in Bethany to provoke Judas to go and offer to betray Him to the Jews, knowing they would immediately jump at this opportunity.

The same word for "arrest" is used four timesin Mt. about the ‘taking hold’ of the Lord Jesus in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:48,50,55,57). This ‘laying on of hands’ against the Lord is likewise strongly noted by Mark (s.w. Mk. 14:44,46,49,51). The sight of it was burnt into their memories. There are likewise parts and aspects of the Lord’s sufferings, and words associated with them, which are likewise burnt in the consciousness of all those who truly love Him.

"Trickery" is as AV "*By subtilty"*- an allusion to the Lord’s Jewish opposition as the seed of the serpent at whose hands the seed of the woman was wounded (Gen. 3:15).But the word literally refers to a bait, implying some plan to deceive Him into a position in which they could arrest Him. But what were these plans? The Lord fell for no bait. Perhaps the idea was that Judas would come and kiss Him, and lead Him into some isolated ambush or compromising situation. When the Lord made it clear to Judas that He knew what Judas was up to, the plan fell apart and the soldiers simply

grabbed the Lord. And they ended killing Him “on the feast day”, which was exactly what they had planned to avoid (:2).

The plan made ahead of time to kill Him was clearly typified by the brothers’ plans to kill Joseph.

14:2 *For they said: Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people*- Yet they did arrest the Lord during the feast; another indication that He manipulated the situation so that He gave His life as the Passover lamb. So they did crucify the Lord during the feast, at the same time as the Passover lambs were being killed. Their plan went wrong- see on :1. Try as they might to not kill Him then, the Lord wanted to die as the Passover lamb, and this happened despite the Jews *not* wanting that. The Lord had control over the time of His death, because He gave His life rather than having it taken from Him.

Their fear of an "uproar" indicates the popularity the Lord enjoyed even at that stage, and the fact He was crucified with the general goodwill of the masses is therefore an essay in the fickleness of human nature. And yet the careful plans of the leaders didn't work out- there was "a tumult" about it, the same Greek word translated "uproar" (Mt. 27:24), and likewise they did end up killing Jesus "on the feast day" when it was not their intention to.

14:3 *And while he was in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table*- The anointing recorded in Mark 14 is clearly the same as that in Matthew 26. But the anointing in Luke 7 appears to have occurred in the house of a Pharisee called Simon somewhere in Galilee. The anointing recorded in John 12 is very similar, but occurred six days before the Passover and one day *before* the triumphal entry (Jn. 12:12), whereas the anointing recorded in Matthew and Mark occurred *after* that. There are other differences, too. In Jn. 12:3 Mary uses "a pound of spikenard" whereas the anointing in Matthew seems to emphasize the use of spikenard as a liquid, in an alabaster flask that had to be broken to release the liquid. The spikenard was worth *more* than 300 pence (Mk. 14:5), whereas that of Jn. 12:5 was worth 300 pence; it was used to anoint the Lord's *feet* (Jn. 12:3), whereas that of Mt. 26:7 was used to anoint His *head*. In Jn. 12:4 it is Judas who complains at the apparent waste of the money, whereas in Mt. 26:8 it is the disciples. Mt. 26:11,12 record the Lord's word about "You will always have the poor with you" and goes on to record His explanation that the woman had done this for His burial; whereas in Jn. 12:7,8 these two sayings are the other way around. The wiping of His feet with her hair is stressed in Jn. 12:3, but Matthew and Mark are silent about this. Jn. 12 clearly identifies the woman as Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus; whereas Matthew and Mark are careful to preserve her as a nameless "woman" who "came unto Him" (26:7). I therefore have no doubt that Jn. 12 and Mt. 26 / Mk. 14 speak of two separate anointings, both in Bethany, separated from each other by four days. The anointing in Luke 7 is clearly framed as a similar incident, also in the house of a man called Simon.

The question, of course, is why these three anointings are described in such similar language. Higher critics immediately speak of textual dislocation and mistakes made by the writers in their chronology of events. These kinds of approaches arise from a focus upon the text before our eyes, rather than having a wider perspective on Scripture earned by years of careful Bible reading of the entire Bible text. Those who read the entire Scriptures over a period of time cannot fail to be impressed by the

repetition of situations and events. The way Joseph is called out of prison to interpret a King's dream and is then exalted to rulership in a pagan land is clearly the basis for the language used about Daniel's experience in Babylon. This is not to say that text got dislocated, that Daniel was Joseph or vice versa. Rather do we perceive a single Divine mind behind the production of the Bible as we have it; and God's intention was clearly to show that circumstances repeat within and between the lives of His people. And the language He uses in recording history seeks to bring out those repetitions. This is why the lament of Jeremiah in depression is so similar to that of Job in his depression. And of course we are free to assume that Biblical characters were aware of and took inspiration from those who had gone before them. I suggest that this is what we have going on in the records of these three anointings of the Lord by despised and misunderstood women. They were inspired by each other- for the Lord comments that what the women did was to be told worldwide. This was a command, and it was surely obeyed. Mary of Bethany was inspired by the woman of Luke 7, and the anonymous woman of Matthew 26 was inspired by Mary's anointing of four days previously. Mary had given spikenard worth 300 pence; this woman used even more expensive ointment. And in this is our lesson- to be inspired by the devotion of others to their Lord. Heaven's record of our response is as it were recorded in similar language, in recognition of the inspiration provided by earlier acts of faithfulness by those we know or who have gone before us.

There came a woman with an alabaster vial of ointment of pure nard- very expensive. She broke the vial and poured it over his head- Mary's lavish anointing of the Lord may well have been what inspired Nicodemus to so lavishly prepare the Lord's body for burial. The vast quantities of spices he used was more than that used in the burials of some of the Caesars. He too must have bankrupted himself to anoint the Lord's body. That two people did this within a week of each other is too close a similarity to be co-incidental. Surely Mary inspired him.

The Greek *bar-utimos* uses a term, *utimos*, elsewhere used about the precious, costly blood of Christ. Matthew uses it about the "price" of the Lord's blood (Mt. 27:6,9), as does Paul (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23) and Peter (1 Pet. 2:7). The point is simple. The Lord's blood shed for us was and is the most valuable thing in existence, in the entire cosmos; and we should feel that when we take the cup which symbolizes it. And our response is to give our most valuable things, materially and otherwise, for Him.

The woman anointed the Lord's head in order to reflect her belief that He really was the Christ, the anointed one. She gave her life savings for this belief. It can be apparently painless to believe that Jesus is Christ, and yet the implications of accepting this simple fact can transform a life. What she did was surely rooted in her understanding of Song 1:12, where Solomon's lover has spikenard (s.w. LXX Jn. 12:3) which sends forth its smell "While the king sitteth at his table". Clearly enough she saw Jesus right there and then as the King- even though His Kingdom was not of that world. Her love for Him, her reflection upon the Old Testament, and her perception of Him as her future Lord and King to the extent that she even then treated Him as such, so certain was her faith in His future victory and worthiness… this all motivated her to give the quintessence of her life's work for Him. And it should for us too.

Mary's devotion to the Lord, based on the understanding she had, is truly inspirational. The original word translated "nard" is a foreign [non Greek] word, and appears to have originated far away from Palestine. The suggestion has been made that this bottle of nard belonged to some foreign royalty. The price of "more than

three hundred pence" must be understood in terms of a penny-a-day employment rate for labourers (Mt. 20:2). This bottle would typically only be used at the burial of a king. Yet Mary dearly loved her brother Lazarus, and had only recently buried him. But she hadn't used the nard for *him*; hence perhaps the information is added that his body would be stinking after four days- implying such expensive nard had not been used in embalming *his* body (Jn. 11:39- the fact it's Martha who observes this may suggest she resented Mary for not using her nard for Lazarus, just as she resented how Mary didn't help her in the kitchen but instead sat at the Lord's feet). And the Lord Jesus perceived all this; for He commented to the disciples that Mary had "kept the nard for *my* burial" (Jn. 12:7). The Lord's reference to her 'keeping' the nard can be powerfully understood in the context of Mary not using it for her brother's burial, but rather deciding to keep it for His burial. This not only shows the clarity of Mary's understanding of the Lord's upcoming death. It also reflects how she would give her most treasured possession in an apparently senseless act of devotion to Him. She annointed Him because she understood Him to be Christ, the anointed one. But this is what we expect of a woman who won the accolade from the Lord that she sought after the "one thing" that really matters- which is Him and His word (Lk. 10:42). Our eyes have been opened to that same "one thing", and we too claim to have accepted Jesus of Nazareth as Christ; and so to place devotion to Christ above family, above retention of personal wealth and value... is the intended issue of all this for us too.

14:4 *But there were some that had indignation among themselves, saying*- The indignation was among or "within" themselves, and so the words they are here recorded as saying were likely within themselves. We wonder how many other times when we read of people 'saying' something, the 'saying' was within their own minds. For self-talk is understood by the Lord as our actual words. Whether or not we hold our tongues back is not the ultimate issue. The words have been said within us. See on 26:10 *When Jesus understood*. If the reconstruction of events I offered in commentary on :8, we can better understand their frustration. They would have seen an identical 'waste' of wealth in the anointing of four days previously in the same village, perhaps in the same home; and they had seen it in Galilee at the incident recorded in Luke 7. And they were doing their math and calculating the total cost 'wasted'.

For what purpose- The Greek *eis tis* could equally mean 'For whom?', the implication being that the poor could have been benefitted far more than the Lord Jesus. Hence the Lord replies that the purpose of the anointing was to embalm Him ahead of time for burial. Just as the woman was inspired by the generous anointing of Mary four days previously and the Galilean prostitute of Luke 7, so the huge amount of spices purchased by Nicodemus in Jn. 19:39 was likely motivated in turn by her example. Critics claim that the amount of spices ("one hundred pound weight") bought was more than used in the burial of the Caesars. The woman here used a pound of spikenard, worth more than the 300 pence at which Mary's anointing liquid was valued. And in turn, Nicodemus was motivated yet more- 100 times more. She gave one pound, he gave 100 pounds' weight. This is the reason for the deja vu of our lives, of how experiences repeat between human lives- it's so that we may be inspired to greater service than even those who went before.

Has this waste of the ointment been made?- "Waste" is the same Greek word used nearly 20 times in the NT for destruction and condemnation; it is the same word used in describing Judas as "the son of *perdition*". The tragedy of condemnation is the waste of what could have been. This is the sadness with which God sees condemnation. We note that four days before, it had been Judas who complained about the 'waste'. His attitude had spread to the disciples. But the paradox was that he

was thereby the son of waste, he was condemning himself by complaining about the waste of devotion towards the Lord Jesus. The idea could even be that they were so angry that they thought that the woman was condemning herself by what she had done, because she could have given the money to the poor. This is seen so often in religious experience- those who stand on the sidelines become so bitter at how others actively express their devotions to their Lord that they go so far as to condemn them. We think of how Michal despised David for dancing before the Lord, and was punished with barrenness; and of the Lord's observation: "Is your eye evil, because I am good / generous?" (Mt. 20:15). The world's wealthiest individuals are often very generous to charitable causes- and yet they do so to a chorus of criticism from those who have given little or nothing to such causes.

14:5 *For this ointment might have been sold for above three hundred denarii and given to the poor. And they scolded her*- The very words used by the Lord to the rich ruler, telling him to sell what he had and give to the poor (Mt. 19:21). Their idea in saying this may have been to accuse the woman of disobedience to the Lord's teachings. We see here how deep are the feelings aroused by spiritual jealousy. This woman had made a stellar commitment to her Lord; and quite unspoken, her devotion challenged the other disciples. And so by all means they had to condemn her, and were happy to misquote the Lord's words to achieve that. This is one simple reason why those most active and sacrificial in church life are often the most viciously attacked by their fellow disciples.

14:6 *But Jesus said: Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work*- The Greek has the idea of beauty. The same Greek phrase rendered "a good work" is found in 1 Tim. 5:10 as something required of a mature spiritual woman, and for which she must be "reported"- clearly alluding to how this woman's "good work" was to be told / reported worldwide. She thus became a model for other sisters to follow, in the same way as she herself had copied the examples of Mary four days previously, and the sinful woman of Luke 7. This is the intended power and purpose of good works- they serve as inspiration for others to likewise glorify the Lord. The Greek expression 'to work a [good] work' is used elsewhere regarding the Lord's working of miracles (Jn. 6:28; 9:41; 10:33). Her response was no less significant than the working of a miracle.

Upon me- The Greek *eis eme* could as well mean 'in Me', as if the woman's work gave the Lord huge encouragement within Himself.

14:7 *For you have the poor always with you, and whenever you want you can do them good*- Christ's love for us, His Father's spiritual house, was typified by His being likened to the poor slave under the Law who perpetually dedicated himself to serve his master's house. An extension of this idea is revealed by a connection between the Lord saying "Ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always" (Mt. 26:11) and Dt. 15:11 "For the poor shall never cease out of the land". Thus Jesus is associating himself with the "poor man... of thy brethren" of Dt. 15:7. Note how Jesus calls himself a "poor man", especially on the cross: Ps. 34:6; 35:10; 37:14; 40:17; 69:29,33; 70:5; 86:1; 109:22; 113:7 cp. 2 Cor. 8:9- an impressive list. Christ exercised the rights of the poor to glean in the cornfield on the Sabbath (Lk. 6:1); Dt. 15:7 warned the Israelites not to be hard hearted and refuse help to such a poor brother. Christ is alluding to this passage by saying that the disciples should not be hard hearted by stopping Mary give her rich ointment to Him, the poor. The following Dt. 15:12-17 is also concerning Jesus. Thus Jesus was spiritually poor and hungry, and was so grateful for Mary's encouragement.

Note that the Law also taught that if Israel were obedient, then there would be no poverty. And yet the same Law tacitly recognized the reality of human weakness in noting that "the poor shall never cease out of the land" (Dt. 15:11). God's law therefore also reflects His grace and understanding of human failure to be fully obedient.

But me you do not have always- We would likely have been tempted to expose the root of the immediate problem- Judas was a thief, and wanted the cash because he would keep some of it and only distribute part to the poor. But the Lord as ever, was wiser than to confront issues in such a primitive way. He brushes past the complaint that this woman had ignored His principle of selling what we have and giving to the poor, and doesn't expose the core reason for Judas' trouble stirring about the issue. Rather He focuses upon what the woman *had* achieved, and bids the disciples look closer at His death and how they should be responding to it. ″Always″ is literally, 'at all times'. There would always be opportunity, times of opportunity, to do good to the poor.

We find an example of Paul holding up Mary Magdalene as our example in 2 Cor. 8:12, where he speaks of how the Lord although He was rich became poor for our sakes, and we ought to be inspired by this to generosity towards our poorer brethren. The connection with Mary Magdalene goes back to Mk. 14:7, where Jesus said that Mary *had* in fact given her wealth to the poor, by anointing Him, the poor one, the one who made Himself poor for our sakes.

14:8 *She has done what she could. She has anointed my body beforehand for the burying*- This could be read as the Lord saying that what she did inspired Him to go forward in the path to death which He was treading. The Greek means specifically embalming. It was as if the woman perceived that the Lord was effectively the slain lamb of God even whilst He was alive. It is used only once more in the New Testament, describing the embalming of the Lord's body (Jn. 19:40).

Whether the woman of Mk. 14:8 really understood that she was anointing His body for burial is open to question. But the Lord's positivism graciously imputed this motive to her. See on Mk. 16:3; 2 Cor. 8:11,12.

14:9- see on Acts 10:4.

And truly I say to you: Wherever in the whole world the gospel shall be preached, what this woman has done shall be spoken of as a memorial to her- Her generosity was set up as a cameo of the response to the Lord which all who believe the Gospel should make. The Gospel is not just a set of doctrines to be painlessly apprehended. It is a call to action after the pattern of this woman. The good news was to be of the Lord's death and burial, and yet integral to that message was to be the pattern of response which was seen in her- to give our all, our most treasured and hoarded things, for His sake.

There is evident connection with the Lord's prophecy of how the Gospel would be preached in all the world (Mt. 24:14; Mk. 16:15). He seems to have seen the 'Gospel' that would be preached as a re-telling of His life and incidents in it, such as the woman's anointing of Him. It is significant that her anointing is mentioned in all four Gospel records. In Mk. 14:9 we read that wherever the gospel was to be preached, what she had done would be narrated in memory of her. So 'preaching the Gospel' is defined there as a narration of the events and sayings of the Lord Jesus in His ministry. The Gospel records are transcripts of the Gospel preached by e.g. Matthew. The Gospel is therefore in the Gospels. The rest is interpretation and

theology, necessary and helpful, but there is no avoiding the fact that the Gospel itself is in the records of the Gospel which we have in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The Lord foresaw that transcripts of His work and words would indeed be made, and He envisaged how the supreme devotion of this anonymous woman would be part of that message. The language is very similar to that of Mt. 24:14: "This Gospel... shall be preached [*kerusso* again] in all the world... and then shall the end come". Matthew may have had in view how his version of the Gospel needed to be spread into all the world.

This could mean that when the Gospel message is proclaimed in all the world at Messiah's return, then what Mary had done would be told [before God] that He may mercifully remember her for good at the judgment. This may sound a forced interpretation to Western ears and eyes, but we must remember that the idea of 'for a memorial' denoted being spoken of for good before someone, in this case, the judge of all. What follows from this is that there will be a direct link between our deeds today, and the judgment process of tomorrow [or later today]. What we have done will be told before God, and He will remember us for good. On one hand, works are irrelevant. We are saved by grace. On the other hand, there will be a certain 'going through' of our deeds before Him. Quite simply, there is a direct link between our behaviour and our future judgment. Nothing will in that sense be forgotten.

The early preachers would have gone around telling the good news about Jesus Christ, and in so doing would have recited time and again His teaching and life story. Mark records how the Lord commanded the Gospel to be preached world-wide (Mark 16:15); but he surely intends this to be linked with his record of how the generosity of the sinful woman would be told "wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world" (Mk. 14:9). 'The Gospel' was therefore not just the basic doctrines of the Gospel; it was the whole record of the life and works of Christ. This is why each of the Gospels is somehow personalized to the writer. And the comment that wherever the Gospel was preached, her example would be preached (Mk. 14:9) is tantamount to saying that her action was to be the pattern for all who would afterward believe the Gospel. Note in passing that the Gospel was not intended by the Lord to be a mere set of doctrinal propositions; it was to be a message which included practical patterns of response to it, of which Mary's was to be always mentioned.

The language of 'memorial' is typically used in contemporary literature about memorials to the gallant deeds of *men*. But the Lord was challenging such thinking by saying that the Gospel would include a memorial of an anonymous *woman*. And her humanly senseless pouring out of her wealth in a ten minute act of devotion to Him was none less than the bravest or noblest act of any man.

14:10 *And Judas Iscariot, he that was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests, that he might betray him to them*- In all the Gospel records, the decision of Judas to betray the Lord follows on from the anointing incidents. I suggested on :1 that the Lord set up the whole scene, knowing that the apparent waste of so much money would deeply irk Judas and trigger the betrayal. People who are obsessed with money as he was often find such things unbearable to be part of. Judas is repeatedly called "Simon's son" at this time. And the anointing took place in Simon's house. It could well be that Judas was a member of the family, possibly even a brother of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. To see the family wealth 'wasted' in this way was unbearable for him. The reasons for his betrayal were surely multi-factorial, but attitudes to money played a large part. "What will you give me, and I will betray Him...?" clearly suggests a financial motive; and the records seem to give the impression that the apparent waste of money, especially if it was money he thought might be coming to

him in the inheritance, was the final straw for him. After that, he went to the Jews and opened discussions about betraying the Lord. The way he threw the thirty pieces of silver down on the ground reflects his final realization of how foolish he had been. And yet the lesson is so often never learnt; men and women effectively betray their Lord for money; accumulation of wealth, development of career, take precedence over devotion to Him, and finally lead to betrayal.

14:11 *And they, when they heard it, were glad; and promised to give him money. And he sought how he might conveniently betray him*- Matthew says they gave him 30 pieces of silver immediately, but this would have been a down payment for a future promise of money.

14:12 *And on the first day of unleavened bread, when they sacrificed the Passover, his disciples said to him: Where will you have us prepare for you the Passover to eat?*- Lk. 22:8 adds the detail that actually this was said in response to Peter and John being told to go and prepare the Passover. Mk. 14:15 brings out the paradox that the Lord directed them to an upper room that was already "prepared" (s.w.), and there they prepared the Passover. The Lord had taught that the festal meal was already prepared for His people (22:4 s.w.). The Lord was surely using the language of Passover preparation in saying that He was going [to the cross] to prepare a place for us (Jn. 14:1-3)- and He said that at the very time Passover was being prepared. His request that *they* prepare Passover was therefore asking for a mutuality in response from them.

We feel we must *do* something before we can expect anything from God. And yet in condescension to this, the Father sometimes almost goes along with us in this. Reflect how the disciples, with all the petty pride of the practical man wishing to do something practical for the leader he adores, earnestly asked the Lord where to prepare for Him the Passover. He told them to find a certain man, and ask him where the Master would eat Passover *with His disciples*. He would show them an upper room furnished and already prepared. '*There'*, the Lord added with His gentle irony, 'prepare for *us*, not just me but you as well, to eat. Even though I've already arranged it all, and I'm inviting *you* to eat with *me*, well, I understand you must feel you do your little human bit, so there *you* prepare; although I've already prepared it all'. 'What love through all his actions ran'. This was grace and understanding and accommodation of men *par excellence*.

14:13 *And he sent two of his disciples and said to them: Go into the city and there you shall meet a man bearing a pitcher of water. Follow him*- This water was carried upstairs into the upper room, and became, as it were, the wine of the new covenant. Carrying water was woman's work, and the Lord surely arranged this special sign in order to show how at His table, there was gender equality. He was so far ahead of His time. The vague "such a man" is perhaps to conceal the identity of the householder, given that the Gospels were distributed at a time of persecution. Or perhaps it was in order to avoid the identifying of the house and turning it into some kind of shrine, or special honour being given to the householder.

14:14 *And wherever he enters, say to the master of the house: The teacher asks, where is the guest room in which I can eat the Passover with my disciples?*- The "guest room" is the same concept as in Jn. 14:2, where there in that very guest room which they had "prepared", the Lord says that He is now going to the cross to prepare *them* a room, an eternal place in the Father's house. He wished them to perceive a mutuality between them and Himself; what they had done, He was now going to do

on a far greater scale. And to this day, we sense this mutuality between us and our Lord.

14:15 *And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare it for us*- The room was "ready" and yet there they were to "prepare"; "prepare" translates the same Greek word as "ready". All was prepared; the Lord was the Passover lamb and had prepared Himself for an untimely death, just as they were to keep Passover in advance of the 14th Nissan. They were to show willingness to do their part, but they could not fully do it. It has been done for them already. And we get this impression in all our attempts at labour for the Lord.

14:16 *And the disciples went into the city and found as he had said to them. And they made ready the Passover*- As noted on :15, it was already "made ready", so they just did the cosmetic arrangements. We likewise can add nothing really to the Lord's sacrifice.

14:17 *And when it was evening he came with the twelve*- There is no actual mention of the slaying of the paschal lamb, which should have been done that evening. It had already been strangely provided for them.

14:18 *And as they sat and were eating, Jesus said: Truly I say to you, one of you shall betray me- even he that eats with me*- The Lord had repeatedly predicted that He would be 'betrayed' or 'handed over'. But He had not defined who would do it, indeed the form in which He had spoken of being 'handed over' was vague and didn't necessarily require that one individual would do it. We must remember that *paradidomi* means literally 'to hand over' and doesn't carry the sense of personal betrayal which the English word 'betray' is loaded with. They were there shocked when He stated that "one of *you*" would do this.

14:19 *They began*- The idea is that they all burst out with the same question at the same time. And yet Mk. 14:19 records that they asked this "One by one". The scene is imaginable- after initially all bursting out with the same question, they try to ask Him the same question personally in order to get an answer. Which is why Judas asks the question somewhat later. Again it is commendable that their very first reaction was to wonder whether they personally could be the betrayer- rather than 'Lord, is it *him*?'. But after realizing that it was not them personally, naturally they began to look at one another, wondering whom He was speaking of (Jn. 13:22). Although "doubting of whom He spoke" (Jn. 13:22) really means they were at a loss to know. Clearly they had absolutely no suspicion that it was Judas. And when Judas is told "What you are doing, do quickly" and Judas exits (Jn. 13:27-29), they still assume that he must have been sent out to minister to the poor [suggesting there were beggars around the feast, again hinting that the last supper was not held behind closed doors]. This again speaks to us who replicate the last supper week by week. Some will indeed betray their Lord, but we have absolutely no idea who they are.

To be sorrowful- It is commendable that their dominant emotion was of sorrow rather than anger. We perhaps would have expected anger more than sorrow. But their sorrow is a reflection of the degree of their love for the Lord, and their sorrow for the person who would face the awful consequences of doing so.

And to say to him one by one: Is it I?- Some texts read: "And another said, Is it I?". It is easy to assume that this "another" was Judas. But it has been suggested that in spoken Aramaic, "and another said..." would be a device for saying 'And I, I said...'. If Mark's Gospel is a verbatim account of Peter's preaching of the Gospel, this would be so appropriate. Peter would be saying: 'All the disciples couldn't imagine it was them who would betray Jesus; and I, yes I also asked if it was me who

would betray Him. I was so sure I wouldn't'. The record in Mark 14 then goes on to describe how Peter *did* effectively betray / deny the Lord.

The negative implies the answer 'No, you are not the one'. It was more than a question- it was a declaration of innocence. This is the basis for self-examination at the Lord's table; we should be able to do it and conclude that we are not the Lord's betrayer. Some who sit at that table will betray Him, and we are to realize the very real possibility of our own ultimate failure, the eternity of the future we may miss. Perhaps "every one of them" excludes Judas, because he apparently asked the question later, and replaces 'Lord' with "Master"[Gk. 'rabbi'] when he asks: "Master ['rabbi'], is it I?" (Mt. 26:25). His usage of 'rabbi' to address the Lord may reflect how influenced he was by Judaism, and how he failed to appreciate the utter Lordship of Jesus. Judas maybe persuaded himself that this Jesus was just another itinerant rabbi, who Judaism would be better off without. Note that "Is it I?" is *eimi ego*, literally 'Am I?'. This is one of many examples of where *ego eimi* means simply 'I am', and [contrary to Trinitarian claims] the words do not mean that the speaker of them is claiming to be God.

14:20 *And he said to them: It is one of the twelve. He that dipped in the dish at the same time with me*- The past tense is important, for if the Lord was predicting a future event, then all the disciples would be looking carefully at the dish. "Dipped", *em-bapto*, carries the suggestion that there was liquid or water within the dish. Lamb is greasy, and there would have been dishes of water on the table in which the diners dipped their hands. The Lord had done that at the same time as Judas, and must have pressed His fingers against those of Judas. But none of the others had noticed. Jn. 13:26 says that "It is he to whom I gave the morsel of bread after I dipped it"- perhaps meaning that the Lord had put a crumb of bread into Judas' fingers whilst their hands touched in the bowl. Any other reading of the incident faces the obvious difficulty that if indeed the Lord publically pointed Judas out as the betrayer, there would have been no confusion as to why he went out into the darkness. And we would expect to read of an outcry amongst the 11 against Judas; but the record instead stresses that they totally didn't suspect Judas until he was out of the room. Mk. 14:20 adds that the Lord said that the man was "One of the twelve" who had dipped his hand with the Lord in the dish. This suggests there were others apart from the twelve eating at the table and dipping their hands in the dish. It was not therefore a closed communion. There would have been no need for such a "large" room (Lk. 22:12) if only the twelve were present.

He lamented that His betrayer was one who had dipped in the dish with Him at the last supper. There was no way that this was meant to be an indication to the disciples that Judas was the betrayer- for they all ate the supper and dipped in the same dish. Hence His point was surely to foreground the awful fact that *it was a brother who had broken bread with Him* who would now betray Him. Ps. 41:9 laments that it was one who "ate of my bread" who betrayed Him. This is why the challenge "Lord, is it I?" echoes down to every communion service.

14:21 *For the Son of Man goes*- The Lord's 'going' was His going to the cross. The Lord used the same word in Mt. 13:44 in describing Himself as the man who 'goes' *with joy* and sells all that He has in order to buy / redeem [s.w.] the field (representing the world) in order to gain for Himself the treasure (the redeemed). His 'going' to the cross was therefore done with some form of "joy". Even when the only visible representative of the treasure were that band of mixed up men and a few doubtful women. He uses the word again in telling Peter to 'go' behind Him and carry

His cross (Mt. 16:23). Yet the Lord looked beyond the cross; He saw Himself as 'going' to the Father (Jn. 7:33; 8:14,21,22 s.w.), in the same way as we do not only 'go' to our death, but ultimately even death itself is part of an onward journey ultimately towards God and His Kingdom. The Lord's attitude to His death was that He *knew* that He was now 'going to the Father' (Jn. 13:3; 14:28; 16:5,10,16,17 s.w.). This unique perspective upon death and suffering is only logical for those who have a clear conception of future resurrection and personal fellowship with the Father in His future Kingdom.

Even as it is written of him- Jn. 13:18 is specific: "But the scripture must be fulfilled: He that eats my bread lifted up his heel against me". The reference to the heel naturally suggests the Gospel promise of Gen. 3:15. But it seems the wrong way around- it is the seed of the woman who lifts up a bruised heel with which to crush the seed of the serpent. There is no lack of evidence that on the cross, the Lord identified totally with sinners, to the point that He felt forsaken just as sinners are forsaken. Or perhaps Judas justified his actions by deciding that Jesus was a false Messiah, the seed of the serpent, and the righteous thing to do was to crush the serpent with his heel.

But woe to that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed!- The Lord typically pronounced 'Woe' upon the Jewish world and their religious leaders. He classes Judas along with them, because his actions had been inspired by them. The devil, in this context referring to the Jewish opposition to Jesus, had put the idea of betrayal into the heart of Judas (Jn. 13:2). "Woe" translates *ouai*, an intensified form of *ou*, "no". Perhaps in His word choice the Lord was still desperately saying to Judas 'No! No! Don't do it!'. He knew that He had to be betrayed, but His appeals for Judas to repent were therefore rooted in an understanding that the Bible prophecies would come true in some other way than through Judas. For otherwise, Judas would have had no real possibility of repentance, and no real choice but than to do what he did.

It would be better for that man if he had not been born- "Better" shows how the Lord is sympathetically looking at things from the perspective of Judas. For in Jn. 14 He reasons that His departure is good for all concerned. The Lord foresaw Judas' agony at the last day. But the Greek can bear a retranslation: 'It would be virtuous for that man if he did not conceive / gender'. In that case, there would be yet another appeal for Judas to stop dead in his heart the conception of sin. The Lord elsewhere uses words with two [or more] meanings in order to deliver a specific message to an individual, within a statement of general truth which appeared intended for others. The messages He sent back to the imprisoned John the Baptist are a clear example. The Lord's last ditch attempts to save Judas, rather than allow himself to be so hurt by him that He just ignored him, are a powerful encouragement to us in dealing with those who harm us and willfully do evil.

14:22 *And as they were eating*- Eating the Passover lamb. The bread and wine were accessories, side dishes, and the Lord takes these things and makes them so significant. He doesn't, e.g., take some lamb and divide it between the guests with the message that "This represents My body". Even though the lamb was the more obvious symbol of Himself than the bread was. He wanted the last supper to be repeated by poor and ordinary people, who had bread but not lamb each week; He used common, readily available bread because that spoke more of His humanity, His ordinariness. He used what was to hand, just as we can for the breaking of bread.

Note that Judas was still present at this point. Jn. 13:18 makes the point concerning him that "He that eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me". If

Judas broke bread with the Lord, this surely indicates that there is nothing intrinsically sinful in breaking bread with sinners. The quotation from Psalm 41 is interesting in the LXX: "the man of my peace, on whom I set my hope". There was special potential in Judas, and the Lord on one hand had hopes for him. It has been argued that the giving of the "sop" to him was the sign of special love and fellowship. Jn. 13:20 goes on to say: "He that receiveth whomsoever I shall send, receiveth me". The 'receiving' in this context is receiving at the Lord's table. To reject others from His table is to reject the Lord.

He took bread- Taking bread, blessing and breaking it and giving to the disciples was exactly what the Lord did at the feeding of the 5000 and 4000 (Mt. 14:19; 15:36), and we are thereby justified in seeing what He did then as having a religious dimension, practicing thereby an extremely open table. To 'take bread' can mean [although not always] to actually eat bread. Consider: "The disciples had forgotten to take bread,*neither* did they have with them more than one loaf" (Mk. 8:14)- the force of "neither..." is that they had not eaten bread, rather than that they had forgotten to bring any with them. Philip complained that there would not be enough bread for each of the crowd to 'take' even a little, i.e. to eat just a little (Jn. 6:7). So it could be that the Lord took and ate bread, blessed it, and then asked the disciples to eat it. This sequence of events would then make the eating of bread a more conscious doing of what Jesus had done. He took the bread, and then He asks them to take the bread ("Take, eat"). He is inviting them to mimic Him.

And when he had blessed it- It was usual to bless a meal, especially the Passover lamb, but here the Lord offers a special prayer for the accessory to the meal, the side dish of bread. He wanted to highlight the significance of the most ordinary thing on the table and show that it represented Him.

He broke it and gave it to them, and said: Take, eat- The use of *didomi* ["gave"] is set in the context of all the talk about how the Lord would be *para-didomi*, betrayed / handed / given over to the Jews. The idea is that what happened was ultimately the Lord's choice. He gave Himself, to God and to His people, rather than being given over to death against His will. Lk. 22:29 says that the Lord then used the word *didomi* again: "This is My body, which is given for you". The giving of the bread to them was symbolic of how He would give His body to crucifixion, and how the 'giving over' of Jesus by Judas was not something outside of the Lord's control. It was not a misfortune which changed plans, rather was it precisely in line with the Lord's own giving of His body.

This is my body- He said "This is My body which is given for you" (Lk. 22:29), and also "This is My body which is broken for you" (1 Cor. 11:24). He surely said both, repeating the words as the disciples ate the bread. He chose bread and not lamb to represent His body because He wished to emphasize His ordinariness and thereby His presence in the human, daily things of life. To give ones' body is a very intimate statement, almost to the point of being sexual. This is the sober intensity and extent to which the Lord gave Himself for us.

When Jesus said "this is My body" we are to understand that 'this *represents*, this is [a symbol of] my body'. Jesus was clearly referring to what was usually said at the Passover: "This is the bread of affliction which our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt". It wasn't of course literally the same bread. "This is" clearly means 'this represents' in Zech. 5:3,8; Mt. 13:19-23,38; 1 Cor. 11:25; 12:27. In some Bible versions, when we read the word 'means', it is simply a translation of the verb 'to be' (Mt. 9:13; 12:7; Lk. 15:26; Acts 2:12). 'This is' should be read as 'this means / this

represents'. The deftness of the way He broke that bread apart and held the cup comes out here in Mt. 26:26. He knew what that breaking of bread was going to mean.

14:23 *And he took a cup*- This was by no means easy for Him, because in Gethsemane He struggled so deeply in order to take it. Surely Mark was aware of this and wishes us to remember it every time we break bread. He *did* take the cup- the cup we go on to read about, that was so difficult for Him to accept. Luke's record records the taking of the cup twice. This could be a reference to multiple cups of wine drunk at the Passover; or it could be that Luke simply records the incident twice. Or perhaps the Lord was simply drinking from the common table wine, and more than once drew out the symbology.

And when he had given thanks- Here *eucharisteo* is used, but *eulogeo* for the 'blessing' of the bread. The difference may be in that the Lord took the bread, an accessory to the meal, and turned that which was so ordinary into something of spiritual symbolism; and His blessing of the bread was necessary for this.
But *eucharisteo* includes the idea of grace, *charis*, and suggests more thankfulness for grace- a thought appropriate to the meaning of the Lord's blood shed for us by grace. And naturally we wonder whether the wine that was taken was one of the Passover cups, or simply some of the table wine, an accessory to the meal just as the bread was. Whilst there was a taking of four cups of wine at the Passover, this may not be the only explanation for Luke recording the taking of two of them. It could simply be that as they were eating the Passover lamb, they ate bread and drunk weak wine as part of the accompaniments which went with every Palestinian meal. And the Lord twice passed comment on the wine, that it represented His blood. This would be similar to the manner in which He chose the bread, the *artos*, the ordinary word for bread rather than one referring specifically to unleavened bread, as the symbol for His body- rather than the meat of the Passover lamb. He could have made use of the blood of the Passover lamb as a symbol in some way- e.g. He could have asked a servant to bring the blood of the lamb and asked the disciples to all dip their fingers in it. But instead He uses wine as a symbol of His blood. My hunch is that the wine was the ordinary table wine accompanying the meal, just as the bread was, and was not the ritually significant Passover cup. In any case, the tradition of drinking cups of wine at Passover was non-Biblical, and somehow out of keeping with the original spirit of Passover, which was to remember the haste with which the first Passover was eaten. 1 Cor. 10:16 speaks of "the cup of blessing which *we* bless", with the emphasis on the "we". We are to do what the Lord did that night- not be mere audience figures, but actually do what He did.

He gave it to them and they all drank from it- The Lord held the memorial meeting as a keeping of a Passover, and yet He changed some elements of it. Joachim Jeremias cites evidence that "By the time of Jesus, individual cups were used at the Passover meal", and yet Mk. 14:23 implies that He used only one cup, which was passed around amongst those at the last supper: "He took the cup [RV "a cup"]… he gave it to them: and they all drank of *it* [singular]". They didn't take up their own cups and drink- the Lord gave them His cup, just as He passes on to all in Him a participation in His "cup" of suffering and final joy. Reflect how deftly and determinedly the Lord must have "received the cup" (Lk. 22:17 RV), knowing what it represented; imagine His body language. Paul's references to "*the* cup" imply the same. This change was surely to indicate the unity that His death, His blood, His life, was to inspire amongst those who share in it. This, in passing, is behind my undoubted preference for not using individual cups at the memorial meeting. It would

seem to be a returning to the Jewish legalistic tradition, however unintentionally. I have elsewhere commented upon the clear link between the death of Jesus and our unity. The memorial meeting is the supreme celebration of that unity between us. To deny a brother or sister participation in it is something serious indeed. Tragically, and it is a tragedy, we have tended to use the memorial meeting as a weapon for exclusion rather than as a celebration of our unity. Yet this was the intention, without doubt. Comparing Lk. 22:20 and Mk. 14:24 we find the Lord saying that the cup of wine was "for you poured out, poured out for many"- as if He wanted them to be aware at the memorial meeting that it was not only they who had been redeemed in Him. Likewise the Passover was essentially a remembering of the deliverance of a community, through which the individual worshipper found his or her personal salvation. This is why it is just not good enough to insist on breaking bread alone, or with no thought to the fact that all of us were redeemed together, as one man, as one nation, in Him. Remember that the Hebrew word for covenant, *berith*, is "derived from a verb meaning 'to eat'". That covenant was made with a community, the Israel of God; by eating the covenant meal we recall that collective covenant, that salvation of a community of which we are part- and it is appropriate therefore that it becomes a symbol of our unity within that community. The Old Testament idea of covenant is associated with words like *hesed* (kindness, love, devotion, grace), *emeth* (truth, integrity), *emunah* (faithfulness, allegiance). These are the characteristics associated with being in covenant relationship; and we are to show them to all others who are in covenant relationship, not just some of them.

14:24 *And he said to them: This is my blood*- Given Jewish obsession with blood and ritual uncleanness arising from contact with it, such language was surely purposefully challenging and radical, just as He had spoken of eating His flesh and drinking His blood in Jn. 6:53. This made many turn away when He said it, but the Lord realized that His followers had to make a total break with Judaism. The drift of some Christian believes back towards the mentality of Judaism is totally missing the Lord's point- He was speaking in such challenging terms to make His followers realize that there was no middle path of compromise between Him and Judaism. Although He never commanded them to leave the synagogue system, and assumed they would remain in it until they were thrown out of it, all the same the Lord stated His principles in such a way that it would've been effectively impossible for His followers to remain within that system.

Of the new covenant, which is poured out for many- The promises to Abraham were effectively the new covenant, even though they were given before the old covenant [the law of Moses] was given. The Lord's death confirmed those promises made to the Jewish fathers (Rom. 15:8). But God's word is true as it stands and in that sense needs no confirmation, no guarantee of truthfulness. But in an effort to persuade us of the simple truth and reality of the promises of eternity in the Kingdom which were made to Abraham, God confirmed it through the death of His Son. This was foreseen in the horror of great darkness which Abraham experienced in Genesis 15. Abraham did nothing to confirm his side of the covenant; it was God who passed between the pieces of the slain animal, during a time of Divine darkness as there was on the cross, in order to demonstrate to Abraham and to us all how serious He was about keeping His promise. Through the death of Christ, God commended His love to us (Rom. 5:8), He confirmed the covenant; not that He needed to do so, nor that His love needs any more commendation to us. But He did, in order to seek to persuade us of the truth of the promises which comprise the Gospel (Gal. 3:8). In this sense "the

promise was made sure [s.w. 'confirmed'] to all the seed" (Rom. 4:16); the extra element of making sure or confirming the promise was in the death of God's Son. Our hope is therefore "sure *and* confirmed [AV "steadfast"]" (Heb. 6:19). Heb. 9:17 puts it another way in saying that a will or legacy is only confirmed [AV "of force"] by the death of the one who promised the inheritance, and the death of Christ was God's way of confirming the truth of what He had promised. This same word meaning 'confirmed' is used by Peter in writing of how we have "the word of prophecy made sure / confirmed" (2 Pet. 1:19). The prophesied word is the word of the Gospel, the promise of the Kingdom which began in Genesis, and this has been confirmed to us, made even more sure, by the Lord's death. Peter isn't referring to prophecy in the sense of future events being predicted in the arena of world geopolitics; the prophesied word is the word of our salvation, of the Gospel- which is how Peter elsewhere uses the idea of "the word". God can save who He wishes, as, how and when He wishes. He was not somehow duty bound, left with no option, forced by an unpleasant logical bind to suffer the death of His Son. He gave His Son, according to His own plan from the beginning. But He did it that way in order to persuade us of His love and simple desire to give us the Kingdom He has promised from the beginning of His revelation to men. The Lord's blood is "of the new covenant" not in that it *is itself* the new covenant, but rather in that it is the blood associated with the confirmation of that covenant as true. And so it is understandable that the Lord should wish us to understand His blood as the blood of the new covenant, the supreme sign that it is for real, and desire us to regularly take that cup which reminds us of these things. Heb. 6:17,18 carries the same idea- that in order to demonstrate the utter certainty of the things promised to Abraham's seed, God confirmed it by an oath so that we might a strong consolation and persuasion of the certainty of the promise. The death of God's Son was not therefore unavoidable for Him; He could save us as He wishes. But He chose this most painful way in the ultimate attempt to persuade men of the reality of His Son. With this understanding we can better appreciate the tales of the old missionaries who went to pagan and illiterate tribes and reported a strange response to their message once they explained the idea of the Son of God dying on a cross to show us God's love. It must be persuasive to us too, week by week as we reflect on the blood of the covenant.

"Covenant" literally means that which is to be disposed of or distributed, and was used about the distribution of property upon decease. The Lord's parables about the Master who distributes all His wealth and possessions to His servants were surely looking forward to His death, at which He gave us all He had- and that was and is visually symbolized in the breaking of bread, the division even of His body and life blood amongst us, for us to trade with.

Moses bound the people into covenant relationship with the words: “Behold the blood of the covenant" (Ex. 24:8). These very words were used by the Lord in introducing the emblems of the breaking of bread (Mk. 14:24). This is how important it is. We are showing that we are the covenant, special Israel of God amidst a Gentile world. Indeed, “the blood of the covenant" in later Judaism came to refer to the blood of circumcision (cp. Gen. 17:10) and it could be that the Lord was seeking to draw a comparison between circumcision and the breaking of bread. For this is how His words would have sounded in the ears of His initial hearers. This is how vital and defining it is to partake of it.

14:25 *Truly I say to you: I shall no more drink of the fruit of the vine-* An allusion to how the priest on duty was not to drink wine during his service. The Lord foresaw His

work from then on, beginning with the cross, as an active doing of priestly work for us. This would imply that the essence of His work on the cross is the essence of His work for us today; there is a continuity between Him there and His work for us now, with elements of the same pain and passionate focus upon us and the achievement of our salvation. He is not waiting passively in Heaven for the time to return; He is actively busy for us. There is also the implication in His words that His future 'drinking' will be literal- He was holding literal wine in His hand, and He said He would not again drink it until the Kingdom. This suggests that at very least, He invites us to understand His future Messianic banquet as being in some ways a literal feast.

Until the day when I drink it anew- This is not 'new' in the sense of freshly made (a different word is used for that), but new in terms of quality, not time. It speaks of a new quality, a freshness, rather than something 'new' in chronological terms. The new wine represented the blood of the new covenant which was shed on the cross. It could be argued that the drinking of this new wine became possible not simply at the last day, but in this life too, in the experience of the church after the Lord's shedding of that blood on the cross.

In the kingdom of God- The reference is primarily to the literal Kingdom to be established on earth at His return (Lk. 22:29,30 goes on to speak of the disciples eating and drinking in the Kingdom as they sit with Christ on His throne judging Israel), but there is a sense in which His word is fulfilled in the breaking of bread service, where He drinks wine with us as the invisible guest. For His parables of the Kingdom all speak of the experience of God's reign / Kingship as a present experience in the lives of His people. Lk. 22:16 adds with reference to the bread: "Until it be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God". The fulfiment of Passover deliverance is finally in the last day, and yet the fulfilment of Passover is also to be seen in the breaking of bread service. Note in passing that the Lord's prediliction for the term 'Kingdom of God' or 'Father's Kingdom' was perhaps to counterbalance the Jewish emphasis upon the Kingdom as being that of *our* father *David* (Mk. 11:10). The Kingdom was God's, "*Yours* is the Kingdom", rather than simply and solely the re-establishment of Israel's Kingdom.

The Lord Jesus clearly saw a link between the breaking of bread and His return. He not only told His people to perform it “until he come", but He said both before and after the last supper [putting together the Gospel records] that He would not keep this feast until He returned. Our breakings of bread are therefore a foretaste of the final sitting down with Him in His Kingdom- for He had elsewhere used the idea of feasting with Him as a symbol of our fellowship with Him at His return. The Rabbis had repeatedly taught that Messiah would come at Passover; the first century Rabbi Joshua said that “In that night they were redeemed and in that night they will be redeemed by Messiah". Much evidence could be given of this. For this reason Josephus records how the Jewish revolts against Rome repeatedly occurred around Passover time. Yet all the Jewish feasts have some reference to the breaking of bread. The Hebrew writer picks up the image of the High Priest appearing to pronounce the blessing on the people as a type of the Lord’s second coming from Heaven bearing our blessing. And yet they also all prefigure judgment in some way. Thus the Mishnah taught: “At four times in the year is the world judged". Because the breaking of bread involves a serious concentration upon the cross, and the cross was in a sense the judgment of this world, it is apparent that the breaking of bread is in some ways a preview of the judgment seat.

The Lord's promise that He would not break bread again until He did it with us in the Kingdom (Mk. 14:25) seems to require a literal fulfillment. In a non-literal sense

He breaks bread with His people even now. Therefore His statement that He would not do it again until the Kingdom seems to refer to His literal taking of bread and wine. Likewise His promise that He would literally gird Himself and come forth and serve us at a future banquet has to be linked in with this (Lk. 12:37). If all the faithful are to be gathered together to a meal, and literally eat bread and drink wine with the Lord, this suggests all sorts of logistical and practical 'problems'. It is easier to understand that space and time will have different meanings at the judgment and after.

14:26- see on Jn. 17:1.

And when they had sung a hymn- Probably the Passover hallel of Ps. 115-118. It's worth reading those Psalms imagining them on the lips of the Lord at the last supper; they are pregnant with relevance for His forthcoming death, especially the reference to "I will take the cup of salvation". Heb. 2:12 surely has the scene in mind, quoting "In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto You" as being proof of the Lord's absolute humanity. The fact He sung praise to *God* surely reveals a human and not Divine Christ. But doing so amongst His brethren, "the church", as one of them, is an essay in His unity with us, both in nature and experience.

They went out to the Mount of Olives- The Passover ritual required that nobody should go out of the house until morning (Ex. 12:22). This is clearly teaching that the Passover deliverance had already begun, even before the Lord's blood had been shed, and would connect with the usage of present tenses concerning the Passover and shedding of the Lord's blood (see on :2,28). This sets the scene for the Lord's comment in :32 that He would go before them, and they should follow Him. He was as Moses and as the Angel which went before Israel on Passover night. The allusion to Ex. 12:22 shows that the old legislation had passed away, and in any case the type of Passover being kept by the Lord was not strictly the Mosaic one- for it's likely He was celebrating it a day earlier than stipulated. But the point perhaps was that the true Israel of God were now 'going out' from Egypt; so certain was the Lord that He would achieve deliverance that He could speak of that deliverance as already being achieved. He didn't, therefore, see His work on the cross as something which He might or might not successfully achieve- as we should, He went ahead in the certainty of ultimate success and victory.

14:27 *And Jesus said to them: All of you shall fall away. For it is written: I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered abroad*- See on Mk. 4:17. They would spiritually stumble and fall because Zech. 13:7 predicted this would happen. But the Lord goes on to urge them to watch and pray so that they do not succumb to temptation. He saw Biblical prophecy as being open ended in fulfilment- the prophecy of spiritual failure didn't have to come true. They could resist, sin and failure is never inevitable. He spoke to them in the upper room specifically so that they would *not* be offended (Jn. 16:1 s.w.); the prophecy didn't have to come true in the disciples, and the Lord did His utmost to provide the potential for it not coming true for them.

His death was to be as that of Moses, which left the Israel of God as sheep without a shepher (Num. 27:17). And yet the Lord's death would gather together the scattered [s.w.] people of God (Jn. 11:52), His death was as a shepherd giving His life for the sheep (Jn. 10:11). His death and resurrection was to be the means of reviving the lost faith of the disciples- when they meditated upon it. The people of Israel at the Lord's time had had no true shepherds and were therefore as scattered sheep (Mt. 9:36). The Lord's death would therefore temporarily leave the disciples just like the rest of Israel- they would return to the mentality of Judaism, the 'satan' of the Jewish system and its thinking would tempt them and they would give in. The wolf of

Judaism would scatter the sheep (Jn. 10:12). The disciples were therefore as sheep who scattered because of the thinking of the Jewish world around them, who saw death on a cross as the final defeat for a man; and yet were to be gathered by that very death. Peter was one of those disciples, even though he insisted that *he* would not be scattered even if others were. He surely had this in mind in appealing to other believers who were falling under the influence of Judaism: "You were as sheep going astray, but are now returned [s.w. 'converted'- just as he was 'converted' to strengthen his brethren] unto the Shepherd... of your souls" (1 Pet. 2:25). Peter was therefore appealing to others to follow his own pattern- of revival and conversion after spiritual failure. This is the basis for all powerful pastoral appeal.

14:28 *However, after I am raised up*- There is no equivalent of "after" in the Greek text. This is an insertion by translators in order to try to give sense to the three brief Greek words which simply say "And I rise again". The idea is that 'By My rising again, I will go before you...'. The Lord's plan was that His resurrection would re-ignite faith in His disciples, and He would go before them as a shepherd leads His sheep, into Galilee.

I will go ahead of you into Galilee- This is the language of the shepherd going before the sheep (Jn. 10:4), in obedience to His voice. The Lord is saying that although they will stumble and lose faith, His resurrection will provide them with a credible word from Him which they would obey by following Him into Galilee. This is why the resurrected Lord's first instruction to the women was to "Go tell My brothers that they go into Galilee; there shall they see Me" (28:10). But it actually didn't work out like that. His meeting with them in Galilee was in fact the third time He revealed Himself to them (Jn. 21:14). He appeared to them twice before that. And the picture we have of the disciples fishing in Galilee in Jn. 21 is of them still relatively faithless, depressed and having returned to their fishing; they are hardly pictured as eagerly awaiting the Lord's promised appearance in Galilee. So it seems to me that the Lord changed His intended program with them. Their faith was so weak that He appeared to them in Jerusalem twice, whereas He had originally planned for the women to tell them His word- to go before Him into Galilee, and there He would reveal Himself to them. But in His love for them, His own desire to see them, His awareness of their weakness in faith... He appeared to them twice *before* Galilee. And even then, we sense from the fishing incident of John 21 that they were still floundering in their faith, and may well have returned to Galilee in order to return to their fishing business, rather than in obedience to His word. Why did He so wish to meet them in Galilee, rather than in Jerusalem? Their journey to Galilee would've been a test of obedience for them, for sure. But surely the Lord reflected by this choice the paramount importance He placed upon the conversion of families. He wanted to appear to them there, surely, because that was where most of them were from, and where their families were. He wanted them too to be persuaded once and for all time of the reality of His resurrection.

This promise sounds very much like a conscious allusion to the Angel going ahead of Israel; as if Christ felt that He (through the Comforter Angel?) had taken over the role of the Angel that represented Him previously?

14:29 *But Peter said to him: Although all shall fall away, I will not!*- Peter three separate times states that he will not fail the Lord (also in Lk. 22:33; Jn. 13:37). Literally, 'not at any time', i.e. 'not even once'. Hence the Lord's comment that Peter

would deny Him not once but three times. Yet he denied the Lord three times, and it was on the Lord's third appearance to him (Jn. 21:14) that the Lord undid the three denials by His three questions concerning whether Peter really loves Him, and three times (again by a charcoal fire) re-enstates Peter in the work of strengthening his brethren. These tripilisms and repetitions serve to make the record memorable, and also reflect how somehow the Lord worked through Peter's failures with some overarching plan; there was a higher hand at work through all of the failure, reflected in these tripilisms which could only have been effected by a Divine, higher hand. The Lord's question to Peter "Do you love Me more than these?" surely has reference to the other disciples, whom Peter had thought himself spiritually superior to. He was sure that even if they stumbled, he would not. And the Lord paid special attention to undoing this attitude in Peter and specifically bringing him to realize that he was no better than his brethren. Any sense of spiritual superiority over others is so obnoxious to the Lord. And He will work in our lives to remove it from us, as He did with Job, Jonah and many others. Peter continually alludes to his denials throughout his appeal for Israel's repentance in Acts 2 and throughout his pastoral letters; it is our own failures and receipt of such utter grace which serve as the basis for our credible and persuasive appeal to others to repent. He spoke in 1 Pet. 2:8 of how the Lord Jesus is a stone of stumbling ['offence', s.w.] to those who do not believe- and yet he said this fully aware that he had been one of those who stumbled over Jesus. Mt. 21:44 offers us to the choice- to stumble upon the stone and be broken, or for the stone to fall upon us and grind us to powder, in the figure of judgment and condemnation used in Daniel 2. We either stumble in failure upon Christ and rise up as Peter did, broken men and women, to do our best in serving Him- or that stone shall crush us in condemnation. That is the choice before us, and Peter is the parade example in this to all.

14:30 *And Jesus said to him: Truly I say to you, yes to you today, that this night*- Much of the Lord's knowledge and foreknowledge of events ahead of time can be explained in terms of His incredible sensitivity to others, His understanding of human psychology and behaviour patterns. But there are times when it seems He was given direct foreknowledge from the Father. And this seems one of them- to predict the exact number of denials that would be made that night, and to predict they would happen before the cock crew. This leads to the possibility that whenever He prefaces His words with "Truly I say unto you...", He is stating something received by direct revelation. Another example is when He uses this rubric to introduce His prediction of how Peter would die (Jn. 21:18). This would be His equivalent of how the Old Testament prophets introduced their directly inspired words with the rubric "Thus says the Lord". "Truly" (AV "verily") is literally 'amen', as if the Lord Jesus is saying that He is aware of the words of His Father and in uttering them from His lips, is giving His personal agreement, stamp or 'Amen!' to them.

Before the cock crows twice- There is no article in the Greek. 'Before cock crow' is the idea, before the earliest sign of morning when the first cock crew, that very night, before that night even began to come to a close. Crowing "twice" may mean that the cock would not need to crow twice, before Peter thrice denied Him.

You shall deny me three times- There is more detail about the denials in Mark because Mark appears to be writing for Peter; Peter's presentation of the Gospel emphasized his own failures. The Roman persecution of Christians required the converts to three times deny the Lord Jesus. Perhaps such emphasis is given to Peter's triple denials in order to encourage those who failed that test that their relationship with the Lord was not finished; and in fact they were in good company.

It's been pointed out that chickens couldn't have been anywhere near the High Priest's house because the priests forbad anyone in Jerusalem from keeping chickens, lest they stray into the temple. The *Encyclopedia Judaica* points out that the priest who was the temple crier was called the *Gaver*, Hebrew for 'cock' or 'rooster'. This man opened the temple before dawn and called the priests and people to make the morning sacrifice. And he did this two or three times. Surely the Lord was referring to this when He spoke of the 'cock' crowing. Each time, Peter was being called to make the sacrifice with Jesus; but instead he denied knowledge of Jesus and the call to the cross which that knowledge entails. The context of the Lord's warnings to Peter about his forthcoming denial was that Peter had insisted he *would* die with Jesus, sharing in His sacrifice. And the Lord was foretelling that when that call came, Peter would deny the knowledge of Jesus.

14:31 *But Peter said emphatically: Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you*- Gk. 'If I must die' or 'If it be necessary that I die, I will'. And yet the Lord had taught that He was going to die on the cross, and that all who would truly follow Him should likewise die with Him. When the Lord stated this in Mt. 16, Peter had earnestly sought to dissuade the Lord from that course of action because He didn't want to die with Him. Peter had a problem accepting the inevitable reality of the cross and its demand that we likewise lose our lives for Him. He considered it the most extreme possibility, rather than an obviously necessary sacrifice which is part and parcel of being a true follower of Jesus. We likewise can consider that extreme self-sacrifice is something we might possibly be called to make. But in fact if we are truly signed up to carrying the Lord's cross, it is exactly such radical self-sacrifice which is indeed required of us. The Lord said that Peter was not yet able to die for Him, he would deny Him rather than follow Him, but one day he would be strong enough, and *then* he would follow Him to the end (Jn. 13:36,37). Peter thought he was strong enough then; for he followed (s.w.) Christ afar off, to the High Priest's house (Mt. 26:58). But in ineffable self-hatred he came to see that the Lord's prediction was right.

"I will not deny you" surely alludes to Mt. 16:24, where the Lord has urged Peter to accept that he must deny *himself* and take up the Lord's cross and die with Him. But instead, because Peter didn't want to do that, he would end up denying Jesus. This is the intensity of our choice- if we will not deny ourselves, then we shall deny Jesus. The Lord had clearly taught that whoever denied Him before men would be denied by Him at the last day (Mt. 10:33), and Paul repeats this (2 Tim. 2:12). Peter stood condemned by that denial, and yet we can be condemned in this life and change the verdict if we repent. It is this which releases such fervency into our lives if we go through the experience of condemnation but perceive that the verdict has been mercifully changed. Peter appealed to Israel to recognize that they had denied Jesus (Acts 3:13,14 "You denied Him in the presence of Pilate"); and he made that appeal a stone's throw and only a few weeks after his own denials of Jesus in the presence of all. And yet this was why his appeal was so credible, as was his later appeal to believers not to do the worst imaginable thing, namely to deny the Lord who had bought them- for that was exactly what, as everyone knew, Peter had himself done (2 Pet. 2:1). John speaks of denying Christ as the hallmark of the antichrist (1 Jn. 2:22 "He that denies Jesus... is the antichrist"), and he wrote this knowing full well that Peter was the rock upon whom the early church had been built. His point, therefore, is that even those who had done that, the antichrist, could still repent as Peter had done.

And they all said the same- Mt. "Likewise also", using two words are used when one

would suffice, such is the emphasis upon the fact that they all said the same. Peter was the one who went furthest in seeking to live out his claim, and yet he it is whose failure is the most emphasized. And that is how it is often is amongst God's people. But it is because we are asked to identify specifically with Peter.

14:32- see on Mk. 5:1.

And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples- The Lord often went to this garden (Jn. 18:2), but the record at this point emphasizes its name, meaning 'oil press', a common metaphor for judgment. There the Lord as it were passed through His judgment, and there the disciples had their judgment- and ran away into the darkness condemned. Even though through repentance they were later saved out of that condemnation.

Sit here while I pray- The Greek can equally mean 'stay here'. The separation between the Lord and His people, to go away and pray with His senior followers with Him, clearly was based upon Moses going up into the mountain to pray to God, taking Joshua with him, leaving Israel behind. And like Israel, the disciples failed miserably, and were met with the Lord's rebuke on His return from prayer. The Lord is clearly making the point that He now replaces Moses, and that the new Israel were comprised of those 11 mixed up men of weak faith and very limited understanding. The Greek text here has the Lord saying to the disciples: "Sit in this place [*kathisate autou*] until going away, I pray there", and then He takes along with him [*paralambanein*] Peter. These are the very words used in the Gen. 22 LXX account of Abraham taking Isaac to 'the cross'. Jesus is seeking to encourage Peter to see himself as Isaac, being taken to share in the cross. Now whether Peter discerned this or not, we don't know. But the Lord gave him the potential possibility to be inspired like this.

He was seeking to help them perceive the similarity with Moses going away to pray, hence His warnings for them *not* to give way to temptation were asking them to consciously make the effort to not be like the Israel whom Moses left behind when he went away to pray. Of course the Lord could have baldly drawn the similarities between Himself and Moses, but He acted in this way in order to provoke in them the association with Moses, and to realize that they were as Israel, tempted to fall away. And this is His style to the present day. Instead of flashing red lights and words dropping from Heaven, instead we find ourselves set up in situations which recall Biblical situations, and appeal to us to perceive ourselves within that history. That is why daily Bible reading and continual familiarity with the recorded histories of the Bible is so essential, it is all part of the Lord's way of working with us.

The whole structure of Mark's Gospel seems designed for memorization- the material is arranged in triplets, and the sections have chiastic structures [e.g. material arranged in the form ABA, ABCBA, ABCDCBA]. Even within the triplets, themes often occur in triplets- the three experiences in Gethsemane (Mk. 14:32-42), Peter's three denials (Mk. 14:66-72), three wrong answers about the identity of Jesus (Mk. 6:14-16; 8:28). The use of triplets and tripilisms is common in folk stories- to aid memorization. We shouldn't be unduly phased by the idea of the early Christians memorizing the Gospels. Even today in the Islamic world, students in religious schools are expected to memorize the entire Koran, which is roughly the same size as the entire New Testament. There are reports of this even being achieved by a seven year old.

14:33 *And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled*- As Moses took Joshua with him. AV: "He was amazed". The amazement was perhaps because He came to realize that His subconscious hopes for a

deliverance, akin to Isaac's at the last minute, were not going to come true. This element of surprise is reflected later in His desperate question "Why have You forsaken Me?". This crisis of understanding contrasts strongly with His calm assurance and assumption that He must now die and resurrect. And yet to be tempted just as we are, He had to go through the experience of things not working out as expected, of crisis and desperate desiring to understand. For these things are what are at the root of our hardest human experiences.

14:34 *And he said to them: My soul is exceeding sorrowful even to death*- This was the fulfilment of Is. 53:3, "a man of sorrows", an intensive plural, implying 'great sorrow'. The fact He 'began' to feel this suggests that the prophecy of Is. 53 is specifically about the Lord in His time of sufferings, rather than generally in His life. It was there, at the end, that there was no beauty that He should be desired. And yet Is. 53:4 defines those 'sorrows' as the sorrows of our sins. His sorrow was therefore in that He felt His identification with our sins, our sorrows. And He felt that identification very intensely as He prayed. Likewise the weight He felt, in that He began to feel heavy, refers to the weight of human sin which He felt Himself carrying.

The Lord's psychological struggle was so intense that it was almost killing Him. Yet Peter had said that he was ready to go with the Lord even unto death (Lk. 22:33). But he failed to perceive that the Lord's death involved huge psychological suffering- and Peter opted out of that by falling asleep. To physically die was not so much the issue as sharing the psychological trauma of carrying the cross.

The fullness of the Lord's humanity is of course supremely shown in His death and His quite natural fear of that death. Perhaps on no other point do human beings show they are humans than when it comes to their reaction to and reflection upon their own death. I would go further and suggested that the thought of suicide even entered the Lord's mind. It's hard to understand His thought about throwing Himself off the top of the temple in any other way. His almost throw away comment that "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (*heos thanatou*) is actually a quotation from the suicidal thoughts of Jonah (Jonah 4:9) and those of the Psalmist in Ps. 42:5,6. Now of course the Lord overcame those thoughts- but their very existence is a window into the depth and reality of His humanity.

Heb. 5:7,8 clearly refer to the Lord's prayer in Gethsemane. The Lord had a quite genuine "fear of death" (Heb. 5:8). This "fear of death" within the Lord Jesus provides a profound insight into His so genuine humanity. We fear death because our human life is our greatest and most personal possession... and it was just the same with the Lord Jesus. Note that when seeking here to exemplify Christ's humanity, the writer to the Hebrews chooses His fear of death in Gethsemane as the epitome of His humanity. Heb. 5:7 comments that Christ prayed "with strong crying and tears". These words are certainly to be connected with Rom. 8:26, which speaks of Christ making intercession for us now with "groanings which cannot be uttered". Rom. 8:26 says that his groaning is so intense that it cannot be audibly uttered; the physicality of sound would not do justice to the intensity of mental striving. The point is that the same agonizing depth of prayer which the Lord achieved for us is what he now goes through as he intercedes for us with the Father.

Oscar Cullmann translates Heb. 5:7: "He was heard in his fear (anxiety)". That very human anxiety about death is reflected in the way He urges Judas to get over and done the betrayal process "quickly" (Jn. 13:28); He was "straitened until it be accomplished" (Lk. 12:50). He prayed to God just as we would when gripped by the fear of impending death. And He was heard. No wonder He is able therefore and

thereby to comfort and save us, who lived all our lives in the same fear of death which He had (Heb. 2:15). This repetition of the 'fear of death' theme in Hebrews is surely significant- the Lord Jesus had the same fear of death as we do, and He prayed in desperation to God just as we do. And because He overcame, He is able to support us when *we* in our turn pray in *our* "time of need"- for He likewise had the very same "time of need" as we have, when He was in Gethsemane (Heb. 4:16). Death was "the last enemy" for the Lord Jesus just as it is for all humanity (1 Cor. 15:26). Reflection on these things not only emphasizes the humanity of the Lord Jesus, but also indicates He had no belief whatsoever in an 'immortal soul' consciously surviving death.

"Exceeding sorrowful" uses the same word used about the exceeding sorrow of the men of the world (Herod- Mk. 6:26; the rich young man, Lk. 18:23,24). Those who will be rich pierce themselves through with sorrows, they go through the crucifixion pains for the sake of this world (1 Tim. 6:10). So it's a cross either way, and it may as well be in identification with the Lord, leading unto eternal life, than unto eternal death. The same point is made in 2 Cor. 7:10, where the same word translated "sorrowful" is found- the sorrow of the world leads to death, but Godly sorrow leads to salvation. The disciples fell asleep, and yet by pure grace the record says that they slept for "sorrow" (Lk. 22:45), using a related but less intense word as used here for the Lord's *exceeding* sorrow; and the Lord attributes such "sorrow" to them repeatedly at this time (Jn. 16:6,20-22). But the point is that His sorrow was of an altogether more intense and higher order than theirs, and yet by grace they are counted as having some part in His sorrow. We speak and read of our sharing in the Lord's sufferings, and yet our sufferings are nothing compared to His; yet by grace they are counted as a sharing in those sufferings.

Stay here- This is *meno*, the word the Lord has just used multiple times in the upper room discourse, translated "abide". Now He leads them out of the upper room into the real world, and gives them the concrete outworking of abiding in Him- to enter into His struggles, to watch and pray with Him, to share His intensity with the Father. And they fell asleep.

And watch- The Greek means to literally keep awake, but is used about watching in prayer. The fact the disciples physically fell asleep, and three times, is a clear statement of their failure. And it is used by the disciples here in their own account and preaching of the Gospel, of which the Gospel records are transcripts, as if to emphasize their own failure, and on that basis appeal to others to likewise accept the Lord's forgiveness and salvation by grace. It is the same word used repeatedly by the Lord in appealing for watchfulness in the very last days before His coming (Mt. 24:42,43; Lk. 12:37 etc.), as if the disciples in Gethsemane were going through their judgment, their last days. Likewise the sufferings and experiences of the very last generation will give them the opportunity to uniquely identify with the Lord's crucifixion sufferings. Seeing that generation will never taste of death, this identification with His death will be necessary for them as for no other generation, and the tribulation will be designed to elicit that identification. We are therefore invited to enter into Gethsemane and not repeat the failures of the disciples- the same words are used by Paul in encouraging us all to 'pray and watch' (Col. 4:2). "Let us not sleep as others, but let us watch" (1 Thess. 5:6) could be asking us to not be as the disciples there, but rather to learn from their failure and watch. And yet the comfort of grace is that whether we watch [s.w.] or sleep, we shall be accepted by Him (1 Thess. 5:10), just as the disciples were saved by grace despite their failure. Likewise we are

asked to watch and keep our garment (Rev. 16:15), unlike the disciple present in Gethsemane who did not watch and fled naked having lost his garment (Mk. 14:52).

14:35 *And he went forward a little*- Lk. 22:41 “About a stone’s cast”, pointing us back to David’s conflict with Goliath as a type of the Lord’s final conflict with sin.

And fell on the ground, and prayed- Paul's description of himself on the Damascus road falling down and seeing a Heavenly vision, surrounded by men who did not understand, is framed in exactly the language of Gethsemane (Acts 22:7 = Mt. 26:39); as if right at his conversion, Paul was brought to realize the spirit of Gethsemane. His connection with the Gethsemane spirit continued. He describes himself as "sorrowful" (2 Cor. 6:10), just as Christ was then (Mt. 26:37). His description of how he prayed the same words three times without receiving an answer (2 Cor. 12:8) is clearly linked to Christ's experience in the garden (Mt. 26:44); and note that in that context he speaks of being “buffeted” by Satan’s servants, using the very word used of the Lord being “buffeted” straight after Gethsemane (2 Cor. 12:7 = Mt. 26:67).

To fall on the face is used in the Old Testament to describe men like Abraham and Moses falling on their face in the visible presence of God, e.g. before an Angel (Gen. 17:3; Num. 16:4; 22:31). Yet there was no visible manifestation of God’s presence at this time; so we are to assume that the Lord Jesus intensely perceived the Father’s presence even though there was no visible sign of it. It could be that the Angel from Heaven strengthening the Lord had already appeared, but this appears to come *after* the Lord had fallen on His face.

The Lord had foreseen how He must be like the grain of the wheat (note the articles in the Greek) which must fall to the ground and die, and then arise in a glorious harvest (Jn. 12:24). But soon after saying that, the Lord fell to the ground (same Greek words) in prayer and asked the Father if the cup might pass from Him (Mk. 14:35). It seems to me that He fell to the ground in full reference to His earlier words, and asked desperately if this might be accepted as the falling to the earth of the grain of the wheat, i.e. Himself, which was vital for the harvest of the world. Don’t under-estimate the amount of internal debate which the Lord would have had about these matters. The spirit of Christ in the prophets testified Messiah’s sufferings “unto Christ" (1 Pet. 1:11 RVmg.), but He still had to figure it all out. And this enabled an element of doubt, even though in the end He knew “all the things that were coming upon him" (Jn. 18:4). To doubt is not to sin. Another Messianic Psalm had foretold: “In the multitude of my doubts within me, thy comforts delight my soul" (Ps. 94:19 RVmg.). This aspect heightens the agony of His final crisis, when He unexpectedly felt forsaken.

That, if it were possible, the hour might pass away from him- See on Lk. 22:46. This may not simply mean 'If it's possible, may I not have to die'. The Lord could have meant: 'If *it*- some unrecorded possible alternative to the cross- is *really* possible, then let *this* cup pass'- as if to say 'If option A is possible, then let the cup of option B pass from me'. But He overrode this with a desire to be submissive to the Father's preferred will- which was for us to have a part in the greatest, most surpassing salvation, which required the death of the cross. “Such *great* salvation" (Heb. 2:3) might imply that a lesser salvation could have been achieved by Christ, but He achieved the greatest possible. "He is able also *to save them to the uttermost* that come unto God by him" (Heb. 7:25) may be saying the same thing. Indeed, the *excellence* of our salvation in Christ is a major NT theme. It was typified by the way Esther interceded for Israel; she could have simply asked for her own life to be spared, but she asked for that of all Israel. And further, she has the

courage (and we sense her reticence, how difficult it was for her) to ask the King yet another favour- that the Jews be allowed to slay their enemies for one more day, and also to hang Haman's sons (Es. 9:12). She was achieving the maximum possible redemption for Israel rather than the minimum. Paul again seems to comment on this theme when he speaks of how Christ became obedient, "*even* to the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8), as if perhaps some kind of salvation could have been achieved without the death *of the cross*. Perhaps there was no theological necessity for Christ to die *such* a painful death; if so, doubtless this was in His mind in His agony in the garden.

The Lord had taught more than once that "with God all things are possible" (Mt. 19:26; Mk. 9:23), and yet He inserts here a condition: "If it be possible". He recognized that God's plan was possible of fulfilment by any means, and yet He recognized that there was a condition to that. This issue is not really resoluble, at least not by any intellectual process. If, or rather when, we struggle with these issues, this balance between God's ultimate possibility and the fact there appear to be terms and conditions attached- then we are there with the Lord in Gethsemane. But we need to note that it was God who was being pushed to the limit here as well- for literally all things are indeed possible to Him, and He could have saved the world any way He wished. In His allowing of this chosen method we see the degree to which the cross was indeed His plan that He so wanted to see worked out.

Matthew records the Lord's prayer that the cup might pass from Him; here, that the hour might pass. Paul uses the same Greek term "from me" in describing how also three times he asked for the thorn in the flesh to "depart *from me*" (2 Cor. 12:8). He saw his prayers and desires as a sharing in the Lord's struggle in Gethsemane, just as we can too.

14:36 *And he said: Abba, Father, all things are possible for You; remove this cup from me*- "We cry Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6), as our Lord did then (Mk. 14:36). Both references speak of our crying Abba, Father. The Lord prayed to Abba, Father with strong crying. We are being invited to enter into His relationship with the Father, crying the same. We can, we really can, it is possible, to enter into something of our Lord's intensity then. Paul saw his beloved brother Epaphroditus as "heavy" in spirit (Phil. 2:26), using a word only used elsewhere about the Lord in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:37; Mk. 14:33). Luke and other early brethren seemed to have had the Gethsemane record in mind in their sufferings, as we can also do (Acts 21:14 = Mk. 14:36).

However, not as I will but what You will- Trinitarians need to note that the Lord's will was not totally the same as that of His Father.

14:37- see on Mk. 14:72.

*And he returned and found them sleeping, and said to Peter: Simon, why do you sleep?- "*Comes… and finds" are the very words used of the Lord's coming in judgment to 'find' the state of His people (Mt. 21:19; 24:46 "whom his Lord when He *comes* shall *find* so doing"; Lk. 18:8 "When the Son of Man comes, shall He find faith…?"). And His 'coming' to the disciples found them asleep and unprepared. This was exactly the picture of Mk. 13:36 (and Lk. 12:37), using the same Greek words: "Watch… lest coming suddenly, He find you sleeping". We can be condemned in this life, as Peter was when he denied his Lord, and yet be saved out of it by repentance.

There are good reasons for thinking that Mark's Gospel record is actually Peter's; and in his preaching of the Gospel he makes ample reference to his own failures [he contains the most detailed account of the denials of all the Gospels] and to the misunderstanding of his fellows. Both Matthew and Luke record that the Lord asked

the three disciples 'Why are you [plural] sleeping?' (Mt. 26:40). It is only Mark who says that the Lord asked this of Peter personally, in the singular (Mk. 14:37). And compare Matthew's "Could you [plural] not watch with me?" with Mk. 14:37 to Peter: "Could you not [singular] watch?".

Could you not watch one hour?- Peter later urged his converts to "be watchful" (1 Pet. 5:8 RV), watching unto prayer as the end approaches (1 Pet. 4:7), as Peter had *not* been watchful in the garden and had earned the Lord's rebuke for going to sleep praying (Mt. 26:40,41). They were to learn from his mistake. Their watchfulness was to be because the devil was prowling around, seeking whom he could desire (1 Pet. 5:8). This was exactly the case with Peter: Satan desired to have him, he should have prayed for strength but didn't do so sufficiently (Lk. 22:31). He was warning his brethren that they were in exactly the situation he had been in, a few hours before he went into that fateful High Priest's house. Paul was deeply moved by the Gethsemane record: 1 Thess. 5:6,7 = Mt. 26:40,41; Eph. 6:18 = 26:4;1 Acts 22:7= 26:39; 2 Cor. 6:10 = 26:37; 2 Cor. 12:8 = 26:44; Rom. 5:6 = 26:41; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6 = Mk. 14:36.

14:38- see on Acts 20:29,30.

Watch and pray so that you do not fall into temptation- The relationship between prayer and temptation may not simply be that the Holy Spirit will be provided to fortify us against temptation if we pray. If we are in prayer, in the Father's presence, then we are less likely to just give in to temptation. However, the connection between prayer and strength against temptation is proof enough that Bible reading is not the only strength against temptation. So much more help and succour of the Holy Spirit is available (Heb. 4:15,16). The repeated emphasis upon their lack of watching contrasts with the Lord's stress upon the need to watch in the last days, and how lack of watching would lead to condemnation (Mt. 24:42,43; 25:13). Their lack of watching meant they were condemned- and yet they were redeemed by their recognition of their state, as evidenced in the Gospel records. ″That you do not fall into″ is addressed to Peter in the singular, and yet the "you" here is plural. The Lord is telling Peter that he is no different to the rest of the disciples, despite his assertion that even if they all denied the Lord, he would not do so. Peter's sense of spiritual superiority was especially displeasing to the Lord.

Each statement of the apparently simple model prayer needs careful reflection. The Lord told the disciples in Gethsemane to earnestly pray the simple saying: "Pray not to fail in the test" (Mt. 26:41 cp. 6:13). The prayer that they could gabble mindlessly must be prayed with intense attention to every phrase. They presumably did pray as directed, but the Lord later warns them: "Why do you sleep? Get up and pray, so that you will not enter into temptation". He intended them to keep on praying, as He spent an hour praying the same words; and not just rattle off a few words and think we have done our praying. Just as the tribulation of the last days seems to be conditional upon our faith, so the Lord may imply that entering into the time of trial or testing was avoidable by their prayer and faith. Again we see the final time of tribulation as reflective of the Lord's sufferings, enabling the very last generation to identify with the Lord's death so that they might share in His resurrection.

The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak- The Lord took a very positive view of his struggling, stuttering followers, especially in the run up to His death. His teaching had throughout emphasized the importance of the heart, and how thought and action are linked. Yet He appears to have made a temporary exception when He generously excused His disciples' sleeping in Gethsemane: "The spirit [mind] truly is

ready, but the flesh is weak" (Mk. 14:38). The theoretical willingness of the mind does not usually excuse fleshly weakness, according to the Lord's teaching. It seems to me that this statement of His, which for me gets harder to interpret the more one ponders it, is simply the Lord's generous, justifying impulse towards His weak followers. And He was feeling like this towards them at the very time when, in symbol and in essence, they had condemned themselves. For He 'comes' to them, finds them asleep, like the sleepy virgins in His recent parable, they were dumbfounded and unable to answer Him, just as the rejected will be at judgment day, and then they fled, as the rejected likewise will (Mk. 14:40,41,51). If these were His generous feelings for them, then… what comfort it is to know we follow the same Lord.

14:40 The disciples' sleepiness is excused in the statement "for their eyes were heavy" (Mk. 14:40), even though their falling asleep at that time was utterly shameful. Luke's record excuses them by saying they slept for sorrow- which isn't really possible. It's the grace of inspiration covering up for them. Yet He kindly says that their spirit is willing but their flesh was weak (Mk. 14:38); although elsewhere, the Lord rigorously demonstrates that mental attitudes are inevitably reflected in external behaviour, and therefore the difference between flesh and spirit in this sense is minimal.

The question is whether the Lord is making a general observation about human nature, or whether He is specifically criticizing them for being spiritually weak at that specific time. He could be saying that they underestimated the power of human nature, and needed to pray that they would not enter into the temptation posed by their own flesh, their humanity. This is a clear demonstration of the source of spiritual weakness- our own flesh, rather than any superhuman being. Or it could be that the Lord has in view the specific weakness of the flesh- to disown Him in the face of opposition and the risk of arrest and death.

The word "weak" is often used about spiritual weakness. Paul describes all of us as having been saved although we were weak, using the same word used about the disciples asleep in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:41 "weak" = Rom. 5:6 "without strength"). He saw the evident similarity between them and us, tragically indifferent in practice to the mental agony of our Lord, failing to share His intensity of striving- although we are so willing in spirit to do this. And yet, Paul implies, be better than them. Don't be weak and sleepy as they were when Christ wanted them awake (Mt. 26:40,41 = 1 Thess. 5:6,7). Strive for the imitation of Christ's attitude in the garden (Mt. 26:41 = Eph. 6:18). And yet in Romans 7, a depressed but realistic Paul laments that he fails in this; his description of the losing battle he experienced within him between flesh and spirit is couched in the language of Christ's rebuke to the disciples in Gethsemane (the spirit was willing, but the flesh weak).

14:39 *And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words*- This is saying the same thing twice. We are enabled to imagine the Lord again walking away from them, as if Matthew's camera is located amongst the disciples and focused upon the rear view of the Lord Jesus.

14:40 *And again he returned and found them sleeping. Their eyes were very heavy*- It's clear from all the allusions to the need for watchfulness and the moral failure associated with sleeping, that there was really no adequate excuse for their failure. And yet the record gracefully takes note of the human weakness they were facing. We should not dismiss circumstantial ethics too quickly. Whilst sin remains sin, there is every reason for thinking that God does take circumstance into account in

His final judgment of human failures. The only other time the Greek word translated "heavy" occurs in the Gospels is in Lk. 9:32, where again it is used of heaviness with sleep, and again about Peter, James and John sleeping whilst the Lord was involved in active dialogue with the Father about His forthcoming death: "Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep". Mk. 14:40 adds that "They did not know what to answer Him", and this likewise was the situation at the transfiguration (Mk. 9:6 s.w.). The events of the transfiguration were to prepare Peter, James and John for the events of Gethsemane; they were supposed to see the similarities, and learn. But they didn't. Likewise circumstances repeat in our lives, as the Father seeks to teach us, hoping we shall learn from one event which is then in essence repeated later. The way the situation here repeats three times, and each time they fail and fall asleep, is another example of how circumstances repeat in the hope that we will learn.

And they did not know what to answer him- Not only did the Lord Jesus 'answer' to the needs of others, but He Himself was a silent, insistent question that had to be responded to. He came and found the disciples sleeping, and they didn't know what to *answer* Him (Mk. 14:40). His look, the fact that when facing super exhaustion and sleep deprivation He endured in prayer... this was something that demanded, and demands, an answer- *even if we can't give it*. He responds / 'answers' to us, and we have to respond / answer to Him. This is how His piercing sensitivity, coupled with the height of His devotion, compels the building of real relationship between ourselves and this invisible Man.

14:41 *And he returned a third time*- The three failures of Peter to keep awake were clearly meant to portend his forthcoming triple failure. The Lord was seeking to educate him as to his own weakness. But he failed to perceive it. After each failure he would've urged himself not to fail again, and he would've gone through the same thoughts as time after time he denied his Lord later that night. We gasp with wonder at how the Lord was not so focused upon His own struggles that He had no thought for desperately trying to educate his beloved Peter. This is surely the mark of spiritual maturity- being able to never be so obsessed with our own struggles that we forget our responsibilities to our brethren. So often we reason that we must sort out our own issues before we can help others, but this kind of self-centredness would've meant that the Lord failed Himself to be the One He needed to be, both for Himself and for others.

And said to them: Sleep on now- The Lord spoke this to them whilst they were asleep, because in :42 He asks them to arise. A lesser man than the Lord would've been bitterly disappointed, full of fear that His entire mission was open to failure if the material He had so especially focused upon saving was so incredibly weak. But instead in tenderness He speaks to them as a loving parent speaks to their sleeping children. For this seems the only credible interpretation of His words- for immediately afterwards He tells them to awake.

And take your rest- Seeing the Lord proceeds to immediately awake them from sleep, He must have had some other idea in view apart from taking literal rest. Surely He had in view His earlier invitation to His followers to find rest in Him (Mt. 11:28); He knew that He was dying so that they might have this ultimate rest to their souls.

It is enough. The hour comes- Mt.. 'is approaching'. Perhaps the Lord noticed the approach of Judas and the soldiers. Mk. 14:41 has "the hour is come". 'It is approaching... it has come' would be an appropriate thing to say in soliloquy as the Lord saw the men approaching closer. *Eggizo*, "is at hand", is the very word used specifically about Judas in Mt. 26:46: "He is at hand that betrays Me".

The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners- Remember that the Greek word behind 'betrayal' means simply to be handed over. Earlier the Lord had spoken of being handed over into the hand or power of men (Mt. 17:22), to the chief priests (Mt. 20:18), to the Gentiles (Mk. 10:33). But now the Lord introduces a moral dimension- He was to be handed over into the power of sin, but would break that power by His resurrection. For the resurrection of the Lord was not simply a vindication of Himself against men, but against the power of sin. And this is what opens up the path to deliverance for all likewise under the power of sin. Surely Heb. 2:14 had this in mind when speaking of how the Lord destroyed "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil"- sin manifested in the powers of Rome and Judaism.

14:42 *Arise! Let us be going. He that betrays me is nearby*- If this were the simple sense of the Greek, another construction would've been used. The sense is definitely 'Let us lead on'. Although going into the hands of sinners, the Lord was in control, leading Himself to them- for He insisted that His life was not taken from Him, but rather He gave it of Himself. Judas was leading the soldiers (Lk. 22:47); but the Lord was leading Himself toward them.

14:43 *And immediately, while he yet spoke, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd*- The appearance of Judas is as it were called forth by the Lord, who went to as it were meet Judas before he even appeared (:42). The Lord had set up the whole situation, and Judas was acting according to plan. The repeated use of "Behold" or "Lo" (Mt. 26:45,46,47,51) encourage us to play Bible television with these events. The scene was clearly etched upon the memory of the Gospel writers. Mk. 14:43 Gk. puts it all in the present tense: "There comes Judas…", to encourage us to re-live the incident. The crowd with Judas was a tacit recognition of the fanatic loyalty of the eleven; Judas reckoned that they could put up enough of a fight to require this great multitude.

From the chief priests and the scribes and the elders bearing swords and staves- This little detail accords well with the reality of the situation. Although the Chief Priests had some authority to use the Roman guards to control difficult situations in the temple area, they surely didn't have use of Roman soldiers to arrest a civilian in a garden at night. So these were ruffians rustled up by Judas and the Jewish leaders, which explains why they had staves as well as swords. Staves were hardly the military equipment of professional soldiers, but it fits the idea that the leaders gathered together a crowd of hoods to do this dirty work. And it was only later that the Jews handed the Lord over to Gentile power. "Staves" translates *xulon*, the word meaning 'stake' or 'tree' which is used about the cross.

14:44 *Now he that betrayed him had given them a signal, saying*- These are the very words more commonly used together about signs being given to the Jewish world by the Lord. Judas was in every way a fake Christ, acting as the real disciple and the true Christ, when in fact he was the very opposite. This is why he as the "son of perdition" becomes the prototype of the antichrist figure in 2 Thess. 2. Note that 'anti-Christ' doesn't mean so much one who is*against* Christ as one who mimics the real Christ but is in fact a false one and not the original, despite all appearances.

Whomsoever I shall kiss- The Greek *phileo* literally means 'to love'. I have mentioned several times the essential similarity between the betrayals of Judas and Peter that same night. When the Lord later asks Peter whether Peter has *phileo* for Him (Jn. 21:17), He is as it were asking 'Do you kiss Me, as Judas did?'. He is probing Peter to see the similarities between himself and Judas, and to recognize that

he was not in fact more loyal and devoted to Jesus than any of the others [as Peter had once claimed]- and that included even Judas.

That is he. Take him and lead him away safely- The Lord was a well known public figure, having taught openly in Jerusalem in the presence of huge crowds. The need to identify Him indicates that the crowd of hoods being used didn't know who He was, because they were not the types to attend teaching sessions in the temple, or perhaps they weren't locals, or maybe not even Jews. Again we find the ring of truth in how these records are written; if they were anything other than Divinely inspired, there would be all manner of lack of congruence in the details and information given.

14:45 *And when he arrived, immediately he came to him and said: Master, Master; and kissed him*- But why did Judas address Him in this way? It could be that the crowd of armed men were still hidden, and he came alone to make this act of identification of Jesus- again suggesting that the crowd of hired hoods were unclear as to which one of the group of disciples was Jesus. This is why :46 says that after the kiss, "then came they"- Judas was alone when he first approached the Lord. Although the Lord later protests that He had been with 'them' in the temple teaching, presumably that comment was directed only at the leadership of the group. Or perhaps it was simply because in the darkness it was not clear who was who, and Judas needed to make the identification for that reason. He needed to be alone to make that identification- he would've been unable to do it if he had approached Jesus and the disciples with the crowd of men next to him.

14:46 *And they arrested him*- The Lord uses the same expression about the sufferings of the faithful in the very last generation (Lk. 21:12), as He seeks to bring them to know the essence of His death, seeing that that generation will not taste of death but be given immortality at the judgment seat.

And took him away- Literally, they had power over Him. The same word is used in Heb. 2:14 about how the Lord overcame the 'devil' who had the 'power' of death. They had the power, apparently, externally. But the paradox was that by willingly giving Himself over to it, He had power over the 'devil' of sin, both abstractly as sin, and also in all forms of its political manifestation, in this case, the Roman and Jewish authorities.

14:47 *But one of the disciples that was standing nearby drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear*- Perhaps the detail is provided as backdrop for the Lord's response- that whoever *takes* the sword shall perish by it (Mt. 26:52). Peter did indeed take the sword- but by grace was saved from the consequence. He clearly aimed to strike off the man's head, but he ducked and Peter only caught his ear.

The material from Mark is about the same as in Matthew, but Luke and John add various details. Here is Matthew's account of the arrest in the Garden, with the details from Luke 22 and John 18 (on which see commentary) added in square brackets:

"The hour is at hand and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise! Let us be going. He that betrays me is nearby. And while he yet spoke, Judas, one of the twelve, came; and with him a great crowd with swords and staves, from the chief priest and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying: Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is he. Take him. [Lk. 22:47,48 He drew near to Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus said to him: Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?] And immediately he came to Jesus, and said, Greetings, Rabbi; and kissed him.

And Jesus said to him: Friend, do what you came to do. [Lk. 22 And when they that were about him saw what would follow, they said: Lord, shall we strike with the sword?]. Then they came. [Jn. 18:4-9 Jesus knowing all the things that must come upon him, went forward and said to them: Whom do you seek? They answered him: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them: I am he (Judas, the one who betrayed him, was standing with them). When he said to them: I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them: Whom do you seek? And they said: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered: I told you that I am he. If therefore you seek me, let these go their way- that the word might be fulfilled which he spoke: Of those whom you have given me I lost not one]. [then they] laid hands on Jesus and took him. And one of those with Jesus [Jn. 18 Simon Peter] stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear [Jn. 18 his right ear. Now the servant's name was Malchus]. Then said Jesus to him: [No more of this Lk. 22:51] Put away your sword into its place, [into its sheath, Jn. 18] for all that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Do you think I cannot ask my Father and He shall, even now, send me more than twelve legions of Angels? [Jn. 18:11 The cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?] [Lk. 22:51 And he touched his ear and healed him]. But how then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way? In that hour Jesus said to the mob: Have you come out as against a robber with swords and staves to seize me? I sat daily in the temple teaching and you did not take me. [Lk. 22 But this is your hour, and the power of darkness]. But all this is happening so that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples left him and fled. [Lk. 22 And they seized him and led him away, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed from a distance]".

14:48 *And Jesus said to them: Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me?*- The same word used about Jesus and the disciples 'going out' from the Upper Room to Gethsemane (Mt. 26:30; Jn. 18:1), and Jesus 'going forth' to meet the crowd of armed men (Jn. 18:4). The impression is given of a head on meeting between the forces of light and darkness.

14:49 *I was daily with you in the temple teaching and you did not arrest me*- The Lord was addressing the leadership of the group, who had sat daily in the temple over the past week and heard Him. They knew what He looked like, He had sat *pros humas,* "with you" (AV), not so much "with you" as 'directly facing you', sitting down in front of them and therefore at close range. Therefore the need for Judas to identify the Lord with a kiss, to prove "that same is He", was because the mass of armed men didn't know who He was, and had therefore not sat in the temple. Again we see the Lord recognizing that men are only who they are, the hired thugs were no more than hired thugs acting in ignorance; but the leaders who were present were the ones He wanted to address. This is confirmed by Lk. 22:52 stating that "Jesus said to the chief priests and captains of the temple and elders that had come against him: Have you come as against a robber, with swords and staves?". The priests and elders were in that large crowd, and the Lord directly addresses them. So although He addressed "the multitudes", His message was aimed at specific individuals within the crowd. This is true of much of Scripture; perhaps those parts we personally fail to understand are speaking to a particular group in need of that message, perhaps in a previous age, and it may not be as directly intended for us as it was to them. The correspondence between the narratives is detailed and deeply credible. Uninspired writers would surely not only contradict themselves, but lack this artless congruence between each other which we find in the inspired Gospel records. Lk. 22:53 adds that the Lord continued to say: "But this is your hour, and the power of darkness". The

sense is surely that in broad daylight they dared not lay hold on Him- they had to do it under cover of darkness, because they were of the darkness.

But this is done that the scriptures might be fulfilled- This can be read as part of the Lord's words, or the comment of Matthew. "Is happening" is translated "was done" in the AV. See on :54; the emphasis upon the fulfilment of Scripture is not merely noting a correspondence between New Testament event and Old Testament scripture. Rather I suggest is the idea that the Lord chose to be obedient to God's word and will, to make it His own, to the highest possible extent, to the point of total personal identification with it; when by its nature, God's prophetic word has various possibilities of fulfilments on different levels, some of which would have enabled the Lord to bypass the cross. The specific reference may be to Ps. 31:11. This refers to how David's family appear to have later disowned him during Saul's persecution, fleeing from him, as the Lord's friends also did.

There is a sense of compulsion associated with the cross. The Greek word *dei*, translated "must" or "ought", is repeatedly used by the Lord in reference to His death. He spoke of that death as the coming of His hour, as if always and in all things He felt a compulsion that He must die as He was to. Listing the references chronologically gives an impressive list:

"I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the scriptures *must be fulfilled*" (Mark 14:49). Three times in say 30 minutes, the Lord has stressed the compulsion of the cross.

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so *must* the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:14)

"From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he *must* go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders" (Mt. 16:21).

"And he straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing; Saying, The Son of man *must suffer* many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and *[must]* be slain, and be raised the third day" (Luke 9:21-22).

"And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he *must suffer* many things, and be set at nought" (Mark 9:12). These last three references all occurred within a day of each other, if not a few hours. The Lord at least three times was emphasizing how He *must* die the death of the cross.

"Nevertheless *I must* walk to day, and to morrow, and the day following: for *it cannot be* that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem" (Luke 13:33)

"But first [i.e. most importantly, not just chronologically] *must he* suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation" (Luke 17:25).

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die. The people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man *must be lifted up*? who is this Son of man?" (John 12:32-34). When the Lord spoke of "*If* I be lifted up", there was no doubt about it. The idiom was correctly understood by the people as meaning: "I absolutely *must*". And for them this was a contradiction in terms: a "son of man" Messiah who *must* be crucified.

"Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the Passover *must* be killed" (Luke 22:7).

"As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also *I must* bring, and

they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again" (John 10:15-17). Embedded in the context of prediction of the cross, the Lord described that act as being how He *must* bring His sheep unto Himself.
"But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that *thus it must be*?... For I say unto you, that this that is written *must yet be accomplished* in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me *have an end*" (Matt 26:54; Luke 22:37). See on Lk. 24:6.

14:50 *And all the disciples left him*- Although the Lord had set up the opportunity for them to flee by stunning the armed men and telling them to allow the disciples free exit, they were still forsaking Him by doing so. And it still hurt the Lord. He simply knew their spiritual capabilities, and was giving them a lower level escape route. One size simply doesn't fit all; He didn't deal with them on a legalistic level of demanding obedience to a certain standard, failing which they were rejected. Neither does He work like that today. Their forsaking of Him sets the scene for His final agonized cry to the Father: "Why have *You* forsaken Me?" (Mt. 27:46). His disciples had, the inner circle of ministering women and His own mother had walked away from the cross- and now He felt even the Father forsaking Him, despite earlier having said that "He that sent Me is with Me: the Father has not left Me alone [s.w. 'forsake']" (Jn. 8:29).

And fled- Their action is emphasized by the usage of both words, forsake and fled. Typically the Gospel writers emphasize their own weakness and failures, all as part of their compelling appeal to others to respond to the message they themselves had been so slow to grasp.

14:51 *And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him*- It is possible to argue that the young man who followed Jesus and then ran away was in fact Peter; it was Peter who "followed him" at this time (Mt. 26:58). Mk. 14:54 RV tells us after this incident that "*Peter* had followed him afar off". Peter describes himself in the third person a few verses previously: "A certain one of them that stood by drew a sword…" (Mk. 14:47 RV). And then we go on to read in v. 51 of "a certain young man" (RV). But when speaking of his denials, Peter records them in the first person- he totally owns up to them. All of Mk. 14:27-52 concerns Peter's part in the story, and then vv. 54-72 likewise. So it is likely that the record of the young man following disguised in a linen cloth is in fact referring to Peter too. So Peter followed, ran back, followed again, then ran away to Galilee, and then followed again. This was how hard it was for him to pick up the cross of identification with Jesus and follow Him. And for us too.

14:52 *But he left the linen cloth and fled naked*- If indeed the man was Peter, then he was demonstrating that he was not in fact prepared to go to prison and death with his Lord, as he had so confidently claimed. He ought to have taken this as a warning against being so confident that he would not deny his lord.

14:53 *And they led Jesus away to the high priest; and there came together all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes*- This recalls Psalm 2; the Gentiles gathered together against the Christ in Jerusalem. Those pious men were no more than Gentiles.

14:54 *And Peter had followed him at a distance*- This following of Peter is recorded in the same words by all three Synoptics. It impressed them all as perhaps typical of so much of their 'following' the Lord; it was a following, but far off from Him. His challenge to Peter had been to not just physically follow Him, but to pick up His cross and walk behind Him on His way to His cross (Mt. 16:24 s.w.). Following

Jesus in the shadows and avoiding identification with Him was hardly the kind of following which He intended. Yet Peter recognized this, because his appeal for repentance describes his audience as likewise "afar off" (Acts 2:39 s.w.); he is asking them to make the conversion which he did, and he thereby considers his 'following afar off' as not really following at all, and being in a 'far off from Christ' position from which he repented and thereby 'came near' to Christ in conversion. The Greek words for 'followed' and 'afar off' are also used about how the few remaining disciples stood 'afar off' from Christ on the cross. The sense is perhaps that the Gospel writers recognized how far they were from co-crucifixion with Christ, and this sense is one we can identify with. And we are those likewise described in Ephesians as "far off" as Peter was, but are now likewise reconciled.

Right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he was sitting with the guards and warming himself at the fire- "Into" is the same word used by the Lord in warning Peter not to "enter into" temptation (Lk. 22:46). And it is used again of how Satan entered into Judas (Jn. 13:27), again drawing a parallel between the path of both Peter and Judas- the difference finally being simply that Peter believed in the Lord's grace whereas Judas could not.

Mt. ″and sat with the officers". The presence of the definite article suggests that "the servants" [the Greek also means "officers"] are a group which has already been mentioned, and surely they are the "servants" who comprised the crowd of armed men who arrested Jesus in the Garden. The same word is used three times about them in Jn. 18:3,12,18. The risk Peter was taking was considerable, seeing he had visibly been with the Lord in the Garden and had tried to kill one of the servants. We must give due weight to this- his devotion to his Lord was incomplete but all the same must be recognized for what it was as far as it was. So often those who aim higher than others in their spiritual devotions are those who fall the most publically, and yet their devotion to their Lord should not be forgotten- for it is higher than the mass of other disciples.

14:55 *Now the chief priests and the whole council*- Gk. 'the Sanhedrin'. All of them participated in desiring or requiring [Gk.; AV "sought"] false witness against Jesus. And yet within that group was Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews (Jn. 3:1- and "all" the Jewish leaders condemned Jesus to death, 27:1); and Joseph, who is specifically called a member of the Council (Mk. 15:43; Lk. 23:50). Perhaps this is an example of where "all" is used in Biblical languages in a general but not strictly literal sense. Lk. 23:51 says that Joseph had not "consented" with the Council. The Greek can mean specifically to vote, but also to simply 'agree'. Perhaps he voted against their decision; or perhaps his lack of consent was deeply internal. In any case, it seems that it was only after the Lord was pronounced dead that he 'came out' publically in open identification with the Lord (note "after this...", Jn. 19:38). We see here the grace of God, in not holding against those men the way that they passively went along with the decision to crucify God's Son. Their strong internal disagreement was noted. We are reminded of how not all Joseph's brothers went along with the plan to kill him, but their silence meant that the plan went ahead. We likewise should show grace to those who go along with decisions which are deeply wrong and hurtful. This is not to say that they were correct in their lack of commitment, but we may well have done the same. And we can take a lesson from the Father's gracious attitude to those who would not immediately stand up and be counted for the Lord's cause. This affects our decision making in terms of disciplining those who do things like responding to military call up, voting under duress or other things which are against the Lord's will, which are failures... and yet ultimately God may very well extend the same grace to

them as He did to Joseph and Nicodemus. And He tends to use circumstances to make a person finally come out in the open about their views, because secret discipleship is an oxymoron and His desire is that we are as a city set on a hill which cannot be hid.

Sought evidence against Jesus to put him to death, and did not find it- The word is only used elsewhere in the Gospels about the way that the faithful will experience being 'put to death' in the final tribulation (Mt. 10:21; Mk. 13:12; Lk. 21:16). The sufferings of the tribulation will enable the last generation to identify with the sufferings of Christ, and thus to share His resurrection life.

14:56 *For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree*- This is twice emphasized in this verse. Yet there were many false witnesses made. Presumably their legalistic minds insisted on giving the Lord 'a fair trial'; part of their minds were clouded by hatred and wickedness, and yet another part of their minds was set on strict legalistic obedience to God and the principles of legal integrity. In this we see the schizophrenic nature of the human mind. No matter what heights of devotion and understanding we may reach, we can never assume that we are totally with the Lord. And likewise we should not assume that others are either perfectly, totally spiritual or totally unspiritual. Sadly the human mind is capable of operating in different directions at once.

14:57 *And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying*- Mt.- there were two. The semblance of legal integrity they were following required that at least two and preferably three witnesses made the same accusation. The legalism of the Jews is emphasized, not least in their fear of ritual defilement at Passover time (Jn. 18:28). They held themselves to legal obedience and integrity, whilst committing the ultimate sin, of condemning the Son of God to a cruel death. The hatred they unleashed upon Him was done by men who were rigorously obedient to commandments; their abuse of Him would therefore have been justified by them as some form of obedience to Divine principle. And this is why religious people can be the most abusive and cruel of any- if the principles they are wedded to are wrong, and if they have not perceived grace.

14:58 *We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands*- They were misquoting Him, and their witness did not agree, each of the two men reported His words differently (Mk. 14:59). And this lack of agreement between witnesses, "many" of them, was what had delayed proceedings to this point. But finally these evil men gave up all semblance of legal integrity- for time was running out. They thus condemned themselves even by the legal standards they were holding themselves to. The technical reason for His death sentence, therefore, was a supposed plan to destroy the temple, to commit the ultimate sacrilege. But what the Lord had said was that *they* would destroy the temple, referring to Himself, but after three days He would raise it up (Jn. 2:19). It was in fact they and not Him who were guilty of the crime of destroying the temple; indeed, the literal temple was finally destroyed exactly because of them. They condemned Him for what they themselves were guilty of. Legalists are so often led by the Lord to positions wherein they condemn themselves by their own standards, words and demands. The trial of Jesus is the ultimate expose of legalism.

14:59 *But not even then did their testimony agree*- The utter weakness of the case is emphasized. They could not even agree amongst themselves as to what false story to give.

14:60 *And the high priest stood up in their midst and asked Jesus*- As a judge arises to give the verdict.

Do you answer nothing?- One reason for the Lord's silence was in order to allow them to condemn themselves. But His self-control at His trials caused marvel amongst those who observed it, and it should to us too. For when justice and truth are so obviously not being upheld, all that is within us as humans cries out against it. Campaigns against injustice always gather mass support- it's very much a part of our human nature. But the Lord in this context said nothing. He let the unjust condemn themselves.

What is this that these witnesses say against you?- The Greek could equally be translated 'Who are these that these testify against you?'. We wonder whether one of them was Judas, and whether the other was some other former disciple. The High Priest's point would therefore have been 'Come on, these are Your own men who are testifying You said this. And you remain silent?'. The pain of betrayal would have been intense. Surely the deal with Judas had involved his being a legal witness at the trial. But the fact his witness did not agree with the other man's witness showed yet again that their careful plans simply didn't work out; see on Mt. 26:5. The Lord Jesus freely gave His life, rather than having it taken from Him by the working out of carefully laid clever plans. Those plans failed. But He gave His life.

14:61 *But he held his peace and said nothing*- The High Priest 'answered' to this silence, according to Matthew. Silence is itself a statement, a word. Is. 57:11 reasons with Israel that despite their sins, God had 'held His peace' in not judging them, and yet they still did not respect Him. Perhaps the Lord held His peace because all He could really speak in response was judgment against them. And He did not want to do that overmuch, He wanted to give them the maximum time for repentance before having to speak the inevitable judgment upon them. The answer He finally gives is not an answer to the accusations, but rather a pronouncement of judgment. And this is why, it seems to me, that He 'held His peace'- in order to give them the maximum opportunity to repent, and He was counting almost every second now. This desire for human repentance is a fundamental part of the Lord, as it should be part of our basic personality in Christ. This same Lord works moment by moment with us likewise, to bring us to repentance. This is His earnest desire.

Again the high priest questioned him, saying: Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?- The technical reason for condemning Him was a supposed plot to destroy the temple building, but now the judge moves on to make another accusation, the issue which was most important to him and the Jews, but which was not of itself a criminal accusation which could be then transferred to Roman judgment with a request for a death penalty. But *contra* this there is the possibility that because Caesar declared himself to be the son of God and the anointed one, any man claiming to be that could be reported to the Romans and be condemned to death. In terms of legal procedure, their behaviour was wrong. The accusation shifted from one count to another, reflecting the clear desire of the judge to secure a condemnation regardless of procedure or witnesses. If this line of thought is correct, then it follows that confession of faith in any person as being "the Christ, the Son of God" was a criminal offence worthy of death. The crucifixion of the Lord for making this claim was therefore creating a legal precedent for the death by crucifixion of anyone else who believed there was such a person alive within the Roman empire. And the Gospels are studded with examples of confession of faith in "the Christ, the Son of God" (16:16; Lk. 4:41; Jn. 6:69; 11:27). The whole intention of the Gospel records was to bring people to make that same profession of faith in "the Christ, the Son of God" (Mk. 1:1;

Jn. 20:31). Those parchments and the rehearsing of them would therefore have been forbidden material. In our age it may appear painless to confess faith in "the Christ, the Son of God", but it is no less radical in the separation it requires from the spirit of the societies in which we live.

14:62- see on Mt. 24:28.

And Jesus said: I am, and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven-

The allusion is clearly to Daniel's vision of the Son of Man coming in glory to judge the Gentile world. And the Lord is saying that those hyper religious Jews were effectively condemned Gentiles before God. But those men to whom He spoke died in their beds. Lifespans were short in first century Palestine, most males were dead by 40. Most of them wouldn't even have lived to experience the calamity of AD67-70. They will only therefore "see the Son of Man sitting..." at His return, when they are resurrected and see Him in His glory. And this will be of itself their condemnation- to see Him there enthroned in glory, and themselves not in His Kingdom. This was exactly His teaching to them in 23:39: "You shall not see Me from this time forward, until you shall say: Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord". They will then bless Him- but all too tragically late.

At His trial, the Lord warned them that He would come again as judge (Mt. 26:64,65), as if He realized that they were living out a foretaste of the final judgment. The thief likewise understood the Lord's presence as being the presence of the judge who would finally judge him (Lk. 23:44). Harry Whittaker points out that the cross divided men: there were women who followed and mourned insincerely, and the women who really followed. There were soldiers who gambled over the Lord's clothes, and one who really repented. There was a thief who repented and one who wouldn't. There were those who mocked and others who watched and believed.

14:63 *And the high priest tore his clothes and said-* Declaring the end of his priesthood, to be replaced by the Lord Jesus. The Lord was crucified for blasphemy; this was the charge on which He was found guilty at His trial by the Jews, and the basis upon which they demanded His crucifixion. The Mishnah claims that this was only possible if someone actually used the Yahweh Name. *Sanhedrin* 7.5 outlines the protocol for condemning someone for this, in terms which have accurate correspondence with the Lord's trial: "The blasphemer is not guilty until he have expressly uttered the Name... When the trial is over... the judges stand up and rend their clothes" (Quoted in F.F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame (*Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995 ed.), p. 53). So when the Lord responded to their question as to His Messiahship by saying "I am", and went on to appropriate the Messianic words of Dan. 7:13 and Ps. 110:1 to Himself, He must have explicitly used the Yahweh Name about Himself. This is why they were so quick to accuse Him of blasphemy, and why the High Priest rent his clothes. The Lord died because He declared the Yahweh Name, unashamedly, knowing that His declaration of it would take Him to the cross. Our declaration of the essence of Yahweh, by truthfulness, forgiveness... this may cost us, although maybe not so dearly. Yet we can be inspired by the Lord's example.

What further need have we of witnesses?- Again, legal procedure, which they had tried so carefully to follow, was made a mockery of. They began with a conviction of plotting to destroy the temple buildings, then turned that into an accusation that He was a "Christ, the Son of God", a rival to Caesar; and now they jump on the charge of blasphemy, for which they gave Him the death penalty. And yet the Jews had no legal power to execute people; they had to present their case to the Roman authorities. And

blasphemy was not a capital offence under Roman law. Their careful attempts to follow legal integrity broke down in pathetic collapse, and thereby they condemned themselves. The same word, *blasphemeo*, is then used of how the Jews "reviled" or blasphemed the Lord as He hung on the cross (27:39; Lk. 22:65). They had earlier accused the Lord of blasphemy at least twice during His ministry (Mt. 9:3; Jn. 10:36 s.w.). So they should have thought of that earlier in the trial, seeing they themselves were the witnesses of that supposed crime. We are left with the impression of a judge and jury increasingly desperate to find the Lord guilty, progressively throwing their integrity and legalism to the winds in their obsession to make Him guilty of death. Little wonder that Pilate later remonstrated with them that Jesus was simply not legally guilty of any capital offence. But the more he made that point to them, the more they screamed for His death.

14:64 *You have heard the blasphemy. What think you?*- The spiritual culture of Almighty God is shown by the way in which although *all* the Council (Mk. 14:64), including Joseph, condemned Christ to death by crucifixion, God overlooks Joseph's lack of boldness in not contesting this, and speaks of him in such glowing spiritual terms. His 'not consenting unto' Christ's death was deep within him. I would be inclined to say: 'The *least* you could have done was to have abstained from the vote'. But the record is far more positive than that. No note is made of Joseph or Nicodemus speaking out against it. The mob ruled, despite all the appearances of jurisprudence, spiritual and legal integrity. And yet the record speaks so positively of those two men. Perhaps this is because the Gospel records were encouraging those who had offered a pinch of incense to Caesar, or in some other way been silent in the Roman world when they should have stood up and been counted, that God's grace was still with them- even though ultimately, providence tends to overrule circumstances so that we do have to stand up openly.

And they all condemned him to be worthy of death- The Lord had earlier taught that whoever calls their brother 'Raca', worthless, would be "guilty" [s.w.] before "the Council", the Sanhedrin (5:21,22). He had in mind that the Sanhedrin of the Jews was not the ultimate court of judgment for God's people, but rather the Heavenly council of Angels, presided over by God Almighty. The Lord must surely have been aware of this as the men of that human Sanhedrin condemned and abused Him. Human committees, courts or even groups of friends and family members are not the ultimate Sanhedrin; judge us as they may, the ultimate court is in Heaven. The same word for "guilty" is found in 1 Cor. 11:27, where Paul urges us to self-examination at the Lord's table lest we be guilty of His body and blood. The allusion shows that we as baptized believers can be no better than those evil men- unless we perceive Him and His death for what they really are.

14:65 *And some began to spit on him and to cover his face*- This was done by men who just minutes beforehand had been carefully upholding some isolated principles of Divine law and general legal integrity. Their appearance of culture vanished. They only could have been so crude and cruel if they first justified it in terms of their religion; spitting and beating would have been justified by them as the punishment due to a heretic. But here we see how they were justifying their own natural anger and jealousy by taking a tiny shard of Biblical precedent- for only in Dt. 25:2 do we have any justification for legal beating, and once it was finished, then there was to be no other punishment. The beating was to be on his back and not on his face; and there was no talk of spitting. But the Jews took that and used it to justify spitting in the

Lord's *face*, beating Him with their fists and then further condemning Him to death. The only command to spit in the face of a man was if he refused to raise up children for his dead relative (Dt. 25:9); but this was totally irrelevant to the Lord Jesus. He in any case was the ultimate example of a man who did build up His Father's house. There is anger in each of us, and religious people at times give full vent to that anger by justifying it as righteous anger, grabbing hold of the vague implication of some Bible verse and taking it way beyond the obvious meaning of the verse. In doing so, they are behaving no better than these the very worst of men who have ever lived, committing the worst ever crime ever committed in the cosmos. The face of Jesus shone at times with God's glory; He was the face of God to men. And they spat in that face, and beat it. The wonder was that the Lord had specifically foreseen this- He had predicted that they would spit at Him (Mk. 10:34). He foresaw how they would fuel their anger against Him with their persuasion that He was a heretic.

Striking him- Slapping Him. A Semitic insult to a heretic. Again, their anger was fuelled by and excused by their religious convictions. This slapping (whilst He was blindfolded, Lk. 22:64) was connected to their question: "Prophesy to us, you Christ! Who is he that struck you?" (:68). Clearly they were seeking to test His claim to be the Christ. They thought that the Christ could demonstrate supernatural knowledge; and He had already demonstrated that multiple times. They clearly had in mind a section from the uninspired Psalms of Solomon, where false Messiahs were to be tested in this way. The warning to us is to never allow fragments of Scripture or our religious tradition or beloved writings to justify us in expressing our anger in this way.

And saying to him: Prophesy!- They had blindfolded Him, and were challenging Him to exercise the prophetic gift of discernment by saying the name of the soldier who had struck Him. We note that 'prophesy' is not to be understood solely as the prediction of future events. The fact is, the Lord did know who had struck Him. They were clearly alluding to the fact that the Jews had concluded the Lord was a false prophet and false Christ and were punishing Him as such.

And the guards took him and beat him with their hands- Men smote “the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek" (Mic. 5:1). The RVmg. of Mk. 14:65 says that the Lord was hit with “strokes of rods". Perhaps it was in this sense that the rod comforted Messiah (Ps. 23:4) in that He saw immediately that prophecy was being fulfilled in Him. Our darkest moments likewise can be our greatest encouragement if only we perceive them as we should. As men mocked Him and smote Him, thus they were treating their judge at the time of judgment. In His time of dying, the Lord Jesus was the judge of Israel. This explains why when we come before the cross, not only at the breaking of bread but *whenever* we come into contact with Him, or reflect upon Him and His death, we are in some sense coming before Him in judgment.

14:66 *And as Peter was downstairs in the courtyard, there came*- Jn. 18:17 says that the girl was keeping the door and let Peter through. As the door keeper she would have looked carefully at his face in the light of a torch. And then she came to him as he was sitting by the fire (Lk.), say some minutes later, as she realized who he was. This again has the ring of congruence about it, indicating how perfectly the records dovetail.

One of the maids of the high priest- Gk. 'a servant girl', "one of the servant girls of the High Priest" (Mk. 14:66). Her claim that "You also were with Jesus" may specifically refer to Peter's presence with Jesus in Gethsemane, for "the servants" of the High Priest had been there. Perhaps she was one of them. She describes Peter as being *meta* Jesus ["you were with Jesus"], and the same phrase *meta* Jesus is used to

described the disciples being *meta* Jesus in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:36,51). Or since the Lord was a public figure in Jerusalem, it would be likely that Peter was known as one of those ever to be seen hanging around Him. Jn. 18:17 gives further information about her: "The maid keeping watch at the door said to Peter: Are you also one of this man's disciples? He said: I am not!". The only other time we read of a servant girl who was a door keeper is in Acts 12:16, where the servant girl [s.w.] called Rhoda was the door keeper at the home of the disciples in Jerusalem, and is thrilled when she realizes that it is Peter knocking at the door asking her to let him in. Note that "door keeper" is likely a technical term, a kind of profession. This heightens the similarity between the two characters. The similarities with the scene in Jn. 18:17 are too strong to be passed off as unintentional; for here Peter has to have the door to the courtyard opened by the servant girl, and it is at the gate that she recognizes him. Peter's failure, his denials, were the basis of his successful appeals for Israel to follow his pattern of repentance. Thousands heard him make those appeals in Jerusalem, for if a few thousand were baptized in one day, we can be sure that many others heard the message and didn't act upon it. It's highly likely that that servant girl was in the crowd, and was one who responded. I suggest that Rhoda was that servant girl, converted by Peter's failure, repentance and experience of forgiveness. She converted from serving the Jewish High Priest to serving the Heavenly High Priest, the Lord Jesus; from being one of the crowd who went out to arrest Jesus, to being one who glorified His resurrection.

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Accusation 1	Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a maid came to him, saying: You also were with Jesus the Galilean.	And as Peter was downstairs in the courtyard, there came one of the maids of the high priest. And seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said: You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus!	And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat among them. And a certain maid seeing him as he sat in the light of the fire and looking earnestly	Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest; and he entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest. But Peter was standing

			upon him, said: This man also was with him.	outside the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the maid who kept watch at the door. The maid keeping watch at the door said to Peter: Are you also one of this man's disciples ?
Denial 1	But he denied before them all, saying: I do not know what you say.	But he denied it, saying: I neither know, nor understand what you say; and he went out into the porch; and the cock crew.	But he denied it, saying: Woman, I do not know him.	He said: I am not!
Accusation 2	And when he went out to the	And the maid saw him and	And after a little while	Now the servants and the

	entrance, another maid saw him and said to the bystanders: This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.	began again to say to them that stood by: This is one of them!	another person saw him and said: You also are one of them.	officers were standing there, having made a fire of coals. For it was cold, and they were warming themselves; and Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself... Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said to him: Are you also one of his disciples?
Denial 2	And again he denied with an oath: I do not know the man.	But he again denied it.	But Peter said: Man, I am not.	He denied and said: I am not!
Accusation 3	And after a little while they	And after a little while,	And after the space of about one	One of the servants of the

	that stood by came and said to Peter: Of a truth you also are one of them, for your dialect makes you known.	again they that stood by said to Peter: Of a truth you are one of them; for you are a Galilean.	hour another confidently affirmed, saying: Of a truth, this man also was with him. For he is a Galilean.	high priest, being a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said: Did I not see you in the garden with him?
Denial 3	Then he began to curse and to swear: I do not know the man! And immediately the cock crowed.	But he began to curse and to swear under oath: I do not know this man of whom you speak. And immediately the second time the cock crew	But Peter said: Man, I do not know what you say. And immediately, as he spoke, the cock crew.	Peter denied again; and immediately the cock crew.
Peter's response 1	And Peter remembered the words which Jesus had said: Before the cock crows, you shall deny me three times.	And Peter remembered what Jesus had said to him: Before the cock crows twice, you shall deny me three times.	And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord that he had said to him:	

			Before the cock crow this day, you shall deny me three times.	
Peter goes out	And he went out and wept bitterly.	And as he thought upon it, he wept.	And he went out and wept bitterly.	

14:67 *And seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said: You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus!*- This has the ring of circumstantial truth to it. The light from the fire would have drawn attention to the features of Peter's face. He would have been well known in Jerusalem as the Lord's right hand man. We see here another hint at the simplicity and lack of wisdom in Peter. And yet he was the one the Lord used so powerfully.

14:68 *But he denied it, saying*- Matthew stresses the denial was before them all. Peter was living out the scene of condemnation at the last day, where the verdict likewise will be manifest "before all". The Lord had used the same word in saying that whoever denied Him "before men" [cp. "before all"], He will deny before the Father at the last day (Mt. 10:33). Peter appealed for Israel to repent on the basis that they had "denied" Christ (Acts 3:13,14 s.w.)- he is appealing for them to realize that they had done what he had done, and yet they could repent, convert and experience the same grace he had done. His appeal, made a stone's throw from where the denials were made and only 6 weeks later, was therefore so powerful. Peter likewise used his failure in his pastoral work with his converts, warning them that to even deny the Lord who redeemed us is the worst possible thing we can do (2 Pet. 2:1). Likewise 1 Jn. 2:22,23 speaks of denying Christ as being the characteristic of the AntiChrist. And John wrote in the context of the early church having Peter as its first leader, and John of course was fully aware of Peter's failure that night.

Peter in this life denied his Lord *in front of men* (Mt. 26:70)- and the record of his failure intentionally looks back to the Lord's warning that whoever denies Him *before men* will be denied by Him at judgment day (Mt. 10:33). He sinned, and in the court of Heaven was condemned. There is a passage in Proverbs 24:11,12 which has a strange relevance to Peter's self-condemnation. Having spoken of those being led away to death (the very context of Peter's denial), we read: "If thou sayest, Behold we know not this man: doth not he that weigheth the hearts consider it? And shall not he render to every man according to his works?". This last phrase is quoted in Rev. 22:12 about the final judgment. Paul seems to consciously link Peter's church hypocrisy and legalism with his earlier denials that he had ever known the Lord Jesus. He writes of how he had to reveal Peter's denial of the Lord's grace "before them all" (Gal. 2:14), using the very same Greek phrase of Mt. 26:70, where "before them all" Peter made the same essential denial.

I neither know, nor understand what you say; and he went out into the porch; and the cock crew- Again, Peter was acting as the condemned, to whom the Lord will say

"I know you not" (Mt. 25:12; Lk. 13:25). The whole idea of 'I don't know Him' must, sadly, be connected with the Lord's words in Mt. 7:23 and 25:41, where He tells the rejected: "I never knew you". By denying knowledge of the Saviour, Peter was effectively agreeing that the verdict of condemnation could appropriately be passed upon him. In one of his many allusions to the Gospels, Paul wrote that "If we deny him, he also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2:12). Peter in this life denied his Lord *in front of men* (Mt. 26:70)- and the record of his failure intentionally looks back to the Lord's warning that whoever denies Him *before men* will be denied by Him at judgment day (Mt. 10:33). He sinned, and in the court of Heaven was condemned; and yet he could change the verdict by repentance.

Bible minded Peter must surely have later reflected that he had said those very words: 'I know not this man'. He "went out" from the Lord (Mk. 14:68) and then some minutes later further "went out and wept bitterly" (Lk. 22:62), living out the very figure of condemnation- and yet he was able to repent and come back. Peter's self condemnation is brought out in yet finer detail by considering what he meant when he thrice denied that he either knew nor understood about Jesus (Mk. 14:68). By that time, everyone had heard about Jesus- after all, the trial of Jesus was going on, and all Jerusalem were waiting with bated breath for the outcome. And there was Peter, standing by the fire in the High Priest's house, with everyone talking about the Jesus affair. Peter hardly would've meant 'Jesus? 'Jesus' who? Never heard of him. Dunno who you're talking about'. What he therefore meant, or wished to be understood as meaning, was that he didn't 'know' Jesus in a close sense, he wasn't a disciple of Jesus, he didn't know nor understand Jesus, i.e., he wasn't a follower of Jesus. When Peter tells the maid: "I know not, neither understand what you say [about this Jesus]" (Mk. 14:68), the other records interpret this as meaning that Peter said that he didn't know Jesus. So we may have to interpret the form of speech being used here; for Semitic speakers don't answer questions in the same way and form as we may be accustomed to. The "what you say" was about Jesus; and therefore Peter is saying that he neither knows [closely] nor understands this Jesus. And yet time and again, Peter's Lord had taught that those who did not or would not 'know and understand' Him were those who were "outside", unknown by Him, rejected. And Peter was saying, to save his skin, 'Yes, that's me'. And yet... Peter repented, and changed that verdict. Mark's record of the Lord's trial is not merely a historical account. It's framed in terms of our need to testify for our faith too. The Lord's example in His time of suffering was and is intended to be our example and inspiration, in that we are to in a very practical sense enter into His sufferings. Mark records the Lord's prediction that His people would have to witness before both Jewish and Gentile authorities (Mk. 13:9-13)- and then Mark goes on in the next chapter to describe Jesus doing just this. The Lord asked His suffering followers not to prepare speeches of self-defence- perhaps exemplified and patterned for us in the way that He remained silent before His accusers. Peter is recorded as denying Christ three times- just as the Romans interrogated Christians and asked them to three times deny Christ. The Christians were also asked to curse, or *anathematizein*, Jesus. And when we read of Peter's cursing, the same word is used. We're left with the impression that Peter actually cursed Christ. And so Mark, who was likely writing the Gospel on Peter's behalf, is showing that Peter, the leader of the church, actually pathetically failed to follow his Lord at this time. And yet the Gospel of Mark was being distributed to Christians who were being dragged before Jewish and Roman courts. The idea was surely to give them an example and encouragement from Peter's failure, rather than portray a positive example of a man overcoming the temptation to curse and deny Christ. But

this was how the Lord used Peter- as an example from failure for all of us.
"Went out" is the language of Judas going out (Jn. 13:30), Cain "'went out" (Gen. 4:16), as did Zedekiah in the judgment of Jerusalem (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). Esau went out from the land of Canaan into Edom, slinking away from the face of his brother Jacob, sensing his righteousness and his own carnality (Gen. 36:2-8). Even in this life, those who leave the ecclesia 'go out' after the pattern of Judas, condemning themselves in advance of the judgment by their attitude to the ecclesia (1 Jn. 2:19 cp. Acts 15:24). The unrighteous flee from God now, as they will then (Hos. 7:13). The ungrateful servant "went out" and condemned his brother- thus condemning himself (Mt. 18:28). Yet Peter in this life "went out" from the Lord (Mk. 14:68) and then some minutes later further "went out and wept bitterly" (Lk. 22:62), living out the very figure of rejection at the judgment- and yet was able to repent and come back. In this life we can be judged, condemned, weep...but still repent of it and thereby change our eternal destiny. But at the final judgment: it will be just too late. That 'judgment' will be a detailed statement of the outcome of the ongoing investigative jud1gment which is going on right now.
Mark's [Peter's] Gospel omits many incidents, but also uses the device of repetition to stress what the writer considers significant. In Mk. 14:68 he records himself as having said: "I know , neither understand I what thou sayest". He stresses the nature of his own rejection of knowledge of the Lord. A similar awareness of the weakness of the flesh is found in 7:21: "From within, out of the heart of man...".

14:69 *And the maid saw him and began again to say to them that stood by: This is one of them!*- Peter overheard her talking to the men about him, and jumped in with a denial. This is absolutely psychologically credible.

14:70 *But he again denied it. And after a little while, again they that stood by said to Peter*- John says that a group of men made the second accusation; see the parallel texts at the commentary on :66. Luke says that Peter replied to the second accusation [which Matthew says was made by a *woman*] by saying "*Man*, I am not". Clearly the accusations and denials were in groups- the second 'denial' involved a number of people [a man, a woman and plural men] making accusations and Peter denying them all. If we put together the various records of Peter's three denials, it seems clear that a number of accusations were made, and he replied slightly differently each time. But there were three groups of accusations and denials. We can imagine the scene- there was a whole group of men and women present, all within earshot, and once one person made the accusation, others would've chimed in. But the account is stylized to group the denials in three groups, and Peter obviously perceived this after his final oath of denial. But in fact it seems that each denial was a series of separate denials. Indeed the tense of the verb "denied" suggests he kept on and on denying.

Of a truth you are one of them; for you are a Galilean-
From the larynx of a Palestinian Jew there came the words of Almighty God. And yet He spoke them in the accent of a rural Galilean. We know this because Peter was identified as being one of the Lord's close disciples because of His accent (Mt. 26:73; Mk. 14:70). The dialect of Aramaic used in Galilee was a permanent topic of sarcasm in Jerusalem circles. There is a story in the Mishnah (bErubin 53b) which mocks how the Galileans pronounced words which began with a guttural [deep-throat] consonant. It ridicules how a Galilean in Jerusalem tries to buy something in a market but is mocked by the merchant: "You stupid Galilean, do you need something to ride on [*hamair*- a donkey], or something to drink [*hamar*- wine], or something to make a

dress with [*'amar*- wool], or something for a sacrifice [*immar*- lamb]". What an essay in God's preference for using the things which man despises- that He should arrange for His Son to speak His words in the most humanly despised dialect of the ecclesia. In this context, it is interesting to note the debate over the original text of Mk. 5:41, where the Lord is recorded as saying the Aramaic words *Talitha kum in* the oldest manuscripts, but it seems this has been changed to the more grammatically correct *Talitha kumi* in later codices. *Kum* would apparently have been the slovenly Galilean way of speaking, whereby the masculine form of the imperative is joined to a feminine subject. It could be that the Lord spoke in the Galilean way, technically incorrect grammatically- as a Londoner might say 'We was waiting for a bus' rather than 'we were waiting...'; or an Ulsterman 'how are yous all?' rather than using the more correct 'you' for 'you' plural. If this is so, we have another window into the person of Jesus. There was a naturalness about Him, an expression of the ultimate image of God in totally human form, which was so attractive.

14:71 *But he began*- The implication could be that he began to call down the curses of eternal condemnation and rejection at judgment day upon himself, but the crowing of the rooster made him stop.

To curse and to swear under oath: I do not know this man of whom you speak- Not an expletive, but rather a Jewish oath. Many of them wished condemnation on the person making the oath if it were not true. Again, Peter is entering into condemnation, signing himself up for condemnation. James wrote to the very early church, probably to the Jerusalem ecclesia, who were clearly led by Peter. He urged them "Above all things, my brethren, swear not… neither by any other oath" (James 5:12). He was clearly saying, in effect: 'Don't be like Peter'. The weakness of Peter, and the way he had repented and been forgiven, was the basis of his success as a preacher and also of his special commission to feed the lambs of the early flock. He did not present himself as the flawless pastor, and neither did his fellow elders like James present him as such. But as with his Lord, it was his humanity which was the basis of his exaltation. This can be read as meaning that Peter actually cursed Christ, as well as taking an oath that he didn't know Him. Commenting on the verb form of *anathematizein* there, Raymond Brown comments: "[it] should be taken transitively with 'Jesus' understood as the object: Peter cursed Jesus and took an oath that he had no personal acquaintance with him" - R.E. Brown, *The Death Of The Messiah* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1994) p. 605. I find it significant that the most awful detail about Peter's denials is provided in Mark's record, which I have suggested elsewhere is in fact Peter's record of the Gospel, written up by Mark.

"This man" suggests he didn't even know Jesus' name. He protested too much, for Jesus was a well known public figure in Jerusalem at the time (Lk. 24:18,19).

14:72 *And immediately the second time the cock crew. And Peter remembered what Jesus had said to him: Before the cock crows twice, you shall deny me three times. And as he thought upon it, he wept*- It is only Mark who records the two cock crowings at the time of Peter's denial. Peter wished to quietly emphasize the exactness of fulfilment of the Lord's words about his denial. Mark / Peter likewise record Peter's words as: "I neither know nor understand what you mean". The 'what' can apply to both Jesus personally as well as the general 'being with' Jesus. Peter is admitting that He had denied having any understanding at all of the Lord- the Lord whose knowledge he now preached. One can imagine Peter's voice quivering as he recounted his Gospel story. Note how Luke says that all the disciples slept in

Gethsemane (Lk. 22:45); but Mark [Peter] records how only Peter, James and John slept (Mk. 14:37).

"Peter remembered" the Lord's words. The letters of Peter urge his readers to “be mindful of the words which were spoken before” (2 Pet. 3:2). Yet this is evidently alluding to the frequent references to the disciples being slow to “remember” [s.w. “mindful”] the words which their Lord had “spoken before” (Lk. 24:6,8; Jn. 2:17,22; 12:16). Indeed, the same word is used about Peter ‘remembering’ [s.w. “be mindful”] all too late, the words which his Lord had “spoken before” to him (Mt. 26:75). So Peter was aware that his readers knew that he had not ‘remembered’ the words his Lord had “spoken before” to *him*- and yet, knowing that, he exhorts his readers to ‘remember’ or ‘be mindful’ [s.w.] of words which had been previously spoken. His readers likely had memorized the Gospels by heart. And yet Peter asks them to learn from his mistake, not to be as slow to remember as the disciples had been, and he especially. This is the basis of powerful exhortation- a repentant life, not an appearance of sinlessness.

MARK CHAPTER 15

15:1 *And immediately in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes and the whole council, made their decision and bound Jesus and took him away and delivered him up to Pilate*- Trying a man through the night was hardly transparent or in accordance with the most basic standards of integrity. And yet on some issues, at this very same time, those men sought to carefully uphold their integrity and obedience to Divine principles. In this we see the tragic, cruel dualism of the human mind- and we understand again the call of God’s word to give ourselves to Him with our *whole* heart.

Israelites binding a man and delivering him over to Gentiles sounds very much like what Israel did to Samson. The Lord must’ve reflected how easily He likewise could have burst those bands and destroyed them all. The similarity with Samson is surely to remind us that He had those possibilities, but He was consciously choosing to give His life. The great paradox was that by accepting those bonds, He was thereby binding the strong man of sin and sin as manifested in the Jewish system (Mt. 12:29). For "Took Him away" see on Mt. 26:57 *Led Him away.*

15:2 *And Pilate asked him: Are you the King of the Jews?*- Out of the various Jewish accusations against the Lord, this was the only one which directly affected the Romans, and was the technical reason for Pilate agreeing to the death penalty; it was this reason which was written over the Lord’s head on the cross. The irony of the situation must have rubbed hard upon the Lord; He was dying as the King of a people, not one of whom would openly show loyalty to Him. In any suffering we may have because of feeling utterly alone, betrayed, having lived life to no end, not being shown loyalty by those we expect it of- we are connected with the spirit of the cross.

And he answering said to him: So you say- Jesus before Pilate said just one word in Greek; translated "You say it". It is stressed there that Jesus said nothing else, so that Pilate marvelled at His silent self-control. Yet Paul speaks with pride of how the Lord Jesus "before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession" (1 Tim. 6:13). You'd expect him to be alluding to some major speech of Jesus. But it seems, reading his spirit, Paul's saying: 'Lord Jesus, your self control, your strength of purpose, was great. I salute you, I hold you up to Timothy as the supreme example. Just one word.

What a witness!'. As He witnessed in His ministry, so must we (Rom. 2:19 cp. Mt. 4:16). As He witnessed before Pilate, so must we witness (1 Tim. 6:12,13).

15:3 *And the chief priests accused him of many things*- The accusations were of course false (as Pilate himself pointed out, Lk. 23:14), making the chief priests and Jewish system the 'devil', the false accuser. In my *The Real Devil* I demonstrated at length that the terms 'satan' and 'devil' often refer specifically to the Jewish system in the first century. The paradox was that it was those very Jews who were standing in the dock before God, accused by the writings of Moses (Jn. 5:45). And yet we must give Jn. 12:42 its due weight- many of the chief rulers believed in Jesus as Christ but were fearful of the Pharisees and exclusion from the synagogue. So it has so often been- fear of religious excommunication leads believers to crucify their Christ brethren. Their behaviour is explained by the repeated descriptions of the Jews 'gathering together' to take their decisions about killing the Lord. In company, men adopt positions far beyond those they personally hold, and even strongly against their own personal convictions. Reading the account of Jewish treatment of Jesus, it seems incredible, at first blush, that some or even "many" of those men "believed in Him". But this is the power of group think and the fear of appearing strange to others, or being rejected by others, especially from their religious fellowship.

Is. 53:7 speaks of the Lord at this time as being uncannily silent: " as a sheep before *her* shearers is silent" . The LXX has: "Because of his affliction he opens not his mouth", as if the silence was from pure fear as well as a reflection of an internal pain that was unspeakable. Job's experience had foretold that the cross would be what the Lord had always "greatly feared". The Passover Lamb, so evidently typical of the Lord as He approached death, was to be *male*. And yet Is. 53:7 conspicuously speaks of a female sheep. Why such an obvious contradiction? Was it not because the prophet foresaw that in the extraordinary breadth of experience the Lord was passing through, He was made to empathize with both men *and* women? He felt then, as He as the seed of the woman stood silent before those abusive men, as a woman would feel. This is not the only place where both the Father and Son are described in feminine terms. It doesn't mean, of course, that the Father is a woman; what it means is that He has the ability to appreciate and manifest feelings which a male would not normally be able to. Through His experience and zeal for our redemption, the Lord Jesus came to the same ability as His Father in these areas. Those who have suffered most are the most able to empathize. And yet somehow the Lord exceeded this principle; it was true of Him, but *such* were His sufferings and such His final empathy that this isn't a fully adequate explanation as to *how* He got to that point of supreme empathy and identity with us that He did. *Exactly* how He did it must surely remain a mystery; for God was in Him, reconciling the world unto Himself by that fully and totally representative sacrifice. The female element in Old Testament sacrifice pointed forward to the Lord's sacrifice, as a sheep before her shearers. His identity with both male and female, as the ultimate representative of all humanity, meant that He took upon Himself things that were perceived as specifically feminine. The mother was the story teller of the family; when people heard the Lord tell parables and teach wisdom, it would have struck them that He was doing the work of the matriarch of a family. "Typical female behaviour included taking the last place at the table, serving others, forgiving wrongs, having compassion, and attempting to heal wounds", strife and arguments. And yet the woman was to be silent... as Christ was. All this was done by the Lord Jesus- especially in His time of dying and the lead up to it. He was in many ways the idealized mother / matriarch. His sacrifice for us was very much seen as

woman's work. And this is why the example of his mother Mary would have been a particular inspiration for Him in going through the final process of self-surrender and sacrifice for others, to bring about forgiveness and healing of strife between God and men. In a fascinating study, Diane Jacobs-Malina develops the thesis that a psychological analysis of the Gospels shows that the Lord Jesus played his roles like "the wife of the absent husband". And assuming that Joseph disappeared from the scene early in life, His own mother would have been His role model here- for she was indeed the wife of an absent husband. You'd have to read Jacobs-Malina's study to be able to judge whether or not you think it's all valid. But if she's right, then it would be yet another tribute to the abiding influence of Mary upon the character of the Son of God.

15:4 *And Pilate again asked him: Have you no answer to make?*- The implication was 'Are you deaf?'. The Lord was fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies that Messiah would be as deaf before His accusers (Ps. 38:13 "I as a deaf man don't hear"; Is. 42:19 "Who is blind, but My servant? Or who is as deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is as blind as he who is at peace, and as blind as Yahweh's servant?"). The quotation from Psalm 38 is from one of the Psalms David wrote concerning his failure with Bathsheba and subsequent sufferings. Many other of these Psalms, especially Psalms 22 and 69, are full of material relevant to the Lord's sufferings. We observe therefore that through suffering for his sin, David came to know the sufferings of his future Messiah. We marvel at how God works through sin. He doesn't ignore it, nor simply punish men for the sake of needing to punish them. Those sufferings and the very experience of sin are somehow worked through by God in order to bring men to His Son and to His cross. We likewise should not turn away from sinners but rather seek to work with them to bring them to know Christ, knowing that this is indeed God's game plan with them too. The allusion to Is. 42:19 must be understood likewise in the context of that passage. The preceding verse has appealed to the blind and deaf within Judah at that time: "Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind" (Is. 42:18), and then goes on say that sinless Messiah likewise was deaf and blind. We see here a principle that was to be worked out throughout the Lord's passion- He identified with sinners. They were deaf and blind, and He now acted as deaf and blind, He identified with sinners to the point that He felt as a sinner. His silence to the accusations was therefore also capable of being understood as the silence of a guilty man before His accusers. Not that the Lord was guilty, but He identified with sinful man to the extent that He felt that way, and this all came to its final term in His genuine feeling that He had been forsaken even by God (:46). Not that He was, for God only forsakes sinners and never forsakes the righteous (see notes on :46). But He so identified with sinners that the Lord felt as one of us, although He was not a sinner. Yet as the Lord stood before His accusers silent, He knew great peace; so Is. 42:19 assures us: "Who is blind, but My servant? Or who is as deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is as blind as *he who is at peace*, and as blind as Yahweh's servant?".

See how many accusations they make against you- The Greek is used only four times in the New Testament; here and twice in the comment of the High Priest at the Lord's earlier trial (Mt. 26:62; Mk. 14:60). Circumstances repeated. The Lord learnt silence at the first trial, and there was the same reaction from the judge; and now the situation repeated itself, although Pilate had not been present at the first trial. He overcame that first test, and repeated the victory. We have seen how in contrast to this, Peter was given various tests which he failed the first time and then subsequent

times when they were repeated (e.g. the three failures to keep awake in Gethsemane, and the triple failure to not deny the Lord later that evening).

A theme of the whole record is that the Lord gave His life of His own volition. This must be remembered as we reflect upon the background to the crucifixion. His refusal to answer Pilate meant that Pilate had to pronounce Him guilty (Mk. 15:4)- hence his marvel at the Lord's silence, as if the Lord was willingly allowing Himself to be condemned.

15:5 *But Jesus made no further answer; so that Pilate marvelled*- This is the same response by the judge as at the Lord's earlier trial (Mt. 26:62,63; see on Mt. 27:13 *They testify against you*). Pilate had presided over many such cases of men being falsely accused. He was astounded at how a man in the face of such blatantly false accusation could be so self-controlled. This, in spiritual terms, was our Lord at one of His most supreme moments. He sets a supreme example to all those falsely accused. Pilate was also staggered at how the Lord had a good human chance of getting off the hook by answering what was blatantly false. But the Lord's mission was to give His life- it was not taken from Him, He gave it. And therefore He made no attempt to get Himself off.

Do we feel that our conscience is so dysfunctional and our heart so hardened in some places that nothing much can touch us and motivate us like it used to? The cross can touch and transform the hardest and most damaged heart. Apart from many real life examples around of this, consider the Biblical case of Pilate. Jewish and Roman historians paint a very different picture of Pilate than what we see in the Biblical record. Philo describes him as “ruthless, stubborn and of cruel disposition", famed for “frequent executions without trial". Josephus speaks of him as totally despising the Jews, stealing money from the temple treasury and brutally suppressing unruly crowds. Why then does he come over in the Gospels as a man desperately struggling with his conscience, to the extent that the Jewish crowds manipulate him to order the crucifixion of a man whom he genuinely believed to be innocent? Surely because the person of the Lord Jesus and the awfulness of putting the Son of God to death touched a conscience which appeared not to even exist. If the whole drama of the death of Jesus could touch the conscience and personality of even Pilate, it can touch each of us. Just compare the words of Philo and Josephus with how Mark records that Pilate was “amazed" at the self-control of Jesus under trial (Mk. 15:5); how he almost pleads with his Jewish subjects for justice to be done: “Why, what evil has he done?" (Mk. 15:14). Compare this with how Philo speaks of Pilate as a man of “inflexible, stubborn and cruel disposition", famous for “abusive behaviour… and endless savage ferocity". Mt. 27:25 describes how Pilate washes his hands, alluding to the Jewish rite based in Deuteronomy, to declare that he is innocent of the blood of a just man. But Josephus records how Pilate totally despised Jewish religious customs and sensibilities, and appeared to love to commit sacrilege against Jewish things. And in Luke’s record, Pilate is recorded as pronouncing Jesus innocent no less than three times. I so admire the way the Lord attempted even as He faced death in the face, to appeal to Pilate's conscience. I'd paraphrase Mk. 15:2 like this: 'Pilate: 'You are King of Israel?'. Jesus: 'You're saying it". Why did the Lord put it like that? Surely because He knew that Pilate, in his conscience, did actually know that Jesus was King of Israel, and the very words [in the original] 'You are King of Israel' came out of his lips, as a kind of psychological slip. This small incident not only indicates how the suffering Jesus could touch even Pilate's conscience; but that the Lord was eagerly

seeking the response of men, even the toughest and unspiritual, right to His very end. And He is the same today. May our feeble responses give Him pleasure and glory.

15:6 *Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them*- The Greek is also translated 'to forgive', and there was within the 'release' the idea that the crime had been forgiven. This was not, therefore, completely appropriate for the Lord Jesus, who had done no wrong. The same word is used in Acts 2:24 of how God "loosed" Jesus from the pangs of death. The Lord's temptation would have been to hope against hope that each of the human possibilities of release would come true. But He had resolutely decided to do God's will unto the end, and therefore He knew that the only ultimate release would be in resurrection, and that would be performed by the Father rather than by any human power. The language of loosing or releasing [s.w.] is used about what the Lord achieved by His death (He 'loosed' the works of the devil, 1 Jn. 3:8; loosed the middle wall of partition, Eph. 2:14; loosed the seals on the book of life, Rev. 5:5). As ever, the paradox was that this release, this form of salvation, falsely appeared to be in the power of those who crucified the Lord. But the Lord saw through it all. Likewise, they appeared His judges and He appeared the guilty; when the opposite was the case.

Whomever they requested- Or, "wanted" (Mt.). In essence, they had made their choice earlier. The Lord had used the same word in Mt. 12:7: "But if you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not [s.w. "wanted"] have condemned the guiltless". The Lord perceived that the essence of the cross, the essence of all that was happening to Him, had already happened during His ministry. They had already condemned the guiltless. This would have helped Him not to hang too intensely on the possibility of the outcome of events changing suddenly at the last minute through some failure in their legal process. And we perceive too that there was no great divide between His final intense sufferings, and what He went through during His life. Our carrying of the cross likewise is a daily matter, rather than a few moments of intense choice which occur during our lives. The same Greek word translated "wanted" occurs three times in describing how they 'wanted' to condemn Jesus and 'wanted' Barabbas (Mt. 26:15,17,21). Lk. 23:25 concludes the section by saying that Pilate "delivered Jesus to their will". It is the same word which the Lord had agonized over in Gethsemane- "Not as I *will*, but as You *will*" (Mt. 26:39). Even though it appeared that the will of evil, conniving men was being done, it was in fact the Father's will. And we can take similar comfort when it appears that the will of evil men is being done. Ultimately, there is the Father's will far over and above them, working on a far higher level, although we cannot see the final picture of His purpose in specific moments. It can be painless of itself to pray the Father's will be done (Mt. 6:10), but this is what it meant for the Lord. It took Him an hour [long enough for the disciples to fall asleep] to pray for the Father's will to be done, and not His (Mt. 26:42). In the Lord's ministry, He had sought to do not His own will but the Father's (Jn. 5:30; 6:38), and this came to its ultimate moment in His situation in Gethsemane facing the cross. Again we see that the essence of Gethsemane and of the Lord's choice to die on the cross was not simply in these final intense moments, but was an outflow of a life daily lived by that principle, in which to do the Father's will was the food He ate and the air He breathed (Jn. 4:34). John doesn't record the Lord's struggle in Gethsemane concerning doing the Father's will rather than His own will, but [as so often] John has made the same point in other ways earlier in his Gospel; John has shown the Lord making this choice throughout His life, and inviting His followers to do likewise (Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38). This is John's way of showing that the essence of Gethsemane and the cross was to be found throughout the Lord's life.

15:7 *And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man named Barabbas*- Son of Abba, the father. This man was clearly an anti-Christ, a fake Christ, a man set up in appearance as the Christ, the son of God, when he was the very opposite. And Israel chose him. His similarity with the Lord is made even more interesting by the fact that some early manuscripts (such as the Caesarean, the Sinaitic Palimpsest and the Palestinian Syriac) here read 'Jesus Barabbas' (Referenced in Craig A. Evans, *Matthew (New Cambridge Bible Commentary)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012 p. 453.). The four gospel records only occasionally all record the same incident. When they do all mention the same thing, it seems that the Spirit intends us to see an especial significance in this. The fact that the crowd chose Barabbas rather than the Lord of glory is one of those aspects of the Passion which is recorded by all four writers. There is much information given about Barabbas, emphasizing the kind of criminal he was (Mt. 27:16; Mk. 15:7; Lk. 23:19; Jn. 18:40). That men would reject the righteousness of God, the Spotless Lamb of God, for such a man... this is the tragic story of our race and our nature. And it was the ecclesia of those days which made this dastard choice, and crucified the Lord Jesus. The same nature, the same blindness, is in us all.

15:8 *And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them*- They hated the Lord and wanted to see Him crucified. So they were coming to ask for the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of Jesus. But Pilate is so desperate to get the Lord off, so screaming was his conscience, that he misread the situation and grasped at this tradition of releasing a prisoner, hoping the Jews would want their King released and not crucified. Actually his offer only fomented their passions the more. According to Lk. 23:16, Pilate attempted to take the decision out of their hands by saying that Jesus was to be the prisoner to be released; and this also had the effect of piquing their desire for His crucifixion the more. For nobody, especially a mob, likes to feel railroaded out of their desired outcome at the last moment.

15:9 *And Pilate answered them saying: Will you have me release to you the King of the Jews?*- This word for "release" is used of how Paul could have been released or "let go" because after examination by the Romans, "there was no cause of death in me" (Acts 28:18). Paul's trials are full of connection with those of the Lord, and Paul (like us) took special comfort in any similarity between the Lord's sufferings and his own. For this is indeed why we have such a mass of detail about the Lord's final sufferings- we are to see endless points of connection between His experiences and our own. And as Paul says, if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. It was to this process which we signed up to at baptism, in which we dedicated ourselves to a life of dying and living with Him.

15:10 *For he knew that because of envy the chief priests had delivered him up*- Pilate was encouraging them to choose Barabbas over Jesus so that the guilt of Jesus' crucifixion would be upon them and not him. Bible critics have pointed out that this was unusual behaviour for Pilate, renowned as he was for being a brutal and apparently conscienceless man. Indeed he was that- but the point is that the Lord Jesus in His time of dying can touch even the person whose conscience appears to be otherwise untouchable. This was and is the power of the cross of Christ. I suggest we are mistaken in reading this as if Pilate wanted them to choose Jesus for release and was mystified they chose Barabbas. He asked them to choose, knowing they had

delivered Jesus to him out of envy. He wanted them to take the choice, in an attempt to assuage his own conscience.

James 4:5 reminds us that "The spirit that dwells in us lusts to envy" (s.w.). Envy is a basic human tendency which we must restrain. In the whole process of the Lord's betrayal, abuse and crucifixion we see the end result of basic human tendencies when they are let go unrestrained. The crucifixion of God's Son is where they lead. This is the shocking message of the whole process the Gospels record concerning the Lord's death at the hands of the Jews. The point is that we have the same nature, and unrestrained, we shall end up in essence doing the same.

15:11 *But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, that instead he should release Barabbas to them*- The idea is not so much that Pilate wanted to release Jesus *but* the priests worked against that. Pilate knew they envied Jesus and were intent on having Him executed, and wished to place the decision as far as he could in their hands in order to not have the Lord's blood on his hands. Such were his attempts to ease his conscience.

It could be that the Jewish leadership also had an uneasy conscience. Pilate wanted to shift the responsibility onto them, and they in turn wanted the crowd to be the ones who made the decision. Because it seems that the person to be released at Passover was not usually chosen by mass decision or request, rather the decision was made by Pilate. But in this case, he gets the Jewish leadership to choose between Jesus and Barabbas. And they in turn get the crowd involved in the choice, just as they kept 'consulting together' before each decision regarding Jesus. This all indicates how conscience was being touched in all those concerned. It is a powerful insight into the degree to which the Lord Jesus and His death can touch the most hardened conscience; and even those who appear to have absolutely no conscience do in fact have one, which can be touched by Christ. We see too the fickleness of the crowd- those who once welcomed Jesus as Messiah just a few days before, were so soon turned around against Him. And then turned back again a few weeks later by Peter's preaching.

15:12 *And Pilate again answered and said to them: What then shall I do to him whom you call the King of the Jews?*- This is asking an obvious question, seeing that the record has noted that Pilate knew they had delivered Jesus to him out of envy, and they had made it abundantly clear that they sought the death penalty for Him. Pilate asked the question knowing full well the answer they were going to give. But he wanted to elicit from them in clear, specific and public terms that it was *their* wish that Jesus be crucified. See on Mt. 27:21 *Which of the two do you want me to release to you?* It was all part of an extended psychological game Pilate was playing with them, leading them to so clearly take the blame for the Lord's crucifixion. But he only bothered doing this because his conscience was troubling him, and in this we see a powerful insight into the way the Lord's death can touch the hardest of consciences. This is the very reason why reflection upon the Lord in His time of dying leads on naturally to true self-examination. And in this lies the connection between self-examination and the breaking of bread service.

15:13 *And they cried out again: Crucify him!*- When people are pressed for a reason for their unreasonable positions and behaviours, they simply say the same thing again, but more loudly (in various ways). This is the classic example- they repeated their cry "Let Him be crucified!". Surely Pilate knew that they would respond like this, and I see him as stage managing the entire crowd, purposefully

leading the crowd to cry out ever louder, in order to set the stage for his public washing of his hands. But he played this elaborate game because he had a conscience, and wanted to try to separate himself from the decision to crucify the Lord.

15:14 *And Pilate said to them: Why? What evil has he done? But they cried out exceedingly: Crucify him!*- We see here Pilate's persuasion of the Lord's sinlessness; and how he discounted even the talk about the Lord seeking to stop tribute being given to Caesar and to start a revolution. Pilate knew that they had delivered Jesus to him from envy, and that there was no legitimate reason for the death sentence. I suggest he is not so much seeking to change their minds, but rather purposefully seeking to elicit from the Jews a clear statement that they wanted Him crucified.

15:15 *And Pilate, wishing to calm the crowd, released to them Barabbas and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified*- As soon as the sentence was pronounced: You shall be crucified, the victim was stripped naked and fastened to a post about as high as the waist and then flogged. Josephus twice mentions that the body was stripped naked and flogged until the flesh hung down in shreds. 13 stripes were against His breast, 26 on the back. They probably chanted them. He may have had a slab of iron between His teeth to grit against. Men were known to have bitten their tongues in two during the whipping. John Pollock explains that the victim was stretched with hands above his head, whipped by naked slaves with a device of three leather thongs laced with pieces of sharpened bone, whilst a clerk stood with a slab on which to take down confessions. Scourging was usually "accomplished by tying the victim's wrists to an iron ring set about knee level, so that he would be bent over; or, facing or backed to a column, the wrists would be tied overhead. There were probably two scourgers, standing on each side, each with whips five or six feet long ending in two leather thongs tipped with metal. As the scourging whips fell across the victim's back they would wrap around his body at times lacerating his body front and back, so that scourge marks soon covered all of his body except the head, feet, and forearms... It was uncommon for the Romans to both scourge and crucify a person. Why was it done to Jesus? It has been conjectured by some scholars that Pilate thought by excessive scourging and beating of Jesus the Jewish council would be satisfied. They weren't". All men usually screamed out something, anything, in the hope that the lashing would therefore be shortened. The Lord's silence at this time would have been yet one more thing which awed His tormentors. There were runnels, Pollock says, in which the blood drained away. The scourging would already have been done twice for the thieves. The Angel watchers of the skies would have peered down into that blood, as they did in cherubic form into the blood on the mercy seat. The blood of the Son of God was treated by men as something ordinary, thoughtlessly mixed with that of criminals, and was trodden under foot. Perhaps it was to this aspect of the Lord's sufferings and insult that Heb. 10:29 refers to, in describing the crucifixion (and the Lord's *re-crucifixion* by fallen believers) as counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and thereby treading under foot the Son of God (cp. Heb. 6:6 RV mg "*while* they crucify the son of God", suggesting that once this ongoing re-crucifixion stops, men can be forgiven). The despising and treading under of that blood in a literal sense only occurred at the scourging. It was observed by some first century writers that the length of time it took a crucifixion victim to die was related to the severity of the scourging. The Lord's relatively quick death may therefore (although not necessarily) reflect the brutality with which He was treated at this time. When Peter speaks of how we are healed by Christ's "stripes" (1 Pet. 2:24), uses an especially intense word to describe the scourging. It could be that he somehow saw or heard about the scourging, and saw it as parallel to Christ suffering for us "on the tree". The

Lord's bloody sweat in Gethsemane has been identified as hemohidrosis, an extreme nervous state in which there is haemorrhage into the sweat glands, and therefore the skin becomes fragile and tender. This would have meant that flogging, the carrying of the cross and the constant friction between His back and the rough wood would have been agonizing. Hemohidrosis also produces severe chills. The Lord would have been shivering in the cold darkness of His final hours, with every involuntary movement causing agony to the nerves which the nails purposefully transfixed.

15:16 *Then the soldiers led him away into the hall called Praetorium, and they called together the whole battalion*- We wonder how many of those soldiers later converted to the Lord's side. Because surely their degrading of Him was done with strong quirks of bad conscience.

15:17 *And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on him*- The thorns would have penetrated the scalp into the network of blood vessels there, producing a flow of blood onto the mock-kingly garment. We see here human nature at its most raw and primitive. That is one feature of the crucifixion accounts. They were also motivated by a desire to test His claims to royalty. He had made it clear that His Kingdom was not of this world; His teaching about the Kingdom, largely in the parables, was about life lived now under domination of the Father's principles. And yet they willingly overlooked that and focused on mocking Him as a king. We note that Babylon too is arrayed in purple (Rev. 17:4 s.w.), making her a veritable anti Christ, a fake imitation of Him.

The thorns were growing between the cobbles of the courtyard? Or were they using thorns on their courtyard fire? The thorns on the head would have reminded Him that He was being temporarily overcome by the result of the curse in Eden. As with several aspects of His mocking, His tormentors unknowingly gave Him spiritual stimulus by what they did. His mind was certainly in Eden, for He spoke of the Kingdom as "paradise", with evident allusion to Eden (Lk. 23:43). Note that the Lord was beaten up at least three times: by the Jewish guards, by Herod's men and by the Roman soldiers. In a literal sense He was bruised for our iniquities, and chastised for us to obtain the peace of sin forgiven (Is. 53:5). And the Father surely foresaw all this back in Gen. 3:15, where the promised seed was to be *bruised*. He willed (*not* "pleased", as AV) this bruising, and this putting to grief (Is. 53:10). The parallel here between the bruising, beating and putting to grief may suggest that the beatings up ('bruisings') really grieved the Lord. And note that the final sacrifice of which Is. 53 speaks was not *only* achieved by the hours spent hanging on the cross. This earlier beating and abusing was just as much a part of His final passion, as, in essence, His whole life was a living out of the principles of the cross. It has been suggested that the crown of thorns was not only a mockery, but a significant part of the physical torture of crucifixion. If the net of nerves and veins under the skin of the scalp are pierced, profuse bleeding and stunning head ache would occur. His hair would therefore have been bloody. It would have been a wreath, a *stephanos* similar to that worn by Tiberius. The mock homage to the crowned Saviour-Lord was surely in the Lord's mind at His ascension, when all the Angels of God bowed before Him in true worship (Heb. 1:6).

15:18 *And they began to salute him: Hail, King of the Jews!*- "Hail" is literally, 'Be happy'. J.D. Crossan mentions a Jewish tradition, quoting Mishnah passages to support it, that the bruised scapegoat had scarlet wool tied to it, and that the Jews spat on the scapegoat in order to place their sins upon it (J.D. Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994)). It could be

that the Roman soldiers were doing all this in mockery of this tradition. It would have given the Lord something more to fill His holy mind with. He knew that He was actually doing what they were mockingly suggesting- carrying Israel's sins. God worked even through the spitting and mocking of men to work out the finest details of our redemption. The spitting is in the context of their mocking His Kingship. "Hail, King of the Jews!"was in parody of 'Ave, Caesar'. It was customary to give a kiss of homage to royalty. Their parody of this was to spit at Him, in the face, according to the type of Job 30:10. Earlier, at the trial, the Jews had spat in His face (Mt. 26:67). Now He tasted Roman spittle. And this was the face from which the glory of God had shone (Mk. 9:15?). One of the themes of the crucifixion records is that the same abuse and suffering was repeated to the Lord. Hence the frequent usage of the continuous tense. During the trial by Pilate, the Lord underwent mock worship and spitting (Jn. 19:3). Then later it was mock worship, spitting, hitting on the head (Mt. 27:29,30). And then hitting on the head, spitting, mock worship (Mk. 15:19,20). It seems they alternated bruising / spitting on Christ with bruising / kneeling before Him in mock homage. The reed was used as a mock diadem, although instead of touching His shoulder with it they hit Him on the head with it. They put it in His hand as a sceptre and then snatched it back to hit Him on the head with it. Wave after wave of the same treatment. Notice how many times the word "again" features in the Greek text (*palin*). This is the essence of our temptations. And it was a big theme in the Lord's final human experience. Likewise a comparison of the records shows that "Come down..." was clearly said more than once, the continuous tenses notwithstanding (Mt. 27:40 cp. Mk. 15:30). However, it is worth cataloguing the use of continuous tenses in this part of the record: The crowd *kept on* crying out (as demons did), "Crucify him" (Mt. 27:23); the soldiers *kept on* clothing Him (Mt. 27:28), *kept on* coming to Him and kept on saying... (Jn. 19:3 Gk.), Pilate *kept on seeking* (imperfect) to deliver the Lord (Jn. 19:12), thereby agitating the tension in the Lord's mind. They *kept on* kneeling (27:29), *kept on* spitting (v.30), *kept on* passing in front of Him on the cross and *kept on* shaking their heads (v. 39), *kept on* saying "...save thyself", *kept on* mocking and asking Him to come down from the cross (vv. 40,41), the soldiers *kept on* coming to Him and offering Him their vinegar in mock homage (Lk. 23:36), they *kept on* offering Him the pain killer. They *kept on and on and on*. This is an undoubted theme.

15:19 *And they hit his head with a rod and spat upon him, and kneeled down in homage to him*- The question is to why Gentile soldiers would unleash such hatred upon Jesus, when the crucifixion of a Jew was just another job for them to do. We somehow do not imagine them doing this to the thieves or other crucifixion victims. I conclude that there was something in the Lord which forced men to either respond to Him, or go the other way in assuming that unless He was as He claimed, then He must be the worst of all and worthy of all hatred. We see the same effect upon men today, even if social norms mean that we express the passions [both for and against Him] in less dramatic and more restrained terms.

15:20 *And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple cloak and dressed him in his own garments*- The record that they put the Lord's own clothes on Him and then led Him to crucifixion conflicts with contemporary records of the victim being led out naked, or certainly without his own outer clothes. Christ was revealed, or 'revealed himself' (Gk.) on the cross, when He took away our sins (1 Jn. 3:5). This may be John referring to how he had witnessed Christ crucified naked. Yet we know that the Lord wore His outer robe right up to the impaling. It may be that the whipping and abuse He had suffered was far beyond what the soldiers had the right to minister. There

were special directives concerning the need for the victim to die by crucifixion, not at the hands of the soldiers. It may be that they wanted to cover up the illegal marks on the body by making the Lord go to the cross fully dressed. In which case, again we see how He suffered the very *worst* of man's machinations. The Lord having His own clothes put back on Him meant that He would have been dressed in blood sprinkled garments for the walk to Golgotha. Again His holy mind would have been on the Messianic prophecies of Is. 63 about a Messiah with blood sprinkled garments lifted up in glorious victory. Or perhaps He saw the connection to Lev. 8:30, where the priests had to have blood sprinkled garments in order to begin their priestly work. This would have sent His mind to us, for whom He was interceding. Likewise when He perceived that His garment would not be rent, He would have joyfully perceived that He was indeed as the High Priest whose garment was not to be rent (Ex. 39:23).

And they led him out to crucify him- The Greek word translated "led away" is used about 10 times in the Gospels for the leading away of Jesus to death. It occurs in another context, in 7:13,14, where the Lord spoke of how wide and common is the way that 'leads away to' destruction compared to the way which 'leads away to' eternal life. He was being led away to destruction; He was sharing the path of all condemned sinners. This is a great theme of the crucifixion accounts- that the Lord identified totally with the position of condemned sinners. The logic is that by living the life of the flesh, we are led away to destruction; and yet by being led away to destruction with the Lord, in sharing His death, we are in fact being led away to life.

Tradition has it that the victim had to hold their hands out to receive the stake, which they then had to carry. The Lord's prophecy of Peter's crucifixion thus describes it as Peter stretching out his hands and being led to his death (Jn. 21:18). Yet the Lord emphasized in His teaching that we must *take up* the cross, as He did (Mk. 8:34; 10:21). This might just suggest that in line with the Lord's willing death, giving up of His life rather than it being taken from Him, He bent down and picked up the stake before the soldiers had the chance to offer it to Him. I imagine doing this in a deft manner. The deftness of the way He broke that bread apart and held the cup comes out in Mt. 26:26. He knew what that breaking of bread was going to mean. His willingness would have been such a contrast to the unwilling hesitation of the thieves and other victims. The soldiers must have been blind indeed to still mock Him, despite all these indications that He was more than mere man. That piece of wood that was laid upon Him by the Father, however the Lord physically took it up, represented our sins, which were laid upon Him (Is. 53:6); your laziness to do your Bible readings early this morning, my snap at the woman in the bus, his hatred of his mother in law... that piece of wood was the symbol of our sins, every one of them. This is what we brought upon Him. It was our laziness, our enmity, our foolishness, *our weak will*... that necessitated the death of Jesus in this terrible way. He went through with it all "to make an end of sins" (Dan. 9:26). Will we do our little bit in responding? The marks of His sufferings will be in Him eternally, and thereby we will be eternally reminded of the things we now only dimly appreciate (Rev. 5:6; Zech. 13:6).

The walk from the courthouse to Golgotha was probably about 800m (half a mile). One of the soldiers would have carried the sign displaying the Lord's Name and crime. The thieves were probably counting the paces (maybe the crowd was chanting them?). You know how it is when doing a heavy task, 'Just three more boxes to lug upstairs... just two more... last one'. But the Lord was above this. Of that I'm sure. Doing any physically strenuous task that takes you to the end of your strength, there is that concentration on nothing else but the job in hand. Hauling a heavy box or load, especially in situations of compulsion or urgency, it becomes irrelevant if you bump

into someone or crush a child's toy beneath your heavy feet. But the Lord rose above. He turned and spoke to the women. Luke as a doctor knew that suffering makes one self-centred. It is perhaps because of this that he especially seems to concentrate on the wonder of the way in which the Lord looked out of His own agony to be so concerned with that of others. A.D. Norris has commented (*The Gospel Of Mark*): "It is he who reports the Lord's prayer for Simon Peter (22:31); who recounts the Lord's sympathetic warning to the women of Jerusalem (23:27-31); and who speaks of the Lord's forgiveness for His crucifiers, and remission for the penitent thief (23:34,43)" .

15:21 *And they compelled a passer-by to carry his cross, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the countryside, the father of Alexander and Rufus*- Cyrene was where there was a strongly orthodox Jewish community (cp. Acts 6:9). Simon was probably dark skinned, a countryman, a simple man, who had perhaps come up to Jerusalem in his zeal to keep Passover. What a comfort it was to the Lord to see a black man carrying His cross; for He had earlier said that *all* His true followers would carry the cross behind Him (Mt. 10:38; 16:24). The Hebrew writer seemed to see Simon as typical of us all when writing of how we must go out of the city with the Lord, "bearing his reproach" (Heb. 13:12,13, probably using 'reproach' as a parallel to 'the cross'). He would have seen in Simon a prototype of all His future, suffering, humiliated followers; "impressed" by the predestined calling, almost against our will, to carry His cross (Mt. 27:32 RV mg.). And was it accident that this prototype was almost certainly a black man, when perhaps ultimately it may appear that a large proportion of the faithful body of the Lord Jesus will have been black people? If indeed Simon was a black Jew (cp. modern Falashas) who had come up to keep the Passover, it would have been annoying beyond words for him to be made unclean by the blood of the Lord, which was inevitably on the stake after His first attempt at bearing it after His flogging. Not to mention the shame for a zealous Jew in having to carry the cross of this Jesus of Nazareth. Yet it would seem that he was later converted, and he in turn converted his wife and son (Mk. 15:21 cp. Rom. 16:13). Mark rarely records proper nouns, but he makes a special effort to mention that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. It would therefore seem that these men were well known in the early church. Simon may be the "Simeon called Niger" ('the black one') of Acts 13:1. He is listed there next to Lucius, who was also from Cyrene. The thief and the centurion were likewise converted, and the faith of Joseph, Nicodemus and probably others was brought out into the open by the cross. Like Samson, the Lord won victories even in His death. The spiritual turn-around in Simon is a type of what is experienced by all whom the Lord compels to carry His cross. He was passing by, going somewhere else, full of his own plans, going about to establish his own righteousness... and then, out of the blue, he was called to what he much later realized was the greatest honour a man could be called to: to accompany the Son of God and carry His cross, right to the end. We are left to imagine him plonking it down, as if to say to Jesus 'Now you've got to do the rest', and then slipping off into the crowd.

Another reading of Simon is possible. Simon is a Greek name, and the names of his sons are Greco-Roman. The way he is described as “coming out of the field" (Lk. 23:26) could imply that he was working, doing what was improper on a feast day, because he was a Gentile. It could be that he simply lived and worked near Jerusalem, he wasn’t a religious guy, and like Saul out looking for lost cattle, he was going some place else…until the Lord as it were arrested him with the message of the cross.

15:22 *And they brought him to the place named Golgotha, which means, Place of the skull*- See on Jn. 19:25. John says that the Lord went out bearing His cross. Luke says that Simon was asked to carry the hinder part of the cross behind Him. Matthew and Mark say Simon carried the cross. Mk. 15:22 (Gk.) says that the soldiers carried Jesus to Golgotha. J.B. Phillips renders it: "They got him to a place Golgotha". It would seem that the Lord collapsed, perhaps fainting. If He was crucified on an olive tree (excavations of crucified men suggest this is what was used), it would not have been simply because of the weight of the stake. Take a picture of Him lying there, with the face that was marred more than the children of men pressed into the hot dust of that Jerusalem street. And some human fool probably said something like 'Come on, get up' (doubtless with embellishments). If indeed He did faint, there would have been that sense of 'coming round', the "Where am I?", the memory and consciousness flooding back. "Have I died and been resurrected?" No, as some nameless soldier kicked Him and told Him to get up.

15:23 *And they offered him wine mingled with myrrh; but he did not accept it*- To give strong drink to those ready to perish was a well-known custom at crucifixion. The fact victims survived two or three days was only because they were given drink. The Lord didn't simply refuse the pain killer. He took it, tasted it, and then refused it. Why did He first taste it? Surely He knew the custom, and He knew what it was. Various alternatives arise in the mind, each a source of devotional inspiration:

- Was it that His eyesight was damaged by the punches and He didn't see what it was until He tasted it? "When Jesus therefore saw his mother..." may suggest that He didn't initially recognize her. The Messianic Scriptures mention the affliction of eyesight in Messiah's final suffering. Early crucifixion art shows the Lord with His right eye damaged (as does the Turin shroud). The mucous membrane (the thin slippery tissues which lubricate the human body) would have dried so that "they rip layers of tissues from the eyes every time the pupil is moved or blinked" (C.M. Ward).
- Maybe He realized as He had the cup on His lips that they were giving this to Him in the spirit of Jer. 23:15: to show that He was a false prophet. In this case, for the sake of His respect for the implications of Holy Scripture, He endured a far higher degree of pain.
- Another explanation is that He wanted to speak out loud, saying (several times?) "Father, forgive them", and to perhaps recite Psalm 22. He was so parched from thirst (He had lost body fluid in Gethsemane) that He knew He couldn't speak out loud without some liquid. The dehydration would have made His tongue thicken so that speech was eventually almost impossible. But He only drank enough to moisten His throat, not to deaden any pain. This shows the majestic self-mastery within the Lord; He knew just when to stop, even though it must have been so tempting to keep on drinking.
- Taking the pain killer would not have been a sin, neither would it have theologically damaged the atonement. Perhaps the Lord took it, as doubtless the others did, and then had the self-control to think better of it and give it back. Such was His devotion to the absolute height of identity with us. It makes His action all the more poignant if He first tasted and then refused, rather than just refusing outright.

He was *repeatedly* offered the pain killer, the tense implies. Men offering Him myrrh in (mock) homage would have sent His mind back to the story dear Mary had told Him about the wise men bringing myrrh. And inevitably her tortured mind would have gone back there too. But I have another suggestion. When we read that

“someone" offered him a sponge with wine mixed with myrrh (Mk. 15:36; Mt. 27:48), we recall the use of myrrh in preparing bodies for burial (Mk. 14:3; Lk. 23:56; Jn. 12:3; 19:39). Pliny (*Natural History* 14.15.92,107) records: “The finest wine in early days was that spiced with the scent of myrrh… I also find that aromatic wine is constantly made from almost the same ingredient as perfumes, from myrrh". This alerts me to the real possibility that the unnamed bystander who did this was Mary Magdalene. Earlier she had anointed the Lord’s body with myrrh “to the burial". And now she has prepared the most expensive form of wine as some sort of pain killer. Perhaps the Lord was so touched by this that He accepted it, but didn’t drink it. His doing this is otherwise very hard to understand. Her love was on one hand inappropriate, and yet the Lord still accepted it, even though He couldn’t use it. He could have felt angry with her for tempting Him to the easier way. But He didn’t. And in so doing He showed her that the essence of the cross is that there is no easy way. The principles of all this are to be reflected in our cross carrying.

Another alternative presents itself from the Hebrew text of Ps. 69:21: “They gave me also gall". The Hebrew can stand the translation ‘poison’ (see RSV). Given the extended, agitated torture of crucifixion, there was a custom for close friends to get close enough to the cross to lift up a poisonous substance which the crucified would lick, and thereby die quickly. It is just possible that a friend (or even his mother?) or a sympathetic soldier did this. Again, in this case it would seem that the Lord chose the highest level; our salvation would surely have been theologically achievable if He had taken it. But He chose to attain for us not only salvation, but “such *great* salvation" (Heb. 2:3) by always taking the highest level. He became obedient not only to death, but “even the death of the cross".

One feels that the Lord would have been justified in accepting the pain killer that was offered Him in His final agony; but He refused it, it seems to me, in order to achieve the *greatest* salvation for us. He never once used what I have called the principle of Jephthah's vow. In the same spirit, some faithful men of old refused legitimate deliverance from torture so that they might obtain "a better resurrection" (Heb. 11:35). The record of the cross is full of examples of where the Lord in physical terms rejected legitimate comforts in His final hours. Yet throughout His life, He was ever ready to concede to the weakness of those who would genuinely follow Him. The way He spoke about demons without giving His hearers a lecture about the folly of such belief is proof of this. He could have insisted, as we do, on the rejection of such superstitions. But this was not His way. I am not suggesting that *we* have the right to make such concessions in our preaching and baptizing. But He did.

15:24 *And they crucify him and part his garments among themselves, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take*- There seems to have been something unusual about the Lord’s outer garment. The same Greek word *chiton* used in Jn. 19:23,24 is that used in the LXX of Gen. 37:3 to describe Joseph’s coat of many pieces. Josephus (*Antiquities* 3.7.4,161) uses the word for the tunic of the High Priest, which was likewise not to be rent (Lev. 21:10). The Lord in His time of dying is thus set up as High Priest, gaining forgiveness for His people, to ‘come out’ of the grave as on the day of Atonement, pronouncing the forgiveness gained, and bidding His people spread that good news world-wide. The robe was not to be torn, *schizein*. There was to be no schism in it. Ahijah tore his garment into twelve pieces to symbolize the division of Israel (1 Kings 11:30,31). The Lord’s coat being unrent may therefore be another reflection of how His death brought about unity amongst His people (Jn. 11:52; 17:21,22). Before Him, there, we simply cannot be divided amongst ourselves. Likewise the net through which the Lord gathers His people was unbroken (Jn.

21:11). Note how all these references are in John- as if he perceived this theme of unity through the cross.

It is likely that the Lord was crucified naked, thereby sharing the shame of Adam's nakedness. The *shame* of the cross is stressed (Heb. 11:26; 12:2; Ps. 31:17; Ps. 69:6,7,12,19,20). And we are to share those sufferings. There *must*, therefore, be an open standing up for what we believe in the eyes of a hostile world. Preaching, in this sense, is for all of us. And if we dodge this, we put the Son of God to a naked shame; we re-crucify Him naked, we shame Him again (Heb. 6:6). He was crucified naked, and the sun went in for three hours. He must have been cold, very cold (Jn. 18:18). Artemidorus Daldianus (*Oneirokritika* 2.53) confirms that the Romans usually crucified victims naked. Melito of Sardis, writing in the 2nd century, writes of "his body naked and not even deemed worthy of a clothing that it might not be seen. Therefore the heavenly lights turned away and the day darkened in order that he might be hidden who was denuded upon the cross" (*On the Pasch* 97). The earliest portrayals of the crucified Jesus, on carved gems, feature Him naked. There is reason to think that the Jews put the Lord to the maximum possible shame and pain; therefore they may well have crucified Him naked. T. Mommsen *The Digest Of Justinian* 48.20.6 reports that "the garments that the condemned person is wearing may not be demanded by the torturers"- the fact that they gambled for His clothes shows that the Lord was yet again treated illegally (quite a feature of the records) and to the maximum level of abuse. We not only get this impression from the Biblical record, but from a passage in the Wisdom of Solomon (2:12-20) which would have been well known to them, and which has a surprising number of similarities to the Lord's life amongst the Jews (Susan Garrett lists several Greek words and phrases found in the Gospel of Mark which are identical to those in this section of the Wisdom of Solomon. It would seem that Mark was aware of this passage in the Wisdom of Solomon, and sought to show how throughout the Lord's ministry, and especially in His death, the Jews were seeking to apply it to Him in the way they treated Him. See Susan Garrett, *The Temptations Of Jesus In Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) p. 68):

"Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man, since he annoys us and opposes our way of life, reproaches us for our breaches of the law an accuses us of playing false... he claims to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a son of the Lord. Before us he stands, a reproof to our way of thinking, the very sight of him weighs our spirits down; His way of life is not like other men's... in His opinion we are counterfeit...and boasts of having God as His father. let us see if what he says is true, let us observe what kind of end he himself will have. If the virtuous man is God's son, God will take his part and rescue him from the clutches of his enemies. *Let us test him with cruelty and with torture, and thus explore this gentleness of His and put His endurance to the proof. Let us condemn him to a shameful death* since he will be looked after- we have his word for it".

The idea of the Lord being subjected to the maximum pain and mocking must, sadly, be applied to Seneca's description of how some victims of crucifixion were nailed through their genitals (*Dialogi* 6.20.3). In this sense the paradox of Is. 53 would have come true- through losing His ability to bring forth children, the Lord brought forth a huge multitude of spiritual children world-wide. It's an honour to be one of them.
By casting lots- Did they throw the die on top of His outer garment? Note the focus of

the soldiers upon the dividing up of the clothes, whilst the Son of God played out the ultimate spiritual drama for human salvation just a metre or so away from them. And our pettiness is worked out all too often in sight of the same cross. As those miserable men argued over the clothes at the foot of the cross, so when Israel stood before the glory of Yahweh at Sinai, they still suffered “disputes" amongst themselves (Ex. 24:22 NIV cp. Heb. 12:29). So pressing and important do human pettinesses appear, despite the awesomeness of that bigger picture to which we stand related.

The sheer and utter reality of the crucifixion needs to be meditated upon just as much as the actual reality of the fact that Jesus actually existed. A Psalm foretold that Jesus at His death would be the song of the drunkards. Many Nazi exterminators took to drink. And it would seem almost inevitable that the soldiers who crucified Jesus went out drinking afterwards. Ernest Hemingway wrote a chilling fictional story of how those men went into a tavern late on that Friday evening. After drunkenly debating whether “Today is Friday", they decide that it really is Friday, and then tell how they nailed Him and lifted Him up. "When the weight starts to pull on 'em, that's when it gets em... Ain't I seen em ? I seen plenty of 'em . I tell you, he was pretty good today". And that last phrase runs like a refrain through their drunken evening. Whether or not this is an accurate reconstruction isn't my point- we have a serious duty to seek to imagine what it might have been like. Both Nazi and Soviet executioners admit how vital it was to never look the man you were murdering in the face. It was why they put on a roughness which covered their real personalities. And the Lord’s executioners would have done the same. To look into His face, especially His eyes, dark with love and grief for His people, would have driven those men to either suicide or conversion. I imagine them stealing a look at His face, the face of this man who didn’t struggle with them but willingly laid Himself down on the wood. The cross struck an educated Greek as barbaric folly, a Roman citizen as sheer disgrace, and a Jew as God's curse. Yet Jesus turned the sign of disgrace into a sign of victory. Through it, He announced a radical revaluation of all values. He made it a symbol for a brave life, without fear even in the face of fatal risks; through struggle, suffering, death, in firm trust and hope in the goal of true freedom, life, humanity, eternal life. The offence, the sheer scandal, was turned into an amazing experience of salvation, the way of the cross into a possible way of life. The risen Christ was and is just as much a living reality. Suetonius records that Claudius expelled Jewish Christians from Rome because they were agitated by one Chrestus; i.e. Jesus the Christ. Yet the historian speaks as if He was actually alive and actively present in person . In essence, He was. All the volumes of confused theology, the senseless theories about the Trinity. would all have been avoided if only men had had the faith to believe that the man Jesus who really died and rose, both never sinned and was also indeed the Son of God. And that His achievement of perfection in human flesh was real. Yes it takes faith- and all the wrong theology was only an excuse for a lack of such faith.

Several crucifixion victims have been unearthed. One was nailed with nails 18c.m. long (7 inches). A piece of acacia word seems to have been inserted between the nail head and the flesh. *Did the Lord cry out in initial pain and shock?* Probably, as far as I can reconstruct it; for He would have had all the physical reflex reactions of any man. But yet I also sense that He didn't flinch as other men did. He came to offer His life, willingly; not grudgingly, resistantly give it up. He went through the panic of approaching the pain threshold. The nailing of the hands and feet just where the nerves were would have sent bolts of pain through the Lord's arms every time He moved or spoke. The pain would have been such that even with the eyelids closed, a

penetrating red glare would have throbbed in the Lord's vision. Hence the value and intensity of those words He did speak. The pulling up on the nails in the hands as the cross was lifted up would have been excruciating. The hands were nailed through the 'Destot gap', between the first and second row of wrist bones, touching an extra sensitive nerve which controls the movement of the thumb and signals receipt of pain. They would not have been nailed through the palms or the body would not have been supportable . It has been reconstructed that in order to breathe, the crucified would have had to pull up on his hands, lift the head for a breath, and then let the head subside. The sheer physical agony of it all cannot be minimized. Zenon Ziolkowski (*Spor O Calun*) discusses contemporary descriptions of the faces of the crucified, including Jehohanan the Zealot, whose crucifixion Josephus mentions. Their faces were renowned for being terribly distorted by pain. The Lord's face was marred more than that of any other, so much so that those who saw Him looked away (Is. 52:14). That prophecy may suggest that for the Lord, the crucifixion process hurt even more. We suggest later that He purposefully refused to take relief from pushing down on the 'seat', and thus died more painfully and quicker. Several of the unearthed victims were crucified on olive trees. So it was perhaps an olive tree which the Lord had to carry. He would have thought of this as He prayed among the olive trees of Gethsemane (perhaps they took it from that garden?). I would not have gone through with this. I would have chosen a lesser death and the achieving of a lesser salvation. I would have had more pity on myself. But the Lord of all did it *for me*, He became obedient *even* to death on a cross (Phil. 2:8), as if He could have been obedient to a lesser death, but He chose this ultimately high level. I can only marvel at the Father's gentleness with us, that despite the ineffable trauma of death, the way He takes us is so much more gentle than how He allowed His only begotten to go.

Presumably there were many soldiers around. The temple guard which was seconded to the Jews (Mt. 27:65) was doubtless there in full force, lest there be any attempt to save Jesus by the crowd or the disciples. And yet Jn. 19:23 suggests there were only four soldiers, each of whom received a part of His clothing. This must mean that there were four actually involved in the crucifixion: one for each hand and foot. He had signs of nails (plural) in His hands. We are left to meditate as to whether He was nailed hand over hand as tradition has it (which would have meant two very long nails were used); or both hands separately.

Despite much prior meditation, there perhaps dawned on the Lord some 'physical' realizations as to the nature of His crucified position: the utter impossibility of making the slightest change of position, especially when tormented by flies, the fact that the hands and feet had been pierced in the most sensitive areas; the fact that the arms were arranged in such a way so that the weight of the body hung only on the muscles, not on the bones and tendons. The smell of blood would have brought forth yelping dogs, circling birds of prey, flying insects…an incessant barrage of annoyances, things to distract the Lord's mind. As we too also face. He would have realized that the whole process was designed to produce tension in every part of the body. All His body, every part of it, in every aspect, had to suffer (and He would have realized the significance of this, and seen *all* of us as suffering with Him). The muscles were all hopelessly overworked, cramps due to the malcirculation of blood would have created an overwhelming desire to move. All victims would have writhed and wriggled within the few millimetres leeway which they had, to avoid a splinter pushing into the back lacerated from flogging... But my sense is that the Lord somehow didn't do this. He

didn't push down on the footrests for relief (see 54), He didn't take the pain killer, He didn't ask for a drink until the end, when presumably the others accepted. Every muscle in the body would have become locked after two hours or so. Every part of His body suffered, symbolic of how through His sufferings He was able to identify with every member of His spiritual body- for "we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones" (Eph. 5:30). He had perhaps foreseen something of all this when He likened the killing of His body to the taking down of a tent / tabernacle- every bone and sinew, like every pole and canvass, had to be uprooted, 'taken down' (Jn. 2:19,21).

The moment of lifting the stake up vertical, probably amidst a renewed surge of abuse or cheering from the crowd, had been long foreseen and imagined by the Lord. "If, if I be *lifted up*..." (Jn. 12:32). He foresaw the physical (and spiritual) details of the crucifixion process in such detail. Recall how He foresaw that moment of handing over to death. And yet still He asked for the cup to pass, still He panicked and felt forsaken. If the theory of the cross was so hard to actually live out in practice for the Lord, then how hard it must be for us. The Lord's descriptions of Himself as being 'lifted up' use a phrase which carried in Hebrew the idea of exaltation and glory. As He was lifted up physically, the ground swaying before His eyes, His mind fixed upon the Father and the forgiveness which He was making possible through His sacrifice, covered in blood and spittle, struggling for breath... He was 'lifted up' in glory and exaltation, to those who have open eyes to see and hearts to imagine and brains to comprehend.

Imagine yourself being crucified. Go through the stages in the process. The Lord invited us to do this when He asked us to figuratively crucify ourselves daily. Consider all the language of the sacrifices which pointed forward to the final, supreme act of the Lord: poured out, pierced, parted in pieces, beaten out; the rock smitten... and this is the process which we are going through, although the Father deals with us infinitely more gently than with His only Son.

It is one of the greatest internal proofs of inspiration that this climactic act is recorded by each of the Gospel writers as a participial or subordinate clause. The concentration is on the splitting up of the clothes, which happened, of course, after the impaling. It is as if the record at this point is from the perspective of the soldiers. Get the job done, and *then*, on with the important bit!- the dividing of the clothes! No human author would ever have written like this. It's rather like the way Mary thinks that the risen Lord is a gardener. There is something artless and utterly Divine about it all. The record is full of what I would call spiritual culture. It has the hallmark of the Divine. This may be why some of the 'obvious' fulfilments of prophecy aren't mentioned, e.g. Is. 53:7 concerning the Lamb dumb before her shearers. Likewise there is no record of the faithful women weeping, or moaning as the body was taken down.

15:25 *And it was the third hour when they crucified him*- "And it was the third hour and (not 'when') they crucified Him" (Mk. 15:25) suggests they were waiting for the hour to come. It was in their brief to do it at the third hour. It may be that they got there a little early, and there was an agonizing wait for the third hour. Mark 15 has so many usages of the word “and”; circle them in your Bible (especially AV). This is to emphasize the relentlessness of it all, the repetition of everything, the way it droned

remorselessly on. This is a feature of the cross, which we must carry. The crucifixion of Christ was at 9 a.m. He would have willingly laid Himself down on the stake, whereas most victims had to be thrown down on the ground by the soldiers. He gave His life, it wasn't taken from Him. Likewise He *gave* His back to the smiters when they flogged Him; He gave His face to them when they spoke about pulling out His beard (Is. 50:6). Men usually clenched their fists to stop the nails being driven in, and apparently fingers were often broken by the soldiers to ease their task. Not a bone of the Lord was broken. We can imagine Him willingly opening His palms to the nails; as we, so far away from it all, should have something of a willing acceptance of what being in Him demands of us. It may be that He undressed Himself when they finally reached the place of crucifixion. In similar vein, early paintings of the flogging show the Lord standing there *not* tied to the flogging post, as victims usually were. As He lay there horizontal, His eyes would have been heavenwards, for the last time in His mortality. Perhaps He went through the business of thinking 'this is the last time I'll do this...or that...'. How often He had lifted up His eyes to Heaven and prayed (Jn. 11:41; 17:1). And now, this was the last time, except for the final raising of the head at His death. "While four soldiers held the prisoner, [a Centurion] placed the sharp five inch spike in the dead centre of the palm…four to five strokes would hammer the spike deep into the rough plank and a fifth turned it up so that the hand would not slip free" (C.M. Ward, *Treasury Of Praise*). If it is indeed so that a Centurion usually did the nailing, it is a wondrous testimony that it was the Centurion who could say later that "truly this was the Son of God". The very man who actually nailed the Son of God was not struck dead on the spot, as a human 'deity' would have done. God's patient grace was extended, with the result that this man too came to faith.

The Hebrew language so often reflects the character of God. And His artless self-expression is no clearer seen in the way He inspired the records of the death of His Son. The record of the death of God's Son is something altogether beyond the use of devices as primitive as adjectives. The way in which the actual act of impaling is recorded as just a subordinate clause is perhaps the clearest illustration of this. The way Mary thinks the risen Lord is a gardener is another such. Or the weeping of the women, and Joseph, and Nicodemus (presumably this happened) when the body was taken from the cross, as the nails were taken out: this isn't recorded. Likewise, only Matthew records the suicide of Judas; the Father chose not to emphasize in the records that the man who did the worst a man has ever done or could ever do- to betray the peerless Son of God- actually went and took his own life (and even made a mess of doing that). If it were my son, I would have wanted to emphasize this. But the Almighty doesn't. In similar vein, it is almost incredible that there was no immediate judgment on the men who did the Son of God to death. The judgments of AD70 only came on the next generation. Those middle aged men who stood and derided the Saviour in His time of finest trial: they died, as far as we know, in their beds. And the Roman / Italian empire went on for a long time afterwards, even if God did in fact impute guilt to them for what their soldiers did.

Another hallmark of God's Hand in the record is that what to us are the most obvious OT prophecies are not quoted; e.g. Is. 53:7: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth". A human author would have made great capital from such detailed fulfilments. But not so the Almighty. Hebrew, along with all the Semitic languages, has no superlatives. God doesn't need them.

And the record of the cross is a classic example. The record of the resurrection reflects a similar culture. The actual resurrection isn't ever described [in marked contrast to how it is in the uninspired 'gospels']. Instead we read of the impact of His resurrection upon His disciples. The spiritual culture of Almighty God is also shown by the way in which although *all* the Council (Mk. 14:64), including Joseph, condemned Christ to death by crucifixion, God overlooks Joseph's lack of boldness in not contesting this, and speaks of him in such glowing spiritual terms. His 'not consenting unto' Christ's death was deep within him. I would be inclined to say: 'The *least* you could have done was to have abstained from the vote'. But the record is far more positive than that.

For want of a better way of putting it, the spiritual culture of God comes through so sublimely in these records. He began His written revelation with the comment, as an almost throw-away clause, that "He made the stars also" (Gen. 1:16). The vastness of that creation, far more wondrous and extensive than just this planet, is treated *en passant*. The actual resurrection of the Lord Jesus is likewise not recorded; we only learn of it from the recorded witness of those who went to the tomb, and who later met the Lord. The uninspired *Gospel of Peter* 39-42 does record the actual arising of the Lord's dead body; but immediately it becomes evident that this isn't inspired, simply because of the lack of spiritual culture which we are accustomed to in the inspired writings. Likewise it has been observed that God uses "an economy of miracle" when He has acted openly. The record of the disciples' baptism, whether and how the Lord met His mother after the resurrection (for surely He did), Saul changing his name to Paul, Aaron's repentance after the golden calf- all these things are left unrecorded. The Gospel writers do not praise the majestic temple and city of Jerusalem in any way, unlike the uninspired contemporary writers. And that same spiritual culture comes out especially in the account of the crucifixion. It makes a good exercise to read through one of the records, especially John 19, and make a list of the adjectives used. There are virtually none. Read a page of any human novelist or historian: the pages are cluttered with them. Hebrew is deficient in adjectives, and because of this it often uses 'Son of...' plus an abstract noun, instead of an adjective. Thus we read of a "son of peace" (Lk. 10:5,6), or "a man of tongue" (Ps. 140:11 RVmg; AV "an evil speaker").

15:26 *And the inscription of the charge against him read: The King of the Jews*- It was also written in Hebrew (Jn.), and putting together the gospel records, it said "This is Jesus of Naareth, the king of the Jews". Did Pilate write it in his own handwriting? Did they use the same ladder to place the inscription which Joseph later used to retrieve the body? Why do the records suggest that the inscription was placed after the stake had been erected? Was there initial resistance from the Jews? Was He impaled with the placard around His neck, and then the ladder was put up, and a soldier lifted it off and nailed it above His head? "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would have used words whose first letters created the sacred Name: YHWH. Perhaps this was why there was such opposition to it. "King of the Jews" would have been understood as a Messianic title. Either Pilate was sarcastic, or really believed it, or just wanted to provoke the Jews. In any case, somehow the Yahweh Name was linked with the Messiah: King of the Jews. The Name was declared in the Lord's death, as He had foretold (Jn. 17:26). Forgiveness of sins is through baptism into the Name (Acts 2:38), as even in OT times forgiveness was for the sake of the Name (Ps. 79:9). And yet through the cross and blood of Christ is

forgiveness made possible. His blood and death therefore was the supreme declaration of God's Name; through His cross the grace and forgiveness, love, salvation and judgment implicit in the Name was all enabled and revealed in practice. Ps. 22:22 prophesied that "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation [*ekklesia*, LXX]". It was to us His brethren that the Name was declared; in the eyes of an unbelieving world, this was just another crucified man, a failure, a wannabe who never made it. But to us, it is the declaration of the Name. It was and is done in the midst of the ecclesia, as if the whole church from that day to this beholds it all at first hand. And our response is to in turn "Declare his righteousness" (Ps. 22:31), in response to seeing the Name declared, we declare to Him… in lives of love for the brethren. For the Name was declared, that the love that was between the Father and Son might be in us.

It is possible to argue that "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would require the use of words, the first letters of which created the word YHWH:

y Jesus- Yeshua
h The Nazarene- Ha'Natzri [cp. "the sect of 'The Nazarene(s)', Acts 24:5]
v and King- u'Melek
h of the Jews- Ha'Yehudim
giving the Yahweh Name:
hvhy

This is why the Jews minded it so strongly when the title was put up. Pilate's retort "What I have written I have written" may well have been an oblique reference to 'I am that I am'. It was his attempt to have the last laugh with the Jews who had manipulated him into crucifying a man against whom there was no real charge. It was as if the Lord suffered as He did with a placard above Him which effectively said: 'This is Yahweh'. The Name was declared there, as the Lord had foreseen (Jn. 17:26). The declaration of Yahweh's Name to Moses in Ex. 34:6 thus becomes a foretaste of the Lord's crucifixion. Some LXX versions render Ex. 34:6 as 'Yahweh, Yahweh, *a man* full of mercy....'. In the crucifixion of the man Christ Jesus the essence of Yahweh was declared. And we, John says with reference to the cross, saw that glory,as it were cowering in the rock like Moses, *full* of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14 cp. Ex. 34:6 RV).

There are other reasons for thinking that there was the supreme manifestation of Yahweh in the cross of His Son:

· It has been observed that the blood of the Passover Lamb on the lintels of the doors at the Exodus, three sides of a square, would have recalled the two repeated letters of 'Yahweh' (see above panel), as if His Name was manifested in the blood of the slain lamb.
· Yahweh laid on the Lord the iniquity of us all, as if He was present there when the soldiers laid the cross upon the Lord's shoulders (Is. 53:6).
· Yahweh had prophesied of what He would achieve through the crucified Christ: "I am, I am: He that blots out thy trangressions" (Is. 43:25 LXX). He declares His Name as being supremely demonstrated in His forgiveness of our sins through and in the Lord's cross.
· Jehovah-Jireh can mean "Yahweh will show Yah" (Gen. 22:14), in eloquent prophecy of the crucifixion. There Yahweh was to be manifested supremely.
· Paul speaks of how the cross of Christ should humble us, so that no flesh should glory in God's presence (1 Cor. 1:29); as if God's presence is found in the cross, before which we cannot have any form of pride.

· The LXX uses the word translated “propitiation" in the NT with reference to how God forgave / propitiated for Israel’s sins for His Name’s sake (Ex. 32:14; Ps. 79:9). That propitiation was only for the sake of the Lord’s future death, which would be the propitiation God ultimately accepted. Having no past or future with Him, Yahweh could act as if His Son’s death had already occurred. But that death and forgiveness for “His name’s sake" were one and the same thing. The Son’s death was the expression of the Father’s Name.
· There was a Jewish tradition that the only time when the Yahweh Name could be pronounced was by the High Priest, when he sprinkled the blood of Israel's atonement on the altar. The Name was expressed in that blood.
· Zech. 11:13 speaks of Yahweh being priced at thirty shekels of silver by Israel. But these words are appropriated to the Lord in His time of betrayal. What men did to Him, they did to the Father.
-The Red Heifer was to be slain before the face of the priest, "as he watches" (Num. 19:3-5 NIV), pointing forward to the Lord's slaughter in the personal presence of the Father.

- The blood of the sin offering was to be sprinkled “before the LORD, before the veil" (Lev. 4:6,17). Yet the veil was a symbol of the flesh of the Lord Jesus at the time of His dying. At the time of the sprinkling of blood when the sin offering was made, the veil [the flesh of the Lord Jesus] was identifiable with Yahweh Himself. The blood of the offerings was poured out “before Yahweh" (Lev. 4:15 etc.), pointing forward to how God Himself, from so physically far away, “came down" so that the blood shedding of His Son was done as it were in His presence. And who is to say that the theophany that afternoon, of earthquake and thick darkness, was not the personal presence of Yahweh, hovering above crucifixion hill? Over the mercy seat (a symbol of the Lord Jesus in Hebrews), between the cherubim where the blood was sprinkled, “there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee" (Ex. 25:22). There we see the essence of God, and there in the cross we hear the essential word and message of God made flesh.
· The smitten rock was an evident type of the Lord’s smiting on the cross. And yet in Deuteronomy especially it is made clear that Israel were to understand Yahweh as their rock. And yet “that rock was Christ". God Himself said that he would stand upon the rock as it was smitten- presumably fulfilled by the Angel standing or hovering above / upon the rock, while Moses smote it. And yet again it is Yahweh who is described as smiting the rock in Ps. 78 and Is. 48:21. He was with Christ, directly identified with Him, at the very same time as He ‘smote’ Him.

Significantly, very few actual details are given by the Gospel writers of both the scourging and the crucifixion. It could be that they felt it impossible to dwell upon these things; or it could be that they and their readers knew what was involved in these practices, and we are left to dwell upon them in our own imagination. We are intended to reconstruct in our own minds what may have happened… We have a solemn duty towards Him to do this. This is perhaps why the tenses change so dramatically in the records. Take just Mk. 15:23-26: “They offered… they crucify… and part… casting lots… crucified… was written". These arresting changes are surely to encourage us to re-live it all. Mark speaks of “they crucify him", going on to say that “then are there two crucified with him" (Mk. 15:38 RV), whereas Luke records the act in the past tense. Mark’s present tenses are arresting: “plaiting… they clothe him… they smote…" (:17,19 RV). Perhaps Mark is seeking consciously to make us

imagine it all as going on before our eyes. Mt. 27:38 RV has a similar dramatic change: “Then are there crucified with him…".

15:27 *And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right hand and one on his left*- Mt. 27:38 RV has a dramatic change of tense: “Then are there crucified with him…". Mark’s present tenses are also arresting: “plaiting… they clothe him… they smote…" (:17,19 RV). Perhaps Mark is seeking consciously to make us imagine it all as going on before our eyes. Take just Mk. 15:23-26: “They offered… they crucify… and part… casting lots… crucified… was written". These arresting changes are surely to encourage us to re-live it all. Mark speaks of “they crucify him", going on to say that “then are there two crucified with him" (Mk. 15:38 RV), whereas Luke records the act in the past tense. Significantly, very few actual details are given by the Gospel writers of both the scourging and the crucifixion. It could be that they felt it impossible to dwell upon these things; or it could be that they and their readers knew what was involved in these practices, and we are left to dwell upon them in our own imagination. We are intended to reconstruct in our own minds what may have happened… We have a solemn duty towards Him to do this. This is perhaps why the tenses change so dramatically in the records.

The crucified Christ is portrayed as King of criminals, King of the basest sort, enthroned between them, taking the place of their leader Barabbas, who ought to have been where the Lord was. Both Barabbas and the thieves are described with the same Greek word, translated "robber" (Jn. 18:40; Mk. 15:27). The Lord uses the same word when He points out that His persecutors were treating him as a "robber" (Mt. 26:55; Mk. 14:48; Lk. 22:52); He seems to be aware that what the experience He is going through is setting up Barabbas as a kind of inverse type of Himself, the true 'Son of the Father' (= 'Barabbas'). Those low, desperate men, the dregs of society, were types of us. Barabbas especially becomes a symbol of us all. According to Jewish tradition at the time (*Pesach* 8.6) “They may slaughter the Passover lamb…for one whom they [the authorities] have promised to release from prison". The Passover amnesty freed a man justly condemned to death- on account of the death of the lamb. We can imagine the relief and joy and almost unbelief of Barabbas, as he watched or reflected upon the crucifixion of Jesus- that he who rightfully should have been there on the cross, was delivered from such a death because of the cross of Christ. The image of condemned prisoners being released due to the death of Messiah is an undoubted Old Testament figure for our redemption from slavery. Some of the legal terms used in the NT for our redemption imply that Christ redeemed us from slavery through His death. And yet one could redeem a slave by oneself becoming a slave (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Gal. 3:13; 4:5). This is why the crucified Jesus is typified by the suffering servant / slave of Isaiah’s prophesies. And Paul seems to have risen up to something similar when he speaks of giving his body to be branded, i.e. becoming a slave (1 Cor. 13:3 Gk.).

John’s Gospel has many references to Moses, as catalogued elsewhere. When John records the death of the Lord with two men either side of Him, he seems to do so with his mind on the record of Moses praying with Aaron and Hur on each side of him (Ex. 17:12). John’s account in English reads: “They crucified him, and with him two others, on either side one” (Jn. 19:18). Karl Delitzsch translated the Greek New Testament into Hebrew, and the Hebrew phrase he chose to use here is identical with that in Ex. 17:12. Perhaps this explains why John alone of the Gospel writers doesn’t mention that the two men on either side of the Lord were in fact criminals- he calls them “two others” (Jn. 19:18) and “… the legs of the first and of the other” (Jn.

19:32). Thus John may've chosen to highlight simply how there were two men on either side of the Lord, in order to bring out the connection with the Moses scene.

15:28 *And the scripture was fulfilled, which said: And he was numbered with the transgressors*- Perhaps the idea is that in the eyes of men, the Lord was considered just another dying criminal, counted along with the two thieves. The idea of numbering might refer to some legal report of the crucifixion being made, numbering three victims. The context of Is. 53:12 is that it was through being numbered with sinners that the Lord could bare their sin. This means that sin no longer totally separates man from God; because the Lord was so identified with sinful man, feeling as a sinner although he never actually sinned. But the Hebrew idea of 'numbering' is of preparing (s.w. Dan. 1:5,10; Jonah 1:17; 4:6,7,8). Through the crucifixion experience, the Lord was prepared for His role of identification with us; and this was visually exemplified by His death amongst the worst of criminals.

15:29 *And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying: Ha! You that would destroy the temple and build it in three days*- The Christian life, as crucified with Christ, cannot be kept secret from the world. This is why the place of crucifixion was so public- it was near a road, for passers by spoke to the crucified Jesus (Mk. 15:29), and Simon was a passerby coming in from the field (Gk. *agros*, Lk. 23:26). The cross confronted people in their daily living, just as it should us today. Quintillian (*Declamationes* 274) records how crucifixions were always held in the most public places where crowds would gather. For us, if we are living the crucified life with Jesus, it cannot be done in a corner. See on Rom. 4:25.

This would have reminded Him that He was doing this to Himself, they weren't doing it to Him. He knew that the temple would be ripped apart stone by stone. And so He knew the temple of His body must be, for in that body He bore our sins on the tree. He had foretold that the tabernacle of His body would be 'taken down' as that in the wilderness was, taken apart piece by piece. In that lengthy procedure He had seen foretold the excruciating nature of His death, as every aspect of humanity was taken apart. "...and buildest it in three days" would have taken His mind forward to that certain future. So their taunt would have aided His efforts to remain spiritual. Likewise their allusions to Ps. 22 ("He trusted in God...") served to steer the Lord's mind there, and to take comfort from the rest of the Psalm and the context of their mocking quotations. Yet even in the mocking, the Lord's Bible mind would have found some sort of encouragement. For the Lord was so clearly bearing the judgment of Israel's sins: "All who pass along the way clap their hands at you: they hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem" (Lam. 2:15). And note too Jer. 48:27 (LXX 31:27): "Is Israel a laughing stock? Was she caught between thieves that you wag your head?". This is exactly the Lord's position, between thieves, and mocked- but by Israel. These prophecies imply it was the Gentiles who would mock Israel; thus by treating the Lord as they did, they declared themselves to be no longer God's people but Gentiles. The darkness that came down would have recalled Jer. 33:19-21- when day and night no longer follow their normal sequence, God is breaking His covenant. Israel's condemnation would be that "even at midday you will grope like a blind man in the dark" (Dt. 28:29). And yet the Lord would have known that He was suffering for Israel, treated as an apostate Israel, and thus He was the more inspired to pray for their ultimate forgiveness and salvation, seeing He had borne their condemnation. The Lord suffered "for the transgression of my people, to whom the

stroke was due" (Is. 53:8 RVmg.). There are therefore elements of the crucifixion sufferings of Jesus in every suffering of natural Israel.

15:30 *Save yourself and come down from the cross!*- All the emphasis on save *yourself* was a temptation for Him to forget *us*. He would have reflected that He was saving Himself and us by staying where He was; coming down from the cross wouldn't lead to salvation. What the flesh understands by salvation and what the spirit understands by it are vastly different.

15:31 *In like manner also the chief priests mocked among themselves and the scribes, saying: He saved others. Himself he cannot save!*- Matthew and Mark record the same incident. The priests said among themselves (Mk.); Matthew implies they said it to Him. They spoke in mock whispers, huddled in their group, but loud enough for Him to hear. Many of "the elders" believed in Him (Jn. 12:42), but were led to this awful behaviour by the need to keep up appearances and the fear of exclusion from the synagogue.

15:32 *Let the Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, so we may see and believe! And they that were crucified with him ridiculed him*- "Come down from the cross" was a repeat of the wilderness temptation to come down from the temple pinnacle. This temptation was at the hands of the Jews, and there is every reason to think that the wilderness temptations likewise were somehow involved with the Jewish satan. The Lord had likened His death on the cross, His giving of His flesh for the life of the world, to the coming down of manna from Heaven (Jn. 6:50,51,58). 'Coming down' was the classic language of theophany and God manifestation; the Lord's ascension was on the very basis that He had indeed 'come down' (Eph. 4:10). And He was indeed 'coming down', not a mere meter or so from the stake to the ground, but from Heaven to earth- for their salvation. Time and again the situations associated with the Lord's suffering were full of reference to His earlier teachings and beliefs. He was thus confirmed by the hand of providence in the path He had taken, realizing that this was not at all 'bad luck' or a suffering to simply be endured, but rather every detail of it was under God's hand controlled to confirm Him in His path to glory.

"Come down from the cross" was a repeat of the second temptation: Come down from the temple tower; throw yourself to death in Gehenna below, and perhaps the Angels will even then save you. This had been a temptation to commit suicide, to give up life without giving it for His friends, and hope that somehow the Angels would save Him personally. Victory in one temptation leads to victory again and again. All the wilderness temptations recurred during the crucifixion. Notice how the three temptations of Jesus in the desert are repeated in the three mockeries of Him on the cross recorded in Matthew and Luke. The comment that the devil departed from Him "for a season" may imply 'he' returned at the cross. And clearly enough, the temptations at the end were internal, even if voiced by an external person.

15:33 *And when the sixth hour had come, darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour*- Darkness is often associated in the OT with mourning. Am. 8:9,10 speaks of earthquake and darkness at noon because "I will make it as the mourning for an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day", i.e. a funeral. The darkness was a sign of *Almighty God mourning for His Son*.

Mark's account of the crucifixion has 5 component parts. The third part, the centrepiece as it were, is the account of the actual death of the Lord; but it is surrounded by cameos of human response to it (consider Mk. 15:22-27; 28-32; the

actual death of Jesus, 15:33-37; then 15:38-41; 15:42-47). See on Lk. 23:48; Jn. 19:25.

15:34 *And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice: Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? Which means: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?-*

The Greek seems to mean "Why *did You* forsake me", perhaps implying that He had already overcome the feeling of being forsaken. Mark records "Eloi"; Matthew "Eli". Why? There *is* a difference. Did He say "Eli, Eli, Eloi, Eloi" ? Four times calling upon God? We are going to suggest that these words indicate a crisis in the mind of the Lord Jesus. We would wish to write in almost every sentence of this study that the Lord Jesus was utterly sinless. Yet as one tempted to the limit, He must have come close to the edge. One of the superlative marvels of the Lord in His death was the way He never seems to have lost His spiritual composure, despite every physical and mental assault. Yet in these words we have Him perhaps nearer to such a breakdown of composure than anywhere else. Another example of His being 'close to the edge' was when He was in the Garden, asking for the cup to be taken away from Him. Compare those words with His clear understanding that He would have to die on a cross and later be resurrected. The clarity of His understanding is to be marvelled at. He went to the cross “knowing all things that should come upon him" (Jn. 18:4). He not only foresaw His death by crucifixion and subsequent resurrection, but many other details besides. Thus He spoke of how He was like a seed which would be buried in a *garden* (as He was) and then rise again (Lk. 13:19). But compare all this with His plea for another way to be found in Gethsemane, and also the cry "Why hast thou forsaken me?". There is only one realistic conclusion from this comparison: those words indicate a faltering in the Lord Jesus, a blip on the screen, a wavering in purpose. One marvels that there were not more such occasions recorded.

The first blip on the screen was in Gethsemane. The second one was when He cried "Why have You forsaken me?". We should remind ourselves of the chronology of events around the crucifixion (1):

14th Nissan	9p.m.	Last Supper
12p.m.	Arrest	
9a.m. (the third hour")	Crucifixion	
12a.m. - 3p.m. ("sixth to the ninth hour")	Darkness	
3p.m. ("the ninth hour")	Death; Passover lambs killed	
15th Nissan	9p.m.	Israel eat Passover
16th Nissan	6p.m.	Passover Sabbath ends
5a.m.	Resurrection?	
6a.m.	Women at the tomb	
3p.m.	Walk to Emmaus	

The fact is, Christ died "at the ninth hour". It was at the ninth hour that he cried "It is finished" and "Father into thy hands I commend my spirit". Yet it was also *at* the ninth hour that He said "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mk. 15:34). The conclusion is that *at the very last moment* our Lord faltered. It was 11:59, and He faltered. Enter, *please*, into the sense of crisis and intensity. This is the only time that he prays to God as “God" rather than “Father" / *abba*. This itself reflects the sense of distance that enveloped Him. For He was your Lord and your Saviour hanging there, it was your salvation which hung in the balance. There is a very telling point to be made from Mt. 27:46. There we read that at "*about* the ninth hour, Jesus cried" those words about being forsaken. Mark says it was at the ninth hour, and we know it was at the ninth hour that Christ uttered His final words of victory. Yet it must have been only a few minutes before the ninth hour when Christ faltered; hence Matthew says that it was "*about* the ninth hour". What is a few minutes? Only a few hundred seconds, only moments. Only moments before the sweetness of the final victory, "It is finished" or accomplished, the Son of God was faltering. The more we appreciate this wavering at the last minute, the more fully we will appreciate the power and sense of victory behind Christ's final two sayings on the cross, uttered only moments later.

And so we come to the crux of the problem. How and why was Christ forsaken by the Father? Ultimately, of course, the Father did not forsake the Son in His time of greatest need and agony. I would suggest that Christ only *felt* forsaken; although if you *feel* forsaken, in a sense you are forsaken. The prototype of Christ feeling forsaken was in David feeling forsaken by God when he fled from Absalom (Ps. 42:9; 43:2; 88:14); but clearly he was not actually forsaken. But *why* did our Lord falter like this, at 11:59, one minute to twelve, at this agonizing last moment? Seeing the Father did not forsake the Son, there seems to have been some kind of intellectual failure in the Lord’s reasoning. In the terrible circumstances in which He was, this is hardly surprising. Yet such genuine intellectual failure, a real, unpretended failure to correctly understand something, usually has a psychological basis. The Lord, it seems to me, *feared death more than any other man*. He knew that death was separation from God, the wages of sin. Different people have varying degrees of fear of death (e.g. the unrepentant thief was totally resigned to it). It would seem that the Lord had the highest conceivable level of unresignation to death, to the point of being almost paranoid about it- even though He knew He must die. Two prototypes of the Lord had similar experiences. Abraham suffered “an horror of great darkness" (Gen. 15:12), in an event rich in reference to the crucifixion. And Job’s sufferings were the very things which he “greatly feared" (Job 3:25). The Lord stood as a lamb dumb before His shearers; and the lamb is struck dumb with fear. This all makes the Lord’s death *for us* so much the more awesome.

We have elsewhere commented concerning the possibility that Christ felt that although He would be tied to the cross as Isaac was, yet somehow He would be delivered. Gen. 22:22 LXX speaks of Abraham not withholding his son- and the same word is found in Rom. 8:32 about God ‘not sparing’ His own son. Clearly the offering of Isaac is to be understood as prophetic of the Lord’s sacrifice. The Lord's growing realization that the entangled ram represented Him rather than Isaac would have led to this sense of panic which He now expressed. There is more evidence than we sometimes care to consider that Christ's understanding was indeed limited; He was capable of misunderstanding Scripture, especially under the stress of the cross. Earlier, in the garden, He had panicked; He was "sore amazed" (Mk. 14:33, s.w. "greatly wondering", Acts 3:11).

This desire for personal deliverance from the cross would have been there within our Lord throughout the six hours He hung there. And yet His only other earlier utterances which are recorded are all concerned with the welfare of others; us, the Jews, the thief, His mother. He supremely mastered His own flare of panic and desire for His personal salvation and relief, subjecting it to His spiritual and practical concern for others.

A study of Psalm 22 indicates deeper reasons why Christ felt forsaken. He had been crying out loud for deliverance, presumably for some time, according to Ps. 22:1-6, both during and before the unnatural three hour darkness. He felt that His desire for deliverance was not being heard, although the prayers of others had been heard in the past when they cried with a like intensity. The Lord Jesus was well aware of the connection between God's refusal to answer prayer and His recognition of sin in the person praying (2 Sam. 22:42 = Ps. 2:2-5). It is emphasized time and again that God will not forsake those who love Him (e.g. Dt. 4:31; 31:6; 1 Sam. 12:22; 1 Kings 6:13; Ps. 94:14; Is. 41:17; 42:16). Every one of these passages must have been well known to our Lord, the word made flesh. He knew that God forsaking Israel was a punishment for their sin (Jud. 6:13; 2 Kings 21:14; Is. 2:6; Jer. 23:33). God would forsake Israel only if they forsook Him (Dt. 31:16,17; 2 Chron. 15:2). It may be helpful to summarize the two strands of Bible teaching concerning being forsaken:

God will not forsake His people if they are righteous
"When thou art in tribulation... and shalt be obedient unto his voice... he will not forsake thee" (Dt. 4:18,19)
"The Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Dt. 31:6)
"The Lord will not forsake His people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people" (1 Sam. 12:22)
"If thou wilt walk in my statutes... and keep all my commandments to walk in them... I will not forsake my people" (1 Kings 6:12,13)
"Blessed is the man (Messiah) whom thou chastenest... for the Lord will not cast off his people, neither forsake his inheritance... all the upright in heart" (Ps. 94:12-15)
"When the poor and needy seek water... I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them" (Is. 41:17); i.e. God not forsaking was shown in His answering of prayer (cp. Ps. 22:1-11).

God will forsake His people if they sin
"Now the Lord hath forsaken us" because of Israel's disobedience at the time of the Judges (Jud. 6:9,13)
"Because Mannaseh hath done these abominations... I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies" (2 Kings 21:14)
"Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people... because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers and they please themselves" (Is. 2:6)
"I am against the (false) prophets... (therefore) I will even forsake you" (Jer. 23:33)
"If ye seek him, he will be found of you; but ye forsake him, he will forsake you" (2 Chron. 15:2)
"This people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the land... and will forsake me... then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them" (Dt. 31:16,17).

Knowing all this, He cried out: "*Why* have You forsaken me?". He felt forsaken by God, and Biblically, without a doubt, being forsaken by God means you are a sinner. "*Why* (oh *why*) have You forsaken me?" is surely the Lord Jesus searching His conscience with desperate intensity, finding nothing wrong, and crying to God to show Him where He had failed, why the Father had forsaken Him. It may be that initially He assumed He had sinned (Ps. 69:5), going through the self-doubt which David went through at the time of Absalom's rebellion (Ps. 3:2). As David had felt then that God had cast him off, even though "My lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail", so the Lord felt (Ps. 89:33,38). But then with an unsurpassedly rigorous self-examination, He came to know that He really hadn't. This means that once over the crisis, our Lord died with a purity of conscience known by no other being, with a profound sense of His own totality of righteousness. Again, this enables us to better enter into the intensity of "*It* is finished".

The Lord understood His death as drinking a cup from God. But that cup was, in Old Testament language, the cup of God's wrath against a disobedient people. The Lord knew that His death was a bearing of their judgment- which is not to say, of course, that the Lord's murderers, as any sinners, have to also answer for their sins. He so wished to gather the "chicks" of Jerusalem under His wings, but they would not, and thus the house of the temple would be left desolate. The image seems to be of a farmyard hen in a fire, gathering the chicks under wings as the house burnt down, so that afterwards, beneath her charred and destroyed body, her brood would be found alive. The Lord so wished the burnt offering of the cross to result in the salvation of the Israel of His day- but they would not. This was His level of love for those who baited Him, irritated Him, dogged His every step.

Christ knew from Isaiah 53 that He was to bear Israel's sins, that the judgments for their sins were to fall upon Him. Israel 'bore their iniquities' by being condemned for them (Num. 14:34,35; Lev. 5:17; 20:17); to be a sin bearer was therefore to be one condemned. To die in punishment for your sin was to bear you sin. There is a difference between sin, and sin being laid upon a person. Num. 12:11 brings this out: "Lay not the sin upon us… wherein we have sinned". The idea of sin being laid upon a person therefore refers to condemnation for sin. Our sin being laid upon Jesus therefore means that He was treated *as if* He were a condemned sinner. He briefly endured within Him the torment of soul which the condemned will feel. It seems that even our Lord did not appreciate the extent to which He would be identified with sinful Israel, the extent to which He would have our sins imputed to Him, the weight of them, the degree to which He would be made sin for us, although knowing no sin (2 Cor. 5:21). And if He found this hard to come to terms with, no wonder we do too. The fact that the judgment for sin is sometimes equated with the sin itself was doubtless appreciated by the Lord (cp. 2 Kings 15:23); but the extent of this principle was what seemed to have been unappreciated by Him until the cross. Likewise, He would have meditated upon the way righteous men had taken upon themselves the sins of their people. Thus Jeremiah speaks as if he has committed Israel's sins; Ezra rends his clothes and plucks off his hair, as if *he* has married out of the Faith (Ezra 9:4 cp. Neh. 13:25; the Lord received the same sinner's treatment, Is. 50:6). Moses' prayer for God to relent and let him enter the land was only rejected for the sake of his association with Israel's sins (Dt. 3:26). But the *extent* to which the Lord would bear

our sins was perhaps unforeseen by Him. And indeed, through His sin- bearing and sin-feeling, He enabled God Himself to know something of it too, as a Father learns and feels through a son. Thus God is likened to a man who goes away into a far country (Mt. 21:33)- the very words used by the Lord to describe how the sinner goes into a far country in his departure from the Father (Lk. 15:13). “My servant" was both Israel and the Lord Jesus; He was their representative in His sufferings. Which may well explain why in an exhibition of prisoners art from the Auschwitz death camp, there were so many crucifixes and ‘stages of the cross’ drawn by Jews, even in the wood of the huts, etched with their finger nails. They saw then, and will see again, the extent to which Jesus of Nazareth, through His cross, identifies with the suffering servant of Israel. Isaiah brings this point out Biblically- early in his prophecy he speaks of how “my servant" Israel will be wounded, bruised, tormented with “fresh stripes" (Is. 1:6 RVmg)- exactly the language Isaiah later uses about the sufferings of the Lord Jesus in His death.

Christ died to save Israel rather than everyone in the Gentile world (Is. 49:5; 53:8; Gal. 4:4,5), He was “a servant to the circumcised" (Rom. 15:8), " the consolation *of Israel*" , unto *them* was born a saviour (Lk. 2:11,25), and therefore He had to be exactly representative of them. For this reason it was theologically necessary for Jesus to be Jewish in order to achieve the work He did. We are only saved by reason of becoming in Christ and therefore part of the Israel of God (Gal. 3:27-29). The Jewish basis of salvation is absolutely fundamental to a correct understanding of the Gospel.

Consider the following evidence that fundamentally, Christ died to save Israel:
"For unto us (Israel) a child is born, unto us a son is given" (Is. 9:6)
"The Lord formed me in the womb to be His servant, to bring Jacob again to Him" (Is. 49:5)
"For the transgression of my people was he stricken" (Is. 53:8)
“God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law" (Gal. 4:4,5)
The good news of Christ’s birth was for “all the people" of Israel, primarily (Lk. 2:10 RV).
The Lord laid down His life “for the sheep" of Israel (Jn. 10:15,16).

Both Peter and Paul appealed to the Jews to repent because it was for them that Christ had died: "Ye are the children...of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying.... And in thy seed shall all the kindreds (tribes) of the earth (land) be blessed. Unto you first (i.e. most importantly) God, having raised up his son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities... God raised unto Israel a Saviour… men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham... to you is the word of this salvation sent... we declare unto you glad tidings (the Gospel), how that the promise (of salvation in Christ) which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children" (Acts 3:25,26; 13:23,26,32,33).

"For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision (Rom. 15:17) has reference to Isaiah’s Servant prophecies of the crucifixion. But it is also, as so often in Paul, a reference to the Lord’s words; in this case, Mt. 20.26-28: "It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many". The

‘becoming a servant’ refers to His death; and He became a servant, Paul says, to the Jews above all.

Because of all this, the sufferings of Christ on the cross have connections with the punishments for Israel's sins (e.g. being offered gall to drink = Jer. 8:14; Lam. 3:5). Israel were temporarily forsaken by God because of their sins (Is. 49:14; 54:7), and therefore so was Christ. Christ was chastened with the rod of men "and with the stripes of the children of men", i.e. Israel (Is. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24; Mic. 5:1), in His death on the cross. But punishment with rod and stripes was to be given if Messiah sinned (2 Sam. 7:14). Yet Christ received this punishment; because God counted Him as if He were a sinner. His sharing in our condemnation was no harmless piece of theology. He really did feel, deep inside Him, that He was a sinner, forsaken by God. Instead of lifting up His face to Heaven, with the freedom of sinlessness, He fell on His face before the Father in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:39), bearing the guilt of human sin. There are times when we may feel that the righteousness of Christ makes Him somehow inaccessible to us. Even among contemporary brethren and sisters, there are some who I feel somehow distanced from, simply because I know they are far more righteous than I. And I know that there are many of us who feel the same. We feel that they just don't know what it feels like to be spiritually down and out, to feel and deeply know the dirt of our own nature. And if we have this problem with each other, we will surely have it with the Lord Jesus too. For this reason many of us lack the dynamic, close personal relationship with Christ which we should have.

And yet here on the cross, we see our Lord with all the panic of the sinner who knows He is facing judgment and death, feeling every bit, right throughout His very being, the alienation from God which sin brings. He knew the agony of separation from God because of sin. He was a sin bearer (Is. 53:11); and the idea of sin bearing was almost an idiom for being personally guilty and sinful (Num. 14:34; Ex. 28:43). The Lord was our sin bearer and yet personally guiltless. This is the paradox which even He struggled with; no wonder we do, on a far more abstract level. Is. 63:2,3 explains how in the process of obtaining salvation, the Lord’s clothing would be made red. Red clothes in Isaiah suggest sinfulness that needs cleansing (Is. 1:18). He was completely identified with us, to the point of feeling a sinner even although He never sinned. Perhaps this was why Pilate marvelled so greatly at Christ's silence when under false accusation (Mk. 15:5); Pilate knew Jesus was innocent, and he had seen many innocent men being condemned in that court situation. Innocent men usually protest their innocence, desperately. But this innocent man didn't. Perhaps the paradox is explained by the fact that Jesus felt so closely identified with sinful, guilty humanity that He didn't do the natural thing, which would've been to loudly proclaim His own innocence.

The Greek word translated "forsaken" occurs also in Acts 2:27, where Peter quotes from Psalm 16 concerning how Christ was always aware of His own righteousness, and therefore confidently knew that God would not "*leave* (forsake) his soul in hell". In Ps. 22:1, our Lord was doubting His previous thoughts, as prophesied in Ps. 16:10. He now feared that God had forsaken Him, when previously He had been full of confidence that God would not do so, on account of His perfect character. Because Christ felt such a sinner deep within Him, He even doubted if He really was the Messiah. This is how deeply, how deeply, our Lord was our representative, this is how thoroughly He bare our own sins in His own body on the tree, this is how deeply He came to know us, to be able to exactly empathize with us in our spiritual

weakness; this was how He became able to have a fellow feeling with those who are out of the way, who have lost the faith, "for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity" (Heb. 5:2). The way the Lord felt as a sinner without being one is possibly reflected in the way He framed the parable of the prodigal son. For like it or not, the prodigal is portrayed in terms which are elsewhere applicable to Jesus- the beloved son of the Father, given the Father's wealth as His inheritance, He who was rich becoming poor, going into the Gentile world, accused of companying with prostitutes, bitterly rejected by the elder brother [cp. the Pharisees], accused of wasting wealth [by Judas], received with joy by the Father. Of course, the Lord Jesus did not sin. But why is the sinner framed in the story in the very terms which are applicable to the sinless Son of God? Surely the Lord did this to reflect the degree to which He felt His identity with sinners, although He never sinned.

The greatest fear within a righteous man is that of sinning. There are many Messianic Psalms in which David, in the spirit of Christ, speaks of His fear of being forsaken by God:
"Leave me not, neither forsake me, *O God of my* salvation" (Ps. 27:9; cp. "*My God*, Why hast thou forsaken me")
"Forsake me not, O Lord: *O my God* be not far from me" (Ps. 38:21)
"Hide not they face from thy servant... hear me speedily" (Ps. 69:17)- implying that a lack of response to prayer (as He experienced on the cross) was perceived by the Lord as rejection.
"Forsake me not... *O God*, forsake me not" (Ps. 71:9,18)
"I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not" (Ps. 119:8)
"Forsake not the works of thine own hands" (Ps. 138:8).

This points forward to how our Lord had this lifelong fear of being forsaken by God as a result of sin. Under the extreme pressure of the cross, amidst His constant self-examination, it is understandable that Christ's greatest fear, perhaps almost His paranoia, appeared to become realized. The crowd had been trying to brainwash our Lord with the idea that He had sinned; and because of His humanity and sensitivity of His personality, the Lord Jesus was perhaps subconsciously influenced by all this. He was no hard man, insensitive to the jeers of men. Remember how He was laughed *to scorn* both on the cross and in the home of Jairus, and how He did not hide His face from the *shame* which He was made to feel by men (Mt. 9:24; Ps. 22:7; Is. 50:6). Job's sufferings were another type of Christ's, and his sufferings (cp. Christ's experience on the cross) was the thing which He had greatly feared all his life (Job 3:25). The thing which Christ greatly feared, according to the Psalms, was being forsaken by God. And true enough to the Job type, this came upon Him.
Because Christ truly felt a sinner, He felt forsaken by God. This is to me the explanation of one of Scripture's most enigmatic verses: "Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but my servant? Or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? Who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant?" (Is. 42:18,19). The Lord Jesus, as the servant, was to share the blindness and deafness of an obdurate Israel. He identified with us even in our sinfulness; and yet He was the blind who was perfect; and this is the very thing that empowers the spiritually blind to see. When God made His soul sin on the cross [AV "offering for sin" is not in the Hebrew text- it's an interpretation], *then* He saw [Heb. to perceive / discern] His seed (Is. 53:10). This all seems to mean that it was through this feeling as a sinner deep within His very soul, that the Lord Jesus came to 'see', to closely identify with, to

perceive truly, us His sinful seed / children. And He did this right at the very end of His hours of suffering, as if this was the climax of His sufferings- they led Him to a full and total identity with sinful men and women. And once He reached that point, He died. The total identity of the Lord with our sinfulness is brought out in passages like Rom. 8:3, describing Jesus as being "in the likeness of sinful flesh" when He was made a sin offering; and 1 Pet. 2:24, which speaks of how He "his own self…in his own body" bore our sins "upon the tree". Note that it was at the time of His death that He was especially like this. I believe that these passages speak more of the Lord's moral association with sinners, which reached a climax in His death, than they do of His 'nature'. The Greek words *charis* [grace] and *choris* [apart] differ by one very small squiggle. This is why there's an alternative reading of Heb. 2:9: "So that apart from God [*choris theou*] he [Jesus] tasted death for us" (2). This would then be a clear reference to the way that the Lord Jesus felt apart from God at His very end. Not that He was, but if He felt like that, then this was in practice the experience which He had. Thus even when we feel apart from God- the Lord Jesus knows even that feeling.

In every other recorded prayer of His in the Gospels, the Lord addressed the Almighty as "Father"; but now He uses the more distant "My God", reflecting the separation He felt. But therefore His mind flew to Ps. 22:1, and He quoted those words: "My God, why hast thou forsaken me". But the fact His mind went to the Scriptures like that was His salvation. There is reason to think that in His last few minutes, the Lord quoted the whole of Ps. 22 out loud. Thus He asked for a drink " that the Scripture might be fulfilled" , or finished, and then His words "It is finished" followed- which are actually an exact quote from the Septuagint of the last verse of Ps. 22. Psalms 22 and 69 can be clearly divided into two halves; the first half speaks of the confused thoughts of the Lord Jesus as He hung on the cross, but then there is a sudden rally, and His thoughts become clearly more confident and positive, centred around the certainty of our future salvation. As Christ quoted or at least thought through Psalm 22, He came to the glorious conclusion: Of course this is how Messiah must feel, He *must* feel forsaken, as Ps. 22 prophesied, but He would go on to save God's people! Just because Messiah would *feel* forsaken didn't mean that He Himself had sinned! We can almost sense the wave of reassurance that swept over our Lord, that deep knowledge of His own good conscience. And therefore how desperate He was, despite that ravaging thirst, to utter to the world that cry, "It is finished"; to show to us all that He had achieved God's work, that He *had* perfectly manifested the Father, and that thereby He really had achieved our redemption.

Notes

(1) This chronology is my preferred one. Yet it presents the problem (for some) of reading "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Mt. 12:40) as an idiom rather than a literal time period. This problem is well handled in H.A.Whittaker, 'Three days and three nights', in *Studies in the Gospels*.

(2) A reading justified at length in Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977) pp. 87-97.

15:35 *And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said: Look, he calls Elijah*- They were confusing "Eliyahu" with "Eloi, Eloi". With teeth loose or missing, throat parched from the fever induced by the iron nails in the blood stream, the difficulty of speaking because of being suspended by the arms... this confusion isn't surprising.

15:36 *And one ran and filling a sponge full of vinegar, put it on a rod and gave it to*

him to drink, saying: Leave him be. Let us see if Elijah will come to take Him down- When we read that "someone" offered him a sponge with wine mixed with myrrh (Mk. 15:36; Mt. 27:48), we recall the use of myrrh in preparing bodies for burial (Mk. 14:3; Lk. 23:56; Jn. 12:3; 19:39). Pliny (*Natural History* 14.15.92,107) records: "The finest wine in early days was that spiced with the scent of myrrh…I also find that aromatic wine is constantly made from almost the same ingredient as perfumes, from myrrh". This alerts me to the real possibility that the unnamed bystander who did this was Mary Magdalene. Earlier she had anointed the Lord's body with myrrh "to the burial". And now she has prepared the most expensive form of wine as some sort of pain killer. Perhaps the Lord was so touched by this that He accepted it, but didn't drink it. His doing this is otherwise very hard to understand. Her love was on one hand inappropriate, and yet the Lord still accepted it, even though He couldn't use it. He could have felt angry with her for tempting Him to the easier way. But He didn't. And in so doing He showed her that the essence of the cross is that there is no easy way. The principles of all this are to be reflected in our cross carrying.

15:37 *And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed his last*- Mt. 27:50 suggests that this cry *was* the giving up of the spirit: "Then Jesus crying out again with a loud voice, expired". For the huge significance of this, see on Lk. 23:46. The Lord gave His life, it was not taken from Him (Jn. 10:18); He consciously controlled the giving out of His last breath.

15:38 *And the veil of the temple was torn in two- from the top to the bottom*- The way into the most holy was now open to all, the veil torn from top to bottom because this was done by God. The High Priest's garments had been torn by him, and now the veil itself was open. Judaism was effectively over. Direct fellowship with God was now made possible through the Lord's death. We note by contrast how the same word is used to describe how the Lord's garment was *not* rent (Jn. 19:24). "From the top" indicates that this was done by God. He was no longer hidden behind ritual, stones and sacred space. The rending of the veil is clearly alluded to in Heb. 9:3; 10:19; but as noted there, we must have boldness to enter in to the holiest. We all now are to act as the High Priest, going into the very presence of God for the same of others.

15:39 *And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw how he breathed his last breath, he said: Truly this man was the Son of God*- He said it twice: "This was a righteous man (Lk.), truly this man was the son of God" (Mk.). And he might well have added in his own thoughts: "And I've crucified him". The Lord died through an act of utter self control; consciously breathing out His last breath in the form of the words "Father into your hands I commit my spirit". He gave His life, it was not taken from Him (Jn. 10:18).

15:40 *And there were also women watching from afar, among whom were both Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome*- Perhaps when He crossed Kidron He would have thought back to how Asa had to separate himself from his mother in the very same place (1 Kings 15:13). The crucifixion record describes Mary the mother of Jesus as Mary the mother of James and Joses (Mk. 15:40 cp. Mt. 13:55)- not Mary the mother of Jesus. It's as if the record itself seeks to show that separation between mother and Son which occurred there. Both Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James- i.e. the mother of Jesus too (Mk. 16:1 = Mk. 15:40 = Mt. 13:55) came to the sepulchre, but Jesus chose to appear to Mary Magdalene first (Mk. 15:9), and not His own dear mother. Mt. 27:61 almost cruelly rubs the point in: "There was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting

over against the sepulchre", but the Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene first. Indeed, there is no record that He ever appeared to His mother. This would presumably have been to help her in realizing that she must relate to Him as her Lord and Saviour now, like any other woman had to, and not as a woman with special maternal privileges in her relationship with her now Almighty Son. It must have so pained the Lord to do this- to not appear to his dear mother first. But as He oftentimes acts with us, so He did with her- doing something which even in Divine nature must have been so painful for Him, in order to help her in her growth.

We read in Mk. 15:40 that "Mary the mother of James the little one and of Joses" stood by the cross (RVmg.). I take this Mary to be Mary the mother of Jesus, for Mt. 13:55 records that James and Joses were brothers of Jesus and thus children of Mary. Remember that Mark is writing under inspiration a transcript of the preaching of the Gospel by the apostles, as they recounted the message of Jesus time and again. Could it not be that in the preaching of that Gospel, when it came to the cross, James asked to be surnamed "the little one", remembering his earlier rejection of Jesus his brother? Now it is not at all surprising that Saul of Tarsus too decides to call himself 'the little one', through sustained meditation upon the cross. See on Jn. 19:25; Rev. 14:4.

15:41 *Who, when he was in Galilee, had also followed him and ministered to him; and many other women that also had come with him up to Jerusalem*- The connection is between following the Lord in the easier times, at the height of His popularity in Galilee; and also following Him when all seems hopeless, and there seems absolutely no human advantage from identity with Him. The reference to "many" women coming up to Jerusalem in support of Him would suggest that He may have had more female supporters than male.

15:42 *And when evening had come, because it was the Preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath*- This confirms that the Lord died at the same time as the Passover lambs were slain; just as He had planned. His "last supper" was therefore a Passover held in advance.

15:43 *Joseph of Arimathaea, a councillor of honourable rank, who also was looking for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus*- Perhaps Old Testament 'Ramah', birthplace and home of Samuel. He was 'also' a disciple (Mt.), in God's eyes, in the same category as the women disciples who were so public about their discipleship (Mt. 27:56). Whilst secret discipleship is not the Lord's intention, and He will arrange circumstances so that we 'come out' publically, it is not for us to say that He doesn't count secret disciples as also His disciples, just as He did Joseph.

Joseph is now showing his open affinity with this crucified man; for only close family members could ask for the body. At that time, he didn't firmly believe in the resurrection. For sheer *love* of this crucified man, he was willing to sacrifice his standing in society, his economic position, risk his life, grovel before the hated Pilate to beg (Lk.), crave (Mk.) the body. This was something which only the close relatives of the crucified could presume to do. But he felt already that new relationship to the Lord, and whether or not He would ever be raised he wanted to show openly to the world his connection with Him, come what may. This was the effect of the Lord's death upon him.

The text records that the Jews desired Pilate for the death of Jesus; but the very same

Greek words are used to describe how Joseph desired Pilate to let him have the body of Jesus (Mt. 27:58)- as if to show how Joseph openly undid his request for the crucifixion, by requesting the body. It is twice stressed that Joseph was on the Sanhedrin council. So was Nicodemus (Jn. 3:2). Yet the whole council unanimously voted for the crucifixion (Mk. 14:64). "The whole Sanhedrin" (Mk. 15:1 NIV) agreed the High Priests' plan of action. They *all* interrogated Him and “the whole multitude of them" led Jesus to Pilate (Lk. 22:66,70; 23:1). This is some emphasis. Joseph “was not in agreement" with them, we are told, but it seems this was a position held within his own conscience; indeed, “many” of the elders actually believed in Jesus (Jn. 12:42). It was only the actual cross which brought faith into the open. “You shall not be in agreement with the wicked as an unjust witness" (Ex. 23:1) probably tore out his heart. It may be that these men weren't present and that the Jews broke their own law, that the death sentence must be unanimously agreed. However, I have an intuitive sense (and nothing more) that these men voted for the Lord's death; and that they went along with the discussion in which " all" the council were involved, as to which incidents in His life they could remember for which they could condemn Him (Mk. 14:55) . They may not have consented to what was done in their hearts, but they still went along with it all on the surface. Acts 13:28,29 is at pains, almost, to associate Joseph, Nicodemus and the rest of the Sanhedrin: "*They* have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though *they* found no cause of death in him, yet desired *they* Pilate that He should be slain... *they* took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre".

They were secret disciples, fearing the loss of standing among the Jews. It was only after the Lord's death that they came out in the open. It seems to me that they voted for the Son of God to die. But in His grace, the Father emphasizes in the record that Joseph was a good man, and a just; a disciple, although secretly. The grace of God shines through the whole record. Thus only Matthew speaks about the suicide of Judas; the other three records are silent. A human god would inevitably have stressed that the betrayer of His Son went out in shame and took his own life. But the God of all grace is higher than reflecting vindictiveness in His word.
If the Lord died at 3p.m. and sunset was at 6p.m., there were only three hours for Joseph to find Pilate, gain a hearing, make his request, for Pilate to verify that the body was dead, and then for Nicodemus to buy the spices and for the burial to be done. Joseph and Nicodemus must have decided almost immediately what they were going to do. And the lesson for us: Beholding the cross makes us see what we ought to do, it becomes urgently apparent, and then we give our all, with the spirit of 'nothing else matters', to achieve it as far as we can. But we can enter into their thoughts: I wish I'd done more for Him while He was alive, and now, even now, because of the pressure of time, I just can't bury and honour this body as I'd like to. All these things are against me. The self hate and loathing and regret would have arisen within them, mixed with that love and devotion to the Lord of all grace. And there would have been an earnest desire for God to accept what little they could do, with time, the surrounding world, the Jewish culture, the unchangeable past, and their own present natures, all militating against the height of devotion they fain would show.

John gives the additional detail about the concern that Jesus might not be fully dead, and the piercing of His side. It is difficult to tell if a body is dead or not. But there was something about the Lord's corpse which somehow shone forth the message that He

had given up His life. " He that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe" (Jn. 19:35). Do we not get the sense here of a man, even under inspiration, grasping for adequate words and finding there are none? This is an experience beyond the paradigm of verbal description. The description of blood and water flowing has raised the question as to whether the Lord had been fasting, or had emptied His bowels in Gethsemane, before the crucifixion. It has been suggested that for this to have happened the Lord would have been pierced from the right hand side above the fifth rib, piercing the right auricle of the heart (from which the blood came) and also the pericardium, from where the serum came which appeared like water. However there are critics of these suggestions, which leaves the possibility that the flow of blood and water was in fact a miracle- hence John's insistence that yes, he actually saw this happen. And he says that he records it so that we might believe. The implication is that meditation upon the cross is what inspires faith, as well as conviction of sin and repentance. The way the Lord's blood flowed out from His heart is highly evocative of powerful lessons. He gave out from the very core and foundation of His being. We may serve God in good deeds, in writing books, in labouring for Him, without any real demand being made on our innermost self. The challenge of the cross is to give from the very centre and fountain of our life, our very selves, our person, our most vital soul.

15:44 *And Pilate wondered if he were already dead, and called the centurion. He asked him whether he was already dead*- Josephus records that victims usually lingered for two days or so before death. The Lord died so quickly. And the legs were broken so that the victims would die quickly (not, as has sometimes been supposed, to stop them running away). These things are harmonized by realizing that there was a support on which the victim could seek temporal relief in order to keep himself alive. Werner Keller (*The Bible As History* p. 356) explains: "There was often a small support attached called a "sedile" (seat). if the victim hanging there eased his misery from time to time by supporting himself on this, the blood returned to the upper half of his body... when the torture of the crucified man was finally to be brought to an end, the "crucifragrum" was proceeded with: his legs were broken. That meant that he could no longer ease his weight in the footrests and heart failure quickly followed". It seems to me that in keeping with His refusal of the pain killer, His not requesting a drink until the very end, His willing giving of His life... that the Lord didn't press down on the seat, so that effectively He tortured Himself to death. If the victim did not press down on the sedile, the dead weight of the body would cause the intercostals muscles that facilitate inhaling to become too weakened to function. The lungs, unable to empty, would become full of carbon dioxide and death would result from asphyxia. The fact the Lord was making the effort to talk to people and yet, it seems, not pressing down on the sedile… is simply an essay in His self control, in His love, to bother to talk to others… which should inspire us to rise out of our introspection and make the effort likewise to connect with others. Seneca (*Dialogue 3*) writes: "Is it worth to weigh down on one's own wound and hand impaled on a gibbet to postpone something which is... the end of punishment [i.e. death]?". In practice, the victim was only prolonging his own agony by pressing down on the rest. If the Lord didn't do this, He must have been extremely faint. Keller also comments: "In the case of a person suspended by his two hands the blood sinks very quickly into the lower half of the body. After six to twelve minutes blood pressure has dropped by 50% and the pulse rate has doubled". The Lord must have felt His every heartbeat, and therefore been able to sense when He was approaching death. Yet amidst the faintness, the knowledge that His heart was about to give out, the Lord remained, I am convinced,

completely intellectually consciousness. Deep within Him, that perfect mind was centred on the Father and His word. Several Psalms take on a literal reference to the Lord's final agony: "My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me... my flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever" (Ps. 38:10; 73:26).

15:45 *And when it was confirmed by the centurion, he granted the corpse to Joseph*- We get the impression that the one thing Joseph wanted was to be given the crucified body of the Lord. And we are each "given" just that, as memorialized in the communion service. His body is given for each of us, and we should realize that it ought to cost us every penny we have and all our standing in society.

15:46 *And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock*- Luke's record that Joseph himself took the body down invites us to imagine him using a ladder, perhaps that used to place the title. However, Acts 13:29 suggests that the Roman soldiers on behalf of Jewish people (i.e. Joseph) took the body down; Pilate "commanded the body to be delivered", implying he gave a command to underlings. So in what sense did *Joseph* take the body down and wrap it? Are we to imagine him humbling himself before the crowd to assist those soldiers in the physical act of taking the nails out and lowering the body down? Or it could be that he attracted so much attention to himself and had to humble himself so much to ask the soldiers to do it, that it was effectively as if he did it. But there is no reason to think that he himself didn't walk out in that no man's land between the crowd and the cross and humble himself to take it down, hearing the gasp from the crowd as he touched the blood and dead body which would make him unclean for the feast. His act was a tremendous mental sacrifice as well as a social and physical one. He is described as "honourable", literally 'well-formed / bodied', as if to emphasis his deportment befitting a leader of men. But he humbled himself before that stake. "He took it down" may imply that the stake was left standing. Or was it laid backwards and lowered down horizontal, with Joseph's anxious hands guiding it down? His contact with the body meant that he couldn't keep the Passover (Num. 9:9,10). The people would have watched incredulous as one of the leaders of Israel openly showed his preference for the crucified Nazarene as opposed to keeping the Mosaic Law. The obsession with cleanliness at Passover time would have meant that everyone was extremely sensitive to what Joseph did.

And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb- This apparently needless detail is added because the camera is as it were focused on the closed tomb, with Joseph now walking away from it.

15:47 *And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses observed where he was laid*- They didn't stay there long, but the camera is focused on Joseph, sealing the tomb and walking away from it, but in the background the camera picks up (blurred and out of focus, as it were) the women sitting there.

The crucifixion record describes Mary the mother of Jesus as Mary the mother of James and Joses (Mk. 15:40 cp. Mt. 13:55)- not Mary the mother of Jesus. It's as if the record itself seeks to show that separation between mother and Son which occurred there. Both Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James- i.e. the mother of Jesus too (Mk. 16:1 = Mk. 15:40 = Mt. 13:55) came to the sepulchre, but Jesus chose to appear to Mary Magdalene first (Mk. 15:9), and not His own dear mother. Mt. 27:61 almost cruelly rubs the point in: "There was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre", but the Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene first. Indeed, there is no record that He ever appeared to His mother. This would

presumably have been to help her in realizing that she must relate to Him as her Lord and Saviour now, like any other woman had to, and not as a woman with special maternal privileges in her relationship with her now Almighty Son. It must have so pained the Lord to do this- to not appear to his dear mother first. But as He oftentimes acts with us, so He did with her- doing something which even in Divine nature must have been so painful for Him, in order to help her in her growth. We read in Mk. 15:40 that "Mary the mother of James the little one and of Joses" stood by the cross (RVmg.). I take this Mary to be Mary the mother of Jesus, for Mt. 13:55 records that James and Joses were brothers of Jesus and thus children of Mary. Remember that Mark is writing under inspiration a transcript of the preaching of the Gospel by the apostles, as they recounted the message of Jesus time and again. Could it not be that in the preaching of that Gospel, when it came to the cross, James asked to be surnamed "the little one", remembering his earlier rejection of Jesus his brother? Now it is not at all surprising that Saul of Tarsus too decides to call himself 'the little one', through sustained meditation upon the cross.

MARK CHAPTER 16

16:1 *And when the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome, bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him*- As noted on Jn., Joseph had bought a huge amount of spices to anoint the Lord, far more than used even for the burials of the Caesars. But the women still bought some more. They too made their sacrifice, in order to anoint the Lord. This all arose from their abiding belief that He was Jesus the Christ, the anointed one; and their duty was therefore to anoint Him. Belief in the Lord Jesus as Christ can roll off the tongue and be apparently painless; but it demanded all for Joseph and the women.

In Matthew too, Mary Magdalene is first in the list. As discussed on :4, these women headed by Mary Magdalene are the primary witnesses to the Lord's resurrection. And of them, Mary Magdalene has primacy in the list, and she was the least qualified humanly speaking. She had a history of 'seven demons' [mental illness] and possibly prostitution. 'Magdalene' could mean 'the one with braided hair', something later criticized by Paul as inappropriate for Godly women, but referencing her dubious past. For "Magdalene" was not a surname but a term of differentiation. Or it may refer simply to Magdala, which she had now left because that is why she is known as the Magdalene, the woman from Magdala. Or again, it could mean a trader in perfume, which would explain her prominence in anointing the Lord's body.

16:2 *And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun was risen, they went to the tomb*- "They went" is an arresting present tense, they come, they draw near. We are being invited to play Bible television with the text and see the whole wondrous story time and again for the first time.

The language hints very much at a new creation beginning. And yet it began in darkness, not only literally, but also in the darkness of the disciples' disappointment, misunderstanding and weak faith. From all this, great light was to arise.

Mary came seeking the Lord early in the morning… and this inevitably takes our minds to some OT passages which speak of doing just this:

- "O God, thou *art* my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory" (Ps. 63:1,2). The resurrection of Jesus showed clearly both the power

(2 Cor. 13:4) and glory (Rom. 6:4) of the Father. For Mary, life without her Lord was a dry and thirsty land. This was why she went to the grave early that morning. She was simply aching for Him. And she had well learnt the Lord's teaching, that her brother's resurrection had been associated with the glory of the Father (Jn. 11:40). She went early to the tomb to seek the Father's glory- so the allusion to Ps. 63 implies. She was the one person who had actually believed in advance the Lord's teaching about resurrection. And yet even she was confused- half her brain perceived it all and believed it, and was rewarded by being the first to see the risen Lord; and yet another part of her brain was simply overcome with grief, believing that the gardener had somehow removed the body some place else. And our own highest heights of spiritual perception are likewise shrouded by such humanity too.
- "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me" (Prov. 8:17) is written in the first instance of wisdom. And yet the Lord Jesus has "wisdom" as one of His titles (Mt. 12:42; 1 Cor. 1:24,30). Mary sat at the Lord's feet to hear His wisdom; to her, she showed in practice what it means to comprehend Jesus as "the wisdom of God". She anxiously heard His words. And thus she sought Him early…because she so wanted to hear His wisdom again. Of course, she loved Him. But that love was rooted in respect and almost an addiction to His wisdom. It was this that she loved about Him, and it was this which led her to the grave early. And it was this which led her to the honour of being the first to see the risen Jesus.
- "Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of *our* soul *is* to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early" (Is. 26:8,9) makes the same connection between seeking the Lord early, and loving His words.

16:3 *And they were talking among themselves: Who shall roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?*- They had seen the stone rolled there (Mk. 15:46). We are being shown the problem: they went to anoint a body within an already closed tomb. This is recorded in order to give the impression of their devoted loyalty in the midst of mind numbing grief. And it is so psychologically credible. "Looking up..." (:4) implies they were walking along looking at the ground. It's typical of how those in grief would act, totally credible as description. Their love for the Lord is thereby well demonstrated.

The women who came to the garden tomb weren't looking for the risen Lord; they came to anoint the body. But their love of the Lord was counted to them as seeking Him (Mt. 28:5). Here's an example of our prayers and needs being answered whilst we are yet speaking. They worried about what had already been sorted!

16:4 *And looking up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled aside*- "Looking up" enables us to see them walking with their heads down in sadness. The Angel descended and did this before the women arrived; for on the way, they had worried about how they would roll the stone away, but when they got there, they found it done already (Mk. 16:2,4). Women unable to roll away a stone recalls the scene when Rachel and her girls were unable to roll the stone away from the well until Jacob did it (Gen. 29:3,10). The idea would therefore be that the Lord's tomb was in fact a well of living water, the gift of the Spirit, which would flow for God's people after and on account of His resurrection; and this idea is elsewhere stated specifically by the Lord in John's Gospel.

They apparently didn't see the Angel sitting on the stone who is mentioned in Mt. 27:2. Perhaps the Divine plan was that they ought to have been searching for the

empty tomb and rejoiced on finding it; and believed without the revelation of Angels. But eventually they needed the Angelic revelations. We too can walk by Angels sitting on stones...

We note the emphasis of "they saw", also in :5 and in :6 "Behold / see the place where He lay". The other Gospels give even more examples. These women were the first eye witnesses of the events of the Lord's resurrection, and Mary Magdalene the first to see the risen Lord. The verb can mean "to observe something with sustained attention" [Walter Bauer and Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* p. 360]. At the end of Mk. 15 we have these same women likewise described as seeing / observing His death, embalming and burial. They were the eye witnesses to it all. Luke and John stress the women standing, both at the cross and the tomb. Matthew and Luke stress the seeing / observing. Between them, the records present these women as the legal witnesses. Female witness was disallowed in Jewish and Roman courts. But not with God. He chose those whose disqualifications were in fact their qualifications, and He does the same with us.

16:5 *And entering into the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed*- If "the right side" refers to where the Lord had lain, we are invited to see Him now as enthroned superior to Angels, with them at His right hand, subject to Him. This is visual representation of what Hebrews 1 states specifically.

16:6 *And he said to them: Do not be alarmed*- The idea is '*You* do not need to be fearful, unlike these soldiers who are paralyzed by their own fears'. Their weakness is still apparent in the record, because Mt. 28:8 says that they left the scene "with fear...".

You seek Jesus the Nazarene who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here! See the place where they laid him!- The women had come to anoint the Lord's dead body, with apparently no expectation that He would indeed rise the third day as He had predicted. And yet the Angel generously counts this to them (Mt. 'I know / perceive / accept / count it') as if they were actively looking for Jesus. Their obvious error- that they assumed Him to still be dead- is not rebuked because the good news is simply so much greater. The resurrection records are full of such imputed righteousness. Lk. 24:5 enquires why they are 'seeking the living amongst the dead'. They were not seeking the living- they had come to anoint a dead body. Yet they are graciously counted as seeking Jesus as if they were seeking for a living person. John's record has the Lord asking Mary *whom* she is 'seeking', and this is how John's Gospel opens, with the Lord enquiring of His followers *whom* they were seeking (Jn. 1:38; 20:15). This question as to the Lord's identity echoes down to us, for we too can feel a devotion and identity with the idea of 'Jesus' without perceiving that He really is alive and active. The Lord counted righteousness to them, they are commended by the Angels for ‘seeking the Lord’- even though that seeking was deep in their subconscious. Yet the record notices that even incipient faith and understanding in those women, and counts it to them. Would that we would be so generous in our perception of others. The weeping, helpless standing afar off at the cross are described as still following the Lord Jesus and ministering to Him, as they did in the happier Galilee days (Mk. 15:41). Their essential spirit was understood and credited to them, even though their actions seemed to belie this. Likewise our essential desires are read as our prayers, even if the words we use seem quite different.

Mk. 16:6 adds to the other records "Jesus of Nazareth", as if emphasizing the Lord's humanity and death as compared to the wonderful reality of His resurrection.

The idea may be that He is 'Not here in a tomb, in a place for the dead', in the spirit of Lk. 24:5 "Why do you seek the living amongst the dead?". There is no hint that the women obeyed and went to see the place where the Lord lay. They had arrived at the tomb and had gone in and found the body missing (Lk. 24:3,23), and then the Angel[s] appeared to them. Now the Angels are inviting them to go into the tomb again and behold the place where the Lord's body had lain- perhaps because now there were Angels sitting at the head and feet of where the Lord's body had lain (Jn. 20:12). Along with imputed faith and righteousness, the disobedience of the disciples is also emphasized by the records. They struggle to believe His clear predictions of resurrection, are disobedient to the various commands to witness about it, disbelieve the women, and still appear depressed and sceptical that it is really Him when He appears to them for the third time in Galilee. Or it could be that they did go and see the place where the Lord lay, and yet found the body missing and were confused (Lk. 24:3,23)- even with an Angel standing there telling them the Lord had risen as He had said!

16:7 *Go tell his disciples, and Peter, that he goes ahead of you into Galilee. There shall you see him, just as he told you-*
Angelic unity with the risen Lord Jesus is brought out by a comparison of the words spoken to the women after the resurrection. Mk. 16:7 has the Angels telling the women: “He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you”. But Mt. 28:7 has the Angel saying: “He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. Lo, I [the Angel] have told you”. Perhaps what the Angel said was: “… as he told you… Lo, I have told you”, thus bringing out the new unity between the risen Christ and the Angel.

The Lord's original plan to meet them first in Galilee was changed; for He appeared to them in Jerusalem after they had first disbelieved. He was so eager to see them; and their faith and obedience was weak. This addresses their obvious although unspoken question: 'Where's the body? When can we see Him?'. The answer was 'As He explained before, you must show your obedience to Him by going into Galilee and there you will see Him'. But this plan, explained by the Lord earlier and now repeated by the Angel, was cut short by the Lord Himself. For right after this, He appears to Mary and the women. Right there, and not in Galilee. And soon afterwards He appears to the eleven in Jerusalem; and when He does finally meet the disciples in Galilee, this was the third appearance He had made to them, the earlier two having been in Jerusalem (Jn. 21:14). This change of plan was perhaps partly quite simply from the excitement of love, emotions which are still possible even within Divine nature. But partly it may have been because of the very weak state of the disciples' faith, and the Lord's sense that He must act urgently so that they did not lose faith permanently; see on *Go quickly and tell....* The idea of the Lord going before them into Galilee is based upon the Lord's teaching in Mt. 26:31,32: "I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you into Galilee". The 'going ahead' is also a sheep and shepherd allusion; although the sheep would be scattered, the Lord would go ahead of them into Galilee and like sheep obedient to the shepherd's voice, they would follow Him there. But perhaps the Lord now realized that their faith and obedience was just not enough for them to do that, and so He appeared to them anyway. Indeed, according to John, the disciples appeared to have finally returned to Galilee in order to return to their fishing business, despite having met the risen Lord in Jerusalem. They were very slow to really grasp the reality of His resurrection. The Gospels are their own account of

their preaching, and it's as if they are telling the world how slow they had been to believe and were urging the world to do better than them, and to believe more quickly.

The urgency required was partly because the wonder of the good news does itself impart an urgency to our presentation of it. And we need to analyze our own approach to witness and discern whether there is any sense of urgency to it; the record of baptisms in the early church was of immediate baptism, the very moment the person had believed, rather than waiting as many do today until a convenient time and place. But the urgency was also to tell the disciples before they totally lost their faith. The Lord was clearly concerned that they would lose faith entirely; and this explains His change of plans concerning revealing Himself to them in Galilee.

The initial plan had been that the women also would need to go to Galilee before meeting the Lord (Mt. 28:7). The Lord changed that plan and appeared to the women immediately; but His plan was still that He would reveal Himself to His male disciples for the first time in Galilee. But He soon changed that plan too, for the other records make it clear that the Lord twice appeared to them in Jerusalem (Jn. 21:14).

Put together the following passages:
- The disciples' return to Galilee after the resurrection was a result of their lack of faith (Jn. 16:31,32)
- But the Lord went before them, as a shepherd goes before His sheep, into Galilee (Mt. 28:7). Even in their weakness of faith, He was still their shepherd, they were still His sheep, and He led them even then.
- The Lord told them to go to Galilee (Mt. 28:10). He accepted their lower level of faith. And He worked through that and led them through it.

The return to Galilee is seen in an even worse light once we reflect on the circumstances surrounding the first calling of the disciples, nearly four years earlier. John's Gospel implies that they were called at Bethany; whereas the other Gospels say they were called whilst fishing at the sea of Galilee. This is usually, and correctly, harmonized by concluding that they were called as John says in Bethany, but they then returned to their fishing in Galilee, and the Lord went there to call them again. So returning to their fishing in Galilee had already been shown to them as being a running away from the call of their Lord. And yet still they did it. And yet John's inspired record is so positive; he speaks as if the disciples were called at Bethany and unwaveringly responded immediately. The point that they actually lost their intensity and returned home is gently omitted from specific mention.

16:8 *And they went out and ran from the tomb. Trembling and astonishment had come upon them, and they said nothing to anyone. For they were afraid*- There has always been opposition to spreading the Gospel outside our own environment. Jonah was unwilling to take it to Nineveh, Israel failed miserably in their intended role as a missionary nation, and the apostles showed remarkable reluctance to obey the command to take Christ into all the world in the first century. The women were told to go tell the disciples of the resurrection, but they went away and told nobody, Mark records (Mk. 16:7,8). The other records say that they did tell the disciples. There is no contradiction here; Mark's point is surely that they were reluctant to obey the great commission initially.

It was only later that they told the disciples, once their fear subsided and joy began to be their dominant emotion. We recall how the shepherds were told not to fear but to focus upon the joy of the Lord's birth (Lk. 2:10). Fear and joy do not remain coexistent for long, and to their credit, the women's joy became greater than

their fear. See on :10 *Fear Not*. But putting meaning into words, what were they fearful about? Surely they now realized that they had so failed to believe the Lord's clear words about His resurrection; and they knew now that since He was alive, they must meet Him and explain. So their fear related to their own sense of unworthiness; and yet it was paradoxically mixed with the "great joy" of knowing His resurrection. And there is reason to understand that those women are typical of all those who are to fulfil the great commission.

The accounts of the Lord's resurrection and the imparting of that good news to others are studded with the idea of speedy response. "Go quickly and tell his disciples… and they departed quickly… and did run to bring his disciples word" (Mt. 28:7,8). The accounts show how Mary "quickly" told the disciples, the women did likewise, the two on the way to Emmaus ran back to town and urgently told the others that the Lord had risen… and then the record climaxes in bidding us take that very same good news of the resurrection to the whole world. But the implication from the context is that it is to be done with the same spirit of urgency. We are merely continuing in the spirit of those who first spread that good news.

After initially saying nothing, they did eventually tell the disciples. Matthew and Luke omit this disobedience to the Lord's command to witness. The record in a beautiful way both covers their weakness, and yet also brings it out. In fact resistance to the command to tell others, or being slow to fulfil it, is another theme of the resurrection accounts.

16:9 *Now when he had risen from the dead early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons*- One would have expected that the Lord Jesus would have first of all appeared to His dear mother, after resurrecting. His mother could so easily have taken this as yet another snub, similar to the way in which He had rebuked her for not knowing He must be in His Father's house, how He addressed her at Cana as "Woman" and asked her what He had to do with her; how He told those who informed Him that His mother was outside that all those who heard God's word were His mothers; how He said that His mother wasn't blessed for suckling Him, but rather, blessed were all those who heard God's word. And the way He chose to appear to the other Mary rather than His own mother could have been taken by her as yet another snub. Yet these incidents weren't snubs. The Lord loved His mother, with a depth of passion and emotion that maybe we [and she] will never know. Yet He wanted the best for her spiritually. He wanted her to relate to Him for who He really was, not for who she perceived Him to be. It must have so hurt the Lord to work with her in this way. And so it is with His workings with us, as He seeks to bring us to know Him in truth. It must be hard for Him to bring distress into our lives. Yet with His dear mother, it worked. For the next we read of her, she is meeting with the rest of the ecclesia in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14), and, according to how we read Revelation 12, the Lord Himself saw her as clothed with the sun in glory, responsible for the birth of Himself as the man child, who would bring the Kingdom of God on earth. She made it in the end.

Mary Magdalene was the least qualified to be a witness. Women's testimony was not accepted in the Roman world; and Mary had previously been seriously 'demon possessed', probably referring to mental illness. And in addition to that she had worked as a prostitute. Yet she was the one chosen by the Lord as His star witness. We should not therefore worry about our own apparent inadequacy as witnesses. The Lord delights to use our inadequacies in this work of witness.

Mary Magdalene is always noted first in the appearance lists in the gospels. It is unusual that the first appearance would involve women as in that culture their role as

witnesses would not be well accepted. It is a sign of the veracity of the account, because if an ancient were to create such a story he would never have it start with women. But inspiration disregards this. The Lord so wanted those women to be His leading witnesses. Joachim Jeremias quotes extensively from Jewish sources to show that “a woman had no right to bear witness, because it was concluded from Gen. 18:15 that she was a liar”. And Josephus (*Antiquities Of The Jews* 4.219) concurs: “Let not the testimony of women be admitted because of the levity and boldness of their sex”. And so it should not surprise us that He chooses today the most unlikely of witnesses, indeed, those who somehow shock and arrest the attention of others.

16:10 *She went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept*- The account of the disciples' response to the realization of the resurrection shows perfectly how men will rise above every barrier, both within them and without, to speak the good news of what they now realize to be absolute truth. Mary, bashful ex-hooker that she was, "went and told them that had been with him", the broken-down women "with great joy... did run to bring his disciples word" , those on the Emmaus road "went and told it unto the residue", "the other disciples *therefore* "told Thomas, John told Peter "It is the Lord", and finally they all "went forth, and preached everywhere" the news of the resurrection (Mt. 28:8; Mk. 16:10,13,20; Jn. 20:25; 21:7). The speed and spirit of the narrative pounds away at a major theme: The natural desire to tell others the Gospel of the Lord's resurrection. This same spirit of *urgently* passing on good news pervades the preaching recorded in Acts.

Note that the disciples are described as "weeping" for the loss of Jesus, the Greek word meaning specifically to weep aloud (Mk. 16:10). And yet the Lord appears to them in that state and upbraids them for not believing His words and for having *hard* hearts (Mk. 16:14). Faith is *so* crucial- and for all their *love* of Him, they didn't have much *faith* in Jesus. Are there similarities with ourselves? Do we on one hand love Him, and yet remain hard hearted to His words?

16:11 *And they, when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, disbelieved*- There is a strong theme in the Gospels that the disciples repeatedly disbelieved the news of the resurrection. And yet they were appealing for people to believe the message of the Lord's resurrection and be baptized into it. But they made that appeal on the basis of their own weakness and slowness to believe. They considered it "Idle talk" (Lk. 24:11), which means literally the talk of the crazy. They assumed this was a story of the once demon-possessed Mary Magdalene, an outcome of her previous mental disturbance. When the Lord had so clearly foretold His resurrection. Luke is pointing out their own disbelief, implying it was almost to the point of blasphemy. Each of the Gospel writers brings out a sense of inadequacy about themselves or the disciples, this self-criticism, in different ways.

16:12 *And after these things he was manifested in another guise to two of them as they walked on their way into the countryside*- The two could well have been Cleopas and his wife Mary, who had been at the crucifixion (see on Lk. 24:13). We wonder why He appeared in various forms which as it were disguised Him. Perhaps this was because He wanted them to believe with a minimum of miracle; He wanted them, as He wants us, to join the dots and believe, rather than having His in-your-face revelation directly to as it were force belief. And maybe the lesson was also that the same Lord can reveal Himself to us in different ways and forms through the persons of various ordinary people. Note too that *morphe*, "guise" or "form", does not refer to

His essential nature, but to His appearance and deportment. This is valuable to bear in mind when considering the usage of *morphe* in Phil. 2 "the form of God".

16:13 *And they went away, and told it to the rest, who did not believe them either*- Although the disciples accepted that Jesus had appeared to Simon, they didn't believe the account of Cleopas and his friend. The record emphasizes their refusal to believe- and then goes on to appeal to the hearers or readers of their message to learn from their slowness, and to believe and be baptized (:16). Their stubborn refusal to believe is so emphasized.

16:14 *And later he was manifested to the eleven themselves as they were eating; and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those that had seen him after he had risen*- The Lord "upbraided" the disciples for their immaturity and unbelief concerning His cross and resurrection. The Greek word is always used in a very severe context of 'reviling' (Mt. 5:11; 11:20; 27:44; Rom. 15:3; 1 Tim. 4:10); it's a tough and abusive word. It appears out of place when applied to the Lord. Yet what it indicates is that the Lord was so angry with them for not believing the witness of the women. Discounting people's experience of Jesus merely on account of their gender or background was *so* angering to the Lord. And He's the same today.

A read through the Gospels reveals the deep frustration and anger of the Lord Jesus because of the blindness of the disciples. Mark's record brings this out especially. The following comments by the Lord, almost under His breath, were all made within a matter of days of each other: "Peter said, Declare unto us this parable. And Jesus said, Are ye also *yet* without understanding? Do not ye *yet* understand?... do ye not *yet* understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand? Perceive ye not *yet*... having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not?... how is it that ye do not understand?... O faithless generation, *how long* shall I be with you? *how long* shall I suffer you? (with reference to the disciples' faithlessness)... the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answereth (i.e. responded) *again*, and saith unto them, Children ...and they were astonished out of measure... Jesus went before them: and they were amazed... and he took *again* the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen... Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask" (Mt. 15:17; 16:9; Mk. 8:18,21; 9:19; 10:1,24-32). Notice the stress on "how long" and "yet". The Lord clearly was disappointed at the slow rate of development. Their blindness was an agony to Him. Especially does this come out in His attitude to the disciples after His resurrection. The exalted Son of God, *the Son of God*, poured out His anger on those eleven men. You get the sense of them cowering before the presence of a super-human intellect, beneath a force of personality that could concuss men when turned against them. He *upbraided* them for their lack of perception, their lack of understanding (Mk. 16:14; Lk. 24:25). As I read the record of this, there's part of me that feels so sorry for them. Thoughts of sympathy skate through my mind: *they weren't a bad crowd... only ordinary men... just poor little human beings down here on earth... only men... only human beings... limited by their own nature*. But this wasn't how the Lord saw it at all. He was angry with them. The picture of the Son of God, the exalted Son of man with eyes as a flame of fire, upbraiding His friends, those he had died for... because they hadn't understood something which he knew and they knew had been within their power to. The picture is awesome.

The experience of emotion on reflection at the Lord's sufferings can be yet another area where our spirituality isn't genuine. The scene of those 11 grown men mourning and weeping at the loss of their Lord makes me think 'They were a soft

hearted lot really, behold how they loved him...'. But then the Lord appears to them and upbraids them for being *hard* hearted and indifferent to His words (Mk. 16:10,14). His upbraiding of them must have really hurt- for they must have been sure that they were anything but hard hearted towards Him.

The even greater commission to go into all the world with the Gospel followed straight on from Christ upbraiding the eleven "with their unbelief and hardness of heart" (Mk. 16:14,15). That 'upbraiding' must have left them wallowing in their weakness. It would have been quite something. The Son of God upbraiding His friends. But straight on from that: "Go ye... go ye into all the world" (Mt. cp. Mk. shows "go ye" was said twice). And He told them to preach that those who believed not would be damned- after having just told them that they were men who believed not. Mark's record stresses three times in the lead up to this that they "believed not"; and then, he records how they were told to go and preach condemnation on those who believed not (Mk. 16:11,13,14,16). They were humbled men who did that. The idea of taking the Gospel world-wide was in fact alluding to Is. 66:17-20. Here those who are spared the 'Gehenna' of the last day judgment will have a sign placed on them, as upon Cain, and they will then be sent "unto the nations…and they shall declare my glory among the gentiles". The rejection process glorifies God's righteous Name, and this world-wide exhibition of the rejected will actually bring men "out of all nations" (:20) to God, just as Israel's condemnation was an "instruction" unto the surrounding nations. The connection shows that in our obedience to the great commission, we go forth as condemned men who in our case, like the disciples, have known the wonder of grace.

16:15- see on Mk. 14:9.

And he said to them: You are to go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation- The essential spirit of the great commission was "Go!", following on as it does from the repeated commands to "go" and share the glorious news that Christ had risen. And yet so many congregations of believers seem to stress instead "Come in to us!". And every manner of carrot is dangled before the public to entice them to 'come in' to some church event. But the emphasis was clearly, and should still be, upon 'going' to people. Our turning of 'Go!' into 'Come to us' is all part of a wider picture, whereby the group of hard core, desperate men who first followed Jesus, the whores, the gamblers, the mentally ill, the marginalized women… have all been diluted into a religion of conformists, a spiritual bubble in which we risk nothing, sacrifice nothing, and comfortably continue in the way of our fathers who were also members of the same church as we are.

The Lord twice told the disciples: "Go ye... go ye" (Mk. 16:15 cp. Mt. 28:19 and contexts). He was encouraging them to do the natural corollary of what they had experienced. We are to preach to "all the world" (16:15)- the *kosmos*. In the last days, the Gospel will go to "all nations"- every *ethnos* (Mk. 13:10). The parallel record in Mt. 24:14 has Jesus saying that it must go to the whole world- *oikoumene*. What did He actually say? I suggest He used both words, in an emphasis of just how universal the witness would be: 'The Gospel will be preached in the whole *oikoumene*, yes, to every *ethnos*…'. This is all some emphasis- every creature (individual), in the whole world system, every part of society (*kosmos*), of every nation (*ethnos*), on the whole planet (*oikoumene*) was to have the message. And this is our unmistakable mandate. The number of different words used by the Lord was surely intentional.

As so often with reading the Gospels, it is profitable to imagine the tone of voice in which the Lord spoke the words which are recorded. "Go ye *into all the world* and preach the gospel to *every creature*". If only we could sense the intensity of desire, the deepness of spiritual meaning, which His voice would have conveyed. We *must* have the spiritual ambition to take the Gospel to the whole world- no matter how small our world may be. The world of our street, of our town, nation- and as far as we are able, the whole planet. Paul had this ambition, quite apart from any personal commission he received.

The great commission is framed in language which picks up on the descriptions of the Lord's own preaching earlier in His ministry. His idea clearly enough is that He will no longer be on earth; therefore His people must be 'Him' to the whole earth:

The great commission to us	The personal preaching of Jesus
Make disciples (Mt. 28:19)	Made disciples (Mt. 4:18-22; Mk. 1:16-20; Lk. 5:1-11)
Preach the Gospel, teach people (Mk. 16:15)	Proclaimed the Gospel (Lk. 4:18), taught people (Mk. 6:30)
Proclaim repentance (Lk. 24:47)	Proclaimed repentance (Mk. 1:15)
Forgive and retain sins (Jn. 20:23)	Forgave sins (Mt. 9:1-9; Mk. 2:1-12)
Retained sins (Jn. 8:21-24; 9:41)	
Witnessed to others in obedience to the great commission (Acts 1:8)	Witnessed what he had seen and heard (Jn. 3:11)
Cast out demons, heal (Mk. 16:16)	Cast out demons (Mk. 3:15; 6:7,13), healed (Mk. 6:13)

16:16 *He that believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he that disbelieves shall be condemned*- In the very context of the Lord upbraiding them for their slowness to believe the Gospel of His death and resurrection, they were asked to go and teach others that he who didn't believe this same message would be damned (Mk. 16:15,16). Their witness, as it is recorded in the Gospel records, is therefore shot through with recognition of their own weakness. They record how Peter their leader was described by the Lord as a "satan" (Mk. 8:33). They were good fishermen- yet their records show that never do they record themselves as catching a fish without their Lord's help. In this they set a model for our witness; it must be shot through with a full recognition of our weakness, our own struggles to believe that which we invite others to believe. And the more real, the more credible. Not only did the Gospel writers portray their own weakness and slowness to believe; they write in such a way as to minimize their own personalities and presence. They don't continually harp on about the fact they were really present.

16:17 *And these signs shall accompany them that believe- in my name shall they cast out demons, they shall speak with new tongues*- All the "they shall" clauses in :17 and :18 were fulfilled in various examples of Divine protection to the early preachers of the Gospel. "If they drink any deadly thing..." is worded in a conditional way, and we have no Biblical example of this happening, although traditions exist of various apostles being unharmed by poison.

16:18 *They shall pick up snakes, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall in no way hurt them. They shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover*- See on :17. In Old Testament times, God described His whole people as His anointed one, His Christ: “The Lord is a strength unto his people, and he is the saving strength of his anointed” (Ps. 28:8 RVmg.). The whole people were His anointed King, His Messiah, the anointed one. And so it is for all those today who are “in Christ”. Thus the prophecy about Christ personally that He would tread upon snakes and wild animals (Ps. 91:13) is quoted as being fulfilled in the disciples, who ‘were’ Christ on their preaching mission (Lk. 10:19; Mk. 16:18).

Not being hurt alludes to the promise of how the restored Israel would be in Is. 43:2. Those somewhat confused men and women were now the new Israel.

16:19 *So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God*- The 'speaking to them' could refer to His general teaching throughout the 40 days. Or we could read the emphasis as therefore on the fact that the great commission was His last word to His people; after He spoke that, He was received into Heaven. We might expect to read that He 'ascended', but Mark's focus is on His being received into heaven. The ceremony of His 'receiving into heaven' is recorded in more detail in Revelation 4 and 5. Paul alludes here in saying that the Lord was received up into glory (1 Tim. 3:16). The cloud which "received" Him (Lk. 24:51; Acts 1:9) was therefore a cloud of glory. It was a sign of His acceptance by God, visible to the watching disciples.

The Ethiopic text brings out the reality more strongly: "Our Lord, the Lord Jesus" was received up to "his own Father". Our man is now there in Heaven, with His Father. He is God's right hand man, functioning as God without being God the Father Himself. As noted on Acts 7:56, the Lord is seated at God's right hand; but He stands up in passion and intercession for His people on earth. He is not in that sense sedentary, passively sitting.

16:20 *And they went and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that followed. Amen*- Luke has the disciples returning to Jerusalem and focusing upon praise of their ascended Lord; Mark focuses upon their obedience to the great commission, the Lord's last word to them. That witness was made, as ours should be, in a spirit of homage and praise to the Lord Jesus. And He who was now in Heaven worked with them in their witness. Any obedience to the great commission will result in a definite sense of the Lord's working with us, even if the form of confirmation of our word has changed from miraculous gifts to more subtle forms of Spirit manifestation. The same word for 'working with' is used in 2 Cor. 6:1, again in the context of evangelism, when Paul remarks that the Lord Jesus is a worker together with "us". The promise of His co-working with us is not therefore limited to the disciples who first heard Him.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: LUKE

LUKE

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Duncan Heaster

LUKE CHAPTER 1

1:1 *Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us*- "The things ["matters"]" believed are those of Acts 8:12, the things about the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom. But the "things" of the

gospel are the "things" of the gospel records. The gospels are transcripts of how e.g. Luke preached the gospel. So the gospel message, "the things" of the Gospel, are to be found in the gospels. The gospel is not a theology collected from the whole New Testament.

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

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

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

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

narrated in memory of her. So ‘preaching the Gospel’ is defined there as a narration of the events and sayings of the Lord Jesus in His ministry. Luke's address to "Most Excellent Theophilus" may be a reference to the Roman-imposed High Priest of Israel between AD 37 and AD 41, Theophilus ben Ananus.

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

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

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

1:7 *And they had no child, because Elisabeth was barren and they both were now well stricken in years*- The record is deconstructing the common idea that the fruit of the

womb would be given to the righteous, and withheld from the unrighteous. They walked blameless, as Job apparently did (Job 1:1), but still "trouble came".

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

1:9 *According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to enter into the temple of the Lord and burn incense*- This honour was chosen by lot, and it fell upon Zacharias. And surely we have here an example of how the drawing of lots is at times overruled by God (Prov. 16:33). It was a tradition that no priest ever did this twice (*T. Bab. Yoma*, fol. 26. 1), and there were apparently 20,000 priests at this time. So Zacharias had waited all his life for this honour, and he was surely being nudged to see that he could also receive something he had waited all his life for, a child. This burning of incense had its reflection in the heavenly tabernacle (Rev. 8:3); or rather, the earthly tabernacle was a reflection of the heavenly. Hence *elohim* is used in the OT for both priests and Angels; the priests were to act as a copy of the Angelic system in the heavenly throne room. This is a common idea in Revelation, the comfort being that situations on earth are acted out in heaven, and through the operation of the vast Angelic system above us, man is not alone in this world. The incense represented prayer, not only of the people but of the offering priest personally; and Zacharias was being again nudged towards believing that his lifetime of prayer was actually getting through to God. But his disbelief of the answer indicates that he failed to perceive these things as intended.

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

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

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

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

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

1:14 *And you shall have joy and gladness, and many shall rejoice at his birth*- The Angel hoped that "many" would perceive in John's birth the good news of Messiah's soon

appearing; for the rejoicing was to be because of his significance in God's plan (:15). But did "many" rejoice in this sense? Perhaps as with many such predictions, it is stating a potential rather than an actual truth. "Joy and gladness" is a term only used elsewhere about all of us as we look forward to the Lord's coming (1 Pet. 1:8). Zacharias and Elisabeth are therefore set up as every believer. See on :16.

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

"John did no miracle" (Jn. 10:41) and yet he was filled with the Spirit. The promises of our likewise being filled with the Spirit are often discounted because we do not have the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. But being filled with the Spirit is not the same as having the ability to do miracles. John was filled with the Spirit from the womb; so the filling of the Spirit is not solely in response to our own efforts. The idea here is that God had a plan for John, and John chose to follow it and walk in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). This is why Paul can lament that in one sense the Corinthians had been filled with the Spirit, but were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1), they were not living according to the potential made possible by the gift of the Spirit which is purely on God's initiative. The same term "filled with the Spirit" is used of both John's parents (:41,67). This was a little family open to being filled with the Spirit, and so they were filled. The appeal to allow ourselves to be "filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18) shows we are to live open to and receptive of such filling.

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

The idea of hearts being turned to the Lord alludes to the intended work of the historical Elijah (1 Kings 18:37) which was to be achieved by the Elijah prophet who heralded

Messiah (Mal. 4:6). This was only potentially true; Elijah only converted a minority. John the Baptist is prophesied as achieving this with "many"; but again, this did not happen. And so the prophecy is rescheduled for fulfilment in the work of the latter day Elijah prophet. As we go out into this world and meet apparent disinterest, we need to remember that potentially, people can respond. They are actually actively resisting what is potentially possible for them.

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

1:17 *And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord*- As noted on :16, if hearts turn to God then they turn to their own brethren. We cannot turn to God without turning to our brethren; baptism is into the body of Christ and not simply into a totally individual relationship with the Father and Son. Latter day Israel will *turn* to the Lord their God, and part-and-parcel of this process will be the *turning* of the hearts of the fathers to the children (Lk. 1:16,17). When Israel earlier played traitor to their brethren, by doing so they broke their marriage covenant with God (Mal. 2:10); their attitude to their brethren was essentially their attitude to their Heavenly Father. Our God and our brethren simply can't be separated. Asa's broken relationship with God resulted in him 'crushing' the people at the same time (2 Chron. 16:10 AVmg.). See on Jn. 8:42.

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

encourages us to view positively our brethren who seem stuck within the parameters of their natural personality and cannot, it seems, overcome all weaknesses of their spirit.

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

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

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

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

1:19- see on 3 Jn. 11.

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

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

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

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

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

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

1:25 *Thus has the Lord done to me in the days wherein he looked upon me, to take away my reproach among men*- She felt the Lord was looking upon her during her pregnancy; but she was blameless "before God", in His eyes / presence (:6). Yet the wonder of her

status in His eyes was unappreciated as it might have been. We have the same problem. Her joy was that her "reproach among men" had been taken away, quoting the words of unspiritual Rachel in Gen. 30:23; we would think that she might instead have focused upon the huge significance of John in God's salvation purpose. But for all these human weaknesses, she and her husband were accepted before God.

1:26 *Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee, named Nazareth*- The "sixth month" was presumably of Elisabeth's pregnancy. She concealed her pregnancy for five months (:24) and then announced it. Mary would have heard this, and been given the potential encouragement that with God, pregnancy was possible. And having been thus prepared for her challenge of faith, the angel comes and gives it to her. We too are prepared for our challenges to faith, often by meeting or hearing of others who have likewise endured. God chose a poor village girl who dreamt of being Messiah's mother, not one of the Jerusalem elite. The word "Nazareth" may mean nothing to us in our age, but in first century Israel it was a term of contempt, for nothing good ever came out of that town (Jn. 1:46). To that dumb mountain village, to an illiterate teenager, there came an Angel with the amazing news that she had been chosen to bear God's Son.

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

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

Mary was "highly favoured"; yet the only other place the word occurs is in Eph. 1:6,

where we are told that “He has made *us* accepted [highly favoured] in Christ”. Thus in the thinking of Paul and the Spirit, Mary is to represent all of us.

Hannah’s song was clearly a major influence in the mind of Mary. But there are some background similarities as well as the verbal ones. The LXX of 1 Sam. 1:18 [not the Hebrew text] speaks of Elkanah and Hannah staying in a *katalyma* on their journey to Shiloh- the very word used of the “inn” in whose stable Mary had to stay. If we ask *why* Mary based her song so heavily on that of Hannah, we find a clue in considering how she was greeted by the Angel as “favoured” (Lk. 1:28). The Greek *kecharitomene* virtually translates the Hebrew name ‘Hannah’. The record is written in Greek, but Mary was a Jewess and spoke Aramaic and Hebrew; and probably the Angel spoke to her in those languages. So the link would have been all the stronger- ‘Hail, Hannah-like one’. And this set the mind of Mary thinking about Hannah, and in the days between hearing these words and meeting Elisabeth, Mary had perceived the similarities between her position and that of Hannah. She allowed the spirit of Hannah to genuinely become hers, in perceptive obedience to the Angel’s bidding. She came to share God’s perception of her as a woman like Hannah. ‘Hannah’ comes from the Hebrew root *hnn* – favour. Mary is told that she has been favoured / ‘Hannah-ed’ by God (Lk. 1:30)- as if to lead her to see the similarities between her and Hannah. And she responds magnificently, by alluding to Hannah’s song so closely. Tragically as we shall see, she later came to be more influenced by the world’s perception of both herself and her Son. The theme of joy is very great in her song- again, because she was obedient to the greeting “Hail!”, literally, ‘rejoice!’. The points of connection between the songs of Hannah and Mary's Magnificat are really quite detailed:

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

:10 anointed LXX “His Christ”- the first occurrence of ‘Messiah’ in the O.T.
And there are plenty of allusions in the Magnificat to other parts of Scripture and well known Apocryphal writings, especially the Psalms, which Mary evidently had

committed to memory:
My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit has found gladness in God my Saviour; Ps 35:9 Then my soul will find gladness in the Lord; It will take pleasure in His salvation. I Sam 2:1,2 (Hannah's hymn): My heart is strengthened in the Lord; My horn is exalted in my God…I delight in your salvation.
Hab. 3: 18 (Habakkuk's hymn): I shall find gladness in the Lord; I shall rejoice in God my Savior.
Because He has regarded the low estate of His handmaid-
I Sam 1:11 (Hannah praying for a child): O Lord of Hosts, if you will look on the low estate of your handmaid,
Gen 29:32 (Leah after childbirth): Because the Lord has regarded my low estate.
4 Ezra 9:45 (Zion speaking as a barren woman): God heard you're your handmaid and regarded my low estate, And considered my distress and gave me a son.
For behold, henceforth all generation will call me fortunate-
Gen 30:13 (Leah after childbirth): Fortunate am I, for all women call me fortunate.
Because He who is mighty has done great things for me.
Deut. 10:21 (Moses to Israel): He is your God who has done great things in you.
Zeph. 3:17: The Lord your God is in you, A Mighty One will save you.
And holy is His Name,
Ps. 111:9: Holy and awesome is His name.
And His mercy is from generation to generation on those who fear Him.
Ps 103:17:
But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear Him.
Psalms of Solomon 13:11: His mercy upon those who fear Him.
He his shown His strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones
and has exalted those of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.
I Sam 2:7-8 (Hannah's hymn): The Lord makes poor and makes rich: He reduces to lowliness and he lifts up. He lifts the needy from the earth, and from the dung heap He raises up the poor to seat them with the mighty, making them inherit a throne of glory.
Ps. 89:11(10- a hymn praising God's action for the Davidic king): You have reduced the proud to lowliness like a wounded thing: And by your powerful arm you have scattered your enemies.
Sirach 10:14: He has put down the thrones of princes and has seated the humble before them.
Job 12:19: He has overthrown the mighty.
1QM xiv 10-11: You have raised the fallen by your strength, and have cut down the high and mighty.
Ez. 21:31 LXX (26 Heb.): Having reduced the proud to lowliness, and having exalted the man of low degree.

Ps 107:9: He has filled the soul of the hungry with good things.
He has helped His servant Israel in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke unto our fathers, to Abraham and his posterity forever.
Isa. 41:8-9: You, O Israel, My servant Jacob whom I chose, seed of Abraham whom I loved, whom I have helped from the ends of the earth.
Ps. 98:3: He has remembered His mercy to Jacob and His goodness to the House of Israel.
Psalms of Solomon 10:4: And the Lord will remember His servants in mercy.
Micah 7:20: You will give truth to Jacob and mercy to Israel, as you have sworn to our fathers from days of old.
2 Sam. 22:51 (David's hymn at the end of his life) Showing mercy to His anointed one, to David and his posterity forever.
And a few more:
Luke
1:47 = Gen. 21:6
1:48 = Ps. 138:6 LXX; Gen. 30:13
1:49 = Ps. 126:2,3; 111:9
1:50 = Gen. 17:7
1:51 = Ps. 118:14,15.

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

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

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

Zeph. 3	Luke 1:28-31
Rejoice [LXX *chaire*], daughter of Zion (Zeph. 3)	Rejoice [*chaire*]…[Mary]Notice how *chaire* is also addressed to the Daughter of Zion in Zech. 9:9, a passage also applied to Jesus in Mt. 21:5; Jn. 12:14,15.
The King of Israel, the Lord, is in the midst of you [*en meso sou*] (Zeph. 3)	The Lord is with you [*meta sou*]. "The king of Israel" was a well known Messianic title. He was in the midst of Mary in the sense that He was now in her womb.
Do not be afraid, Zion (Zeph. 3)	Do not be afraid, Mary
The Lord your God is with / in you (Zeph. 3)- the Hebrew can imply 'in your interior parts', cp. the womb	You have found favour with God. We can perceive a double meaning now in Zephaniah's words- the Lord God was with Mary, but was also within her manifest in His Son.
The mighty one will save you (Zeph. 3)	"God my Saviour"- as if Mary picked up the allusions and responded to them.

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

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

1:32 *He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God shall give to him the throne of his ancestor David*- Again we note the future tenses, precluding any personal pre-existence of the Lord. "He shall be great" is what Zacharias had just been told in :15. The response of Mary and Zacharias is clearly compared and

contrasted; and the illiterate teenage girl comes out presented as a far stronger believer than the legally obedient Zacharias. Mary's Biblical mind [for she alludes to Scripture with such felicity] would have figured that God had to be the Father of the Davidic seed; and a woman in David's line, just like herself, had to be the mother. But how that was to come about was of course a challenge to her faith.

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

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

1:35 *And the angel answered and said to her: The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you. Therefore also the holy thing which is*

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

The Angel's description of Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary could have sent her mind back to how the Spirit-Cherubim and the cloud of Spirit glory overshadowed the ark (Ex. 25:20; 1 Chron. 28:18). The LXX uses the word for "overshadow" about the cloud of glory overshadowing the ark in the wilderness (Ex. 40:35; Num. 9:18,22). If Mary's mind had been alerted to this possibility, she would have seen the relevance of Elizabeth's words: "Who am I, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Lk. 1:43). For they are remarkably similar to the LXX of 2 Sam. 6:9, where David asks "How can the ark of the Lord come to me?". As a result of this question of David's, the ark remained three months in the house of Obed-Edom (2 Sam. 6:11). And was this why Mary, seeing herself as the ark, remained for three months in the house of Elisabeth straight after hearing this same question asked (Lk. 1:56)? There are further links, between the gladness of Lk. 1:44 and the joy of 2 Sam. 6:12; and the loud cry of Lk. 1:42 and that of 2 Sam. 6:15. If one combines Lk. 1:31 and Jn. 1:14 we have the word of God becoming flesh and "tabernacling" among us in the womb and faith of Mary. If these connections are valid, then Mary would have felt that within her was He who would be the covenant of the Lord, the stones of the word of God made flesh in a little boy. This was perception indeed.

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

1:37 *For no word from God shall be void of power*- The various possibilities in translation offer various possible interpretations. The idea could be that Mary was not to worry about the mechanics of how God's prophetic words about the virgin birth and the birth of the Messianic forerunner would come about; there was and is power within the prophetic word to bring about its own fulfilment. This principle has wide relevance. Not least, we need not worry how all shall be fulfilled in the last days, nor seek to force fulfilment of prophecy; for the power of fulfilment is lodged within the prophetic word itself. But "void of power" can also simply mean "impossible". The only other time the

Greek word occurs is in Mt. 17:20: "If you have faith... nothing shall be impossible unto you". The 'possibility' of the fulfilment depends partially upon our faith. And this would have been so appropriate to Mary, who had prayed in faith to be the mother of Messiah. The prophetic word is "possible", but it is made actual by our faith. When Mary says "Be it unto me according to your word" (:38) she is as it were enabling the fulfilment of that word. See on :45. This is not to say that God does not have sovereign possibility of Himself; but clearly His preference is to work within the parameters of human faith.

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

Not only did Mary see herself as representative of Israel [see on :28]; she also felt a strong connection between herself and her Messiah Son. Any woman would feel this connection and identity with her child; but in Mary's case, her child was the Son of God, Messiah of Israel. And she had the spiritual ambition to see herself in some way, thereby, as Messiah. Consider the evidence:
- Lk. 1:38 "the handmaid of the Lord" uses the Greek female form for "servant of the Lord", a clear title of Messiah.
- She appropriates words spoken in the spirit of Christ to herself: "You have reduced the proud to lowliness like a wounded thing: and by your powerful arm you have scattered your enemies" (Ps. 89:10 cp. Lk. 1:51-53).
- She refers to herself in saying that God has helped His servant Israel in remembrance of His mercy; yet His Servant was Messiah, according to Isaiah's servant songs (Lk. 1:54,55).
- Lk. 1:28,42 "blessed among women" alludes to Jud. 5:24, as if Mary was already as Jael who had killed Sisera, an incident typical of the Lord's destruction of sin with the hammer of God's word. Mary is tied up with her son's victory- for He was part of her. There is a parallel between Mary and the "fruit of your womb" , they were both to be blessed together (:42), as if God recognized this link between the mother and Son. The fact He 'allowed' this, rather than just using a cold 'channel' for His purpose, is simply surpassing in its wonder.
- Her words of Lk. 1:47 "my spirit shall rejoice in God" allude to Ps. 63:11: "But *the king* shall rejoice in God; every one that swears by him shall glory: but the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped". Mary parallels herself with "the King", seeing herself as connected with Messiah.

- “The servant of the Lord" would rejoice in God: “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God" (Is. 61:10), and yet Mary as the female "servant of the Lord" also rejoices, sharing the joy of her Son.
- Lk. 1:48 has Mary rejoicing: “All generations shall call me blessed”, alluding to how in Ps. 72:17 “all nations shall call *him* [Messiah] blessed”. Mary is equated with her son, Messiah, and she recognized this. He was part of her.
- Mary understood that through her conception, God had put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted *them* of low degree (Lk. 1:52). This clearly alludes to Ez. 21:26, where the princes are to be put down and *him* that is low is to be exalted, i.e. Messiah. But Mary felt that she had been exalted; thus she shared Messiah’s exaltation because He was in her and she in Him. We too are in Him, and we should feel something of the pride and joy, along with the suffering, that comes from that identification. She parallels *her* low estate with *them* of low degree (Lk. 1:48,52)- perhaps referring to her and Jesus?
- She appropriated the promises to Abraham’s seed [which according to Gal. 3:16 is one man, Jesus] to her personally (Lk. 1:55).

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

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

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

1:40 *And entered into the house of Zacharias and greeted Elisabeth*- The usual girlie teenage thing would have been to go talk to her contemporaries about it. But not Mary. She went on probably the longest journey she had ever made, and probably alone, to see Elisabeth. She describes herself as the lowly, the hungry, who had been exalted and fed... whereas the proud and haughty had been disregarded. These words, and the evident allusions she makes back to Hannah’s song, could be read as reflecting what

had actually been wrought in Mary's own person and experience by some kind of persecution in her childhood. And it drove her within herself. It seems that she had been deeply humbled in order for her to be highly exalted. One wonders if she had been sexually abused. If Joseph was indeed much older than her, then we can understand how it happened that this girl, mature as she was beyond her years, got attracted to an older and spiritual man. Her spirituality and intelligence [for her allusions to Scripture indicate a fine appreciation of so much] would have been enough to spark plenty of village jealousy. Jn. 2:11,12 speak of three groups- the disciples, who believed, the brothers of Jesus who didn't (Jn. 7:5), and Mary, whose level of faith isn't commented upon. She stands alone. Recognizing this tendency to isolationism within her, the Father seems to have encouraged Mary to open herself up to Elisabeth, encouraging her that her relative was in a somewhat similar position, having been barren for a lifetime and now expecting a child. Although Elisabeth was somewhat distant from Mary, Mary immediately goes to see her, following the prompting of the Lord. The record is styled to show the experiences of the two pregnancies as parallel:
- "The virgin's name was Mary" (1:27) = "her name was Elisabeth" (1:5).
- Both were startled at the Angelic appearances (1:12,29), and were comforted not to be afraid.
- "You will call his name John... you will call his name Jesus".
- "He will be great... he will be great".
- "How am I to know this?", and the Angel responded; "How shall this be?", and likewise the Angel responded.
- Both were given signs- the dumbness of Zacharias, and the pregnancy of Elisabeth.
- Both John and Jesus are described as growing up and becoming strong (Lk. 1:80; 2:40).

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

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

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

And she lifted up her voice with a loud cry and said: Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!- Elisabeth is repeating the words and ideas of the Angel in :28. Mary would have realized that the Angel was indeed from God, and the same Spirit was speaking through Elisabeth as through the Angel. We see the Father's gentle grace in providing her with confirmation after confirmation of the strange and lonely path she was being led along.

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

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

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

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

what they eternally will be. For Jesus alluded to the memory of His mother even in Divine nature.

1:46 *And Mary said: My soul does magnify the Lord*- See on :38 for the allusions to Hannah's song. This is alluded to by Paul, when he uses the same Greek word in Phil. 1:2: “Christ shall be *magnified* in *my body / soul*”. If this is a valid allusion, then "the Lord" is a reference to Jesus. In Lk. 1:43 Elisabeth had just described Jesus as "my Lord". And then Mary here parallels "the Lord" with "God my saviour / my Jesus". She understood how God was to be manifest in Jesus, as she parallels “my soul" with "my spirit"(:47). It's amazing that an illiterate teenager should have risen to such heights of understanding, probably without learning much at all from the local synagogue.

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

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

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

humiliation of the Lord which Phil. 2 speaks of, He was living out the spirit of His mother. She taught Him the life and the way of the cross. Hence the way she insisted on being there at the end, and the comfort she would have given Him, and the love He showed by asking for the only one who really understood Him to be taken away, for her sake as well as His own. The Lord directly alluded to His mother's pattern of humiliation and exaltation by using the same word again in Mt. 23:12: "Whosever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself [s.w. be abased- we must either humble ourselves or be humbled, it's such a powerful logic] shall be exalted". Thus the Lord Jesus alludes to His mother's words in order to set her up as our pattern ["whosoever"]. And yet He Himself showed the ultimate obedience to her pattern in the death of the cross. For this and many other reasons, the Lord's mind was upon His mother in His time of dying. And according to the Messianic Psalms, He even asks God to have mercy upon Him *for Mary's sake* (Ps. 86:16; 116:16).

For from this time forward all generations shall call me blessed- When Mary spoke of all generations calling her blessed, her mind was in Gen. 30:13: "The daughters [i.e. future generations of them] shall call me blessed", and yet at the same time on Zilpah the servant maid [cp. Mary the handmaiden] bearing Asher [happy]. These women were seen by Mary as representatives of herself. She was so humble to compare herself with the servant girl. Yet she also had in mind Prov. 31:28, where the virtuous woman is blessed by all. She saw herself as the virtuous woman who excelled all- yet she was so humble. She was the most highly favoured woman, but was so humble. It's hard to know your true value without being proud about it. It seems to me that we must learn to value ourselves far more, to love our neighbour *as* we do really love / respect ourselves, without being proud. The ability to see your own worth and value in God's purpose is crucial; we tend to be either proud, or too negative about ourselves. Mary was so spiritually ambitious to want to be the mother of Messiah, understanding He would be God manifest.

Mary realized that her great honour was being given in response to her humility- God had regarded her "low estate", her humility. She was humble enough to know God had noticed her humility- and still not be proud about it. She had enough self knowledge to perceive this. It's as if she is saying ''Thank you for taking note of my humility'. This is really a deep essay in humility- to recognize she was humble without being proud about it. And to be able to say it sincerely. Mary's humility was programmatic for Jesus on the cross; for there He humbled Himself that He might be exalted. This was the theme that, according to Phil. 2, was ever in His mind.

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

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

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

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

Such a Bible minded woman inevitably had faith. For faith comes by hearing the word of God. Mary believed the Angel's words fully- hence her rejoicing. The aorist tenses of Lk. 1:51-53 seem the equivalent of prophetic perfect tenses in Hebrew- Mary firmly believes that what is still future is as good as happened. She had the faith that considers what has been promised to have actually happened. At that moment it was as if God *had* scattered the proud, the rulers and the princes- even though this would only be achieved by the Lord's life, death and glorification (Acts 2:33; 4:24-27; 5:31).

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

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

1:53 *The hungry He has filled with good things and the rich He has sent away empty*- See on :38 for the allusions to Hannah's song. Not only was the Lord Himself influenced by His mother. Paul and Peter allude to Mary and her words in their writings. The hymn to Jesus which Paul wrote in Phil. 2 is full of themes taken from Mary's song- the same themes of God's manifestation in His Son, humiliation and exaltation, occur there. There are several connections between the accounts of the early preaching of the Gospel in Acts, and Mary's song of praise. Her words came to influence the brethren who stood up there and preached. Perhaps Mary, who was meeting with them (Acts 1:14), sung the words to them and they all memorized it. Raymond Brown claims there are 18 words or items shared by the preaching of Peter (Acts 3:12-26) and the Magnificat [Mary's song of praise] (*The Birth Of The Messiah*, New York: Doubleday, 1993 p. 354). Mary had quoted Ps. 107:9 about how she had been filled with good things; but Zacharias quoted the next verse, Ps. 107:10, shortly afterwards (Lk. 1:79). Surely Mary

had gotten him thinking in the same paths as she did. And she should likewise influence us.

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

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

1:55 *(As He spoke to our fathers) toward Abraham and his seed for ever*- See on :38 for the allusions to Hannah's song.
She speaks in Lk. 1:55 Gk. of "*the* seed of him"- she understood the seed of Abraham to be Messiah, her son, and makes many references and allusions to the promises to Abraham. She had clearly reflected upon the way that the things of the Gospel were all promised to Abraham (Gal. 3:8).

1:56 *And Mary stayed with her about three months and then returned home*- As noted earlier, she took lessons from Elisabeth's example. She too therefore hid herself during the early part of her pregnancy. She must have returned home just before Elisabeth gave

birth (cp. :36), seeking to avoid the public eye by being present at the birth of John. It was presumably at her return that she was "found with child" (Mt. 1:18), as the end of the first trimester of pregnancy would have given her certain evidence that she was really pregnant.

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

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

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

1:60 *But his mother answered and said: No, he shall be called John*- One of Luke's themes is the equality and dignity of women before God. For a woman to stand up against her male relatives and take the decision about the naming of a child, in defiance of tradition whereby a male firstborn child must have the name of his father, was quite something. Mary took encouragement from this by naming her child 'Jesus' rather than some form of 'Joseph'.

1:61 *And they said to her: There are none of your kindred that are called by this name*- This break with tradition was to reflect how God was beginning a new creation, in which family ties and names were of no significance. This was radical stuff for a kinship

oriented society. We too, in our own times and over our contemporary issues, are asked to radically step out from societal expectations.

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

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

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

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

1:66 *And all that heard them laid them up in their heart, saying: What then shall this child be? For the hand of the Lord was with him*- Mary and Elisabeth are likewise described by Luke as laying these things up in their hearts. There was clearly a psychological expectation amongst the people that John was going to be significant. Somehow they perceived that God's hand was with the child and was going to use him; they were being prepared to be potentially open to the message he would preach. The "hand of the Lord" being "with" people is the language of the exodus (Dt. 6:21; 7:8; 9:26 and often). There was a sense that deliverance from bondage was at hand through this man's ministry. But of course they failed to perceive that the bondage in view was to sin

rather than to Rome; and the freedom was not immediate political freedom, but the priceless gift of freedom from sin and death.

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

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

1:69 *And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David*- This again is a reference to the Lord Jesus and not to John; for John was a Levite whereas the Lord was from Judah via David. Zacharias was focused not upon his own son and his natural joy, but upon the far greater spiritual things portended by it. We need to likewise not focus solely upon our own immediate family experiences but to see the far greater picture in the perspective of the Lord Jesus. The horn of David was Yahweh's anointed or Christ, which would sprout fruit (Ps. 132:17). For David, Yahweh was the horn of his salvation (2 Sam. 22:3); the idea is that this Divine salvation would appear as a horn arising within the family of David. This is the kind of human and Divine fusion which was implied in the great promises to David about his seed; this seed would be God's son and also David's son. The only way that could be achieved was through the virgin birth. Zacharias would have reflected on these things, recalling that Mary was in the line of David. His own son John is not in view at all, for he was a Levite. The focus of Zacharias was so completely upon the Lord Jesus, Mary's son, rather than his own son. And he seems to have passed on to his son John this focus upon the Christ.

1:70 *(As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets that have been since the world began)*- The promised Messianic seed was the message of all the prophets, and Luke

concludes his Gospel with the Lord explaining these things from all the prophets to the two on the way to Emmaus. This is one of many points of contact between the opening and closing of the Gospel. The beginning of the world was seen as the time when the prophets began, presumably referring to Adam. The world and its beginning as presented in the Bible began then. All angst about the ultimate origins of the earth, previous creations, the process of creation etc. is all misplaced. We are asked to see the time when God's prophetic word began to be spoken as the beginning of the world.

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

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

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

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

1:74 *To grant to us, that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, should serve Him without fear*- The promises were "to us". “Salvation is of the Jews” (Jn. 4:22) in the sense that the promises concerning salvation were made only to Abraham and his seed. We can only have those promises made to us if we become *in* the seed, by being baptised *into* Christ (Gal. 3:22-29). Then, all that is true of the Lord Jesus becomes true of us. Thus Zacharias quoted prophecies about the seed of Abraham and David as

applying to all believers (Lk. 1:69,73,74). As noted on :72 and :73, the essential salvation promised in Christ was of mercy towards our sins. These are our enemies, from which we are to be delivered in Christ; we can serve Him now "without fear"- the fear of ultimate failure, of condemnation. The same word is used in 1 Jn. 4:18 of how we can now live without fear, secure in his love and salvation by grace. This is the good news of the Gospel. The idea of serving *without* fear is in conscious contrast to the repeated Old Testament commands for those under the law to serve God *with* fear (Dt. 6:13; 10:20; Josh. 24:14; Ps. 2:11 and often). It would have been a strange, novel and challenging idea; and yet it was in fact implicit in the promises to Abraham. This is the good news.

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

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

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

1:77 *To give knowledge of salvation to His people in the remission of their sins*- See on Mt. 3:11. The experience of forgiveness is a foretaste of salvation; as John's gospel puts it, we have eternal life now. Not in that we shall not die, but in so far as we live in the experience of sin forgiven, without fear of condemnation should the Lord return right now... for this is "salvation", the present experience of the great salvation to be brought to us at the Lord's second coming. And we can share this knowledge of salvation with

others; Paul alludes to these words, showing that he was to bring others to the light just as John had (Lk. 1:77,79 = Acts 13:47; 26:18,23). Luke is the only evangelist to continue the quotation of Is. 40 to include the words “all mankind will see God’s salvation”. And he focuses especially upon the wonder of forgiveness (Lk. 1:77; 7:48; Acts 13:38). Only he records the parable of the prodigal (Lk. 15:11-32), and only he describes the great preaching commission as relating to “repentance and remission of sins” (Lk. 24:47).

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

1:78 *Because of the tender mercy of our God*- The fact that God has a “heart of mercy”- a lovely phrase- is His glory. It leads Him to glory in overlooking sin. And on this basis John appealed to people to repent and claim that forgiveness, thus allowing God to glory. In the light of all this, one wonders in what tone of voice John spoke. The cold printed words in our Bibles can lead us to imagine him speaking in a gruff, austere manner.

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

Many of the incidents in the first coming of the Lord Jesus are intended to point us forward to events which will happen at the his second coming. There is clear indication in the records of Luke 1 and 2 that there were a faithful remnant in Jerusalem at the time of our Lord's birth, whose attitude points forward to that of the latter-day remnant at the time of His second coming. Whilst only Zacharias, Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna are mentioned, we can be sure that there were others in this group - Anna "spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38); "many" rejoiced even at the birth of John, on the understanding that he was Christ's forerunner (Luke 1:14). It is

possible that the shepherds, too, were in this group, which would confirm the impression that the 'remnant' were in the lower ranks of society - Zacharias a superannuated priest, Anna a servant of the temple (Luke 2:37) - the equivalent of a modern office cleaner. This connects with the 'remnant' left in the land by Nebuchadnezzar being the poorest of the poor (2 Kings 24:15 cp. 25:11,12), and suggests a working-class Jewish 'remnant' in the last days.

There is much language used concerning the birth of Jesus which is easily applicable to His second coming. This in itself encourages us to see the record of those awaiting His first coming as typical of the last days. The birth of John and Jesus is described as God 'visiting and redeeming his people' (Luke 1:68); what better way of describing God's latter-day intervention? "The sun rising from on high hath visited us" (Luke 1:78 A.V. mg.) was Zacharias' comment upon God's purpose in John and Jesus, making an unmistakable allusion to Mal. 4:2 concerning Christ's second coming being like the rising sun. Note how this sun rising is upon the righteous remnant of the last days (Mal. 4:12) - identifying Zacharias with them. The Angels rejoiced that through Christ's birth there was "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14), although this will only be fully done in the Kingdom. Simeon spoke of the baby Jesus as "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2:32), although this will only be fully true after the second coming (Is. 42:6; 49:6). The remnant "looked for redemption (to appear) in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38); they could only have figured this out from realizing that the Old Testament 'kingdom' prophecies concerning Jerusalem, which we normally associate with the second coming, had a primary fulfilment in the birth of Christ.

John the Baptist commented that he preached repentance and baptized in Israel, *so that* the Messiah might be manifest to Israel (Jn. 1:31). His work was a pattern for the Elijah ministry of the last days. It could be argued that Messiah was only manifest in the first century because of the success of John's work- for large numbers were baptized of him. Could it be that the timing of the final revelation of Messiah likewise depends upon the success of the Elijah ministry in leading Israel to repentance? And what implications are there in this, if actually *we* are the voice of that ministry...
We can now scan the record for more detailed latter-day typology:-
- The remnant were in or around Jerusalem - as it seems the latter-day faithful will also be. They looked for Messiah to appear in Jerusalem (Luke 2:38). If latter-day Jewry are persecuted to the extent that the only Jews left alive in the land are in Jerusalem (see previous studies, especially Chapter 8), then they, too, will expect Messiah to come to them in that same city. Note that the woman whose intense pleadings represent the prayers of the latter day remnant (Lk.18:2-8) "was in a city" - Jerusalem?
- They eagerly looked for the Lord's birth as a fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises, that

through his seed "we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve (God) without fear" (Luke 1:74). Likewise the latter-day remnant will meditate how the Abrahamic promises concerning freedom from their (Arab) enemies are so relevant to them - perhaps due to the Elijah ministry turning their hearts to the Jewish "fathers", a phrase often used about the patriarchs who received the promises (Mal. 4:6).

- Israel in the first century were under the domination of Rome, the fourth beast of Dan. 7:23. In the latter-day application of this, necessitated by the image upon which the beasts are based standing complete in the last days, the fourth beast with its horns corresponds to the Arab coalition which will then dominate Israel.
- Some of the remnant had the Spirit gift of prophecy (Luke 1:41,67; 2:26,36). The latter-day remnant may also experience this - their old men (cp. Zacharias and Simeon) and young people (cp. Mary), may have the gift of prophecy around the time of the Lord's return - "before the great and terrible day of the Lord come" (Joel 2:28-31).
- The shepherds watching at night while the Lord was born (Luke 2:8) echoes the Passover. There is good reason to think that the second coming may be associated with Passover time. The vision of Angels which they saw may correspond to the remnant in Jerusalem seeing a literal "sign of the (coming of the) son of man in (literal) heaven" (Matt. 24:30), composed of the Angel-cherubim. This "sign of the son of man in heaven" must be alluding back to the literal portent which the shepherds saw in the sky, pointing to the Lord's first coming. Thus there will be no need to say "See here; or see there", because the Lord's return will be so evidently public (Lk. 17:23).
- Zacharias and Elisabeth "were both righteous before God" (Luke 1:6) amidst a corrupt Jewish world that refused to prepare itself for God's manifestation in Christ, despite the availability to them of God's Word, which clearly prophesied it. This recalls the description of Noah as being "righteous before God" (Gen. 7:1) in the context of the flood coming upon the world. We have earlier shown this to be full of reference to the last days.
- There is a triple emphasis on Israel praying to God in the lead up to Christ's birth (Luke 1:10,13; 2:37). We know from Joel 2:17 and many other passages that the remnant will likewise devote themselves to prayer in the last days, as will spiritual Israel.
- The appearance of Angels before Christ's birth (Luke 1:12,26) is similar to their visiting Israel under persecution during the times of the Judges, bringing the news of deliverance from their Arab enemies through a 'saviour' ('Jesus').
- The conception of John (the Elijah prophet of the first century) preceded that of Christ - he was Christ's forerunner - there is therefore a necessity for this type to be fulfilled in the literal coming of the latter-day Elijah as a prelude to Christ's manifestation to Israel.
- The "joy and gladness" (Luke 1:14) of the remnant at Christ's birth will be but a dim foretaste of the ecstasy which the embattled remnant of the last days will experience at their Lord's return.

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

1:80 *And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the desert until the day he appeared publicly to Israel*- The reference to "spirit" could be to the work of the Spirit, active in the formation of his character from his mother's womb (:15). God's Spirit and John's spirit are clearly connected here; and this is how the Holy Spirit works in our spirit / lives too, through a collaboration, a conspiracy of the willing. Presumably at some point in his youth, John left his parents, or perhaps they died, and went to live "in the desert". He may have encountered the Essenes there, or even lived with them, for there are undoubted points of contact and allusion between his teaching and theirs.

LUKE CHAPTER 2

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

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

2:3 *And all went to register themselves, everyone to his own city*- As noted on :1, we have global language used here, within the framework of the general thematic impression which the inspired historian wishes to give (see on :2). Not "everyone" in the Roman empire, let alone a poor backwater like Palestine, would have gone to their birth place to be registered. It is also unclear why everyone had to physically go to their birth place for registration. Surely the tax registration census was of people where they were then living and working. Old people and children were surely not required to journey to their birth place just to be counted. But the impression is given

that everyone went to their birth place, and then the Lord was born. There is no such thing as pure, factual history. Every record of events reflects the agenda of the historian; and this is true of the inspired historian Luke. The idea is that everyone has a birth place; and so did the Lord Jesus. His humanity is thereby emphasized.

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

2:5 *To enroll himself with Mary, who was engaged to him, being great with child*- It could be that this is recorded as a fulfillment of how Is. 53:12 had predicted that Jesus would be "numbered with the transgressors". He was numbered amongst humanity, and was born where both Mary and Joseph were, in Bethlehem. "With Mary" could suggest that she too had been born there; otherwise we are left to assume that only the males had to register, and so Mary tagged along with him. If indeed Mary had also been born in Bethlehem, as is here implied, then this would reinforce the idea that the Lord was truly David's seed, and should have been the legitimate king of Israel by descent.

We are left asking why Joseph took his pregnant bride such a long way, from Nazareth in the north to Bethlehem in the south, when clearly it was a major journey and she was about to give birth. The person making the declaration, whom we are told was Joseph, had to make a full declaration about their relationships and children. But these declarations were usually only done by the wealthy, who were concerned about proving their child was the rightful inheritor of their estate. "Privileged families were concerned to get their boys registered", because otherwise their Roman citizenship could not later be proved. But Joseph wasn't surely a Roman citizen, and the birth in the cattle shed speaks of his poverty. He believed that the child was special. In a case like Joseph's, there was an official scrutiny or judicial hearing "at which the deponents could be questioned on discrepancies, and the truth of allegations regarding births and deaths could be checked", and therefore any children had to be brought in person. "The great detail of surviving depositions shows that their makers we afraid of discrepancies coming to light". Nazareth was under the jurisdiction of Antipas, and Bethlehem was in a different registration district. We enquire again, why did Joseph take Mary with him, knowing she would give birth in Bethlehem? Putting all the strands together, I suggest that Joseph although poor, believed that the child was special- so special, he wanted the child's birth registered. He acted as if the child was his and Mary was already his wife. He kindly took full legal responsibility and had the Lord Jesus registered as his child. His faith in Mary and in God's word to her was truly remarkable. The trauma of the journey for a teenager would have greatly increased the chances of her losing the baby or giving birth prematurely on the journey. Everything about the Lord's birth was miraculous.

2:6 *And it came to pass, while they were there, the time came that she should give birth*- "While they were there" heightens the connection with the fact the Lord was born in Bethlehem, the birth place of His mother and adoptive father (see on :5). The time which came was that precise moment so carefully prepared and calculated by the

Father; Gal. 4:4 surely alludes here in saying that "when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman".

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

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

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

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

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

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

2:10 *And the angel said to them: Be not afraid. For I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people*- Their fear was because of their own sense of unworthiness in the presence of the Lord's glory. But Luke has already begun the

theme that the grace to be revealed in the Lord Jesus takes away our fear and sense of unworthiness (see on 1:74,77). And it continues with this assurance to the shepherds, that the good tidings of the Gospel are that "all people" [implying the Gentiles too] could serve God without fear. It is this which is the greatest joy, and which is good news indeed; that we need not fear God's condemnation because we are identified with His Son. Anything less than this would make the "Gospel" not so much good news, but rather just a worrying and burdensome weight of responsibility before God.

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

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

And this will be a sign to you: You shall find a baby wrapped in birth clothes and lying in a manger- The "sign" that this great salvation was for real was in the very absurdity of a Divine saviour being born in the very lowliest of human situations, placed in a manger from where animals ate, born amidst the smell and sound and dirt of animal excrement. The whole thing had the hallmark of the Divine.

2:13 *And suddenly there was with the angel a crowd of the heavenly host praising God, and saying*- It's important to realize that praise isn't just singing or using musical instruments. In Hebrew the same word means both 'worship' and 'service' (*abodah*). The supposition that praise = music is deeply ingrained in many minds. Thus there is the common assumption that the Angels sang to the shepherds; but in fact they *spoke* their praise.

2:14 *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those in whom He is well pleased*- The peace in view was peace with God, resulting in a lack of fear of condemnation before Him (see on :10,11 and 1:74,77). This peace with God vertically also has a horizontal dimension. A major result of the existence of the Lord's work was unity amongst God's people. If we are not at peace amongst ourselves, then God is not well pleased. The One in whom the Father was well pleased was His Son (Mt. 3:17). Those who are "in Christ" are described therefore with the same language as He is described with. It is by being in Him that we find peace with God, and the grateful recognition and acceptance of this gives glory to Him.

2:15- see on Acts 8:4.

And it came to pass, when the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to each other: Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us- We assume they left their sheep in the field, willing to sacrifice their careers and livelihood for the sake of obedience to the word about the Lord Jesus. The Lord surely had them in mind when He later taught that He was like the shepherd who left His sheep unattended in order to go to the one all important sheep. He reasons as if He identifies with them and they with

Him. It could be that these shepherds were keeping flocks which would later be taken to Jerusalem and sold as sacrifices; in which case we wonder about how far they connected Messiah with the Passover lamb. They went to see the thing which they considered "has some to pass"; they absolutely believed the word spoken.

2:16 *And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in the manger*- The baby was asleep and not feeding; the "sign" had been that they would find the baby in a manger, and this is what happened as they opened the door of the shed. Their response to the word "with haste" fits in with a major Bible theme- that the faithful respond to God's word and the Divine calling immediately and with haste.

2:17 *And when they saw it, they told people about the saying which was spoken to them about this child*- "The saying" was that about "the sign" (:12). It was indeed remarkable; that the Son of God, Israel's Messiah, should be born in the lowest way, in a strange place, to an unmarried teenager, without any human father present, with no money... and the baby was laid down to sleep in a cattle manger in a shed. And this great Messianic secret was revealed not to intellectually rigorous theologians or pious priests, but to a bunch of secular despised shepherds sitting one night on a hillside, interrupted from their lowlife gossip and chatter by a vision of Angels who told them of this great sign. This is absolutely God's way.

2:18 *And all that heard it wondered at the things which were spoken to them by the shepherds*- As noted in :17, "shepherds" were not the most credible of witnesses, and so people "wondered at" rather than "believed" the message. We notice how at the end of Luke, the chosen witnesses include women, who were not allowed to bear credible legal witness, and men who had just been disgraced by their public disloyalty to the Messiah they testified about. And this is why the likes of you and me have likewise been chosen as witnesses.

2:19 *And Mary treasured up all these sayings, pondering them in her heart*- When the shepherds came to worship, Mary pondered within herself what it all meant, as if she was now rather lacking in comprehension. Luke describes his Gospel as a compilation of eyewitness accounts. Where did he get the material from about Mary pondering things in her heart [2:19,51]? Was it from interviewing her himself? Or was her inward meditation and frozenness evident to others who on this basis told Luke?

We read that Mary “kept” God’s words in her, yet the Lord in one of His allusions to His dear mother says in Lk. 5:38 that we must preserve or “keep” [s.w.] the new wine of the Gospel in us. The Lord saw His mother as a pattern for us all. When He heard the comment “Blessed are the breasts which you sucked!”, His comment is to draw attention rather to the spiritual side of Mary: “Blessed are they [like My dear mother] who hear the word of God and keep it”. Thus He held her up as an example to them all; she shouldn’t be marvelled at just because of the fact she carried the Son of God (Catholics take note) but rather because of her reflective and tenacious attitude to the word of God. Mary’s song has so many Biblical allusions in it. Mary’s Bible minded-ness was really quite something. The Greek word translated “ponder” (Lk. 2:19) comes from syn, “with”, and *ballein*, “to throw”, as if she combined Scripture with her experience of life, seeking to find her place in the mass of OT allusion and teaching which she was being presented with. Her every phrase has multiple allusions to Scripture, which in itself indicates a fair level of intelligence to think on so many levels simultaneously.

The descriptions of Mary as keeping things in her heart (Lk. 2:19,52), and the way it seems she didn't tell Joseph about the Angel's visit, but instead immediately went down to Elisabeth for three months… all these are indications that Mary, like many sensitive people, was a very closed woman. Only when Mary was "found" pregnant by Joseph (Mt. 1:18- s.w. to see, perceive, be obvious) was the situation explained to him by an Angel. It seems His move to divorce her was based on his noticing she was pregnant, and she hadn't given any explanation to him. She "arose" after perhaps being face down on the ground as the Angel spoke with her, and went immediately off to Elisabeth. And then, after three months she returns evidently pregnant (Lk. 1:39). Mary is portrayed as somehow separate from the other ministering women. It would have been psychologically impossible, or at best very hard, for the mother of the Lord to hang around with them. The group dynamics would have been impossible. Likewise in Acts 1:14 we have "the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus", as if she is separate from them. She followed Him to Cana, uninvited, and also to Capernaum. Next she is at the cross risking her life, but she isn't among the women who went to the grave. Why not? It was surely natural that she would go there, and that the other women would go with her to comfort her. But she was a loner; either she went alone, as I think I would have tried to, or she just couldn't face contact with the others and simply hid away. And could it be that Jesus, in recognition of her unique perception of Him, appeared to her first privately, in a rightfully unrecorded meeting? But by Acts 1:14, she was in the upper room, as if His death led her to be more reconciled to her brethren, to seek to get along with them.. although by nature, in her heart and soul, she was a loner, maybe almost reclusive. A struggler to understand. A meditator, a reflector, who just wanted to be alone, one of those who take their energy from themselves rather than from other people.

2:20 *And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, just as it had been spoken to them*- Again we see a connection between the beginning and ending of Luke's Gospel; for he concludes with the disciples praising God in the temple. These shepherds are presented as believers, as converts. They rejoiced in the fulfilment of what had been prophetically told them; and likewise the disciples at the end rejoiced when they perceived how the Old Testament prophetic word had been so accurately fulfilled in the things that happened to the Lord. The "things heard and seen", the "things" preached by the shepherds (:18), the "thing" told by the Angels (:15), all clearly look forward to the "things" concerning the Kingdom and name of Jesus which Luke later says were the basis of the apostolic preaching (Acts 8:5,12). The shepherds are being set up as examples of preachers, telling forth the "things" of the Gospel which they had personally experienced- even when they appeared so strange to secular ears, and were testified by those apparently least qualified to be witnesses.

2:21 *And after eight days, when he was circumcised, his name was called Jesus, which name was given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb*- The obedient naming of John as John rather than Zacharias no doubt encouraged Mary to be likewise obedient. For her son too had been given a name by an Angel before His birth. Our acts of obedience are likewise encouraged by our fellowship with other believers in similar situations who have likewise been obedient and responsive to God's word. We note the chronology; Mary's conception came *after* the Angel appeared to her. Presumably the conception only began after she had demonstrated her belief and desire to partner with God in this profound plan.

2:22 *And when the days of their purification according to the law of Moses were*

completed, they brought him up to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord- There was no Mosaic requirement to take a newborn child to Jerusalem, but despite their poverty, Mary and Joseph clearly tried to do the most they could for the Lord Jesus. Joseph's willing cooperation in all this is to be noted; for it was after all not his child. We can only conclude that he accepted the Lord's virgin birth and willingly went along with it- at least at that time. The Lord was perfect, without any barrier between Himself and the Father; "holy, harmless and separate from sinners" (Heb. 7:26). The purification ritual was not therefore to remove any sin from Him; it is no sin to be human, to be alive, and this must affect our view of what 'human nature' really is. For all we posit about it we posit about the Lord Jesus, who fully had our nature. The Greek translated "purification" here means literally a washing, and is used many times of how the Lord cleansed lepers and also sinners from their sins. The Lord did so knowing that He Himself had been likewise cleansed.

2:23 *(As it is written in the law of the Lord: Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord)*- Again we note the medical language of the day; for the womb is not literally opened by the birth of a firstborn child. The quotation from Ex. 13:2 concerns how the dedication of the firstborn was to be a reminder of how the slain lamb had saved the firstborn from death at the time of the exodus. The dedication of the firstborn was therefore to effectively say: 'This child ought to have died. It will not die, but will be dedicated to the Lord as a living death, a life lived out for Him and not for self'. And the Lord was therefore the supreme firstborn, to the point that "the firstborn" is a title for Him (Col. 1:18; Heb. 12:23).

2:24 *And to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord: A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons*- This was the sacrifice for the poor who could not afford an animal; and we have here a picture of their poverty. It was therefore all the more sacrificial for them to have made the journey to Jerusalem for this dedication, when this was not actually required by the Mosaic law. We must carefully note that the Mosaic legislation in Lev. 12:8 stated that the two birds were for the mother; there is no hint that they were a sacrifice for the cleansing of the human nature of the child born. They were for a sin offering and for a burnt offering. It could be fairly argued that they were not in fact necessary in the Lord's case, but Mary made the offering anyway and thereby the Lord's connection with sinful humanity was emphasized. It was for the same reason that He was baptized by John in a baptism which was "for the remission of sins"; not because He was a sinner, but to portray His unity with sinful humanity. They actually offered the birds, whereas Edersheim claims that at the time, the poor usually just dropped the coins which were the price of two birds into the temple coffers, and it was accepted as if the sacrifice had been offered. But Mary insisted on actually offering the birds. When the Lord paid such special attention to the widow woman casting two small coins into the same collection trumpets, He may well have thought of His mother doing the same at His birth, a coin for each of the two birds. Such restimulation is a profound window onto the total nature of His humanity.

2:25 *And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel. And the Holy Spirit was upon him*- Simeon waited for "the consolation (comfort) of Israel", referring to the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 40:1,2- and saw it have a fulfilment in the first coming of the Lord. "Simeon", the hearing one or 'the one who was heard', had heard God's word and looked for its fulfilment; and perhaps the idea is also that he had prayed for

Messiah's coming, and had been heard. Therefore he was assured that his prayers would be heard, and he would see the Messiah. The consolation of Israel is therefore paralleled with Messiah personally (:26), just as "the hope of Israel" refers to the One for whom Israel hoped, Jesus the Messiah. We should not over emphasize the material aspect of the Gospel; the implicit hope of eternity in God's Kingdom on earth is in fact secondary to the things about the Lord Jesus. He personally is the hope and consolation of Israel. This tendency is very human, and a reflection of our own deep reservations- to focus upon the material [the things of the material Kingdom on earth] rather than on upon a person, the Lord Jesus, with all the issues involved in a living relationship with that person. Israel at the Lord's time likewise had the emphasis misplaced- upon the material issues of freedom from the Romans, rather than upon the wonder of their King and Messiah coming to save them from their sins through self-sacrifice. The comfort / consolation which we need above all is the comfort that our sins shall not stand between God and us. The Lord refers to Himself as the comforter in Jn. 14-16, promising that the gift of His spirit would mean that His comforting presence remained with His people even after His physical departure.

2:26 *And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ*- The Spirit being "upon" Simeon (:25) did not make him infallible; but there had been a special revelation to him that his prayers for the coming of Israel's consolation, the Messiah, would be heard. And "Simeon" means just that, 'hearing', in the context of prayer being heard. Therefore he was comforted that he would live to see the Messiah.

2:27 *And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, that they might do concerning him after the custom of the law*- Mary did not legally have to bring the Lord to the temple; she was poor, as reflected in her inability to offer a lamb but rather two cheap birds. It was a Divinely overruled coincidence that she happened to be in the temple courts at just the time that Simeon entered; Anna likewise (see on :38). This kind of coincidence is simply called being "in the Spirit", and the Spirit is no less active in our encounters and coincidences today. "The parents" is obviously an example of the Biblical record being written from the viewpoint of secular observers; the language of demons is similar. Joseph was not the actual parent, just as demons don't actually exist, but the language of human perception is still used. For language is in a sense a matter of human perception.

2:28 *Then he took him into his arms and blessed God, and said*- It was of "the Spirit" (see on :27) that Simeon recognized that this particular baby, held in the arms of a poor couple offering the poor person's sacrifice, without the fanfare which attended the dedication of babies from more wealthy families, was in fact the Messiah. And in this again we see how God operates, through the lowly and unnoticed by the world.

2:29 *Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word*- "Peace" usually refers to peace with God; we noted on the song of Zacharias that the Lord's birth was understood by the faithful as being essentially about the good news of peace with God through His work and death. Simeon felt he could die at peace with God because of Messiah; he clearly understood that He would atone for his sins.

This is all the language of Jacob being content to die after seeing Joseph. Joseph is simply one of the clearest types of Christ. There are many echoes of Christ which seem to have no specific purpose apart from to confirm us in our enthusiasm to constantly see the spirit of Christ in this record (e.g. Gen. 46:30 LXX = Lk. 2:29,30).

2:30 *For my eyes have seen Your salvation*- 'Jesus', Yehoshua, is literally 'the salvation of Yah'. The 'seeing' of salvation alludes to how Israel were redeemed from Egypt through the slain lamb (Ex. 14:13); Simeon understood this to be representative of Messiah's victory against sin and all Israel's enemies. It is the fulfilment of the "mercy and truth" of the promises to the fathers which enables God's salvation to be seen by all the world (Ps. 98:3). Simeon's desire for the coming of Messiah was therefore rooted in a deep appreciation of the huge spiritual significance of His work and sacrifice, and not from any passing nationalistic desire to see Israel justified. He surely had Ps. 98:3 in mind, for he goes on to speak in :31 of how all the peoples of the world would 'see' what he was now seeing; he realized that he was typical of all who would later come to 'see' the Son.

2:31 *Which You have prepared before the presence of all peoples*- As noted on :30, Simeon has in mind Ps. 98:3, understanding himself as representative of all those worldwide in future ages who would 'see' God's salvation, His 'Jesus'. The translation here is difficult, and the idea is probably that he understood that this child was being prepared for exhibition in the presence of all the Gentile peoples; they in their time would see what he was now seeing. This idea is confirmed in :32.

2:32 *A light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel*- The light of Messiah was to be what Israel gloried in, and they were to share that light to the Gentiles. Here we have another reference to the great commission; the glorious light of Israel was to be revealed by them to the world. Simeon had in mind Is. 60:1-3, where Israel were to arise and shine just as their Messiah would. As the Lord said, "you are the light of the world", just as He personally was the light of the world. And because of that, the Gentiles would come to that light in Zion, just as Simeon had come into the temple and see the light. He is presented as representative of all future believers, and he himself perceived this.

2:33 *And his father and his mother were marvelling at the things which were spoken concerning him*- There must have been certain similarities of personality type between the Lord and His mother. Thus in Lk. 2:33 Mary “marvelled”, and the same word is used about Jesus in Mt. 8:10 and Mk. 6:6. Again we have here an essay in His humanity. And there is another echo of the Joseph story. "The men marvelled" at Joseph’s discernment. Ditto for the Lord Jesus- it is emphasized (Mt. 8:27; 9:8,33; 21:20, 42; 22:22; 27:14; Lk. 2:33; Jn. 4:27; 7:15). Mary had perceived that her son was God's Son, the Messiah; but clearly the extent of the prophetic implications of this were not fully perceived by her. Hence she marvelled at the Biblical allusions made by Simeon.

2:34 *And Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary his mother*-Addressing himself to the mother rather than the father is another of Luke's emphases upon the high status of women before God. Simeon surely perceived that this was a virgin birth, and Joseph was not the true father- hence he addressed Mary.

Behold, this child is set for the falling and the rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against- Simeon knew that the good news of Messiah's coming was to balanced against the fact that the Old Testament taught that He would be the rock of offence over which many would stumble and be broken (Is. 8:14; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:8). But he knew that many would rise up broken from that encounter into new life, and the "rising again" also therefore has reference to resurrection at the last day. He would be "spoken against", and yet out of that experience of rejecting Him, some would repent and rise again. Indeed, in 1 Pet. 2:8

Peter seems to assume that all believers will go through this- stumbling in spiritual failure, and yet rising again to new life in Him. Luke will go on in 20:18 to record the Lord developing this logic- He is a stone, and we either fall upon Him and join the community of the broken, or He shall fall upon us as members of this world, and grind us to powder in condemnation- clearly alluding to the stone of Daniel 2. Luke in Acts likes to use this idea of 'speaking against' for the opposition towards the message of the Lord Jesus and those "in Him", who were likewise spoken against; for all that is true of the Lord personally becomes true for we who are in Him (Acts 13:45; 28:19,22). We see in all this how the Lord works through our stumbling; there is hardly a strong believer I know who has not at some time seriously stumbled in their walk.

2:35 *Yes, and a sword shall pierce through your own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed*-Mary's lack of perception caused her great pain. The way the Lord refers to her as "Woman" both in Cana was, apparently, an unusually cold way for a man to refer to his mother. He effectively rebuffed her in Cana for her lack of perception; He responds to the woman who tells Him how blessed His mother is by saying that all who hear the word of God and keep it are equally blessed. And when His mother wants to speak to Him, He says in front of the whole crowd that His mothers are all who do God's will. And the final pain must have been at the cross, where in His dying words He tells her that she is no longer His mother, but she must now be the mother of John. Simeon's prophecy that a sword would pierce her soul (Lk. 2:35- the Syriac text has 'a spear') may refer to her feelings on beholding the literal piercing of her son's side- remembering that He was pierced with "the *staff* of a spear" (2 Sam. 23:7), it went in so deep. The fact water as well as blood came out is further evidence that the spear penetrated deeply. Yet there is an allusion surely to Is. 49:1,2, where Messiah's mouth is likened to a sharp, piercing sword. Note how the passage has reference to Mary: "The Lord has called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother has he made mention of my name. And he has made my mouth like a sharp sword". Could it not be that Simeon foresaw how the Lord's words would pierce Mary to the quick? For in all the incidents above, she must have thought with a lump in her throat: 'But come on Jesus… I'm your *mum*… the one who knitted and mended your clothes as a child… how can you speak to me like that…?'. And as a sensitive, reflective soul she would have reflected and hurt deeply at these words.

The sword / spear that pierced the Lord pierced her heart, "that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed". The cross is therefore the ultimate source of self-examination. The Greek for "thoughts" means "inmost thoughts", and all 13 uses of *dialogismos* in the NT are negative- bad thoughts, vain thoughts, doubting thoughts. The five other references in Luke are all very pointedly like this (Lk. 5:22; 6:8; 9:46,47; 24:38). We all find self-understanding and self-examination difficult; and we find it hard to feel our sinfulness as we should. Yet the cross is the ultimate stimulus to self-examination, to conviction of sin, and then of salvation and the reality of grace and God's love. This same process happened for Mary "also". Over the years she had perhaps lost something of her initial humility, feeling that her exalted place in God's plan was due to some personal righteousness, and therefore the cross experience had to pierce her too, so that she too had the inmost thoughts of her heart revealed to herself. We have shown earlier how Mary so identified herself with her dearest Son that she felt in some way part of Messiah. Yet over the years of repetitive domestic life in Nazareth, the height of the call to be "in Christ", really part of Him and His

work, must have been ground away. Yet at the cross, her soul was as it were pierced with the same sword / spear that pierced her Son. Ps. 22:20 prophesied how the Lord would suffer "the sword" on the cross, and 2 Sam. 24 had spoken of Him being filled with a spear. "A sword shall pierce through your own soul *also*" meant that as Mary was part of Jesus, so she must also share in His sufferings too. The proud and happy mother as she stood before Simeon was so thrilled to be as it were "In Christ", connected with Messiah. But she had to be reminded that to share in His life is to share in His death- and it was only the actual experience of the cross which brought this home to her. And so with us, brethren in Christ, and rightfully proud of the high calling and association with Him which we have… there is a darker side to our being in Christ. It involves sharing in His death, that we might share in His life. Mary's achievement of this is perhaps reflected in the way the mother of the man child [Jesus] in Rev. 12 is persecuted after the pattern of her Son Jesus, and yet survives.

As Simeon held the baby Jesus in his arms, he saw in that beautiful little boy something terrible; for he looked ahead to how His soul would one day be pierced in crucifixion, "that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed". The same word is used for how thoughts will be revealed at the judgment (Mt. 10:26; 1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5). In the piercing of the Son of God, the thoughts of hearts would be revealed. But the question arises: revealed to whom? We may (rightly) assume: to ourselves. But Luke's Gospel emphasizes the ability of the Lord Jesus to know human hearts (5:22; 6:8; 9:2,6,47; 24:38). Could it not be that the cross is used by the Father and Son to know the minds of men? They see in our response to it the real you and the real me. See on 1 Cor. 11:32.

The cross leads to thoughts being *revealed*; and the judgment process likewise will lead to thoughts being revealed (s.w. in Mt. 10:26; 1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5). The Lord's death is described as His washing "his garments in wine, and his vesture in the blood of grapes" (Gen. 49:11 RV). Treading out the grapes is a Hebraism for judgment, and yet it is used here and in Is. 63:1-3 regarding the Lord's treading of the winepress alone in His death. Indeed, the Isaiah passage is clearly applicable to both the crucifixion and the final judgment of the Lord Jesus. The reason being, that in His death was the judgment of this world.

We should note that as Mary's soul was pierced at the death of her son, so was the Father's. For "they shall look upon me whom they have pierced" (Zech. 12:10) in its context speaks of the Father and not the Son. So in the Son's piercing, the Father and mother were likewise pierced. The Divine-human family were united at that tragic moment.

2:36 *And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with a husband seven years from her virginity-*

Hannah's example not only influenced Mary, but also Anna's. 'Anna' is an unusual first century name; "of the 247 Jewish women in Palestine from the period 330 BCE - 200 CE whose names are known, Anna [in Luke 2] is the only one who bears this name" (Tal Ilan, 'Notes of the distribution of Jewish women's names in Palestine', Journal of Jewish Studies Vol. 40 (1989) pp. 186,193). She therefore named herself this after Hannah, the Hebrew equivalent of Anna; she was inspired by Hannah's example of waiting and praying in the sanctuary for a child. For Anna, the coming of Messiah was equivalent to having her own child. Her hope for Messiah's

coming was something which she felt personally. We too are awaiting the Lord's coming- but with anything of her intensity and feeling? She looked for redemption to appear in Jerusalem (Lk. 2:25,38), clearly alluding to the LXX of Is. 52:9: "The Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem". She saw the coming of that little baby as the redemption of God's people; she had the faith to see things yet unseen. The Hebrew for 'redemption' can imply 'with blood'- is it going too far to suggest that she perceived the need for that little baby to grow up and then shed His blood for Israel's redemption? Her father's name, Phanuel, is the Hebrew 'Peniel', meaning 'the face of God'. And 'Hannah' means 'God's grace'. Straight away we see a link to Num. 6:25: "The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you". The connection implies God's passionate joy at her attitude and existence. Her remaining in the temple was perhaps inspired by passages like Ps. 27:4, where David spoke of his desire to dwell in the temple all the days of his life in order to see God's beauty- which she understood in terms of His Son. And especially, Mal. 3:1, which speaks of the Lord's coming to His temple. We must ask ourselves what our Bible study and knowledge actually leads to. A study of Romans 6 may lead to baptism; but all God's word demands of us an actual and concrete response in the things of real life. She allowed the example of another woman, Hannah, to influence her, perhaps even to the point of changing her name; what of us?

2:37 *And she had been a widow eighty four years. She departed not from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day*- She "departed not" in the sense that she was regularly present for the morning and evening sacrifices and prayers. She "came up" to the temple to worship (:38) so she was not actually there all the time. Again we have the language of observed experience, as we have with demons. It appeared that she never left the temple, just as small children have the impression that their school teachers live at the school.

Men like David, Hezekiah and Daniel appreciated that God knew already. In a sense, all that will happen has happened; so prayer is an opening up of ourselves to God, a *service* ['worshiping'] of God (Dan. 6:16; Lk. 2:37), for His glory and for our benefit, rather than a means of communicating information to Him. Therefore they opened themselves up to Him, expressing their understanding that He knew the situation, and didn't present a long list of concrete requests to Him. Their relationship with Him went far beyond that kind of surface level. What of ours?

2:38 *And coming up to worship at that very same hour, she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all those that were looking for redemption in Jerusalem*- See on :36. The loyal band of Bible students in the temple expected redemption to appear in Jerusalem, presumably because of the Old Testament prophecies like Joel 2 concerning Christ being manifested in Jerusalem at His second coming and Kingdom. But their first century application of these was not wrong. "At that very same hour" reflects the same kind of Divine coincidence that we noted on :27. No meeting is by chance for those who are led by the Spirit.

2:39 *And when they had accomplished all things that were according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city Nazareth*- Mary "performed [fulfilled] all things according to the law" in her dedication of Jesus. In doing this, she anticipated the spirit of the cross and whole ministry of Jesus, where He performed [s.w. fulfilled] all things of the law- Lk. 18:31; Jn. 19:28; 30; Acts 13:29. These

passages each use the same three words for all things, law, and fulfilled. She brought the Lord up in the way of the cross; and He continued in that path.

2:40 *And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him*- "Grace" often refers to the gift of the Spirit. The parallel is with the growth of John the Baptist in 1:80, who was strong in the Spirit, and filled with the Spirit from the womb.

Hebrews always speaks of Him as “perfected”, as a verb (Heb. 2:10; 5:9; 7:28)- never with the adjective ‘perfect’. Apart from being a major problem for Trinitarian views, this simple fact sets Him up as *our* pattern, whom the Father seeks like wise ‘to perfect’. Yet the path the Lord had to take to achieve this was hard indeed. Not only did it culminate in the cross, but His growth as a young man is described by the word *prokoptein* (Lk. 2:40,52), defined by Karl Barth [*Church Dogmatics* I 2, p. 158] as meaning ‘to extend by blows, as a smith stretches metal by hammering’. Through childhood crises and the turmoil of adolescence, this is what He went through, to lead Him to the final ‘perfection’ of being able to say “I am”.

2:41 *And his parents went up every year to Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover*- It was only the enthusiasts who went to Jerusalem every year. The Mosaic command was that every male should appear; but Mary went too. Perhaps she was motivated by the example of her heroine Hannah, who also went up to the tabernacle each year (1 Sam. 1:7). We can conclude that Joseph was indeed a spiritual person, and that Mary supported him in this. For her to go to Jerusalem every year for the first 12 years of marriage indicates that she placed great priority on it; for she would surely at times have been pregnant, yet she still made the pilgrimage.

2:42 *And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to the tradition of the feast*- There was no legal requirement for this; but they are presented as obedient to Jewish tradition.

2:43 *And when they had finished the days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem; and his parents knew it not*- "The days" which they "finished" may refer not to Passover but to the traditional dedication of a 12 year old boy. The Lord clearly wanted to remain in Jerusalem, and may well have arranged circumstances so that His parents would not initially notice His absence. He must have felt some need to do His true Father's business in His house at that time; perhaps He felt the need to make a first appeal to the Jewish leadership at that time.

2:44 *Supposing him to be in the company, they went a day's journey; and then they looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances*- It has been speculated that men and women travelled in different companies, and so Joseph assumed the Lord was with Mary, and vice versa. But we cannot avoid a suspicion of negligence on their part, especially given that He was known by them to be God's Son.

2:45 *And when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking him*- The Lord gently rebukes them for not knowing that He would be in the temple; we note that they searched for three days (:46) before thinking to look for Him in the temple. Presumably He had made some comment to them about His need to remain three days in the temple, and they had not perceived His sense at all. This all paves the way for how His clear predictions of His three days disappearance in death were likewise not understood. His followers came seeking Him at that time, but in the wrong way and place. His clearly stated words at this time were not understood, just as His later words about His resurrection would not be.

2:46 *And it came to pass, after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both hearing them and asking them questions*- The three days were clearly a significant period; see on :45. The Lord presumably slept rough, perhaps on the mount of Olives. By that age He would already have perceived much about His death and how it would all transpire, and wished to familiarize himself with the city where it would all happen. He is often portrayed later as sitting in the midst of His students; here, at 12 years old, the teachers are already His students. His asking of questions may not necessarily mean that He asked them things He didn't know; it could refer to the rabbinic method of teaching by asking rhetorical questions, a style frequently used by the Lord.

2:47 *And all that heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers*- See on Acts 2:7. These men who were so impressed by His intellect and insight would have had amongst them some who 18 years later would have encountered Him again, and become filled with the same envy which perhaps began to well up within them even then. As He posed rhetorical questions to them, so they did to Him; and they were amazed at His answers. Despite this intellectual and spiritual supremacy which the Lord had as Son of God, His neighbours and family considered Him a mere carpenter and were offended when He indirectly claimed to be Messiah. We can deduce that He clearly held Himself back from revealing Himself as radically different from the rest of them. It would have been so frustrating and irritating to be so intellectually and spiritually more developed than others, and yet to say nothing, time and again, and relate with them on their level.

2:48 *And when they saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him: Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you*- "Anxiously searching" is “sorrowing”, using a word elsewhere used about despair and anguish for the loss of life (Lk. 16:24,25; Acts 20:38). She feared He was dead. But where, then, was her faith in the promise that He would have an eternal Kingdom…? The distraction of poverty, the demands of the other children, perhaps an unsupportive partner, self-doubt… all these ground away at her earlier spirituality and faith, just as happens to so many of us after baptism too.

“Why have you done this to us?” is a rebuke- as if she implied that Jesus had sinned / done wrong by what He had done? Surely her faith in a sinless Messiah was now put to a brutal test by a domestic upset; just as, in barest essence, ours is too by such things. Yet notice that she frames those words in the LXX language of Gen. 3:14; 4:10; 1 Sam. 13:11. Those allusions would imply that she felt Jesus had sinned; and yet at the same time as revealing that gross lack of perception, another part of her mind is still back in Scripture. Unlike 12 years previously, she is now using Scripture without correct context; but she has far from totally lost her spirituality.

Mary and Joseph were “astonished”. She shared Joseph's amazement; and the word is only used of the amazement / incomprehension of the crowds- Mt. 7:28; 13:54; 19:25; 22:33; Mk. 10:26. Slowly she became influenced by the world's view of her son- not totally, but partially, to the extent that she lost that keen perception and height of spiritual ambition which she had earlier had. And so it can be for so many of us; the world comes to influence our view not only of our own children, but of all things in spiritual life.

Mary scolds Him that his father [Joseph] and her have been seeking for Him. The

surrounding world perceived Him as the carpenter's son (Mt. 13:55), the son of Joseph (Jn. 6:42). He was "as was supposed" ['reckoned legally'?] the son of Joseph" (Lk. 3:23). Even Philip perceived Messiah to be "the son of Joseph" even after he had accepted Him (Jn. 1:45). Hence Jesus gently rebuked her that He was about His true Father's business, in His true Father's house. Her description of Joseph as "thy father" is surely worthy of the Lord's rebuke. She had allowed the views of the world to influence her view of the Lord. "Is not this the son of Mary?" (Mk. 6:3) is paralleled in Mt. 13:55 by "the carpenter's son", and in Lk. 4:22 Joseph's son; everyone assumed they were His natural parents, the son of Mary & Joseph, and this came to influence her. Jesus told them that they should have sought Him in His true Father's house- and this may not only be a reference to the temple, but to the way in which they had assumed He was somewhere with the house / family of Joseph in the convoy; and perhaps they had gone round Joseph's relatives in Jerusalem hunting for Him.

2:49 *And he said to them: How is it you searched for me? Did you not know that I would be in my Father's house?*- I suggested on :45 that the Lord had in fact told them that He was going to be in His Father's house, the temple, for three days. They had misunderstood or ignored His words; just as His followers would do to His later predictions of His three days 'disappearance'.

There are Biblical examples of refusing to take guilt when others feel that it should be taken. The Lord's own parents blamed Him for 'making them anxious' by 'irresponsibly' remaining behind in the temple. The Lord refused to take any guilt, didn't apologize, and even gently rebuked them (Lk. 2:42-51). In similar vein, Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "Even if I made you sorry with a letter, I do not regret it" (2 Cor. 7:8). He would not take guilt for their being upset with him. Likewise Absalom comforted his raped sister not to 'take it to heart', not to feel guilty about it, as it seems she was feeling that way, taking false guilt upon her (2 Sam. 13:20).

A window into the Lord's self-perception is given here in the record of His behaviour in the temple at age 12. Within the psychological matrix in which the young Jesus existed, as well as within the cultural norms of first century Palestine, it was rude for a 12 year old to retort to his mother: "Didn't you know I would be about my father's business?". It appears insolent towards Joseph too. But that statement, in the Lord's case, was not a sin, nor a typically precocious childish comment- although it would've been on the lips of any other 12 year old. Instead it reflects an abnormal degree of detachment from His mother and step-father, and a remarkable statement as to how much He was Himself, how mature and strong was His sense of identity as the uniquely begotten Son of God.

A sense of compulsion was found in the Lord's whole life of service, leading up to the cross as it did (see on Mk. 14:49):
"Wist ye not that *I must be* about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49 AV). "And he said unto them, *I must preach* the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent" (Luke 4:43). "He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee. And he *must needs* go through Samaria" (John 4:3-4). This is significant, as this was not from geographical necessity. The Lord was in the Jordan valley (Jn. 3:22) and could easily have taken the valley road north through Bethshan into Galilee, avoiding Samaria entirely. "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4).

2:50 *And they did not understand what he spoke to them*- He had told them that He would be in His Father's house for three days. But they did not understand. And

now they see plainly what has happened, they still do not understand. This is exactly the situation we find at the end of Luke's gospel, where the resurrected Lord [after three days disappearance] is still not understood.

Lk. 2:50 records that Mary "understood not", using the same phrase as is on the lips of the Lord in Mt. 13:13, speaking of those without who " hear not neither do they understand"; and ominously, Mary stood without and asked to see Jesus, only to be told that His real mothers were those women sitting around Him listening to His words. In passing, note how the disciples also often "understood not" (Mt. 16:12; Mk. 6:52; 8:17,21; Lk. 18:34). And yet the Lord counted them as more understanding than they were. As with Mary. She "understood not" (Lk. 2:50) the clear enough statement that He was in *His* Father's house. And the Lord rebuked her for spending so long, three days, looking elsewhere when she should have perceived quicker that He was going to be in the house of His true Father. I take His words not as a sharp rebuff but rather more of grief, that Mary had known him so poorly, sad at her loss of perception.

2:51 *And he left with them and went to Nazareth, and was subject to them; and his mother treasured all these sayings in her heart*- It could be that she had pondered from the LXX of Gen. 37:11 how Jacob "observed" (s.w.) the saying of Joseph / Jesus, and therefore felt that she too must meditate on all the words associated with her Son. The Lord at 12 years old displayed such piercing knowledge and spirituality, but it seems He returned to Nazareth and suppressed the expression of it. This is why the villagers were so amazed when He stood up in the Nazareth synagogue and on the basis of Old Testament exposition, indirectly declared Himself the Messiah. He must have stored up so much knowledge and spirituality within Him, but hid it from the eyes of men. This was quite an achievement- to be perfect, and yet not to be noticed as somehow other-worldly. The Lord was "subject unto" Mary- to train Him for the time when we would be subject to Him as we are now (1 Cor. 15:27,28; Eph. 1:22; 5:24), and all the world subject unto Him (1 Pet. 3:22; Heb. 2:8). And so, wondrous thought that it is, the training of His mother has effect even now; with literally *all* subject to Him, He was prepared for this by having been subject unto His mother.

2:52- see on Mk. 6:2; Lk. 2:19.

And Jesus developed both in wisdom and body, and in favour with God and men- A Joseph allusion: "The Lord... gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison" (Gen. 39:21). As noted on :40, Hebrews always speaks of Him as "perfected" or as we have it here in Luke, "developed", as a verb (Heb. 2:10; 5:9; 7:28)- never with the adjective 'perfect'. Apart from being a major problem for Trinitarian views, this simple fact sets Him up as *our* pattern, whom the Father seeks like wise 'to perfect'. Yet the path the Lord had to take to achieve this was hard indeed. Not only did it culminate in the cross, but His growth as a young man is described by the word *prokoptein* (Lk. 2:40,52), defined by Karl Barth [*Church Dogmatics* I 2, p. 158] as meaning 'to extend by blows, as a smith stretches metal by hammering'. Through childhood crises and the turmoil of adolescence, this is what He went through, to lead Him to the final 'perfection' of being able to say "I am".

LUKE CHAPTER 3

3:1 *Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of the*

region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene- Luke's careful attention to historical detail is understandable if his Gospel was partly written for use in Paul's defence whilst imprisoned in Caesarea and / or Rome. And the material is also used specifically to seek to convert Theophilus.

3:2 *In the highpriesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness*- John came preaching the word (Mt. 3:1); and the word came to John. All witness and evangelism is a reflection of an ongoing mutual relationship between God and the preaher, mediated through His word. John's message of repentance (:3) was taken from the word of God in the Old Testament; and so the word of God which came to him was perhaps the command to begin his minstry. He had been in the wilderness from a young man, awaiting the call to begin his ministry. We have here another example of a man experiencing a period in the wilderness before starting his ministry; Moses, Paul and the Lord Jesus are other examples. And in essence the same is often the pattern in human life today.

3:3 *And he came into all the region round about the Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*- Presumably this connects with Mt. 2:23, meaning that whilst the Lord was still living in Nazareth, John began preaching. One wonders whether John maybe began his ministry up to three and a half years before the baptism of Jesus, seeing his work was typical of the three and a half year Elijah ministry preparing for the *second* coming of the Lord Jesus.

The two clauses in this sentence appear to be the wrong way around. We would expect to read that John came preaching baptism, and then baptized people. One way around the problem is to imagine that the second clause ("preaching the baptism...") is as it were in brackets, explaining that the baptism he performed was not Christian baptism but simply a sign of repentance and request for remission of sins. But Mt. 3:11 makes it explicit that his baptism *preceded* the call for repentance. "Baptize... unto repentance" alludes to the Isaiah 40 passage which offered forgiveness in order to provoke repentance. John baptized in order to lead people to repentance, rather than baptizing only those who had repented and got their lives in order. Even the NET Bible's "baptize... for repentance" could be read the same way- baptism was for the end of provoking repentance, rather than being baptism only for the visibly repentant. This likelihood is strengthened once we realize that there is surely an allusion here to Wisdom 11:23: "You overlook the sins of men, unto repentance". Repentance in any case is an internal attitude (see on Mt. 3:6), and John as he stood in the Jordan River was totally incapable of judging whether or not in practice his hearers had actually changed their lives. He baptized them because they had confessed their sins and re-thought, re-pented. Not because they had actually changed in practical, ongoing lifestyle issues. Likewise the apostles who baptized 3000 people in Acts 2 had no way of measuring repentance in practice. Mk. 1:15 records John's message as being: "Repent ye and believe the Gospel". This might seem to be in the wrong order- for we have come to think that surely belief of the Gospel comes before repentance. And so it does very often- but there is another option here- that the repentance is ongoing. Life after conversion is a life of believing the basic Gospel which led us to conversion and repentance in the first place.

The Greek *metanoia* ["repentance"] was used as a legal term describing the re-thinking of a sentence. Paul uses this figure in Romans to describe how we are condemned as guilty, but the sentence is re-thought because we are in Christ. Strong's lexicon claims that the word can mean "by implication, reversal of another's

decision". Our re-thinking thus becomes God's re-thinking. In this we see something of the intimacy and connection between God and man achieved by human repentance. The legal metaphor continues in the word translated "remission"- the idea is of legal pardon or freedom from the accusation.

John the Baptist's audience responded to his preaching by being baptized "with the baptism of repentance" (Mk. 1:4); and yet the Lord Jesus built on this by appealing to people to repent because the Kingdom was at hand (Mk. 1:15; Mt. 3:2). Their repentance was therefore only surface level. The Lord cursed the fig tree (cp. Israel) because they had only leaves, an appearance of repentance and spiritual fruit, but actually there was not even the first sign of real fruit on that tree when it was really analyzed. Earlier, Israel had appeared to have fruit, when actually, they didn't have any at all (Hos. 10:1). The man in the parable built his spiritual house, but in fact he didn't get down to the real nitty-gritty of obedience to the Lord's words; and so it miserably, pathetically fell at judgment day. The seriousness of sin becomes de-emphasized in our lives, until repentance comes to mean a vague twinge of guilt. This, again, was the problem of Old Testament Israel. "They return, but not to the Most High" (Hos. 7:16); they had the sensation of regret, of turning back- but it wasn't real repentance. A few verses earlier God had commented: “They do *not* return to the Lord their God” (Hos. 7:10); but they on a surface level *did* return to Him. Hosea continues his theme: “Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself” (Hos. 10:1). Did they or did they not bring forth fruit? They did- but only in their own eyes. They felt they had repented, and brought forth spiritual fruit. But not in God’s estimation. And we too can have the sensation of spirituality and even spiritual growth, but only in our own eyes. “Though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him” (Hos. 11:7) in the way which true repentance requires. "Judah hath not turned unto me with her *whole* heart, but feignedly" (Jer. 3:10). They did turn back to Yahweh- but not in their heart. Israel rejoiced in the light of John’s teaching- and he taught real, on-your-knees repentance. They thought they’d repented. But the Lord describes John as mourning, and them not mourning in sympathy and response (Lk. 7:32). They rejoiced in the idea of repentance, but never really got down to it.

3:4 *As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: The voice of one crying, In the wilderness make ready the way of the Lord, make his paths straight*- Just as the preaching of the Gospel was to make straight paths for the Messiah to come, so we are to make *our* paths straight (Heb. 12:13)- as if somehow we are the Lord Jesus; His revelation to this world at the second coming will in a sense be our revelation. Hence the final visions of Revelation speak of the Lord's second coming in terms which are applicable to the community of those in Him [e.g. a city of people coming down from Heaven to earth]. John’s preaching was in order to make [s.w. ‘to bring forth fruit’] His [the Lord’s] paths straight- but the ways of the Lord are “right” [s.w. “straight”] anyway (Acts 13:10). So how could John’s preaching make the Lord’s ways straight / right, when they already are? God is so associated with His people that their straightness or crookedness reflects upon Him; for they are His witnesses in this world. His ways are their ways. This is the N.T. equivalent of the O.T. concept of keeping / walking in the way of the Lord (Gen. 18:19; 2 Kings 21:22). Perhaps this is the thought behind the exhortation of Heb. 12:13 to make straight paths for our own feet. We are to bring our ways into harmony with the Lord’s ways; for He is to be us, His ways our ways. Thus Is. 40:3, which is being quoted in Lk. 3:4, speaks of “Prepare ye the way *of the Lord*”, whereas Is. 62:10

speaks of “Prepare ye the way *of the people*”. Yet tragically, the way / path of Israel was not the way / path of the Lord (Ez. 18:25).

There was an intensity and critical urgency about John and his message. John urged people to make their path “straight”- using a Greek word elsewhere translated “immediately”, “forthwith” (s.w. Mk. 1:12,28 and often). Getting things straight in our lives is a question of immediate response. He warns people to “flee from the wrath to come” (Lk. 3:7). This was what their changed lives and baptisms were to be about- a fleeing from the wrath to come. He speaks as if that “wrath to come” is just about to come, it’s staring them in the face like a wall of forest fire, and they are to flee away from it. And yet Paul (in one of his many allusions to John’s message, which perhaps he had heard himself ‘live’) speaks of “the wrath to come” as being the wrath of the final judgment (1 Thess. 1:10), or possibly that of AD70 (1 Thess. 2:16). But both those events would not have come upon the majority of John’s audience. And the day of ‘wrath to come’ is clearly ultimately to be at the Lord’s return (Rev. 6:17; 11:18). Yet John zooms his hearers forward in time, to perceive that they face condemnation and judgment day right now, as they hear the call of the Gospel. This was a feature of John; he had the faith which sees things which are not as though they already are. Thus he looked at Jesus walking towards him and commented that here was the “Lamb of God”, a phrase the Jews would’ve understood as referring to the lamb which was about to be sacrificed on Passover (Jn. 1:29). John presumably was referencing the description of the crucified Jesus in Is. 53:7; for John, he foresaw it all, it was as if he saw Jesus as already being led out to die, even though that event was over three years distant. And so he could appeal to his audience to face judgment day as if they were standing there already. We need to have the same perspective.

3:5 *Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked paths shall become straight, and the rough ways smooth*- John the Baptist's ministry was so that the 'crooked' nation of Israel should be 'made straight' and ready to accept Jesus as Messiah. God's enabling power was present so that this might have happened; but the same word is used in Acts 2:40 and Phil. 2:15 to describe Israel as still being a 'crooked' nation. John's preaching, like ours, was potentially able to bring about the conversion of an entire nation. So instead of being discouraged by the lack of response to our witness, let's remember the enormous potential power which there is behind it. Every word, witness of any kind, tract left lying on a seat... has such huge potential conversion power lodged within it, a power from God Himself.

John's mission was to prepare Israel for Christ, to figuratively '*bring low'* the hills and mountains, the proud Jews of first century Israel, and raise the valleys, i.e. inspire the humble with the real possibility of salvation in Christ. Paul uses the same Greek word for "bring low" no fewer than three times, concerning how the Gospel has humbled him (Acts 20:19; 2 Cor. 11:7; Phil. 4:12). It's as if he's saying: 'John's preaching did finally have its’ effect upon me; it did finally make me humble enough for the Lord Jesus'. And as John made straight paths for men's feet that they might come unto Christ (Mt. 3:3), so did Paul (Heb. 12:13).

3:6 *And all flesh*- See on Mt. 3:3.

Shall see the salvation of God- John perceived how eager God is to forgive, and how our acceptance of that forgiveness is His glory and His salvation. John says, quoting Is. 40:5, that if men repent and ready themselves for the Lord’s coming, then

"all flesh shall see the salvation of God". But he is changing the quotation- Isaiah said that all flesh shall see the glory of God. But saving men and women is the thing God glories in.

3:7 *He said to the crowds that went out to be baptized by him: You offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*- The ideas of fleeing wrath and preparing a way are surely based upon the Law's command in Dt. 19:3 that a way or road should be prepared to the city of refuge (symbolic of Christ- Heb. 6:18), along which the person under the death sentence for manslaughter could flee for refuge. John was preparing that way or road to Christ, and urging ordinary people to flee along it. They didn't like to think they were under a death sentence for murder. They were just ordinary folk like the soldiers who grumbled about their wages, and the publicans who were a bit less than honest at work. But they had to flee. But they wouldn't be alone in that. If a man prepares his way after God's principles (2 Chron. 27:6; Prov. 4:26), then God will 'prepare' that man's way too (Ps. 37:23; 119:5), confirming him in the way of escape.

This intense, urgent presentation of the ultimate issues of life and death, acceptance and rejection, brought forth a massive response. People lined up for baptism. And John was hardly polite. He called his baptismal candidates a "generation of vipers", alluding obviously to the seed of the serpent in Gen. 3:15. Yet his tough line with them, his convicting them of sin, led them to ask what precisely they must do, in order to be baptized. They didn't turn away in offence. They somehow sensed he was for real, and the message he preached couldn't be ignored or shrugged off as the ravings of a fanatic. Time and again we see the same- the very height of the demand of Christ of itself convicts men and women of Him. And it's for this reason that it seems almost 'easier' to convict people of Christ and the need for baptism into Him in societies [e.g. radical Moslem ones] where the price for conversion to Him is death or serious persecution… than in the easy going Western countries where being 'Christian' is the normal cultural thing to do.

The Gospel was presented in different forms by the early preachers, according to their audience. John the baptist set the pattern in this. Having quoted the prophecy about the need for the rough to be made smooth and the proud to be humbled in order for them to accept Jesus, John "said *therefore* to the multitude… ye offspring of vipers" (Lk. 3:7 RV). He used tough and startling language because that was what the audience required. He had set his aims- to humble the proud. And so he used "therefore" appropriate approaches. The early preachers as Paul became all things to all men, so that they might win some. They therefore consciously matched their presentation and *how* they articulated the same basic truths to their audience.
But perhaps even his comment "Generation of vipers" was said with a heart of love and appeal, reflecting the "heart of mercy" which he had come to know in the Father. He was "the friend of the bridegroom" (Jn. 3:29)- the one who introduced the groom to the bride and arranged the marriage and then the wedding. John's "Generation of vipers" stuff was all part of his attempt to persuade the bride, Israel, to accept the groom, the Lord Jesus. He wasn't angrily moralizing, lashing out at society as many a dysfunctional preacher does today, working out his own anger by criticizing and condemning society in the name of God. No, John was appealing. He had an agenda and an aim- to bring Israel and the Son of God together in marriage.

When asked who he was, John's reply was simply: "a voice". He was nothing; his message about Jesus was everything. In all this there is a far cry from the self-confident, self-projecting speaking off the podium which characterizes so much of our 'preaching' today. So John's appeal to repentance was shot through with a recognition of his own humanity. It wasn't mere moralizing. We likely don't preach as John did because we fear that confronting people with their sins is inappropriate for us to do, because we too are sinners. But with recognition of our own humanity, we build a bridge between our audience and ourselves. In this context it's worth reconsidering Lk. 3:7: "Who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?". John said these words to those who were coming to him wishing to be baptized by him- exactly because he had warned them of the wrath to come. It's possible that John meant this as a rhetorical reflection, thus enabling us to paraphrase him something like this: 'And what kind of man am I, who am I, just another sinful guy like you, who has warned you to flee? I'm nothing- don't get baptized because of me, but because you repent and are committed to bringing forth the fruits of repentance". And it's worth meditating that if Israel had responded to his preaching, then the glorious salvation of God might have even then been revealed in the form of the Kingdom coming on earth, even then. But instead of heeding John's message, Israel in the end crucified their King, necessitating a latter day John the Baptist mission (Mt. 11:13,14; 17:11,12). And it's not going too far to suggest that our latter day witness to Israel and indeed to the world is to conducted in the spirit of John's preaching; hence the crucial importance of understanding the spirit and content of his witness.

3:8 *Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves: We have Abraham as our father. For I say to you, that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones*- The eagerness of John for the inculcation of faith is seen in the way He foresees the likely thought processes within men. "Begin not to say within yourselves...." (Lk. 3:8), He told a generation of vipers; and the Lord eagerly strengthened the centurion's faith when it was announced that faith was pointless, because his daughter had died. Always the Biblical emphasis is upon internal thought processes and the need to be aware of them. John's great convert Paul several times uses the same device in his letters- foreseeing the likely thought process in response to his message, and answering it ahead of time (e.g. 1 Cor. 15:35).

"These stones" was said perhaps pointing to the stones. Perhaps they were the 12 stones set up after the Jordan crossing (Josh. 3 and 4). There is a word play between *avanim*, stones, and *banim*¸sons. *Avanim*, stones, in turn sounds like *evyonim*, the term for the poor, the social outcasts- these were the "stones" which were being accepted into the covenant of grace.

3:9- see on Lk. 13:8; Col. 3:13.

And even now, the axe also lies at the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bring forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire- John's words about cutting down the fruitless tree are directly quoted by the Lord Jesus in Mt. 7:17-19; 12:33- as if to show His solidarity with John's teaching. Perhaps the Lord Jesus had heard these very words being preached by John when He went to be baptized by him. "Now [also]", right now; John felt that the day of Christ's judgment was very close. The language of gathering grain into the barn and burning the chaff is used by the Lord concerning the future judgment at His second coming (Mt. 13:30). John saw the Lord Jesus as already having the winnowing fork in His hand (Mt. 3:13), meaning

that in essence, judgment began with the ministry of Jesus. In essence, we stand before His judgment right now. Judgment day is not some unknown future entity which has no connection with this life.

3:10 *And the crowds asked him, saying: What then must we do?*- Luke phrases this in the same language he uses of the crowds who responded to Peter's preaching in Acts 2. The answer was the same- repent, accept Jesus as Messiah and be baptized. John saw the essence of the Christian gospel as just that, and it was essentially the same message taught by both John and Peter.

3:11 *And he answered and said to them: He that has two coats, let him give to him that has none, and he that has food, let him do likewise*- In order to prepare the way of the Lord, to make a level passage for Him, the man with two coats should give to him who had none, and likewise share his food. So the 'equality' and levelling was to be one of practical care for others. We have to ask, how often we have shared our food, clothing or money with those who don't have… for this is all part of preparing for the Lord's coming. It could even be that when there is more of what Paul calls "an equality" amongst the community of believers, that then the way of the Lord will have been prepared. And He will then return.

3:12 *And there came also tax collectors to be baptized; and they said to him: Teacher, what must we do?*- There is a parallel between desiring baptism and realizing that they must *do* something concretely in their lives. The baptism process brings us into the realm of God's gracious forgiveness and redemption, and into living contact with the real Christ. There is no way we can be passive to this and do nothing about it. Note that Matthew himself was a publican and also records this- this is an example of the Gospel records being a transcript of the message standardly taught by e.g. Matthew.

3:13 *And he said to them: Collect no more than what you have been ordered to*- John the Baptist showed a spirit of concession to human weakness in his preaching. He told the publicans: "Extort no more than that which is appointed you" (Lk. 3:13 RV). He tacitly accepted that these men would be into extortion. But within limits, he let it go. Likewise he told soldiers to be content with their wages- not to quit the job. And seeing there were no Roman Legions in Judaea at his time [Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.5.1], these were likely Jewish soldiers.

3:14 *And soldiers also asked him, saying: And we, what must we do? And he said to them: Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages*-

The nature of how demanding John was is reflected in his response to the soldiers and publicans. He didn't tell them to quit their jobs, but to live with integrity within those jobs. He told the soldiers to be content with their wages- implying he expected them to not throw in their job. And seeing there were no Roman Legions in Judaea at his time [Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.5.1], these were likely Jewish soldiers. He didn't tell them to quit their jobs, but to live with integrity within those jobs. He told the soldiers to be content with their wages- implying he expected them to not throw in their job. This is juxtaposed with the command for them to do no violence. But not grumbling about wages was as fundamental an issue for John as not doing physical violence to people. To have as Paul put it "Godliness with contentment" [another of his allusions to John's preaching?] is as important as not doing violence. And yet our tendency is to think that moaning about our wages is a perfectly normal and acceptable thing to do, whereas violence is of an altogether different order. It's like Paul hitting the Corinthians for their divisiveness, when if we'd been writing to them

we would likely have focused upon their immorality and false doctrine. John would have been far less demanding had he simply told the publicans and soldiers to quit their jobs. By asking them to continue, and yet to live out their lives within those jobs with Godly principles, He was being far more demanding.

John places complaining about wages [a common human fault] in juxtaposition with doing violence to others (Lk. 3:14)- to show that in his serious call to a devout and holy life, there are no such things as little sins. Ez. 16:49,50 defines the sins of Sodom as including "pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor… they were haughty, and committed abomination". The abomination of their sexual perversion is placed last in the list, as if to emphasize that all the other sins were just as much sin. Likewise Paul writes to the Corinthians about their failures, but he doesn't start where I would have started- with their drunkenness at the memorial meeting. Instead he starts off with their disunity. Those things which we may consider as lesser sins, the Bible continually lists together with those things we have been conditioned into thinking are the greater sins. Clearest of all is the way Paul lists schism and hatred in his lists of sins that will exclude from the Kingdom. The Anglo-Saxon worldview has taught that sexual sin is so infinitely far worse than a bit of argument within a church. But is this really right…?

3:15 *And as the people were in expectation, and all men reasoned in their hearts concerning John, whether he was the Christ-*

There was strong Messianic expectation. The fact they missed recognizing Messiah when He came... is evidence enough that a desire for a new age, for the coming of the Christ, is not the same as true spirituality. We must take the warning of Am. 5:18: "Woe to you who desire the day of Yahweh! Why do you long for the day of Yahweh? It will be darkness for you, and not light".

3:16 *John answered, saying to them all: I indeed baptize you with water, but there comes he that is mightier than I, whose shoelaces I am not worthy to untie. He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire-* The Greek for "mightier" is that translated 'stronger' and the idea of Jesus as the one 'stronger / mightier than' recurs in Lk. 11:22, where Jesus is 'mightier than' the 'strong man' who had previously posessed the house of Israel. That there is a connection of thought here cannot be denied, but the existence of such a connection doesn't of itself mean that there is a detailed semantic connection. Perhaps John's words had simply left a subconscious impression upon the word choice of the Lord.

Christ "shall baptize *you*" plural was deeply meditated upon by Paul, until he came to see in the fact that we *plural* are baptized the strong implication that therefore we should be one body, without unnecessary divisions (= 1 Cor. 12:13).

John prophesied that the disciples would be baptized with fire; this was fulfilled by tongues of Spirit descending which looked like fire (Acts 2:3). Evidently this was not literal fire or else it would not have rested on the heads of the disciples. So the words here spoke of how things would *appear* to the disciples, without saying so explicitly.

John described himself as a preacher of Christ who was not "worthy" to do so. The same Greek word is used by Paul when he says he is "not *meet* (s.w.) to be called an apostle" (1 Cor. 15:9); and that it was God's grace alone that had made him an "*able* (s.w. "worthy") minister of the Gospel" (2 Cor. 13:6). He knew that his "*sufficiency*" (s.w. "worthy") to give knowledge of salvation (John language- Lk. 1:77), to be a preacher, was from God alone (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5); and that in fact this

was true of *all* preachers. But do we really feel like this in our preaching? John was a burning and shining light to the world (Jn. 5:35), just as we should be (Phil. 2:15). And therefore, if we are to witness as John did, we need to have the humility of John in our preaching. He was 'in the Truth' from a baby, he lived a spiritual, self-controlled life. And yet he had this great sense of personal sinfulness and unworthiness as a preacher. It's difficult for those raised Christian to have the sense of sinfulness which Paul had, and thereby to have his zeal for preaching. But actually his zeal was a reflection of John's; and John was a 'good boy', brought up in the Faith. Yet he had a burning sense of his spiritual inadequacy. Anglo-Saxon Christianity urgently needs to capture his spirit. Truly Paul 'bore' Christ to the world just as John 'bore' (s.w.) Christ's Gospel (Acts 9:15 = Mt. 3:11). If ever a man was hard on himself, it was John the Baptist. His comment on his preaching of Christ was that he was not worthy (RVmg. 'sufficient') to bear Christ's sandals (Mt. 3:11). The sandal-bearer was the herald; John knew he was heralding Christ's appearing, but he openly said he was not worthy to do this. He felt his insufficiency, as we ought to ours. Would we had that depth of awareness; for on the brink of the Lord's coming, we are in a remarkably similar position to John. Paul perhaps directs us back to John when he says that we are not "sufficient" to be the savour of God to this world; and yet we are made sufficient to preach by God (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5,6 RV). To carry the master's sandals (Mt. 3:11) was, according to Vine, the work of the lowest slave. This was how John saw himself; and this is what witnessing for Jesus is all about, being the lowest slave and servant of the Lord of glory. It's interesting in this context to note how the Lord Jesus states that in some sense, John 'was Elijah', whereas he himself denies this (Mt. 11:14; 17:12; Mk. 9:13). Such was his humility.

"He shall baptize you" points up the contrast is between John baptizing unto repentance, and Jesus baptizing with the Holy Spirit. The contrast is between 'repentance' and 'the Holy Spirit'. I suggest that the idea is that the gift of the Holy Spirit would empower repentance and new-mindedness far more than what was achieved by unaided, steel-willed human repentance.

3:17 *Whose fan is in his hand, to cleanse his threshing-floor thoroughly, and to gather the wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire*- John says that the axe is laid to the root of the trees; his hearers were about to be cut down and thrown into the fire of condemnation. And He says that the Jesus whom he heralds is about to come and divide the wheat from the chaff in judgment, gathering in the wheat, and burning the chaff with "unquenchable fire" (Lk. 3:17). But the 'fire' of condemnation and the division of wheat and chaff is to be done ultimately at the Lord's second coming (Mt. 13:30; Mk. 9:48). But for John, the moment his audience met Jesus, they were standing before the Lord of judgment, the Judge of all the earth. In their response to Him, they were living out the final judgment. And this is just as true of us, both as preachers and hearers of the Gospel.

"He (Jesus) shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit (even) with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and... he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Mt. 3:11,12). John put a choice before them: fire, or fire. Either we are consumed with the fire of devotion to God, or we face the figurative fire of condemnation. This is the logic of judgment. John says that the axe is laid to the root of the trees; his hearers were about to be cut down and thrown into the fire of condemnation. And He says that the Jesus whom he heralds is about to come and divide the wheat from the chaff in judgment, gathering in the wheat, and burning the chaff with "unquenchable fire" (Lk. 3:17). But the 'fire' of condemnation and the division of wheat and chaff is to be done ultimately

at the Lord's second coming (Mt. 13:30; Mk. 9:48). But for John, the moment his audience met Jesus, they were standing before the Lord of judgment, the Judge of all the earth. In their response to Him, they were living out the final judgment. And this is just as true of us, both as preachers and hearers of the Gospel. The message that the Lord will "burn with unquenchable fire" those who reject Him is described as preaching "good tidings unto the people" (Lk. 3:18 RV). Likewise the stark teaching about the mortality of man in Is. 40 is quoted in 1 Pet. as being the Gospel. The harder side of God is in fact the good news for those who reflect deeply upon the essential message and nature of the Almighty. In Jer. 26:2, Jeremiah is warned to "diminish not a word, if so be…" Israel may repent. His temptation of course was to water down the message which he had to deliver. But only the harder, more demanding side of God might elicit response in them. By making the message less demanding, it wouldn't have any chance of eliciting a response.

3:18 *With many other appeals he preached good tidings to the people*- The need to repent is in fact good news. The message that the Lord will "burn with unquenchable fire" those who reject Him is described as Jesus preaching "good tidings unto the people" (Lk. 3:18 RV). Likewise the stark teaching about the mortality of man in Is. 40 is quoted in 1 Pet. as being the Gospel. The harder side of God is in fact the good news for those who reflect deeply upon the essential message and nature of the Almighty. In Jer. 26:2, Jeremiah is warned to "diminish not a word, if so be…" Israel may repent. His temptation of course was to water down the message which he had to deliver. But only the harder, more demanding side of God might elicit response in them. By making the message less demanding, it wouldn't have any chance of eliciting a response.

3:19 *But Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by him for marrying Herodias his brother's wife, and for all the evil things which Herod had done*- Josephus claims that she was in fact married to another relative, not Philip, before she married Herod (*Antiquities* 18:136). We can simply decide to trust the Biblical record over Josephus. Or it could be that Josephus refers to a previous relationship she had. See on Mt. 14:10 for another conflict with Josephus. John's example here raises the question of whether we should protest immoral behaviour in society. It could be argued that Herod claimed to be Jewish and therefore responsible to Divine law.

The laws of Lev. 18:16; 20:21 were applicable to Jews; which opens the wider question as to whether we ought to be drawing the attention of the world to their disobedience to Biblical principles, even though they do not claim any faith in the Bible. Criticizing others' ways of living leads to anger if the point isn't accepted; and we have a classic case of it here. The Herods were from Idumea, but although they weren't ethnic Jews, they claimed to be religious Jews. So it could be that John's attitude was that if someone considered themselves as being under God's law, then they should be obedient to it and were therefore culpable before Him for disobedience to it. In this case, we do not actually have here any reason to think that a Christian's duty is to lobby the unbelieving world leaders to be obedient to God's law.

3:20 *Also added this, that he locked John up in prison*- Even with very sinful men, their continual sins still register in the feelings of God. The way God progressively senses the weight of accumulated sin is reflected in His description of the Amorites' iniquity filling up (Gen. 15:16); or Israel marrying Gentiles "to increase the trespass of Israel" (Ezra 10:10). "The iniquity of Israel is bound up, his sin is kept in store" (Hos. 13:12). God sees some wicked men as more wicked than others; for He is sensitive to every one of their sins (e.g. 2 Kings 17:2). "For three transgressions

and for four" of Israel or the Gentiles, God would still punish Jew and Gentile alike (Am. 1,2)- i.e. He still feels the fourth sin, He doesn't become insensitive after the third sin. And this doesn't only apply to His people; but to all sin, committed by anyone, anywhere. Thus Herod "added yet this above all" when he imprisoned John after also sinning with another man's wife. We have an uncanny ability to become numb to sin the more we see or do it. But not so Almighty, all righteous God. This is a feature of His nature that needs meditation.

3:21 *Now it came to pass, when all the people were baptized, that Jesus also having been baptized and praying, the heaven was opened*- The Lord's baptism was in his case not for forgiveness, but as a sign of identity with "all the people". And Luke in his words here recognizes that. Sometimes God indicates from what perspective the record is written; at other times He doesn't. Thus Matthew 3:16 makes it clear that the Lord saw Heaven opened at his baptism, and the Spirit descending like a dove. But Luke 3:21-22 just says that "the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended". Luke doesn't say that this is only what happened from the Lord's perspective. This problem of perspective is at the root of the misunderstanding of the demon language in the Gospels.

3:22 *And the Holy Spirit descended upon him in a bodily form as a dove, and a voice came out of heaven: You are My beloved Son*- Surely an allusion to Gen. 22:2 (LXX), where the sacrificed Isaac was Abraham's beloved son.

In you I am well pleased- Combining references to Ps. 2:7 and Is. 42:1. Klausner: "In whom I shall be blessed". Quoted about the Lord also in Mt. 12:18; 17:5. The contrast is with how the Father was not "well pleased" with Israel when they were in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:5); but He was well pleased with His Son in the wilderness. Many prophecies about Israel, the 'servant' of Isaiah's prophecies, come true in Jesus. God's plan in Israel failed due to their disobedience, but the intention behind it came true in Jesus; He was the Son who fulfilled the Father's wishes after Israel failed Him. Jesus thus became the embodiment of Israel; He was their representative before God. It is in this context that the representative nature of the Lord Jesus was first established; He was God's Son who was fully representative of Israel. It is thereby through Him that Israel can be finally restored to their Father. See on 2 Pet. 1:17. The voice had the same intonation as the voice on the mount of transfiguration; it was the voice of God Himself in person. The Father's 'pleasure' spoke also of His 'will'. His will was done, and His pleasure thereby achieved, "in" His Son; because of the Lord's internal state of mind. And this sets the path toward understanding our own status "in Christ".

3:23 *And Jesus, when he began to teach, was about thirty years of age*- Thirty was the age at which priests began to minister; and yet Luke connects this with the Lord's beginning to teach. For the duty of priests was to teach.

Being the son (as was legally reckoned) of Joseph, the son of Heli- See on Lk. 2:49. The genealogies focus upon Joseph because Mary has already been stated to be the descendant of David, in his direct line. Giving the genealogies of Joseph is however a kind of concession to human weakness in not accepting genealogies through the mother; for Joseph was of course not the Lord's biological father. But even he could be traced as the rightful inheritor of Israel's throne had there been a monarchy at the time of Jesus. Jesus was his adopted son; he was "as was supposed", or 'as was reckoned by law', the son of Joseph. And the genealogy is included for the sake of those who reckoned by law. And yet the record in Luke appears to effectively be that of Mary; Joseph being "the son of Heli" was probably by reason of marrying

Mary, the daughter of Heli; the Talmud speaks with gross vitriolic about Mary the daughter of Heli going to hell for her blasphemy, referring to Mary the mother of Jesus. This shows that the Jews accept that Mary was the daughter of Heli. Heli's father was Matthat, who can be equated with Matthan the grandfather of Joseph. Thus Mary and Joseph were cousins (hinting at an arranged marriage?), and therefore Jesus was a son of David through both his mother and father by adoption. In the light of this it is evident that the question mark over the validity of a genealogy through Joseph is an irrelevancy, seeing that Joseph and Mary had a common grandfather. The point has to be made that a humanly fabricated genealogy would be sure to make some glaring errors, especially if it was produced by simple, uneducated men as the Jews claim the New Testament was. The wonder of the New Testament genealogies is that closer study reveals ever more intricate internal evidence for their truth and reliability, rather than exposing more problems.

The Talmud (*Treatise Bava Bathra*, 110a) claims that Mary the mother of Jesus was called the daughter of Heli. In this case we would then effectively have here the genealogy of Mary; and this is rather confirmed by the fact that Matthew's genealogy gives a man called Jacob as the Lord's grandfather, whereas Luke gives "Heli". Both can be correct, if one [i.e. Luke] is the genealogy of Mary as it were attached to Joseph, the "supposed" father of Jesus.

3:24 *The son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph*- This "Jannai" is identified by Philo with Hyrcanus the second, who reigned sixteen years.

3:25 *The son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai*- These are all identified by Philo as being kings during the period of the Maccabees.

3:26 *The son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda*- "Joda" or "Juda" is identified by Philo with Hyrcanus the first, in whom the kingly and priestly lines crossed, making him and his offspring 'king-priests'. This is how the Lord is portrayed, as a king who is also priest after the order of Melchizedek.

3:27 *The son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri*- Lk. 3:27 in some versions describes Zerubbabel as the head / chief / leader. The term Rhesa is incorrectly rendered in many versions as a name. Perhaps Luke's point was that the Lord Jesus was the final Messiah, after the failure of so many potential ones beforehand. 'Zerubbabel the chief' would then be a similar rubric to "David the king" in Matthew's genealogy (Mt. 1:16). It could be that Shealtiel adopted Zerubbabel.

3:28 *The son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er*- From verses 28 to 31 we have 20 names; Matthew for the same period has 14, demonstrating that the genealogies do not cover every generation; "son of" can mean grandson or descendant of. Those named are clearly for a purpose.

3:29 *The son of Jesus, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi*- The mention of a "Levi" could suggest that although this is the line through Judah, there was some intermarriage with the Levites; this made the Lord a king-priest, as required for the Messianic priest after the order of Melchizedek.

3:30 *The son of Symeon, the son of Judas, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim*- We read of a Levi in :29; now of a Simeon, Judah and Joseph. And yet this is the genealogy through Judah (:33). We can assume from these names that the tribes intermarried. This was far from ideal and was not God's intention; and

yet all this was in the genetic pool and background of the Lord Jesus. Yet none of these factors make us inevitable sinners, and the Lord overcame them as we can.

3:31 *The son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David*- The line is traced not through Solomon but rather through Nathan, named perhaps after the prophet Nathan who had rebuked David, and whom he so respected that he names a son after Nathan. Yet Nathan openly rebuked David for what he had done with Uriah and Bathsheba. This in the end led to deep respect.

3:32 *The son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon*- Boaz was unashamed to marry Ruth the Moabitess and raise up his seed to his relative, meaning that his inheritance would have to be further divided. This was at a time when the fields were split up into strips, as we also learn from the book of Ruth, and further subdividing the strips made farming difficult and unprofitable. The nameless relative who was closer to Ruth than Boaz refused to marry her because he didn't want to spoil the inheritance he was going to hand over to his existing children. And yet he who was so concerned about secular things and the good continuance of his name- found himself anonymous in the final account. It was Boaz, the one prepared to have more children and further subdivide his inheritance, who goes down in history as an ancestor of the Lord.

3:33 *The son of Amminadab, the son of Arni, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah*- Perez was born by the strange and immoral set of events recorded in Genesis 38, whereby Judah's daughter in law Tamar acted as a prostitute to seduce Judah to get her pregnant- and Perez was the result. So often it seems that pre-existing background, family and genetic issues all set up a person for spiritual failure. One lesson of these genealogies is that sin is not inevitable. The Lord Jesus had all this, and far more, in His ancestry- and yet He never sinned. We are a new creation in Him.

3:34 *The son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor*- This is a clear statement that the Lord was indeed the promised seed of the Jewish fathers. His humanity was critically important to the fulfilment of those promises.

3:35 *The son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah*- "Eber" has been suggested as the first occurrence of "Hebrew". The Lord is being presented as a well qualified Jew, despite the admixture of Gentile blood at many points. We note that it is Matthew, writing to Jews, who tends to mention the Gentile connections of the Lord's genealogy; whereas Luke, writing to Gentiles, doesn't emphasize them. Perhaps this was in order to demonstrate to them that indeed "salvation is of the Jews" (Jn. 4:22); Gentile salvation was brought about by the Lord being Israel's Messiah and fulfilling the promises to the Jewish fathers.

3:36 *The son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech*- The apparent differences with the genealogy in Gen. 10:24; 11:12; 1 Chron. 1:24 are because Luke is following the Septuagint rather than the Masoretic text. It is common for the New Testament writers to do this. We note that Shem's grandson was called Cainan; clearly there was intermarriage between the descendants of Noah, and the theory that different coloured human beings emerged from the three sons of Noah is simply fantasy.

3:37 *The son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of*

Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan- Luke is concerned with the facts of the genealogy; he could have done what people tend to do in presenting genealogies, and present the hero as continuing a prestigious line. Positive things could have been noted about Enoch and Methuselah, as we find when we read their histories in Genesis; but there is not a word about this. The great truth presented is that the Lord is truly the seed of Abraham and David, and really had our nature and connection with us all.

3:38 *The son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God*- The Roman emperors and Greek heroes sometimes traced their pedigree back to a god- and therefore the genealogies of Jesus we find in Matthew and Luke were quite radical in this regard. For they traced the pedigree of Jesus back to God- as if He were the emperor. This would have made this gospel record fobridden literature at some periods of the Roman empire and emperor cult.

LUKE CHAPTER 4

4:1 *And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness*- The Lord Jesus was led of the Spirit at His time of testing; and Paul uses just those words of us in our present experience of trial (Rom. 8:14). His victory in the wilderness therefore becomes a living inspiration for us, who are tempted as He was (Heb. 4:15,16). Note how Mark speaks of Jesus being 'driven' at this time. Being driven by circumstances can be a form of leading- it just depends which perspective we have.

4:2 *Being tempted by the Devil for forty days. And he ate nothing in those days; and when they were completed, he was hungry*- Commentary on what this passage does *not* mean can be found in my *The Real Devil*.

The only other two men recorded as doing this are Moses and Elijah (Ex. 34:28; 1 Kings 19:8). The Lord chose to seek to enter into their experience; it was presumably His decision to fast for this period. And the Father responded to that by giving Him the encouraging vision of those same two men at the transfiguration. We see here how God is in dialogue with man; if we wish to identify with some Bible character, the Father will respond His side to enable us to do so yet more.

With His familiarity with Scripture, Christ would have seen the similarities between Himself and Elijah, whose morale collapsed after 40 days in the wilderness (1 Kings 19: 8) and Moses, who forfeited his immediate inheritance of the land at the end of 40 years in the wilderness. Jesus at the end of 40 days, was in a similar position to them - faced with a real possibility of failure. Moses and Elijah failed because of human weakness - not because of a person called “the devil”. It was this same human weakness, the “Satan’ , or adversary, that was tempting Jesus.

The temptations were controlled by God for the Lord’s spiritual education. The passages quoted by the Lord to strengthen Himself against His desires (“devil”) are all from the same part of Deuteronomy, regarding Israel’s experience in the wilderness. Jesus clearly saw a parallel between His experiences and theirs:

Deuteronomy 8:2 “The Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart,	Matthew 4 / Luke 4 “Jesus led up of the spirit” “forty days” “in the wilderness”. Jesus was proved by the temptations. Jesus overcame by quoting the Scriptures that were in His heart (Ps. 119:11), thus

whether thou wouldest keep His commandments (word), or no.”	showing it was the Scriptures that were in His heart.
Deuteronomy 8:3. “And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna... that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word...of the Lord...”	“He was afterward an hungered". In John 6 manna is interpreted by Jesus as representing the Word of God, which Jesus lived by in the wilderness. Jesus learnt that spiritually He lived by the Word of God. “He answered...it is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word ...of God”.,
Deuteronomy 8:5 “Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee”	Jesus no doubt reflected on His experiences. God chastened His Son, Jesus- 2 Sam. 7:12; Ps. 89: 32.

Thus the Lord showed us how to read and study the Word - He thought Himself into the position of Israel in the wilderness, and therefore took the lessons that can be learnt from their experiences to Himself in His wilderness trials. The description of the Lord Jesus as being in the wilderness with beasts and Angels (Mk. 1:13) is another connection with Israel’s experience in the wilderness- they were plagued there by “wild beasts” because of their disobedience (Dt. 32:19-24 and context).

4:3 *And the Devil said to him: If you are the Son of God, command these stones that they become bread*- The first temptation- to turn stones into bread- would not in itself have been a sin if He had agreed to it. But it would have been choosing a lower level, by breaking His fast. But the next temptations were to actually sin. If He had agreed to the first suggestion, obedience to the next ones would have been harder. It could even be argued that to put the Lord to the test was permissible on a lower level- for passages like Ps. 34:8 and Mal. 3:10 almost encourage it for those with a weak faith. Gideon likewise put the Lord to the test and was answered. But the Lord chose the higher level: and He knew Scripture which could support it. But the fact He chose the highest level first of all, meant that He was better able to take the higher level again, and to finally overcome the third temptation, which was definitely a clear choice between right and wrong. More than this, anything other than a desire to make the highest maximum commitment can lead to failure. “The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left” (Ecc. 10:2 NIV) has been understood as referring not so much to right and wrong, good and evil, as to the highest good and lesser good (cp. how the left hand can stand for simply lesser blessing rather than outright evil, e.g. Gen. 48:13-20). The fool inclines to lower commitment. The wise will always incline to the maximum, wholehearted level.

It's perhaps noteworthy that in the wilderness temptation, the Lord responds to the "If you are the Son of *God*..." by quoting Dt. 8:3 "*man* shall not live by bread alone"- and the Jonathan Targum has *bar nasha* [son of man] here for "man". If we are correct in understanding those wilderness temptations as the Lord's internal struggles, we see Him tempted to wrongly focus upon His being Son of *God*, forgetting His humanity; and we see Him overcoming this temptation, preferring instead to perceive Himself as Son of *man*. The *if... then* structure here (a 'first class conditional') effectively means 'Because...' (See Craig A.
Evans, *Matthew* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2012) p. 83). In this case, we are clearly being

given an insight into the internal thinking of the Lord Jesus. 'Because You are Son of God, why not...'. A truly human Jesus would inevitably have had such thoughts, and the record here makes that clear. Seeing that Mary appears to have become somewhat influenced by the surrounding view of Jesus as her illegitimate son, it's likely the Lord too had moments when He wondered whether this could all be true- whether He really was God's Son.

4:4 *And Jesus answered him: It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone*- The Lord overcame all His temptations by quoting from Deuteronomy, showing that His mind was seeking strength from the words of the Angel leading Israel through the wilderness. There are clear similarities between the Angel's leading of Israel through the wilderness and the Lord's experience in the wilderness:

Deuteronomy 8	Luke 4
v. 2 "The Lord your God [an Angel] led you... in the wilderness"	v. 1 Jesus led by the spirit (an Angel?) into the wilderness.
Forty years in the wilderness	Forty days in the wilderness
v. 3 "He (the Angel who led them in v. 2) suffered you to hunger".	The Angel made Jesus hunger.
The Angel "fed you with manna" (Ps. 78:25)	Jesus was tempted to ask the Angel to provide bread as He did to Israel in their testing.
"Man does not live by bread alone"	v. 4 "Man does not live by bread alone"

Thus the Lord Jesus surveyed His own experience in the wilderness, and saw that He could take to Himself personally the lessons given to Israel. The Angel led Israel through the wilderness "to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments or no" (Dt. 8:2). God Himself knows anyway, so this must be regarding the Angel, seeking to know the spiritual strength of Israel, as Job's Satan Angel sought to know Job's strength. Similarly, the Lord's Angel led Him into the wilderness, suffering Him to hunger, to humble and prove Him, to reveal His real attitude to the word of God. His quoting of the word to answer the temptations surely proved this to the Angel, especially since the Lord showed Himself so capable of thinking Himself into Scripture, and therefore taking the lessons most powerfully to Himself. The Lord was made to realize the importance of His memory of the word, as He would have later reflected that this was the only way He had overcome- that man spiritually lives by "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God". As a result of their wilderness temptations, both Israel and Christ were led to "consider in (their) heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God (the Angel) chasteneth thee". The chastenings of the Lord spiritually in the wilderness were therefore arranged by the Angels. There did not have to be Angels actually tempting Christ in the wilderness temptations- because they can act directly on a man's heart, they can lead us into temptation. The fact we pray for Him not to implies that He

does- through the Angels, as He Himself tempts no man (James 1:13), although the Angels tempted Abraham, and Israel among others. Thus the Angels may arrange an external stimulus, e. g. the fruit of the tree of knowledge, knowing it must produce certain internal desires within us which tempt us. Note how the temptation to throw Himself off the top of the temple was a temptation to misuse Angelic care. He answered it by a quotation which has an Angelic context: "You (Jesus) shall not tempt the Lord your God, as ye tempted Him in Massah" (Dt. 6:16). At Massah the Israelites put the Angel to the test by questioning whether He could provide water (Ex. 17:2-7).

4:5 *And he led him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time*- This was surely a vision or imagination of the Kingdom, when "the kingdoms of this world" becomes those of the Lord Jesus. It can hardly be that a fiendish being took the Lord Jesus literally up the highest mountain (Everest) from where He could see all the world. Nor would being up a tall mountain enable the Lord to see "the glory of them". Surely a non-literal event is implied here- within the Lord's mind.

The temptations are hard to take literally:

- Matthew 4:8 implies that Jesus was led up into a high mountain to see all the kingdoms of the world in their future glory, “In a moment of time”. There is no mountain high enough to see all the world. And why would the height of the mountain enable Jesus to see what the world would be like in the future? The earth, being a sphere, there is no point on its surface from which one can see all the parts of the world at one time.

- A comparison of Matthew 4 and Luke 4 shows that the temptations are described in a different order. Mark 1:13 says that Jesus was “in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan”, whilst Matthew 4:2,3 says that “when he had fasted forty days... the tempter (Satan) came to Him...”. Because Scripture cannot contradict itself, we can conclude that these same temptations kept repeating themselves. The temptation to turn stones into bread is an obvious example. This would fit nicely if these temptations occurred within the mind of Jesus. Being of our nature, the lack of food would have affected him mentally as well as physically, and thus his mind would have easily begun to imagine things. Just going a few days without food can lead to delirium for some (cp. 1 Sam. 30:12). The similarity between rolls of bread and stones is mentioned by Jesus in Mt. 7: 9, and doubtless those images often merged in his tortured mind - although always to be brought into swift control by his recollection of the Word

- Jesus probably told the Gospel writers the record of His temptations, and to bring home in words the intensity of what He underwent, He could have used the figurative approach seen in Matthew 4 and Luke 4.

- It seems unlikely that several times the devil led Jesus through the wilderness and streets of Jerusalem and then scaled a pinnacle of the temple together, all in view of the inquisitive Jews. Josephus makes no record of anything like this happening - presumably it would have caused a major stir. Similarly, if these temptations occurred several times within the forty days as well as at the end of that period (which they did at least twice, seeing that Matthew and Luke have them in different order), how would Jesus have had time to walk to the nearest high mountain (which could have been Hermon in the far north of Israel), climb to the top and back down again, return to the wilderness and then repeat the exercise? His temptations all occurred in the wilderness - He was there for forty days, tempted all the time by the devil (he only departed at the end). If Jesus was tempted by the devil each day, and the temptations occurred only in the wilderness, then it follows that Jesus could not have left the

wilderness to go to Jerusalem or travel to a high mountain. These things therefore could not have literally happened.

4:6 *And the Devil said to him: To you will I give all this authority and the glory of them. For it has been delivered to me, and to whomsoever I will, I give it*- The Lord knew full well that "all things" (Mt.), the Kingdom of God when the kingdoms of this world have been subsumed beneath it, could only be given to Him to God. He was tempted to play God, to assume that by His own action He could grasp it for Himself without the cross. It is perhaps to this that Paul alludes when he writes that the Lord did not consider such equality with God a thing to be even grasped after (Phil. 2:6). Again we see how the essence of the wilderness temptations returned to the Lord on the cross. For Phil. 2:6 specifically speaks of the Lord in His time of dying.

4:7 *Therefore, if you will worship me, it shall all be yours*- All the kingdoms of the world will indeed be the Lord's. This was the subtlety of the temptation. The question was when and how that was to be achieved. The Lord knew that the cross must come before that crown. But the temptation would have been to try to circumvent that, and this is portrayed as falling down and worshipping self.

4:8 *And Jesus answered and said to him: It is written, you shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve*- The record of the Lord's wilderness temptations is almost certainly a reflection of *His* self-perception; He spoke to the 'devil' / personification of sin which was within Him, He saw Himself as two people, and His spiritual man triumphed gloriously against the man of the flesh. He understood that we can only serve two masters: God or the flesh ("mammon" is another personification of the flesh, similar to 'satan'). He saw His own flesh, His own internal thoughts, as a master begging to be served which He must totally reject. His words are a quotation from Dt. 6:13, which warns Israel to serve Yahweh alone and not idols. He perceived His own natural mind and desire as an idol calling to be served. When the Lord explained what had happened in the wilderness to the disciples and thereby to the Gospel writers, He opened His heart to them. He gave us all a window on how He perceived Himself, as He sought to explain to men the internal struggles of the Son of God. Bringing it all back home, I must ask firstly how much we even *struggle* with temptation? And as and when we do, would we not be helped by the Lord's example of talking to ourselves, and personalizing Scripture as He did? 'You don't want to do *that*! Give up your place in the Kingdom, for that... drug, that girl, that job? Of course not! Come on. There *is* a way of escape; Paul told me God won't try me beyond my strength, He will make me a way of escape'.

4:9 *And he led him to Jerusalem, set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him: If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down from here*- The idea may well be that He was imagining being received into rulership of the Messianic Kingdom, and was wondering whether that would be possible through accepting 'the devil', be it His own flesh or the Jewish system, who humanly speaking seemed able to offer a path to this. Likewise '*set him*' in Mt. 4:5 carries the idea of being appointed, established in authority.

4:10 *For it is written: He shall give His angels charge concerning you, to guard you*- The Angels were given "charge concerning thee" (Jesus)- in the court of Heaven, God's purpose was declared and His charge made clear concerning His Son (Lk. 4:10 RVmg.).

Presumably this was to be taken literally- the Angels physically with Him would have literally held Him under the arms if He jumped from the temple. So we see the literal physical presence of the Angels in our lives. The eyes of God, an evident reference to the Angels, are associated with the temple (1 Kings 8:29; Ps. 11:4; Ps. 5:6-8). The implication surely is that the Angel[s] specifically functioned in the temple / sanctuary. It seems that great stress is placed in Scripture on the Angels physically moving through space, both on the earth and between Heaven and earth, in order to fulfill their tasks, rather than being static in Heaven or earth and bringing things about by just willing them to happen.

The 'devil' of the Lord's own thoughts tempted Him to apply Ps. 91:11 in a wrong context, and jump off the pinnacle of the temple. But if the Lord had gone on, as surely He did, He would have found the words: "You shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shall you trample under feet" (Ps. 91:13). This promise would have been of wonderful comfort, as throughout the wilderness temptations the Lord "was with the wild beasts" (Mk. 1:13).

4:11 *And on their hands they shall carry you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone*- Presumably this was to be taken literally- the Angels physically with Him would have literally held Him under the arms if He jumped from the temple. So we see the literal physical presence of the Angels in our lives. The eyes of God, an evident reference to the Angels, are associated with the temple (1 Kings 8:29; Ps. 11:4; Ps. 5:6-8). The implication surely is that the Angel[s] specifically functioned in the temple / sanctuary. It seems that great stress is placed in Scripture on the Angels physically moving through space, both on the earth and between Heaven and earth, in order to fulfil their tasks, rather than being static in Heaven or earth and bringing things about by just willing them to happen (Gen. 18:10).

4:12 *And Jesus answering said to him: It is said, you shall not test the Lord your God*- The Greek in Matthew effectively means 'On the other hand, it is also written...'. The Lord Jesus did not try to reconcile the two verses, He accepted them as part of a dialectic whereby this verse says that but this verse says this- which is typical Hebrew reasoning. Geek reasoning would seek to explain that this verse says this, but that is qualified by this other verse, so the truth is a mixture between the two verses. The Hebrew style of reasoning leaves apparent contradictions to the Western, Greek reasoning mind. But they are not this at all, just dialectical style.

4:13 *And when the Devil had completed every temptation, he departed from him for a time*- The essence of all the temptations returned to the Lord, particularly in Gethsemane and on the cross. Every time we discern them returning, they are at the hands of the Jews- to become king immediately in Jn. 6, to come down from the cross. Which leads us to perceive that the 'devil' in the wilderness may have been manifested through the Jewish satan; the idea of the Jewish system as the great satan or adversary to the Lord and His later work is continued throughout the New Testament.

4:14 *And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee, and the news about him went out throughout all the region*- This was no glorious entry into Galilee; He withdrew into Galilee (Mt. 4:12) after cleansing the temple (Jn. 2:13-22), taking the imprisonment of John as the sign to begin His ministry. He felt He was withdrawing, heavy in spirit at the loss of John the Baptist to prison, but in the eyes of the world, it was a triumphal entry (:15). "The power of the Spirit" may mean that He began doing

miracles, thus accounting for news of Him spreading like wildfire, or simply that He was propelled by the leadership of the Spirit as we can be today.

4:15 *And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all*- The entry to Galilee could be that of Jn. 4:43, meaning that by this stage He had already turned water into wine at Cana (Jn. 2). The miracles had begun, but the 'glorifying' of Jesus is presented as in connection with His teaching rather than His miracles. This is an important theme- that His teaching was far more significant than His miracles. And that teaching we have recorded for us. It ought to elicit the same desire to glorify Him.

4:16 *And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and he entered, as his custom was, into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read*- This suggests He had been a regular synagogue attender and reader, but somehow this time, as He read the Messianic prophecies, it was clear that He was the word made flesh. He was the One. He must have previously somehow contained the fact He was the Messiah, living His life of perfect obedience in a somehow obscured manner. Now, He let down the mask and revealed Himself for who He was.

4:17 *And there was delivered to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And he opened the book, and found the place where it was written*- The record is as it were of a video capture, focusing on every detail of His body language- He stood up to read (:16), the scroll was delivered into His hands, He opened it and He found the place in the scroll. All this is to present in more visual form what John states more enigmatically- the word was made flesh.

Although the Greek *euangelion* is not used, the LXX of Is. 40:9; 52:7 and 60:1,2 clearly envisage a Messianic figure proclaiming the "good news" of Israel's freedom from oppression and sin. The Lord seems to assume that His audience would know what 'good news' He had in view. Perhaps He was alluding to those Servant Songs in Isaiah, and saying that the good news is of "the Kingdom of God". And He goes on in Matthew particularly to explain that this good news is of the life of forgiveness and grace lived out now, under the rulership of God, and coming to its material climax in His second coming and the literal establishment of God's Kingdom on earth.

4:18 *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and the recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those that are bruised*- The Lord began His ministry by proclaiming a freedom from burdens through Him (Lk. 4). And He concludes it by telling the disciples to proclaim the same deliverance (Lk. 24:47). Consider how He brings together various passages from Isaiah in His opening declaration in Lk. 4:18: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach [proclaim] [Heb. 'call out to a man'] the acceptable year of the Lord". This combines allusions to Is. 61:1 (Lev. 25:10); Is. 58:6 LXX and Is. 61:2.
Is. 58:6 AV: "To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free (cp. Dt. 15:12 re freedom of slaves, s.w.), and that you break every yoke" is in the context of an insincerely kept year of Jubilee in Hezekiah's time, after the Sennacherib invasion. Is. 58 has many Day of Atonement allusions- the year of Jubilee began on this feast. We are as the High Priest declaring the reality of forgiveness to the crowd. Hence Lk. 24:47 asks us to proclaim a Jubilee of atonement. The Greek for "preach" in Lk. 24:47 and for "preach / proclaim the acceptable year"

in Lk. 4:19 are the same, and the word is used in the LXX for proclaiming the Jubilee. And the LXX word used for 'jubilee' means remission, release, forgiveness, and it is the word used to describe our preaching / proclaiming forgiveness in Lk. 24:47. It could be that we are to see the cross as the day of atonement, and from then on the Jubilee should be proclaimed in the lives of those who accept it. It's as if we are running round telling people that their mortgages have been cancelled, hire purchase payments written off...and yet we are treated as telling them something unreal, when it is in fact so real and pertinent to them. And the very fact that *Yahweh* has released others means that we likewise ought to live in a spirit of releasing others from their debts to us: "The creditor shall release that which he hath lent… *because* the Lord's release hath been proclaimed" (Dt. 15:2 RV).

Isaiah 61 was the Jewish synagogue reading for the Day of Atonement and especially on the first day of a jubilee year, and it could be that the Lord is alluding to this when He said that "today" those words were coming true. Perhaps that day was a day of atonement. He was the means for atonement, on which basis the Jubilee was proclaimed; the good news of Messiah was not so much a political kingdom free from the Romans, but the good news of atonement for sin.

Christ means 'Messiah', the anointed one. He was anointed in order "to preach the Gospel"; and we too have been anointed insofar as we are in Christ, the anointed one (2 Cor. 1:21). Therefore as He was ordained a preacher of the Gospel to the world, we too share that honour (as we do all His honours, to some extent). He was anointed ('oiled') by God in order to give the oil of joy to His people; He shared His experience of anointing with us, and we must go out and do likewise (Is. 61:1,2 cp. Lk. 4:18).

4:19 *To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord*- See on :18. To preach [proclaim] the acceptable year of the Lord (Lk. 4:19) is thus parallel with "You shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants" (Lev. 25:10). Likewise there are to be found other such allusions to the proclamation of Jubilee: "We as workers together with him, beseech you also that you receive… the grace of God… a time accepted… in the day of salvation [the Jubilee] have I succoured you: behold, now is the accepted time" (2 Cor. 6:1,2) "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached [proclaimed, s.w. 4:19] in his name among all nations" (Lk. 24:47).

4:20 *And he closed the book and gave it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him*- "The word was made flesh" in daily reality for Jesus. The extraordinary connection between the man Jesus and the word of God which He preached and spoke is reflected here, as noted on :17. Here we have as it were an exquisite close up of Jesus, His very body movements, His handling of the scroll, and the movement of the congregation's eyes. Notice that at this stage He had only read from the scroll, and not yet begun His exposition of what He had read. The impression I take from this is that there was an uncanny connection between Him and the word of His Father. The Son reading His Father's word, with a personality totally in conformity to it, must have been quite something to behold. He was the word of God made flesh in a person, in a way no other person had or could ever be. See on Lk. 4:36; Jn. 14:10.

4:21 *And he began to say to them: Today has this scripture been fulfilled in your hearing*- It was fulfilled "today" in that it was on that day that He chose to remove the mask He had worn before His neighbours, and reveal Himself for who He was- the Messiah.

Some prophecies are fulfilled according to the acceptance of their fulfillment by believers, and therefore have their fulfilments in different ways at different times. Thus for those who received it, Malachi's 'Elijah' prophecies were fulfilled in John the Baptist, for those who accepted him (Mt. 11:14). The implication is that for those who didn't, those prophecies weren't fulfilled. He didn't mean that His reading those words in a synagogue had fulfilled them. He speaks of "your ears" or "hearing" as standing for 'your correct perception / understanding' in Mt. 13:16. What He was surely saying was that for those of them who perceived who He was, Isaiah's words were ringing true. For those who rejected Him, of course, they weren't fulfilled, and therefore their complete, universal acceptance / fulfilment would be delayed until a future day; just as it was with the 'Elijah' prophecy.

4:22 *And all bore him witness, and wondered at the words of grace which proceeded out of his mouth; and they said-*

We see how easily man changes position. Initially they were impressed ["bore him witness" means just that]. They marvelled at His words of grace. But then, as we read on, we find they stumbled. They struggled to accept that someone as human as Jesus could actually be this gracious Messiah. Just as many stumble over His humanity today, and invent "another Jesus". And then when He stresses that there will not be any miracles done for them, although other villages experienced them... their animal self-interest was piqued. If there was no immediate benefit for them whereas there apparently had been for others... they were gone. They forgot about His gracious words. And turned to anger with Him to such an extent they attempted to lynch Him there and then. Despite the amazing possibilities declared to them from the potential fulfilment of Isaiah 61 there and then. Not least the way the Lord stopped short of quoting "And the day of vengeance". He had dealt with judgment. His focus was upon the wonderful transformation and salvation now possible. We see so many initially respond to the Lord's words, and then fall away for similar basic reasons. We think of the enthusiasm of the crowds at the Lord's final triumphal entry to Jerusalem, which soon turned to similar hatred when they realized they stood to get nothing out of Him immediately.

Because of the gracious words and manner of speaking of Jesus, therefore God so highly exalted Him (Ps. 45:2). The Father was *so* impressed with the words of His Son. Lk. 4:22 records how people were amazed at the gracious words He spoke, as in Jn. 7:46; there was something very unusual in His manner of speaking. Evidently there must have been something totally outstanding about His use of language. God highly exalted Him because He so loved righteousness and hated wickedness (Ps. 45:7), and yet also because of His manner of speaking (Ps. 45:2); so this *love* of righteousness and hatred of evil was what made His words so special.

Is this not Joseph's son?- Mary had clearly not shared with others what had happened around the Lord's conception. She had perhaps come to see Him as Joseph's son by the time she rebuked Him at age 12 in the temple, when she refers to Joseph as His father. She became influenced in her view of the Lord by the view of others. And we can take a warning from this. Such was His humanity that He appeared to have just followed the profession of His supposed 'father' on earth. In essence, the same is happening to Trinitarians. They just can't hack that Jesus, Son of God, perfect human being... was truly human, with a human brother, mother and relatives. And so they have stumbled off into various wrong theories and theologies about Jesus to try to rationalize and spiritually legitimise their lack of faith in Him as a human person.

One of the most surpassing wonders of the Lord's character was that He could live for 30 years in a small town in Galilee, never ever committing sin, and never ever omitting an act of righteousness... and yet when He stood up and basically proclaimed Himself to be Messiah, the people were scandalized. They were shocked that this carpenter's son should think He was anything much more than them. Yet whenever we try to be a bit more righteous than our fellows, it's always noticed and held against us. Yet the Lord Jesus was both perfect, and also in favour with men. He came over as the ordinary guy, and yet He was perfect, and the light of this world. In this there is a matchless example for us. This wondrous feature of the Lord's achievement in His own character is reflected by the way His own brothers, who knew Him better than any, perceived Him to be just an ordinary person. When He started implying that He was the Son of God, they thought He'd gone crazy. When He declared Himself as Messiah, the people who had grown up with Him were scandalized. He was *so* human that even though He never sinned, the people who intimately knew Him for 30 years thought that He was truly one of them. In our making the word flesh, we tend to irritate people by our apparent righteousness, or turn them away from us by our hypocrisy. But the Lord truly made the word flesh, to the extent that the very dregs of society could relate to Him as one of them. There is a wonder in this that requires sustained meditation.

4:23 *And he said to them: Doubtless you will say to me this proverb: Physician, heal yourself. Whatever we have heard done at Capernaum, do also here in your hometown*- The nobleman's son had been cured in Capernaum, as recorded in John. "Heal yourself" could suggest the Lord had some illness or physical weakness. The language of Isaiah 53 is full of allusion to leprosy. He may have had the appearance of leprosy, some skin condition, whilst not having leprosy itself. This would speak much of the Lord's relationship with sin.

4:24 *And he said: Truly I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his own hometown*- We need to ask *why* this is so true. In the first century Palestinian world, a person wasn't defined so much by 'who they were' as by 'whom they belonged to and where they originated from'. Hence their problem with seeing that the Lord had access to wisdom and power which they did not have as a group. He didn't get that from them- and this confused them and their lack of understanding it turned to anger with Him. He had become different to them, therefore He was not of them- so they reasoned. And yet He *was* of them- the record stresses that they were His natural *patris*("country") and *oikos* ("family"). This is the same problem as Trinitarians have- they can't see that the Lord could have what He had, and yet be one of us, of our human nature. And perhaps that partly explains their frequently observed anger with non-Trinitarian Christians. This proverb is quoted again in Jn. 4:44 but in a different sense. The Lord is recorded as leaving Judea and going to Galilee exactly because a prophet has no honour in "His own country". Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, not in Galilee. It could be that He went to Galilee from Judea because the "country" He had in mind here in quoting this proverb was Bethlehem, rather than Nazareth. And yet in Mt. 13:57 He uses this proverb about Nazareth. Perhaps this explains His deep amazement at His rejection now in Nazareth- see on Mt. 13:58.

4:25 *But of a truth I say to you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there came a great famine over all the land*- See on James 5:16-18. We only learn of the length of the famine in the New Testament. Three and a half years is a period we often meet in the latter day prophecies- 1260 days, 42 months, a time, times [two times] and a half.

This latter day period is therefore flagged up as the time of the ministry of the latter day Elijah, as an appeal for Israel to repent.

4:26 *And to none of them was Elijah sent, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman that was a widow*- In the context of :27, the implication would be that this woman too was a Gentile. Even at the start of His ministry, the Lord stressed Gentile acceptance. This was not simply because He realized Israel would reject Him and the door thereby opened to the Gentiles; but because He understood that the good news of the Hope of Israel was in fact good news for the Gentile world if they embraced that hope.

4:27 *And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them were cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian*- When Naaman's maid asserted that Elisha could cure him of his leprosy, this was not therefore based on experience. She had not even heard of Elisha curing any lepers in Israel. But she believed it was the kind of thing he could do.

4:28 *And they were all filled with anger in the synagogue as they heard these things*- There is a similar account in Mt. 13:55-58. If this is indeed a later, similar incident, then we marvel at how despite this rejection, the Lord later returned to give them another chance- and was treated likewise. Anger is demonstrated here to be rooted in a bad conscience. They realized the truth of who He was, but refused to accept it. And this leads to anger. Much human anger, although not all of it, is rooted in such bad conscience. And the anger is directed at the one[s] whose words have been rejected.

4:29 *And they rose up and threw him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might throw him down headlong*- This was the punishment for a heretic. They knew He said the truth, but because it demanded so much of them, they claimed He was heretical. So many cries of 'heresy' and 'heretic' are psychologically rooted in a subconscious refusal to accept the truths presented. I suggest this is why there has been such a long tradition of hatred, anger and calling of 'heretic' against those who preach a non-trinitarian Jesus. If He truly had our nature and therefore was not God, this demands so much of us. And men shy away from that and cry 'heresy' rather than be challenged as to what are the very high possibilities for we who share the nature the Lord had when mortal.

There may be an allusion here to Jephthah, who had been "despised and rejected of men" during the time of Israel's suffering. In this and many other ways he is a clear type of Christ. Jephthah reminded the "elders of Gilead" who were now seeking his help, "Did not you hate me, and expel me out of my father's house?" (Jud. 11:7). The Hebrew for "expel" is also translated 'thrust out'; Jesus was 'thrust out' from his native town as Jephthah was from Gilead, perhaps a technical term for local excommunication from the city synagogue region. It was "the elders" who were also responsible for Christ's rejection. He was despised as "the son of a strange woman" (Jud. 11:2) as the Lord was accused of being born out of wedlock (Jn. 8:41).

4:30 *But he passing through the midst of them went his way*- The Lord clearly had the ability to avoid capture and death. This explains why towards the end of His ministry He was not taken and killed earlier. He gave His life, it was not taken from Him (Jn. 10:17,18). So we see highlighted the fact that He could have avoided the cross, but chose not to- the essence of His wilderness temptations.

4:31 *And he came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath day*- He had been there earlier (:23), and cured the nobleman's son

there. But Luke is writing for Gentiles, and so he mentions where Capernaum was located.

4:32 *And they were astonished at his teaching; for his word was with authority*- The synagogue minister gave the lesson or sermon, but invited members of the congregation to contribute their thoughts. The Lord's message would therefore have been brief, but so powerful that it astonished people. The Gospel records twelve times record astonishment at the Lord's teaching. How could the passage of mere ideas from the larynx of a Palestinian Jew be so utterly astonishing, no matter how profound the content of the message? The Old Testament prophets likewise spoke God's word, but they were met with cynicism and mocking. Surely there was another factor which elicited such astonishment at His teaching, and I suggest it was in the way that His person was so perfectly congruent with the amazing ideas He was teaching. He was after all the word made flesh.

His authority was based upon something. And I suggest it was not His miracles, but rather the congruence between His person and His word. The scribes indeed claimed authority. But the teaching of Jesus somehow had that authority within itself. It was not therefore just the nature or profundity of the ideas and content itself which were authoritative. He really did have authority, and He didn't need to make any claim to having it. The amazing challenge is in the parable of Mk. 13:34, where the Lord gives His authority to us His servants... We are not merely standing on a street lamely holding out tracts, offering them to anyone willing to come up and take one. We have an element of His authority if we are teaching His word in His Name; and thus Paul uses the word when speaking of his 'authority in the [preaching of] the Gospel' (1 Cor. 9:18; 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10; 2 Thess. 3:9). And in our personal standing before the Father, we likewise have been given authority by the Lord Jesus to be the sons of God (Jn. 1:12). Paul realized we have each been given this authority, and uses the same word when warning believers not to let their "authority" (AV "this liberty of yours") cause others to stumble (1 Cor. 8:9).

4:33 *And in the synagogue, there was a man that had a spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice*- Notice that the man [singular] cried out in the plural ["us... we", :34], and then changes immediately back to the singular "I know you..." (:34). This is a classic case of schizophrenia- not literal demon possession.

4:34 *Leave us alone! What have we to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are! The Holy One of God*!- See on :33. Notice the changes of pronouns from plural to singular. The supposedly spirit-possessed man was what we would call a man suffering from multiple personality disorder or a schizophrenic. Perhaps the dominant personality of the man was that which could say "I know who you are- the Holy One of God". "You Nazarene" may suggest this man had met the Lord previously, and was one of the few who during the Lord's carpenter years had perceived that He was God's Holy One. Despite his affliction, in his deepest heart and most fundamental personality, the mentally ill man perceived what few others did- that Jesus was the Son of God. The man's less dominant personalities feared condemnation and destruction from this Son of God, and wanted Him to leave. The dominant personality recognized Him as Son of God, and maybe we are to imagine him saying "I know who you are..." said in a totally different tone of voice, as if another person was speaking compared to the ones who feared condemnation and didn't want closer engagement with Jesus. That same struggle, in essence, goes on in the mind of every person as they come to Jesus; a desire to pull back before it gets too serious and risky, and yet another desire to accept Him for who He is, the saviour Son

of God. The Lord's apparent exorcism of the other personalities therefore left the man with who he really was in his heart of confused hearts- a believer in Jesus as God's Holy Son.

4:35 *And Jesus rebuked him, saying: Hold your peace and come out of him. And when the demon had thrown him down in the midst, he came out of him, having done him no hurt*- If as suggested on :34, the man had multiple personalities, the Lord is rebuking the less dominant personality. He speaks of course in terms which the man would have related to- of demon possession. The language of "rebuke" is appropriate to rebuking a personality; for one could hardly "rebuke" a person for being mentally disturbed. That is not a moral issue.

This is recorded from the perspective of the onlooking crowd, with their beliefs and observations coloured by those beliefs. The video camera of the Gospel writer is as it were focused on them, and therefore the language of demon possession is used. The Greek for "tearing" used in Mark at this point is literally 'to make gasp'. It is appropriate to an epileptic convulsion or fit. But these incidents are not the work of indwelling demons; for they can be managed by medication today. The convulsion is described in the language of the day, as if there was a struggle within the man, and then in the man's panting afterwards we are invited to imagine a spirit departing from him. There was no actual "unclean spirit" involved; the cure was of personality, as noted on :34, it was as if one of the man's less dominant personalities now left him. And that is the kind of healing which the Lord through the Spirit can work today.

4:36 *And amazement came upon all, and they spoke together, one with another, saying: What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits and they come out*- See on :32. We can see here one reason why the Lord 'went along' with their misunderstanding about evil spirits. They were left with the impression, within their albeit incorrect worldview, that His *teaching* had the power to change radically, and to cause a spirit or mindset to depart from a person permanently. They thereby perceived that His words had power; the ideas in His teaching were of themselves powerful.

4:37 *And there went a rumour concerning him into every place of the region round about*- "Rumour" is literally "a noise". The word about the Lord Jesus went to "every place", every isolated dwelling. The Lord clearly used an economy of miracle, but He did so initially in order to publicize His Messianic claims and above all, His message. For we have noted above that He was using the miracles to exemplify and back up His message.

4:38 *And he rose up from the synagogue and entered into the house of Simon. And Simon's wife's mother was sick with a high fever*- The Greek literally means ‘to be on fire’. This is yet another example of phenomenological language. A high temperature was thought to be a sign that something was on fire within a person; that wrong idea is repeated without correction, just as the language of demons is. The simple point being made, time and again, is that however folk understood disease, the power of the Lord Jesus was so infinitely greater that whatever was supposed to be causing the illness effectively didn’t exist.

And they made request of him concerning her- Mt. 8:14 says: "And when Jesus had entered Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother lying", as if the Lord noticed the problem and took the initiative to assist, rather than being asked to- although Luke says they did ask Him. But they asked for what He already had noticed and knew all

about. Mk. 1:31 states that “they [told] Him about her” and He responded. Surely the overall picture is that He did notice her need. But He waited to be asked before responding- not because He would not otherwise have responded, but because He wanted to pique the intensity of request and entreaty on their part. We sense the same spirit in how He appeared to be asleep on the sinking boat, and how He made as if He would go further on the way to Emmaus. And His apparent silence in our own lives is surely to provoke our prayerfulness and faith likewise.

4:39 *And he stood over her and rebuked the fever; and it left her*- Also the language of the day, because illness was understood as having to go somewhere when it was healed.

And immediately she rose up and served them- Her response to her healing was to serve the Lord and His people. This should be the underlying motive why we ask for healing and good health- so that we can serve. And our response to the Lord’s touching of us can never be passive- it involves some level of active serving. Perhaps the use of *diakoneo* looks forward to the office and practice of women being deacons, ministers, in the early church. For the church of any age is to be an extension of the men and women who followed the Lord Jesus in Galilee. There was a Rabbinic prohibition of women serving men at table, so this is yet another instance of the Lord and His people being driven by their desire to respond to God's grace to breaking accepted social norms about gender.

4:40 *And when the sun was setting, they brought to him all that were sick with various diseases; and he laid his hands on everyone of them and healed them*- The healing had been done on a Sabbath, and so they only carried their sick to the Lord after sunset. We see here the power of religious tradition and fear of religious leaders and infringement of their traditions. There would have been urgently sick people, who needed healing as soon as possible. The people believed the Lord could heal them; but their fear of infringing Sabbath traditions was even greater. And we see the same in essence today.

4:41 *And demons also came out from many, crying out and saying: You are the Son of God!*- The "many" had "various diseases" (Mk. 1:34). The "various diseases" demonstrated His wide ranging power; for healers tended to specialize in specific diseases, claiming power over particular [supposed] demons. But the Lord could heal all kinds of diseases. The purpose of the healings was not simply to meet human need, but to elicit a belief in Him as "Son of God". His miracles were always to back up His preaching.

But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ- "Allow / permit" is the same word translated "send forth". The idea could simply be that the Lord didn't send out these converts as 'sent forth' missionary apostles. "The demons" are put for the [supposedly] 'demon possessed' people. The focus is ultimately upon the person and not upon whatever was thought to be possessing them. Note how it was the Egyptian people who were judged (Gen. 15:14); their idols (“gods”) are used by metonymy to stand for those who believed in them. Likewise “demons” is sometimes put by metonymy for those who believed in them.

4:42 *Now when it was day, he departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowd sought him and came to him, and tried to keep him from leaving them*- We continually notice the Lord's dislike of melodrama and large crowds. He was used to sustained personal contact with the Father, and the pressure of the crowds would have

been unbearable for Him. He loved solitude with God. Many of us can relate to Him in this, and He thereby to us. But He worked with the crowds exactly because He saw their need, He as it were came out of Himself for their sakes and for the sake of God's glory.

4:43 *But he said to them: I must preach the good tidings of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for this is why I was sent*- He did not want to be a mere miracle man. His focus was upon preaching the Kingdom, and so He departed rather than meet all the human need which He could have done. His approach ought to be programmatic for us; and too often the focus of our ministry has either been upon purely academic pushing of Biblical ideas at one extreme, or mere do-gooding for its own sake at the other.

Comparing with :19, the preaching of the Kingdom is made parallel to preaching the time of acceptance with God and forgiveness of sins *now* (2 Cor. 6:2). Rom. 14:17 seems to teach that the Kingdom of God is more about "peace and joy in the Holy Spirit", both now and eternally, than physical, tangible things. Christ's parables about the Kingdom don't speak of a political Kingdom, but rather about the relationship between God and the believer in the here and now. See on Acts 8:12.

4:44 *And he was preaching in the synagogues of Galilee*- As with Paul's ministry, the openness of the synagogues to visiting teachers was well used by the Lord. "Went about… teaching… preaching… healing" (Mt. 4:23) is just what we read of the Lord's followers doing in Acts. The preaching of the apostles (and of ourselves) continues the personal work of the Lord in whom they lived and moved, and therefore often Acts records the preaching work in language lifted from Luke as well as the other Gospel records (e.g. Acts 4:2; 5:12-16 = Mt. 4:23).

LUKE CHAPTER 5

5:1 *Now it came to pass, while the crowd pressed upon him and heard the word of God, that he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret*- As elsewhere in the Gospels, the Lord's focus is presented as being upon the disciples rather than upon the crowds. He sought to develop and teach a small body of serious converts rather than make mass conversions; the mass conversions were to be made by them, rather than Him personally. And Acts continues this theme.

5:2 *And he saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets*- The impression is that they were potentially ready to go 'fishing' for the Lord, but with His presence in the boat they were able to do it. "Fishermen" is literally, 'salty ones'. The Greek can equally mean 'sailors'. The Lord must have had this in mind when He said that they were "the salt of the earth" (Mt. 5:13). If we are likewise the salt of the earth in our influence upon others, we will find ourselves as the modern counterpart to those 'salty ones' who followed the Lord in His Galilee days.

5:3 *And he entered into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the shore. And he sat down and taught the crowds out of the boat*- It was for all the world as if the boat belonged to the Lord. He was setting these men up to continue His preaching ministry. He sat in their place, so that they would take His place later. Teaching from a boat is in intended contrast with the idea that teaching could only take place within the synagogue. He surely would have been

better standing up, so that His voice carried, and so that He could speak louder. But He "sat", as His style was, just as an adult gets down to the level of a child in order to talk with them.

5:4 *And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon: Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch*- The scene is purposefully repeated by the Lord after His resurrection. He wished them to see that He was the same essential Jesus both in His mortal life and also in His post resurrection glory. And the same Jesus who loved little children and so desperately wished human salvation is the same yesterday, today and for ever- including when we meet Him at judgment day. He had asked Peter to "put out" into shallow water, with Him in the boat teaching (:3 s.w.). Now He asks them to "put out" into deeper water, alone, without Him, to fish. This was an acted parable of how their calling was to share the Gospel with others as the Lord had done; His teaching was their fishing of men. Prior to His presence and entering of their lives, they could not have done this. But He was present on the shore. This is expressed in more abstract terms in Jn. 14-16, where the Comforter, the spirit of Jesus, is promised to all who will teach Him to others. He is with us just as really as He was in His mortal life. But they were to go fishing "for a catch", in the expectation of response. Our witness too is not merely a witness for the sake of it, but is to be made in firm faith that there are fish / men out there to be caught. A "catch" is literally a 'bringing', the same word is used of how sick people were 'brought' to the Lord in 4:10. The drawing process depends partially upon our bringing of men into the Gospel net.

5:5 *And Simon answered and said: Master, we toiled all night and took nothing, but at your word I will let down the nets*- See on :4 and Jn. 21:7. Despite having toiled all night and caught nothing, Peter was able to subdue his natural wisdom, his sense of futility, and the sense of irritation and superiority which exists in the experienced working man: "Nevertheless ["but"] (how much that hides!) at *your word* I will let down the nets". It would seem that the parallel record of this is found in Mt. 4:18, which describes the call of the disciples soon after Christ's triumphant emergence from the wilderness temptations. We learn from Jn. 1:41,42 that it was Peter's brother, Andrew, who first told Peter about Jesus, and who brought him to meet Jesus first of all. The point is that at the time of Peter's call as he was fishing, he had probably heard very few of Christ's words personally. He had heard about Him, and listened to His words for perhaps a few hours at different times in the past. So where did he get this tremendous respect for the word of Christ from, which he demonstrated when Christ called him? The answer must be that he meditated deeply on those words that he had heard and understood, and came to appreciate that the man saying them was worth giving all for. Our far easier access to God's word does not seem to make us more meditative as individuals. We have access to hearing God's word which previous generations never had. We can listen to it on a Walkman, have tapes of well read Scripture playing at home, analyze it by computer, hear it sung to us according to our taste in music, read it from pocket Bibles as we work and travel... we *can* and *could* do all these things. My sense is that we just don't make use of our opportunities as we should. Why has God given our generation these special opportunities to be ultra-familiar with His word? Surely it is because our age contains temptations which are simply more powerful than those of former years. So it is *vital*, vital for our eternal destiny, that we do make as much use as possible of all these opportunities. We should be *cramming*, yes cramming, our hearts and brains with the words of God. I certainly get the feeling that Peter would have listened to a tape of Isaiah on his

Walkman if he had one, as he went out fishing; that he'd have had tapes of the Psalms going all evening long in his little fisherman's cottage, wife and kids caught up in his enthusiasm too (Mk. 10:10,15 suggests that the incident with the little children occurred in Peter's house). There *are* a handful of Christian homes where this spirit is truly seen.

It seems to me that the Lord asks each of us to do that which is essentially difficult for us personally, something against the grain of our very nature and personal understanding of and position in life. This may explain why sometimes He asked those He cured to spread the message (perhaps the introverts, or those whose past lives had been notorious?), whilst others (perhaps the extroverts?) He asked to remain silent about what He had done. When the Lord asked Peter to go out fishing, for example, this was totally and exactly against every grain of Peter's natural self. He was a fisherman, he'd been fishing all night, he knew it was *absolutely* pointless to try again. He knew that a carpenter didn't know what a fisherman did. The Lord's request was a blow at the justifiable pride in his specialism which every working man has. If the Lord Jesus had asked let's say *Paul* to go out fishing, well, I guess he'd have obeyed with no real difficulty. But He asked Peter to do that, at that very moment, because it was a real cross for Peter to pick up. Likewise it would have seemed logical for Paul to preach to the Jews, and Peter to the Gentiles (note how the Gentiles approached Philip, from semi-Gentile Galilee, in Jn. 12:20,21). Yet in fact the Lord God used those men in the very opposite way, right against the grain of their natural abilities. He asked goldsmiths to do the manual work of building the wall of Jerusalem, bruising their sensitive fingers against lumps of rock (Neh. 3:8,31); and Barak's victorious warriors were civil servants and writers (Jud. 5:14), not military men. Paul was sent to the Gentiles and Peter to the Jews, when we'd have thought that naturally speaking, they would have been far more comfortable in the reverse roles. Judas was put in charge of the money amongst the twelve; when Matthew the tax collector would presumably have been the obvious man for the job. Naaman wanted to do some great act, but was asked to do the hardest thing for him- to dip in Jordan. And Abraham was asked to do what was so evidently the hardest thing- to offer up his only, specially beloved son.

5:6 *And when they had done this, they caught a great many fishes; and their nets were breaking*- See on Acts 2:6. As explained above, the Lord was teaching them that they were to do His work of fishing men into the Gospel net. In the similar incident after the resurrection, their nets did not break. The Lord will somehow provide the resources needed for this work. And perhaps He was also encouraging them to follow Him and forsake their fishing business because He is absolutely able to provide any amount of fish. All human endeavour and desire for income can be dramatically overridden by the Lord if we devote ourselves to His work.

5:7 *And they beckoned to their partners in the other boat, that they should come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink*- Paul seems to allude here in saying that the desire for wealth can drown believers (1 Tim. 6:9). The Lord is warning them not to allow their desire for wealth and good income to drown them; rather they were to focus upon doing the work of the Gospel, and somehow all shall be provided.

It would seem that Peter as a working man had a love of his job. He left his fishing in Mark 1 to follow the Lord, but returned to it by Luke 5. Then he left it, and returned to it in the post-resurrection crisis. The Lord's provision of fish on the shore

was simply saying: ‘You don’t need to fish any more’. He asked them to drag the nets to land, which would usually have broken them, but they didn’t break. Likewise He had earlier told fisherman Peter to cast the net on the other side, when Peter knew full well which side of the boat there were likely to be fish. And a whirlwind storm had come upon Galilee which would have drowned fisherman and sailor Peter were it not for the Lord’s presence. In all these things, Peter was being taught to quit the life that he loved. “Lovest thou me more than these?” was asked with the huge catch of fish lying there on the shore- a fisherman’s dream. It could be that the question referred to them. ‘Go and feed *my* sheep rather than worry about *your* fish’. When earlier the boats had begun to sink with too many fish, the word used for ‘sinking’ occurs in 1 Tim. 6:9, about believers being drowned in materialism and thereby condemning themselves (Lk. 5:7). Whether it’s a career that we love, a livelihood that we simply trust as a sure means of human survival, or the spiritual pride that we love the Lord more than our brethren, all these things are demanded of us by the demanding Lord, as we seek to follow Him to the cross.

5:8 *But Simon Peter, when he saw it, fell down at Jesus' knees, saying: Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord* - See on Jn. 21:7. The Father seems to have wanted Peter to make the connection between preaching and recognition of personal sinfulness quite early on. “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” was followed by a commission to go preach the Gospel to Israel, just as Isaiah had been brought to the same point and then been sent on a like mission. The picture of the condemned is presented in Scripture in some detail. We are all condemned men and women before the light of the glory of Jesus Christ. If we are to be saved in that future day, we must judge / condemn ourselves now in our self-examination (1 Cor. 11:31). This means that we ought to have their feelings in some respects; as they will have no desire to go on living in the flesh, as they will so earnestly desire entry into the Kingdom, as they will then desperately not want to go back into the world... so we should feel now, grateful that for us there is entry into the Kingdom made possible. Thus Peter asked the Lord to depart from him (Lk. 5:8), with the very same words the Lord used about what He will say to the rejected (Lk. 13:27).

"Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" was capturing the spirit of Isaiah. But the Lord responded that he was not to fear, but no now "catch men". Peter's deep recognition of his sinfulness resulted in him being given a preaching commission. And in similar vein, Peter was given another commission to teach the word when he met the Lord after his denials (Jn. 21:15-17). In response to this he stood up and preached that forgiveness of sins was possible to all those that are afar off from God (Acts 2:39). As he did so, consciously or unconsciously, part of his mind must have been back in the way that on that shameful night he followed the Lord “afar off”, and far off from Him, denied Him (Mk. 14:54). Peter’s vision of the unclean animals in the net taught him that those people whom he considered unclean, he was to “eat”, i.e. preach to and fellowship with. When he recounts the vision, he comments [in an account that is strictly factual in all other regards and without any embellishment]: “It [the sheet with the animals] came *even to me*” (Acts 11:5). He is expressing his unworthiness at being called to the task of preaching, just as Paul likewise expressed his inadequacy.

5:9 *For he was amazed, and all that were with him, at the catch of fish which they had taken*- The huge catch of fish, which nearly drowned them, was what provoked Peter to confess how sinful he was. He felt therefore that his sin was in being materialistic, in being obsessed with that huge catch, thinking of all the money they

could earn in the market by selling it. The gift of wealth elicited within him a sense of sinfulness; and it should likewise within us all.

5:10 *And so were also James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon: Fear not. From this time forward you shall catch men*- See on Lk. 9:59; Jn. 21:2. "Catch men" is Gk. 'to catch alive'. This is an example of where what sounds like predictive prophecy is actually a command, which men are free to obey or disobey. The whole section about the temple to be built in Ez. 40-48 is another example. Peter was not to "fear" his tendency to materialism and his momentary failure in this matter. He was to move onwards from that and see that the greatest thing in life is not success in our business, but bringing others into the Gospel net, dragging them, with the help of our brethren ["partners" is *koinonos*, those we fellowship with], into the Kingdom.

5:11 *And when they had brought their boats to land, they left all and followed him*- They became His disciples, that is the meaning of the idiom. They powerfully learnt the lesson- that the Lord could give business success and wealth at ease. And therefore they in a moment left it all and focused on following Him. The "all" which they left included the huge catch of fish.

Peter on the shore doesn't say to the Lord that he had 'made a mistake' or cast the net on the wrong side etc.- he confesses that he is a "sinful man" altogether. Jesus taught that sin was no longer to be seen as a list of specific actions which must be avoided in order to have a good conscience before God. The conviction of sin as God intends is far deeper than this. As the Lord makes clear, it's all about motives, what is inside the cup rather than what appears on the outside (Lk. 11:39). And we are to press on with the work of the Gospel, regardless of our previous failings in being distracted by issues of wealth and income.

5:12 *And it came to pass, while he was in one of the cities, that there was a man full of leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, saying*- The Greek literally means to bow or crouch. Perhaps it is being used here in that literal sense, inviting us then to imagine the Lord extending His hand to the kneeling man (:13). Or the idea could be that the man's worship was not in any external display of respect, but in the fact he believed in the Lord's ability and power to respond to his request. In this case, the man worshipped Jesus *in saying* "If You will, You can...".

"Begging" is the Greek *parakleo*; and John's Gospel records at length the Lord's promise to be our *parakletos*, doing the work of comfort and entreaty, *parakleo*, for *us*. We see here the mutuality between a man and his Lord; both relate to each other in the same passionate way, in prayer [from our side] and in the Lord's gracious response [from His side]. The *parakleo* group of words are appropriate to both sides of the relationship.

Lord, if you will, you can make me clean- The Lord replied that this was indeed His will (:13). This coincidence of human will with that of our Lord is what fellowship with Him and answered prayer is all about. The phrase "If You will, You can..." is recorded identically in all three of the synoptics (Mk. 1:40; Lk. 5:12), as if they all wished to draw attention to the man's attitude and make an example of it- accepting that the Lord has all power ("can" = *dunamai*), but that our will is not always His.

The man recognized that it was within the Lord's power to heal him, but he also recognized that the Lord's will is not always ours, as His longer term plan may require Him not to respond to our request in the immediate term. This is a great example to us. For he would have been aware that the Lord did not heal all human need which He

encountered; He had just left Simon's house, apparently because He didn't want to cure all the crowds surely gathering there for healing.

Faith is inculcated by an appreciation of the height of Christ's exaltation. He now has all power in Heaven and in earth, and this in itself should inspire us with faith in prayer and hope in His coming salvation. On the basis of passages like Ex. 4:7; Num. 12:10-15; 2 Kings 5:7,8, "leprosy was regarded as a "stroke" only to be removed by the Divine hand which had imposed it" (L.G. Sargent,*The Gospel Of The Son Of God*, p. 28). The leper lived with this understanding, and yet he saw in Jesus nothing less than God manifest. Inspired by the height of the position which he gave Jesus in his heart, he could ask him in faith for a cure: "If You will, You can [as only God was understood to be able to] make me clean".

5:13 *And he stretched forth his hand and touched him, saying: I will. Be made clean*- The Lord responds within the terms of the man's request: "If You will, You can make me clean". We note the man sought cleansing above mere healing; his spiritual need for cleansing was paramount in his mind. We likewise should ask for material blessings motivated by spiritual concerns. The Lord could have cured the man in multiple ways, but he chose to touch the man, making Himself technically unclean; although it could be argued that the cure was so immediate that it was therefore debatable as to whether the Lord had actually touched a leper or not. Surely He did it the way He did to provoke such questions; for the process of questioning led to them becoming the more aware of the fact that the Lord's touch had indeed cleansed the man. And the whole question of ritual uncleanness was of course put in the spotlight. The Lord was and is unafraid to associate with the very dirtiest of human conditions and situations. There was no revulsion from them, as there is not today. The Lord is described a staggering 28 times in the synoptics as touching people. This was a studied rejection of the false teaching of 'guilt by association' or 'contamination by contact'. More than that, the Lord was at such lengths to identify Himself with suffering people.

And immediately the leprosy departed from him- The immediacy of the cure upon touching the Lord raised all kind of questions for the legalistic mind, as to whether the Lord was made unclean or not. The Greek literally means 'scales' and the same word is used of scales falling from Saul's eyes in Acts 9:18. It could've been any skin disease rather than Hansen's disease. In Mt. 10:8 the Lord told the disciples to likewise "cleanse the lepers". Again the Lord is giving the disciples the work of the priests to do. For it was their job to pronounce lepers cleansed. But He is asking them to do what He Himself had done here. His work was to be theirs. The later NT references to *our* being cleansed by the Lord Jesus (Eph. 5:26; Tit. 2:14; 1 Jn. 1:7,9 etc.) perhaps look back to how the historical Jesus cleansed lepers in Galilee. We are to see ourselves in that isolated and rejected man.

5:14 *And he ordered him: Tell no one, but go your way and show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing according as Moses commanded, for a testimony to them*- The Lord had told the cured leper to tell no other man but go and offer for his cleansing, in order to make a witness to the priests. All three synoptics record this, as if it made a special impression on everyone (Mt. 8:4; Mk. 1:44; Lk. 5:14). It could be that the Lord is using an idiom when He told the leper to tell nobody: 'Go and make a witness *first and foremost* to the priests as opposed to anybody else'. Such was His zeal for their salvation. And the fact that "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7) shows how this apparently hope-against-hope desire of the Lord for the conversion of His enemies somehow came true. We noted on Mt.

8:3 that the work of the priests was to cleanse the leper- but this had been done by the Lord. The man was therefore to show himself to the priests- in order to demonstrate to them that another priest and priesthood was already coming into operation.

5:15 *However, the report went around concerning him all the more; and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities*- Mk. 1:45 notes that therefore "Jesus could no more openly enter into a city, but stayed in deserted places". If we put the stress on the word "openly", we are left imagining Jesus somehow disguising Himself in order to enter the towns. This is the reason why the Lord so sternly charged the healed man not to spread the news (:43); the stampede of people wanting healing meant that the Lord was unable to perform His most important ministry, which was to preach rather than to heal

5:16 *But he withdrew himself into the desert and prayed*- Each healing took energy and spiritual power from the Lord (8:46). As noted on 4:42, the Lord was desperate for aloneness with God in prayer; for this was His source of being filled by the Spirit.

5:17 *And it came to pass on one of those days that he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, who had come out of every village of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem; and the power of the Lord was with him to hea*l- The power of the Lord was present to heal the Pharisees- but they would not make use of what was potentially made available. The text suggests that the healing was possible for the Pharisees. The healing in view was therefore spiritual healing; and the whole incident of curing the paralyzed man was therefore in order to potentially provie the religious leaders with spiritual healing. The Lord's work in our lives is likewise multifaceted. Things happen in order that others may be taught, as happened in the life and sufferings of Job- it was to convert and teach the friends rather than Job personally, who is presented as "perfect" both before and after the recorded sufferings.

5:18 *And men brought on a bed a man that was paralysed; and they sought to bring him in and to lay him before him*- The term for "brought" is also used of bringing a sacrifice to God, but in this case of the lame. "Bed" is Gk. a table or a couch. They had grabbed whatever could serve as a stretcher.

5:19 *But not finding by what way they might bring him in, because of the crowd, they went to the housetop and let him down through the tiles with his couch, into the midst before Jesus*- This was all done in faith, and by doing this the Lord saw their faith (:20). Mk. 2:3 says they "carried" him, the term means literally to be taken up or away, and reflects the Hebrew term used for the bearing away of sin. And :20 confirms this association by stating that it was through the faith of the four friends that the man's sins were forgiven. This is the huge horizon of potential which there is for us in our efforts for others- we can even play a role in the Lord forgiving them their sins. This lifts the concept of pastoral work far beyond mere doing of good works.

5:20 *And seeing their faith, he said*- This is emphasized in all the accounts of this incident. Because of the faith of third parties, the sins of this man were forgiven. James speaks of the same possibility (James 5:15- the same Greek words for "sins" and "forgiven" are used there). Here we have a principle which can totally affect the course and hourly practice of our lives. In some cases, the sins of others can be forgiven because of *our* faith. Job understood that when he offered for his sons after their wild parties. Of course there are invisible limits to the principle, but many of those with whom we have to do in church life are surely within those limits. Quite

simply, the salvation of others depends to some extent and in some cases- upon our faith and prayers, and effort to get them to Jesus. This imparts huge and eternal significance to our lives, lived and prayed for others. The same Greek words for "sins" and "forgiven" are used again in the enigmatic Jn. 20:23: "Whose soever sins you forgive, they are forgiven them". I suspect this is John's version of the great commission to preach the Gospel of forgiveness to others- the idea being that if we bring them to Jesus, then thanks to our efforts for them, they will be forgiven. And if we are slack to do this, then God may not always find another way, and their sins remain unforgiven. Prayer really does change things. God is willing to do things in the life of a third party (even forgive them) for the sake of the prayers and efforts of others. That man was healed for the sake of the faith of others. The widow woman's son was resurrected because God heard Elijah's faithful prayer (1 Kings 17:22).

Man, your sins are forgiven you- The Lord emphasized this first, and then went on to heal him physically. It's common for the sick and their carers to focus almost exclusively upon their need for healing, whereas the most essential human need is for forgiveness. So the Lord stressed the forgiveness first, and the healing secondly. Clearly there was a link in this case between sin and illness. It could be argued that the two things are connected as they both arise from the curse in Eden. But I would suggest that it's likely that in this case, the connection between the man's paralysis and his sin was more direct. We too often shrug at those in such situations and consider that 'it's their fault'. So it may be, but if a man digs a hole and falls into it, he's still in the hole. And we have all done this, and the Gospel was designed for us exactly because we have done that. There is an inevitable connection between this incident and Is. 33:24, where we read of the restored Zion that "the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity". The Lord is implying here as elsewhere that the prophecies of the restored Zion were to be fulfilled in the lives of individuals who had come to Him, and not in the literal glorification and exaltation of Jerusalem over the Roman occupiers.

5:21 *And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason*-Matthew adds "within themselves". Consider the huge emphasis of the New Testament upon 'thinking / talking within oneself', especially within the Gospels. The same Greek phrase is used repeatedly:

- "Think not to say within yourselves" (Mt. 3:9)
- "The scribes said within themselves" (Mt. 9:3)
- "She said within herself" (Mt. 9:21)
- The believer who fails to grow spiritually has no root "within himself" (Mt. 13:21)
- "They reasoned within themselves... Why do you reason within yourselves..." (Mt. 16:7,8)
- "The husbandmen... said within themselves" (Mt. 21:38)
- The disciples "disputed within themselves" (Mk. 9:33)
- Have salt "within yourselves" (Mk. 9:50)
- The Pharisee "spake within himself" (Lk. 7:39)
- The guests "began to say within themselves" (Lk. 7:49)
- The rich fool "thought within himself, saying..." (Lk. 12:17)
- "The steward said within himself" (Lk. 16:3)
- The unjust judge "said within himself" (Lk. 18:4)
- Peter "doubted in himself" (Acts 10:17)
- Jews who heard the Gospel "reasoned within themselves" (Acts 28:29 Gk.)
- Israel "through the lusts of their own hearts... dishonoured their bodies within themselves" (Rom. 1:24)

- "Within yourselves... you have a better and enduring substance" (Heb. 10:34)
- "Partial within yourselves, judges of evil thoughts" (James 2:4).

There are many other Bible verses which likewise speak of the internal state of a person and the significance of our self-talk- these are just examples of one Greek phrase. It is logical therefore to expect that the great adversary or 'satan' to be internal thinking, how we think and speak within ourselves. And properly understood, this is indeed what 'satan' in the Bible sometimes refers to. We should deeply note at this point that the thoughts of men in their hearts are known to the Father and Son, and have been recorded publically here in these records for many centuries.

Saying: Who is this that speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?- The miracles of Jesus exposed the error of local views, e.g. of demons, without correcting them in so many words. Thus in Lk. 5:21 the Jews made two false statements: that Jesus was a blasphemer, and that God alone could forgive sins. Jesus did not verbally correct them; instead he did a miracle which proved the falsity of those statements. It was clearly the belief of Jesus that actions speak louder than words. He rarely denounced false ideas directly, thus he did not denounce the Mosaic law as being unable to offer salvation, but He showed by His actions, e.g. healing on the Sabbath, what the truth was.

The Jews got caught up on the issue of whether Christ's forgiveness of others made Him God or not- just as some folk do today. His response was to refocus them on the fact that He wanted *you* to *know* that He had real power to forgive *their* sins (Lk. 5:24). I spend a lot of time arguing against the trinity and the 'Jesus = God' mentality. But the essence is, do we *know* on a personal level that the Lord Jesus really has the power to forgive *our* sins?

5:22 *But Jesus, perceiving their reasoning, answered and said to them*- Time and again, the Gospels record how He "perceived" things about people. Admittedly this could have been because He simply had a Holy Spirit gift to enable this. But I prefer to think that His sensitivity, His perception, aided by His extraordinary intellectual ability as the Son of God [for intelligence and perception / sensitivity are related]… these things developed within Him over the years so that He could sense the essential needs and feelings of others to an unsurpassed extent. "Jesus, seeing their thoughts…" (Mt. 9:4 RVmg.) shows how He came to perceive the hearts of others from His observation of them. This was the same Jesus who could be ridiculed into scorn / shame / embarrassment (Mt. 9:24), such was His sensitivity to others. This incident helps us to understand the ability of the mind / spirit of the Lord Jesus to connect with that of human beings. Mk. 2:8 puts it like this: "Now immediately, when Jesus realized in his spirit that they were contemplating such thoughts, he said to them, "Why are you thinking such things in your hearts?" (NET Bible). The spirit / mind of Jesus was at one with the spirit / mind of those men. Such was His sensitivity. I don't think it was a gift of Holy Spirit knowledge so much as His sensitivity to the minds of men... and yet Rom. 8:16 calls Jesus "The Spirit" as a title, saying that He bears witness with our spirit / mind, in His intercession to the Father. So this incident in the Gospels gives us as it were an insight into how He *now* operates too... He's the same today as yesterday. He's at one with our mind / spirit, and also with the mind / Spirit of the Father. Thus is He such a matchless mediator. The way the Lord Jesus 'knew' things because of His extreme sensitivity, rather than necessarily by some flash of Holy Spirit insight, isn't unparalleled amongst other men. Elisha knew what Gehazi had done when Gehazi went back to ask Naaman for a reward- Elisha commented:

"Went not my heart with you, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet you?" (2 Kings 5:26). Elisha imagined Naaman dismounting from his chariot, etc. And he could guess that the request had involved "money... garments" etc. That the Lord's knowledge wasn't necessarily automatic is reflected in the way we read things like "When he saw their faith... when Jesus heard it..." (Mk. 2:5,17). He 'saw' and knew things by the sensitivity of His perception.

Why reason you so in your hearts?- This was a rhetorical question. Why did they struggle with His offer of forgiveness? Because it required an acceptance of it from them, which in turn required repentance.

5:23 *Which is easier to say*- Gk. 'less work'. The Lord meant 'Which is easier for Me'. There were plenty of claims to heal people; but to forgive sins was of a different order altogether. But the Lord is saying that for Him, they are one and the same; and that His healing was performed in this case on the basis of having forgiven the man his sin. Not only could He forgive sin, but in this case He could remove the consequence of it. For the Lord healed the man *so that* they would realize that He had power to forgive sins (:24).

Your sins are forgiven; or to say: Arise and walk?- The same words used by Peter when he tells the lame man to 'arise and walk' (Acts 3:6). Peter consciously or unconsciously replicated his Lord in doing healing miracles. The very body language and word choice of the Lord were so impressed upon him that they became the pattern for *his* ministry; and the same should be true of us. The paralyzed man of Jn. 5:8 was likewise told to arise, take up his bed and walk- using the same words used here about the paralyzed man. Clearly the Lord Jesus worked with people according to some pattern. And we can discern similar hallmarks of His work as we get to know each other within the body of Christ today, perceiving as we exchange stories and testimonies that the Lord in essence works in similar ways between human lives today.

5:24 *But that you may know*- The reason for the healing miracle was to teach that He could forgive sins. This is why I suggest that in this man's case, his paralysis was a direct and publically known result of his sin. Perhaps he had been alcoholic, or become paralyzed in an accident whilst stealing something. In this case his friends are to be commended for so wanting his healing, because many would have shrugged him off as someone who was suffering justly. The link between his illness and his sin was so clear that to heal him was seen as effectively forgiving him *and* removing the consequence of his sin. David, Moses and others often asked for the consequences of sin to be removed and at times received this. The palsied man was healed by the Lord in order to *teach others* that Jesus had the power to forgive sins. Job was a “perfect” man before the afflictions started; and he is presented as a ‘perfect’ man at the end. The purpose of his trials was not only to develop him, but also in order to teach the friends [and we readers] some lessons. The purpose of our trials too may not only be for our benefit, but for that of others. If we suffer anything, it is so that we might help others (2 Cor. 1:4). He didn’t *only* reward the faith of the man’s friends; His motive for the miracle was to seek to teach those Scribes. Our tendency surely would have been to ignore them, to be angry that in the face of grace they could be so legalistic and petty and so far, far from God... and get on and heal the sick man who believed. But the Lord’s picture of human salvation was far wider and more inclusive and more hopeful than that.

That the Son of Man- The humanity of Jesus was the very basis upon which He could and can forgive human sin. This is why Mt. 9:8 records that the crowds praised God for having given such power *unto men*. He understood Himself as rightful judge

of humanity exactly because He was "son of man" (Jn. 5:27)- because every time we sin, He as a man would've chosen differently, He is therefore able to be our judge. And likewise, exactly because He was a "son of man", "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins". If it is indeed true that "'Son of Man' represents the highest conceivable declaration of exaltation in Judaism", then we can understand the play on words the Lord was making- for the term 'son of man' can also without doubt just mean 'humanity generally'. Exactly because He was human, and yet perfect, He was so exalted.

Has authority on earth to forgive sins (he said to him who was paralyzed)- He had that power during His mortal life, and yet after His resurrection "*all* power is given unto Me in Heaven and in earth" (Mt. 28:18). His power to save and forgive is therefore even greater. Perhaps the contrast was that He had the power of forgiveness delegated to Him in specific cases during His ministry, but after the resurrection He had power in His own right to forgive, not on the basis of delegated power but power / authority in His own Name; even though that exalted position was of course given Him by God the Father.

The Jews got caught up on the issue of whether Christ's forgiveness of others made Him God or not- just as some folk do today. His response was to refocus them on the fact that He wanted *you* to *know* that He had real power to forgive *their* sins. I spend a lot of time arguing against the trinity and the 'Jesus = God' mentality. But the essence is, do we *know* on a personal level that the Lord Jesus really has the power to forgive *our* sins?

The disciples observed as Jesus made a lame man *arise*, take up his bed, and follow Him. But in Acts 9:34, we find Peter doing just the same to Aeneas, even taking him by the hand as he had seen Jesus do to Jairus' daughter. What Peter had seen and learnt of the Lord Jesus, he was now called to do. Not for nothing did he tell Aeneas that "Jesus Christ makes you whole", thereby recognizing the connection between him and his Lord.

"He said to him that was paralyzed" suggests He turned from the Jews to the paralyzed man. It could be that the healing was really for the benefit of the hard hearted scribes- the Lord was going to all this trouble to try to persuade them of His authority as God's Son. We would likely have given up with them, but the way the Lord kept on trying with the orthodox Jews of His day is an essay in perseverance in witnessing. And amazingly, it paid off- in that a number of priests and Pharisees were baptized after His resurrection (Acts 6:7; 15:5).

I say to you, arise and take up your bedding and go to your house- The same word is used for taking up the cross (Mt. 16:24), and the Greek for "bed" is also translated a table or couch. He was to pick up a piece of wood and go his way. He was given a simple task of obedience immediately after meeting with Jesus, and we can see that pattern repeated in how the Lord works with people today.

The Lord was sensitive to the situation of those He healed or converted. Just as He commanded the resurrected girl to be given something to eat, so He realized the pressure that would be on the healed man- and so He told him to go home immediately and thus avoid the limelight.

5:25 *And immediately, he stood up before them, picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God*- Emphasizing his exact and studied obedience to the Lord's command to Him to go home (:24). He did it "before them [all]"- another hint that the miracle was for teaching purposes; the Lord was surrounded by people eager for healing, and instead He taught them. The immediacy of the cure, especially in

response to the faith of third parties, was utterly unknown amongst those who had seen too many fake healers attempting to heal illness.

5:26 *And they were all amazed, and they glorified God; and they were filled with fear, saying: We have seen strange things today*- This is a strange mixture, at first blush- glorifying God and yet being filled with fear instead of joy, describing the wonderful healing and forgiveness as "strange things". Why the barrier to joyful acceptance of the Lord's work? I suggest as noted on :22 that His offer of forgiveness demanded acceptance of it, and therefore repentance. And so they preferred to act bemused and confused, as many do to this day when faced with God's truth in Christ, preferring the search rather than the finding of the ultimate truth- that really we can be forgiven and faith rewarded in salvation and the ultimate healing of persons. On one hand, they knew it was all true, and "glorified God". But then their humanity kicked in. And we see this so often in folk today.

5:27 *And after these things he went and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the tax office, and said to him: Follow me*- Matthew, according to Matthew's record. There is reason to believe that Matthew was himself a converted Scribe, who had perhaps turned away from it to being a tax collector; the way he has access to various versions of Scripture and quotes them as having been fulfilled in a way reminiscent of the Jewish commentaries (compare Mt. 4:12-17 with Mk. 1:14,15) suggests this. Matthew's other name was Levi, strengthening the possibility he was once a Levitical scribe; for the scribes were drawn from the priests and Levites. The point is that in this case Matthew would be referring to himself when he writes: “Every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old” (Mt. 13:52). Yet he does so in a beautifully oblique and selfless manner. The Scribes have just been mentioned in the previous incident, which apparently took place within sight of Matthew's desk (Mt. 9:3).

It's hard to grasp the degree to which tax collectors were despised and distrusted. We may at times think that we need to show our best front personally when preaching the Gospel, to display our credentials, in order to persuade others of our message. Matthew thought otherwise. He was quite open about who he had been when he was called. Human credentials do not ultimately persuade men and women of Christ- a degree in theology, knowledge of Hebrew or Greek, academic status, a stable career, an externally spotless family history. Rather do the Gospels show us that it is those from questionable backgrounds who are chosen by the Lord as His most effective messengers. The content of the message ultimately far outweighs the credibility of the messenger. And the same is seen today in the preaching of the Gospel.

It was whilst he was at work that he was called, just as the other disciples were called exactly whilst they were about their fishing business, and like Matthew, left all and "followed" the Lord. This is when the call of Christ comes to us- in the very midst of secular life, rather than resting at home looking at a screen.

"Follow me" means to share the same road with. And the road or way of Jesus led to Jerusalem, to the death of the cross, and then to life eternal. The word is used about 80 times in the Gospels. The call was to follow Jesus; the crowds followed, the disciples followed, but often the Lord tries to teach them the difference between merely externally following Him on the same public road, and following Him as He intends; which is to carry a cross and follow Him to Golgotha. We who follow Him in our life situations today are in essence continuing the following of Him which began

in those early days in Galilee. But we likewise are challenged as to whether our following is mere membership of a denomination, or a personal following of Him.

5:28 *And he forsook all, and rose up and followed him*- Exactly as he had just observed the paralyzed man obediently arise and go where the Lord told him. It's as if Matthew saw himself in that paralyzed man. As the man was laying on the 'bed', so Matthew was sitting 'on' the receipt of custom, the elevated chair and desk (*epi*, translated "at", is better translated in this context "on"). The Lord spoke with "authority" in the eyes of the people- so that a man arose and followed Him. What gave Him this? Surely it was His lifestyle, who He was, the way there was no gap between His words and who He was. The word of the Gospel, the message, was made flesh in Him. There was a perfect congruence between His theory and His practice. The repeated amazement which people expressed at the Lord's teaching may not only refer to the actual content of His material; but more at the way in which He expressed it, the unique way in which word was made flesh in Him. The way the Lord could ask men to follow Him, and they arose and followed is surely testimony to the absolute, direct and unaccountable authority of Jesus. It was surely His very ordinariness which made Him so compelling.

The Lord valued persons for who they were, and this had radical results in practice. And yet He spoke with "authority" in the eyes of the people. What gave Him this? Surely it was His lifestyle, who He was, the way there was no gap between His words and who He was. The word of the Gospel, the message, was made flesh in Him. There was a perfect congruence between His theory and His practice. The repeated amazement which people expressed at the Lord's teaching may not only refer to the actual content of His material; but more at the way in which He expressed it, the unique way in which word was made flesh in Him. The way the Lord could ask men to follow Him, and they arose and followed (Mk. 2:14), is surely testimony to the absolute, direct and unaccountable authority of Jesus. It was surely His very ordinariness which made Him so compelling.

5:29 *And Levi made him a great feast in his house; and there was a great crowd of tax collectors and of others that were dining with them*- Clearly the associates of Matthew. They came and sat down with Jesus whilst He was eating. And He accepted them. Given the religious significance of eating together, note the Lord's open table.

5:30 *And the Pharisees and their scribes murmured against his disciples, saying: Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?*- See on Lk. 7:39. To eat together had a religious dimension; the Lord was seen as fellowshipping sinners at His table in a radically open manner, just as we should. To break your bread with someone, to eat together, was a religious act in Palestinian Jewish society. The Lord broke His bread with sinners in order to bring them to repentance; not because He considered they had cleared some kind of bar of moral and doctrinal acceptability. His table was open, radically so, and so should ours be.

The disciples were from very varied backgrounds; and Lk. 5:30 RVmg. describes how publicans and sinners had Pharisees and Scribes among them as they all sat at the same table gathered around Jesus. There was something in His person and teaching which welded people together.

5:31 *And Jesus answering said to them: They that are in health have no need of a doctor, but they that are sick*- "Doctor" is literally, a healer. The same word is used of how "by his stripes you were healed" (1 Pet. 2:24). All who will finally be saved have been healed by Jesus. Therefore "they that be whole" must be understood as meaning 'those who *think they are* whole'. The Lord's healing work was done by

fellowshipping with those who realized their need for healing. He broke His bread with them first; He didn't heal them and then invite only the healed to His exclusive table. This breaking of bread with them was a 'calling to repentance' (:32). The many records of the Lord's physical healing were all intended to be acted parables of His healing of spiritual sickness

The Greek word for "in health" is usually translated with the sense of 'being able'. The Lord's work was with them who felt *unable* to be righteous, who felt that circumstance and past history had left them spiritually incapacitated.
Perception of need and spiritual helplessness is the vital prerequisite. The Lord healed "them that had need of healing" (Lk. 9:11), those who perceived their need. The Lord uses the same word in speaking of how He doesn't go find and save those "which need no repentance" (Lk. 15:11); again, an ellipsis must be read in: 'Those who *think they* need no repentance'. And again in Rev. 3:17- the Laodiceans thought that they "had need of nothing". This, therefore, was a major concern of the Lord- that we cease to perceive our need for Him. The attitude that 'I have no need...' is picked up by Paul in 1 Cor. 12:21,24, where he warns against thinking that we have no need of weaker members of the body of Christ. Our need for Christ personally is to be reflected in practice in our need for association with His body, however weak we feel it to be. God supplies all our need in Christ (Phil. 4:19), but that supplying of our need is not solely in the death of Christ for us, but in the body of Christ.

5:32 *I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance*- He was implying, 'I came not to call those who believe they are righteous'. But Jesus spoke to them on their own terms, even though, technically, He was using language which was untrue. See on Lk. 19:23. The Lord is referring to the wicked Pharisees here as "the righteous… they that are whole". Yet they were not righteous. He was speaking of them according to how they saw themselves.

It was the disciples who had only recently been 'called'- because they considered themselves sinners, the sick who needed a doctor.

Consider how the Lord asks Zacchaeus to eat with Him- a public sign of religious fellowship in first century Palestine. This acceptance of the man for who and where he was, inspired Zacchaeus to then start changing his life in practice- he then offered to give back what he had stolen. When quizzed as to why He ate / fellowshipped with sinners, the Lord replied that He had come to call sinners to repentance. Think through the implications of this. He fellowshipped with those who were so weak within the ecclesia of Israel so as to bring them to repentance; His eating with them was like a doctor making a home visit. The religious attitude of the Pharisees was that one only fellowshipped someone who was repentant; whereas the Lord said that He fellowshipped with people to bring them to repentance. Note how in Lk. 19:1-10, the Lord offered salvation to sinners *before* they had repented. It's the same idea.

The fellowship of the Lord Jesus was a call towards repentance, not a reward for it. See on Mt. 3:11; John baptized people *unto* repentance. The methods of the Lord should be ours, for having spent His ministry doing this, He transferred it to us in bidding us likewise go worldwide and call others to repentance (Lk. 24:47).

5:33 *And they said to him: The disciples of John fast often and make supplications, likewise also the disciples of the Pharisees; but your disciples eat and drink*- Was this also in Capernaum? If so, we note that John's influence had spread as far north as Galilee. In any case, the impression is given of wave after wave of questioning, activity, controversy. It would've all been so mentally draining of the Lord's spirituality and emotions.

The implication was that they didn't even fast at the Day of Atonement, the one Biblical command for fasting. The Lord's disciples were mostly secular men whom He was trying to turn into spiritual people. And this continues to be the thrust of His work with people. The focus of our preaching should likewise be on getting unspiritual, secular people to believe, rather than focusing on trying to persuade those who already believe in Him to change their understandings of some points. I don't say we shouldn't do this, but far more will be achieved to His glory by bringing unbelievers to faith, rather than correcting misbelievers. Another reason why John's disciples thought the Lord's men didn't fast could have been because they took seriously His command to not appear to others to fast. And John's disciples proclaiming their fasting meant they were overlooking the Lord's clear teaching *not* to do this in the Sermon on the Mount. But in His gracious way, the Lord didn't point out the obvious *faux pas* in their reasoning. He could've said 'John told you to obey Me. I teach not to proclaim your own fasting. Why aren't you obedient to My teaching?'. But instead He reasoned with them on their own ground. And again, we see a pattern for our engagement with others- not to always baldly confront misunderstanding and reduce it to a right / wrong, black and white issue, but to lead the person further by accepting for a moment that their faulty assumptions are true; for they are true to the person who holds them, and the Lord recognized that.

We also see the Lord's gentle grace in teaching His disciples how to fast, acting as if they were not fasting; when actually they never fasted at all until that point. He wanted them to continue showing themselves to be secular men, who really believed in Jesus. This had been exactly His approach until age 30, to manifest God's perfection through the shroud of ordinariness.

The Lord defended the non-observant Judaism of the twelve as being due to their joy that He, the bridegroom, was with them. When they ‘ground corn’ on the Sabbath, the Lord defended them to their critics by saying that they were like David’s men eating the shewbread. Those guys were just walking through a cornfield rubbing ears together as their manner was, as they had done on many a sabbath day, but not realizing that this time there was some Scribe out with his binocular vision scrutinizing them. They surely weren’t doing it because their minds were on the incident of David’s men eating the shewbread. The Lord had asked them to obey the Scribes, who sat in Moses’ seat, over this kind of trivia. But He doesn’t rebuke them. Rather, He defends them to others, imputing far more spiritual perception to them than they had (Lk. 6:1-4).

5:34 *And Jesus said to them: Can you make the wedding guests fast, while the bridegroom is with them?*- He spoke of how that band of rough, mixed up men were filled with the joy of little bridesmaids because He was among them. Now this is an essay in imputed righteousness. The Lord saw the zeal of the uncertain, misunderstanding disciples as storm troopers taking the city of the Kingdom of God by force- knowing exactly where they were coming from and where they were going (Mt. 11:12). And even after reprimanding them for their slowness of heart to believe, the record graciously says that they “believed not for joy”- although joy can never hinder faith.

John had likened himself to the Lord's best man at a forthcoming wedding. The Lord phrases his reply to John's disciples in terms they would've understood- a pattern for us to follow in our response to people. Note too that the Lord's answer implied that His wedding was about to happen. He hoped against hope that Israel would respond, and the Messianic banquet would be soon. But in His later parables, He spoke of how

even the guests couldn't be bothered to attend it; it was delayed until human response was suitable. But His hopefulness for human response is again a pattern for us, to have a hopeful attitude in our witness.

The joy of the bridegroom's friends is a sharing of the groom's joy. John's Gospel records this truth in a different way when speaking of how the Lord's joy is to be our joy (Jn. 15:11; 17:13); at His return, we will enter into His joy (Mt. 25:21). We note again how the Lord phrased His response to John's disciples in terms they would best relate to- for John had said that his joy was complete, because he was 'the friend of the bridegroom' (Jn. 3:29). The Lord is saying that His disciples are also friends of the bridegroom- He is seeking to persuade John's disciples that actually His disciples are the same as they are, notwithstanding differences in spiritual culture, in that they are related to Jesus in the same way, as friends of the groom. The Lord was always very positive about His followers. He explained their lack of fasting on their joy at the forthcoming Messianic banquet, when in reality their lack of fasting was because they were secular, non-religious people. The Lord wasn't naïve, although He was so positive. He told the disciples quite frankly that they were full of "unbelief", and couldn't do miracles which He expected them to because they didn't pray and fast (Mt. 17:19-21). And yet when quizzed by the Pharisees as to why His disciples didn't fast, He said it was because they were so happy to be with Him, the bridegroom. Here surely He was seeing the best in them. They come over as confused, mixed up men who wanted the Kingdom there and then and were frustrated at the Lord's inaction in establishing it. But He saw that they recognised Him as the bridegroom, as Messiah, and He exalted in this, and saw their lack of fasting as partly due to the deep-down joy which He knew they had.

5:35 *But the days will come*- Not necessarily plural- s.w. "the day" (Mt. 6:34; 10:15), "that day" (Mt. 7:22).

When the bridegroom shall be taken away from them; then will they fast, in those days- The Gk. *apairo* ["taken away"] is a form of the Greek *pairo* which has just been used in Mt. 9:6 ("*take up* your bed") and which is now used in the next verse about the new cloth 'taking from' the old garment (Mt. 9:16). What exactly the connection of thought might be is hard to say. But clearly the 'taking of Jesus from' the disciples was to be at the same time as when the new wine and new cloth were available, which would 'take from' the old cloth in destroying it. This time was surely the death of the Lord Jesus, at which the new wine of His blood confirmed the new covenant and thus ended the old. It was then of course that the disciples mourned (s.w. Mk. 16:10 "they *mourned* and wept"); and the same Greek word for 'taken from' occurs in Jn. 19:15 where the Jews cry "Away with Him!"- to the cross; in Jn. 19:31,38 where the body of Jesus is 'taken from' the cross and in Acts 8:33 "His life is *taken from* the earth". Significantly, Col. 2:14 uses the word to describe how on the cross, Christ 'took away' the old covenant. This is the idea of its usage in Mt. 9:16, that the new wine and new garment would 'take from / away' the old. And it was achieved by the 'taking away' of Jesus at the cross. Through the grace of Jesus, He is in love with us; He has called us to be His bride. He sees us in an extremely positive light. He counts us as righteous to a degree that is a real struggle to believe- even during His ministry, "when we were yet sinners", and when the only example He had of His bride were those faltering 12. He tells the Jews that His people will fast and mourn for His absence after His departure, with the intensity that the friends of the bridegroom would have if the groom suddenly collapsed and died at the wedding (this seems to be the picture of Mt. 9:15, seeing "taken away" as an idiom for sudden death). This is surely a positive view of the sorrow of the body of Christ for their Lord's absence.

Even if we see in this mini-parable only a description of the disciples' sorrow after the Lord's death, He is giving a very positive description of the disciples' joy, saying that they didn't fast for joy of being with Him; He describes their joy as the joy of the friends of the groom at the wedding. Yet the Gospels paint the twelve as a struggling, uncertain group of men, eaten up with the petty arguments of this life, unused to the self-control of fasting. Peter, for example, had until very recently been a possibly immoral young fisherman (1 Pet. 4:3). The happiness of the disciples is explained in terms of them being at a wedding. The happiness of the wedding is normally associated with alcohol, and the context here goes on to explain that Christ's new covenant is symbolised by new wine. The difference between John's disciples and Christ's was that Christ's were full of the joy of the new covenant. But there is ample reason to think that they were heavily influenced by Judaist thinking; they didn't go and preach to the Gentile world as Christ commanded, and even Peter was marvellously slow to realize the Jewish food laws had been ended by Christ, despite the Lord's strong implication of this in Mk. 7:19 (not AV). Yet the grace of Jesus saw His men *as if* they had grasped the meaning of the new covenant, *as if* they had the joy of true faith in and understanding of His work; and He spoke of them to the world in these terms. We can take untold comfort from this; for we dare to believe that the Lord does and will confess our name (character) in a like exalted manner to the Father and His Angels.

There seems to be the idea that fasting was somehow part of the Mosaic system that we have now left behind. Yet the Sermon on the Mount clearly implies that the Lord saw fasting as part of the path of discipleship (Mt. 6:16-18). And there are many examples of fasting in the Old Testament that are quite unconnected with obedience to the Law. When the bridegroom is away, then we will fast [by implication, for His return]. Try it, that's all I can say. Just start by going without some meals. Use the time and the natural desire to eat to increase the poignancy of the special requests you are making. Is. 58:4 RV says that fasting makes “your voice to be heard on high”. Yet the essence of fasting is to take us out of our comfort zone. We human beings have a great tendency to form habits in order to create or keep us within the comfort zone. Yet truly creative thinking and action, not to say true obedience to the call of Christ, all occur outside of the comfort zone. Fasting is only one of many ways to go outside of it. Take a different route home from work; describe your faith to yourself in terms and language you wouldn't usually use. Pray at different times, bring before the Lord the most banal things you usually wouldn't dream of talking with Him about.

Time and again, the Lord uses language about the restoration from exile and applies it to Himself. Thus fasting was common amongst Palestinian Jews of His time, and it was involved with mourning the destruction of the temple and Judah's submission to Rome. And yet the Lord pronounced that the days of fasting were over, and His people were to be feasting because of His work. But He brought no freedom from Rome, and spoke of the principles of the Messianic Kingdom as being non-resistance to evil rather than military resistance to it. He spoke of Yahweh as 'visiting' His people- but not to save them as they expected, but rather to judge them, with Messiah on His behalf at the head of the Roman armies who would come to destroy Jerusalem and the temple. And thus Jesus deeply disappointed people who didn't want to change their self-centred, nationalistic outlook- those who didn't want to see things spiritually rather than naturally, those who refused to accept the extent of Israel's sin.

5:36 *And he spoke also a parable to them: No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it upon an old garment, else he will tear the new, and also the piece from the*

new will not agree with the old- The same phrase for "old garment" is used to describe the Mosaic system in Heb. 1:11. The stress may be on "a *piece*". Taking parts of Christ's teachings like fasting was the temptation being given in to by John's disciples. The torn old garment had to be thrown away and the new one totally accepted and publically worn. The Greek for "new" is not the same as in "new wine" in :37. Here the word means not dressed, not worked by a dressmaker. The only other time the related word occurs is in Mk. 9:3 concerning the clothes of Jesus not having been worked by a dressmaker (AV "fuller"). The Lord Jesus presents Himself here as raw, fresh, unworked to suite the appearance of men.

To get a piece out of a new garment, that new garment would be spoiled; and the old one likewise would be rent further (Mt., Mk.). "New" cloth refers to cloth which hasn't yet been washed; on first washing of the new garment, it would shrink, and thus make a tear. The tragic waste envisioned here is like the new wine running away on the ground from the burst old bottles. Likewise the old wine skins would've had to have the old wine poured out from them to have this new wine put into them. Mixing the old life and the new covenant, a bit of the one here and a bit of the other there, results in this tragic wastage all around. The parables make it seem so obvious that this isn't the way to go; but in reality, we find it hard to be so complete in our devotion to the new covenant.

Jesus told this parable in the context of His eating with sinners- clothing and wine were part of the 'eating out' scene; He took whatever was around Him and made spiritual lessons out of it. To get a piece out of a new garment, that new garment would be spoiled; and the old one likewise would be rent further (Mt., Mk.). "New" cloth refers to cloth which hasn't yet been washed; on first washing of the new garment, it would shrink, and thus make a tear. The tragic waste envisioned here is like the new wine running away on the ground from the burst old bottles. Likewise the old wine skins would've had to have the old wine poured out from them to have this new wine put into them. Mixing the old life and the new covenant, a bit of the one here and a bit of the other there, results in this tragic wastage all around. The parables make it seem so obvious that this isn't the way to go; but in reality, we find it hard to be so complete in our devotion to the new covenant.

The unrent garment is that of Christ- the same Greek words are used about the fact that His garment was not rent at His death (Jn. 19:24). Division both within ourselves and within the community is caused by partial response to the new covenant; mixing grace with legalism; it is a rending of Christ's garment, cutting out just a part of it and mixing it with the old way. An old garment that is torn can't be mended by anything new- it must be thrown out and a new garment accepted. The Mosaic system is described as an old garment in Heb. 1:11; it "shall perish" uses the same Greek word as in 5:37, where the bottles "perish". The new garment of Christ is unrent. We are each clothed with the white garment of Christ's imputed righteousness (Rev. 19:8; Mt. 22:11); by dividing with each other we are seeking to rend and thereby destroy that covering. "New" translates a different Greek word than that which in the parallel Mt. 9:16 and Mk. 2:21 is translated "new". The word there means something which has not been carded. "*Agnaphos* is a combination of the negative article *a*, with *knapto*, meaning, "to card". It is sometimes translated undressed, uncombed or, as above, unfinished, and refers to wool or cotton cloth that has not been carded or combed so that the fibers are aligned, giving it both strength and a smoother, more finished appearance". This suggests that the New Covenant is an unfinished work, God's work

in us is ongoing and may take apparently unstable turns and changes- e.g. prophecy is often conditional, the intended timing of Christ's return has and may yet still change, dependent upon factors like the freewill repentance of Israel; God may plan one line of possibility for someone or a whole nation, e.g. Nineveh or Israel at the time of Moses- but change His stated intention in response to human prayer and repentance. This open-ended approach simply can't be squared with the "old" set-in-stone approach of the Old Covenant. The same message is taught by the next parable- *new* wineskins are required, because the New Covenant wine is fermenting, they need to be soft and flexible enough to change; if they are old and set, they will burst because of the movement and dynamism of the new wine. The wine of the Lord Jesus is therefore not about tradition, about a set pattern; but is rather a call to constant change and evolution. Yet paradoxically, religious people become set in their ways more than any, and seek stability in those traditions; whereas the activity of the Lord Jesus is the very opposite.

Old and new covenants cannot overlap. The encounter with Christ means that ultimately there can be no brinkmanship in remaining partly with the old way, be it the Mosaic way of legalism or the way of secular modern life, and partly in the Lord's way. There will only be a painful and messy division in the end.

5:37 *And no one puts new wine into old wine-skins, or else the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilt, and the skins will perish*- The new wine is a clear reference to Christ's blood of the new covenant.

Wine skins were made of goat skin. The goats speak of the rejected, the sinners, in the parable of the sheep and goats. The wine skins may therefore speak of our flesh of sin. It's no sin to be a human being and have human flesh, but because of the nature of the new wine, we must become wholly new- or we will be destroyed. The new wine fermented powerfully- similar to the Lord describing His Gospel as yeast which works through flour (Lk. 13:21). The new covenant will work powerfully in us if we let it, and our skins, the life structure we have, must be prepared to accept that. Each wineskin expanded slightly differently in response to the fermenting of the new wine poured into it; no two wineskins expanded to an identical shape or form. We too will individually and uniquely respond to the new wine.

The skins will be "burst", Gk. to shatter, divide. The context is of John's disciples uniting with the Pharisees against the disciples of Jesus. He's saying that if His new wine is not totally accepted, if it is mixed with the old, then lives will be destroyed through further schism. The only basis for avoiding schism is a total acceptance by all parties of the blood of the new covenant.

"Spilt" is the same word used in Lk. 20:20 about the blood of the new covenant being "shed". We can crucify Christ afresh (Heb. 6:6), His death can be "in vain" for us (Gal. 2:21)- if we refuse to respond and be renewed, or trust in our own works. Especially significant is the reference in Mt. 26:28 to Christ's blood of the *new* covenant being "shed". Failed spiritual life, the life which only partially accepts the new wine of Christ but refuses to change, refusing to be new containers for it, results in the blood of Christ being as it were shed, the blood of Calvary wasted in the dust, and Christ crucified afresh by our apostasy (Heb. 6:6). This is the final tragedy of refusing to change upon receipt of the new wine.

5:38 *But new wine must be put into fresh wine-skins*- AV adds "and both are preserved", Gk. preserved from loss / ruin. There is a very real sense of loss to Jesus if

His blood (the new wine) is as it were poured out in vain. There will be tragic loss both to Him and to the person who refuses to be wholly renewed. The word is used of the final destruction in condemnation at the last day (Mt. 10:28,39; 16:25; Jn. 3:15). The lives of the untransformed recipients of the new wine are shattered ("break") and then finally they are destroyed in final condemnation. The loss is not only to the untransformed person. There is also a loss and damage to the new wine, the Lord Jesus. He is not undamaged by the loss of any of His people. Their failure is His re-crucifixion, the pouring out again of His blood, but in vain. All this signals the danger of not being totally transformed after having received the Truth. Interestingly, a form of the Greek *suntereo* ["preserved"] is used in Jn. 2:10, where it is noted that the Lord Jesus *kept* [Gk. *tereo*] the best wine. *Tereo* is frequently on the lips of the Lord in John's Gospel (and is widely used by John in his letters), in the context of 'keeping' His word. But this is done by totally surrendering human life to be a vessel totally devoted to the new wine we have received, rather than steel willed, nail-biting, white-knuckled struggle for obedience to specific laws.

5:39 *And no one having drunk old wine immediately then desires new wine; for he says: The old is good*- The Lord here recognizes the basic conservatism of human nature; even those who consider themselves "liberal" are often only so in comparison to others, in relative terms- we are all in fact basically conservative. We stick with what we know and don't easily go outside our comfort zone of the old and familiar. We all find change hard; new wineskins are able to be stretched. He was perhaps, in the context, making some apology for John's disciples, who still couldn't fully allow themselves to be filled with the new covenant wine. The Gospel of Jesus is all about change and being stretched; and He recognizes that we find this so very difficult. People do not immediately / quickly respond to the new wine of the new covenant because, the Lord piercingly observed, they think the old was better (Lk. 5:39). He perceived, with His amazing penetration of the human psyche, that there is a conservatism deep within us all that militates against the immediate response to Him and the new wine of His blood / sacrifice which He so seeks. Yet once we have made this immediate response in a few things, it becomes easier to get into an upward spiral of response to Him. We become truly a new creation in Him, breaking constantly with factor after factor in our past, which has previously defined us as persons. Quite simply, we become new persons, with all the rejection of the ‘old’ ways which this requires.

The parable of the sower shows how the Lord foresaw that the majority who responded to His word would not hold on; He knew that men would not immediately appreciate the blood of His cross, but would prefer the old wine of the old covenant (Lk. 5:39). He saw that our spiritual growth would be an agonizingly slow business; as slow as a tiny mustard seed growing into a tree, as slow as a man digging a foundation in rock, or a seed growing and bringing forth fruit. Such growth is *very* slow *from a human perspective*.

The parable of the wine exactly predicted the attitude of people to Christ's work in taking the Old Covenant out of the way. The Lord is surely saying: 'I know you won't immediately want the blood of my new covenant. I understand your nature, by nature you'll prefer what you are familiar with, the Old Covenant; you won't "straightway" desire the new wine, but (by implication) you will, after a while' (Lk. 5:39). He foresaw how the implication of the blood of His sacrifice wouldn't be accepted by His people first of all. It would be a process, of coming to accept how radical the gift of

His blood is. As we weekly take the cup of His covenant, we come to see more and more the excellency of that blood, and its supremacy over all else. Christ recognized that conservatism in human nature which will naturally shy away from the marvellous implications of what He achieved for us. And true enough, whenever we talk about the present aspect of the Kingdom of God, our present blessings of redemption in Christ, the sense in which we have already been saved...there is a desire to shy away from it all. And true enough, the early Christian believers desperately clung on to the Mosaic food laws, circumcision and synagogue attendance as far as they could; the command to witness to the Gentiles was likewise not taken seriously for some time. It must have been painful for the Lord to know this and to see it, recognizing in it a lack of appreciation of His life and final sacrifice, a desire to reconcile with God without totally committing oneself to His work. He saw the possibility of His blood being wasted if men didn't change from old to new wineskins. The slowness of the changeover in attitudes amongst the early believers must have been a great pain to Him; as if His blood was being poured out again. The implication is that we shed His blood afresh if we won't change, if we allow the conservatism of our natures to have an iron grip upon us we not only destroy ourselves, but waste the blood of the Son of God. The picture of the new wine being "spilled" uses the same word as in Mt. 26:28 concerning the 'shedding' of Christ's blood. Again, how utterly, painfully accurate. This is the danger of the conservatism that is in our natures; it was this which led men to shed the Lord's blood, and it is this same element within us which He foresaw would lead us to crucify Him afresh. How many times has this conservatism been mistaken as true spirituality! How careful we must be, therefore, not to adopt any attitude which glorifies that conservatism and masks it as the hallmark of a stable believer. The sensitivity of Jesus to the value of the human person was the very opposite of this.

LUKE CHAPTER 6

6:1 *Now it came to pass on a Sabbath that he was going through the grain fields*- The very poor were allowed to do this by the Law (Lev. 19:9; Dt. 23:24,25), and so we see in this a picture of the deep poverty of the Lord's followers; He later parallels the urgent hunger of David's men at the time of 1 Sam. 21 with that of His followers. It would seem that He Himself did not make use of the concession, because the criticism was focused upon His disciples rather than Himself. W.D. Davies lists evidence that Judaism forbad fasting on the Sabbath (Jubilees 50:12) (W.D. Davies *Matthew* p. 312 (*op cit.*)). In this case, the record is showing how the legalism of the time would've condemned the disciples- and the poor generally- either way: for fasting on the Sabbath, or for 'threshing' on the Sabbath to get food so as not to fast. The Lord therefore takes the whole argument to a level far above such petty legalism.

And his disciples plucked the ears and ate, rubbing them in their hands- See on Mt. 26:11. The only point in mentioning this would presumably be because the Pharisees came and stopped them. This shows how closely the Lord and His men were under the critical eyes of others, even from a distance.

6:2 *But certain of the Pharisees said: Why do you do what is unlawful on the Sabbath day?*- A constant concern with the Pharisees (Mt. 19:3; 22:17; 27:6; Jn. 5:10; 18:31). The Lord's attitude here was to show that the Old Testament itself envisaged situations where true spirituality was above law. The parable of Mt. 20:15 brings the point home- the generous employer justified his pouring out of grace, giving the weak

and lazy the same penny a day as the hard workers, on the basis that 'It is lawful for me to do what I wish'.

6:3 *And Jesus answered them, saying: Have you not read*- Of course they had, many times. But the Lord here and several times elsewhere challenges them (and us) as to whether we have really read what we have. The Lord could have legitimately answered them: 'It is lawful to pick corn whilst passing through a field, the Law allows for this if one is poor, and my followers are indeed poor. There is nothing in the Law which stipulates this permission doesn't operate on the Sabbath'. But as always, the Lord was prepared to meet people where they were, and to take them to a higher level. He seeks to teach by general principle that the extent of His Lordship meant that He and His men were free to do as they pleased on this kind of matter. He reasoned that 'OK, let's assume you're right, but David and *his* men broke the law because they were about God's business, this over-rode the need for technical obedience'. The Lord Jesus wasn't constantly correcting specific errors of interpretation. He dealt in principles much larger than this, in order to make a more essential, practical, useful point.

What David did when he was hungry, he and they that were with him?- The Lord's reasoning depends upon drawing a parallel between Himself and David, and David's warriors and the disciples. Again, He is encouraging them to see themselves as no less than the warriors of David who later became the governors of Israel. Aaron's sons were the ones who were intended to eat the showbread (Lev. 24:5-9)- and again the Lord is inviting His secular disciples to see themselves as a new priesthood.

6:4 *How he entered the house of God*- For non-Levites to enter the Sanctuary was also not 'lawful', quite apart from eating the bread which only the priests could lawfully eat. This prepares the way for the Lord's later parable about God urging unclean street people to 'enter [His] house' because Israel had rejected the invitation (the same words are used- Lk. 14:23). The psychological magnitude of the Lord's new system of thinking is hard to appreciate. Non-Levites could now enter it- and even the worst of the Gentiles. But the magnitude of the new thinking in Christ for anyone, not least secular people of the 21st Century, is no less.

And took and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those with him?- The Lord defended the non-observant Judaism of the twelve as being due to their joy that He, the bridegroom, was with them (Lk. 5:33,34). When they 'ground corn' on the Sabbath, the Lord defended them to their critics by saying that they were like David's men eating the showbread. Those guys were just walking through a cornfield rubbing ears together as their manner was, as they had done on many a Sabbath day, but not realizing that this time there was some Scribe out with his binocular vision scrutinizing them. They surely weren't doing it because their minds were on the incident of David's men eating the showbread. The Lord had asked them to obey the Scribes, who sat in Moses' seat, over this kind of trivia. But He doesn't rebuke them. Rather, He defends them to others, imputing far more spiritual perception to them than they had.

"Gave it to those with him" recalls how the Lord blessed the bread and gave it to those with *Him*. He was turning the ordinary bread of the people into the shewbread of the sanctuary. Clearly the Lord is suggesting that His ragtag crowd of disciples and questionable ministering women were the new priesthood of a new Israel.

6:5 *And he said to them: The Son of Man is lord*- Here as elsewhere we see the juxtaposition of the Lord's humanity and His Lordship. His exaltation is precisely

because He was human; He has authority to judge us because He was Son of man (Jn. 5:27). The Lordship of Jesus was predicated upon His obedience to death and exaltation (Acts 2:36), and yet Jesus was calmly confident that this would be achieved by Him; to the point that He could reason that He already was "Lord" and thereby able to abrogate the Sabbath and act as the ultimate temple.

Of the Sabbath- The “of” is supplied as guesswork by the translators; it could equally be left unsupplied, giving the sense of “the Lord the Sabbath”; or, “Lord *on* the Sabbath”. Mark adds that the Lord went on to teach that God's law was made for man, rather than man being built in such a way as to easily fit in with God's word (Mk. 2:27).

6:6 *And it came to pass on another Sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught; and there was a man there whose right hand was withered*- The point is that the Lord was *outside* the synagogue when He had recently declared that the "place" where He was then standing, in or near a cornfield, was holy ground; see on Mt. 12:6. It was "their" synagogue, just as the temple was "the temple of the Jews", and the feasts of Yahweh had been hijacked to become "the feast of the Jews". It's typical of Luke as a doctor to mention the medical details. God's Spirit worked through the natural perceptions and personalities of those who were inspired, and achieves a similar synthesis in working with us today. His right hand suggests his own strength and ability to act was withered.

6:7 *And the scribes and Pharisees watched him closely, whether he would heal on the Sabbath, that they might find an accusation against him*- A legal term. They wanted to get Jesus in court over this issue. But there’s no evidence they actually did, and there was no recorded mention of Sabbath breaking in His final trial- so well and profoundly did He answer them. Their false accusation of Him was especially seen at His trials. Pilate’s question to them “What accusation do you bring against this man?” (Jn. 18:29) shows the Jews as the ultimate false accusers of God’s Son. For it was because of their playing the ultimate role of the Devil, the false accuser, that the Son of God was slain. No wonder the ideas of ‘Devil’ and ‘Satan’ are often associated with the Jewish system’s opposition of Christ and His people. The same Greek word for ‘accuser’ is five times used about Jewish false accusation of Paul in an attempt to hinder His work for Christ (Acts 23:30,35; 24:8; 25:16,18).

6:8 *But he knew their thoughts*- The Lord's ability to read minds and motives (5:22; Jn. 2:25) was partly given by the Spirit, but also an outcome of His own extreme sensitivity to humanity, and also His undoubted intellectual ability as God's Son. He was far ahead of all depth psychologists of later generations. I will suggest later regarding the triumphal entry that the Lord set up all the circumstances surrounding His death and apparent 'capture' by the Jews and betrayal by Judas; He therefore knew exactly the events which would follow, as the chess grandmaster foresees the game in advance. Rev. 2:23 states that the Lord to this day has this ability, even more enhanced by His Divine nature.

And he said to the man that had his hand withered: Rise up and stand in the midst. And he arose and stood- The Lord's miracles were performed for a range of reasons, quite apart from basic sympathy with the sick. He often used them to teach lessons to the onlookers; and this explains the way He asked the man to cooperate in public display.

6:9 *And Jesus said to them: I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good, or to do harm? To save a life, or to destroy it?*- See on Lk. 9:54,55. The Lord said that to refrain from saving a man when it was in your power to do so was effectively “to do evil… to destroy” (Lk. 6:9 AV). This is how the Lord looks at our laziness and

passivity- as active wrongdoing. Sins of omission are probably our greatest temptation.

Mark records that He developed this point- if He had *not* performed the miracle, He would have been actively committing "evil", even 'killing'. When the Lord taught that it was right to break the Sabbath because they were in the business of saving life (Mk. 3:4), His words were purposefully alluding to how the Maccabees had pronounced that it was acceptable for Jewish soldiers to break the Sabbath in time of war, in order to save lives through their fighting (1 Macc. 2:32). He intended His people to live as active soldiers on duty, at war in order to save the lives of God's people. Indeed, so frequently, the whole language of the future judgment is applied to us right here and now. We are living out our judgment now; we are standing as it were before the final judgment seat, and receiving our judgment for how we act, speak and feel and are. Thus if He had omitted to heal the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath, this would have been 'doing evil' and even 'killing' (Mk. 3:4). That's how seriously He took omitting to do good when it's in our power to do it. He had a choice of saving life or destroying life, were He to prefer to keep the Sabbath laws above the need for preserving life. Clearly He saw failing to act to save life as tantamount to destroying life. We must give our Lord's words their due weight here in our decision making. To not act to save life, to excuse ourselves for whatever reason, is effectively destroying life, or, as Mark's record puts it, "to kill" (Mk. 3:4; Lk. 6:9). We can't therefore be passive in this matter. The context of the Lord's statement was in response to questions about whether something was "lawful" or not; it was the age old question, 'Is it is a sin to do X, Y or Z?'. His answer was as ever in terms of a principle- that our guiding principle must be the saving and healing and preservation of human life. The attitude of the Pharisees was that the Lord was infringing a letter of the law and therefore was guilty of death. They murdered Him on the Sabbath days; and thus they chose to destroy life rather than save it. The word for "to kill" in Mk. 3:4 is so often used in the Gospels about the killing of Jesus. They failed to take His exhortation. The crucifixion of God's Son was thus a result of legalism; it was because of His attitude to the man with the withered hand that the Pharisees first plotted to kill Jesus (Lk. 6:11). Whatever our individual conscience, let us not "be filled with madness" as the Pharisees were at the fact the Lord approached human behaviour in terms of principles, rather than reducing everything to a common right / wrong scenario. The principle is clearly the saving and preservation and enriching of others' lives. Surely we should each allow each other to articulate this fundamental issue as we each have occasion to do so.

6:10 *And he looked round about on them all, and then said to him*- The Lord maintained eye-contact with His listeners: Mt. 19:26; Mk. 3:5,34; 5:32; 8:33; 10:21, 23,27; Lk. 6:10; 20:17; 22:61; Jn. 1:42. These are all separate occurrences; the fact is really being emphasized. This paying appropriate attention with eye contact is also a good strategy for matching the silences that occur from time to time in any serious conversation. Most of us can tell when another is thinking by observing the eyes, and when they are not their eyes will tell you.

Stretch out your hand. And he did so, and his hand was restored- Matthew uses the same word to describe how the Lord Himself stretched forth *His* hand in order to heal, save and welcome (Mt. 8:3; 12:49; 14:31). Again we are encouraged to perceive a sense of mutuality between the Lord and His people. According to the textus receptus, his hand was restored whole as the other. This detail is recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke. It is another touch of the eye witness- the man would've held out both his hands and everyone would've looked from the one to the other, observing they

now looked so similar.

6:11 *But they were filled with rage, and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus*- Here we see the common human feature of doing evil in response to the experience of grace. Even amongst believers, and even at judgment day, there is the possibility of the eye becoming evil because of His goodness and grace to others (Mt. 20:15). We see the principle in both secular and church life. Grace shown to others can elicit the worst evil from religious people. We shouldn't be surprised at this phenomenon; but it is the very surprise at encountering it which causes so many to become disillusioned with the church and ultimately with the Lord.

6:12 *And it came to pass in these days that he went out into the mountain to pray; and he continued all night in prayer to God*- Luke alone records the all night prayer. How long have you ever prayed for at one time? Luke as a doctor was struck by the psychological intensity of the Lord in maintaining such lengthy contact with God Almighty. He presumably was praying for wisdom and blessing in this matter of ordaining the twelve, probably with special attention to the issue of calling Judas.

6:13 *And when it was day, he called his disciples*- He was in the mountain, so He called them up into the mountain, and they came down the mountain with Him (:17). In the same way as Moses was called up into the mount to receive his Divine commission, so the Lord Jesus called up to the mount His disciples- implying that they, who represent all of us, were now a new Moses. Moses was thus an example that challenged those from a Jewish background especially. He was no longer to be gazed at with incomprehension as to his greatness and intimacy with God; he was to become the realistic pattern for all followers of the Lord Jesus, who would meaningfully emulate His closeness to God.

And he chose from them twelve, whom also he named apostles- Whoever is sent forth is apostled, and the great commission sends forth all believers. This is not the same incident as the sending forth of the twelve in Matthew 10. But we see how there were various tiers; the crowds, His disciples, the twelve supported by the ministering women; and within them, an inner core of Peter, James and John, with Peter set up as the leader. This kind of hierarchy of leadership was found in the Old Testament too, and is not inappropriate today, if managed with humility and servant-leadership as the dominant spirit. For total equality of role is just unworkable amongst any group of people, and attempts to enforce it often leave Christian communities without the leadership which people need, and the group becomes rudderless.

6:14 *Simon, whom he also named Peter*- Simon was anything but rock-like, but the Lord named him Peter, 'rocky'. He perceived the ultimate stability in Peter's faith, despite all the ups and downs he had. And He sees to the core of each of us too. Peter is always listed first in the lists of apostles, and was the one chosen to be the rock of the early church. But the Lord chose the one who seemed most inappropriate for that work. And so is again exhibited a major theme in the Lord's work amongst men and women like us, that the most inappropriate are often chosen for the job. For the Lord's power is made manifest through our inadequacy.

And Andrew his brother, and James, and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew- Apparently the same as Nathanael, also mentioned with Philip in Jn. 1:46-51.

6:15 *And Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot*- We see the wide range of men the Lord called into His band; Matthew the tax collector would've been seen as a traitor, whereas the zealots were at

the other end of the political spectrum. The way the 12 didn't break up as a group after living together under extreme psychological conditions is a testament to the unifying power of the person of Jesus. The composition of the Lord's body is the same today, including "all [types of] men". Sadly denominationalism and churchianity has led to churches often being clusters of believers having the same socio-economic, racial and personality type positions, rather than being conglomerations of literally all types, of whatever accent and formation.

6:16 *And Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became the betrayer*- "Iscariot" is perhaps 'man of Kerioth.' Kerioth was a small village in Judea (Josh 15:25). Judas would therefore have been the only Judean. It could be that 'Iscariot' is from *sicarius*, 'dagger-man' or 'assassin'. This would suggest that Judas belonged to what was reckoned to be the most far right of the various resistance groups, the Sicarii (the partisans, cp. Acts 21:38). Again we see the wide range of people the Lord was calling together in order to weld them into one body in Him.

6:17 *And he came down with them and stood on a level place; and a great crowd of his disciples, and a great number of the people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases*- "Came down" heightens the similarity with Moses coming down from the mountain after receiving the law (Ex. 19).

6:18 *And they that were disturbed with unclean spirits were healed*-
The parallel is between being "disturbed" and then being 'not disturbed' through being 'healed' from the 'unclean spirits'. Clearly "unclean spirits" was a way of describing mental disturbance. This is one of the "diseases" of :17. This is further evidence that the language of unclean spirits and demon possession is to be read as simply describing mental illness, which was cured by the Lord Jesus.

6:19 *And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power went out from him and healed them all*- See on Lk. 16:1.
It seems that the apostles were filled with the Spirit in order to do certain acts, and after doing them they were as it were 'drained' of the Spirit, and had to be filled up again. Thus the Lord Jesus felt that something had gone out of Him after performing miracles (Lk. 6:19; 8:46). The non-miraculous work of God through His Spirit would seem to follow a similar pattern. We are "strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man", "strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering" (Eph. 3:16; Col. 1:11). God strengthens us deep inside to have that *hupomonè*, that patient endurance, that energy to keep on keeping on. But this strengthening is according to our effort in the appropriate spiritual exercises, and the strength given is not ultimately permanent unless we continue responding to it. and it isn't only a N.T. phenomena; even in earlier times, they that waited on the Lord had their strength renewed, they mounted up on eagle wings, they were made to walk and not faint in God's ways (Is. 40:31). As God doesn't faint or weary, so somehow those who identify their lives with His will also keep on keeping on- even now (Is. 40:31 cp. 29). David felt that his youth was renewed like the eagle's in his repeated experience of God's grace (Ps. 103:5), that his soul was restored (Ps. 23:5), and that a right spirit could be renewed by God within him (Ps. 51:10).

6:20 *Then he lifted up his eyes toward his disciples, and said*- The way the Lord Jesus had of lifting up His eyes was something which evidently struck the Gospel writers (Lk. 6:20; Jn. 6:5; 11:41; 17:1 cp. the emphasis upon the eyes of the risen Lord in Rev. 1:14; 2:18; 5:6; 19:12). The Hebrew phrase "to lift up the eyes" is used very extensively about the Abraham family; and the Lord was the seed of Abraham. Most Bible characters have the term used at most once or twice about them; but the

Genesis record emphasizes this characteristic of this family. It's as if we're being bidden to really visualize them as a family, and to enable this we're even given an insight into their body language. Consider the emphasis on the way this family had of lifting up their eyes:
Lot lifted up his eyes (Gen. 13:10)
Abraham lifted up his eyes (Gen. 13:14)
Abraham lifted up his eyes and noticed the Angels (Gen. 18:2)
Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place of sacrifice (Gen. 22:4)
Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the ram caught (Gen. 22:13)
Isaac lifted up his eyes and saw camels coming on which Rebekah was riding (Gen. 24:63)
Rebekah, as part of a marriage made in Heaven, lifted up *her* eyes and saw Isaac at the same moment (Gen. 24:64)
Jacob lifted up his eyes and saw the vision of the speckled cattle (twice recorded- Gen. 31:10,12)
Jacob lifted up his eyes and saw Esau coming (Gen. 33:1)
Esau lifted up his eyes and saw Jacob's family (Gen. 33:5)
Jacob's sons lifted up their eyes and saw the traders coming (Gen. 37:25)
Joseph lifted up his eyes and saw Benjamin (Gen. 43:29)
Of course the classic epitome of this feature is when Abraham lifts up his eyes to Heaven and is asked to count the stars, and there and then believes God's word of promise that "so shall thy seed be". Yet *we*, as Abraham's family, his children by faith, are likewise asked [with the same Hebrew words] to lift up *our* eyes to Heaven and consider the stars, and take strength from the fact that their creator is our God (Is. 40:26; 51:6; 60:4). Surrounded by huge crowds, the Lord focused upon teaching the disciples. This was typical of Him, and occurred also at the time of the sermon on the mount.

Blessed are you poor- The poverty in view is spiritual poverty; those who wish to be spiritually rich but are not. It is no blessing to simply be poor materially; for such poverty can distract people from spiritual focus just as much as wealth can. Our prayers should be like those of a man on death row in a dark dungeon, waiting to die, but groaning for salvation (Ps. 102:17,20). This is the extent of our desperation. We are “the poor” (Gk. ‘the crouchers’), cringing in utter spiritual destitution (Mt. 5:3). And yet we have a terrible tendency to only occasionally *really* pray, content with prayer on a surface level. The Lord's parables invite us to see ourselves as, e.g., the desperate widow woman pleading for deliverance from her oppressive landlord (Lk. 18:3).

For yours is the kingdom of God- The Lord's prayer used the same phrase "Yours is the Kingdom" in addressing God. But “Blessed are you poor, for *yours* is the Kingdom *of God*”. The Lord thereby assures us that the Father wants to give *His* Kingdom to those who are poor in spirit, to the broken, to the self-doubters, the uncertain, those uncomfortable with themselves, the unbearably and desperately lonely, the awkwardly spoken… the poor in spirit. Those who would be the very last to believe that God would give *them* what is evidently *His* Kingdom. But not only *will* the Father do this, but Jesus stresses that it *is* ours right now. The certainty of the glory that will be revealed for us means that we cope better with suffering; as Paul writes, they “are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18).

The similarities with the sermon on the mount are many; but this sermon is delivered on the plain. The Lord is repeating in the Jerusalem area what He had taught in Galilee.

6:21 *Blessed are you that hunger now; for you shall be filled*-According to the beatitudes, the hunger is a spiritual hunger after righteousness (Mt. 5:6). "*Blessed* (Lk. 1:48) are they which do *hunger* (Lk. 1:53) and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be *filled* (Lk. 1:53)" (Mt. 5:6) shows the Lord clearly alluding to His mother's own description of herself. It's as if He stands up there before the hushed crowd and lays down His manifesto with those words. This was the keynote of what He had to say to humanity. Everybody was waiting to hear what His message really was. And this is what He said. He was saying 'This, guys, is what I essentially and most fundamentally seek to inspire in you'. And He saw His dear mother as the epitome of the converts He was seeking to make. I lay great store by this allusion. For it makes Mary, at least at the time of the Angel's visit, truly our pattern. She heard the glad tidings and believed that word in faith, holding on to it in her heart (Lk. 8:15,21). She was a model for all who hear the Gospel. It could even be that the language of Lk. 1:32,33,35 is framed in such a way as to make Mary appear to be the first person who heard the gospel about Jesus.

Blessed are you that weep now; for you shall laugh- See on 1:53. Associated in the Old Testament with mourning for sin (Ex. 33:4,5; Ezra 10:6; Neh. 8:9; Ps. 38:5,6). The time of God's grace was extended to those who mourned for their sins (Is. 61:2,3; 66:10). Such Godly sorrow is the sorrow of repentance (2 Cor. 7:10); and the laughter in view is therefore the utter joy of good conscience with God through His forgiveness.

6:22 *Blessed are you, when men shall hate you, and when they shall reject you, and reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake*- 'Reject' is literally 'to drive away' (Mt. 1:23; 23:34), maybe carrying the idea of excommunication. Being thrown out of the synagogue was a major and frequent occurrence for many who came to Jesus (Jn. 9:22). There are Old Testament connections between persecution and suffering for sin (Dt. 30:1-7), so the Lord could also have in view, as in the Beatitudes, that He is offering blessing and happiness for the messed up sinners who are suffering in this life for their sins.

This is quoted by Peter in 1 Pet. 4:14 where he says that we are blessed / happy if we are reviled for the sake of Christ's Name. The implication is that persecution, slander and serious opposition is inevitable for all who will follow Christ. Yet when these things happen, we seem to be shocked and surprised. Paul's extraordinary ability to rejoice in his trials seems to have been rooted in his sustained reflection upon these verses. These words are alluded to in at least 5 verses in his epistles. When Corinth reviled him (2 Cor. 7:4), Paul saw this as being reviled and persecuted after the pattern of Lk. 6:22.

6:23 *Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy; for your reward is great in heaven. For in the same manner did their fathers treat the prophets*- Again seeking to challenge the prevailing views of the Jewish leadership, the Lord invited His humble fishermen-followers to see themselves as the great prophets of old being persecuted by a wicked Israel. The language of persecution is also rooted very much in the language and experience of the prophets. The similar language in Mk. 13:8-11 and Lk. 21:12-18 suggests the same. Again, just as the Lord has challenged his secular, nothing-special followers to see themselves as Moses, now He invites them to see themselves as the

prophets. And so a theme develops in the Lord's teaching- that He is seeking to place the mantle of Moses, David and the prophets upon ordinary, sinful members of spiritual society, seeking to show them their huge potential significance in God's program. And that impression must come home to us too in our situations, no longer considering that spiritual heroics and work for God are somehow for 'the others', the leaders.

6:24 *But woe to you that are rich! For you have received your consolation*- Is the "woe!" in Lk. 6:24-26; 11:42-52 an imprecation ['woe to'] or a lament ['alas!']? Luke has more to say about the "rich" than any other of the gospels. The implication is that the comfort is for those who are poor in spirit. The comfort offered in Isaiah was specifically comfort for sinners who realized their desperation (Is. 12:1; 40:1). We noted on Matthew 4 that the Lord presented the way that John had prepared the way for Him in terms of the prophecy of Isaiah 40, which spoke of 'comfort' to God's doubting people. If this comfort were accepted, then the glory would come to Zion and John's work would have prepared a highway of repentant people over which the Lord Jesus could have come to Zion and established the Kingdom there and then. Comfort to the mourners was one of Isaiah's descriptions of that possible Kingdom. It could have all happened in the first century, but Israel would not- and so the final fulfilment of this comfort will be at Christ's return and the establishment of God's Kingdom fully on earth. "Be comforted" may be a prophesy of the Comforter which was to give a measure of comfort even in this life (Jn. 14:16).

6:25 *Woe to you, you that are full now! For you shall hunger. Woe to you that laugh now! For you shall mourn and weep*- The wealth, laughter and fullness refers to spiritual confidence of the type seen in the Jewish religious leadership. The gospel is good news for those who mourn for their sins, and hunger to be righteous. Those who considered themselves spiritually rich would experience the mourning and weeping associated with condemnation at the last day. Either we will mourn now in repentance, or we will mourn at the judgment (Mt. 8:12 etc.). Having foretold the inevitable coming of judgment day, Yahweh Himself pleads with Israel: "Therefore also *now*... turn ye even to me... with weeping, and with mourning" (Joel 2:12). See on Mt. 3:11.

6:26 *Woe to you, when all men shall speak well of you! For in the same manner did their fathers do to the false prophets*- The Lord assumes that His followers will not be people of spotless reputation, but will be as unpopular as the Old Testament prophets. He was at this point largely appealing to secular, irreligious people who wanted to be spiritual but couldn't so far get their act together- rather than seeking to tweak the theology of those who claimed to be believers already. And this should be the focus of our outreach too. But just as in this verse He assumes His people will not be well thought of in society, so He assumes that they shall each one be as the true prophets of Israel. He reasons as if all His followers shall have a prophetic ministry.

6:27 *But I say to you that hear: Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you*- We tend to love in response to others' love. But the love which the Lord has in mind is the love which is an act of the will, consciously effected towards the *un*loving. This love of enemies is specifically exemplified in :35 as lending without expecting anything back. It's not usual for an enemy to try to borrow from us; but I suggest that the lending in view is that of forgiveness. For debt is so often used as a metaphor for sin.

It was the Essenes in their *Rule Of The Community* who taught that Essenes must yearly chant curses upon their enemies. The Lord's attitude to the Essenes is a case study in bridge building- developing what we have in common with our target audience, and yet through that commonality addressing the issues over which we differ. The Dead Sea scrolls reveal that the terms ""poor in spirit" and "poor" are technical terms used only by the Essenes to describe themselves". So when the Lord encouraged us to be "poor in spirit" (Mt. 5:3), He was commending the Essene position. Likewise when He praised those who were eunuchs for God's Kingdom (Mt. 19:10-12), He was alluding to the Essenes, who were the only celibate group in first century Israel. And yet lepers were anathema to the Essenes, and the Lord's staying in the home of Simon the leper (Mk. 14:3) was a purposeful affront to Essene thinking. The parable of the Good Samaritan has been seen as another purposeful attack upon them; likewise the Lord's teaching: "You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy" (Mt. 5:43). So the Lord within His teaching as a whole, both commended and challenged the Essenes; His bridge building didn't involve just accepting their position.

6:28 *Bless those that curse you, pray for those that mistreat you*- Praying for our enemies and abusers, not wishing a curse upon them but rather a blessing, sounds like Job (Job 31:30). 'Blessing' has Biblical connection with the ideas of forgiveness and salvation. There would be no point in praying for forgiveness for the obviously impenitent unless God might actually grant it. This opens huge possibilities and potentials to us. God is willing to forgive people for the sake of the prayers and efforts of others (Mk. 2:5). Jesus isn't simply telling us to vaguely pray for our enemies because it is psychologically good for us and eases our pain a bit. Genuine prayer for abusers really has the possibility of being heard- for God is willing to save people for the sake of our prayers. Otherwise, this exhortation to do good to abusers through praying for their blessing would be rather meaningless. 'Cursing' likewise tended to carry the sense of 'May you be condemned at the day of judgment'. Those who condemn others will be condemned (Mt. 7:1 etc.)- and yet we can pray for their blessing. It is perhaps only our prayers and desire for their salvation which can over-ride the otherwise certain connection between condemning others and being condemned. This gives those condemned and abused by others so much work to do. In fact, so amazing are the possibilities that that alone is therapeutic. Moses' praying for Pharaoh in Ex. 9:28,29 is perhaps the Old Testament source of Christ's words. Let's not read those records as implying that Moses simply uttered a few words to God, and then each of the plagues was lifted. There was an element of real fervency in Moses' prayers- which may well be lacking in ours. This is surely an example of genuinely praying for our enemies.

Curse [condemn]... hate... despitefully use [slander]... persecute [chase out-excommunicate] the terms used here are very applicable to attitudes from some members of God's people to others- first century Israel, in the first context, and the Christian church in the longer term context. The language is not so applicable to persecution at the hands of the unbelieving world. Likewise the commands to pray for spiritual blessing and acceptance of our abusers is surely more appropriate to prayers for those who are bitter misbelievers than for complete unbelievers who profess no desire to please God.

6:29 *To him that hits you on the cheek offer also the other*- You singular. Time and again the Sermons on the Mount and Plain seem to take a broad sweep in its record of the Lord's teaching to us all; and then He suddenly focuses in on the individual. The AV brings this out well through the use of "you" (plural) and "thee"

(singular): “Blessed are you poor… love your enemies… to him who strikes thee on the cheek…”. Note how many times there is this change of pronoun in Luke 6. Clearly the Lord wants us to see our collective standing before Him, and yet not to overlook the purely personal nature of His appeal to us individually. The Lord was smitten on the cheek but enquired why He was being smitten, rather than literally turning the other cheek. But to do this would be so humiliating for the aggressor that it would be a far more effective resistance of evil than anything else. The power in the confrontation is now with the one who turns the other cheek. S/he is calling the shots, not the beater. The idea of not resisting evil and offering the other cheek we normally apply to suffering loss from the world without fighting for our rights. Yet Paul took this as referring to the need to not retaliate to the harmful things done to us by members of the ecclesia (Rom. 12:16,17; 1 Cor. 6:7; 1 Thess. 5:15). When struck on the right cheek- which was a Semitic insult to a heretic- they were to not respond and open themselves up for further insult [surely a lesson for those brethren who are falsely accused of wrong beliefs]. And yet the compassion of Jesus shines through both His parables and the records of His words; as does His acceptance of people for who they were. People were relaxed with Him because they could see He had no hidden agenda. He wasn't going to use them for His own power trip.

And from him that takes away your cloak- withhold not your coat also- The simple principle 'Do not resist wrong judgment of you' is a very large ask. Even in this life, truth often comes out. And if we believe in the ultimate justice of the final judgment, we will not for ever be going around correcting others' misjudgments and wrong impressions of us. That is something I have had to deeply learn in my own life. It was forbidden by the Law to keep a man’s outer garment overnight (Ex. 22:26,27). But the Lord taught *whilst the law was still in operation* that we should be willing to give it up, and even offer it. The threatened man could have quoted the Law and kept his clothing. But the Lord bids us go to a higher level, beyond using God’s law to uphold our own rights. And in this He raises a vital if difficult principle: Don’t always enforce what Biblical rights you have against your brother. Don’t rush to your own defence and justification even if Scripture is on your side. Live on the level of true love and non-resistance to evil. In this case the idea would be that even if someone amongst God's people does something unBiblical to us, clearly breaking God's laws, we are still to not resist evil but rather by our grace to them, shame them into repentance.

6:30 *Give to everyone who asks of you, from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back*- This parallels the Lord's teaching that we receive from God whatever we ask. But that is not to be taken literally. It is paramountly true in spiritual terms. 'Debt' is used as a metaphor for sin. The idea is used in :35 for forgiving sin. Likewise the Lord's teaching here likely has context and parameters to it. The Lord is teaching not to resist evil; for the 'asking' of us is parallel to taking away our goods.

6:31 *And as you would that men should do to you, do you also to them likewise*- This is another way of saying 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. The Greek for 'do to you' recurs in Mt. 18:35 where we read how God shall 'do to you' if you do not forgive your brother. We also find the phrase in Mt. 25:40,45- 'whatever you do' to Christ's brethren, you do to Him and shall receive from Him accordingly. It is true that what goes around, comes around- so it's best to treat others as you would like to be treated. But that kind of truth is expressed in almost every religious and cultural system of the world. My sense is that the Lord is not merely repeating conventional, folksy wisdom, but rather is elevating it to a far higher and more deeply internal,

spiritual level. For this is His style throughout the Sermons on the mount and plain. The recurrence of the phrase 'whatever you do' in Mt. 25:40,45 teaches that whatever we do (or do not do) to others, we do to Christ personally. And in that dimension of life, the 'come back' of our actions will not simply be in this life, but more importantly, at the last day. Judgment day, either explicitly or implicitly, forms a major theme in the Lord's teaching. If He is indeed teaching that what we do to others is done to Him and therefore will have its response at the day of judgment, rather than merely in this life as folksy wisdom teaches, then indeed we can understand His comment in Mt. 7:12: "For this is the law and the prophets". The law and the prophets do indeed teach that human behaviour, especially that done to others, shall come to final judgment in the last day. But I would not say that 'what goes around, comes around' is exactly their major and noteworthy theme, true as that bit of folksy wisdom is.

6:32 *For if you love those that love you, what praise do you have? For even sinners love those that love them*- Taking responsibility for others is often thankless. Our human dysfunction cries out for affirmation, and we tend not to do those things for which we are not thanked. This is one of the most radical aspects of our calling as followers of Christ- to serve without being thanked. Belief in God's judgment helps us with this. For all our works will be rewarded in some sense by Him at the last day. If we love those that love us, we have no "thank" (AV) or "praise"- but we will have "thank", or "praise of God" ultimately. And this is what ultimately matters. This speaks of receiving "thank" for making the conscious effort to love the unlovable. The Greek for "thank" or "praise" is *charis*, normally translated "grace", and often connected with the help of the Spirit which is given to us in response to our own efforts.

6:33 *And if you do good to those that do good to you, what praise do you have? For even sinners do the same*- There is no *charis*, no grace, in loving those who love us; grace is found in doing good to those who do not do good to us. Too easily, believing communities can become self-help clubs, whereby we do good to those who do good to us. And that is the way of the world, of secular society. The call of grace is to do good to those who are not of us, and who are against us.

6:34 *And if you lend to those of whom you hope to receive, what praise do you have? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive again as much*- As noted on :32 and :33, there is no grace [s.w. "praise"] in giving when we hope to receive back in this life. This is the way of secular society and groups within it. From whom do we receive grace or praise? Surely from the Father, the source of grace. Secular people do good (:33) and lend to others because they hope to receive again "as much", literally, the same kind of thing. Our spiritual investment is of an altogether different character. We will not receive back in this life from those we give to. But we are banking in Heaven, and at judgment day, will receive back the grace we are so desperately in need of. Then we shall receive "praise of God" (1 Cor. 4:5), according to the parable, the Lord will go through our good works to weak people and praise us for them. We will indeed "receive" for what we do, but not "as much", not in the same coin, not things of the same nature which we gave. There is a radical exchange going on- our lending to others, be it literally or in terms of the gift of forgiveness, time and grace, shall be recompensed- but not from them, and on a far more wonderful level.

6:35 *But love your enemies, and do good and lend, never despairing, and your reward shall be great, and you shall be sons of the Most High. For He is kind toward the unthankful and evil*- See on Mt. 5:45. The Lord sort to inculcate in His followers His same positive spirit. We must love our enemies "never despairing". To never give

up with people, for all the losses, the casualties, the hurt… never despairing of humanity. This was and is the spirit of Jesus. Debt is a common metaphor for sin, being in need of forgiveness. The constant lending we are called to, not expecting repayment but all the same placing those lent to in an ever greater debt to us, corresponds more accurately with the experience of forgiving people than it does with lending of material things. To lend without hoping for anything back ["never despairing"] is quite some challenge. This appears to be the pattern of God's kindness; He is kind for the sake of it, with no hope of anything back. And yet what joy we must give Him when we form the habit of regular thanks before food, and seek to appreciate His kindness. Worthiness of the recipient is not the way of grace, and the teaching here is in conscious contrast to the Jewish idea, soon to be recorded by Luke, that a man was worthy of a miracle because he had been generous to a Jewish community (7:4). The paradox of this teaching is that although we should serve for nothing, with no hope for anything back, there will in fact be a great reward prepared for us. Although not in this life, nor in secular terms, as noted on :34.

6:36 *Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful*- Quite simply, who God is should inspire us to be like Him; to copy His characteristics [the things of His Name] in our personalities. We must be "perfect" as our Father is; "be holy", because He is holy (1 Pet. 1:14-16); "kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God forgave… be you therefore followers of God, as dear children" (Eph. 4:32; 5:1); "merciful, as your Father is merciful" (Lk. 6:36). Prov. 19:11 RV uses language frequently applied to Yahweh Himself and applies it to the wise man: "The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression". And thus Phinehas was commended for being "jealous with my jealousy" (Num. 25:11 RV)- his emotion at that time was a mirror of that of God Himself.

Not only was language re-interpreted by the Christian movement. Whole concepts were reoriented. Holiness in the sense of separation from the unclean had been a major theme in the Mosaic Law, and it figured largely in the theology of the Pharisees. But the Lord quoted “Be holy because I, Yahweh your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2) as “Be merciful, even as your father [in heaven- AV] is merciful”. To be merciful to those who sin is now the true holiness- not merely separation from them and condemnation of their ways. Note, too, how He invites us to interpret the Yahweh as “father”, rather than transliterating the Name.

6:37 *Judge not, and you shall not be judged; condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you shall be forgiven*- This confirms the suggestion so far made in commentary on this chapter; that the lending and giving in view is particularly that of forgiveness, unconditionally granted. For Paul, "judge not..." echoed in his mind throughout the years; thus it is at the basis of Rom. 2:1; the whole of Rom. 14, and 1 Cor. 4:3,5. The Lord's teaching about judging does not in fact say that the act of condemning our brother is in itself a sin- it's simply that we must cast out the beam from our own eye first, and then we can judge our brother by pointing out to him the splinter in his eye. But the Lord tells us not to judge because He foresaw that we would never completely throw out the beam from our own eye. His command not to judge / condemn at all was therefore in this sense a concession to our inevitable weakness (:41). The commentary of James on this is interesting: “Don’t speak against one another, brothers. He who speaks against a brother and judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge" (James 4:11). In what sense is to judge / condemn

our brother to judge the law? And which law? Maybe James considered Lk. 6:37 and Mt. 7:1 to be so fundamental a part of "the law of Christ" that he refers to it as "the law". See on Mt. 7:24. The Lord had taught clearly that under His law, to condemn meant being condemned. Yet there were those in James' readership, as there are today, who think they can go ahead and condemn others. Seeing the Lord's law is so clear, James is saying that effectively they are condemning the law of Jesus, placing themselves as judges over His law by deciding that they can break it at will.

We observe that not forgiving is parallel here to condemning and judging. We are setting ourselves up as judge of others if we refuse to forgive. Forgiveness is not the same as trust, but it is clearly required- otherwise we are condemning. If we assume that all our brethren shall be saved [and seeing we can't prejudge the judgment, we have to assume this, as Paul did about Corinth], then we assume that whatever sins they have committed against us will be forgiven. Therefore we must forgive them, acting in harmony with the Lord's position to them. In this lies the connection between not forgiving and condemning. If we refuse to condemn them, then we must forgive them. And the nature of the logic demands that we are to grant that forgiveness to any whom the Lord will not condemn, and so the forgiveness in view is to be granted without any angst about whether or not the person has repented. That is not for us to judge; it is for us to forgive. The logic of the whole argument requires this. There are passages which picture a person sinning against us and saying they repent and then being forgiven; but their purpose is to teach that we are to forgive when they do that, even if their repentance appears insincere; but we are not thereby taught not to forgive unless they repent. We are being presented in those passages with a theoretical situation, and told to forgive even if repentance seems sincere. But the logic here in Lk. 6:37 is to forgive in any case; for all "in Christ" are not condemned and therefore forgiven.

Because of the principle that we shall be condemned if we condemn, we need to remember that we will receive according to the measure we use to people in this life. Again, a direct connection is made between our judgment experience before Jesus at the last day, and our attitude to others now.

6:38 *Give; and it shall be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they pour into your lap. For with what measure you use, it shall be measured to you again*- We are to give expecting nothing again, and we do not get such generous response to our generosity from men in this life. So I suggest the reference is to judgment day, and the "men" refer to Angels. As men gather in a net and sort out the fish, so the angels will at judgment day (Mt. 13:47-50). "Men (angels) gather (the branches), and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (Jn. 15:6). This same equation of men and angels is seen in Lk. 6:38, this time concerning how the angels will mete out rewards as well as punishment at the judgment; for the language here is very much the language of judgment to come (Lk. 6:38 cp. Mt. 7:1,2). This association of "men" (angels) with the judgment is fitting, seeing that our guardian angel will have been with us through every up and down of life, and shall come with the Lord Jesus to our judgment. See on Lk. 12:48.

We might have expected Him to say: ‘Give generously, with a good, running over measure, and this is what you will receive in return’. But He doesn’t. He says simply “Give”; and then we will be given to in a generous measure, because with what measure we use in our giving, we will receive. Thinking it through, He means surely that “giving”, by His definition, means a generous, well packed, abundant giving; for that *is* Christian giving. And note that the context of Lk. 6:38 is the Lord

talking about not being critical and judgmental of others, but rather forgiving and accepting them. It is our 'giving' in this sense which is to be so full and generous. Only God's grace / giving can inspire this attitude within us, as we live hemmed in by the people of a materialistic, mean world, where nobody takes up a cross for anyone else. This is why Paul makes a play on the word 'grace' when writing to the Corinthians about giving; for *charis*, "grace", means 'giving'. He urges them to not receive God's grace in vain, but rather, motivated by it, to give grace to others (2 Cor. 6:1; 8:6,7,19).

6:39 *And he spoke also a parable to them: Can the blind guide the blind? Shall they not both fall into a pit?*- The blind can lead the blind into the ditch, i.e. to be 'rooted up' in condemnation (Mt. 15:13,14 cp. 13:29). And yet *now* in this day of marvellous opportunity, we can lift both ourselves and others out of that pit of condemnation (Mt. 12:11). Some of those who are now 'rooted up', i.e. condemned as they would be in the future judgment (Mt. 13:28), who are "wandering" as the rejected will in the last day, can still be saved from this by us pulling them out of the fire of condemnation (Jude 12,22). Men can escape from the "damnation of hell" in which they are in (Mt. 23:33). Herein lies the urgency of our task in both personal repentance and pastoral work. But we note too the responsibility of leaders- they can lead others to condemnation. We do well to analyse our leaders. When the Lord elsewhere spoke of the blind leading the blind, He went on to tell the story of the partially sighted man who tries to remove what he perceives as a splinter of wood from his brother's eye (:39-42). The implication is that we are all blind, and need leadership- but by the Lord, not by each other. And He is saying the same thing here in Mt. 15. By telling the disciples not to be led by the Pharisees in order to avoid falling into condemnation, He is effectively implying that the disciples were blind- for if the blind lead the blind, then they will fall into the ditch of condemnation.

The pit is that of condemnation. And yet the Lord likens Himself to a man who lifts His sheep out of the ditch / pit (s.w. Mt. 12:11). We can be condemned in this life, as Peter was, and yet be saved out of it. Just as some of those blind Scribes and Pharisees were saved.

6:40 *The disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is perfected, shall be as his teacher*- The Lord is partly speaking to the possible desire in some of the disciples to be martyrs for His cause. Peter's attitude in Gethsemane was clearly of that nature, and some of the disciples came from radicalized, fanatical backgrounds. Martyrdom was a common concept in the first century, and the Lord's warning to flee persecution, to bring about a quiet revolution rather than a political one, was aimed at warning against any desire for a quick, glamorous death for the sake of the Kingdom. In the context, He has warned them to endure persecution. He could be saying that the game plan was that *He* was to die, but *they* were to seek to preserve their lives so that they could make a longer and more effective witness to Him. They were not 'above' Him- He was the one who had to die as the perfect sacrifice, not them. They were to be 'as' Him in terms of personality, and be satisfied with that- it was to be "enough" for them to bear His reproach (Mt. 10:25). The Lord elsewhere taught Peter that the time for martyrdom would indeed come for Peter, when he was "perfected" or matured- but not right then. So there is the possibility that the Lord is implying 'You are not at this stage *huper* ("above") Me, for the moment, focus on being "as" Me, as disciples learning to copy their teacher'. This suggestion is strengthened by the fact that Paul later writes that we are indeed to be *huper* Christ, in the sense of being instead of Him, for His sake, in our witness. Thus we are to preach "*huper* Christ... in Christ's stead [*huper* again]" (2 Cor. 5:20), suffering in the work of

preaching *huper* Christ (2 Cor. 12:10; Phil. 1:29; Col. 1:24), giving our lives *huper* Christ (Acts 15:26), in response to Christ's death *huper* us (Rom. 5:8 and often). So when the Lord taught that the disciples were not to give their lives *huper* Him their Lord and Master, He might have meant 'at this time'. The time would come, but for then, they were to focus on learning of Him.

Today, students are 'trained' to think for themselves, be creative, develop their own opinions, push forward their own independent research, using question / problem-based learning as a paradigm for their education. 'Education' in the first century wasn't like that at all. The idea was that "every one when he is fully taught will be like his teacher" (Lk. 6:40). The idea was that a person born into a certain social situation was trained to take their place in society, given that 'station and place' into which they had been born. Initiative in that sense was not encouraged; it was all about training up a person to correctly fulfil societies' expectation of them. The idea of being personally taught by the invisible Master / teacher Jesus, becoming like Him rather than like the person whom society expected, being given talents by Him which we are to trade and multiply at our initiative (Mt. 25:15-28)... this was all totally counter-cultural stuff. What was so vital in the Mediterranean world was that a person achieved conformity to accepted values. Cicero advised that in any good presentation of a legal case or encomium, emotions and passions shouldn't be referred to. Individualism was seen as a threat to tradition and the collective society. The huge New Testament emphasis on becoming disciples, learners, of an invisible Lord, Master and teacher located in Heaven, serving Him alone, worried about *His* standards, perceptions and judgment of us- that was and is so totally opposite to the expectations of society. People were educated to be embedded in society, rather than to come out of their world and live in the new world in which Christ was the light, and all things were made new in a new creation, a new set of values.

6:41 *And why do you see the splinter that is in your brother's eye, but do not consider the beam that is in your own eye?*- The Lord prefaces this mini-parable by saying that the blind can't lead the blind. For Him, a man with even slightly impaired vision was effectively blind. In this very context He speaks of the need to be "perfected... as his master". Only the perfect, by implication, can criticize their brethren. And the final reason He gives for not attempting to cast out the plank from our brother's eye is that "For a good tree brings not forth corrupt fruit" . This is rather hard to understand in the context. But on reflection, it seems that He is teaching that if we are good trees, we will have no corrupt fruit, no splinters in our eye- and because none of us are like this, there is corrupt fruit on each of us, we aren't perfect as our Master, therefore we shouldn't think of trying to cast out the plank from our brother's eye (Lk. 6:39-43). And of course He bids us to be perfect as our Father is. These high standards of demand were mixed with an incredible grace. Only a man who was evidently perfect could speak like this with any realness or credibility. Otherwise His words would just have been seen as the ravings of a weirdo. But there was a realness to His perfection that made and makes His demands so piercingly appropriate to us. The way He handled His perfection is a wonderful insight into His character. He knew that He was without sin; and He knew that the life He lived moment by moment was to be the pattern for all God’s people. Yet somehow, He handled this in a manner which was never arrogant, never proud, and never off-putting to sinners; but rather, actually inviting to them.

This continues the context about judging. Our attitude to others will be the Lord's attitude to us at the last day. If we are hyper-critical of others, then this is how the Lord will look upon us. If *He* should mark iniquity in us, none could stand (Ps.

130:3)- and we should struggle with the natural human tendency to mark iniquity in others. The question 'Why...?' is answered by the Lord in verse 42- He perceived that we excuse our judgmentalness and critical attitudes with the excuse that we actually want to assist the poor person who is the object of our critical gaze. How many times have we heard the bitterest, most carping criticism of others- rounded off with the excuse 'I actually really feel so sorry for him'. This is the very mentality the Lord is bringing to our attention. He bids us realize how we justify critical attitudes towards others on the basis that we kind ourselves that we want to help them.

The splinter is literally, a twig. Both a twig and a beam are all of the same material- wood. If the Lord was indeed a woodworker, He would have prepared this teaching during meditation in His workplace. The point is, all our faults are of the same essence. The problem is that although we have been called out of darkness / blindness into the light of life, we are still blind in so many ways- even though blindness is a feature of the unsaved, and ignorance of God is the basis of His anger with men (2 Thess. 1:8). Crystal clear teaching of Jesus relating to wealth, brotherly love, personal forgiveness, the vital unity of His church, personal purity… these all go ignored in some way by each of us, and therefore by us as a community. The Lord gently warns us that we are *all* likely to be blind in some way- why, He asks, are we so keen to comment on our brother's blindness / darkness, when we too have such limited vision (Mt. 7:3)? We can read the same passages time and again, and fail to let them really register.

"Consider not" is alluded to by James. James is full of references to the Sermon, and James 1:23,24 repeat this Greek word for "consider". James warns that we can be like the man who considers / beholds his face in a mirror and then carries on with life, immediately forgetting what he has seen of himself. It's not that we are totally, blissfully unaware of our faults. We see / consider them, but for a fleeting moment. And then live as if we have not seen them. The Lord is telling us to indeed see / consider our own planks. The idea seems to be that the plank in our own eye is our judgmental attitude towards our brother. This is what damages our vision; John teaches that we cannot see where we are walking if we hate our brother in our heart (1 Jn. 2:11). If we are without this major impediment to our vision, then maybe we will be able to assist others with removing small parts [a twig] of the major problems [a beam] which we have ourselves overcome.

6:42 *Or how can you say to your brother: Brother, let me cast out the splinter that is in your eye- when you yourself do not perceive the beam that is in your own eye? You hypocrite! Cast out first the beam out of your own eye, and then shall you see clearly to cast out the splinter that is in your brother's eye*- The Lord foresaw the problems we would have within our community; from the schisms of the first century to the struggles of latter day believers. Consider the story He told of the carpenter with a beam in his own eye who is so keen to extract the splinter from the eye of his fellow worker (note how he almost forces himself upon his brother to do this!). There is something grotesque, absurd, over the top in this story. In this story of the two carpenters there is something not only unreal, but almost cartoon-like. We read it and think 'The Lord's obviously exaggerating, nobody would really be so foolish'. But that's exactly how He knew we would think! Our attempts to sort out our brother really are that absurd! Christ is effectively saying: 'Now, I know you'll think I'm exaggerating- but I'm not' (Lk. 6:41,42). Often it seems the Lord intends us to think His parables through to their end, imagining the necessary details. A splinter will

come out of the eye naturally, its presence will provoke tears which ultimately will wash it out. 'The grief of life will work on your brother to solve his problem, there are some spiritual weaknesses which time and the experience of life will heal; but I know you people will want to rush in and speed up the spiritual growth of your brother. But you can't do it!'. Christ even foresaw how we will stress the fact that our fellow believer is our "brother" as we try to do this; as if we'll try to be so righteous in the very moment when in God's eyes we do something grotesquely foolish. Doubtless the Lord's carpenter years were the time when He formulated this story of the two carpenters. Significantly they both had wood in their eye- as if a brother will tend to seek to correct another brother who has in essence the same weaknesses, but the 'helping' brother considers that the other brother's is so much greater than his. Perhaps the Lord intends us to take it further, and pick up the implication that these two carpenters couldn't help each other; but there's another one who can...

If we condemn ourselves in our self-examination, we will not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). We are to most importantly [Gk. *proton*] "cast out" the beam from our own eye (Lk. 6:42)- and the Lord uses the same word about the 'casting forth' of the rejected at the last day. We are to judge our own weaknesses as worthy of condemnation. See on Lk. 18:10.

6:43 *For there is no good tree that brings forth corrupt fruit, nor a corrupt tree that brings forth good fruit*- We take a third road of indifferent tolerance to far too many. Having spoken of the need to tolerate our brother, the Lord Jesus repeated His common theme: that there is no third road. There's no third position. Either we love our brother, and bring forth good fruit; or we don't get down to it, and bring forth bad fruit. We can't sometimes bring forth good, sometimes bad. At heart, we are either loving or selfishly hateful. Anything less than following Yahweh with all our heart is seen as doing evil in His eyes (1 Kings 11:6).

Fruit on a transformed person is obvious and visible. If we are to use the presence or absence of fruit as a basis for perceiving false teachers, then we will have no problem at all discerning who is of the Lord and who isn't. And yet this very issue of deciding on others' status has been fatally divisive and destructive for the Lord's church. Statements of faith are analysed, and the teaching of others is watchfully dissected to see if it fits that given statement- in order to decide whether someone is 'in' or 'out'. The Lord foresaw that tendency, for it was the tendency of the scribes too. And instead He offers us this other way, elevating spirituality to the highest level- whoever has the fruits "cannot" be a bad tree. The issue of 'fruit' therefore becomes the key methodology through which to make the judgments which we are called to make in life. The attitude is often expressed that 'Well they may be very nice Christians and all that, but they do not understand the Truth about... [issue X]'. The Lord is tackling that mentality head on, by saying that this "cannot" be the case; if the fruit is there, then they are a good tree, whatever misunderstandings they may have (and we all have them).

6:44 *For each tree is known by its own fruit*- The Lord knows the evil hearts of people- but we can't see their hearts, and so *we* shall know them by their external fruits. The need for fruit as a sign of repentance had been a theme in John's teaching (Mt. 3:8,10), and the Lord in His Sermon is often building on John's words. The Lord's concern is about those who appear to have accepted His message, dressing as sheep, and yet are in fact completely false. The whole thrust of His Sermon is that acceptance of Him produces a change in human life; there must be fruit. And we take a simple lesson from that- if we are to be able to tell whether someone is a genuine

Christian or not by whether their fruits are visible, we have to ask ourselves whether our lives are so markedly different from unbelievers. There is to be something about us, fruit hanging on us, which clearly differentiates us from the unbelieving world. The difference has got to be fairly obvious, because the Lord is here teaching that we can easily discern whether someone purporting to be spiritual is indeed so because the fruits of it will be evident. Therefore there will not be any debate about whether someone is in the wolf / false prophet category- because they either have the fruits of the Spirit, the signs of the transformed life, or they do not. And the difference will be obvious. And yet endless energy has been expended trying to judge false prophets according to the content of their Biblical exposition and teaching. The Lord, however, teaches that the litmus test is in their life, rather than in their intellectual position.

For from thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush do they gather grapes- The idea is 'Of course not'. The Lord's point is that spiritual fruit is obvious, it cannot be hidden, like a city set on a hill. If there are grapes, the blessed fruit of the new covenant, on a person- then for sure they are not a thorn bush, with all the associations between thorns and cursing. In Mt. 12:33 the Lord makes an apparently obvious point- a good tree has good fruit, a bad tree has bad fruit. But the point is that we can easily, clearly tell whether someone has the fruit of the transformed life or not. There is no argument about it, because the fruit of the transformed life, lived according to this Sermon on the Mount, is public and visible. The seed of the Gospel which is sown by Jesus either brings forth fruit, or it doesn't (Mt. 13:8,26). So much angst about labelling individuals as false teachers is rendered unnecessary if we take this approach. And the false teachers with whom the later New Testament letters engage are teaching a false way of life, and Jude, Peter and John especially point out that their way of life indicates that they are false teachers.

Figs are associated with spiritual fruit (Mt. 21:19; 24:32), whereas thistles, like thorns, are associated with the curse (Gen. 3:18 "thorns and thistles"; s.w. Heb. 6:8 "that which bears thorns and thistles is rejected"). The point is, that the difference between the accepted and the condemned is apparent even in this life, because the fruit of the transformed life simply has to be seen publically on people. This is perhaps the Lord's expansion upon His command not to judge / condemn. He's saying that we should not, however, walk around life blind and imperceptive, but rather take good notice of the presence or absence of fruit on a person.

The Lord puts it slightly another way in Lk. 6:44 when He says that men don't "gather" good fruit from a corrupt tree. The language of gathering is very much that of judgment to come; and yet the fruit is produced and gathered now, in the words / fruit that comes out of our mouth. This is why right now we can judge a false teacher, by his corrupt words [this is one of the contexts of the Lord's words about corrupt trees and fruit- we see the fruit *now*]. The corrupt man *will* speak villainy (Is. 32:6). But corrupt words don't just mean expletives- the false teacher would be too smart to use them. He comes in sheep's clothing. But Lk. 6:41-44 gives us an example of "corrupt" words; words which create a corrupting spiritual influence in a man or in a community. One may *say* to his brother that he must cast out the splinter from his eye, although he has a plank in his own. And the Lord goes on to say that a good tree doesn't bring forth corrupt fruit. The corrupt fruit, as in the above passages, means 'corrupt words'. And in Lk. 6:45 the Lord concludes by saying that "for of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh". The corrupt fruit are the corrupt words of Lk. 6:42- saying, 'My brother, I'm very sorry, but I just have to correct you, you are so obviously wrong and stupid to walk round with a splinter in your eye, I can correct your spiritual vision, because I see perfectly. At the moment your spiritual perception

['eye] is just hopeless'. The Lord understood 'the eye' as ones' spiritual vision (Mt. 6:22,23). These kind of words, in essence, are the real leaven; they corrupt / pull apart over time communities as well as individual faith. These criticisms work away within a brother or sister, disaffirming them as believers, disaffirming them for who they are, raising doubt and not hope, humiliating them that they haven't made the grade… until they are corrupted. We have a specific example of a man being punished in judgment for his words, and it may well be the basis for the Lord's teaching here: "When the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done this…" (Is. 10:11,12). And there follows a long quotation of his words. These words were the 'fruit of his heart'- out of the abundance of his heart his mouth had spoken. And these words were almost cited back to him at the time of his condemnation. We know, however, that it is quite possible for human actions and words to *not* reflect the heart. Consider how Sennacherib invaded Judah but in his heart "he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so" (Is. 10:7). This is why the Lord clearly condemns the thought as being as bad as the action, even if the action isn't actually committed. Ps. 55:21 laments how words cannot reflect the true state of a man's heart: "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords". So why, then, is there so much emphasis on spoken words as the basis for judgment to come? Surely it is that although thoughts will also be judged, and the hypocrites revealed for who they are, it doesn't follow that a good man sometimes uses 'corrupt speech'. It's impossible. A good man cannot bring forth bad words. But a bad man can sometimes bring forth words which seem good on the surface, but which are in fact counterfeit. But it can't happen another way- a good man's words aren't just his surface level sin. And I for one flinch at this; because when I have to own up to having said inappropriate words, my flesh wants me to think that in my heart, I didn't mean them. And yet, ruthlessly, I must press the point: bad words reflect a bad heart. We can't justify them. We must repent of them, and by the influence of knowing God, through and in His Son and His word, we must change the state of mind that leads to them. And we should be, on one hand, simply *worried*: that bad words came out of a bad heart. And a good man cannot bring forth such corrupt fruit. There is with some especially the problem of temper, saying things well beyond what they really mean in hot blood. But here again, the words of hot blood do reflect something of the real man or woman. The tongue is a fire that can lead to condemnation, whatever and however we justify its' words as a relatively harmless outcome of our personality type. This may be true, but it isn't harmless.

6:45 *The good man*- The good man is as the good tree. His good fruit or works is because of a good mind within- and vice versa. The Lord as always took the issue to its deepest essence- which was within the deepest heart. He was the ultimate “good man” and good tree. His good works came forth from deep within Him, they were a reflection of His mind.

Out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth that which is good- The heart is our wealth. This is the real gold and silver, the core value of a man's life- what we are thinking about. Spiritual mindedness is the essence of Christianity.

And the evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth that which is evil- The Lord uses the same word to speak of "this evil (AV "wicked") generation" in Mt. 12:45. The problem with Jewish society as a whole was how they thought. This is

the Biblical emphasis- sin comes from our thinking, and not because society is controlled by a personal cosmic 'satan' figure.

For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks- Gk. 'that which remains'. The idea may be that a certain amount of human thought is taken up with basic human functioning, but that which remains over and above that, the part of our thinking which we can consciously control, is what must be controlled- for it is that part of our thinking which controls the words and actions which are the fruit on the tree of a man's life.

6:46 *And why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and not do the things which I say?*- In Rom. 2:13, Paul saw the "Lord, Lord" people as the Jews of the first century who initially responded enthusiastically to the Gospel. The contrast is between saying "Lord, Lord" in this life, and then in the future not entering into the Kingdom. The contrast is between merely *saying* and actually *doing*. The Lord repeats the idea in His mini parable of the two sons; the one who 'said' he would be obedient, and the other who 'did' the will of his father (Mt. 21:30,31). The acceptance of Christ as Lord means that we are as His servants and slaves; it is for us to 'do' His will and work. This fits with the context of the preceding verses- that if He is really our Lord, we will inevitably *do* His will, and that doing will be actual, practical and visible. It is the false prophets who merely say but don't *do*, just as they claim to be good trees but don't have good fruit.

As with many aspects of doctrine, it is often difficult for us to appreciate how radically revolutionary they were in the first century context; and in essence they should lose none of their radicalness with us. David Bosch observes: “Christians confessed Jesus as Lord of all lords- the most revolutionary political demonstration imagineable in the Roman Empire". Philip Yancey likewise: “As the church spread throughout the Roman empire, its followers took up the slogan “Christ is Lord", a direct affront to Roman authorities who required all citizens to take the oath ‘Caesar [the state] is Lord’" (*The Jesus I Never Knew*, p. 246). It hurt, it cost, to recognize Him as Lord. And so it should with us. Men and women died for this; and we likewise give our lives in response to that very same knowledge. There is a tendency, which the Lord Himself brought to our attention, of calling Him Lord but not doing what He says. To know Him as Lord in truth is axiomatically to be obedient to Him (Lk. 6:46). The attitude which we have to the Lord Jesus *now* will be the attitude we have to Him at the day of judgment (Mt. 7:23 cp. Lk. 6:46).

The sensation of working for the Lord can be so self-deceptive. He draws the difference between doing many wonderful works in His name, saying “Lord, Lord”; and *really* doing the will of the Father (Mt. 7:21,22). The parallel Lk. 6:46 has that men will say “Lord, Lord” but not really hear His words. To hear them is to do the will of the Father. Putting all this together, it is perfectly possible to bear His Name, call Him Lord, work hard for Him- and yet never really hear His words, and thereby never really know the will of our Father. From this parallel we can conclude that our attitude to Christ in this life (e.g. "Lord, Lord!") will be our attitude to Him at the judgment seat. If we think He is a hard, unreasonable Lord: that is how He will be. To the froward (in this life), He will shew Himself froward. Straight away we are met head on with a major challenge: Our attitude to Christ in this life will be our attitude to Him at the judgment seat. John's letters reason down the same line: “If (in this life) our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence (now) toward God... this is the confidence that we have in him... abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence... before him (at the judgment) at His coming" (1 Jn. 3:21; 5:14; 2:28). The confidence we have towards Christ now will be the confidence we have at

judgment day. This fact should pull us up out of the spiritual indifference which characterizes so much of our lives. If we see Christ as an abstract theological necessity, a black box in our brain called 'Christ'; if we don't have a dynamic, two- way relationship with Him now- then this too is how we will regard Him then.

In 1 Cor. 13:2 Paul understands those who say "Lord, Lord" as saying it without really *knowing* Christ, and living without love. Thus Paul saw an association between a lack of true love and an external show of appreciation of Christ's Lordship. Not doing what Christ says is a lack of love, in Paul's mind. If we appreciate this, we will see that those who are ignorant of Christ's words cannot show true love. Biblically ignorant Christians need to think through the implications of this. Those who insincerely say "Lord, Lord" now, will say the same then, at the judgment, with the same lack of reality (Mt. 7:21,22). The repetition of "Lord, Lord" shows that our attitude to Him in this life will be that we have when we meet in the last day.

6:47 *Everyone that comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you to whom he is like*- The parable of the builders is fundamentally about our attitude to the Lord. There is good reason to think it mainly concerns the attitude of the responsible; these words of Jesus are set against the background of :27: "I say unto you which hear". The rest of the chapter seems to be addressed primarily to the disciples- e.g. :41,42 speak of them beholding the mote in their brother's eye; warning surely more relevant to believing disciples than to the world generally. The parable of the builders likewise refers to those within the ecclesia, who know Christ as their Lord: "Lord, Lord", they say. Among this class of people there would be "many" (Mt. 7:21- 23) who would hear Christ's sayings, but not do them. See on Jn. 13:13. I'm obviously labouring this point, that the builders in the parable are those within the ecclesia, or at best the responsible. This is because the parallel record in Mt. 7 is rather unpleasant to apply to the ecclesia; it says that "many" of us will be in the category who say "Lord, Lord", and whose house will be destroyed. The Greek for “many" can imply 'the majority'. Even the majority of those who hear Christ's words simply don't do them. Now that's an uncomfortable statistic for us who sit before the bread and wine each week, seeking to hear Christ's words and do them. This parable was spoken in the context of crowds of the ecclesia of Israel coming to Christ, hearing His words, and doing sweet nothing about it. Such an attitude is not building a house on a rock.

Logos suggests more than simply words. The Lord intends us to get to the essential intention of His Spirit. God's word is often styled His 'judgments' in the OT (e.g. Ps. 119:43,160; 147:19). In His word we see His judgments- how He judges and will judge. And in the wealth of Bible history we see examples of how these judgments have been articulated with men in practice. Thus the Lord Jesus concluded the sermon with a parable of judgment, that of the two builders. One heard the Lord's words of the sermon and did them, the other heard but didn't deeply apply them. The message was clear: 'Deeply meditate on what I've just been saying. For this is the basis upon which I will judge men in the last day. You can try to discern for yourselves how seriously and fundamentally you apply my words; and in this you will have a preview of how I will judge you".

The figure of building a house on a rock conjures up the idea of sweating labour. Do we feel that we are spiritually sweating, in a sense? Is it that hard to understand and therefore do the words of Christ? A number of passages make this connection between labouring and understanding the word. Elders labour in the word (1 Tim. 5:17), as the prophets laboured in writing the word of God (Jn. 4:38); and the true Bible student is a labourer who will not be ashamed of his work at the end (2 Tim.

2:15). And the Lord Jesus spoke of us labouring for the manna of God's words, even harder than we labour for our daily bread, and more earnestly than the crowds ran around the lake of Galilee in the blazing midday sun in order to benefit from Christ's miracles (Jn. 6:27). One could be forgiven for thinking that most of us find hearing the words of Christ easy. But there is an element of difficulty, even unpleasantness for us, in truly understanding Him in practical application. How do we hear and do? We are helped to get the answer by considering how Christ elsewhere appealed to people to "Hear *and understand*" (Mt. 15:10). Truly understanding is related to action, 'doing'. In the parable, hearing and doing is like the hard work of digging the foundation on a rock. This is how hard it is to truly understand the words of Christ. Remember how the one talent man also dug into the earth (Mt. 25:18). He did some digging, he did some work. But he failed to truly understand. The very physical action of digging deceived him into thinking he had done enough, as the physical action of building deceived the man who built on earth. Of course we are progressing somewhere spiritually, as we live day by day. But our movement can deceive us.

James clearly alludes to the appeal to not only hear but do: “But be doers of the word, and not only hearers, deluding your own selves” (James 1:22). James spells out the problem- we hear the Lord's words and for a moment assent to them- but don't continue to do them in the long term. "The word" is paralleled by James with "the perfect law of freedom". “But he who looks into the perfect law of freedom, and continues, not being a hearer who forgets, but a doer of the work, this man will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:25). The term "perfect law of freedom" is hard to interpret, and it seems to be in contrast with how the New Testament elsewhere speaks of the Mosaic law as being a form of bondage, with Christ's teaching as the way to freedom. I would suggest that this "perfect law of freedom" refers to the Sermons on the Mount and plain (see on Mt. 7:1), perhaps specifically to the challenge to be perfect (Mt. 5:48); the Sermon, as we showed in commenting on Mt. 5:1, was the Lord's equivalent to the Mosaic Law. The Sermon would've been memorized and recited by the vast mass of early Christians who were illiterate. And James is urging them to not merely encounter the words and nod approvingly at them, nor even merely recite them- but continuing in actually doing them. And this of course is the challenge to us too, assailed as we are in our generation by too many words, to the point that we can easily give a passing 'like' to them, and yet live on uninfluenced.

6:48 *He is like*- Present tense. Matthew says he "shall be like"; the essence of judgment is now. We can discern the principles by which we shall be judged. The future tenses in Matthew's version imply that the truth of the parable of the builders will only be apparent at the day of judgment. The purpose of judgment day is largely for our benefit, and therefore the process will be public- we will learn from the rejection and acceptance of others. Paul alludes to the idea by saying that "the day [of judgment] shall declare" each man's building work (1 Cor. 3:13). And to whom will it be declared? The Lord already knows them that are His. It will be declared to the individual being judged, and to those who are observing. The Lord uses the same word translated 'likened' in speaking of how in this life, the state of the Kingdom in a man's life "*is* likened", present tense, right now, to various things (Mt. 13:24; 18:23; 22:2). But in Mt. 25:1 we find another future tense- at the Lord's return, the Kingdom *will be likened unto* the wise and foolish girls [cp. the wise and foolish builders]. We can perceive the essence of the Lord's future judgment in this life- for the Bible is full of His "judgments" ahead of time. Therefore the nature and outcome

of the final judgment need not be a mystery for us, if we perceive the principles of judgment which the Lord teaches in the Sermon and elsewhere. But all the same, that day will be the final and ultimate declaration of those values.

A man building a house, who dug and went deep, and laid a foundation upon the rock- This is exactly what the Lord Himself is doing (Mt. 16:18; 26:61). There is a mutuality between the Lord and us. We build upon a rock, and He builds us upon a rock. We ourselves build, and yet we are "built up a spiritual house" by God (1 Pet. 2:5; note how Peter goes right on to speak of the Jews as foolish builders in 1 Pet. 2:7; he surely had the Lord's parable of the two types of builder in mind). Both men *built* in that both men *heard* the Lord's sayings. We are all making progress on our spiritual journey, for good or bad. There's no way to just take a break from the journey. We are building, hearing the Lord's will- but the question is, where is our foundation. The fundamental core, the dominant desire, of the Lord's people is Him. For the rock is clearly a symbol of the Lord Jesus ("that rock was Christ", 1 Cor. 10:4; 1 Pet. 2:8 s.w.). On one hand, the Lord teaches that obedience to His sayings in practice is building upon a rock. And yet the rock is Him. He was the word made flesh, the perfect fulfilment and example of obedience to His sayings. To follow the Sermon fully means becoming as Him. And yet the judgment of the last day will not be a simple test of legalistic obedience. It will be a revelation of where our core foundation, our dominant desire, really is. Many people living in this postmodern, passionless world will have to think long and hard before answering the question: 'What is your dominant desire?'. Short term things such as getting a qualification, a career, a particular level or form of wealth, buying a particular house, marrying a particular person, some specific success for our children... all these things fade from dominance in the course of a person's life. Many people simply don't have a dominant desire. The difference with true believers is that we do- and it is 'Christ', Him as a person, the things of His eternal Kingdom. This perhaps more than anything else is the simple difference between the true believer and all other people. This is why there is a simple test as to whether a person is a genuine Christian or not- and it's 'fruit', as the Lord has just previously explained. The difference is clear. The dominant desire of a true Christian is manifest and cannot be hid.

Comparing with the parallel in Mt. 7 it seems that both men built on the same kind of ground- it was rock overlaid with sand. The difference was that the wise man dug through the sand to the rock, whereas the fool built only on the sand. To really get down to the rock of Christ is hard and long work. It is achieved through the process of 'doing' what He teaches. And the story is true to life- for so many of us in our spiritual biography can relate how we passed through years of being 'Christian' or religious without having any personal relationship with Jesus, not praying nor talking to Him, not sensing Him at all as a living Lord. The story suggests that there will be some, perhaps "many", who build a spiritual edifice of grand appearance which has no personal root in a relationship with Jesus- indeed, some actually preach against this because of their obsession with upholding theologies about the supremacy of God the Father. But getting through the sand, through the dirt and dust of our own humanity, to truly knowing Christ- this is what alone will come through judgment day.

Paul uses the metaphor of building about the work of converting and building up others in Christ (Rom. 15:20; 1 Cor. 10:23; Gal. 2:18), knowing that the day of judgment shall declare the quality of our work (1 Cor. 3:13). But even if that building work does not pass through the fire of judgment, we shall personally be saved (1 Cor. 3:15). But our personal house must stand firm throughout the judgment process. Note

there is a continuity between the house before and after the storm of judgment day- it "fell not". Who we essentially are in spiritual terms is who we shall eternally be; our spirit shall be saved at that day (1 Cor. 5:5), our essential spiritual person will be preserved. The experience of the day of judgment will not make us somehow flip over another side and relationship with the Lord, previously unknown to us. Those who say "Lord, Lord" in this life without meaning will use the same empty terms in that day.

To get down to the rock, the man who truly heard Christ had to dig through the earth which the foolish man also dug into. Hearing Christ's words is likened to digging into that earth. Doing and understanding them is likened to then digging into the bed- rock. The foolish man did allow the word to go into him- skin deep. We need to ask ourselves how often these days the word really goes right through our skin, and forces us to hack into the bed- rock. Are we truly building our house on a rock? The force of Mk. 16:16, for example, went more than skin deep just before our baptism. We read it, thought about it, and did it. But now. Are we old and brave, thick skinned, hardened by the humdrum of repetition, no longer building a house on a rock? My sense is that many of us are. Let's be aware that Heb. 6:1,2 defines "the foundation" as "repentance", and an awareness of the reality of the resurrection and coming judgment. In some ways, the longer we are in Christ, the more likely it is that we will not reach down to the bedrock of these things as we ought to. I mean, how often these days do we really repent of something? How often does the reality of the judgment seat truly come home to us? The poetry of the Bible's language, especially if we read the same version, makes God's word glide over us. Exhortations, even the recollection of Golgotha's tragic scene, the final, friendless end... can all slip so easily over our heads. We rest on the laurels of past spiritual victories. Nothing really shakes us up, reaching right down to the bedrock. Surely each of us should be sensing a surge of spiritual urgency when we look at ourselves like this. Yet God will help us; it is He Himself who will "settle" us, or 'make a foundation for' us, as the Greek can mean (1 Pet. 5:10).

The rock which our response to the word must reach down to is that of the crucified Christ. That rock represents Christ and Him crucified, according to Paul (1 Cor. 10:4 and 3:11 cp. 2:2). The Lord's parable of building on the rock was surely quarried from His understanding of Is. 28:16,17: “I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone... a precious cornerstone. The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place". Truly doing God's word will always lead us back to the spirit of the suffering Christ on Calvary. If it does not, our building, our apparent development within the much-vaunted biblicism of our faith, is just a "refuge of lies". All our spiritual effort and suffering finds its ultimate summation in Christ's crucifixion. His suffering there is the quintessence of all spiritual struggle. It is quite possible that as we break bread weekly, we are merely digging a little deeper than usual in the earth, yet still not reaching down to the real meaning of building on the example of Christ's death. The wise man's house was "founded upon a rock". The same Greek word occurs in Col. 2:7, describing how we are "rooted and built up in him". The parallel Eph. 3:17 expands this to mean that if Christ dwells in our hearts, we are "rooted and grounded in love... able to comprehend... and to know the love of Christ", which was supremely shown in His death. Col. 1:23 associates this being "grounded and settled" with not being "moved away from the hope of the Gospel, which ye have heard". If the word really sinks down deep within us, it will reveal to us the love of Christ on the cross, it will result in true love, and all this will be the outworking of the basic doctrines of the Truth which we understood at baptism. Thus

the hacking away at the rock is not only hard, grim work against human nature. It reveals the wondrous love of Christ. The implication is that we can only really understand this love, that passes human knowledge, if we are really sweating away to obey Christ's words, to build our house on a rock.

Luke seems to translate the Palestinian style of things into terms which were understandable by a Roman audience. He had an ambition to preach the gospel to Gentiles even when this was felt by the other brethren to be an outrageous thing to do. Thus Lk. 6:48; 11:33 speak of houses with cellars, which were uncommon in Palestine; and in Lk. 8:16; 11:33 of houses with an entrance passage from which the light shines out. The synagogue official of Mt. 5:25 becomes the "bailiff" in Lk. 12:58. In Palestine, the cultivation of mustard in garden beds was forbidden, whereas Lk. 13:19 speaks of mustard sown in a garden, which would have been understandable only to a Roman audience. It seems in these cases that inspiration caused Luke to dynamically translate the essence of the Lord's teaching into terms understandable to a non-Palestinian audience. Even in Mt. 5:25 we read of going to prison for non-payment of debts, which was not the standard Jewish practice. Imprisonment was unknown in Jewish law. The point of all this is to show that we must match our terms and language to our audience. See on Mk. 13:35.

And when the flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it; because it had been founded upon a rock- The allusion is clearly to Noah's flood; although the Greek for 'flood' here usually refers to a river. Only those within the ark of Christ were saved. To do he will of God, to hear and do the Lord's teaching, to be in the ark of Christ, to be founded upon the rock of Christ as our dominant desire- these are all different ways of saying the same thing. Our core root, our foundation, our dominant desire, our main self-perception and self-understanding, must be of being and living in Christ. This is the fundamental divide between persons, not their statement of faith, their spiritual culture. It comes down to whether they have a heart for the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom. And we cannot judge those "secrets of men" in this life, but we can at least be sure never to reject anyone who professes to have such a heart for the Lord. Paul uses the same word for "descended" to describe how Christ shall descend from Heaven at His return (1 Thess. 4:16); likewise the word for "came" is used about the coming of Christ (Mt. 24:30,39 parallel the coming of Noah's flood with the coming of Christ). The coming of Christ will be judgment; our meeting with Him will be the coming of the rain etc. Even the house founded upon the rock took a fair beating- the purpose of judgment day is to reveal to the builder (and other observers) how he built.

The flood which came was like the day of judgment. This fits in exactly with the way Christ used the figure of the flood to describe His second coming in Mt. 24. Peter does the same in 2 Pet. 3. The beating of the stream upon the house on a rock is a truly apposite figure for the day of judgment. It certainly implies a process of judgment, in which the unworthy will experience a gradual collapse of their spirituality. For the man with the firm foundation, the flood of the parable would have been a worrying experience. Would the house stand up to it? In many of the parables, we can profitably speculate as to likely details of the story. The wise man would have remembered his hard work on the foundation, not with any sense of pride or self- gratitude. But he would nevertheless have been aware of it. Our real spiritual effort will be so valuable in that day. Only then will we realize the extent of the fact that there can be no short cut to true spiritual development. A man cannot be crowned, unless he strive lawfully. The Lord's parable was no doubt partly based on Is. 28:17,

which speaks of the day of judgment being like hail which "shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters (which) shall overflow". The spiritual house of the foolish builder was a lie, effectively; an appearance of real development which deceived men. For externally, men cannot know anything about the different foundations of houses built side by side. We are left to imagine the details of the parable. The foolish man would have run outside and watched his house being beaten down and washed away. He would have thought of trying to do something to stop the destruction, but then given up, realizing it was too late. The foolish girls saw that "our oil *is* running out" (Gk.). The unworthy will have that terrible sense of their opportunity and spirituality ebbing away from them. The impression is given in the parable that the two houses were next door to each other; again confirming our feeling that this parable is about different attitudes to the word within the ecclesia.

"Came" is the same word in the model prayer- we pray for God's Kingdom to "come" (Mt. 6:10), but again we find it hard to pray that prayer if we understand it. We are praying for the storm of judgment to come and beat upon our house.

The picture of the storm beating on the house to see if it collapses implies a purpose and process of the judgment. If it were only a yes / no decision, the language of tribunal, judgment and appeal which occurs in passages concerning the judgment seat would appear to be out of place. Both sheep and goats register their surprise at their Lord's comments on various specific actions of theirs which he discusses with them (Mt. 25:44).

The same house stood before and after judgment. Every knee shall bow to Him in this manner- either in this life, or in condemnation before Him. This is what flesh must come to; and we must realize that now. We must fall down and be broken upon the rock of Christ now, or that rock will fall upon us and grind us to powder with the rest of the kingdoms of men (Mt. 21:41). Ananias and Saphira fell to the earth at their condemnation, whereas Saul fell to the earth in repentance (Acts 5:5,10; 9:4 s.w.). At the last day, we shall fall to the earth but be lifted up and made to stand (Rom. 14:4).

"Because it had been founded upon a rock" is surely alluded to by Paul when he teaches that we must be grounded / have a foundation in love (Eph. 3:17), in the Gospel of the Kingdom (Col. 1:23). And God Himself has the ability to "settle" or ground / foundation us (1 Pet. 5:10 s.w.)- if we so wish to have the things of the Lord Jesus, His love and His Kingdom, as the dominant, master passion of our lives, then God will confirm us in that.

6:49 *But he that hears and does not do is like a man that built a house upon the earth without a foundation, against which the stream broke- and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great*- The Jews who rejected the Lord Jesus are described as builders in Mk. 12:10; Lk. 11:48- and to unwise builders in Lk. 14:28.

he Lord spoke of the rejected at the judgment as being like a house against which "the floods came, and the winds blew, and smote upon that house; and it fell". Floods (of the ungodly), winds (whirlwinds), smiting, a falling house- this is all language taken from Job's experiences. He went through all this *now*, just as each righteous man must come to condemn himself in self-examination *now* so that he won't be condemned then. Flesh must be condemned, each man must come to know his own

desperation. And if he won't do this, the judgment process at the last day will teach it him.

The collapse of time around the events of the judgment would explain this equation between the gathering and the judgment. The wicked will "immediately" feel that the house of their pseudo-spirituality has totally collapsed, as soon as the rain of judgment comes down (Lk. 6:49). The 'rain' will be a symbol of blessing for the righteous, and of judgment for the wicked. Likewise the cup of wine is another double symbol- of blessing, and of condemnation. Yet we know that there will be a *process* of condemnation- they will argue back with their Lord, expecting a reward for their good works… but underneath, "immediately" from their first knowledge of the Lord's return, there will be this sense of total collapse within them. The judgment passages which speak of the rejected apparently confidently demanding a place in the Kingdom in reward for their good works must be read with this fact as background.

The man who hears and does not appears to be building- he has the sensation of going some place in his spiritual life. He *did* dig a foundation- in sand, where it is easy to dig. But the Lord said that he built "without a foundation" (Lk. 6:49). Are we *really* hearing and doing- or just going through the motion of it, experiencing the sensation of appearing to do it?

In the parable, the flood which came was like the day of judgment. This fits in exactly with the way Christ used the figure of the flood to describe His second coming in Mt. 24. Peter does the same in 2 Pet. 3. The beating of the stream upon the house on a rock is a truly apposite figure for the day of judgment. It certainly implies a process of judgment, in which the unworthy will experience a gradual collapse of their spirituality. For the man with the firm foundation, the flood of the parable would have been a worrying experience. Would the house stand up to it? In many of the parables, we can profitably speculate as to likely details of the story. The wise man would have remembered his hard work on the foundation, not with any sense of pride or self- gratitude. But he would nevertheless have been aware of it. Our real spiritual effort will be so valuable in that day. Only then will we realize the extent of the fact that there can be no short cut to true spiritual development. A man cannot be crowned, unless he strive lawfully. The Lord's parable was no doubt partly based on Is. 28:17, which speaks of the day of judgment being like hail which "shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters (which) shall overflow". The spiritual house of the foolish builder was a lie, effectively; an appearance of real development which deceived men. For externally, men cannot know anything about the different foundations of houses built side by side. We are left to imagine the details of the parable. The foolish man would have run outside and watched his house being beaten down and washed away. He would have thought of trying to do something to stop the destruction, but then given up, realizing it was too late. The foolish girls saw that "our oil *is* running out" (Gk.). The unworthy will have that terrible sense of their opportunity and spirituality ebbing away from them. The impression is given in the parable that the two houses were next door to each other; again confirming our feeling that this parable is about different attitudes to the word within the ecclesia.

Condemnation will be tragic- the ruin is "great". Not only for those individuals, but for the Father and Son and all of us who view it. These are the final words of the Sermon. The Lord ends on the note of the possibility of condemnation, despite His many positive, upbeat and encouraging words about the certainty of salvation. The tragedy of the future we might miss is simply so great that the Lord felt He had to say this. It isn't mere negative psychology. The eternal reality of the issues before us are

such that we can do nothing else but let the Lord's concern and earnestness ring in our ears.

LUKE CHAPTER 7

7:1 *After he had ended all his sayings in the ears of the people, he entered into Capernaum*- The Lord was based in Capernaum and returned there after the public work of teaching the sermon on the plain and healing. The language of 'ending sayings' and the stress that the people heard what He said is somewhat solemn, as if the Sermon was a manifesto of the Kingdom which they had heard and were now responsible to.

7:2 *And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and at the point of death*- It is tempting to think that this is the same incident as recorded in Mt. 8:5-13. But the differences are such that they preclude this. In Matthew, the centurion and the Lord are in direct contact, and not through mediators and messengers. The healing is from a distance, a Gentile centurion is involved, his sick servant is healed, the Lord is willing to enter the Gentile's house but each Centurion says that this is not necessary as they believe in the Lord's power to heal. So there were two centurions in the Capernaum area who both had sick servants whom the Lord healed. The similarity of wording between the two is understandable; one of the incidents happened first, and the second Centurion was inspired to faith and humility by the words and attitude of the first one. This is how faith spreads today too; a person sees in practice the words and faith of a person similar in position to themselves- and they are encouraged to do as that person has done.

The next pericope in Luke concerns the widow's son at Nain, and this also is not recorded elsewhere apart from in Luke. Indeed, most of Luke 7 is material unique to Luke. This strengthens the suggestion that this is not the same centurion as in Mt. 8 but is more unique material.

7:3 *And when he heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, pleading with him to come and heal his servant*- It was common to approach another for favours through intermediaries whom it was thought would be impressive to the one being besought. The centurion clearly had faith in the Lord and yet failed to perceive the chasmic differences between Him and "the elders of the Jews"- the very class who rejected and crucified Him. So we can assume that the man's understanding of the Lord's message was minimal. And yet on the other hand, we must give due weight to his own later explanation as to why he sent the elders to the Lord- he says it was because he felt unworthy to talk directly with the Lord (:7). The man's faith progressed- from inviting the Lord into his house, to then realizing that such a visit was not necessary as the Lord had power to heal from a distance (:6). The qualities of humility and faith in this man are clearly set up as exemplary for all Gentile believers. For the aim of Luke's Gospel was to bring Gentiles to faith, and so this man becomes a parade example.

7:4 *And they, when they came to Jesus, pleaded earnestly, saying: He is worthy to have you do this for him*- The man protested that he was *not* worthy (:6), perhaps in conscious allusion to their words. The synagogue elders considered the man "worthy" by his works (:5), whereas the Lord saw him as "worthy" by his faith in the Lord's grace. The situation is set up as a cameo of the entire argument of Romans 1-8.

7:5 *For he loves our nation and he built our synagogue*- As noted on :4, they considered worthiness to come from generosity and loyalty to all things Jewish. But the point of the account is that it was his faith in the Lord Jesus, rather than these

things, which was counted as significant. Theophilus, "lover of God", was the immediate audience for this Gospel; and his given name could suggest he too was a proselyte. Luke is perhaps trying to get him to identify with this centurion who likewise was a God lover, and whose example inspired the centurion in Mt. 8 to a similar faith. Luke was hoping that Theophilus would be likewise inspired. It was of course unusual for a Roman centurion to be a Jewish proselyte. The man must have taken issues of faith very seriously, and so his amazing faith in the Lord as Messiah is quite credible.

7:6 *And Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying to him: Lord, trouble not yourself. For I am not worthy that you should come under my roof*- See on Jn. 4:53. He was aware that Jews were not supposed to 'come to' or under the roof of a Gentile (Acts 10:28). He was therefore aware that the purpose of God at that time was for Jews rather than Gentiles- his understanding was quite deep. See on Mt. 8:9. But the Lord was quite willing to go under the roof a Gentile; that is the significance of the Lord's response that He would come to the sick servant. The man's faith and humility progressed; for the Lord was now near his house, and he may as well let Him enter. But he clearly felt unworthy to have the Lord in his home and even to directly talk with the Lord.

7:7 *Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to you. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed*- His faith was absolute- the servant would be surely healed at the Lord's word. The messengers sent to beg the Lord to assist were not therefore sent in order to as it were persuade the Lord to assist by their fine oratory and arguments. That is maybe how they perceived themselves, and how others perceived it; but the simple truth was that the man felt unworthy to even talk with the Lord. His faith in Him as Son of God was therefore so deep.

7:8 *For I also am a man under authority, having under myself soldiers; and I say to one: Go! And he goes. And to another: Come! And he comes. And to my servant: Do this. And he does it*- Like any good teacher, the Lord repeated His lessons. The disciples heard His commendation of the Centurion, who believed that just as he had men under his control, so Jesus had the whole cosmos under His control (Lk. 7:8-10); and they learnt that lesson again as they sat awestruck in the boat soon afterwards: "What manner of man is this! For he commands even the winds and water, and they obey him" (Lk. 8:25). Clearly the centurion understood that the Lord was of immense power in His own right; He was surely appreciative that the Lord was God's Son, able to function for Him and with His power. He had thought through the issues. Perhaps He had heard the Lord's preaching in the Capernaum synagogue, which he had built. He felt a level of identification with the Lord; for he reasons that just as he has a servant whom he can command, so he wishes the Lord to treat *his* servant as *His* servant. He was inviting the Lord to take his own place as Lord and master of his family, and to have him as one of His soldiers, to come and go at His command, and to have his servant healed. The language of 'going' at the Lord's word of command is used elsewhere about casting out of demons. Maybe the centurion thought that the servant was demon possessed, and wanted the Lord to tell the demons to 'go'. In which case we can perceive that misunderstandings, even erroneous ones, having our science and language wrong, will not hinder relationship with the Lord if we have faith in Him.

7:9 *And when Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him*- He admired him [Gk.]. Here we see the humility of the Lord Jesus, that despite His own peerless perfection, He could admire the faith of a man who as a centurion was yet far from His own level of spirituality. Despite His peerless faith, the Lord Jesus marvelled at

the extent of other's faith; the Gospels stress how sensitive He was to the faith of others (Mt. 9:2,22,29; 15:28; Mk. 5:34; 10:52; Lk. 7:9,50; 8:48; 17:19; 18:42). Yet measured by His standards, they probably hardly knew what faith was. “No, not in Israel" suggests the Lord thought that Israel’s faith was something *very* high; when their rejection of Him was the cruelest tragedy in their history. The Lord marvelled at the man's faith, and also at the extent of unbelief in others (s.w. Mk. 6:6). Given the Lord's tiredness, mental and physical exhaustion, demanding program, extreme loneliness etc., the fact He had the emotional energy to marvel is an essay in His extreme sensitivity, and how He let neither His spiritual mission nor His external circumstances stop Him from having such sensitivity regarding the spiritual state of others. In this we see a deep challenge to ourselves.

And turned and said to the crowd that followed him- The Gospel records, Luke especially, often record how the Lord turned and spoke to His followers- as if He was in the habit of walking ahead of them, with them following (Lk. 7:9,44,55; 10:23; 14:25; 23:28; Mt. 9:22; Jn. 1:38). Peter thought that following the Lord was not so hard, because he was literally following Jesus around first century Israel, and identifying himself with His cause. But he simply failed to make the connection between following and cross carrying. And we too can agree to follow the Lord without realizing that it means laying down our lives.

I say to you, I have not found so great a faith, not even in Israel- The Lord was and is actively searching for faith in people. He is the man looking to find a great treasure (Mt. 13:44), seeking to find a pearl of great price (Mt. 13:46), finding a lost sheep or coin (Mt. 18:13; Lk. 15:4-9), finding weak and rejected workers to work for Him in His work (Mt. 20:6), wanting to find spiritual fruit on the fig tree (Mt. 21:19), finding willing guests for His own wedding (Mt. 22:10)- any who believe in Him. As He meets so many disappointments, imagine His joy at finding *our* faith, incomplete and at times misplaced as it is. Surely in all this work of seeking and finding just a few He was living out His own command to seek, because we will find (Lk. 11:10). He seems to allude to the idea in telling the disciples to fish on the right side of their boat, and they would find (Jn. 21:6). The incident is replete with symbolism- the message surely is that we will find converts for the Lord, if we seek for them as the Lord did. We in our turn are searching to find the Lord (Acts 17:27); and He is seeking to find us. Hence the flash moment when the searching God and His Son meet searching man in conversion to Christ. Ultimately we are 'found' at the Lord's return (Phil. 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:7; 2 Pet. 3:14), but we are also 'found' by Him at the point of first faith in this life.

7:10 *And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant healed*- These 'sent ones' were converted; the apostles were intended to be challenged by the conversion of these other 'sent ones', just as we are intended to take lessons from the folks amongst whom we live in this world.

7:11 *And it came to pass soon afterwards, that he went to a city called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him*- Perhaps He had some other reason for going to Nain; or maybe He went there to attend the funeral because the woman and her son were relatives. The crowd would likely have been nagging Him all the way to perform healings. His economy of miracle is remarkable.

7:12 *Now when he came near to the gate of the city, there was carried out one that was dead, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and many people of the city were with her*- Luke's attention to women and the marginalized continues. This woman had no husband and now no son; she was without males in her life and

thereby marginalized and despised. But the Lord comes to her, and becomes the ultimate saviour male in her life.

7:13 *And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said to her: Weep not*- We are given the impression that the Lord's plans of action were sometimes spontaneous. Realizing how she was now bereft of males in her life, He felt compassion for her and intervened. And yet if we enquire why He decided to take a journey to Nain, we conclude that it was specifically to attend this funeral and transform it. "Weep not" is itself an invitation to faith in Him. Otherwise, it is a most inappropriate thing to say to a mother as she buries her son. She could only stop crying if she believed that the Lord could radically change the situation. And He could.

This is the first time Luke calls Jesus "the Lord". Possibly he has in view the manifestation of the "LORD", Yahweh, in His Son. And this is shown in the Lord Jesus having compassion, which perhaps is the leading commonality and theme in His manifestation of the Father.

7:14 *And he came near and touched the coffin; and the bearers stood still. And he said: Young man, I say to you, arise*- The Lord spoke to the corpse of the widow's dead son as if it were already restored to life; see on Mk. 5:41. The touching of the coffin was all significant, for it made the Lord ritually unclean. And yet He touched it when in His own mind having proclaimed the man alive; there was therefore no defilement from a dead body because in fact the body was not dead. The Lord surely knew the kind of casuistic discussion of the legalism of the situation which would be provoked. And He was seeking to teach through the miracle that legalistic defilement is no issue to Him because He can transform defiling situations. He taught the same by touching lepers and sick people who were probably also ritually unclean. But He touched them at the point of healing, raising the legalistic question as to whether He had in fact touched the defiled, seeing that He spoke of dead and unclean things as if they had already come clean and alive to Him.

7:15 *And he that was dead sat up and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother*- The idea of giving the man over to his mother would again imply physical contact between the Lord and the once dead man; and surely the mother embraced her son. The new life given by the Lord meant that concepts of defilement were changed; and it was this fear of defilement which had stymied the development of true spirituality within Judaism, just as it is does within legalistic Christianity today. "Sat up" is literally to be sat up, suggesting the Lord lifting up the revived man to a sitting position. The Greek is only used in one other place, again by Luke, when Peter raises Tabitha and she sits up (Acts 9:40). This continues Luke's theme that the Lord's work and style of operation was continued in the ministry of His body of believers. Their work, as ours, was as if He was still on earth, present through them on account of the presence of His Spirit in the Comforter. And their whole style of working was therefore reflective of His.

7:16 *And fear took hold of all, and they glorified God, saying: A great prophet has arisen among us, and God has visited His people!*- See on Mk. 1:2. Juxtaposition of the Lord's humanity and His exaltation is found all through Bible teaching about His death. He touched the coffin- so that the crowd would have gasped at how unclean Jesus was, and how He had identified Himself with the unclean to the point of Himself appearing unclean. It was surely shock that made the pallbearers stop in their tracks. But then the Lord raised the dead man- and the people perceived His greatness, convinced that in the person of Jesus "God has visited His people". His humanity and yet His greatness, His Divine side if you like, were artlessly juxtaposed together.

Hence prophetic visions of the exalted Jesus in Daniel call Him “the Son of man”. But again we notice another juxtaposition- of fear along with glorifying God. Why should they be fearful that God had visited them in His Son? The same idea has been used in Lk. 1:68,78 of how 'God visiting' is parallel with 'God redeeming' from sin. Why fear redemption and salvation? The only reason for such fear would be because they sensed that this visitation from God required their repentance and exposed their sin. The Gentiles were "visited" (s.w.) in order to take out a people for His Name (Acts 15:14). The visitation of God in His Son required that people respond, and thereby become "His people". And this demanded too much for many in Israel.

7:17 *And this report about him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region*- The *logos* "went out"- similar language as used in John's gospel. It hardly refers to any personal pre-existence of the Lord. It seems that it was the spreading of this "report" which reached some of John's disciples (:18). The report in view could be of the resurrection in Nain, or that of :16- the idea that the Lord was indeed the promised Messiah or "prophet".

7:18 *And the disciples of John told him of all these things*- They heard the "report" that Jesus of Nazareth was "the prophet" (:16) and that the time of Messianic visitation had come. As noted on :19, the "report" may have been that the Lord was not so much Messiah as the Elijah prophet. This would make John's enquiry of :19 not so much a lack of faith but more of genuine confusion as to the Lord's prophetic identity.

7:19 *And John calling to himself two of his disciples, sent them to Jesus, asking: Are you he that comes, or look we for another?*- Even John the Baptist, whose teaching had prepared most of the twelve to accept Jesus, seems to have not been altogether clear about what we might consider fundamental things. He speaks of Jesus as “the one to come”, a commonly understood description of the Elijah prophet, based on the phrase being used about him in Mal. 3:1- and not of Messiah Himself. Thus John the Baptist anticipated that this “one to come”, his cousin Jesus, would be a refining fire (Mt. 3:12)- which is exactly Malachi’s language about the Elijah prophet (Mal. 3:2; 4:1). This would explain why John the Baptist had apparent ‘doubts’ whilst in prison as to whether Jesus really was the Messiah. And it would also explain why the disciples expected Jesus to act like Elijah in Lk. 9:52-56. It was not until the baptism of Jesus that John the Baptist came to understand Jesus as the “one to come”; so the preparatory work which he had done with the disciples must have had what we would call a flimsy doctrinal basis. When Jesus called them to follow Him, and they so quickly obeyed, it is often assumed that John the Baptist had prepared them for this. But that preparation must at best have been very shallow and incomplete, given John’s own admission that he did not recognize Jesus for who He was until His baptism. Why, however, was John’s misunderstanding recorded in the Gospel records? Or the misunderstanding of his father Zacharias, that John was in fact the promised Messiah, “the prophet”, the one would bring forgiveness of sins and freedom from the Romans (Lk. 1:71-79)? Perhaps for the same reason as the language of demons is used, especially to describe the miracles at the beginning of the Lord’s ministry. He didn’t correct this. But over time it became evident that the sheer power of the Son of God meant that in practice, demons didn’t exist. Likewise, as the ministry of Jesus unfolds to us in the Gospel records, it becomes apparent that He was Son of God, the Messiah- and not merely an Elijah prophet.

And yet for all this, it could simply be that John had a crisis of faith in prison. It can’t be insignificant that John sends two disciples out just after the Lord had sent

out *His* disciples two by two in Matthew 10. Surely this is a literary device to set up John in negative contrast to the Lord at this time; John sent out his pair of disciples in response to his crisis of faith. He knew Jesus was to do mighty works- but he had heard of them only by report. Those he sent out had already heard and seen the Lord's miracles (Mt. 11:4), and yet John sends them to Jesus to ask if He is Messiah. It all reads rather negatively about John. It could even be that he died at a low point in his faith, and yet the Lord's positive comment about Him surely suggests that He saw John as being ultimately saved. The records of the Kings of Israel and Judah, along with various passages in Ezekiel 18, place great emphasis upon how a man *finishes* his spiritual journey, and yet there are also Biblical examples of faithful men dying at low ebb spiritually; this will not necessarily exclude from the Kingdom, and John the Baptist may be another example.

7:20 *And when the men came to him, they said: John the Baptist has sent us to you to ask: Are you he that comes, or do we look for another?*- The emphasis may be on the word "you". The coming one was a well-known term for Messiah, based upon Ps. 118:26. Despite John's clearly stated belief that Jesus was the promised bridegroom, the lamb of God and Son of God (Jn. 1:29-34), it seems things had not gone according to the prophetic program John had imagined- and he now had doubts about Jesus. For a man claiming (at least implicitly) to be Messiah, it would've been an unnecessary question to ask Him 'Are you Messiah?'. It could be inferred that John still believed in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, but had begun to wonder if He was only the *herald* of "another" whom they should be looking for in order to establish the Kingdom. It could be that John's understanding of himself as the Elijah prophet had led him to expect that all Israel would repent, and then Messiah Himself would come and establish His Kingdom immediately. For this is indeed how the prophecies of Isaiah 40 and Malachi 4 could be read. Perhaps John was full of such self-doubt that he wondered if he really had been the Elijah prophet, and was thinking that maybe he had just heralded the Elijah prophet, Jesus, who was in turn to herald "He that should come". This is the problem with holding a dogmatic view of prophetic sequences- when they prove wrong, either because our interpretation was faulty or because human lack of response means they are to come true in another way than ideally planned, then often peoples' faith in Christ Himself is damaged. If we have an open ended view of prophecy, whereby we understand it to state possibilities which may have other ways of fulfillment than what is ideally intended, then such crises don't arise. "Look we for another?" doesn't sound as if John was simply asking for a sign, in the spirit of Gideon. He had major questions about the whole prophetic program, sensing that something had changed; the word for "another" is also translated "altered" (Lk. 9:29). In this sense, his question may not necessarily reflect a crisis of faith in Jesus personally, but rather an earnest desire to know the new details of the revised prophetic program.

7:21 *In that hour he cured many of diseases and illnesses and evil spirits, and on many that were blind he bestowed sight*- Again we are being shown that the Lord's miracles were for a teaching purpose; in this case, to give a lesson to John's disciples and to John himself, proving beyond cavil that the Lord was Messiah, Son of God, and not simply a prophet. The Lord did heal from genuine feelings of compassion, as seen at Nain; and yet Luke seems to always stress that this was far from the only reason. Here His miracles were done in order to intentionally fulfilling prophecies in Isaiah, and then asking John to accept that (see on :22).

7:22 *And he answered and said to them: Go and tell John the things which you have seen and heard. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are*

cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up- See on Mk. 6:3; Lk. 15:7. They had already told him once- the same word is used for how they initially had told John these things (:18). There is definitely the sense that John needed to work through the implications of what he was hearing, rather than having some specific explanation from the Lord. The request that John 'hear' these reports more carefully begs connection with the Lord's frequent comment that the Jews heard but did not really hear (e.g. Mt. 13:13-17). John's lack of understanding appears to be in some sense culpable and at best disappointing to the Lord. The Lord is seeking to assure John that if he just thinks about the evidence, it's clear that Jesus is indeed Messiah, and as John had earlier preached- Son and lamb of God, who saves His people from their sins. He seems to be saying that that was so wonderful and fundamental, that the rearrangement of the prophetic timetable is in a sense irrelevant compared to that. Whether or not the timing or chronology of events surrounding the Kingdom comes true as we expect, or whether or not we discern how God has re-planned the fulfillment of prophecy- is all irrelevant compared to the wonder of knowing Jesus as the Christ and personal Saviour.

The teaching of Jesus included frequent quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament. When we go back and read around the contexts of the passages He quoted, it becomes apparent that He very often omits to quote the negative, judgmental, or conditional aspects of the blessings which He quotes. Consider the way He quotes Is. 29:18; 35:5,6 and 61:1 in the parallel record in Mt. 11:5,6. These are all talking about Messianic blessings. But they are embedded amidst warnings of judgment and the conditionality of God's grace. Likewise Luke records how Jesus read from Is. 61:1,2, but He stopped at the very point where Isaiah's message turns from promise to threat. None of this takes away from the terrible reality that future failure is a real possibility, even tomorrow. We can throw it all away. We may do. We have the possibility. And some do. There is an eternity ahead which we may miss. And each one who enters the Kingdom will, humanly speaking, have come pretty close to losing it at various points in his or her mortal life. But the Lord's positivity is a powerful example.

The poor have the good news preached to them- This was as remarkable and significant as the previous miraculous signs, of the blind seeing etc. There was a deep impression that religion was for the middle class or wealthy. Teachers didn't bother preaching to the poor because there was no possibility of financial support coming from them. Yet the Lord opened His manifesto in the Sermon on the Mount by saying that His message was especially intended for "the poor" (Mt. 5:3 s.w.). In many Christian circles, the same is true today. Churches need money (or, they think they do), and so their focus is not on taking the Gospel to the poor but rather to the potential tithers. The disciples were amazed that the rich wouldn't be saved (Mt. 19:24,25), so deeply ingrained was this idea that spirituality and wealth were somehow supposed to go together. The Lord was teaching the opposite. There's no doubt that the Gospel is designed for the poor; and that if one were to bring "the poor" *en masse* into many churches / ecclesias today, the existing membership would up and go somewhere else. The Spirit was clearly upon the Lord Jesus exactly *because* He preached the Gospel to the poor (Lk. 4:18). Our preaching attitude to "the poor" is a reflection of our spirituality. "The poor" in the immediate context were the disciples, for the Lord had just looked upon them in love and commented: "Blessed are you poor" (Lk. 6:20). In the response of "the poor" to Him, the Lord saw a Divine confirmation of His ministry. And it is the same with us. Our ministry is to take the Gospel to the unbelieving poor, and not to get middle class Christian religionists to shift churches and allegiance to our group. James 2:5 is clear that God

chooses the poor *more than* the rich to be heirs of His Kingdom; so in this case, our preaching focus should be specifically towards them.

The same passage alluded to in Is. 61:1 promised freedom and good news to the imprisoned- which was where John was at the time, according to Mt. 11. The Lord was encouraging him in a hidden kind of way that He was aware of where John was, and there would be ultimate freedom from that prison in the Kingdom.

7:23 *And blessed is he, whoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me-* Clearly the Lord saw John as likely to be about to stumble. As explained earlier, the cause of stumbling was [and is to this day] that the Lord at times makes changes in the outworking of His prophetic program. Because things haven't gone just as mere humans imagined it, because they can't get their heads around God's huge sensitivity to human repentance and choices, nor His subsequent willingness to change His timetable to accommodate that… therefore people stumble at Christ. The Lord encountered a similar situation in Nazareth, where people again were "offended in Him" (Mt. 13:57) because His Messiahship was not as they supposed it ought to be. Likewise the death of the Messiah by crucifixion caused even the disciples to be offended- it was simply not how they had imagined Messiah's salvation. They were "offended" exactly because He was 'smitten' (Mt. 26:31), even though the Lord had warned them ahead of time about His death so that they would not be offended (Jn. 16:1). The cross was therefore a rock of offence to many (1 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 5:11). So often we see the process- people come to Jesus with preconceived notions of how things should be, and fit those notions into the structure of their 'Christianity'. But the Christ's most fundamental teachings may in fact outlaw their beloved notions and favourite suppositions. And because their imagination of Jesus doesn't fit in with who He actually is- they stumble. It's like falling in love with an idea of a person, rather than with the person as they actually are. God's word presents Jesus as He actually is, and it is this which we must accept, allowing it thereby to jettison all preconceived notions we have of Him. The parable of the sower taught that persecution leads to people being offended (Mt. 13:21), and John was certainly undergoing persecution for the word there in prison. But persecution leads to spiritual stumbling largely because of the dashed expectations- that with Christ, all shall go well for us, and we in this life shall be delivered from problems. But the Lord is stressing throughout His teaching that that Jewish conception of Messiah and Messiah's Kingship over men was simply incorrect. Those who followed Him would suffer and die, in one form or another, the death of the cross.

The Lord tried not to offend / stumble people (Mt. 17:27) and yet people were indeed offended in Him. But in Mt. 18:6-9 He makes offence of others a serious sin. In this connection of thought we see an example of where there are some things which can be said of Jesus, some things He could do, which we simply cannot do. In forgiving others, we are often challenged to forgive *as* the Lord does. Not all that He does can be replicated by us, nor indeed is it possible. Thus for us, forgiveness is usually a process, whereas for the Father and Son it appears to be more instantaneous.

7:24 *And when the messengers of John had departed, he began to say to the crowds concerning John: What did you go out into the wilderness to see?-* The crowds whom the Lord was addressing were therefore eager listeners of John, even perhaps in a sense his disciples. We see her the fulfillment of John's commission- to prepare *in the wilderness* a smooth way for the coming of the Messianic King of glory. But the crowds didn't respond, and Messiah didn't come in His glorious Kingdom. I suggested on Mt. 10:11 that the mission of the disciples was initially to those who had responded to John the Baptist's teaching; and now whilst they were

away on their preaching tour doing such follow up work, the Lord was doing the same, addressing a crowd who had also responded to John enough to trek out into the wilderness to hear him.

A reed shaken with the wind?- See on :41. The reference is probably to the reeds growing in the Jordan where John baptized. Just as the people didn't go there to look at the reeds but at John as God's prophet, so the Lord is hinting that they should not look on John's weakness but upon who he essentially was. When John the Baptist had this crisis of faith, the Lord spoke of John to the multitude as if he was a strong believer, no reed shaken in the wind of doubt. And yet He didn't just paper over John's doubts and forget them, pretending He hadn't seen. The message He returned to John encouraged him to look back to the Isaiah prophecies of Messiah, and to remember especially the way that the weak, doubting ones would be made strong. The Lord evidently sought to strengthen the weak John by this allusion. The language of being *shaken* by *wind* is used elsewhere by the Lord in describing the process of condemnation at the last day (both Greek words are found in Mt. 7:25,27). The Lord's idea may therefore be: 'Sure, John is wavering at this very moment. But when you saw him in the wilderness, he wasn't; and in God's eyes, even now, he's not shaking in the wind, he's not going to be condemned at the day of judgment- even though, as you've just heard, he has his doubts and weaknesses'. Perhaps the Lord had John in mind when He soon afterwards spoke of how He would not condemn even a broken reed (s.w.- Mt. 12:20), but rather still use it as a channel for the oil of the Spirit. The whole situation with John is helpful in coping with others who clearly are passing through times of trial which is resulting in their faith wavering. Think positively of who they were, have been, and still essentially are…

7:25 *But what went you out to see? A man clothed in soft clothing? Look, they that are gorgeously apparelled and live delicately, are in kings' courts*- The allusion is surely to Herod and Herodias, who had imprisoned John. John's clothing was rugged, not soft (Mt. 3:4). The Lord is drawing a contrast between John and Herod who imprisoned him. Herod Antipas had minted coins with a reed on them to celebrate the building of Tiberias. Perhaps the Lord is saying: 'OK, so John is weak for the moment, there in prison. But just think of the man he was when he was free, and how in God's eyes he compares so favourably against Herod who imprisoned him'. In His gracious way, the Lord is teaching that the overall sum of a man's spiritual life must be considered, and not whether he ends it with some element of weakness. This approach is also to be found in the way the inspired record appears to comment upon some of the kings of Israel and Judah- weakness at the end didn't necessarily scribble God's overall judgment of their lives.

7:26 *But what went you out to see?*- Three times in :7-9 the Lord reminds them of their trek out into the wilderness to hear John; His point is that the respect they once had for him should remain, despite his wavering under extreme suffering. God's overall impression of Job appears similar, and it is a good teaching for we who are all too inclined to too harshly judge a good believer for a temporary period of weakness. The Greek phrase 'go out to see…' is used in classical Greek about going out to a spectacle or show. The Lord is suggesting that perhaps that was all their interest in John might have been, just as today likewise, it's quite possible to visit the truest church and hear the truest teaching, yet unperceived by those who are merely 'going to church'.

A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and much more than a prophet- The idea is 'the greatest prophet'. Judaism had various theories about who had been the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. The Lord was saying that actually, the greatest of them was

that man who was now sitting in the grim prison cell, having a crisis of faith and understanding.

7:27 *This is he*- The emphasis is on the word "is". He *was* the prophet who came to herald Messiah. And yet John had denied that he was Elijah, nor "that prophet" (Jn. 1:20), surely a reference to the Elijah prophet; even though he later stated that he had been 'sent before' Messiah (Jn. 3:28), and was the voice of the Isaiah 40 prophet crying in the wilderness (Jn. 1:23). The Lord is saying 'Actually, John *was* that prophet. He initially denied it in his humility, but he really was and is "that prophet". Now again his humility has led him to self-denial, he's wondering whether in fact I am the Elijah prophet and the Messiah Himself is yet to be 'looked for'. But take it on My authority- he really was the Elijah prophet, even though his humility leads him to self-doubt at times'.

Of whom it is written: Look- An invitation to perceive, and the Lord was asking them to perceive in that imprisoned man a great prophet, to see beyond his temporary, surface-level crisis of John, to perceive that "this *is* he".

I send My messenger before your face, who shall prepare your way before you- The pronouns are somewhat different from the original in Mal. 3:1: "Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before [My face] ... says Yahweh of Armies". Jesus, as the face and presence of God to men, interpreted the words of His Father as being spoken personally to Him. The way was prepared before God's face, according to Malachi, but God's Son applies that to Himself. That is not to say that Jesus was God in any Trinitarian sense. He was the supreme manifestation of God, and He quotes Malachi 3 in such a way as to teach that to those with ears to hear. We have a window here onto how the Lord Jesus read Scripture; passages about His Father were applied by Him to Himself, but that is no claim by Him to be God Himself in person.

The Lord is reminding the crowds who had gone out to hear John in the wilderness that *they* were the way which John had tried to prepare, and He was now the face of Yahweh standing before them. But they had become side-tracked from the essence of personal transformation by a worry about the credibility and humanity of the messenger; and again, this is a principle which badly needs our attention in our own path. So often believers leave the path, the way prepared, because of the perceived weakness or plain humanity of the one who taught them.

The Hebrew text being quoted in Mal. 3:1 has a word play here. "Prepare" translates *panah*, meaning to turn the face (s.w. Gen. 18:22 where the Angels "turned their faces"), and "Before [your face]" translates *paniym*. The idea is that the messenger would turn the faces of people towards the face of God. The height of the calling was hard for Jewish minds, indeed for any human mind, to take on board; that the God whose face even Moses could not see can be seen face to face, thanks to the work of John the "messenger" turning men's faces to the face of Christ, who is the image of God. No wonder the people so easily became distracted from the height and wonder of the invitation, by focusing upon the fact that a depressed and humble prophet awaiting death in a dark prison cell had some crisis of Biblical interpretation. And so, so often the wonder of our calling likewise is eagerly forgotten by us and eclipsed by petty gossip and speculation about the faith and possible spiritual status of another man.

7:28 *I say to you, among those that are born of women- there is none greater than John*- The Lord Jesus was Himself the greatest of all born of women (Gal. 4:4),

but in His humility He adds no rider to the effect 'John was the greatest of all born of women, Myself excepted, of course'. How we love Him for His humility.

Yet he that is but little in the kingdom of God is greater than he- The little ones were the disciples, according to what the Lord had recently said in Mt. 10:42 (s.w.). He was urging them, yet again, to see their exalted status and to get over Judaism's attitude that the prophets were icons to whom the rank and file of God's people should never pretend. The Lord is using hyperbole here to make the point- that His immature 'little ones' were going to be far greater than even John, the greatest prophet. Or He could be implying that there will be some element of rank in God's future Kingdom- ruling over different numbers of cities, one star differing from another in glory. And the least in that age will be far greater than John was *in this life*. And yet Jesus was proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom in the sense of the breaking in of God's principles in the lives of men. He could mean that John was the greatest under the old system, but the least of those within the new system were greater than John. Oscar Cullmann made a case for translating *mikroteros* here as "the youngest", with reference to the Lord being younger than John the Baptist and yet greater than him (see Jn. 3:30).

7:29 *When all the people and the tax collectors heard this, they acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John*- "Acknowledge" is the word for "justify". They justified God, rather than justifying themselves as the impenitent Jewish leaders did (s.w. 16:15). God is justified by our recognition of sin (s.w. Rom. 3:4). Achan likewise was asked to give glory to God by repenting (Josh. 7:19), as are Israel (Jer. 13:16). And in mutual response, God justifies us through imputing righteousness to us in the process of forgiveness (Rom. 8:33). So this comment that they acknowledged God's justice, or justified God, is stating that they repented. They had already been baptized by John, but that baptism was unto repentance; see on Mt. 3:3,11. He baptized in order to lead to repentance, not to as it were set the seal upon a suitably cleaned up life. And in these cases, they did now repent as hoped for. But what was it which they heard which provoked this? Perhaps it was realizing that John their baptizer was also imperfect in faith and understanding, and yet was being comforted that despite his crisis of faith in prison, the Father loved and accepted him. And this inspired those he had baptized to repent further.

7:30 *But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected for themselves the counsel of God, being not baptized by him*- Some had been baptized by him, so the reference is to the Pharisees and lawyers in the crowd at that time. God will fulfill His purpose for us- if we align ourselves with it, and thus see in everything that happens in our lives *His* will being forwarded. We can choose to not align ourselves with His will. The Pharisees rejected the purpose of God against themselves by not being baptized by John (Lk. 7:30 ESV). His will is not that we should sit around doing Sudoku, watching movies, bantering on the internet, trying to get as much money as possible to finance our nice meals, expensive coffees and designer clothes. His will, as expressed in His very Name, is that He 'will be' grace, love, care, justice, salvation, righteousness, all over the world and to every man and woman. If these things are our focus, our mission, our purpose, our passion, our underlying heartthrob, if *His* will is behind *our* will… then everything somehow comes together for us in a dynamic and fulfilling existence, both in this world and in the life eternal.

7:31 *And the Lord said: Unto whom shall I liken the men of this generation, and to what are they like?*- The Lord several times spoke of that entire generation as sinful and unresponsive to the Gospel. Yet the context here is talking of John the Baptist's work. This therefore was a tacit recognition that John's ministry had been

unsuccessful in terms of converting all Israel, and therefore clearly there was to be a change in the prophetic program. As noted earlier in commentary on this chapter, it was this change in the prophetic program which was worrying John, even though unnecessarily in terms of his own salvation.

7:32 *They are like children that sit in the marketplace and call to each other, who say: We piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not weep*- See on Mt. 21:32; Mk. 1:4. The Lord's enthusiasm for Israel's response to the Gospel comes out again when the grace of Jesus likens Himself to a street kid in the market who really wanted to get a game going with the other kids. He offered to play funerals with them (through His appeal through John the Baptist), but they refused. He then offered to play weddings (through His Gospel of grace, joy and peace), but still they refused (Lk. 7:32). By all means connect this with another market place parable, where Christ (the servant) comes there to try to recruit labourers, on almost unbelievably good rates.

John's ministry was like children wanting to play funerals, and taking the initiative by beginning with mock weeping- but not getting any response. The Lord's ministry was as children wanting to play weddings, piping to the other children, who would not respond by dancing. Note that in Mt. 10:42 the Lord has likened His preachers to little children. Children were considered non-persons in society, and yet the Lord uses children in this parable as representative of His preachers. We note that although He likened them to children, He had to sternly warn them that they still needed to be converted and become *as* children (Mt. 18:3). We see Him so often imputing status to His followers which they had not in reality attained. This is to help us appreciate how He can impute righteousness to we who are not righteous. The parable of preaching here pictures children appealing to children. The commonality between us and our audience is very attractive and persuasive. We are humans reaching out to humans, indeed, children to children; the children called out (cp. calling out the Gospel) to "their *fellows*".

The marketplace was the town square. he Lord uses the same word in the parable of Mt. 20:3, where the call of the Gospel comes to men who are standing idle in the market place (s.w.). The picture is perhaps of society getting on with its existence, but the weak labourers and the children being left to one side, excluded from standard adult social and economic life. And it is to these that the call of the Gospel comes, in the midst of human busyness.

The Old Testament as well as the New is written in such a way as to encourage memorization, although this is often masked by the translation. There are several devices commonly used to assist in this. Not least is alliteration, i.e. similarly sounding syllables. "We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced (*orchee-sasthe*); we have mourned unto you and ye have not lamented (*ekop-sasthe*)" (Mt. 11:17) could be dynamically rendered: 'We piped for you, and you never stept; we dirged for you, and you never wept". We note that the Lord parallels the work of the children John's 'children' or disciples, and His. Although both of them were somewhat negative about each other, the Lord saw both groups of children as doing the same work, despite a different culture and even doctrinal emphasis. The division in the town square was between the children begging the others to respond, and the children of this world who didn't want to, in the midst of those who didn't even have ears to hear and were just getting on with their worldly business and never 'heard' the invitation from either group of children.

The Lord was speaking this whilst the disciples were away on their preaching tour. He

could say that just as John's preparation of the way had not been responded to on the level of the whole "generation" or society, neither had His more upbeat and joyful invitation been accepted. Note that the call of the Gospel is a call to engage with the preacher, to dance in response to the tune piped. Community and fellowship are all part of response to the Gospel; it's not about delivering truths to an individual who then accepts them and has no further relationship with the preacher. This is why the father-son analogy is used for preaching and conversion later in the NT. There is the implication too that the initial preacher continues to call the tune, to direct the dancing of the convert, even after initial acceptance of the invitation.

7:33 *For John the Baptist came eating no bread nor drinking wine, and you say: He has a demon*- The Gospels give the impression that there was mass response to John's preaching, but according to the Lord's reasoning here, He felt that "this generation", society as a whole, had rejected John's message and slandered him as in league with demons. Exactly the same was said about the ministry of Jesus (Jn. 8:48 uses the same term about Jesus- "He has a demon"). Surface level interest in the message, even applauding it and making a great effort to go out into the desert to hear it preached, was and is not the same as responding in real repentance.

7:34 *The Son of Man comes eating and drinking, and you say: Behold a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!*- See on Mt. 11:19. The Lord was accused of being a drunkard, a glutton, and a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Mt. 11:19; Lk. 7:34). This is all language reminiscent of the commands for the parents to slay the 'rebellious son' of Dt. 21:18-21. It's conceivable that one of the reasons why His death was demanded was because of this. Hence His relatives sought to take Him away out of public sight. It's also been claimed that the Jews' complaint that Jesus 'made Himself equal to the Father' (Jn. 5:18) is alluding to a rabbinic expression which speaks of the 'rebellious son' of Dt. 21 as being a son who makes himself equal to his father. The shame of being Jesus' mother eventually wore off upon Mary, or so it seems to me. Just as the shame of standing up for Christian principles can wear us down, too. In passing, note that the prodigal son is likewise cast in the role of the 'rebellious son' who should be killed; the correspondence suggests that the Lord Jesus can identify with sinners like the prodigal because He was treated *as if* He were a sinner, a rebellious son; even though He was not in actuality.

The criticisms of the Lord here were all related to His drinking, eating and table company. Jesus showed by His fellowship with "the poor in spirit" that He meant what He said. He, as God's Son, extended His Father's fellowship to them in the here and now of this life. Luke seems to have been especially perceptive of the fact that Jesus often accepted invitations to eat with those whom others despised (Lk. 5:29; 7:36; 10:38; 11:37; 14:1). In 1st century Palestine, to eat with someone was a religious act. The host blessed and broke the bread and then broke off a piece for each guest, thus binding together all present. This was why the many sects of Judaism carefully limited their table fellowship (notably the Pharisees and Essenes). Thus it was the Lord's desire to share table fellowship with the very lowest (apparently) within the community of God that brought Him such criticism (Mt. 11:19; Mk. 2:16). His teaching also made it plain that He saw table fellowship with Him at a meal as a type of the future Messianic banquet, to be enjoyed in His Kingdom at His return, when redeemed sinners will again sit and eat with Him (Lk. 22:29,30). To accept the

gift of the bread of life at the breaking of bread is to symbolize our acceptance of the life that is in Him. If we believe what we are doing at the memorial meeting, we are showing our acceptance of the fact that we will be there, and that what we are doing in our humble breakings of bread is in fact a true foretaste of the Kingdom experience which awaits us.

The Lord was 'fond' [*philos*] of sinners; He liked them and their company. In this we see His greatness, for most spiritual people admit to finding the company of the unspiritual somewhat of a burden. But the Lord's spirituality was beyond that. Truly He is the sinners' friend.

7:35 *But wisdom is justified of all her children*- This could simply mean that both His and John's disciples would be justified in the end, despite their differences.

Appreciating the inter-relation between 'doctrine' and practice will result in our seeing through the fallacy that because someone's deeds are good, therefore it doesn't matter too much about their doctrine. The spiritual fruit which God seeks is that which is brought forth by the seed of His word, the Gospel. To *really* understand the basic Gospel with one's heart is to bring forth fruit, to be converted. True wisdom is justified by the works she brings forth (Mt. 11:19). This is why true conversion involves understanding and perceiving, and not merely hearing doctrinal truth (Mt. 13:15). Yet the counter argument would be that there are people who know God's truth who behave poorly, and there are those who know little of it who act well. This is why the Lord speaks of "wisdom", not "truth"; for wisdom is God's truth applied in practice.

On another level, we see here the Lord's response to slander, both of Himself and John. Wisdom is justified of her children- in the end. The "children" are those of Himself and John, who have just featured in His parable of the preachers, His children, meeting lack of response in the town square. Even if there is lack of response to the invitation, the Lord was confident that both His 'children' (the "little ones" of Mt. 10:42) and John's would be the justification of the truth and wisdom which they were teaching. This is all a comfort to those undergoing slander. In the end, if we are on the side of wisdom, we shall be justified.

7:36 *And one of the Pharisees requested him to eat with him. And he entered into the Pharisee's house and sat down to the meal*- As noted on :34, to eat together and to enter into a house was a sign of religious acceptance. Perhaps it was done simply to try to catch the Lord out by the presence of the sinful woman. Or maybe the Pharisee had a genuine interest.

7:37 *And a woman who was in the city, a sinner, when she knew that he was dining in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment*- The three anointings of Luke 7, Matthew 26 and John 12 are similar but different. Here the scene is in Galilee; but it inspired Mary to do something similar in John 12 in Bethany, which in turn encouraged an anonymous woman in Matthew 26 to do the same kind of thing near Jerusalem. Self sacrifice and devotion are examples which spread. This is the reason for fellowship in practice- to be inspired and encouraged together by human examples of responses to the same Lord. "A sinner" with no reference to any change could suggest that she was right at that moment still working as a prostitute.

7:38 *And standing behind at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment*- The weeping was presumably for her sins, so ashamed that she stood behind Him, not facing His face. She believed that He was the Christ, the anointed one. And that understanding was not cheap nor painless for her; it motivated

her to anoint the anointed one, the Christ, with her most valuable possession. Our belief in the most basic principles of the Lord and truths about Him should require likewise.

7:39 *Now when the Pharisee that had invited him saw it, he spoke within himself, saying: This man, if he were a prophet, would have perceived who and what manner of woman this is that touches him, that she is a sinner*- We note that the thoughts of a man within himself as he sat in his lounge many centuries ago... are recorded for us to this day. God notices all thoughts. When the woman touched the Lord, people reasoned that Jesus wasn't Messiah because He appeared not to know that He was being touched by a sinner. Yet this incident prepared the Lord for the time when He would be smitten and demanded to prophesy who smote Him, if He was the Christ (Lk. 22:64). At that moment, perhaps He thought back to this incident, realizing it had been a living out of the spirit of the cross, and it prepared Him for the final agony.

The Lord's response to Simon was not self-justification, but rather an enquiry as to how much Simon loved the Lord in response to the forgiveness of *his* sins (Lk. 7:39-48). And when the Pharisees criticized the disciples for mixing with sinners, the Lord's response was to appeal to them *personally* to repent (Lk. 5:30-32). And He went further in justifying His disciples, by answering another criticism of them by the Jews with the comment that unless they changed, they would be like old bottles broken by His new wine. *They* personally had to change- and they needed to focus upon that rather than criticizing others for their possible guilt by association. Knowing the Lord Jesus as a person will excite real passion and feeling in response. Our reactions to the tragedy of the way He was rejected, and is rejected and mocked to this day, will be like those of the woman who was a sinner whom Luke records in Lk. 7. The Lord was invited to the home of a Pharisee, who clearly had only invited Him to insult and mock Him. For the Pharisee hadn't kissed Him, nor arranged for His feet to be washed- things which simply *have* to be done to an invited guest. And so that woman becomes passionate. She feels anger and hurt for the insult and rejection made against Jesus. She does what Simon the Pharisee didn't do- kissing Him, washing His feet. Having no towel to dry His feet, she let down her hair to use as a towel- and a woman could be divorced for letting down her hair in front of men. She touches the Lord's body- something deeply despised, for the Greek and Hebrew idea of 'touching' has sexual overtones (Gen. 20:6; Prov. 6:29; 1 Cor. 7:1), the Greek word 'to touch' also meaning 'to light a fire'. The ointment she carried between her breasts denoted her as a prostitute- but she breaks it open and pours it on the Lord in repentance. Her attitude was surely: 'Yeah I'm a whore, you all know that. And yes, you're all gonna misunderstand me and think I am just madly coming on at this Jesus. OK, misunderstand me as you will, I don't care, I truly love Him as my Saviour, and there, I'm pouring out my ointment, I'm through with this broadway life, I'm repenting, in the abandon of freedom from sin I now feel, I'm giving myself wholly to Him and His cause, mock me, be shocked and disgusted in your middle class way all you like, but this is for real'. And this, it seems to me, is the response of everyone who truly comes to the Lord Jesus as a person, and feels for Him as a real person whom we have met in a real, valid encounter. The Lord responded to that woman by doing something which may not seem a big deal to us, but which was radical in first century culture. He criticized strongly the hospitality of His host. This just wasn't done, and still isn't. He was angry- because despite the woman's sincerity, they still labelled her as a 'sinner' (Lk. 7:39). He rebuked Simon through the parable of the two debtors,

who owed 500 pence and 50 pence. As that woman went away "in peace", with her Lord passionately behind her and on her side, defending her to the world, so we too walk away from our encounters with Him.

7:40 *And Jesus answering said to him: Simon, I have something to say to you. And he said: Teacher, speak*- Like David, the Lord Jesus saw through peoples' actions to the self-talk behind it. He observed the body language of the Pharisee, despising the repentant woman; Lk. 7:39 records that the man "said within himself... 'She is a sinner!'", but "Jesus *answering* said to him..." (Lk. 7:40). The Lord perceived the man's self-talk, and responded to it. For Him, the Pharisee's unspoken words were loud and clear, and Jesus acted as if He was in a conversation with the man. He correctly read the man's silent disapproval as actually saying something, and responded to it as if in conversation. Of course we could argue that the Lord was empowered by a flash of Holy Spirit illumination to be able to read the Pharisee's mind; but it seems to me altogether more likely that it was His own sensitivity, His own perception of the other's self-talk, that enabled Him to know what was being silently said within the man's mind.

The parables of Lk. 7 and 14 were told during a meal- perhaps many of the others were, too. The Lord would have been a brilliant conversationalist, drawing out unexpected challenges and lessons from what appeared to be everyday facts. The implications of the parables are not pleasant- they would have soured some of His table conversations if they were properly perceived. And likewise with us as we read them in this age; these stories are indeed profoundly disturbing if understood properly and allowed to take their effect upon us. Yet for all their challenge, the parables of Jesus reveal how deeply familiar He was with human life in all its daily issues and complexities. He artlessly revealed how He had meditated deeply upon the issues involved in farming, the problem of weeds, how much poor men were paid for a day's work, the desperation of the beggar Lazarus, problems faced by builders when laying foundations… He was and is truly sensitive and understanding of the everyday issues of our lives, and yet draws out of them something deeply challenging and radical. In this was and is His surpassing, magnetic brilliance. But the unanswered questions in the parables aren't all there is to them.

7:41 *A certain lender had two debtors. The one owed five hundred denarii and the other fifty*- The Lord saw the hypocritical Pharisee Simon as being a man forgiven fifty pence, who therefore loved Him (Lk. 7:41).This shows the generous way in which the Lord reads people. In the same chapter, the Lord recognised that John the Baptist had suffered a crisis of faith. But He tells the crowd that John wasn't a reed shaken with the wind, an unstable believer (Lk. 7:24 cp. Is. 7:2), but the greatest of God's servants; He overlooked the temporary failure, and judged the overall spirit of John.

7:42 *When they had nothing with which to pay, he forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him most?*- See on :47. The forgiveness was granted *when* they had nothing to pay. Spiritually, having nothing to pay means a person is at rock bottom. They recognize that they cannot pay back, cannot turn the clock back, cannot make things right again. All they can do is to throw themselves upon God's grace. This is the idea of :29. The desperate sinners justified God in repentance. We wonder if this prostitute was one of the group mentioned there.

The forgiveness of debts was associated with the Jubilee year. But Luke has recorded how the Lord began His ministry by proclaiming a Jubilee of forgiveness of debts / sins. The forgiveness of debts at the Jubilee was regardless of whether the debtor had great or small debts, or had ended up indebted because of foolishness, unwisdom, weakness of will or whatever. And so the Lord in this spirit had forgiven Simon his debt as well. And yet Simon didn't perceive that, and had not responded with any love towards his forgiving creditor.

7:43 *Simon answered and said: He, I suppose, to whom he forgave the most. And he said to him: You have rightly judged*- There is a direct connection between amount of forgiveness and love for the Lord. And yet volume of forgiveness is also a matter of perception. Those who perceive the enormous extent of their sins and receipt of forgiveness are those who will love the Lord more. The woman's utter abandon towards the Lord was therefore because of this. Simon's minimalistic approach to the Lord was because he had little sense of personal debt to the Lord. The Lord's implication to Simon that he ought to have been more generous in entertaining the Lord is therefore another way of saying that he needed to repent the more and perceive the size of his debt.

7:44 *And turning to the woman, he said to Simon: Saw you this woman? I entered into your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wetted my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair*- It was rude to speak to a man without looking at them, let alone with back turned to the person and looking at a woman. The Lord is purposefully snubbing Simon and demonstrating the huge respect He had for this prostitute. The Lord saw Simon the proud Pharisee as having been forgiven a little, and as loving Him a little (Lk. 7:44-48). This isn't how we would have seen that man. This is surely something more than generosity of spirit, even though the Lord certainly had this. His attitude reflects a hopefulness for Simon, an earnest desire for his salvation that only saw and imagined the best.

7:45 *You gave me no kiss, but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss my feet*- The Lord saw a connection between the way the sinful woman kissed Him much, and the way she "loved much" (Lk. 7:45,47 RVmg.). He then told a parable about her and Simon the Pharisee. His point was that they both owed Him money and He had forgiven the debt, but He was looking for an appropriate response from them. Yet there is no evidence that Simon had repented before receiving that forgiveness.

7:46 *My head with oil you did not anoint, but she has anointed my feet with ointment*- The Lord makes a clear allusion to Ps. 23 in saying that *she* had anointed His head with oil, and His feet with ointment. There, it is *God* who is said to have anointed David's head, and prepared a feast in the presence of his enemies (Ps. 23:5). The historical background for this Psalm is when David fled from Absalom, and God manifested in Barzillai prepared an unexpected feast for him, just the other side of the valley from where his enemies were. Perhaps Barzillai also anointed David's head with oil at the time. It seems the Lord saw God as now manifest in a woman- He, through her, anointed His head with oil. And she did it at a time when the Lord was sitting at a great feast. It could logically follow that it was likewise she who had prepared the feast for Him, explaining her presence in the home. And if, as we have suggested, Simon the Pharisee was her brother or father or relative, then this would make sense. The whole thing surely has the ring of truth about it. Thus the Lord saw God as personally manifested through a sex worker. This should quieten all our doubts as to whether God really could be manifested through such as us.

7:47 *Therefore I say to you, that her sins, which are many, are forgiven (for she loved much). But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little*- Paul seems to have seen this woman as one of his patterns when he speaks of how he laboured more abundantly than anyone, because of the depth of grace he had known (1 Tim. 1:14,15)- for she "loved much" because she had been forgiven much (Lk. 7:47). In passing, was the Lord's comment "she loved much" an indication that He thereby knew how much she had sinned, without having the knowledge beamed into Him, because He observed how much she now loved Him? In the parable which the Lord told comparing Simon and the woman, He made the comment that it was only "When they [realized that] they had nothing wherewith to pay" (Lk. 7:42 RV) that they were forgiven. He perceived how Mary had come to that point, at His feet, weeping, of knowing that she had nothing to pay. And Paul, and us, must reach that point if we are to find the motivation to "love much" in response.

He who is forgiven much, the same will love much (Lk. 7:41-50). The purpose of the Lord's mini-parable was not that the druggies, the hookers, the murderers will love Christ more than you or me. It was to teach that according to a man's *perception* of his sin, so he will love his Lord. All too often we serve Him because we have a conscience that we should do so; and yet the service He requires is service, even the senseless service of that forgiven woman with her precious ointment, simply because we *love* Him. And that overwhelming, overflowing *love* will only come from a true sense of our desperation. By knowing our desperation, we will know the Lord, we will know the grace and fathomless mercy which is so essentially *Him*: "Ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have wrought with you... not according to your wicked ways" (Ez. 20:43,44).

In the parable, the creditor is the Lord Jesus. He considers that He had forgiven both the woman [the big debtor] and Simon [the small debtor]. But Simon was impenitent. The Lord is telling Simon that despite this, He had forgiven him for his sins. But, He expected Simon to respond. Simon had not done so; instead, He had snubbed Jesus by giving Him no kiss, feet washing nor anointing. But as so often, there is a final twist in the Lord's parable. Simon ought to have done what the woman had done- and he had not. The Lord is therefore implying that actually, it is Simon who has the large debt. For arrogant religious superiority and hypocrisy is major sin, in the Lord's ledger. Simon ought to have been warmly hospitable towards the Lord. But he had not been. Because he failed to realize that he was the 500 pence debtor. The Lord thereby raises the issue of perception of sin. Simon perceived himself as a 50 pence debtor, and the Lord had forgiven him without demanding repentance. But he had not responded to that. And now the Lord is needling Simon towards recognizing that in fact, Simon owes not 50 but 500 pence. And this is the huge challenge to so many religious folks who turn their noses up at those they consider big sinners, whilst shrugging off and rationalizing their own 50 pence sins.

Quite simply, the Lord's forgiveness precedes our love of Him. This is contrary to how we naturally are- we forgive those who love us. But whilst we were yet enemies, He died for us. He showed His love. We love, because He first loved us. The initiative is always His. For this is the way of grace, and is to be reflected by us in our dealings with others.

7:48 *And he said to her: Your sins are forgiven*- This was not so much a pronouncement of forgiveness in response to repentance; rather is it a reminder to her that her sins really had been forgiven, an encouragement to her to believe that which

was already true. Or perhaps the idea is that the Lord as the creditor forgave both Simon and the woman. But that forgiveness had to be believed and accepted, and this would be reflected in love towards the Lord Jesus. The woman did this; but Simon didn't. And thus he spurned the forgiveness granted him, because he simply didn't want it. Because he considered he had no sin needing forgiveness.

7:49 *And they that sat at food with him began to say within themselves: Who is this that even forgives sins?*- They *began* to say within themselves. But, presumably, they didn't verbalize it, when they easily could have done. Why not? Was it not that the anointing was an unspoken testimony that indeed, Jesus had forgiven her sins?

7:50 *And he said to the woman: Your faith has saved you. Go into peace*- Her faith is specifically her faith in forgiveness (:48) and the "peace" in view is therefore peace with God. This is what comes from faith (Rom. 5:1 s.w.). The woman therefore becomes representative of every believer.

LUKE CHAPTER 8

8:1 *And it came to pass soon afterwards, that he went about through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good tidings of the kingdom of God; and companying with him were the twelve*- The synoptic Gospels use the same words for the activities of both the Lord Jesus and the disciples in respect of preaching, teaching, healing etc. Theirs was a shared ministry. Thus the Lord is recorded as "*showing* the glad tidings of the Kingdom", but in the same context He asks a new convert to go home "and *shew* how great things God has done" (:39), as if he were to continue the 'showing' of Jesus.

The Lord taught them how to preach by having them accompany Him as He went about preaching. We can too easily assume that the purpose of the Bible, or the teaching of Jesus, the doctrine of Christ, is merely and solely to impart information. We can underestimate the degree to which the immediate intention of doctrine, of Jesus, was the transformation of human life. Many of us have been educated in an environment where the aim of teaching is to bring people to know things that have no practical effect upon their lives; yet this is most decidedly not how we should approach the words of the Gospel. Our model of learning has been 'from jug to mug', i.e. there is the assumption that the teacher simply pours out their knowledge into the student's passive mental space. And then the student is tested as to the degree of retention of that knowledge. But as disciples, students, of the Lord Jesus, we are about something different. If the Lord were scheduled to give a class in one of our ecclesial halls, my sense is we would turn up with our video cameras, tape recorders, note books, pens and pencils. But when in reality He delivered the 'sermon on the mount', His listeners simply beheld a life lived, the reflection of His words in practice, "the word made flesh". He both preached *and* shewed the Gospel- in His life as well as His doctrinal teaching. And so it should be with our teaching of others.

8:2 *And certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary that was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out*- Mary Magdalene was perhaps named after the town of Magdala. But named Magdalene may mean the Lord gave her that Name just as He gave names to His other disciples. The name derives from the Hebrew *migdol*, 'tower'. So the repeated description of her as the Magdalene could be implying: Mary the tower- Magdalene. Just as the shaky Simon was described as 'the rock', Simon-the-rock, so the shady Mary was surnamed 'Mary-the-tower'. It was common for Jewish rabbis to give their followers names, and it

seems the Lord did this too- but the names He gave reflected the potential which He saw in His men and women. And the name He gives us likewise is a reflection of the potential we can live up to.

Mary Magdalene is the most frequently named person in the passion narratives. Clearly the Gospel writers, under inspiration, perceived her as the central figure amongst those who were witnesses of it all. In doing so they turned on its head the prevailing idea that the witness of a woman was worthless. They saw her as the main witness. The Gospel writers clearly see Mary Magdalene as of prime importance amongst the women who followed the Lord. Luke twice places her first in his lists of the ministering women (Lk. 8:2; 24:10). Matthew likewise focuses on how she was at Calvary, at the burial and at the empty tomb (Mt. 27:56, 61; 28:1,9). She clearly captured the attention of the gospel writers.

8:3 *And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, who ministered to them out of their means*- It is worth noting, though, that the NT does reflect the fact that a number of wealthy individuals came to the Truth too; and that these were bound together in fellowship with the poor. There were wealthy women amongst the earliest followers of Jesus; and James and John came from a family who owned their own fishing boat and could employ servants (Mk. 1:19,20). Zacchaeus was wealthy- and note that he wasn't commanded to divest himself of all that wealth (Lk. 19:1-10). Consider the Philippi ecclesia- the wealthy lady from Lydia, the homeless slave girl, the middle class, respectable jailer, and the slaves of his and Lydia's household. There was nowhere else in the ancient world that all these classes could come together in such unity. Paul himself was not poor- "to be a citizen of Tarsus one had to pass the means test of owning property worth at least 500 drachmae". He was thought wealthy enough to be able to give a bribe (Acts 24:26). He assured Philemon that he personally would meet any debts arising from the situation with Onesimus. Consider the other wealthy converts: the Proconsul of Cyprus (Acts 13:12), Lydia, Jason who was wealthy enough to put down security for Paul, assisted by prominent women (Acts 17:4,9), Greek women of high standing at Berea (Acts 17:12), Dionysius and Damaris in Athens (Acts 17:16-34), Crispus the ruler of the Corinth synagogue (Acts 18:8 cp. 1 Cor. 1:14), Erastus the city treasurer (Rom. 16:23). Marta Sordi quotes evidence for there being Christians amongst the Roman aristocracy even during the first half of the first century. These few wealthy converts would have bonded together with the mass of poor and slaves who had also come to Christ. It was a unique unity.

8:4 *And when a great crowd came together, and they of every city had come to him, he spoke by a parable*- "Came / gathered together" is the Greek *sunago* from whence 'synagogue'. The idea is that there in the open air, on the sea shore, and *not* in a building, was the synagogue- with the Lord as rabbi, sitting in a fishing boat to teach whilst the audience *stood* instead of sitting (as they did in a Jewish synagogue, James 2:2,3). The whole scene is a radical inversion of orthodox Jewish values and culture. The true synagogue was now in the open air, and beyond the imagination, frames and culture of orthodox religion.

The Gospel records give more information about the day on which the Lord told the sower parable than concerning almost any other in His ministry, with the exception of the crucifixion (compare Mt. 12:22-13:23; Lk. 11:27; Mk. 4:10). Various types of people heard His words; the immediate context is that great crowds were gathered to Him. The parable of the differing types of ground which were for the most part unresponsive to the seed therefore refer to the various reception given to the Lord's sowing when He first "went forth to sow" in His ministry.

The unusually large crowd were attracted to the Lord for various reasons, not least the hope of miracles. And He now tells them a parable to the effect that out of all those who encounter His word, only a minority would truly respond. Perhaps this parable is recorded out of all His teachings, because time proved it so true to that mass of humanity who heard Him preaching.

8:5 *The sower went to sow his seed*- The Lord's teaching in Mt. 12:43 that the Jews had not responded to John the Baptist lays the basis for the parable of the sower, which was told the same day- the seed initially experienced some growth, but then the 'evil one', the Jewish system, stunted that growth. Who is the sower? The preacher, or the Lord Jesus? Some Greek texts read "*a* sower" (followed by the AV), others "*the* sower" (cp. the Diaglott). Perhaps the Lord said both: 'A sower, the sower, went out...'. Surely the sower is the Lord Jesus, but in *our* work of witness we are *His* witnesses. For we represent Him to the world. This is why "the Spirit (the Lord the Spirit, Jesus) and the bride (the ecclesia) say, Come"; ours is a united witness with Him.

"Went" is the word used several times of the Lord 'going forth' to teach, and four times He uses it about His 'going forth' to hire workers for His harvest (Mt. 20:1,3,5,6). The 'sowing' of the word was therefore not merely a placing of ideas and theology in the minds of men, but in practice it was (and is) a call to go out and work, to harvest others for the Kingdom. The Lord 'came forth' in order to preach (Mk. 1:38 s.w. "... that I may preach there... for *therefore came I forth*"). Note that He didn't 'come forth' from Heaven as a pre-existent person; rather Matthew begins his Gospel by using the word about how the Lord 'came forth' from Bethlehem, His birthplace (Mt. 2:6). John's Gospel records the Lord as saying that He 'came forth' from God (Jn. 16:28 etc.), but this was in a spiritual sense; this is John's spiritual equivalent of Matthew's statement that He came forth from Bethlehem.

And as he sowed- The condemned man in the parable of Mt. 25:24-26 complained that the Lord expected to reap where He had not sown. But the parable of the sower makes it clear that the Lord sows, even fanatically, everywhere. We perhaps would've reminded the man of the Lord's parable and His unceasing work of sowing, and reasoned 'That's not true!'. But this isn't the Lord's style. He takes people where they are and uses their own words and reasonings as if they are true- and shows by an altogether higher level of reasoning that they are not true. This explains His approach to the issue of demons. Matthew doesn't record that the Lord made a big issue about the seed- Luke's account records this: "A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed..." (Lk. 8:5). This appears to state the obvious- a sower sows seed. But "his seed" can also mean 'the seed of Him'. There is an obvious connection with the great Messianic promises to the Jewish fathers about their "seed". The seed is God's word, but it is also effectively 'Jesus'. For He personally is the essence of the Gospel message. This parable of the types of ground is explaining to the disciples why the majority of Israel were failing to accept Him, and thus had rejected the ministry and message of John.

Some fell by the way side, and it was trodden under foot, and the birds of the air devoured it- The reason for the way side growth being so short lived was that the seed was "trodden down". This is a Biblical idiom for disdain and contempt (Jud. 5:21; Is. 14:19; 18:7; 28:3; Dan. 8:13; Mic. 7:10). A half hearted response to the word, is effectively to tread it down in contempt. Yet such is the word's power that even a partial response to it results in some growth- although in the final analysis, even this is unacceptable.

Our witness must fundamentally be Christ-centred. The same Greek words are used about treading underfoot the seed of the Gospel, and treading underfoot the Son of God (Lk. 8:5; Heb. 10:29). Our knowledge of Him and living in Him are the essence of our witness. He is essentially our witness.

The fowls taking away the unfruitful plant is the first of a number of connections with the true vine parable of Jn.15, where the ideas of Divine husbandry, fruitfulness due to the word and purging recur. In Jn. 15:2 the fruitless branch is taken away by God; in the sower parable, the birds remove the fruitless plant. The conclusion is that God sends 'birds' of various kinds to remove the spiritual deadwood from His ecclesia. It is in this sense that false teaching (e.g. the Judaist "birds" of the first century) is allowed by God. Thus Lk. 8:5 literally translated speaks of "birds of Heaven".

The Greek *hodos* means simply 'the way'. It is the very word used about John the Baptist seeking to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus (Mt. 3:3). If Israel had responded as envisaged in the Isaiah 40 passage which speaks of this, then the way or road would have been prepared and the glory of Yahweh would have travelled over it to establish God's visible Kingdom in Jerusalem. On one hand, the fact the sower sowed even on the 'way' is an element of unreality in the parable which simply points to the extreme enthusiasm of this sower, casting the seed onto all types of human personality, including those who appear hopeless cases. The seed of God's word would have made the rough way smooth for the King of glory to ride over to Zion. But instead the seed was despised and even condemned, trampled underfoot- an idiom meaning it was despised and even condemned. And then the birds came and took it away altogether. The way was not prepared by response to the seed because of the Jewish leadership stopping others responding. We note the usage of the same word to describe how some despised individuals sitting in 'the way' were in fact persuaded to respond to the Kingdom invitation (Mt. 22:9,10); Bartimaeus was likewise sitting in the way [s.w.] and responded, following Jesus "in the way" (Mk. 10:46,52). The 'way [side]' could have responded to the seed- but it didn't. Because men came and trampled it under foot, and the birds came and took it away. It wasn't as if there was no chance at all that it could have responded.

First of all, the seed was "trodden down" before the birds came. The impression is given of something, someone or a group of people hindering the growth of the seed- and that is a theme explaining the failure of the seed to grow in the other cases of 'bad ground'. The Lord has in mind the damage done to the growth of the word in the hearts of first century Israel by a group of people- and those people were the Jewish religious leaders. On a wider level, it's true that in practice it is the attitudes and pressures from others, conscious and unconscious, which stops people today from responding to God's word beyond an initial interest. Birds were symbolically understood in Judaism as the Gentiles- and the Lord is applying the symbol to the very religious leaders of Judaism, whom He saw as Gentiles in that they were consciously trying to stop people responding to the seed of God's word of Christ. And yet His later parable in the same chapter speaks of the birds coming and dwelling in the branches of His Kingdom (Mt. 13:32). I see in this His hope, even His fantasy, that His worst opponents would come into His Kingdom. And some did- for some Pharisees did later repent and were baptized, even Saul. And this is a great example to us, of wishing the very best, the Kingdom, for even the worst.

The picture of fowls coming down to take away the seed is firmly rooted in a host of Old Testament passages which speak of fowls descending on apostate Israel (Is. 18:6; Jer. 7:33; 15:3; 16:4; 19:7; 34:20). These birds taking away the seed are interpreted as

"the wicked one" (the Biblical devil) 'catching away' the word. There must be a thought connection here with Jesus' comment that from him who would not understand the sower parable "shall be *taken away* even that he hath" (Mt. 13:12). Those who would not make the mental effort to grapple with Christ's parable had what understanding they did have snatched away by the Jewish devil. "The wicked one" responsible for this easily connects with "the devil" of the parable of the tares which follows; this parable has frequently been interpreted with reference to Jewish false teachers of the first century. "The wicked one... catches away" the seed/word, as the Jewish wolf "catches" the sheep (Mt. 13:19; Jn. 10:12). This association of the first century Jewish system with the wolf/ wild beast/ devil/ wicked one is probably continued by some of the beasts of Revelation having a similar Jewish application in the first century.

Lk. 8:5 literally translated speaks of "birds of Heaven". The fowls taking away the unfruitful seed is the first of a number of connections with the true vine parable of Jn. 15, where the ideas of Divine husbandry and fruitfulness due to the word recur. In Jn. 15:2 the fruitless branch is taken away by God; in the sower parable, the birds remove the fruitless plant. The conclusion is that God sends 'birds' of various kinds to remove the spiritual deadwood from His ecclesia. It is in this sense that false teaching (e.g. the Judaist "fowls" of the first century) is allowed by God. parable of the sower connects the Devil with the fowls which take away the Word from potential converts, stopping their spiritual growth. This would aptly fit the Judaizers who were leading the young ecclesias away from the word, and the Jews who “shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men... neither do you suffer them that are entering (young converts) to go in” (Mt. 23:13). The Devil takes away the word of the Kingdom, “lest they should believe and be saved” (Lk. 8:12).

The seed was "devoured"; the same word is used of how the Pharisees "devour[ed] widows houses" (Mt. 23:14) and of how the Judaist fifth column within the fledgling church 'devoured' some (Gal. 5:15). The sober fact is that we can be barriers to the response of others to the word of Jesus, the word which is *the* seed-Jesus. One lesson we can take from the parable is that spiritual growth involves resisting other influences in order to respond to the Lord Jesus personally through His word.

8:6 *And other fell on the rock*- The Greek *petrodes* is a form of *petra*. The Lord had taught that the wise man who heard and did His sayings developed his spiritual house upon a *petra*, a rock (Mt. 7:24). And of course Peter was the *petra* upon which the church would be built (Mt. 16:18). So again we see that it was not impossible for the seed on the rock to prosper. The problem was that some who began their growth upon rocks stopped growing because of persecution and tribulation- which in the first instance was from the Jews.

And as soon as it grew- Matthew- "immediately it grew". There is nothing wrong with this, indeed this is as response to the word should be; and the Gospels often note the immediacy of response. When you perceive an opportunity to do the Lord's service, *respond immediately*. See it as another opportunity for "redeeming the time". This is a major Biblical theme. Israel were not to delay in offering their firstfruits to God (Ex. 22:29), lest their intentions weren't translated into practice. The disciples *immediately* left the ship, simply put their nets down and followed (Mt. 4:20,22); Matthew left his opened books and queue of clients in the tax office and walked out never to return (Lk. 5:17,18 implies). There is a marked theme in the NT of men and women hearing the Gospel and *immediately* responding by accepting

baptism. In this spirit Cornelius immediately sent for Peter (Acts 10:33), and the Philippian jailer was immediately baptized, even though there were many other things to think about that night (Acts 16:33). Joseph was twice told in dreams to “arise” and take the child Jesus to another country. Both times he “arose” in the morning and just did it, leaving all he had, responding immediately (Mt. 2:13,14,20,21). Paul and Luke immediately went to preach in Macedonia after seeing the inviting vision (Acts 16:10); Paul "straightway" preached Christ after receiving his vision of preaching commission (Acts 9:20). Indeed, the records of the Lord's ministry are shot through (in Mark especially) with words like "immediately", "straightway", "forthwith", "as soon as...". He was a man of immediate response, Yahweh's servant *par excellence*. He dismissed the man who would fain follow Him after he had buried his father, i.e. who wanted to wait some years until his father’s death and then set out in earnest on the Christian life. The Lord’s point was that we must immediately respond to the call to live and preach Him, with none of the delay and hesitancy to total commitment which masquerades as careful planning. Note how the Lord told another parable in which He characterized those not worthy of Him as those who thought they had valid reason to delay their response to the call (Lk. 14:16-20). They didn't turn Him down, they just thought He would understand if they delayed. But He is a demanding Lord, in some ways. What He seeks is an immediacy of response. If we have this in the daily calls to service in this life, we will likewise respond immediately to the knowledge that 'He's back' (Lk. 12:36, cp. the wise virgins going immediately, whilst the others delayed). And whether we respond immediately or not will be the litmus test as to whether our life's spirituality was worth anything or not. All this is not to say that we should rush off in hot-headed enthusiasm, crushing the work and systematic efforts of other brethren and committees under foot. But when we see the need, when we catch the vision of service, let's not hesitate in our response, dilly dallying until we are left with simply a host of good intentions swimming around in our brain cells. Instead, let's appreciate that one aspect of the seed in good soil was that there was an *immediacy of response* to the word, a joyful and speedy 'springing up' in response (Mk. 4:5).

It withered away, because it had no moisture- Because it had no depth (Mt. 13:6). John perhaps explains the 'depth' in his account of the woman at the well. The salvation in Christ was brought from the 'deep' [s.w.] well (Jn. 4:11). This connects the ideas of depth and moisture. These people had only a surface level interest and did not really grasp the deep reality of the Lord and His work; just as some can apparently respond to the Bible, and yet not really engage in relationship with the Lord Jesus.

The same word for "withered" is used by the Lord about how Israel were the fig tree who had once had promise of fruit (in their initial response to John) but was now withered (Mt. 21:19,20). Those who initially accept Christ but do not abide in Him are likewise "withered" (Jn. 15:6). John's emphasis upon 'abiding' in Christ likely has reference to the need to accept John's message about Christ and abide in it, rather than wandering off and back to Judaism. Both James and Peter seem to allude to this point of the parable in their teaching that the word of God stands forever, whereas flesh withers away (James 1:11; 1 Pet. 1:24). As we will note on 13:22, the seed is to become the person. Those who do not wither are those who have the seed within them, the power of eternal life which endures. "Because they had no root, they withered away" (Mt. 13:6) is alluded to in Jn. 15:6 concerning the branches of the vine withering as a result of God's word not abiding in them. The connection between the plants of the sower parable and the branches of the vine is further evidence that

the sower parable mainly concerns the response to the word of those *within* the ecclesia.

8:7 *And other fell amidst the thorns; and the thorns grew with it and choked it*- This of itself didn't mean that growth was impossible. The Lord's next parable makes that clear- the good sees brings forth fruit, clearly alluding to the 'good ground' of the sower parable, *despite* being surrounded by "tares", weeds, within which category are thorns (Mt. 13:26). The point of the later parable would therefore be to make the point that fruit can be brought forth *despite* a spiritual environment in which we have to grow and fruit next to thorns. "Thorns" were defined by the Lord as *people*- those who do not bring forth good fruit, even though they may claim to be true believers (Mt. 7:16). Heb. 6:8 likewise speaks of 'thorns' as people ("He that bears thorns... is rejected"). The later interpretation in Mt. 13:22 is that the thorns are the deceitfulness of riches and the cares of "this world"- and yet these abstract things operate upon the believer through persons, through people devoted to them. For we all 'are' the principles which we live by; and our example and influence upon others is more significant than we realize. Those people in the first instance were Jewish people in first century Palestinian society who strangled the growth of the seed in the hearts of people by their attitudes and the pressure of their example. We note that "this world" in the first instance referred to the *aion* around Jesus- which was the Jewish world. Especially in John's Gospel the phrase carries that meaning in most occurrences.

The next parable in Matthew explains that both good and bad seed 'spring / grow up'; the point is that the good seed continues to bear fruit despite this. They intertwined with the roots of the crop beneath the ground, and later kept light from reaching the plants. Again the suggestion is that there was a specific group of people [the Jewish religious leadership] who were damaging the growth of seed which had begun to grow [in response to the preaching of John]. And yet the interpretation is that the thorns represent the worry of the world, and wealth (Mt. 13:22). We can understand these things in the context of the Jews loving wealth and the whole system of Judaism, the Jewish ‘world’, making them worry about appearances to the point that the real seed of the word grows no more. The same can be seen in legalistic forms of Christianity today, where appearance to others becomes all important and thereby real spirituality goes out of the window.

"Choked" is again language more relevant to persons. The same word is found in the Lord's description of the man who initially accepted forgiveness from God and then went and 'choked' or 'took by the throat' his brother (Mt. 18:28). That man who was initially forgiven and then finally condemned speaks in the primary context of those who responded to John's message of forgiveness, but ended up condemned because of their aggression towards their brother- the Christians. Again, those who choked the response of others to the word are the members of Jewish society. The parable of the sower can be interpreted as fulfilling every time we hear the word sown in us. Thus some seed is "choked with cares" (Lk. 8:14)- exactly the same words used about Martha being "cumbered" with her domestic duties so that she didn't hear the Lord's word at that time (Lk. 10:40). We bring various attitudes of mind- stony, receptive, cumbered etc.- to the word each time we hear it. And it is our attitude to it which determines our response to it.

8:8 *And other fell into the good ground, and grew, and brought forth fruit a hundredfold*- The next parable in Matthew is clearly related to this parable of the sower. There, the same word is used for the "good seed", the "children of the

Kingdom" (Mt. 13:24,38). The ground refers to the hearts of people; but in the parable of the good seed, the seed itself is paralleled with the person. The word had become flesh in them, as it was in the Lord Himself (Jn. 1:14). John the Baptist had preached about the need to be a "good" plant bearing good fruit, or else face condemnation (Mt. 3:10, and repeated by the Lord in Mt. 7:17-19). The appeal was for the audience to be as John intended, to follow where his teaching led. They had initially accepted that teaching but had failed to follow where it led. And this was to be their condemnation.

Mk. 4:8 adds the significant detail that it was the *fruit* that the plant yielded which "sprung up and increased". The picture is of a plant bringing forth seeds which themselves germinate into separate plants and bear fruit. This can be interpreted in at least two ways:
1) True spiritual development in our lives is a cumulative upward spiral; successfully developing spiritual fruit leads to developing yet more.
2) The new plants which come out of our fruit refer to our converts, both from the world and those within the ecclesia whom we help to yield spiritual fruit. There is another link here with the parable of the vine bearing fruit: "I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should *go* and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (Jn. 15:8,16). This connects with Christ's command to them to *go* into the world preaching the Gospel and thereby making converts. In this sense our spiritual fruiting is partly through our bringing others to glorify God through the development of a God-like character. It is in this context of using the word for preaching and personal spiritual development that we receive the glorious encouragement "that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he (will) give it you" (Jn. 15:7,16). Every believer who truly strives to bring forth fruit to God's glory, both in preaching to others and in personal character development, will find this promise constantly true.

God works like this because He is prepared to accept that different people will make something different of His Truth. The parable of the sower shows this in that the "good ground" brings forth 30, 60 or 100 fold. Some believers respond three times as actively to the Gospel as others; yet they will all be accepted at the end. I see a connection between this parable and the Lord's words to the rich, righteous young man: '"If you will be *perfect*..." sell what you've got; and then you'll receive *100 fold* in this life, and eternal life in the Kingdom' (Mt. 19:12,21). Presumably, that man at that time was (say) in the 30 or 60 fold category. The Lord wanted him in the 100 fold category. But if that man didn't sell all that he had, it doesn't necessarily mean that Christ would have rejected him ultimately. In this context, He says: " Many that are first (in this life) will be last (least- in the Kingdom); and the last shall be first" (Mt. 19:30). Those who don't sell all that they have will be in the Kingdom, but least in it. The poor of his world, rich in faith, will be great in the Kingdom (James 2:5). We need to ask ourselves whether we really accept the parable of the sower; whether we are strong enough to let another brother be weak, to accept that even if he's in the 30 fold category, he's still acceptable to his Lord, just living on a different level. Indeed, it isn't for us to go very deeply at all into how exactly the Lord sees others; because we can't know. The point to note is that God wants us to rise up the levels of commitment. Paul was persuaded that the Romans were “full of goodness, filled with all knowledge”, but he prayed they would be filled yet further (Rom. 15:13,14).

Growth was in fact possible on each type of ground, and the New Testament contains

examples of where this happened. I suggest that in fact there are only three types of ground- the way side, the rocky and the thorny. These three types of ground would then match the three types of good ground- which gave 30,60 and 100 fold increase. Putting the gospel records together, the Lord's description of the good ground contains elements of the initially good response from the three bad types of ground. The good ground represents a good state of mind- for the ground is clearly to be understood as the heart of those receiving the word. This category therefore refers to those on the three other types of ground who *did* respond to the end, who overcame the pressures upon them not to respond further. This also removes the moral problem which is otherwise presented- in that it would appear that the seed of the word is spread, but the good ground people can do nothing else but respond, and the bad ground people can do nothing but not ultimately respond because of who they are by nature and where they are situated in life. The good ground category had to 'keep the word' (Lk. 8:15)- they didn't let men tread it underfoot nor birds take it away. Given their position in life, even by the wayside, they still responded by keeping the word. There was an element of choice and human effort required- rather than some categories being inevitably unable to keep the word because of their location in life and surrounding influences upon them. In this we see huge encouragement in our cluttered lives today, subject as they are to negative spiritual influences which at times seem too strong to resist. And we are further encouraged in our own sowing of the seed- nobody is incapable of response, from the deepest room in a strict Moslem family to sharing a one room apartment in Europe surrounded by materialistic, unGodly people.

Jeremias claims that a yield of tenfold was considered good in first century Palestine (Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Scribner's, 1972) p. 150). Even if that is somewhat conservative, the point is that the seed on good ground yielded amazingly. This element of unreality speaks of how each person in the 'good ground' category will experience growth and blessing out of proportion to their tiny spiritual beginnings. The parable of the mustard seed makes the same point. Amazing harvests is the language of the Messianic Kingdom, both Biblically and in Judaism. The beginning of the Kingdom experience is in our response to God's word in this life. The one hundred fold response is huge- but then so is the loss. It's as if the Lord is trying to encourage the disciples after the conclusions drawn about the general failure of the ministry of John- and therefore the Lord's also. His point is that despite all the failure, *some* will respond, and their response and blessing will be so huge that this more than counterbalances all the failure of others. If we can bring one person towards eternity, this is so wonderful that all the rejection of our message is worthwhile.

In Palestine, sowing precedes ploughing. The sower sows on the path which the villagers have beaten over the stubble, since he intends to plough up the path with the rest of the field. He sows amongst thorns because they too will be ploughed in. And it has been suggested that the rocky ground was land with underlying limestone which barely shows above the surface. Even if some preaching work appears not to bear fruit, this shouldn't discourage us from the essentially outgoing spirit we should have in spreading the word far and wide. Many of the parables have an element of unreality about them, designed to focus our attention on a vital aspect of teaching. The sower parable has 75% of the seed sowed on bad ground, due to the almost fanatic way the sower throws the seed so far and wide, evidently without too much attention to whether it lands on responsive soil or not. His emphasis was clearly on broadcasting

the seed far and wide. We should desire to see the spread of God's ways, His Truth, His will, the knowledge of the real Christ, to as many as possible.
The word / seed which fell into good ground produced fruit. This connects with Jn. 15:5,7, which says that the branches of the vine bring forth fruit through the word abiding in them. Likewise the good ground keeps the word and continually brings forth fruit (Lk. 8:15). It is common for us to learn something from the word, apply it for a few days, and then forget it. Yet surely the implication is that if our hearts are truly open to the word, it will have permanent effects upon us, if the word abides in us. For this reason it is necessary to pray at least daily for our minds to be good ground for the word, and to retain what we already comprehend. Those on the good ground who hear and understand in Mt. 13:23 are described as those who hear and keep the word (Lk. 8:16). True understanding of the word's teaching is therefore related to an ongoing practical application of it. We may read a human book and understand it at the moment of reading; understanding God's word is quite a different concept. Truly understanding it means keeping it in our heart and therefore in our lives. The seed fell on good ground, "sprang up, and bare fruit"; indeed, it kept on bearing fruit (Lk. 8:8,15). The plant being sown was therefore a repeating crop. True response to the word will lead to wave after wave of spiritual progression. Again, we see that the sower parable is describing an ongoing response to the word- it keeps on being sown by the believer keeping the word, and fruit is continuously brought forth.

As he said these things, he cried: He that has ears to hear, let him hear- The Lord so wanted their response. The very muscles of the Lords face, His body language, would have reflected an earnest, *burning* care and compassion. The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost; He put His whole personality into the task. And we beseech men "in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:10 RV). We are to be *His* face to this world and to our brethren. With raised eyebrows, lines showing in our forehead, one eye half closed… our body language should reflect the depth of our concern for others. Having spoken of how our attitudes to God's word will elicit from Him varying responses, the Lord *cried*, loudly, "he that has ears to hear, *let him hear*" (Lk. 8:8). There is then the sickening anticlimax of :9, where the disciples ask Him whatever His parable meant. One senses a moment of silence in which the Lord composed Himself and camouflaged the pain of His disappointment; and then His essential hopefulness returns in :10: "Unto you it is given (potentially, anyway) to know (understand) the mysteries (parables) of the Kingdom of God".

There is a fine point of translation in Lk. 8:8 which needs to be appreciated: "*As* he said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (ASV and Greek). It seems that the Lord was 'throwing out' this challenge several times, as He spoke the parable. As the sower sows seed, so the Lord was challenging His hearers to decide what type of ground they were, as they heard the parable.

8:9 *And his disciples asked him what this parable meant*- The disciples' response would have been a cutting anti-climax for the Lord after his impassioned plea of :8. According to Matthew, this was His first parable, and it marked the Lord's turning away from Israel and focus upon the disciples. They were taken aback by His changed method of teaching, probably noticing that the eagerly listening multitudes had not properly understood it, overhearing all kinds of wild guesses at what the Lord was maybe driving at.

8:10 *And he said: To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest the parables remain as parables; so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand*- The things which God has prepared for those who

love Him, things which the natural eye has not seen but which are revealed unto us by the Spirit, relate to our redemption in Christ, rather than the wonders of the future political Kingdom (because Mt. 13:11; 16:17 = 1 Cor. 2:9,10). The context of 1 Cor. 2 and the allusions to Isaiah there demand the same interpretation.

Here we see the element of predestination- understanding is “given”. Paul in Romans speaks of such predestination as the supreme evidence of our salvation by grace. One example of the Lord Jesus' emphasis on our salvation being through grace rather than our works is found in the way the parables teach that our acceptance is to some degree dependent on our predestination. Thus the parable of the types of ground suggests that we are good or bad ground at the time the seed is first sown; the fish are good or bad at the time they first enter the net; the wise virgins take the oil with them from the start of their vigil. I would suggest that this is not just part of the story. It was evidently within the Lord's ability to construct stories which featured the idea of bad seed or fish etc. changing to good, and vice versa. But He didn't; indeed, His emphasis seems to have been on the idea of predestination. This isn't to decry the effort for spirituality which we must make; but His stress of the predestination factor is surely to remind us of the degree to which our calling and salvation is by pure grace.

They the supposed disciples, learners, of the Lord Jesus had been as dumb as the crowd; but by grace alone the Lord had privately explained the parables to them. And our understanding of true Bible teaching is likewise a gift of grace, when we are every bit as obtuse as the people in darkness who surround us.

8:11 *Now the parable is this. The seed is the word of God*- The word of the Gospel of the Kingdom (Mt. 13:19). The parable gives the impression that the ground was in a certain condition when the seed was first sown; there seems no hint at the possibility of changing the ground, although we will see later that there is a sense in which this is possible. The stony ground, for example, is in that state as soon as the seed lands upon it. It seems the Lord is showing us how God looks down upon the preaching of the Gospel to various people, seeing that He speaks about things which are future as if they are already (Rom. 4:17). He knows the type of ground which each of us will ultimately be. Therefore, as far as God is concerned, we are good ground, or whatever, at the time of our first encounter with the Gospel, even if we are initially stony or thistle-filled.

The seed is the word; but "the word" doesn't necessarily mean the whole Bible (although the whole Bible is of course inspired). The phrase specifically means the word of the power of the Gospel, by which we were ushered into spiritual being. And *this* is what brings forth fruit, through our 'patient' and continued response to it. We were born again, "not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God... and this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you" (1 Pet. 1:23,25). Time and again the New Testament uses "the word of God" or "the word of the Lord (Jesus)" as shorthand for the preaching of the basic Gospel. *This* is the seed, this is the source of new life, this is what can lead to new character and behaviour in us. James speaks of being "doers of the word" (1:22,25), using the same word as in the parable of the sower, there translated 'to bring forth fruit'. Note that "the word of God" in the NT often refers specifically to the Gospel. James foresaw the possibility of hearing the word of the Gospel but not doing it, not bringing forth what those basic doctrines imply. He foresees how we can admire it as a vain man seeing his reflection in a mirror. We are not to be "forgetful hearers" of the word of the basics, the "implanted

word" (1:21 RV- another reference to the sower parable). We aren't to learn the Gospel and then forget those doctrines. We are to be doers of them.

8:12 *Those by the way side are they that have heard; then comes the Devil*- The parable of the sower connects the Devil with the fowls which take away the Word from potential converts, stopping their spiritual growth. This would aptly fit the Judaizers who were leading the young ecclesias away from the word, and the Jews who "shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men... neither suffer ye them that are entering (young converts) to go in" (Mt. 23:13). The Devil takes away the word of the Kingdom, "lest they should believe and be saved" (Lk. 8:12).

The entire context of the parable and the preceding chapter in Matthew is that it was the Jewish world system which hindered people from further responding to the seed / word about Jesus which they had first heard from John the Baptist. As I showed at length in *The Real Devil*, the Jewish system is frequently described as the 'satan' or adversary of the early church. By 'the wicked one', the Lord's audience would've understood 'satan'; and the Lord is redefining their view of 'satan' as being not so much the Gentiles or some cosmic being, as their own religious elders and system.

And takes away- The same word for "takes away" had recently been used by the Lord in Mt. 11:12 about how the violent take away the Kingdom. I suggested in the commentary there that this is possible to understand as referring to the Jewish leaders stopping people entering the Kingdom of Jesus. In this case, "the wicked one" is again identified as the Jews. The word is also used about the wolf 'catching away' the sheep (Jn. 10:12)- and in the same passage in John 10, it is the wolf who kills Jesus in His mortal combat with him in order to save the rest of the sheep. Clearly the wolf there refers to the Jewish leaders who ravaged the flock, indeed John 10 is full of reference to Ezekiel 34, which speaks of Israel's priesthood as responsible for the scattering of the sheep. Mt. 13:19 describes the evil one taking away the word out of our heart. However can we resist that evil one? Paul had his eye on this question in 2 Thess. 3:1,3, where he speaks of the word being *with them*, and also of the Lord keeping them from the evil one. Paul knew that the Lord (Jesus) will help us in keeping the word in our hearts, if we allow him to; he saw that the power of God is greater than our low nature.

The word from their heart, that they may not believe and be saved- Clearly the types of ground represent types of heart or mind. In addition to the elements of unreality in the parables, there are other features which shout out for our attention. Often details are omitted which we would expect to see merely as part of the story. For example, the parable of the ten girls says nothing at all about the bride; the bridegroom alone is focused upon, along with the bridesmaids. Where's the bride in the story? Surely the point is that in the story, the bridesmaids are treated as the bride; this is the wonder of the whole thing, that we as mere bridesmaids are in fact the bride herself. Another example would be the way in which the sower's presence is not really explained. No reference is made to the importance of rain or ploughing in making the seed grow. The preacher is unimportant; we are mere voices, as was John the Baptist. But it is the type of ground we are which is so all important; and the type of ground refers to the type of heart we have (Mt. 13:19). The state of the human heart is what is so crucial. Yet another example is in the way that there is no explanation for exactly why the tenants of the vineyard so hate the owner and kill His Son. This teaches of the irrational hatred the Jews had towards the Father and Son. And why would the owner send His Son, when so clearly the other servants had been abused?

Why not just use force against them? Here again we see reflected the inevitable grace of the Father in sending the Son to be the Saviour of the Jewish world.

8:13 *And those on the rock are they who, when they have heard, receive the word with joy*- Belief and joy are therefore paralleled. The later references to our joy *remaining* unto the end of our spiritual path surely allude here (Jn. 15:11; 16:22; Acts 20:24; Heb. 3:6). Note how in Jn. 16:22 the joy of the disciples could be taken from them by those who took Christ from them; another hint that the persecution which choked the joy came from the Jews, who were those who took Christ from them. Joy and faith are linked many times in the New Testament; we must ask whether we really have the joy which is the proof of real faith.

But these have no root, they for a while believe, but in time of temptation fall away- It is quite possible that our Lord's sad prophecy of the disciples being offended because of having to identify with his sufferings looked back to this parable, concerning those who impulsively respond to the word in joy, but are offended because they have no deep root (Mk. 4:17 = Mk. 14:27; Mt. 26:31). The fact that the disciples became good ground after this encourages us that we can change the type of ground which we are on initially receiving the seed.

8:14 *And that which fell among the thorns, these are those that have heard*- One of the ineffable sadnesses of Paul's life must have been to see his converts falling away. Yet he seems to have comforted himself by seeing their defection in terms of the sower parable. Many a missionary has been brought close to that parable for the same reason. It supplies an explanation, an answer, a comfort, as 'Friends one by one depart (some we saw as pillars to our own faith, those we thought would always be there) / Lonely and sad our heart'. Thus Paul saw Demas as a seed among thorns (Mt. 13:22 = 2 Tim. 4:10); he saw Elymas as a weed (Mt. 13:38 = Acts 13:10); and he pleads with the Romans not to slip into the weed category (Mt. 13:41 Gk. = Rom. 14:13).

Thorns were symbolic of false teachers in the Old Testament ecclesia (Ez. 2:6; Is. 33:12-14). It is a repeated theme that thorns are devoured by fire (Ex. 22:6; Ps. 118:12; Ecc. 7:6; Is. 10:17), looking ahead to the destruction of all false elements of the ecclesia. The thorns easily equate with the tares of the next parable, which represent false teachers (primarily the Judaist infiltrators of the first century ecclesia). It would seem from this that some members of the ecclesia are never right with God, but exist purely for the spiritual trial of others; although it cannot be over-emphasized that it is quite wrong to attempt to label individuals as this 'thorn' element. Thus Jesus pointed out that grapes (the true Israel) and thorns can be apparently similar (Mt. 7:16), but "Ye shall know them by their *fruits*". The thorns of the sower parable and those they influenced were "unfruitful". However, seeing that "the thorns sprang up *with it*" (Lk. 8:7), there was some genuine spiritual growth, matched by the appearance of this among the thorns too. Heb. 6:8 likewise speaks of the thorns as believers who grew up within the ecclesia. This indicates the dual-mindedness of those who only partially commit themselves to the word; knowledge like this should play an active part in our self-examination. Because the thorns outwardly look like true believers, having an outward appearance of spiritual growth even more zealous and strong than that of the plants which they choke, it is impossible to personally identify the "thorns"; but there can be no doubt that, according to the parable, they *must* be present among the ecclesia. The seed "fell *among* thorns" (Mt. 13:7), showing that this thorn category were already within the ecclesia when the person who was to be choked was converted. We have shown that Biblically the thorns are false teachers; yet Jesus interprets them as "the care (Gk. 'divisions'- the double

mindedness of serving two masters) of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches" (Mt.13:22). The conclusion to be drawn is that the false teachers are responsible for the new convert being choked by these things. Mk. 4:19 says that these lusts enter into the convert's heart. Therefore the thorns must influence the person's thinking, so that he follows after these things until "he becometh unfruitful". The Greek for "choked" is from a root meaning 'association, companionship'. Marshall's Interlinear renders the Greek text of Lk. 8:7 in keeping with this idea: "Growing up with the thorns choked it". Thus it is through close association with the thorn element already in the ecclesia, that the new convert who enters it is corrupted. We each have to ask 'What type of ground are we as an ecclesia? Do *I* have thorn elements to me...?'

But as they go on their way, they are choked- Paul had thought deeply about the parables. He doesn't just half-quote them in an offhand way. For example, Mt. 13:22 says that riches choke a man's response to the word. 1 Tim. 6:9 warns that those who *want to be rich* are choked by their *desire* for riches. Likewise Paul saw the rich man of Mt. 19:23 as actually one who *wanted* to be rich (= 1 Tim. 6:9,10). So Paul had thought through the parable. He saw that possession of riches alone wouldn't choke a man; he saw that the Lord was using "riches" as meaning 'the desire for riches'. And because "riches" are relative and subjective, this must be right. And therefore the Spirit was able to use Paul's deductions. My point is that the Spirit *could* have used just anyone to write (e.g.) 1 Tim. 6:9. But it was no accident that God chose to use a man with a fine knowledge and appreciation of His Son to be His pen-man.

With cares and riches and the pleasures of life- In our age as never before, given more possibilities and knowledge of possible futures and what could go wrong, we have as never before the temptation to be full of such care. The same word is used in Lk. 21:34 about the "cares" which will be a feature of the last days- both of AD70 and today. But in the first instance, the 'world' in view was the Jewish world. There are not a few Bible passages which confirm this view of materialism, as *the* besetting temptation of every human soul, and which confirm that therefore our attitude to materialism, serving God or mammon, is the litmus test of our spirituality. The parable of the sower teaches that for those who begin well in the Truth, who don't fall away immediately or get discouraged by persecution, "the deceitfulness of riches... the cares and pleasures of this life" will be their temptation. I would have expected the Lord to either speak in more general terms about the flesh, or to reel off a list of common vices. But instead He focuses on the desire for wealth as the real problem. The love of wealth is the root of *all* evil behaviour (1 Tim. 6:10). And I would go further, and suggest that so many of the excuses we hear which relate to "I haven't got time" (for reading, preaching, meeting, writing...) are related to this desire for material improvement. The desire for advancement takes an iron grip on a man's soul. As we move through life, our thinking is concerned with prices, with possibilities, with schemings... what *ought* to be the surpassingly dominating aspect of our life, the Son of God and His Truth, takes a poor second place. The connection between the desire for riches and the devil (our nature) is powerful. The devil is a deceiver. And 'riches' is also a deceiver (Mt. 13:22). That we know for sure. The desire for material things, for the false security of bank balances, the excuse that we are allowing ourselves to be so preoccupied for the sake of our families, the idea that we are only human beings and so God will let us be dominated by these worries... all this is the deception of the flesh. God *does* remember that we are dust, and yes, of course we *must* provide for our own, some thought (but not *anxious* thought) must be given to tomorrow (Mt. 6:25,31,34). But these facts must never make us push God's

Truth into *second* place. The lilies of the field are fed and dressed by God without anxiously worrying about it. Israel on their wilderness journey were miraculously provided with food *and clothing,* surely to prefigure God's basic material care of His spiritual Israel of later years. David, all his life long, never saw the seed of the righteous begging bread (Ps. 37:25).

And bring no fruit to maturity- See on Lk. 15:31. The word becoming unfruitful in Mt. 13:22 is matched by it yielding "no fruit" (Mk. 4:7) and no fruit being perfected in Lk. 8:14. The conclusion from this is that spiritual fruit which is developed but does not remain is not really fruit at all. There is the constant temptation for us to recognize just a bit of apparent 'growth' within us, and feel satisfied with it- rather than taking on board the concept of the word having a fulness of effect upon every part of our lives. Given the lesson of the thorns, there is no doubt that one must watch their friends even within the ecclesia. "Thorns and snares are in the way of the forward: he that doth keep (the Hebrew for "keep" is often used in Proverbs about keeping the word) his soul shall be far from them" (Prov. 22:5). The language of thorns must connect with the curse upon Eden; the ecclesia, the paradise of God, must always have its thorns in order to spiritually exercise Adam, the spiritual gardener. As our brother's keeper, we need to be aware that after conversion, a whole gamut of new temptations face the convert. *After* he has heard the word, he is choked with the cares, riches and pleasures (Lk. 8:14). Yet these things existed before he heard the word; the point is that they became new temptations after his response to the word. A concerted effort to understand, with Biblical guidance, the pressures upon new converts might help save a few more of the many which are being lost.
The parable of the sower can be interpreted as fulfilling every time we hear the word sown in us. Thus some seed is "choked with cares" (Lk. 8:14)- exactly the same words used about Martha being "cumbered" with her domestic duties so that she didn't hear the Lord's word at that time (Lk. 10:40). We bring various attitudes of mind- stony, receptive, cumbered etc.- to the word each time we hear it. And it is our attitude to it which determines our response to it.

8:15 *And that in the good ground are those with an honest and good heart, who having heard the word, hold it fast and bring forth fruit with patience*- See on Lk. 10:37. Paul tells the Hebrews and Romans to have the patient, fruit-bearing characteristics of the good ground (Lk. 8:15 = Rom. 2:7; Heb. 10:36). The word/ seed which fell into good ground produced fruit. Thus connects with Jn. 15:5,7, which says that the branches of the vine bring forth fruit through the word abiding in them. Likewise the good ground keeps the word and continually brings forth fruit. It is common for us to learn something from the word, apply it for a few days, and then forget it. Yet surely the implication is that if our hearts are truly open to the word, it will have permanent effects upon us, if the word abides in us. For this reason it is necessary to pray at least daily for our minds to be good ground for the word, and to retain what we already comprehend. Those on the good ground who hear and understand in Mt. 13:23 are described as those who hear and keep the word (Lk. 8:16). True understanding of the word's teaching is therefore related to an ongoing practical application of it. We may read a human book and understand it at the moment of reading; understanding God's word is quite a different concept. Truly understanding it means keeping it in our heart and therefore in our lives. The seed fell on good ground, "sprang up, and bare fruit"; indeed, it kept on bearing fruit (Lk. 8:8,15). The plant being sown was therefore a repeating crop. True response to the

word will lead to wave after wave of spiritual progression. Again, we see that the sower parable is describing an ongoing response to the word- it keeps on being sown by the believer keeping the word, and fruit is continuously brought forth.

The good ground "accepts" (Mk. 4:20), "holds fast" (Lk. 8:15) the word. In our present culture of anti-intellectualism, it can be overlooked that any real acceptance of a message, let alone holding onto it, must require a degree of 'understanding'. We can hear the Bible explained and at that point *understand* intellectually. But this is something different to real understanding; for if we truly apprehend the message, we will receive it deep within us and keep that understanding ever present in our subsequent actions. The background of the parable is that it was given the same day as the Lord's lament over the lack of response to John's message and therefore His own ministry (Mt. 13:1). The very fact there is good ground, and three different types of it matching the three different types of failure, is therefore an encouragement to the disciples (and all) that God's word doesn't 'return void' but does ultimately achieve an end in some lives. Indeed it has even been suggested that the parable of the sower is a kind of *midrash* or interpretation of the Isaiah 55 passage about the word going forth and not returning void. Ultimately, despite rejection, setbacks and only a minority responding- the work of the Kingdom will succeed. That is one aspect of the parable.

The parable of the sower concluded by lamenting that the Lord's general Jewish audience did *not* understand, and He spoke the parables knowing they wouldn't understand and would be confirmed in this. And He stressed that a feature of the good ground is that His message is understood. In this context, the Lord commends the disciples because they saw and heard, in the sense of understanding (Mt. 13:13,15,16,23). Yet so evidently they didn't understand. And yet the Lord was so thrilled with the fact they understood a very little that He counted them as the good ground that understood.

Many of the Lord's parables had some oblique reference to Himself. The parable of the sower speaks of the type of ground which gave one hundred fold yield- and surely the Lord was thinking of Himself in this. And yet the whole point of the parable is that all who receive the Lord's word have the possibility of responding in this way. Or take the related parable of the mustard seed [=God's word of the Gospel] which grows up into a huge tree under which all the birds can find refuge (Mk. 4:31,32). This image is replete with allusion to Old Testament pictures of God's future Kingdom, and the growth of Messiah from a small twig into a great tree (Ez. 17:22). Here we see the power of the basic Gospel message- truly responded to, it can enable us to have a share in the very heights to which the Lord Jesus is exalted.

The parable of the sower leaves us begging the question: 'So how can we be good ground?'. Mark's record goes straight on to record that the Lord right then said that a candle is lit so as to publicly give light and not to be hidden (Mk. 4:21). He is speaking of how our conversion is in order to witness to others. But He says this in the context of being good ground. To respond to the word ourselves, our light must be spreading to all. The only way for the candle of our faith to burn is for it to be out in the open air. Hidden under the bucket of embarrassment or shyness or an inconsistent life, it will go out. We will lose our faith if we don't in some sense witness to it. Witnessing is in that sense for our benefit. When the disciples ask how ever they can accomplish the standards which the Lord set them, He replied by saying that a city set on a hill cannot be hid (Mt. 5:14). He meant that the open exhibition of the Truth by us will help us in the life of personal obedience to Him. We must give forth the light,

not keep it under a bucket, because "there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested; neither was anything kept secret, but that it should come abroad" (Mk. 4:21,22). In other words, the very reason why God has hidden the things of His word from the world and some aspects of them from our brethren, is so that we can reveal them to them. The ecclesias, groups of believers, are lampstands (Rev. 2:5 cp. Ps. 18:28). We must give forth the light, not keep it under a bucket, letting laziness (under a bed) or worldly care (a bushel) distract us; because "there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested; neither was anything kept secret, but that it should come abroad" (Mk. 4:21,22).

Luke goes on to record the Lord's teaching about a candle. Burning brightly before others is therefore the way to be good ground.

8:16 *Nobody, when he has lit a lamp, covers it with a vessel, or puts it under a bed; but puts it on a stand, so that they that enter may see the light*- See on Lk. 6:47. We are compared to a candle that is lit (cp. our baptism) *so that* it may give light to others (Lk. 8:16; 11:33); the woman (the Lord Jesus) lights a candle (He uses believers) to find his lost coin (through our efforts) (Lk. 15:8; this must be seen in the context of the other two references in Luke to lighting a candle). If we don't give light (God's word, Ps. 119:105) to others, we are a candle under a bucket, and therefore we will lose our faith, the flame will go out. So it's hard not to conclude that if we don't naturally give the light to others, we don't believe. The very nature of a lit candle is that it gives light; *all* candles do this, not just some. The Lord wants to use us as His candle, and He will arrange situations in life to enable this.

8:17 *For nothing is hid, that shall not be revealed; nor anything secret, that shall not be known and come to light*- Nothing is done secretly that will not then come to the light- and therefore we should come to the light right now, living life in God's light and before His judgment (Jn. 3:20,21). This not only means we should not sin 'in secret', but more positively, we should feel and realize His constant affirmation of us for thoughts and actions which are invisible to others or for which we do not receive any thank.

The Lord taught that either the 'devil' will "take away" the word from the rejected, or He will "take away" what He has given them at the last day (Lk. 8:12,17). In this sense, the word "abiding" in us is a foretaste of the day of judgment- if we don't let it abide, and the 'devil' of the world or our own humanity takes it away from us, then effectively such people are living out the condemnation process even in this life.

8:18 *Take heed therefore how you hear. For whoever has, to him shall be given*- This is a clear statement of the upward spiral which we can experience. What we 'have' in our commitment to His word will be added to. The faithful do not get the blessing solely by their own effort and application to God's word, but through the gift /grace of God. The context requires we understand this as 'having' the ability to hear the Lord's words and practically 'understand' them (Mt. 13:9). Mark speaks of what a man has, whereas Lk. 8:18 AV mg. more precisely speaks of what a man *thinks* he has. Matthew's record adds to "shall be given" the idea of 'given in abundance'. This Greek word for "abundance" is used about the 'abundance' which characterizes the life of the believer. But the 'abundance' is not of material things, but of understanding of and thereby relationship with the Lord.

And whoever has not, from him shall be taken away even that which he thinks he has- See on Lk. 13:28.

The language is difficult, but makes good sense if we understand 'what a man has' as referring to what that generation had due to responding to John's preaching; but because they had not followed where it led, they were left with nothing. The ideas are similar to the parable the Lord had just given of the demon being thrown out of the house of Israel by John the Baptist, but then returning. The language is arrestingly and purposefully strange. How can a man who has nothing have what he has taken away from him? All is clearer once we accept the initial context as being the Lord's commentary upon Israel's initial response to John the Baptist, and subsequent rejection of his ministry insofar as they rejected Jesus as Messiah. What they had once had- an initial response to the word sown- was now being taken away from them. This likewise explains the language of the next verse- that it was by the process of seeing and hearing that they became blind and deaf. It was their initial seeing and hearing of John's message which had made them now totally blind and deaf- because they had not responded to it.

In the sower context, those who appear to have been committed to the word but have now fallen away (the seed on the rocks, wayside and amongst thorns) will find that their time of apparent commitment to it was nothing; they have nothing if they did not endure to the end, and what they appeared to have will be taken away from them.

8:19 *And there came to him his mother and relatives; and they could not come to him because of the crowd*- Mt. 12:46-50 five times repeats the phrase "his mother and his brethren", as if to link her with them. In the parallel Mk. 3:21,31-35 we read of how "his own" family thought He was crazy and came to talk to Him. Then we read that it was His mother and brothers who demanded an audience with Him, perhaps linking Mary with her other children. Their cynicism of Jesus, their lack of perception of Him, came to influence her- for He effectively rebuffs her special claims upon Him by saying that His mother and brethren are all who hear God's word. Clearly the brothers, who didn't believe in Jesus (Jn. 7:5) influenced her. When He speaks of how His real family are those who hear the word of God and do it, the Lord is alluding to Dt. 33:9, where we have the commendation of Levi for refusing to recognize his apostate brethren at the time of the golden calf: "Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren… for they [Levi] have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant". The last sentence is the essence of the Lord's saying that His true family are those who keep God's word and do it. The strong implication of the allusion is that the Lord felt that His mother and brethren had committed some kind of apostasy.

8:20 *And it was told him: Your mother and your relatives stand outside, desiring to see you*- Note how in Mk. 3:32 we read that "your mother and your brothers are outside looking [seeking] for you", and in Mk. 1:37 the same word occurred: "all men seek for you"; and also in Lk. 2:45, of how Mary looked for Jesus. The similarity is such that the intention may be to show us how Mary had been influenced by the world's perception of Him. And we too can be influenced by the world's light hearted view of the Lord of glory. It's so easy to allow their patterns of language use to lead us into blaspheming, taking His Name in vain, seeing His religion as just a hobby, a social activity… In passing, it was not that the Lord was insensitive or discounted her. It is in Mt. 12:46 that Mary wanted to speak with Him, and presumably she did- but then He goes to His home town, back to where she had come from (Mt. 13:54), as if He did in fact pay her attention. See on Mk. 6:3.

8:21 *But he answered and said to them: My mother and my relatives are these that hear the word of God and do it*- This refers back to His recent parable of the good seed that "did" the word which they heard (8:15). But surely that group of fascinated, surface-interested onlookers didn't all come into the good seed category, who held the word to the end, all their lives? He was so positive about others' faith. It has been observed that "in a kinship-oriented society like Israel, it must have been startling for people to hear of a bond that was even deeper than that of the natural family". And so it is in many parts of the world today.

The parallel records speak of hearing and doing the will of God; Luke has "the word of God". We can too easily assume that every reference to "the word of God" is to the book known as the Bible. The Bible is indeed "the word of God", but the idea is used in other ways within Biblical language; and here it seems to mean the will or intention of God.

8:22 *Now it came to pass on one of those days that he boarded a boat, he and his disciples, and he said to them: Let us go over to the other side of the lake. And they cast off*- So often we encounter the Lord's desire for solitude, avoiding crowds and pressure to perform mass healings. His regular crossings of the lake were largely to avoid these situations. The constant outpouring of energy from Him accounts for the complete exhaustion of :23. In these things we see the Lord's utter humanity.

8:23 *But as they sailed, he fell asleep; and there came down a storm of wind on the lake, and they were filling with water; and were in danger for their lives*- Mt. 8:26 uses a word for "storm" which is also translated "earthquake". The waves from the earthquake "covered" or 'hid' [s.w.] the ship. Given the intensity of the situation it seems unlikely the Lord was really "asleep". Here we have a picture of the apparent silence of God. He appeared to be asleep, He remained with eyes closed, lying there as the boat was hidden beneath the waves. But He did this surely to pique the intensity of faith and urgency of appeal in their prayer to Him for salvation. And the apparent silence of the Lord in our lives is ultimately to try to achieve the same effect.

The Greek for "sleep" could also stand the translation 'lying down to rest'. But how could He appear to be resting or asleep in such a situation? I suggest He did this to elicit their desire for Him. Likewise He made as if He would walk by them during another storm, and acted as if He would go on further on the walk to Emmaus. It was all in order to elicit their urgent desire for Him. And so it is with His apparent silence to us; that silence or lack of immediate response is in order to heighten our final sense of His grace and action. We see it in how He delayed going to Lazarus; it is the principle of Is. 30:18: "Therefore Yahweh will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you, for Yahweh is a God of justice. Blessed are all those who wait for Him".

8:24 *And they came to him and woke him, saying*- Literally, to raise up. It seemed He didn't want to do anything- until they imposed upon Him with all their energy and intensity of focus upon Him and Him alone as their Saviour. And the whole situation was raised up to that end.

Master, master, we perish! And he awoke, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water; and they ceased, and there was a calm- The same Greek words for 'save' and 'perish' also occur together in Mt. 16:25, where the Lord teaches that if we seek to save our lives in this world then we will perish. He could thereby be making a criticism of the disciples' plea to be saved from perishing; His sense would then have been 'You should have an even greater, focused intensity upon your need to be saved spiritually and not to perish eternally'. Again the two words occur together in Mt. 18:11, where the Lord says that He came to save those who are perishing- and again,

He has in view spiritual, ultimate salvation. The perishing disciples on the lake, in need of saving, are therefore being set up as a picture of the intensity of desire we should have for forgiveness and salvation. The way essential intention is understood as prayer is perhaps reflected in the way Matthew records that the disciples prayed during the storm on the lake: "Lord, save us, we are perishing!" (Mt. 8:25). Mark records that their actual words were "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" (Mk. 4:38). Perhaps this was read by Matthew's inspiration as prayer. An alternative would be that they firstly said the words recorded by Mark, and then those by Matthew- in which case we could perhaps notice the difference between "Teacher!" and "Lord!", as if the higher they perceived the greatness of the Lord Jesus, the more moved they were to prayer.

Mark records that they actually said: "Don't you care that we perish?" (Mk. 4:38). His whole life and death were because He *did* so care that they would not perish (Jn. 3:16). It's so reminiscent of a child's total, if temporary, misunderstanding and lack of appreciation of the parent's love and self-sacrifice.

The Greek for "rebuked" can mean just this, but it is also translated 'to solemnly charge'. There are times in the Gospels where the sovereign authority of Jesus as Lord simply shines through. He did His work with a minimum of such displays of authority. Yet there are enough of them to make us appreciate how He could so easily have 'come down from the cross'; such incidents of sovereign authority in His ministry simply pave the way for us to appreciate the degree of self-control and wilful sacrifice and suffering which He achieved on the cross. The peoples of the first century, and their predecessors, believed that demons and the Satan monster were somehow associated with water – that was why, they figured, the water mysteriously kept moving, and at times blew up into storms. When we read of God 'rebuking' the waters and making them calm or do what He wished (Ps. 18:16; 104:7; 106:9), we're effectively being told that Yahweh of Israel is so infinitely superior to those supposed demons and sea monsters that for God's people, they have no effective existence. The Lord Jesus taught the same lesson when He 'rebuked' the sea and wind during the storm on the lake (Mt. 8:26). The same Greek word is used to described how He 'rebuked' demons (Mt. 17:18 etc.). I have no doubt that the Lord Jesus didn't believe there was a Loch Ness–type monster lurking in Galilee which He had to rebuke in order to save the disciples from the storm; and likewise He spoke of 'rebuking' demons as a similar way of teaching others that *whatever* ideas they had about demons, He was greater and was in a position to 'rebuke' them. Likewise He assured His men that they had the power to tread on snakes, scorpions, and all their enemies (Lk. 10:17–20). The image of a victorious god trampling his foes and snakes underfoot was well established in the surrounding cultures, and had entered Judaism. The Lord is teaching those fearful men that OK, if that's your perception of things, well, in your terms, you have ultimate victory through working 'in My name'.

Mark records that the Lord commanded the waves "Peace, be still". His authoritative "Peace, be still" (Mk. 4:39) was probably primarily addressed to the Angels controlling the natural elements. The reference to Angels 'ministering' to Him after the temptations suggests their inferiority. Thus He could summon twelve legions of Angels at the time of His greatest passion- maybe He remembered this incident and it was a temptation to Him to use this power over Angels at the crucifixion.

All three of the Synoptics use the same phrase for "a great calm" (Mk. 4:39; Lk. 8:24). It would've been a profound experience. The whole experience looks ahead to

the calm of God's Kingdom being brought about by intense latter day prayer during a tribulation so intense that unless it were shortened, the faithful would die. When the Lord calmed the raging sea into a still calmness, He was consciously replicating what happened when Jonah was cast into the sea. He said plainly that He understood Jonah's willing submission to this as a type of His coming death. Therefore He saw the stilled sea as a symbol of the peace His sacrifice would achieve. And yet even during His ministry, He brought that calmness about; for in principle, His sacrifice was ongoing throughout His life. His blood is a symbol both of His cross and of the life He lived.

8:25 *And he said to them: Where is your faith?*- See on Lk. 7:8. They so often feared (Lk. 8:25; 9:34,45; Mk. 4:40; 6:50; 10:32); despite the Lord repeatedly telling them not to be afraid (Lk. 12:4,32; Jn. 14:27). The Gospel writers use their records to bring out their own fickleness. After having been awed by the Lord's stilling of the storm, they are soon almost mocking Him for asking who had touched Him, when hundreds of the jostling crowd had touched Him (Lk. 8:25 cp. 45).

The question as to *why* they had little faith echoes to us. Why is it that faith is so hard for us? The track record of the Father and Son as rewarding faith is clear and without question. This *why* question drives each individual into personal introspection, reviewing our history, past and present influences upon us, the nature of our personality. *Why* do we not believe very strongly... ? The records of the Lord's words to the disciples in the sinking ship are significantly different within the Gospel records. Luke's record has Him upbraiding them: "Where is your faith?", as if He thought they had none. Matthew and Mark have Him commenting: "O you of *little* faith...". Putting them together, perhaps He said and implied something like: 'O you of little faith, you who think you have a little faith, in my view you have no *real* faith. Come on, where is your *real* faith, not the little bit which *you* think you have...?' (Mt. 8:26 cp. Mk. 4:40). The Greek for "little" faith is also translated 'almost'; as if the Lord is saying that they almost had faith, but in reality, had nothing. The Lord spoke of how just a little piece of real faith, like a grain of mustard seed, could result in so much (Mk. 11:12,13)- as if He recognized that there was pseudo-faith, and the real thing. *Oligopistos* ("little faith") is used five times by Matthew (Mt. 6:30; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20); it never occurs in Mark and only once in Luke. Perhaps Matthew's Gospel record was written to challenge those whose faith was small, and he encourages them that the disciples likewise started with "little faith".

It seems to me that all the Lord's servants are taught by increments, progressively, being given tests as to the degree to which they have grasped what the Lord has sought to teach them previously. And the Lord Jesus used a similar structured approach with the training of the twelve disciples. When the Lord commented "Have you not yet faith?" (Mk. 4:40 RV) it becomes immediately apparent that He was working with the twelve according to some program of spiritual development, and He was frustrated with their lack of response to it and slow progress. He surely has a similar program in place, and makes similar patient efforts, with each one of us. It is apparent to any reader of the Greek text of the Gospels that Jesus almost always left the verb "believe" without an object (e.g. Mk. 4:40; 5:34,36; 9:23). The question naturally arose: 'Believe *in what or whom*?'. And seeing the speaker of the words, the answer was there before their eyes.

And being afraid they marvelled, saying to each other- A word so often used about the response of people to miracles. The Lord had marvelled at another's faith, and now men marvel at His faith. A very positive mutuality is suggested here between the Lord and His followers.

Who then is this- What *sort* of man is this (Gk. *potapos*), they asked themselves. They felt very much their own humanity (hence they are called "the men" at this time), and their awe was because they sensed that Jesus too was a man. Accepting the humanity of the Lord Jesus is relatively easy on one level, as a matter of theology, exposition or logic. But then comes the far harder part- the awe at the fact that One who was like me could actually do so much and be so much. And this can lead to our feeling a kind of gap between Him and us, although we know He shared the same nature, this in a sense means that we feel the spiritual distance between Him and us very keenly. In later spiritual maturity, Peter seems to have reflected upon this gap and realized that it was bridgeable- for he uses a similar word in saying that because of God's grace, "what manner of persons (*potapous*) ought we to be...". Just as Jesus was human and yet different from unbelieving men, so that same element of difference can be seen in us. The whole consideration is an essay in His humanity and representation of us as humans.

"What manner of *man* is this?" was maybe said on perceiving that His actions were in fulfilment of the prophecy that *Yahweh* would still the waves of the sea. And in the context of stilling another storm, He comments: "Fear not, it is I" - not 'it's *me*'. He was surely suggesting they connect Him with the essence of the Yahweh Name, I am that I am. But the connection was only for those who would truly meditate and connect things together. As our Moslem friends have correctly pointed out many times, Jesus Himself never in so many words claimed to be Messiah. When others said this about Him, He replies by describing Himself as the "son of man". Indeed, this was His preferred self-image. He was intensely conscious of His humanity, His solidarity with us, and it was as if He directed us who later have believed to image Him first and foremost as a *man of our nature*. Of course, He was and is so much more than that. But because we are human, we have to image ourselves around a perfect human- Jesus, the real and full humanity as God intended. Here those who believe Jesus was God Himself place themselves at a distinct disadvantage- our understanding that Jesus did indeed come "in the flesh" ought to be a tremendous inspiration to us to be like Him. The power and compulsion of His life and example are surely diminished by relating to Him as God Himself.

That he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?- The disciples spoke of the wind and sea as if they were conscious entities, able to be obedient to the word of Jesus. The same word is used to describe the marvel of the people that "even the unclean spirits... obey Him" (Mk. 1:27). Just as wind and sea are not actually living entities, so unclean spirits likewise don't actually exist. But the disciples clearly had the idea in their head. Yet the scale of the Lord's power over such entities in fact showed their effective non-existence in practice.

8:26 *And they arrived in the region of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee*- The "Girgashites" of Dt. 7:1, some of the original inhabitants of Canaan who had never been cast out of the land as intended by God. These men stopped anyone passing along the way or road. The point may be that those whom Israel should've 'cast out' to secure their inheritance of the Kingdom were finally cast out by Christ. This lays the basis for the language of 'casting out' the demons into the lake.

8:27 *And when he had arrived upon the land, there met him a certain man out of the city, who had demons*- For a detailed study on this incident, see my discussion of it in *The Real Devil*. See too commentary on Matthew 8 and Mark 5. There are many incidents where evidently the disciples were with Jesus, yet the focus of the record is entirely upon Him, so awed were they by the magnitude of His personality, and so

selfless were they (Lk. 8:27; 10:38-41; Jn. 11:15,20-57). They are appealing for others to believe on the basis that they are recounting the story of how they heard Jesus, and eventually, very slowly and falteringly, had also come to believe.

We are not reading here about literal spirits. See on Ml. 5:7. But when we meet a similar situation in Acts 8:7 of unclean spirits crying out, the Eastern (Aramaic) text reads: "Many who were mentally afflicted cried out". This is because, according to George Lamsa, ""Unclean spirits" is an Aramaic term used to describe lunatics" (George Lamsa, *New Testament Commentary* (Philadelphia: A.J. Holman, 1945) pp. 57,58). It should be noted that Lamsa was a native Aramaic speaker with a fine understanding of Aramaic terms. He grew up in a remote part of Kurdistan which had maintained the Aramaic language almost unchanged since the time of Jesus. It's significant that Lamsa's extensive writings indicate that he failed to see in the teachings of Jesus and Paul any support for the popular conception of the devil and demons- he insisted that the Semitic and Aramaic terms used by them have been misunderstood by Western readers and misused in order to lend support for their conceptions of a personal Devil and demons.

And for a long time he had worn no clothes and abode not in any house, but in the tombs- A fairly detailed case can be made that the man Legion was to be understood as representative of Judah in captivity, suffering for their sins, who despite initially opposing Christ (Legion ran up to Jesus just as he had 'run upon' people in aggressive fits earlier), could still repent as Legion did, be healed of their sins and be His witnesses to the world. This fits in with the whole theme which the Lord had- that the restoration of Israel's fortunes would not be by violent opposition to the Legions of Rome but by repentance and spiritual witness to the world. The point is, Israel were bound in fetters and beaten by the Gentiles because of their sins, which they were culpable of, for which they had responsibility and from which they could repent; rather than because they had been taken over by powerful demons against their will. Here then are reasons for understanding Legion as representative of Judah under Gentile oppression:

- Israel were “A people... which remain among the tombs, and lodge in the monuments” (Is. 65:3-4).

- Legion was always “in the mountains”- the "high places" where Israel sinned (Is. 65:7; Hos. 4:13).

- The man's name, Legion, suggests he was under the ownership of Rome. The miracle occurred in Gentile territory, suggesting Judah in the Gentile dominated world.

- ‘What is your name?’ is the same question asked of Jacob

- Legion's comment that ‘we are many’ is identical to the words of Ez. 33:24 about Israel: “Son of man, they that inhabit those wastes of the land of Israel speak, saying, Abraham was one, and he inherited the land: but *we are many*; the land is given us for inheritance. Wherefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Ye eat with the blood, and lift up your eyes toward your idols, and shed blood: and shall ye possess the land?”.

- Legion had often been bound with fetters and chains (Mk 5:3,4)- just as God's people had so often been taken into captivity in "fetters and chains” (2 Chron. 33:11; 36:6, 2 Kings 24:7).

- When the sick man asks that the unclean spirits not be sent "out of the country" (Mk. 5:10), I take this as his resisting the healing. But he later repents and asks for them to be sent into the herd of pigs. This recalls a prophecy about the restoration of Judah in Zech. 13:2: “And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land”.

- The herd of pigs being "destroyed" in the water recalls the Egyptians being “destroyed” in the Red Sea when Israel were delivered from Gentile power before. The Gadarene Gentiles "were afraid", just as the Gentile world was at the time of the Exodus (Ex. 15:14). The curing of Legion is termed “great things” (Mk. 5:19); and Israel's exodus from Gentile power and the destruction of the Egyptians is likewise called “great things” (Ps. 106:21).

8:28 *And when he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said: What have I to do with you, Jesus, you Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me-*

He was one of the few who joined the dots and saw that the Lord was God's Son; yet he feared condemnation, which is what "torment" spoke of. It was his mental illness which was largely responsible for that paranoia about condemnation; and the Lord healed him of it.

A comparison of the records indicates that the voice of the individual man is paralleled with that of the 'demons' (see on :2)- the man was called Legion, because he believed and spoke as if he were inhabited by hundreds of 'demons':

"Torment *me* not" (Mk. 5:7) = “Are you come to torment *us*?” (Mt. 8:29). “*He* [singular] besought him” (Mk. 5:9) = "*the demons* besought him" (Mk. 5:12) The man's own words explain his self-perception: "*My* name [singular] is Legion: for *we* are many (Mk. 5:9)". This is classic schizophrenic behaviour and language. Thus Lk. 8:30 explains that Legion spoke as he did because [he thought that] many demons had entered into him.

Another case of 'proving too much' arises from reflection upon the fact that the 'demon possessed' Legion clearly recognized Jesus as the Son of God (Mk. 5:7); Mark seems to emphasize that demon possessed' people perceived Jesus as God's Son (Mk. 1:24,34; 3:11). Yet Mark and the other Gospel writers likewise emphasize the slowness or refusal of many other groups in the Gospels to arrive at the same perception. And so we are forced to deal with the question: Since when do 'demons' bring people to accept Jesus as God's Son? Surely, according to the classical schema of understanding them, they and the Devil supposedly behind them are leading people to unbelief rather than to belief? But once we accept the language of 'demon possession' as referring to mental illness without requiring the actual physical existence of demons, then everything falls into place. For it's so often the case that the mentally ill have a very fine and accurate perception of spiritual things. And we see a clear pattern developed in the Gospels: the poor, the marginalized, women, slaves, the mentally ill ['demon possessed'], the disenfranchised, the lepers, the prostitutes, are the ones who perceive Jesus as God's Son and believe in Him.

The man's fear of condemnation ["torment"] was triggered or restimulated by the command to the 'unclean spirit' to come out of the man. Legion assumed that he personally was going to be condemned if the "unclean spirit" was condemned which he supposed was within him. But the Lord was seeking to help the man see a difference between himself personally, and his mental illness, the "spirit" or mind

within him which was paranoid about condemnation. And so the Lord went along with the man's self perception, and in terms the man understood, showed beyond doubt that that spirit of fear had been cast out. Perhaps John reflects on this incident when he writes that perfect love casts out fear, because fear is associated with "torment" (1 Jn. 4:18), which is just what the man was obsessed with fearing (Mk. 5:7).

8:29 *For he was commanding the unclean spirit to come out from the man. For oftentimes it had seized him, and he was kept under guard and bound with chains and fetters; and breaking the chains apart, he was driven by the demon into the desert*- Legion believed he was demon possessed. But the Lord didn't correct him regarding this before healing him; indeed, one assumes the man probably had some faith for the miracle to be performed (Mt. 13:58). Lk. 8:29 says that Legion "was driven of the demon into the wilderness", in the same way as the Lord had been driven into the wilderness *by the spirit* (Mk. 1:12) and yet overcame the 'devil' in whatever form at this time. The man was surely intended to reflect on these more subtle things and see that whatever he had once believed in was immaterial and irrelevant compared to the Spirit power of the Lord. And yet the Lord 'went along' with his request for the demons he thought were within him to be cast into 'the deep', thoroughly rooted as it was in misunderstanding of demons and sinners being thrown into the abyss. This was in keeping with the kind of healing styles people were used to at the time – e.g. Josephus records how Eleazar cast demons out of people and placed a cup of water nearby, which was then [supposedly] tipped over by the demons as they left the sick person [*Antiquities of the Jews* 8.46–48]. It seems to me that the Lord 'went along with' that kind of need for reassurance, and so He made the pigs stampede over the cliff to symbolize to the healed man how his disease had really left him.

He had "often" been restrained, in efforts to cure him. He therefore needed some assurance that the cure from the Lord Jesus was going to be permanent, and the rushing of the pigs over the cliff to their permanent destruction would have been a reminder of that.

8:30 *And Jesus asked him: What is your name?*- The Lord focused the man's attention upon the man's beliefs about himself- by asking him "What is your name?", to which he replies "Legion! For we are many!". Thus the man was brought to realize on later reflection that the pig stampede was a miracle by the Lord, and a judgment against illegal keeping of unclean animals- rather than an action performed by the demons he thought inhabited him. The idea of transference of disease from one to another was a common Semitic perception, and it's an idea used by God. And thus God went along with the peoples' idea of disease transference, and the result is recorded in terms of demons [which was how they understood illness] going from one person to another. Likewise the leprosy of Naaman clave to Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27). God threatened to make the diseases of the inhabitants of Canaan and Egypt to cleave to Israel if they were disobedient (Dt. 28:21,60). Here too, God is accommodating the ideas of disease transference which people had at the time.

And he said: Legion. For many demons had entered into him-

Legion could be seen as representative of Israel in their weakness. Mark records how Jesus asked the man his name- as if He wished the man to reflect upon who he thought he was. He replied: "Legion". And of course the word "legion" referred to a division of Roman soldiers, usually five or six thousand. The man felt possessed by Roman legions. Through the incident with the pigs, Jesus helped him understand that He alone had the power to rid the man, and all Israel, of the Roman legions. The observation has been made that the incidents of 'driving out demons' nearly all occur

in "militarized zones", areas where the Roman army was highly visible and resented (Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw*, Jesus for President (*Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008) p. 115). The man wished the "demons" he imagined to be possessing him to be identified with the pigs. And Jesus empowered that desire. The 'band' of pigs is described using the same original word as used for a group of military cadets. And the pig was the mascot of Rome's Tenth Fretensis Legion which was stationed nearby; indeed, "pigs" were used as symbols for Romans in non-Roman literature of the time (Warren Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001) p. 71; Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000) pp. 212,213). William Harwood comes to the same conclusion: "Jerusalem had been occupied by the Roman Tenth Legion [X Fretensis], whose emblem was a pig. Mark's reference to about two thousand pigs, the size of the occupying Legion, combined with his blatant designation of the evil beings as Legion, left no doubt in Jewish minds that the pigs in the fable represented the army of occupation. Mark's fable in effect promised that the messiah, when he returned, would drive the Romans into the sea as he had earlier driven their four-legged surrogates" (William Harwood, *Mythology's Last Gods: Yahweh and Jesus* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1990) p. 48). The claim has been made by Joachim Jeremias that the Aramaic word for "soldiers" was in fact translated "Legion" (The same point is made in Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Earliest Palestinian Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1978) pp. 101,102). Jesus elsewhere taught that through faith in Him, "this mountain" could be cast into the sea (Mt. 21:21; Mk. 11:23). Seeing that mountains are symbolic in Scripture of empires, it could be that He was referring to how the empire contemporary with Him as He spoke those words, the Roman empire, could be cast into the sea through faith in Him. The acted parable of the Legion of pigs running into the sea was surely teaching the same thing. In passing, I note the apparent discrepancy between the fact that a Roman Legion contained five or six thousand people and yet there were two thousand pigs drowned. I found the comment on an internet forum, by an unbeliever, that "the governor of Judaea only had 2000 legionaries at his disposal". I have searched Josephus and other sources for confirmation of this, but can't find any. If it were to be found, it would be marvellous confirmation of the thesis I'm presenting here- that the pigs were to be understood as representative of the Roman Legions, who in their turn were responsible for the man's mental illness. In any case, there is evidence to believe that there were Roman troops stationed in Gadara, and the pigs were likely being kept in order to provide food for them (Michael Willett Newheart, *"My name is Legion": The Story and Soul of the Gerasene Demoniac* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004) p. 14). "Pigs for the pigs" would've been the common quip about that herd of swine.

There is a strange flip of the tail in all this. Josephus records how the Romans massacred many Jewish rebels in Gadara, the very place of the Legion miracle, in AD69: "Vespasian sent Placidus with 500 horse and 3000 foot to pursue those who had fled from Gadara... Placidus, relying on his cavalry and emboldened by his previous success, pursued the Gadarenes, killing all whom he overtook, as far as the Jordan. Having driven the whole multitude up to the river, where they were blocked by the stream, which being swollen by the rain was unfordable, he drew up his troops in line opposite them. Necessity goaded them to battle, flight being impossible... Fifteen thousand perished by the enemy's hands, while the number of those who were driven to fling themselves into the Jordan was incalculable; about two thousand two hundred were captured..." (*Wars of the Jews,* Book 4, Chapter 7). This is all very similar to the picture of the [Roman] legions being driven into the water, as Jesus had

implied would happen. Perhaps we are to understand that what was made potentially possible for the Jews by the work of Jesus was in fact turned around against them- they suffered the very punishment and judgment which was potentially prepared for Rome, because they refused their Messiah. This is possibly why the destruction of Rome / Babylon predicted in the Apocalypse is described in terms of Jerusalem's destruction in the Old Testament. The judgment intended for Babylon / Rome actually came upon Jerusalem and the Jews.

I suggest that the man's mental illness was related to the possession of his country by the Roman Legions. Perhaps he found huge power within himself to smash the chains with which he was restrained because he imagined them as symbolizing the Roman grip upon his soul and his country. In this case, his self-mutilation, gashing himself with stones (Mk. 5:5), would've been from a desire to kill the Legions within him, the 'demons' of Rome whom he perceived as having possessed him. He saw himself as representative of his people; Walter Wink sees the man's gashing himself with stones as a result of how he had "internalized [Judah's] captivity and the utter futility of resistance" (Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) Vol. 2 p. 46). So often the mentally ill internalize their abusers; they act and speak as if their abusers are actually them, within them. This is why the abused so often end up abusing others; it's why Israel treat some Palestinians in a way strangely similar to how they were treated at the hands of the Nazis; and it's why Jesus urges us to pray for those who persecute us, to the end we might place a psychological distance between them and us, be ourselves, and not become like them. Jesus recognized this long before modern psychiatry did; hence he asks the sick man his name, "Legion". The man's reply really says it all- as if to say 'I am my abusers. I have internalized them'. Hence one commentator writes of how Legion "carries his persecutors inside him in the classic mode of the victim who internalizes his tormentors" (Robert G. Hammerton-Kelley, *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1994) p. 93).

Frantz Fanon was a psychiatrist who analyzed the psychological damage done to those living under repressive regimes. Taking case studies from the French colonization of Martinique and Algeria, Fanon demonstrated that many darker skinned local people came to see themselves as second rate and dirty, and that when these darker skinned natives interacted with the white colonizers, they often experienced a tension between who they really were, and who they had to act as in secular life with the white masters. One of his books says it all in its title: *Black Skin, White Masks*. Having listed the various types of mental illness and multiple personality disorders which he attributed to French colonialism, Fanon concluded that there was brought about "this disintegrating of personality, this splitting and dissolution... in the organism of the colonized world" (Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963) p. 57. See too his *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967)). Similar observations have been made, in a white-on-white context, about the psychological damage done by the Soviet occupation to the ethnic Baltic population, perhaps explaining why the tiny countries of Latvia and Lithuania have some of the highest suicide and mental illness rates in the world. The point is, however exaggerated these studies may be in some areas, there is indeed huge psychological damage caused by occupying, colonial powers; and this was the case in first century Palestine, and I submit that Legion with his multiple personalities was an example of mental illness caused by such a scenario. Paul Hollenbach likewise interprets the case of Legion, commenting in that context that "mental illness can be seen as a socially acceptable form of oblique protest against, or escape from,

oppressions... his very madness permitted him to do what he could not do as sane, namely express his total hostility to the Romans; he did this by identifying the Roman legions with demons. His possession was thus at once both the result of oppression and an expression of his resistance to it" (Paul Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* Vol. 99 (1981) p. 575). Richard Horsley takes the idea further: "The demon possession of the manically violent man among the Gerasenes can be understood as a combination of the effect of Roman imperial violence, a displaced protest against it" (Richard Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) p. 145). By asking the sick man for his name, the Lord Jesus was surely seeking to help the man clarify the fact that his real issue was with Rome, and the man actually need not fear supposed 'demons'. This refocusing upon the real problem is a common feature of how the Bible deals with the whole subject of Satan and demons, as we've often seen in the course of this book. Horsley is right on target in his conclusion: "The casting out and naming of "Legion" is a demystification of demons and demon possession. It is now evident to Jesus' followers and to the hearers of Mark's story that the struggle is really against the rulers, the Romans" (*Ibid* p. 147). Newheart writes in very similar terms: "Jesus... demystified the demons, showing that the real culprit was Rome" (Newheart, *op cit* p. 84).

8:31 *And they begged him that he would not command them to depart into the abyss*- See on Acts 16:16. This is the man's fear of condemnation, noted on :28. Note that the sick man is paralleled with the demons. "*He* begged him earnestly not to send *them* out of the country" (Mk. 5:10) parallels "he", the man, with "them", the demons. And the parallel record speaks as if it were the demons who did the begging: "*They* begged him not to order them to go into the abyss" (Lk. 8:31). This is significant in that the record doesn't suggest that demons were manipulating the man to speak and be mad; rather are they made parallel with the man himself. This indicates, on the level of linguistics at least, that the language of "demons" is being used as a synonym for the mentally ill man. There's another example of this, in Mark 3:11: "Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, “You are the Son of God!”". Who fell down on their knees and who shouted? The mentally disturbed people. But they are called "unclean spirits". James 2:19 likewise: "The demons believe and tremble". This is surely an allusion to the trembling of those *people* whom Jesus cured, and 'belief' is appropriate to persons not [supposed] eternally damned agents of Satan. Clearly James is putting "demons" for 'mentally disturbed people who believed and were cured'. And thus we can better understand why in Mk. 5:8 Jesus addresses Himself not to these supposed spirits; but to the man himself: "Jesus said to *him,* Come out of the man, you unclean spirit". He doesn't say to the *unclean spirit* "Come out of the man". Jesus addresses Himself to "the man". The demons / unclean spirits never actually say anything in the records; it's always the man himself who speaks. Josephus records that when the first century Rabbis cast out demons [as they supposed], they first had to ask for the name of the demon. The Lord Jesus doesn't do this; He asks the man for *his* personal name. The difference is instructive- the Lord wasn't speaking to demons, He was speaking to the mentally sick man, and going along with the man's belief that he had demons within him. The 'demons' plead with Jesus not to torment them, and back this up by invoking God. 'They' believed in God and honoured Him to the point of believing He was the ultimate authenticator of oaths. 'They' hardly fit the classical idea that demons are anti-God and in conflict with Him. Clearly enough, when we read of demons and spirits in this passage we are not

reading of the actual existence of 'demons' as they are classically understood, but simply of the mentally ill man himself.

8:32 *Now there was there a herd of many swine feeding on the mountain*- Mt. 8:30 "Now there was afar off from them a herd of many pigs feeding". The term is used about those 'far off' from Christ, the unsaved (Lk. 15:20; Acts 2:39; 22:21; Eph. 2:13,17). The man saw himself as far from Christ, with nothing in common between them (Mt. 8:29). His response was to say that OK, let's get the condemnation over and done with- and you yourselves shall be saved. See on :8 for the man's paranoia about condemnation, although he believed in the Lord as God's Son and worshipped Him as such. This is very much the kind of teaching which John's Gospel records as being specifically on the Lord's lips.

And they begged him that he would give them leave to enter into them. And he gave them permission- Mt. 8:31 adds: "And the demons begged him, saying: If you cast us out". The word is used about 'casting out' to condemnation at the last day (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk. 13:28; Jn. 6:37). Legion was obsessed with the thought of condemnation at the last day, being 'tormented' at the last day (Mt. 8:28), being 'far off' from Christ and His salvation (see on Mt. 8:30), 'going away' into condemnation (s.w. Mt. 25:46), plunged into the sea of condemnation (see on Mt. 8:32). He correctly perceived that meeting Jesus in this life was in effect a meeting of Him in judgment, for even then, even now, He is the judge of all. The Lord was assuring Legion that his fear of condemnation was well and truly 'cast out'; His destruction of the pigs was an acted parable of final condemnation at the last day; and this addressed the man's paranoia about condemnation noted on :8. John's Gospel doesn't record this incident but as so often, he records the essential teaching in spiritual terms. In John's terms, we need have no fear of future condemnation, for we have received it now, and have passed from judgment to life and salvation. Legion had a fine understanding of the Lord Jesus. He realized that meeting Him was meeting his judge. And he ask that the pigs bear his condemnation. And the Lord agrees- which meant that once Legion had as it were received his condemnation, he had passed from death into life.

8:33 *And the demons came out from the man, and entered into the swine, and the herd rushed down the hill into the lake and were drowned*- Why did the pigs run over the cliff, and why did the Lord Jesus agree to the man's request for this? Because mental illness features intermittent episodes, it's understandable that the Lord sought to comfort those cured that the change He had brought was permanent. Thus the Lord tells the 'spirit' assumed to be tormenting the mentally afflicted child: "I command you, come out of him, *and enter no more* into him" (Mk. 9:25). It's in the same vein that He drove the pigs into the lake as a sign that Legion's cure was permanent. I suggest that it was a kind of visual *aide memoire*, of the kind often used in the Bible to impress a point upon illiterate people. I suggest that's why in the ritual of the Day of Atonement, the scapegoat ran off into the wilderness bearing Israel's sins. As the bobbing animal was watched by thousands of eyes, thousands of minds would've reflected that their sins were being cast out. And the same principle was in the curing of the schizophrenic Legion- the pigs were made to run into the lake by the Lord Jesus, not because they were actually possessed by demons in reality, but as an *aide memoire* to the cured Legion that his illness, all his perceived personalities, were now no more. Mental illness is typically intermittent. Legion had met Jesus, for he recognized Him afar off, and knew that He was God's Son (Mk. 5:6); indeed, one assumes the man probably had some faith for the miracle to be performed (Mt. 13:58). He comes to meet Jesus "from out of the city" (Lk. 8:27) and yet Mt. 8:28 speaks of him living in the tombs outside the city. He pleads with the Lord not to torment him

(Mk. 5:7)- full of memories of how the local folk had tied him up and beaten him to try to exorcise the demons. Probably Legion's greatest fear was that he would relapse into madness again; that the cure which he believed Jesus could offer him might not be permanent. And so the Lord agreed to the man's request that the demons he perceived as within him should be permanently cast out; and the sight of the herd of pigs running over the cliff to permanent death below, with the awful sound this would've made, would have remained an abiding memory for the man. Note how the 'demon possessed' man in Mk. 1:23 sits in the synagogue and then suddenly screams out (Mk. 1:23)- showing he was likewise afflicted by intermittent fits.

The madness may have been an infection in the brain of the trichina parasite, commonly found infecting the muscles of pigs - and transmissible to humans in undercooked pork. The infected man would likely have been forced by poverty to eat this kind of food, and likely associated his "problem" with it because of the prohibition of pork under the Mosaic Law. This approach is confirmed by medical observations such as the following:

"Neurocysticercosis is the most common parasitic disease in the world which affects the central nervous system… A 25 year old, illiterate married Hindu male… presented with a three month history of gradual change in behavior in the form of irrelevant talk … On mental status examination, he was well oriented to time, place and person, cooperative, communicative and responded well to questions asked… Delusions of persecution and reference were present… he accepted the illness but attributed the cause to evil spirits… histopathology report of subcutaneous nodule confirmed the diagnosis of cysticercosis cellulosae…. Significant improvement in psychiatric symptoms was also observed following albendazole (an anti-parasitic drug) therapy. Delusions of persecution and delusions of reference were not found on mental status examination. Insight also improved; instead of attributing the illness to evil spirits, the patient accepted having a physical illness." ("Neurocysticercosis Presenting as Schizophrenia: A Case Report", B. Bhatia, S. Mishra, A.S. Srivastava, *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 1994, Vol. 36(4), pp. 187-189).

The desire to see the disease return to the herds of swine probably stemmed from a need to know that his affliction had been cured in a rather permanent sort of way. And the Lord went along with this. The idea of transference of disease from one to another was a common Semitic perception, and it's an idea used by God. And thus God went along with the peoples' idea of disease transference, and the result is recorded in terms of demons [which was how they understood illness] going from one person to another. Likewise the leprosy of Naaman clave to Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27). God threatened to make the diseases of the inhabitants of Canaan and Egypt to cleave to Israel if they were disobedient (Dt. 28:21,60). Here too, as with Legion, there is Divine accommodation to the ideas of disease transference which people had at the time.

Death in the sea was seen as condemnation; the same figure is used of Babylon's final condemnation. The Legion incident "proves too much" if we are to insist on reading it on a strictly literal level. Do demons drown? Presumably, no. And yet the story as it stands requires us to believe that demons drown- if we are talking about literal 'demons' here. Clearly, Legion was mentally ill. We therefore have to face the hard question: Was that mental illness caused by demons, or, as I am suggesting, is the language of demon possession merely being used to describe mental illness? If indeed mental illness is caused by demons, the observations of T.S. Huxley are about right: "The belief in demons and demoniacal possession is a mere survival of a once universal superstition, its persistence pretty much in the inverse ratio of the general

instruction, intelligence, and sound judgment of the population among whom it prevails. Demonology gave rise through the special influence of Christian ecclesiastics, to the most horrible persecutions and judicial murders of thousands upon thousands of innocent men, women, and children... If the story is true, the medieval theory of the invisible world may be and probably is, quite correct; and the witchfinders, from Sprenger to Hopkins and Mather, are much-maligned men… For the question of the existence of demons and of possession by them, though it lies strictly within the province of science, is also of the deepest moral and religious significance. If physical and mental disorders are caused by demons, Gregory of Tours and his contemporaries rightly considered that relics and exorcists were more useful than doctors; the gravest questions arise as to the legal and moral responsibilities of persons inspired by demoniacal impulses; and our whole conception of the universe and of our relations to it becomes totally different from what it would be on the contrary hypothesis" (T. S. Huxley, *Science and Christian Tradition* (New York: Appleton, 1899) p. 225).

8:34 *And when the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and reported it in the nearby town and in the countryside*- "What had happened" was the cure of Legion; they came to investigate, and saw the cured man. As Jews they were not supposed to be keeping pigs; they realized they could say little against the Lord's action, for what they had been doing was illegal. It would have taken some time for the news to spread to "the city and in the country"; so we can assume the Lord sat with the cured Legion for some time, even days, teaching him further.

8:35 *And they went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man, from whom the demons had left, sitting, clothed and in his right mind, at the feet of Jesus; and they were afraid-*

When Legion was cured of his 'demons', we read of him as now "clothed and in his right mind". His 'demon possession' therefore referred to a sick state of mind; and the 'casting out' of those demons to the healing of his mental state. People thought that Jesus was mad and said this must be because He had a demon- "He has a demon, and is mad" (Jn. 10:20; 7:19-20; 8:52). They therefore believed that demons caused madness.

The "fear" of the people was perhaps related to their bad conscience about keeping pigs. The parable of the prodigal son associated Jewish pig keepers with those who needed to repent, and for whom the Father was eagerly waiting to welcome back home. Those people were in the same position as Legion; being now aware of the Lord's Divine power, but fearing condemnation. They actually needed the same basic healing which the Lord had given Legion in curing him of his complex about condemnation. Indeed the case of Legion speaks to so many believers today, who believe in and even worship the Lord as Son of God, but who are obsessed with a fear of final condemnation.

8:36 *And they that saw it told them how he that was possessed with demons had been healed*- Apart from the loss of their pigs, what had happened was good news. Fear of condemnation, to the point of paranoia, really could be cured by the Lord Jesus; the demons of doubt and fear really could be cast out, and the miracle of the destruction of the pigs was dramatic visual evidence of this. But when faced with this, the people feared and didn't want that good news.

8:37 *And all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into a boat and returned-* "Begged" is the very same word used about the demons / mentally ill men

'beseeching' Jesus in Mt. 8:31. As the mentally ill men besought Jesus to send away the demons, so the city dwellers besought Jesus to also 'go away'. As the keepers of the pigs "went their way" (Mt. 8:33), so the same word is used of the demons 'going away' into the pigs (Mt. 8:31,32). As the city dwellers 'came out' to meet Jesus, so the mentally ill men 'came out' of the tombs to meet Jesus (Mt. 8:28) and the demons 'came out' of them (Mt. 8:32). Perhaps the idea is that those unbelievers were spiritually in the same position as the despised mentally ill men whom they had excluded from their society. And the story ends with the mentally ill saved, and the townspeople asking Jesus to depart from them, which will be the exact position of the rejected at the last day (Mt. 25:41; Lk. 13:27). It is they who are condemned, by their own wish; the mentally ill men asked for the pigs to bear their condemnation, which they felt worthy of- and thus were saved.

Consider how the believers were assembled praying for Peter's release, and then when he turns up on the doorstep, they tell the servant girl that she's mad to think Peter was there. Or how the Lord Jesus did such wonderful miracles- and people asked him to go away. We too have this element within us. We would rather salvation and forgiveness were 'harder' to attain. The popularity of Catholic and Orthodox rituals is proof enough of this. It always touches me to read in the Gospels how the Lord Jesus cured wide eyed spastic children, crippled, wheezing young women, and sent them (and their loved ones) away with a joy and sparkle this world has never known. But the people asked Him to go away, and eventually did Him to death. A voice came from Heaven, validating Him as the Son of God; those who heard it involuntarily fell to the ground. But the people didn't really believe, and plotted to kill him (Jn. 12:37). They turned round and bayed for His blood, and nailed Him to death. He cured poor Legion; and the people told the Lord to go away.

8:38 *But the man from whom the demons had left pleaded with him that he might be with him; but he sent him away, saying*- Motivations for involvement in evangelistic work vary. This man was separated from his family and society, for he had been violent and abusive to them. It would have been far more convenient for him to just leave them and join the peripatetic ministry of the Lord Jesus. But the Lord realized that the healing of relationships was a fundamental outcome of acceptance of the Gospel; and He wished this process to at least be given a chance in this case. And so He established a principle which many have struggled to accept: ministry to family and local society is even more important than joining in mobile missionary work.

8:39 *Return to your family, and declare what great things God has done for you*- We must "do" the Lord's will (Mt. 7:21), but the Lord also 'does' for us by His grace ("mercy"); our 'doing' is in response to His 'doing' for us. The same word is used in Jn. 4:1 (also Acts 15:17) of how the Lord 'did' or "made" disciples. That was the end point in view; the "great things" done were not just the cure, but the making of a disciple. Mary's praise that "He has done to me great things" is surely behind her Son's words in Lk. 8:39, where He bids a man go home "and shew how great things God has done unto you".

And he went his way, publishing throughout the whole city how great were the things Jesus had done for him- This public preaching in the city and all the Decapolis (Mark says) rather than to his family could be read as disobedience. The Gospels are transcripts of the twelve disciples' own preaching and obedience to the Lord's commission for them to go into all the world and tell the news of what they had seen and heard of Him. Yet there is a theme in the Gospels, consciously included by the writers and speakers, of men being disobedient to the preaching commission which

the Lord gave them. When some were told to say nothing, they went and told many others (Mk. 7:36). And as Acts makes clear, the disciples themselves were disobedient, initially, to the commission to go tell the Gentiles the good news of their salvation. Legion's disobedience is especially instructive for us:

Mk. 5:19	Mk. 5:20
Go to your *house*	He goes to the *ten cities* [Decapolis]
unto your *friends* [relatives]	He goes to *strangers*
tell them [Lk. 8:39 "*show* them"- by personal demonstration to individuals]	He "*publishes*"
how great things	how great things
the *Lord [i.e. God]* has done for you	*Jesus* had done for him
and how he had mercy on you.	[ignored]

The record of the commission given him and his obedience to it are clearly intended to be compared. The man went to strange cities, indeed he organized a whole preaching tour of ten cities- rather than going home and telling his immediate friends / family. And how true this is of us. It's so much easier to embark upon a campaign to strangers, to do 'mission work', to 'publish' the Gospel loudly, rather than *tell* and *show* it to our immediate personal contacts. And we notice too how he omits to tell others of the Lord's merciful grace to him personally. Rather does he speak only of the material, the literality of the healing. And he tells others what Jesus had done for him, rather than take the Lord Jesus' invitation to perceive the bigger picture in all this- that this was the hand of God. One wonders whether the disciples were commenting upon their own sense of inadequacy in their initial personal witness. The Lord told the cured demoniac to go back to his friends (Mk. 5:19) and family (Lk. 8:39) and witness to them. Clearly enough, the man didn't have any friends- for he had a history of violence and lived alone, many having tried unsuccessfully to bind him due to the grievous harm he must have inflicted upon many. Yet the man went out and preached to the whole area (Mk. 5:20). Was this just rank disobedience to what His Saviour Lord had just told him? Perhaps, due to unrestrained enthusiasm. But more likely is that the man now considered the whole world around him to be his family and friends, and therefore he witnessed to them. His care for others in desiring to witness to them flowed quite naturally from his experience of conversion at the Lord's hands.

There are some things in Scripture which are recorded in such a way as to promote meditation, and therefore they will always be ambiguous in terms of the actual interpretation which is sustainable. We can't *always* say "This word means X, this phrase means Y, therefore this verse means interpretation Z; and if you don't agree with that, you don't really accept the Bible". Because it is possible to say that about the interpretation of basic doctrine doesn't mean that we can adopt this attitude to the interpretation of every Bible passage. The record of the crucifixion is a good example

of this. Or consider how it is recorded that some of those healed by the Lord *didn't* afterwards do what He said: one preached to his whole city rather than to his family (Lk. 8:39); another didn't obey the Lord's plea to not tell anyone else (Mk. 1:45). How are we to read these responses? Rank disobedience? Misguided zeal? Zeal in doing over and above what they were asked? You may have your ideas, and it is right that we should meditate upon these things and discuss them. But I suggest that ultimately they are left 'hanging' for the very purpose of promoting meditation and personal application, rather than being statements which shout for an obvious interpretation.

8:40 *And when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him. For they were all waiting for him*- The apparent disobedience to the command to focus upon his family was still worked with by the Lord (see on :39). The testimony of this healed man must have been so powerful.

8:41 *And there came a man named Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue*- The Orthodox Jewish opposition claimed that none of the rulers [i.e. rulers of the synagogues] had believed on Jesus (Jn. 7:48), and yet Jn. 12:42 notes that "Among the chief rulers also many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be cast out of the synagogue". Jairus clearly was one such ruler, and yet he didn't confess Jesus for fear of consequence and disfellowship. Remember that Jairus had come to Jesus whilst He had been teaching John's disciples the need to totally accept His new wine and not compromise with Judaism and the Pharisees who were standing with them. But whilst He was teaching that, Jairus had been clamouring for Jesus to come and heal his daughter. He rather missed the essential spiritual point because he was distracted by his human need. The Lord's sermon on the mount taught that we are a city set on a hill which cannot be hid, and that if we seek to hide our light under a bucket, then we will lose the light altogether. The omission of Jairus' name in Matthew leads me to fear that perhaps Jairus drifted away from faith, although his great faith at this particular moment in time is recorded positively.

And he fell down at Jesus' feet and begged him to come into his house- The Greek *proskuneo* is not used (as some Trinitarians wrongly claim) exclusively of worship of God. It is used in the LXX, classical Greek and in the later New Testament for worship of men- e.g. Cornelius worshipped Peter (Acts 10:25), men will worship faithful Christians (Rev. 3:9), the beast is worshipped (Rev. 13:4).

Jairus begged the Lord to enter his house; this was seen as necessary for any healing. The contrast is with the Centurion who asked the Lord not to enter his home, but just to say the word.

8:42 *For he had an only daughter, about twelve years of age; and she was dying. But as he went, the crowds crushed him*-See on Lk. 15:31. The Lord's rush to heal her was interrupted by a woman, whom He addressed [unusually] as "daughter". She had been sick for 12 years. And she was healed because of her faith. To the unspiritual man, this would have been nothing but an irritating interruption, to be sworn about under the breath. But to the spiritual man, there was ample encouragement here for faith; for another beloved daughter lay sick, and she was 12 years old, and she likewise could be healed by faith... The Lord's question: "Who touched me?" was therefore also a rhetorical device to spur faith in Jairus and his family. Who? Another "daughter", 12 years afflicted... It is only by our spiritual laziness in not providing that freewill input, that desire to understand, that crying for the knowledge of God which is in His word (Prov. 2:3-5), that this marvellous equation will fail. What greater motivation could each of us want in inspiring us to a total commitment to the word,

rising early and staying up late to find that knowledge of God to overcome the sin which we hate? If we can only continue to desire to make the effort, to bruise the flesh more through that glorious word of God, then this spiral of growth will catch us up with ever increasing speed.

8:43 *And a woman who had suffered from chronic bleeding for twelve years, who had spent all her livelihood upon doctors and could not be healed by any*- Exactly how old the child was. Clearly the hand of providence had been at work in both these lives according to some defined sense of timing. She has spent her livelihood not just on trying to get better, but on attempting to get out of a state of permanent ritual uncleanness. "Her livelihood" / money (Mark) suggests she was single, as married woman didn't have their own money. She was alone in the world. She may have been well known as Capernaum was not large, possibly she was driven to begging, and her condition may well have made her emit unpleasant odours. So we can assume she disguised herself to enter the crowd. Constant blood loss would have left her with chronic anaemia- pale skin, brittle nails, joint pain, little energy to work. Capernaum was known as economically depressed at this time. It's quite likely she only survived thanks to charitable help from the synagogue- administered by Jairus! So we see people from both ends of the social spectrum made equal by their need and in both cases, by their need for the Lord's saving touch.

This is another similarity with Legion, who had suffered from many failed attempts to cure his conditions. Getting 'worse and worse' is the picture of all people outside of Christ, and specifically of the spiritual state of Israel at the time (Mt. 9:16; 12:45; 2 Tim. 3:13; 2 Pet. 2:20). The Mosaic system of Judaism could not "better" humanity (s.w. Jn. 6:63; Rom. 2:25; Gal. 5:2; Heb. 4:2; 13:9), just as she was not "bettered" (Mk. 5:26). Perhaps the implication is that the woman represented Israel, who like Asa had trusted in physicians rather than the Lord (2 Chron. 16:12). Job's 'friends' had many Judaist characteristics and reasoned in the same way as orthodox Judaism; and they were "physicians of no value" (Job 13:4). The woman was bankrupt and desperate. This was how all were under the Law; the only answer was to throw themselves upon the Lord Jesus.

The woman would have been unclean and would've made anything and everyone unclean whom she touched. A “woman who has a discharge of blood for many days at a time other than her monthly period or has a discharge that continues beyond her period” will be considered unclean. Any person or thing she touches will be considered unclean until evening (Lev. 15:25). So she had become used to lying about or covering her true position, as it would have placed her outside society and the temple worship; like so many, she felt alone in this world. And the simple message is that Jesus is for those alone in the world. Such a condition would've meant she likely never married and the constant menstrual flushing would've meant she was anyway unable to get pregnant. She was like the secret alcoholic, who shies away from intimacy with others. By being in a packed crowd, so dense it was 'crushing' the Lord, she would have made them all unclean; and technically the Lord also. She realized that she could not just secretly have a relationship with the Lord; she realized she could not be hid. Her game was up, over and out in front of the crowd. And so she becomes representative of all healed of secret uncleanness by the Lord's touch.

8:44 *Came behind him*- The scene is being developed from Mt. 9:19, where the Lord and the disciples are following the rushing man; and now we 'see' the woman coming behind Jesus, as if she in this sense was also one of the disciples who followed behind Him.

And touched the border of his garment; and immediately her bleeding stopped- It was by the unclean touching the clean that she was cleansed; whereas in Mosaic ritual, the clean is always made unclean by touching the unclean. The Lord radically reversed all the fears of guilt by association. Mark's version says that she kept saying this to herself [imperfect]. Her self talk was what led to faith and action.

Her example inspired the many others who later sought to do this in Mt. 14:36. It has been suggested that the hem of the garment referred to the blue band which was to be worn by Jews to remind them of their commitment to obedience to God. In this case she would have been seeking to associate herself with the righteousness of Christ and be healed / saved [the same Greek word is used] thereby. In essence, this is what faith and baptism into Christ is all about. But the simpler reading is that she thought that if she associated herself even with the Lord's periphery, she would thereby be saved / healed. Given Jewish phobia about blood and the fact that any touching her would have been ritually unclean, she surely disguised her condition. And yet she didn't consider that her uncleanness could make the Lord unclean. Her view of His righteousness was correct- it can be shared with us, but our uncleanness cannot negate His purity. She was driven to this insight by her desperation, just as Job's desperation led him to understand doctrinal truths that were beyond his time and place.

The Lord allowed this interruption when the man was so earnest that the Lord would haste to his home. The Lord, and the hand of providence, wanted to teach the man that how long a person has been dead is no barrier to resurrection; his faith needed to be developed further. And it fits in with the apparent silence of the Lord, always to develop the intensity of our desire for Him and our focus upon Him. Jesus focused on the essential whilst still being human enough to be involved in the irrelevancies which cloud the lives of all other men. Just glancing through a few random chapters from the Gospels reveals this tremendous sense of focus which He had, and His refusal to be distracted by self-justification. In all of the following examples I suspect we would have become caught up with justifying ourselves and answering the distractions to the point that our initial aim was paralyzed.

Focus	Distraction	Resumed Focus
The sick woman touches His clothes, and He turns around to see her. He wants to talk to her.	The disciples tell Him that this is unreasonable, as a huge crowd is pressing on to Him	"He looked round about [again] to see her that had done this thing" (Mk. 5:30-32). He talks to her.
He says that the dead girl is only sleeping; for He wants to raise her.	"They laughed Him to scorn"	"But..." He put them all out of the house and raised her (Mk. 5:40,41).
He was moved with compassion for the crowds, and	The disciples tell Him to send the people away as	He tells the disciples to feed them so that they can

wants to feed them and teach them more.	it was getting late	stay and hear more (Mk. 6:35-37)
Again He has compassion on the hunger of the crowd	The disciples mock His plan to feed them	He feeds them (Mk. 8:3-6)
He explains how He must die	Peter rebukes Him	He repeats His message, telling them that they too must follow the way of the cross (Mk. 8:31-34)

8:45 *And Jesus said: Who is it that touched me?*- This was a rhetorical question, designed to give the woman the opportunity to come out for the Lord before all. The Lord knew; for the woman felt she was no hidden from His eyes. She apparently "denied" along with all the others present. But the Lord was pushing her as He pushes us- to not have some secret flirtation with Him which exists just within our own brain cells, but to come out for Him before men, to His glory.

And when all denied, Peter and they that were with him said: Master, the crowds press upon you and crush you- The gospels are transcripts of how the disciples spoke the gospel message. And yet they are shot through with thee disciples' recognition of their own weakness, and thereby their message was the more appealing and convicting to their hearers. Here, they paint themselves as foolish and inappropriate; they record their mocking of the Lord in the same section in which they record the scorning of the Lord by unbelievers at the home of Jairus.

8:46 *But Jesus said: Someone did touch me. For I perceived power going out from me*- This gives an insight into the huge outflow of energy from the Lord when He healed people. As noted on Mk. 5:29, His healing of people was on account of His total identification with them; and each healing was a living out in essence of the cross even during His life. The Lord of course knew the woman had touched Him; but He didn't want her to just have a secret faith. He wanted her to 'come out'; and He engineers circumstance in our lives likewise, so that we have to become a city that is set on a hill.

8:47 *And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him, declared in the presence of all the people for what reason she touched him, and how she was healed immediately*- As noted on :45, the Lord purposefully pushed her towards making a public statement for Him. We are a city set on a hill and likewise "cannot be hid". We see another connection with Legion, who feared condemnation and yet also fell before the Lord in worship. The Lord knew her history; but "the truth" to be told forth is a personal confession of our hopeless spiritual history, and the Lord's saving by grace. Yet she had initially "denied" the Lord's activity for her (:45). Perhaps this is included, as are Peter's denials, as comfort for those who under persecution did deny their Lord. He was still open to fellowship with them. The woman was probably disguised, and the crowd would have been

furious that she had made them all ritually unclean- hence perhaps her assurance that she had been immediately healed and was not unclean any more.

8:48 *And he said to her: Daughter*- Perhaps the Lord was using the term in the Hebraic sense of 'descendant', seeing her as a daughter of Abraham because of her faith in Him. But clearly the connection is with another daughter, of Jairus. The Lord saw the two as connected, seeing the "12 years" period occurred in both their lives; suggesting this was all planned by God but only at this point did the Lord grasp the connection between the two women. We can also deduce that this woman who had no family relationships because of her condition was now a daughter- in the family of the Lord Jesus.

Your faith has made you whole. Go in peace- The *faith* of the sick woman is commended by the Lord- when it was due to her *understanding* of the significance of the *hem* of the Lord's robe that she had touched Him. She had perceived the connection with the High Priest's hem; perhaps too she had added Job's comment about our touching but the hem of God's garment into the equation. And certainly she perceived that the sun of righteousness of Mal. 4 had healing in his hems / wings of his garment.

The Centurion's servant was healed for the sake of *his* faith; Jairus' daughter was healed because of *his* faith (Mk. 5:36). Hence the Lord told them to believe and stop wavering, so that she would be made whole, or "saved" (Lk. 8:50). This comes straight after the Lord's commendation of the woman with "an issue of blood": "Your faith has made you whole [or, saved]" (Lk. 8:48). It's as if the two healings are similar in their result- being made whole, or saved- and both required faith. But the woman's own personal faith which led to her healing is paralleled with the faith of the family of the girl who was resurrected.

The wholeness of the woman was also in that she could now live a transparent life within society. No longer pretending and faking things to cover her secret condition and uncleanness. Thus she went away into peace. "The Acts of Pilate (chapter 7) records a testimony at Jesus' trial in which a woman named Bernice cries out that she had an issue of blood for twelve years and was healed by touching the hem of his garment. The trial leaders respond that 'we have a law not to permit a woman to give testimony'".

8:49 *While he yet spoke, there came one from the house of the ruler of the synagogue, saying: Your daughter is dead. Do not trouble the Teacher*- We naturally ask: *who* was this "one" who came with this message? In the Gospels, it is often the disciples who term Jesus "the Master". The implication is that it was they who thought that Jesus wouldn't have the power to raise the dead, perhaps connecting with their own studied lack of faith in His resurrection later. This again contrasts with messengers from the house of the Centurion asking the Lord not to come, but just to say the word for the curing.

8:50 *But Jesus hearing it, responded: Fear not. Only believe, and she shall be made whole*- Do not fear *but* believe shows the power of fear- it is fear which stops faith, fear is the opposite of faith. If we know the love that casts out fear, then a whole new style of relationships becomes possible. In so many relationships there is a balance of power which is more realistically a balance of fear- a fear of losing, of being made to look small, a fighting back with self-affirmation against the fear of being subsumed by the other. Be it parents and kids, teachers and students, pastor and flock, so often both sides fear the other. Yet if we are truly affirmed in Christ, no longer seeking

victory because we have found victory in Him, His victories become ours… then our whole positioning in relationships becomes so different. For example, our fear of rejection becomes less significant if we believe firmly in our acceptance in the eyes of the Lord, the only one whose judgment has ultimate value. If we can say with Paul that for us the judgment of others has very little value, because we only have one judge… then we will no longer worrying about acting in such a way as to impress others. No longer will it be so important to not express our inner thoughts about people or situations for fear of not using the constant 'nicespeak' which results in judgment from others unless it's used. There will be a congruence between what we feel and think within us, and what we actually show. And thus we will avoid the dysfunction which is so apparent in so many, as they forever struggle to control their outward expressions, hiding their real self, with the real self and the external self struggling against each other in a painful dis-ease.

8:51 *And when he came to the house, he did not permit anyone to enter with him*- We see here the Lord's amazing force of personality when He wished to use it, just as He walked through the crowd in Nazareth who wished to throw Him off the cliff. He sent away the inquisitive crowd, just as He sent away the crowd after the miarculous feeding. He used the same power in commanding the mourners to leave the home.

The Greek phrase for "came into" is used so often in the Synoptics. Just in Matthew 9, Jesus came into His own city (9:1), came into the ruler's house (9:23) and came into a house (9:28). Consider the other usages of the phrase in Matthew alone: He came into Israel (Mt. 2:21), came into Nazareth (2:23), came into Capernaum (4:13), came into Peter's house (8:14), came into the land of the Gergesenes (8:28); came into a synagogue (12:9), came into a house (13:36), came into His own region (13:54), came into the land of Gennesaret (14:34), came into Magdala (15:39), came into Caesarea (16:13, came into Capernaum (17:24), came into the borders of Judea (19:1), came into Bethphage (21:1), came into the temple (21:23), came into Gethsemane (26:36), came into the place called Golgotha (27:33). Mark and Luke record even other cases of His 'coming into' various towns, areas and situations. It is a huge emphasis. John's Gospel uses the term, but frequently in the more abstract sense of the Lord Jesus 'coming into' the (Jewish) world. The prologue uses the Greek phrase three times alone in describing how Jesus 'came into' the world and into "His own" (Jn. 1:7,9,11). He was the light and prophet that "came into the world" (Jn. 3:19; 6:14). John's references to the Lord Jesus coming "into the world" (Jn. 12:46; 16:28; 18:37) are therefore not to be read as implying that He literally came down out of Heaven into the world; but rather they are John's more abstract equivalent of the Synoptics' direct and repeated statements that the Lord came into the Jewish world of His day, into human situations. His sending of us out "into" the world is therefore inviting us to go forth and enter into our world and its various situations just as He did. We are to replicate His ministry in our world and situations.

Except Peter, John and James, and the father and mother of the girl- Luke records how Peter, James, John and the parents of the dead girl entered the house where she was *alone*; and then "they" laughed Jesus to scorn when He proclaimed she was merely asleep (Lk. 8:51,53). It's psychologically unlikely that the distraught, desperately hopeful parents would've ridiculed Jesus like this at that time. The reference is surely to the three disciples doing this. This is a profound recognition of the disciples' weakness- there, alone with Jesus and the distraught parents, they mocked Jesus' ability to resurrect the girl. And they have the profound humility to tell the world about that in their record of the Gospel.

8:52 *All were weeping and bewailing her, but he said: Weep not. For she is not dead but sleeps*- The Angel repeated the same words to the women at the Lord's grave, as did the Lord to Mary: "Why do you weep?" (Jn. 20:13,15). Surely those women were close to the Lord at this time. The Lord used the same word choice before and after His resurrection, showing the continuity of personality between how we are now in the flesh, and how we shall eternally be. Salvation is personal, and how we are now is of critical importance eternally.

8:53 *And they laughed at him with scorn, knowing that she was dead*- This is recorded in all three of the Synoptics (Mk. 5:40; Lk. 8:53). It made a deep impression upon them all. The Greek could suggest (although not necessarily) that there was a process of derision here which left the Lord looking somehow scorned ("to scorn"). Perhaps He blushed, or looked at the ground- for He was after all human. Clearly these people were just the hired mourners and flute players. There was an element of anger in their derision because clearly money and payment were at issue if they were to just be sent away.

8:54 *But he, taking her by the hand, called, saying: Little girl, arise*- The whole scene of putting mourners out of the house, taking her by the hand and raising her up was followed exactly by Peter in raising Tabitha. The Lord's style, language and even body language became the pattern for those who had been with Him, and it must be the same for us. The Gospels are written in such a way, that through the power of inspiration we can as it were be there with the disciples likewise watching Jesus and learning of His Spirit.

Mark adds that the Lord said: "Talitha cumi, which is, My child, I say to you, Get up" (Mk. 5:41). "Get up" there isn't from the '*anastasis*' group of words which are used about the 'rising up' of dead people in resurrection. It's *egeiro*, which more literally means 'to get up'. 'Honey, it's time to get up now' was what the Lord was saying- not 'I command you to resurrect'. He had raised her, given her life, and He knew that. In fact, He'd done it a while beforehand. For He told the mourners: "The girl isn't dead, she's only sleeping" (:24; Mk. 5:39). He raised her even before going into the room- and He knew that. And so when He finally saw her, He took her hand and gently asked her to get up out of bed. His gentleness, His faith, His calmness, His certainty that the Father heard Him- are all wondrous. "Talitha" means literally 'little lamb'. In the resurrection of the little lamb the Lord clearly saw His own resurrection as God's slain lamb. We too have encounters which encourage us in faith in our own ultimate salvation.

8:55 *And her spirit returned and she rose up immediately, and he commanded that something be given her to eat*- The way the Lord healed people reflects His sensitivity- He commanded food to be brought for a girl who had been dead and was therefore hungry.

8:56 *And her parents were amazed, but he ordered them to tell no one what had been done*- See on Lk. 9:44. The Lord Jesus, in His ministry, had forbidden the extroverts from publicly preaching about Him, as they naturally wanted to (e.g. Mk. 8:26). To keep silent was an act of the will for them, something against the grain. It is hard to find any other explanation for why He told Jairus not to tell anyone that He had raised his daughter- for it would have been obvious, surely. For they knew she had died (:53). By contrast, those who would naturally have preferred to stay quiet were told to go and preach (e.g. Mk. 5:19). Perhaps Paul was in this category. The parallel between the Lord's words and works is brought out in Lk. 9:43,44: "They wondered at all things which Jesus *did*…He said…let these *sayings* sink down into your ears". There are no distinct 'sayings' of Jesus in this context; He wanted them to

see that His works were His words. There was perfect congruence between what He said and what He did. Perhaps this was why He told the parents of the girl whom He resurrected to tell nobody what was done, even though it was so obvious; He wanted His self-evident works to speak for themselves, without the need for human words. For His works were essentially His message.

LUKE CHAPTER 9

9:1 *And he called the twelve together-*

Implying they were not always with Him. But there seems an intended contrast between calling them to Him, and then sending them forth (:2). They were with Him when they were away from Him. It is simply so, that when we witness, the words we speak are in effect the words of Jesus. Our words are His. This is how close we are to Him. And this is why our deportment and manner of life, which is the essential witness, must be in Him. For He is articulated to the world through us. And it explains the paradox of the parallel record in Mk. 3:14, whereby Jesus chose men that they should "be with Him and that He might send them forth to preach". As they went out to witness, they were with Him, just as He is with us in our witness, to the end of the world [both geographically and in time]. And this solves another Marcan paradox, in Mk. 4:10: "When He was alone, they that were about Him with the twelve asked Him…". Was He alone, or not? Mark speaks as if when the Lord was away from the crowd and with His true followers, He was "alone"- for He counted them as one body with Him. This was why the Lord told Mary, when she so desperately wanted to be personally with Him, to go and preach to His brethren (Jn. 20:18), just as He had told some of those whom He had healed- for going and preaching Him was in effect being with Him.

And gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases- Every kind of sickness and disease was to be engaged with by them because they were to be the re-incarnation of Jesus' personal ministry, His body to the world. See on Mt. 9:35.

9:2 *And he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick*- The emphasis was upon preaching the Kingdom. The healings were secondary to that, and were to exemplify the things of the Kingdom. The noun for "heal" is found once, in Heb. 3:5, where in the context of describing the Lord Jesus He is called "a servant". The acts of healing were done in a servant-like way. This contrasts sharply with the pride associated with many Pentecostal healers. Whatever good we do others, dramatic or not so dramatic, is to be done as an incarnation of the supreme Servant of all, the Lord Jesus. For it is His ministry which we are performing, not ultimately our own.

9:3 *And he said to them: Take nothing for your journey, neither staff, nor wallet, nor bread, nor money. Neither have two coats*- Luke is picking out the picture of Israel as they were on Passover night, as an illustration of how His disciples should be on their preaching mission. His next words for them in :4 about staying until you move on appear to be stating the obvious, unless they allude to Israel remaining at whatever place they reached until the fire and cloud moved them on. It must be remembered that God intended Israel to be a missionary nation, teaching the surrounding world of His ways by their example of obedience to His law. As Israel left Egypt with the gold and jewels of Egypt, so, Jesus implied, the disciples were to carry the precious things of the Gospel. "Nor money"- Mt. ″Nor brass for your

purses"- Even small coins were not to be considered necessary for the missionary work to finally succeed.

9:4 *And into whatever house you enter, there stay and from there depart*- This appears to be stating the obvious, unless they allude to Israel remaining at whatever place they reached until the fire and cloud moved them on; see on :3. It must be remembered that God intended Israel to be a missionary nation, teaching the surrounding world of His ways by their example of obedience to His law. As Israel left Egypt with the gold and jewels of Egypt, so, the Lord implied, the disciples were to carry the precious things of the Gospel. In practice, this command was in order to develop relationships in families which would lead to the development of house churches, which was the Lord's preferred vision for His church, at least in the first century.

The Lord at least twice stressed to His disciples that they were not to go preaching from house to house, but rather focus upon one house in a village and make that the centre of their work (Lk. 9:4; 10:7). Clearly His intention was that they built up house groups rather than scattered converts. Perhaps this was alluded to by Paul when he criticized sisters who went spreading gossip "from house to house" (1 Tim. 5:13). He surely had house churches in mind.

9:5 *And as many as do not welcome you, when you depart from that city, shake off the dust from your feet for a testimony against them*- The disciples were to shake off the dust of their feet against unbelieving Israel (Mt. 10:14; Mk. 6:11; Acts 8:51), in allusion to the Rabbinic teaching that the dust of Gentile lands caused defilement. Israel who rejected the Gospel were thus to be treated as Gentiles. Time and again the prophets describe the judgments to fall upon Israel in the same terms as they speak of the condemnations of the surrounding nations (e.g. Jer. 50:3,13). The message was clear: rejected Israel would be treated as Gentiles. Thus Joel describes the locust invasion of Israel in the language of locusts covering the face of Egypt (Joel 2:2,20 = Ex. 10:14,15,19). Israel's hardness of heart is explicitly likened to that of Pharaoh (1 Sam. 6:6); as the Egyptians were drowned, so would Israel be (Am. 9:5-8). As Pharaoh's heart was plagued (Ex. 9:14), so was Israel's (1 Kings 8:38); as Egypt was a reed, so were Israel (1 Kings 14:15). As Pharaoh-hophra was given into the hand of his enemies, so would Israel be (Jer. 44:30). Even if we are separated from this world externally, we can still act in a worldly way, and share the world's condemnation by being finally "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32).

9:6 *And they departed and went throughout the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere*- They were obedient to the emphasis commanded them in :2; to preach firstly, and heal. The focus upon villages rather than towns and big cities like Sepphoris is notable. We get the impression the Lord by all means sought to avoid controversy and conflict.

9:7 *Now Herod the tetrarch*- Literally, 'one of a fourth'; a reference to how after the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC, the kingdom was divided amongst four others.

Heard of all that was done- The Lord had recently used the same word in saying that unbelievers "By hearing shall hear and shall not understand" (Mt. 13:14). The connection may be to demonstrate that pagan Herod was no better than the unbelieving Jewish religious leaders. Even in the Old Testament, unbelieving Israel are often described in terms of the Gentile world. We can also note that the Gospels were designed for memorization, and such word plays are common in order to assist committing them to memory. The Gospels likewise should be the lifeblood of all serious Christian living and thinking in this age of electronic memory.

And he was very worried, because of what was said by some, that John had risen from the dead- The people thought that Jesus was John the Baptist resurrected (Mk. 6:14). Perhaps this was because they looked somehow similar, as cousins? The idea of bodily resurrection was around in the first century, but very often in the sense of a dead person not really dying but returning *redivivus* in another form. This was widely believed about Nero- and there are allusions to the legend of Nero *redivivus* in Revelation (they are deconstructed there as being untrue- the ultimate resurrection was of the Lord Jesus, not Nero). Herod's words show that a 'resurrected' person was expected to do great miracles as proof of their resurrection. The Lord's resurrection was likewise accompanied by "mighty works"- but not by Him personally, but by the community of believers. This accommodation to contemporary views of resurrection was therefore a way of demonstrating that the believers doing the miracles after the Lord's resurrection were being presented to society as Jesus *redivivus*; as if they truly were the body of Jesus revived. Which of course they were, and we are. Paul uses the same Greek word translated "show forth themselves" to describe how the Lord Jesus worked through both Peter and himself through the doing of miracles (Gal. 2:8; 3:5).

9:8 *And by some, that Elijah had appeared, and by others, that one of the old prophets had arisen*- As made explicit in Matthew 12 and 13, the crowds did not accept the essential message of John- but they fiercely defended him as a prophet, speaking God's word. Acceptance of an inspired word is one thing, but to grasp the essence of the Lord Jesus is quite another. By assuming the Lord was Elijah rather than Messiah, we see how they had missed the whole point of John's teaching; for he had been the Elijah prophet, heralding Messiah. And yet John had such popularity that Herod had been unable to murder him because of his mass support (Mt. 14:5). The image of John was popular, John as religion; but his essential message went unheeded. And so it can be with us today; the image and religion of Christianity may be appealing to us to the point we identify with it. But the essential message of the Christ who should be at the core of it can be totally ignored or not even grasped.

9:9 *And Herod said: John I beheaded, but who is this, about whom I hear such things? And he sought to see him*- Mk. 6:16 says that therefore Herod concluded this was John resurrected. Having killed John, Herod's conscience was haunted by him, and he was eager to see John alive again. He regretted murdering him; his subconscious desire was that John would somehow overcome that death and revive. And so he became convinced of the idea that John had reincarnated as Jesus. This explains why people can be so utterly convinced of after death experiences, reincarnation, ghosts, appearances of the dead etc. Such apparent experiences are a reflection of their own deep subconscious desire to see the dead again, to make death somehow not death. This is where the clear Biblical definition of death as unconsciousness is so challenging.

9:10 *And the apostles, when they had returned, declared to him what things they had done. And he took them and withdrew to a city called Bethsaida*- The Lord wanted to follow up with them about their experiences whilst preaching, and to develop their skills further. He wanted to be alone with them on their return from the assignment. But He is apparently frustrated by the crowds turning up (:11); indeed, this happens several times in the Gospels. It is all a deep insight into the depth of His humanity, with things not working out always as planned.

9:11 *But the crowds knew it, and they followed him; and he welcomed them, and spoke to them of the kingdom of God, and those that had need of healing he cured*- Possibly implying that some posed as being sick, and yet the Lord could discern

whose need was genuine. How hard His life must have been, in that hard land. And how hard it *is* for Him, in this hard world.

To not offend others we must "receive" them (Mt. 18:5). It is written of Jesus that when crowds of materialistic, fascinated people followed Him, "He received them, and spake unto them of the Kingdom" (Lk. 9:11). He didn't just turn round and read them a lecture about the Kingdom. "He *received* them". Presumably Luke means to reflect how he perceived something in the Lord's body language that was receiving of that crowd of peasants- whom we would likely have written off as just dumb groupies with no more than surface level interest. And we too must receive one another, even as the Lord has received us (Rom. 15:7)- and this includes receiving him who is even weak in the faith (Rom. 14:1). We should be looking for every reason to receive and fellowship our brethren, rather than reasons not to.

Mt. 13:54-58 records how the Lord taught in the synagogue but didn't get a good response, nor did He do many miracles there because of their unbelief. But now He leaves, and the people flock after Him. This may be understandable just in terms of basic psychology- when a wonderful offer is not taken up but appears to be receding, people then desperately grab onto it. Perhaps that's why the Lord seems well disposed to these people- healing and feeding them. But we also get the impression that the Lord was not constantly available for teaching and healing. I have previously remarked that the intensity of some of the days which the Gospels record was surely not repeated every day of His ministry. It seems He spent most of His time training the twelve and only occasionally made public appearances to teach and heal.

9:12 *And the day began to wear away; and the twelve came and said to him*- The implication is that they weren't standing by Him, but rather watching cynically from a distance. Which explains their harsh attitude to the crowds. After all, they too had been followers of John the Baptist, they too wanted to get away on their own to mourn the news of His death. They probably felt the Lord should've sent away the multitudes from the start. It's not hard to sense that the record paints the disciples negatively at this time. But who wrote this record? The Gospels are transcripts of how the disciples preached the Gospel. Despite the process of inspiration, the disciples in their recounting of the Gospel repeatedly mentioned their own weakness, and thereby would've come over as all the more credible to their audience. And in this we see a fine pattern for our own witness.

Send the crowd away- Twice they wanted to turn away those who wished to come to Jesus, and whom He wished to accept (Mt. 14:15; 15:23). As with the two miracles of bread, the second incident was giving them the opportunity to learn the lesson from the first incident- and yet they failed. Likewise they "forbad" John's disciples just as they wrongly "forbad" the little children to come to Him (Lk. 9:50). They ask the Lord to send the multitude away, whereas He had taught by word and example, that whoever came to Him He would not turn away (Jn. 6:37). Mark and Matthew present themselves, the disciples, as seriously out of step with their Lord at this time. And surely the communities which they were establishing were likewise tempted to 'send away' or deny fellowship to those whom the Lord would have them fellowship.

That they may go into the villages and countryside and lodge and get provisions. For we are here in a deserted place- Seeing most of the people were poor, and were likely subsistence farmers, it is most unlikely they had money to buy food. And 5000 men plus women and children would've meant a crowd of 10,000 at least- the few shops in those tiny hamlets would've been totally unable to provide for them. Here again we see the insensitivity of the disciples being related in the narrative which they

themselves told after the resurrection. The apparently redundant "buy *themselves*" (Mk.) may suggest the disciples' bitterness and resentment at the apparent expectation of the crowd that the Lord was to provide food for them. The only other time we meet the phrase is when the wise virgins tell the foolish to go and 'buy for themselves', and refuse to give their oil to them. Perhaps the Lord built that phrase into the parable because the disciples had earlier used it- and by His provision, He had effectively rebuked them for doing so.

9:13 *But he said to them: You give them something to eat-* According to Jn. 6:5, the Lord also asked: "From whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?". Even if money was no issue, the village shops simply had nowhere near the amount of food required. So in "You give them…", the stress was not only on the word "you". Perhaps it was more so on the word and concept of "give", standing as it does in contrast to the disciples' unrealistic and harsh expectation that these poor people go to a village and *buy* food. Surely the Lord had in mind Is. 55:1,2: "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food". He intended the disciples to see the connection and to figure that He would even provide them with free food, because they were seeking His word. We are confirmed in this idea by the way that He appealed to the crowd in the same discourse: "Labour not for the food which perishes" (Jn. 6:27), which is surely an allusion to Is. 55:2. Perhaps the disciples got the point- perhaps not. Often the Lord sets us up with situations in which we are intended to have our minds sent back to a Biblical verse or precedent as encouragement and guidance for us in our decisions. Whether or not we grasp it is a matter partly of our familiarity with the text of Scripture, but more significantly, our openness to this kind of spiritual prompting, and the idea of God's word being part of a living, two-way dialogue between Him and ourselves.

The Lord told the disciples to feed the crowd, when they had nothing to give them (Mk. 6:37). He was actually quoting from 2 Kings 4:42, where the man of God told his servant to do the same. He gave what bread he had to the people, and miraculously it fed them. The disciples don't seem to have seen the point; otherwise, they would have realized that if they went ahead in faith, another such miracle would likely be wrought. But it seems that God almost over-ruled them to make the response of the faithless servant of 2 Kings 4:43: "Shall we... give them to eat?" (Mk. 6:37). They were almost 'made' to do this to make them later see the similarity with the 2 Kings 4 incident. If they had been more spiritually aware at the time, the Lord's quotation would have been a fillip for their faith.

When the Lord calmly bid them feed the huge crowd with just a few loaves ("How many loaves have you? Go and see" (Mk. 6:38)), we are left to imagine those men, almost paralysed and certainly gob smacked by the extent of the demand, awkwardly going away to count their few loaves. He could be seen as a demanding Lord. The Lord Jesus said many "hard sayings" which dissuaded people from seriously following Him. He kept speaking about a condemned criminal's last walk to his cross, and telling people they had to do this. He told them, amidst wondrous stories of flowers and birds, to rip out their eyes, cut off their limbs- and if they didn't, He didn't think they were serious and would put a stone round their neck and hurl them into the sea (Mk. 9:42-48). He healed a leper, and then spoke sternly to Him (Mk. 1:43 AV mg.).

It makes a good exercise to re-read the Gospels looking out for cases of where the Lord urged the disciples to not look at Him as somehow separate from themselves, an automatic Saviour from sin and problems. Thus when it was apparent that the huge, hungry crowd needed feeding, the Lord asked the disciples where "*we*" could get food from to feed them (Jn. 6:5). In all the accounts of the miraculous feedings, we see the disciples assuming that Jesus would solve the situation- and they appear even irritated and offended when He implies that this is *our* joint problem, and *they* must tackle this seemingly impossible task with *their* faith. The mentality of the disciples at that time is that of so many Trinitarians- who assume that 'Jesus is the answer' in such a form that they are exempt from seeing His humanity as a challenge for them to live likewise.

The disciples, in John's record, complain: "From whence shall *we* find bread in the wilderness?". The record of the disciples' murmuring in John 6 reflects how influenced they were by the Jews around them. "The Jews then murmured at him", and the Lord rebukes them: "Murmur not among yourselves". But then we read of how "Jesus knew in himself that his disciples were murmuring" (Jn. 6:40,43,61). And again, remember that these gospel records were written by the repentant disciples, and they were using the example of their own weakness in order to appeal to others. The disciples appeared to share Judaism's idea that Moses never sinned. When the Lord challenges them to find food for the crowd in the desert, they quote Moses' hasty words: "Whence shall I have flesh to give unto all this people?"; and note Moses almost mocks God by saying that all the fish of the sea wouldn't be enough to feed the people (Num. 11:13,22). Faced with the same need for bread and fish, the disciples justified their lack of faith by quoting Moses, apparently unwilling to accept that Moses' words at that time were not of faith. The way everything worked out, they doubtless learnt that Moses, like them, was of imperfect faith and spirituality.

And they said: We have no more than five loaves and two fishes, unless we go and buy food for all these people-

Jn. 6:9 says that they said: "There is a lad here, which has five barley loaves and two small fishes". The boy out of the crowd gave the bread to the disciples- for now, the bread is no longer 'his', but belongs to 'the disciples'. Then they gave it to Jesus. He then gives it back to the disciples, and they give it back to the crowd, including to the boy. We see in this cycling around of the bread an eloquent picture of the Lord's humanity. What little the crowd of humanity had was taken by the Lord and transformed by Him into what could save them; and in this sense, the bread was 'sent down' from Heaven, in John's terms, even though it was a recycling of the peoples' own bread.

The very human perspective of the disciples is almost predictably brought out by their response to the Lord's question to them about where to get bread to feed the hungry crowd. "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient" was Philip's response (Jn. 6:7). Andrew's comment that they had five loaves and two fishes surely carried the undertone that '…and that's not even enough for us, let alone them- we're starving too, you know!'. The disciples wanted the crowd sent away, to those who sold food, so that they might buy for themselves (Mt. 14:15). As the Lord's extended commentary upon their reactions throughout John 6 indicates, these responses were human and selfish. And yet- and here is a fine insight into His grace and positive thinking about His men- He puts their very words and attitudes into the mouth of the wise virgins at the very moment of their acceptance at the day of judgment: "The wise answered [the foolish virgins] saying, Not so, lest there be not enough [s.w. "not

sufficient", Jn. 6:7] for us and you; but got ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves" (Mt. 25:9). Clearly the Lord framed that parable in the very words, terms and attitudes of His selfish disciples. He counted even their weakness as positive, and thus showed His desire to accept them in the last day in spite of it. Another reading of the connection would be that the Lord foresaw how even in the final moment of acceptance into His Kingdom, right on the very eve of judgment day, His people would still be as hopelessly limited in outlook and spiritually self-centred as the disciples were that day with the multitude. Whatever way we want to read this undoubted connection of ideas, we have a window into a grace so amazing it almost literally takes our breath away.

The Lord told the disciples to feed the crowd, when they had nothing to give them. He was actually quoting from 2 Kings 4:42, where the man of God told his servant to do the same. He gave what bread he had to the people, and miraculously it fed them. The disciples don't seem to have seen the point; otherwise, they would have realized that if they went ahead in faith, another such miracle would likely be wrought. We too are given Divine nudges towards seeing Biblical precedents for our situations; but we may not always grasp them. Familiarity with the Bible text through regular re-reading is a great help here. But it seems that God almost over-ruled them to make the response of the faithless servant of 2 Kings 4:43: "Shall we... give them to eat?". They were almost 'made' to do this to make them later see the similarity with the 2 Kings 4 incident. If they had been more spiritually aware at the time, the Lord's quotation would have been a fillip for their faith.

If a labourer worked for a denarius a day during harvest season, we can conclude that their figure of 200 denarii was a year's wages for a working man. Like us so often, they focused on the size of the problem rather than on the Lord's ability to move absolutely any mountain.

9:14 *For they were about five thousand men*- It is tempting to try to work out some significance in the figures here and in the feeding of the 4000 recorded later. Five loaves and two fishes fed 5000 with 12 baskets taken up; seven loaves and a few fishes fed 4000 with seven baskets taken up. With the food distributed each time by 12 disciples. One observation would be that the total number of loaves used was 12, which was the number of loaves required for the showbread (Lev. 24:5). The loaves in totality represent the Lord Jesus, the bread of God's presence in Israel, offered to all and sundry- not just to the priests. The Lord had made the same point in reminding Israel that David and his men had eaten the showbread- the things considered exclusively for the religious elite were now open to all, women and kids and Gentiles included. The very same Greek phrase "about five thousand men" occurs in Acts 4:4, to describe the total number of converts made by the disciples in the very early days of the church. Surely there must be some connection here. As the disciples moved amongst the crowds, each of them repeatedly breaking the bread of Christ to the multitudes, they were being trained towards the day when they would move amongst other multitudes preaching Christ and baptizing people into Him. It would seem that there were two major incidents when the disciples preached and performed mass baptisms; the 3000 in Acts 2:41, and then either 2000 or 5000 (depending how one reads the Greek) in Acts 4:4. These days of mass baptisms were probably never repeated in the history of the early church; and so the two feeding miracles were to prepare them for those two later incidents. In our yearning to attach meaning to event, we too can be encouraged that what we currently cannot understand is likely preparation for some potential future calling for us at some point in the future.

And he said to his disciples: Make them sit down in groups, about fifty in each- "In groups" is a technical term for how in the Roman empire, large groups sat at groups of three tables forming three sides of a square, with divans or couches on which they reclined as they ate. The open end of the square was entered by the servants who waited on the guests. But there no tables nor couches. They were bidden imagine them. For this was set up as a banquet; with the Lord as host. It was a foretaste of the Messianic banquet. And all and any present were invited to recline and eat. So the people sat down as it were in table-companies but without tables, in companies of a hundred and others of fifty (Mk.), waited upon by the disciples. Who you ate with had religious meaning in their society; it was a sign of religious fellowship. And here the Lord opened His table to any who wished to hear His word, be they clean, unclean, Jew, Gentile, women or children.

9:15 *And they did so, and made them all sit down*- Vine comments: "Lit., like beds in a garden. The former adverb, by companies, describes the arrangement; this the color. The red, blue, and yellow clothing of the poorest orientals makes an Eastern crowd full of color; a fact which would appeal to Peter's eye, suggesting the appearance of flower-beds in a garden". If this were the case, then the allusion would be to the encampment of Israel in Num. 24:6: "As valleys they are spread forth, as gardens by the riverside, as aloes which Yahweh has planted, as cedar trees beside the waters". Equally if the allusion is instead to military groups or companies, the idea is that this apparently random group of peasants, with all their shady biographies and legal uncleanness and lack of understanding, were the new Israel the Lord was forming; the new "hosts" of Yahweh of Hosts.

The 'making' to sit down could suggest nervousness within the crowd as to whatever was being done with them. The wonder of being provided for at the Lord's table is indeed hard to grasp.

9:16 *And he took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven*- This detail not only suggests the close fellowship enjoyed between the Father and Son, to the extent that the Lord could pray with open eyes looking up to Heaven, knowing there was no barrier between Him and God. But we also as it were have the camera zoomed in upon the Lord, yet another indication that we have in the Gospels an eye witness account. Likewise the Lord's way of looking up was noticed in Lk. 19:5; 21:1. And the Comforter passages promise us that we can share His relationship with the Father, through the gift of the Spirit.

He blessed them and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd- The aorist followed by the imperfect in "broke and gave" suggests He broke the bread once, and went on giving it out as a continuous act. This speaks of the Lord's one time death, and His continuous giving out of that to His people. The miracle of multiplication therefore happened at the moment of breaking the bread and His giving it out. This is indeed the work of the Spirit in our lives.

Clearly the record is structured to show how the Lord worked through them. In giving the bread of life to the world, the Lord usually works through some kind of human mechanism rather than as it were parachuting His word and salvation directly to a person. There was no word from the Lord that He had performed the miracle of multiplication- the disciples had to go forth in faith and start distributing the bread and fish. Presumably He broke the five loaves into 12 parts, and the two fish likewise. The disciples, each holding a small piece of bread and fish in their hands, in turn went to the crowds and broke it further- and never ran out. It was indeed a sign of their faith that they participated, risking looking foolish as they first began. This is indeed an accurate picture of our fears as we go out into this world with the Lord's salvation.

Time and again, it becomes apparent that the Lord especially designed incidents in His men's experience which they would learn from, and later be able to put to use when similar experiences occurred after He had ascended. This was essential to the training of the twelve disciples. Thus He made *them* distribute the food to the multitude (Jn. 6:11); yet after His ascension, we meet the same Greek word in Acts 4:35, describing how they were to distribute welfare to the multitude of the Lord's followers.

9:17 *And they ate and were all filled*- "All" ate; and eating together at a banquet was a sign of religious fellowship. There were for sure some there who were Gentiles, unclean, or simply curious. They were "filled", perhaps alluding to Dt. 8:10, "you shall eat and be full". The blessings of an obedient Israel were counted to this random crowd. By grace. They were "filled" superabundantly. The Lord's generosity is wonderful.

And there was taken up of the leftovers twelve baskets- Eph. 1:8 talks of how God has lavished or abounded His grace upon us. The same word is used about the Lord not only made miraculous loaves and fishes, but there was so much that abounded ("leftovers") that it filled twelve baskets, another implication that here were assembled the new Israel. The word for "baskets" here is a different word to that used in the feeding of the 4000 in Mt. 15:37. This here is the smaller basket, used for carrying ritually clean food when in Gentile areas. The Lord imparted a sense of ritual holiness to the otherwise random and unclean.

Why did the Lord do that, and why make the disciples pick up all those crumbs? Surely to give them an object lesson in how God delights in abounding to us. He didn't just give the people food; He abounded to them. The record of each of the feeding miracles, in each of the Gospels, uses this word translated "remained" in commenting about the fragments that were left over- although the real meaning is 'to abound'. Each of the Gospel writers was therefore deeply impressed by the fact that the Lord not only provided food- but such an abundance. All this sets the background for Paul's use of the very same word to describe how God's grace has "abounded" to us in Christ (Rom. 3:7; 5:15; Eph. 1:8).

9:18 *And it came to pass, as he was praying alone, that his disciples joined him; and he asked them, saying- Erotao* can mean to pray, to entreat, to ask for something- rather than to casually enquire about an opinion held. He asked the question seeking a positive answer; He was indirectly asking them to believe in Him as God's Son.

Who do the crowds say that I am?- This was to pave the way for His more significant, personal question: Whom do *you* say I am? (:20). "Say" translates *lego* which more specifically means to speak rather than 'to believe' or 'to understand'. He wanted to know the words of men's' actual lips about Him- which again hints that the disciples were not with the Lord all the time. They were often with people when the Lord wasn't present. Psychologically, considering others' views of Christ helps us better understand where we personally stand regarding Him- indeed, this is true generally in terms of self-understanding. Hence the Lord firstly asks whom others thought Him to be, rather than simply asking the disciples whether they believed in Him as the Son of God.

9:19 *And they answering said: John the Baptist*-Literally, *the* John the Baptist. "Some..." is simply translating *ho*, the definite article. "The John the Baptist" would therefore appear to be the main opinion- after that, some thought Jesus was Elijah, others thought He was another of the prophets. There was a strong belief in dead people reappearing in the form of others, *redivivus*, a kind of reincarnation. This had been Herod's view of Jesus, that He was the resurrected John the Baptist. None of the

opinions they list include the possibility that Jesus was Messiah. The disciples' answer is therefore a tacit recognition of the failure of John's ministry. He was known even at that early stage as "John the Baptist" because his baptism of so many people was what he was noted for. But that baptism, that recognition of sin, had not led people to accept Jesus as the Christ. It happens so often, that we can have a temporary conviction of sin, and even do something about it- but to fully come to Christ is a different question, and it seems that few go on to make that vital connection.

But others Elijah- John's crisis of faith in prison involved him thinking that perhaps he had only been the herald of Elijah, rather than Messiah- and that therefore perhaps Jesus was the Elijah prophet. And it seems some had accepted that view. This is the problem with crises of faith- others are affected by them and can easily share our opinion. In Jn. 6:14 we learn that after the miracle of feeding the 5000, the crowd thought that Jesus must be "that prophet which should come into the world". But by "that prophet" they likely referred to Elijah or a herald of Elijah- and not Messiah.

And others, that one of the old prophets has risen- Why so much misunderstanding? Perhaps because it demands far less faith to accept Jesus as a prophet, a holy man, than as being the unique Son of God, Saviour and Messiah; it demands far less response in practice. Islam presents Jesus as a "prophet", the new age religions as a "top bloke". But to accept Him as He is demands not only more faith, but also far more response in practice.

We can note that in Mt. 12:23 the crowd asks: "Is not this the Son of David?". That was a Messianic title. But the answer given here shows that this suspicion that Jesus might be Messiah was just a passing thing. The miracles themselves did not persuade the crowds of the Lord's Messiahship. Pentecostals should take note of that- miracles do not necessarily produce faith.

The false notion that the Lord Jesus literally pre-existed and was then somehow incarnated, or re-incarnated, was a pagan idea that had become popular in Judaism around the time of Christ. In fact the road to the Trinity began with Justin and other 'church fathers' coming to teach that Jesus personally pre-existed- even though they initially denied that He was God Himself. The Qumran sect, some of whose followers became the first Christians, believed that the "Teacher of Righteousness" pre-existed as the former prophets and would be an incarnation of them. This explains why they thought Messiah had previously been incarnated as Moses, Elijah and the prophets. In this lies the significance of the account in Mt. 16:14-18. Jesus enquires who the people think He is- and the disciples answer that the popular view is that Jesus of Nazareth is Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets reincarnated. But this was exactly who first century Judaism thought Messiah would be. So the crowd view was indeed that Jesus was Messiah- but "Messiah" as they understood Messiah would be. The significance of the incident lies in Peter's affirmation that Jesus, whom he accepted as Messiah, was not a re-incarnation of a pre-existent prophet but was the begotten Son of God. Note in passing that the false doctrine of pre-existence is connected to the pagan myth of incarnation and re-incarnation. If, for example, Jesus really was existing in Old Testament times, then somehow He would have had to have been re-incarnated in Mary's womb.

9:20 *And he said to them: But who do you say that I am? And Peter answering said: The Christ of God*- Why did He ask this? Surely, with His sensitivity and insight into people and society, He knew full well the various theories that first Century Palestine entertained about Him. It seems to me that He asked this question for the disciples' sake; He wanted them to reflect upon the wide range of wrong theories

which there were concerning His identification. And this led on to His next question: "But who do you say that I am? Peter answering said, The Christ of God". Surely the Lord Jesus knew what they thought of Him, without needing to ask them. Philip and Nathanael had earlier revealed that they considered Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah and "the Son of God" (Jn. 1:45,49). So, why did the Lord ask this question? Again, it was surely to focus His disciples upon the reality of the fact that despite all the various wrong theories, they actually knew the truth about Him. But the Lord then goes on to His essential point: "Tell no man that thing; saying, The Son of man must suffer many things…and be slain, and be raised…If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me… For what is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?" (Lk. 9:21-25). The Lord told the disciples to "Tell no man" by saying that "The Son of man must suffer…".

9:21 *And he ordered and commanded them to tell this to no one*- "Tell no man…" is almost hyperbole; surely He means 'For now, focus more on the fact of my forthcoming death and your response to it, than telling others. If you gain the whole world for me in your preaching but lose your own salvation, what are you advantaged?'. After His resurrection they were to tell others; as the great commission made plain. And there is a powerful message to us all here, especially to those who concern themselves with large amounts of preaching. We should not be so caught up in listing the errors of others that we fail to appreciate the huge personal import of the truth that we do surely know. Indeed, the Lord sought to focus His men upon the Truth they knew by asking them firstly to consider all the wrong theories about Him. He then went on to bring home to them the radical, transforming impact of that Truth if it is properly believed and acted upon. Luke seems to draw attention to this theme again in Lk. 10:20, where the disciples return from a successful preaching mission to be told to focus their elation instead upon the reality of their own personal salvation: "Rejoice not [i.e. not so much] that the spirits are subject unto you: but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven". We are not to turn a blind eye to others' misunderstandings; the tragedy of the errors of Islam, Judaism, Hinduism etc. should not pass us by. But neither are we to remain obsessed with them. We are to be led by such reflection to rejoice in the basic truth of Jesus which we have been blessed with.

9:22 *Saying: The Son of Man must*- The usage of *dei* ["must"]is so common in the Lord's discussion of His death.

Suffer many things- The phrase is used elsewhere of the sick woman who had "suffered many things" at the hands of "many physicians" (Mk. 5:26), and yet is used elsewhere about the Lord's 'many' sufferings at the hands of the Jewish leaders (also in Mk. 9:12). Surely the Lord perceived in her someone who was sharing something of His final sufferings. All our sufferings are likewise part of His crucifixion sufferings, and if we suffer with Him, we shall also therefore experience His resurrection. That woman was therefore set up as an example of us all.

And be rejected- The same word is used about the stone of Christ being "rejected" by themselves, the builders (Mt. 21:42). The word carries the sense of legally condemning. They rejected the sinless Son of God as a condemned sinner and demanded His death. If nothing else we learn some basic psychology- that when a person touches the conscience of less spiritual people, they are likely to intensely slander the person and effectively demand their death, which in our day may be the social death of rejection.

By the elders- Presbuteros is specifically used of the Sanhedrin members. The Lord's predictions here are highly specific and detailed.

And chief priests and scribes and be killed, and the third day be raised up- Literally, 'High Priests'. There was only supposed to be one High Priest, but the position was so lucrative and argued over that there were a group called the 'High Priests'- so far had Judaism fallen away from basic Biblical teachings, despite their zeal to keep the details.

9:23 *And he said to all: If anyone would follow me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me*- See on Mt. 10:38. In the context of telling His followers to witness to Him, the Lord equates this with taking up their cross daily (Lk. 9:23,26). To not bear that cross is to deny the knowledge of Him before men. To live the crucifixion life is the essential witness. Every act of grace, every evident sign of self-control, every statement of forgiveness towards misunderstanding and unrepentant men... all this is showing something of the cross. And in this, painful and difficult as it is, demanding and driving-to-the-limit as it must be, lies the essence of our being the Lord's witnesses. To witness Christ is not to just painlessly distribute a few tracts. It is to live out the dying of the cross.

Take up the cross, and follow me" is inviting us to carry Christ's cross with Him - He speaks of "the cross" rather than 'a cross'. The Greek translated "take up" is that translated 'to take away' in the context of Christ taking away our sins. Strong says that it implies "expiation" (of sins). This connection, between our taking away / up the cross, and Christ's taking away our sins, suggests that the efficacy of His cross for us depends upon our daily 'taking up the cross'. It is vital therefore that we "take up the cross" if our sins are to be taken away by Him. But our taking up of the cross is a response to the taking away / up of our sins.

We all know from experience that how we start each day is important. Indeed, how we start any enterprise is crucial- hence the need for a sound understanding of the basic Gospel before we're baptized. We so often meet the phrase "rose early in the morning" in the Hebrew Bible. Strong defines the Hebrew *shawkam* translated "rose early" as essentially meaning "to incline the shoulder to a burden... literally to load up on the back of man". In this we see an evident connection with the Lord's thought about taking up the cross *daily*, for that surely implies we are to take it up each morning (Lk. 9:23). Men and women had arisen each morning for 4000 years and inclined their shoulders to the burden of the day, loaded themselves with it onto their back. And the Lord now took humanity further, in redefining that "load", that burden, as His cross. Practically, does this not mean that we are to reflect as we come to consciousness each morning that we are to load ourselves with His cross? This thought need not necessarily lead to an image of having to burden ourselves with an impossible, awful weight. For again in allusion to this idea of loading oneself up each morning, the Lord spoke of how His burden is *light*! Here perhaps is one of the finest paradoxes of the spiritual life- that His cross, the life of self-sacrifice and self-giving unto the very end, is indeed heavy and demanding... yet in another sense it is "light", far lighter than the burdens of legalism which Pharisaic religion bound [and binds] upon people.

9:24 *For whoever would save his life shall lose it, but whoever shall lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it*- Lk. 9:23,24 describes cross carrying as a rejection of saving *our* life, of making our present life as rich and fulfilled as possible; and instead concentrating on *giving up* our lives. William Barclay comments on this passage: "A man must spend his life, not hoard it... the Christian must realize that he is given life, not to keep it for himself, but to spend it for others; not to husband its flame, but to burn himself out for Christ and for men... the questions are not 'How

much can I *get*?', but, 'How much can I *give*?'. Not 'What is the *safe* thing to do?', but 'What is the *right* thing to do?".

9:25 *For what does it profit a man if he gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit his life?*- This threat rung in Paul's mind (in 1 Cor. 3:15; 2 Cor. 7:9; Phil. 3:8): If a man gains the world for Christ but does not take up the cross, or is ashamed of Christ's words and principles in this world, he will be *cast away*. Especially does Paul allude to these words in 1 Cor. 9:27: "Lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway". Paul recognized his temptation: to think that his zeal for preaching excused him from taking up the cross. In essence, we must all see our own likely temptations: to focus on one area of spirituality, with the hope that it will excuse us from the cross.

Jesus speaks of how a person can lose their place in the Kingdom as a person losing or forfeiting their own self; He was thereby teaching that a place in the Kingdom was possessing one's own real self (Lk. 9:25 RV).

The Greek text in Mt. 16:25,26 and Lk. 9:25 can bear a re-translation and re-punctuation which quite alters the sense as found in the English translations. It shows the Lord emphasizing the evident and compelling logic of losing our lives for His sake: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For how much a man is profited if he shall gain the whole world (in the Kingdom) and lose his own soul (now, as I asked you to do, to lose your soul for me)!... for the Son of man shall come... and then he shall reward every man according to his works", i.e. the losing of our soul is through our everyday works. Lk. 9:25 makes the same point: 'How is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world (the Kingdom) and lose himself (now)!: *or* - be cast away, be condemned at the judgment, because he tried to keep his soul, he didn't see the logic of all this!'. The point is, a man at the day of judgment will be willing to give up *everything*, even the whole world if he possesses it in order that he may find acceptance. But then it will be too late. *Now* is the time to resign all for the sake of that blessed acceptance.

9:26 *For whoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his own glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels*- See on Rev. 19:10. If we are *now* ashamed of our Lord before men, we will be in the condemnation process (Lk. 9:26 cp. 1 Jn. 2:28).

See on Rom. 1:16. Being ashamed of the Lord's words doesn't just apply to not speaking up for the Truth when someone invites us to a topless bar after work. It's equally true, and the punishment for it just the same, in the context of not speaking out Christ's word in the ecclesia, to our very own brethren (Lk. 9:26 = 2 Tim. 1:8). The Lord Jesus will be ashamed of the rejected when He comes in the glory of the Father. There is a telling juxtaposition of ideas here- shame and glory. Amidst the utter glory of the Father's throne, surrounded by Angels, the Lord will be sitting there with eyes downwards in shame as the rejected stand before Him and walk away. The Proverbs speak of how shame is to be the ultimate end of the wicked, and glory the end of the righteous. Yet it is *the rejected who* go away "into shame". *They* will be "ashamed before him at his coming". Yet the Lord will so feel for even the rejected, that He feels for them and reflects their feelings. This is no stern-faced judge chasing away those He is angry with. This is a window into the Lord's ineffable love and feelings even for those for whom it truly is too late, for whom the way to the tree of life is now barred.

The way the Lord Jesus says that He will be "ashamed" of those He has to reject opens an interesting window into what it means to have Divine nature. It doesn't mean

that we will not then know the range of emotions which we have as humans today- for we are made in God's image. To think of the Lord of Heaven and earth, on the throne of His glory, sitting or standing there "ashamed"... because of His people. And shame is really a concept relevant to the presence of others- and the others who will be present will be the Angels and ourselves. Before us, we who are ourselves *so* weak and saved by His grace alone, He will feel shame because of those He has to reject. But there's another way of looking at the Lord's 'shame'. It is the rejected who will have shame in that day (Dan. 12:2). Such is the nature of the Lord's love and empathy that He will somehow feel their shame, feel embarrassed for them as it were. Which thought in itself should banish for ever any idea that we are coming before an angry Master. The Lord of grace is the One who will be, and is, our judge. And even in His condemnation of men, His essential love shines through. His condemnation of Israel involved them wandering for years in the wilderness; but during that wandering, "in all their affliction, he was afflicted" (Is. 63:9). God shared in their feelings and suffering of rejection; just as the Lord Jesus will share in the shame of those who walk away from Him at the last day in shame. God's being with Israel during their wilderness wanderings is cited in Am. 2:10 as an example of His especial love for His people.

9:27 *But I tell you a truth: There are some that stand here, who shall in no way taste death, until they see the kingdom of God*- The Lord will essentially be the same as the Gospels present Him when we see Him again. This is why Jesus even in His earthly life could be called "the Kingdom of God", so close was the link between the man who walked Palestine and the One who will come again in glory. “They see the Kingdom of God come” (Mk. 9:1) is paralleled by “They see the Son of man coming” (Mt. 16:28). Indeed it would seem that the references in the Synoptic Gospels to the ‘coming’ of the Kingdom are interpreted in the rest of the New Testament as referring to the personal ‘coming’ of the Lord Jesus (e.g. 1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20). In that very context of referring to Himself as "the Kingdom of God", the Lord speaks of His return as 'the days of the Son of man'- the human Jesus. And yet He also speaks in that context of how after His death, men will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, i.e. how He had been in His mortal life (Lk. 17:20-26). As He was in His mortal days, so He will essentially be in the day of His final glory.

Mk. 9:1 records that He also said: "The Kingdom of God come with power". It is of course argued by many that the Gospel writers are merely summarizing the Lord's words in their own words. After extensive comparison of the Gospel records, I find this explanation unnecessary- because in no case of apparent contradiction do I see that the different forms of words are mutually contradictory. The Lord could easily have said something like: 'Till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom (Mt.)- The Kingdom of God come with power (Mk.)'. Luke's "Till they see the Kingdom of God" (Lk. 9:27) is perfectly in accordance with this- the first part of that clause ("Till they see") is from Matthew and "the Kingdom of God" is from Mark. It's statistically incredible that there is not a single case that I have come across in comparing the Gospels which is impossible to reconcile in this manner. If the Gospel writers were anything less than Divinely inspired, there would simply have to be contradiction between the accounts. I therefore see no need to assume that the writers were summarizing the Lord's words in their own words. This manner of repeating the same basic truth several times, e.g. 'Till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom (Mt.)- The Kingdom of God come with power (Mk.)', is true to my human experience in preaching the Gospel in public formats to illiterate people. I tend to repeat the same basic idea in slightly different words. And this is exactly what the

Lord would've been doing, and the records of His words reflect that.

The preceding verse 26 has clearly used the language of Christ's coming and His Kingdom in the context of the final judgment, when payment will be made to those who have 'lost' in this life that they might gain eternally. It is of course no coincidence that the synoptics each go on to record the transfiguration. But the connection with verse 26 means that the Lord surely was referring to His actual return in glory and final judgment. The language of '*Some* here will not taste of death' is strange if the Lord has in mind an event which would occur within the next week. Surely He meant that that generation would see His coming in glory. The transfiguration was at best a vision or foretaste of that time, the evident "glory" involved with the situation is to be connected with the "glory" that will be revealed at the Lord's second coming (:26). I note under Mt. 17:1 that the Lord may not have been even expecting the transfiguration when He spoke these words. What are we to make of this?

One suggestion is that just as it had been possible for Israel to have been prepared by John to accept Jesus as Christ and thus enabled the King of glory to come to Zion and establish His Kingdom, so it was possible that the Kingdom of God could have been established in that generation. But Israel crucified the Son rather than giving Him the fruit of the vineyard, and even afterwards they did not repent *en masse*, and those who did failed to take the Gospel to the Gentile world to the extent which was then required for the Kingdom to come. "*Shall not* taste of death" uses the same word as in Mt. 10:23: "You *shall not* have gone over the cities of Israel [in preaching the Gospel] before the Son of Man be come". But it seems that the disciples did not fulfil the preaching commission as intended, for the Lord's parables of harvest lament the paucity and weakness of the labourers, to the extent that the implication is that the harvest was largely spoilt because of this.

Much hinges around how we understand *heos an*, translated "until". "Until" suggests that one state is ended after an event happens. Did the Lord mean 'You will not die until the Kingdom comes, and then you will die'?. That reflection alone suggests we need to think more carefully about the translation of those Greek words. Did the Lord really mean that they would not die until they saw the Kingdom come, and then they would? It could be that *heos an* is capable of a conditional meaning, as if to say 'Some of you will not taste of death *heos an* the coming of the Kingdom- i.e. you need not necessarily die, until the Kingdom come'. The problem with that is that every attested usage of *heos an* means 'until'; hyper examination of a common Greek term and trying to make it mean something else, or hoping such a meaning might be legitimate, is not the way to conduct Bible study.

Which leads me to my preferred suggestion- that the Lord indeed was saying that some of those present would indeed taste of death after they had seen His coming in glory. In this case, those referred to would be the rejected, those who had sought to gain the world for themselves in this life, rather than losing it all now in order to gain the future Kingdom at the day of His coming. The Lord often speaks of the awful position of the condemned in the last day. They will “see” Him- and *eido* refers more to understanding and recognition than to physical seeing- but all too late, for after that, they will then die the second death. According to Mt. 23:39, those who condemned Him to death would see Him again, and say "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord", they would accept Him as Messiah- but when? At His return,

they as persons responsible to judgment will be resurrected and then in that day will wish to welcome Him as Messiah. But too late. This is the basis for the gnashing of teeth at the last day- seeing His coming and Kingdom, recognizing Him as Lord, but then having to die. Rev. 1:7 speaks of this situation- those who pierced Him will see Him at His coming in glory and bitterly weep. So the Lord is foreseeing how some would indeed be resurrected to judgment, see His Kingdom come- and then have to die "the second death".

However, it seems another meaning is also loaded within the words. John's Gospel speaks of how only those who are born again can "see the Kingdom of God... see life" (Jn. 3:3,36). Later, John records how the Lord spoke of how those who keep His word shall never "see death... never taste of death" (Jn. 8:51,52). The idea would then be that some of them would come to find spiritual life, and see the essence of the Kingdom in their lives- and the following account of the transfiguration would then be proof that this was indeed achieved in embryo by at least three of them. In this case we could also understand "the Kingdom" as a reference to the King of the Kingdom, the 'royal splendour' referring to Christ personally- and the disciples saw this in the transfiguration. The connections with John's Gospel are strong, but it would however seem strange for Matthew to start using language in such symbolic ways in the style of John. For this is generally not his style at all.

9:28 *And it came to pass about eight days after these sayings, that he took with him Peter, John and James and went up into the mountain to pray*- Peter is mentioned first. An over-reaction against Catholic views of Peter can lead us to under-estimate the undoubted supremacy of Peter in the early ecclesia. He was in the inner three along with James and John, and in incidents involving them he is always mentioned first, as the leader (Mt. 17:1,2; 26:37; Mk. 5:37). He is the first to confess Jesus as Messiah (Mt. 16:13-17), the first apostle to see the risen Christ (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5), the first to preach to the Gentiles. Being given the keys of the Kingdom is language which would have been understood at the time as the Lord making Peter the Chief Rabbi of His new ecclesia. The Acts record without doubt gives primacy to Peter as the leader and chief representative of Christ's fledgling church. But, humanly speaking, he was the most unlikely choice. The one who in the eyes of the world and brotherhood should have sat a fair while on the back burner, done the honourable thing… in fact, many honourable things, in just keeping a respectful and bashful silence. And there is no lack of evidence that Peter himself would have preferred that. But no, he was commissioned by the Lord to specifically lead the church. The early church was to be built on the rock of Peter. Whether we like to read this as meaning the rock of Peter's confession that Christ was the Son of God, or as simply meaning Peter's work as the manifestation of Christ, *the* rock, the Acts record shows clearly that the early church was built upon the specific work of Peter.

Being led up [Gk.] a high mountain by the leader to be present at a theophany is very much the language of Moses taking Joshua and earlier another trio of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu) with him part way up Mount Sinai, and likewise experiencing a shining face (Ex. 34:29-35) and God's voice from a cloud (Ex. 34:5). Moses returned from the Mount with shining face and the people were afraid- just as happened here (Mk. 9:6). Perhaps Peter vaguely comprehended all this when he wanted to build 'tabernacles', because this was the task given to Moses for Israel to complete. Lk. 9:32 speaks of the *exodus* which the Lord was to make at Jerusalem- a reference to His death. It was the Passover lamb which died at the Exodus- the implication is that

now God's people were free to leave Egypt. Again, those secular fishermen were being shown (through the obvious parallel) that they were none less than Joshua in this new Israel which was being created; and after the Lord's departure, they were to take His place and lead God's Israel into the Kingdom.

9:29 *And as he was praying*- The idea seems to be that just as He had taken the twelve into Gentile areas for a period of intense teaching of them, so even within the twelve He focused upon these three and wanted to spend time alone with them. He "took" them means to desire association with, to come close to. This was His intention, and one wonders whether the transfiguration was therefore unexpected for Him. Previously when He had tried to get the twelve away by themselves, there had been unexpected events which hampered that, such as the crowds following them, and even in Gentile areas the Lord seems to have been surprised by the faith and need to perform miracles which He encountered. In this case, it would be unintentional that the transfiguration is recorded as following straight after His words about His coming in His Kingdom; it wasn't as if the Lord said those words knowing that some would witness the transfiguration. According to Lk. 9:28, the Lord's intention was to go up the mountain "to pray", but whilst He prayed, the transfiguration occurred. See on Mt. 16:28. He started praying and then there was a theophany; but in their human weakness they missed much of it because they fell asleep. This was exactly the situation in the Garden of Gethsemane, with the same three involved; it was as if He was seeking to train them for it. They were "heavy" with sleep (Lk. 9:32), and the word is only used elsewhere in the Gospels to describe how the same three were "heavy" with sleep in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:43; Mk. 14:40). Even if Jesus Himself wasn't consciously doing this, we have here an example of how the Divine hand leads us through experiences in order to prepare us for others which are to come later in similar form.

The appearance of his face was altered- Mt. "His face shone as the sun". The same word used about the shining associated with the Lord's second coming (Lk. 17:24). Having taught that we too should be transfigured (2 Cor. 3:18 s.w.), Paul goes on to say that God has "shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). This is transfiguration language. We are to be transformed into that same image. He there becomes the picture of what each of us in Him are evolving into. The Lord's return will be as the rising of the sun (Mal. 4:2). The same figure is used for the Kingdom age and His return in Mt. 13:46 and Rev. 1:16.

And his garment became white and dazzling- The same description used about the white clothing of the Angels at the resurrection ("white as snow", Mt. 28:3, just as in Mk. 9:3; Mk. 16:5; Jn. 20:12). In the midst of the conversation about His upcoming death (Lk. 9:31), there was the encouragement of what the resurrection glory would be like. The same word is also used about the Lord's current appearance in Heavenly glory with clothes "as white as snow" (Rev. 1:14- the very phrased used in Mk. 9:3). Indeed, the description of the risen Lord in Rev. 1 has many connections with the language used about His appearance at the transfiguration. Again the idea was to show Him how He would be after His glorification, to motivate Him to go through with the *exodus* at the cross which He must fulfil at Jerusalem.

Mark adds that the Lord's clothing was "white as snow, such that no fuller on earth can white them" (Mk. 9:3). The Hebrew mind would have obviously thought of the clothing of God Himself, the "ancient of days" of Dan. 7:9, which is described

likewise. The comment that no *man* could ever make them so white is also a hint in that direction. He was clothed with the clothing of God. This doesn't make Him God, for Revelation has many descriptions of the faithful having the same kind of clothing. Against this background, the promise of Is. 1:18 becomes the more awesome- that even although our sins are red as crimson, yet they can become white as snow. This can only be achieved by the wearing of God's own clothing, the gift of His imputed righteousness, which Paul extensively glories in throughout Romans 1-8. Rev. 7:14 speaks of plunging our robes in the blood of the lamb, and them becoming white. It's all so paradoxical- that this whiteness cannot be achieved by man, no fuller on earth could do this, but by plunging [surely an allusion to baptism] into the red blood of Christ. This is the challenge of faith- to believe that the promised whiteness can be achieved through Christ. It was possible even in Isaiah's time, on the basis that God looked ahead to the work of Christ which as it were enabled Him to do this. Therefore the reference to "no fuller on earth" suggests that there is a fuller in Heaven who can do this. And Mal. 3:2 is specific that the Messiah heralded by the Elijah prophet, John the Baptist, would be like "fuller's soap" in cleansing men through the judgment of their sins. David in the depth of his sin appealed to God to 'full' him ("wash me", but s.w. 'fuller'- Ps. 51:2,7); and this was done for him, on account of the future work of Christ which the Father then held in view. The Lord's glistering garments are therefore available for all of us. And it is with that connection that the scene there becomes no mere spectacle to behold in awe from afar, but a real picture of our own possibility before God.

9:30 *And talking with him were two men, who were Moses and Elijah*- They appeared "in glory" (Lk. 9:31), as the Lord did- this is clearly a vision of the Kingdom. The Lord Jesus was the firstfruits from the dead, who opened the way to immortality. So there is no way that they were already glorified before His death and resurrection. It was a vision (Mt. 17:9), of the Kingdom. Just as Jesus was not then glorified Himself at that time, neither were they. They spoke of how the Lord was going to "fulfill" the *exodus* in His death at Jerusalem (Lk. 9:31). It was Moses who could supremely explain this to the Lord, having himself slain the Passover lamb and experienced the *exodus* made possible thereby.

The transfiguration follows straight on from the Lord's talk about the Kingdom. It was a foretaste of the Kingdom. Yet the Kingdom is fundamentally a *relationship* with God. Thus the foretaste of the Kingdom presented at the transfiguration was of faithful men in spiritual conversation with the glorified Lord Jesus, with His face shining as the sun as it will in the Kingdom, as the "sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2).

9:31 *Who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem*- See on 2 Pet. 1:15. "In glory" suggests they were presented as it were already in the Kingdom, and from that kingdom perspective they talked with the Lord about His upcoming short term sufferings. We too must try to see our sharings in the cross as being in the context of the Kingdom. "Departure" is *eksodos*- Moses and Elijah had each experienced death at their exodus. And yet the Lord's exodus was all the more meaningful because it would enable the final delivery of God's people from the slavery of sin and death.

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9:32 *Now Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they were fully awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him*- "Saw his glory" is absolutely the language of Moses and the Old Testament heroes seeing Divine glory in theophanies, and like the disciples, hearing God's voice (Ex. 33:18 Heb. – "shew" is the same word translated 'to see''; Isaiah- Jn. 12:41; Ezekiel- Ez. 1:28). Yet again the Lord was seeking to show those secular men that they were called to work on the level of Moses and the prophets in the new Israel which the Lord Jesus was creating out of manual labourers, prostitutes, tax collectors, swindlers and sinners.

The disciples' eyes were heavy in Gethsemane and they fell asleep at the critical moment. But earlier, "having remained awake", the same disciples were blessed with a vision of the Lord's glory (Lk. 9:32 RVmg.). If they had remained awake in the garden, they would have seen the Lord being glorified by Angelic visitation. But they didn't perceive how the circumstances were repeating, and thus didn't find the strength and inspiration which was potentially prepared for them through the similarity of circumstance.

9:33 *And it came to pass, as they were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus: Master, it is good for us to be here! Let us make three booths, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah*- Throughout the Lord's ministry, Peter had a mental barrier to the idea of his Lord suffering and dying. It could be argued that his desire to build tents and remain in the mountain of transfiguration was rooted in this- Moses and Elijah had just spoken with the Lord Jesus about the path He must take to death, and Peter somehow wants the Lord to stay there in the mountain (Mk. 9:5). And yet Peter's later preaching has so much to say about the Lord's death. And his letters contain quotations and allusions from Isaiah's suffering servant prophecies (1 Pet. 2:21 etc.). Further, if we accept the idea elsewhere discussed that Mark's Gospel is a transcript of Peter's preaching of the Gospel, it becomes significant that Mark's version of the Gospel likewise emphasizes Jesus as the suffering servant. Thus what Peter was once blind to, he made a special point of preaching. The content of his witness reflected his deep awareness of his past blindness- and therefore his appeal to others to 'get it' was the more powerful seeing that he himself had patently 'not got it' for some years. And it shouldn't be hard to translate his example into our daily experience, speaking of our weaknesses and former blindnesses rather than coming over as the self-congratulatory religious guy.

It may have taken much of the day to climb the mountain, and Peter was maybe thinking of where they were going to sleep for the night. Or was did he also have in mind a celebration of the feast of Tabernacles at that time? Later, Peter came to see his death as a taking down of a tent (2 Pet. 1:13), using the same word for the tabernacle he had wanted to build for his Lord at the transfiguration. Then, he had wanted the tent to be set up so that the time of the Lord's departure wouldn't come; so that the Lord would stay with them there, with Moses and Elijah, in what must have seemed like the Kingdom of God. Again, Peter didn't want the cross, neither for his Lord nor for himself. But by the time he wrote 2 Peter, he had learnt his lesson; he saw that his tent must be taken down. The vision of the glory of the Lord Jesus, the words of His coming death and future Kingdom, these were quite enough. There had

been no need of the tent on the mountain, and now he saw there was no need for the tent of his body either. We are all the same. Our death will literally be a death with the Lord, in that our resurrection will be after the pattern of His (Rom. 6:5). Peter learnt this lesson from the transfiguration because he describes his coming death as his *exodus* (2 Pet. 1:15), just as Moses and Elijah had spoken then of the Lord's coming death (Lk. 9:31).

Not knowing what he said- It is possible to understand Peter's suggestion simply as the kind of inappropriate thing a man would say who wants to make a response to spirituality, but doesn't know how to. He wanted to do something material and physical- he simply didn't know what to say. The response was the voice from Heaven telling Peter to *hear* Jesus, to respond to His word, rather than run around doing inappropriate works just because we feel we have to *do* something.

9:34 *And while he said these things, there came a cloud that overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered into the cloud*- Moses had previously entered the cloud of glory, seen God's glory and heard God's voice- on the top of a mountain. Moses' ascent into the mountain and into the very cloud of Divine glory was understood in Judaism as the very zenith of human spiritual achievement of all time, coming so close to the very personal presence of God, never to be repeated amongst men. And now, three fishermen were having the very same experience. No wonder they feared as they themselves entered into that cloud.

9:35 *And a voice came out of the cloud, saying: This is My Son, My chosen. Hear him*- This was literally the word of God, and yet it was actually a string of three quotations from God's word in the Old Testament: "You are My Son" (Ps. 2:7), "In whom My soul delights" (Is. 42:1), "Hear Him" (Dt. 18:15). It must have been a profound evidence of the Bible's Divine inspiration. The very voice of God repeating His own words as found in the Law, Psalms and Prophets- the three divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures. "Hear Him″ was intended to take the mind back to Dt. 18:15, where it was written that Messiah would be 'heard' by the faithful. But Peter fell down paralyzed with fear; he didn't really hear the son of God then. Yet in Acts 3:22, Peter quotes Dt. 18:15 and asks his hearers to obey the passage by hearing Jesus, through his preaching of Him. He was asking his audience to do what he himself hadn't done.

9:36 *And when the voice came, Jesus was found alone*- He was the word made flesh. The law and the prophets were fulfilled in Him, and so the voice of God as it were made Elijah and Moses to exit. Matthew says: "No one, save Jesus only". In the Greek as well as in translation, this is really labouring the point. The "save / only", *monos*, is redundant- they saw 'nobody except Jesus' is a statement which needs no further qualification, indeed grammatically it almost cannot be given further qualification, and reads awkwardly because of the monos, "only", that is added. But the word "only" is added to emphasize that their focus was solely upon Him. That was the purpose of the event, and it had been achieved. Christ centeredness is the ultimate, final and total issue of our experience of Him, the Law and the prophets. The transfiguration ends with this total focus monos upon Christ; this was the practical effect of the theophany. John's Gospel doesn't record the transfiguration, but as so often, it is indeed alluded to. For John's Gospel is full of references to seeing glory, to hearing the Son. It's as if John presents Jesus to us a constant theophany, not one that three of the best disciples go up a mountain to see for a short period, but one which is continually before each of us, and which according to Paul's allusions to it, draws us

into its very process. For we too are transfigured as we like the disciples behold the Lord's transfiguration (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18 s.w.).

And they kept quiet and told no one in those days any of the things which they had seen- "To no one" maybe connects with the fact that they saw "no man" except Jesus (Mk. 9:8); and so they are asked to tell the vision to "no man" until after the Lord's resurrection. It could be that the Lord wanted them to retain their focus upon Him by not telling others but instead meditating personally upon what they had seen. The vision had been of the Lord's resurrection glory- we noted above the similarities in language to the shining garments of the Angels at the resurrection scene. The Lord didn't want people to think that He had already attained that glory without the cross. Even though in prospect He had that glory, He was insistent that no impression be given that He could attain it without passing through the cross. This was particularly important for Peter to appreciate, who several times entertained a hope that glory was possible for the Lord without the cross.

9:37 *And it came to pass, the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him*- This meeting with the crowd occurred the day after the transfiguration (Lk. 9:37)- presumably they slept up the mountain for the night. The transfiguration record is replete with references to the theophany on Sinai. Moses' return from the mount was to a faithless people of God, and the same is found here, in that the disciples had been unable to perform a healing which they had potentially been given the power to do.

Note how the three accounts dovetail so nicely: Jesus and the three with Him moved towards the crowd (Mt.), Jesus having noticed them from a distance (Mk.), and the crowd came towards them (Lk.). And as Jesus came (*erchomai*) towards the crowd, there came out of the crowd towards Him (*pros-erchomai*) the man who wanted a healing for his son (Mt.). Mark records that the people ran towards Jesus when they saw Him (Mk. 9:15- presumably His face was shining after the encounter, after the pattern of Moses), which explains why Luke says that the man had to 'cry out' from out of the crowd (Lk. 9:38- Gk. 'to holler', to get attention amidst the rush of all the others towards Jesus) and that Jesus firstly asked the Scribes what they were questioning His disciples about. We really can powerfully reconstruct the scene by putting the three different viewpoints together. Matthew focuses upon the man who came to Jesus wanting healing for his son. The best analogy is to cameramen. Matthew focuses close up upon one man; Mark is taking a broader view of the crowd as a whole, and therefore picks up the brief question to the Scribes first of all- they made no answer that is recorded, and the Lord's answer to whatever questions they were asking was given in the healing miracle. That there are no actual contradictions of fact or chronology is to me a profound internal evidence of an inspired record, with a common Divine hand behind all the authors. If these were three uninspired men writing their recollections some time after the event, or uninspired people writing down what had been passed down to them as originating with those men, then for sure there would be contradictions. Because misremembering of detail is just part of our human condition, and the supposed lengthy process of oral tradition would inevitably have meant there was further corruption and unclarity added. The lack of contradiction in the accounts and the way they complement each other so perfectly has to me the hallmark of the Divine. Even witnesses who agree together to lie in court and rehearse their stories many times over- still end up contradicting each other. But that is not the case with the Gospels.

Mark adds: "All the crowd, when they saw Him, were greatly amazed; and running to Him saluted Him" (Mk. 9:15). They ran up to Him- and He add Peter,

James and John with Him. This sentence in Greek is intentionally similar to the account of Acts 3:11, where again "All the people [cp. "all the crowd"] ran [s.w. "running to Him"] together unto them… greatly wondering [s.w. "greatly amazed"]. The response of the crowd to Peter and John in Acts 3:11 could not possibly have been contrived by them. Their experience at the return from the transfiguration was to prepare them for their own later witness, when without the physical presence of Jesus, they were Him to the world. And the same kind of carefully, sensitively planned education of us is ongoing now. Not only do situations occur and then repeat in essence later in our lives, but what we go through in this life will only have understood meaning in the Kingdom, when we shall put into eternal practice what we are learning now. But for now, there is an inevitable difficulty in attaching meaning to event, because we cannot foresee the billion situations in our eternities where we will put into practice what we are now learning.

9:38 *And a man from the crowd cried, saying: Teacher, I beg you to look upon my son; for he is my only child*- Having only one child was unusual; perhaps the mother had died.

9:39 *And a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out*- The spirit and the person are parallel here; the person's behaviour was understood to be that of the supposed spirit. They failed to examine the behaviour or symptoms of a person as just that, instead they sought to explain it with reference to their theories of spirits.

It convulses him so that he foams at the mouth; and it departs from him with great difficulty, bruising him- Matthew and Mark speak of gnashing teeth and jumping into fire and water. Descriptions of the rejected come to mind as gnashing teeth, cast into fire and water, wallowing helpless... Likewise hitting himself was a sign of self hatred, believing he was guilty of the beatings which were associated with the idea of condemnation (Lk. 12:47,48). The child was obsessed with fear of condemnation, just as we noted Legion had been. His problem was therefore psychologically rooted, and the language of demons is simply the language of the day to describe his actions and their apparent cure. This connection shows at least two things: that there will be a madness in the rejected, the tragic aimlessness of the demented. And secondly, that because the demoniac was cured, it is possible for a man whose behaviour leads to his condemnation *now* to still repent, before it's too late. And yet although the rejected may appear demented, they may well not feel like this. They will gnash their teeth with anger, not least against themselves. Being cast into fire or water (Mt.) were both figures of condemnation. The young man felt he was worthy of condemnation- hence conviction of the Lord's saving mercy would have been enough to cure him of the deep sense of unworthiness which he had.

9:40 *And I begged your disciples to cast it out*- He "besought" them, he begged them, to heal the child. According to Mark, when the father of the dumb child brought him to the disciples, he tells Jesus that "I brought unto thee my son", but the disciples couldn't cure him (Mk. 9:17 RV); he perceived Jesus as His followers, just as folk do today. The Lord had earlier given them power over "unclean spirits" (Mt. 10:8)- but still they couldn't heal him. The power given to them was therefore potential power, but it was no guarantee that they would actually do the works. Alternatively, we could conclude that that power was only given to them temporarily. Or, that there is a difference between the twelve, and the more general "disciples" / followers of Jesus. However it would have been strange indeed if the man had not brought his son to the

group of the twelve in the hope of healing. And it is the disciples, presumably the twelve, who then come to the Lord and ask why they could not perform the cure (Mt. 17:19).

But they could not- They had no *dunamai* (possibility); Mk. 9:18 uses a different word- according to Mark, the man said that they "could not" using *ischuo* (more carrying the sense of physical power). The man therefore bewailed at least twice that the disciples couldn't help; and he asks the Lord Jesus to help "if You can" (Mk. 9:22- *dunamai*). They did have the possibility; but they lacked the faith to actualize it (Mt. 10:8; Lk. 10:19,20 "I give unto you power… over all the power of the enemy… the spirits are subject unto you"). We too have been given potentials which require faith to exploit, and our failures to do so leave people with the impression that the Lord Himself is limited- for, like the disciples, we are His representatives in this world, and people coming to us are effectively coming to Him.

9:41 *And Jesus answered and said: O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you and put up with you?*- He describes them as [part of] a "faithless generation", again indicating how the disciples were all too influenced by Judaism, the "generation" or world around them. The disciples and Judaism / the Jewish world are paralleled in Jn. 7:3,4: "Let your disciples see your work… shew yourself to the world". See on Jn. 7:33.

An example of the Lord's perhaps unconscious usage of His Father's words is to be found in this exasperated comment. Of course the Lord would have spoken those words and expressed those ideas in Aramaic- but the similarity is striking with His Father's Hebrew words of Num. 14:27: "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation…?". As a son comes out with phrases and word usages which 'Could be his father speaking!', so the Lord Jesus did the same thing. What I am saying is that the Lord was not merely quoting or alluding to the Father's Old Testament words, in the way that, say, Paul or Peter did. As the Father's Son, He was speaking in the same way as His Father, no doubt saturated with the written record of the Father's words, but all the same, there were those similarities of wording and underlying thinking which are only seen between fathers and sons. And His words of Mt. 17:17 = Num. 14:27 seem to me to be an example of this. It was the disciples who were faithless. In Matthew chapters 12 and 13, the Lord had drawn a clear difference between the disciples, and the unbelieving surrounding generation. It seems that He now despaired of whether that distinction was valid; He sees them, in the heat of that moment of bitter disappointment, as no better than the masses who did not believe. The "faithless" will be condemned (Lk. 12:46 "his portion with the unbelievers", s.w.), and this is the term used about the world generally (1 Cor. 6:6; 7:12); or as the Lord puts it, this "generation". And yet the Lord uses it here about the disciples and again in Jn. 20:27. The very phrase "perverse generation" is used by Paul about the unbelieving world (Phil. 2:15). To use this term about the disciples is therefore significant; the Lord really felt that His faith and hope that they were different from the Jewish world had been misplaced. After His encounter with Elijah and Moses, he doubtless expected more of God's people.

This fits in with a Biblical theme- of people being confronted with acute spiritual temptation immediately after a highly spiritual experience. And this is true to life- so often, merely hours after a highly intense spiritual experience [e.g. at a breaking of bread meeting] we find ourselves assailed by temptation and spiritual depression. It's not that we are encountered by a physical person called 'Satan' immediately after our spiritual 'high'; rather it is a feature of human nature that the closer we come to God,

the stronger is the tidal backwash of *internal* temptation immediately afterwards. Consider some examples:

- Noah walks off the ark, a superb triumph of faith, into a cleansed and pristine world, with the rainbow arch of God's grace above him- and gets dead drunk (Gen. 9:21-24).
- Moses renounced greatness, stood up for God's people and then left Egypt by faith, "not fearing the wrath of the king" (Heb. 11:27); and yet ended up fleeing in fear from Pharaoh (Ex. 2:14,15).
- Moses returned from the awesome meeting with God on Sinai and gave in to a flash of anger, during which he smashed the tables of the covenant- a covenant which had also been made with him personally.
- Israel were ecstatic with joy and confidence in God as they stood on the other side of the Red Sea- but very soon afterwards they were giving in to temptation in the wilderness, accusing God of intending to kill them and being careless for them.
- Judas went from the spiritual height of being present at the first "breaking of bread" meeting with the Lord Jesus, just prior to His death, directly into temptation from "the Devil" and then went out into the darkness of that night (Lk. 22:3).
- Soon after his spiritual triumph on Carmel, Elijah is to be found suicidal and bitter with God, and considering that the other faithful in Israel are in fact also apostate (1 Kings 19:4-11).
- Samson's life was full of giving in to spiritual temptation immediately after he had been empowered by God to do some great miracle.
- Immediately after having been saved by God's grace from a huge invasion (2 Sam. 11), David sins with Bathsheba and murders Uriah (2 Sam. 12).
- After the wonder of having a terminal illness delayed by 15 years in response to prayer, Hezekiah gives in to the temptation to be proud and selfish in the events of Is. 39.
- Soon after the wonder of the miracles of the loaves and fishes, the disciples hardened their heart to it and accused Jesus of not caring for them (Mk. 4:38; 6:52).
- Paul straight after his wonderful vision of "the third heaven" finds himself struggling with a "thorn in the flesh", a term I have elsewhere suggested may refer to a spiritual weakness or temptation (2 Cor. 12:7).
- After the wonder of baptism and the confirming voice from Heaven, Jesus was immediately assaulted by major temptation in the wilderness.

This is surely the most graphic and intense expression of frustration in the entire recorded history of the Lord Jesus. His frustration was with how His disciples were not living up to their potential, and how faithless they were. And we daily exhibit the same terribly disappointing characteristics. But *how long* may not necessarily be a cry of exasperation- although it could be that. There can also be the sense of 'Until when?', and the time in view was the Lord's death. John's Gospel records the Lord several times speaking of how His hour or time had not yet come, and how He agonized until it did. That end point was clearly the moment when He cried from the cross "It is finished".

Bring your son here- The man had brought [s.w. "bring"] his son to the disciples, they couldn't heal him, and so the Lord asks for the child to be brought to Him personally. And yet He had taught that in their witness, the disciples were Him to this world. Coming to them was coming to Him. But He despaired that in this case, there was now a difference between them and Him. They were unable to manifest Him as they should because of their lack of faith. And there are times when our status as

'brethren in Christ' likewise fails, and we fail to be Him to this world and He has to intervene and reveal Himself more directly to men.

9:42 *And as he was coming, the demon dashed him down and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father*- As noted above, the young man was obsessed with fear of condemnation. When he realized he was in the presence of the Lord, his condition therefore worsened considerably; he felt he really had arrived at judgment day, and wanted to destroy himself. Again we note that the underlying problem with him was psychological and spiritual, rather than being literally attacked by a demon.

There are a number of parallels between the language used of 'casting out' demons, and that used about healings. Jesus "rebuked" demons in Mk. 9:25, and yet He "rebuked" a fever (Lk. 4:39) and the wind (Mt. 8:26). Demons are spoken of as having "departed" (Mt. 17:18), yet we read of leprosy 'departing' (Mk. 1:42) and diseases 'departing' after cure (Acts 19:12). I'd go so far as to say that every case of a person being spoken of as demon possessed has its equivalent in diseases which we can identify today – e.g. epilepsy, schizophrenia. The peoples of the first century, and their predecessors, believed that demons and the Satan monster were somehow associated with water- that was why, they figured, the water mysteriously kept moving, and at times blew up into storms. When we read of God 'rebuking' the waters and making them calm or do what He wished (Ps. 18:16; 104:7; 106:9), we're effectively being told that Yahweh of Israel is so infinitely superior to those supposed demons and sea monsters that for God's people, they have no effective existence. The Lord Jesus taught the same lesson when He 'rebuked' the sea and wind during the storm on the lake (Mt. 8:26). The same Greek word is used to described how He 'rebuked' demons (Mt. 17:18 etc.). I have no doubt that the Lord Jesus didn't believe there was a Loch Ness-type monster lurking in Galilee which He had to rebuke in order to save the disciples from the storm; and likewise He spoke of 'rebuking' demons as a similar way of teaching others that *whatever* ideas they had about demons, He was greater and was in a position to 'rebuke' them. Likewise He assured His men that they had the power to tread on snakes, scorpions, and all their enemies (Lk. 10:17-20). The image of a victorious god trampling his foes and snakes underfoot was well established in the surrounding cultures, and had entered Judaism. The Lord is teaching those fearful men that OK, if that's your perception of things, well, in your terms, you have ultimate victory through working 'in My name'. It must be noted that the man had previously described the boy's condition as being due to how "A spirit seizes him… and it *departs* from him with great difficulty" (Lk. 9:39). The condition was intermittent (consistent with viewing the condition as epilepsy rather than actual, literal manipulation by a spirit or demon). Trying various remedies, probably including beating him, the condition 'departed'. The Lord's cure is described in the same terms, with the implication that it was total and permanent, rather than partial and temporary, as their 'healings' were. The Lord said that the 'spirit' would never again enter the boy (Mk. 9:25).

9:43 *And they were all astonished at the majesty of God. But while all were marvelling at all the things which he did, he said to his disciples*- Momentary faith and devotion to the Lord is worth little. No matter how impressive it might appear to others at the time, it is our long run commitment to the Lord which matters. The Lord knew that these same people would be involved in His betrayal and death (:44); they who for the moment were marvelling at His miracle, correctly perceiving that it exemplified the majesty or rulership of God in His Kingdom.

9:44 *Let these words sink into your ears. For the Son of Man shall be delivered up into the hands of men*- He said that He would be, in the future, delivered up (Lk. 9:44); but the parallel Mk. 9:31 records Him saying: "I *am* delivered up". And Lk. 24:7 says that at this time, He told them that He *must be* delivered up. It is possible that He said all three things in one sentence, such was His emphasis: "I must be delivered up, I will be delivered up, in fact I am now being delivered up". He saw the future experience of the cross as being fulfilled in His daily experience of life.

The parallel between the Lord's words and works is brought out in Lk. 9:43,44: "They wondered at all things which Jesus *did*…He said…let these *sayings* sink down into your ears". There are no distinct 'sayings' of Jesus in this context; He wanted them to see that His works were His words. There was perfect congruence between what He said and what He did. Perhaps this was why He told the parents of the girl whom He resurrected "to tell no man what was done" (Lk. 8:56), even though it was so obvious; He wanted His self-evident works to speak for themselves, without the need for human words. For His works were essentially His message. See on Jn. 8:28.

9:45 *But they did not understand this saying, and it was hidden from them so that they did not perceive it, and they were afraid to ask Him about this saying*- They were rebuked later for being so slow to understand. A refusal to understand has a psychological basis. They didn't want to understand the predictions of His death because it meant death with Him, in essence if not in practice. So they would rather it just were not true. In response, God "hid" the understanding from them. We are confirmed in whichever way we wish to go in.

The Lord's teaching about the cross was "hid from them" (Lk. 9:45), much to the Lord's distress. And yet in prayer to the Father, He rejoices that these things are not hid from them (Lk. 10:21,23). This is a picture of the Lord's present mediation for us in prayer- speaking of us as far better than we are. The message of Christ crucified was "hid" from them (Lk. 9:45; 18:34)- and Paul surely alludes to this when he says that this message is hid by the veil of Judaism from those who are lost (2 Cor. 4:3).

9:46 *And there arose a dispute among them, which of them was the greatest*- Straight after the Lord's descriptions of His death, so often there are arose petty argument and jealousies. Just as happens with us, in the shadow of His cross which we meet to remember. His greatness there is to be so perceived that none of us will be at all interested in being "the greatest". The power of the cross is likewise lost on the hearts of many because of their obsession with petty argument. Perhaps the Lord's clear choice of Peter as the leader was unpopular with them because of his impetuous ways and lack of leadership finesse. Or maybe they meant (as AV) who was to be the greatest after their Lord had died.

9:47 *But when Jesus saw the reasoning of their heart, he took a little child and set him by his side*- The disciples are framed as doing exactly the opposite soon afterwards, when they forbad the little children [s.w.] to come to Jesus (19:13)- whereas the Lord actually invited them to Him. Again we note how the Gospel writers present the disciples as so often out of step with their Lord.

The Greek for "set" means to stand, not to sit- this is how it is usually translated. Mk. 9:35,36 says that the Lord *sat* but He *stood* the child in their midst. But *histemi*, often translated "set" in Mt. 18:2, has the strong connotation of standing up or setting someone up in a position. "The midst" suggests the disciples were in a closed circle, and the Lord stood the child within the circle. If you call an onlooking child into the midst of a group of unknown adults, they will typically not want to come. We see the

powerful attraction of the Lord to children in that this child came, although likely with much nervousness, wanting to come to Jesus, but not into that closed circle of men- just as so many today. Almost certainly the child came to the Lord and He held the child close to Himself; for He goes on to urge the disciples to "receive" such little ones, implying they were reluctant to have the child amongst them. That closeness to the Lord was what was being set up as an example. The scene is portrayed graphically if we put the Gospel records together- the Lord *sat* with the men in a circle around Him, He calls the child to Him, stands him up "by Him" (*para* Him means close by Him, Lk. 9:47) and then 'takes' him, cuddling the child to Himself "in His arms" (Mk. 9:36)- whilst He is sitting down. The natural response of the child who had been stood would be to want to sit down, holding on to Jesus, and not to stand above those men with their attention focused upon him. This natural desire to come down, to humble self, is what is being memorialized by the Lord as the pattern for all who wish to enter His Kingdom. Perhaps we can imagine the scene even further- the child would've wanted to come to Jesus personally, but the circle of disciples with their apparent superiority and judgmentalism would've been off-putting. But still the child came, and the Lord in Luke's record urges the disciples to allow the child to join the circle and "receive" him. This scenario is seen so often in the body of Christ in our days. In the early church, there soon developed a problem about 'receiving' others, not least children, women and Gentiles- and the Gospel records through this incident show how seriously wrong the disciples were not to do so. Luke's record goes on to record the incident with John's disciples where the Lord's disciples didn't want to "receive" them- implying they did not immediately grasp the teaching themselves.

9:48 *And said to them: Whoever shall receive this little child in my name receives me, and whoever shall receive me, receives Him that sent me. For he that is least among you all, the same is great*- To not offend others we must “receive” them (Mt. 18:5). It is written of Jesus that when crowds of materialistic, fascinated people followed Him, “He received them, and spake unto them of the Kingdom” (Lk. 9:11). He didn’t just turn round and read them a lecture about the Kingdom.
“He *received* them”. Presumably Luke means to reflect how he perceived something in the Lord’s body language that was receiving of that crowd of peasants- whom we would likely have written off as just dumb groupies with no more than surface level interest. And we too must receive one another, even as the Lord has received us (Rom. 15:7)- and this includes receiving him who is even weak in the faith (Rom. 14:1). We should be looking for every reason to receive and fellowship our brethren, rather than reasons not to.

The disciples would've had to open their closed circle to allow the child to enter. As the child settled down in the arms of the Lord Jesus, he was effectively added to the circle of disciples. Children were counted as non-persons in first century society, along with women, serious sinners, the mentally ill and lepers. The Lord is powerfully teaching that our attitude to such persons is our attitude to Him and therefore to God (Mk., Lk.). The challenge comes down to many of us too, who come from closed table communities. The Lord foresaw that to form a tight circle around Him was the natural response of those who followed Him, but He is saying that unless we open that circle, we are in danger of actually not having received Him at all. Our not receiving of such persons is going to make them stumble ("offend them"), and this warrants eternal condemnation. The Lord had bidden the disciples 'humble themselves', and now they are given an opportunity to do so- by 'receiving' amongst themselves, as one of them, into their circle, a little child. Opening our circle and accepting amongst us those who do not share (at least, at this time) our level of faith, understanding or even

culture- this is indeed a humbling experience. All that is in us cries out to keep them excluded, and to keep our circle tightly closed against them. But the argument for a closed circle, or a closed table, is ultimately one which originates in pride and a refusal to humble self.

The little child was to be identified with the Lord Jesus personally. To not receive the little ones is to not receive Jesus personally. The issue is of eternal importance, as the next verse emphasizes. We cannot simply go along with such rejections and refusal to receive others just because it is the policy of a church or fellowship to which we have belonged or grown up in. Social death and rejection by our brethren is nothing compared to the painful rejection at the last day which the Lord speaks of.

Mark inserts at this point the question about a man casting out demons although 'not following us' (Mk. 9:38-42). The Lord rebukes them for this and goes on to warn them about not offending little ones. In Matthew, that warning follows straight on from the teaching about the need to receive little ones- as if refusing to receive them is what makes them stumble. The case raised by the disciples, as it were in protest at His teaching about receiving little ones, was presumably one of John's disciples. Although they had a different spiritual culture, history and even doctrinal understanding, the Lord had earlier likened both His and John's disciples to children in the marketplace working in parallel, presenting the same message in different ways. They were admittedly immature in some ways and in parts of their doctrinal understanding, but the Lord is teaching that this is what made John's disciples "little ones", and they must still be accepted. The Lord warns twice in that section in Mk. 9:38-42: "Forbid him not". This is the same as saying 'Receive him, do not forbid him from entering your circle'. It is the same word which the Lord will go on to use in Mt. 19:14 about not forbidding another group of "little children". The Jewish world was to be condemned exactly because they hindered or forbad [s.w.] men to enter the Kingdom (Lk. 11:52). Peter surely alludes to the Lord's teaching when reasoning: "Who can forbid water" that Gentiles be baptized (Acts 10:47). Refusing baptism to those not considered good, ready or mature enough is surely a way of forbidding and not receiving little ones.

9:49 *And John answered and said: Master, we saw one casting out demons in your name and we forbade him, because he follows not with us*- Luke inserts at this point the question about a man casting out demons although 'not following us'. The Lord rebukes them for this and goes on to warn them about not offending little ones. In Matthew, that warning follows straight on from the teaching about the need to receive little ones- as if refusing to receive them is what makes them stumble. The case raised by the disciples, as it were in protest at His teaching about receiving little ones, was presumably one of John's disciples. Although they had a different spiritual culture, history and even doctrinal understanding, the Lord had earlier likened both His and John's disciples to children in the marketplace working in parallel, presenting the same message in different ways. They were admittedly immature in some ways and in parts of their doctrinal understanding, but the Lord is teaching that this is what made John's disciples "little ones", and they must still be accepted. The Lord warns twice in that section in Mk. 9:38-42: "Forbid him not". This is the same as saying 'Receive him, do not forbid him from entering your circle'. It is the same word which the Lord will go on to use in Mt. 19:14 about not forbidding another group of "little children". The Jewish world was to be condemned exactly because they hindered or forbad [s.w.] men to enter the Kingdom (Lk. 11:52- see on Mt. 18:7 *Woe to the*

world). Peter surely alludes to the Lord's teaching when reasoning: "Who can forbid water" that Gentiles be baptized (Acts 10:47). Refusing baptism to those not considered good, ready or mature enough is surely a way of forbidding and not receiving little ones.

9:50 *But Jesus said to him: Forbid not*- The preceding section has sternly warned against forbidding the little ones, and now we have a worked example. The little ones in view were John's disciples; although seeing "John did no miracle" we wonder whether the miracle claimed was legitimate. But the Lord is not only gentle, He seeks to accept even such misunderstanding and misguided ones. For He alludes without doubt to Num. 11:28,29: "Joshua… answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them. And Moses said unto him, Are you envious for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them". He considered this misguided miracle worker in John's group as all the same one of God's new Israel. As noted earlier, the disciples tended to "forbid" those whom the Lord wished to accept. And that same tension is seen time and again with the way closed, denominational mindsets seek to exclude and "forbid" others who differ and are immature. But the allusion to Numbers 11 seems to be saying that all in whom the Spirit is working should be accepted; and the litmus test is whether they shall "speak evil of me". If they do not, then they are not against Him but for, despite their misunderstanding. An alternative reading however is "Shall not lightly speak evil of me" (as AV). In this case, the Lord is comforting His sceptical disciples that if such a person does is in fact against Him, then this is no light matter and will be dealt with by the Lord's judgment; but not by theirs. This incident is surely alluded to by Paul when he warns against some who claimed to possess the Spirit who 'call Jesus accursed' (1 Cor. 12:3). There were such, and it was their attitude to the Lord Jesus personally which proclaimed them against Him. What people think of Christ is the critical issue when it comes to deciding whether a person is for or against Him; and that is obvious really, but the natural tendency to "forbid" those who interpret differently to ourselves is strong.

For he that is not against you is for you- If a person is not against the Lord personally (Mk. 9:39), then he is not against "us", the body of Christ. And so even if that person will not mix with us, from God's wider point of view he is "for us", "on our part". Here on earth, sectors of the Lord's body are against each other. But from the Lord's perspective, those who are not against Him are on His part. But speaking evil of the Lord personally is parallel here with being against *us*. And here we have a worrying implication. Attitudes to those in Christ are attitudes to Him. To be "against" any of them is to be against Him.

And so the Lord's attitude to John's disciples is very telling. He saw those who "follow not us" as being "on our part", not losing their reward, as being the little ones who believed in Him; and He saw wisdom as being justified by *all* her children, be they His personal disciples or those of John (Mk. 9:38-41; Lk. 7:35). John's men had a wrong attitude to fellowship- they should have 'followed with' the disciples of Jesus; and it would seem their doctrinal understanding of the Holy Spirit was lacking, although not wrong (Acts 19:1-5). Indeed, they are called there "disciples", a term synonymous with all believers in Luke's writing. And the Lord too spoke in such an inclusive way towards them. No wonder His disciples had and have such difficulty grasping His inclusiveness and breadth of desire to fellowship and save.

9:51 *Now it came to pass, when the time had come for him to be received up, that he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem*- The record alludes to the way Hazael set

his face to go up against Jerusalem in judgment (2 Kings 12:17). The Lord's death was effectively Israel's judgment. He set His face to go to Jerusalem, and the final sacrifice which would be there. He hardened His face like a rock (Is. 50:7); and yet the wicked similarly harden their faces like a rock to go in the way of the flesh (Jer. 5:3). We are hardened in our path, one way or the other. Jeremiah had his face hardened in response to his own hardening of face (Jer. 1:17; 5:3), and the wicked in Israel likewise were hardened (Jer. 3:3; 4:30).

9:52 *And sent messengers before his face; and they went and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him*- The idea of messages sent before the face to prepare the way is absolutely the language uses about John's preparation for the Lord. The context here (see on :49,50) is of the Lord seeking to accept the disciples of John. So in order to promote unity between His disciples and those of John, the Lord speaks of His preachers as if they too are preparing His way before His face.

9:53 *But they did not receive him, because his face was set for the journey to Jerusalem*- To be truly inclusive is hard. The Lord wanted to show His acceptance of the Samaritans, perhaps building on the converts made from the conversion of the woman at the well in Jn. 4. But the mere fact He was going up to Jerusalem at a feast time was enough for them to not receive Him; when He had just been teaching about His radical acceptance of all. For all His grace, they treated the Lord with a guilt by association mentality, quite oblivious that He was going to Jerusalem to die there for them, at the hands of the Jews whom they despised.

9:54 *And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said: Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?*- Time and again, the Lord responded to requests for *Him* to do something by reminding the requesters of *their* responsibilities- e.g. 'Bring fire down on these guys! You have the Spirit, go on, do it, you surely can!' was responded to with a reminder that *you* don't appreciate what Spirit *you* have (Lk. 9:54,55). 'Send the people away... No, *you* feed them' (Lk. 9:12,13). 'Save us from this storm, Jesus, you miracle man!... Where is *your* faith?' (Lk. 8:24,25). Elijah is presented both here and in the Old Testament record as judgmental and lacking grace and love. He is presented as all head and no heart for people. He was used by God and had a heart for God himself, and the Spirit worked through him... but he was far from God in other ways and in need of rebuke.

9:55 *But he turned and rebuked them, saying: You know what kind of Spirit you have*- The incident in 2 Kings 1:10 of calling fire down from Heaven is specifically rebuked by the Lord Jesus as not being of *His* Spirit. And He rebukes His followers for assuming that their natural prejudice against others can be justified by an appeal to Elijah's example. The Lord's comment that He had not come to *destroy* men's *lives* but to *save* them (Lk. 9:56) must surely be connected with what He has just said: Whosoever will *save* his *life* shall *lose* [s.w. *destroy*] it and vice versa (Lk. 9:24,25). The three words *save, life, lose / destroy* are all the same. There is surely a connection of thought here. But what is the Lord saying through it? The disciples like Elijah would have had their prayers heard- the fire of destruction could have come. But the Lord says that they don't know the type of spirit they are of. His Spirit is one of saving and not destruction. Men destroy *themselves* by seeking to save themselves without Him. This is why the Lord could say that He Himself judged / condemned no man- each rejected man will have condemned himself. The same point is actually made within the Elijah story too. In 1 Kings 18:28 the prophets of Baal worshipped *after their manner*- a Hebrew word normally translated 296 times "judgment"; they

judged / condemned themselves, rather than needing Elijah to do so. And the word translated "cut" essentially means to gather. They gathered themselves together to condemnation and poured out their own blood. "Knives and lancets" is a phrase normally translated "swords and spears". They lived out judgment upon themselves rather than Elijah needing to condemn them. Elijah like the disciples thought that he was the judge on God's behalf, and that he was justified in calling down fire, evocative as that was of the way God Himself judges sinners. But Jesus puts it all another way- our focus, if we have His spirit, should be on saving people by getting them to destroy / lose their own fleshly lives through following Him. Jn. 12:25,26 makes the same point- he who loves his life *loses / destroys* it, but he who picks up the cross and follows Jesus will *save* it. Our absolute focus must be on the salvation of others through helping them condemn / destroy / lose themselves for the Lord's sake; and we achieve this by following Jesus in the life of the cross, not by destroying others ourselves. The Lord came to save not destroy; to save the lost / destroyed (Lk. 6:9; 19:10- the same words are used; note how this theme is developed specifically by Luke). But He did this through getting people to destroy their lives. And He begged- and begs- His followers to have His spirit / attitude in all this. And His point was that Elijah didn't have His Spirit. Note that God worked with Elijah- He heard his prayers. Elijah like the disciples had the Spirit, the power that God was willing to let them have; and yet the Spirit of Jesus is more than raw power. And so it could be said of us, that we so often know not what manner of spirit we are of. We may be correctly reflecting the judgment of God, we may have Biblical justification for the hard line we adopt; but this doesn't mean that we fully have the spirit of Christ. Yet as with Elijah, the fact our prayers are heard, that Scripture appears to back us, can make us blind to such major insufficiencies in our spirituality. We have a choice in how we respond to others' weakness; there are different levels of response. If thy brother sin against thee, the Lord said- we can ultimately take others with us and then treat him as a Gentile or tax collector. But He continues- if our brother sin against us, we should forgive to an unlimited extent. This is the higher level of response to your brother's weakness. Elijah and the disciples took the first of those options, as many of us do; but in doing so we so easily forget what manner of spirit we are of; for we are to be of the spirit of Christ, not Elijah. And His attitude / spirit was most definitely to save rather than to destroy, to share table fellowship rather than disassociate... See on Lk. 12:49-54.

9:56 *And they went to another village*- Rather than to the Samaritan village as originally planned. Clearly the Lord's original plan had to be changed because of obstacles to it created by the Samaritans allowing their prejudices to derail potential evangelism; and the Lord is like this so often. He set up great potentials, but allows others to destroy them. In this sense His purpose is open rather than predictive and prescriptive.

9:57 *And as they were going along the road, someone said to him: I will follow you wherever you go*- The question implies that it would only be possible to do this with the Lord's agreement. The Lord was on His way to Jerusalem and death on the cross; He knew that nobody could follow Him literally wherever He went. We note His gentleness; He doesn't say that, rather does He simply warn of the hardship of the way; and that His fate would be that of all who followed Him.

9:58 *And Jesus said to him: The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head*- When the Lord spoke of the Son of man having nowhere to lay His head, He surely had His mind upon how

His dear mother had told Him that when He was born, there was no place to lay Him, and His dear head had to be laid in an animal's feeding trough.

The Lord used language which challenged people. He could be seen as a demanding Lord. The Lord Jesus said many "hard sayings" which dissuaded people from seriously following Him. He kept speaking about a condemned criminal's last walk to his cross, and telling people they had to do this. He told them, amidst wondrous stories of flowers and birds, to rip out their eyes, cut off their limbs- and if they didn't, He didn't think they were serious and would put a stone round their neck and hurl them into the sea (Mk. 9:42-48). He healed a leper, and then spoke sternly to him (Mk. 1:43 AV mg.). All three synoptics record how He summarily ordered His weary disciples to feed a crowd numbering thousands in a desert, when they had no food (Mt. 14:16; Mk. 6:37; Lk. 9:13). He criticizes the man who earnestly wished to follow Him, but first had to attend his father's funeral. "Let the dead bury their dead" (Mt. 8:22) was a shocking, even coarse figure to use- 'let the dead bodies drag one more dead body into their grave'. And then He went on to speak and show His matchless, endless love. He expressed Himself to the Jews in ways which were almost provocative (consider His Sabbath day miracles, and invitation to drink His blood). He intended to shake them. He seems to have used hyperbole in order to make the point concerning the high standard of commitment He expects. Thus He spoke of cutting off the limbs that offend. He told those who were interested in following Him that He had nowhere to lay His head (Lk. 9:58). That may have been true that night, but the ministering women surely saw to it that this was not the case with Him most nights.

9:59 *And he said to another: Follow me. But he said: Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father*- Following Christ, which is to carry His cross, is paralleled by Him with preaching His Kingdom (Lk. 9:59,60). To live out the essence of the cross, in daily self-control, unconditional kindness and forgiveness, patience with those who provoke us… this is the real witness (Lk. 9:23-26). If we don't preach, we aren't following Him. And if we do follow Him, it's axiomatic that we therefore preach Him. "From henceforth you shall catch men. And... they forsook all, and followed him" (Lk. 5:10,11) definitely parallels preaching with following the Lord. Following after Him is the way to be fishers of men (Mk. 1:17), and yet following Jesus is so often understood by Him as a call to carrying the cross. A focus on Him and the life of His cross leads to a catching of men for Him in a quite natural way.

The man was on the way to his father's funeral and yet the Lord expected him to immediately follow Him, and quit going to the funeral as he intended (Lk. 9:59). And He criticized the man for not doing this. Another who wanted to first "bid farewell" to his family was likewise criticized (Lk. 9:61). Even Elisha bid farewell to his family before following Elijah, and Elijah allowed him to do this (1 Kings 19:20)- but the Lord Jesus was more demanding. He described the disciples as a "perverse generation" because they didn't have enough faith to work a miracle (Lk. 9:41). His demands and standards were and are very high; and we should never allow the extent of His grace to blind us to this fact, nor to assume that He is not serious about those demands.

The man who wanted to first attend his father's funeral was told that this wasn't good enough; although Abraham and Joseph did this. The man who wanted to go and say farewell to his family was told the same; although Elisha did this (Lk. 9:60,61).

The Lord is surely saying that the commitment of such Old Testament giants was to be less than what He expected of those for whom He was to give His all. It isn't that He won't *save* a man who (in the parable) puts his father's funeral before the Lord's demands. But He expects the *ultimate* level of commitment from us. Likewise His Father had asked Abraham to offer his dearest: Isaac. This is the Father and Son with whom we have to do. His parables of Mt. 25 make the point that the rejected will be surprised at how hard He turns out to be: they didn't expect Him to judge sins of omission so seriously. Likewise the man who held on to his talent of the Truth seemed surprised when the Lord said that He expected more. The foolish virgins were likewise shocked to be told that actually they didn't know their Lord at all.

9:60 *But he said to him: Leave the dead to bury their own dead, but you go and publish the kingdom of God*- This would have been more shocking to first century ears than it is even to ours. For to bury his father was the most elemental duty of a Jewish son- "in Jewish custom it came before other fundamental religious responsibilities like reciting the Shema". And the urgency about the preacher was to elicit a like urgency in the response of their hearers.

The principle of Nazariteship (explained in Num. 6) encouraged the average Israelite, regardless of his tribe, to in some way aspire to the High Priesthood. He could grow his hair long to imitate the High Priestly mitre, and he could chose to have the same commands concerning defilement by the dead and eating vine-products apply to him, as applied to the High Priest. The Lord applied this to all His followers, when He told the man who wished to bury his father to *not* do so, but engage instead in His work (Lk. 9:59,60). This would have sent the Jewish mind back to Lev. 21:1-11, where the High Priest could not be distracted from his service even by the death of his father.

9:61 *And another also said: I will follow you Lord, but first permit me to bid farewell to them that are at my house*- The urgency of the call to preach is taught by the way that the Lord called men to go preaching at the most inconvenient times for them- such as when they were in the midst of casting a net into the sea to catch fish during their workaday lives, or whilst Matthew was counting coins at his tax table. The Lord even insisted that a man not fulfil his most basic Jewish duty to bury his father- but rather go and preach the Gospel *immediately*. The poignancy of all this becomes the deeper when we realize that in first century Palestine, burial took place on the day of death. The son had just that day lost his father, and was willing to miss the traditional six days of mourning to go preach for the Lord. But no, the Lord wanted him to go *there and then, immediately.* No delay for anything was possible in the light of the knife-edge urgency of sharing Christ with others.

9:62 *But Jesus said to him: No one, having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God*- It is amazing that with the clear command echoing in his ears, "neither stay in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest you be consumed" (Gen. 19:17), Lot could ask leave to live in Zoar, a small city of the plain, and not go to the mountain. He clearly failed to appreciate the reality and seriousness of the Angel's coming- and this will certainly be a temptation to us in that moment when the typology of Lot is fulfilled in us. The only way to guard against this is by consciously living our lives now in awareness of the fact that now we have been called to leave the world and its ways, and therefore our whole life now should have the spirit which we will have when we leave this world when the Angel comes. This is confirmed by an oblique allusion which our Lord makes here to this Angelic

command "Look not behind you", when He says that any who like Lot's wife "look back" are not "fit for the Kingdom of God". The context shows that starting to plough represents the start of our new life in response to the Gospel call- but the allusion to the Angel's words to Lot show that we should live our whole lives in response to that call as if we are on the way to the judgment, having been called away by the Angel. The Lord spoke of following Him as being like a man ploughing by keeping his eye constantly and unswervingly on an end point- and that point is Him as a person. The account of Peter starting to drown exemplifies all this- when he took his gaze off the Lord personally, in order to notice how the wind was so strongly blowing some object [perhaps back on the boat], then his walk to Jesus started to come to an end (Mt. 14:30).

All the Gospels present the crucifixion and resurrection as the climax of their presentation of the Gospel. Luke's record is studded with references to the Lord's progress on that final journey up to Jerusalem; events took place "as they went in the way" (Lk. 9:57-62), as if they were incidental to the main aim of the record, which was to describe the final coming of the Lord to Jerusalem and death (Lk. 13:22).

LUKE CHAPTER 10

10:1 *Now after these things the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them two by two ahead of him into every city and place, where he was about to go*- According to some texts, Luke records that the Lord sent out 72 preachers. The Jews understood that there were 72 nations in the world, based on the LXX of Gen. 10. Surely Luke's point is that they went only to the Jews, thus highlighting the gap between the disciples' understanding at the time, and the Lord's further reaching intention of a mission to the Gentiles.

The Lord sent out the 70 "before his face into every city to where he himself would come". They were heralds of His presence; and He goes on in this context to tell them that they were "*as* lambs among wolves"- i.e. they were like Him, *the* lamb- and that therefore "he that rejecteth you rejecteth me" (Lk. 10:1,3,16 RV). Yet significantly, having told the 70 to proclaim His face to the cities where He would come, we find the comment: "Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few [i.e. only 70]: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest. Go your ways..." (:2). Could this not mean that He would have travelled more extensively around Israel in His ministry than He did, but He was limited in the places He witnessed in by whether there were enough heralds to go there in advance and prepare the way? The dearth of workers meant that places He otherwise would have visited, He didn't- for it seems that He had a policy of only Himself working in areas where His men had broken the ground. And is there not some worrying relevance of all this for our work in *this* day, in *this* hard land...?

10:2 *And he said to them: The harvest indeed is plenteous, but the labourers are few. Therefore pray to the Lord of the harvest, that He send out labourers into His harvest-*

The Lord had to comment that the harvest was great, but the labourers [i.e. the disciples] were few or weak [Gk.]. And yet He delegated so much to them- authority, the power of miracles, the Gospel itself (Lk. 9:1-6), despite their weakness, and despite the fact much harvest was spoilt or not harvested by their weakness. They were His representatives to the world (:16)- and yet they still didn't know how to pray (Lk. 11:1). We marvel at the way the Lord used them, and yet we end up realizing with a similar amazement that the same Lord has entrusted His Gospel to us, with all our weakness and dysfunction.

The Hebrew writer asked his brethren to pray for him "that I may be restored to you the sooner" (Heb. 13:19). The amount of prayer seems significant. The Lord Himself seems to have asked the disciples to add their prayers to His in asking the Father to send forth more labourers into the over-ripe, unharvested fields (Lk. 10:2), which, by implication, He alone couldn't satisfactorily gather. Volume of prayer is significant, although this is not to say that 'just' one prayer of faith is ineffective.

10:3 *Go your way. See, I send you forth as lambs in the midst of wolves*- As He was the lamb of God sent forth for the salvation of men, so those in Him are sent forth with that same Gospel, as lambs. This was the language of the Jewish teachers about the role of Israel in the world; but the Lord is implying that His preachers are the new Israel, and the Jewish world is as the unbelieving Gentile world. Judah is spoken of as "One sheep attempting to survive among seventy wolves" (*Esther Rabbah* 10:11).

10:4 *Carry no purse, no wallet, no shoes; and greet no one on the way*- As we read the preaching of Jesus, one cannot but be impressed by the gravity of His message. He never spoke of His message, of His person and His Kingdom, in a take-it-or-leave-it way, as thought it didn't matter how His hearers responded. And we ought to preach as He preached. He realized that how His hearers responded would determine the structure of their whole lives and what their eternal destiny would be. He urged His preachers to exchange no greetings on the road as they pressed on to take His Gospel to others. This would have been seen as most unusual and even offensive in first century Palestine. The people would have had their attention arrested by this- these preachers of the man from Nazareth had an urgency about them, a sense of utmost priority in the work they were about. They were to be known as men in an urgent hurry. They were to go on their preaching mission without pausing to greet others, such was their haste (cp. 2 Kings 4:29). The Greek word translated 'greet' also carries the idea of joining together with others. People rarely travelled alone unless they were in great haste, but rather moved in caravans. But for the Lord's messengers, there was to be no loss of time. Every minute was to be precious. In a world full of time wasting distractions, information we don't need to know... this is all so necessary. No wonder that when those men finally came to themselves, realized their calling, and hurled themselves in joy at this world after the

Lord’s ascension... they preached repentance, immediate conversion and quick baptism, right up front.

To not carry spare shoes is an allusion to God's miraculous provision for Israel in the wilderness. The preaching of the Gospel is a fundamental part of our wilderness journey. We are on a mission, a journey; and part of that mission is sharing the message with others.

10:5 *And into whatever house you shall enter, first say: Peace to this house*- The Lord raised everything to an altogether higher level. It was, for example, customary for Semitic peoples to greet each other [as it is today] with the words 'shalom!' or 'salaam!' ['peace']. But there was little real meaning in those words. The Lord said that His peace, His 'shalom', He gives to us, not as the [Jewish] world gave it. Likewise He told His disciples to say "Peace be to this house" when they entered a home. Yet this was the standard greeting. What He surely meant was that they were to say it with meaning; and wish the household peace with God through His Son.

10:6 *And if a son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it, but if not, it shall return to you*- "Peace" meant peace with God; it had been John the Baptist's mission to guide the feet of Israel into the way of peace (Lk. 1:79). Very many had responded to John's message, but they failed to fully accept Jesus as Christ when it actually came to it. The mission of the apostles was likely to those who had responded to John; that would have been the logical program in any case, to go visit and develop interest amongst those who were already known to have responded to John the Baptist.

10:7 *And in that same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give. For the labourer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house*- See on Lk. 9:4. Preaching is all about relationships. The Lord commanded to not go from house to house but rather build up a base in one home. I take this to mean that He saw the importance of relationship building in preaching, rather than a surface level contact with many people of the type achieved in more public addresses. He envisioned these houses as becoming the focus of house churches, which were to be the building blocks of the wider body of Christ.

Preaching is essentially about building relationships, not platform evangelism. The Lord taught that His preachers were not to go "from house to house" but rather to remain within an acceptive household and make that their base. In modern terms, I think we could interpret this as meaning: 'Focus on building relationships; don't build up a shallow relationship with a lot of people, but rather try to get deep with one household'.

The reference to eating and drinking what was offered, as noted on :8, would seem more likely to mean 'Accept their offer of table fellowship on whatever basis they offer it'.

The saying that "the labourer is worthy of his hire" is quoted as "Scripture" in 1 Tim. 5:18, on the same level of acceptance as the Old Testament. This indicates that the gospel records were in circulation in written form from an early stage after the events, and were accepted by the church as Divinely inspired. Higher criticism is simply wrong to claim that the gospels were written long after the events by men with dim memories.

As in all ages, it was common in the first century for religious teachers to expect payment. But here the Lord redefines that 'payment' as being no more than subsistence level.

10:8 *And into whatever city you enter, if they welcome you, eat such things as are set before you*- See on 1 Cor. 9:22; 10:27. I don't think the Lord simply means 'Don't be fussy about your food, be grateful for what's on your plate'. To eat together had religious dimensions. You ate together as a sign of fellowship. So I take the Lord to be meaning that they should accept whatever fellowship was offered to them, and work from within that setting to convince men of the truth of Christ.

10:9 *Heal the sick that are therein, and say to them: The kingdom of God comes near to you*- This again is the language of John's ministry; I suggested on :6 that the households being visited were those who had originally responded positively to John's message. The healing of the sick was to serve as an acted parable and exemplification of the gospel of the Kingdom.

10:10 *But into whatever city you shall enter and they do not welcome you, go out into the streets of it and say*- The language is very similar to that in 14:21, where Israelite rejection of the Gospel was to lead the preachers to go out into the streets of such cities- and drag in absolutely anyone they could find living on those streets.

10:11 *Even the dust from your city, that clings to our feet, we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God comes near*- Whether or not Israel accepted the Gospel, the Kingdom of God as it was in Messiah Jesus would still come. If the coming of the King and His Kingdom was not dependent upon Israel's acceptance of it, the implication had to be that the Gentiles would accept it, and therefore it would come.

The disciples were to shake off the dust of their feet against unbelieving Israel (Mt. 10:14; Mk. 6:11; Acts 8:51), in allusion to the Rabbinic teaching that the dust of Gentile lands caused defilement. Israel who rejected the Gospel were thus to be treated as Gentiles. Time and again the prophets describe the judgments to fall upon Israel in the same terms as they speak of the condemnations of the surrounding nations (e.g. Jer. 50:3,13). The message was clear: rejected Israel would be treated as Gentiles. Thus Joel

describes the locust invasion of Israel in the language of locusts covering the face of Egypt (Joel 2:2,20 = Ex. 10:14,15,19). Israel's hardness of heart is explicitly likened to that of Pharaoh (1 Sam. 6:6); as the Egyptians were drowned, so would Israel be (Am. 9:5-8). As Pharaoh's heart was plagued (Ex. 9:14), so was Israel's (1 Kings 8:38); as Egypt was a reed, so were Israel (1 Kings 14:15). As Pharaoh-hophra was given into the hand of his enemies, so would Israel be (Jer. 44:30). Even if we are separated from this world externally, we can still act in a worldly way, and share the world's condemnation by being finally "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32).

"Salvation near to come" in Is. 56:1 is the same idea as discussed on Is. 46:13; 51:5: "I bring near My righteousness, it shall not be far off, and My salvation shall not wait; and I will place salvation in Zion... My righteousness is near, My salvation is gone forth". The idea was that the restoration of God's Kingdom, "salvation", had come near to the Jews in exile- and all they had to do was accept it, leave Babylon and go to Zion in faith and live it. But they refused, and most didn't even leave Babylon at that time. But God's word [of this restored Kingdom] didn't return to Him without having achieved its end- because this amazing good news was and is offered to the whole world, of whatever ethnicity, Jew or Gentile. And so the language is taken up in the New Testament- the Kingdom of God 'came near' again in the first century (Mt. 3:2; 10:7 "the kingdom is at hand"; Lk. 10:9,11; 21:31; James 5:8). The Kingdom coming near doesn't therefore have to mean that it was inevitably about to come. "Near", in the context of the Isaiah passages, meant that the possibility of it coming was indeed "near" at that time. But if it wasn't accepted, then the possibility would recede and be reapplied to others. It came near to the exiles in Babylon, it came near to first century Israel- but both times they rejected it. And so it has come near to us, especially in these last days.

10:12 *I say to you, it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city*- Jer. 20:16 has a graphic description of the people of Sodom screaming out in anguish, both mental and physical, as the judgments of God fell upon them: "The cry in the morning (when the judgments began, Gen. 19:23,24), and the shouting at noontide". This is in reality a picture of the rejected in the last days. And yet those who heard the Christian Gospel and rejected it will be resurrected to a worse judgment than Sodom. The degrees of judgment ("more tolerable...") reflect degrees of responsibility to God according to varying levels of knowledge. The Sodomites had seen Lot's way of life and presumably been told by him that their behaviour was wrong. Their refusal to repent means that "in that day" of the Lord's coming they will be resurrected and punished; but those who hear the Christian gospel and reject it shall have a far greater punishment than Sodom had or will have.

10:13 *Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works had been*

done in Tyre and Sidon, which were done in you, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes- See on Lk. 19:42. The pain that arises from knowing what might have been is really the essence of grief and tragedy; and the Father and Son who know all possible futures must therefore feel so pained. The connection between grief and knowing what might have been is so poignantly brought out by the grief of Martha and Mary over their brother's death- they knew that if Jesus had have been there, Lazarus wouldn't have died (Jn. 11:21,32). Jesus as God's Son had something of this ability to see what might have been- hence He could state with absolute confidence that if Gentile Tyre and Sidon had witnessed His miracles, they would've repented in sackcloth and ashes. He lamented with pain over the fact that things would have been so much better for Jerusalem if she had only known / apprehended the things which would bring her ultimate peace (Lk. 19:42). The Lord Jesus was deeply pained at what might have been, if the things of God's Kingdom had not remained willfully hidden from Israel's perception. His pain was because of realizing what might have been. In this He was directly reflecting the mind of His Father, who had previously lamented over Jerusalem: "O that you had hearkened to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river" (Is. 48:18).

10:14 *But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the judgment, than for you*- The Lord taught His preachers that if people rejected their message, *in that day* when they did this, “it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city”. But He repeats Himself later on: “It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon *in the judgment* than for you” (Lk. 10:12,14 RV). “In that day” clearly refers to the day on which the preacher’s message was rejected. But that day was effectively their judgment day.

10:15 *And you, Capernaum, shall you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades*- Some will be exalted and others brought down at the day of judgment ("come up higher... go down lower", 14:10). Capernaum was expecting commendation an exaltation at judgment day; but that was to be the very reason why she would be cast down to destruction. And in essence, that judgment process is ongoing whenever people hear the Gospel (:18).

As He sent the 70 away on their preaching mission, the Lord commented that Capernaum was exalted to heaven, and yet at the judgment would be thrust down to hell; and yet when they returned, He said that He had seen Satan falling from heaven to earth (Lk. 10:15,18), in anticipation of how it will at judgment day (Rev. 12). The connection is not co-incidental. He was countering the disciples' joy at the superficial response by saying that He has seen it another way; He had seen the Satan of the Jewish system already condemned, hurled from heaven to earth, by their rejection of the Gospel preached.

10:16 *He that hears you hears me; and he that rejects you rejects me, and he that rejects me rejects Him that sent me*- Here we see the Lord Jesus personally equated with His word in the Gospel, preached by His followers. Attitudes to that word are attitudes to Him. The rejection of some at the last day will be because they themselves rejected the Lord. They made the answer in their attitude to His word; in that sense those who "reject" (s.w.) the Lord are judged by His word at the last day (Jn. 12:48). Attention to His word is therefore critical. Whoever rejects us as we preach therefore rejects God (1 Thess. 4:8 s.w.).

10:17 *And the seventy returned with joy, saying: Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!*- As noted on :9, the miracles were to back up the preaching of the word of the Kingdom; but the disciples failed to properly perceive this. They considered that the miracles they had done were of themselves the most impressive thing; whereas the Lord always gave priority to the preaching of the word over miracles, and Himself used an economy of miracle to get His message over. He therefore urges them to rejoice more in the fact that they personally will be saved in the Kingdom (:20).

10:18 *And he said to them: I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven*- No sinful being can be tolerated in God's presence in Heaven (Mt. 6:10; Ps. 5: 4,5; Hab. 1:13). The Lord is using parabolic language - "*as* lightning fall from heaven" (AV)- so this "Satan" or adversary fell. Lightning comes from heaven in the sense of the sky, not as in the dwelling place of God. It doesn't literally fall from heaven to earth. Any attempt to link this with the prince of this world being cast out is difficult, because that happened at Christ's death (note "now" in Jn. 12:31), whereas this falling of Satan occurred during His ministry. According to popular thought, "Satan" is supposed to have fallen from heaven in Eden, so that he was on the earth at Job's time, yet Jesus is described as seeing this occurring at His time. Weymouth adds a marginal note on Lk. 10:18 in his translation of the Bible: "The thought is not that of Milton's rebel angel banished for ever from the abide of bliss". If an evil being and his host of followers fell down on to earth literally, why did only Jesus see it and not the disciples? Why is there no other record of this strange event? Falling from heaven is figurative of losing authority, e.g. it is used about the demise of the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14. See also Lamentations 2:1 and Jeremiah 51:53.

The apostles had just cured many people and were blinded by their great physical power over disease (:20). The real cause of illness and disease is our sin prone nature. That sin is the ultimate reason for illness is stressed in Mt. 9:12 and 12:11, where a sheep gone astray, a clear symbol of a sinner (Mt. 18:13), is equated with a sick man. The principle is summed up in Mt. 9:5 "Which is easier, to say, Your sins be forgiven you; or to say, Arise and walk?". Thus Jesus said, "I beheld Satan fall", i.e. "In My view the great thing was that the power of sin was being overcome". There must be a connection with the fall of Capernaum in :15. Is Jesus implying that "Satan", the ways of the flesh,

which were so well exemplified in Capernaum, were being overcome? Notice that Capernaum was “exalted” in Jewish eyes. “Satan” often referring to the Jewish system, maybe Jesus is equating Capernaum with “Satan” and commenting how the sin which was at the basis of this system was being toppled by the preaching of the Gospel.

10:19 *See, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall in any way hurt you*- See on Mk. 16:18; Jn. 8:44. This is a promise repeated in the context of preaching the Gospel in Mk. 16:18. The gift of the Spirit continues to assist Christian preachers, but only in the first century was it manifested in such miraculous forms; and even then, only in specific times and places during the course of missionary work. Paul taking up a viper in his hand and being unharmed on Malta would be an example.

10:20 *Nevertheless, rejoice not that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven*- This implies that their elation at being able to pull off miracles was wrong, or at best immature; rather should they have rejoiced that their names were written in Heaven; that the good news of future salvation in the Kingdom they preached was so personally true.

10:21 *In that same hour he rejoiced in spirit, and said*- This was the kind of rejoicing in spirit (cp. rejoicing about subject spirits in :20) which they should have had- a glorying in the Father's way of working with the simple and marginalized.

I thank You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You hid these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to babes. Yes, Father. For so it was pleasing in Your sight- See on Lk. 1:47; 9:45. This is the standard Jewish thanksgiving before food: "I thank You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth...". We expect to hear thanks for food, but instead find praise for how the Father works with people by revealing truths to babes rather than the worldly wise. As was the case with the Samaritan woman, the Lord found the Father's working with other people His food and drink which sustained Him. And it can be so with us too. This is one reason for meeting together and sharing testimony of the Lord's work in our lives.

The disciples didn't have totally correct understanding; they believed in ghosts and demons, and were too maxed out on miracles (:20). But still the Lord rejoices in what has been revealed to them, the babes; and those same truths had not been revealed to the Jewish leadership who claimed to be wise and understanding. We note that truths are "revealed" by God in a sovereign way. It's not simply that whoever reads the Bible understands. There is a higher hand at work than that; the way of God's grace, revealing truths to the "babes".

10:22 *All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is, save the Son, and he to whomever the Son wills to reveal Him*- Again as noted on :21 there is a distinct revelation of the Father to people through the Son. This can mean simply that in the Son, we see the Father reflected. And yet the language goes somewhat further than that, in saying that the Son chooses some to whom to reveal the Father. This is by the work of the Spirit of Christ, which refers both to the spirit of the character and personality of the Lord Jesus and also to how that spirit transforms human hearts, under His direction. "Knows" is in a continuous sense, implying that the Father and Son grow in knowing each other; the knowledge in view is the Hebraic sense of knowledge as relationship, rather than increments of factual knowledge. The "all things" delivered to the Son may be the power of salvation for all men.

Nobody, the disciples included, to whom the Father had 'revealed' repentance, fully knew the Son nor the Father. There is a parallel to be observed here between 'knowing the Father' and repenting; for the context in Mt. 11 speaks of how the majority had not repented despite the Lord's miracles. The little ones, the babes, the disciples, had repented- but this had been 'revealed' to them by the Father (Mt. 11:25). Now, the Lord speaks of how the Son 'reveals' the Father. The life of repentance is the life of knowing the Father. To know God is to know our sinfulness and repent. And this is the "rest" from sin which the Lord speaks of in Mt. 11:28.

Whether or not Joseph died or left Mary by the time Jesus hit adolescence, the fact was that Joseph wasn't His real father. He was effectively fatherless in the earthly sense. As such, this would have set Him up in certain psychological matrices which had their effect on His personality. He could speak of His Heavenly Father in the shockingly unprecedented form of 'abba', daddy. He grew so close to His Heavenly Father because of the lack of an earthly one, and the inevitable stresses which there would have been between Him and Joseph. A strong, fatherly-type figure is a recurrent feature of the Lord's parables; clearly He was very focused upon His Heavenly Father. He could say with passionate truth: "No one knows a son except a father, and no one knows a father except a son" (Mt. 11:27; Lk. 10:22 Gk.).

The idea is not that the Lord Jesus had a list of humanity and chose a few from that list. He has earlier spoken of the freedom of choice to 'receive' (Mt. 11:14) God's message, and He was urging all men to do so. Although all men are potentially delivered to Him, the Father is revealing Himself to only some of them. The Father is revealed in the Son, as John's Gospel makes clear. It's not that some people are chosen by the Son to have this revelation; rather is it a statement of fact, or method- the knowledge of the Father is through the Son revealing Him. And this is why He goes straight on in Mt. 11:28 to urge people to come to Him. The ideas of coming to Him and 'whomsoever', anyone, are very

much the language of John's Gospel and the Revelation, which concludes with an appeal to 'whosoever will' to 'come' to Christ and salvation.

The revealing is by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10; Eph. 3:5). It was not flesh and blood that revealed the Lord to Peter (Mt. 16:17). As noted on 1 Pet. 1:21, relationship with God is predicated upon relationship with the Son; He is the only way to the Father. Academic Bible study, consideration of the apparent evidence of apologetics, will not reveal God as Father to men. It is the Son who reveals Him. If we take the jump of faith in accepting Him, only then will He reveal the Father to us.

10:23 *And turning to the disciples, he said privately: Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see*- See on Lk. 7:9. As noted on :22, to have the Son reveal the Father to us is the work of the Spirit, and is of grace. The idea of predestined calling is discussed by Paul in Romans in the context of explaining how the Spirit works. The fact we have been called to know Him is grace indeed.

10:24 *For I say to you, that many prophets and kings desired to see the things which you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear them*- The blessedness of :23 also relates to where we stand in human history. There was a desire amongst the Old Testament heroes to know more about the Lord Jesus; but then was not the time for the full manifestation now given. We who have the completed New Testament, and easy access to it, are perhaps even more blessed. This insight into 'blessedness' is helpful when in moments of depression we may consider that we lack blessing, and all we have are vague, dimly revealed ideas that somehow 'God loves me'. We can indeed count our blessings and name them one by one. And where we stand in history is one of them, according to the Lord's reasoning here. It may well be that we are blessed to be the generation which see the Lord's return- the only generation to never taste of death.

10:25 *And a certain lawyer stood up, and to test him, asked: Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*- When the lawyer asked Jesus what he must "do to inherit eternal life", the Lord could have lectured him on salvation being by grace rather than works. But He doesn't; instead He tells the parable of the good Samaritan, running with the lawyer's misunderstanding for a while [as His gracious manner was]. The essential basis of inheriting eternal life is of course faith, but the Lord's answer to the question shows that we can safely conclude: 'Faith must be shown in our care for the salvation of this world if it is real faith. We are the injured man and cannot do anything to inherit eternal life'.

10:26 *And he said to him: What is written in the law? How do you read it?*- The Lord was not searching for a right or wrong answer, ready to respond to the effect that 'Ah well, you just misunderstood a bit, now let Me correct you'. His questions are nearly always

rhetorical. Whatever the answer, the Lord would work with it. We note the Lord doesn't ask 'what' he read in the law, but "how"- how did he interpret it?

10:27 *And he answered saying: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself*- He quotes Dt. 6:5 along with Lev. 19:18. Dt. 6:5 along with Dt. 11:13 was repeated by the Jews morning and evening, and was the text written in the phylacteries. But this zealous lawyer added Lev. 19:18 about loving neighbours. The Greek can mean "Love your neighbour as if he was yourself"; this removes the vexed question of self love. The answer is in the parable of the Samaritan and the challenge to go and do likewise. The parable explains this "as if he was yourself". The Lord Jesus is the good Samaritan. He looks at us in our suffering for sin as if He was us and we are Him. He 'comes' to us in total identity with us as our representative; and we respond by baptism and life lived in Him, likewise identified with Him. So it's not a question [as the lawyer supposed] of who is worthy of our mercy. Rather, the Lord reasons, is it a question of our realizing our desperation, our salvation by utter grace, and acting to others as we would act toward ourselves- in grace and immediate understanding, whoever they are. There are therefore no categories of worthiness, no distinctions about who is worthy. Rather we act to others as we would toward ourselves. The lawyer's intention was to lead the Lord to the question of "Who is my neighbour?", knowing that the standard interpretation of Lev. 19:18 was that your neighbour was "any of your people", and not Gentiles nor Samaritans: “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself”.

10:28 *And he said to him: You have answered correctly*- We have eternal life insofar as the life that Jesus lived and lives, He will eternally live. If we live that life, we are living the essence of the life which we will eternally live. The lawyer asked the Lord what good thing he must do “to inherit eternal life”. The Lord replied that he must properly love his God and his neighbour: “this do, and you shall live”. By living a life based on this, he would be living the life which he would eternally live (Lk. 10:25,28). And thus the Lord responds to the query about inheriting eternal life by changing the emphasis of the question- He replies by speaking of the life we should be living now.

That God is one is not just a numerical description. If there is only one God, He therefore demands our *all*. Because He is the One God, He demands all our worship; and because He is One, He therefore treats all His people the same, regardless, e.g., of their nationality (Rom. 3:30). All true worshippers of the one God, whether Jew or Gentile, are united in that the one God offers salvation to them on the same basis. The fact there is only one Lord Jesus implies the same for Him (Rom. 10:12). Paul saw these implications in the doctrine of the unity of God. But that doctrine needs reflecting on before we come to grasp these conclusions. Christ taught that the command that God was one and therefore we must love God *included* the second command: to love our neighbour as

ourselves. The first and second commands were in fact one command; they were inseparably part of the first commandment (Mk. 12:29-31). This is why the 'two' commandments, to love God and neighbour, are spoken of in the singular in Lk. 10:27,28: "*this* do...". If God is one, then our brother bears the one Name of God, and so to love God is to love our brother (cp. 1 Jn. 4:21). And because there is only one God, this demands *all* our spiritual energy. There is only one, the one God, who seeks glory for men and judges them (Jn. 8:50)- therefore the unity of God should mean we do not seek glory of men, neither do we judge our brother.

This do and you shall live- The context is that the lawyer asked the Lord Jesus what he should do "to inherit eternal life" (Lk.10:25), and in a sense we ask the same question. But we mustn't be quite like him, in thinking that if we physically *do* certain things, then we will at some future point be given eternal life as a kind of payment; and nor should we think that the eternity of the Kingdom life is the most important aspect of our salvation. In Lk. 18:18 "a certain ruler asked him" the very same question: What he should do to inherit eternal life. The Lord's response was that if he kept the commandments in the right spirit, he would "have treasure in heaven". When the man found this impossible, the Lord commented how hard it was for the rich to "enter into the kingdom of God" (Lk. 18:24). So there is a parallel here between inheriting eternal life, having treasure in heaven, and entering the Kingdom. We are told that now is the time, in this life, for us to lay up treasure in Heaven (Mt. 6:20). So here and now it is possible to have treasure in Heaven, to have eternal life in prospect. In a sense we now have eternal life (1 Jn. 5:11,13), in a sense we are now in the process of entering into the Kingdom. We have been translated, here and now, into the Kingdom (Col. 1:13). The very same Greek construction used in Col. 1:13 occurs in Acts 14:22, where Paul says that through much tribulation we enter into the Kingdom; in other words, entry into the Kingdom is an ongoing process, and we experience this on account of the effect of our trials. Entering the Kingdom is used to describe our response to the Gospel in Lk. 16:16: "The kingdom of God is preached, and every man presses into it". Unless we receive the Gospel of the kingdom as a child, we will not enter it; i.e. respond fully to that Gospel (Lk. 18:17).

In prospect we have been saved, we are now in Christ, and therefore the great salvation which he was given is therefore counted to all those who are in him. We shy away from the positive promises that we really can start to enter the Kingdom now, that we do now have eternal life in prospect. But this shying away is surely an indication of our lack of faith; our desperate unwillingness to believe so fully and deeply that our salvation really is so wonderfully assured. That eternal life dwells in us insofar as the eternal spirit of Christ is in us. And so as we face up to the sureness of these promises, we earnestly want to know what we must *do* to inherit this eternal life, to have this great treasure of assured salvation laid up for us now in Heaven. Of course we are saved by our faith, not our works (Tit. 3:5-7); yet our faith, if it is real, will inevitably be shown in practical ways.

10:29 *But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus: And who is my neighbour?*- The Lord's open attitude towards Gentiles had provoked anger amongst the lawyers; hence this scribe had incorporated Lev. 19:18 into his standard quotation as to Jewish duty. He suspected the Lord considered the Gentile world as His neighbours. The man's plan for self justification was going to be demolished by the Lord turning it all around to show that justification is by grace, not works- the very ideas which Paul states more specifically and theologically in Romans. The Lord never answers a question directly in the terms of the question. He always turns it around to higher principle. His parabolic answer, on reflection, shows that we are the desperately injured man. Who exactly is my neighbour... becomes an irrelevant question. The issue is that we are the injured man dependent upon the Lord's grace. And to accept that, we must for all time ditch our presuppositions, our racism, our intuitive dislike of "Samaritans". Whoever they may be to us in our worldviews. The Lord indeed says "Go and do likewise". We can only be the Samaritan if we have first known what it is to be the desperate man. The lawyer sought to justify himself. Buy we know from Paul that no man can do this. Justification is by grace alone. "No man shall be justified by works", he writes. But the lawyer asked what works he should "do" in order to inherit, by right, eternal life; and thus justify himself by such works.

The lawyer's question was a trick. It was based on the contemporary argument over the meaning of the command to love your neighbour as yourself. They called it the *lere'aka kamoka* and liked to translate it as "your neighbour who is like yourself", as one similar to one's Israelite self. The Lord is going to turn the question around, to show that it is He and not the lawyer or any Israelite who is the Samaritan, and who shows grace to His neighbour who was like Himself. This is typical of how the Lord dealt with questions- about divorce, giving tribute to Caesar, defining the most important of the 10 commandments etc. The lawyer along with all men lies naked and half dead on the road. The Lord Jesus was the "neighbour who is like yourself". In this again we have a window onto the Lord's own understanding of His humanity. He used it to save others, and "Go and do likewise" is an invitation to do the same. The picture of the wounded man is exactly that of the Lord on the cross- naked, bleeding, dead. He was a neighbour through His being "like yourself", like that man. And that fits in with the translation "Love your neighbour as if he were yourself". The Lord saw us in Himself, as the Samaritan saw himself in the injured man.

If the Lord had said 'Only Jews are neighbours' then He would have been coming down on the side of the hard line religious Jews. If He replied to the intent that Gentiles and even Samaritans are your neighbours, they would have criticized Him for failing to see the significance of the boundaries around God's people. As in answering other questions, the Lord doesn't come down on one side or the other, but turns the question around. If we interpret the parable as meaning 'You must be a neighbour to everyone including Gentiles', then we are forcing the Lord into coming down on one side- the

liberal side. But instead He is saying: 'You aren't in a position to choose. You are desperately wounded. You need to accept the grace of a Samaritan saviour, whom you would despise in secular life; spiritually, you're not in a position to worry about who is your neighbour. You need to accept My grace'. See on :30. Likewise the parable engages with the question "What shall I do to *inherit* eternal life", as if eternity was some kind of preordained right and preexisting inheritance. Eternal life is not a natural inheritance, somehow actualized by good deeds. You are a desperately, mortally injured man and you're not going to inherit anything nor be a neighbour to anyone, Jew or Gentile. You desperately need salvation.

10:30 *Jesus answered and said: A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he encountered robbers who both stripped him and beat him, and departed leaving him half dead-*

The road was 17 miles [27 km.] long and descended 3300 feet [1 km.], to Jericho which is 770 feet [235 meters] below sea level. Famed for bandits, it was known as ‘the red or bloody way’. All a picture of man's descent from the city and things of God.

The wounded man is all of us- "a certain man" (Lk. 10:30) is a phrase more usually translated 'any man', 'whomsoever' etc. The idea of journeying downwards from Jerusalem to Jericho has some definite OT connections, not least with wicked King Zedekiah, who ignored repeated prophetic please to repent and fled from Jerusalem to Jericho, only to be overtaken on the way by the Babylonians and sent to Babylon to condemnation (2 Kings 25:4). ‘You’re every one a Zedekiah’, is the implication- but we’ve been saved from out of that condemnation by the Samaritan’s grace. Another allusion is to the incident in 2 Chron. 28:15, where the captured and injured Jews are marched from Jerusalem to Jericho by the Samaritans, the men of the 10 tribes whose capital was then Samaria, and yet by grace they are given clothes, food and water after the prophet Oded ordered the Samaritans to show grace: "[they] took the captives, and with the booty they clothed all that were naked among them; they clothed them, gave them sandals, provided them with food and drink, and anointed them; and carrying all the feeble among them on donkeys, they brought them to their brothers at Jericho. Then they returned to Samaria". In all these allusions, Jesus is radically reversing all the roles. The true people of God are the repentant enemies of the people of God, the “thieves” who spoil the people of God are the Jewish elders (Hos. 6:1,29), the Divine Saviour is not a Jew but a Samaritan etc.

One of the many Old Testament quarries for this good Samaritan parable is found in 2 Chron. 28:15 (Another will be found in Hos. 6:1,2,9, which seems to equate the Jewish priesthood with the thieves which attacked the man. This was also Christ's estimation of them (Mt. 21:13; Jn. 10:1). This allusion would have been especially relevant in the first century context. Another connection will be found in 2 Kings 25:4). Here we read how Israel attacked Judah whilst Judah were apostate, and took them captives. But then

they realized their own shortcomings, and the fact that Judah really were their brethren; then they "clothed all that were naked among (he captives taken from Judah), and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought them to Jericho…to their brethren". Now there is allusion after allusion to this scene in the Samaritan parable. Surely our Lord had his eye on this incident as he devised that parable. The point he was making as surely this: 'In trying to follow my example of total love for your brethren, your spiritual neighbours, remember your own shortcomings, and what the Lord has done for you by His grace; and then go and reflect this to your brethren'.

The helplessness of the injured man is a fine picture of our weakness. We can only accept salvation; there is nothing we can *do* to earn it. Hence the Lord warned those who *seek* to *save* their own lives (Lk. 17:33)- He uses the same two words to explain how *He* is the one who seeks and saves (Lk. 19:10). Acceptance of salvation is perhaps what faith is all about in its barest essence.

As the man was stripped and wounded, so identical language is used about the sufferings of the Lord on the cross (Mt. 27:28,29; Lk. 20:12; Zech. 13:6). As his would-be neighbours passed him by on the other side, so the neighbours of the Lord stood aloof from his stricken body on the cross (Ps. 38:11 AVmg.). Through this he can fully enter into our broken hearts, into our intense spiritual loneliness without him (if only we would realize it) and therefore he will come alongside us with a heart of true compassion. So because of his sufferings which we now behold, he can so truly, so truly and exactly, empathize with our spiritual state.

The description of the stricken man being "stripped" of his clothing uses the very same word, rarely used in the NT, to describe the 'stripping' of the Lord Jesus at the time of His death (Mt. 27:28,21; Mk. 15:20). Likewise the robbers 'left him' (Lk. 10:30), in the same as the Lord was 'left' alone by the disciples to face the end alone (Mk. 14:50 s.w.). The robbers "wounded him" (Lk. 10:30), a phrase which translates two Greek words, 'to lay upon' and 'stripes'. The cross was 'laid upon' Jesus (Lk. 23:26 s.w.); and we are familiar with the idea of the Lord being 'wounded' and receiving 'stripes' in His final sufferings (Is. 53:5). The connection is surely that in the process of His death, the Lord came to know the feelings of the stripped and stricken people whom He came to save. No wonder He can powerfully "have compassion" upon us. And it's been pointed out elsewhere that the 'two pennies' paid by the Samaritan are the equivalent of the half shekel atonement money under the Mosaic Law, whereby a man could be redeemed.

It's easy to think that the focus of the parable is upon being like the good Samaritan; but the focus equally is upon seeing ourselves in the wounded man. The Lord's answers to questions nearly always seem to provide a simple answer to them, and yet more subtly turn them upon their head, and redefine the terms. The parable was told in response to the question "What shall I *do* to inherit eternal life?". One answer appears to be:

'Recognize you're the injured man. Accept the Good Samaritan's salvation; for the Law which you so love can't save you'. Indeed if read the other way around, the Lord's answer would appear to be 'If you want eternal life, you must *do* lots of good works, after the pattern of the good Samaritan'. But this would contradict the whole message of salvation by pure grace which was central to the Lord's teaching. It seems to me that the parable is often interpreted that way- and it's actually the very opposite of how the Lord wished us to read it. No matter how much good we *do* to people along the way, this cannot give us the life eternal.

The context of the parable is the question about 'Who is my neighbour?'. Was it only a Jew, or all men? In this we see the significance of the fact the man had been stripped naked. Those who interpreted "my neighbour" as Jews only had to define who was a Jew. One school of rabbinic thought was that a Jew was identified by clothing. Particularly having the tassels (*tzitzit*) on the four corners of their garments, one of the tassels being blue, in obedience to Num. 15:37-39; Dt. 22:12. But the Lord presents the man as naked. There were no identification marks on him. All the external markers which divide men were no longer. Being half dead, we assume he was unconscious, unable to say who he was, unable to speak in any language whereby he would indicate his ethnicity. And this is how we too have to look at men, colourblind and focused solely on our common humanity. 'Going and doing likewise' is to act like this to their salvation. The three passers by, Priest, Levite and Samaritan, were all faced with the naked body at a point where nobody was watching their response, apart from God. And here we have the essence of Christianity and all spirituality- who we are, when nobody is watching.

10:31 *And by chance a certain priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side-*

"By chance" is repeated of the Levite who "in like manner", i.e. "chance", encountered the injured man (:32). Why this stress? This is notably not said of the Samaritan. At the risk of over interpretation, we could say that the impression may be that the Samaritan set out to help the injured man, perhaps having heard of his plight from the Priest and Levite. That would explain why he travelled with bandages, oil and wine. In which case, we have a sense of the Lord's purposeful setting out for our salvation. The representatives of mere religion, faced with death, looking at a naked, bleeding, dying man, were unable to save. Only Jesus saves from the ultimate issue of death. The Greek *kata sunkurian* translated "by chance" can as well be rendered "fortunately", 'luckily enough', and is used this way in modern Greek. We are set up to expect a salvation from the Priest and Levite, but we are disappointed. Just as legalism and all religion ultimately disappoints. "Going down that road" can refer to the literal steep descent from Jerusalem to Jericho; but in a religious sense, men 'went up' to Jerusalem, such as the priest to do his service, and 'went down' from Jerusalem when they returned home.

The priest had done his service, his religious thing. And he still wasn't thereby empowered to save a man, to give salvation.

Josephus says that when Herod the Great dismissed the 40,000 men who had been employed in building the temple, many of them became robbers on the Jerusalem-Jericho road. Again there is the theme that the temple was finished, just as the Priest and Levite were going home having finished their temple service. It is claimed that there were 12,000 priests and Levites living at Jericho; and so they would have been constantly travelling on that road.

The radical nature of the Lord Jesus is reflected in His teaching style. His parables work around what I have elsewhere called "elements of unreality". They involve a clash of the familiar, the comfortable, the normal, with the strange and unreal and radical. The parables are now so well known that their radical nature has been almost buried under the avalanche of familiarity. The parables begin by getting the hearers sympathetic and onboard with the story line- and then, in a flick of the tail, the whole punch line is turned round against their expectations, with radical demands. The story of a man travelling the Jerusalem-Jericho road alone would've elicited sympathy and identity with the hearers- yes, that road *is* awfully dangerous. And then the priest and Levite pass by and don't help. That was realistic-"priests and Levites were known to have quarters in the Jordan valley near Jericho where they retreated from the beehive of activity surrounding the temple". The common people were anticlerical, and yes, they could just imagine the priest and Levite passing by. "Typical!" would've been their comment. They're all set up to expect the Messianic Jewish working class hero to stride in to the rescue. But... it's a despised Samaritan who stops and gives saving help. They had expected a Jewish Saviour- and Jesus, the teller of the parable, claimed to be just that. But... in the story, He's represented by a Samaritan. Remember that Samaritans and Jews had no dealings, and people were amazed that Jesus would even speak with the Samaritan woman at the well. Even in desperation, a Jew wouldn't have wanted to be helped by a Samaritan. You had to be utterly desperate to accept such help. Moments earlier, the audience had been identifying with the injured Jewish man. But... were they really *that* desperate, did they appreciate their desperation to that extent, to keep "in" the story, and accept that that desperate man was really them? They wanted to be able to identify with the hero. But no, they had to first of all identify with the wounded, dying, desperate Jew. And only then were they bidden "Go and do likewise"- 'be like the Samaritan'. The Lord's initial audience would have been left with knitted eyebrows and deep introspection at the end of it. The whole thing was too challenging for many. They quit the parable, quit identifying with the story... just as we can when it gets too demanding. It's a tragedy that this amazing story, crafted in such a radically demanding way, has been reduced to merely 'Be a good neighbour to the guy next door, so long as it doesn't demand too much of you'- which is what the story has come to mean for the majority of

professed Christians today. That of itself indicates a discomfort with the radical nature of the demands.

It's the same with Nathan's parable to David. It elicited David's sympathy- and then it was turned back on David: "You are the man!". But he didn't quit the parable. He acted on it, as we have to. The parable of the self-righteous older son is just the same. The parable's story line leads us to expect that the wayward son repents and is accepted back by his father. But then right at the end, the whole thing takes a biting twist. We suddenly realize that the prodigal son and the need to forgive your wayward son isn't the point of the story- for that's something which comes naturally to any father and family. The whole point is that the son who played safe, who stayed home and behaved himself... *he* is the one who ends up outside of the family's joy because of his self-righteousness. *He* ends up the villain, the lost son. Again, there'd have been knotted brows and an exit from identity with the story line. And the way generations of Christians have described the story as "the parable of the lost / prodigal son" shows how they [we] too have so often missed the essentially radical point of the story.

10:32 *And in like manner a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side*- See on :31. When we analyze this good Samaritan parable, it becomes clear that we are not simply intended to do good deeds to people we meet, copying the Samaritan. We are also aptly represented by the wounded man; it is the Lord Jesus who is the good Samaritan. The Law of Moses, symbolized by the priest and Levite, came near to man's stricken condition, and had a close look at it. Lk. 10:32 (Young's Literal) brings this out: "Having been about the place, having come and seen...", the Levite passed on by. The Jews regarded Christ as a Samaritan, so they would have immediately understood the Samaritan of the parable to represent Jesus (Jn. 8:48 "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?"). The good Samaritan having compassion on the man and being moved to do something about him has echoes of the Lord's compassion on the multitudes (:33). His promise to come again after two days (he gave two pence, and a penny a day was a fair rate, Mt. 20:2) is a clear connection with the Lord's promise to come again (after 2000 years from his departure?).

We enquire why the Lord chose the priest and Levite in this story. His teaching, especially in Luke, was always aimed at the scribes and Pharisees. Not the priests and Levites. Perhaps He wishes His audience to figure that if the priest or Levite had touched the body, they would have been unclean and unable to serve in the temple (Lev. 21:1-4,11). To help the man, representative as he was of humanity, meant an end to temple service. We are perhaps invited to imagine the priest and Levite weighing up in their minds between helping the man, and serving in the temple. For perhaps they were on their way to the temple to start their duties. And they chose religion over spirituality,

as so many do. Although it is perhaps significant that the priest was going "down" the road (:32), and the road went "down" from Jerusalem to Jericho (:31). In which case, we imagine he switched into auto pilot, always putting a fence around the law; and doing his religious duties was above absolutely everything for him. Helping the man was a deed which would not have been observed by anyone. But the essence of spirituality is who we are when nobody is watching. Likewise the law about not serving when unclean actually only strictly applied to the Priest and not to the Levite. But he too had fences around the laws, in his own mind. They both failed to realize that God wants mercy and not [the performance of] sacrifice (Hos. 6:6). And there was also the economic aspect. If indeed the man were dead, the Priest at least would have been rendered unclean. It has been commented: "If the priest became unclean, he must return to Jerusalem, stand by the Eastern gate with the unclean, and go through the process of purification.. This ritual would not only take time, but it would result in the loss of wages. He would have to buy and offer a heifer, which
would take up most of a week and be of significant cost to him,
his family, and his household". We are invited to imagine these issues playing subconsciously in his mind- all such a contrast to the Samaritan.

In reality, it is unnatural to pass by a wounded man in the way presented in the story. Most human beings would have stopped and helped- if there were no other factors in play. Humanity generally responds to humanity in such a situation. The fact neither of the two men do stop and try to help is in fact an element of unreality in the story. We are left, then, with the question highlighted- *why* did they not respond? What factor was greater than even their basic humanity? The factor was religion, their fear of defilement, fear of possible religious consequence. The commands about defilement related to touching a dead body, and the man was still alive. But it was their instinctive placing of a hedge around a law that led them to assume they must not touch a man who was near death but not yet dead. And the priest and Levite had finished their term of service in Jerusalem and were heading home, so they had no real practical concern about being unable to serve at the sanctuary whilst unclean. The story well portrays how 'religion' and the religious mentality is even stronger than basic humanity and common human decency. It drags man even lower than he already is. They failed to properly interpret Lev. 21:1,2: “No one shall defile himself for a dead person among his relatives, except for his nearest kin: his mother, his father, his son, his daughter, his brother". That wounded man ought to have been treated by them as their nearest relative. For the parable is implicitly critical of the priest and Levite. They failed to see themselves, spiritually, in that man. Organized religion is hereby shown to be useless. And putting the Gospel records together, we note that almost immediately after giving this parable, according to Matthew and Mark, the Lord goes on to prophecy the destruction of the temple, Jerusalem and the Jewish system.

10:33 *But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion-*

The Samaritans rejected the Jerusalem temple, as witness the Lord's conversation with the Samaritan woman in Jn. 4. This Samaritan is travelling either from the temple down to Jericho- an element of unreality, in that no Samaritan would usually make any journey to or from Jerusalem. He is an unusual Samaritan; despised by the Jews but having at least some respect for the Jerusalem temple. An exact fit with the Lord Jesus. Stereotypes are turned on their head. Lk. 9:51-54 has just demonstrated that Samaritans weren't hospitable to Jews. But this Samaritan is different. He has a heart of compassion for the dying Jew.

'Coming to where he was' speaks volumes of the Lord's humanity, being with us where we are. He came near to the man, whilst the others went away from him, passing by on the other side. We think of how "sinners were all drawing near to hear Him" (Lk. 15:1). The moving with compassion is the same word used of the Father having compassion on the prodigal (Lk. 15:20); and the master having compassion upon his indebted servants (Mt. 18:27). The Lord's compassion is so often noted in the Gospels (Mk 1:42; 6:34; 8:2; 9:22; Mt 14:14; 20:34). That compassion is based upon identity; for the Lord likens Himself to the sick, rejected, hungry and unhelped in Mt. 25:35-40. His 'going down' from Jerusalem to Jericho is the equivalent of John's language of the Lord 'coming down' to save man. He has walked the path of man's descent into sin, not as a personal sinner but through identity with us. And this was shown in His death as a sinner, for "cursed is every one who hangs on a tree". In this sense, even sin does not separate us from the love of Christ. And "go and do likewise" challenges us to in our lives do this work of the Lord Jesus, coming down and going close to men stricken in sin.

The Samaritan "was moved with compassion" by the man's (spiritual) state. This is the same phrase as used concerning how Christ "was moved with compassion" by the multitudes. The connection with the good Samaritan parable would invite us to read the Lord's compassion as fundamentally *spiritual*. The reason for the miracles was to confirm the spoken word (Mk. 16:20), to lead men to see the wisdom of the message they were validating (Mk. 6:2). Are there any examples of Christ doing miracles for reasons unconnected with preaching? They often (always?) had symbolic meaning; and were designed to inculcate faith (Jn. 20:31) and repentance (Mt. 11:21). And in any case, His miracles were largely to benefit the Covenant people, or those closely associated with them. The apostles didn't do mass benefit miracles (e.g. feeding thousands of people) to back up their preaching in the Gentile world; even though they had the power to do "greater works" than did the Lord (Jn. 14:12). 'Charitable' giving ought to be *associated* with preaching, surely, if we are to follow the example of Christ's compassion with the multitudes. In practice, the work of providing welfare and conducting fresh preaching is done by the same brethren in the mission field.

The Lord Jesus "knew what was in man", not only by direct revelation from the Father and the Old Testament word, but also from His own observation of our own nature, both in Himself and the surrounding world. The sensitivity of Jesus is reflected in this realization which He reflects. As the Samaritan came near to the wounded man (the ecclesia), realized the extent of his problem (the ravages of sin) and was thereby moved with compassion, so Christ was motivated by His consideration of our position (Lk. 10:33,34); the Lord realized His humanity more and more, and progressively humbled Himself, achieving a progressively fuller identity with us by so doing, until He crowned it all by His death (Phil. 2:6-8). The main lying helpless on the Jerusalem - Jericho road was surely modelled on Zedekiah being overtaken there by his enemies (Jer. 39:5). See on Lk. 14:9.

10:34 *And came to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on them oil and wine, and he put him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him*- He "bound up his wounds", alluding to the manner in which Christ was to bind up the broken hearted (Is. 61:1). He cured those mental wounds by pouring in oil and wine, symbols of his word and his blood respectively. So the brutal beating up of that man, leaving him half dead, refers to the broken-heartedness which the sin of this world inflicts upon us. Picture the scene on that Jericho road, the body covered in blood and dust, massive bruises swelling up, flies buzzing around on the congealed blood, face in the dust, frightened donkey neighing among the scrub somewhere. That is the very picture of our broken heartedness, the broken heartedness which Christ came to heal. The physical grossness of those wounds is a picture of our mental state. Yet the flesh deceives us that there is nothing really that wrong with our minds, with our natures. Yet there *is*, and we need to come to terms with it more and more completely, to realize our deep mental need for Christ's healing. Once we do this, we will be able to see the need, the urgent need, for his healing of our *minds* through his spirit, his perfect, clean mind, being in us. And how were those wounds healed? How are our mental wounds healed? By the Son of God tearing up his own garments to bandage up the wounds (how else did he do it?), and healing us with his blood and his word.

"He brought him to the inn" can also be translated "He led it [the donkey] to the inn". In this case, the Samaritan is acting as a servant, for it is the master who rides on the donkey and the servant who walks on foot, leading it there. Remember how Haman has to lead the horse on which Mordecai rides (Esther 6:7-11). All this speaks of how the Lord took upon Himself the form of a servant in order to lead us to salvation- when at the time we could do nothing, and had no awareness of the huge grace being shown to us. The Samaritan was of course making himself vulnerable to attack by robbers by doing this. But think through it some more. There was an eye-for-eye vengeance syndrome alive and well at that time. If a Samaritan turned up with a wounded Jew, it

would look for all the world like *he* was responsible for the damage. It would be the first time a Samaritan was known to have done such an act of kindness. And he risks himself all the more, by staying at the inn, leaving, and then returning there, thus willing to face the inevitable suspicion that *he* had attacked the man, or was somehow involved in the incident. This risking of His own salvation was what the cross was all about. The parable gives a rare window into the Lord's self-perception on this point. And so for us- we may stay up all night serving someone's need, only to make ourselves irritable and impatient and more prone to sin ourselves the next day. And in any case, it's my experience that no good deed goes unpunished; we have to pay various prices for it in this life. In all these things we are living out the spirit of the Samaritan saviour.

Until the good Samaritan's return, the man was kept in the inn, with everything that was needed lavishly provided. Surely the inn is symbolic of the ecclesia; in the ecclesia there should be a common sense of spiritual improvement, of growing in health, of remembering our extraordinary deliverance, realizing our weakness, looking forward to seeing the Samaritan again to praise him for the wonder of it all. This ought to characterize our gatherings as the church. Who is the innkeeper? He may just be part of the furniture of the parable, as I have yet to find a convincing interpretation.

The parables, especially those which Luke records, appear to end leaving us with unanswered questions. Does the wounded traveller survive and get better? When does the Samaritan return? How much does it cost him? Was the beaten man happy to see the Samaritan when he returned? Who inherits the property of the rich fool? Does the barren fig tree produce a crop in the end? Does the elder brother finally join in the party? Does the unjust steward succeed in getting himself out of his problems after his dismissal? What happens to the rich man’s five brothers, seeing Lazarus isn’t allowed to go and warn them? Do they hear Moses and the prophets? Do the riff raff come in from the lanes to the Great Supper? Does the unjust judge actually resolve the widow’s complaints? How does the rich merchant survive, after having sold all he has for the one pearl, thus discarding his entire past, his life’s work…? And what does he do with the pearl? He, presumably, sits and treasures it, but can do nothing with it in order to prosper materially… And yet we are left to reflect upon this. See on Mt. 13:44; Lk. 14:32.

In the culture of the time, strangers were to be welcomed and put up for the night according to their culture of hospitality. "Hotels" as we know them weren't common. The word used for "inn" is rather strange and one commentator says that "These places had a dubious character: everybody was welcome, monies had to be paid for lodging, and the female workers at the inn offered sexual favors to guests as a rule". And yet the Lord used this word for a place which represented His church. A different word is used for the Government operated lodging houses- and most travellers in those days were on Government service. A different word is used for the "inn" where Joseph and Mary stayed in Bethlehem. But the Lord doesn't use that word for this "inn". Wealthy travellers

would rather pitch tents and sleep in them for the night, protected by their own guards, rather than use an "inn". Strabo, Philo and other ancient writers all give a negative picture of "inns", as noisy and immoral, frequented by lower classes and outcasts / criminals who had no relatives nearby to stay with, and to be avoided by all good people. Strabo speaks of inns as brothels. And innkeepers are always presented as not trustworthy and morally dubious. We note the confusion in describing Rahab as both an innkeeper and a prostitute. Samaritan doesn't just put the injured man there for one night, as an emergency. He chooses this as the place of healing for him. The ambience of an inn was not conducive to rest or recuperation- they were typically associated with noise, theft, drunks and prostitutes. The church is indeed a strange place. Again we have an inversion of stereotypes; just as the 'bad' Samaritan becomes the good Samaritan, so the despised innkeeper plays a part in the man's salvation. Contra to the idea that two pennies meant a return after two days, "According to Joachim Jeremias, a day's board cost one twelfth of a denarius; the Samaritan's advance payment was sufficient for several days and bound the inn-keeper to look after the man as long as was necessary". He envisaged, in this case, a long stay. In a questionable place that was usually only stayed in for one night. Again, the church is presented as unusual... and not as secular people would like to imagine it.

Given the bad reputation of innkeepers, the Samaritan is entrusting the innkeeper with money. And promising to pay anything else that might be needed. This is an element of unreality in the story. The Samaritan seems both wealthy, or generous, and very trusting of a stereotypically weak and dubious person. In this we see something similar to the parables which speak of the Lord giving His wealth to others to manage, in an apparently too trusting manner and extent. In this we see the Lord's empowerment of His weak church to do the work of saving sick humanity, and He will give all the resources required for this. The Samaritan "took care of him" and then uses the same words to tell the innkeeper in :35 to "Take care of him". He is asking the innkeeper, dubious as he supposedly was, to show the same care as the Samaritan had shown, to save the man. This is an exact picture of the Lord's delegation of His own saving work to the church, and His assurance that He will provide all human resources to enable that. We could argue that the two characters who failed to help / care (Levite and priest) are matched by two characters who did care- the Samaritan and the innkeeper. The Samaritan and innkeeper would thereby be linked together as co-workers in the man's salvation.

10:35 *And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the host, and said: Take care of him, and if you spend more, I, when I come back again, will repay you*- "If you spend more..." was perhaps to guard against the way that unpaid debts could lead to the indebted person being enslaved (as in Mt. 18:23-35) or otherwise abused until they had paid the debt. The Samaritan, like the Lord, is absolutely thoughtful and sensitive to

our every possible spiritual need. And the gift of the two denarii to the dubious innkeeper was an act of entrustment by the Samaritan- for typically, the innkeeper would have kept the money for himself and then billed the Samaritan a huge amount at his return. There is no contract made, not even a verbal agreement as to what the innkeeper's duties are. He is simply asked to care for the person as the Samaritan had cared for him. And being an innkeeper, he might appear the least qualified. He is a dodgy innkeeper, not a medical man. We would be more comfortable if the Samaritan brought the man to a physician and paid him in advance to care for him. The Samaritan's example so far in the story was the pattern- and it speaks of the Lord's death on the cross. He expects the dubious innkeeper to grasp that, and continue it. The trust and lack of agreed contract is an element of unreality that would have caused the first hearers to shake their heads muttering 'That wasn't wise'. The Lord likewise entrusts us with His wealth, as the parable of the talents makes clear. He trusts us to not act as we humans typically do. But to be moved by His example of loving salvation of others, to with integrity do the same and play our part with Him in the ultimate salvation of others. And the innkeeper also had to show some faith / trust- because for all he knew, the Samaritan wouldn't return, or might himself be mugged along that notorious road. And he accepts that, accepting that he might be left out of pocket if the Samaritan doesn't return. And caring for a "half dead" man, who would take weeks to recover and might still die from infections, was no small thing to undertake. And quite possibly it might stop him from serving his regular or usual customers. Especially with no rock solid guarantee that the Samaritan would return and reimburse him. The two pennies were indeed a deposit guaranteeing the return [cp. the Holy Spirit gift]. But still faith was required by the innkeeper. The Samaritan's example [cp. the cross] was what inspired him to rise out of his shrewd, short termist, calculating mindset and accept the challenge. And so with us. Both the Samaritan and innkeeper take a risk, they risk their own possible loss in order to save. If this inn were at the top of the Jerusalem-Jericho road, it would have been near Bethany- and a house in Bethany is the next scene in Luke's account.

We note that these are the only recorded words in the parable. The parable largely functions without words, because contrary to the attitude of the lawyer to whom the parable was first addressed, the issue is all about action and not words. Nor is it about striving over words and meanings to do with the word "neighbour". The injured man had no money- he had been robbed. The Samaritan paid for him. This isn't a story about the need to be generous to strangers; but more is it a challenge to accept we are naked and without anything to our names, no money, and purely dependent upon the grace of the Samaritan Saviour.

"The next day" suggests the Samaritan also stayed a night in the inn, and then left. We note that innkeepers and staying in inns were all somewhat stigmatized. Inns weren't good places. But the inn was used to heal the injured man. This has quite some

implications, once we interpret the inn as the church. His promise to come again after two days (he gave two pence, and a penny a day was a fair rate, Mt. 20:2) is a clear connection with the Lord's promise to come again (after 2000 years from his departure?).

The ‘two pennies’ paid by the Samaritan are the equivalent of the half shekel atonement money under the Mosaic Law, whereby a man could be redeemed. Our redeemer is of course the Lord Jesus. The redemption was ‘paid’ in His blood- which implies His putting us on *His* beast of burden and carrying us to the inn, where He paid the money, is a picture of His final sufferings which lead up to the actual shedding of His blood.

The parable of the good Samaritan explains how Christ took compassion on the stricken spiritual state of us His people, picked us up, made Himself vulnerable to attack by placing the man on His donkey, and caused us to be fully healed. The Samaritan was less vulnerable than the robbed man, on account of having a donkey. But he made himself even more vulnerable than the robbed man had been, in order to take him to the inn. The picture of the wounded man straddled over the donkey and the Samaritan walking patiently alongside shows what easy prey they would have been. The whole process of the man's redemption by this Samaritan is an account of the cross of Christ (not least the pouring in of wine and oil). The implication is that through seeking to save us, Christ made Himself more vulnerable than He would have been if He sought only His own salvation. And the Samaritan's speed of progress was more than halved; he had to walk rather than ride, keeping the wounded man balanced on the donkey. This parable seems to reveal that Christ realized at least in some abstract sense that His concern for us in some ways made it more difficult for Him; although the reality was that the motivation for His victory was largely due to His sense of responsibility for us. The idea of him taking care for the man is expressed in the language of Ex. 21:19, which says that if a man wounds another, "he shall pay... and shall cause him to be thoroughly healed". This somewhat odd allusion (at first sight) surely indicates that the Lord took upon Himself the full blame for our stricken condition, presumably in the sense that as the second Adam He took upon Himself the guilt of Adam. This is why there are so many connections between His death and the effects of Adam's sin (e.g. the crown of *thorns*, the Garden etc.). The way Christ compared Himself to a Samaritan, half Jew and half Gentile, shows that especially on the cross, this is how He felt. He was mindful of both Jewish and Gentile aspects of His future body as He died. The Jews (and His own brothers, Ps. 69:8) treated Him as half Gentile (from a Roman soldier, the Midrash claims).

So we are as it were in the inn, thinking back to our salvation by that suffering Samaritan, the strangeness and yet the glorious *wonder* of it all. I'm sure we are meant us to fill in the unspoken details in his parable. Of course the saved man would have re-lived time and again his wondrous salvation, how he had come to with the eyes of that

man peering earnestly into his, the laying on the ass, and the slow journey to the inn. As Israel remembered their Passover deliverance through the Passover feast, so we lie on our sickbed in the inn, as it were, and remember our great salvation.

10:36 *Which of these three, do you think, proved a neighbour to him that encountered the robbers?*- "Proved a neighbour" takes us back to the initial question; to love God is to love our neighbour as ourselves. The Samaritan parable appears to be an example of the way the Lord left His parables open to multiple interpretations and reflections, all of which express aspects of the many truths He was expressing to us. We need to reflect who the 'neighbour' actually is. The parable is told in extension of the Lord's approval of the statement that to love God is to love our neighbour, and vice versa (:27). The Lord was explaining that what we have to 'do' to get eternal life is to perceive that *God* is our neighbour. This is and was a challenging idea. As challenging and provocative as when a black sister in southern USA said to me once 'Ya know, God's ma nigger'. She meant, 'God's my buddy, my close one'. The turning point of the parable is in it's end stress [as so often in these stories of the Lord]: "Which of these three... was neighbour unto him that fell among thieves?" (Lk. 10:36). Obviously, the neighbour was the Samaritan, whom we have shown to be symbolic of God and His Son. *This* is the answer to the question of the lawyer: 'And who is my neighbour?'. Answer: God / Jesus. The lawyer was wondering to whom he should do his good deeds. So he asks 'Who is my neighbour?'. He misunderstood the whole thing, as people do today. The Lord was turning the question around. Who is your neighbour? God / Jesus is your neighbour. You are lying there stricken. Your fellow lawyers and legalists / Priests / Levites can't help you. To receive eternal life, you must let God be your neighbour. *This* is the work of God, to believe on the one whom He sent (Jn. 6:29). This was the Lord's response to a similar question about what good works ought to be done. And the Samaritans were despised and rejected... yet the Lord chose them as a symbol of Himself. It's easy to under-estimate just how much the Jews despised Samaritans- "The Samaritans were publically cursed in the synagogues; and a petition was daily offered up praying God that the Samaritans might not be partakers of eternal life" (W.O.E. Oesterley, *The Gospel Parables In The Light Of Their Jewish Background* (London: SPCK, 1936) p. 102). We see the sheer bravery of the Lord in framing the parable as He did. He doesn't chose to speak of a good Jew helping a stricken Samaritan; it's the other way around. The watchful student will find up to 12 allusions in the Good Samaritan parable back to Hosea 6:1-10- which portray the Jews as the robbers, and God as the Samaritan saviour. It is none less than Yahweh Himself who "will bind us up... revive us... raise us up... come to us"- all the very things which the Samaritan did. In all this was a huge challenge to the Lord's audience- as to whether they would accept His grace. "Oil and wine are forbidden objects if they emanate from a Samaritan" (J.D.M. Derrett, *Law In The New Testament* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1970) p. 220)- hence the challenge to the

Jews in accepting the Lord's teaching. We in our turn struggle with the extent and purity of His grace.

But of course, we are intended to be the Good Samaritan too- in that we are to manifest and replicate the saving work of Jesus in our lives and in our interactions with people. There are details in the parables that need to be thought about, the story reconstructed. The Samaritan 'happened' to have "oil and wine" with him, i.e. medicaments for a wounded man (the wine would have been an antiseptic). And he was travelling alone, when people usually travelled in convoys. And the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, they wouldn't even talk with them on the street (Jn. 4:9). So perhaps the Lord intended us to figure that the Samaritan was actually going to help one of his fellow Samaritans who needed attention, but on the way, he met one of another race in even greater need, and changed his plans in order to save him. In all this we have an exquisite example of the self-revelation of Jesus in His own parables- for He saw Himself as the Samaritan. And for us too, the call to save often comes when we are on our way to do something else, at the most inconvenient moment, to people we would never have considered would need nor accept our help towards salvation.

The parable of the good Samaritan needs careful reflection before we see in it a command to concentrate on giving to the world. It is used as Biblical evidence for a social gospel. The Samaritan was "neighbour unto him that fell among thieves" (Lk. 10:36)- i.e. the story shows how he fulfilled the command to love our neighbour. We have shown above that this command refers to love for those related to the Covenant. The Samaritan represented Christ. The mugged man was those He came to save; not the world generally, for they have not all accepted His healing. We must go and do likewise; in showing the love of Christ to the world. But we have earlier defined that love as being paramountly *spiritual*, and relating to the work of the cross. The parable was teaching the inability of the Law to save man *spiritually*, not materially.

The injured man is every man. But he can do nothing. Apart from accept grace. He has a passive role in the story. So again the Lord is turning the lawyer's question on its head. It's not about what we can do, nor to whom we should do good. We can in fact do nothing, but accept grace.

10:37 *And he said: The one who showed him mercy. And Jesus said to him: Go and do likewise*- The lawyer could not bring himself to say the word "The Samaritan". They were hated and despised so deeply. There's ample evidence that the despised Samaritan of this parable refers to the Lord Jesus. He was 'neighbour' to stricken humanity, he came near to us, binding up our broken hearts, and carried us to the haven of the ecclesia. "Go and do likewise" is therefore a real challenge to us: to have the same dedication for others' salvation as Christ had. His zeal to achieve God's plan of redemption should be

ours. Remember how the good Samaritan parable is an exposition of how to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind (:27). Every fibre of the Lord's mind and body was bent *for us,* for bringing about God's plan of redemption. He loved us, his neighbour, as himself. Because of this it is impossible to separate Christ from the work He came to do, i.e. our redemption. The point of the good Samaritan parable is to teach us that his same devotion to the work of conquering sin should be seen in us; our concern for the salvation of others should be as great as that for our own. We need to be totally filled with the idea of bringing about God's glory, of seeing the conquest of sin achieved through Christ. So all our strength, our mind, will be given over to the conquest of sin in ourselves, to the spreading of the Gospel to others, and to the binding up of the broken hearts of our brethren.

The preface to the good Samaritan parable is there in :27,28, about loving God with all our strength and our neighbour as ourselves; and "this do, and you shall live" (eternally). To define this statement more closely, the Lord told the good Samaritan parable. "Go and do likewise" is referring back to :28, where the Lord commands the man "*this do*", i.e. loving God with all the heart, soul etc. So the example of the good Samaritan is a practical epitome of loving God with all the heart, soul etc. To love our neighbour as ourselves is to love God with all the heart and soul and strength and mind. Therefore the good Samaritan needs to represent us, although we are also the wounded man.

"Be going on, and do likewise", the Lord concluded (:37 YLT). Verse 38 appropriately continues: "Now it came to pass, *as they went*", in the same way as the Samaritan Saviour "as he journeyed" (:33) showed such energetic compassion, with all his heart and strength, to the stricken man. We must be able to use our own realization of our own desperate need for Christ's grace to motivate us to zealously devote ourselves to ministering to others. Our lack of zeal in this is largely due to our own failure to appreciate our own need, and the degree to which this has been satisfied by the Lord. He knew (and knows) the feelings of the stricken man.

Like most Jews, the Lord would have prayed the *shema* ("The Lord our God is one") upon rising and going to bed- just as He had a garment like that of the Pharisees, with the traditional tassels hanging from its edge (Mt. 9:20; 23:5). Yet He thought about what He prayed. When asked which was the greatest of the commandments, He replied that it was the fact that God is one. He saw the unity of God as a commandment that elicited action; and He says [note His grammar] that this plus the command to love our neighbour is the [singular] great commandment (Mk. 12:31). And He again combines these two commandments in Lk. 10:27,37, saying that to love God with all our heart is parallel with loving our neighbour and showing mercy to him. He quoted two commandments as one, so deeply had He perceived that we can't claim to love God without loving our brother. How had He worked that out? Perhaps by daily reflecting upon what to many was merely a ritual saying of words. And we too read and have pass

our lips, ideas which can work radical transformation in us *if only we will put meaning into the words* and reflect upon them. He speaks of giving His *shalom* [peace] to us, not as the [Jewish] world gives it; each time He called out *shalom* across the street or to the guys at work each morning, He meant it. And He perceived that it would take His death on the cross to really achieve what He was giving to them in His words.

A feature we need to bear in mind with all the parables is the almost constant stress on the end of the story as the part which makes the main point which the Lord is seeking to get over. Likewise the emphasis is often upon the last person mentioned in the story, the last action, the last words. Think of the parable of the prodigal; or how the Samaritan, the last man on the scene, is the example for us. “Go and do likewise” (Lk. 10:37) invites us to go forth and be like the Lord Jesus in bringing salvation to others. Or the man who buried his talent and did nothing with it; the crux of the story is that indifference to our potential is *so* awful. The parable of the sower focuses in the end on the good seed which brings a great harvest. The fact so much of the seed is lost is in itself an element of unreality- but the focus is on the fact that some seed brings forth wonderfully. And isn’t this just the encouragement every preacher needs? That despite all the hard hearts, the initial responses that come to nothing, all is worth it because *someone* responds truly.

We wonder if the Lord closed the parable with a gentle smile on His face. The parable engaged with the question of 'Who is my neighbour?', but also with 'What shall I do to inherit eternal life?' (:25). The answers to that is, nothing. We can "do" nothing. The parable turns everything on its head. We are the stricken man. Not anyone else in the parable. The story of course invites us to think we are to act as the Samaritan. But any thoughtful reader comes to see that this is not the point. The Lord is the Samaritan. We are the stricken man, unable to do anything to be saved. Like the lost sheep, frozen and unable to make any move back to the fold. To fret about questions about the definition of "neighbour" was to ask the wrong questions. There are actually no questions to be asked. It's a case of accepting the grace of a saviour. The real question is 'So will you let the despised Samaritan save you?'. To read the parable as simply meaning 'Be a top bloke to random people' is to fall into the same trap as the lawyer was in.

10:38 *Now as they went on their way, he entered into a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha welcomed him into her house*- This incident is recorded perhaps to demonstrate the outworking of 'going and doing likewise' in the preceding parable (:37). But the 'doing' was not doing works, but rather listening to the Lord's teaching of salvation by grace and believing it.

The parable of the good Samaritan features Jesus as the Samaritan helping the stricken man, representative of us all. However, the parable is followed immediately by the account of the Lord visiting the Bethany home of Martha and Mary. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho went via Bethany. The home where the sick man was taken was surely intended to be understood as that of Martha and Mary. The attacked man is called “a certain man”, and then we read straight on that the Lord was entertained by “a certain woman”, Martha (Lk. 10:30,38). The Samaritan “as he journeyed” came to the stricken man; and yet “as they went on their way, he entered into a certain village…” (Lk. 10:33,38). The Samaritan Jesus ‘cared for him’; and yet Martha unkindly challenges the Lord ‘Don’t you care…?’ (Lk. 10:35,40). The similarities aren’t just co-incidence. Surely the Lord is teaching that whether or not Martha perceives it, she and Mary are actually the wounded man of the parable, and He is taking care of them, not vice versa as Martha thought, in the teaching He was giving them in their home. He was spiritually pouring in oil and wine. And yet Martha and Mary, especially in Martha’s incomprehension of the Lord’s spiritual and saving care for her, are set up as types of all of us who are saved and cared for in Christ.

The disciples literally did give up most of what they had and follow the Lord. And yet there were evidently others who responded to His teaching without doing this- Peter’s family (Mk. 1:29); Mary and Martha (Lk. 10:38); Simon the leper Mk. 14:3). They made use of the Lord's concessions to human weakness.

10:39 *And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at the Lord's feet and heard his word*- See on 8:27. "Also sat" is a positive comment on Martha; despite her obsession with hospitality, she also loved the Lord's words and was His disciple- 'sitting at the feet' is an idiom for being a disciple of a rabbi. What is challenging is that many Jewish teachers considered it better for the Law to be burnt than to be taught to a woman. But the Lord taught women, as He did the Samaritan woman; and Martha and Mary were also amongst those 'at His feet'. This again is typical of how Luke emphasizes the Lord's radical acceptance of women and the marginalized.

10:40 *But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said: Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me*- We can so easily be like Martha, "distracted" even by the secular dimension to our supposed service of the Lord. The parable of the sower can be interpreted as fulfilling every time we hear the word sown in us. Thus some seed is "choked with cares" (Lk. 8:14)- exactly the same words used about Martha being "distracted" with her domestic duties so that she didn't hear the Lord's word at that time. We bring various attitudes of mind- stony, receptive, cumbered etc.- to the word each time we hear it. And it is our attitude to it which determines our response to it.

"Do you not care?" is the language of the distracted disciples in the boat at Mk. 4:38. His whole life and death were because He *did* so care that they would not perish (Jn. 3:16).

It's so reminiscent of a child's total, if temporary, misunderstanding and lack of appreciation of the parent's love and self-sacrifice. We note in Mk. 12:14 that the Lord was again accused there of 'not caring'. The most ultimately caring person was at times perceived as not caring; and when our care is ignored or misread, we can take comfort from this.

10:41 *But the Lord answered and said to her: Martha, Martha, you are anxious and disturbed about many things*- Nearly every one of the 19 occurrences of the Greek word for "anxious" is in the Lord's teachings *not* to take anxious thought but instead to focus upon the things of the Kingdom. The focus upon only "one thing" in life empowers us to handle the stress of "the many" secular things. Without that focus, life appears full of "many things" and the fact we cannot sufficiently multi-task leaves us stressed and distracted from that one thing which is needful.

10:42 *But one thing is needful. For Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her*- Martha was "anxious and disturbed about many things" (:41), but the Lord perceived that Mary was anxious and troubled about the "one thing" that was "needful"- and the context demands we understand this "one thing" as hearing the Lord's words. For her, as she sat there at His feet, it was an anxious and troubling experience. To hear the Lord's words is in this sense a troubling experience. Whilst we are saved by grace, the extent of the imperative within the Lord's teaching is without doubt 'troubling' to the sensitive believer in Him. For we cannot hear Him without perceiving the enormous imperative which there is within those words for the transformation of our human lives in practice. See on Phil. 4:6. The one thing that was needful is surely to be connected by the incident, also recorded by Luke, where the Lord tells the rich young man that he lacks "the one thing" (Lk. 18:22)- which in his case, was to give his wealth away. Yet Mary did this, when she poured out her life savings on the Lord's feet. Sitting at His feet, hearing His words, led her to anoint those feet. She chose "the one thing", of anxiously hearing His words, the lines in her forehead showing in intense concentration. And yet that learning of Him issued in something practical- she gave her life to Him in practice, by giving all she had to those feet. The rich young man lacked the one thing- for he was not then ready to give his life's wealth to the Lord. Moving the spotlight onto ourselves, we can hear, and yet do nothing. We can read our Bibles without the intensity of devotion which Mary had, and without there being any direct translation of what we hear and read into practice. We can be as the rich young man, intellectually impressed, and yet totally failing to accept the tremendous practical demands behind the most simple, basic teachings of the Lord.
Local Jewish culture stressed that the place of the woman was about domestic matters rather than spiritual ones. Yet in the incident of Martha and Mary, the Lord commended Mary for neglecting her domestic duties in order to concern herself with spiritual development. She sat at his feet, as if a student at the feet of a rabbi. As noted on :39, it's easy to forget that to sit at the feet of a Rabbi [and the Lord was called 'Rabbi']

meant to be a disciple of that Rabbi. And women… couldn't be disciples of a Rabbi. It was all radical stuff.

LUKE CHAPTER 11

11:1 *And it came to pass, as he was praying in a certain place*- Perhaps Bethany, following on from the context of chapter 10. But we have the impression as in Mk. 1:36 of the disciples finding Him praying, in some secluded spot; and wishing to have that same intimacy with the Father which exuded from Him. The Comforter promises us that same relationship with God as Father which the Lord experienced; and so He teaches them in practice how to move towards it.

That when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him: Lord, teach us to pray, even as John also taught his disciples- This means that this teaching of prayer is different to that recorded in Matthew 6. It would seem therefore that He replies to their request to share His intimacy with the Father by repeating an earlier teaching which [like us] they had not given due attention to. They knew John had taught his disciples forms of prayer, and they wanted one. The Lord is reminding them that He actually had given them one , but they had not paid attention to it. Or it could be that because John's disciples were well known for their prayers (5:33), the disciples of the Lord wanted a different prayer to that which the Lord had given them, one more in line with common Jewish prayer forms. And the Lord replies by repeating the prayer He had originally taught them, which they apparently weren't satisfied with. Again we see their immaturity, chronicled by they themselves in these gospel records, as an encouragement to their hearers and readers to mature more quickly than they had.

The model prayer given by the Lord can of course be used just as it is. But it's worth noting that the Lord's own subsequent prayers, and some of Paul, repeated the essence of some of the phrases in it, but in different words. This may be a useful pattern for us in learning how to formulate prayers. There was therefore no need for Him to give another prayer. The prayer of Jesus in Jn. 17 is in some ways an expanded restatement of the model prayer. In it, the Lord asks for the Father's Name to be hallowed or glorified (Jn. 17:1,11,12); for His work or will to be done or finished (Jn. 17:4); for deliverance from the evil one (Jn. 17:15). The prayer of Jn. 17 can be divided into three units of about the same length (Jn. 17:1-8; 9-19; 20-26). Each has the theme of glory, of directly addressing the Father, and of the needs of God's people- all clearly taken from the model prayer.

11:2 *And he said to them: When you pray, say, Father*- The model prayer begins with the words "Our Father" (AV, textus receptus). Straight away we are bidden remember that no man is an island; the Lord intended us to be aware of the entire community of believers in our private prayers.

His teaching about our having a *Heavenly* Father (AV) may appear quite painless to accept; but it was radical, demanding stuff in the first century. The family then was "the centrally located institution maintaining societal existence... it [was] the primary focus of personal loyalty and it [held] supreme sway over individual life". "Our father, *who is in*

Heaven" was a prayer hard to pray if one really accepted the full import of the words; every bit as much as it is today. The idea of belonging to another family, of which the invisible Lord Jesus in Heaven was the head, belonging to a new society of world-wide brothers and sisters, where the Lord from Heaven held "supreme sway over individual life", was radical indeed. It took huge commitment and a deep faith in this invisible head of the new family to step out from ones existing family. And the call of Christ is no less radical today. The social circle at uni, the guys at work, our unbelieving family members... now all take a radical second place to our precious family in Christ. And yet we so easily abuse or disregard the importance of our spiritual family; we too easily exclude them, won't meet with them, can't be bothered about them.

Hallowed be your name- Hallowed / sanctified be Your name" uses an aorist tense which implies that it will be accomplished as a one-time act; at the coming of the Lord. Indeed, the aorist tenses in the Lord's model prayer are arresting; each phrase of the prayer asks for something to be done in a one-time sense. This alone suggests an intended 'answer' in terms of the final establishment of the Kingdom. "Hallowed be Your Name" was actually one of the Eighteen Benedictions used by most Jews at the time. This common phrase was consciously seen as a reference to the YHWH Name (Hal Taussig, *Jesus Before God: The Prayer Life of the Historical Jesus* (Santa Rosa, CA: The Polebridge Press, 1999) p. 76). But the Lord purposefully juxtaposes *Abba*, "Father", with that phrase. This Aramaic, non-Hebrew, familiar word, an equivalent of "Daddy!", is placed by the Lord next to Judaism's most well known and frequently used blessing of the YHWH Name. By doing so, He was making the Name even more hallowed and glorious- by showing that the essence of that Name speaks of familiar family relationship with us, and is no longer the carefully guarded preserve of Hebrew people, thought, culture and language. The Lord prayed this in Gethsemane; and it took Him so long to say these words that the disciples fell asleep.

Your kingdom come- It has been pointed out that "Your Kingdom come!" was violently in conflict with the Roman view that the lives of a subject people like Israel belonged to Caesar's kingdom. "'Your kingdom come!' is therefore a word of defiance; to pray it is a subversive activity. This is also how the authorities understand the ministry of Jesus: it is subversive and not to be tolerated". And so with us, the seeking of the future Kingdom is a radical denial of the spirit of our age, which seeks its Kingdom now; it demands a separation from the world around us. The well known description of the Kingdom in Is. 2:1-4 is in the context of appealing to Israel to change their ways. Because they would *then* walk in the ways of the Lord, therefore "O house of Israel [therefore] Come ye [now] and walk in the ways of the Lord" (Is. 2:5). The hope of Israel ought to motivate Israel to live the Kingdom life here and now.

Greek scholars have pointed out that some phrases in the Lord's prayer show a remarkable lack of etiquette and the usual language of petition to a superior; literally,

the text reads: "Come Your Kingdom, done Your will". Is this part of the "boldness" in approaching God which the NT speaks of? That God should encourage us in this (although He also encourages us in reverential fear of Him) reflects something of His humility. The Kingdom of God refers to that over which God reigns. We are "a colony of Heaven" in our response to His principles (Phil. 3:20 Moffat). We are to pray for His Kingdom to come, so that His will may be done on earth (Mt. 6:10). The Kingdom and the doing of His will are therefore paralleled. His Kingdom reigns over all in Heaven, for there, all the Angels are obedient to Him (Ps. 103:19-21). By praying for the Kingdom to come on earth we are not only praying for the Lord's second coming, but for the progress of the Gospel world-wide right now. Not only that more men and women will hear it and respond, but that those who have accepted it might work God's will rather than their own to an ever greater extent. Whether or not we can physically spread the Gospel is in this sense irrelevant; our prayer should be, first and foremost if the pattern of the Lord's prayer is to be taken exactly, for the triumph of the Gospel world-wide. It has been pointed out by Philip Yancey that "Thy Kingdom come!" was violently in conflict with the Roman view that the lives of a subject people like Israel belonged to Caesar's kingdom.

"'Your kingdom come!' is therefore a word of defiance; to pray it is a subversive activity. This is also how the authorities understand the ministry of Jesus: it is subversive and not to be tolerated" (Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Harper Collins, 1998). The word *basileia* translated "Kingdom" definitely brought to mind the imperial reign or empire of Rome. Thus Hal Taussig comments: "Whenever anyone in Jesus' time used the term "basileia", the first thing people thought of was the Roman "kingdom" or "empire". That is, "basileia" really meant "Roman empire" to most people who heard it... It was to many ears a direct insult to the Roman empire. Uttered in the presence of Roman soldiers, such a prayer could have gotten [a person] in immediate trouble" (Hal Taussig, *op cit* pp. 21,96). And so with us, the seeking of the future Kingdom is a radical denial of the spirit of our age, which seeks its Kingdom now; it demands a separation from the world around us. The well-known description of the Kingdom in Is. 2:1-4 is in the context of appealing to Israel to change their ways. Because they would *then* walk in the ways of the Lord, therefore "O house of Israel [therefore] Come ye [now] and walk in the ways of the Lord" (2:5). The hope of Israel ought to motivate Israel to live the Kingdom life here and now.

11:3 *Give us day by day our daily bread*- This may appear hard for comfortably off Christians to pray- until they grasp that they are praying for "our" daily bread, not "my" daily bread. There are so many in the brotherhood for whom having daily bread is indeed a constantly uncertain question. We should be aware of the whole brotherhood; and pray that "we" will be given our bread for today.

This has long been recognized as an inadequate translation of a very strange Greek phrase. The adjective *epiousios* in "our daily bread" is one example of Christ's radical use of language; there in the midst of the prayer which the Lord bid His followers constantly use, was a word which was virtually unknown to them. Our bread only-for-this-day was the idea; the word is used for the rations of soldiers. The idea is 'Give us today, right now, the bread / food of tomorrow'. In ancient Judaism, *mahar* means not only tomorrow but the great Tomorrow, i.e. the Kingdom. Jesus spoke of the inauguration of the future Kingdom in terms of eating food together (Mt. 8:11; Lk. 6:21; 14:15; 22:29,30; Rev. 7:16). 'Give us the future Kingdom today, may it come right now' is perhaps one of the levels on which He intended us to understand the prayer. The aorist implies: 'Give us this once and final time' the bread of tomorrow. The Lord was surely alluding to the way that Israel in the wilderness had been told that "in the morning [tomorrow] you shall be filled with bread"; and this was widely understood in first century Palestine as being typical of the coming of Messiah's Kingdom. Notice too how Is. 55:10 connects the descent of God's word made flesh in Jesus, with the giving of bread. And one practical point. Even though we may have daily bread, we are still to pray for it. It's rather like Zech. 10:1: "Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain"; even when it's the season, still ask Him for what it appears you naturally already have. Israel were fed with manna one day at a time- this is so stressed (Ex. 16:4,19,20).

The idea of 'daily bread' recalls the gift of manna. There was to be no hoarding of manna- anything extra was to be shared with others (Ex. 16:8; 2 Cor. 8:15). But we live in a world where the financial challenges of retirement, housing, small family size [if any family at all]... mean that there appears no other option but to 'hoard manna' for the future. To some extent this may be a reflection of the way that life in these very last days is indeed quite different to anything previously known in history; but all the same, we face a very real challenge. Are we going to hoard manna, for our retirement, for our unknown futures? Or will we rise up to the challenge to trust in God's day by day provision, and share what's left over? "Give us this day our bread-for-today" really needs to be prayed by us daily. Let's give full weight to the Lord's command to pray for only "our daily bread", the daily rations granted to a soldier on active duty. It's almost impossible to translate this term adequately in English. In the former USSR and Communist East Germany (DDR), there was the idea that nobody in a Socialist state should go hungry. And so if you were hungry in a restaurant after eating, you had the right to ask for some food, beyond what you paid for. In the former East Germany, the term *Sättigungsbeilage* was used for this in restaurants- the portion of necessity. It's this food we should ask God for- the food to keep us alive, the food which a Socialist restaurant would give you for free. We shouldn't be thinking in terms of anything more than this. It's an eloquent essay in what our attitude to wealth, materialism and long term self-provision ought to be.

To steal is to take the Name of Yahweh called upon us in vain (Prov. 30:9), and therefore we ask to be given *only* our daily bread and no more (NIV); not so much that if we are found out, the Name will be brought into disrepute, but rather that we personally will have blasphemed the imperative of Yahweh which is heavy upon us; these words of Agur are applied to us here.

11:4 *And forgive us our sins. For we ourselves also forgive everyone that is indebted to us. And bring us not into temptation*- There is a parallel between "sins" and being "indebted"; probably an allusion to the jubilee. We release / forgive men their debt to us, as God does to us. If we chose not to participate in this Jubilee by not releasing others, then we cannot expect to receive it ourselves (note the Jubilee allusions in Lk. 24:47). Around 90% of Old Testament references to sin use the metaphor of a weight or burden, which can be lifted by forgiveness. The Lord Jesus prefers to speak of sin as a debt, which can be forgiven by not being demanded and the debt erased. The metaphor of debt is somewhat richer than that or burdens. It opens the possibility that God lent to us, that He allowed us to get into that debt- because He didn't strike us dead for the sin. 'Debt' also carries with it the idea that we would like to repay, but cannot. This is the flavour of the Lord's opening to the Sermon- that He is the solution for those who would like to be spiritual but feel unable to be as they would wish to be (see on Mt. 5:6). The release of debt carries with it a greater sense of gratitude, knowing that we should not have got into the debt in the first place. All this was foreseen by the Lord in His change of metaphor from sin as weight to sin as debt. It has been noted that sin was not spoken as debt until Jesus introduced the idea. We are in debt to God. And yet so many have the idea that God owes them, and big time. The prayer of Apollonius of Tyana was that “O ye gods, give me the things which are owing to me”. And that ancient attitude is alive today, leading to some who think it is their right not to work and to be supported, or expect some kind of material blessing from God. When actually, we are in deep debt to God, and forgiven it only by pure grace.

Those “indebted” to us are those who have a debt to us. But Biblically, who are those who are ‘indebted’? The same Greek word occurs often in the New Testament. Mt. 18:30 explains that there is a debt to us if we have been sinned against and it’s not been reconciled. The debt our brethren have to us, and we to them, is to love one another, to lay our lives down for each other, to entertain and receive each other at home (s.w. 3 Jn. 8; 1 Jn. 3:16; 4:11). A wife has her husband in her debt if he doesn’t love her with the love of Christ (Eph. 5:28); our brethren are in debt to us if they don’t give us material help when we truly need it (Rom. 15:27); or if they don’t wash our feet (Jn. 13:14). A debt implies that it’s not been paid; and so I come to the conclusion that the *forgiveness* of our debtors is forgiving our brethren when they don’t love us as they should, don’t care

for us... and never apologize or rectify it. The debt is outstanding; they've not cleared it. But we are to forgive it; we are to forgive unconditionally, without demanding restoration or grovelling repentance before us. This is the challenge of that phrase in the Lord's prayer. For we ask for "our sins" in general to be likewise forgiven; and they surely include many 'secret sins' which we don't even perceive or haven't repented of. And further. "As we also forgive every one that is indebted to us" (Lk. 11:4) can actually be read as a word of command, a statement that is actually a request. The request is that the sins of those who've sinned against us be forgiven- in this sense, "whosesoever sins ye remit [s.w. forgive] they are remitted unto them" (Jn. 20:23). That's another challenging thought. If they're impenitent, how can they be forgiven? But if *we* forgive them, perhaps we are to understand that God is happy to forgive them. If we feel, as I do, that we've been sinned against so much... then we have a wonderful opportunity to gain our own forgiveness and even that of those people... by forgiving them. The more I hurt at how others have treated me, the more I realize my own desperate need for forgiveness. The two things, as the Lord foresaw in His model prayer, dovetail seamlessly together.
Further evidence that Jesus prayed in Aramaic is found by comparing the two records of the Lord's prayer; Matthew has "forgive us our debts", whilst Luke has "forgive us our sins". The Aramaic word *hobha* means both 'sin' and 'debt'. The conclusion is therefore that Jesus taught the disciples to pray in their native Aramaic dialect rather than in Hebrew or Greek. Further, the Lord's prayer has many links to the *Kaddish*, an ancient Aramaic prayer which included phrases like "Exalted and hallowed be his great name... may he let his kingdom rule... speedily and soon".

"As we..." is a challenge. The crucial little Greek word *hos* is elsewhere translated: according as, as soon as, even as, like as, as greatly as, since, whenever, while. Clearly enough, our forgiveness by God is dependent upon and of the same nature as our forgiveness of others.

"Forgive us our / debts sins as we have forgiven those who sin against us" uses the aorist which implies 'Forgive us this once'. Could this not be an anticipation of the state of the believer before the judgment seat of Christ- 'forgive me please this once for all my sins, as I have forgiven those who sinned against me'. If so, we have a powerful exhortation to forgive *now*; for in that awesome moment, it will be so apparent that the Lord's gracious acceptance of us will be directly proportional to how deeply we accepted and forgave our brethren in this life. Notice how strongly Jesus links future judgment with our present forgiveness (Lk. 6:37). He teaches us to pray now for forgiveness on the basis of how we have forgiven others, knowing that in prayer, we have a foretaste of the judgment. Now we can come boldly before the throne of grace in prayer, just as we will come before that same throne in the last day.

11:5 *And he said to them: Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight and say to him: Friend, lend me three loaves-*

After teaching the model prayer earlier, the Lord went straight on to teach about the need to forgive others. And quite possibly, the parable of the friend at midnight is similar. For it connects with other parables and their images of the Lord's return at midnight, and the door being shut and not opened to those who then knock. But in this parable, one man can knock and get the door opened at midnight for the sake of his friend, who has "gone out of the way" (Gk., "in his journey is come"). We can save others from condemnation- and, the implication is, we can do that by forgiving them and praying to God for their salvation. And the man who goes and asks the rich man for sustenance is clearly poor. According to Prov. 3:28, this man didn't even have a loaf of bread for his friend: "Do not say to your neighbour, 'Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it' – when you have it with you". But despite his poverty, he can do something of eternal significance- he can get the Lord to open the door at midnight for the sake of another poor man. And he is shameless and bold in doing so, for he sees the huge importance of his request. The visitor has arrived at night, when usually travel was only done in the day time. The night time arrival would suggest the traveller had been refused hospitality at other homes, hence his arrival in the middle of the night at this man's home, desperate for food.

The request to the rich man (God) for loaves is the Lord's interpretation of His previous teaching to pray "Give us this day our daily bread". "Our", not "my", is taken by the Lord here to mean we can pray for others to get their daily bread. And yet as noted above, the allusion is to the manna, which in Jn. 6 is taken to represent salvation. It's amazing how the Lord's teaching dovetails so perfectly. The rich man knew that he would never be repaid, but he gives the loaves anyway. And the point is, how much more will God give salvation, "the Holy Spirit" (:13), to those who ask it especially when motivated by others' needs. The message is powerful: A poor man has the ambition and persistence to get a rich man to open his door at midnight. Just as the obscure but prayerful man can actually get salvation from condemnation for another man. The poor man treats the rich man as if he is a man on his level, to whom he could go for a special favour, and he is shameless in this; the need was the call and motivation. And that is an outcome of being able to call God Almighty "abba", daddy, Father, as taught in the model prayer that this parable follows on from so directly. In some cultures, in Asia especially, the rudeness of a request is a reflection of how intimate one views the friendship. It's the same here- the shamelessness of the request reflects the intimacy the poor man feels towards the rich man.

"Persistence" is an unfortunate translation. The idea really is of shamelessness. And likewise in the possibly parallel parable of the widow and the unjust judge. The idea is not that we are knocking at Heaven's door trying to awake or get the attention of an

otherwise sleepy or distracted God. The sheer number of times we make a request has no relation to the likelihood of God answering us. Hence the fallacy of prayer beads, rosaries and the like. The idea is that the poor man treats the rich man as if is his familiar friend, his neighbour from whom he can shamelessly ask and receive because of the nature of relationship between poor village people, most of whom were relatives anyway. And as he views the rich man, who can give him not just three loaves but whatever he needs, so the rich man view himself- this is the force of "because he is his friend". All this is the Lord's interpretation of what it means to call God "Abba", daddy, a familiar friend and relative. It is the Lord's model prayer which must be the basis for interpreting this parable.

A man finds a friend comes to him at midnight, wanting food. So he goes to *his* friend, notwithstanding the inconvenient hour, and asks for some loaves, but actually he's given whatever he wants. His want, his will, was to find sustenance for his friend / brother. And therefore his friend gives abundantly above all he asks or thinks, indeed, whatever he wants is provided. The promise of boundless response to prayer is therefore true, but in the context of seeking to help others. This parable comes straight after 'the Lord's prayer'. In Matthew's record, the prayer is followed by a reminder that we must forgive our brother, if we are to be forgiven (Mt. 6:14,15). So perhaps the friend coming to the man at midnight starving hungry, represents a brother sinning against us. Our response must be to go to the Father in prayer and seek forgiveness / spiritual food for our brother. And in that context, we will be given whatever we desire. Note that banging on the shut door is elsewhere a symbol of asking for forgiveness (Lk. 13:24,25; Mt. 25:10).
The parable of the man coming to his friend at midnight and asking for loaves (Lk. 11:5-13) occurred in the context of the Lord's teaching about forgiveness (see the parallel Gospels). Yet the terms of the parable are replete with reference to the Lord's return and judgment:
11:5 At midnight- the Lord comes "at midnight" in other parables (cp. Mk. 13:35)
11:7 Door now shut- the door is shut on those rejected, never to be opened (Mt. 25:10; Lk. 13:25)
11:9 Knocking on the door in prayer, and the door is opened- the rejected knock on the door but it isn't opened.

Now, in this life, we knock on the door, knowing we are condemned, needing forgiveness, living out the situation of the rejected at the last day. But *now*, the door is opened. We are granted as much forgiveness as we need, which we accept shamefacedly and awkwardly, as the man receiving loaves at midnight for the visitor [note how Nathan describes David's lust for Bathsheba as a visitor arriving needing feeding].

The parable of the friend at midnight uses an element of unreality, but in a reverse way. The Lord paints the picture of a guest coming to a person who has no bread, and so they go and disturb their neighbour at midnight, asking for bread. The Middle Eastern peasant who appreciated the huge burden of responsibility to give food to a visitor would say that no, he couldn't possibly imagine that the person who was asked for food would say 'No'. He would not only give bread, but whatever was needed. And so it is with God. It's unthinkable, as unthinkable as it is in a Palestinian village to not be hospitable, that our Father will not answer a prayer for resources with which to help others. This has been my own experience time and again. And further, the villager would respond not just because it is his neighbour asking him, but because he realizes that the responsibility to entertain the needy person actually falls upon the whole community. And God too sees our requests for others as partly His personal and communal responsibility. However let it be noted that the poor neighbour asks only for bread- for the very bare minimum with which to provide for the need of another. And the richer neighbour responds with far more. Again, a pattern for our own prayers for resources with which to help others.

11:6 *For a friend of mine has arrived from a journey and I have nothing to set before him*- Perhaps those not from an Eastern background can never understand the pressing urgency of the hospitality culture; you *must* feed the visitor. It just has to be done. But he is poor, and he doesn't have any bread. So, he goes to his richer friend, friend number three, and wakes him up, disturbing the whole household, to ask him to give him some bread with which to entertain the first friend.

The friend who came on his journey with "nothing" is intended by the Lord to be understood primarily as referring to the disciples whom He had sent out on their journey with nothing ("take nothing for your journey", Lk. 9:3). When He told them to "eat such things as are set before you" (Lk. 10:8), He didn't just mean 'Don't be picky about your food'. He used the same word in Lk. 11:6 to describe how the faithful friend "set [food] before" his visitor. As they travelled around, the disciples were to be received in the way He was describing. Those in that early brotherhood of believers who received and supported them were to do so knowing that these brethren were in their turn responding to human need, and they could be fellow-helpers in the Gospel's work by showing hospitality. John says just the same: "Because that for his name's sake they went forth [alluding to the great commission to go into all the world], taking nothing *of the Gentiles* [i.e. the unbelievers]. *We* therefore ought to help receive such, that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth" (3 Jn. 7,8).

Does the 'traveller' needing sustenance of Lk. 11:6 refer to our sinful tendencies, in the light of 2 Sam. 12:4? Heb. 5:2 describes those in sin whom the Lord saved as "out of the way". The same idea is found in Lk. 11:6 AVmg., where the man "out of his way" comes knocking on the Lord's door. The image of the shut door is that of rejection; but here the

door is opened, and the man given “as much as he needs” of forgiveness and acceptance.

11:7 *And he from within shall answer and say-*

The sentence begins with "Who among you?". The idea is, 'No one among you would answer like this', as in Lk. 17:7; 14:28. So the message of the parable is that God is sure to say "Yes", and that fits with the context seamlessly. But the request is for others, and for "the Holy Spirit" (:11), for spiritual things, for forgiveness and the opening of a closed door at midnight, the removal of condemnation from another.

"From within" is always used in the Bible about the inner man, rather than meaning indoors. The Greek word occurs twice in the same context: "your *inward part*... that which is *within*" (11:39,40). Inside himself, he spoke to his friend: "Trouble me not". Yet that satan within him, that desire to be selfish, was overcome by his realization of his friends need, and *why* it had arisen. And if we have this same emboldened conscience to overcome our innate selfishness and ask of our Father *for the sake of others*, then we will s the work of the ministry will be provided by Him- that is His sober promise. Jn. 15:16 is one of John’s versions of the great preaching commission: " I chose you and appointed you, that ye should *go* and bear fruit...whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you" . The promise of support and help and answered prayer is again held out- in the context of preaching and ministering to the Gospel.

Do not trouble me! The door is now shut and my children are with me in bed, I cannot rise and give anything to you?- This gives further insight into how prayer is heard- the householder, God, is in His house (Heaven) with the door shut and his children with him in bed, and in order to get up- corresponding to God answering our prayer in the parable- the *whole* household, the children of God (a description of the Angels- Luke 20:35,36 etc.), have to be roused. Thus all the Angels are conscious of one specific action on our behalf. See on Lk. 15:6.

The man who knocks is answered, the Lord taught. He may have meant that all true prayer is answered in its essence, rather than its particularities. But for our purposes we note that the first knocks weren’t heard. Only by continual knocking was the request responded to. And so “knock, and it shall be opened” doesn’t just mean ‘ask for something and you’ll get it’. The first knocks produced nothing. It surely means ‘Keep on and on knocking, driven to your utmost desperation and entreaty; *this* is what I call knocking’.

The Lord will one day come to *us* at midnight, and the unworthy will not open to Him (Song 5). And He right now stands at the door and knocks (Rev. 3:20). The rejected will know what it is like to stand knocking at the Lords shut door and be unanswered (Mt. 25:10; Lk. 13:25). He surely intended us to make such links within His teachings. The message is quite clear- those who cant be bothered to respond to the knocking of

others, who refuse to feel for others in their desperation... these are the ones who will then come to know just how that feels, as in ultimate spiritual desperation *they* hammer at the Lords door. From this it surely follows that in our response to the desperation of others, we are working out our own eternal destiny. We are deciding whether or not the Lord will respond *to us*, as we lay there prostrate before Him at judgment, knowing our desperation whilst at the same time believing and hoping in His love and response. When we see others in their needs, the sister who cant get to meeting because nobody will baby-sit for her once in a while, the brother who just needs someone to talk to, someone to listen, an evening of someone's time, the man over there who is so lost in his Catholicism, that guy so addicted to his dreams of personal wealth, the woman back there hooked on dope, the single father with two spastic children, the grandmother left to bring up three children on a tiny pension in one room with broken windows and severe winters, the refugees streaming over that border day after day... we are confronted with these pictures daily.

They are knocking at our door, at midnight. And we would rather not be disturbed. We would rather acknowledge their status as our friends, our brothers and sisters, but make excuses as to why here and now we cant respond. To tell the friend that, well, give him bread tomorrow...this was quite inappropriate. It could have been argued that they didn't *need* bread right then. They could wait till morning. But the friend appreciated the *shame* and the *awkwardness* of his friend...his heart felt for him, and he responded. It isn't just dire material need we should feel for, therefore; but feel for others in the sheer humanity of their life situations, and have a heart willing to try to give them all they need in them.

11:8 *I say to you, though he will not want to rise and give anything to him, yet because he is his friend, and because of the man's persistence, he will get up and give him as much as he needs*- The knocking on the door is specifically a symbol of prayer. If we see our brothers need, even if we can do nothing physically to help (and so often, we cant); we will *pray* earnestly for them. If we truly feel for them, we will pray for them. The friend troubles his friend for help (Lk. 18:7), just as in another parable about prayer the desperate widow "troubles" the judge for a response (Lk. 18:5).

The poor neighbour asks with "importunity" (AV)- with shamelessness. He is confident of being heard and has no shame or hesitation to his request because he knows he really does have nothing to give the visitor. This is of course the prerequisite for prayer which will be heard. The Lord drives the point home that whoever asks in this way, receives. And yet the Lord addresses this comment to those who although "evil", knew how to give gifts to their kids. Surely the Lord was speaking to the Pharisees present, who prayed regularly. Perhaps He is saying that they had never really prayed the prayer of earnest desire, motivated by others' needs.

Because of his "importunity", the rich friend gave to him. The Greek translated "importunity" means lack of shamefacedness, lack of reverence. The Greek word is *an-aideia*: without *aidos*. What does *aidos* mean? It is used twice in the New Testament: in 1 Tim. 2:9 "shamefacedness", and in Heb. 12:28 "serve God acceptably with *reverence*". The man (who the Lord invites us to see as representing us) comes to the rich friend (cp. God) *wit out* this reverence. Now of course we should serve our God with appropriate reverence. But there ought to be times when we as it were rush to God, because He is our father and our friend, without that formality which our worship of Him might more usually include. Contrary to the ideas of popular religion, God is not merely something to be worshipped; He is Father and friend, the one to run to in time of urgent need *when that need arises from the requirements of His people and His work*.

Paul's writings are packed with allusions back to the Lords parables. In his reference to the tale of the three friends, Paul seems to have understood just as we have done. Rom. 16:1,2 comments that the ecclesia should welcome "Phoebe our sister receive her in the Lord, as becomes saints, and that you assist her in whatever business she *has need* of you: for she has been a succourer of many". "Has need" is the same Greek word as in Lk. 11:8- the friend gave whatever *was needed* to the friend who arrived from his journey. And Paul says this should be done for Phoebe because she lived a life of giving out to others needs.

11:9 *And I say to you: Ask and it shall be given you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you*- Jesus likens requesting things from God to a man asking a favour of his friend at midnight (Lk. 11:5,9). We are to see God as *our friend* to whom like Abraham, we respectfully and rather awkwardly present ourselves. And He sees us as *His* friends. There's a wonderful mutuality between a man and his God. As noted above, the guaranteed answer of prayers refers to the requests we make for others when we truly do not have the resources to provide for them. And this is true in spiritual terms; for so often we feel utterly lacking in ability to provide for the spiritual needs of those who come to us at midnight.

The connections with the Sermon on the Mount surely send us back to Mt. 5:42 "Give to him that asks". The same Greek words are used. Our responsiveness to others will be reflected in God's responsiveness to us. And yet the Lord's style throughout the sermon is to elevate the natural onto a higher, spiritual plane. This is not a blank cheque promise, as is clear from both personal experience and Bible teaching. What we can be utterly assured of being given is God's grace and salvation. The Lord surely foresaw that the initial mental objection to His words would be 'But that's not true! I don't get everything I ask for, and neither did many Bible characters!'. But He wanted us to therefore think further as to what He might be really saying- and what He is saying is that forgiveness and salvation will surely be given to whoever asks. These things are

summarized in Mt. 7:11 as God for sure giving "good things to them that ask Him". The parallel here in Lk. 11:13 summarizes those "good things" as "the Holy Spirit".

11:10 *For everyone that asks receives*- Passages like this can be read to teach that every one who seeks in prayer, receives. This just isn't true in terms of the words of our actual requests being answered. But once we understand that God sees the spirit behind our words and answers this rather than the specific request, then these promises become more realistically believable; and the entire context is about asking for loaves for our needy visitor which we truly do not have to give him.

And he that seeks finds- As David "found" God through experiencing His forgiveness, so can "every one that is Godly" today (Ps. 32:6). It is quite possible that "seek and you shall find" was uttered by the Lord with his mind on Ps. 32:6 and David's experience. After all, we cannot expect this to be a blank cheque offer, that whatever we seek for we must receive. But if these words are an allusion to David's seeking and finding forgiveness in Ps. 32:6, then the promise is more realistic. If we seek for forgiveness and a living relationship with God, then we have this unconditional promise that we *will* find this. Yet in a sense, the time when we will ultimately find God will be at the judgment: we will "find mercy of the Lord in that day" (2 Tim. 1:18), so that "ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless" (2 Pet. 3:14). We will find God, as He will find us, in that great moment of consummation; "for then shall (we) know (God), even as also (we) are known" by Him (1 Cor. 13:12;). Then we will "be *found* in him... that I may (then) *know* him" (Phil. 3:9,10). Yet David says that after forgiveness, we can find and know God. It is as if whenever we sin, we in a sense face our judgment seat. And the knowledge and 'finding' of God which we will then enjoy should be prefigured in our present experience of forgiveness. Should we not therefore pray for forgiveness with the intensity with which we would at the judgment, if we were then offered the chance to do so?

The 'seeking' which is in view is clearly of spiritual things. In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord had used the same word in encouraging us to above all "seek the Kingdom of God" (Mt. 6:33). And now He is encouraging us that if we seek it, we will 'find' it- the word for "find" is elsewhere translated "obtain". If we really want the things of the Kingdom and to eternally be in that environment- we will be. The Lord Jesus Himself went out seeking for goodly pearls- and found them (Mt. 13:45,46). He goes seeking His sheep- and finds it (Mt. 18:12,13). He "found" faith in a Gentile (Mt. 8:10), He was as the woman who sought and found her precious coin (Lk. 15:8,9). Our seeking the things of the Kingdom is therefore not merely our personal seeking a place in its future establishment upon earth. We can seek the progress of the Kingdom principles which comprise the reign and kingship of God on earth right now. Part of that is in seeking men

and women to submit to that Kingship / Kingdom. And that too shall ultimately succeed, as the Lord Jesus demonstrated in His own life despite so many setbacks and failures in response to Him. 'But nobody's interested!' is really the cry of unbelief in this promise. If we are seeking for men and women to submit to the things of God's Kingdom, then we shall find them- even if they may not join our denomination or agree totally with all of our theology.

And to him that knocks it shall be opened- This is the language of preaching. For Paul appears to allude to it three times in speaking of how doors of opportunity have been opened for him in the work of the Gospel (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3). The implication is surely that he had knocked in prayer, and the doors had been opened. If we pray for opportunities to preach, to save people (rather than spending our mental energy on condemning our brethren), then God will respond. According to our principle of letting the Sermon interpret itself, it may be that the idea of the door being opened looks back to Mt. 6:6- in prayer, we are to shut our door and pray. And our knocking means that the door is opened. The particular metaphor of knocking upon a door and it being opened is used in Lk. 12:36 about the Lord knocking on our door at the second coming, and us opening; yet He stands today and knocks at the door, and we are to open to Him (Rev. 3:20). The point is surely that our relationship with Him is mutual, we knock and He opens, He knocks and we open. And at the last day, tragically too late, the rejected knock and the door will not be opened to them (Lk. 13:25). Their knocking is a desperate plea for salvation. But if we ask for it in this life- we shall receive it. So the metaphor speaks of seeking salvation and a relationship with the Lord in this life, but in context of the rest of the verse it also refers to our desire for others to have the door opened to them. John's equivalent to all this is perhaps His description of the Lord Jesus as the door, through whom any man may enter in to salvation. It's the same idea- the door is easily opened in this life, indeed the implication is that Jesus is effectively an open door for all who believe in Him.

The language of knocking and opening is used in other parables about spiritual acceptance with the Lord; it is this which He is also willing to provide us with, for others' sake.

11:11 *What father among you*- We can imagine Him looking around at them.

If his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a snake?- The Lord sensed that His promise of Divine response to prayer for salvation would be so hard for them to accept. He is here persuading them by all manner of methods to simply accept that reality. We are God's children, and He will not be cruel to us. It would be unnatural and counter-instinctive for Him to not save us. For His is the Kingdom- therefore He desires to give it to us, He designed it for us.

There were some fish (similar to eels) caught in the sea of Galilee which looked like snakes. The Lord is penetrating deep into the psychology of His people. We fear that the promised salvation may only be an appearance. And we are being shown here that that is to effectively accuse God of a cruel trick. At what stage the fish became a symbol of Christianity is not clear (there is a distinct similarity in sound between the Aramaic for 'Jesus' and for 'fish', something like 'Iisus' and 'Ikfus'), but the combination of fish and serpent tempt us to interpret this as also having the sense: Do you think that Christianity, the whole offer of the Kingdom I am making, is really such a cruel trick that it's really the serpent, the symbol of evil incarnate? Because that really is how it would have to be. It's either that, or gloriously true. And if we accept God as our loving Father, then with childlike faith we must also believe that His offer of salvation is simply true for us- if we ask. Again we see a connection with earlier teaching in the Sermon; for the Lord had taught His people to pray to "Our Father". Like all of the Lord's prayer, that is harder to pray than might first appear. Because if He really is our loving Heavenly Father, then we are to believe that if we ask Him for salvation and the things of His Kingdom, we shall surely receive.

11:12 *Or if he shall ask for an egg, will he give him a scorpion?*- See on :11. Eggs and small scorpions could look similar. But in the life of a mature believer, there is no possible doubt that every gift from the Father is good- ultimately. Our environments are all given us by Him to develop our spirituality, and not because He hates us or wishes us to suffer. The song of the vineyard in Isaiah 5 makes the amazing point that the Father does all things possible so that we might bear fruit.

11:13 *If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?*- See on Mt. 7:11. Quite simply, we have to believe that prayer changes things. God can change the course of a nation's destiny, or even in a sense the whole course of the universe, because some finite, ignorant, sinful human being has the neck to fervently ask Him to. We are encouraged by the Lord to persist in prayer (Lk. 11:5-13). Elijah had to pray for rain seven times before the cloud came. Daniel prayed 21 days before an answer came. Why doesn't God answer immediately? Is it not simply because He sees it is for our good to develop this habit of knocking on Heaven's door with the same request?

The power of spiritual victory, the real way to holiness in practice, a spiritual mind, unity through forgiveness with God's mind / spirit, is assured to those who simply ask for it in faith. Seeking and finding, knocking on the door and it being opened, are likewise metaphors elsewhere used for God's assured positive response to our spiritual requests. John's equivalent to this part of the Sermon is perhaps the Lord's assurance that He will definitely *give* "living water" to whoever *asks* Him (Jn. 4:10); and the frequent references to us being given "the Holy Spirit" or whatever we ask in His Name if it results in the Father being glorified (Jn. 14:13,14; 15:7,16; 16:23,24,26). The letter of James is

full of reference to the Sermon, and his allusion to 'ask and you will be given' is that if any man ask for *wisdom*, he will be given it (James 1:5,6), but a man will *not* be given things if he asks for material things to fulfill his own natural desires (James 4:2,3). It's as if James is answering the primitive objection: 'Jesus said if you ask, you will be given- but I asked for stuff and never got it'. And his answer is that the blank cheque promise is obviously about asking for spiritual things, not material things. 1 Jn. 3:22; 5:14,15 likewise speak of receiving whatever we ask- in the context of saying that we can look forward to the day of judgment and be confident of acceptance there. God is willing and eager to save us, as the whole wonder of the crucifixion makes clear. If we ask for forgiveness, salvation and the strength to be spiritual, then He has promised to give those things to us. The wonder of that means that any attempt to try to as it were extort material blessing from God is sadly inappropriate and will not enter the mind of those who are rejoicing in His salvation.

11:14 *And he was casting out a demon that was dumb. And it came to pass, when the demon had gone out, the dumb man spoke*- This is the language used at the time for explaining medical situations which today we would diagnose differently. Blindness (Mt.) and deafness are explicable in medical terms. The verse states that the Lord 'healed' the man and therefore, because of that healing, the blindness (Mt.) and deafness left him. The language of healing of persons is not what we would expect if the Lord instead engaged in battle with demonic entities in Heaven or at least, outside of the man.

And the crowds marvelled- This is a strong word, meaning utterly astonished, and even used about madness (Mk. 3:21; 2 Cor. 5:13).

11:15 *But some of them said*- The Pharisees (Mt.). Their comment appears to have been made in very hot blood, for it was logically contradictory to claim that someone who cast out demons must therefore be in league with the prince of the demons; because their own sons (either literally or in the sense of their disciples) claimed to cast out demons. And if Jesus was actually on the side of the prince of demons, why then was he as it were fighting for the other side by casting out demons. Such gaping error in logic was exactly what the Pharisees were constantly careful to avoid; but their intense jealousy of the Lord led them to make this logical error. Again we note that the Lord's style was not so much to directly state the errors of his opponents, but to work on the assumption that their beliefs were correct- and to then follow those beliefs to their logical conclusions, thus showing how those positions contradicted themselves to the point they could not be true. This is one explanation for the use of the language of demons in the Gospels, even though demons don't in fact exist.

By Beelzebub the prince of the demons he casts out demons-

By the instrumentality of Beelzebub. They were driven to assume that the Lord was in league with some higher power in order to perform His miracles. If it wasn't the Holy Spirit of God- it had to be by some other power, and the only option in their theology was some form of the Satan myth. Their logical desperation is a reflection of the undeniable nature of the Lord's miracles (as in Acts 4:16). Any who claim to be able to do miracles through the Holy Spirit should likewise be producing healings which even their most sceptical opponents cannot deny are miracles; but that feature is not seen in many claims of healings today. When accused of being in league with 'satan', the Lord didn't read them a charge of blasphemy. He reasoned instead that a thief cannot bind a strong man; and likewise He couldn't bind 'satan' unless He were stronger than Satan (cp. Mk. 3:23-27). He doesn't take the tack that 'Satan / Beelzebub / demons' don't exist; He showed instead that He was evidently stronger than any such being or force, to the point that belief in such a concept was meaningless. Faith must rather be in Him alone.

The Jews accused the Lord of being in league with the prince of the demons, Beelzebub. His comment was that if the family / house of Satan was so divided, then Satan "has an end" (Mk. 3:26). His approach was 'OK you believe in demons, Beelzebub etc. Well if that's the case, then according to the extension of your logic, Satan will soon come to an end, will cease existence. That's the bottom line. As it happens, I am indeed 'binding the strong man', rendering Satan powerless, making him 'have an end', and so whichever way you look at it, believing in demons or not, the bottom line is that My miracles demonstrate that effectively Satan is powerless and not an item now'. The way the New Testament is written reflects the same approach. When the Lord was alone with His disciples, He explained further: "If they have called the Master of the House [i.e. Jesus] 'Beelzebub', how much more shall they call them of his household?" [i.e. the disciples] (Mt. 10:25). By saying this, the Lord was clarifying that of course He didn't *really* mean that He was part of the Satan family, working against Satan to destroy the entire family. Rather was He and His family quite separate from the Satan family. But He didn't make that clarification to the Jewish crowds – He simply used their idea and reasoned with them on their own terms. Note in passing how the Jews actually thought Jesus was Beelzebub, or Satan. This would be one explanation for their mad passion to kill Him; for those labelled 'Satan' were hunted to their death in such societies, as seen later in the witch hunts of the middle ages. The Jews say Jesus as a false miracle worker, a false Messiah, a bogus Son of God – all characteristics of their view of 'Satan'. Some centuries later, the Jewish sage Maimonides described Jesus in terms of the antichrist: "Daniel had already alluded to him when he presaged the downfall of a wicked one and a heretic among the Jews who would endeavour to destroy the Law, claim prophecy for himself, make pretences to miracles, and allege that he is the Messiah" (*Maimonides' Epistle to Yemen*). It's been suggested that the way the Jewish rabbinical writings call Him *Yeshu* is an acronym for the Hebrew expression *yemach shemo vezichro*– "May his name and memory be obliterated"). This was the very Jewish definition of Satan. They

saw Jesus as Satan himself; hence they were so insistent on slaying Him. Yet by the deft twist of Divine providence, it was through the death of Jesus that the *real* Devil (i.e. the power of sin) was in fact slain (Heb. 2:14). To those with perceptive enough minds to see it, yet once again the Jewish ideas had been turned back upon them to reveal the real nature of the Devil to them, within their own frames of reference and terminology. Likewise Beelzebub means literally 'the lord of the house'; and the Lord Jesus alludes to this in describing Himself as the Master of the House of God.

Judaism had taken over the surrounding pagan notion of a personal 'Satan'. And the Lord Jesus and the Gospel writers use this term, but in the way they use it, they redefine it. The parable of the Lord Jesus binding the "strong man" – the Devil – was really to show that the "Devil" as they understood it was now no more, and his supposed Kingdom now taken over by that of Christ. The last Gospel, John, doesn't use the term in the way the earlier Gospels do. He defines what the earlier writers called "the Devil" as actual people, such as the Jews or the brothers of Jesus, in their articulation of an adversarial ['satanic'] position to Jesus.

Archon, "the first" ["prince"], would imply that Beelzebub was also a demon, the "first" or leading one. Thus the fallacy of their argument is the more apparent- if Beelzebub really existed, why would he cast out his own fellow demons?

11:16 *And others, testing him, sought from him a sign from heaven*- They considered this to be a sign connected with the 'devil'. The Lord could have just walked away from such obvious blasphemers. But He works with them from whatever position they stated, and thereby sets us a huge challenge in dealing with difficult folks.

11:17 *But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them*- But they had "said" these things (:15). Perhaps they said these things within their own minds. Or maybe the contrast is to highlight the upcoming teaching that thoughts are as good as words (Mt. 12:34-37). To hear their words was to know their thoughts.

Every kingdom- Again the Lord accepts their position for one moment as true, and yet takes it forward to its logical implication. If Beelzebub was fighting against his own side, then all the same, Satan's Kingdom was divided against itself and would soon crumble into self-destruction. Therefore what Jesus had done ought to be seen as a presage of Satan's Kingdom ending and, by implication, the soon triumph of God's Kingdom.

Divided against itself- The Lord Jesus framed His parable about Satan's kingdom rising up and being divided against itself in the very language of the Kingdom of Israel being "divided" against itself by Jeroboam's 'rising up' (1 Kings 12:21; 2 Chron. 13:6)- as if Israel's Kingdom was Satan's kingdom.

Is brought to desolation- The Lord only uses the Greek word elsewhere with regard to latter day Babylon's destruction as a result of her followers rising up against her (Rev. 17:16; 18:17,19). This typically been how God destroyed Israel's enemies in the Old Testament- by them turning upon themselves. It follows another great Biblical theme- that those who ultimately will be condemned are in practice self-condemned and bring about their own condemnation.

And a family divided against a family falls apart- A divided house is the characteristic of Satan's house or kingdom, and it will fall- just as the house built on sand fell at the day of judgment. This is the strongest condemnation of any divided Christian community. The Lord is teaching that the breakup of a Kingdom, even Satan's, must start on the household level and progress higher. Perhaps this is a hint at the growth of *God's* kingdom beginning with the household conversions and house churches with which Christianity started.

11:18 *And if Satan*- Mark adds that the Lord spoke all this "in parables" (Mk. 3:23). 'Satan' was a parable and is being used here in a non-literal sense. The Lord reasons with them on their own ground, assuming for a moment that their wrong ideas were true- hence "*if* Satan...". The one who cast out Satan / demons was of course Jesus personally. Their false logic and theology had led them to label a good man as Satan just because He did a good work of healing. So quickly, false logic and theology drives jealous people along a path of demonization, negative labelling of others and religious hatred.

Also is divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? Because you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebub- Ez. 17:14 uses this language about how Old Testament kingdom of Judah no longer 'stood' because of their disobedience. The true Kingdom of God would 'stand' for ever (Dan. 2:44). The Lord may be hinting that Israel was no longer God's Kingdom and was in fact therefore Satan's kingdom- for the true Kingdom of God would always stand. It is Satan's Kingdom which falls, not God's.

Bible readers are familiar with the personification of sin as a man called 'Satan', the enemy. This symbolic man is in fact the antithesis of the Lord Jesus Christ. As we follow this theme through Scripture, it becomes apparent that we are just at the tip of an iceberg. This symbolic man has a kingdom and almost every attribute of the Lord Jesus and *His* Divine Kingdom of righteousness. Consider the similarities:
Satan has a Kingdom (Lk. 11:18)
The power and glory of which have been *delivered* to him by God, and which he can give to whomsoever he will (Lk. 4:6)
Angels (Mt. 25:41; 2 Cor. 12:7 Gk.)
The power of death (Heb. 2:14 cp. Hos. 13:14; Rev. 1:18; 20:6)
Power to condemn men (1 Tim. 3:6)

A judgment seat and system of rewards based on that of Christ (Mt. 6:1 cp. 2,16)
Condemned sinners are invited to the 'feast' of God's judgments and given suitable wedding clothes (Zeph. 1:7,8) in parody of the Kingdom (Mt. 22:2,3)
Is a father (Jn. 8:44)
Has children (Acts 13:10; 1 Jn. 3:10 cp. Heb. 2:13)
And a wisdom that is opposed to God's wisdom (James 3:15-17)
Armour (Lk. 11:22)
Power (Acts 26:18)
Spiritual "depths" (Rev. 2:24, s.w. Rom. 11:33; 1 Cor. 2:10; Eph. 3:18)
Seed which he sows (Mt. 13:39)
A throne (Rev. 2:13; 2 Thess. 2:4)
A mystery (2 Thess. 2:7; Rev. 2:24)
"Power... signs and... wonders" (2 Thess. 2:9; Rev. 13:13)
Stands at the right hand of men (Ps. 109:6 cp. 109:31; 16:8; 110:1)
Is likened to lightening (Lk. 10:18 cp. 17:24)
Puts things in men's' hearts (Jn. 13:2 cp. 2 Cor. 8:16)
He is a son who will be "revealed" (2 Thess. 2:4), as Christ will be (Lk. 17:30, same Gk.)
He is "he that comes" (2 Cor. 11:4), a phrase so often used about the Lord Jesus (Lk. 7:19,20; Jn. 7:27,31)
He will be "revealed *in his time*" (2 Thess. 2:6), as Christ will be (Lk. 17:24)
"The god of this world" who emits a bright light into the hearts of men (2 Cor. 4:4 cp. 6)
Enthroned in God's temple (2 Thess. 2:4)
He has "works" (1 Jn. 3:8)
Figuratively comes down from heaven to earth in the last days (Rev. 12:12)
Has bread and wine of wickedness (Prov. 4:17)
His followers "hold" Christ, as the true disciples do (same words in Col. 2:9; Mt. 28:19 cp. Mt. 26:4,48,50,55,57)
Will be 'apocalypsed' as Christ will be (2 Thess. 2:8).

11:19 *And even if I*- Three times in succession the Lord uses the "if... " clause. Logic and consequence of position is therefore significant to Him. If it were not, it would totally not matter what we believed about anything.

By Beelzebub- 2 Kings 1:2 clearly tells us that Beelzebub was a false god of the Philistines. Jesus did not say, 'Now look, 2 Kings 1:2 says Beelzebub was a false god, so your accusation cannot be true'. No, He spoke as if Beelzebub existed, because He was interested in getting His message through to His audience. So in the same way Jesus talked about casting out demons – He did not keep saying, 'actually, they do not exist', He just preached the Gospel in the language of the day.

Cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out?- The miracles claimed by the Jews would've compared poorly with the Lord's, rather like the attempts by the Egyptian magicians to imitate the miracles of Moses. The Lord never makes that point directly. He accepts that these people claimed to 'cast out demons' and reasons as if that is true- in order to clinch the greater point, that their whole belief system was deeply flawed. It seems to me that this is one reason why the NT writers go along with the idea of demons- to demonstrate by colossal implication that either they do not exist, or they are utterly powerless. “By whom do your sons cast them [demons] out?” (Lk. 11:19) shows the Lord assuming for a moment that there were demons, and that the Jews could cast them out. He doesn’t directly challenge them on their false miracles, their exaggerated reports of healings, nor on the non-existence of demons. He takes them from where they are and seeks to lead them to truth.

Therefore shall they be your judges- See on Rev. 16:15.

Their own sons who had claimed to do miracles would be presented at the day of judgment when their lives were examined. The point would be made that they had condemned Jesus for something which their own sons did, and yet they had not condemned *them*, and therefore they would be condemned / judged at the hands of their own sons. Likewise the Lord reasoned that the presence of the Queen of Sheba at judgment day would be a condemnation for some in first century Israel (12:42). Judgment day will not be a mere yes / no encounter. Our lives will be laid bare, specific incidents raised and the implications of them discussed, with the persons involved or implicated standing there giving testimony; or at least, this is how it shall be for the rejected. There is a colossal importance to life and living, to justice, to the implications of actions. It’s no good just shrugging and hoping for the best, allowing the passage of time to work a kind of pseudo-atonement, whereby we forget the implications of our actions.

The fact the Pharisees' children cast out demons condemned the Pharisees. Noah's very example was a condemnation of his world (Heb. 11:7); the very existence of believing Gentiles judges the Jews as condemned (Rom. 2:27); and the very existence of the repentant Ninevites condemned first century Israel (Mt. 12:41). The faithful preaching of the Corinthians would judge an unbeliever (1 Cor. 14:24). Noah's very act of righteousness in building the ark condemned / judged those who saw it and didn't respond (Heb. 11:7). This is why the rejected will be shamed before the accepted; they will bow in shame at their feet (Rev. 3:9; 16:15). Perhaps it is in this sense that "we shall judge angels" (1 Cor. 6:3)- rejected ecclesial elders, cp. the angels of the churches in Rev. 2,3? The point is, men's behaviour and conduct judges others because of the contrast it throws upon them. And this was supremely true of the Lord. No wonder in the naked shame and glory of the cross lay the supreme "judgment of this world".

However "your sons" could refer to the Lord's disciples, who were ethnic Jews and many had previously been "sons" or disciples of the Jews. The immediate context in Lk. 10 is of the Lord's 72 disciples casting out demons. They thereby became judges of the Pharisees.

11:20 *But if I by the finger of God*- A comparison of Mt. 12:28 and Lk. 11:20 shows that "the finger of God" and "the spirit of God" are parallel - God in action is His spirit. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth" (Ps. 33:6). One reason the Lord did miracles was to try to drive people towards a final decision about Him- see Mt. 12:30. Either He did them by the Spirit, and was therefore attested at God's Messiah and providing a true foretaste of the Messianic Kingdom- or, as the Pharisees claimed, the source of power He was clearly tapping into must be from 'the other side', from evil. The population were therefore faced with a deep choice- either He was who He claimed, or He was an agent of Satan. There was no middle position. It was clear that Jesus, a manual worker from Nazareth, had access to some cosmic power on a scale previously unknown in the earth. The Bible clearly teaches that there is no power but of God. And there is only one God. Those teachings alone make redundant any concept of a personal cosmic Satan and demons. If I had faced off against first century Palestinians deeply persuaded of demonic forces, I think I would've gone down the road of arguing that the God of Israel is omnipotent, quoting Is. 45:7 etc. But the Son of God did it differently. He demonstrated beyond doubt, even by his fiercest enemies, that He had access to superhuman power. He was happy to bear with their idea that there were two 'powers' in the cosmos- of good (from Yahweh) and evil (from Satan). But He then argued that seeing He was doing good, He must therefore have access to that good power. He must, therefore, have unique relationship with Yahweh. Those who clung on to their beliefs in Satan and the power of evil were left with no option but to accept that either He was of Satan, or of God. And seeing His works were *good* (as they grudgingly admit in Jn. 10:33), they really had to accept He was of God. And clearly His power was such that effectively, the supposedly 'evil force' was of no account. The next verse goes on to develop the point- that these miracles were a plundering of the palace of 'Satan', so therefore the power of Jesus was such that He had effectively subdued this being and left 'him' powerless. This was a far more effective path to take than a point blank denial of the existence of any evil power or Satan figure.

Cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you- The Greek *phthano* can carry the idea of to anticipate or precede; it is translated "go before" in 1 Thess. 4:15. The Lord's miracles were a foretaste of how the Kingdom of God on earth will be, with no sickness and total healing, spiritually and physically. In the ministry and person of Jesus we see a foretaste of how the Kingdom of God will actually be; and 'the Kingdom' was a title of Christ, so closely was He personally the epitome of that time (Lk. 17:21). If we

want to know what the future Kingdom of God on earth will be like- look at the person and actions of Jesus. He was in Himself the proclamation and essence of that Kingdom. The descriptions of a renewed earth in Isaiah focus very much on the physicalities of that time, and at best describe the situation during the initial part of God's Kingdom. But the ultimate spiritual essence of life in eternity is to be found in Jesus as a person.

11:21 *When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe*- The strength of sin, and thereby the extent of the Lord's victory, is brought out by another unreal element in the Lord's picture of "a strong man fully armed [guarding] his own court" (Lk. 11:21 RV). This householder is fanatic; he wanders around fully armed to protect his own courtyard and his goods, rather than getting servants or guards to do it. The Lord being "stronger than he" through the cross was therefore indeed strong. See on Lk. 13:9. 'Beelzebub' can mean 'Lord of the house'. The 'strong man' is clearly 'Satan' in the parable the Lord is creating here (Mk. 3:23).Note the allusions to Samson (Jud. 14:18).

11:22 *But when one stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him his whole armour in which he had trusted, and divides his spoils*- The idea of the Lord binding satan (the "strong man"), stealing his goods and sharing them with His followers is a picture of His victory on the cross. It is full of allusion to Is. 53:12, which says that on account of the fact that Christ would pour out His soul unto death and bear our sins, "he shall divide the spoil with the strong (Heb: 'those that are bound')". With the same thought in mind, Paul spoke of how through the cross, Christ "*spoiled* principalities and powers" (Col. 2:15). It may be that this is one of many examples of the New Testament writers thinking in a Hebrew way, despite writing in Greek. "Principalities and powers" is perhaps an intensive plural, referring to the *great* principality and power, i.e. Satan. The way He 'triumphed over them in himself' (Gk. + AVmg.) would certainly make more sense if they referred to the Biblical devil / satan which was overcome within Christ (cp. the language of Heb. 2:14-18; 1 Pet. 2:24). Eph. 2:15,16 appears to be parallel to Col. 2:15. It speaks of how Christ "abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments... for to make *in himself* of twain one new man, so making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby". Col. 2:15 speaks of the Lord on the cross as the victorious champion, killing "principalities and powers" and then triumphing over them by sharing their spoils with his soldiers. Eph. 2:15 speaks of the Lord on the cross "slaying the enmity" (the Biblical Devil) and achieving peace and reconciliation for all those within His body. Yet in the immediate context, the Lord is offering an explanation of why His miracles proved He was the Messiah. He hadn't yet died on the cross; but He was doing the works which were possible as a result of the binding of Satan which He would then achieve. This is yet another example of the Lord's confidence that He would overcome, and God going along with Him in this. The Lord's miracles were a physical foretaste of the great

spiritual blessings which would be made available as a result of the binding of Satan by the Lord's death and resurrection.

The "spoils" of Satan are those things which he has taken away; surely the spoils taken from Satan by Christ refer to the righteousness which our nature takes away from us. Lk. 11:22 adds another detail to the story. The "armour" of Satan which he depends upon is taken away by Christ on the cross, and then Satan is bound, and his spoils shared out. The armour of Satan is the antithesis of the armour of righteousness (Eph. 6:11,13). As the Kingdom of God has a God who dwells in darkness, a Prince, an armour, a Christ, a dominion, a will and spirit, fruits, rewards etc., so does the kingdom of (the personified) Satan. The armour of righteousness is the fruit of the Spirit, the righteous characteristics of the Spirit. The armour of Satan is the fruits of the flesh nature. These have been taken away by Christ, He has bound Satan, and therefore what Satan has robbed us of, the fruits of righteousness, his spoils, can be taken at will by the Lord Jesus. We have shown that Christ was alluding to Is. 53:12, which says that through the cross, Christ divides the spoil with the bound ones, i.e. us. In this lies a paradox. Binding is associated with sin (Ps. 68:6; Is. 61:1; Lam. 1:14; Lk. 13:16). We are bound, in many ways, intrinsically limited by our own natures. Only at the second coming will Satan be bound, i.e. the Lord's personal achievement will be physically shared with the world (Rev. 20:2). Yet we, the bound ones, are given the goods which the Lord personally took away from the bound Satan. Those goods are the righteous attributes which our natures stop us possessing as we should. The dividing of the spoils to us by the victorious Lord (Lk. 11:22; Is. 53:12) recalls how the Lord divided *all* His goods between His servants (Mt. 25:14), the dividing of *all* the Father's goods between the sons (representing the good and bad believers, Lk. 15:12). We have elsewhere shown that these goods refer to the various aspects of the supreme righteousness of Christ which are divided between the body of Christ. The spoils divided to us by the Lord are the various aspects of righteousness which He took for Himself from Satan. The picture of a bound strong man having his house ransacked before his eyes carries with it the idea of suspense, of daring, of doing something absolutely impossible. And so the idea of Christ really taking the righteousness which the Satan of our very natures denies us, and giving these things to us, is almost too much to believe.

It is normally the fellow-soldiers who share the spoils (cp. Heb. 7:4). But we didn't even fight; the spoils are divided amongst the bound ones (Is. 53:12 Heb.). Satan in general is still unbound (cp. Rev. 20:2). Christ bound the Satan within Himself personally, and took the spoils of victory for Himself. Col. 2:15 says that Christ "spoiled" as a result of His victory on the cross; and the Greek specifically means 'to completely divest *for oneself*'. He is being painted as the lone hero who took it all for Himself; of the people there was none with Him in His great battle on the cross (Is. 63:3). And indeed, He was the lone

hero. But the point is that He has shared with us the spoils of righteousness which He took for Himself as a result, even though we are not worthy to receive them. Seeing the teaching of the Lord is just outline principle, it is evident that through His death He gained possession of absolute righteousness, and then shared this with us. In the first century, the outward demonstration of this was in the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. "He led captivity captive (more language of the heroic victor), and gave gifts unto men", the miraculous gifts, in the first century context (Eph. 4:8,11). But what was taken away from Satan was not only power over illness. If this was the main meaning of Satan being bound and his spoils shared with us, then it would follow that the effect of Christ's binding of Satan was only in the first century; for those miraculous gifts of the Spirit are no longer available; illness still triumphs over God's people. The spoils of Satan refer to the righteousness which Satan limits and denies. It is this which has been taken from him, and divided to us all as a result of the cross. The miracles of the first century were a physical reflection of this, just as the rending of the temple veil and resurrection of some dead saints was a physical foretaste of the spiritual possibilities opened up by the Lord's death.

There are many references to the spiritual blessings which are even now mediated to us (as the whole body of Christ) on account of the Lord's death; we (as a community) are given peace and "eternal life" (Jn. 14:27; 17:2; 1 Jn. 5:11), knowledge (2 Cor. 4:6), wisdom (Eph. 1:17; James 1:15), peace (2 Thess. 3:16), understanding (1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:7), love in our hearts (Rom. 5:5), grace (Eph. 4:7), comfort (2 Thess. 2:16), righteousness (Rom. 5:16,17), confidence (2 Tim. 1:7), sexual self restraint (1 Cor. 7:7). All the different aspects of the 100% righteousness of our Lord, *all* His goods, the spoils He personally took from Satan, are divided up amongst ourselves, some having spiritual possibilities in one area, others in another. As a community we are counted as if we have overcome the world, overcome Satan, as Christ did, although on a human level we are still bound (Jn. 16:33 cp. 1 Jn. 2:13,14; 5:4). Only at the day of judgment will we have overcome all (Rev. 21:7 cp. Lk. 11:22 s.w.), but we are treated as if we have already done so.

Grasping this extensive theme helps explain the deep sense of paradox which is central to all serious self-examination. We are counted righteous, we are given spiritual gifts of righteousness now, and our self-examination reveals this to us; but we are expected to develop them (according to the parable of the pounds). Yet we also see that we are pathetically bound by our Satan, somehow held back from that life of righteousness which we would fain achieve. All these things were deeply foreseen and appreciated by the Lord when He constructed this parable of binding Satan. Christ in His own life has overcome Satan, and has graciously shared the various aspects of righteousness with the whole of His body. This is the very idea of the body of Christ; between us, over time,

we will approximate to the perfect reflection of our Lord. We have each been given different aspects to develop, different parts of His personality. This explains the difference in emphasis which can be observed within the different parts of the present body, and also in the history of the body over time.

11:23 *He that is not with me is against me*- The original is memorable- either *meta* Me, or *kata* Me. The Lord is speaking here from *His* perspective. For He Himself observed that Judas 'ate *with Me*', but lifted up his heel '*against* Me' (Jn. 13:18). It's simply not so that all those who claim to be with the Lord are therefore with Him and on the same side as we who know we are in truth 'with' Him. He is simply observing an ultimate truth- that finally, there will be (and therefore is not now) any middle position in relation to Him. It's not therefore for us to insist that anyone who claims to be 'with Him' is so merely because they say so. Let His words sink in to you personally: “He who is not with me is against me... he that is not against us is for us” (Mt. 12:30; Mk. 9:40). We may think we are not against the Lord’s cause, even if we’re not as committed to it as we might be; many an unbaptized young person has told me this. But to be ‘not against’ Jesus means we must be *with Him*. Nobody can be passively ‘not against’ Jesus. If we’re not whole heartedly with Him, we’re against Him. That’s how His demanding logic goes. A relationship with Him demands the whole person; *you*, your very heart and essence.

And he that does not gather with me scatters- In connection with the gathering of spoil from the strong man's house. There is a tendency to use this verse as a general statement of principle, but the surrounding context is specifically about the Lord's healing miracles being part of the spoil He has plundered from the 'Lord of the house', Beelzebub / Satan. People were faced with the choice of accepting the Lord's miracles were performed using either God's power, or Satan's. The whole issue pushed the audience to a crucial choice- of accepting of Jesus as God's special Son, or as Satan. The miracles were proof that the Lord Jesus had bound the power of Satan- the power which people believed was behind illness. If you didn't want to go and gather the spoil, then you were actively scattering it abroad. This hyperbole was used to force all the cautious people who remained undecided to realize that ultimately, there is no such thing as agnosticism. If you are not eagerly gathering the spoil the Lord has now released, then you are actively working against Him.

The moment of conversion is the beginning of the gathering to judgment (Lk. 11:23; Jn. 4:36). The one talent man didn't appreciate this; he objected to the Lord reaping and gathering him (Mt. 25:24). But whatever human objections, the responsible from all nations *will be gathered* to judgment (Mt. 25:32). The servants are called to receive their talents, and then called again to account (Lk. 19;13,15); there is something in common between the calling to know the Gospel, and the calling to judgment.

11:24 *When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says*- The ministry of the Lord Jesus was a follow

up to that of John the Baptist, and that theme is never far from us in Luke's Gospel. Those not against who are for in :23 may well refer to John's disciples. The unclean spirit was cast out of Israel due to their surface level response to John's preaching- this was the sweeping of the house. But it returned and that generation became more evil than before. This lays the basis for the parable of the sower, which was told the same day- the seed initially experienced some growth, but then the 'evil one', the Jewish system, stunted that growth. Demons supposedly didn't like water (as in Mt. 8:28-34). Again we find the Lord using the language of the day without correcting it. The reference is also to the Jews going into the wilderness to hear John's preaching.

I will return to my house from which I came- The Greek word is elsewhere translated to convert (Mt. 13:15). Israel's rejection of Jesus was effectively a re-conversion away from John's message. The same word is used of how John was to convert Israel to their God (Lk. 1:16,17). "Came [out]" is the same word used thrice about that generation going out into the wilderness to hear John (Mt. 11:7-9).

11:25 *And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order*- The only other usage of the word "swept" is in the Lord's self-description of His 'sweeping' the house of Israel in order to find the lost (Lk. 15:8). The house of Israel had been swept- but the nation had not been 'found' because they would not come to Jesus in repentance.

11:26 *Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter in and dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first*- "State" is an addition from the translators. "The last" was the state of condemnation which that generation ended up in. The Lord's comments that the first would be "last" (Mt. 20:16) could therefore be taken as a reference to the final condemnation of the Jewish religious leadership, "the first". However, "the last", the *eschatos*, could refer to their status at the judgment of the last day. But the essence of judgment is now, and the Lord saw them as already in that state. It "*is* worse" and yet thus 'it *shall* be' for that generation.

11:27 *And it came to pass, as he said these things, that a certain woman out of the crowd lifted up her voice and said to him: Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts which you did suck*- The woman was not merely making a passing comment, but alluding somehow to the repeated blessedness attached to Mary (1:28,42,48). Perhaps the Angel's words to Mary were already known and publicized; or perhaps this was a close relative whom Mary had told this to; or maybe Luke is just demonstrating the truth of the Angelic promise that all generations would call Mary "blessed".

11:28 *But he said: Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it*- The Lord shifts all focus away from considering Mary to be blessed just because she happened to be the physical channel used for His conception. Rather her blessedness was to be understood in terms of how she heard God's word and kept it, meditating

upon it in her heart (2:19,51). Likewise we can take the warning that even if the Father clearly uses us as a channel, this doesn't of itself mean we are acceptable with Him. It is personal spirituality, of the kind Mary had, which is all significant.

Paul Wyns has spotted the following connections:

REVELATION 1	LUKE 11
Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things that are written therein. (v.3)	Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it. (v.28)
Seven spirits (angels) before the throne. (v.4)	Contrast – seven unclean spirits invited into the house. (v.24-26)
The resurrected Christ – I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore. (v.12-19)	The sign of Jonah the prophet. (v.29-32)
The seven golden candlesticks. (v.12,13,20)	The parable of the lighted candlestick. (v.33-36)

The lesson for us is that the Lord even in His Heavenly glory alluded to His dear mother's attitude, and held her up as the pattern for all His people. She had an eternal influence upon Him. Even in His Heavenly glory, the incidents of that day in Lk. 11, and the example of His mother, remained with Him. This is surely a tremendous incentive to parents- their influence on their children may be a factor in how their children will eternally be. The Lord was alluding to how His mother had "kept" God's word in her heart in devout meditation (Lk. 2:51). He didn't say 'Blessed is *she* because *she* heard the word and kept it'. Rather, "blessed are *they*". He was surely saying: 'Don't just dumbly admire my mother, with some kind of distant, spectator admiration; she is the pattern for *all* of you. Follow her, make her the pattern of *your* life with respect to God's word, rather than just gasp at her example'.

11:29 *And when the crowds were gathering together to him, he began to say: This generation is an evil generation. It seeks after a sign*- Ahaz was likewise rebuked for seeking a sign instead of believing in faith the Messianic prophecies. The Lord had been clearly doing signs / miracles. They were maybe claiming that they personally had not been present when the signs were done, and now they wanted to see one. But Lk. 11:16 adds the detail that they sought a "sign *from Heaven*". This continues the issue under debate; the Pharisees accepted that Jesus was doing signs / miracles, but they

considered them to be from 'Satan'; the Lord has responded by saying that His good works show He is a good man working on God's behalf, and that they would be called to account at the last day for their blasphemy. But it seems this other group of Pharisees continue in the blasphemous position- their response is to assume that the earlier miracles were signs from 'Satan', but now they give the Lord a chance to do a sign / miracle from God ("Heaven"). They repeated this request later (Mt. 16:1), and again the Lord answered them with "the sign of the prophet Jonah". It's not necessarily wrong to require a sign- Gideon's example comes to mind. The disciples themselves asked for a sign (Mt. 24:3), and the Lord answered them to the effect that there would be "the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven" (Mt. 24:30). "In" Heaven can mean 'by the instrumentality of [Heaven]'. The similarity of words and concepts is so close that there must be some continuity in meaning. It could be that the sign of the Son of Man given by Heaven in the last days is the sign of Jonah- the successful preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles and the resurrection from the dead.

But there shall no sign be given to it- The idea could be 'no *further* sign', as if the Lord was saying that He would do no further dramatic miracles to seek to persuade the Pharisees. In this case, the allusion would be to the Egyptians not believing the signs given them (Ex. 4:9), resulting in their final destruction. Unbelieving Israel are no better than Egypt / the world, and will "be condemned with the world". Note that here as often we have to read in an ellipsis: 'No *more* sign'. For He had been doing signs / miracles in abundance. Or perhaps, seeing that He did continue doing miracles: 'No sign *greater than* [that of Jonah]'.

Except the sign of Jonah- The ‘resurrected’ Jonah was a type of the Lord- and he was a ‘sign’ to the Ninevites presumably in that he still bore in his body the marks of a man who had been three days within a fish. It could be that the fish beached itself, and vomited Jonah out of its stomach in its death throes (this is how beached whales meet their end). In this case, the fish would have drawn the attention of the local population, as would have the man with bleached hair and strange skin who walked away from it. We too as witnesses of Christ will have something about us that is unintentionally striking in the eyes of those with whom we mix. There was no human chance that Jonah would be listened to when he came to preach judgment against Nineveh. Some guy standing on the edge of town, saying ‘You’re all gonna be destroyed’. People would have laughed, ignored him, or told him to shut up. But there was something about him that was gripping and arresting. He was living proof that the judgment of God is real, and that His mercy is just as real. Presumably Jonah must have said far more than “Nineveh is going to be destroyed”.

It is a worthwhile speculation that for Jonah to be a sign to the Ninevites by reason of being three days in the whale (Mt. 12:38-40), he must have borne in his body the marks of his experience for all to see, as our Lord did. Being inside the fish for that period may

have made his flesh change colour or bear some other physical mark so that he could be a sign to them of what had happened. Doubtless he recounted his story to them- so that they were encouraged by the fact of God's love to the resurrected Jonah to repent and likewise throw themselves on God's mercy. In all this we see Jonah as a type of Christ. They would have looked upon that man as we look upon Jesus, to see the love of God manifested in him; they responded by repenting in sackcloth, casting off their materialism, and living in a way that showed their complete belief that "the judge stands before the door". What is our response to Jonah/Jesus?

11:30 *For even as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of Man be to this generation*- As Jonah was three days in the whale and then came up out of it to preach to the Gentiles, so the Lord would be three days in the grave and then would rise- as a sign to the Jews. But how was His resurrection a sign to them, seeing they never saw His risen body? Yet the Lord's reasoning demands that His resurrection be a sign to them, just as tangible as the re-appearance of the drowned Jonah. But, the Jews never saw Him after the resurrection...? The resolution must be that in the preaching of the risen Jesus by those in Him, it was as if the Jews saw Him, risen and standing as a sign before them, every bit as real as the Jonah who emerged from the whale after three days.

11:31 *The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and shall condemn them. For she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, a greater than Solomon is here*- "Rise up" translates *egeiro* whereas "stand up" in :32 translates *anistemi*. The Ninevites will "rise in judgment", as a judge arises to pronounce a verdict; whereas the Queen of the South arises "in *the* judgment", with the article. The difference may be because the Queen of the South is being portrayed as being resurrected along with the people of the Lord's generation. The reference is perhaps more to resurrection than to arising in judgment.

If Sheba is at the very end of 'the earth', we have another confirmation that the 'earth' or land in Scripture often refers to the land promised to Abraham, and not the entire planet. The point is that she made a huge effort to come to hear Divine truth, whereas Christ as "the wisdom of God" stood before their eyes and they refused to believe and repent. The parallel is between the Queen of Sheba and the Ninevites, who repented. We may be able to infer that she likewise repented upon hearing Solomon's wisdom. The whole theme in this section is of the need to make an abiding repentance upon hearing God's Truth as spoken by His Son.

11:32 *The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation and shall condemn it*- We must read in an ellipsis, '[the people of] this generation'. For individuals and not entire generations will be judged. 'Standing up' is possibly an allusion to the resurrection of the responsible at the last day, but more likely the figure is of a judge

arising in judgment to state the verdict; which in this case, is condemnation. The Lord in :19 has spoken of how the children of the Jews would judge those Jews in the last day. The Lord clearly seems to envisage the judgment process as having a public dimension to it. The fact one person was spiritually responsive, given a similar or harder set of circumstances than what another has had who did not respond, will therefore as it were be the judgment of the person who didn't respond. It clearly won't be merely an awards ceremony nor a yes / no decision, but rather will context and precedent from others be taken into account. 'If *they* responded and *you* did not, given similar circumstances, then *they* will condemn *you*'- that seems to be the Lord's reasoning.

The truly righteous among the remnant "shall tread down the wicked... (as) ashes under the soles of your feet" (Malachi 4:3). "The wicked" are those of Malachi 3:18 and 4:1 - the unspiritual element amongst the latter-day Jewish 'remnant' in Jerusalem. This implies that in some way the spiritual Jews acceptable to Jesus will mete out judgment on the rejected ones. Perhaps in similar fashion the men of Nineveh will condemn the first century Jews at the judgment (Luke 11:32), and we will judge Angels (1 Cor. 6:3). In this way the righteous remnant shall "discern (judge) between the righteous and the wicked" (Malachi 3:18). The men of Nineveh will condemn first century Israel, just as the folly of the rejected will be made manifest unto all men (2 Tim. 3:9). This is not so as to simply humiliate the rejected. It is so that the faithful *learn* something too. This was all foreshadowed in the way that Israel experienced their judgments in the sight of the nations, so that God's principles would be taught even to the Gentile world (Ez. 5:8,15). Indeed, the idea of God executing judgment on His people *in the sight* of others is quite common (e.g. Ez. 5:8; 16:41). But we can learn the principles of God's judgments right now, from His word.

For they repented- The Lord has explained that initially the people had responded to John's message- the demon had been as it were cast out and the house of Israel left swept and cleaned. But both John and Jesus appealed for repentance, in the very same words: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Mt. 3:2; 4:17). But they had not really repented; they had responded to a religious message but not really repented. And the challenge comes down to us- as to whether our repentance, along with any spiritual act, is indeed the real thing or a mere appearance.

At the preaching of Jonah, and behold, a greater than Jonah is here- This effectively is a noun, referring to "the preaching" as in the message of Jonah. What he preached was judgment to come, and the Ninevites repented on hearing it. The Lord was teaching not only judgment to come, but was making specific the call to repentance implicit within that message, and urging people to accept God's grace. Hence those who heard Him were even more guilty before the Ninevites. Jonah's preaching occurred *after* he had been three days within the whale; after the Lord had been three days in the earth, He too would preach mightily, through the ministry of those 'in Him' who were effectively

His representatives and appealed on His behalf. But He reasons as if that appeal was already being made- as if in essence He had already passed through the cross and resurrection. This is not the only time He reasons in this way; in proclaiming Himself Lord, the serpent lifted up on the pole, the One who had already "overcome the world", He reasoned as if the successful outcome of His death had already occurred. Such was His faith that He would come forth triumphant.

11:33 *No one when he has lit a lamp puts it in a cellar, neither under a bucket, but on the lightstand, so that they who enter in may see the light*- See on Lk. 8:16. We may wonder why the Lord at this point appears to be repeating so many elements from the sermon on the mount recorded in Mt. 5-7. That sermon was given in Galilee; now He is near Bethany in the Jerusalem area (at the end of chapter 10). He is repeating His Galilean teachings for the southerners.

The Lord speaks of how we are the light of the world, giving light to the world in the same way as "they" light a lamp. Who are the "they"? The point has been made that to first century Palestinian ears, the answer was obvious: Women. Because lighting the lamps was a typical female duty, which men were not usually involved in. Could it not be that the Lord Jesus even *especially* envisaged women as His witnesses? Did He here have in mind how a great company of women would be the first to share the news that the light of the world had risen?

The Greek article in "the lamp / candlestick" refers to the specific candlestick, and to Jewish minds this would surely have referred to the candlestick in the Holy Place (s.w. Heb. 9:2). This continues the theme of the Lord teaching a new form of Judaism, for His sermon on the mount is full of allusions to previous Mosaic practice, but redefining it. The implication is that ordinary men are present in the Holy Place too, who will see our light. Or it could be that Jesus has in mind how it was the priests who alone entered the Holy Place- and He is saying that the light from those who followed Him would illuminate the Jewish priesthood. The light of the candlestick is both the believer (Mt. 5:15) and the Gospel itself (Mk. 4:21). We are to be the Gospel. We must burn as a candle now, in shedding forth the light, or we will be burnt at the judgment (Mt. 5:15 and Jn. 15:6 use the same words). This is but one of many examples of the logic of endurance; we must burn anyway, so why not do it for the Lord's sake and reap the reward.

The story of the candle that was put under a bucket brings out an issue related to that of the desire to root up the tares: the candle was put there (presumably) on account of an almost paranoiac fear that the wind would blow it out; but this over-protection of the lamp in itself caused the light to go out (Mt. 5:15). Time and again, preaching the light, holding up the beacon of the word of Christ's cross, has been impeded or stifled in the name of preserving the truth, strengthening what remains (words taken out of context).

And because of this lack of witness, this lack of holding out the light to others, the fire of Christ has waxed dim amongst us. This ties in to the theme that preaching is not just commanded as a publicity exercise for Almighty God; He doesn't need us to do that for Him. It is commanded for the benefit of the preacher more than those preached to. To put a candle under a bucket or bed seems senseless; yet this is how senseless and inappropriate it is to hold back preaching for the sake of defending the Faith. Indeed to put it under a bed (Mk. 4:21) and then go to sleep (candles are normally only lit at night) is likely to destroy the person who does it, to burn them while they are asleep. All who have the light but don't preach it (in whatever form) are likely to suffer the same; notice how the Lord (by implication) links night time and sleepiness with an apathy in preaching. Evidently the Lord foresaw the attitude that has surfaced amongst His people: 'We must concentrate on keeping the Truth, new converts are often problematic, too much energy goes to preaching rather than building up ourselves in the faith'. Probably the resistance to preaching to the Gentiles in the first century used similar reasoning. The Lord may have had in mind a Talmud entry (*Shabbat* 107a) which permitted the covering of a lamp with a bowl on the Sabbath if it was done in order to stop the entire house catching fire. He is arguing that such a fear based attitude, fearful of possible consequence if we share the light, will result in the light going out. And that lesson needs to be learnt time and again.

11:34 *The lamp of your body is your eye. When your eye is single, your whole body also is full of light*- This observation about single-mindedness ["healthy" = 'single'] follows on from the Lord's teaching about the overall direction of the human mind, observing that we cannot have two overall directions for our heart. Our eye must be single, the entrance of light must be only from one source. God gives to all men with a single eye (James 1:5 Gk.); and in response, we too must be single eyed in our giving (s.w.). If our eye / world-view / outlook on life is *single* [s.w. 'simple' in the passages quoted], then our whole body / life will be full of light. In daily work, in private reflection and planning for our immediate futures and present needs, there must be a direct and undiluted belief of the teachings of the Gospel, connecting those teachings to our daily life of faith. In this simplicity of the life of faith, in a world that makes life so complicated [especially for the poor], we will find humility. With that simplicity and humility will come peace, and the ability to pray with a concentrated and uncluttered mind, without our thoughts wandering off into the petty troubles of life as we frame our words before Almighty God each morning and night.

I've always sensed that the more complex a person, the harder it is for them to be generous. But we are all commanded to be generous to the Lord's cause, knowing that nothing we have is our own. And I am not only talking to wealthy brethren. *All* of us have

something, and all of us can give something to our brethren. Consider how the poor believers of the first century such as Corinth [amongst whom there were not many rich or mighty, Paul reminds them] collected funds for the poor brethren in Judea. There is a Greek word translated “simplicity” which is related to the word translated "single" here. It occurs eight times in the NT. Five of these are in 2 Corinthians, written as it was in the context of Corinth giving funds for the Jerusalem poor.

Consider how the word is translated:
- Paul had “*simplicity* and Godly sincerity” (2 Cor. 1:12)
- They had “*liberality*” (2 Cor. 8:2)
- “*Bountifulness*” (2 Cor. 9:11)
- Their “*liberal distribution*” (2 Cor. 9:13)
- He feared lest they be corrupted from “the *simplicity* that is in Christ” (2 Cor. 11:3).

Evidently Paul saw a link between generosity and the simplicity of the faith in Christ. It doesn’t need a lexicon to tell you that this word means both ‘simplicity’ and also ‘generous’. The connection is because the basis for generosity is a simple faith. Not a dumb, blind faith, glossing over the details of God’s word. But a realistic, simple, direct conviction. This is why Paul exhorts that all giving to the Lord’s cause should be done with “simplicity” (Rom. 12:8- the AVmg. translates ‘liberally’). Give, in whatever way, and don’t complicate it with all the ifs and buts which our fleshly mind proposes. Paul warns them against false teachers who would corrupt them from their “simplicity”- and yet he usually speaks of ‘simplicity’ in the sense of generosity. Pure doctrine, wholeheartedly accepted, will lead us to be generous. False doctrine and human philosophy leads to all manner of self-complication. Paul was clever, he was smart; but he rejoiced that he lived his life “in simplicity…by the grace of God” (2 Cor. 1:12). If our eye is single (translating a Greek word related to that translated ‘simple’), then the whole body is full of light- and the Lord spoke again in the context of generosity. An evil eye, a world view that is not ‘simple’ or single, is used as a figure for mean spiritedness.

But when it is evil, your body also is full of darkness- A bad or evil eye was an idiom for mean spiritedness. It continues the theme of materialism from the previous verses. To follow materialism is to be mean spirited- towards God. Speaking in the context of serving *either* God *or* mammon, the Lord uttered these difficult words: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth… the light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness… how great is that darkness!" (Mt. 6:19-22 AV). All this is in the context of not being materialistic. The Lord is drawing on the OT usage of "an evil eye" - and consistently, this idiom means someone who is selfishly materialistic (Prov. 22:9; 23:7; 28:22; Dt. 15:9). The NIV renders some of these idioms as "stingy" or “mean".

11:35 *Look therefore whether the light that is in you is not darkness*- See on 1 Cor. 4:4. A single eye refers to a generous spirit (1 Chron. 29:17 LXX), and a related Greek word occurs in 2 Cor. 8:2; 9:11,13 with the sense of “generous". So surely the Lord is saying that our attitude to wealth controls our whole spirituality. Whether we have a mean or generous spirit will affect our whole life- an evil [stingy] eye means our whole body is full of darkness. Just let this sink in. If we are materialistic, our whole life will be filled with darkness, whatever our external pretensions may be, and there is a definite link to be made here with the "darkness" of rejection. The riches of Jericho are described with a Hebrew word which means both a curse, and something devoted (to God; Josh. 6:18). This teaches a powerful lesson: such riches of this world as come into our possession will curse us, unless they are devoted to the Father.

11:36 *If therefore your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it shall be wholly full of light, as when the lamp with its bright shining gives you light*- The Lord Jesus likens Himself to a candle that has been lit and displayed publicly, giving light to us. He then continues that imagery in some rather difficult words. He says that in our lives, the eye is "the light of the body"- a good eye lets light and vision in, thus totally and fundamentally affecting how we are inside us, as persons. But if the eye is faulty, then there is darkness within. But when the eye is good and functioning, the whole person is "full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle gives you light" (Lk. 11:33-36). But earlier, He's defined Himself as the candle which gives light. He seems to be saying that our "eye", our perception of Him, is vital. And this is exactly the context of this passage- He's been lamenting how Israel haven't perceived Him for who He is. If we perceive Him rightly, if our "eye" is good, then our whole body will be filled with the light which comes from Him. But it all depends upon our image / perception of / eye for Jesus. Hence the vital and ultimate importance of understanding and perceiving Him correctly. The subject we're now studying actually couldn't be more important; for the correct perception of Him will fill our whole lives with light, totally affect our internal world-views, granting us an ability to understand and make sense of all around us and within us in the light of the person of Jesus. And if we don't perceive Him aright, our inner lives will be dark and formless, whatever external trappings of culture and knowledge we may have.

11:37 *Now as he spoke, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, and he went in and sat down to eat*- Eating together had a religious dimension in the first century. But the Jews were more open in their view of fellowship than many are today. Clearly the Pharisee wanted to find fault, but he had no problem at this stage in eating with the Lord.

11:38 *And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first washed before dinner*- Rabbi Joses claimed that “to eat with unwashen hands is as great a sin as adultery”. And Rabbi Akiba in captivity used his water ration to wash his hands rather

than to drink, resulting in him almost dying of dehydration. The Lord seems to have purposefully ignored this tradition in order to provoke the inevitable conversation about it. The Lord Jesus had asked the disciples to be obedient to every jot and tittle of the teaching of the Scribes, because they "sit in Moses' seat". But He was no literalist nor legalist. He broke that principle in order to establish higher ones in this context.

11:39 *And the Lord said to him: Now you the Pharisees cleanse*- The Lord Jesus is described [using the same word for "cleanse"] as making others clean (Mt. 8:2,3; 10:8; 11:5). The Pharisees were concerned with making *themselves* look clean externally. They are a parody of the Lord. He was concerned with making *others* clean, and really clean. This tension, between making ourselves look clean and making others clean, is highly relevant to us all. For there is such a thing as being spiritually selfish.

The outside- The tension between outside and inside, along with the idea of cleanliness, is to be found in the Lord's earlier teaching in Mk. 7:15,18. Nothing on the *outside* can defile a man, it is the *inside* , the thoughts, which must be cleansed. If we ask *why* there is a desire for good appearances externally, the answer may not simply be 'so as to look good to others'. It can also partly be a recognition of our own inner defilement and our sense that we ought to be doing something about it. Peter explores the same tension in 1 Pet. 3:3, teaching that a woman should not focus on *outside* [s.w.] adorning, but not on *internal* attitudes. He's not saying that 'outward adornment' is wrong of itself, but rather that her focus should be on *inner* spirituality rather than focusing on the *external* to the exclusion of the *internal*. Thus obsession with external cosmetic issues, and literal cosmetics, can likely be a running away from internal issues which need serious addressing. So often pedantic attitudes to externalities conceal insecurity, and in spiritual terms, that insecurity is a reflection of disbelief that the inner conscience has been cleansed of sin in Christ.

Of the cup and plate, but your inward part is full of extortion- The plate and cup refer to the Pharisees personally. The picture is of silverware being cleansed and shining outwardly, whilst it contains unclean things within. "Even so *you also* outwardly appear righteous" (Mt. 23:28). Here Lk. 11:39 speaks of 'them' as their inward part: "*Your* inward part is full of ravening [Gk. 'extortion'] and wickedness [Gk. 'plots']". They were ever scheming how to get money out of people. But why choose these two items as examples? The presence of the article both times, *the* cup and *the* plate, suggest they have specific relevance. The Gospels were written as the handbook for the early Christian converts and ecclesias. They would largely have been recited or read at the breaking of bread meetings. It's hard therefore to avoid the reference to the memorial cup and plate of the communion meetings. And again, the warning comes so close to home. The memorial meeting is the time to look within, at the likely wickedness within us, rather than appearing in our Sunday best and making ourselves shine externally.

And wickedness- The Greek suggests complete lack of restraint. And here is the paradox. The most rule-governed people were actually without any sense of restraint. Obedience to rules, and elevating rules, does not of itself mean we are restrained. It can mean the very opposite.

11:40 *You foolish ones, did not He that made the outside make the inside also?*- Cleaning the inside of a cup doesn't make the outside clean. But that is the jump of faith required. The inside is the outside- in God's eyes. He created the aspect of external appearance, as well as the mind and "inward part" (:39). He perceives the precise interplay between appearances and internal reality- because He is creator and designer, not merely of our bodies, but of human psychology. To think we can hide our thoughts from Him is indeed "foolish".

11:41 *But give for alms those things which are within, and behold, all things are clean to you*- This textual reading [not supported by AV] would be saying that giving of alms is one of the external things which is not the essence. What is essential is to give our "inward part", our inner thoughts, to God. To be filled with *His* Spirit in *our* spirit. "To be spiritually minded" is the very and essential core of Christianity. No amount of giving money and external things can compensate for a deficit in this.

The AV reads as if giving alms makes all things clean. In Lk. 16:9, the Lord is saying that the use of our material possessions is *so* important that it's *almost as if* (in the hyperbole) we can buy our way into the Kingdom. He made the point in so many words in Lk. 11:41 AV: "Give alms of such things as ye have (i.e. regardless of how small); and, behold, all things are clean unto you". Paul seems to have these words in mind when says that to the pure, all things are pure (Tit. 1:15)- as if he saw the epitome of purity as being in giving what we have. "The ransom of a man's life are his riches" (Prov. 13:8) likewise suggests that our attitude to riches is one of the things that decides our eternal destiny.

11:42 *But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe*- The Greek can equally mean to both take or receive tithes. They demanded and perhaps paid themselves tithes on absolutely everything.

Mint, rue and every herb- These plants grew on windowsills, and a tenth of their 'crop' would've been very light in weight. The lightness of the 'crop' is contrasted with the 'heavier' things which were required of believers. Again, the Lord could've deployed convincing Biblical arguments that the tithe was to be paid from harvested crops, and given to the Levites / priests- not the Pharisees. For they were not the same as the priests. There is no hint in the Mosaic legislation that a tenth of such things was to be given to support the livelihood of the priests. But the Lord goes along with their position- and doesn't say they should not do this. Rather He lifts the issue to a higher and 'heavier' level. In engagement with those who willfully misunderstand Scripture, it's

easy to present a strictly Biblical case which demolishes their position. And the Lord could so easily have done this in the matter of tithing kitchen herbs. But He doesn't. He simply raises weightier issues and principles.

And neglect justice and the love of God; but these you should have done- In line with the teaching in :41, it seems they thought that by such alms giving and tithing, they were excused from being spiritually minded within. "The inward part" of :40,41 is therefore a mind focused upon "justice and the love of God". To think justly of and for others is far more than making a material donation.

And not to leave the other undone- The Greek *aphiemi* occurs again in Mt. 23:38; 24:2: "Your house is left [*aphiemi*] unto you desolate", and there would therefore not be left [*aphiemi*] one stone upon another in that temple / house; not one part of the masonry would be omitted or overlooked, every stone would be thrown down. They had omitted the weightier matters of justice etc., thinking they were justified in this because they did not omit to tithe kitchen herbs. But the Lord is saying that effectively they *had* omitted "the other", the tithing of kitchen herbs. So although they did tithe them, effectively they had not done so. Because they had omitted the weightier matters of justice, mercy and faith. So they tithed, but they did not tithe. Just as we can pray, but not pray; think we believe, when we do not; forgive, when we do not really; read God's word, when we do not really do so [as the Lord often pointed out to them in saying "Have you never read...?", when clearly on one level they had read]. Omitting justice, mercy and faith meant that their tithing of the small stuff was also omitted, in God's final view of them. The spiritual life is intended to be all encompassing, it's not a case of a series of specific obediences to a long list of specific commandments, whereby our omission of the heavier issues is compensated for by our commission of the lighter issues. And this again is a challenge to us all; for surveying God's expectations of us, we can so easily cut ourselves slack in some areas because we feel we are being obedient in others. Thus the failure of the Pharisees in this becomes not something to merely shake our heads at, but a challenge to our deepest internal reasonings in our own walk before God.

11:43 *Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the chief seats in the synagogues*- They wanted to be publically seen as spiritually superior. The whole structure of church life, whereby some must have public roles, is such that people can fall so easily into a love of publicity. The Lord realizes this, and often removes His beloved from such temptations. This explains the otherwise inexplicable way in which the Lord allows some of His most talented and capable servants to be removed from the public eye to serve Him in human obscurity.

And the greetings in the marketplaces- The Lord's reason for going to the market was to invite men to work in the vineyard and receive the penny of salvation (Mt. 20:3); and His people sitting in the markets sought to persuade others of the need to respond to the

Gospel (Mt. 11:16). The Pharisees went to the markets to simply flaunt their external spirituality. Again, note how their behaviour was the very inversion of true spirituality.

11:44 *Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it*- A month before Passover, the graves were painted white so that the pilgrims coming to keep the feast would not be defiled. This was therefore something fresh in everyone's minds, for the Lord was speaking at Passover time. It was as if they had not whitened / cleansed themselves before Passover as was required, and thereby led men into defilement rather than the purity which they so emphasized and demanded.

11:45 *And one of the lawyers answering said to him: Teacher, in saying this you reproach us also*- This particular lawyer perhaps said this in recognition of their sin. For the context is of the Lord accusing the Pharisees of hypocrisy; and the lawyer speaks up and says that actually, this was true of lawyers too.

11:46 *And he said: Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens*- John appears to allude to this in saying that the true commandments are "not grievous" (1 Jn. 5:3, s.w. "heavy"). The fences created by men around God's law are in fact higher than the actual Divine law. God's laws have a creative intention, whereas human fences around them are totally negative in their intention. The Lord uses the same word later in the discourse, in stating that the 'heavier' matters of the law are justice, mercy and faith. Yet even those things are not "heavy" (1 Jn. 5:3) in the sense that the regulations of the Pharisees were. The Lord's burden is light compared with the weight of carrying unforgiven sin (Mt. 11:30). The parallel between sin and heavy burdens is also found in David's comment about carrying the weight of his unforgiven sin with Bathsheba (Ps. 38:4). The burden of sin was thus tied upon people by giving them religious rules which they were unable to keep due to human weakness, and because sin is partly a matter of conscience, it was still counted to the people as sin if they broke it. Therefore to enforce such rules upon people was effectively lading them with sin. This principle needs to be considered by those who 'bind' isolation from other brethren upon believers, or who 'bind' them to a single life after divorce.

Hard to bear- The Lord sensitively commented that He had many things to command His disciples, "but you cannot bear / carry [s.w.] them at this time" (Jn. 16:12). In teaching others God's requirements, we must be sensitive to human weakness, rather than present them with a whole set of Divine standards as a package and demand their immediate acceptance of it. The Lord still accepted the disciples, even though He had not asked them to do all the things He would like to have asked them to do. And there are likewise levels of discipleship for us too. The same word is also used about carrying the cross of Jesus (Lk. 14:27; Jn. 19:17). This is the ultimately hard to be carried burden.

If people have signed up to carry this, who are we to seek to add to it by our demands upon them. James surely had the Lord's teaching here in mind when he reasoned that neither the disciples nor the Jewish fathers had been able to carry the yoke of the Mosaic law (Acts 15:10). Any teaching that the Mosaic law must be obeyed [and there are plenty of Christians teaching this, sadly] is therefore seeking to bind a heavy burden upon men which will lead to their spiritual collapse and thereby to our own condemnation.

And you yourselves do not touch the burdens- Mt. 23:4 they will not move or 'remove' them. The Lord by contrast used touch frequently in order to connect with sinful people and their conditions, and to thereby heal them. The Pharisees would not touch them for fear of contamination; they would not associate or engage with sinful people and the results of their sins. The Lord used His fingers to enter the ears of the deaf and touch the eyes of the blind, secreting unclean body fluid. This is the way to remove burdens- to engage with them. And yet closed table policies effectively do the same, by refusing association with those judged by latter day Pharisees to be too serious sinners. The fear of guilt by association is utterly selfish, and results in the burdens never being removed or made lighter for the person struggling to carry them.

With one of your fingers- The contrast is between the weight of the burdens on the shoulders of men, so great it crushed them; and the ease with which the law-makers could remove them with their fingers, perhaps referring to their ability to write things with a few strokes of the fingers which would remove those burdens. This is ever more true today- a few taps with a finger on a keyboard to change traditional demands on fellow believers, and burdens can be removed.

11:47 *Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed*- *Oikodomeo* means not only to build but carries the sense of 'to confirm', and is also translated in the NT in this sense. On one hand, building the tombs of the prophets was a sign of respect, but the Lord read it negatively, as if by doing so they were confirming the decision to murder them made by their forefathers. We have here an example of where the same action can be judged positively or negatively by the Lord; and this of itself disproves the mentality of salvation by works. Because it depends with what motive or background attitude the works are done, and this decides whether the work was an act of righteousness or a sin. And this is a further warning against the impossibility of judging another's works. For we fail to see those background, internal attitudes behind the work. See on Mt. 23:30 *Our fathers*.

11:48 *So you are witnesses and consent to the works of your fathers; for they killed them and you build their tombs*- "Witnesses against yourselves". The rejected are witnesses against themselves (Is. 44:9). Herein lies the crass folly and illogicality of sin. Jeremiah pleaded with Israel: "Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls [i.e.

yourselves], to cut off from you man and woman... that ye might cut yourselves off" (Jer. 44:7,8, cp. how Jerusalem cut her own hair off in Jer. 7:29). In the same passage, Yahweh is the one who does the cutting off (Jer. 44:11); but they had cut themselves off. Likewise as they had kindled fire on their roofs in offering sacrifices to Baal, so Yahweh through the Babylonians would set fire to those same houses (Jer. 32:29). And note the present tense of the Lord's words here. In that the judgment process is now ongoing, we *are right now* witnesses against ourselves when we sin. And we are not only witnesses, but also the judge who pronounces the verdict of condemnation: for the sinner is condemned *of himself* (Tit. 3:11). In this lies the illogicality of sin and the utter blindness of man to the implications of his actions before God. They right now fulfil or live out the judgment of the wicked (Job 36:17).

Mt. 23:31 "You are the sons of them that slew the prophets". The idea of being a 'son of' someone or something meant to be in agreement with them, or to be a disciple of them. Again, this seems an example of imputing iniquity. Their usage of the term "our fathers" was taken by the Lord to mean that they 'allowed' or [Gk.] 'had pleasure in' the murder of the prophets (Lk. 11:48). But the same words "our fathers" are used by Paul to describe his faithless Israelite forbears- and he is not condemned for it (1 Cor. 10:1; Acts 28:25). Clearly, the same words can be used by men with different background meanings, and this is seen by God and His Son. But all we hear are the words- we cannot therefore judge them.

11:49 *Therefore also the Wisdom of God said*- This certainly sounds like a quotation from extant literature, possibly from an apocryphal book no longer known. The Lord Jesus was indeed "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24), and so it could be that the Gospel writers were pointing out that these words of Jesus were a proof text amongst their persecuted converts; perhaps by quoting Matthew's words here, Luke is treating them as "the wisdom of God". Certainly the Lord's words here would've been a good mission statement for the early church. Or it could be that the Lord is quoting some now unknown text with approval. There can be no doubt that every part of the verse has direct relevance to the first century witness to the Jews. The source of the quotation is therefore of secondary importance; the Lord places it in His own mouth, at any rate, in predicting the outcome of the great commission. And yet clearly enough, at the time He spoke these words, that bunch of mixed up, largely secular men, who misunderstood so much, who knew so little, and whose ideals were so misplaced, were far from being the preaching machine which the Lord's words imply here. We can take one simple lesson from this- He had a profound hopefulness in people, a hopefulness which against all odds so often paid off. We, by contrast, tend to be highly cynical of people because we fail to see what they might turn into in spiritual terms.

I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute- "Send them" is a reference to the sending of the great commission. The Lord's desire

was that the worldwide witness began at Jerusalem (Lk. 24:47), and Paul's interpretation of the commission was clearly that it involved being sent *firstly* to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles. The secular disciples were the equivalent of the prophets in the old Israel. There may be particular reference to the New Testament prophets, those who had the Spirit gift of prophecy. Clearly the witness of the early Christians is in view.

11:50 *So that the blood of all the prophets*- This stands for '*judgment for* all the righteous blood shed'. Note how language is being used here. The sin is put by metonymy for *the judgment for* the sin. Sin is its own judgment. To sin is to ask for judgment / condemnation. In this lies the utter lack of logic in any sin. And iniquity was added to their iniquity (Ps. 69:27- a specific prophecy of the Jews who killed Jesus), just as righteousness can be imputed.

Which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation- "Upon you", Mt. 23:35. One would've expected God to be so hurt by the death of His Son that judgment came immediately upon those responsible. But instead, the Lord predicted that the judgment would come only after the Jews had further persecuted the apostles as they went out to fulfil the great preaching commission to the Jews. This apparent delay was not because God was not hurt or not angry. He was. But His patient love and desire for human repentance, to give them yet more chances, was simply greater. The delay was so that the Lord could send out the apostles to appeal to Israel for repentance. But they had been given final appeal after final appeal. And still God waited for their repentance. With what eagerness must He have watched for response to the preaching to them, and with what generous provision He would've provided for all those who wished to make that appeal to the Jews. And nothing has changed to this day. The idea of blood coming upon, *epi*, a person clearly meant 'guilt for their death'. Soon the Jews were to be using this very term in asking for the blood of Jesus to be 'upon' them (Mt. 27:25). Because Jesus was the personification of God's prophetic word and thereby the summary of all the prophets, their desire for *His* blood to be upon them was effectively taking upon themselves the blood of the prophets.

Even in this prediction of terrible judgment there is grace. Because the AD70 judgments didn't come until nearly 40 years afterwards. Male lifespans in first century Palestine were estimated at an average of 29 years by J.D. Crossan, basing his research on tomb inscriptions and analysis of bones from graves. So the actual 'elders' who were responsible for the Lord's death likely died in their beds rather than in the Jewish-Roman war or the final holocaust in Jerusalem. I can only explain this on the basis of God's grace prolonging that final coming of judgment, in the earnest hope that Israel would yet repent. In the context of AD70, this would appear to be the teaching of 2 Peter 3. We would expect those men to have fairly soon received their judgment in this life. They will

be judged- at the last day. But it would seem that God's desire to judge them was in tension with His desire to give Israel the maximum opportunity for repentance. We can only draw a sharp breath at God's grace. Another approach would be to understand that the threatened judgment upon that generation simply didn't happen- in their lifetimes. The entire Divine program was delayed until the last days, when that generation shall be resurrected and receive their judgment. The events of AD70 were simply a foretaste and prefigurement of the final judgment at the Lord's second coming.

"This generation" is a phrase often used by the Lord concerning those who heard and dealt with Him. It is surely the same generation in view in Mt. 24:34: "This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled". *This* generation is used elsewhere by the Lord concerning those right in front of Him. It is the same "this generation" as in Mt. 24:34. The Lord doesn't, therefore, mean 'The future generation which shall exist and see these things will not pass until all is fulfilled'. He is saying that the generation, *this* generation, would not pass until all was fulfilled. The fact all wasn't fulfilled simply in that generation shows that there was a major delay or change in the Divine program. And the reason for the delay was not simply that Israel hadn't repented, but because God's loving patience was still awaiting their repentance- and He so wished them to repent.

11:51 *From the blood of Abel*- If that generation were guilty of Abel's murder, this associates them with Cain. The Jewish false teachers are likened to Cain (1 Jn. 3:12; Jude 11); and the Lord says that the Jews seeking to kill Him are the sons of the one who was a "murderer from the beginning" (Jn. 8:44). Cain was the first murderer.

To the blood of Zachariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation- The prophet Zechariah would fit this description, but there's no record of him being murdered. Josephus in *The Jewish War* 4.5.4 speaks of a Zacharias ben Baruch (as in Mt. 23:35) who was assassinated by the Zealots in the Sanhedrin. But he was not a prophet, and this event was still future. And he wasn't killed in the temple. However, there was a prophet Zechariah who was stoned to death in the temple (2 Chron. 24:19-22). He was the son or grandson of Jehoiada, so it's feasible he was the son of a Baruk. The Hebrew Bible ended with 2 Chronicles, and so the mention of this murder would form an appropriate inclusio with the first murder, of Abel. All the murders of the faithful, from the first to the last as recorded in the Hebrew Bible, were going to have their judgment exacted from the generation who crucified God's Son.

11:52 *Woe to you lawyers! For you took away the key of knowledge*-

The Kingdom therefore remained 'locked' to people. We see here that "knowledge" does play a role in coming to the Kingdom. The same figure of the door of the Kingdom being shut [but by the Lord, not men] is found in Mt. 25:10. The similarity is such that we may be intended to understand the foolish virgins are those who were locked out of the Kingdom because of the Pharisees. Their lack of oil, of personal spirituality, was because their religious leaders had not inculcated this in them, nor any sense of their own fallibility and frailty- in that the reason they ended up locked out of the Kingdom was because they had not considered that their oil would likely fail. They had "the key of knowledge" in a spiritually ignorant and illiterate society which depended upon them for knowledge of God's word. Likewise if the elders / judges of Israel had been wise, the entire people would have entered the land (Dt. 16:20). The whole of Israel would've stayed in the wilderness and not entered the Kingdom / land if Gad and Reuben hadn't initially gone over Jordan (Num. 32:15). Wrath would come upon all Israel if the Levites weren't encamped around the tabernacle (Num. 1:53). We really can cause others to not enter God's Kingdom by limiting their access to God's word [a sin of omission], or by making demands on them in the name of His Kingdom which are too heavy for them to bear [a sin of commission]. This imparts an urgency and eternal importance to all our interactions with others. No longer can we see the community of believers as a mere social club, nor the world around us as simply the dead furniture of our lives. We have their salvation or stumbling away from it within our power. This fact also denies us from assuming that whether we fail or not in our interactions with others, God will somehow make good our failures and save others anyway. He has delegated His work into our hands, and to some extent the degree to which it prospers or fails is our responsibility. Otherwise the whole language of delegation of His wealth into our hands is somehow meaningless.

You did not enter in yourselves, and those that were entering in, you hindered- As if they kept locked the door in the face of ones eager to enter the Kingdom. If we believe that we ourselves will be there, we will spark off an upward spiral of positive thinking in the community of believers with whom we are associated. Think carefully on the Lord's words to the Pharisees: "For you neither go in yourselves, neither suffer you them that are entering to go in" (Mt. 23:13). If we don't believe we will be there, we end up discouraging others. There is a sense in which we will enter the Kingdom at the last day (Mt. 5:20; "Not every one that says Lord, Lord shall enter into the Kingdom", Mt. 7:21; 18:3; 25:10 s.w.), and yet in another sense we are entering now through the gates ("enter in at the narrow gate", Mt. 7:13; 19:17,24). Our lives now are on a path, a journey, which is entering the Kingdom. The significance of life and living could not be more intense.

The same word for 'hindering' is used about how the disciples 'forbad' children to come to Jesus (Mt. 19:14) and about 'forbidding' baptism (Acts 8:36; 10:47). This is exactly how people can be hindered or not 'allowed' to enter the Kingdom today- by refusing them baptism because of some inadequacy of knowledge or behaviour, or because they

are simply felt to be in a category [like “children” were by the disciples] who are inappropriate for the Kingdom. These reflections make us realize that the Pharisees were not a mere phenomenon in history, but have their direct equivalents today.

11:53 *And when he got out from there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to press upon him vehemently, and to provoke him to speak of many things*- They were experts in winding up a person; they rightly perceived that the Lord had passion and emotion, and they sought to play upon that by a series of provocatively worded questions and statements.

11:54 *Lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say*- The same word used of how *they* were to be entangled or caught up in condemnation (Lk. 21:35; Rom. 11:9). As they treated the Lord, so they were treated. Our attitude to Him is in a way our attitude to ourselves and our eternal destiny. They are presented as the robbers on the way to Jericho, lying in wait like bandits.

LUKE CHAPTER 12

12:1 *In the mean time, when the many thousands of the crowd were gathered together, so much so that they trod one upon another, he began to say to his disciples first of all-*

As in the account of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, we get the idea of the Lord purposefully focusing upon the disciples, despite the presence of crowds of well over 10,000. His interest was in developing that small core, rather than getting superficial acceptance from thousands.

Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy- The disciples were overly influenced by the Pharisees. They were worried that the Pharisees were not happy with the Lord's teaching (Mt. 15:12). He had to warn them *above all* of the danger of the influence [yeast] of the Pharisees (Lk. 12:1 Gk.). And yet they still misunderstood Him- they thought He was talking about literal bread (Mk. 8:15,16). He encouraged His followers 'be themselves'. He spoke much of not being a *hupokrites*, an actor. Those who follow Him are not to act a part before others, as if all the world's a stage, being what others want in the audience of the world of eyes that surround us, acting as an actor does, merely to please others. He continued the image when He warned of not doing things "to be seen [Gk. *theathenai*]of men". Don't let them be a mere theatre audience to you- be yourself, living life in the constant presence of God's eyes, not man's. This was a major theme with the Lord. Paul likewise teaches us that every man should "be as he is" (1 Cor. 7:26 RV). This is why the Lord Jesus taught His men "first of all", i.e. most importantly, to beware of hypocrisy. This was a cardinal point in Christ's manifesto. We must ask whether it has this place in our discipleship. It can be that the ecclesial audience is a kind of theatre, showing gratitude for the pleasing entertainment of the speakers. Yet the opposite should be true- God is the audience, we are living bared lives before His gaze.

The Lord taught that hypocrisy was like leaven- once it begins in a community of believers, it so easily spreads and engulfs all (Lk. 12:1-3). In this context He went on to say that "there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed... whatever you have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light". It is so easy, and we have all done this, to say something about somebody, and ask our hearer not to repeat it. But even in this life, as well as at judgment day, what is spoken in the ear comes out on the housetops. In discussion about fellowship matters, divorce etc. we can so easily say one thing to one group of brethren and something quite different to another. But this, the Lord taught, is hypocrisy. Let us decide our principles and live and speak by them, in humility and sensitivity and simplicity. Because all will be revealed, both in this life and in the coming day of judgment, we ought to be without such hypocrisy.

The Lord taught His followers "first", or 'most of all', to beware of hypocrisy. For us, all

the world is *not* to be a stage, and we are *not* to be merely actors upon that stage. Hypocrisy is that living out of a persona, acting, rather than being the person God created us to be. In the Lord Jesus men saw the word made flesh (Jn. 1:14). There was perfect congruence between the person He presented Himself as, and the person He essentially was. This was why He could so easily touch the true person in others. And I think this is the meaning of the otherwise enigmatic insistence that the Cherubim's faces, their appearances, and 'themselves' were all one (Ez. 10:22). The Russian [Synodal] version translates this: 'Their view, was who they themselves were'. So often in our encounters with others there is no real dialogue, rather a conflict of monologues. This is why so many a debate between a Christian and a Mormon, e.g., has come to nothing; for perhaps both of them are merely showing one of their personas.

12:2 *But there is nothing covered up that shall not be revealed, and hid that shall not be known*- See on Mt. 10:27.
Whatever we have spoken in darkness will be revealed for all to hear and know (Lk. 12:2,3)- our words will as it were be cited back to us before others in that day. The Lord says this in the context of warning us not to have the leaven of hypocrisy in the matter of our words- there's no point in saying one thing to one person and something different to someone else, because our words will be gone through at the judgment and will be open for everyone to hear. We should live, He implies, as if we are now before the judgment; speaking things we wouldn't be ashamed for anyone to hear. Note in passing how he says that hypocrisy in our words is like leaven, that corrupts and spreads within an individual and a community. Once somebody starts being hypocritical with their words, someone else does. Even every word of murmuring against each other will be judged; and hence, James points out, it is bizarre that we should be doing this with the judge standing before the door (James 5:9).

12:3 *Therefore whatever you have said in the darkness shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors shall be proclaimed upon the housetops*- The reference to "closets" (AV) takes us back to Mt. 6:6, where He uses the same word to speak of how we should pray in closets and then we will be openly rewarded by the Father. The 'open reward' is clearly in the Kingdom (Mt. 6:4,18; Lk. 8:17; 1 Cor. 3:13). Could this not be saying, then, that in the Kingdom, the answers to the prayers we are *now* making will be openly proclaimed to all from the housetops? Hence there is an awesome connection between our feeble words of prayer now, and the nature of our eternal existence in the Kingdom.
"God shall judge the righteous and the wicked (at the second coming): for there is a time there for *every* purpose and for *every* work... for God shall bring *every* work into judgment, with *every* secret thing, whether it be good or bad" (Ecc. 3:17; 12:14). Note the emphasis on "*every*". Even what we have spoken in the ear will be shouted out (Lk. 12:3) -implying others will somehow observe our judgment, cp. Mt. 12:41. If the

judgment is merely a yes/no statement which has been worked out taking our whole life into consideration, then this emphasis on every work having a time for consideration and judgment "there" is pointless. However, these verses must be considered in conjunction with those which speak of God's 'forgetting' of bad deeds on account of how people later chose to live. However, this need not mean that they are erased from God's infinite knowledge; all too often we perceive God's memory as a vast memory bank which can have our sins erased from it. But His knowledge knows no such bounds of human perception; yet He is willing not to hold those things against us, and to therefore count us as having never committed them.

Ultimately, nothing remains secret; at the day of judgment, what we spoke in darkness (i.e. In our own minds) will be heard in the light of God's Kingdom (Lk. 12:3). Note how Paul read the Lord's words here in this way – for he surely alludes here when he speaks of how "the hidden things of darkness" are "the counsels of the hearts" which will be revealed at His return (1 Cor. 4:5). The implications of this are awesome. The thoughts and intents of our hearts in this life will be eternally open and manifest in the eternal light of God's Kingdom. In that day, our brethren will see every one of our hidden thoughts. To live now according to the principle 'I can think what I like, but I won't act like it, for the sake of appearances to others' is therefore foolish. Who we are now in our hearts is whom we shall ultimately be revealed to be. So we may as well get on and act according to how we really think; for throughout eternity, what we think now will be manifest to everyone, seeing that a man *is* as he thinks in his heart.

12:4 *And I say to you my friends*- Assuring them that they had nothing ultimately to fear at the last day; for we are His friends. If we are His friends, the friends of the Son of God, the prince of the kings of the earth- why fear audience response when we witness? The labored assurances of the next verses about being of more value than sparrows etc. are all in the context, therefore, of assuring us that we need not ultimately fear negative response to our witness.

Do not be afraid- The Lord was quite clear that His followers should expect death and serious suffering for preaching Him. He perceived that fear of audience response would be a strong factor in the temptation not to preach Him. But He gave the reason for not fearing in :3- all shall be revealed at the day of judgment. Belief in the doctrine of final judgment therefore has huge impact upon life in practice- in this case, giving us strength not to fear the consequences of our witness. For many believers today, persecution unto death is not a likely consequence of witness; fear of slight embarrassment, being thought 'odd' for turning a conversation around, is a very small price. The Lord is asking us here to accept that witness for Him may well cost us death. If we accept that, accept it as part and parcel of the Lord's basic message, then our approach to witness will be

quite different. Fear of audience response will no longer be a major factor, if we have solemnly accepted that we are prepared to die for the sake of preaching the Gospel.

Of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do- Mt. 10:28 adds: "But are not able to kill the soul". "They" cannot touch our essential self. It is our 'real self' which will eternally endure. In this sense, for the faithful, their body may be killed but their soul cannot be. I take this to mean that who they essentially are is for ever recorded by the Lord, and they will be given that same personality at the resurrection. Significantly, the Bible speaks not of the 'resurrection of the body' [it's the creeds which speak of this], but rather "the resurrection of the just", "the resurrection of the dead". The resurrection is more about resurrected characters than resurrected bodies, although the process will involve a new body being given.

12:5 *But I will warn you about whom you shall fear. Fear Him, who after He has killed has power to cast you into Gehenna. Yes, I say to you, fear Him!*- The fear of the eternity we might miss, condemnation, is to be infinitely greater than our fear of death in this life. The Jews believed that 'hell' had three sections: Gehenna, a place of eternal fire for those Jews who broke the covenant and blasphemed God; 'the shades', an intermediate place similar to the Catholic idea of purgatory; and a place of rest where the faithful Jew awaited the resurrection at the last day. This distinction has no basis in the Bible. However, it's significant that the Lord Jesus uses 'Gehenna' and the figure of eternal fire to describe the punishment of people for what the Jews of His day would've considered incidental sins, matters which were far from blasphemy and breaking the covenant – glancing at a woman with a lustful eye (Mk. 9:47), hypocrisy (Lk. 12:1,5; Mt. 23:27–33), not giving a cup of water to a "little one", forbidding a disciple of John the Baptist to follow Jesus (Mk. 9:39–43); not preaching the Gospel fearlessly and boldly (Mt. 10:25–28). These matters were and are shrugged off as of no eternal consequence. But just like the prophets of Israel did, the Lord Jesus seizes upon such issues and purposefully associates them with the most dire possible punishment which His Jewish hearers could conceive – Gehenna. Time and again, the Bible alludes to incorrect ideas and reasons with people from the temporary assumption those ideas might be true. The language of demons, as we will show later, is a classic example. And it's quite possible the Lord is doing the same here with the concept of Gehenna – the punishment for the Jew who breaks the covenant and blasphemes. The Lord was primarily teaching about behaviour, not giving a lecture about the state of the dead. And so He takes the maximum category of eternal punishment known to His audience, and says that this awaits those who sin in matters which on His agenda are so major, even if in the eyes of the Jewish world and humanity generally they were insignificant.

12:6 *Are not five sparrows sold for two very small coins? And not one of them is forgotten in the sight of God*- See on Mt. 10:29. Two sparrows were sold for one coin; and five were given for two coins. The sparrows were so little worth that one was thrown

in for free. Yet the sparrows are represented in the presence of God (Gk.); even animals have their representative Angels there. This is 'how' in one sense a personal God sees and knows all things; because His Spirit / Angels are in His presence reporting all things to Him. At least this is how we are invited to perceive it. The sparrows aren't forgotten in the presence of God, and we are of more value than many sparrows (Lk. 12:6,7); Matthew has: 'Your Father feeds the sparrows; are you not of more value [same Greek as in Luke] than many sparrows?' ; 'no sparrow falls to the ground without your Father knowing... you are of more value than many sparrows" (Mt. 6:26; 10:29,31). The sparrows being in God's presence is paralleled with His feeding them [Gk. 'to bring them up'] and being aware of what is happening to them on earth. God feeds / raises the sparrows through His Angelic messengers.

"An inscription of the Emperor Diocletian setting out the maximum prices that might be paid for various articles of commerce shows that sparrows were the cheapest of birds used for food..." (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Leciester: I.V.P., 1992)). This is another example of the Lord's radical collision course with the Rabbis; He taught that God's care even embraces sparrow. For the Rabbis explicitly forbad prayers that mentioned God's care for birds, because they argued that it was dishonouring to God to associate Him with something so small as a bird (*Berith* 5.3). And the Lord purposefully stood that idea upon its head. The Rabbis had a whole list of unforgivable sins, like murder, apostasy, contempt for the Law, etc. But the Lord went further. His many words of judgment weren't directed to the murderers and whores and Sabbath breakers; they were instead directed against those who condemned those people, considering themselves righteous. He calls those who appeared so righteous a 'generation of vipers'. The publican, not the Pharisee, finds God's acceptance, according to Jesus. And again, the Lord is making a telling point- because Rabbis held that repentance for publicans was almost impossible, because it was impossible for them to know exactly all the people they'd cheated. Very clearly, the Lord's message was radical. He was out to form a holy people from whores and gamblers, no-good boys and conmen. And moreover, He was out to show that what God especially judges and hates are the things that humanity doesn't think twice about: hypocrisy, self-righteousness, judgmentalism, exclusion of others...

12:7 *But the very hairs of your head are all numbered*- The redeemed are a community whom man cannot number (Rev. 7:9), as many as the stars in the sky which neither Abraham nor any man could number. The Lord may be making an allusion to this in order to highlight the scale of knowledge which God has- He numbers the community of believers exactly, over space and over time, and He also numbers the hairs on every one of His people. This vast knowledge of God is often referred to in the Psalms as a guarantee that therefore God will ultimately protect His people. Lk. 21:18, which we

have shown to have similarities with the preaching commission of Mt. 10, comments that "there shall not an hair of your head perish". The question is whether the Lord is assuring His preachers that they will not ultimately die; it might sound like it, from such assurance. And yet earlier verses in the preaching commission sound as if the preachers will indeed suffer, quite possibly unto death. And we know that some of them did suffer death. So what are we to make of these assurances of protection, so strong that the preacher should be fearless and not fear death as a consequence for preaching? I suggest that the Lord, as often in His teaching, is speaking on an elevated, spiritual level. The possibility of death for witness is a clear theme of His, especially in Revelation. These strong assurances of protection and salvation from death would therefore be His way of saying that His ultimate salvation of His preachers at the resurrection will involve the preservation of them as unique personalities, down to the hairs of their head. And therefore they should not fear death in this life. For He knows them. The fear of death revolves around the sense that I as the sum of all my experiences, my uniqueness, shall be no more- and the Lord is urging us to believe that God not only knows our unique attributes better than we do, but shall ultimately preserve them in the resurrection of the body and in the nature of the life eternal.

Fear not!- The Lord is asking a lot here; He's asking for us to preach without fear of consequence and audience reaction. That is a step beyond preaching knowing the likely price, and being willing to pay that price. To know that price and yet preach without fear is a step beyond being willing to accept consequence.

You are of more value than many sparrows- The same word is used in the same context in Mt. 6:26. Having spoken of how God provides for the birds of the air, the Lord drives home the comparison: "Are you not much better [s.w. "of more value"] than them?". The term is again used in Mt. 12:12: "How much then is a man better than a sheep". We must give full weight to this triple emphasis on how much more valuable we are than the mortal animals whom God is so careful for. The request that we do not fear is repeated and labored throughout the section. It is fear of what others think and may do which so often holds us back from witness, be it to family members or literally approaching people on the street. With such laboured assurances, we are to overcome fear and therefore confess Him openly (:8).

12:8 *And I say to you, every one who shall confess me before men*- Confessing Christ before men can also be an allusion to baptism, not just bucking up the courage to give someone a tract at work (Rom. 10:9,10). This allusion is confirmed when we realize that "confess" translates two Greek words, 'to confess in'. We confess in Christ by baptism into Him. In another sense, our witness is because we are in Christ, we are Him to the world, and therefore His fearlessness unto death in witness should be ours. The Lord spoke of how if we confess Him before men, He will confess knowledge of us before the

Father; and if we deny Him, He will deny us. This language is applied by John to John the Baptist- for he comments that John the Baptist "confessed and denied not, but confessed, I am not the Christ" (Jn. 1:20). In this sense, John Baptist is being set up as our example in preaching- and again, John comments that we too are to confess the Son and not deny Him (1 Jn. 2:23), after the pattern of John the Baptist. And yet note what John's 'confession' was- it was a profession of his unworthiness, that although he was the herald of the Christ, he was not Jesus. Again, we see here a pattern for our witness to the Lord. Eph. 6:15 speaks of our each being 'sandaled' with the preparation of the Gospel. Who prepared the way of the Lord by preaching, wearing sandals? John the Baptist. It seems Paul is alluding to John here, setting him up as the preacher's example. The reference to "loins girt" (Eph. 6:14) would also be a John allusion- the record twice (in Mt. 3:4; Mk. 1:6) stresses how John had his 'loins girded'.

Him shall the Son of Man also confess before the angels of God- See on Mt. 10:32; Lk. 13:8; 1 Tim. 5:21. So close are the Lord and the Angels and such His respect and love for them, that it seems that Jesus will even feel ashamed or embarrassed before them when He comes to consider one of the unworthy at the day of judgement- Luke 12:8 implies that the same feeling of embarrassment and shame which the unworthy have now when backing out of preaching will be felt by Jesus when He looks on them at the judgement. And it is quite possible that one of the things which motivated our Lord to continue hanging on the cross was the thought of praising God in the midst of the Angels at His ascension: "My praise shall be of Thee in the great congregation (of Angels?): I will pay my vows before them that fear Him".

But in the same way as the Angels minister condemnation, they also joyfully give eternal life to their faithful charges, on Christ's command at the judgement- "him shall the Son of man also confess before the Angels of God" (Luke 12:8). This is perhaps the fact alluded to in 2 Cor. 10:18: "not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth (at the judgement)". To be commended implies to be commended *to* somebody- the Angels?

When He says He will confess *us* before the Father, He means He will confess *our name* before God (Rev. 3:5); He knows us according to our names / characters. He speaks of ecclesial members as "names" in Rev. 3:4; He calls His own sheep by name, and they each know His voice, responding to His word *individually*. The call to one sheep will only be recognized by that sheep; the others won't respond (Jn. 10:3). He will take individual note of each sheep, treating them accordingly, as the shepherd leads more gently those that are with young (Is. 40:11). It seems that even now, we each have our own individual name with the Father and Son, encompassing their understanding of our essential character. It may even be that in the record of Scripture, God inspired the writers to record the names of individuals according to His judgment of them (or at

least, how the faithful viewed them at the time), rather than by the names they actually went under. What mother would have named her child Nabal (fool), or Ahira (brother of evil, Num. 1:15), or 'sickness' or 'wasting' (Mahlon and Chilion)? These names were either given to them by others and the use adopted by God, or simply God in the record assigned them such names.

The same two words for "confess [in]" are found in Rom. 10:9 “If you shall *confess with* your mouth the Lord Jesus... you shall be saved”. The idea of *homolegeo* seems to be of public confession; literally to *homo-logos*. The Lord uses the word *logos* with reference to the “words” of our preaching before men (Mt. 10:14). *Homo* has the sense of being together with others. It can carry the sense of ‘assent’, in that our*logos* comes together with the *logos* of another; but the majority of NT usage is clearly with the sense of professing, making our *logos* before others. At the day of judgment, the Lord will “profess” His verdict to men (Mt. 7:23) and here we learn that He will “profess” it to His Father too. The weight of evidence on the basis of usage is that this word refers to public profession of a *logos*, of our innermost thought- which is exactly in line with the themes of the Lord's teaching here: that our internal thought and position, our *logos*, is crucially important; but if it is a Christ-like *logos* then it will be impossible to conceal it, it must naturally become public, for a city set on a hill cannot be hid. Consider the evidence:
-Herod *confessed* [AV “promised”] with an oath” in front of witnesses to give Herodias’ daughter whatever she wished (Mt. 14:7)
- John the Baptist *confessed* in his preaching (Jn. 1:20)
- If anyone *confessed* openly that Jesus was Messiah, then they would be cast out of the synagogue (Jn. 9:22; 12:42)
- The Pharisees *confessed* their doctrinal positions, i.e. they openly taught them (Acts 23:8)
- Paul *confessed* his beliefs publically when on trial (Acts 24:14)
- Timothy *confessed* his confession before many witnesses (1 Tim. 6:12)
- Some openly *confess* their knowledge of God when their private lives don’t match that public confession (Titus 1:16)
- The faithful *confessed* their faith in God’s promises before all (Heb. 11:13)
- Teachers *confess* a doctrinal position about Jesus in their teaching and must be assessed by their audience accordingly (1 Jn. 2:23; 4:2,3,15; 2 Jn. 7).

According to the Lord's teaching here, he who refuses to make this public profession will not be accepted in the day of judgment; the Lord Jesus will not confess such a person before “My Father”. Rom. 10:9,10 likewise predicate salvation upon this public confession. And the contrast in Matthew 10:32,33 is between *confessing* Christ and *denying* Him before men, leading to being *denied* by Jesus before “My *Father*”. Without doubt, 1 Jn. 2:23 has all this in mind when teaching that “Whosoever *denies* the Son, the same has not *the Father*, but he that *confesses* [s.w.; AV “acknowledges”] the Son has the Father also”. Taken together, these usages of *confession* present a solid

case- that salvation is related to public confession. That is not to say that salvation is by works, nor is it to say that evangelism is the be all and end all of the Christian life- after all, we all have different gifts, some are more pastoral than evangelical. Salvation is by grace *through faith*; and if we believe, then we cannot be passive, we become a city set on a hill which cannot be hid. Otherwise, as the Lord teaches several times in the Sermon on the Mount, we have not really believed in God's grace. The Sermon teaches that there is no such thing as a secret Christian, a candle lit which nobody else sees or gets a hint of. In this area particularly, we are faced with the temptation of sins of omission- to consider that we are believers because we have mentally assented to certain theological propositions about Christ, but not making any public commitment or confession about them. No wonder the Lord raised this theme in encouraging His preachers to go forth fearlessly.

12:9 *But he that denies me*- The whole purpose of the true church is to be a light to the world- "the only cooperative society in the world that exists for the benefit of its non-members", as William Temple put it. The Lord will tell some in the last day that He never knew them, He will deny them; and yet He will deny those who never confessed Him before men (Mt. 8:23; 10:32,33). These people will have prophesied in His Name [i.e. preached to the ecclesia], and done "mighty works" for Him; but the fact they didn't confess Him before men is seen as not knowing Him; for to know Him is to perceive that we are intended to confess Him before men. This, perhaps, is our greatest danger. The presence and witness of God is no longer in a tent in the Sinai, nor in a Jerusalem temple. God reveals Himself through the group of ordinary, mixed up folks who comprise the ecclesias. For the watching world, we present proof that Christ is indeed alive; we provide the visible shape of what God and Jesus are really like. This is how vital is the matter of witness. It is utterly fundamental to the whole purpose behind our having been called. If we deny Christ, we deny that Jesus is the Christ (1 Jn. 2:22); and yet we deny Christ if we don't preach Him (Mt. 10:33). It follows that if we really believe that Jesus was not just Jesus of Nazareth but the Christ of God, therefore we won't deny Him but will preach Him. This is why there is connection between confessing Jesus as Christ and preaching Him (Jn. 9:22; Acts 18:5; Phil. 2:11). A grasp of who the Lord Jesus really is and the height of His present exaltation will naturally result in a confession of Him to the world, as well as a deep personal obedience to His word and will (Heb. 2:1).

There are at least three Biblical examples of people denying Jesus- the same Greek word is used- and yet repenting. Peter denied the Lord "before all" (Mt. 26:70), and yet was restored. The entire crowd around Jesus, including the healed woman, initially 'denied' they had touched Jesus (Lk. 8:45); but the woman then came out into the open and confessed Christ before all. The Jews 'denied' Christ (Acts 3:13,14) but then repented and were baptized publically. The point is, that in the moments when we deny Him, He denies us; but we can change the situation.

It’s tempting to wonder whether all this talk of confession and denial is only really relevant to those standing trial for their Christian faith, with the threat of death before them and the possibility of saving their life if they make some symbolic denial of Christ. But the words for confessing and denying occur together in Tit. 1:16 about those within the ecclesia who “Profess [s.w. ‘confess’] that they know God, but in works *deny* Him”. We can make the profession of faith before men, and in the public confession of baptism- whilst effectively denying the faith in our lives. There were some within the ecclesias of the first century who ‘denied’ the Lord (2 Pet. 2:1). External membership can appear as ‘confession’, but the point is that it isn’t necessarily. It can actually be a front for denial of Him...

In the presence of men shall be denied in the presence of the angels of God- The Lord Jesus in the last day will confess, or witness to in a legal sense, for His people "before the angels of God" (Lk. 12:8,9); and yet He uses the same language to describe how right now, He confesses us in Heaven in the presence of His Father (Mt. 10:32). Thus when we witness- or don't witness- to our relationship with Him, the Lord Jesus either confesses or denies knowledge of us before His Father. Right now. And this, therefore, is a foretaste of the final judgment. And we face these foretastes day by day in human life, as we encounter the choices of confessing or denying our Lord.

There is a direct correlation between our attitudes to witnessing before men now, and the attitude of the Lord Jesus about us in Heaven “before”, or ‘before the face of’, the Father. Witnessing is essentially personal, each of us individually “before men”. As modern life progresses in reducing relationships to online abstractions, we must remember this. An individual may press the right keys on their keyboard, send money online to a preaching organization- and yet never be making any witness about Christ before the faces of men. Indeed, those with whom the person does have face to face relationships may well be totally unaware he is a Christian. It’s this kind of thing which the Lord is addressing in such demanding terms- our witness *before men* , not in some anonymous world of avatars, is related to how we witnesses about us *before the face of God in Heaven*.

So whoever denies the Lord before men will be denied before the Angels. Two words are used here, the first weaker than the second. If we deny Jesus, He will utterly deny us before the Angels- what we do now on earth is even more strongly reflected in Heaven and at judgment day. The Heavenly response to our words and actions is out of proportion to our words. This surely inspires us in our daily words and decisions.

12:10 *And everyone who shall speak a word against the Son of Man*- The sin of stating that Jesus was Satan's agent rather than God's could not be forgiven whilst it continued to be the position of a person- although repentance was always possible. For those who had accepted Jesus as God's unique agent, they can be forgiven all manner of failure, including speaking "a word" against Him. Maybe the Lord foresaw the situations in

which persecution could be avoided for an apparently few words calling Him accursed. And He, along with Matthew, wanted to assure those who would do this in the weakness of a moment that in fact they had *not* blasphemed the Spirit and were not beyond forgiveness. The 'speaking against' is clearly parallel to 'blaspheming'. Blaspheming the name of Jesus was and is required by various anti-Christian regimes such from Judaism through the Roman empire to fundamentalist Islamic states today. Surely the Lord had this in mind. And the encouragement is that this is forgivable. But to decide He is not the Son of God but the embodiment of evil is a situation for which there is no forgiveness because it is wilfully continued in. The Lord has just stated that whoever is not with Him is against Him (:30), but here He foresees a situation when one of those who is ultimately 'with Him' will speak 'against Him'- and yet be forgiven. Because that moment of failure was not the overall position of a man's life. The denials by Peter, replete with curses / blasphemy, would surely be the parade example.

The “son of man” here could refer to the Lord Jesus, but it could just as comfortably mean ‘human beings’. One angle on this passage is to remember that the Gospels were written as a means of preaching to Jewish people at some point after the Lord’s resurrection. The message may be: ‘Whatever sin you committed against Jesus, even to the point of crucifixion, is forgivable. But now the Holy Spirit is witnessing to you through the apostles to repent and accept His forgiveness. If you refuse *that*, then there will [obviously] be no forgiveness for you’. The Lord foresaw the situation as it would be in the lives of his audience, and that explains His language here.

It shall be forgiven him, but to him that blasphemes against the Holy Spirit it shall not be forgiven- Whenever we sin, we are judged by the court of Heaven as deserving condemnation. Yet now is our day of opportunity; the verdict really is given, but we can mercifully change it. Consider the implications of the parallel Mk. 3:29: "he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness but is in danger of *eternal* damnation". Not being *ever* forgiven is paralleled with having *eternal* damnation. The implication is that when we sin and are unforgiven, we are condemned. But in this life we can be forgiven, and therefore become uncondensed. Abimelech was "but a dead man" for taking Sarah (Gen. 20:3), as if although he was alive, for that sin he was in God's eyes condemned and dead. But that verdict for that case was changed by his change of the situation.

12:11 *And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious how or what you shall answer, or what you shall say*- The Lord wanted His truth to be witnessed by His people to the authorities in "heavenly places" (Eph. 3:10). The Lord wanted to give even kings and rulers the chance of repentance. We too should not consider anyone anywhere beyond The legal language suggests that a court case was going on- in the court of Heaven, situations on earth are tried, and the witness

of the apostles at their earthly court cases against *them* was used in the court case *against the rulers* which was going on in Heaven.

12:12 *For the Holy Spirit shall teach you in that very hour what you should say*- Luke's later volume records how indeed this happened to the persecuted apostles (Acts 4:8; 6:10; 7:2,53,55 and throughout the trials of Paul). But there is a very clear application to the events of the very last days, which the run up to AD70 prefigured. The allusion is to Ex. 4:12, where God tells Moses at the time of the Egyptian persecution of God's people, "I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say". This persecution lead to intensified prayer to God, resulting in the deliverance of the suffering saints at Passover time, after a period of especial distress and 'time of trouble' for the surrounding world due to the plagues. After this deliverance, God's people went into the wilderness and were declared God's Kingdom. All these events form a remarkable latter day prophecy. The gifts of the Spirit may be given to some in the Elijah ministry in order to enable them to make a more powerful witness (as in Rev.11:6). Similarly Joel 2 prophesies the pouring out of the gifts "before the great and terrible day of the Lord" (:31). Malachi surely refers to this passage when prophesying the Elijah ministry "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5). This suggests that the three and a half year Elijah ministry of the last days (James 5:17) will be accompanied by Spirit gifts, and will coincide with the time of persecution.

12:13 *And one out of the crowd said to him: Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me*- The Lord replies by asking the man to think again about *who* had given Jesus authority- for if indeed God really had given Jesus authority, then the man ought *himself* to fear the judgment of Jesus- for as the Lord goes on to show in the parable of the rich fool, He has the power to reject those who are materialistic, exactly because He has such authority from God. The Lord is pushing the man to look at himself and think of himself at the end of his life and before the final day of judgment; and to cease paying a mere lipservice respect to the authority of Jesus, but to take this for real, realizing what it means for his own personal responsibility.

The law required an elder brother to inherit a double portion (Dt. 21:17), but the Lord replies that He is being asked to be a "divider"- perhaps hinting that this man is asking the Lord to support his request for a simple division. Presumably because he considered his brother to be wealthy enough and he considered he needed the wealth more. The Lord's reply is to call their deceased wealthy father a "fool" and to warn the man against covetousness and materialism.

The Lord's response was to tell the parable of the rich fool- a parable which ought to be seriously worrying for every one of us, rich or poor. He put the immediate argument between the brothers in the perspective of eternity; the eternity we may miss because we got too distracted with the immediate argument of the moment. And the Lord's basic message in this case was: "Be rich toward God. Give Him whatever you have". This cut

right across the issues of life's unfairness, missing out on wealth, not getting our share of respect... to the essential question which should have made both brothers feel uncomfortable. Had they, have we, given all they had to the Lord's cause? We may lack the quick thinking or penetrating analysis required to make this kind of fast response when confronted by others' conflicts. But we can surely analyze our own conflicts, at our own pace, in the light of eternity; and regain perspective, even if our opponent fails to do this. We need to cut to the essence of why we are feeling as we are; pray for God to help you in this, for accurate self-examination is so hard. If we don't connect and engage with the core issues, then even if the immediate problem [e.g. the argument about the inheritance] is resolved, then other issues will still then arise. It will only be a matter of time. The more we focus on resolving just one conflict, the more we will realize that in fact we are dealing with a tangled web of multiple conflicts. We cannot change others, but we can come to understand ourselves, and to define and engage with the essential issues which we personally face in the whole conflict.

12:14 *But he said to him: Man! Who made me a judge or a divider over you?*- As noted on :13, this is not to be read as meaning 'I am not your judge, why ever would you think that?'. The answer to this rhetorical question is 'God'. The man was to quit worrying about material issues and conflicts with his brother, and focus instead on his relationship with God. The Father and Son will indeed judge and divide between men at the last day- but on the basis of spiritual and not secular things. The ultimate judgment and division between men will be made on the basis of how they have handled such issues of judgment and division in their secular lives; and seeing we need His absolute grace in the time of the final judgment and division, we need to show it now. All such conflicts with our brethren are therefore a dry run of judgment day; we make the answer now. Note too the allusion to Ex. 2:14, whereby the Lord presents Himself as a new Moses.

12:15 *And he said to them: Take heed and keep yourselves from all covetousness. For a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses*- See on Lk. 17:32. As noted on :13 and :14, the true life is that to come, and that will be predicated upon how far in this life we have judged and divided rightly with secular issues now. The Lord seeks to prize apart the connection between a person and their possessions; a connection which has become the dogma of our materialistic age. The life, the personality, is to be seen as of paramount importance; 'Who "am" I?' is to be the question we return to time and again in our self-examination. The way of naming houses and lands in the name of the owner indicates the chronic degree of identification between possessions and personhood which there is in so many minds. But we are to make a great divorce in our minds between who we really are, and what we possess.

12:16 *And he spoke a parable to them, saying: The ground of a certain rich man brought*

forth plentifully- The aorist could imply that the ground was about to bring forth plentifully. The way the man talks about building bigger barns in order to store his "goods" suggests he is fantasizing about wealth, about actually getting a large harvest and turning it into goods; to spend time and labour demolishing existing barns and building greater when the intensity of harvest is upon him is foolish, and suggests an unreal fantasy about wealth rather than reality. Likewise his assumption that his harvest would be so huge that he could live from it for the rest of his life... is perhaps somewhat unrealistic.

The man's wealth was because of the "ground"- stressing that his wealth actually was from God's blessing. By fixating upon it as if the wealth was personally his, the man became an effective atheist, the fool who says in his heart that there is no God (Ps. 14:1).

12:17 *And he reasoned within himself, saying: What shall I do, because I do not have anywhere to store my crops?*- Jesus pinpointed the crucial importance of self-talk in this parable of the rich fool, who said to himself that he had many goods, and discussed with his own “soul” or self the need for greater barns etc. If we at least realize that our self-talk is potentially our greatest adversary [‘Satan’], then we will find the strength to move towards genuine spiritual mindedness, bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

Luke's Gospel opens with the record of Simeon's prediction that the Lord would reveal the thoughts of many hearts. One way He does that is through the parables recorded by Luke; they all feature the inner speech, the self talk, of people. The rich fool (12:16–20); the unfaithful servant (12:42–46); the prodigal son (15:11–32); the unjust steward (16:1–8); the unjust judge (18:2–5) and the owner of the vineyard (20:9–16). By hearing the self talk of those characters, our own inner self talk is revealed to us. The rich fool's "What shall I do?" becomes our own question: "What should I do?". This was significant in the first century world, where outward appearance was seen as so important and most people were disinterested in their self talk. Appearance and external action was seen as all important; and yet the Lord repeatedly persuades His audience to look at their hearts.

His ground is bringing forth plentifully, but the bumper harvest hasn't yet come- because he would hardly build bigger barns after the harvest has been gathered. He foresees a bumper harvest, and decides to build bigger barns and fantasizes about the luxury retirement this could bring him. And then, zap, his soul / life is required of him. He dies. The point of the parable is that the man's attitudes were wrong; it is a critique of what he thinks, his self talk, rather than his actions.

"What shall I / we do?" is a question which keeps occurring in the Gospels and Acts. It is one of those phrases which flies out of the text, forcing us to engage with it and to ask ourselves the same question (Mt. 20:32; 21:40; 27:22; Mk. 10:17; Jn. 6:28; 11:47). And especially in Luke: 3:10,12,14 [the whole account of the gospel begins with people being forced to ask this question]; 10:25; 12:17; 16:3,4; 18:18,41; 20:13,15. And Luke brings the question to a head when the crowds ask Peter: "What shall we do?", and the same question is on the lips of the repentant Saul (Acts 2:37; 9:6; 10:6; 22:10). The answer of course is to repent and be baptized. But the rich fool ignored that and identified himself with his possessions (:15), and answered accordingly.

12:18 *And he said: This will I do. I will pull down my barns and build greater ones, and there will I store all my grain and my goods*- The Greek phrase for bestowing / gathering / storing into barns is to be found in Mt. 3:12; 13:30; Lk. 3:17- every time in the context of gathering God's people into God's Kingdom. This is what he should have been doing with his time and wealth. The barn represents the Kingdom. The man should've sought the things of God's Kingdom or barn, rather than his own, trying to build his own fake Kingdom here on earth (: 31). As noted on :17, the answer to the question "What shall I do?" ought to have been to devote himself to the Lord.

Solomon's obsession with building the temple and his own houses shows a massive attraction towards material things. Ecc. 2 chronicles how he crazily tried to accumulate every branch of material possession. Solomon figuratively chastised the people with whips in the form of the excessive tax he raised in order to build store cities (1 Kings 9:15,19), in which to store all his accumulation. Surely this is behind the Lord's parable of the rich fool, devoid of wisdom in practice, who built ever bigger barns because of his lack of understanding about the future Kingdom. The Hebrew for "*store* cities" (2 Chron. 8:6) is also translated "to heap up", strengthening the connection with the rich fool (Lk. 12:15-28). That parable stresses the self-centredness of the fool- just circle all the occurrences of the word "I". A similar over-use of personal pronouns in Ecc.2:4-8 makes the same point. Ecc.2:26 records how Solomon reflected that the sinner "heaped up" treasures- using the same word as for his "*store* cities". He saw his error, but wasn't bothered to do anything about it.

It has been posited: "Roman farming manuals, for example, contain admonitions that storage facilities should be used so that the farmer can wait until a more propitious time to sell his crops. Cato, for one, advises that a farmer should "have a well-built barn and storage room and plenty of vats for oil and wine, so that he may hold his products for good prices; it will redound to his wealth, his self-respect, and his reputation" (*On Agriculture* 3.2). Prov. 11:26, on the other hand, says that "people curse those who hold back grain"".

12:19 *And I will say to my soul: Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years*- see

on Mt. 6:25; 1 Cor. 15:32. The rich fool reasoned that because he had had a big harvest, he would build bigger barns and relax, because he had enough to last him “many years” (Lk. 12:18,19). The unreal element here is that a harvest doesn’t last many years, especially in a Middle Eastern climate with no way of effectively preserving it. And the lesson, on reflection, is obvious. Riches don’t last for ever, he who earns big wages puts them into a bag with holes in... and yet there is the genuine conviction that they will last much longer than they do. Another unreal element here is that the rich man is described as speaking *with himself*. It's hard for some cultures to appreciate how Middle Eastern culture is a collective affair. Decisions are taken through much discussion with other people. Likewise, the rich man plans out how to enjoy his wealth *alone*. There is no speech to his family; he invites *himself* to rejoice with *himself*. But all these unreal elements about this man signpost to us the loneliness, insulation and selfishness which is brought about by excess wealth and the increase of investments. It's so relevant to the 21st century. By the way, there's a word play going on here. The man whose land brings forth many things (*eu-phoreo*) and therefore wants to be merry (*eu-phraino*) is actually a fool- *aphron*- an *a-phron* person, a person without those things. All those things were "required" of him, as a loan is required. They weren't really his. And as so often, the parable is left hanging, with no actual response from the man. We have to imagine where the man's mind turned, what he thought... and take the lesson.

Take your ease, eat, drink, be merry- A direct quotation from Epicurean philosophers. The Lord is directly engaging with secular ideas current at the time. But no quotation marks or used, nor acknowledgment of sources given. Many of the Bible's 'difficult passages' are because of these kinds of allusions to contemporary phrases, ideas and literature, many of which are not preserved today.

This is also a direct quote from the LXX of Ecc. 8:15: "there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and enjoy”. But that is the perspective of the man who lives with no perspective of future judgment.

For each aspect of true spirituality, there is a fake counterpart; an appearance of peace when a man has no peace with God; a semblance of prayer and Bible study when actually these are performed as exercises devoid of meaning. The pseudo-believer takes “ease” (Lk. 12:19) in his materialism; and yet this is the same word used about the true “rest” which the Lord gives in His ecclesia (Mt. 11:28). If we allow ourselves to be caught up in this, then we are effectively having our part in the spirit of antiChrist. There will not only be a fake Jesus, but there is already within our natures a shadow spirituality, which apes the real thing, and thereby seeks to persuade us that we can take the crown without the cross. In this lies the colossal practical relevance of this theme to the serious believer.

12:20 *But God said to him: You foolish one, this night is your soul required from you, and the things which you have prepared, whose shall they be?*- The parable of the rich fool is

the Lord's response to a man asking him to get involved in persuading the man's brother to share the inheritance of their late father. As ever, the Lord replies to such questions obliquely and always in terms of overarching higher principle. His parable here features the question of who shall receive what a man has carefully laid up and saved during his life. It's as if He is asking the man to stop worrying about receiving the inheritance- and instead consider his father to actually have been a fool for laying it all up in store and not using it himself for God. Here again we see the Lord's apparently simply stories actually having a radical twist to them. The fool's children and family aren't mentioned. But most wealthy men were married at that time or at least within some wider family context. They aren't mentioned because the Lord was focusing on the fact the man was so self centered. Whether or not they existed, the man saw his wealth as for his own enjoyment. The Lord is also cutting hard into the idea that a man who built up wealth and left it to others was actually a good man, a relative to be proud of. Indeed, a wise man who saved his wealth for future use rather than spent it. But the Lord calls the man a fool. This is all built in to His question "Whose shall [these things] be?".

God calls the man a "fool"; for the fool has said in his heart [and this parable talks much of this man's heart] that there is no God (Ps. 14:1). He speaks to himself and the voice of his own self talk is his authority. But then *God* speaks to him- and takes away his life. He has acted as if God doesn't exist. His life consisted in what things he owned, rather than in God. Such materialism is hereby branded effective atheism.

Gk. / RVmg. "They shall require of thee". Who are the "they"? The reference could be to "the goods" of :19, "the things" of the latter part of :20. The things required his life. He didn't own them, they owned him. And so he had no life of his own. Or the "they" could be the Angels, to whom we shall give account at the day of judgment (:9). A similar, related Greek word is in :48- as God has given much to us, so "they"- the Angels- will require of us during the judgment process. But the exact same Greek word translated "required" occurs only in Lk. 6:30- we should give to others and not 'ask again' of them. The connection teaches that insofar as we 'require' of others, so it will be 'required' of us. If we forgive freely without demanding repentance, so God will treat us; if we 'require again' of others in this life, so God will of us. In a sense our lives are required of us when we die in that our next conscious moment will be the judgment.

The word for "required" was a commercial term, used of a loan. The man, every man, has life and whatever wealth we have as a loan from God. It must be repaid- if we don't use it. Like the one talent man, he had not used it at all but had become lost in narcissism. Jim Elliot's words are so true: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose”. This reasoning cuts so hard against the modern ideal of building up a pension pot large enough to empower a retirement of luxury living.

This is an allusion to various passages from the Apocrypha, especially Ecclesiasticus- as noted on :19, the Lord is again engaging with contemporary ideas.

"Prepared" is the same word as "prepared" in v. 47. We must prepare ourselves, our character and personality; we provide or prepare by being generous to others, v. 33. Because we do not have an immortal soul that is somehow recycled into us through reincarnation, our soul / life is given to us by God. In the parable of the rich fool, the Lord says that in the day of his death, his soul was "required" of him. The Greek word for 'required' means 'to ask back, to request to be given again'. The fact we have life [a 'soul'] makes us responsible to God; and at the judgment we will be asked to give that life back to Him with an account. And, as the parable shows, this utterly precludes a focus upon material acquisition. The Lord goes on to say that therefore we should take no anxious thought about what our soul will eat or wear- because our soul / life is in fact God's soul / life, and He will care for it until He takes it back to Himself (Lk. 12:22). The soul is greater than food and clothes (Lk. 12:23 Gk.). The wonder that we are alive, with God's life in us, should be far greater to us than what we feed or clothe it with. Because we can't take that life out of ourselves until God does, nor can we give it to another person, nor can we make our body / soul grow taller, *therefore* we should not take anxious thought for the material things related to it, which are all peripheral compared to the wonder of the fact that we have life from God: "why take ye thought for the rest [Gk. 'the things that are left over / extraneous']?" (Lk. 12:26). And to drive the point home, we are bidden "consider" (s.w. 'discover') the birds and plants, who are simply content with the life God has given them. This was the Lord's way of doing what Solomon did in Ecc. 3:17-20- showing that man and plants and animals are all possessed of the same God-given spirit / life. As Gen. 2:7; Ecc. 12:7 make clear, the spirit / life is given by God to our bodies; it doesn't come from anywhere else. There is no reincarnation. And this is no painless Bible fact; it demands that we live lives that are *His*, and not lived out as if our spirit / life / soul is *ours*. The fact that God "holdeth our soul in life", a reference to Gen. 2:7, means that David wanted to "make the voice of his praise to be heard" (Ps. 66:8,9). This was the meaning of the basic facts of creation for David!

The man who built greater barns realized on the night of his death that all his laid up treasures could not be his after his death. And yet this is couched in the very language of Ecclesiastes. We can come to that attitude and understanding right now; and if we don't, we will come to it on our deathbeds or at judgment day. The parable of the pounds may be intended to describe our dealing with wealth. This is how it would have appeared to the Lord's first hearers.

12:21 *So is he that lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God*- Without in any way seeking to teach justification by works, it is also true that there are Bible passages which imply that there will be a reckoning up of a man's good works at the last day. The rich fool should have been "rich toward God" (Lk. 12:21); he should have

hoarded up spiritual wealth and fruit against his last day rather than material things. Yet this of course will not have been consciously done; yet the judgment process will reveal the good works of the righteous to them and others.

"Rich towards" is a phrase only used elsewhere in Rom. 10:12, where Paul observes that the Lord is "rich towards" all believers. The fool had failed to perceive God's richness, or generosity, towards him; and so he was rich towards, or generous to, himself rather than God.

12:22 *And he said to his disciples: Therefore I say to you, do not be anxious for life, what you shall eat. Nor yet for your body, what you shall put on*- This is all building up to the momentous challenge of :33 to sell what we have and give to the poor. The allusion is to how God provided food and clothing for Israel as they journeyed through the desert to the promised land.

The Lord's teaching is concerned with how we think, with inculcating spiritual mindedness. The exhortations in this section against materialism arise out of that- they are appeals not to be materialistic and faithless in God's provision, because this leads to our thinking, our heart and mind, being on those things rather than with the Lord. It's true that the Greek translated 'thought' can mean 'no *anxious* thought'. But the problem is that we can make this mean that we are in fact allowed to spend a lot of time thinking about material things, so long as we're not 'anxious'. This line of interpretation seems to ignore the wider context. We can be spiritually minded, the Lord is teaching, if we simply accept that we shall never go hungry or naked. God will provide for His children who trust in Him. The Lord clearly saw material concerns as being the great enemy of daily spiritual mindedness. The emphasis upon not taking thought is considerable- the Lord uses the word five times in swift succession (Mt. 6:25,27,28,31,34). And He repeats the command not to take thought for what we shall eat or drink (Mt. 6:25,31). Luke's record records this warning not to worry about what we shall 'eat and drink' only once (Lk. 12:29), but it is prefaced by the parable of the rich fool, upon whose lips we find the same words. After he has spent a lifetime amassing wealth, he says to himself "eat, drink and be merry" (Lk. 12:19). Clearly we are to understand him as a man who failed to live by the Lord's principles not to worry about eating and drinking. Yet he was not poor. He was fabulously rich. The point is thus established that the rich, or at least those who have enough to eat and drink, are not to consider the Lord's principle as speaking only to the desperately poor who are tempted to worry about what they shall eat. The principle applies to the rich too. For it is a basic human principle that all of us, rich or poor, are tempted to expend mental thought about how we shall basically survive. The omission of the Sermon in John is typical of how John omits much of the Synoptic material, and yet repeats it in essence. He records the same 'eat and drink' language about our need eat and drink of the flesh and blood of the crucified Lord Jesus

(Jn. 6:53). The point perhaps is that instead of expending mental energy worrying about how we shall eat and drink, we are to instead focus upon absorbing the Lord Jesus into our lives. And all material things will somehow fall into place. A similar idea is to be found in the Lord's warning not to worry about what clothing to "put on", because He uses the same word about how the rejected man had not 'put on' the wedding garment of the Lord's righteousness (Mt. 22:11). Repeatedly the later New Testament appeals for us to "put on [s.w.] the Lord Jesus" (Rom. 13:12,14; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:24; 6:11,14; Col. 3:10,12; 1 Thess. 5:8), so that in the last day we may 'put on' the clothing of immortality (s.w. 1 Cor. 15:53,54; 2 Cor. 5:3). If putting on *this* garment is our mental focus, then we need not worry about what we shall 'put on' for clothing in this life.
This is alluded to in Phil. 4:6. How do we obey that command to "take no thought for your life"? By praying consciously for every little thing that you need in daily life, e.g. daily bread. We do not have two masters; only one. Therefore, the more we grasp this, the more we will give ourselves solely to Him. And this leads on, in the thinking of Jesus, to having no anxious thought for tomorrow; for a life of total devotion to Him means that we need not worry about tomorrow (Mt. 6:24,25). If we seek first His Kingdom, then we will not be anxious for tomorrow (Mt. 6:33,34).

12:23 *For the life is more than the food, and the body more than the clothing*- I noted on :15 that the Lord is teaching us to make a radical divorce between our life and our possessions. The presence of the articles focuses attention upon *the* life and *the* body- and surely the Lord has in view the life to come, which will involve having a glorious *body* (Phil. 3:21), not existence in any disembodied sense. The contrast is therefore between this present life, and *the* life to come; this present body, and *the* body which is to be given us. It's a question of identification; whether we focus upon this present life and body, or perceive that this life is but a miniscule percentage of our eternal existence, when we will not be living this life with this body. The life and the body to come are "more" than the present life and body; and the Greek for "more" is elsewhere translated 'the greater part', the idea being 'the major portion'. The vastly greater part of our existence will be with *the* life and *the* body which is yet to come. If we are secure in Christ and confident of our eternal destiny by His grace, then issues pertaining to this life and this body become insignificant.

When the Lord taught that “the life is more than the food” which we worry about today (Lk. 12:23 RV), and “the body [which we shall receive] is more than the raiment”, He surely means that our hope of eternal life, *the* life, the only real and ultimate life worth having, should eclipse our worries about today’s problems of survival. Not worrying about food, drink and clothing, which God will provide, is likely an allusion to His provision for Israel during their wilderness journey to the promised land. And in this context the Lord encourage us: “Seek ye the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you... fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom” (Lk. 12:31,32). If it is God’s pleasure to give us the Kingdom, then surely

He will give us all basic necessities until that time comes. Our certainty of being there thus greatly relieves us from earthly cares, compared to the person who has no such hope.

12:24 *Consider the ravens, how they do not sow nor reap. They have no store nor barn, but God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!*- Gk. 'gaze into'. Surely He drew attention to some birds flying around. And the Greek words behind "Behold" mean more than a casual glance. He asks us to look for some time with deep penetration at the birds of the natural creation, and learn a lesson.

As always, the Lord applied His words to Himself. For we sense in Mt. 8:20 that He had really thought about His words. Yes, the Father feeds the birds- but they have nests, and the Son of Man at least that night had nowhere to lay His head. Note too that the birds of the air are generally unclean (Acts 10:12). The fact God feeds even the unclean animals ties in with the Lord's opening comfort when He began the Sermon that His message is for those who worry about their uncleanness and spiritual inadequacy before God.

Sow... reap... gather into barns are words repeatedly used by the Lord Jesus, especially in Matthew, for the work of the Gospel. The seed of the word is *sown* (Matthew records three sowing parables- Mt. 13:3,24,31 cp. Mt. 25:26); , then *reaped* at Christ's return (Mt. 25:26- as in 2 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 6:7-9; Rev. 14:15), and finally *gathered* (by the preachers and Angels, Mt. 3:12; 12:30; 13:30,47; 22:10; 25:26,32), "into my barn" (Mt. 3:12; 13:30)- the Kingdom. We cannot simply ignore all this use of identical language in Matthew's Gospel. I noted at Mt. 6:25 and elsewhere that the Lord is often saying 'Do not worry about the activities which are part of this life, but focus instead on doing those activities in a spiritual sense'. I gave the example of how the command not to worry about what we shall physically eat and drink implies that we should instead be concerned about our spiritual eating and drinking. Remembering the focus of the Sermon upon the need for outgoing, proactive sharing of the Gospel, it would be fair to conclude that the Lord wishes us to not worry about sowing, reaping and gathering into barns in the literal sense, but instead to concern ourselves with doing those things *in the work of the Gospel*. 'Focus on sharing the Gospel, and all the material things will fall into place if you just trust that they will work out OK'.

God consciously feeds the birds with their every mouthful. In the same way, God individually and consciously cares for each blade of grass. Fundamentally, they do not grow so much as a result of chemical combination or photosynthesis, but due to the conscious care of God using such processes. The idea of every little thing in life and the world being controlled by Angels contradicts the notion that God has set this world in motion according to certain natural laws, and that things continue without His direct intervention- as if the whole system is run by clockwork which God initially wound up. Intervention in this system by God has been called 'the hand of providence'. However,

these ideas surely contradict the clear Biblical teaching that every movement in the natural creation is consciously controlled by God through His Angels, thus needing an energetic input from Him through His Spirit for every action to occur. "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your Heavenly Father feeds them" suggests that God consciously feeds the birds with their every mouthful. See too Mt. 5:45; 6:30; 10:29-31; Job 38:12,32; 39:27; Amos 9:6; Is. 40:7; Ps. 90:3; 104: 13; Prov. 11:1.

Things being "better than" or "of more value than" is quite a theme in the thinking of the Lord Jesus. The Greek word is used by Him at least three times in this way. Better than the birds, than many sparrows (Mt. 10:31), than a sheep (Mt. 12:12). Doubtless this thought was developed in the Lord by His observation of birds, flocks of sparrows and sheep- developing the implications of the simple thought that we are of more value than them to God. For we are made in His image in a way in which they are not.

12:25 *And which of you by being anxious can add a cubit to the measure of his life?*- As always, the emphasis is upon the state of the heart. No amount of mental worry can add anything to us. And so our hearts and minds should instead be devoted to the God who can transform our body into an eternal state of existence. The same word for "add" occurs in Mt. 6:33. We cannot ultimately 'add' anything to ourselves in secular life; if we seek first the things of God's Kingdom [i.e. 'take thought' for them rather than our material life], then what is necessary for the material, human life will be added to us. The concept of 'addition' suggests we are to see ourselves as ourselves *without* the issues of food, clothing and survival. We are then to decide how we are to take care of those 'additional' issues. And the Lord is teaching that we are to focus upon spiritual things and the service of God's Kingdom, believing that He will 'add' these things to us. To perceive ourselves independent from our human, secular needs and position is hard. But Paul got the idea right when he spoke of how we bring nothing into this world and can take nothing out (1 Tim. 6:7). 'We' come into this world; we exist, but have nothing added to us initially. And 'we' exit this world, likewise without anything 'added'.

No amount of secular thought can add age to our lives. Because life, the eternal life, comes only from God. So it is to Him that our hearts belong. Again, the Lord Jesus was the word of the Sermon made flesh in His own example. For we read that He grew in stature before God (Lk. 2:52 s.w.)- not by anxious worldly thought. Perhaps Zacchaeus thought upon the implications of the Lord's words, because Luke uses the same word to note that he was of inadequate stature (Lk. 19:3). The 'stature' that we seek to attain is not any physique or longevity in this life- but the "stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13 s.w.). The amount of thought and effort that goes into trying to live longer, adding a cubit to our lifespan, is immense. And understandably so, for those who have only this

life. Surely the Lord is saying that we should give no anxious thought to this, but rather, give our mental energy to growing into the age / stature of Himself.

12:26 *If then you are not able to do even that which is least, why are you anxious concerning the rest?-* The least is to add age to our lives, even just a little bit. The Lord is arguing from the viewpoint that "life" is the most important thing we have. To add a fraction to its length is "the least"; and therefore concerns about what we do with that life is "the rest" which should not be worried about exactly because we cannot add length to our lives. This is an unusual but powerful argument against anxious worry. We cannot extend our lives; and therefore, given our inability, we shouldn't worry about "the rest" because we simply have no power to change it anyway. All we can do is to surrender our lives and existence into the hands of a loving Father and His Son.

12:27 *Consider the lilies-* Gk. 'to study deeply', used only here in the NT. Whilst no doubt the Lord with a wave of the hand did draw attention to the mountain lilies growing where He was teaching, He was most definitely not inviting us to take a cursory glance at them. But rather to study them; and the unusual Greek word used for "consider" drove home that point. Perhaps He picked one and invited the disciples to gaze at it in silence for some time.

How they grow- The Greek can mean 'in what way' and also 'how much', 'to what great extent'.

They do not toil, nor do they spin- As so often in the Lord's teaching and parables, He was careful to balance what He said with relevance to both men ['toiling' in Greek has the idea of heavy labour], and women [spinning]. The appeal for those who are 'toiling' in heavy labour to come to Christ (Mt. 11:28) is an invitation to know in this life a lifting of the curse of labour which came upon Adam. This is not to say that we shall not have to labour, but the desperate toiling for survival is mitigated by the knowledge that God will ultimately provide for His people.

Yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not dressed like one of these-

It is hard to avoid the connection with the description of the righteous as being clothed in glory at the last day. The clothing metaphor is repeated throughout the NT in this connection (e.g. Rev. 3:5,18; 7:9,13; 19:8). Of course we are dealing with metaphor here- plants are not literally clothed, although perhaps the Lord was alluding to them flowering as their 'glory'. The lily is glorious for what it is, not because it has laboured to make itself something other than it is. We will be made glorious by God in Christ. The city set on a hill cannot be hid. We are who and as we are before God. There is nothing to cover with clothing. This consideration alone puts the whole issue of present clothing into perspective.

The Lord Jesus hinted indirectly at Solomon's pride when he said that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one wild flower, symbolic of how God would clothe, with imputed righteousness, even the weakest believer. This reference to Solomon is only one of several hints that our Lord read Solomon in a negative light. In this context He warns against excessive attention to food, drink and clothes- all things which the court of Solomon revelled in to a quite extraordinary extent. "Take therefore no (anxious) thought for the morrow... sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Mt. 6:34) sounds like a rebuke of the way Solomon did just this in Ecclesiastes, as he intellectually battled with the sadness of knowing that all his achievements would mean nothing in the future. "But", says Jesus, "seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mt. 6:33)- clearly a reference to Solomon seeking Divine wisdom and subsequently being blessed; surely the Lord is telling us to follow Solomon's example in this, but to avoid his pride and materialism. Solomon didn't seek the future Kingdom of God, but rather his own. The Lord taught that we should love our enemies, and not fall into the trap of only loving those who love us (Mt. 5:44-46). He seems to be alluding here to Solomon's claim that wisdom says: "I love them that love me" (Prov. 8:17). Maybe I'm wrong, and the Lord didn't have His mind there on that passage; but in the context of Him re-interpreting and re-presenting Solomon to us, it seems likely that He was consciously showing that God's grace is in fact the very opposite of what Solomon thought. God loves His enemies, and doesn't only love those who love Him; and this is to be our credo likewise. The record of how Solomon spoke of his building of the temple can now be seen as blatant pride in his external appearance of spirituality; without the foregoing analysis of the *hints* of Solomon's pride, this wouldn't necessarily be a correct conclusion to reach; but with all these inspired links, surely we can read the following as pure pride: "Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven (hardly praying in his closet! Was the Lord alluding to Solomon in Mt. 6:6?)... the house that I have built for thy name" (1 Kings 8:22,44). Solomon's frequent emphasis on the fact that *he* built the house makes a telling connection with the principle that God does not live in houses *built* by men (Acts 17:24?)

12:28 *But if God does so clothe the grass in the field, which today is*- The blessings God gives us do not come by clockwork- we thankfully recognize they are individual acts of mercy towards us. Perhaps our sometimes 'clockwork' prayers are an indication that we think God's blessings of food etc. are clockwork too? In the same way, God individually and consciously cares for each blade of grass. Fundamentally, they do not grow merely as a result of chemical combination or photosynthesis, but due to the conscious care of God using such processes. The worry-free life is a characteristic of the true believer. If God gave us His Son, how much more will He not give us "all things"? "Clothe" translates the Greek *amphi-hennumi*- to enrobe around. The Lord seems to have been

referring to a type of wild flower that appears to be draped around by its natural skin, rather like an iris. God gives the wild flowers robes... although they do not spin them or work for them. Solomon's robes weren't as beautiful as them. And how *much more* will God clothe us, both literally and with salvation (for this is how the Bible usually uses the idea of God clothing us). God does so much for the lilies, who are to be 'thrown into the fire'... a phrase which inevitably connects with the Lord's other uses of that idea to describe the final condemnation of the wicked (as in James 1:11). God cares for flowers, and He even cares and provides for those whom He will one day condemn. For God to keep such people alive is a conscious outflowing of His lavish energy, His gracious gift of life and health. If He does that for things and persons which will ultimately be 'thrown into the fire', how *much more* will He clothe us. Let's remember that creation isn't run on clockwork; God makes His rain come, and His sun to rise, on the just and unjust; He's aware when a bird falls from the air; counts the hairs on our heads, as a mother dotes over a new-born baby's features. Just by keeping alive humanity (indeed, all of creation), God is lavishing His grace and consciously outgiving of Himself.

And tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more shall he clothe you- The idea of 'casting' is used by the Lord with reference to condemnation at the last day; and 'the oven' is reminiscent of the imagery of Gehenna fire to destroy the rejected. If God shows so much care and gives so much passing glory to that which shall be rejected and be ultimately unused by Him in eternity- how much more will he clothe us whom He loves and has accepted with His nature. All worry about what garment we shall physically put on, let alone whether it has a brand name on it or not, becomes subsumed beneath the wonder of the metaphor of our final clothing.

O you of little faith?- The Lord tells the disciples that they are "of little faith" if they don't perceive and live by what He is teaching about God's care for the flowers. The 'faith' is surely faith in the simple fact that God lavishes His loving care upon us, just because, like a flower, we are here as His creation, in His eternal purpose. All flesh is as grass, and yet the Lord speaks as if God treats us as better than the grass "which is today in the field and tomorrow is cast into the oven" (Lk. 12:28).

The "little faith" is not so much in God's promised provision of physical clothing, but in the promise of final clothing in salvation. But God's care even for those whom He shall condemn, keeping them in life, and the glory He gives to the plant and animal creation which last but for days, is sure encouragement that He shall so much more super abundantly clothe us with salvation- and also, will ensure we don't go physically naked in this world. The Gospel records, as transcripts of the disciples' early preaching, show the disciples appealing to others to have faith, to believe and be baptized. And yet the same accounts record so often how weak and small was the disciples' faith. Matthew is a classic example: Mt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20. It was on the basis of this acknowledged weakness of their own, that the disciples could appeal so powerfully to

others. The more real they showed themselves to be, the more credible was their appeal.

12:29 *And do not seek what you shall eat and what you shall drink, neither be of doubtful mind*- Clothes have been mentioned in :28. These are the three things God provided for Israel in their wilderness journey. The same old clothes, food (manna) and water, of course. But He provided for them. God will provide, but the question is, how does He provide? The same word is used in Mt. 25:36,38,43 about the believer in Christ who is not clothed, and needs to be clothed by other believers- some of whom refuse to, whilst others do. If God really does provide food and clothing for His people- why are some apparently without them? One window onto that question might be that potentially all such needs have been met, in that the food and clothing is within the brotherhood. But there can be a dysfunction, in that it is not shared out as it should be- meaning that some go without the provision which God has potentially provided. But another window is that David could say that he had never seen the seed of the righteous begging bread at any time in his long and varied life (Ps. 37:25). And despite a lifetime in the poorer world I also have yet to encounter this. The promise holds true, in my observation.

We are to firmly believe in His provision, without being in any sense "doubtful" about it. This lack of doubt will remove all materialism and concern about providing for our futures.

12:30 *For all these things the nations of the world seek after, but your Father knows you have need of these things*- God's people who worry and spend their thoughts on eating, drinking and clothing are no better than the Gentile world. This was a radical thing to say to first century Jews. It is a common Biblical theme that the unspiritual amongst God's people shall share the judgments of the world whom in spirit they are like. The idea of the Gentiles seeking is of course from Is. 11:10, where we read that finally the Gentiles will seek unto Christ (as in Acts 15:17). Perhaps the idea is that we should right now have that changed direction of 'seeking' which the Gentile world will have in the future. Our practical life in Christ is really all about our response to the abounding nature of God’s grace. If we really believe it, then we will trust in Him and not worry. The difference between the Gentile world and the believer in Christ is quite simply that we believe that our Father has this level of care and concern for us; and therefore we will not worry, whereas the unbelieving world worry constantly about material things. This is how much of a ‘first principle’ this really is.

God knows our human situation. Our faithlessness and lack of spiritual mindedness is because of an unspoken sense that actually He is unaware of our needs and the nature of being human. But the God who knows all things is not unaware of humanity and the needs which accompany being human. Frequently the prophecies directed to the Jews returning from Babylon spoke at length of God's amazing knowledge- because the

sense was that whilst God existed, He did not know close-up about the human situation. He does, of course, know perfectly.

12:31 *Seek His kingdom*- Seeking is paralleled with taking thought in :29,30. The overall direction of our lives must be towards the Kingdom of God above all. If that is put "first", then actually there is no room for thought about much else. The idea is not 'Seek the Kingdom first, and other things secondly'. Rather must the 'seeking' of our thinking be towards the Kingdom. 'Seeking' was a common Hebraism for 'worship'. But the Lord has defined 'seeking' as thinking, as the overall direction of our mental state, our heart. It was not merely a question of going through the worship rituals of Judaism in a holy space such as the temple. True worship is redefined as the state of our heart.

The Lord's prayer asked us to pray firstly for the things of His Kingdom; this reflects our priorities. I noted under Mt. 6:10 that the coming of the Kingdom in our lives is through the doing of God's will. The Lord's message is not simply that we should long for the coming of the Kingdom at His second coming; it is that starting right now, we should seek above all things to extend the principles of the Kingdom (as taught in the Lord's parables of the Kingdom) in our lives and in the world around us.

And these things- Semitic languages such as Aramaic and Hebrew can often have various levels of meaning in a phrase. The phrase may mean or say one thing, but also suggest something else. We are of course reading the expression of those phrases in Greek. *Pas tauta* (usually translated "all these things") need not necessarily be translated as a plural. The idea could equally be 'The whole, complete thing'- we might say 'The real deal'. And that would make sense of the connection between 'added' and Mt. 6:27, which speaks of how we cannot 'add' a cubit to our lifespan. The implication could be that 'the real deal', the *real* thing- eternal life, salvation in God's Kingdom- shall be added if we seek that Kingdom first and foremost. Alternatively, we can interpret more in line with the common translations and understand that 'all these things' is the same 'all these things' of the preceding verses- the material things which God knows we need. These things *will be added* to us if we do not seek them first, but rather seek God's Kingdom first. But there is the suggestion that the real 'all things' for us is eternity in God's Kingdom. For a discussion of what may have happened if these basic things are apparently *not* added to a believer, see on Mt. 6:31.

Shall be added to you- The same word is used just a few verses earlier, where the Lord has pointed out that we are unable to 'add' a cubit to our length of human life nor to our body height.

12:32 *Fear not little flock. For it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom*- See on 2 Cor. 8:9. The pleasure or will of our loving Father is that we should share His Kingdom, and that pleasure / will prospered through the cross of Jesus (Is. 53:10). God isn't indifferent. He wants us to be there. That's why He gave His Son to die. It's as

simple as that. The deepest longings we feel in our earthly lives, as parents, as lovers, are mere flickers of the hungering desire God feels for us. It is a desire that cost Him His very own crucified son. The Lord Himself knew our basic tendency to disbelieve the certainty of our salvation when He comforted us here not to fear- and the implication is not to fear condemnation, not to fear exclusion from the Kingdom.

He spoke of us all as a little flock, fearing it is *not* the Father's pleasure / will to give us the Kingdom. In doing so, He was as ever drawing on the language of the OT. Joshua-Jesus encouraged Israel that Yahweh delighted / willed that they should enter the land (Num. 14:8); but instead, they were too caught up with doubts... doubt about salvation, about what they could eat and drink day by day, and the giants in the land. This is the very context in which the Lord was speaking- fearing "the nations of the world", doubting where food and clothes would come from, just as Israel did (Lk. 12:22-29). Yet the pleasure / will of Yahweh is that we should share His Kingdom, and that pleasure / will prospered through the cross (Is. 53:10). Therefore we should not fear or worry about our lack of material things, because God is eager to give us His Kingdom. The certainty of salvation which we may have ought to mean that worry about all human things of this life becomes irrelevant.

12:33 *Sell that which you have and give alms. Make for yourselves purses which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail*- The disciples were told to sell what they had (Lk. 12:22,32,33); but it seems they kept their fishing business. After having asked them this, the Lord again had to speak to them about forsaking all that they had (Lk. 14:33). Their claim to have left literally all and followed Him (Lk. 18:28) appears somewhat exaggerated. To follow Him meant taking up a cross (Lk. 14:27).

He warns the crowd not to everlastingly worry about where the next meal was coming from; and then in that very context, tells *them* to sell what they have (Lk. 12:29-33). He wasn't just talking to the rich. He was telling the desperately poor to forsake what little they had, so as to seek His Kingdom. He probably didn't mean them to take His words dead literally (cp. cutting off the offending hand or foot); what He surely meant was: 'Resign, in your mind, the possession of everything you have, concern yourselves rather with the needs of others and entering my Kingdom'. No wonder those crowds turned round and soon bayed for His blood. See on Mt. 6:19.

The idea is of incremental growth. It's as if spirituality, both in personality and deed, is carefully noted in Heaven as it occurs.

Where no thief draws near nor moth destroys- Or, "corrupt". James 5:2 alludes here and states that wealth is already rusted and moth-eaten. So this perhaps was the Lord's idea here, although the grammar is unclear. The idea of gold is that it doesn't rust. What appears to be permanent material wealth is not, and is already rusted in God's eyes.

The Lord's return is going to break up the house of those not looking for His return (Mt. 24:43 s.w.). It may be that 'thieves' is an intensive plural referring to the great thief, whom Jesus likens to Himself in Mt. 24:43. In this case He would be saying that He will take human wealth anyway at the last day- so we should give it to Him now and not seek it.

Because we know people (and brethren) who are richer and more wealth-seeking than we are, it's fatally easy to conclude that therefore we aren't rich, therefore we aren't materialistic. This is part of the subtle snare of materialism; that we all think that this is an area where we're not doing too badly; that really, we don't care *that* much where we live, or what the furniture's like, or whether we have money to take a holiday... But remember, our attitude to materialism is the litmus test of all our spirituality. None of us should be so quick to say that we're OK in this area. These words were spoken to a huge crowd of Jewish peasants. The Lord wasn't only referring to the few rich men who might be hanging around on the edge of the group. He was talking to all of them. He knew their mud walled homes which thieves could so easily dig through. That little cheap bangle, that ring, thinly buried under the bed mat after the pattern of Achan, that prized tunic... the petty riches of the poor which they so strove for, which *to them* were priceless treasures. This is what the Lord was getting at; and His point was that *every one of us*, from beggar to prince, has this 'laying up' mentality. He is almost ruthless in His demands.

12:34 *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*- Gk. 'to there'. The direction of our heart is towards where our treasure is. If our treasure is in Heaven, with God, then our life direction will be towards Him and not towards earthly things. The emphasis of the Lord throughout the Sermon has been on the state of the heart. The overall direction of our heart, our thinking, is all important. That direction cannot be both to earthly things and Heavenly things. Laying up treasure on earth cannot be done whilst having treasure in Heaven. The emphasis of course is on 'laying up', wilfully incrementing, not the mere possession of wealth which the Lord may send into our hands. 'Laying up' means to increment, not to merely possess. But it is the overall direction of our hearts which will be the deciding factor in our eternal destiny; 'to where' they are directed. And we can direct them by deciding what our treasure really is, and where it is.

12:35 *Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning*-

Luke 12:35-39 speaks of the Master coming at night and then sharing the Passover meal with those who are "watching". Israel were told to 'watch' throughout that first Passover night (Ex. 12:42 RV mg.), eating the meal with loins girded. Our Lord matches this with "let your loins be girded, and your lamps burning", referring to the virgins parable. Israel eating that meal together, huddled around the slain lamb, the oil burning lamps

revealing their tense faces, is therefore a picture of what the new Israel should be like just prior to their deliverance.

12:36 *And be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks*- See on Lk. 17:31. How we respond to the Lord now is how we will respond at His return. Those who open to Him immediately will be saved. The wise virgins go immediately and are thereby accepted, whereas the foolish delay their response. The implication is surely that those who are ready to drop all and go when He knocks, will be saved. Our reaction in that split second of knowing 'He's back!' will determine our eternal destiny; it will effectively be our self-judgment. And yet in this life too, the figure of the Lord knocking at our door is used to describe our response to Jesus in this life (Rev. 3:20). If there is no immediacy of response now, there will not be then.
The faithful watching for the Lord's return are here described as men waiting for their master to *return* from a wedding. But Christ's coming is also described as His coming *to* the wedding to marry the faithful. This difference may simply indicate that metaphor cannot be pressed too strictly or literally in the process of Biblical interpretation.

12:37 *Blessed are those servants, whom the master when he comes shall find awake*- Passover night was to be "a night of watching" (Ex. 12:42 RV mg.), strongly suggesting "watching in prayer" (Eph. 6:18; 1 Pet. 4:7; 2 Cor. 11:27). Similarly those who are found "watching" at the Lord's midnight coming (cp. that of the Passover angel) will be found acceptable. The picture of Israel in their family units huddled together around the Lamb, desperately focusing their attention on that saving blood, watching and praying, examining themselves- this is us, right now. For there can be no serious doubt that the second coming is almost upon our generation.

Our attitude to the second coming decides whether we will be in the Kingdom. In this sense we are judging ourselves, right now; we are formulating the outcome of the judgment seat by our attitude now towards the second coming. The proof for this lies in a group of passages which suggest that everyone who truly loves the return of his Lord will be in the Kingdom. Of course, a true love of His coming is only possible if we hold correct doctrine, and if our faith and behaviour is mature enough to be able to look with quiet joy and confidence towards that day. Thus our Lord said that all those whom He finds *watching* will be welcomed into the marriage feast. And 2 Tim. 4:8 is plain enough: "All them also that love his appearing" will be rewarded along with Paul. Paul's own confidence in salvation was because he knew the earnestness of his desire to be "present with the Lord" Jesus (2 Cor. 5:8), such was the closeness of his relationship with Him. Is this really our attitude too? Can we feel like Simeon, that we are quite

happy to die after we have just seen our Lord with our own eyes (Lk. 2:29)? Is there really much *love* between us and our Lord?

The foolish virgins knock on the door, i.e. ask for acceptance. At the second coming, the Lord knocked on their door, and they didn't answer immediately. They had decided their own fate by their dilatory response.

Truly I say to you, that he shall dress himself for service and make them sit down to eat, and shall come and serve them- The Lord's self-crucifixion spirit was seen not only in His life and then finally in His death and subsequent life; but who He was in His mortal life, He will *eternally* be. He is the same yesterday as today and as for ever. He will dress Himself to serve us, as a servant, in His future Kingdom, reminiscent of how at the last supper and on the cross He in principle did the same (Phil. 2:7). Thus the spirit of the cross must be a way of life, and this feature of our characters will be seen in the Kingdom too.

The Lord's exalted view of the disciples is reflected in how He washed their feet. To wash the feet of guests was more menial than we might imagine. It was normal to provide water for the guest to wash his own feet. The Midrash *Mekhilta* on Ex. 21:2 taught that a Jewish slave should never be required to wash his Master's feet. But as a sign of extreme devotion and respect, some disciples of the most respected rabbis would wash their feet. Yet the Lord Jesus, having reminded them that He was indeed their Lord and Master, does this to them. And according to Lk. 12:37, He will do this again to us in His Kingdom, in that He will then tie a cloth around Him and come forth and serve us. It would seem the Lord was referring back to this prophecy when He tied a cloth around Him and washed the disciples' feet. This was how highly He thought of them; and that incident was an enacted prophecy of the attitude He will have to *us*, whom the 12 symbolize, even in the glory of His Kingdom. He surely totally redefined the nature of Lordship and respect.

The Master is so delighted that his servants are watching for Him that He immediately sits down and gets a meal ready for them, doing the serving Himself. There is an arresting element of unreality here. Would a Master really do this, at such an unlikely time at night, would he really serve himself, and would he really be so glad that the servants were waiting up for him? But these elements of unreality serve to teach the lessons: that the Lord will have unspeakable joy at His return because of our expectancy of the second coming, and He will surprise us by His glee and enthusiasm for us. See on 2 Tim. 4:8.

The master makes the servants "recline at table"; they are made to feel like the Master, by the Master Himself! This is what it means to be "in Christ". There's a kind of out of

scale inappropriacy about the idea that if the Master comes and finds the servants awake, then He will gird Himself and serve them. Of course they ought to be awake! But it's as if He is so especially impressed by this fact. And we who live awaiting His return need to take note. And the idea of the master serving is of course the idea behind the description of the cross in Phil. 2:6,7. We should have the same awkward sense of wonder at the cross as we have when we recline at the breaking of bread. This implies that those who serve the emblems are in fact manifesting the Lord Jesus, and are actually of far greater significance than the president or the speaker. See on Lk. 13:7.

Ps. 36:8 says that God will "make us" partake of the blessings of the Kingdom of God. It reminds us of how the Lord Jesus said that in his Kingdom, he will "make us" sit down at a table, and he will come and serve us, knowing full well that he who sits at meat is greater than he who serves (Lk. 22:27). It isn't so difficult to imagine this scene: the Lord of glory wanting us to sit down to a meal, and then *He* comes and serves us. He *will* have to "make us" sit down and let ourselves be served. Perhaps "*Come*, you blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom" (Mt. 25:34) likewise suggests a hesitancy of the faithful to enter the Kingdom. And perhaps the way the Lord had to 'make' the healed blind man look up and use his new sight was some kind of foretaste of this. There is even the suggestion in Rev. 7:15 that after the judgment process, the Lord will come down off His throne and mix with us, after the pattern of Joseph. See on Lk. 18:17.

The Lord Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. It is wrong to think that the Lord was only humble in His ministry, but will return with almost bitter indignation. This is not so. He girded Himself and served His men in the days of His flesh (Jn. 13:4); and He will do *exactly* the same again, in the glory of His Kingdom (Lk. 12:37). That same essential humility of God and Jesus will be with Him; He won't have changed. It is His fundamental, eternal characteristic. The fear of God lest Israel would not attain the promised land ("lest peradventure...", Ex. 13:17) shows His humility, in being so concerned for the salvation of petty man; and that characteristic likewise will be His, right up to and through and beyond the day of judgment.
The Lord who will judge us knows us each individually. The question arises, 'Why would *all* the servants stay awake in order to open the door (Lk. 12:37)? Why not just the night watchman? The answer is that there is a totally unique and special personal relationship between this Master and *all* His servants.

12:38 *And if he shall come in the second watch and if in the third and find them waiting, so blessed are they*- We must speak the word as others are able to hear it, expressing the Truths of Christ in language and terms which will reach them. There are some differences within the Gospels in the records of the parables. It could be that the

different writers, under inspiration, were rendering the Lord's Aramaic words into Greek in different styles of translation. Also, we must bear in mind the different audiences. Mark speaks of the four watches of the night which would have been familiar to Romans (Mk. 13:35 cp. 6:48), whereas Lk. 12:38 speaks of the Jewish division of the night into three watches (cp. Jud. 7:19). Yet Luke seems to translate the Palestinian style of things into terms which were understandable by a Roman audience.

12:39 *But know this*- Our focus should be on 'knowing' that we don't 'know' the time of His coming; and therefore watching at all times, living *as if* His return is imminent. This would be one explanation of why Paul and Peter write in their letters as if the Lord's return is imminent when in fact He did not return in the first century.

That if the master of the house had known in what hour the thief was coming- The Lord is drawing a parallel between the householder watching, and the disciples / believers watching, being aware of the possibility of the Lord's return at any moment. He will only come unexpectedly, as a thief, to those who are not watching and are caught unprepared. But almost every usage of *oikodespotes* in the parables is concerning the Lord Jesus (Mt. 10:25; 13:27; 20:1,11; 21:33; Lk. 13:25). As so often, the Lord was speaking to the disciples but not forgetting to speak also to Himself. He was soon to ask them in Gethsemane to watch and pray *with Him* (Mt. 26:38); as if His watchfulness was to be theirs. In Mt. 13:52 He does also use this term about every scribe instructed in the things of the Kingdom. We are all the master of the house in the sense that we are to all be watching out for the household as a whole; the work of the Lord Jesus is to be our work. 'Watching' is thereby defined as not only watching ourselves, but watching out for the rest of the household. This is being presented here as the supreme way of not becoming unwatchful. By watching out for others we are watching for the Lord's return, living with the imminence of His coming over before us.

He would have stayed awake- The point is surely that if we were to know when the Lord is coming, then we would watch for Him *at the time of His coming*; just as a householder would watch out for a thief if he knew ahead of time when the thief was coming. Because we do not know when the Lord is coming, we must watch for His coming all the time, living *as if* He is coming imminently even though we do not *know* for sure whether He is or not. Therefore our living as if He is about to come is to be done independently of any hunches we may have that He is about to return, based as they usually are upon prophetic interpretations.

And not have left his house to be broken into- This is the key; recognizing that the household of God is in fact our household, and we are to watch out for it as we would for our very own family. Indeed, it *is* our family. The connection is to Mt. 23:38 "*Your house* is left unto you desolate". Here, "*his house*" is "broken up". The Lord is saying that they were in the status of condemnation already. The physical breaking up of the temple would be the result of the elders of Israel not 'watching' as intended.

12:40 *You also- be ready-* The Lord was initially speaking to the disciples, the future elders of the church. The elders, represented by "the goodman of the house", have a special responsibility in this watching, so that the Lord's return is not thief-like to the 'house' of their ecclesia (Mt. 24:43). They "watch for your souls" (Heb. 13:17). But in a sense, the duty of watching falls to each of us: we're all elders (Lk. 12:41-46). All believers are called to watch, and that watching involves watching for others. The connection with 1 Thess. 5:2,6 therefore suggests that one of the reasons for the unworthy experiencing the second coming "as a thief" will be the lack of awareness by their elders concerning the spiritual trials of the last days. The reverse is also true. A good latter-day elder will have to give his very soul to the work of watching over the flock, fully aware of the many dangers they face in the last days. It is difficult to see how this vital role can be filled by those who have sold their souls to demanding employers. This work can't be simply left to others. This passage teaches that the servant who must feed the household with appropriate food represents each of us; he must watch for the Lord's return and be diligent in feeding the household; yet (it must be stressed), this parable is intended for each of us (cp. Mk. 13:37). If he doesn't do this, he is rejected. We are set a high standard here. Christ is "the goodman of the house" (Mt. 20:11), but here "the goodman of the house" represents each of us (Mt. 24:43; Lk. 12:39,40). We are in Him, and therefore we must try to share his level of concern for his household. He carried his cross for us, for our salvation. And he asks us to share His cross, i.e. His devotion to the body of believers, even unto death. If we are in Him, we too must devote ourselves to the saving of the body.

The very same word and idea for "ready" is repeated in Mt. 25:10. Those who were "ready" and responded immediately to the news of the Lord's return were accepted. The 'readiness' is in being constantly ready to leave all and go to be with the Lord. We shouldn't be so surprised, therefore, that life in this world is so unbearable for the believers; for we are being led to a point where we will be ready and eager to leave all for the sake of being with the Lord.

For in the hour you do not expect- the Son of Man comes- The fact we do not know the date of the Lord's return is what makes us live in a spirit of constant readiness for His coming. The point is that we should be "ready" even when we "think not" that the Lord's coming is near. The contrast is being drawn between on one hand our 'readiness', and on the other, our 'thinking', our computing, our calculations, the seeming to us, that the return of Christ is near. "The Son of Man comes" uses the present tense, whereas "Be... ready" would properly require the future tense. There may be here a hint that the future coming of the Son of Man in essence is ongoing in the life of the believer.

12:41 *And Peter said: Lord, are you telling this parable aimed at us, or to everyone?-* See on Mk. 13:34; Lk. 13:1. Peter perceived that the parable was aimed at those who had

responsibility for the Lord's house / family. He wondered whether it could really be so that he and those immature disciples were really being spoken to as the elders of the new Israel; and he wondered whether actually the Lord meant that we are all elders. The Lord rarely answers questions directly, but lifts them to a higher level. And He does so here. He urges us each to take responsibility, and to grasp the urgency of living as if He will return any moment- knowing that this will mean giving an account for our responsibilities toward others.

12:42 *And the Lord said: Who then is the faithful and wise steward-* See on :41 and 1 Tim. 3:15. One aspect of spirituality leads to another. Thus the Lord commends the one who is watching for His coming, and then speaks of how those who are to be accepted at His coming are those busy preparing spiritual food for their brethren (Lk. 12:39,42). The implication is that he who is watching, truly watching, for the return will be busy about the brotherhood's needs; and in caring for them is our own personal preparedness. "Let patience have her perfect work... let brotherly love continue" sounds as if we must allow the process of righteousness inspired by spiritual acts of love and patience. We can obstruct that process (James 1:4; Heb. 13:1).

The Lord is replying to Peter's question as to whether we the hearers and readers are to assume that it is our responsibility to feed others in the household. The answer seems to be that yes it is, because this is what is naturally elicited by watching and being alert for the Lord's return.

Our 'watching' is to be expressed in terms of ensuring that all the household have their food at the appropriate time. In Mk. 13:34,35 the Lord expands on this parable in saying that each of the servants are given a different work, but He wants us to be like the doorkeeper [AV "porter"], whose job it was to simply watch- and "You, watch, therefore!". Putting together the various images, we see that we are likened to the very master of the house; then to the chief steward who was to provide food for the household; and then to the lowest doorkeeper. We are thoroughly representative of the Lord Himself, the steward of the household, and the lowest servant, the doorkeeper. But throughout the analogies, we are to above all mirror the way in which they watched / looked out for the wellbeing of the household. Being occupied with this is what makes a person ready and watching for their Lord's return.

This is the "good and faithful [s.w.] servant" of Mt. 25:21,23 who is commended for trading his Lord's goods and making increase of them. Here, the duty of the faithful servant is to care for the household. These are different metaphors for the same reality- spiritual care for others is a way of increasing the overall wealth of the Lord and the progress of His household. We have been delegated a huge amount, and the Lord is 'absent', not in the sense that He is not spiritually with us, but in that He will not intervene in how we carry on His work. The salvation and spiritual prosperity of others is

therefore in our hands. By laziness and unwise behaviour we can seriously damage them and limit the progress of the Lord's business; and He being 'absent' will not forcibly intervene to stop us, in this life. The "wise servant" is likewise to be connected with the "wise [s.w.] virgins" (Mt. 25:2,4,8,9). The connection is, however, slightly odd. The wise servant is to provide food for the others in the household. The wise virgins were unable to provide oil for the weaker members of the household, because they were themselves weak and had fallen asleep when clearly they were intended to remain awake. If the connection with the next parable is indeed purposeful, then we are left with the picture of the wise virgins being wise only in that they *intended* to provide for others, although in reality they were too weak themselves to follow through with that intention in practice. But their intention to do so was counted to them as wisdom.

Whom his master shall set over his household to give them their portion of food in due season?- The idea is surely that if we are doing that now, we shall do it eternally. If we are found 'doing' care and provision for the household, then we shall be empowered to eternally do this in essence. The important thing is that when the Lord comes, He finds us engaged [at least mentally] with what we shall eternally be doing, living the essence of the Kingdom life now. We have been made ruler over the household now; we shall be set over it eternally if when the Lord comes He finds us doing what He has appointed us to do. When the Lord comes, He finds the servant either smiting the servants (Mt. 24:49), or feeding and caring for them (Mt. 24:45). Our attitude to our brethren in the moment of our Lord's coming will decide our eternal future. The structure of the parable allows of no half way position. The purpose of any authority given to any of us within the household is in order to feed others. If that, in the end, is not being done, then we are abusing the trust and authority given us by the Lord. The "food" is called their *sitometron* in Lk. 12:42, their "portion of food", or ration. The impression is given of a steward providing the right food ['nourishment'] for the right persons at the right time. This is the essence of all care for others. *Kairos*, "due season", means literally 'time', and is often used about 'the time' of the Lord's return (Mt. 8:29; 13:30; 16:3; 21:34). Indeed it is used in the Olivet prophecy for this moment: "You know not when the time is" (Mk. 13:33). The idea seems to be that instead of worrying about calculating "the time" of the Lord's coming, we are instead to be concerned with feeding others in the household at that *kairos* or time. This is the sign of our preparedness and watchfulness, and not our [apparent] skill in matching world events to Bible prophecies.

12:43 *Blessed is that servant, whom his master, when he comes, shall find so doing*- 'Watching' is a major theme here in the context; but the blessing in view here is for "doing", actually providing nourishment for the household. Again we see the parallel between watching and doing. Watching can never be an academic interest in Bible prophecies. It has to be active, or else it isn't 'watching' in the sense intended.

In "Shall find" we find emphasized the eternal importance of our attitude of mind at the moment of the Lord's coming. Those who want to go to the Lord are confirmed in their desire by being snatched away to meet Him, whereas those who don't have that immediacy of desire will be left behind, to be forcibly gathered to Him later.

12:44 *Of a truth I say to you, that he will set him over all that he has*- We each individually have this promise of being made ruler over *all* that Jesus has. The "all things" refers to the believers; a concordance study of these two words gives fair testimony to this. The ecclesia *is* the body of Christ, "the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22,23). Let us pause to exult in this fact; that Jesus *exists* for no one else except the believers. Each of us is promised by Him that He will make us ruler over "all that he hath", i.e. all the saints. We will each rule over each other because we will each be so closely identified with the Lord Jesus; yet in another sense there will be a hierarchy of spiritual glory in the Kingdom.

If we are doing what we have been empowered to do for the household now, then we shall be appointed to eternally do this. The state of perfection in the Kingdom is described as us (the complete church of all ages) having reached, "a perfect man... the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ", having grown up into Christ, who is the head of the body (Eph. 4:13,15). When the Lord comes, we will each individually be made ruler over *all* that He has, we will each individually be fully righteous, fully manifesting the Lord Jesus. There seems to be marked connection with the fact (brought out in the parable of the talents) that we will each have *all* the Master's goods, and the description in the next parable of those goods being distributed between us in this life (Mt. 24:47; 25:15). In the Kingdom we will no longer know partially, as a result of seeing parts of the whole picture; we will see face to face (1 Cor. 13:9,12 Gk.).

In this life, the servant was 'made ruler over' [s.w.] the household, his job was to feed his fellow servants. If he is found so doing at the Lord's return, he will be made ruler over literally all that his master owns, "all his goods" (AV) is literally 'all that He has'. This is a profound insight into the nature of eternity. All that God has will be put under us. God has not subjected the world to come to the Angels but to us (Heb. 2:5). This is because "all things" are to be put in subjection under the Lord Jesus (Heb. 2:8), and all that is true of Him is true of us. But that being part of Him is dependent upon our serving of our brethren within the household. He is the householder, but we also are, because we are in Him.

12:45 *But if that servant*- The parable of Mt. 25:26,30 likewise features two types of servant; the "faithful" servant [s.w.], and the equivalent of this "servant" is the "wicked and lazy servant... the unprofitable servant" (25:26,30). That servant who did nothing is paralleled with the servant who proactively got drunk, thought his Lord delayed, and beat his brethren. Despite all that bad behaviour, the real issue was that he did nothing

positive for his Lord. So often, the fellow servants are effectively beaten because of the sins of omission, inaction, refusal to stand up for the abused.

Shall say in his heart- The Bible knows nothing of a personal, cosmic Satan. Rather the real adversary is presented as the human heart, and therefore a huge amount of attention is given to the state of the human heart and the significance of our self-talk. Nobody consciously says 'The Lord is delaying, great, now I can drink and abuse my brethren'. But the Lord puts His finger on the self-talk that goes on in our deep subconscious, and He does so in the context of warning against having a specific date in mind for the second coming.

My lord delays his coming- There is no turning to atheism or rebellion against the Lord, but rather the root cause of the misbehavior is placed by the parable upon the man's mentality that because he knows the date of his Lord's coming, he can just ensure he's behaving properly when He comes. And this is the purpose of the parable- to challenge that idea and explain why the date must be left unknown by us. This is the same idea as the foolish virgins not taking oil with them in the next parable. The idea is simply that the foolish take no oil because they are certain they know the day and hour of the bridegroom's coming; whereas the wise recognize that they do not know the exact day and hour, and therefore act accordingly by taking more oil in case there is a delay. This is exactly the point being made in the Lord's teaching at the end of Matthew 24. Those who are convinced they know the day and hour, for whom the idea of flexibility or delay in the Lord's purpose is anathema, are in fact those who fall asleep and are caught unprepared.

The Lord Jesus / bridegroom "tarries" (Mt. 25:5), the same Greek word translated 'delay' in "my Lord delays His coming". The Lord *does* delay His coming- the man's mistake was in acting inappropriately because of this. God's judgments likewise "waited", or delayed, in Noah's time (1 Pet. 3:20)- presumably for the 120 year period of Gen. 6:3. In a similar way, the judgment on Nineveh preached by Jonah also delayed- it came in the end, but their repentance meant that it delayed at that time. In the first century, all things were ready for the Supper- supper time had come. But the start of the supper has been delayed 2000 years by Israel's rejection of the invitation to participate (Lk. 14:17). The evil servant misbehaved because he thought the Lord had delayed and therefore he could misbehave, so long as he got his act together at the time of the Lord's coming. This parable is therefore an explanation of why we must recognize that we don't know the date of the Lord's return; if we do think we know it, then this will lead us into misbehaviour. Those with a determinate, black and white view of God and His prophetic style have often shown us the truth of this parable. They thought the Lord would return at a certain date, or once certain conditions had been fulfilled. These things happened, and the Lord didn't come- and their behaviour went seriously downhill.

Moses' sprinkling of Israel with blood and then going away for forty days (the period of probation), returning after a perceived delay to a people lost in revelry with only a faithful minority, must point forward to our Lord's ascension to the Father's presence after the blood sprinkling of the cross, and His subsequent return. The Lord's words here suggest he read this incident along these lines: "That evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delays his coming (cp. "Where is the promise of his coming?" and the people feeling Moses had delayed to return); and shall begin to... eat and drink with the drunken (cp. "the people sat down to eat and drink", 1 Cor. 10:7); the Lord of that servant shall come... in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder"- recalling the Levite's sudden massacre of the people on Moses' return. If the return of Moses from the mount is indeed typical of the second coming, then it would follow that the majority of the new Israel will be unprepared at the Lord's return also.

"The Lord (Jesus) is not slack concerning his promise (to return- of Jn. 14:3,18,28), as some men (in the ecclesia) count slackness", but is longsuffering (2 Pet. 3:9). The Greek for "slack" here means 'delay'; this is assurance that God is not 'delaying' as men dilly-dally in the execution of their plans, but is rather postponing this for a good reason. There's an allusion here to Is. 30:17-19, which records how Israel would suffer for their sins, but then God would wait for a certain time until they cried to Him in repentance, before bringing about a time of blessing on the earth based around the Lord's presence in Jerusalem: "One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one (Dt. 28 language)... until you are left as a tree bereft of branches (how Paul describes what happened to Israel in the first century, Rom. 11)... and therefore (i.e. because you are such sinners) will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted (through your repentance), that He may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for Him. For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: you shall weep no more (the language of Is. 65:17-25, quoted in 2 Pet. 3:13): He will be very gracious unto you at the voice of your cry (of repentance): *when* He shall hear it, He will answer you". Not only is God delaying the Kingdom until there is repentance in Israel, but such is His *mercy* that He will not bring it about until such repentance. His purpose should not be seen, therefore, just in terms of the cold equation 'Repentance in Israel= second coming', but the supreme *mercy* and *love* which this arrangement shows should be appreciated. "And *therefore* will He be exalted" Isaiah comments- by those who understand these things. Rom. 11:32-36 is a marvellous example of this.

And shall begin- The idea is that only soon after he has begun his misbehaviour, the Lord comes. This highlights the point that because the man was sure that he knew the exact time of the Lord's coming, and that time was not right now, *therefore* he did these bad things. The whole point of the parable is to explain *why* we do not and should not ever think we know the date of His coming. For it is this which is portrayed in the parable as

the root reason why he begins beating the fellow servants and being self-indulgent, mixing with the unbelievers rather than the believers.

To beat the menservants and the maidservants- Smiting the fellow servants is related to keeping other company- with the drunken. It could be that this parable is intended to have a specific latter day fulfilment, in that it speaks of the last few days or little while before the Lord's return. For the evil servant has only just begun to beat, eat and drink, when his Lord comes. The 'smiting' might suggest that the evil servant joins in the persecution of the Lord's servants which will be ongoing in that final period of tribulation.

The idea of the steward of the house smiting the fellow servant is referred to by Paul (in the Greek text) in 1 Cor. 8:12, concerning *wounding* the conscience of weak brethren. Paul's vision of the latter day ecclesia was therefore that materialistic elders would act with no thought as to their effect on the consciences of the flock, and thereby many would stumble. The Lord's only other reference to fellow servants is in Mt. 18:28-33, where the deeply indebted servant 'beat' a fellow servant who owed him a relatively small amount. The beating of the fellow servants may therefore be intended to be understood in terms of refusing to forgive, and demanding what is due.

And to eat and drink and to be drunk- His duty was to feed his fellow servants, but instead he became obsessed with feeding himself. The Lord spoke of 'eating and drinking' as characterizing Noah's world- and also Lot's world (Lk. 17:28). There's nothing wrong with any of the things Noah's world were doing in themselves, but they were indulged in to the point of obsession. The man called to go in to the ark and care for those within it had instead gone outside into the world and engaged with them in their way of life.

The man himself becomes drunk; he is influenced by the company he now keeps. He is alluded to in 1 Thess. 5:3-7, where the picture is graphically created of a man who has been hard drinking for a whole evening, now at home stupefied, late at night. It is then that the thief comes; whilst dimly aware of his coming, the man is quite unprepared to meet him and keep his (spiritual) house intact. This will be the tragic position of those who through belief and practice are unready for their Lord. It seems that a materialistic eldership, uncommitted to the real needs of the household, indifferent to guarding the house, will contribute to our latter day apostasy as a community. And note the correspondence between those who are harsh on their brethren being those who are also caught up in the things of the world. The drunken servant starts to beat the fellow servants, using a Greek word which means to punish. This creates the picture of a worldly ecclesial elder over-disciplining others, whilst himself being guilty of the same things. He is transferring his guilt onto others, and punishing them with the punishment

he subconsciously knows he deserves. No wonder there will be so much friction and disunity amongst spiritual Israel of the last days.

12:46 *The master of that servant shall come in a day when he does not expect, and at an hour he does not know*- The implication is that the unfaithful servant should have 'known' and 'been aware of' his Lord's coming. He should have lived every moment as if *this* were the day and hour of the Lord's coming; even whilst recognizing that he does not finally know it. There is another possibility, discussed in a separate digression- and that is simply that the faithful in [literally] the very last few days *will* in fact know that the day and hour. The language of the Olivet prophecy brims with certainty as to the faithful *knowing* the time: "When you shall see these things come to pass, *know* that it is near... you *know* that Summer is near... *when* you shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then *know* that the desolation thereof is near... when you therefore shall *see* (same Greek translated "know") the abomination of desolation... when you *see* (Gk. know, understand, perceive) all these things come to pass, *know* that the Kingdom of God is near". The idea is that we will understand clearly certain signs, and know *therefore* that the Lord is imminent. This all seems in marked contrast to the Lord's conclusion to the prophecy: "of that day and that hour *knoweth* no man". There is a marked connection here with the fact that he has just been saying that it will be possible to know once the signs are seen and understood. Surely he must be talking specifically to the twelve; *they* didn't *then* know the time, neither could they; but those who saw the signs by implication *would* know. In the context of these words about them not *then* knowing the day and hour, the Lord said that the believer *at the time of his return* who didn't know the day and hour of his coming would be found unprepared (Mt. 24:50). This is surely proof enough that the last generation *will* in some way know the day and hour, i.e. the appointed time (cp. Rev. 9:15), of the Lord's return. This point is a very powerful one.

This word *ginosko* is used of how the world of Noah's day did not "know" until all too late (Mt. 24:39). We are to "know" the time (Mt. 24:33 "know that it is near", "know this" Lk. 21:31). And yet we cannot know the time in terms of a calendar date. Therefore we are to "know" the time in living according to the principle that the Lord *could* come imminently, at this very moment.

And shall cut him into pieces- Gk. 'to cut him in two', literally 'to dichotomize'. This unreal and severe punishment- to cut a slave in half as punishment- emphasizes the extreme nature of the wrongdoing. This may also allude to the idea of cutting a covenant. The parties to the covenant passed between the pieces of the covenant sacrifice and thereby proclaimed that they should be cut in two if they broke the covenant. These condemned persons, in this particular teaching, would therefore refer to those who had already entered covenant with God and are being judged for it. And the hint is that they broke that covenant because they preferred to be hypocrites, to look

good in the eyes of men when their heart was somewhere else. The evil servant will be "cut asunder", i.e. his hypocrisy will be openly revealed for the first time (remember, he was an ecclesial elder in mortal life, according to the parable). There will be a public dimension to the judgment process, for the whole purpose of it is for the learning of those present at it, rather than for God's benefit. What we have spoken in the Lord's ear will be revealed by him openly ("from the housetops") at the judgment (Lk. 12:3). When the righteous receive their inheritance (i.e. at the judgment), then the fool will be held up to shame (Prov. 3:35 NIV).

And put him with the unbelievers- The Lord will appoint (the wicked servant) his portion with the unbelievers, his portion with the hypocrites (Mt. 24:51), reminiscent of a "goat" in the later parable being told to go to the group of goats at the left hand side. They represent "the unbelievers", i.e. those responsible but lacking in real faith (the word is used concerning this group in Jn. 20:27; Mt. 17:20; Rom. 11:20; Heb. 3:12; Tit. 1:15; Rev. 21:8). The Lord's self-indulgent servant will be cut asunder at judgment day- revealed for who he really is- and then be appointed his portion with the [other] hypocrites (Mt. 24:41). The rejected servants, who appeared to believe but who only play-acted, are in fact unbelievers. They have as little faith as the unbelieving world, although they think they believe and serve the Lord.

12:47 *And that servant, who knew his master's will and did not prepare or did not do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes*- Beating with stripes was a synagogue punishment. The Lord is developing the idea that He a new Israel is coming into being. "Prepare" is the same word used of John seeking to prepare the way for Messiah's coming in terms of getting people morally prepared (s.w. 1:76; 3:4). Those who had heard John's message, been baptized and potentially prepared for the Lord's coming... would be beaten much if they refused to respond further and instead rejected the Lord, as many of John's apparent converts did. "Prepared" is the same word just used in :20 of the rich fool 'preparing' for his wealth. The rich fool is therefore the servant who knew his master's will, but prepared for himself rather than for his Lord. Our efforts to 'prepare' for eternity are in step with the Lord's work through the Spirit to 'prepare' our places in the Kingdom (Jn. 14:2,3; Heb. 11:16 s.w.). We pray "Your will be done" (Lk. 11:2 s.w.) as a way of saying that we want the will of God, which is that we shall inherit our prepared place in eternity, to become our will; His preparation works therefore in tandem with our own. It is therefore a desire to 'do' the master's will which is a lead characteristic of those who shall be finally saved (Jn. 7:17).

12:48 *But he that did not know and did things worthy of stripes, he shall be beaten with few stripes*- We have here a clear statement of the principle that knowledge makes us responsible to judgment, being 'asked the more' at that day if we have been 'given much'.
"A fool's mouth is [will be] his destruction, and his mouth calleth for strokes [i.e.

condemnation at the judgment, Lk. 12:47,48]" (Prov. 18:6). By our words we may be *shouting out for condemnation*.

We all commit sin worthy of "stripes". The word is only found elsewhere in the gospels in 10:30, of the wounding of the man saved by the Samaritan. And that man is each of us.

And to whom much is given, of him shall much be required- The judgment will 'require' of us a life lived in accordance with the knowledge of the Lord's will which we have been given. This is helpful to bear in mind when considering whether those who know less than we do are in fellowship with the Lord. Many of them are- it's just that we have been given more knowledge, and more shall be required of us. The same word is used of how the Father seeks or requires fruit from His trees (13:6); the more effort He has made with them, the more fruit is required. And that seeking of response from us is ongoing now in the Lord's relationship with us; He in this sense searches for us until He finds us (15:6; 19:10; Jn. 4:23 s.w.).

And to whom people commit much, of him will they ask the more- Speaking of the principle of responsibility upon which our judgment will be conducted, the Lord hints at Angelic involvement in the judgment: "to whom men (our guardian angels?) have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Lk. 12:48 AV). See on Lk. 6:38. We who are literate, living in an age of mass ease and technology, we who have the benefit of hindsight in looking back upon the development of God's purpose with this earth... have had much committed to us. And much is therefore required.

12:49 *I came to cast fire upon the earth, yet it is already kindled!*- The Lord wished that the fire He came to kindle had already been kindled. This may be an allusion to a common Latin saying at the time: *Nemo accendit nisi ipse ardet*, 'No one can kindle another unless he himself burns'. In this case Jesus is likening Himself to a fire which ignites others; and yet He so wished that someone else had earlier come and been Messiah. Some of the Messianic passages describe Him being amazed that there had been no man, and He Himself therefore dressed for action and did the Messianic duty. It is an essay in His humility that He should have held such a view. It also reflects how there had been previous opportunities for Messiah to come.

The Gehenna fire of condemnation of the wicked is "already kindled" by men's attitude now. The tree that will not bring forth good fruit "*is* hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Mt. 7:19)- alluding to the figure of Gehenna, into which the rejected will be 'thrown'. The ungodly *are* already like the chaff that will be blown away after the Lord's return (Ps. 1:4,5; 35:5; Job 21:18-20 cp. Is. 5:24; 17:13; 29:5; Dan. 2:35; Lk. 3:17). Those who lose their first love are *now* condemned (1 Tim. 3:6; 5:12). The Lord Jesus stands with the sword of judgment *now* going out of His mouth (Rev. 1:16), as it will do at the final judgment (Is. 11:4).

The disciples had wanted to bring fire down as Elijah had done, to consume their opponents. The Lord replied that His spirit is different; they didn't know His Spirit, without which, Paul says, "we are none of his". And yet still He patiently bore with them. However, He also says that He has come to send fire on the earth at the last day- an evident reference to Elijah. We could read the Lord's treatment of the disciples' request as saying 'The time to act like Elijah will come- but it's not now'. Likewise His comment that He came to bring division rather than peace. Elijah was renowned as the prophet who would turn the fathers to the children and bring peace in the land (Mal. 4:6; Ecclus. 48:10). The Lord may be saying: 'You think, like some of the Jews, that I am a re-incarnation of John the Baptist, the Elijah prophet. I'm not. I'm the Messiah Himself. My spirit is different'. In that very context, the Lord stressed that He had a baptism to undergo, rather than to dispense to others as had John (Lk. 12:50). Perhaps the immaturity of the disciples was so great that they, former disciples of John, somehow believed that Jesus had turned into a re-incarnation of John. In this case, they would have been caught up in the surrounding world's view of Jesus- for there was much speculation that Jesus was John the Baptist *redivivus*. The way John in his gospel labours the point that John the Baptist "was not that light", i.e. Messiah (Jn. 1:8), perhaps is John's recognition that finally, they got it right. You can imagine him preaching in those early days: 'After John's death we thought at times that Jesus was some sort of reincarnation of John. But Peter got it right, and now, I'm just making it clear also what the truth was. He wasn't John the Baptist *redivivus* as so many thought. We were caught up a bit in that thinking; but we were wrong'.

The Lord Jesus spoke of how "I am come to send fire on earth [after the pattern of Elisha against apostate Israel]... I am come to give... division". He parallels the fire of condemnation with division. And yet He says that this figurative fire is "already kindled". If we are divided willingly, of our creation, then we stand self-condemned. This is how serious this matter is. I fear, really fear, that in the day of final account it may be that a brother or sister has lived separately from the world, believed all the right things, and yet his or her divisiveness means that they are condemned together with the immoral and the worldly.

The idea of fire from Heaven in Lk. 12:49-54 is associated by the Lord with division in the brotherhood. And the Lord went on to say that the Pharisees could interpret a cloud arising in the West as a sign that rain was coming, but they could not forgive their brethren, which was what was essential (Lk. 12:54). This just has to be a reference to Elijah, who saw a cloud arising from the West as a sign of rain. The Lord is, it seems, sadly associating Elijah with the Pharisees. And yet... despite all this, the Lord Jesus likens Himself to Elijah. He sent fire on earth as Elijah did (Lk. 12:49). And the context of the Lk. 9:54 reference to Elijah is that the Lord's time had come that he should be received up, and he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem (Lk. 9:51). This is all very much the language of Elijah (2 Kings 2:1). And elsewhere Jesus quotes Elijah's words

“Your son lives” (1 Kings 17:23 = Jn. 4:50-53). What this shows is that the Lord saw what was good in Elijah, and He didn’t separate Himself from someone who didn’t have His Spirit. He simply wanted His followers to learn better from him.

12:50 *But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and great is my distress until it be accomplished!*- These words almost seem to be the Lord speaking to Himself. The immediate context is of judgment to come, and the divisive effect the Lord's work will have upon relationships. But *His* focus was upon His upcoming death for the salvation of His people. This was what He sought above all to 'accomplish'.

The cross was to the Lord a baptism He was being baptized with, it was not only accomplished in His physical death; the process was ongoing. He saw His death as the baptism with which He must be baptized (Lk. 12:50 cp. Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:10-12, His 'baptism-unto-death' Gk.); and yet He spoke of the baptism with which He was being baptized in an ongoing sense (Mt. 20:22). The Lord's fear of death was, it seems to me, to a far greater extent than what even we experience- doubtless because He knew all that was tied up with *His* death and how much depended upon it. Hence His "distress" He spoke of how "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Lk. 12:50). See on Heb. 5:7.

12:51 *Do you think that I came to give peace in the earth? I tell you no, but rather division*- Peace on earth was a feature of the messianic Kingdom. The Lord is emphasizing that His Kingdom had not yet come. Until then, there would be division between the kingdom people and the others. To be unwillingly caught up in a divided house / family is not, therefore, a sin or a sign of our personal condemnation. There must be schisms amongst us, that they might make manifest who the faithful are, by their attitude to them.

The Lord surely has in mind what He had commanded in Mt. 10:13, where He uses the same words to describe how the apostles were to let their *peace come* upon the households they entered- the peace of *shalom* with God, the salvation of Jesus. But that peace could return to them unclaimed, and the Lord's words here seem to imply that He is warning them that generally, their message of peace will not be accepted.

"Peace on the earth" is an allusion to the prophecies of peace in the Messianic Kingdom, and to the Angelic proclamation that there would be peace on earth through Christ (Lk. 2:14). The disciples were prone to be influenced by Jewish expectations and hopes for an imminent Messianic Kingdom to be established. The Lord's point is therefore surely that they were not to preach a gospel of immediate peace on earth, but rather one to come in the future; He made the point later that He had come to *take* peace from the earth (Rev. 6:4), but of course He offered *peace with God* through

forgiveness and reconciliation which He would achieve through His life and death (Col. 1:20).

12:52 *For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three*- Salvation, as Robert Roberts so frequently said, is an individual matter. It is not a collective affair. Compare two passages within the Lord's teaching, which each use the same Greek words: "I am come to give... division. From henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three [i.e. sometimes they would be 2:3 and other times 3:2- there would be a series of disagreements over various issues]... a house divided against a house falls" (Lk. 12:52,52 cp. Lk. 11:17). What are we to make of this? Every divided house or Kingdom will "fall", i.e. be condemned at judgment day (s.w. Mt. 7:27; Rom. 14:4; 1 Cor. 10:12; Heb. 4:11; James 5:12). And yet Jesus inevitably divides 'houses'. Surely the Lord is teaching that every Kingdom and family will fall, because it will be divided, and therefore the only hope of salvation is purely individual. This was radical thinking in first century Palestine, where the destiny of the extended family was held to be uniform; i.e., you would end up in the last day wherever your extended family did. But the Lord is cutting through all this, and teaching that salvation is a personal matter. No single extended family will, as a unit, avoid being divided by the result of the judgment. The Lord's teaching surely has some relevance to some Christian cultures which can likewise give the impression that large, well established Christian families will almost automatically all be saved.

12:53 *They shall be divided, father against son and son against father*- Division within families, especially between sons and fathers, was seen as far more awful than it is today. But the offer of Christ to be Lord, to be our head, is so compelling and colossal in implication that there can simply be no other option than division, at least emotionally and psychologically, between those members of a household who accept Him as Lord and head, and those who will not. The implications of what the Lord is teaching here outlaws any thought of marriage out of the faith; to consciously create a divided family from the start can only reflect a very low level of commitment to Him as Lord, Master and household head.

Mother against daughter and daughter against her mother. Mother in law against her daughter in law and daughter in law against her mother in law- Why these specific examples? Perhaps the Lord envisaged the younger generation being more responsive than their elders. But maybe His point was that the younger members of an extended family were expected to obey the head of the household- and the good news of His Kingdom, His dominion over men and women, was that loyalty was no longer to be to the head of the family, but to Him. For He was offering men and women entrance into a new King-dom, where He was King and His dominion was accepted in the lives of those who accepted the Gospel of that Kingdom.

12:54 *And he said to the crowds: Also, When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, Here comes a shower- and so it comes to pass*- Showers are figures for the Messianic blessings. They were to perceive that His coming was imminent. This is all in the context, before and after, of forgiving our brother and living at peace. A joint focus on living as if the Lord's coming is imminent, reading life's signs to mean that we are living on the brink of His coming... this will enhance our relationship with our brother. For who, on their way to judgment day, is going to get into argument with his brother (:58).

12:55 *And when you see a south wind blowing, you say, There will be a scorching heat- and it comes to pass*- As noted on :54, they were to interpret life as meaning that the Lord's return was imminent- and live with their brother accordingly (:58). The "scorching heat" is the language of condemnation. As they could discern that such heat was coming in the weather, so they ought to be able to have a sense of the reality of the two destinies before them: condemnation, or the showers of Messianic blessing (:54). And awareness of these things would affect how they lived with their brother and remove all divisions- which is the context.

12:56 *You hypocrites*- Hypocrisy may seem a strange charge to level at men who could read the weather but did not want to perceive the fact that there were definite outcomes to their lives, either showers of eternal blessing, or the scorching heat of condemnation. The charge of hypocrisy would seem to me to imply that they realized indeed who Jesus was, but were acting as if they didn't. The Lord said as much in designing a later parable to have the Jews saying "This is the heir; come, let us kill Him" (Mt. 21:38). Another option is that their ability to read basic signs in the weather made them responsible to discerning who Christ was and their need to repent; and to not use our potential abilities is perhaps seen by the Lord as hypocrisy.

You know how to interpret the signs of the earth and the sky, but how is it you do not know how to interpret this time?- The "time" can be seen as the whole work of Jesus, rather than specifically the signs of His coming again. The "sign[s]" which they sought for were in front of them at the time of their asking for them. They therefore cannot really refer to fulfilled latter day prophecies. The lesson is that as farmers and shepherds act accordingly as they interpret the weather, so we ought to respond to the reality of Christ, knowing that we stand before either eternal life or eternal death, very soon.

12:57 *And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?*- We are to have an abiding sense of the imminent coming of the Lord, and the two possible outcomes it brings for us (showers of eternal blessing, or scorching heat of condemnation). If we have this perception, then we will judge rightly "for" or "among" ourselves. There will be no division amongst us (:51), only urgent forgiveness (:58)- which is the only 'right judgment' we can make.

The Lord warned the Jews that they were not discerning the signs of their times as they ought to- i.e. they were not paying heed to the imminence of the day of the Lord which was to come in AD70, and neither were they perceiving that Israel's king was in fact amongst them. He went straight on to tell them a parable about the need to agree with our brother, because they were on their way to judgment. He links these two themes, of their not discerning the signs of the times and their disagreement with their brother, with the question as to why they cannot judge rightly. He seems to be saying that their discernment of the reality of His coming in judgment was to be connected with their discernment of the need for love and forgiveness of their brother. The same basic link is found in Heb. 10:25, where we are exhorted to meet together and encourage one another "and so much the more, as you see the day approaching". See on Mt. 5:25.

12:58 *For as you are going with your adversary before the magistrate, on the way give diligence to be rid of him. Lest he drag you to the judge and the judge shall deliver you to the officer, and the officer shall throw you into prison*- See on :57 and Lk. 6:47. There is an urgency here- related to the fact that very soon, relatively speaking, we shall stand before judgment day and face either eternal showers of blessing, or the eternal death symbolized by the "scorching heat".

The Christian life is likened to a man on his way to his judge along with his adversary; and evidently, he ought to settle his differences with his brother before he arrives, for this judge will be extremely hard upon those who cannot be reconciled to their brethren. This would suggest that the Lord foresaw that getting along with our brethren would be a major part in the development process of His people; and as they draw closer to the day of meeting with Him, the more urgent is the need to settle their disputes, as He will be unsympathetic towards them. The Lord prefaces this parable by appealing for His people to ‘judge righteously’ because His judgment is about to come (Lk. 12:57 Gk.). By forgiving our brother and reconciling with him, we are judging righteously; we are in essence deciding our own judgment which is to be revealed at the Lord’s return- see on Mt. 13:47.

The Lord taught that our focus upon Him and His return should affect how we feel about others, even our enemies. Lk. 12:54-59 continues a theme of living appropriately to a belief that we shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. The Lord pictures us as walking to meet our judge, along with our adversary. And His parable assumes that we will automatically be found in the wrong, the case will go against us; and so therefore we better make peace with our adversary and drop the case. We are walking towards the day of judgment, our meeting with our Judge. The bottom line is that we should not be walking to judgment day carrying with us a case against our brother. Drop it, whatever it is. At least, in our hearts. It's simply impossible to live at peace with all- Paul spoke from much personal experience of living at peace with others insomuch as it

depends upon *us*: "If it be possible, as much as depends upon you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18). Again, this doesn't mean that abuse shouldn't be challenged and exposed. It should be. But we as sinners shouldn't be walking to judgment day carrying with us the weight of a case against our brother.

12:59 *I say to you, you shall never get out, until you have paid the very last coin*- This could mean that the only reconcilliation is in death, the last coin we have being our own life itself. This is the price for refusing to forgive and be reconciled. Whilst the Catholic idea of purgatory is incorrect, it could also be that judgment will be for our education; for it is for our benefit, not the Lord's, who already knows all things. And we can imagine those who have been unforgiving in this life learning the error of their ways, experiencing the dread prospect of condemnation before them, and then 'getting out' by grace. To live eternity in humbled awareness of grace, and how they ought to have been more forgiving in this brief life.

LUKE CHAPTER 13

13:1 *Now there were some present at that very time who told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices*- We see here Pilate's apparently total lack of conscience, which fits with the picture we get of him from other historical sources. Yet the Gospels present him as a man of finely tuned conscience who wriggled terribly and felt awful about allowing the Lord's death. There is no contradiction. He was as history states; but encounter with the Lord in His time of dying is enough to soften the conscience of even a Pilate. We should never think that anyone is too far gone, or is utterly insensitive to our message of a crucified Jesus. We can tend to assume that the questioners were asking for the Lord's take on the problem of suffering, as if to say 'So why did those people suffer and others didn't?'. But that is to retroject our questions into the mouths of the people we read of. More likely is that they were not commending these Galileans as martyrs, but rather pointing out that these people had, in their view, suffered Divine vengeance. Rather like the people of Malta assuming anyone who was especially suffering, like Paul, must have been a sinner. The questioners were therefore asking the Lord to accept that some of His fellow Galileans were sinners; the view was that although they had been slain by Pilate apparently by random, they must therefore have been serious sinners.

13:2 *And he answered and said to them: Do you think that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they have suffered these things?*- The Lord assumes here that all Galileans are sinners, but those Galileans might be supposed to be worse sinners. And yet the Lord was perceived and self-identified as a "Galilean". We have here an example of how the Lord identified with sinners and was within the 'sinner' category, without being a personal sinner.

13:3 *I tell you no, but unless you repent, you shall all in like manner perish*- He answers that *all* humanity are under danger of eternal judgment and they needed to start worrying about themselves rather than worrying about God's justice [or otherwise] with those Galileans. And the Lord follows this up with the parable of the unfruitful tree which by rights should be cut down, but He was urgently pleading for more time in order that it might bring forth fruit. In other words, the Lord's audience were to realize the intense urgency of *their* position rather than worrying about the justice of others' judgment. Their personal situation was *so* urgent, they really were to worry about bringing forth fruit, rather than being sidetracked by the issues connected with the suffering and possible judgment of *others*. It's not that these matters don't have importance; it was simply that those asking those questions of Jesus were in such a personally urgent position that they just had to get that right. And this seems to me most relevant to those who will not get personally themselves right with God because of their complaint about His justice with others. And Luke's record develops the theme yet further. In Lk. 13:23 we read of Him being asked the perennial question- why will only

few be saved? His answer is simply to speak of the utter horror of personal rejection by the Lord Jesus at the day of judgment- knocking on the door, thinking this is your old friend's house, to be told "I never knew you". The idea is clearly to worry about the future which *we* may personally miss rather than debating the unsearchable issues of why, apparently, few will be saved. Same again with Peter's question as to whether the Lord's predictions of condemnation refer to the disciples or to the unbelieving world (Lk. 12:41)- the Lord's response was simply to speak about the need to personally be always prepared for the Lord's coming. And so it is with us- don't worry about who may be condemned, worry about your own personal readiness and how you will respond in that split second moment when we know for sure 'He's back!'.

"In like manner" may have had a literal element to it; for Josephus records how in AD70 the blood of the slain rain together with the blood of the sacrifices.

13:4 *Or those eighteen*- The number 18 clearly connects with the woman we shall soon read of who had been bent over for 18 years. The idea appears to be that the woman represented not some unfortunate person more afflicted than others, but in fact, all humanity. We are all bowed down and need the Lord's deliverance.

Upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them. Do you think that they were offenders above all the men that dwell in Jerusalem?- Urgent response in view of coming judgment is a repeated theme in the teaching of Jesus. His servants are to wait in hourly anticipation of His return (Mk. 13:34-36; Lk. 12:36-38); the day of reckoning is even now at hand, all our guilt will be uncovered, and we should act now before it is too late (Lk. 16:1-8). We are as a guilty man about to be hauled to court, whose only way out is to make peace with his offended brother (Mt. 5:25,26). Unless we repent, a great tower is about to fall upon us. Jesus saw Divine judgment as something imminent, something which is essentially happening now, and therefore day by day we need to live accordingly. He insisted that any supposition that life will simply carry on as it is... was a fatal delusion. He piercingly dismantles our natural human assumption that life can be broadly maintained as it is or simply adapted a little. There is an urgent need to *change* and to keep on being *transformed* in the new life in Him. So the urgency of response is because the Lord is coming back soon, but also because He is right now our constant and insistent judge. Our generation particularly ought to have a sense of urgency. For I will go on record as saying that I do truly believe the Lord may very well come in our time. He is near, even at the doors. Written in our lives, as a neon sign in the black of our human lives, should be the simple reality: *Jesus Is Coming*.

"Offenders" is literally 'debtors', and the connection is with the preceding teaching at the end of Luke 12- that we are all desperate debtors. We are all sinners. The significance of death is that it is the end of our opportunity to repent. How that death comes is therefore unimportant; rather should our concern be with our personal need to repent

whilst we have life. That is the Lord's perspective on the whole complaint that some appear to die premature or harder deaths than others.

As noted on :1, the assumption was that those who had died in apparently random acts of misfortune were in fact serious sinners. Pilate had built the aqueduct to the Pool of Siloam with the "corban" donations to the temple. Probably the builders who died in a constrution accident related to this were thought to have been slain by Divine judgment for their sins.

13:5 *I tell you no, but unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish*- In AD70, many were killed by falling masonry, and Josephus claims that the blood of the priests was indeed mixed with the blood of their sacrifices in the final collapse of masonry. But this is likely not the Lord's idea, for given the short lifespans of the time, those He was then speaking too largely died in their beds rather than in the calamities of AD70, some 37 years later. His point was that the common death of all men is no more nor less significant than the dramatic deaths of people in tragedies.Or it could be that indeed the fall of Jerusalem was intended in their lifetimes- but as 2 Peter 3 implies, it was delayed by grace, in order to give yet more time for repentance. This section concludes with the Lord likening Himself to a protective mother bird, wishing to gather her young beneath her wings- as if to save them from disaster. But the people of Jerusalem refused to come under the wings of the Lord Jesus. And yet despite this, their judgment was delayed.

13:6 *And he spoke this parable: A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit thereon and found none*- The element of unreality is that there was a fig tree amongst vines. It has been observed that this was never done, because the fig would take up too much of the ground water, the shade of the fig tree would stop anything else growing, and the fig would attract birds which would eat the grapes from the vines. But Israel were God's special enthusiasm and He did this. The idea is perhaps that this tree was the special project of the man. In Matthew 21, the Lord uses the unfruitful *fig* tree as a springboard for telling the parable of the vineyard. Israel were God's special concern and focus. His passion for them led to Him breaking His own principle, of not planting different seeds together (Lev. 19:19; Dt. 21:9 "do not sow a field of yours with two different kinds of seeds"). Likewise, the Father likens Himself in the prophets to a man who has divorced His wife (Israel) and yet still wants her to come back to Him, even though that was an abomination to Him. Or the Lord telling the one talent man that he ought to have lent out the money for interest, when this was forbidden by the Law.

Or it could be that the Lord is using the fig tree as it was used in Judaism- a metaphor for the religious leaders, in whose shadow their students sat. We would have soon ran out of patience with them; but the Lord's strong desire was that even they should be saved. And some of them did repent and accept baptism after the Lord's resurrection. He set

us an example of hoping against hope for response even from the most unlikely; and it paid off.

13:7 *And he said to the vinedresser*- Again the unreality is emphasized; a *vine*dresser is asked to pay special attention to a solitary *fig* tree. See on :6.

Behold, these three years I came seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?- The allusion is to the Mosaic principle that such fruit was only clean after three years. After the three years of His ministry, during the Lord's final six months, God suggested to Him that the nation of Israel be cut down (this is but one example of the private intercourses between Father and Son). The Lord knew when He must die soon; He had already steadfastly set His face to go to die at Jerusalem (Lk. 9:51). It seems to me that He knew He would be killed by the Jews in a few months time. But He asks the Father to spare Israel for at least another year- as if to show that He knew they wouldn't accept Him even after His death, but He's saying to God: 'Give them a chance even after they kill me'. Those who think further along the lines suggested by the parable will see that in reality, Israel were not cut down by God for another 37 years. The implication is that this was due to Christ's pleading with God during those years for patience to be shown to the nation who rejected and crucified Him. The element of unreality in the story reflects the grace of Jesus- for it was unthinkable for a servant to argue back with his master, asking not to do what he had been ordered to do.

The ground was 'used up' or 'sterilized' in that nothing else was able to grow. The Jews are here presented as hindering the growth of fruitbearing plants, i.e. the Gentiles.

13:8 *And he answering said to him: Master, leave it alone this year also, I shall dig about it and fertilize it*- We have here another element of unreality, in that fig trees needed little attention compared to vines. But there was a huge effort made to get fruit from this fig tree, as if it were an almost idiosyncratic obsession of the owner. This speaks of the deep, passionate level of concern that there should be fruit.

The relationship between servants and master in the parables is also at times somewhat unreal. It's hard for us to imagine how slaves belonged to their masters and had to do their will and not their own. Yet in the parable of Lk. 13:7,8, the servant is commanded by his master to cut down the fig tree. Not only does the servant take a lot of initiative in saying that no, he will dig around it and try desperately to get it to give fruit; but, he says, if even that fails, then *you*, the Master, will have to cut it down... when he, the servant, had been ordered to do it by his master! This servant [the Lord Jesus] obviously has a most unusual relationship with the Master. He suggests things on his own initiative, and even passes the job of cutting off Israel back to God, as if He would rather not do it. And it's in a way the same with us. See on Lk. 12:37; 14:22.

The Lord of His own volition asked the Father not to destroy Israel at the time He planned, but to give them longer to repent. This was exactly the spirit of Moses' pleas for

Israel. But this is not the same as 'relaying' the words of human prayers to God. This is undoubtedly how many of us conceive of Christ's intercessory role for us; but is this actually what Scripture teaches? Many of the relevant Scriptures which speak of Christ's activity for us before the Lord God are not in this context; they suggest that He of His own will prays to the Father on our behalf concerning things which are on His agenda for us, not ours. If we confess Christ before men, i.e. reveal Him to them, He will confess us, reveal us favourably, in the court of Heaven, before the Father and the Angels (Lk. 12:8).

This parable could suggest that the Lord's attitude to Israel was even more patient than that of God Himself; yet because their feelings to Israel are identical, the implication is perhaps that the Son enables and thereby persuades the Father to be even more patient with us than He would naturally be!
So often, the parables [as well as the Lord's teaching generally] appear to be Him almost talking to Himself. The Lord spoke of how it was His Father's plan to cut down the Jewish fig tree; but He asked His Father if it could remain for another year, until He had dug around it and spread dung by it (Lk. 13:8)- and *then* it could be destroyed, if there was still no fruit. The Lord Jesus was thinking here of His crucifixion- for this was the reason for the final cutting down of the Jewish fig tree. To dig was the work of a slave- recall how the disgraced steward felt ashamed to dig (Lk. 16:3). And to spread dung was the work of the very lowest slave. And yet this was how the Lord foresaw His death- becoming as the lowest slave. Yet His hope in doing this was that Israel would bear spiritual fruit. This, then, is to be the motivational effect upon us of meditating upon the Lord's ultimate servanthood in His death- spiritual fruit in *our* lives just *has* to be elicited by it, lest we too will be cut down.

He sent His servants the prophets to find the fruit- but they were beaten and murdered. He finally sent His Son, reasoning that "*surely* they will reverence my son" (Mt. 21:37). But they murdered Him. I have suggested elsewhere that this language can only suggest that God in some sense limited His omniscience and omnipotence in order to fully enter into our dimensions; and hence His experience of dashed hope and deep disappointment. Amazing as the Father's hopefulness was, His Son's was even greater. This Father who had had all this experience of simply not getting any fruit, asked His vinedresser (the Lord Jesus) to cut down the tree of Israel, as for the three years of Christ's ministry He had sought fruit from them and not found any; and further, this tree was 'cumbering the ground', taking away nutrients which He could have given to another (Gentile) tree. But His servant argues back with Him; the servant asks to be allowed to dig and dung around the tree; and then, he says, '*You* can cut it down, although you asked *me* to do this job'. This was quite unusual for a servant to talk like this; but it's an insight into the way the Lord Jesus was even more hopeful than His longsuffering Father.

The Lord was prepared to dig around the tree- and digging was the lowest, most shameful occupation (Lk. 16:3). Further, He would shovel dung, making Him unclean and despised of men. He *so* wanted fruit on Israel. This describes the intense effort of the Lord Jesus during the last six months of His ministry. His attitude was summarized when shortly before He died, He came hungry to a fig tree, expecting to find just the immature beginnings of fruit there, which He would gladly have eaten. But that particular tree had nothing on it. His deep hunger and willingness to eat anything reflected His willingness to find some spirituality from Israel. But He "found none", just as there was "not found" any of those Jews He healed who would glorify God (Lk. 17:18 s.w. Lk. 13:6). This longsuffering, patient, passionate desire for spiritual fruit in the Lord Jesus is presented as being even stronger than it was in His Father. No wonder John the Baptist misunderstood the extent of Christ's grace- he proclaimed that Jesus already had the axe aimed at the bottom of the trees (Mt. 3:10; Lk. 3:9), and was about to fell them. The situation truly demanded this- but actually the Lord Jesus waited three years for fruit, and when it didn't come, even then He pleaded with the Father not to fell the tree but let Him dig and dung it... We must factor all this into our understanding of Mt. 7:19, where the Lord apparently in a bland, matter-of-fact manner teaches that the tree that doesn't bear good fruit will be hewn down and burnt. This burning is ultimately at the judgment day; but all our lives He is earnestly seeking to develop spiritual fruit upon us; as in the parable of the sower, only those who produce totally nothing will be rejected. Of course our fruit must be the fruit that abides- the changes in personality which are permanent, the converts who remain, the forgiveness which is maintained on a felt level, the generosity never later regretted... But if there's even something of this, then it seems this is what the Lord is so eagerly seeking. Earlier, Israel were the vine and the Lord Jesus the vinedresser (Lk. 13:7). But now *we* are the vine, and God Himself the vinedresser (Jn. 15:1). We are in good hands; and the Father and Son who through Biblical history showed themselves so sensitive to spiritual fruit are the very same ones who will meet us in the last day.

13:9 In the parable of Lk. 13:8,9, the Lord portrays Himself as even reasoning with God, who had decreed the Jewish tree be cut down in the third year of His ministry. He as it were persuades God to allow His efforts to continue for another six months, in desperate hope against hope that there would be some fruit of repentance. We, to a man and to a woman, would have given up on Israel, and would have somehow been gratified that the Father wanted to treat them like this. I would have turned to the Gentiles a long time before the Lord and Paul did.

13:9 *Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you shall cut it down*- Here we have another insight into the open ended nature of God's purpose. His intention was to bring an end to the fig tree, either Israel or the Jewish leadership represented by the fig tree; but His Son argued for more time, and He agreed. The amazing extent and power of the Lord Jesus is further brought out in the story of the

worker in the vineyard who can almost direct His boss- the Father- not to cut down the barren fig tree of Israel until it has more chance to bear spiritual fruit- “if not, *you* shall cut it down”. Speaking to crowds of day labourers and farm workers, this would have struck them as strange- that this worker had such power over his boss, and even insisted upon his difference of judgment with the boss. This is typical of the parables- homely, imaginable scenes that have elements of unreality in them, which flag the essential point, the extraordinary in the midst of the ordinary. Which here, is the amazing patience of Jesus for repentance. And God's longsuffering deferal of judgment in order that men might repent.

This parable is left with open questions- does the tree bear fruit, if it doesn't, is it in fact cut down? It would seem that what happened was that the tree was not cut down the next year- it was left until AD70, 37 years later. This fits with the threat that the inhabitants of Jerusalem surrounding the Lord were to be destroyed by falling masonry- when in fact God's patient and desperate desire for repentance meant that most of the died in their beds rather than from the destruction of Jerusalem. Perhaps we are to infer that at the end of the agreed period, the Lord Jesus went back to God, the owner, and asked for even more grace for this tree- 37 years, in fact. The point is that as Paul puts it, the goodness of God, His patient longsuffering, ought to lead us to repentance. Or as Peter puts it, God's longsuffering is so that all might come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9) . See on Lk. 11:21.

13:10 *And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath day*- This "teaching" would have been in the period when comments were invited; He was not a synagogue rabbi with His own local congregation. His continued teaching effort is an exemplification of His continuing work with the fig tree (:8).

13:11 *And a woman was there who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years; she was bent over and could in no way straighten herself*- Bullinger has some interesting comments upon the woman with an unclean “spirit of infirmity” (Lk. 13:11) that resulted in her being unable to lift herself up straight. “The negative is *me*, not *ou*; and is therefore subjective. She *felt as if* she could not do so... it appears, therefore, to have been a *nervous disorder*; and had to do with her *pneuma*” or mind. And yet she is described as having been ‘bound by Satan’. The ‘Satan’ or adversary to her standing upright was her own mindset. And it was this spirit or mindset “of infirmity” from which the Lord released her. Here we clearly see the connection between ‘spirits’ and mental disorder or dysfunction; for ‘spirit’ in Scripture so often refers to the psychological mindset of a person.

The description of the woman has several links with the time of the Judges; there were two periods of 18 year domination (Jud. 3:14; 10:18), and they were likewise stooping in affliction and unable to stand up in their own strength because of the power of their oppressors. She was a "daughter of Abraham" (:16), representative of Israel. All the

judges / saviours of Israel pointed forward to the Lord as Israel's 'Jesus', Yah's salvation. We may also note that the number 18 is written here in Luke 13 as the letters IH, 10 and 8, which are the initials in Greek for Iisus Hristos, Jesus Christ. As if the Lord Jesus totally share in this general suffering of humanity. As noted on :3, her 18 year affliction connects with the 18 slain when the tower of Siloam fell. She is to be seen, therefore, as representative of us all- and not just some unusually unfortunate individual. Just as we shall all likewise perish like the 18 men, unless we repent; so likewise, the woman of 18 years bondage to 'Satan' is everyman.

13:12 *And when Jesus saw her, he called her and said to her: Woman, you are free from your infirmity*- "Free" is literally 'let loose', and is also used of forgiveness. So often, the Lord's healings were acted parables of freedom from sin. She was 'freed' before the Lord laid His hands upon her. The two stages in the healing were perhaps to give her a chance to respond to His calling of her and then to believe in His promise of freedom / release. When she responded positively, then the potential was unleashed by His touch (:13). The same process is seen in His work with people today.

13:13 *And he laid his hands upon her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God*- Again we note the Lord's usage of physical touch. This touch was technically unnecessary, in that He had just stated that she was freed from her weakness by His word alone (:12). But He wished to demonstrate His total identity with human weakness, which is one reason why He was baptized. This healing happened as the Lord was teaching in the synagogue (:10), so presumably He called the woman out of the audience to be cured. He presented the healing as an acted parable of the power of His word in human life.

13:14 *And the ruler of the synagogue, being moved with indignation because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, answered and said to the crowd*- This anger was at the same time as the woman glorified God, presumably in words of genuine praise (:13). The Lord had healed the woman during the synagogue service as He was teaching, in order to demonstrate and exemplify the real power of His word. The synagogue ruler had never been able to do anything like it. The anger was therefore rooted in jealousy. The words and teaching of that man were nothing like those of the Lord. And so jealousy led him to latch on to the Lord's technical infringement of rabbinic law.

There are six days in which men ought to work. In them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day- The Sabbath was a day of "rest". The Hebrew word for "rest" means not only a cessation of labour, but literally a sending away, a departing; and it is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word used in :12 for how the woman had been set free, sent away, released from her burdens (:15). The Lord had in fact fulfilled the spirit of the Sabbath by this healing. The synagogue ruler either capitulated to the glorious Spirit being revealed in all this; or turned away into the anger and bitterness of legalism.

And religious people today face the same choice when they encounter the gracious action of the Lord.

13:15 *But the Lord answered them and said: You hypocrites! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath release his ox or his ass from the stall and lead him away for watering?*- The Lord described His healing of her as losing her from a bond in order to lead her away to the water of life- this is the very cameo of all the redeemed in Rev. 7:17. "Release" is similar in meaning to the Hebrew word for "rest". The Lord had not only released or 'sabbathed' this woman, but was leading her away to the water of the Spirit filled life.

13:16 *And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham whom Satan had bound for eighteen years, to have been freed from this bond on the Sabbath day?*- As noted above, the Hebrew idea of 'sabbath' was of release and freedom. It was appropriate for her to be healed on the Sabbath of all days. The idea of being 'freed' or 'released' connects with how Luke opens his account of the Lord's message- it was a proclamation of release, of freedom (Lk. 4:18). Therefore again we conclude that the woman is to be seen as representative of us all, her condition [like that of the 18 men killed in Siloam] was not atypical; it is actually how we all are. In this reflection we have a perspective on the apparent 'unfairness' of how some are born with, or develop, terrible debilitation.

The woman "had" a spirit which was associated with her being bent over (Lk. 13:11). She was not attacked by a "spirit" from outside of her, but she "had" this spirit within her. "Spirit" is commonly to be understood in Biblical usage as an attitude of mind. She had an attitude of mind which disabled her. And this spirit came from an adversary, a satan. And that adversary is explained in the context- the "adversaries" were the Jewish system who had so crippled the woman (:17). There is no explicit statement that "Satan", the adversary, controlled the "spirit". That has to be assumed by those who wish to see that idea, but the text itself doesn't support it. The Lord is not recorded as doing spiritual battle with Satan or any evil spirit; He simply said "Woman, you are free from your infirmity". He dealt directly with the issue of her illness. And it was "*your* infirmity", just as the woman "had" a disabling spirit. The source of her illness was within her, internal to her rather than having been imposed by some external, cosmic entity.

I have elsewhere outlined the connection between "Satan" and the Jewish opposition to Jesus; for they were the main adversary / satan to His work and that of the early church. The connection is made explicit in this passage- the Jews are called Christ's "adversaries" (:17), as if explaining who the 'satan' was who had 'bound' the woman. The woman's binding by Satan is connected with the fact she was "a daughter of Abraham", a Jewess. Why make this otherwise throwaway comment, that she was a Jewess? For we are led by the context to assume that obviously she was Jewish. The point surely is that the Jewish system had 'bound' this woman. I suggested elsewhere that many of the

diseases the Lord cured had a psychological basis to them; His healing of minds was reflected in the healing of bodies from conditions which had been brought about psychologically. Just as He "loosed" the woman from her illness, so He "loosed" sinners from the burden of their sin [the same word is used in Mt. 18:27 in this connection, and is twice translated "to forgiven" in Lk. 6:37]. It may've been that it was her sense of unforgiven sin which was the actual psychosomatic cause of her strange physical condition. The woman's physical condition- being chronically bowed down- may well have been her body reflecting how her mind felt, bowed down by the heavy burdens the Jewish leaders placed upon her. And of course the Lord uses that very figure in describing the weight placed upon Jewish people by the teachers of Judaism (Mt. 23:4- "They bind heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders; but they will not move them with their finger"). The context of the miracle is that the Jews loosed their tied up animals on the Sabbath, and Jesus reasoned that He likewise could loose His sheep who had been bound or tied up by Satan. But who tied up the animals whom the Jewish leadership loosed? They themselves bound / tied them and loosed them. Jesus says that He looses / unties those whom Satan has tied up. He thus draws a parallel between the Jewish leadership and Satan, the adversary to His work. The unloosing was performed on the Sabbath- the very day whose Mosaic regulations the Jews had abused to burden people. Significantly, Jn. 5:18 uses the same word translated "loose" to describe how Jesus was accused of 'breaking' or 'unloosing' the Sabbath. He did not come to destroy the Law of Moses itself during His lifetime, but to teach Israel that the Jewish additional laws were to be unloosed. The same Greek word is used in other contexts of how Jesus through His death unloosed ['took down'] the wall of partition which excluded Gentiles (Eph. 2:10).

Without doubt there is a word play going on: "And ought [*dei* - must] not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham whom Satan had bound [*deo* - a form of *dei*, literally, 'must-ed'] for eighteen years, to have been freed from this bond [*deis-mon*, another form of *dei*, this 'must-ing'] on the Sabbath day?". Who was it who had taught the woman 'You must this, that and the other; you must not this or that'? Was it Satan in the sense of a personal, cosmic being? Was it surely not the Jewish system who were 'must-ing' people? They, therefore, were the adversary in this context.

13:17 *And as he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the crowd rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him*- "Adversaries" suggests the Jewish opposition were His 'satan' or 'adversary'; see on :16. The synagogue ruler was not alone in being jealous. Shame was a huge issue in first century Palestinian society. We can assume that those who were shamed went away to scheme how they could destroy the Lord. The tension is clearly brought out between "the crowd" and the religious leaders. This was only six months before the Lord's death (:7). Yet this fickle

"crowd" were to be so easily manipulated by the religious leaders to scream for the Lord's crucifixion. We see here how limited is the power of miracle to achieve abiding conviction in human hearts, and this explains why the Lord used miracles so sparingly compared to what He was capable of.

13:18 *He replied-* The parables of the mustard seed and yeast are to therefore be read as continued commentary upon the healing of the once bound woman. The surrounding theme is of repentance. The idea may therefore be that the huge change she experienced was in response to her repentance; or perhaps the idea is that she was cured without repentance in order that she might repent. And the results of repentance, an internal disposition, are huge. Repentance is the narrow door through which we must enter. Repentance is what was lacking in those who said "Lord, Lord!" and yet continued in sin, as "workers of iniquity", impenitent.

To what is the kingdom of God like? And unto what shall I liken it?- Perhaps we are to sense here the struggle to compress the wonder of God's Kingdom into any parable or simile. The small seed of the Gospel of the Kingdom can produce a mighty tree in the Kingdom (Lk. 13:18,19). It is easy to under-estimate the power of that seed- the Lord's parable seems to be making that point. I would seriously suggest that *all* of us ought to regularly study the basic doctrines of our One Faith for ourselves, personally. The writer told the Hebrews that he would have to lay *again* the foundation teachings of the Gospel, in order to renew them *again* unto repentance (Heb. 6:1-4).

13:19- see on Lk. 6:47.

It is like a grain- Gk. 'a kernel'. The element of unreality is that a man would not consciously sow one tiny seed in a garden. But the Lord does this, knowing the potential power within that one tiny seed. He 'takes' this one tiny seed [in his palm, we are to imagine] out into the garden and sows it. And the mustard bush was perceived as a weed, a wild bush, not a crop. But it grows into a tree, it grows far greater and more majestically than could ever be expected. Here again is the Lord's encouragement to His disillusioned preachers- the growth of the Gospel, rather like the unreal increase on the good ground, is out of all proportion to what it initially is. Preaching appears 'foolish' (1 Cor. 1:18,21); that by sharing the Gospel with others, the vast majority of whom ultimately reject it, something so wonderful and eternal can really come. This parable thereby highlights the faith of the Father and Son, the sowers, that the word of the Kingdom really would survive and grow out of all proportion to its beginnings. This was exactly the encouragement which the disciples needed to hear, disillusioned as they were by the pathetic response to John's ministry and the Lord's real spiritual demands upon people.

Of mustard seed, which a man took and threw into his own garden- But mustard trees aren't *this* big. Surely the point is that the small seed of the Gospel produces a quite out

of proportion result- by reading literature, spotting a press advertisement, getting baptized... we will by grace become part of the Kingdom of God, and provide shelter to the nations of this world. This is the extraordinary power of the Gospel. This is how far it will take us, and the extent to which we can, through the Gospel, become saviours of men. See on Mt. 13:33. Each of the records of the great preaching commission in the Gospels ties in with earlier passages within the same Gospel record. Mark's "preach the gospel to every creature" is to be understood in the context of the Lord's prophecy that the seed of His Gospel would be sown by preaching, and would result in creatures of all kinds coming under its' shadow (Mk. 16:15 cp. 4:32). The extent of witness we make is our choice; and according to how well we do it, so the extent of the shadow of the Kingdom gives shelter to many kinds.

Mustard seed was a weed, part of the curse upon the earth. Indeed it was the weed which specifically grows up at harvest time amongst the wheat; and the Lord will speak of this kind of mustard seed weed as representing those to be condemned at the last day. In this it connects with the yeast, which is elsewhere a symbol of sin. Remember that the context here is of repentance. The idea is that out of sin, out of the weakness common to all men, there can arise something beautiful- a huge beautiful tree, a raised loaf of fresh bread. And both of these are of benefit and blessing to others. But sin will only turn into that if we repent. And that apparently small beginning is the foundation of so much. An obvious element of unreality is that the man [representing God or Jesus] plants this weed seed in His garden, probably alluding to the garden of Eden, where weeds were first introduced as part of the curse. Why would a man plant a weed seed in his garden? Especially when mustard seed was known to be invasive of fields, and was battled against rather than encouraged by farmers. If the man was obedient to Lev. 19:19 ["you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed"], he would have been unable to plant any other kind of seed in his garden plot. Medicinal plants were grown in pots rather than in the garden plot exactly because of this. But this man plants the weed in his garden. As if it was his special project. Rather like the fig tree planted in a vineyard, just a few verses earlier. Here we see another picture of God's unusual interest in us sinners, and His desire that we grow up from that sinful beginning, through repentance, into the tree of His Kingdom.

And it grew and became a tree- The tiniest seed was only supposed to grow into a bush, but this unusual seed 'became' a tree, *ginomai* carrying the sense of being 'caused to become'. This was another element of the unreal- a shrub became a tree. The emphasis is on the word "it"- when *this* particular tiny seed grows... The point is that this particular tiny seed had extraordinary growth. This on one hand speaks of the amazing growth experienced by the believer from the apparently tiny beginnings of the Gospel. The entire parable may refer to the Lord Jesus, the ultimate seed, tiny and despised, yet who grew to become the Kingdom of God under whose branches the Gentile world would find blessing. For 'the Kingdom' was a legitimate title for Jesus, the King of the Kingdom

who embodied it in His very person (Lk. 17:21). If here the Lord (as elsewhere) is speaking parables to and about Himself, it would in this context be in encouraging others as to the huge extent of growth possible. For Jesus is the parade example of how something which began so small- an egg within the womb of a barefoot unmarried teenager- could become so great.

And the birds of the sky lodged in the branches of it- A mustard bush doesn't have 'great' branches, but in this unreal story, it does have them. According to the Lord's parable of Jn. 15:5, the branches represented the disciples: "I am the vine, you are the branches". The total greatness of the Lord Jesus depends to some extent upon the degree to which we grow into great branches. The disciples were depressed at the lack of response to their message, and the failure of John's ministry in first century Palestine. The Lord is encouraging them personally that from their *mikro*, tiny beginnings, they would become great branches, and be able to provide shelter for the birds of the Gentiles; although the "birds" in the earlier parable of the sower were representative of the Jewish religious leaders. When the disciples later baptized priests and Pharisees, the Lord's ambitious vision began to come true.
There are a number of insights throughout the parables into how the Lord perceived His future Kingdom. Significantly, His emphasis in the parables of the Kingdom is upon our spiritual status then, rather than on the physical wonders which His reign will bring on the earth. He foresaw how although our faith is so puny now, as a mustard seed, we will be those who will be as a solid tree, a real place of refuge, to the nations of the Millennium (Mt. 13:31,32 = Ez. 17:23,24).

The parables reveal how the Lord was so sensitive to us. He realized that his audience thought in pictures; and so He turned concepts and ideas into imaginable pictures in a truly masterful way. He wanted to radically change people; and He realized that the way to do this was not by a catechism, not by pages or hours of intellectual, abstract droning, but by helping them to relate real, imaginable life to the things of His Kingdom. Truly did W.H. Auden reflect: "You cannot tell people what to do, you can only tell them parables; and that is what art really is, particular stories of particular people and experiences". The way the Lord Jesus constructed and taught His parables was indeed an art form, of exquisite beauty. He took ordinary, homely stories and introduced into them the elements of unreality which we will explore in this study. By being so normal, He created the possibility of participation in the minds of His hearers; because they could relate to the very normalcy of the stories. And so when the unreal elements are perceived- e.g. the mustard seed becomes not just a bush but a huge tree- there is an element of surprise and joy. Out of, and indeed right within, the most ordinary things of life, there await for the believer the surprise and joy of 'the Gospel of the Kingdom' intersecting with their ordinary lives.

The Lord Jesus was highly sensitive to the gender division. He did not just ignore it. The parable of the mustard seed which a man planted is followed by that of the leaven which a woman hid in the meal (Lk. 13:18-21). Likewise in Lk. 15:3-10 Jesus speaks firstly of the joy of a man finding a lost sheep, and then of the joy of a woman on finding a lost dowry coin. He spoke of the lilies of the field which do not physically exert themselves in labour, as men must do, but also who do not spin (women's work). Christ spoke of the second coming as finding two men in the field and two women grinding at the mill. This parallelism of attention between men and women can be profitably followed through the Gospel records: Lk. 8:14,15 cp. Lk. 8:16,17; Lk. 11:5-8 cp. 18:1-8; Lk. 4:24-27; Mt. 24:43-51 cp. 25:1-13; 24:40,41; Mt. 13:31-33 cp. Lk. 13:18-21. This approach contrasts sharply with the male-centred teaching approach of the contemporary rabbis and other religious leaders. Thus His parables were consciously designed to appeal to both men and women. Luke particularly seems to rejoice in observing how the Lord treated men and women in parallel. Both Martha and the male ruler lack one thing (Lk. 10:41,42 cp. 18:22); there are two parables on answered prayer for men and women (Lk. 11:5-8 cp. 18:1-8); the men of Nineveh and the queen of the South are paired (Lk. 11:29-32); justice is for both male and female servants (Lk. 12:45,46); both men and women would be divided (Lk. 12:51-53); a woman and a man are both healed on the Sabbath (Lk. 13:10-16; 14:1-6); a 'daughter of Abraham' and a 'son of Abraham' are healed (Lk. 13:16; 19:9); the woman loses a coin, a man loses a sheep (Lk. 15:4-10). Indeed, a profitable study could be made of how the Old Testament prophets liken God to both male and female figures in tandem- e.g. "The Lord goes forth as a mighty man... I will cry out like a woman in travail" (Is. 42:13,14).

13:20 *And again he said: Unto what shall I liken the kingdom of God?*- As noted on :18, perhaps we are to sense here the struggle to compress the wonder of God's Kingdom into any parable or simile.

13:21 *It is like the yeast which a woman took*- The good news of God's Kingdom, in both present and future aspects, is like yeast which works away *from the inside* of a man and *inevitably, by its very nature* makes a fundamental change. Because whoever really believes the doctrines of the One Faith and lives the life which they naturally bring forth, really will be saved. Therefore we will have a sense of true unity with our brethren who believe as we do, whatever human barriers there may be between us. Therefore "the Faith" is linked with unity between believers (Eph. 4:13; Phil. 1:27).

This continues the theme of the preceding parable; which was about a *man*, and now He tells a similar story balanced out with a *woman* as the central figure. Again the point is that from tiny beginnings, great influence comes. And as a note in how to perform Biblical exegesis, we should learn here that because yeast is used negatively in some Bible passages, it doesn't *always* have to require that meaning. The Gospel which we preach is likened to yeast- in itself a startling comparison- because it is through our

humanity that we will influence others, by being our real, human selves. Yet the woman mixing yeast is preparing a huge amount of bread, according to the specifications in Mt. 13:33. This is perhaps to show us that whilst our influence may be quiet and unseen, the quietest witness can have a huge influence. W.D. Davies quotes Pliny and the Mishnah, giving examples of the use of yeast as a *positive* symbol (W.D.Davies, *Matthew* p. 422). However the parable of the mustard weed leads me to accept the associations of leaven with sin (Lk. 12:1; 1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9). Out of dealing with sin in repentance, which is the context surrounding these parables, then something of huge blessing develops.

And hid- The teaching of Jesus works quietly from within- that could be the sense. Just as the tiny seed of the Gospel produces huge results finally, so the yeast of the Gospel has disproportionate influence. But we must give full weight to the Lord's other teachings about hiddenness. We are to become a city set on a hill which *cannot* be hid (Mt. 5:14; our good works "cannot be hid", 1 Tim. 5:25); it is the rejected who hide the talent of the Gospel so that nobody sees it (Mt. 25:25). Ultimately, the yeast hidden within us at the time of sowing the seed, at the time the yeast is first inserted into the dough, will become public. In the wider context of this section, the Lord is explaining to the disciples the tragedy of how the seed or yeast first sown by John the Baptist has not achieved its intended result- because people were still hiding it, as Joseph and Nicodemus did (Jn. 19:38 s.w.- Joseph was a 'secret' or 'hidden' disciple). And we find the same word just two verses later in Mt. 13:35- the Lord was now speaking forth publically things which had been 'hidden' (AV "kept secret") in the Old Testament period. The treasure was "hid" in the field of the world, but the Lord Jesus gave all that He had so that He could redeem / buy the world, the field, and bring the hidden treasure to light (Mt. 13:44). Perhaps we could say that the yeast was only hidden to those who did not have eyes to see; for that has been the context of the Lord's teaching here (see on 13:10).

In three measures of flour, until it was all raised- Until the flour was completely influenced. The hint could be that when the Gospel, the yeast, has done its complete work and the flour is finally completely leavened into a loaf- then the Lord will come. His work then will be complete. The calendar date of the Lord's return is therefore 'open' to some extent, just as the harvest is reaped only when the fruit (of the Spirit) has been brought forth.

The element of unreality here is that "three measures of flour" would require about three Romans pounds of yeast to leaven it. A huge amount of bread would have been baked- enough to feed 100 people. As noted earlier, these mini parables are teaching that sin when properly 'used' through repentance, produces blessing for others- a huge tree of shelter, or a huge amount of bread for others. But the woman leavens it with yeast which she 'hides' within all that flour. 'Concealing' yeast within those measures of flour would

imply that the amount of yeast used was not great. Because we would expect the woman to *knead* the yeast into that quantity of flour. The element of unreality is that she doesn't knead the yeast into the flour, but rather just hides a relatively tiny amount of yeast within the flour. The idea is that a very small amount of goodness, in the context referring to repentance, can have a huge influence and grow into something great. We note it was Sarah who also prepared three measures of flour for her visitors (Gen. 18:6), at a time when she was weak in faith and yet repented of that weakness in order to fall pregnant and continue the Messianic line of promise.

It's tempting to see some connection with Paul's warning that false teachers must be removed from the church, because a little yeast leavens the whole lump (1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9). It could be that he is simply using the figure of yeast in a different sense. But his frequent allusions to the Gospels make us wonder whether he is consciously alluding to the Lord's teaching here. It could be that he is saying 'Get rid of the *old* yeast, the yeast of false teaching and associated unspirituality- and instead, be influenced by the *true* yeast, of Christ's teachings rather than the yeast of *false* teaching'.

13:22 *And he went on his way through cities and villages, teaching and journeying on to Jerusalem*- This was His final appeal to them. For at this point He was in the last six months of His ministry (:7).

13:23 *And one said to him: Lord, are they few that are saved? And he said to them*- See on Lk. 13:1. This question about the ultimate justice of God in saving only some has reverberated throughout the centuries. The Lord gives no direct answer, but instead urges us to strive to enter in to salvation ourselves (:24); as if these kind of philosophical questions are likely to derail us from ourselves entering salvation. The existence of such unanswered questions is purposeful in how God has set up our entire spiritual and mental existence. They are to humble us, and to lead us deeper in clinging on to faith and love of God by our faith rather than by our intellectual understanding. Clarity of understanding such questions would not lead to faith- or else the Lord would have given the answers. But He did not. The next verse goes on to note that there will be many who wish to enter the Kingdom, but all too late- for in this life they didn't want to. This provides helpful perspective to the question of why few shall be saved. One angle on it is that actually the majority don't want to be saved, and would not want to be saved even if they were given the opportunity or knowledge. And instead of accusing God of injustice, we should ensure we are not amongst them.

However it is worth noting that the tense here is best rendered "Are there few that are being saved?". So the idea may not concern the numbers of those to be ultimately saved, but may in a more local, immediate sense be probing how the Lord gauged His present followers. Did He consider many of them to be on the path to salvation? But

whatever the reference, His answer is to not worry about the figures because such a concern is an escapism and distraction from paying attention to striving ourselves to enter the Kingdom through sincere repentance.

13:24 *Strive to enter in*- The idea of *striving* to enter the Kingdom, the need for such agonizing effort, meant an awful lot to Paul (1 Cor. 9:25; Col. 1:29; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). It's fashionable these days to focus upon the certainty of our redemption in Christ and to ignore the warnings about apostasy. In Paul we see a brother who brought these two strands together; because his mind was so Christ and Gospels-centred. He personalized those Gospels, he must have kept thinking to himself 'Now this applies to *me*... it really does...'. What a brother. What an active mind, a mind which he knew had Christ living in it. The Lord answers the question "Are there few that be saved?" by insisting that we personally strive to enter by the narrow door (Lk. 13:23,24).

We note that 'striving', literally 'agonizing', the word used of the Lord's agony in Gethsemane, is contrasted with merely 'seeking' to enter the Kingdom mentioned later in this verse. It is one thing to shrug and say "yes" to the idea of God's Kingdom. But the Lord seems to be saying that this is not the same as the agonizing for it which is required.

Those who "are first" in their own eyes, those who think for sure they will be in the Kingdom, will seek to enter the Kingdom at the day of judgment, but be unable. Those who strive to enter the Kingdom *now* are "last" in their own spiritual assessment; and the first will be made last in the sense that they won't be in the Kingdom. Thus when those who will enter the Kingdom are described as thinking of themselves as "last", this must mean that they think of themselves now as being unworthy of the Kingdom, but as "striving" to be there now, in their minds (Lk. 13:23,24). The likes of Samson died with a confession of unworthiness on their lips- in his case, that he deserved to die the death of a Philistine (Jud. 16:30)- but he will actually be in the Kingdom (Heb. 11:32).

By the narrow door. For I say to you, many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able- "Door" here means specifically an entry to a house, not a gate. Entry to the Kingdom is entry to a household, a family, a home. Salvation is not to be enjoyed only by us on an individual level; rather is it about membership of the saved community. And we begin that experience now. The picture of many people striving unsuccessfully to enter in through a door recalls the picture of the Sodomites seeking to find the door of Lot's house and being smitten down in condemnation (Gen. 19:11). Those men represent those who outside a shut door shall be condemned at the Lord's return. So it's not at all that some want to find the way in this life, but can't. Those who wish to find it can find it. The picture here is rather of condemnation at the last day. The narrow door leads to the vastness of eternity in God's Kingdom; it continues the idea of the tiny seed becoming a

great tree, and the small amount of yeast raising a large amount of flour. The context is surely, again, of repentance. This is the critical issue in entering into the Kingdom.

"Many" of those who call Christ their Lord and who regularly break bread in his presence, where two or three others are gathered believing they are in his name, will find they are rejected, *and they just won't be able to understand why on earth they were rejected* (Lk. 13:24-27 cp. Mt. 18:20). Anyone who thinks the majority of believers must surely make it through to salvation needs to think again. Please God, we will- but "many" (the Greek can mean, but not always, 'the majority') will be in for this inexplicable (to them) rejection, when they were sure they'd lived a good Christian life. Those with spiritual problems are prone to reason that when judgment day comes, they will be able to just shrug their shoulders and walk away from their Lord to eventual death. However, there is every reason to think that the rejected will come to their spiritual senses then, and plead to be allowed to enter the Kingdom. Many will seek to enter into the Kingdom at the judgment but will not be able; and so we should strive now to enter into it. The implication is that if we strive to enter in now, we will enter in then. Everyone will so earnestly seek to enter the Kingdom in the last day, and the urgency of that coming day should be ours today. Ezekiel's prophecies so often make the point that experiencing God's judgments leads men to *know* Him; thus at the day of judgment, the rejected will knock at the door of the Kingdom, knowing that they know Christ- to be told that although they may now know him, he doesn't know them. Thus the pain of rejection will be acutely mental rather than physical. Ezekiel is told to judge Israel, i.e. "cause them to know the abominations of their fathers" (Ez. 20:4). This is what condemnation will result in- a recognition of sin for what it is. "According to thy ways, and according to thy doings, shall they [the ways and doings] judge thee" (Ez. 24:14). It will be self-condemnation, but they will then *realize* this in terrible detail.

The Greek for "many" often means 'the majority'. Here perhaps we have the clearest implication that only a minority of those who come to Christ shall ultimately be saved. Hebrews, Romans and 1 Cor. 10 suggest that if we think that natural Israel were far worse than spiritual Israel in terms of percentage coming to salvation- then we must take heed lest we fall.

13:25 *When the master of the house*- The "master of the house" is representative of Jesus; and yet we are to be the "master of the house" in spiritually feeding our brethren (Mt. 24:43,45 RV). It is through us that He ministers to His household.

Is risen and has shut the door- The narrow door of the preceding verse is in view. When people realize the Kingdom is closed to them, then they want to enter it. That is absolutely true to human psychology. And it will be ultimately true in that day.

And you begin to stand without and to knock at the door, saying- This continues the allusion to the men of Sodom outside the locked door; see on :24. We are Christ to our brethren. Knocking is sometimes used as a figure for prayer (Mt. 7:7; Lk. 11:7). The basis for these foolish virgins is surely in Prov. 1:28,29: "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer... they shall not find me: for that hated knowledge". The foolish virgins realize the need for prayer all too late; they knocked on the door with great zeal, asking for it to be opened; seeking but not finding. They were so convinced they knew the day and hour that prayer for the Lord's return, and prayer to Him generally, somehow was overlooked or felt to be unnecessary.

Lord- The Lord had warned that saying "Lord, Lord" would not guarantee "entry" into the Kingdom (Mt. 7:21). And here He is speaking about exactly such "entry"- the same word is used here. The category in view are those who considered themselves believers, who thought that externally correct forms of address would impress the Lord Jesus. The "Lord, Lord" contingent indeed had "done many wonderful works" (Mt. 7:22), but they had never known and loved *Him*. Whilst organized church life is a necessary part of our present experience and the Lord's intention, the danger is that it can exalt such "works" and public appearances to the point that personal relationship with the Lord is totally eclipsed.

Rom. 2:13 alludes here. Paul saw the "Lord, Lord" people of the parable as the Jews of the first century who initially responded enthusiastically to the Gospel. The contrast is between saying "Lord, Lord" in this life, and then in the future not entering into the Kingdom. The contrast is between merely *saying* and actually *doing*. The Lord repeats the idea in His mini parable of the two sons; the one who 'said' he would be obedient, and the other who 'did' the will of his father (Mt. 21:30,31). The acceptance of Christ as Lord means that we are as His servants and slaves; it is for us to 'do' His will and work. This fits with the context of the preceding verses- that if He is really our Lord, we will inevitably *do* His will, and that doing will be actual, practical and visible. It is the false prophets who merely say but don't *do*, just as they claim to be good trees but don't have good fruit.

1 Cor. 13:2 also alludes here. To say "Lord, Lord" without really *knowing* Christ is living without love. Thus Paul saw an association between a lack of true love and an external show of appreciation of Christ's Lordship. Not doing what Christ says is a lack of love, in Paul's mind. If we appreciate this, we will see that those who are ignorant of Christ's words cannot show true love. Biblically ignorant Christians need to think through the implications of this. Those who insincerely say "Lord, Lord" now, will say the same then, at the judgment, with the same lack of reality (Mt. 7:21,22). The repetition of "Lord, Lord" shows that our attitude to Him in this life will be that we have when we meet in the last day. The sensation of working for the Lord can be so self-deceptive. He draws the difference between doing many wonderful works in His name, saying "Lord, Lord";

and *really* doing the will of the Father (Mt. 7:21,22). The parallel Lk. 6:46 has that men will say “Lord, Lord” but not really hear His words. To hear them is to do the will of the Father. Putting all this together, it is perfectly possible to bear His Name, call Him Lord, work hard for Him- and yet never really hear His words, and thereby never really know the will of our Father. From this parallel we can conclude that our attitude to Christ in this life (e.g. "Lord, Lord!") will be our attitude to Him at the judgment seat. If we think He is a hard, unreasonable Lord: that is how He will be. To the froward (in this life), He will show Himself froward. Straight away we are met head on with a major challenge: Our attitude to Christ in this life will be our attitude to Him at the judgment seat. John's letters reason down the same line: “If (in this life) our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence (now) toward God... this is the confidence that we have in him... abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence... before him (at the judgment) at His coming" (1 Jn. 3:21; 5:14; 2:28). The confidence we have towards Christ now will be the confidence we have at judgment day. This fact should pull us up out of the spiritual indifference which characterizes so much of our lives. If we see Christ as an abstract theological necessity, a black box in our brain called 'Christ'; if we don't have a dynamic, two- way relationship with Him now- then this too is how we will regard Him then.

Open to us!- he shall answer and say to you: I do not know who you are- There is clear linkage with the parable of the foolish virgins in Mt. 25, who likewise end up outside the door, and their knocking is to no avail. "Lord, Lord, open to us" is met with the response "I know you not"; and this connects with an earlier picture of the rejected at judgment day: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not... in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you" (Mt. 7:22,23). Thus there is the implication that when the foolish virgins delay their going to meet Christ, they amass a list of "many wonderful works" which they hope will impress their Lord. This would explain the indignation of the rejected at Christ's rebuke of their lack of suitable works (Mt. 25:41-45). These people would probably not have appeared reprobates in this life; works are so impressive to ones' fellow believers. Jesus did not tell this parable about five hookers and five virgins; *all* of them were 'virgins' in the parable, having an appearance of purity from being in Christ. By contrast, "the wise", whose love for Christ makes them respond immediately to the call, are unconscious of their works of faith (Mt. 25:35-40). "Lord, open to us" is therefore to be read as a confident demand by the unworthy for entry into the Kingdom, based upon trust in their "wonderful works". "I know you not" is paralleled with a lack of oil. The Lord knows His people through their attitude to the oil; whether they have enough or not, or whether they think they do or think they do not, is all so irrelevant. The essence is in wanting the Lord’s return.

13:26 *Then shall you begin to say*- The idea is that their words trail off into silence, as they finally realize what they ought to have done in this life. That external religion, even

doing good works and public self-identity with the Lord (Mt. 7:22,23) is not the basis of salvation. Too late, they realize they were facing a Man whom they had never known. 'Beginning to say' is the phrase used in Lk. 3:8 for internal thoughts. Perhaps here we have not so much their spoken words, as their internal self talk.

We did eat and drink in your presence, and you did teach in our streets- Their experience of Him teaching in their streets could suggest that it was first century Israel who are in view here; for the Lord has just been recorded as teaching in their streets (:22). This is confirmed by verse 28, where the particular rejected ones will find they have been replaced by the Gentiles. These people will be resurrected and meet Jesus again. And be denied the Kingdom. We note as a general principle that the rejected will consider that their general association with Jesus, with 'Christianity', even their breaking bread at His table and sense of His presence, is enough for them to be eternally saved. And it is not enough; mere external association, religion alone, cannot save. Their argument was 'But you are one of us!'; His response is 'But you are none of Mine'. We are to belong to Him, rather than wrongly assume that He is one of us and therefore indebted to us by reason of association.

13:27 *And he shall say: I tell you, I do not know from where you are*- From what nation or ethnicity. They were complete strangers, speaking another language. The intended paradox is in that those who were so confident they knew the day and hour actually did not know it (Mt. 25:13), and did not know Christ. They thought knowing the day and hour was the same as knowing Christ; or at least, they put the two together in their minds as one and the same. But they are not. And that is the point of this parable, which is sandwiched in between warnings that we do not and cannot know the day and hour- but we are invited to know Christ personally.

Depart from me- See on Mt. 25:36. The rejected will be told: "Depart from me"; and yet in their lives, they will have already departed themselves. In time of temptation some *fall away* (s.w. "depart from"; Lk. 8:13). Some *depart* (s.w.) from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:12). Demas departed (2 Tim. 4:10), as the rejected will depart (s.w. Mt. 25:41). The same word is used about how the seed sown among thorns *goes forth*, it departs (Lk. 8:14) to condemnation. The foolish virgins go, or depart, to buy oil- using the same word with which they are told by their Lord to depart from Him (Mt. 25:9,41). They departed, and so He tells them to depart. Now they willingly absent themselves from the Lord, but then they will not want to depart from Him. God will gather up the nations to thresh them, but they gather themselves to Him (Mic. 4:11,12).

This is alluded to in 2 Tim. 2:19: ‘Depart from sin now, or you'll depart from Christ at the judgment’. This is Paul's classic way of making plays on words; again an indication of how his writings are partly a product of his own meditation upon and familiarity with the Gospels.

All you workers of iniquity- And yet they have just protested their association with the Lord, and in Mt. 7, all the good they did for others, healing, teaching etc. On one level, good can be done- but the good is a work of iniquity if it is done with an unspiritual heart, and especially in order to gain personal wealth or advantage. In Old Testament times, God used the nations to do His will, but they were still condemned for their hearts being far from Him. Those who "do iniquity" [s.w.] are gathered out of the Kingdom at the last day (Mt. 13:41)- confirming that these people are within the visible Christian community. And there will be "many" of them- suggesting the Lord doesn't just have in view a handful of charlatans at the leadership level who claim to do miracles and teach in His Name just for money. This problem of thinking that we are justified before Him just because we are His channel of work is clearly foreseen by the Lord as a major and widespread problem. Mt. 24:12 could imply that this will be a specific latter day problem- for within the believing community, "because iniquity [s.w.] shall abound, the love of many [Gk. 'the majority'] shall become cold".

13:28 *There shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth*- Either we will mourn now in repentance (Lk. 6:25; the Greek for "mourn" is often in a repentance context), or we will mourn at the judgment. Having foretold the inevitable coming of judgment day, Yahweh Himself pleads with Israel: "Therefore also *now*... turn ye even to me... with weeping, and with mourning" (Joel 2:12). Gnashing of teeth suggests anger, triggered by seeing Gentiles in God's Kingdom and Jewish people from the time of Jesus rejected. So it is partly anger with self, but also the raging anger which comes from jealousy. We need to meditate upon the way in which actual human beings who met Jesus in the flesh are for sure going to reappear at the day of judgment. On their deathbeds or later in life they may've idly reflected 'Ah yes, there was that Jesus guy I met once, the one they killed, and then a cult started based around Him afterwards'. Such people will reappear at judgment day, and their same basic personality will continue. As they were furious at the Lord's claim that Gentiles would be in God's Kingdom, so they will be in a blind rage about it still at judgment day. The only other time the Greek for 'gnashing' is used in the New Testament is in Acts 7:54, where again the Jewish conscience was pricked, leading them to gnash upon Stephen. How they were then in the first century is how they will be at the last day. The gnashing of teeth is clearly connected with the anger which comes from jealousy at others' acceptance. One cannot help think of the very many professing believers who have huge anger at the thought of an open table, or of someone they consider to be 'outside' of their small circle breaking bread at the Lord's table. Those same basic structures and constructs of thinking, that same essential personality, will reappear at judgment day. The awesomeness of having been resurrected and actually meeting Jesus in person will not change our basic personalities. Our spirit, in that sense, is preserved. The time for change of attitudes and transformation of character is now. In the OT, gnashing of teeth always means to hate somebody, often the righteous

(Job 16:9; Ps. 35:16; 37:12; 112:10; Lam. 2:16). Could it not be that the rejected hate their Lord and His people, who will be watching the judgment in some form, and therefore go and join the ranks of the embittered armies that come against Him? Or is their extreme hatred against themselves? Ps. 112:10 speaks of the wicked gnashing with their teeth and melting away, suggesting that the slinking away process goes on even in the outer darkness; they wander, but in their aimless wandering they slowly slink yet further away from their Lord- the one who once fain would have carried them on His shoulders, gathered them under His wings. It's a terrible picture. Cain, in typifying all the rejected, felt that his condemnation was something greater than he could bear (Gen. 4:13).

When you shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves cast out- The rejected will see themselves thrust out of the Kingdom; as if somehow they see themselves from outside of themselves. What spirituality they thought they had they will see as it were taken away from them (Lk. 8:18 AV mg.). This will be the result of the judgment process. They will be convinced by the judgment process of all the ungodly deeds which they had not previously been convicted of, e.g. their hard words against their brethren (Jude 15). 1 Cor. 11:32 may also be a reference to the educative effect of judgment: "When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world". The world's condemnation will be at the second coming; the judgment and chastening to which Paul refers must therefore be that of the last day. However, in the context he is making the point that our self-examination at the memorial meeting and our response to the chastening hand of God in our present life is in fact a foretaste of that final judgment experience.

Note that the Pharisees will be thrust out of the Kingdom at judgment, implying that in a sense they were part of it before its establishment. This is the huge tragedy of rejection.

13:29 *And they shall come from the east and the west, and from the north and the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God*- The mention of the four compass points alludes to the promises to Abraham in Gen. 28;14. The true seed of Abraham were going to take the places of those the Lord is addressing here. And I suggest that this category are those symbolized by the fruitless fig tree of the parable which prefaced this teaching; and the fig tree within the vineyard of Israel perhaps referred specifically to the Jewish religious leadership. They are hereby declared not to be the true seed of Abraham. This paves the way for Paul's declaration that whoever is baptized into the Lord Jesus, Jew or Gentile, is the true seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:27-29).

"Sit down" is Gk. ‘to recline’. The reference is to the Messianic banquet, where Gentile Christians will sit with Abraham and the Jewish fathers (:28)- because they have become the children of Abraham by faith and baptism into Christ (Gal. 3:27-29). Lk.

12:37 comments that the Lord will have to *make* the faithful sit down at that banquet- so strong will be our abiding sense that 'I am not worthy of this'.

13:30 *And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last*- In this amazing comment at the conclusion of the section, we learn that in fact some who are first in this life *and choose to remain first* shall still be saved, although they will be "last" in the Kingdom. The same word for "last" is used in the parable which speaks of believers having to take the "last" or 'lowest' place around the Lord's table (Lk. 14:9,10). There are and will be gradations between the Lord's people, both now and eternally. Those who are "first" in this brief life, retaining their wealth when they should not, shall be saved by grace but will be the least in the Kingdom. Whereas those who are the least in this life, or make themselves the least, will become the first in God's Kingdom. Alternatively, we can read "last" here as referring to condemnation, which is what the Lord implies is the destiny of the religious leaders of first century Israel whom He is addressing.

13:31 *In that very hour certain Pharisees came warning him: Get out and leave here. For Herod wants to kill you*- The Lord's response that Herod was a fox (:32) suggests that He saw this as part of a plot. Herod was trying to force Him towards Jerusalem, where there was a better chance the Lord could be arrested and killed rather than in Herod's jurisdiction (23:6,7). The Pharisees were part of this plot, and they therefore brought this message to the Lord. But the Lord died exactly when and in what manner He chose; He was not overtaken by events. He was going to Jerusalem to give His life, it would not be taken away from Him.

We note that when Herod finally met the Lord, he found no fault in Him and no reason for the death penalty for Him (23:15). And yet Herod wanted to kill the Lord at this stage. There was something in the personal presence of the Lord Jesus which touched even the hardest conscience; Pilate and Herod are parade examples.

13:32 *And he said to them: Go and say to that fox*- Herod was openly hateful towards the Lord Jesus amongst others. "Fox" seems a strange adjective to use for him, as it implies craft, deceit and hypocrisy. Perhaps the Lord is therefore referring to the way Herod was deceitful and fox-like within his own mind, denying the clear prods of conscience which he had felt from his first encounter with John the Baptist's message. Or as suggested on :31, the Lord was not going to be scared out of Herod's jurisdiction and therefore run off to Jerusalem to die there as a result of the plot laid by Herod.

Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow; and on the third day I shall reach my goal- The Lord is saying that He is not going to go away immediately. He had work to do, and on the third day He would leave Herod's jurisdiction, once he had perfected His work / reached His goal- which may be a reference to the resurrection of Lazarus. The language of course is appropriate also to His resurrection on the third day.

He saw this situation as pointing forward to how His death would also be calmly met by Him, He would not have His life taken away by the likes of Herod but rather He would give it; and then in the resurrection of the third day, He would "reach my goal".

13:33 *Nevertheless I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following. For it cannot be possible that a prophet can die anywhere except Jerusalem*- The Lord did not take seriously Herod's threat to kill Him; because Herod only had jurisdiction in Galilee, and the Lord knew that He must die in Jerusalem. But "Jerusalem" may refer more specifically to the Jewish religious leadership, the condemned fig tree with which this section began. The Lord would then be saying that Herod's plan to scare Him into leaving Galilee and going into the jurisdiction of Jerusalem, so that He would be killed, was actually exactly the Lord's plan. There is no Old Testament prophetic requirement that Messiah or any prophet die in Jerusalem or at the hands of the Jerusalem leadership. But the Lord, as a prophet, had created that requirement, knowing it to be the Father's will. And He was going up to "Jerusalem" exactly to do that; He was doing so of His own freewill and not because He had been driven there from fear of Herod. A Herod had after all sought to kill Him in babyhood, and it had come to nothing.

13:34 *O Jerusalem!*- It was “this generation” which killed the prophets (:35), so why does the Lord specifically talk here about the children of Jerusalem? “Daughter of Zion” was an Old Testament term used for the faithful remnant in Jerusalem. But the way the Lord talks of gathering Jerusalem’s residents under His wings is surely because He had a clear vision before Him of how the city would be burnt. For a hen typically gathers her brood under her wings to protect them from a barnyard fire; or perhaps with the intention of being burnt first to preserve the life of her brood as long as possible. And these were the Lord’s feelings to the “Jerusalem” which rejected Him and sought His life; He wanted to save them, to buy them some more time at least (as reflected in the parable of the worker who doesn’t want to cut the tree down immediately). But they didn’t want to know. It was and is all so tragic.

Jerusalem that kills the prophets and stones them that are sent to her! How often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her own brood under her wings, and you were not willing!- I suggested on :33 that "Jerusalem" refers not so much to the physical city as to the Jerusalem based religious leadership of Israel. He so wished to have gathered their "children", their converts and those they influenced; but He had had very limited success. The allusion is to the parable of the husbandmen, who killed and stoned the servants / prophets sent to them (Mt. 21:35). Stoning was the punishment for apostasy (Dt. 13:10; Acts 7:59). It was their wilful religious misunderstandings which led them to such violence in practice.

We must remember that the context of the whole chapter is of repentance. The Lord Jesus was willing to inspire that repentance, to gather the people of Jerusalem under His wings, language reminiscent of the protective cherubim of glory. We note they would

have been gathered *together*; it is the common experience of repentance and forgiveness which binds His people together, rather than any on paper agreement over theology. A related word is used of how the desperate beggars are "gathered together" to the Lord's table (Mt. 22:10 the servants "gathered together all, as many as they found").

"How often would I... but you would not" reflects the conflict of human will with the Lord's will. And God allows man to 'win', in that He will not force man into being a mere puppet. The language contrasts with how the Lord in Gethsemane submitted His will to the Father's. The Lord rarely visited Jerusalem during His ministry, and these words were spoken three years into His ministry (:7); and so "how often..." refers not to His actual appeals to them, but rather to His internal speculations as to whether to force the people of Jerusalem to repent and accept Him. It was another form of His wilderness temptations. But He allowed them to have their freewill. The same word for 'gather together' is used of how the elect will be 'gathered together' at the Lord's return (Mt. 24:31; 25:32). The implication could be that if Israel had repented, then they would have been 'gathered together' by the Lord into His Kingdom. But they would not.

“The Lord builds up Jerusalem: he gathers together the outcasts of Israel” (Ps. 147:2) is alluded to by the Lord here, where He reflects how He would fain have gathered together the children of Jerusalem, “but you were not willing”. The words of the Psalm speak as if this is what the Lord God is going to do. But Jesus understood it as being impossible of fulfilment if the outcast children would not allow themselves to be gathered. Likewise the statement that the Lord will build up Jerusalem was made in a restoration context; but again, it was dependent upon the Jews’ obedience for its fulfilment. God was and is potentially ready to work with us.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is perhaps most clearly seen in His attitude to Israel. So many of the parables refer in some way to the love of God and Christ for Israel; and their love for rebellious, indifferent Israel is the supreme example of pure grace. He felt towards them as a hen for her chicks. Here again is an element of unreality; a hen whose very own chicks won't be gathered under her wings. This seems to go right against nature; the pain of the rejected parent was there in the experience of the Lord. He wasn't just passively enduring the polemics of the Pharisees; they were His chicks, He really wanted them under His wings (cp. Israel dwelling under the wings of the cherubim). We must ever remember this when we read the records of Him arguing with them and exposing their hypocrisy. He wasn't just throwing back their questions, playing the game and winning, just surviving from day to day with them. He was trying to gather them, and their rejection of His words really hurt Him. Their reproach broke His heart; He didn't just brazenly endure it as we might the ravings of a drunken man (Ps. 69:20).

He lamented over a Zion that sought only to hurt and murder Him. Yet not so many verses later in our Bibles we hear the Lord using the same word in saying that at His

coming, the elect would be "*gathered together*" unto Him (Mt. 24:31). He so often had earnestly desired the coming of His Kingdom there and then; to gather His people unto Him. But they would not. It must have been unbearable to be such a sensitive person in such a hard and insensitive, dehumanizing world. “How often…” suggests that there were specific times in His ministry when it would have been potentially possible to gather together Zion’s children in one and begin the Kingdom. But they refused.

We see the Lord’s humility here in comparing Himself to a female, humble, farmyard animal- and not a proud lion. Many of the descriptions of the Lord in the parables are taken from Old Testament passages describing the feelings of *God* towards Israel, showing the truth of this in the first century context when Israel were still God's people. Thus the Lord's description of Himself as a hen wishing to gather the chicks of Jerusalem is based on Is. 31:5: "As mother-birds flying, so will the Lord defend Jerusalem" (Heb.). Lk. 13:8 could suggest that Christ's attitude to Israel was even more patient than that of God Himself; yet because their feelings to Israel are identical, the implication is perhaps that the Son enables and thereby persuades the Father to be even more patient with us than He would naturally be! The gracious desire of the Lord to save even those who crucified Him is the essence of God’s saving care in the Old Testament.

13:35 *Look, your house*- The temple had always been called "The house of Yahweh". But now it is was theirs, as the "feasts of the Lord" become the "feast of the Jews". The Lord's table became *their* table (Ps. 69:25,22). They had hijacked God's institutions, just as men today have hijacked the Lord's table and imposed their own guest list and rejection policy upon it. Likewise the Lord called the law of God through Moses as now being “*their* law" (Jn. 15:25). The breaking of bread ritual practiced by the Corinthians was eating their *own* supper and therefore their gatherings were “*not* to eat the *Lord's* supper" (1 Cor. 11:20).

Is left to you desolate- The Greek word is used many times and always in the sense of a wilderness. This is the fulfilment of Hos. 2:3, where God through Hosea had threatened to make His beloved "a wilderness". This is the link with the Olivet Prophecy in chapter 23, which develops this theme of the desolation of the temple and a desolating abomination which was to be placed there. Clearly, therefore, the primary intention of the Olivet prophecy was to the Jewish generation and temple in which immediate context the Lord was speaking. The fact the prophecy clearly has latter day applications and did not completely fulfil in AD70 shows that there was a change of plan, as has often happened in the Divine program, with prophecies being delayed and reapplied in their fulfilment. The theme in this chapter, this selection of incidents by Luke, is of repentance. The idea of 'desolation' is allusion to the Old Testament prophecies of 'desolation' coming because they had refused to repent (Lev. 26:31; Mic. 3:12).

And I say to you, you shall not see me- The same words are used in Mt. 13:14, "You shall not perceive / see" Christ. Previously, they had 'seen' Christ as Messiah, realizing that this was the heir, and desiring therefore to kill Him. But now the Lord was giving them over to the blindness of their hatred. They would not knowingly crucify God's Son. But He was saying that He now was going to stop them 'seeing' / perceiving Him for who He was, so that they would crucify Him. And they would only again perceive Him as God's Son all too late, when at the day of judgment they uttered the words of Messianic welcome "Blessed is He that comes...". And yet even in this terrible judgment there was interwoven a possibility of hope. They would only perceive Him again as God's Son *when*, or, *until the time that*, they recognized Him as Messiah in the Messianic words "Blessed is He that comes...". Once they made that repentance, they would again perceive / see Him. However, it could be argued that that is axiomatic. The thrust of the Lord's words is surely that in the day of judgment, all too late, they would perceive Him again as He is in truth. But all too late.

Until you shall say- When they are appointed their portion with the hypocrites and there is wailing and gnashing of teeth, *then* shall the Kingdom be likened unto the five wise and five foolish virgins. *Then* the rejected will understand the principles of that parable, crystal clearly. Members of the ecclesia of Israel will say "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord"- but be rejected. Likewise the Egyptians, fleeing in the mud from Yahweh as they vainly hoped against hope that the returning waters wouldn't somehow reach them... they came to know Yahweh (Ex. 14:18). It could well be that this knowing of Yahweh involves a desperate recounting of their sins, seeing that one of the purposes of condemnation is to make men aware of their sinfulness and the depth of God's grace.

Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord- When Jerusalem sees Jesus again, they will be saying: “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord”. This would suggest they are waiting for Him. And these words being taken from the Passover hallel, it could be that the Lord returns to them at Passover time, when they traditionally expect Him. Indeed, Jerusalem will not see the Lord *until* they say “Blessed is he...”- as if the time of His return depends upon their ‘seeing’ / perceiving Him beforehand.

At the day of judgment, nobody will be passive and indifferent. Everyone will want to be accepted. All of us who come there will see there is only one way we want. Self-examination will be the order of the day. The virgins will knock on the door and plead for it to be opened. The first century Jews will say "Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord". They will want to be on Messiah's side then. None of us will be vacillating between total commitment and the lazy drifting of our human nature. And our judgment seat is going on now, today. “This splitting of the decision between only two alternatives may seem an over-simplification: we fondly think of ourselves as faced with a continuous range of possibility over which to decide, but in the ultimate that range may

be broken down into a number of discrete two-way choices, each one a decision between good and evil" (Ralph Lovelock).

LUKE CHAPTER 14

14:1 *And it came to pass, when he went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees on a Sabbath to eat bread, that they were watching him*- The Pharisees liked to feast on the Sabbath, with the work done by Gentile servants or by non-observant Jews who were beneath their respect. This was clearly a set up situation. All the labour which went into preparing the meal had been done somehow within their legal parameters, but to heal would be outside them. They assumed that Jesus was soft hearted enough to want to heal the person immediately, hence the temptation for Him to 'work' on the Sabbath. This gives a window into the essential person the Lord was, and still is- compassionate, and wishing to immediately engage with our human needs.

14:2 *And before him was a certain man that had the dropsy*- This is another example, along with the language of 'demons', of how illness is described from its appearance to the first century beholders- even if their understanding and perception was wrong. For 'dropsy' was the language describing the man's appearance with drooping, saggy limbs and with the soft tissues sagging down because of excess body water gathered in them. The appearance, as they understood it, became the name for the disease. And they considered mental illness to be the work of demons, and so that language is used- without proving that demons actually exist.

14:3 *And Jesus answering spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying: Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?*- The Lord realized the sick man was a plant, placed carefully "before him" (:2) (and see on :4), and so He took the initiative. The Greek for "heal" means literally to wait upon, to serve. At the meal, there would have been servants waiting upon them- on the sabbath. The Lord was doing the same, by healing. But that was held to be 'work'; thus the Lord exposed their double standards.

14:4 *But they held their peace. And he took him and healed him, and let him go*- Letting him go implies the man had been planted there, perhaps against his will; see on :3. 'Taking him' before healing him suggests again the Lord used physical touch. He could heal from a distance, but His preferred style was to emphasize His personal connection with those He healed. We sense His desire, to this day, to personally connect with people.

14:5 *And he said to them: Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately draw him up on a Sabbath day?*- God Himself has an urgency for human salvation; the Lord drew a parallel between the man who rushed out to save his animal on the Sabbath, and His waiving of the Sabbath in order to save others. Indeed, the way He did His miracles on the Sabbath rather than waiting shows His sense of urgency; not a day could be wasted for the sake of human scruples. “Which of you shall have a son fallen into a well, and will not straightway draw him up?" (Lk. 14:5 RV). Wells weren’t that wide. Only a small child would fall down one. We can imagine the tragic

situation in the home. "Benny's fallen down the well!". And everyone would go running. They wouldn't wait until the Saturday evening. Nor would they worry the slightest about infringing the letter of the law. And so, the Lord explained, that little boy was like the sick men and women, sick both physically and spiritually, whom He saw around Him. There was an *urgency* which He felt about them. And so there should be with us too. We can realize that this world is evil and vain; and yet we can still fail t perceive the tragedy of it all, and the urgency of our task to save at least some. The Father of the prodigal told the servants: "Bring forth *quickly* the best robe" (Lk. 15:22 RV). The indebted man was told to sit down *quickly* and have his debt reduced (Lk. 16:6). There is an urgency in the mediation of mercy towards others.

The Lord's enthusiasm for the salvation of first century Israel (and us too) comes out in Lk. 14:5 RSV, where He likens the *urgency* of His mission to that of a man whose son has fallen down a well. He simply *must* get there, regardless of the Sabbath rules. And this, says the Lord, is His all out urgency to save men. We have all fallen down the pit from whence we must be rescued (Zech. 9:11). As we distribute leaflets, place our adverts, talk to our contacts, strive in our own character development towards salvation; this is the verve of the Lord Jesus to save us. It is only the hardness of the human heart that can stand in the way of the mighty enthusiasm of the Son of God for our redemption. Hence the sense of hurt, sadness and frustration to the Master when men refuse His efforts, as typified in the story of the wonderful banquet that was inexplicably spurned by the intended guests (Lk. 14:16). In passing, note the connection of pulling a man out of a pit with Joseph and Jeremiah, types of the Lord's resurrection (cp. Ps. 40:2). When a man is pulled out of the pit at baptism, he is sharing the experience of the resurrected Lord. And the Lord is naturally so urgent that men should share that experience which He suffered so much for.

14:6 *And they could not answer these things*- Rom. 8:31 may allude here; what shall *we* say to these things? Psychologically, being intellectually silenced is a shameful experience- unless one surrenders completely to the new argument. The response of the Jews for the most part was to get angry and to hate the Lord yet more. But the Lord wasn't out to just win an argument; He wanted to convert them. And He knew that by silencing them, He was leading them to a point where they would either convert totally, or hate Him unto death.

14:7 *And when he noted how they chose out the chief seats, he told a parable to those that were invited, saying to them*- The Lord was a guest, but He took the stage. Having silenced His hosts, He goes further, attacking the mindset of His fellow guests as well as His hosts. This was not because He was an aggressive, victory-oriented person. He wanted their repentance, and in this case, He saw this might be achieved by going on the offensive, forcing them to a point where they must capitulate to Him, or go away in

bitterness, self-condemned, having themselves made the answer. And this is His style to this day.

14:8 *When you are invited by anyone to a marriage feast, do not sit in the chief seat; lest a more honourable man than you be invited by him*- Elsewhere, the Lord had presented the invitation to His Kingdom as an invitation to the Messianic banquet. It ought to be obvious that we take the lowest seat in the light of such a gracious invitation. We sit there awed by the grace of being there in the ecclesia; all judgmentalism, superiority and criticism of others is so deeply inappropriate. We are to assume that the others are "more honourable". This is not a call to naivety, but rather to such a deep impression of our own experience of grace that we see others as better than ourselves. The Lord may mean us to assume that our response to His grace in calling us should instill in us an appropriate humility in secular life; as we take the lowest seat in the community of believers, so we take the lowest place in social life. The experience of grace is such that we are affected by it in every department of our secular and social lives. The chiefest in the Kingdom is the Lord Jesus; He is the "honourable" one, the same word translated "precious" about Him in 1 Pet. 2:4,6. The implication is that if we don't take the lowest seat, then we are taking the place which is the Lord's place. Any other choice apart from the deepest humility is an awful, Christ-surpassing pride, a taking of His place.

14:9 *And he that invited you shall come and say to you: Give this man your place. Then you shall be shamed into taking the lowest place*- The Lord teaches that if we're invited to a feast, we should take the lowest place, genuinely assuming the others present are more honourable than us; and we take our place at that table awaiting the coming of the host. Our attitudes to the seating and behaviour on entry to the feast will affect our eternal destiny- for when the Lord comes, He will make the arrogant man suffer "shame", which is a commonly used descriptor of the rejected at judgment day. The Lord goes on in that same discourse to explain what our attitude should be- He tells the parable of the great supper, to which those who were invited didn't pitch, and there was a desperate, last minute compelling of smelly street people to come in and eat the grand meal.

The shamed person who took the highest place is not thrown out of the feast; instead, he takes the lowest place. This could suggest that the judgment process is for our education. Those who were conceited and superior shall be eternally educated then. There may be a similar teaching in the way that the labourers who worked longest and hardest 'learn' when the payment is given at the end of the day; but they retain their penny, their salvation. See on Mt. 20:11. There is therefore the possible implication that some who will be accepted by the Lord who even at the judgment have wrong attitudes towards their brethren. Before the Lord of the harvest, those who thought they had worked hardest complained that those they thought had done less, were still getting a

penny. They were rebuked, but they still had their penny (cp. salvation; Mt. 20:11). The subsequent comment that the first shall be last might imply that they will be in the Kingdom, but in the least place. Likewise the brother who takes the highest place in the ecclesia will be made with shame to take the lower place- yet still within the family of God.

The public nature of the judgment experience is hinted at throughout the Lord's parables. The other guests at the Lord's table will see the man who took the highest place in the ecclesia taking now the lowest place- he has "shame" before their eyes, and likewise the believer who took the lowest place in this life will have praise for that humility from the other guests, as the Lord exalts him or her higher (Lk. 14:9,10). In this context the Lord proceeded to warn His followers not to be like the man who sets out to build a tower, but can't complete it- and therefore he has shame from those who behold it (Lk. 14:29). This is just another way of saying the same thing. There will be believers who grandly showed themselves to their brethren to be building something which actually they couldn't complete; and they will have shame before their brethren when the day of judgment reveals who they really are. All this, of course, has massive practical implications. If all will be ultimately revealed before our brethren in the last day, why try to act before them as someone we're not?

Yet on the other hand, the idea of the Lord Jesus returning and one of His guests having “shame" must surely refer, in line with other Biblical passages, to the shame of condemnation. ‘And so therefore’, the Lord continues, ‘take that lowest place at the feast right now’. When the Lord spoke of how we must come down from our good seats at the feast and take the lowest seat, He's actually referring to condemned King Zedekiah, who likewise had to come down from his throne and take a lowly seat (Jer. 13:18). If the “lowest room" is seen as the place of the shame filled condemned... then surely He’s saying that we should consider ourselves as “condemned" now as we sit at the feast. And what feast does the Lord have in mind? Is He perhaps referring on some level to the breaking of bread, which is the Lord’s supper / feast where we now each take our place? Should we not, therefore, be sitting there feeling [although this is only part of the story] condemned, and the lowest of all? Is that not *one* [and only one, be it noted] of the emotions elicited in us by the cross? The “feast" of the breaking of bread is clearly meant to be understood by us as a foretaste of the Messianic “feast" of the future Kingdom. And if we genuinely feel we should have the least place there, we will reflect that in our taking the lowest place at the memorial meeting. In our hearts, we will sit there knowing we ought to be condemned.

The man lying helpless on the Jerusalem - Jericho road was surely modelled on Zedekiah being overtaken there by his enemies (Jer. 39:5). When the Lord spoke of how we must come down from our good seats at the feast and take the lowest seat, He's

actually again referring to Zedekiah, who likewise had to come down from his throne and take a lowly seat (Jer. 13:18). That weak, vacillating man basically loved God's word, he wanted to be obedient, but just couldn't bring himself to do it. And so he was, quite justly, condemned. It's as if the Lord saw in that wretched, pathetic man a type of all those He came to save. And even in this wretched position, the Lord will pick us up and carry us home. This gives a fine, fine insight into His sensitivity to us. Indeed, several times the Spirit in the NT uses OT pictures of unworthy believers as the basis of a description of the faithful. See on Lk. 10:33,34.

14:10 *But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place; that when he that has invited you comes, he may say to you: Friend, go up higher. Then shall you have glory in the presence of all that sit to eat with you*- The Lord clearly taught the continuity between the breaking of bread and the future marriage supper by observing that He would not again drink the cup until He drinks it anew with us at the marriage supper (Mt. 26:29). The parables of how the Gospel invites people as it were to a meal are suggesting that we should see the Kingdom as a meal, a supper, of which our memorial service is but a foretaste. We are commanded to enter the supper and take the lowest seat, strongly aware that others are present more honourable than ourselves. Those with this spirit are simply never going to dream of telling another guest 'Leave! Don't partake of the meal!'. But this is the spirit of those who are exclusive and who use the Lord's table as a weapon in their hands to wage their petty church wars. The very early church didn't behave like this, but instead sought to incarnate and continue the pattern of the meals of the Lord Jesus during His ministry. And this is one major reason why their unity drew such attention, and they grew. To exclude someone from the Lord's table is to judge them as excluded from the Kingdom banquet. And those who make such judgment will themselves be rejected from it.

We are come to "God the judge of all"- even now (Heb. 12:23). He is right now enthroned as judge of our lives (Mt. 5:34; Ps. 93:2). We are *now* in God's presence, and can't escape from it (Ps. 139:2); and the presence of God is judgment language (Acts 3:19; 2 Thess. 1:9; 2:19; Jude 24; Rev. 14:10). "God is the judge: he puts down one, and sets up another" in His mind (Ps. 75:7)- although the final putting down and setting up will be at the judgment seat (the basis for the parable of the man being asked to go up higher). This same parable is also rooted in Prov. 25:7: "Put not forth yourself in *the presence* of the king, for better it is that it be said unto you, Come up hither: than that you should be put lower in *the presence* of the prince". We are in the King's presence both in this life- when we chose where to sit- just as much as when He returns and re-arranges the seating. The day of the Lord is coming, but it is even now (Mic. 7:4 Heb.). Before His presence, we shall feel "the lowest" of all. And that is how we are to feel in this life. This outlaws any sense of superiority towards our fellow guests, our brethren, in this life.

The parable about taking the lowest seat sounds obvious to us. If a poor nobody is invited to the King's feast, he would naturally take the lowest place, with feelings of wonderment, awe, embarrassment, joy, quiet honour, excitement that he'd been invited, that he was somewhere too good for him, by grace. The element of unreality in the story is that the man arrogantly takes a high place, and has to be demoted at the coming of the King. There's something unreal about this. But there's the rub. This is exactly how we are behaving when we jockey for status and 'power' in the ecclesia [in whatever form], when we fail to consider each man better than ourselves to be. This is how absurd we're being. The way the Lord applies this to His church implies that we should consider each of the other invited guests as "great men" of nobility. This is the level of respect which He intends there to be amongst us for our fellow brethren. The parables of judgment truly touch the very core of our spiritual being.

14:11 *For everyone that exalts himself shall be humbled, and he that humbles himself shall be exalted*- See on Acts 5:31; 2 Cor. 11:7. So how, then, can we 'humble ourselves'? As noted on :9 and :10, we are to live now as if we are in the Lord's judgment presence, and all we seek is the lowest place in His Kingdom. When Israel was a child... she was humble, as we should be after our spiritual rebirth at baptism. It is evidently not something natural; for it is a fruit of the spirit we must develop. It isn't a natural timidity or nervousness or shyness. By realising our own sinfulness, we will realise our condemnation, and thereby be 'brought down'. For we are condemned for our behaviour, but saved out of that condemnation. The exact, vast debt is reckoned up- before we are forgiven (Mt. 18). We have been invited through the Gospel to sit down in the Kingdom. Humbling ourselves is therefore sitting down in the *lowest* place- not just a low place. Strictly, the Greek means 'the farthest' away from the Lord Jesus, who sits at the head of the table. Like Paul we must somehow get that deep and genuine apprehension that we are "chief of sinners"- and sit in the *lowest, farthest* place. This would mean that we 'each esteemed our brother better than ourselves to be', not in any naïve, meaningless way; not seeing strengths where they simply don't exist; but seeing him [or her] that way simply in comparison to our own lowness. Seeing others as higher than ourselves is a sure remedy for every case of ecclesial friction and division. So often pride develops from a worry about what others will think of us, a desire to be seen as acceptable and not unusual. It leads to a hyper-sensitivity regarding what others may be implying about us. The humbled mind will not see things in these terms. *If only we would each, personally, learn this lesson, or at least grasp the truth and beauty and power of it*. The publican was so worried about his own position before God that he paid no attention, so we sense, to the hypocritical brother next to him: "The publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner... this man went down to his house

justified rather than the other: for ... he that humbles himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:13-14). That sin-conscious man is an essay in self-humbling. This is why David sometimes parallels "the meek" and the repentant sinner (e.g. Ps. 25:8,9). See on Mt. 18:4.

14:12 *And he also said to him that had invited him: When you make a dinner or a supper, call not your friends, nor your brothers and sisters, nor your kinsmen, nor rich neighbours, unless they also invite you and repay you*- The Lord gave His parable about how *He* has invited us, through the call of the Gospel, to a great supper. Quite simply, the very experience and wonder of having been invited to the Kingdom should lead us to likewise invite others. But further. If we have truly understood the implications of the Lord's gracious calling, if we have truly perceived our desperation, we will take *the* lowest place, considering ourselves the *lowest* and least worthy. And we will therefore go out and invite others of the same class to which we perceive ourselves to belong- the poor, the maimed and blind.

Our attitude to others will be reflective of our perception of God's grace in calling us- as we were invited by such grace, so we will invite others to *our* table who likewise cannot recompense us. If we are the blind and maimed invited to the Lord's table, we will invite the blind and maimed to our table. The extent of God's grace to us really needs to sink in. When was the last time *you* did an act of pure grace to others like this...?

The Lord Jesus described those who responded to the Kingdom Gospel as entering into a marriage supper (Mk. 2:18,19; Lk. 14:12-24), which was a well known figure for the future Messianic Kingdom (Is. 25:6-9). By eating / fellowshipping with Him in faith, His followers were in prospect enjoying the Kingdom life. To exclude people from His table is to seek to exclude people from His Kingdom.

14:13 *But when you make a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind*- There is a connection between Lk. 14:13 and 21. This is exactly what the parable of :21 teaches that God does: "Bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind". The basis of God's calling of us must be the basis upon which we relate to others. We cannot recompense Him, yet He shows us His gracious invitation. So we too must share ourselves with those who cannot give us anything. In this sense, we like our Father, serve for nothing in the sense of no personal, concrete gain. We must *be* gracious by nature, and just *be* as He *is*.

The lame, blind etc. were not allowed to serve God under the law (Lev. 21:18), nor be offered as sacrifices (Dt. 15:21), nor come within the holy city (2 Sam. 5:6-8). The Lord

purposefully healed multitudes of lame and blind (Mt. 15:30), and allowed them to come to Him in the temple (Mt. 21:14). His acted out message was clearly that those who were despised as unfit for God's service were now being welcomed by Him into that service. The lame and blind were despised because they couldn't work. They had to rely on the grace of others. Here again is a crucial teaching: those called are those who can't do the works, but depend upon grace. We need to appreciate too that in Palestine, to refuse an invitation to a feast was a major insult to the person who gave it. That the majority of people refused it would've been so hurtful to the host. And in this we see a picture of the pain of God, that the majority refuse His invitation. Therefore He is so happy when anyone *does* respond, even if they're down and out. And we should hold in our heart the tragedy of God, the pain of God, that so many have refused Him; and therefore never judge anyone as unsuitable who may respond to the invitation. We're making the invitations for *His* sake, not our own. And on this basis we 'bring in' those desperate types to the Lord's feast (:21). The same word is used about Barnabas 'bringing' the unlikely convert Paul to the apostles (Acts 9:27), and later 'bringing' or introducing him to the Antioch ecclesia (Acts 11:26), the "other sheep" being 'brought' into the fold (Jn. 10:16), the blind man whom people thought was no good for Jesus being 'brought' unto Him (Lk. 18:40), the Samaritan 'bringing' the good-as-dead wounded man to the inn / the ecclesia (Lk. 10:34), all reflecting how the goodness of God leads / brings [s.w.] desperate sinners to repentance (Rom. 2:4). In our 'bringing in' of desperate people to the Lord's feast, we are vehicles for that grace of God which 'brings in' men and women to Him. Notice in passing that we invite people to the Kingdom feast without seeking a recompense from them- i.e. we should not expect anything from them, be it personal loyalty, money, respect etc. And if we don't get it from them, only then will we be rewarded / recompensed for our preaching at the last day. So it should be no surprise to us if as with Paul our converts turn against us and in no form 'recompense' us for calling them. Actually we should take comfort from this, as it is an encouragement that we will have our recompense at the last day.

14:14 *And you shall be blessed; because they do not have anything to repay you with. For you shall be recompensed in the resurrection of the just*- The 'blessing' is defined as recompense at the resurrection, and not necessarily in this life. This inevitably is to be connected with how the Lord went on to say that *we* are the poor, blind, lame etc. who have been invited to the feast (:21). The point being, that if we perceive our own desperation and inappropriacy to be called to the Kingdom feast, then we will likewise invite others who are perceived *by us* as the lowest of the low, and otherwise unsuitable for a king's banquet table. So we are to reflect God's calling of us, the desperate, the down and outs, in our calling of others. A person who feels they are somehow a nice guy and worthy of invitation will be the one who tends to consider others as unworthy of invitation to the Kingdom. He or she who perceives their own desperation will eagerly invite even those they consider to be in the very pits of human society.

The recompense will be in the form of the nature of our eternity. How we shall eternally be is a reflection of what we have done for others, especially in terms of how far we have accepted them.

14:15 *And when one of his dinner guests heard these things, he said to him: Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!*- We mustn't just like *the idea* of being in the Kingdom. We must seek it above all. The Lord told a parable about people invited to the Kingdom who all came up with different excuses as to why they couldn't come. This was in response to somebody remarking: "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" - 'how great it would be to be in the Kingdom!'. And the Lord is replying 'Many of those given the real opportunity to be there actually don't want it that much at all. Don't just like the idea of being in my Kingdom, but make it the driving passion in your daily life, for which you'll sacrifice all'.

The Lord continues to turn the questions / comments back on themselves. A man comments how blessed will be the person to eat bread in the Kingdom of God; and Jesus responds by telling the parable about how in fact the majority of those who receive invitations to eat break in the Kingdom actually turn it down because of worldly distractions. Again the message is clear. 'Take your focus off the blessedness of *others* in the future Messianic Kingdom; but concern yourself with the very real possibility that you *yes you yourself* may actually turn down the invitation to be there because you're too caught up with the things of this world'. See on Lk. 14:25.

14:16 *But he said to him: A certain man made a great supper and he invited many*- "When you are invited by anyone to a marriage feast" (:13) is clearly meant to connect with "A certain man made a great supper, and he invited (s.w.) many". Evidently the idea of eating with the Lord at His table connects with the breaking of bread. Our attitude at that memorial supper is in essence our attitude at the greater supper of the last day. We sit there with our Lord and with our brethren. We will sit there at the last day with the deep feeling, like the handicapped beggars had in the parable: "I should not be here. Who am *I*, me, me with all my weakness, doing *here*?". If we sit likewise at the breaking of bread with that spirit, we will not even consider grabbing the best seat for ourselves; nor would it cross our mind to say to someone else sitting there "Hey you, what are *you* doing here? If *you're* here, I'm gone! Don't you dare take that bread and wine, you're not in fellowship!". Yet this is precisely the attitude of those who exclude their brethren from participation at the Lord's table; for the breaking of bread is a foretaste of the feast to come, and the Lord is teaching that our attitude to our brethren at it is in fact going to be reflected in how He deals with us at the latter day marriage supper. It seems so many of our exclusivist brethren are voting themselves out of their place at the Kingdom; although I believe God's grace is such that He has a place even for them.

14:17 *And he sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were invited: Come. For everything is now ready*- See on Mt. 24:48. In the parable of the great supper, which is

similar but not necessarily the same as that of the marriage feast, the servants going forth "at supper time" fits more naturally into the context of a preaching appeal just prior to the second coming than to the first century. The "supper", i.e. the Kingdom (Lk. 14:15; Mt. 22:2), is prepared, and at "supper time" - 'Kingdom time' - the appeal is made. "All things are now ready" (Lk. 14:17) explains the unmistakable sense of urgency in the commissions given to the servants to preach. This again indicates reference to an eleventh hour preaching campaign just prior to the second coming. The 'decorum of the symbol' suggests that the animals being killed for the meal would necessitate a brief period of invitation immediately prior to the feast, rather than them being on the table for 2,000 years. See on Mt. 24:14.

14:18 *And they all began to make similar excuses. The first said to him: I have bought a field and I need to go out and see it; I pray you excuse me*- See on Lk. 14:33.
There was a harder side to Christ. He was a demanding Lord. He told His disciples to forsake what they had and follow Him. They did. And apparently with no prefatory praise or introduction, He called them "you of little faith... fools... slow of heart to believe". Of course, He may have prefaced these criticisms with something softer (cp. His letters to the churches); but the Spirit has preferred not to record it. Often His parables warn that those who think He will understand their weakness, those who are too familiar with His softer side.

The parable of the great supper records men explaining to Christ why they can't *immediately* respond to Him, although they want to when it's more convenient: "I have bought a piece of ground, *and must needs* go and see it... I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them... I have married a wife, therefore *I* cannot come" (Lk. 14:18-20). The implication is that they assumed that the servant calling them to the wedding (i.e. Christ) would understand that their excuses were quite reasonable; the man who pleaded marriage as his excuse would have been alluding to the Law's provision to have time off from the Lord's duties on account of marriage (Dt. 24:5). All these reasons were assumed to be quite reasonable, and the men sound as if they were confident that *of course* Christ would understand. The parable of the King's son records excuses which are more evidently unreasonable; some said they were going to work on their farm, when actually the banquet was going to be held in the evening (Mt. 22:5). There is a connection with the parable of Lk. 14, where the excuses seem more reasonable. But the similarity shows that as far as the Lord is concerned, *any* excuse, evidently irrelevant or apparently reasonable, is just not acceptable to Him. But the point of the parables is that as far as Christ is concerned, these were all just empty excuses, even the excuse that appeared to be based on a past concession to weakness. He's saying that the invitation to His Kingdom, to His very own wedding, must take priority over all the everyday things of human experience which we assume are so justified, and which we assume He will quite understand if we put in front of Him and

His call. *Every reader* ought to feel uncomfortable on considering this. It's this category of Christian who will be so surprised when they are rejected: "Lord, Lord, open to us... When did we see you hungry...?" (Mt. 25:11,44). They thought they knew Him, but He has never known them (Mt. 7:23). This idea of surprise at rejection is to be connected with that of brethren thinking (mistakenly) that of course the Lord understands their putting His call into second place. He is a Lord they hardly know in this life, despite what they think, and He will be the same at judgment day. There's a point to be made from the way they are so confident they know Christ, but He says He has never known them. They didn't live up to the demanding Lord they served. The idea of a two-way relationship with Him was evidently foreign to them. They thought their theoretical knowledge and outward works meant that Christ knew them. The worrying thing is, how many of us feel we have a two-way relationship with the Lord?

That *all* the girls should fall asleep whilst awaiting the bridegroom (Mt. 25:5) is unusual- they must have been a pretty lazy, switched off bunch. And yet immediately we are led by the Lord to pass judgment upon ourselves- which is quite a feature of the parables, e.g. Mt. 21:31; Lk. 7:43 [as it is elsewhere- consider 2 Sam. 12:5; 14:8; 1 Kings 20:40). Note how there is surely an element of unreality in the Lord's description of *all* those invited to the dinner refusing the invitation (Lk. 14:18,24). Would really *nobody* respond to such a gracious invitation? This was the obvious question that He begged in the minds of His hearers. The intention being that each hearer would reflect: "Is it I...?"... maybe at least *I* could respond to the call of the Gospel... The parable of the wedding feast has an inappropriacy in that for 'merely' rejecting the invitation to the feast and beating the messengers, the King dispatches an army to attack them- whilst the meal is as it were hot on the table ready to be eaten (Mt. 22:3-7). The point is that every rejection of the invitation, every mockery of the preacher, elicits an amazing anger in God.

Christ's low expectations of us are clearly demonstrated when He told the parables of the wedding feasts. When you put them together, you get this picture: God made the wedding between Christ and us. The invited guests didn't bother coming, for very trivial, mundane reasons that they put in front of the honour of being invited to His wedding. Only tramps and beggars come to it, motivated selfishly by the thought of a free meal (cp. a penny for the day). But we, the bride, aren't ready (although Christ graciously doesn't mention that in the parable), and so He delays to come to the wedding. Back home, His most trusted household servants realize that He's delaying His return, and start to get drunk and beat each other. The excited young bridesmaids lose their enthusiasm and go to sleep. Eventually, the wedding happens, but some of the guests don't bother to turn up in a wedding garment, just in their filthy rags. The impression is clearly this: *the whole thing's a mess!* Yet this is the marriage of the Son of God to His dearly purchased bride, for whom He died, and lived a life of total self-control. Yet He *knew* the whole thing would be such a mess. See on Mt. 13:25.

"They all with one consent (s.w. 'agreement') began to make excuse" (s.w. 'reject') sounds like a conscious, national rejection of the message. The Jews will be judged by the word at the second coming (Jn. 12:48); but they were 'accused' (judgment seat language) by their rejection of God's word in the Old Testament during their lifetime (Jn. 5:45). The Jews in the parable "began to make excuse (saying)... I pray thee have me excused" (Lk. 14:18). The Greek word for "excuse" here is also translated "reject"- by excusing themselves from the requirements of God's word in this life, they were effectively rejecting themselves, as they will be at judgment. So as we read the word, we show our judgment. It could be that the reluctance of some to get down to reading the word is not simply because they lack time, but more subtly because they realize they are faced with God's judgments in it.

Israel had consented to be “bidden” to the feast; and according to Oriental practice, to accept an initial invitation to a feast was to commit oneself to respond to the final notice of it. But “they would not come”, and yet despite this insult, their divine host had sent forth yet more servants to beg them to come. The Lord puts behind Him the insult of our rejections, and graciously pleads with us- even God pleading with men. The whole history of Israel is eloquent proof of this grace of God.

14:19 *And another said: I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to test them. I pray you, have me excused*- The invitation had been given ahead of time, and they had agreed to attend. Feasts were held in the evening, and oxen weren't tested in the evening; and they were tested *before* being bought and not afterwards. The excuses are presented as pathetic and not sincere.

14:20 *And another said: I have married a wife, and therefore, I cannot come*- Marriage gave freedom from conscription to the army, but not to turning down a call to attend a wedding feast which they had already agreed to attend. As noted on :19, all excuses for not responding to the Lord's call are here presented as pathetic and quite obviously fabricated.

14:21 *And the servant came and told his master these things. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant: Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and maimed and blind and lame*- The tragedy of the fact that the Jews by and large rejected the invitation of God meant that the servants are asked to “Go out quickly into the streets and lanes... and bring in [any who will respond]”. The ‘quickness’ of the preachers is matched by the ‘quickness’ of the response of those who heard them in the first century. Now what this means is that if we as preachers have an urgency about our approach and our presentation of the message, then people will respond quickly. If we present the urgent good news as a set of academic propositions to be studied at length in the comfort of an untroubled conscience, then those who respond [if they do at all] will do so with the same laid back, cool, calculating attitude. Peter preached on Pentecost with a fire and passion

which came from realizing the urgency of human need and Christ's salvation. And this is why, it seems to me, the people responded so quickly. They were baptized in a matter of hours after hearing the Gospel preached from his lips.

We in these last days are "the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind" who lay in the city streets (Lk. 14:21). Yet we are invited and led (the blind) or dragged / carried (the lame) into the great supper. For those who deeply meditated, the lame at the great man's table would have taken them back to lame Mephibosheth at David's table. His response to the invitation was to *bow*; think of a lame man bowing. How awkward it must have been, and how awkward he must have felt. "I'm a dead dog, from a family who cruelly hated you; why, why me?" was his response. And this ought to be ours. The awkward bow of that lame man, however embarrassing it was to watch for David in his glory, is a superb type of our attempts to respond to the inexplicable grace we have received from the Lord. He knows our weakness. Even though He taught plainly that 'the majority' (Gk; AV "many") of those He called would not be chosen, His parables often use percentages which imply that two thirds (parable of the pounds) or half (parable of the virgins) *will* respond. This shows the love that hopes, in the face of the finest knowledge and foreknowledge of human nature which any man has ever had.

The usual excuse for not reading Scripture daily, or remembering the Lord Jesus in the breaking of bread as He asked, or meeting with brethren and sisters etc. normally goes along these lines: 'I've nothing against these things. But after all, we're only human beings, Christ understands that, He knows we have to get on with the things of this life'. To which so many passages in the Gospels reply: 'Yes, the Lord does know exactly what everyday human life is all about; and He expects you, in these daily things, to make decisions which *consciously* sacrifice what you could get for yourselves in life'. And to which Paul replies: "The love of Christ constrains us". The servant goes out and invites people to the supper. They each make excuses which on a human level seem perfectly reasonable. One man was on his way to inspect some land he had just bought; another man was on his way (Gk.) to prove his new oxen; if they were no good, he had the right to get his money back. It seems, humanly, a bit unreasonable to go up to a person right in the middle of doing something important in daily life, and say 'Now stop that, come to a supper'. The third man assumed the Lord would understand why *he* couldn't respond: "I have married a wife, and therefore (of course, as you'll appreciate) I cannot come". After all, even the Law said that a man was free from military obligations after his marriage. But "the master" was "angry" with those men. What Moses' law conceded to men, the Lord Jesus wasn't necessarily ready to concede (and His attitude to divorce was similar).

In the invitation to the Kingdom, "the poor, and the maimed, and the halt and the blind" are invited; with the implication that Christ will be "recompensed at the resurrection of the just". We don't recompense Him now by our works; we are lost sheep causing Him needless work and worry, wasting His goods and needing to get ourselves out of the problem (Lk. 16:1), needing His frank forgiveness for our huge debts (Mt. 18:24). As Job recognized, if we are righteous, we give nothing to God (Job 35:7). Our *un*righteousness commends God's righteousness (Rom. 3:5). All things come *out of* God: "Who hath first given to him?... for of him, and through him, and to him, are all things" (Rom. 11:35,36); it's give, give, give with God. We are the poor beggars sitting down at the great supper, unable to recompense. Of course, it depends where we put the emphasis. The parable which relates how Christ desires fruit from us is followed by that of the marriage supper, where it seems we are just asked to accept an invitation with humility (Mt. 21:34; 22:3). The point surely is that we are invited, for no reason, to the Kingdom, and we must accept with the humility that will accompany a recognition of such grace (Lk. 14:9). But our experience of this grace will inevitably bring forth some spiritual fruit. Again, it seems we are intended to follow the story through, and visualize the inappropriate, uncultured conduct of these beggars at the table, causing so much unspoken embarrassment and pain to the generous rich man. The link with Is. 55:1-3 would suggest that we can interpret the call to the supper as the call of the Gospel, and the hungry people sitting down to a fine meal as our ecclesial experience now (although this isn't to say that we can't read it as concerning the future Kingdom too). The preceding Lk. 14:8-11 describe us as sitting down at the feast in this life, until the host walks in and starts re-arranging the seating order (cp. the coming of Christ in judgment on His household). We are left to imagine the grabbing for food, the greedy, selfish eyeing up of the plates, the grasping, the lack of social skills, the lack of good conversation between each other, the occasional cursing under the breath, perhaps even throwing of food, the eager desire for wine, the lack of restraint. All in the company of the Master (God) and His servants (Christ and the Angels). And this, it seems to me, was the Lord's imagination of His immature ecclesia, feasting on the good things He has prepared for us. Can we not begin to enter just a little into the pain and acute embarrassment and sadness we cause to our gracious Host by the self-centredness of our natures, manifest as it is in spiritual terms so often? It's quite possible to become so spiritually selfish, so bent on our own salvation, that the whole spirit of the supper is lost. After all, the idea of a large supper is to inculcate a social spirit rather than just to provide individual feeding to each of the guests. How many times has it been reasoned in these last days: 'Sorry, I have to work out my own salvation, I just can't spare time and can't risk association with my weaker brethren...'. And the Lord Jesus, in His perfect way, saw this coming as in sunny Galilee He formulated His parables of grace.

Time and again His parables sought to justify His association with outcasts (Lk. 14:15-24; 15:1-32; Mt. 18:23-25; 20:1-15; 21:28-32). When the nobleman came to ask Jesus to cure his son, Jesus agreed; and the man went home. But it was only on the way home that he really believed. He came to faith spontaneously, and not because Jesus insisted on it. Or remember the woman who had had five men in her life, and presumably a number of children to go with each of them. Her face and body would have reflected the story of her life. She was living with someone not her husband. Jesus didn't tell her to break up with the guy. He knew full well that if a woman left her man, she had nowhere to go. Here was a woman who had been 'married' five times. Who would want her? There were children involved. Probably even her family had rejected her. Jesus accepted the real life situation, and human failure to rise up to higher standards. One wonders whether the very lack of specific demand from Jesus maybe motivated her to somehow normalize her life. The gentle way Jesus treated these cases shows not so much approval, but an understanding of the frailty of human nature. And this is what enabled Jesus to be so unwaveringly committed to His own perfect standards, and yet be so natural and at ease with the lowest of the low.

It's quite possible that those in the streets and lanes *of the city* refer to the marginalized within Israel, as it were within the "holy city" of Jerusalem. But their poor response led to the command to drag in those from *outside* the city, perhaps referring to the Gentiles. Indeed, the language of poor, blind and lame was used by Judaism to describe the spiritual state of Gentiles.

14:22 *And the servant said: Master, what you did command is done, and still there is room*- See on Lk. 14:12. The servant seems surprised that after the crippled and blind beggars have been drafted in to the opulence of the feast, "still there is room". Quite simply, there are more places in the feast of the Kingdom than there are people willing to fill them! How encouraging is that thought! The same Greek word for "place" recurs in Jn. 14:2,3, where the Lord Jesus taught that He was going to die on the cross in order to prepare a place for us in His Father's palatial mansion. The effort made in preparing the feast therefore speaks of Christ's life, death and resurrection for us. And it's *so* tragic that most people don't want to know. So in a sense, "all you gotta do is say yes". Just accept the invitation; take the messengers for real. Although perhaps we are left to read in the detail to the story, that many a desperate beggar just couldn't grasp that the messenger was for real, and preferred to stay put. Maybe only the *truly* desperate thought 'Maybe there's some truth in it... I've nothing to lose". The many places in God's Kingdom... are only for those who desperately want them. Those who make meaningless excuses about how busy they are, those who can't believe that really God could be true to His word and really give us beggars a place in His wonderful Kingdom... will by their own decision not be there.

Let's not under-estimate the struggle which there is to believe the simple fact that there are more places in the Kingdom than people willing to fill them; that really God is begging us to come in to the place prepared for us through the death of His Son. When we read of the Master telling the servant to "*compel*" the beggars to come in to the feast, it's the same Greek word as we find used in one of the excuses given for not going in to the feast: "I *must needs go* and see" (the field the man had supposedly bought that evening without ever seeing it) (Lk. 14:18,23). Just as our loving God, with all the power of His most earnest desire, can seek to *compel* us to accept His offer, so the power of our own flesh *compels* us the other way. The petty human issues had become so large in the minds of the people concerned that they ended up telling obvious untruths or giving very poor excuses to get out of attending; life had gotten on top of them and that was it. The story seems so bizarre; the refusal of such a wonderful invitation would've been the element of unreality which struck the first hearers. The point is that petty human issues, coupled with our lack of appreciation that we are down and out beggars, really will lead people to lose out on eternity. The other such element of unreality would've been the persistence of the host to fill the places with anyone, literally *anyone*, willing to come on in. It's not so much a question of 'Will we be there?' but rather 'Do we really want to be there?'. Because if we do, we shall be.

The servant reports to the master that the invited guests wouldn't come to the supper [cp. God's Kingdom]. The master tells the slave to go out into the streets and invite the poor. And then we're hit with an incredible unreality, especially to first century ears: The servant has already done what the Lord had commanded him. No slave would take it upon himself to draw up the invitation list, or take the initiative to invite poor beggars into his master's supper. But *this* servant *did*! He not only had the unusual relationship with his master that allowed this huge exercise of his own initiative- but he somehow knew his master *so* well that he guessed in advance what the master would say, and he went and did it without being asked. In all this we have a wonderful insight into the relationship possible between us and our Lord, especially in the area of preaching / inviting people to His supper. The initiative is in our hands, and as we come to know Him better, we come to know His mind, and to sense how He would react. We have His aims and desires as ours, and we are in harmony with Him without having to be told things in so many words. And of course for a master to serve his servants was unheard of (Lk. 12:35-38). But this of course was the wonder of what the Lord did for us, "as one who serves" (Lk. 22:27), defining for us our attitude to each other at the memorial table and in all aspects of our lives and relationships. See on Lk. 13:7.

We can also understand the servant as the Lord Jesus, reporting to the master [= God] that the invited guests wouldn't come to the supper [cp. God's Kingdom]. This servant not only had the unusual relationship with His master that allowed this huge exercise of his own initiative- but He somehow knew His master so well that He guessed in advance what the master would say, and he went and did it without being asked. In all this we

have a wonderful insight into the relationship between the Father and Son, especially in the area of inviting people to His supper [cp. salvation]. The point of all this is to demonstrate how the Lord Jesus has His influence upon the Father, and can at times change His stated purpose [e.g. with regard to the rejection of Israel- just as Moses did]. And this is the same Father and Son with whom we have to do, and whose matchless relationship is the basis and reason of our salvation.

14:23 *And the master said to the servant: Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come, that my house may be filled*- See on 1 Cor. 9:13. This shows the blessing which will go behind the efforts to spread the Gospel to all the world in the last days. There is a fervent, *urgent* desire of the Lord for this, and so His blessing will surely be with all who catch the same spirit of urgency. According to the parable, the quality of converts is sacrificed (by the Lord, not us) for the sake of numbers- which connects with the idea that the coming of Christ is to some degree dependent upon the full number of the Gentiles being converted (Rom. 11:25). Likewise the drag net was brought to land once it was full of fish (Mt. 13:48). The Lord speaks of how “few" (the Greek implies physically weak, cp. the unwanted labourers in the market place) the labourers are (Mt. 9:37), and therefore more (numerically) are needed. Any lamentation about the weakness of the latter day ecclesia must be seen in this context; the Lord is desperate for the places at the supper to be filled, although woe to those who come in without a wedding garment (Mt. 22:12).

The parable of the great supper chronicles the preaching of the Gospel over time. There were three stages of appeal: "To them that were bidden" (the Jews in Israel), to those in the streets and lanes of the city (the Jewish Diaspora), and finally, in a spirit of urgency, the preachers are commanded: "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled" (Lk. 14:16-23; the same spirit of urgency in witness is to be found in the Lord’s command to His preachers to cut the courtesy of prolonged greetings). Once the required number are in God's spiritual house, the feast will begin- and that feast represents eating bread in the Kingdom, at the second coming.

The language of 'going out' should be connected to the command to '*go* and teach all nations'. The parable concerns the master of the house (God) commanding His servant (Christ); yet the connection with the preaching commission indicates that the commission given to Christ He fulfils through us, as demonstrated earlier in this study. The ever increasing sense of urgency in the appeal to 'come in' ought to be reflected in our preaching in these last days.

Noah's ark is a well known type of the salvation which humanity can find in Christ; and yet close analysis of the Genesis record reveals that there were some animals whom Noah had to bring into the ark and take them with him (Gen. 6:19; 7:2); and others who came to Noah and entered into the ark of their own volition (Gen. 6:20; 7:9,15,16). The same Hebrew is found in Gen. 8:9, about how the dove came to Noah of its own volition,

and Noah welcomed her and took her into the ark. Putting all this together, we are to compel men to come in; and yet we are also to be there to welcome in the seekers who seek of their own volition. It's easier to do the latter; to put up a website, waiting there for some eager seeker to come and find. But we are also to compel people in, and to also bear in mind that there are some who will be attracted to the Gospel from selfish reasons, as the man who buys the field thinking that he can exploit it for his own benefit. These too we are to take on board and not turn away. Whilst people, with all their wonderful uniqueness, should never be pigeon-holed nor over-categorized... all the same, we need to consider the type of person we're dealing with as we plan out our approach. For if we seek them, we will consider who they are, and how appropriately we can engage them.

"Compel" is the same word used in :18, where the man excuses his lack of response to the Gospel by saying that he "must" or is compelled to go and check out his new land. We are to help people see that the 'necessity' of secular things is to be replaced by the ultimate 'necessity' of responding to the call of the Kingdom.

The eagerness of the Lord to accept us, to find in us spiritual fruit, is perhaps reflected in the way that He begins inviting people of 'His' level to the feast of the Kingdom, but ends up lowering the bar as time goes on, to try by all means to get at least somebody in there. This theme of lowering the bar is perhaps continued in this same passage by the way the Lord says that His disciples must forsake / 'bid goodbye to' all that they had (Lk. 14:33). This is the same word found earlier in Lk. 9:61, where some time before, a potential disciple who first wished to go and "bid goodbye to" his family was judged as not suitably committed to the urgency of the task. But now, the Lord says that this is acceptable in His definition of discipleship. This Lord is our Lord.

“How shall they hear without a preacher?” It’s impossible to hear without a preacher. Of course, God could beam the message into men some other way. But normally He chooses to work through human preachers. The preachers in the parable of the great supper are bidden "Compel them to come in, that my house may be filled". The house of God's Kingdom is filled with people as a result of enthusiastic preaching.

14:24 *For I say to you, that none of those men that were invited shall taste my supper*- There may be the implication that the three people said "I cannot come" with the implication 'I can't come *right now*, but later'; and the Greek could bear such an interpretation. The master's comment at the end suggests that he knew these people would later turn up at the supper, but he would refuse them entry. There are often connections within the Lord's parables; in this case, the men who were so busy with daily life that they turned up at the wedding later would connect with the story of the

other wedding guests who didn't have enough oil, and who *later* turned up at the wedding feast- again, only to be barred entry.

14:25 *Now there went with him great crowds; and he turned and said to them*- See on Lk. 7:9. The people eagerly following Jesus, and then He turns and tells them that actually God is coming after them with 20,000 men and they have only 10,000, and they on a personal level *urgently* therefore need to make peace with Him- because every minute now counts. Time and again, the Lord is urging people to look at themselves and their own position, not follow Him because they're part of a crowd who does, not hesitate from personal commitment because of never-never questions about cosmic ethics and Divine justice which are well beyond us... He forces the spotlight back on us, me myself and I, time and again. And His audience squirmed, just as they do today.

14:26 *If anyone comes to me, and hates not his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple*- The Lord himself spoke of how He expected this of us; and He put it in language which He surely *knew* would arrest attention. He's a demanding Lord- and reflection on His life and death for us shows that He has every right to be so. Notice how the Lord Jesus uses the figure of polysyndeton- i.e. repeating the word "and" when there's no grammatical need to, in order to build up the impression of how many different people we must be prepared to break with. His message is plain: the Lord Jesus must come in front of every human relationship, or else we are not His disciples. And it isn't just human relationships that must be sacrificed; it's "houses... lands" (careers, cars, we might say) as well (Mt. 19:29). It has to be seriously asked whether our community, especially the younger generation, are prepared to be the Lord's disciples; whether they have given up these kind of things for His sake. He must be the *Lord* of our lives, the master passion and controller. Christ's love *constrains* us. *These* sort of demanding words are so common in the Gospels that they almost slip our notice. There can be no serious doubt what He's saying: He has no room for passengers or part-timers. As far as He is concerned, it can't be a hobby.

14:27 *Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple*- The Lord taught that unless a man was willing to carry his cross and forsake all that he had, he couldn't be His disciple. And He called them His disciples, even though they clearly didn't perceive the real nature of the cross, nor did they actually leave all that they had but retained some things. The disciples were told to sell what they had (Lk. 12:22,32,33); but it seems they kept their fishing business. After having asked them this, the Lord again had to speak to them about forsaking all that they had (:33). Their claim to have left literally all (Lk. 18:28) appears somewhat exaggerated. Indeed, the parable of the unjust steward being specifically directed at the disciples (Lk. 15:1 cp. 16:1,9), it

could appear that they had a special problem with lower-middle-class petty materialism (Lk. 16:9). Likewise Lk. 6 is spoken specially to the disciples, and it has much to say about materialism. The Lord was and is very generous to our weak efforts to rise up to His high standards.

Reflect on a Gospel parallel to see the huge importance of being a disciple of Jesus. In Mt. 10:38 the Lord says that whoever doesn't take up his cross and follow after Him, "is not worthy of me". In Lk. 14:27 we have the same words, but concluded with "... the same cannot be my disciple". To be a disciple of the Lord is to be worthy of Him. To seek to walk as He walked, to follow behind Him, is to be worthy of Him. The important thing is to follow, for all our stumblings, but at least to be in the way behind Him.

Of course we cannot literally take up the Lord's cross. Taking up the cross must therefore refer to an attitude of mind; it is paralleled with forsaking all that we have (Lk. 14:27,33), which is surely a command to be obeyed in our attitudes.

14:28 *For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he have enough to complete it?*- Virtually nobody in the audience had ever planned to build a tower (Gk. 'castle'). So the Lord means 'If you were mega wealthy and had money to build a tower, wouldn't you even then be careful to understand the total cost in advance, lest even your wealth is all taken away by it?'. They were asked to imagine they were wealthy. The Lord was seeking to elevate their minds upwards to consider the great potential which they had. But all the same, they must count the cost; and realize that to build a castle / tower was beyond them. This is the implication of :31 and :33. Capitulation is required. Or it could be that the Lord is asking them as poor people to seriously calculate how much it would cost to build a tower / castle, and realize it was beyond them. Recognizing our spiritual bankruptcy, our inability to pay, and throwing ourselves upon the Lord- this is the same as forsaking all we have (:33).

14:29 *Unless, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish it, all that watch begin to mock him, saying*- See on Rev. 16:15. The only true foundation laid is the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 3:11). The potential builder must resign all plans for self-salvation, all efforts to lay his own foundation; and accept that of the Lord Jesus. Luke likes to use the Greek word for "finish" in relation to how all things were finished in the work of the Lord Jesus (12:50; 18:31; 22:37).

14:30 *This man began to build, and was not able to finish*- Earlier, the Lord had spoken of the shame of rejection at judgment day (:9). It would be witnessed publically; the shame of the unworthy will be before the eyes of all their brethren (Rev. 16:15). If the tower / castle had to be built, then the man would have to urgently and desperately find

a mega wealthy person who could enable him to do the job. And that person was the Father offering the wealth of grace in His Son.

On one hand, the fool begins and doesn't finish (Lk. 14:30 "This man began to build, and was not able to finish"). On the other hand, we are saved by grace even when we don't finish. Likewise the Lord has "begun a good work in us" and will complete it- if we let Him, for He will keep on trying to finish it ("Being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will keep working at perfecting it, until the day of Jesus Christ" Phil. 1:6). The Galatians 'began in the Spirit' but left that path and tried to complete the work without the Spirit, "by the flesh", and failed (Gal. 3:3). The Lord 'began' doing and teaching in His ministry (Acts 1:1; 10:37 "that word began from Galilee") and continues. So many times the Lord's words are prefaced with the statement that He "began to say..." (Mt. 4:17; 11:7,20; Mk. 4:1; 6:2,34; 8:31; 10:32; 12:1; 13:5; Lk. 4:21; 7:24; 11:29; 12:1; 20:9; 24:27). This is all quite some theme. His words were intended to commence something in the hearers, although usually that intended process wasn't and isn't allowed to go forward to its intended end. When a man today hears the Lord's words, that process likewise begins; but men truncate it. Samson was intended to "begin" delivering Israel from the Philistines (Jud. 13:5), and so the Spirit of God "Began" [s.w.] to move him to do so (Jud. 13:25). But he didn't let that process progress as intended, becoming caught up on anger and sexual lust issues. We have the sense that God began a work in and through Samson that wasn't completed as potentially possible- perhaps with the implication, that it should have been but wasn't. Not until David's time would Israel be free from the Philistines (2 Sam. 8:1). Yet despite only partially fulfilling his potential, Samson did make a beginning. And he will be saved, despite all that was unfinished and all the unrealized potential.

14:31 *Or what king, as he goes to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel, whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him that comes against him with twenty thousand?*- All the parables contain elements of unreality in order to make a point. This one speaks of a King coming in judgment upon another King who only has half the army which he has. The more powerful King is of course God. But we are likened to a “king” also, on His level in that sense, who has only half His strength. This is altogether such an under estimate of the Father’s physical and moral superiority to us! The smaller army can of course defeat the bigger army- but only with God's help, as various Old Testament examples make clear. The king must resign all attempts to win the battle in his own strength. "By good advice make war (Heb. 'a battle')" (Prov. 20:18); and the advice is to not even attempt it. The weaker king has it seems already embarked on journeying to the encounter; he has to display great humility in avoiding it by recognizing that he really hasn't got the strength to succeed.

14:32 *Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an ambassador and asks*

conditions of peace- See on Rom. 14:19. Does the man with 10,000 men faced with the oncoming army of God with 20,000 men just recklessly go ahead, or does he seek reconciliation? There was surely an intended connection within the Lord's teaching concerning how the loving Father saw the prodigal son "afar off" in his sin and separation; and how the King [God] coming against man with 20,000 men in battle needs to be reconciled with whilst He is still "afar off" (Lk. 14:32; 15:20). God is both coming towards us in judgment; and yet also sees us 'from afar' in untold grace and desire to save. It is this wondrous paradox which makes the ultimate meeting of God and man so intense and wonderful. The 'harder side of God', the King coming in overpowering judgment against sinful man, is what gives power and poignancy to His final meeting with man as the Father meets the prodigal. See on Lk. 10:34.

14:33 *So therefore whoever of you does not renounce all that he has, cannot be my disciple*- See on Lk. 12:22; 14:23; 21:3. The weak king who sends ambassadors asking for conditions of peace is understood by the Lord as the man who forsakes all he has in order for peace with God. This is the importance of forsaking wealth (Lk. 14:33), as the merchant did (Mt. 13:44-46), as the blind man left his garment (Mk. 10:50), as the widow threw in her two mites, rejecting the temptation to be 'prudent' and keep one for herself to use as capital for the future (Lk. 21:2), as Matthew "left all, rose up and followed" (Lk. 5:28), and as the disciples in that beauteous childlike innocence could say " Lo, we have left all...?" (Mk. 10:28). What this surely means is that in our *attitudes* we must be as if we possessed nothing, as if we have in our heart of hearts resigned everything, even the very concept of personal 'possession'. See on 2 Cor. 6:10.

When the Lord speaks of leaving all and following after Him, He surely had in mind the well known story of Mattathias, who began the Maccabean revolt by saying: “Let every one who is zealous for the Law and supports the covenant *follow after me*... and they *left their possessions behind* in the town” (1 Macc. 2:27). And again the Lord seems to have had this in mind when He says that when He comes, His true people are to flee Jerusalem and not worry that their ‘stuff is in the house’ (Lk. 17:31). For an itinerant teacher like Jesus of Nazareth to offer his ideas and his interpretation of the Old Testament, and then have men following Him, was not out of place in first century Palestine. But the Lord twists the whole figure of ‘follow me’. Unlike the other teachers, his teaching didn’t lead to taking arms and fighting Rome. His men are to follow Him in wilfully taking up and carrying a cross, imitating His supreme human bravery in both His life and above all in His death, a bravery which He showed in facing sin in the eye and conquering every temptation, whatever the cost, whatever the human implication.

The Lord followed right on from the supper parable with the demand to hate one's own life, pick up their cross and follow Him, without which we cannot be His disciple. He also told the parable of God coming with a huge army to meet us who are far weaker-

and our need to make peace with Him and forsake all that we have in order to follow Christ (Lk. 14:25-33). These radical demands of Jesus are in fact a development of His parable about the supper. For amongst some Middle Eastern peoples to this day, refusing the invitation to enter the banquet for such a meal- especially after having signalled your earlier acceptance of the invitation- was "equivalent to a declaration of war". And so the parable of *us* as the man going out to war against a far superior army suddenly falls into place in this context. "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that doesn't renounce all that he has, he cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:33). The renouncing or forsaking of all we have refers to the man with 10,000 soldiers renouncing what human strength he had in the face of realizing he was advancing against a force of 20,000. The picking up of the cross, the 'hating' of our own lives, the renouncing all we have... obviously refers to doing something very hard for us. But the context is the parable of the supper, where the 'hard' thing to understand is why people refused the invitation, why they just couldn't believe it was real and for them; or why they just let petty human issues become so large in their minds that they just couldn't be bothered with it. Simply believing that we will be there, that in all sober reality we have been invited to a place in the Kingdom, that God is compelling / persuading / pressurizing us to be there... this is the hard thing. This is the hating of our lives, picking up our cross, forsaking our human strength and surrendering to God.

“Whoever of you does not *renounce* all that he has cannot be my disciple”. Renouncing is something we do in our hearts and deepest feelings and attitudes. Have we truly *renounced* it all? Even if there are still bank balances and pension plans and property deeds and cars and treasured possessions... made out in our name. Have we in our hearts *renounced* them? That they aren’t *really* mine. I have no personal long term security from them, because they’re *not mine*. I’m just holding in stewardship what God gave me. And the Lord Himself drives the point home- if we have any *other* attitude to these wretched things, these *almost*-nooses around our necks, then we are *not* His disciples. It’s one of the scariest thoughts for Christianity. The fearless, gripped-by-Jesus approach to life which we see in the early church is the very opposite of the passivity of our post-modern world. We are called to a passionate, emotional life; a life where we each have someone to save, someone to die for, to live for, to sacrifice our self for. And this approach to life will naturally take care of how we use ‘our’ money. It is the passion-less life which results in a mean, careful approach to the spending of ‘our’ resources for others. See on Acts 4:32.

The Lord appears to make discipleship dependent upon giving up our possessions and forsaking all we have. But it’s quite apparent that His disciples didn’t literally do that. Zacchaeus only gave away half of his possessions (Lk. 19:8); and other disciples of Jesus clearly retained their homes and some possessions. The Lord must therefore

mean that He expects us to *in our minds* resign all personal ownership of absolutely everything which we have- even if those things remain, to human appearance, 'ours'. This is really a challenging thing, in this world of savings and acquisition.

14:34 *Salt therefore is good, but if the salt has lost its taste, with what shall it be seasoned?*- The Greek for "lost its taste" is literally 'to become foolish', and is so translated in Rom. 1:22. Salt is good unless it is not salty, when it is then useless; this means that salt has a very specific usage, and beyond that it cannot be used for anything. It can only be cast away as are the condemned (:35). The idea is that unless we achieve our Divinely intended role as the salt of the earth, then we are useless and will be condemned; we have no other possible usage in this world apart from that intended by God. The "therefore" connects with :33 about being a disciple, which involves leaving all as the disciples did and following the Lord (:33,27). The disciples followed the Lord in the sense of supporting and performing His missionary work. They were the "salt of the earth / land". Without them, "it", the land, would not be salted, as so much depended upon them; or the idea may be that if the disciples lost their saltiness, they could not be re-salted. If they turned away from their ministry, this would be a serious sin and they could not then be re-appointed to it (Heb. 6:5,6). If we are no influence upon the earth around us, then we have failed in our calling to be the salt of the earth, and will be condemned. We cannot be secret believers.

"Good" has the idea is of being able, to have possibility. If we will not use our potential for good, then we will be rejected, because we have no possibilities for use. It's only when we wilfully lose our potential for good that we really are of no use. If salt loses savour, what then can be used for seasoning ["wherewith shall it be salted"]? The idea is surely that if salt cannot be used for making salty- then it can be used for nothing, it has no practical use. This is a major statement about the ultimate vanity of all secular achievement and careers, compared to being the salt of the earth.

14:35 *It is useful neither for the soil nor for the manure heap, it is thrown away. He that has ears to hear, let him hear*- The fact there is no middle road is the most powerful imperative to total devotion. The Lord foresaw that it would be possible for His men to be as salt which had lost it's savour; to appear as His, but for this to have no practical effect at all; and such salt is to be "cast out" in the end. We *must* have influence upon others, or we aren't salt. Salt could be used for nothing apart from savouring things. We must fulfil our ministry, for otherwise we are of no practical use and will be "thrown away" in condemnation (Mt. 3:10; 5:30; 13:48; Jn. 15:6 etc.)

LUKE CHAPTER 15

15:1 *Now all the tax collectors and sinners were drawing near to him to hear him teach*- Unlike many preachers of high spiritual standards, the Lord was attractive to sinners. They flocked to hear Him, He ate with them and appeared to actually quite like their company. 'Drawing near' is a Hebraism for coming to a holy place for worship. The Lord in His very person was the holy place, and not the Jerusalem temple cult. The double mention of "him" indicating the spiritual charisma which the Lord holds over those desperately seeking righteousness

15:2 *And both the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying: This man receives sinners and eats with them*- The Lord was criticized for "receiving sinners" and eating with them. Instead of the usual and expected Greek word *dechomai*, we find here the Greek *prosdechomai*- He welcomed them *into fellowship*, symbolizing this by eating with them. This was an act which had religious overtones in first century Palestine. Notice that *prosdechomai* is used by Paul to describe welcoming a brother / sister in spiritual fellowship (Rom. 16:2 "welcome her in the Lord"; Phil. 2:29 "receive him in the Lord"). The Lord fellowshipped people in the belief that this would lead them to repentance, following His Father's pattern of using grace in order to lead people to repentance (Rom. 2:4). He didn't wait for people to get everything right and repented of and *only then* fellowship them, as a sign that they were up to His standards.
The theme of eating continues after Luke 14- for Luke 15 contains parables told by the Lord in answer to the criticism that He ate with sinners (Lk. 15:2). He explained that He had come to seek and save the lost, and that was why He ate with them (Lk. 15:4 cp. Lk. 19:10, where He justifies eating with Zacchaeus for the same reason). Note how in the case of Zacchaeus, the man only stated his repentance after he had 'received' Jesus into his house and eaten with Him. This exemplifies how the Lord turned upside down the table practice of the Jews- He didn't eat with people *once they had* repented, but *so that* His gracious fellowship of them might *lead them to* repentance. The parables of Lk. 15 speak about eating in order to express joy that a person had repented and been saved- the eating was to celebrate finding the lost sheep, coin and son. But the Lord was saying that this justified His eating with not yet repentant sinners. Thinking this through, we find an insight into the hopefulness of Jesus for human repentance- He fellowshipped with them and treated them *as if* He were celebrating their repentance; for He saw eating with them in this life as a foretaste of His eating with them in His future Kingdom. He invited them to a foretaste of the future banquet. His fellowship policy was therefore to encourage repentance; and seeing He wished all to be saved, He didn't exclude any from His table.

The parables of the lost coin and lost sheep invite the hearer to identify with the heart of the God who seeks His lost. But the final climax of this triad of parables is that of the lost sons. Here the audience has to place themselves in one of two camps- the self-

righteous son who ends up not eating with the Father, or the prodigal who sins so awfully and then eats with the Father in the hushed humility which experience of His grace along can bring. The Jews were worried about whom they might eat / fellowship with, just as many in the body of Christ are today. But the Lord turned it all around- *you* are a serious sinner, you need to make that long walk home to the Father in your day by day repentance, and eat with Him by His grace. He is seeking *you* to eat with Him; the question of whom *you* eat with is utterly secondary to that.

15:3 *And he spoke to them this parable, saying*- This rubric is not used to introduce the parables of the lost coin and lost son which follow. It could be that the Lord intended us to consider the three parables as one.

15:4 *What man of you*- Although the parables have the appearance of simple stories, their essential meaning is only granted to the reflective and spiritually minded reader. Close analysis of the parables reveal that they often contain something in them that is arrestingly unreal; and in this is very often the crux of the message. Surface level reading and listening give the impression that they are simple, homely stories, obvious in their meaning. But they are not; otherwise all men would have understood them, and the Lord would not have spoken them *so that* Israel would hear but not perceive. The true meaning depends upon perceiving that there is an element of startling unreality within the story line, that flags attention to the real message. The parables therefore challenge our stereotypes and force us to re-examine cherished suppositions. Perhaps the most obvious signpost to this feature of elements of unreality in the parables is in that of the lost sheep: "What man of you..." would leave ninety and nine sheep in the wilderness and go searching for the one lost one? Answer: none of you would do that. And perhaps likewise, "What woman..." having lost just one piece of silver would be so obsessive about finding it, and so ecstatic with joy upon finding it (Lk. 15:4,8)? Perhaps the answer is also meant to be: "Not one of you". Yet this is the Father's passion for saving the lost, and rejoicing over them

Having a hundred sheep and having lost one of them, does not leave the other ninety nine in the wilderness and go after that which is lost, until he finds it?- Possibly the 99 not lost refer to the Angels, those saved from previous creations. The lost sheep is then representative of humanity. The shepherd is presented as unusual. A man who owned 100 sheep would employ a shepherd; for a sheep was worth one month's wage for a shepherd. An owner-shepherd was unheard of. And if the man in view is to be understood as a hired hand, then it was also unheard of for one man to have 100 sheep to look after. Whatever way, the shepherd has huge responsibility. And again we see that the Lord's work is not simply salvation of people *en masse*, but one by one, on a personal level. And shepherds were poor, earning 16 denarii / month; when the standard pay for a worker was one denarius [penny] / day. If we take she shepherd as a hired hand rather than the owner, then there we have one reason why he makes so

much effort to save the one lost sheep- if he had to pay for the loss of it, it meant starvation for his family.

Sheep freeze when lost. They lose all initiative and volition. This is a picture of how man often lacks the internal strength to improve his position; and is a window onto the Lord's huge initiative. He is the Samaritan, we are the unconscious wounded man. He is not awaiting people to come to Him, eager for Bible studies and the like. He is proactively going out into their frozen lost lives, to win them to Himself. God is in search of man. We think of Jeremiah searching the squares and streets to find a man who had a heart for God (Jer. 5), of how God "found" Israel as grapes in the wilderness, "found" David as a man after His own heart.

The Lord's parable of the good shepherd (Lk. 15:1-7) brings together Ps. 23 and also the restoration passages of Jer. 23:1-8 and Ez. 34:1-31, which speak of the flock of Israel going astray due to bad shepherds, being saved by the good shepherd, being delivered / gathered, and then returning to the land. The sheep is found, and accepts being found- there is no actual mention of repentance. Thus the 'return' of Judah to their land was intended as a work of God- He would make them return, He would give them repentance [note how Acts 11:18 speaks of God granting men repentance]. This is all such wonderful grace. The even more incredible thing, though, is that Judah refused to accept this grace; they didn't 'return' to the land because they saw no need to 'return' to God. They willingly forgot that they were only in Babylon because of their sins; to 'return' to the land was a 'return' to God, which He had enabled. But they were like the lost sheep refusing to sit on the shepherd's shoulders, preferring to sit in a hole and die... and this is the warning to us. For truly, absolutely all things have been prepared for us to enter the Kingdom. It's only those who don't want to be there who won't be.

The good shepherd searches for the sheep until He finds it. John 10 is full of reference to Ezekiel 34, which describes God’s people as perishing on the mountains, eaten by wolves. But the Lord Jesus set Himself to do that which was impossible- to search *until He found*, even though He knew that some were already lost. Our attitude to those lost from the ecclesia and to those yet out in the world must be similar. The Lord knew there would not be repentance by Israel. But He went to the fig tree seeking fruit, even though it wasn’t the time for fruit (Mk. 11:13). He saw the crowds who wanted only loaves and fishes as a great harvest (Mt. 9:37).
More than anything, preaching has taught me the immense value of the human person as an individual. The Lord’s parable of the strange shepherd who leaves the 99 and gives his all for the one- the foolish one, the lost one, the antisocial one- is programmatic for me. The need is the call. If one person needs fellowship, forgiveness, love, the teaching of the Gospel, baptism, encouragement, re-fellowship, support, money, whatever... the value of them as an individual must be paramount. No matter what it costs us, how far we have to travel [in whatever sense], how much ‘trouble’ we get into, how foolish we

look, how out on a limb we put ourselves. The value and meaning of the individual person was paramount in the Lord's teaching and example, and it must be in our worldviews too.

The leaving of the 99 is an element of unreality in the parable. Shepherds wouldn't do this. It seems an unacceptable risk. Nothing appears to justify the risk- and that is the point. God is passionate about the loss of one. He perceives the value and meaning of the human person to an extent that appears foolish and unrealistic to us. But the point of the hyperbole is that God does leave the 99 for the sake of the one- He is the unusual shepherd, with an even greater passion, occupation and concern for the lost than for those who have not strayed. Shepherds were usually hired. If a man had 100 sheep, this was a large flock. But he acts as if he is the owner, and a loss of one was therefore a loss to his family [hence he calls his neighbours / relatives together when the lost sheep is found]. So again we have the picture of an unusual shepherd- an owner of a large flock who himself shepherds them and doesn't just delegate or contract this out to others.

Shepherds were listed along with tax collectors as those considered unclean by the Pharisees. This fits the context, of the Lord explaining why He ate with tax collectors. He presents Himself as a shepherd, in the same stigmatized category as tax collectors. Shepherds were seen as thieves and low life people, and shepherding was a trade classified as unclean by the Pharisees. "Wages, no supervision, mobility and the carrying of weapons afforded them the means and opportunity for theft and the temptation for other forms of criminality". But the Lord identifies Himself as the good shepherd, and the Father likewise. They are unashamed to appear foolish in the eyes of the world, for the sake of their passion for their flock.

David leaving the sheep and going to fight Goliath recalls the parable of the Lord as the good shepherd leaving the flock and going to save the lost sheep. The shepherd goes alone at night up into the hills (cp. Isaac going to be sacrificed in the hills), and carries the lamb on his shoulder- as the Lord carried the cross of our sins on his shoulder to redeem the lost sheep of mankind (Is. 53:6). This lost sheep parable is also picked up in 1 Peter 2:25: "For you were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the shepherd and bishop of your souls" (i.e. Christ the shepherd). But this in turn is quoting Is. 53:5,6: "All we like sheep have gone astray... but he was wounded (on the cross) for our transgressions", which is thus the parallel to the saving of the lost sheep. This interpretation of the lost sheep parable- i.e. that the shepherd going to save the sheep represents the Lord going to die on the cross- was first prompted by David leaving the sheep with the keeper to go and fight Goliath, representing Christ's saving us from sin on the cross. The leaving of the sheep with the keeper perhaps looks forward to the Lord's entrusting the disciples to the Father's care in those agonizing days while death parted him from them, as David's encounter with Goliath did. David's subsequent

leaving of them altogether to go and live in the King's court clearly looks forward to our Lord's ascension to Heaven after His victory over the real Goliath.

The question arises as to whether the sheep was lost because of its own 'sin', or whether it got lost because it's the nature of sheep to get lost. It's how they are and what happens to them, the mess they get in seems to go with being a sheep. And that is so true of humans. And the Lord's work deals with that as well as the willful sin of the prodigal son. Likewise the coin was lost but totally not of its own fault. So the entire spectrum of sin and lostness is dealt with- that which is not our fault, that which is more in the field of misjudgment than sin, and our actual sins [cp. the sins of the prodigal son]. What remains unforgiven in the parable [comprised of the three stories] is the sin of the older brother who refused to accept his prodigal brother.

15:5 *And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing*- All we like sheep went astray but were found and saved by the Lord's death (Is. 53:6). The laying on his own [Gk.] shoulders clearly refers to His carrying the cross, which represented us. To carry a sheep on the shoulders is another element of unreality, and it draws attention to the connection with the Lord's carrying the cross. Is. 40:12 alludes to the usual practice of carrying a sheep in the arms, AV "in his bosom": "He will take care of his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs together and carry them in his arms" (GNB). Likewise Ps. 28:9 "Be our shepherd and always carry us in your arms" (CEV).

At the time of Jesus, it was taught (*Mishnah Qidd* 4.14) that “A man should not teach his son to be a herdsman…for their craft is the craft of robbers”. Shepherds weren’t seen as kindly old men. They were seen as crafty and thieves. But the Lord chose that figure to represent Himself and the Father- even though the Old Testament likens God to the shepherd of Israel. The startling, unsettling figure [for the first century Jewish mind] was to demonstrate how it is the Lord’s humanity that makes Him our saviour. Likewise, the likening of the Gospel to yeast would have been shocking; or to a mustard bush, which is a member of the cabbage family [rather, e.g., than to a fruitful vine or upright palm tree]. It is signalled to us that there is to be a strangeness to this new Kingdom about which Jesus spoke, a humanity and yet unusualness about it. It was hard for the Lord to explain to us the level of love for us which He would reach in the cross. So He told a story of a shepherd who so madly loves his sheep, whose life is so taken up by his job, that he would die to save one of them, and comes back triumphantly rejoicing when he has found the lost sheep. The average shepherd would have surely accepted that some sheep are lost, it's the luck of the game. But this shepherd who dropped all and ran off after one lost sheep was no usual shepherd. And the element of unreality in the story brings out the Lord's grace towards us. Note in passing how the man : sheep relationship portrays that between us and the Lord. As the sheep understood pathetically little about the shepherd's sacrifice to save it, so we too fail to appreciate the height of the fact that Christ died for us, as the shepherd for the sheep. We can be

sure that the frightened sheep didn't bob along on the shepherd's shoulders, grinning all the way home. With his underside covered in faeces and mud, it would have struggled with the Saviour shepherd, fanatic almost in his passion to save the sheep. As he stumbled along the rocky paths, shoulders bowed down, hands against his chest clutching the animal's paws, the shepherd would be the living imitation of the posture of the Lord as He carried the cross of our sins to Calvary. All this is a pattern of the almost fanatic effort we should expend to win back the lost.

The man who owned 100 sheep was rich. Shepherds were the lowest of the low. If you owned 100 sheep, you employed a shepherd to look after them and take responsibility for chasing the lost. But there's something unreal- the owner of the sheep is the one who is the shepherd. This actually is the point of the Ezekiel 34 passage upon which the Lord built the parable- having fired the unworthy shepherds of Israel, "Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, *I myself, even I*, will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered abroad, so will I seek out my sheep; and I will deliver them … I will bring them … I will feed them … I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep" (Ez. 34:11-15). The remarkable thing is that the owner of the sheep decides to become the personal shepherd, feeding, seeking, delivering, bringing the sheep *himself personally*. A Palestinian wealthy enough to own a whole flock of sheep simply wouldn't do this. He *always* hired someone else to do this- because being a shepherd was so despised. Behold the humility of God. But see too His personal passion for us. Hence the Lord's question: Which one of *you* would act like this? The Father and His Son take such passionate personal responsibility for us, that God was willing in Christ to shame and humiliate Himself in order to get us back into the fold.

Personal Responsibility

There's also something odd about the way the Lord speaks of the shepherd: "*He* has lost one of them". Translations of the Bible into Semitic languages, especially Arabic, tend to read: "If one of them is lost" (passive). In the language and concepts of the Middle East, a speaker never blames himself. As in Spanish, they would not say "I lost my book"- rather, "the book went from me". Likewise "I missed the train" is expressed as "the train left me". And I would even speculate that preaching Christ in Arabic and even Hispanic cultures comes up against the problem of people strongly disliking taking ultimate responsibility, or to own up to the personal guilt of sin; the shifting of blame away from oneself is reflected even in their languages. And so when the Lord puts words in the shepherd's mouth whereby he takes direct responsibility for the loss of the sheep, this would've sounded strange even grammatically. Apparently to this day, it's hard to translate that actual phrase into Arabic. Likewise with the idea of the woman saying that she had found the coin which she had lost. The Lord is labouring how God, and God in Christ, feel an extraordinary personal responsibility for the lost.

15:6 *And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbours, saying to them: Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!-*

The leaders of Israel were condemned for not seeking the lost (Ez. 34:4). The shepherd-owner calls his “friends” together. This surely refers to the clubs the Pharisees formed in villages, called the *Khaburim* [‘friends’]. They ought to have rejoiced to be eating with sinners, as the Lord was- but they wouldn’t. The whole context of the three parables is the Lord justifying why he ate at home with sinners, thereby showing that He considered them as somehow ‘in fellowship’ with Him. The Pharisees wouldn’t do this unless those people repented and learnt Torah in great depth. But the Lord is surely saying that He sees those men who ate with Him as the sheep which has already been brought home. He reflected the gracious outlook with which He saw people; and His hopefulness that by treating a person as if they had ‘come home’, then they would indeed do so. Probing this line further, the Lord Jesus speaks of the found sheep as being symbolic of the repentant. But the sheep did nothing- it was simply acceptant of having been found. To accept being found is, therefore, seen by the Lord as what He calls ‘repentance’. Now surely that’s grace- salvation without works.

The element of unreality is seen in the way the shepherd takes the sheep *home* and not back to the fold, inviting neighbours around to rejoice that his sheep had been found. The quite unusual joy and humanly inappropriate love of the shepherd for that sheep is of course there to signpost to us the "love beyond all reason" of the true shepherd for us. The way the lost sheep is brought home rather than returned to the fold was also perhaps some sort of allusion to the teaching of Dt. 22:1 that the lost sheep of your brother's must be returned to *him*. This would mean that our pastoral care should not simply be for our 'own' sheep, those for whom we have responsibility; but for the lost sheep of other 'pastors' who've not done their job. See on Jn. 10:12.

There is an element of unreality in the story of the lost sheep. And that unreality reflects the sensitivity of Jesus. The shepherd doesn’t return the sheep to the fold, but takes it home and calls his friends round to see the dumb animal and rejoice (Lk. 15:4-6). The Lord knew we would frown a bit at this. He foresaw how hard it would be for us to rejoice in the return of a difficult sheep to fellowship.

This parable was told by the Lord to justify His eating with sinners. He justifies it by saying that He is holding a party over the finding of one lost person; and those sinners are His friends and neighbours. Truly He is the sinner's friend.

To carry a sheep on your shoulders, fighting and struggling with you, as you climb down a mountainside in the dark... isn’t something which is usually done *rejoicing*. But this is the unusual, humanly inexplicable, *joy* which there is in the Father and Son when day by day they 'find’ us and bring us back. And where would a shepherd usually take such a

lost animal? Back to the flock, whom he's left in the wilderness. But then comes another unreal element. The shepherd takes the sheep *home to his very own house*. This sheep had such extraordinary value to this wealthy man. He came back dirty and exhausted- he humiliated himself and made himself a fool in the eyes of the world, all because of this humanly senseless love and joy which he had over this lost sheep. And we have to fill in the details, answering the unasked but implied questions- what about the 99 left out in the wilderness? The story ends with them out of the house- paving the way for how the elder son is left standing outside of the house. Note how Lk. 15:3 speaks of the three parables as one, in the singular, "parable".

In respect of God's relationship with the Angels, it is interesting to note that there seems to be a theme in Scripture of all of the Angels being involved in each action one of them performs, due to the perfect unity that exists between them and God (see on Lk. 11:7,8; 1 Kings 22:19-23; Ex. 12:41). Thus when one of the Angels acts in our lives, all the others are conscious of it too. Consider how Luke 15 describes the joy in Heaven when one sinner repents; the man who found the lost sheep "calls together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me... when she (the woman) has found it (the lost coin) she calls her friends and neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me... likewise I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the Angels of God over one sinner that repents". The man and the woman must therefore represent God manifested through our guardian Angel. The Angel physically leaves the presence of God in Heaven and then goes off to arrange circumstances to encourage the sinner to return. He then calls all the others together to rejoice "when He comes home" (into Heaven, into the multitude around the throne of God from which Angels go and return in obeying God's Word). The whole Heavenly household then rejoice together. Thus we read in Hebrews 1:14 that *all* the Angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation". *All* the Angels are involved together in this work. All things in Heaven (the Angels) and on earth (the things they arrange on earth) are for our sakes!

15:7 *I say to you, that even so there shall be more joy in heaven over one sinner that repents, than over ninety nine righteous persons, who need no repentance-*

Those who need no repentance might refer to the Angels, who are 'saved'. Or it could be an ironic comment upon those who think they have no need of repentance. For Judaism taught that the righteous need no repentance: God had "not appointed repentance to the just, and to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, which have not sinned against thee" (Prayer of Manasses). But the parallel at the end of the prodigal son parable suggests that these 99 are like the elder son, "you are always with me" - those who *think that they have* no need of repentance. It is an ellipsis begging to be filled in.

There can be no doubt that the Lord Jesus spoke the words of God, and therefore His sayings can be interpreted at the deepest possible level; and yet at the same time, they were so easy to understand by simple, sincere hearts. The sayings of Jesus have been

translated back into Aramaic, the language of His day, by C.F. Burney. He was struck by the degree to which they had a rhythmic shape, like many of the prophetic sayings of the Old Testament. Thus a passage like Lk. 7:22 has six two-beat lines followed at the end by a three beat line; the commission to the disciples in Mt. 10:8 rhymes, both in Aramaic and in Greek. The Lord's prayer is expressed in two-beat lines. The crunch point of the Lord's forgiveness parable in Lk. 15:7, that there is joy in Heaven over one sinner that repents, uses the device of alliteration, i.e. similarly sounding words. He uses three words which feature the guttural 'h': joy = *hedwa*; one = *hada*; sinner = *hateya*. In passing, I find this kind of thing evidence that we do have in the Gospel records the actual words of Jesus, and not a rough summary of them interpreted by many others, as modern theologians wrongly suppose. Our view of inspiration enables us to return as it were to the actual, living voice of Jesus in confidence. If the record of His words is sure and true, then we can go on to guess in what tone of voice He would have spoken, and seek to define in our own minds ever more features of the Son of Man. This thought alone I find so immensely inspiring- for we hear the real Christ speaking to us down the centuries. The Lord's teaching style thus reflected His recognition that He was speaking to the illiterate, and that many of those who followed Him would need to commit His words to memory; and so He spoke His words in a form which was memorable by them, as well as profitably dissectible by computer-aided intellectuals of our age. In this alone is a marvelous insight into both His genius and also His sensitivity to His audiences, from which we can take a lesson. But on a practical level, it is apparent that He had carefully prepared His sayings in advance, perhaps during His years up to age 30. I don't see His sayings as off the cuff bursts of wisdom, neither words merely flashed into His mouth by the Father. They were God's words, but carefully prepared by Him. He sets a matchless example to any would-be teacher in His church. Jesus spoke to the hearts of the people. He didn't use words like 'sin' very often. He uses *hamartia* ['sin'] in the Synoptics only 8 times, compared to 64 times in Paul's writings. Jesus wasn't talking theology, He didn't speak in abstract terms. Rather did He speak of evil fruit, lost sheep, lost coins, no good sons... because He was framing His message for the illiterate, who thought in images rather than abstractions.

15:8 *Or what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she loses one piece, does not light a lamp and sweeps the house and seeks diligently until she finds it?*- Luke 15 contains two parables concerning repentance, where the restored sinner is in fact not repentant: the lost sheep and the lost coin. The Lord searches for them *until* He finds them; neither of them actually repent and seek to come back. Indeed, the coin is inanimate, it can't repent. It was actually the woman's fault that it got lost in the first place. Now all these are surely examples of hyperbole- a gross exaggeration to make a point. It isn't the Lord's fault that we stray. But He speaks *as if it is* in this parable, in order to make the point that He *so* strenuously seeks our return to Him. Likewise Yahweh likens Himself to a worthless husband who forsook His sweet wife of Israel in her youth (Is. 54:6).

The inanimate nature of the coin and the inability of the sheep to find its way home, probably frozen on the spot out of fear, as sheep do when they realize they are lost... speak volumes. God is proactive in searching for man, for in a sense we cannot find our way back to Him. This is why nobody at any point in their life, riddled with drug addiction, hopelessly bitter [apparently], so deeply damaged... can in fact not be found. The initiative is with the searcher and finder. The prodigal son admittedly does exercise some freewill in this, but these preceding parables are a foil to that, in encouraging us that in some senses we in fact cannot find our way back without the Father's saving initiative. Indeed :3 seems to introduce the three parables as a singular parable, in which cases we are to understand that even human desire for reconciliation with God [as shown by the prodigal son] still occurs within the difficulty all men have of actually repenting. In one sense we are all unable to make the move home to God.

Remember all this is in the context of the sinners coming to the Lord Jesus, and His fellowship with them despite the fact they were apparently impenitent. They failed to clear the bar set by the religious leaders. But the Lord justified His eating with them by explaining this was His seeking of them. He seeks sinful man by fellowshipping with him prior to his repentance; it is His acceptance of men that leads men to repentance. And we are to follow the Lord in this- if our brother sins against us, we are to treat him as a tax collector (Mt. 18:17), and the Lord's attitude was to seek their repentance by still accepting them in fellowship.

God's need for man- as it were- is brought out in this parable. We are compared to a candle that is lit (cp. our baptism) *so that* it may give light to others (Lk. 8:16; 11:33); the woman (the Lord Jesus) lights a candle (He uses believers) to find his lost coin (through our efforts) (Lk. 15:8; this must be seen in the context of the other two references in Luke to lighting a candle). If we don't give light (God's word, Ps. 119:105) to others, we are a candle under a bucket, and therefore we will lose our faith, the flame will go out. So it's hard not to conclude that if we don't naturally give the light to others, we don't believe. The very nature of a lit candle is that it gives light; *all* candles do this, not just some. The Lord wants to use us as His candle, and He will arrange situations in life to enable this.

It's been suggested that the lost coin was one of the woman's dowry coins, and thus the story speaks of how every lost person is a personal and deeply felt loss to God. However, this view has been criticized in that a drachma, which had the same value as a silver denarius, was the wage paid to a worker for one day's field work (Mt. 20:1-16). It was far less than the dowry coins. It could be that instead we have here a reference to a desperately poor housewife- who certainly had no dowry money left. The poor were so poor in Palestine at the time of Christ that they were selling their land, and many had become landless labourers. They worked for money, with which they bought food. The husband went far and wide searching for work; the Lord's parable pictures labourers

waiting around for work. It's been calculated that on the basis of one denarius / day as wage, even if the worker worked 300 days / year, and had four children and a wife plus himself to support, this income would only enable them to buy enough bread to provide 1400 calories / family member / day. This isn't enough to sustain a person's ability to do manual work. Therefore mothers and children faced malnutrition, and the women tried to grow crops on waste land and did anything for money in order to buy bread. The smiling, full cheeked, charming Mediterranean woman with dowry coins around her forehead (beloved of those Sunday School books about Bible background) just wasn't the scene that the Lord had grown up in. The woman who'd lost her coin was searching desperately for it, because that was what she'd buy the kids food with. No coin, no food, whiny, hungry, sick kids. She needed, desperately needed, that coin; so that she could feed the hungry kids whom she loved and be the *de facto* domestic head which she was. And this is all a picture of God's *need* for the lost, His *need* for us, because He knows the feeding which that lost one can uniquely provide to His beloved family. And one wonders of course whether the Lord's parable wasn't drawn from real life incidents in His own childhood with Mary.

The lighting of the candle is a symbol of our conversion (Mt. 25:1; Heb. 10:32 "when you were first enlightened"). Our lamps were lit by the Lord Jesus (Lk. 8:16 "nobody, when he has lit a lamp, covers it with a vessel,"; Heb. 10:32) for the purpose of giving light to the house. The Lord lights a lamp in order to search for his lost coin, that weak brother or sister that means as much to him on a deep, indescribably personal level as a woman's dowry money in the Middle East (cp. a wedding ring; Lk. 15:8). But the lamp he lights is us. This is yet another example of his parables being intended to fit together. We must burn as a candle now, in shedding forth the light, or we will be burnt at the judgment (Mt. 5:15 and Jn. 15:6 use the same words).

The parables all have an assumption that the mission will succeed. The shepherd and the woman search until they find the lost thing; when we all know that coins and sheep at times are lost permanently. The father is watching for the younger son to return. The parable of the sower and mustard seed assumes that some of the seed sown will definitely produce a huge harvest, quite out of proportion to the smallness of the seed sown. The parable of the labourers assumes there's a huge harvest out there waiting to be gathered. The Lord speaks of a huge harvest being there, but the labourers being few. Likewise the Lord's servants who are given talents assume that they are going to trade and gain, not trade and lose. The Lord seems to assume that also. God's word will not return void. All our efforts have to end in victory. Attempts to get people to join some particular denomination, attend some specific church building or accept some highly defined quirk of Biblical interpretation- these will have limited success. But there is a huge harvest out there waiting to be gathered. Most believers have rarely if ever actually preached the cross of Christ and repentance to other people, baldly and clearly and in

so many words; nor have they challenged people to be baptized. But they complain 'Nobody's interested'. The true word of Christ crucified has to have a harvest.

The element of unreality in the parable of the lost coin is perhaps in the way the woman makes such a fuss about a small coin, probably not worth even a full day's pay. And yet she apparently begins her search at night [using a candle], as soon as she realizes it is lost. The equivalent value of the lost piece might have been an equivalent of say £20. It's a loss but not a huge one; and the element of unreality is that she invited her neighbours to come to her home and celebrate. It would have struck them as strange behaviour; just as the Lord's eating with sinners. But of course the value of the coin to her was far more than its monetary value. It was part of the ten coins she had sewn into her headband, like the equivalent of a wedding ring, to make the public statement: "I am married". And it was worn upon her forehead, where her thoughts were. This peasant woman, distraught for the loss of the symbol of her marriage, representing all her hopes and dreams for her little family... represents God. God Almighty. The shepherd, typically seen as unclean and immoral, represents God. Now, a working class dirt poor peasant woman. And the parable of the good Samaritan will associate the saving Lord with the despised mixed race Samaritan. Whilst we are the lost, we are also used by the Lord as the instruments through which He finds the lost. And He is manifested in this work through those whom man despises.

15:9 *And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying: Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost*- We note the Lord carefully balances the gender issue in these parables; the male shepherd is matched by the woman in the lost coin story. Such was His sensitivity to the value of all persons. As noted on :6, her joyful party reflects how all the Angels are aware of one lost soul being found. And the Lord is justifying His eating with sinners on the basis that they were His friends and neighbours. He was and is the sinner's friend. We recall how when the tax collector Matthew was converted, the Lord had a party to celebrate it along with other tax collectors (Mt. 9:9,10). When Cornelius called together His friends and neighbours to hear the Gospel, he was effectively presenting himself as the lost coin which had been found (Acts 10:24 s.w.).

If we imagine the woman who lost the coin, we sense something of her remorse and desperation as she searches the cracks in the floor for it. It could've been part of her dowry- all that she owned for herself, all that was her very own. Not even her body was hers- it was her husband's, to do what he wished with. But the dowry coins were hers- her very own. If the allusion were to one of these coins, it would speak of how much we mean to the Lord... that I, one of 6 billion, actually mean everything to Him, for whom I am His very own. But the allusion may also be to coins which the peasant women would keep bound up in a rag, close to their body. With this money, the woman would've had to feed the family for the next week or so. But... she'd let the rag come loose, and a coin

had slipped out. In either case, we are to imagine the woman searching for it with a sense of remorse, taking responsibility that she was accountable for the loss. And this, we are invited to understand, is how the Lord feels for those who are lost. Notice how the woman searches *in the house*- presumably, she'd not been out of the house since she last had the coin. By filling out this little detail, we perhaps have a picture of how the Lord took responsibility, or felt responsible, for the loss of those 'within the house' of Israel. The lost sheep is outside the house and brought within the house. The lost coin is lost within the house. We can surely perceive from this that man can be as lost 'in church' as outside of it. "Rejoice with me" is matched by "Enter into the joy of your Lord" in the parable of the talents. We are invited to share God's joy in the progress of His household, to see things totally from His perspective. We can even now respond to "Rejoice with me" and we will do so to a greater extent when we enter into our Lord's joy at the day of judgment.

15:10 *Even so, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents*- "There is joy" translates the same word as in :14 "arose", of how the famine "arose". This arising of joy in Heaven is a big focus of the parables, coming to a climax in the spontaneous party thrown by the father (see on :22). We read of how they "began to be merry" (:24), reflecting this sense of joy arising.

The Lord Jesus purposefully inverted the common assumption that the duty of a righteous man was to condemn the sinners. When He said that there is much joy in Heaven over one sinner that repents, the Lord was purposefully inverting the common contemporary Jewish saying that there was much joy in Heaven whenever one sinner is destroyed in judgment. His desire is to seek to save rather than to destroy.

15:11 *And he said: A certain man had two sons*- The man is not that wealthy; for he has only two sons and no other children are mentioned. This heightens the generosity of the father to the younger son, and the tragedy of the waste. The two sons may represent Israel and Judah.

As with most of the parables, the prodigal has a primary reference to the nation of Israel. The many Old Testament allusions bring this home without doubt. In practice, this means that the intensity of repentance which Israel will eventually manifest should be seen in our contrition at sin. In this lies a real challenge. The following allusions demonstrate that our Lord clearly intended us to make a connection between the prodigal and apostate Israel- and therefore with ourselves:
- The father falling on the prodigal's neck and kissing him sends the mind back to Joseph weeping on Benjamin's neck (another younger brother), typical of Christ's receiving home of a repentant Israel in the last days. As Joseph commanded his servants "Bring these men home, and slay, and make ready" (Gen. 43:16), so the father did likewise (:23). Both repentances were celebrated with a meal of fellowship (cp. the breaking of bread). Both the prodigal and the sons humbled themselves to the position

of servants. Like the prodigal, Israel were often brought back to their spiritual senses by famine (Ruth 1:1; 1 Kings 8:37; Lk.4:25 etc.). His realization that "I perish with hunger" (:17) matches the description of Jacob in Canaan as "A Syrian ready to perish" (Dt. 26:5), dwelling in a land that was 'perishing through the famine' (Gen. 41:36). This affliction came upon natural Israel because of their 'murder' of Joseph / Jesus. The prodigal's profligacy is therefore to be seen as the crucifying of Christ afresh by the believer.

- The prodigal Israel went "into a far country" (Lk. 15:13) - a phrase normally used in the Old Testament concerning the Gentile lands of Israel's dispersion (Dt. 29:22; 1 Kings 8:41,46; 2 Kings 20:14; 2 Chron. 6:32,36). In passing, the "far country" of Lk. 19:12 and 20:9 should also refer to the lands of the Gentiles; *this* is where Christ has gone (as well as Heaven) , and will return to Israel when they desire him to. As with so many of the parables, this one is packed with allusions to the Proverbs. The "far country" recalls Prov. 25:25: "As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country". Like many Proverbs, this is alluding to the Law- concerning how Israel would return from the "far country" of their dispersion upon their repentance. The sense of refreshment and exhilaration which this gives God should surely motivate us to repent, and also to encourage others to do so. Yet we need to ask whether we feel this same exaltation of spirit as God does "over one sinner that repenteth". It requires selflessness, and a real desire to see glory given to our Father.

- Our association of the prodigal with Israel in dispersion is strengthened by the mention that the prodigal "wasted" the Father's riches, the Greek meaning 'to scatter abroad'- suggesting that as Israel had wastefully scattered God's riches in the Gospel, so they too were scattered. Note how the prodigal is pictured as ending up with the pigs- well known symbol of the Gentiles. As the Son's return to the Father was matched by His going out to meet the son, when Israel "return unto the Lord... then the Lord your God will... return and gather you from all the nations" (Dt. 30:2,3).

- The book of Hosea frequently presents prodigal Israel as the one who went astray from God, her loving Father and husband, committing adultery with the surrounding countries, with the result that God cast her off, leaving her to suffer in those very lands whose idols she had worshipped. Her sense of shame and knowledge of God's constant love then brought her to her senses (Hos. 2; 5:11-15; 6:1; 7:8-10). There can be little doubt that our Lord had his eye on this symbology when framing the prodigal parable. Hos. 2:7,8 is the clearest example: "She shall follow after her lovers... he shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now. For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold (cp. the father giving the son his substance), which they prepared for Baal". These blessings of corn, wine and oil are referring to the blessings for obedience promised in Dt. 28. The point is being made that these blessings were not immediately and totally removed once Israel started to go

astray. This demonstrates how material 'blessings' are not necessarily an indication that we have favour with God. Consuming the Father's substance "with harlots" (:30) is therefore parallel to giving it to idols. The spiritual riches of being in covenant with God, as well as our every material blessing from Him, were frittered away by Israel. God's "hand" worked upon Israel to make them realize the seriousness of their ways (Hos. 2:10). This fact starts to plumb the depth of God's love- that even with those who have broken His covenant, God's hand is still working to lead them to repentance.
- Jer. 31:18-20 describe how Ephraim moans: "You have chastised me... turn me, and I shall be turned... after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed... I was ashamed... because I did bear the reproach of my youth. Is Ephraim my dear son?... since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still... I will surely have mercy upon him, says the Lord". We must not think from this that God just chose to turn Israel (the prodigal) back to him at a certain moment. It was because God "spake against him", through which the prodigal was "instructed", that he turned back.
- There is reason to see the family portrayed in the parable as being a priestly family- thus representing prodigal Israel, "a Kingdom of priests". The son did not ask for his share of the inheritance, but of "the portion of goods"- remember that Levites did not own any land. There is surely an echo of the curse on Eli's priestly family in the prodigal parable: "Every one that is left in your house shall come and crouch... for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and shall say, Put me, I pray you, into one of the priests offices, that I may eat a piece of bread" (1 Sam. 2:36). The Father had "hired servants", which takes us back to the reference in Lev. 22:10 to the priests having "hired servants" in their household, who would have performed the mundane work for them (cp. the Gibeonites). The prodigal was therefore asking to be admitted back into God's service, resigning all the spiritual superiorities he could have enjoyed through being of the priestly line. Similarly latter day Israel will be willing to be accepted by God as Gentiles, having resigned their trust in their natural lineage. Our attitude on repentance ought to be similar- just wanting to quietly, humbly participate in God's family for the joy of being close to Him. Further indication that the hired servants represent the Gentiles is found in the fact that they had "bread enough" (Gk. 'an abundance of loaves'), connecting with the Gentiles of Mt. 14:20 being "filled" (same word in Lk. 15:16) with the abundance of loaves created by Christ.
- The parable of the lost son complements that of the lost sheep earlier in the same chapter. "My people have been lost sheep", "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Jer. 50:6; Mt. 10:6; 15:24). A comparison of the parable with Hos.7 :9,10 indicates that most of Israel remain as the prodigal in the pig country: "Strangers have devoured his strength (cp. "devoured your substance"), and he knows it not... they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek him for all this". The illogicality of Israel remaining in their pathetic spiritual position is so apparent to us from this; yet we of the new Israel can also be crazy enough to go on living out of real fellowship with God.

The reason for presenting such a catalogue of evidence is to show that prodigal Israel's latter day repentance will be of a similar intensity of repentance to ours in this life. They will mourn and weep with a rare intensity of self-hate and self-knowledge- even as a father for his only son. Do we shed tears on repentance? Do we realize, as they will, how our sins brought about the crucifixion? Do we appreciate that our spiritual indifference and lack of perception means that we, like Israel, "did esteem him stricken", seeing no beauty in him (Is. 53:2-5) as we march through our lives, unthinking as to the power and beauty of the cross?

The younger son is presented as lacking wisdom and being disobedient to the law, as Judah in dispersion. "Whoso loves wisdom rejoices his father: but he that keeps company with harlots spends his substance" (Prov. 29:3) was clearly in the Lord's mind when constructing this parable. He evidently saw this proverb as applying to the same person in time of sin and repentance. Repenting and loving wisdom are therefore paralleled, showing again that repentance is not just a twinge of conscience, but involves coming to really know God. The prodigal wished to return home so that he could share in the loaves which the servants had "to spare", or (better), "had in abundance". This same word occurs in Jn. 6:12 concerning the bread which "remained", i.e. was in abundance, after the feeding of the five thousand. In that acted parable, the bread represented the abundance of spiritual food which is in the spirit-words of Christ. It was this which the truly repentant sinner earnestly seeks, rather than a mere salving of conscience. "Whoso keeps the law is a wise son: but he that is a companion of riotous men shames his father" (Prov. 28:7) shows that such genuine repentance and knowing of God's wisdom is effectively reckoned as keeping the letter of the Law. "A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causes shame, and shall have part of the inheritance" (Prov. 17:2) seems to also connect with our parable; implying that the wise son who was willing to be a servant was ultimately greater than the son who appeared to be technically obedient to the letter of the law. Likewise, the son desiring to be fed with the husks of the pig food may connect with Lazarus desiring to be fed with the crumbs from the rich man's table (Lk. 16:21). Yet Lazarus is representative of the repentant sinner who is ultimately justified. The degree to which God will so totally impute righteousness to us is indeed hard to come to terms with. But it is faith in this which will be our ultimate salvation.

15:12 *And the younger of them said to his father: Father, give me the inheritance of property that is coming to me. And he divided his property between them*- The somewhat sad picture of the loving Father dividing between his sons “his living", for them to go off and make what they will of, to either squander in the world or selfishly and self-righteously hoard to themselves, is a picture of the vast and genuine delegation

to us by the Father. The Father has given us huge freewill and an amazing amount of self determination. Divine delegation is one of His great characteristics as a Father. It would have been highly unusual for any father to agree to liquidate part of the family estate ahead of time, just so as to give in to the will of a wayward son who totally rejected him. And yet the father did this; he liquidated part of the family inheritance to give it to a son who wanted to openly quit the family. This is how much the Father is willing to give us the essential desires of our own hearts, how much He is willing to allow us to go our own way, so that we may serve Him of our own freewill.

For those Palestinian peasants, politeness and respect to your father was paramount. Even if you didn't obey your father, you had to be polite to him. Rudeness to your father or public disobedience to him was the worst thing you could do, and you shamed yourself. The Lord turned that understanding on its head in His parable of the two sons in Mt. 21:28-32. He taught that the *better* son was the one who rudely refused to do what his father asked, but later relented and did it. The Lord saw this son as better than the one who politely agreed, and yet never fulfilled his promise. Perhaps that parable needs reflection upon today, where 'nicespeak' has become paramount- so long as you say something nicely, what you actually are saying and what you *do* isn't so important. *How* we speak *is* of course important; but it can be exalted to the point where words rather than real action become paramount. But that aside, the point is that both the sons were *extremely* rude to their Father. And he was the most loving, self-sacrificial dad that two kids ever could've had. We feel hurt for the lovely old boy. One element of unreality is that he only had two sons- a small family for those days. How tragic that both his sons went so wrong and rebelled against him. And we sense something of his hurt, our heart starts to bleed for him, and we think of *our* Heavenly Father's hurt. And then the penny drops- those two boys are us.

The younger son was more than rude in demanding his actual share of the inheritance immediately. He was effectively wishing that his father was dead. He had the neck to treat his lovely father as if he were already dead. There arose in Europe after the second world war the 'Death of God' philosophy and theology. We may distance ourselves from it in disgust, finding even the words grating and inappropriate, but let's remember that the younger son ends up the son who is found in the end abiding in the Father's house and joyful fellowship. This is how *we* have treated our wonderful Father. We know from the examples of Abraham (Gen. 25:5-8) and Jacob (Gen. 48-49) that the actual division of the inheritance was made *by the father* as his death approached. For the son to take the initiative was disgusting. Although the sons could have some legal right to what their father gave them before his death, they were strictly denied the right of actually having it in possession [i.e. the right of disposition]. This awful son was therefore each of us. And the father responds with an unreal grace. He agrees. He did what he surely knew was not really for the spiritual good of the son. And according to Dt. 21:7, the younger son's

share was one third. But the father gives him *half*. The younger son turns it all into cash within a few days [the Greek for “gathered all” definitely means ‘to turn into cash’]. This would’ve meant selling the fields and property quickly- and the father would’ve had to give agreement for this and have been involved in the contracts. Buying and selling takes a long time in peasant culture- selling quickly would’ve meant selling very cheaply. It would’ve been the laughing stock of the whole area. The way the son sells the inheritance would've been a more awful and unreal thing in the ears of the Lord's first hearers than it is to us. Naboth would rather have died than sell his inheritance- even to the King (1 Kings 21:3). The lifetime’s hard work of the father and family was wasted. And the father went along with it all. This was more than unusual; it would’ve been outrageous in the ears of the Lord’s hearers. But this is the outrageous nature of God’s grace. He must be so torn by our prayers- as a loving Father, wanting to give us what we ask for materially, whilst knowing it’s not for our good… and sometimes doing so. The father made himself look a fool because of his enormous love for this obnoxious son who wished him dead, this young man who clearly thought solely in terms of ‘Gimme the money and I’m outta here for good’. And he thought this with no thought to the huge damage he was bringing upon the rest of the family. For they would’ve lost so much through losing half the property. We sense the pain of the father, of the family, and the selfishness of the son. And time and again we are breathless at the love and grace of the father.

Significantly, the son asked for his share of the property- not his inheritance. To receive inheritance carried with it responsibility, of building the house of your father, upholding the family name etc. But this son didn’t want that. And the father could quite rightly have said ‘No, you get the inheritance when you take the responsibilities that come with it’. But no, this son wants to quit with his lovely father and the whole family name. In that culture, to cut your ties with your home family, your inheritance, your land… was almost unheard of. It was almost impossible to do. But that’s what this angry young man wanted. The incredible thing is, the father allowed him to do this! And it is almost unrealistic to imagine a father in those times allowing this- because fathers had almost absolute power over their children. The book of Sirach ordered: "While you are still alive and have breath in you, do not let anyone take your place … At the time when you end the days of your life, in the hour of death, distribute your inheritance (Sirach 33:19-23). The Babylonian Talmud likewise condemns the man "who transfers his property to his children in his lifetime’ (b.Baba, Mezia, 75b). Indeed, the duty of the younger son was to stay at home, work and care for his father in his old age. All this is turned upside down by the younger son and the father's agreement to it, to the point that the first hearers may well have considered the father to be the one most at fault. At least, he was a most unusual father. That element of unreality signposts the extent to which God allows us freewill, genuine freedom of determination- and how much it costs Him emotionally

and as a person to do so. This is the frightening thing about freewill- how much it hurts and costs God to give it to us. This insight alone should lead to a far more careful and responsible use of our freewill. William Temple said somewhere, something to the effect that God gives us freedom even to reject His love. It's no good reflecting on the younger son and thinking 'But I'm not that kinda guy'. The whole point of the parable is that yes, we are. That's us. We're either like that son, or the self-righteous son who is left standing outside of the father's fellowship. Clearly enough, the God whom Jesus was revealing was *not* based upon some village patriarch. Freud rightly observed that many people's image of God is based upon their experience of human father figures. For the true believer however, the Lord Jesus is revealing a Father-figure radically different to anything they've ever met.

15:13 *Not many days later, the younger son gathered into money all he had, and took a journey into a far country; and there he squandered his inheritance in reckless living*- The same Greek word occurs in 1 Pet. 4:4 concerning Gentiles (and also the latter day apostacy within the ecclesia?) living in "excess of riot". The corrective to the elder brothers' attitude is provided by the following parable of the unjust steward which comes straight afterwards in Lk. 16. The steward was accused of 'wasting' his master's goods (Lk. 16:1), using the same Greek word translated "substance" in Lk. 15:13, concerning how the son wasted his father's substance. The steward forgave others, and therefore ultimately found a way of escape from his dilemma. The implication is that it was on account of the prodigal being willing to do this, not daring to point the finger at others in the Father's household because of his awareness of his own sins, that he was eventually saved. We can also infer that the elder brother walked out of the Father's fellowship because of his refusal to do this. Again we see how God works through our sins. Because of the prodigal's experience of sin and forgiveness, he was better able to show that vital love and tolerance towards others, without which we cannot receive God's ultimate acceptance. In a sense, it was much *more* difficult for the elder brother.

It was usual when a son departed abroad for the father to give him a speech and instructions about living abroad, along with a plea to return soon- such an example is found in the Apocryphal book of Tobit 4:3-21. But there is no record of this happening here. Possibly we are meant to conclude that the son gets away as fast as he can and doesn't give his father a chance for such a sending off party and speech. Which paints him again as an unpleasant, selfish boy, who wants all the benefits of family membership without being an active part of that family. He is forced to return to that family and engage fully in membership, and this would be a pattern of many who have come back both to the Father and His family. Or we could take this as another element of unreality- the father doesn't give such a speech, in order to highlight the extreme human freedom granted to us as sinners by a loving Heavenly Father. Appreciating the

extent of that freedom provides a powerful window onto the problem of suffering; for much, although not all, of that problem is caused by God's extreme permission of human freewill. And appreciating the extent of that Divine permission helps us grace something of the wonder of the grace of predestination, which operates somehow concurrently with our extreme freewill.

Taking a journey into a far country is the language of other parables about the Lord Jesus departing to Heaven. The parables so often have such interconnections. The point is that even on this journey into sin, the Lord Jesus is somehow with us.

15:14 *And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that country, and he began to be in want*- The prodigal "spent all", just as the diseased woman had "spent all" her living (Mk. 5:26), and now came to take hold of Christ's mantle of righteousness. This we do at baptism. Other similarities between the prodigal and that widow are to be found in *Studies In The Gospels* by H.A.Whittaker. It's bankruptcy, or bankruptcy. Paul spoke of spending and being spent in the Lord's service (2 Cor. 12:15), alluding to how the prodigal spent himself in dissipation. That sense of losing all must come- either in sin's service, or in that of the Lord. See on Mt. 3:11.

15:15 *And he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed pigs*-

"Joined himself" is literally 'hired himself out', the language of indentured labour, whereby a free person sold themselves into temporary slavery to a master, willing to do absolutely whatever they asked. It could be argued that he chooses to escape [illegally] from this and return to his father. This was the more reprehensible, in one sense, because typically the indentured labourer received a payment at the start of the contract- they typically wanted this in order to pay off a debt. Note he "joined himself / hired himself" and then the "citizen" sent him to feed pigs. The sending of the newly contracted labourer to feed pigs was perhaps a test of his obedience to do literally anything. And he fails it by running away from this slavery, breaking his contract. The context of the parable is the tax collectors who had as it were sold themselves to the Gentiles (:2). But they wanted to come to the Father.

The son was attached to a "citizen of that country", perhaps a personification of the Biblical devil to which we are joined before conversion. He was made free from him the moment he started his journey back. He "was dead, and is alive again" is also baptism language (cp. Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:13). "He arose" from the pigs (Lk. 15:20) certainly implies new life and resurrection.

We don’t like to think of ourselves as that thankless young man; but even more do we revolt at the idea that we were and are at times out there feeding pigs. Anyone who’s travelled in the Middle East will know the annoyance of a beggar attaching themselves

to you and just refusing to leave you. But watch how the locals deal with those types. They don't shout at them, or chase them. They will ask them to do something which is beneath even their dignity as a beggar to do. And they walk away shamefaced. I knew a brother who was a schoolteacher. The boss wanted to fire him because of his Christianity. The boss didn't say 'You're fired! Clear off!'. He simply transferred him to a remote village in the middle of nowhere. And so the brother did the only reasonable thing- he resigned. The young man 'joining' or 'gluing' himself to the rich Gentile citizen was like the beggar who glues himself to you, and you don't know how to shake him off. The pig owner told him to go and feed his pigs- thinking that this would surely be beneath this once-wealthy Jew who was hassling him. But so desperate was the young man, that he had to swallow every drop of pride, national and personal- and go do it. And he felt like a pig- he was willing to eat what they ate. *This* is the picture of our desperation at every sin- but we need to feel it, if we are to experience the path back to the Father. In an age when sin is often more about the words you type on your keyboard than actual physical debauchery, this parable hits home hard. Of course it was pride which was in the way for the son, and it is swallowing pride which is the essence of repentance. And again, it was fear of shame that delayed the young man's return- fear of having to go through the *kezazah* ceremony of being officially disowned, fear of how the mob of young kids which roam every village street would whistle and shout and sing insults at him. And we need to pause and reflect whether we contribute to this significant barrier which surely hinders so many from returning to the Father's house.

It has been remarked that "Jews, who had such a loathing and abhorrence for swine that they would not even name them, but spoke of a pig as *dabhar acheer*, 'the other thing'".

15:16 *And he would gladly have filled his belly with the husks that the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything*- The son was joined to a Gentile, and totally ritually unclean by working with the pigs. All hope of justification by the law was long gone. "No one gave him anything" contrasts with his first recorded words to his father- "Give me...". Perhaps we are intended to understand that the contrasting experience was what led his thoughts back to his father. Being a pig shepherd, in a Gentile land... was the very depths of being an irreligious Jew. And it was those types with whom the Lord was eating / fellowshipping, and His parable is justifying why He did so. The prodigal son at this point was as the Jewish whores and tax collectors with whom the Lord joyfully broke His bread.

15:17 *But when he came to his senses he said*-The sense that the prodigal had of having come to a complete end, realizing the ultimate wretchedness of sin, should be ours when we repent. The prodigal's repentance is ours. The prodigal among the pigs, rising up to return, should be a cameo of our repentances throughout each day. The allusion to the Septuagint of Prov. 29:21 shows how that despite having reached such an "end",

there is still a way back: "He that lives wantonly from a child shall be a servant, and in the *end* shall grieve over himself". Yet we know that after that "end", the prodigal returned. The son 'coming to his senses' implies that his life of sin was madness, lived in a haze of semi-consciousness of his real spiritual self. This spiritual anesthesia is *always* present when we sin. Yet it does not mean that God sees and feels our sins as we do; He has a constancy of spiritual awareness. An appreciation of this may help us in our struggle to sense the true seriousness of sin.

All this is indeed the journey of Everyman through departure, estrangement, dissolution and final return to a loving Father. However it may well be asked whether in fact the prodigal does repent at this point. Just as it may be questioned whether the whores and tax collectors the Lord fellowshipped were fully repentant at that point. The prodigal son comes not to the Father, but "to himself". His thoughts were of logic, of what was better for him, and memory of his father's kindness of character. There is later in :18,19 the classical expressions of repentance, but these are the words he formulates to get what he wants from his father. His initial feelings are not of 'I have sinned... am not worthy to be called my father's son'. We would far rather encounter those thoughts first. But we do not. His repentance is therefore presented as not of any great quality. "I have sinned" are the words found on the lips of Pharaoh and Saul, whose repentance wasn't sincere. But in this case, even that is enough for the Father. He "came to himself" (AV) and then "came to his father" (:20). To come to ourselves is to come to the Father, to know ourselves truly in all our wretchedness is to know God. See on :18 "In your sight". Although Luke uses the word for repentance, *metanoia,* 25 times, he doesn't use it here. Perhaps this is another element of unreality. The son's vague movement towards the Father was counted as repentance, although it was more motivated by his hunger and a sense he could work his way out of his problem, rather than trusting the Father's grace. And it explains why the Lord broke His bread with those who had apparently not visibly repented.

How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough to spare, but I perish here with hunger!- The prodigal's perishing with hunger and desperately needing bread suggests a connection with Jn. 6:35: "I am the bread of life: he that comes to me (cp. the prodigal's return) shall never hunger... him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out" (cp. the receiving back of the prodigal). This coming to Christ is both ongoing and also specifically at baptism.

God hoped through the hope of Hosea that 'Gomer' would say "I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better with me then than now" (Hos. 2:17). But Gomer / Israel would not; and so the Lord picked up the idea and puts it in the mouth of the returning prodigal son in Lk. 15:17.

15:18 *I will rise and go to my father, and will say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight*- His plan was to use the phrase “I have sinned against heaven

and against you”- but this is almost quoting verbatim from Pharaoh’s words of insincere repentance in Ex. 10:16! He still failed to grasp that he was his father’s *son*- he didn’t ‘get it’, that *this* would be the basis of his salvation, rather than a master-servant relationship with his father based on hard work. It was the father’s amazing grace which swept him off his feet just along the street from his father’s home; it was the father’s unconditional acceptance of him which made him realize what sonship and repentance was really all about.

"And in your sight" is literally 'before you'. The same word is in :10 where there is joy "before" or 'in the presence of' the Angels when a sinner repents. The moment of realizing we are 'before God' in our sin is the moment when 'before God' there is joy. This is the same idea as discussed on :17, where coming to ourselves in realization of sin is coming to the Father. Repentance is therefore the moment of realizing that we are naked before God, as the prodigal realized that his sins in a foreign land were all the same committed before his father, in the sight of his father. He had a sense that his father knew all and had been with him in the foreign land; just as the Lord in other parables also went into "a far country". And then, in that 'before God' realization, we elicit joy 'before God'. This profound parable teaches the exact response between God and man in the moment of realization of our nakedness, when we grasp as did Hagar so long ago "You God see me". The son still sees the father as his father; although by demanding the inheritance he had been forfeiting any future rights as a son. And so again we see for all time that our sonship, and God's Fatherhood, cannot be abrogated- even by our own desire to do so in return for short term gain. The prodigal didn't so much as repent as retain his basic belief and trust in this truth. This is profound indeed. Perhaps this is why the word "father" occurs so many times in the parable, four times in :17-20 alone. He and His fatherhood are the essence of the story.

15:19 *I am no more worthy to be called your son. Make me as one of your hired servants*- The young man hadn’t quite learnt the need for total grace when he decided to return home. He decided to return and ask to be made “as one of your skilled craftsmen” (Gk.- he uses *misthios* rather than *doulos*, the usual word for ‘slave’). Presumably he figured that he could work and pay off what he had wasted. We would rather read that he offered himself as a mere slave to his father. Yet "I am no more worthy", no longer deserve, contrasts with his earlier "Give me..." my dues as your son (:12). Repeatedly, his repentance is presented as nuanced, as incomplete and less than ideal, but yet so joyfully received by the Father. And this helps us in dealing with the immature repentance of others, as well as our own.

15:20 *And he rose and went to his father. But while he was yet far away, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and ran and embraced and kissed him*-

The son knew the way home; the father doesn't go to the foreign land looking for him. We see here the final need there is for at least some movement, some act of volition and human will, on the side of the penitent. But so long as it is made, for whatever reason and of whatever low quality... it seems that's enough for the Father.

Embracing and kissing quotes from the LXX of the Joseph story, where it means forgiveness and reconciliation: Gen. 33:4; 45:14; 46:29; 50:1. But this is granted by the Father, as it was by Joseph, without any demand for repentance nor discussion. The father acts as if nothing has happened, when he is acutely aware that his inheritance has been sold off quickly and therefore cheaply and he has been shamed. He doesn't have dementia nor forgetfulness nor soppy forgetting of what has happened; He is sharply aware. But this is the power of imputed righteousness and the utter destruction of sin through God's love. That love was indeed worked out through the cross, the blood of Calvary; but in the end, it is God's love that in essence destroys sin. The father's immediate acceptance of the son was and is a scandal, a rock of offence / stumbling, the scandal of God's love. And so many stumble upon it as did the older son. Paul surely has the "great way off" (AV) in mind when he speaks in these terms of every man: "Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off, are made near by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13).

The Father's speed and zeal is captured by the repeated use of the conjunction "and": "His father saw him, *and* had compassion, *and* ran, *and* fell on his neck, *and* kissed him". The son's careful preparation of his request for mercy was needful for him, but not for the Father. This is a precise allusion to the spirit of Is. 65:24: "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear". This is primarily concerning God's relationship with men in the Kingdom. Yet our daily experience of forgiveness now should give us a foretaste of the glorious sense of restoration with God which will be ours in the Kingdom.

There was a Jewish custom called *Kezazah*, 'the cutting off'. If a Jew lost the family fortune amongst Gentiles, he would be greeted at home by the whole family, who would break a pot and scream 'XYZ is cut off from his people' (Kenneth E. Bailey, *The Cross And The Prodigal* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2005) p. 52). The family and community would have no more fellowship with the person (Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jacob And The Prodigal* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003) p. 102). Moulton and Milligan describe the record of a public notice by which parents declare their dissociation from their son who had wasted their wealth (J.H. Moulton & G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary Of The Greek New Testament Illustrated From the Papyri And Other Non-Literary Sources* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952) p. 89). This is what the Lord's Jewish audience would've expected to come next in the story, when the son returns. But no! There is the very opposite. Law and traditional expectation and even human perception of justice is thrown away, as the father races along the street towards his son and accepts him. For an elderly man to run publicly

was yet again an unreal element in the story- mature men always walk, at a slow and dignified pace. Not gather up their robes and run, let alone publicly. Actually the Greek word translated “run” in Lk. 15:20 is that used about sprinting (1 Cor. 9:24,26; Gal. 2:2; 5:7; 2 Thess. 3:1; Heb. 12:1). Here again we see the self-humiliation of the father before men, as he expressed a radical acceptance. Even we from our distance expect there to be a ‘telling off’, a facing of the issues. But there isn’t. The grace of God which meets the returning sinner leads him to repentance. It of itself, by its sheer magnitude, elicits the state of contrition which is indeed vital; but this is inspired by the huge initiative of the Father and Son.

The father’s radical acceptance is the very basis of our salvation. It is challenging, supremely so. Perhaps we handle ‘classic’ repentance easier- someone does wrong, goes off for a long time, is out of sight and out of mind, comes back, asks for our forgiveness with tears and humility. It’s actually psychologically hard to say ‘No’. *That* kind of forgiveness is relatively easy. But what is so much harder is to show forgiveness and the nature of the father’s love and grace time and again in daily life; to keep looking and hoping for the one who has offended us, ruined us, destroyed us, used and abused us… to be coming home. Actually I know virtually none amongst us who rise up to the father’s love and grace in this. It remains a stark, sobering challenge to us all.

It needs to be understood that the father had to act as the village expected him to. They expected him to enact the *kezazah*, to hand the son over to them in some form for judgment, to make an example of this awful man. No village member is an island, all have to act within the expectations of the group. But the father breaks through all that. He again humiliates himself before the villagers by doing what he did. He likely angers them- for anger so often comes as a result of being confronted by the grace shown by others. We see it so often in the life of our spiritual community. Indeed, the Lord got at this in another parable, where He speaks of how some were angry at the extreme grace shown by the generous vineyard owner (Mt. 20:1-16).

The Father offered forgiveness without repentance to the prodigal son before there was any direct evidence of repentance- just a sign of general regret or desire to be in the Father’s house. Indeed, it would see that the very fact the son *wanted* to return to the Father’s house was quite enough to warrant his acceptance there- and the killing of the fatted calf.

The Lord's zeal for our redemption and His enthusiasm to see us as righteous is brought out in the parable of the prodigal. The Father (manifest in the Lord) runs out to meet the son. That story was masterfully tied back in to Is. 64:5-8: "You meet him that rejoices and works righteousness, those that remember you in your ways… we have sinned… we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags… but now, O

Lord, You are our father". The patient, hopeful father saw in the son a boy rejoicing and working righteousness; but this was hardly how *he* felt! And so it will be with Israel in the last days. And so it is with each of us now, in our times of repentance. That surpassing grace is ours; we are seen as working righteousness when all we have is a bitter self-loathing and desire to somehow get back to God. But the crucial point is: *how often* do we have such a true repentance? We repeatedly sin, that we admit. But how frequently is there this kind of repentance which calls forth such grace, to see us as so righteous when we are so unrighteous, the grace of Jesus so great, so free...?
The parables so often allude to contemporary Jewish conceptions of grace, and show how God's grace is so far beyond them. The Father is watching for the return of the prodigal, even while the son was "far off" (Gk. *makron*); and this is the same word used about the "far (Gk. *makros*) country" where the son was (Lk. 15:13,20). The Divine eyesight sees the person who is far off in sin, and longs for their return. This was quite contrary to all Jewish and human notions of showing grace to those who return - *after* they return. There was a contemporary Jewish story about a son who wished to return to his father; and the father sends a message to him saying "Return as far as you can and I will come the rest of the way to you". The Lord's parable showed how the care of the Father for His children is so far more than that. And He is there watching billions of cases, simultaneously... such is the passionate heart of God for the individual.

We must grow in our realization of the *enthusiasm* of God for our salvation. Consider how the Father ran unto the pathetic son and fell on (Gk. violently seized) his neck and kissed him (Lk. 15:20; the same Greek as in Acts 20:37). The Father restlessly watching for the prodigal's return matches the woman searching for the lost coin “till she find it” or the unusual shepherd who searches for his lost sheep “until He finds it” (Lk. 15:4,8,20). This involves God in huge activity- setting up providential encounters, nudging consciences through circumstance. The huge amount of ‘work’ is one thing; but the mental energy of concern and thoughtfulness is phenomenal beyond our comprehension. God rises up early seeking His people- rather like us somehow being able to wake up early in the morning without an alarm clock, because our internal clock is restlessly wanting to be up and on our mission for the day. In all this we are to manifest God- for we too are to seek and save the lost.

The elder brother in the prodigal story shows an unbelievably self righteous attitude. Yet, this truly is the position of the legalists of Christ's day and this. The love of the Father [God] for the son [repentant Israel] is quite something. Would a father really rush out and kiss him, i.e. forgive him (Lk. 15:20 cp. 2 Sam. 14:33) without first requiring an explanation and specific repentance? For this unusual Father, the mere fact the son wanted to return was enough. And when the vineyard workers refused to work and beat and killed the Owner’s servants that were sent, the response we expect is that the

Owner sends in some armed men and re-establishes control. But He doesn't. Why ever keep sending servants after some are killed? But this is the loving, almost desperate persistence of the Father for our response. This is what the parables of Israel teach. In the end, He does something humanly crazy. He sends a single Man walking towards them- His only Son. Or think of the parable of the older son. The loving Father divides all that He has between the two sons- and the son who remained at home therefore ended up with *all* that the Father had, seeing the younger son had blown the other half of it (Lk. 15:31). This was the extent of God's love for Pharisaic, hypocritical Israel. He gave them His all- the blood of His only Son. Elderly oriental gentlemen never run in public. But the Father will do so when the younger son returns. Such will be His joy, and such is His joy over every sinner who repents!

15:21 *And the son said to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I am no more worthy to be called your son*- The son admitted that he had sinned "in your sight", exactly as David confessed after his sin with Bathsheba (Ps. 51:4). In the same way as David openly recognized that he deserved to die, so the prodigal wanted to be made a hireling. Yet in reality, God did not take David's life, the prodigal was not allowed to even get round to saying he wanted to be made a slave (:21 cp. 19), shoes being immediately placed on his feet (:22) to distinguish him from the barefoot slaves.

15:22 *But the father said to his servants: Bring quickly the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet*-

A receiving home party was a major, carefully planned event. The element of unreality is that the father spontaneously holds the feast, with symphony and choruses (:25 Gk.), hence "Bring quickly...". A fatted calf, a calf fed with grain, could feed 100 people. But it's doubtful 100 people would have been found to attend the last minute, spontaneous feast. Killing a fatted calf was unreal for a spontaneous feast. See on :26. Perhaps likewise clothing him with the "best" robe. The Greek *protos* can mean his former robe, the first robe, or [more commonly] the best, number one robe in the household. Indeed there was more joy over the found lost sheep than over the 99 who didn't get lost; and there was more joy over the returned prodigal than over the older son. Rom. 5:20 explains the obvious: "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound".

The Father didn't want him back as a slave, but as a son again. He insists the son is given shoes (:22), worn only by the wealthy, rather than the sandals associated with slaves. And surely Paul applies this to every man in Christ: "you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then also an heir" (Gal. 4:7).

The prodigal was not allowed to even get round to saying he wanted to be made a slave (:21 cp. 19), shoes being immediately placed on his feet (:22) to distinguish him from the

barefoot slaves. The honour bestowed upon the son by the father is totally unreal. Without the slightest sign that the son is now responsible, is truly repentant, has the right motives... the father gives him the best robe, which is what was done for the person whom a leader wished to honour above all (Esther 6:1-9). And the father gives the son his signet ring (cp. Gen. 41:41,42). All this, before the prodigal has in any way proved himself. All he's done is come home, still not wanting to be a son, just a craftsman; and he was only driven home by his desperation. Such is the huge significance attached by the Lord to our turning up home. And in our dealing with returning sinners, which is every one of us day by day, we should reflect the same attitude.

The record of the prodigal's treatment at the homecoming suggests that we are to see in this the sharing of Christ's personal reward with repentant sinners. Removing his rags and clothing him with the best robe recalls Zech.3:4, concerning the very same thing happening to Christ at his glorification. Being given a robe, ring and shoes takes us back to Joseph/Jesus being similarly arrayed in the day of his glory (Gen. 41:42). This parable is rich in reference to the Joseph story, with Joseph's brothers typifying Israel and all sinners. But now there is a powerful twist in the imagery. The sinners (cp. the brothers) now share the reward of the saint (cp. Joseph). This is the very basis of the Gospel of justification in Christ, through having his righteousness imputed to us, so that we can share in his rewards. This will fully be realized at the marriage supper of the lamb, although it also occurs in a sense each time we repent, and live out the parable of the prodigal's repentance again. See on Rev. 6:11.

15:23 *And bring the fatted calf, kill it and let us eat and make merry*- The joyful homecoming and celebration feast after the prodigal's repentance then equates with the Messianic banquet. The fatted calf which was killed therefore connects with the "fatlings" which were killed for the marriage supper of the Kingdom in Mt. 22:4. And those Jews who refused the invitation to join in that feast easily equate with the elder brother. "Let us eat and make merry" is alluded to by the Lord in his later description of the marriage supper: "Let us be glad and rejoice... for the marriage of the lamb is come" (Rev. 19:7). "Enter into the joy of your lord" (Mt. 25:21) is the equivalent in the parable of the virgins. There is good reason to think that our Lord consciously designed his parables to allude to each other, and thus build up a more complete picture of his teaching.

The context of the parable is set in :2. It was in response to the Pharisees' criticism of Jesus that he received sinners and ate with them. Jesus is replying by showing that the meal he ate with them was in the spirit of the joyful feasting occasioned by the finding of the lost coin, and the return of the prodigal. The prodigal's repentance is thus likened to those who were responding to Christ's gospel.

Compare "Slay and make ready" (Gen. 43:16). Joseph's welcome of his brothers is the basis of the prodigal son parable (Gen. 45:14,15 = Lk. 15:20); in this case another line of interpretation opens up, with the father representing Christ, and the prodigal is the repentant Jews, wanting to be servants and nothing else.

"The fatted calf" of Christ is 'killed' by God on our repentance in the sense that He is aware once again of the death of Christ whenever we are granted forgiveness. The spirit of Christ groans for us when we sin, as he did on the cross and in Gethsemane (Rom. 8:26). Thus God looks on the travail of Christ's soul when He bears our sins away from us (Is. 53:11). To crucify Christ afresh as it were puts Christ through the process of death on behalf of sin once again, but because the believer does not 'resurrect' to newness of life in forsaking the sin, neither does God 'visualize' the Lord's triumph over the sufferings of sin in the resurrection. Such a person has left Christ suffering, travailing in soul, groaning with tears, without any triumph or resurrection.

15:24 *For this my son who was dead, is alive again! He was lost and is found! And they began to be merry*- "Is found" connects with the earlier parables of the shepherd and the woman searching and finding the lost. The element of unreality is that there is no record of the father searching. Yet he says that now he has "found" his lost son. The point surely is that the Father's searching for man is often invisible to us. This apparently stay at home elderly man had presumably been quietly instigating all manner of searching for the lost son. But none of it was visible. And likewise with our apparently silent and distant Father.

The prodigal son was a favourite of Paul's. At least four times (Lk. 15:24 = Eph. 2:1,5; 5:14; Col. 2:13) he makes the point that he saw the repentant son as a type of every one of us: not just those who publicly disgrace themselves and go out of church life for a time.

As God took His repentant wife back to her former status, speaking of her once again as a virgin, so the Father emphasizes: "This *my son* was dead...". The prodigal was dead, but then became alive (:32), in the same way as baptism marks both a one-off coming alive with Christ, and also the start of a newness of life in which we are constantly dying to sin and coming alive to God's righteousness (Rom. 6:13). Our repentance and subsequent acceptability with God at our baptisms should therefore be on a similar level to our confessions of sinfulness to God after specific sins in our daily lives, and also related to our doing this at the day of judgment.

Yet in the daily round of sin and failure, it is sometimes difficult to sense the degree to which God is actively seeking our return, and willing to slay the fatted calf. The earlier parables of the lost sheep and coin show God actively working to find us; whilst that of

the prodigal implies that He is not doing anything physical. Yet the clear connections with the preceding parables show that the woman zealously turning the house upside down must therefore be a figure of the mental energy expended by the Almighty in seeking out our repentance. In our semi-aware spiritual days and hours, before we 'come to ourselves', the Father's active mind is urgently seeking us. Surely this should motivate us in our stronger moments to be aware of the need *not* to sleep into the sleepy madness of spiritual indifference and sin. This indifference is effectively spending our substance with whores and riotous living. Prov. 29:3 is one of the root passages for the prodigal parable: "Whoever loves *wisdom* rejoices his father: but he that keeps company with harlots spends his *substance*". There is a parallel here between wisdom and the Father's substance; continuing a popular Biblical theme that God's spiritual riches are to be found in His words of wisdom. An indifference to the spiritual riches which we have been given in the word of Christ is therefore being likened to the prodigal squandering the Father's substance with whores.

It is hard to appreciate that this parable really is intended to be read as having some reference to our daily turning back from our sins- such is the emotional intensity of the story. Yet such is the seriousness of sin that we must see in it an ideal standard to aim for in this regard. The parable alludes to a passage in Job which helps us better appreciate this. The prodigal's confession "I have sinned... in your sight", and his returning from spiritual death to life (Lk. 15:21,32) connect well with Job 33:24-30: "His flesh (of the forgiven sinner) shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth (cp. the prodigal): he shall pray unto God, and He will be favourable unto him: and he shall see his face with joy... if any say (like the prodigal), I have sinned... and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from the pit, and his life shall see the light. Lo, all these things worketh God *oftentimes* with man". The prodigal's experience will often be worked out in our lives, the fatted calf slain time and again, and as such we will come to know and appreciate the Father's love even more.

The joyous feast around the fatted calf can therefore speak of the full fellowship with God which we enjoy each time we come to repentance. The return of Israel in Hos. 2 was one of the source passages for the parable. The feast at their return is there described as a betrothal feast. This is obviously a one-off act. Yet such is the constant newness of life which we can experience through continued repentance, that the feasts of joy which we experience can all have the intensity of a betrothal feast. In like manner our relation with Christ in the Kingdom is likened to a consummation which lasts eternally.

15:25 *Now his elder son was in the field-* The elder brother coming in from the field must be related to the parable about the servant coming home from the field in Lk. 17:7-10. The servant should then have prepared the meal, on the master's command, and then

admitted that despite having been perfectly obedient, he was still unprofitable. The prodigal parable points the great contrast. *God*, while having every right to order the servant/ elder brother to prepare the meal, is the one who has actually prepared it. *God* asks the elder son to come and eat immediately after returning from the field, rather than ordering him to prepare the meal, as He could so justly have done. Yet despite God's boundless love, the elder son refused to act and think in the spirit of the Father's love.

And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing- Literally, symphony and chorus. The element of unreality is that the father arranged all this immediately; see on :22,26. A calf, dancing and music recall the scene on Moses' return from the mount (Ex. 32:17-19); the elder brother's response as he returned from the field and beheld this sight may well have been rooted in his attempt to place himself in Moses' place. He zealously protested at what he liked to see as rank apostasy when it was actually the display of the real spirit of Christ, in receiving back a lost soul. For all this, the lesson is never learned. Schism after schism have been experienced over this very issue of having repentant brethren take their place at the memorial feast. The bad grace and bitterness of the elder brother as he stormed away from the happy feast is seen all too often amongst us.

The parable of the prodigal contains multiple allusions to the record of Jacob and Esau, their estrangement, and the anger of the older brother [Esau] against the younger brother (K.E. Bailey, *Jacob And The Prodigal* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003) lists 51 points of contact between the Jacob / Esau record and the prodigal parable). There is a younger and an elder son, who both break their relationships with their father, and have an argument over the inheritance issue. Jacob like the prodigal son insults his father in order to get his inheritance. As Jacob joined himself to Laban in the far country, leaving his older brother Esau living at home, so the prodigal glued himself to a Gentile and worked for him by minding his flocks, whilst his older brother remained at home with the father. The fear of the prodigal as he returned home matches that of Jacob as he finally prepares to meet the angry Esau. Jacob's unexpected meeting with the Angel and clinging to him physically is matched by the prodigal being embraced and hugged by his father. Notice how Gen. 33:10 records how Jacob felt he saw the face of Esau as the face of an Angel. By being given the ring, the prodigal "has in effect now supplanted his older brother" (A.J. Hultgren, *The Parables Of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) p. 79); just as Jacob did. As Esau was "in the field" (Gen. 27:5), so was the older brother.

What was the Lord Jesus getting at by framing His story in terms of Jacob and Esau? The Jews saw Jacob as an unblemished hero, and Esau / Edom as the epitome of wickedness and all that was anti-Jewish and anti-God. The Book of Jubilees has much to say about all this, as does the Genesis Rabbah (See e.g. Jacob Neusner, *Genesis*

Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary To The Book Of Genesis (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985) Vol. 3 p. 176). The Lord is radically and bravely re-interpreting all this. Jacob is the younger son, who went seriously wrong during his time with Laban. We have shown elsewhere how weak Jacob was at that time. Jacob was saved by grace, the grace shown in the end by the Angel with whom he wrestled, and yet who finally blessed him. As Hos. 12:4 had made clear, Jacob weeping in the Angel's arms and receiving the blessing of gracious forgiveness is all God speaking to us. The older brother who refused to eat with his sinful brother clearly represented, in the context of the parable, the Jewish religious leaders. They were equated with Esau- the very epitome of all that was anti-Jewish. And in any case, according to the parable, the hero of the story is the younger son, Jacob, who is extremely abusive and unspiritual towards his loving father, and is saved by sheer grace alone. This too was a radical challenge to the Jewish perception of their ancestral father Jacob.

The parable demonstrates that both the sons despised their father and their inheritance in the same way. They both wish him dead, treat him as if he isn't their father, abuse his gracious love, shame him to the world. Both finally come to their father from working in the fields. Jacob, the younger son, told Laban that "All these years I have served you... and you have not treated me justly" (Gen. 31:36-42). But these are exactly the words of the older son in the parable! The confusion is surely to demonstrate that both younger and elder son essentially held the same wrong attitudes. And the Father, clearly representing God, and God as He was manifested in Christ, sought so earnestly to reconcile both the younger and elder sons. The Lord Jesus so wished the hypocritical Scribes and Pharisees to fellowship with the repenting sinners that He wept over Jerusalem; He didn't shrug them off as self-righteous bigots, as we tend to do with such people. He wept for them, as the Father so passionately pours out His love to them. And perhaps on another level we see in all this the desperate desire of the Father and Son for Jewish-Arab unity in Christ. For the promises to Ishmael show that although Messiah's line was to come through Isaac, God still has an especial interest in and love for all the children of Abraham- and that includes the Arabs. Only a joint recognition of the Father's grace will bring about Jewish-Arab unity. But in the end, it will happen- for there will be a highway from Assyria to Judah to Egypt in the Millennium. The anger of the elder brother was because the younger son had been reconciled to the Father without compensating for what he had done wrong. It's the same anger at God's grace which is shown by the workers who objected to those who had worked less receiving the same pay. And it's the same anger which is shown every time a believer storms out of an ecclesia because some sinner has been accepted back...

15:26 *And he called one of the servants, and inquired what these things might mean-*

We enquire why the older brother was apparently not invited to the feast. He returns from work in the field at evening and heard the sound of music and dancing, which happened after the meal was over. Apparently he knows nothing of his brother's return. We are left to conclude that the party was thrown spontaneously by the father; see on :22. Whoever was nearby was invited. And the older brother is definitely urged to enter into the party now he has returned home. The father's spontaneous joy at the prodigal's return is a powerful insight into God's feelings when one sinner repents; and it continues the theme of spontaneous joy in the earlier parables of the shepherd and woman who *immediately* throw parties when they have found the lost. Possibly this intense joy at having found the lost is present in the comment that the Lord endured the cross "for the joy set before Him" (Heb. 12:2). The joy of saving lost men.

Wondering what things might mean is an idea used by Luke several times, especially concerning Mary and others at the time of the Lord's birth. The ultimate meaning is grace in God's son. That was the meaning those earlier people were intended to come to, and it was the same for the prodigal.

15:27 *And he said to him: Your brother came, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound*- We are left to imagine in what tone of voice they replied. And whether in fact the elder son already knew what was going on, but was seeking to persuade some of the servants to adopt his perspective.

15:28 *But he was angry and would not go in; and his father came out and encouraged him*- The elder son would not 'go in' to the wedding (Lk. 15:28); and the Lord surely constructed that story to use a word which so often is used about going in to the Kingdom (in Matthew alone: 5:20; 7:21; 18:3,9; 19:17,23,24; 25:21). His point clearly is that those who don't enter into His Kingdom *chose themselves not to do* so, they keep themselves out of the Kingdom, because they cannot bring themselves to show a true love to their brother. In the end, the very end, we receive our dominant desire.

To refuse a father’s invitation to a family celebration was seen as totally unacceptable, rude, and a rejection of one’s father. Hence the rudeness of the guests refusing the King’s invitations. The older brother would usually have played a prominent role in such feasts. But this son refuses to attend. This would’ve struck the Lord’s initial audience as incredibly rude. Remember how Vashti’s refusal to attend her husband’s feast resulted in her being rejected (Esther 1). What the older son did would’ve been seen as an insult to all the guests; and many fathers would simply have rejected and disowned their son for this, or at least, expressed significant disapproval. Indeed, this was expected of him by society and the other guests. But yet again, the father humiliates himself and breaks all Jewish norms and expectations of correctness and decency. He leaves the feast! For the host to walk out was yet again seen as totally rude to the other guests- it of course echoes the shepherd leaving the 99 sheep and going off after the one lost sheep. The father doesn’t go out and giving the arrogant, unloving, disobedient son a good talking

to, as the audience would expect. Again, as so often, the Lord's parables set up an expectation- and then dash it. The father goes out into the darkness of the courtyard, and "entreats" his son (Lk. 15:28). The Greek *parakaleo* means literally to come alongside, as if the father is inviting the son to stand alongside him in his extension of grace. Perhaps Paul is making one of his many allusions to the Lord's parables when he uses the same word to speak of how he 'beseeches' his legalistic brethren (2 Cor. 5:20).

But all this grace is ignored by the elder son. He insults his father. It may not be so apparent to us, but it would've been picked up by the Lord's first hearers. A son should always address his father in this context with the term "O Father". But he doesn't. He speaks of his brother as "Your son" rather than his brother. He speaks of how the prodigal "devoured *your* living". And he speaks of how he has faithfully served his father *as a servant*- like his younger brother, he failed to perceive the wonder of *sonship*. His awful outburst is doing in essence what his younger brother had done some time before. He was saying that he didn't want a part in his father's family. The "living" or wealth of the family was no longer *his*. He wasn't going to respect his father as his father any more. He didn't want to be in the family, so he wouldn't go to the family reunion. That poor, dear father. And what is the father's response? He calls him his *teknon*, his dearly loved son. Notice how the more common *huios* is used for "son" throughout the story (Lk. 15:11,13,19,21,24,25,30). In the face of such awful rejection, he shows his special love. It's like the Lord giving "the sop", the sign of special love and favouritism, to Judas- as he betrays Him. There's a powerful lesson here for those of us who find ourselves irked and angered by legalistic, arrogant brethren who refuse to fellowship with the rest of us. There was no anger and irksomeness in the father's attitude. He was only deeply sorry, hurt, cut up... but he *so* loved that arrogant elder brother. He goes on to say that he gives that son all that he has. But he could only actually do that through being dead! The father is willing to die for that arrogant older brother, whose pride and anger stops him wanting anything to do with his father, whom he has just openly shamed and rejected. And the father wants to die for him. This is to be our attitude to the self-righteous, the divisive, those who reject their brethren.

But of course, there's a real and obvious warning not to be like the older brother. It worries me, it turns me, right in my very gut, when I see so many refusing to fellowship with their brethren because 'He's in that church... they've had her back... she's divorced and remarried... he's never said sorry, his motives aren't right, she only said those words...'. And those attitudes are made out to be expressions of righteousness. It is not for me to judge anyone; I seek to love those who act like this with the love and grief of the father for the elder son. But they must be gently warned as to the implications of their position. By refusing to fellowship with the rest of the family, by making such a fuss

about the return of the prodigals, they fail to realize that they are in essence doing what the prodigals have done; and they are de facto signing themselves out of the Father's family. The issues are that serious. The parable isn't just a story with a possible interpretation which we can shrug our shoulders at and get on with life. The Lord's teaching, His 'doctrine', was and is in these parables.

The lost son story finishes, as do the other stories, with a banquet of rejoicing- rejoicing in the father's love. But it's no accident that Luke 15 is preceded by the parable of Lk. 14:15-24, where we have another great banquet- symbolic of our communion in the future Kingdom of God. The connection is clear. We will "eat bread in the Kingdom of God" if we eat bread with the Lord in the banquets of this life. And yet *so, so often* it is said amongst us: 'I won't break bread there. They have X or Z... who is divorced... who's not repentant... they have Q from that fellowship attending there... I'm not going in there'. It is not for us to judge. And I do not do so in what I write here. But it is the fairly obvious teaching of the Lord here that if we won't eat bread with Him in joy now, if we won't celebrate His grace and love for the lost in this life, then we will not in the future banquet. His grace is likely large enough to cover even the self-righteous; but we need to realize the eternal gravity of our decisions and feelings about our brethren in this life. Especially must we come to see ourselves as the prodigal. If we plan on being in the Kingdom, we must identify ourselves with the prodigal, and not with the self-righteous elder son who is left outside of the Father's fellowship, because he placed himself there. The loving Father 'goes out' to both His sons. By going out of the feast to the older brother, the father was again shamed in the eyes of others. They are both lost, and it is the older son who remains lost and doesn't accept the Father's love. And that is the tragic climax of the story. This, rather than the moment of meeting between Father and younger son, is the climax, the famous final scene. It ends not on a happy note, with love conquering all, and everyone being all right in the end. It ends with a lost son. Indeed, the loving Father very nearly ended up losing both sons- a hint that the entire Divine:human project, the whole encounter, very nearly ends in failure. The other parable of a father with two sons gives the same impression- one rudely refuses him, but then repents. The other simply lies to him. We perhaps see this in how the three parables of Luke 15 develop. The lost sheep features 99 not lost, with great efforts to find the 1 % lost. The lost coin features 9 not lost, with great effort to find the 10% lost. The parable of the sons features at least 50% loss, one out of two sons; and very nearly 100% loss. This serves to highlight the extent to which human beings have been given ultimate freedom and decision making power by the Father. Indeed, if we take the 99 sheep who need no repentance as referring to the already saved Angels [for no man 'needs no repentance'], then the parable of the sons highlights how when it comes to man, God very nearly loses us all.

The anger of the older son is very clearly the anger of the Jews against the preaching of the Gospel to unclean Gentiles, recorded throughout Acts. And throughout my own ministry I observed such absolute anger against the offer of the Gospel to the very lowest in society. He refused to "go in" despite the entreaty of the Father; just as the religious Jews effectively refused to enter God's Kingdom despite much entreaty. “How often would I have gathered you children together… but you would not” (Lk. 13:34).

15:29 *But he answered and said to his father: Look! For so many years I have served you, and I never transgressed a commandment of yours, and yet you never gave me a kid that I might make merry with my friends-*

He is very much the Rabbi of Lk. 18:11,12: “All these things have I kept from my youth up". Those who don't see they have any need for repentance simply fail to grasp the whole nature of God and the extent of His claim upon human life and heart. He clearly represents the self-righteous Pharisees, who refused to eat with sinners. In the same way as the Jews refused to appreciate the spirit in which Christ was feasting with the repentant sinners who responded to his message (:2), so the elder brother refused to attend the celebrations. Thus he is set up as representative of hard hearted Israel; and all those in the new Israel who share his characteristics proclaim themselves to be aligned with the legalistic Pharisaism which failed to discern the real spirit of Christ when he was among them.

Yet the Lord is also talking obliquely to Himself. It was so much harder for the Lord to be as patient with sinners as He was, seeing that He Himself never sinned and experienced God's forgiveness. There is good reason to think that Jesus was speaking about the elder brother partly to warn himself. He was the favoured son, having the right of the firstborn. He alone could say to God "neither transgressed I at any time your commandment". The Father's comment "All that I have is yours" (:31) connects with the references to God giving *all things* into the hands of the Son. His constant abiding in the Father's house echoes Jn. 8:35: "The servant abides not in the house for ever: but the Son abides ever". Our Lord seems to have been indirectly exhorting himself not to be like the elder brother, thereby setting us the example of framing necessary warning and rebuke of others in terms which are relevant to ourselves. If our perfect Master was so sensitive to His own possibility of failure, how much more should we be, ever analyzing our attitudes to our brethren, "considering (ourselves) lest we also be tempted".

All the language of service and obedience befits a servant. Unlike the prodigal, the older son will not address the father as "Father", when this was required and expected in such a conversation. The much beloved older son in fact had the mentality of a servant; he failed to realize what it meant to be the beloved son of such a Father. Even though he was a son, he perceived his Father as a slave owner and himself as a slave. His talk of never having disobeyed his father's commandments is a reflection more of his own

mind; for the parable leaves no doubt that this is not how the father actually was. This speaks exactly and powerfully of the mindset of the Pharisees and their latter day equivalents. The younger son likewise wanted to be made a servant, but he was aware that he was in fact a son- although an unworthy one. "You never gave me a kid" is presumably harking back to the past, because we understand from :12 that the father divided his wealth between the two sons on the request of the younger son. He had given all he had to his sons even before his death. And still the older son complains that he had not been given a kid. He has a legalistic memory only of his own offence, possibly referencing some incident in his youth.

15:30 *But when this your son came, who has devoured your living with prostitutes, you killed for him the fatted calf*- Association with harlots is a common Biblical symbol of committing sin (see James 1:13-15); all our sins are unfaithfulness against Christ our husband. They are not just passing adulteries; the Spirit uses the even more powerful figure of harlotries. There are quite a number of other references in James to this parable, which indicate that the prodigal's experience can apply in an ongoing sense to the believer after baptism. The son '*spending all'* uses the same word which occurs in James 4:3 concerning the believer who 'asks amiss' (cp. the prodigal's request to his father), that he might "*consume* it (same word) upon (his) lusts". James 4:4 continues: "Ye adulterers... know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?". This is all prodigal language. The next verses then seem to go in their allusions, implying that the prodigal is ultimately far more acceptable than the elder brother in the ecclesia: "The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy (cp. the elder brother)... God... giveth grace (forgiveness?) unto the humble... draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you (cp. the prodigal's return being matched by the Father coming to meet him)... let your laughter (cp. the son's "riotous living") be turned to mourning... he that speaketh evil of his brother (is) *not* a doer of the law (as the elder brother thought he was), but a judge" (James 4:5-11).

The parables are full of almost incidental indications of how well the Lord knew our nature and how accurately He foresaw the future struggles of His body. He foresaw that the elder brothers would be self-righteous and unwilling to accept back into fellowship the repentant. Yet instead of making the father address the older boy with words like "You hypocrite! You yourself are disobedient! Get away from me, you callous hypocrite!", the Lord puts the words of grace themselves in the father's mouth: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine" (Lk. 15:30). The Lord foresaw that the elder brethren's relationship with the Father would be damaged by their harshness. But in the way the story ends, I see real hope for the hard line, right wing Christian who condemns his brother, in the light of the Lord's teaching that we will be judged as we have judged. Wrong such brethren certainly are; but their Lord is gracious enough, it seems, to still work with them. In the same breath as the Lord warned that by our words we will be

justified and condemned, and that we will have to account for them at the judgment, He also said that whoever speaks words against Him, He will forgive. I'd like to concentrate on other examples of where the Lord Jesus in His sensitivity foresaw this problem of dealing with apparently weak believers.

The prodigal son parable has as its end stress the problem of the self-righteous elder son. This is in fact the crux of the whole story. He refuses the invitation from his father to come in to the feast- an image used elsewhere in the parables to describe rejection of God's invitation. To refuse such an invitation was a public insult and rejection of his Father. He refuses to address his father as "Father" and refuses to call his brother "brother" [cp. "thy son"]. By breaking his relationship with his brother, he broke his relationship with his Father. As we do likewise. And the end stress of the whole wonderful parable is that we are left wondering how the story finished. The elder brother is left standing there, temporarily rejecting his father, wondering... whether to storm off into the evening darkness, or to turn back and go in to the feast and accept his brother. And this is really the essential point of the story, and the appeal which it makes to us. We may just mindlessly forget some disfellowship case of years ago, leave the decision to others, forget in our own minds that there is a brother or sister begging for our renewed fellowship and forgiveness. Yet it is exactly these issues and our response to them which may decide our eternal destinies. And this was the end stress of the parable...

15:31 *And he said to him: Son, you are ever with me, and all that is mine is yours*- See on :29. Who does the father represent? The context for the three stories is the Lord Jesus justifying his eating with sinners. The fact that the father had received the sinful younger brother is phrased in the same way as the Pharisees' complaint about the Lord Jesus receiving sinners (Lk. 15:2 = Lk. 15:27). And each of the stories involve a closing scene featuring a joyful meal of celebration. The father would appear therefore to refer to Jesus; and yet clearly enough we are intended to see the father as also our Heavenly Father. I don't go for the primitive equation 'Jesus = God'. I'm not a Trinitarian. So I take this to be an exemplification of how "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their iniquities unto them" (2 Cor. 5:19). Notice in how many ways the father humiliates himself before everyone, and breaks all traditional Jewish expectations to do so. He gives the younger son what he asks, and more than the Law allowed; he runs to meet the son; he accepts the son; he leaves the banquet where he is the host in order to plead with his older son; he doesn't discipline either of his sons as expected. He makes a fool of himself time and again, upsetting Jewish rules and norms. And the younger son pestering the father to divide up the inheritance may indicate that the father was about to die. Likewise, when the father says to the older son that he gives him there and then all that is his... this is language only really appropriate if the father is

about to die, or has actually died. Does not all this speak of the cross as the basis for the Father's love, grace and acceptance? That there, God was in Christ to reconcile us to Himself, not imputing sin to us... there the Father was humiliated in Christ, made a fool of, ridiculed. The Almighty God came this low... to the public shame and death of the cross. The suffering of God in the cross was all about rejected and unaccepted love; and so it is to this day.

Much homework awaits someone to work out all the times when the Lord was speaking *to Himself* in the parables, through the elements of unreality. Perhaps He saw Himself tempted to be like the elder brother in the Prodigal parable, who was "always" in the Father's house (as Jesus per Jn. 8:35) and 'everything the father has is his' is the very wording of Jn. 17:10. Or is it co-incidence that the only time the Greek word translated "choked" is used outside the sower parable, it's about the crowds 'thronging' Jesus (Lk. 8:14,42- note how they're in the same chapter and section of the Lord's life)? Was the Lord not aware of how the pressure of the crowds, whom He carefully tried to avoid, could choke His own spiritual growth? Was it for this reason that He begged those He cured not to generate big crowds to throng Him? And thus yet another layer of the Lord's mind and thinking will be revealed to us.

15:32 *But it was fitting to celebrate and be glad. For this your brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost and is found*- We are left, as so often, to imagine how the story finished. How hard it would've been for the younger son to live with the older brother! And one day, dear, darling dad would've died. The younger son would've had *his* sons, been called upon to uphold the family honour, make decisions in the village. We are left to imagine how his experience of grace would've made him judge differently to all others.

The three parables of the lost which climax in the parable of the lost son all depend for their power upon the many elements of unreality found within them; and the lost son parable requires us to fill in many details, try to finish the story, and to take due note of the crescendo of 'end stress' which there is. To appreciate the full power and import of these parables, we need to try to read them through the eyes of the Palestinian peasants who first heard them. Correct understanding of Scripture requires us to read it and feel it within the context in which it was first given. Bombarded as we are by billions of pieces of information each day, especially from the internet, we only cope with it all by letting it all fit into the worldviews and assumptions which we've adopted. Words and information and ideas tend to only fit in to what we've already prepared to house them, rather than us seeing *God's* word as something radically different, and allowing it to totally upset and change our cherished worldviews, constructs and approaches to life. God's word is still words- although they are inspired words. The problem with words is that we read or hear them, and interpret them within our frames of reference and culture. Take an example: "She's mad about her flat!". An American takes this to mean

that she’s angry and frustrated about the puncture / ‘flat tire’ which she has on her car. But in British English, the phrase would mean: ‘She’s really happy and enthusiastic about her apartment’. To understand what the speaker or writer means by those words, we have to understand their cultural background. And so it is with the Lord’s teaching, aimed as it was to first century peasants.

"This your brother" is clearly the father's gentle correction of how the older brother refused to call the prodigal his brother, but rather "This your son" (:30). We wonder if the older brother repented and also came back in to the father's house, and perhaps the story is left open at the end… because this is in fact the question to each of us. Whore or Pharisee, the question still has to be, whether we will return to the father's house, despite the people we know we will find in it. And the story has no happy ending, unlike the previous two parables, and this might appear somewhat unreal- and it thereby points up the real lesson. The feast of rejoicing is nuanced. For a son is lost. The Lord's eating with sinners [which is the context of this parable] was joyful, even though they had not yet repented; but was nuanced by His background sadness about the loss of the religious Jews. Quite possibly the eternal joy of God's Kingdom shall still always have this nuance to it…

To come back to the Father's fellowship, the older son had to accept the younger son. And indeed, fellowship with God and a place in His family may be squandered because of prideful refusal to learn this lesson. That is purely the choice of the "older son" group. For the Father's view is that “you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours” (:31). As ever, it is man who chooses his own condemnation rather than God. In the immediate context, the Pharisees refused to come and sit down to break bread with the Lord and the motley crew of whores and gamblers surrounding Him at that table. He is urging them to come and sit down with Him. For their place in God's family depended upon it. Clearly enough, a 'closed table' policy, fellowship only with the pure, may well cost us eternal fellowship with the Father.

LUKE CHAPTER 16

16:1 *And he said also to the disciples*- The Lord Jesus without doubt focused upon the twelve disciples; they were His special love, His predominant concern. And when they came to write up their records of their experience of this amazing Master, they bring this out very much. He clearly chose them in order to impress His character upon them, and then left them to continue the witness to Him. Even in high society, surrounded by the elitist Pharisees, He spoke parables which were to them- even though the others heard (Lk. 16:1,14; 20:45). There is a repeated feature, in Luke particularly, of the Lord teaching the twelve in front of a multitude- as if the huge crowds were there just listening to what the Lord was speaking specifically to the twelve. When one of the crowd interrupts, the Lord quickly returns His focus to the twelve (Lk. 6:19,20 cp. 7:1; 12:1,13,22). For Jesus, the disciples were His focus and priority.

There was a certain rich man, who had a steward; and the same was accused of wasting his goods- The corrective to the elder brothers' attitude is provided by the following parable of the unjust steward which comes straight afterwards in Lk. 16. The steward was accused of 'wasting' his master's goods (Lk. 16:1), using the same Greek word translated "substance" in Lk. 15:13, concerning how the son wasted his father's substance. The steward forgave others, and therefore ultimately found a way of escape from his dilemma. The implication is that it was on account of the prodigal being willing to do this, not daring to point the finger at others in the Father's household because of his awareness of his own sins, that he was eventually saved. We can also infer that the elder brother walked out of the Father's fellowship because of his refusal to do this. Again we see how God works through our sins. Because of the prodigal's experience of sin and forgiveness, he was better able to show that vital love and tolerance towards others, without which we cannot receive God's ultimate acceptance. In a sense, it was much *more* difficult for the elder brother.

The parable of the unjust steward must be read in the context of the preceding parable of the wasteful prodigal son. I would argue that rather than seeing the three parables of Luke 15 as a trio, rather we should see the first two parables there [lost coin and lost sheep] as a pair, and [ignoring the chapter division] the parables of the wasteful son and wasteful steward as a pair. The steward is not an attractive character, just as the younger son isn't. He does wrong with money; he is immoral. But the return of the prodigal is matched by the forgiveness given by the steward. The prodigal's return was from desperation rather than true repentance, and likewise with the steward. The Lord's surprising commendation of the steward echoes the Father's enthusiasm for the returned prodigal. We see in all this that the Lord on one hand is eager to accept any who want reconciliation with Him- regardless of their poor motivation and incomplete repentance. This of course is but one pole; it must be balanced against the holiness of God, the God who slew Uzzah for touching the ark. The balancing of the poles is one of those unreachable equilibriums built into our spiritual experience, rather like the problem of suffering. We certainly cannot achieve the expanation by any intellectual process, any cleverly wordsmithed explanation or balancing statement. It is to be accepted. It's rather like the balance between the poles of many being saved, as many as the sand on the shore; whilst on the other hand, the path and gate are narrow and few find it. But one crude conclusion is that God doesn't expect perfectionism, in action nor even motive. As Paul is driven to accept in Romans 7. Salvation is by grace, exactly because of this.

The man is in debt to his Master, surely speaking of our sinfulness (Lk. 16:3,4 cp. Mt. 18:24). He was unjust; and the Lord died for us, the just for the unjust. We are unprofitable servants (Lk. 17:10); indeed, servants frequently feature in the Lord's parables, and they usually refer to us. He has wasted his goods- which are given to us at baptism (Lk. 16:1 cp. Mt. 25:14). He *could have* begged, but he was too proud. Therefore *in order to get forgiveness* he raced round forgiving everybody else. This suggests a spiritual selfishness which surely isn't ideal. And yet "the Lord commended the unjust steward". On one hand, we are to trade the master's talants given to us. But like the prodigal, we waste His wealth, and like the steward, we keep too much for ourselves. Our only way out is to throw ourselves upon His grace, which involves forgiving others.

16:2 *And he called him and said to him: What is this that I hear of you? Render the account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward*- See on 20:25. The parable of the unjust steward suggests that there are times in this life when we are called to give an account of our stewardship- and how we react to those judgment calls is what will affect our ultimate destiny (Lk. 16:2). We have a tendency to consider God as passive to our failures and acts of righteousness, simply because His judgments are not openly manifest. We may forget that on, say, 6.6.96 we swore under our breath in anger… but God, in this sense, doesn't forget. The passage of time doesn't act as a pseudo-atonement for Him as it does in our consciences. The tendency for human beings to assume that God forgets our wrong actions and will never judge them is frequently commented upon in Scripture. "They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness", i.e. to judge them for it at a future date (Hos. 7:2). The day of judgment is likened to God 'awaking' (Ps. 68:1; 73:20). Not that He is now sleeping; but then, the principles of His judgment which now appear to lie dormant will be openly manifested. Peter warns that the condemnation of false teachers is given by God in an ongoing sense, and that damnation doesn't slumber (2 Pet. 2:3).

The 'unjust steward' was saved because he forgave others their debts after getting into a mess himself. He wasted his Lord's goods, as the prodigal did (Lk. 15:13 connects with 16:2). Seeing the prodigal represents all of us, the lesson is surely that we all waste our Lord's goods, therefore the basis of salvation is through our forgiving others as an outcome of our own faith in the Lord's grace. This is one explanation of why the parable of the steward flows straight on from that of the prodigal.

One of the most telling examples of an unfinished ending is to be found in the parable of the unjust steward. This is perhaps the hardest parable to interpret; but I suggest the thought is along the following lines. The steward has done wrong; but the element of unreality is that he isn't jailed or even scolded, it's just left as obvious that he can't do the job of steward any longer. The usual response of a master would be to jail servants for running up debts (Mt. 8:23-25). But the Master is unusually gracious. The steward now faces poverty, and so he takes a huge gamble. Before news of his fall is common knowledge, he urgently runs around to those in his master's debt and tells them that their debts are forgiven. His haste is reflected in the way he says "Write quickly... and you... ". He has to write off their debts before his master finds out, and before the debtors know that he now has no right to be forgiving them their debts. His gamble is that his master is indeed such a generous and gracious guy that he will actually uphold these forgivenesses or reductions of debt, and that therefore those who have received this forgiveness will be grateful to the steward, and be generous to him later, maybe giving him employment. The story reflects a theme of the other parables- how the servant knows and understands his master extremely well, and can

guess his response. The way the servant invites the beggars to the feast even before his master has told him to do so is an example. But the power of the parable is in the unended story. Does the gracious Master indeed forgive those in his debt? And seeing he is impressed by how the steward has acted, does he in fact re-instate him, impressed as he obviously is by this sinful steward's perception of his grace? From the other parables we are led to believe that yes, the Lord and Master is indeed this gracious. And of course we are to see ourselves in the desperate position of the steward, staking our whole existences upon His grace and love beyond all reason. For me, this approach to the parable is the only one which can make any sense of the master dismissing the steward for fraud, and then praising him for his apparently 'dishonest' behaviour in forgiving the debtors (Lk. 16:2,8). See on Lk. 10:34.

"The account" suggests this is talking about the last day.

16:3 *And the steward said to himself-*

Again we note the Bible's stress upon self talk and internal dialogue- especially in the parables recorded in Luke. The parallel is with the prodigal son 'coming to himself' and also talking to himself (Lk. 15:17), knowing he must meet his master as the son must meet his father.

What shall I do, seeing that my master takes away the stewardship from me? I do not have strength to dig. To beg I am ashamed- This continues the linkage with the ideas of the prodigal son parable which precedes it. The desperate son at rock bottom feeding the pigs is this disgraced steward. He is unable in his own strength to get himself out of this awful situation. He is ashamed to beg, rather like the son proposes to return to his father and ask to become a hired servant, so that he can repay his debt.

"What shall I / we do?" is a question which keeps occurring in the Gospels and Acts; particularly within Luke-Acts. It is one of those phrases which flies out of the text, forcing us to engage with it and to ask ourselves the same question (Mt. 20:32; 21:40; 27:22; Mk. 10:17; Jn. 6:28; 11:47). And especially in Luke: 3:10,12,14 [the whole account of the gospel begins with people being forced to ask this question]; 10:25; 12:17; 16:3,4; 18:18,41; 20:13,15. And Luke brings the question to a head when the crowds ask Peter: "What shall we do?", and the same question is on the lips of the repentant Saul (Acts 2:37; 9:6; 10:6; 22:10). The answer of course is to repent and be baptized; and in the context here in this parable, it is to madly forgive others. But the rich fool ignored that and identified himself with his possessions (12:15), and answered accordingly. Here, the "What shall I do?... I have resolved what to do" connects with the prodigal son's self talk "I will arise and go to my father...". Both men had likewise wasted the goods of another who trusted them.

16:4 *I have resolved what to do, so that when I am discharged as steward, others may receive me into their houses-* The parable of the unjust steward must be read in the context of the preceding parables of forgiveness. The man is in debt to his Master, surely speaking of our sinfulness (Lk. 16:3,4 cp. Mt. 18:24). He has wasted his goods- which are given to us at baptism (Lk. 16:1 cp. Mt. 25:14). Like the prodigal, the steward imagined that he would by grace be allowed to still remain with the master, but not as steward; just as the son hoped he could live with his father as a servant but not as a son. And he imagined that he would be left without his own house or family, but might be accepted into the extended family ["houses"] of those he forgave, as a servant. But the end twist of the parable is that the steward is surprised by grace- and is commended by the Lord. Just as the prodigal was surprised by grace on his return.

Like the prodigal, his motivations were impure and he was far from the model of repentance. He *could have* begged, but he was too proud. Therefore *in order to get forgiveness* he raced round forgiving everybody else. And we are to take this same

full blooded 'resolution'. This suggests a spiritual selfishness which surely isn't ideal. And yet "the Lord commended the unjust steward"- He makes concessions to our weakness. We all live within parameters of personality and spiritual development which we should exceed but will not- because none of us shall attain total moral perfection in this life. Pride in various forms is typical of those kind of parameters. This is not to suggest that we are not to try; rather is this observation merely some comfort in our weakness.

The man envisaged having to declare bankrupt and losing absolutely all things, even his family- for he reasoned that if he forgave the debts of these debtors, they might have him as a family member, just allowing him to live out his days in their homes. It is this same spirit to which we should all be driven by the realization of our sin; willing to cast ourselves upon the mercy of our brethren, to live out our days in humbled fellowship with them.

We note that despite all the man's pilfering, at the end when he has to render *the* account, he has no extra wealth- all he can hope for is to live on the grace of others.

16:5 *And calling to him each one of his master's debtors, he said to the first: How much do you owe my master?*- The steward knew how much they owed. Quite possibly, the debtors stated a reduced figure, or didn't come clean about every aspect of their debt. But whatever they acknowledged, however they wanted to see it- he forgave them. And this is a pattern for our forgiveness of others, knowing the inevitability of our own shameful judgment. Forgiveness does not involve an agreed version of events and issues. We are to simply and frankly and urgently forgive.

Honour and shame were big things in the first century Mediterranean world. As the prodigal had brought shame on his father by squandering the family inheritance, so the steward had brought shame on his master. It could be argued that by forgiving the debtors in the name of his master, he was seeking to boost the image of his master as a generous, magnaminous man; and thus compensate for the shame which he had brought upon him. For it was widely rumoured that the steward had shamed his master (:2 "What is this that I hear...").

16:6 *And he said: A hundred measures of oil. And he said to him: Take your bill and sit down quickly and write fifty*- See on Lk. 14:5. "Quickly" is the essence of all this; knowing that our judgment is just around the corner, there is no time to be lost in forgiving others. The steward reduced the debt rather than totally writing it off. That may be merely the furniture of the parable, but perhaps we are left to imagine that the further he reduced the debt, the more likely they were to later accept him as a family member (:4). And maybe we are intended to deduce that he would have been better to offer them a total forgiveness rather than some negotiated settlement.

"Take your bill" is literally "receive your bill". A "measure" was the equivalent to the Hebrew "bath" and was about 22 litres / 5.7 gallons. So a reduction of 50 was a very large amount. According to the Jewish law of agency, a representative was as the Master himself. The man forgave the debt on behalf of the Master. The Lord is saying that just as this worldly man acted on behalf of the master in forgiving others so that he might be saved at the end, so our urgent forgiveness of others is likewise on God's behalf. To whom you forgive anything, I forgive also, Paul wrote. And that principle applies to us. It could be that to some extent, God's forgiveness of others factors in whether or not we forgive them. And this gives great power and meaning to those sinned against, the victims. We note how the steward is absolutely sure that judgment will come, but acts accordingly by forgiving.

16:7 *Then said he to another: And how much do you owe? And he said: A hundred measures of wheat. He said to him: Take your bill and write eighty*- The man

who owed oil was forgiven more than the man who owed wheat (100 reduced to 50, compared to 100 redued to 80). Perhaps this reflects how our forgiveness is not of the frank and total measure of the Lord's, for in another parable we read of the Lord Himself frankly forgiving the total debt of His servant, rather than just reducing it somewhat. The steward had the power to act in his lord's name in reducing or even cancelling debt. Perhaps here we see here some reflection of the idea that what we unloose on earth is unloosed in heaven; our forgiveness of others is in a way accepted by God. How exactly this works out, and the mechanism and theology of it, is not explained. But there is some connection, however vaguely expressed, between our forgiveness of others and God's forgiveness of them. Whilst the steward is commended (:8), he could have totally forgiven them. We too tend to make limited deals of forgiveness with others, at least in our own minds; writing down the debt of one more than for another. When we ought to scribble the whole thing.

A measure is a "cor", about 25 kg. So a reduction of 20 measures was of 500 kg.- a huge amount. It could be that in fact the steward had overcharged the clients in the first place. Now he was asking them to pay the real price.

16:8 *And his master commended the unrighteous steward, because he had done wisely. For the sons of this world are for their own generation wiser than the sons of the light-*

However the parable is read, this is an unexpected twist to the story. The master's reaction is hard to understand and totally not what we expect; we have already perhaps begun to speculate how the master may punish him. Will it be with imprisonment or simply firing him? But we are shocked. And that is the point. The Lord's grace makes no sense and is not at all what we expect. And that is the point. The connection is with the accepted in the judgment parable; they are commended for their good works done to Jesus, when they insist they didn't do those works at all. Then we shall all live out the steward's experience, and understand this parable.

There were times when the Lord used shock tactics to get His message over. He did and said things which purposefully turned accepted wisdom and understanding on its head. Thus He touched the leper, spoke of drinking His blood... and used leaven, the usual symbol for sin, as a symbol of the quiet influence of His Gospel. And His parables feature the same element. Because the parables are so familiar to us, we can overlook the fact that their true character is intended to be shocking and disturbing- they are most definitely not just comfortable, cosy, moralistic tales. Consider the way He chooses to take a lesson from a crook who fiddles the books. The 'hero' of the story was a bad guy, not a good guy. Yet the point of the story was that we must realize how critical is our situation before God, and do literally anything in order to forgive others. We can't let things drift- disaster is at the door unless we forgive others *right now*. Everything is at stake in our lives unless we forgive others. The parables didn't give simple teaching to those who first heard them. He used that form of teaching so that men would *not* understand Him; and even His disciples had to come to Him in order to receive the interpretations.

The way "the children of this world" are so zealous in forgiving others their debts so as to get themselves out of major trouble is an example to us, the Lord said. It could be that His comment that they were "wiser than the children of light" was a rebuke to the children of light- that those in the world are more eager to forgive, more zealous in their secular lives, than many of us are. The unjust steward in the parable of Luke 16 ran round forgiving others their debts, so that in his time of crisis and judgment he would have a way out of his own debt problems. And in the context of forgiving our

brethren, the Lord holds him up as an example. But He laments that sadly, the children of this world are often wiser than the children of the Kingdom, i.e. the believers. I take this as meaning that the Lord is sorry that His people don't see the same obvious need to forgive each other, in view of their own inadequacies and the coming of judgment. The children of this world see the coming of their judgments and the urgency of the need to prepare, far more strongly than many of us do; we who face the ultimate crisis of sinful, responsible man meeting with an Almighty God.

The story of the indebted steward likewise stresses the importance of true forgiveness. The master commends the steward because he had told others that their debts to his master were reduced. No *human* master would ever commend his steward for acting so irresponsibly. But the Lord Jesus does commend us for forgiving those who sin against Him, even though our forgiving of those indebted to us and Him is against all the laws of human common sense. See on Mt. 18:23. Or we can read this as meaning that the human master commends the steward for acting like this, because the steward acted on his behalf- and by reducing the debts, his honour appeared greater. And this was critically important in their society.

16:9 *And I say to you: Make to yourselves friends by means of worldly riches; that, when they shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings*- The parable has been about forgiveness, following on from that of the prodigal son. But the Lord makes this parable have another meaning- concerning the need to use wealth wisely. "When they shall fail" suggests that the fraudulent materialism will in the end run out of wealth. Or we can read with AV "When ye fail", a reference to death.

The Bible has a lot to say about the sacrifice of 'our' material possessions; not because God needs them in themselves, but because our resignation of them to His service is an epitome of our whole spirituality. So great is the Lord's emphasis about this, that He suggests in the parable of the crafty steward that if we use our worldly things prudently, when we spiritually fail, the fact we have used them wisely will bring us into the Kingdom. This implication that we can almost buy our way into the Kingdom is hyperbole. This is a device the Lord commonly used in His parables: an exaggerated statement to make a point. When He spoke of the good shepherd leaving the 99 good sheep to go chase the foolish one, this doesn't really mean that He does in fact leave us. He will never leave us. But so great is His love of the lost that it's *as if* He leaves us for the sake of finding them. Or the command to gouge out our eye if it offends us. This is a gross exaggeration; but our self-deprival of those things which lead us into sin requires the same self-will and self-mastery. So here, the Lord is saying that the use of our material possessions is *so* important that it's *almost as if* (in the hyperbole) we can buy our way into the Kingdom. See on Lk. 11:41.

We have nothing now, we own nothing, all we have is given for us to use wisely, so that when we fail (morally, in the failures of our lives), our use of these things may prepare the way for our entry into the everlasting place of the Kingdom. We fall so easily into the trap of thinking 'this is *my* money… *I* worked for it, saved it…'. It's God's money. The danger of materialism is to think it is *ours.* Israel were told that every seventh year they were to cancel debts, release each other from the debt they had; and yet it was "the *LORD's* release". You released a man from his debt, Yahweh released him. What it meant was that your money was Yahweh's money. He released the debt, you released it. In being generous spirited, then, and realizing 'our' money is God's, we are Yahweh-manifest. We are invited to see ourselves as the Levites- whose inheritance was Yahweh, and not anything material in this world. Relationship

with God and the honour of doing His service was seen as the ultimate antidote to materialism. Eliphaz seems to have perceived this when he told the wealthy Job: “Lay thou thy treasure in the dust… and the Almighty shall be thy treasure” (Job 22:24,25 RV).

There is no doubt that our attitude to materialism is a sure indicator of our real spiritual position. We are to make friends of mammon [riches] by giving it away, forsaking all we have- the implication being that riches / mammon are our spiritual enemy, no matter how little of them we possess. And yet we are surrounded as never before by a materialistic, money *loving* world.

"Eternal dwellings" is literally 'eternal tents', the very same idea as in Is. 33:20 of salvation as a tabernacle / tent that shall not be taken down, the eternal tabernacle of 2 Cor. 5:1; Jn. 14:2.

16:10 *He that is faithful in a very little, is faithful also in much, and he that is unrighteous in a very little, is unrighteous also in much*- This is the idea of Lk. 19:17, being faithful in a "very little" now leads to weighty and eternal responsibilities. The sums written down by the steward were significant- but in God's eyes, wealth is a "very little", but it shows a lot about us. God Himself ‘detests’ the mammon which man so highly esteems (Lk. 16:13-15 NIV). A day will come when man *will* despise material possession. "In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold... to the moles and to the bats; to go into the clefts of the rocks... for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty" (Is. 2:20,21). But for us, today is the day of the Lord's coming in judgment. If we will be forsaking all we have in that day; we ought to now, in spirit. The parable of the unjust steward surely teaches that our attitude to the “mammon of unrighteousness” will determine our eternal destiny. The wealth of this world is called “that which is least… that which is another’s [i.e. God’s]” (Lk. 16:10,12 RV). We are told: “make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when it shall fail [at the Lord’s return], they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles” (Lk. 16:9 RV). There will come a day when money will fail, and when we will despise it for what it was- “that which is least”.

16:11 *If therefore you have not been faithful in the handling of worldly riches, who will commit to your trust the true riches?*- Lk.16:11,12 draws a parallel between the "true riches" and "that which is your own"; both phrases, in the context, refer to our reward in the Kingdom. The true riches is the spiritual knowledge of God. In Christ are hid all the riches of God. David rejoiced at the truths of the word more than at finding great riches. We can look forward to a highly personal knowledge of God in the Kingdom; the riches of knowledge "which is your own". This is in the same sense as Rev. 2:17 speaks of each believer receiving a stone with "a new name written, which no man knows saving he that receives it". No other being will be able to enter into the personal knowledge of God which we will then have; as even in this life, it is scarcely possible to enter into another believer's spirituality and relationship with God. To some degree, the Kingdom will be something different for each of us, although this diversity will be bound together by the great unity of all being the collective bride of Christ, and all manifesting the same God, all having the same "penny a day".

If we are faithful with the riches we have been given, *then* we will be given the true riches of eternal salvation. This "unrighteous mammon" is not our own, it is the wealth of "another man", i.e. God, just as the steward was dealing with money which

was not his but his lord's; whereas in the Kingdom, we will have our very own "true riches". This is an altogether lovely idea. Whatever we have now is not ours; we come into this world with nothing, and at death we carry nothing out (1 Tim. 6:7). We must give our all if we are to attain the Kingdom.

If we are faithful in how we use the things lent to us by God in this life, we will be given "the true riches". What we now have is "the Truth", because this is how the Spirit speaks of it. But Truth is relative, and the Truth God wants us to accept as Truth is doubtless designed by Him to be acceptable by mere mortals. But it isn't "the true riches" spoken of here. We are asked to be faithful in that which is God's, and then we will be given "that which is your own" (:12) in the Kingdom, as if we will be given "true riches" which somehow are relevant to us alone, the name given which no one knows except ourselves (Rev. 2:17). "Riches" represent the riches of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:13), and they are paralleled with "that which is your own", as if somehow in the Kingdom we will be given a vast depth of spiritual knowledge and perception which is in some way relevant to us alone. To me, those few words of Lk. 16:11,12 take me to the brink of understanding what the Kingdom will be about. We can go no further.

16:12 *And if you have not been faithful in what is another's, who will give you that which is your own?*- See on :11. The time is soon coming when I will be given that which *is* my own- the things associated with being in the Kingdom. We are slaves now, owning nothing (1 Cor. 6:19), but then we will be gloriously free (Rom. 8:21). So this idea of owning nothing, not even ourselves, is only true of this life; the day of release from slavery will dawn, we will receive that true freedom and that true concept of personal possession- if *now* we resign it. Abraham really grasped this idea that we now can own nothing. He swore to Yahweh as "the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take anything that is yours..." (Gen. 14:22,23). He knew that Yahweh is the owner of all, and *therefore* he was not going to yield to the temptation to increase what appeared to be 'his' possessions. See on 1 Cor. 6:19.

We are asked to be faithful in that which is God's, and then we will be given "that which is your own" in the Kingdom, as if we will be given “true riches" which somehow are relevant to us alone, the name given which no one knows except ourselves (Rev. 2:17). "Riches" represent the riches of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:13), and they are paralleled with "that which is your own", as if somehow in the Kingdom we will be given a vast depth of spiritual knowledge and perception which is in some way relevant to us alone. The reward given will to some degree be totally personal. Each works out his *own* salvation, such as it will be (Phil. 2:12)- not in the sense of achieving it by works, but rather that the sort of spirituality we develop now will be the essential person we are in the eternity of God's Kingdom.

16:13 *No servant can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or else, he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money*- The immediate reference in the context is to the unjust steward, who apparently only served one master- but actually served money too. The Lord Jesus surely based His words on those of Elijah in 1 Kings 18:21: “No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon”. So although on one hand the Lord Jesus Himself quotes Elijah’s ‘truth’ approvingly, there is evidence

galore that at the very same time, Elijah's attitudes were far from Christ-like. At the very same time, Elijah mocks the Baal worshippers, teasing them to shout louder, because maybe their god has gone 'in a journey'- a Hebraism for 'gone to the toilet' (1 Kings 18:27). This kind of mockery and crudeness is surely not how the Father and Son would have us act. Yet Elijah did this whilst at the same time deeply believing the fire would come down, and bringing it down by his faith. And saying other words which were alluded to with deep approval by the Lord.

Mammon is an "abomination" (:15)- a word associated in the Old Testament with idol worship. We are to not only be free of such idolatry, but despise materialism.

16:14 *And the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things; and they scoffed at him*- Scoffing at Divine wisdom recalls so many passages in Proverbs. They were "fools" for all their appearance of wisdom. They justified their love of money (:15), seeing their wealth as a reward for piety, just as the false gospel of wealth does today. They scoffed because they claimed that wealth was the reward for righteousness. But the rest of this chapter records the Lord's deconstruction of that position. They scoffed at the idea of reducing the debts of another- they would've tried to get out of the problem by some other way.

16:15 *And he said to them: You are they that justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God*- As noted on :14, they justified their love of wealth by claiming it was a reward for righteousness. But the Lord says that wealth is abomination to God. He saw as it were the wealth in their hearts, and hated it, treating it as an "abomination"- a term the Old Testament uses for idols.

16:16 *The law and the prophets were until John. From that time the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached*- This is an explanation of the cut-off point between the time of the Kingdom, and the period of the law and prophets. It was as if their work was being done up until John. The *law* prophesied until John (Mt. 11:13) in the sense that in the Messiah whom John proclaimed, the law's prophecies were fulfilled. Note that the law just as much as the prophets is to be seen as prophesying. And yet other changeover points or boundaries are suggested within the New Testament. The law would 'pass' when all was fulfilled, which seems to hint at the 'finishing' of all when the Lord cried "It is finished!" on the cross. The law would not pass *until* this point (Mt. 5:18). The Lord's death was clearly a major ending point for the old system. And yet Heb. 8:13 speaks of the old system as decaying and becoming old, and being about to vanish away- surely in the destruction of the temple in AD70. There are other hints in the NT that the old system somehow operated with some level of acceptance from God until AD70. Why the different potential changeover points? Presumably because the hope and intention was that John would successfully prepare the way, and the Messianic reign would be ushered in by Israel's acceptance of their Messiah. And yet they killed Him. That point in itself was the theological changeover moment. But still not all Israel accepted the apostolic preaching of repentance for the crucifixion. And so in practice, the changeover point came when the temple was destroyed and any serious obedience to the old covenant was thereby rendered impossible. In all this we see God's amazing grace and desire continually to work with people, factoring in the possibility of their repentance.

And every man enters violently into it- Just as the unjust steward urgently ran around trying to forgive others once he realized his own soon coming judgment, so John's declaration of judgment soon to come led repentant people to urgently dash into the Kingdom.

This can be seen as constructing a parable from the idea of Roman storm troopers taking a city. And those men, the Lord teaches in his attention grabbing manner, really represent every believer who responds to the Gospel of the Kingdom and strives to enter that Kingdom. The same word translated 'take by force' is used by the Lord here in Lk. 16:16; true response to the Gospel of the Kingdom is a struggle. Entering the Kingdom is a fight (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7), and we are right now in process of entering the city of God's Kingdom. It's not that we have no idea as to whether we shall enter it, waiting for judgment day to inform us. We have a sense of purpose to us, being in process of entering now. We either violently snatch / take the Kingdom by force (Mt. 11:12), or the devil of our own nature will snatch us away (s.w. Mt. 13:19; Jn. 10:12). The choice before us is that pointed: fight or fall. The Lord graciously and generously saw the zeal of the mixed up, uncertain, misunderstanding disciples as storm troopers taking the city of the Kingdom of God by force- knowing exactly where they were coming from and where they were going. The cause of the Kingdom must be forcefully advanced by "violent men". This was the sort of language the Lord used. He wasn't preaching anything tame, painless membership of a comfortable community. The Lord saw the zeal of the uncertain, misunderstanding disciples as storm troopers taking the city of the Kingdom of God by force- knowing exactly where they were coming from and where they were going.

16:17 *But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one tittle of the law to fall*- Mt. 5:18 speaks of jot and tittle. Vine comments: "Jot is for jod, the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Tittle is the little bend or point which serves to distinguish certain Hebrew letters of similar appearance. Jewish tradition mentions the letter jod as being irremovable; adding that, if all men in the world were gathered to abolish the least letter in the law, they would not succeed. The guilt of changing those little hooks which distinguish between certain Hebrew letters is declared to be so great that, if such a thing were done, the world would be destroyed". The Lord is reminding them that they were under the Mosaic law. All their schemings to get around its more inconvenient requirements, in order to preserve and extend the wealth which they loved (:14), was in fact a breaking of the law which they were under.

16:18 *Everyone that puts away his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he that marries one that is put away from a husband commits adultery*- The context here speaks of the need for forgiveness and a lack of materialism, which the Pharisees tried to cleverly get around by their various twists of the Mosaic law. Hence :17 has reminded them that they are still under that law. These two issues were particularly relevant to how and why they divorced their wives; and so this talk about divorce is exactly in context. And the next parable goes on to criticize them for their attitude to wealth. The divorce and remarriage in view is therefore specifically that practiced by the Pharisees, and is being criticized for not showing forgiveness and for being motivated by a love of wealth and its preserveation.

16:19 *Now there was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, dining sumptuously every day*- The context is of the need to hold feasts to celebrate fellowship with the dirty prodigal who had been licked by pigs in chapter 15. The Pharisees loved wealth (:14), and have been set up as the elder brother in the parable of the prodigal. Their dining whilst excluding Lazarus equates with the older brother refusing to have a feast with the presence of the dirty, smelly, unclean younger son. This exclusion went on "every day". The clothing in purple and fine linen could mean that it is specifically Annas or Caiaphas the high priest who is in view. We marvel that the Lord would even bother to try to get him to see the error of his ways; but such

was His desire that literally all men repented. Purple and fine linen recalls Babylon in Revelation 18:12, which in its first century application refers to the Jerusalem temple cult who were persecuting the Christians whilst enjoying huge wealth. Dining sumptuously" is the word used of the rich fool (12:19). The Lord is calling Caiaphas / Annas and the Jewish leadership no more than fools.

16:20 *And a certain beggar named Lazarus was laid at his gate, full of sores*- The "gate" is s.w. "porch" as in the temple porch, Mt. 26:71. 'Lazarus' is a form of Eleazar- 'God is my help'. He was the helper of those excluded by the Pharisees of the temple cult.

16:21 *Desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Yes, even the dogs came and licked his sores*- "Desiring" continues the linkage with the prodigal parable, where the prodigal 'desired' to be fed with pig food (15:16 s.w.). The rich man should have invited Lazarus to his feast just as the Lord invited sinners to his. And the same word is used of the Gentile woman who wanted to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the table of orthodox Jewry (Mt. 15:27).

16:22 *And it came to pass, that the beggar died; and he was carried away by the angels into Abraham's breast, and the rich man also died and was buried*- "Abraham's breast" or bosom was a Rabbinic phrase referring to Paradise. The Lord is not teaching that the faithful literally go anywhere on death let alone to Abraham's breast; He is clearly using the terms and ideas which the Jews were familiar with, and telling a story within those frames of reference. Adam Clarke comments: "By the phrase, Abraham’s bosom, an allusion is made to the custom at Jewish feasts, when three persons reclining on their left elbows on a couch, the person whose head came near the breast of the other, was said to lie in his bosom. So it is said of the beloved disciple, Jn. 13:25".

Carrying by Angels after death is not a Biblical idea, but again is alluding to apostate Jewish beliefs.

The way the Lord constructed His parable about the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16 is proof enough that He Himself alluded to false ideas without correcting them, but rather in order to make a moral point within the faulty framework of understanding of His audience. Indeed, the Bible is full of instances of where a technically ‘wrong’ idea is used by God without correction in order to teach a higher principle. Thus an eagle doesn’t bear its young upon its wings; it hovers over them. But from an earth-bound perspective, it would appear that [looking up], the eagle is carrying its young on its wings. God accommodates Himself to our earthly perspective in order to lead us to Heavenly things. He doesn’t seek to correct our knowledge at every turn, or else His end aim would not be achieved.

We assume too quickly that the Lord's reference to the Angels carrying Lazarus to the bosom of Abraham means 'straight after his death'. But not necessarily so. He died, was buried, and then at the Lord's return, the Angels will carry the faithful to judgment / the Kingdom- they will go forth and gather the elect. The rich man would only be thrown into Gehenna at the last day, as Jesus so often taught elsewhere. The only element of accommodation to, or parody of, existing Jewish beliefs was in the rich man asking that Lazarus be returned from the dead to warn his brethren. And this element is doubtless inserted into the story by the Lord as a prophecy of how even His resurrection would not convert those who did not truly listen to the Old Testament.

So serious is the tendency to material acquisition that the Lord uses a telling hyperbole in Lk. 16 (in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus): He implies that the

rich man was condemned just for being rich. This is hyperbole, an exaggeration to make a point. And the point was, that being rich is *very likely* to lead you to condemnation. The rust of riches is likened to the fire of condemnation and rejection (James 5:3).

16:23 *And in Hades*- As noted on :22, the Lord used ideas current amongst the Jews for reward, i.e. "Abraham's breast", and here He likewise uses their ideas of what happened as punishment. But this doesn't mean He approved their ideas as true. Job 21:13 clearly explains what happens to the rich on death: "They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave".

He lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his breast- Forget, for one moment, that 'the rich man and Lazarus' is a 'difficult passage'. Focus on how Lazarus is "in" Abraham's 'bosom' or chest. This doesn't mean literally inside it. He was 'in' Abraham's arms, on his chest; and this is explained to us in :25 as meaning that Lazarus was receiving "comfort" at the same time as the rich man was experiencing torment. Mic. 7:5 uses the same figure of being "in" a man's bosom to describe how a wife is held by her husband. And Lam. 2:12 uses it again to mean 'receiving comfort'. This is what the Kingdom will be like, especially immediately after our reward. For this is what the parable is about- the rich man will not be eternally tormented, his torment will be on knowing the reality of the fact that he stands there rejected. But while he is temporarily tormented, some poor beggar brother is getting comforted by Abraham. Both of them with Divine nature. Abraham holding the other brother to his chest and comforting him. And, in passing, this would interpret for us John's words in Jn. 1:18: "The… son, who is in the bosom of the Father" (after His ascension). After His ordeal, Jesus was as it were receiving comfort from His Father. There was and is an emotional bond between them. And so there will be between us all in the Kingdom. The parable of Lk. 16 goes on to say that there will be those who will want to cross over from rejection to acceptance, and *also*- and note this- there will be some who will want to go the other way to save those in the group of the rejected- weeping, screaming, gnashing their teeth as they will be. But it won't be possible for them. Even in Divine nature, some of us will have the desire to do the impossible- to save those rejected. It will be rather like the Angels in the time of Ahab suggesting their plans of action to God, but they were all turned down except for one. To have Divine nature, as Angels do, doesn't preclude having emotional thoughts. Nor does it mean we will have 100% understanding of God's ways beamed into us.

16:24 *And he cried and said: Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame*- The rich man appeals to his physical descent from Abraham ("father Abraham"), but this is of no value. As Lazarus had begged crumbs, so now the man begs for drops of water. His hard heartedness to Lazarus is exactly related to his punishment.

In the day of judgment, that man will cry out "father... have mercy / pity on me", just as Lazarus used to cry out to him daily. The apparent terseness and indifference of Abraham's response in the parable is surely intended as a reflection of the attitude which the rich man had shown to Lazarus in his mortal life. A great gap had been *fixed* between the saved and the rejected; and the language begs the question, 'Fixed by whom?'. Clearly, by the rich man in the attitude he adopted in his daily life. For it would not be God who fixed a gap between the damned and the saved; through His Son He seeks to save and bridge such gaps. The lesson is that whenever we hear the

voice of the desperate, we hear inverted echoes of our own desperation at the final judgment. And how we answer now is related to how we will be answered then. We make the answer now.

Note that the parable talks in terms of tongues, fingers etc.- bodies and not 'immortal souls' are in view. Note that only 11 of the 26 parables recorded in Luke are called "parables". This is clearly a parable and not to be taken as a literal description of things. G. B. Caird, *The Gospel of St. Luke* (Penguin Books), p. 191 concludes that "the story of the wicked rich man and the pious poor man, whose fortunes were reversed in the afterlife, seems to have come originally from Egypt, and was popular among Jewish teachers. ...It was not the intention of Jesus to propagate a strict doctrine of rewards and punishments...or to give a topographical guide to the afterworld."

16:25 *But Abraham said: Son, remember how you in your lifetime received your good things and Lazarus in like manner evil things, but now here he is comforted, and you are in anguish*- "Son" reflects the Lord's pity and tenderness even towards the condemned. Or it could be that this continues the idea of the rich man appealing to Abraham as his father. Indeed he was a son of Abraham- but that was of no avail. Abraham is dead and not yet rewarded (Heb. 11:8,13,39,40) so the idea of Abraham being alive after death is all the language of the Jewish beliefs being used. In the same way the Lord spoke as if Beelzebub really existed, when this was a pagan god (Mt. 12:27 cp. 1 Kings 1:2).

16:26 *And besides all this, between us and you there is fixed a great gulf, so that they that would pass from here to you cannot, and none may cross over from there to us*- The eternal chasm between them was foreseen by the Psalmist: "As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity [cp. the condemned goats]: but peace shall be upon Israel [the sheep, looking on at the rejection of the wicked]" (Ps. 125:5). Those who will want to cross the chasm then will be unable to (Lk. 16:26); the great gulf is fixed. In the context of describing the establishment of the Kingdom, we read that God's servants will eat, drink and rejoice, singing for joy of heart, at the same time as the rejected will be ashamed, hunger and thirst and howl for "breaking of spirit"- all the language of the rejected (Is. 65:13,14,17,18 RVmg.). It seems that this is a picture of the rejected watching the accepted eating with Christ as the Passover is eaten anew. Hence their howling and shame; for shame implies being naked in the presence of others. Thus the rejected will in some sense be in the presence of the accepted.

16:27 *And he said: Therefore I beg you father that you would send him to my father's house*- The point of the parable is at the end, and such 'end stress' is common in the parables. After death, there is no literal communication between the rewarded faithful and the wicked; these were all incorrect Jewish ideas which the Lord was using to construct a story which led up to His major point. He as God's messenger had indeed been sent to the father's house, the people of Israel and their leadership, with an appeal to urgently repent.

16:28 *For I have five brothers*- The High Priest Annas had five sons who each succeeded to the Priesthood,—Eleazar, Jonathan, Theophilus, Matthias, and Annas. These therefore were the brothers in law of Caiphas, who appears to be the rich man in view.

That he may testify to them, lest they also come into this place of torment- The fact that sin really does result in eternal death, and that death is really unconsciousness, there is no immortal soul, the Hebrew word nephesh doesn't mean

that, leads us to preachthe hope of resurrection which we have. It must do- for otherwise we would be plain selfish. And it makes us realize for ourselves the decisiveness and finality of this life's decisions for the determining of eternal destiny. The hope of resurrection is the first and most basic need of our fellows. It was said of the 18th century British preacher Richard Baxter that "he preached as a dying man to dying men". Our mortality, and our appreciation of that of others, should lead to an intensity of appeal to them. Knowing the truth about death leads to a great desire to testify to others. Recall how the rich man in the parable, once he perceived the truth about the death state, earnestly wished to testify to his brethren and persuade them to believe (Lk. 16:28). Elie Wiesel tells how victims of the holocaust either facing death or reflecting upon it later, felt an overbearing desire to testify to others: "We [victims of the holocaust] have all been witnesses and we all feel we have to bear testimony... and that became an obsession, the single most powerful obsession that permeated all the lives, all the dreams, all the work of those people. One minute before they died they thought that was what they had to do". We don't- quite- have to go through those starings of death in the face to perceive death as we should; for the Bible has a lot to say about it, and if we accept the Biblical definitions, then we too will feel this strong compulsion to testify to others.

16:29 *But Abraham said: They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them*- The Lord's argument was that hearing the Old Testament was going to be more motivational to change than meeting the risen Jesus. In Jn. 14-16 He likewise seems to discount His personal presence; the disciples were so upset that He would not be physically with them, but He assures them that the presence of His Spirit in their hearts was going to be of far greater spiritual moment for them than His physical presence. Resurrected persons of themselves were not going to be a powerful source of persuasion to the Jews unless the hearers first of all respected Moses and the prophets. And this very thing, in which Jewish Orthodoxy were so proud, was actually their weak point. The Lord in Jn. 6:45 makes the same point; every man who had truly "heard" the prophets would come to Jesus as Lord.

16:30 *And he said: No father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent*- Reflect on what the Lord was really saying in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. It was Abraham who showed the rich man how useless were human riches. The rich man thought that his natural ancestry was enough- he appeals to "father Abraham". But the point of the parable was surely that the rich man was not a true son of Abraham because he had been materialistic and had neglected the needs of his poorer brother. *This* was and is the implication of being a true son of Abraham.

16:31 *And he said to him: If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, even if one rises from the dead*- See on Lk. 24:11. "Persuaded" is parallel with "repent" (:30). Repentance is a persuasion; whether it takes seconds, minutes or years, we are persuaded towards it.

The parable of the rich man and the poor beggar Lazarus surely carried with it the message that we ought to be generous to the poor; and that there is a need to do this in view of the judgment to come and sense of the future we may miss because of our selfishness in this life. The condemned rich man wanted to warn others of the need to be generous to the poor so that they would not be condemned. The Lord's comment was that it was His resurrection from the dead which was intended to "persuade" people of this (Lk. 16:31). Accepting the import of His resurrection therefore should result in our being "persuaded" towards a life of generosity to the marginal- just, of

course, as the Lord's death and resurrection was God's grace to us, the marginal beggars in spiritual terms.

LUKE CHAPTER 17

17:1 *And he said to his disciples: Stumbling blocks are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come!*- The context of chapter 16 has been an appeal to the Pharisees to accept the likes of the prodigal son and the beggar Lazarus, and not to make them stumble by refusing to have them present at their fellowship table- continuing a theme which began at the beginning of chapter 15. Now here in Lk. 17:3,4 the Lord goes on to talk about the need to forgive- and He is surely saying that not forgiving is to cause another to stumble. That puts those sinned against in a position of great power; they can forgive, and if they don't, both they and the unforgiven will be condemned. The whole situation is structured in order to elevate the underdog and abused to a position of power. The Lord is urging the disciples not to have any part in the system which caused stumbling. The Jewish religious system caused men to stumble, as the Lord often pointed out (e.g. Mt. 18:7). But there would be an especial woe to the individuals who caused the stumbling, because for doing this they will be liable to personal condemnation. The Jewish world, the system, was to face the "Woe" of Divine judgment specifically because it made men stumble spiritually. That's what these words of Jesus seem to be saying, and His criticisms of that system recorded elsewhere would accord with that view- the 'Woes' He pronounces on the Jewish system in Mt. 23 particularly focus on the damage that system did to people, and the barrier it became between God and man. And He from there goes right on to predict the total destruction of the temple system in Mt. 24.

17:2 *It would be better for him if a millstone was hung about his neck and he was thrown into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble*- As noted on :1, the "little ones" in view are the likes of the prodigal son and Lazarus. Our attitude to the spiritually "little", the spiritually vulnerable, is critical to our discipleship. And not having them at our table, like the elder brother of Luke 15 and the "rich man" of chapter 16, is to cause them to stumble. So often, those turned away from fellowship then stumble. And the woe pronounced is so great that we have to urgently enquire of ourselves whether we are in any way responsible for such exclusions. Even if we are separated from this world externally, we can still act in a worldly way, and share the world's condemnation. The Lord taught that the believer who makes his brother stumble should have a millstone hung around his neck and be cast into the sea (Lk. 17:2). This is exactly Babylon's judgment (Rev. 18:21). The unloving in the ecclesia will be treated like the unloving world whose spirit they share. And we are hereby led to see a first century application of Revelation 18 to the "Babylon" of Jerusalem and the temple cult.

17:3 *Pay attention to yourselves!*-
This is to warn us that what follows is highly significant. And it is. If we don't forgive, we shall not be forgiven. The Lord adds on to the model prayer the same warning. The context of :2 is that we must not make little ones stumble; and we make them stumble by not forgiving them, not welcoming them at our table, like the elder son of chapter 15 and the "rich man" of chapter 16, which forms the context for these words. This is alluded to in Acts 20:28, where Paul says we should *take heed to ourselves* of the likelihood of false teachers. Surely what he's saying is 'Yes, take heed

to forgive your brother personal offences, take heed because you'll be tempted *not* to forgive him; but have the same level of watchfulness for false teaching'.

If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him- But the Lord is not necessarily teaching that we are to only grant forgiveness upon repentance; for the implication of much Bible teaching is otherwise. He may be setting us up to think that this is what He means, and then in :4 He challenges us by saying we should forgive even if repentance is so evidently insincere that effectively it is not repentance.

The Greek and Hebrew words translated 'repentance' strictly mean a change of mind, and not necessarily any works / actions. God in this sense can 'repent'. It seems to me that we have to recognize a changed state of heart in our repentant brother, without demanding 'works'. In Mt. 18:15, the Lord says of a sinful brother: "If your brother sins… go and point out the fault… if he listens to you, you have regained your brother". But in Lk. 17:3, He says: "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him". This would parallel the brother's 'repentance' with him 'listening' to you. Seeing repentance is a state of the heart, and we simply can't know the hearts of others, it seems to me very hard indeed to judge the level of another's repentance.

"See that you despise not one of these little ones" is how the parallel account puts it (Mt. 18:10). We offend people by 'despising' them, considering they are not worth worrying about nor forgiving, as the "rich man" did to Lazarus and the older brother did to the prodigal. To *not* seek others' salvation by forgiving them is to despise them. We may not think we are despiteful people. But effectively, in His eyes, we are…if we neglect to actively seek for their salvation until we find it. To not offend others is thus made parallel to seeking their salvation.

17:4 *And if he sins against you seven times in the day and seven times turns again to you, saying: I repent: You shall forgive him*- The idea seems to be 'And don't even demand repentance'. If he repents, don't question the sincerity of the repentance. And even more- forgive without repentance. This would be typical of the Lord's style- teaching on one level, and then elevating the whole question to an altogether higher and more demanding level. Such as "Resist not evil..." but, actually offer your shirt if a thief steals your jacket. Peter found it hard to grapple with the idea that the degree or amount of sin was irrelevant. But "seventy times seven" indicated how far out he was. Even when a brother's repentance seems humanly unlikely (the 490th time in the day, the seventy sevens of Matthew, takes some believing!), we must still have that covenant mercy for him. Comparing with Matthew, perhaps the Lord said this twice- once saying "seven times" and then (as Matthew) "seventy times seven". He is really labouring the point. "Seven times" invites us to think of Lamech's bitter song: "If Cain will be avenged seven times, truly Lamech seventy-seven times" (Gen. 4:24); and also the seventy sevens of judgment upon Israel in Daniel 9. The Lord's policy of total forgiveness is thereby being presented as the counter to the natural human desire for vengeance. Our desire to judge and achieve revenge-to-the-end is to be displaced by a passion for unlimited forgiveness 'to the end'.

Note that only a verbal repentance was required- and the Lord said that the forgiver was to just accept this, rather than demand evidence of 'forsaking' in physical terms. The Greek word for repentance is a compound meaning 'to think differently after'. Repentance is essentially a changed *attitude of mind*. This is why it's difficult to judge whether it exists within the heart of another person. and the Lord seems to be saying that we are not to judge the quality of another's' repentance, which effectively means not demanding repentance before forgiving. We live constantly in need and

receipt of mercy, every second of our existence. The New Covenant is often spoken of in the Old Testament as "mercy" and/or "truth". If we are *in* that Covenant, we are permanently living *in* grace/mercy, not drifting in and out of it in response to our sins. Mercy is not something which we just receive in the few moments while we pray for forgiveness. It is something constantly ongoing. We live *in* it. If we appreciated this, we would not see our forgiveness of others as something we occasionally 'grant'; we will extend mercy to them constantly, as God does to us. So the Lord's apparent requirement for repentance before forgiveness in :3 is tempered by this explanation- that we are to forgive when repentance seems so insincere that it is not repentance. This is rather typical of His teaching style and usage of language and ideas.

At this point, Mt. 18:23 goes on: "Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened..." to the hopelessly indebted servant who doesn't ask for forgiveness of his debt- but is granted it by the Master who sees his utter inability to put things right. And that man is us, forgiven by grace, because of his pathetic situation, even though the parable omits any reference to his asking for the debt to be forgiven. And we are that man- who must beware to forgive anyone who has the slightest debt to him, because his debt to the Master is far greater than any human debt to him.

17:5 *And the apostles said to the Lord: Increase our faith*- The disciples asked that as a community, their faith may be increased so as to forgive others as Jesus requires them to. They believed, correctly, that faith can be given directly by the Lord; and through His Spirit He likewise works on human hearts today too. The same word is used in Mk. 4:24 of how the Lord adds spirituality to those who have it: "What measure you use shall be applied to you, and more shall be *given* to you". The Lord's response is that they should on an individual level realize that even if they were perfectly obedient, they were "unprofitable servants" (Lk. 17:10)- and the only other time that term occurs on the Lord's lips is when speaking of how the unprofitable servant will be cast away to condemnation at the last day (Mt. 25:30). What He's saying is: 'Imagine condemnation. Being cast away as you stand before the judgment seat. That's you- that's what *should* happen, even if you "do" all. Get it- you're saved by grace, an amazing grace- respond to that, and forgiving others and zealous service will flow easily and naturally enough from that'.

17:6 *And the Lord said: If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you would say to this sycamore tree: Be rooted up and be planted in the sea- and it would obey you*- As noted on :5, the faith in view concerns the ability to accept and forgive others. And the Lord says that if they had faith, then the sycamore tree could be planted in the sea- the Gospel could be taken to the Gentiles, forgiveness could be extended even to the Gentile world- an idea so hard for Jewish people to accept. Israel was then covered with sycamore trees (1 Kings 10:27, where Solomon made cedars as common as the sycamore trees which are in abundance) to the point that the tree became emblematic of Israel (Is. 9:10, the sycamore tree that was cut down). By faith, they could extend Israel to the Gentiles, the sea of nations. The choice was either to be cast into the sea in condemnation for refusing to accept the spiritually little ones (:2), or to take the hope of Israel into the sea and plant it there, so that the sea of nations became as the land of Israel. 'Planting' is a metaphor regarding the teaching of the Gospel in 1 Cor. 3:6-8, and the parables of the 'planting' of a vineyard likely have the same sense. It was by faith, the disciples' faith in inclusivity and grace, that the gospel of the hope of Israel, of forgiveness, could be taken to the Gentiles. And the mustard seed is a symbol of the basic Gospel, which grows up into a tree giving shelter to the Gentiles (Lk. 13:19), i.e. forgiveness would be enjoyed by the Gentiles thanks to the Jews

offering it. Here, the mustard seed of faith refers to their faith in grace, forgiveness and inclusivity toward others- which was necessary for them to take that Gospel to the Gentiles.

17:7 *But who is there of you, having a servant ploughing or keeping sheep*- Not all the disciples were dirt poor. Their fishing business employed hired servants. The parable about "one of you" having a servant ploughing and preparing his food was spoken to the twelve. This continues the theme so far developed in the chapter; that we should have the love, faith and vision to be forgiving and radically inclusive of others. The disciples had asked for more faith to forgive effectively without repentance [when repentance is patently insincere]; and the Lord gives part of the answer in this observation that we are all desperate sinners. The motivation for radical forgiveness of others is because we recognize that even if we are fully obedient, we are "unprofitable servants"; and even the highest standard of behaviour, as was seen uniquely in the Lord, is simply what is expected of us as God's servants.

That will say to him when he comes in from the field: Come immediately and sit down to eat- We are not worthy to sit at the table of our master and eat; a thought we need to remember at the breaking of bread. We are the handicapped homeless beggars who have been brought in to the banquet. Eating together has been a theme of this entire section, beginning in chapter 15, where the Lord answers the objection that He eats with sinners. The elder brother of chapter 15 and the "rich man" of chapter 16 refuse to eat with the likes of the prodigal son or Lazarus. To motivate us in not being exclusive and rejecting our brethren from the Lord's table, we are here reminded that our place at His table is by grace. For in no secular situation at that time would a servant ever eat at his lord's table as an equal, let alone have his master serve him there. And yet this is that the Lord Jesus does to us; this is the unique nature of His table.

17:8 *Instead will he not say to him: Make ready my supper and dress yourself and serve me, and after I have eaten and drunk, then you shall eat and drink?*- The implication is that the servant eats and drinks separately to his master. The picture is of a hard life, full of works. Out working in the field all day, and then preparing food for the master in the evening; then, personally eating and drinking, sleeping- and getting up early to another similar day. This is "our duty" (:10). Whilst we are saved by grace through faith, and it is not of works lest any man should boast- it is also true that the Lord here envisages the Christian life as being totally centered around His cause and person. True Christianity is therefore no mere occasional hobby nor an inherited tradition. If we acccept the Lord's assurance of salvation, then our lives are totally taken over by it. But the difference is that the servant does eat at his master's table. And the Lord says that He is among us at table as one that serves, and washes our feet. And He shall come forth and serve us at the future Messianic banquet. Because His servant heart remains; He is the same yesterday, as He was in His ministry, as He shall be for ever (Lk. 12:37 "Blessed are those servants, whom the master when he comes shall find awake. Truly I say to you, that he shall dress himself for service and make them sit down to eat, and shall come and serve them"). We are intended to connect the Lord's teachings. We are to connect that teaching with what we read here, that it is ours to serve, we are unworthy to sit at His table. Let alone to be served by Him, in the greatest inversion of all things.

17:9 *Does he thank the servant because he did the things that were commanded? I think not*- A master doesn't thank his slave for ploughing all day. When he comes home in the evening, the slave's job is to get the Master's food ready, and then when the Master has been looked after, he can get himself something. The Master has no

need to thank (Gk. *charis*, s.w. to give "grace") the slave, and the slave expects nothing else. This is how the Lord sees our works; He expects us to serve Him for nothing, because of our role as His slaves, and not because we expect any gratitude, recognition or reward. We serve because we are His slaves. The parable teaches that absolute obedience should be the norm of our lives, not the exception, and that this is only what our Master demands and expects. From the way He told the story, the Lord framed our sympathy to be with the slave. But His point is that when we have done all, worked all day and then gone the extra mile in the evening, we should still feel unprofitable slaves, slaves who aren't mush profit to their Master. The passive, unspoken *acceptance* seen between Master and slave in the parable should be seen between us and the Lord. There is no attempt by the Lord to ameliorate the Master : slave figure; "You call me master and Lord, and you say well, for so I am" (Jn. 13:13). And yet we are told that at the judgment we will receive "praise of God" (1 Cor. 4:5). This can not, therefore, be praise of our efforts at obedience; it will be praise for the status we are in on account of being in Christ, being counted as righteous as Him. The parable was spoken in the context of the disciples thinking that God would be very happy with them if they forgave their brother seven times a day (Lk. 17:3-6). But the Lord is replying that things like this, which to us may seem going more than the extra mile, should be the norm; such heights of spirituality are only the daily ploughing of the field, and are only the obvious minimum which Christ accepts. He won't shew us grace ("thank") for doing this- with the implication that His grace is totally undeserved, not related to our forgiveness of others or other acts of obedience. The story paints the Master as being rather ungrateful and hard, to see his servant work so hard, then go the extra mile, and not utter a word of thanks. And the Lord is saying: 'Yes, to the natural mind, that's how I am'. Christ says that the slave will not expect the Master to say to him "Sit down to meat", but will expect to be told, tired as he is, to gird himself and serve his Master (Lk. 17:7,8). The Lord's words here are surely intended to recall when He said that in the Kingdom He would make us each sit down to meat and come forth and serve us (Lk. 12:37). The point of the connection is to show that Christ's treatment of us in the Kingdom *will* be different from that of an ordinary Master, but we really, honestly shouldn't expect it; we should serve because we are His servants, not expecting any praise or response from him. And this experience of grace should motivate us to forgive whether or not the repentance seems sincere (:5). As it happens, He will give us all this in the Kingdom, but we shouldn't expect this at all. As the slave would have been dumbfounded if his Master did this, so should our response be in the Kingdom. What makes it difficult is that we *know* our Master is like this, that He's a most unusual Lord, one who washes our feet (Jn. 13:13,14); and the extraordinary relationship we have with Him ought to make us eagerly desire to show a similar service to our brethren, and to forgive them whether or not their repentance appears sincere.

The story of the slave who worked all day in the field and was then expected to come home and cook for his master without a word of thanks to him seems to be more realistic, lacking the element of unreality usually seen in the parables. But the Greek word *charis*, usually translated "grace", is the one used for "thank" here. The point is that we don't receive grace because of our going the extra mile, as we are inclined to think. We receive grace, but not as a result of all our special efforts; these are what are expected of us, on account of the fact that we have become salves to our Master, the Lord Jesus. At the end of all our special efforts (in whatever sphere), we must consciously make an effort to recognize that we are "unprofitable servants" (Lk. 17:10). This must surely connect with Mt. 25:30, which describes the rejected at the

day of judgment as unprofitable servants. If we judge / condemn ourselves, we will not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). This is just one of many examples of where the Lord's parables seem intended to be linked with each other- which further proves that they are not stories with a deeper meaning, whose storyline is not intended to be carefully considered. We must recognize not only that we are unprofitable servants, but that we have only done what was our "duty" or debt to do- the implication being that we were sold into slavery on account of an unpayable debt. This is exactly the figure used by the Lord to describe us in Mt. 18:25.

17:10 *Even so you also, when you shall have done all the things that are commanded of you, say: We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do*- It may be that this is taking us forward to the Kingdom; it is at the judgment that we 'do all' (Eph. 6:13), it is in the Kingdom that we will obey all the commandments (Ps. 119:6). This parable is a glimpse into the appreciation of grace we will have as we enter the Kingdom; once we are fully righteous, we will realize how unprofitable we are of ourselves (notice we may still feel in a sense "unprofitable" then). We will realize that all our service is only the repaying of the huge debt incurred by our sinfulness. *Then*, and perhaps only then, will we see works in their true perspective. This surely is the purpose of the judgment seat. We will walk away with the sense of wonder at the grace of Jesus that filled the one-hour workers as they walked away from the pay table with a day's wages.

The sin offering to be offered after the Nazarite vow had finished (Num. 6:14) suggests the principle of Lk. 17:10 was being taught even back there. There was to be no spiritual pride in commitment made apparently over and above God's minimal requirements. The language of "have done all those things which are commanded" recalls the language of the priests and Moses doing all things which were commanded them under the old covenant (Ex. 29:35; Lev. 8:36; Dt. 1:18). Lk. 17:10 would therefore be hinting that even complete obedience to God's law was not of itself enough to make a man profitable unto God, which was something Job likewise concluded (Job 22:2). And the legislation about concluding the Nazarite vow was teaching the same.

We shouldn't be discouraged if in our self perception we see ourselves as serious sinners. We must say of ourselves that "we are unprofitable servants"- i.e. condemned, for this is how the phrase is used elsewhere in the Lord's thinking (Mt. 25:30). This is the finest paradox of all. If we perceive ourselves as worthy of condemnation, we will be saved. If we would judge [i.e. condemn] ourselves, we will not be judged / condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). If we understand the seriousness of our sin, then forgiveness of others will come easier- and this is the purpose of the story (:5). If we realize our utter spiritual desperation, our worthiness of rejection, our betrayals of our Lord's love, if we condemn ourselves in our own judgment; *then* we will not have to go through this process when the Lord comes. Yet if we don't do this, Paul says, then we are drinking condemnation to ourselves at the last day. It's a powerful, terrifying argument. Such *must be*- not ought to be- our level of self-analysis and knowledge of our desperation. If we so know our desperation now, we will not be condemned. Knowing and feeling our desperation is the key to so many Christian problems: monotony and boredom in spiritual life, problems with our partner, with our ecclesia, pride, a critical, ungrateful spirit, a lack of heartfelt praise, a reserve in witnessing. Even division amongst us would be outlawed by a true sense of our personal desperation. See on Lk. 6:42.

As slaves, we serve without expecting any thanks at all; and the service in the immediate context is forgiving our brother whether or not his repentance appears sincere. We do what is our duty to do by reason of who we are- sinners. The Lord spoke this in response to the disciples saying it was impossible for them to accept His teaching about unconditional forgiveness of each other (:5). Man's ingratitude is perhaps one of the hardest winds to weather, and it can so easily blow us off course in our service. But as the Lord's slaves, judged by Him alone, we didn't ought to look for recognition of our labours nor our forgiveness of others; neither should we demand apologies for *anything*. The Lord humbled Himself to wash the feet of His brethren, even though He was their leader (Phil. 2:4-11 is full of allusion to the foot washing incident, as if there the Lord exemplified the spirit of the cross). There may be brethren who consider it beneath them to talk to others or forgive others, who think it is not for them to help wash up or move furniture or all the host of other tasks that our gatherings require. But in these things lies the spirit of Christ. Paul didn't lord it over others, but was a fellow-worker with them (2 Cor. 1:24). It is one of the finest paradoxes: that he who is the greatest must be the servant of all. See on Mk. 10:45.

17:11 *And it came to pass, as they were on their way to Jerusalem, that he was passing along the borders of Samaria and Galilee*- Time and again, the Gospel records reveal how the disciples manifest the Lord Jesus. There are several passages where the text is unclear, as to whether it should read, e.g., "As *they* were on the way" or "As *He* went" (Lk. 17:11 RV cp. AV). The textual confusion may reflect the unity between the Lord and His preachers. Even within the Gospels, incident after incident shows the Lord doing something alone, and then the disciples somehow being presented as doing the same.

Even when He was heading away from Jerusalem during the course of that final journey, He's still described as going to Jerusalem. This was the degree to which His focus was upon His journey unto death; when He passed through a Samaritan village, His whole body language was as if He were going up to Jerusalem (9:53). And we are asked to have the same focus and sense of direction as we carry His cross.

17:12 *And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men who were lepers, who stood far away*- Reflect how the group of ten lepers huddled together, Jew and Samarian together [perhaps recalling the ten men needed for a synagogue; they were "on the border" of Samaria, :11], their differences sunk in their common appreciation of their desperation. In deep seated humility, we can wait with unfeigned faith for the day of acceptance to dawn, serving with a true love, not interested in feuding with our brethren, thankfully partaking of the emblems with them, not forgetting *how* we were cleansed from our past sins (cp. 2 Pet. 1:9 RV- a sure allusion to the nine ungrateful lepers who forgot the wonder of their cleansing). If we remember how we were cleansed, then there will abound in us virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, culminating in a true love (so Peter's logic runs in 2 Pet. 1:5-9). For our desperation, the cross of the Lord Jesus, the frankness of the Father's forgiveness- these things will ever *live* within our grateful, gracious souls.

They were "far away", the required 100 paces between lepers and non lepers. The Lord's words of :14 were therefore shouted to them over a distance of nearly 100 meters. Perhaps this idea is in view when Paul speaks of how those far away are made near through the Lord, and how Peter is recorded by Luke as saying that salvation is for those afar off. And every man can see something of himself in the lepers- Lev. 13:46, "He is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be"

applies to us all. We all feel at times that we dwell alone and outside the camp of normality and being in with the in crowd.

17:13 *And they lifted up their voices, saying: Jesus, master, have mercy on us!*- The grammar suggests they the many had one voice. And yet they included at least one Samaritan, with whom normal Jews would have nothing to do. The basis of our unity should be our desperation for grace and healing. Lepers were supposed to shout "Unclean! Unclean!". But these lepers moved on from wallowing in their uncleaness to the hope that positively they could be transformed by the Lord Jesus. Not wallowing in uncleanessand defeat is a challenge to all today.

17:14 *And when he saw them, he said to them: Go and show yourselves to the priests. And it came to pass, as they went, they were cleansed*- The motive for this in 5:14 had been in order to make a testimony to the priests. Such was His zeal for their salvation. And the fact that "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7) shows how this apparently hope-against-hope desire of the Lord for the conversion of His enemies somehow came true. We noted on Mt. 8:3 that the work of the priests was to cleanse the leper- but this had been done by the Lord. The man was therefore to show himself to the priests- in order to demonstrate to them that another priest and priesthood was already coming into operation.

The healing happened "as they went". There had to be an element of faith and obedience before the cure- in this case. For the Lord operated variously when it came to preconditions for healing.

17:15 *And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, glorifying God in a loud voice*- "Turned back" carries the idea of repentance. You can believe, to an extent, get healed, experience God's hand in your life- but still not repent nor enter personal relationship with the Lord Jesus. And only that turning back in repentance led him to being healed wholly. The others all saw that they were healed- but the Samaritan alone perceived the grace of it, that this had been done for him whilst he was a sinner. It had been done so that he might repent, and that is what he now does. See on :18. He turned back from going to the priests to thank the Lord, because he perceived that not only would he as a Gentile not get much audience with them, but because he saw that the Lord Jesus was far greater than the priesthood. He took the initiative in technically disobeying the Lord's commandment to come and thank the Lord. It was when he saw that he was healed that he praised God. The others presumably thought that their full healing would only be once they appeared before the priests. But the Samaritan perceived that the total power of healing was with the Lord and that the priests had no role to play in this. Being a Samaritan and therefore separated from the community of Israel made this perception somewhat easier for him, just as those outside religious systems find it easier to perceive the direct hand of the Lord Jesus in their lives- once they encounter Him.

17:16 *And he fell upon his face at his feet, giving him thanks- though he was a Samaritan*- Jews and Samaritans had no dealings, and yet they lifted up their voices as one voice (:13 Gk.). They were united in their desperation, just as we ought to be. This is one of many hints that the work of the Lord Jesus was for non-Jews as well as Jews, and that the Gentiles would respond better to it. The command to go and teach "all nations" the Gospel seamlessly follows from all these hints throughout the Lord's ministry, and the disciples and the early church were all the more culpable for initially refusing to perceive it. But such is the power of assumed correctness of inherited positions, prejudice, nationalism and elitism- even within the hearts of otherwise sincere believers. The man had initially only met the Lord from a distance- and now he can come close to Him. This is what true cleansing is about. "Where are the other

nine?" (:17) begs the answer 'With the priests', in religion. Whereas this man was in personal relationship with the Lord. And again the hero of the story is an outside- a double outsider, as both a leper and a Samaritan.

17:17 *And Jesus responded: Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?*- The Lord's response was to the Samaritan. The implication was that the Lord was deeply disappointed in the Jewish response, and in their consideration of the priestly acceptance of them as being far more important than gratitude to their healer-Messiah. And He wanted the Samaritan to know that indeed, Israel were not OK with God. The Lord Jesus was on that man's side and not, in that sense, approving of Israel just on the basis of their ethnicity. The question as to "Where are the other nine?" was a leading one. The answer was 'With the priests'. The implication was that they should have been with the Samaritan at the Lord's feet, and not, in the first instance, with those priests.

17:18 *Were there none found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger?*- This comment seems more towards the disciples, or perhaps the Lord was just speaking to Himself. The Samaritan had returned to Jesus, glorifying God (:15). It would be far too simplistic to assume that Jesus as He stood there was God Himself. For no man can see God. Further reflection reveals a far profounder situation. By returning to Jesus in gratitude, the man was glorifying God. The worship and glorification of the Son is therefore to the glory of God the Father, as Phil. 2 makes explicit.

"Stranger" or "foreigner" was the word used in the temple: "No foreigner beyond this point". But the foreigner is seen as worshipping at the feet of the Lord Jesus, the true temple. I suggested on :15 that "returned" is to turn back, in repentance. The Lord did the miracle in the hope that those who received it would repent and thus glorify God. For repentance glorifies God. But instead those cured were more interested in the religious side of it rather than personal spirituality and relationship with the Lord Jesus. Healing and forgiveness are related; hence the Lord healed the paralyzed man with the words "Your sins are forgiven you" (Lk. 5:18-25). The connection is very clear between forgiveness and healing. God "forgives all your sins... heals all your diseases" (Ps. 103:3); "the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity" (Is. 33:24). But the Lord healed these men without the apparent prerequisite of repentance and forgiveness. He did it in the hope His grace would elicit repentance and thereby forgiveness from them. Just as He shared His table with as yet impenitent sinners in the hope this would elicit their repentance. But it didn't always work, just as grace doesn't always "work" when shown to men today. The Lord's hope was that the healed lepers would do as the Samaritan, and come to Him in personal relationship- and only then go and do their religious thing, showing themselves to the priests.

17:19 *And he said to him: Arise and go your way. Your faith has made you whole*- The healing had occurred "as they went" to the priests (:14). It could be that the Lord is saying that the man's faith had made him so whole that he didn't need to go to the priests. In any case, the priests likely wouldn't have been happy to see a Samaritan come to them. We note how the priests and the Samaritan are contrasted in the parable of the good Samaritan. So if you don't get much of a welcome in organized religion- come to Jesus, and take Jesus back to your excluded community. He was to go his way, back to his Samaritan community, as the living witness to the Lord's passionate care for non-Jews. Luke seems to stress the role of faith in the cures (7:50; 8:48). He

also speaks more about Samaritans than any other gospel; perhaps because his material was partly aimed at converting Samaritans and other Gentiles.

The Samaritan was told to "go" just as the others were told to "go" to the priests. We note the difference between being healed, and being made whole. Wholeness is part of God's work in men through His Spirit. Physical healing, so coveted by Pentecostalism, is here shown to be of no ultimate worth. The same phrase is used by the Lord to the sinful woman of Lk. 7:50 "Your faith has saved you". This was what He essentially had to offer; the physical healing was only a step towards that. Luke's Gospel notes four people whom the Lord tells "Your faith has made you whole." Each was an outcast: the
sinful woman (Lk. 7:50); the woman unclean from her bleeding (Lk. 8:48); this Samaritan leper (Lk. 17:19); and the excluded blind man (Lk. 18:42). They are presented as now "whole", having everything, despite having been outcasts.

17:20 *And being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God comes, he answered them and said: The kingdom of God comes not with observation*- The disciples repeat the Pharisees' question about when the end will come- in almost the same words. They were clearly influenced by them (Lk. 17:20 cp. Mk. 13:4). "When will the Kingdom come?" was another perennial question- again answered by the Lord redirecting the entire enquiry. "The kingdom of God is within you... as it was in the days of Lot... one shall be taken and the other shall be left" (Lk. 17:34). 'Don't worry about the calendar date, don't let a fascination with prophecy distract you from the personal reality that whenever I do come, some will be left behind. Will that be *you*?'. See on Lk. 19:11. The implication could be that the Kingdom of God is hastened by action- by the repentance of Israel, the spiritual maturity of God's believing children, intense prayer, outreach to the Gentile world and other preconditions for the Lord's return. It will not be hastened by attempts to match current events with Bible prophecies- which perhaps is what the Lord refers to by "observation" here. It's as if He is warning against the obsession with latter day political prophecies which has stymied so much spirituality over the ages.

And yet "observation" translates a word which only Luke uses to describe how the Jews critically "watched" Jesus (6:7; 14:1; 20:20). They were actually looking at Him; the Kingdom was amongst them. They need not observe / look around / watch out for Messiah any further.

17:21 *Neither shall they say, Here it is, or, There it is! For the kingdom of God is among you*- The life that He had and now lives is the essence of the Kingdom life. Who He was and is, this is the definition of the Kingdom life. It's why one of His titles is "the kingdom of God". And it's why it can be said that we 'have' eternal life now, in that we can live the essence of the life we will eternally live, right now. "The kingdom of God is within you" (AV) is more correctly translated "the kingdom of God is *among* you" (see A.V. mg.). The context shows that Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees (:20); the "you" therefore refers to them. They were certainly not Christian believers- the kingdom of God was not established in *their* hearts. The Jews were making a great public show of their zeal in looking for Messiah. In this passage, "the kingdom of God" seems to be a title of Messiah, seeing He is to be the king of the kingdom. Thus when the Lord Jesus entered Jerusalem, the people shouted, "Blessed is he (Messiah) that comes in the name of the Lord: blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that comes in the name of the Lord" (Mark 11:9,10). This parallels Messiah and "the kingdom". Thus John the Baptist preached that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he (Jesus) that was (prophesied)" (Matt. 3:2,3). So here, the Lord answered their question about "when the kingdom of God should come", by

speaking about the coming of "the son of man". His point was that the Jews were making so much show of being on the look out for Messiah's coming, expecting Him to be suddenly revealed in power, that they failed to realize that that Messiah- "the kingdom of God"- was already among them in the humble person of Jesus. Thus He warned them: "The kingdom of God (Messiah) comes not with outward show... behold, the kingdom of God is among you" (Luke 17:20,21). A well known theologian, Joachim Jeremias, has come to the same conclusion: "The meaning 'indwelling in' can certainly be excluded. Neither in Judaism nor elsewhere in the New Testament do we find the idea that the reign of God is something indwelling in men, to be found, say, in the heart; such a spiritualistic understanding is ruled out both for Jesus and for the early Christian tradition" (Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (London: SCM, 1972) p. 101). He goes on to draw out the parallel between Lk. 17:21 and Lk. 17:23,24: "Neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, There! for lo, the kingdom of God is within you…And they shall say to you, Lo, there! Lo, here! go not away, nor follow after them: for as the lightning, when it flashes out of the one part under the heaven, shines unto the other part under heaven; so shall the Son of man be in his day".

The parallel is between the Kingdom of God coming at the return of Christ at the last day- and the Kingdom being 'within' or 'among' you. Jeremias suggests on this basis that "the Kingdom of God is within / among you" means 'The Kingdom of God will come among you suddenly and visibly, at the last day- so it's no good expecting it right at this moment now'.

Who He was and is, this is the definition of the Kingdom life. It's why one of His titles is "the kingdom of God" (Lk. 17:21). And it's why it can be said that we 'have' eternal life now, in that we can live the essence of the life we will eternally live, right now.

17:22 *And he said to the disciples: The days will come, when you shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man and you shall not see it*- Yet Jn. 8:56 implies it is always possible to see one of the days of the Son of man through faith in Him. As explained in Jn. 14-16, the promised Comforter would enable believers to always have the same sense of the Lord's presence as His followers had during His ministry. Is the Lord not hinting here that there will be a clouded spiritual vision amongst His latter day followers, even though they will "desire" this not to be the case? And can we not see uncomfortable similarities with our position and feelings today, realizing our vision is somewhat clouded, desiring for things to be different, but still not seeing…?

The Lord's coming is "the day of the Son of man"; and yet He speaks of the days of His ministry as the days of the Son of Man. The Lord is the same yesterday, today and forever. The same Jesus who was then in Palestine, speaking from the larynx of a Palestinian Jew, is essentially the same who shall return, likewise as judge, friend and patient saviour. Lk. 17:24-26 speaks of the "days of the Son of man" and refers them to three things:

1. The days of the Lord's ministry
2. The time leading up to His return
3. The day of judgment, of His actual second coming.

Putting these together, we come to the following conclusion: those living in the very last days will effectively be living with the actual presence of the Lord, it will be as if He has physically returned, although He has not done so. This may well be in order to provide encouragement to the persecuted saints in their latter day tribulation; but it surely suggests that they will *know* that the Lord is about to return, that they are living

in the days of the Son of man. The Comforter will be poured out, or accepted, so that the believers feel strongly the Lord's presence.

17:23 *And they shall say to you, Look there, or, Look here. Do not go, nor follow after them*- The Lord has been teaching that He is "amongst" them; there is no need to go looking for Him anywhere. But His thought moves on specifically to the time of His return. For the Lord repeats this warning in the Olivet prophecy. There will be false Christs and bogus claims that the Lord has returned. Spoken to the disciples, this suggests that they were the ones who would see these things associated with the return of Christ. But they did not. And in any case, all twelve of them were being addressed, and one of them would turn away from Christ. So there was in any case a conditionality attached to the Lord's words.

"Lo" [AV] suggests the actual pointing out of a person. "Here… or there" is poor translation, because the same original word is behind both "here" and "there". The impression is given of people pointing out actual individuals and claiming that 'This is Christ'. The faithful are to flee once the sign is obvious that the Lord is about to be revealed, and in those days [and they may literally be days or hours] the world will know that His return is imminent, and therefore all manner of charlatans will start claiming 'It's me!'. The relatively few claims to be Jesus Christ which are made today are hardly credible, no temptation at all for the faithful, and nearly always the person making the claim is mentally ill. But the Olivet prophecy suggests that these claims by false Christs will be so credible that even the faithful will be sorely tempted to believe them. The risk of deception would be so great that the Lord repeatedly warned against it. If there is some worldwide sign that the Lord is about to return, perhaps literally in the sky, as "the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven", then in those days, such claimants will have far more credibility. It could be that one claimant is particularly persuasive, leading to the final show down on Mount Zion between the true Christ and the anti-Christ, the fake duplicate of Christ.

17:24 *For as the lightning shines from one part under the heaven to the other part under heaven, so shall the Son of Man be in his day*- This is the "lightning" and earthquake associated with the return of Christ when His people, natural and spiritual, are at the nadir of persecution and tribulation (Rev. 4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18). Lightning doesn't do as described here. The reference is therefore to the Old Testament manifestation of lightning as part of the Cherubim, which flashed with lightning (Ez. 1:4,14). Ezekiel saw the Cherubim depart from the temple (24:1 has alluded to this already), go Eastward to the mount of Olives and then mount up to Heaven (Ez. 10 :19; 11 :22,23). This is why "the Glory", the lightning of the Cherubim chariot, was seen as returning to the Mount of Olives "by the way of the east" into the temple (Ez. 43:2-4).

As the Lord stood amongst them, He was the Son of Man in His day. Those who accepted Him as Messiah were accepting His 'coming' to them. For those who did not, and who argued about whether or not He fulfilled all the prophecies they were analyzing ["with observation"], He would 'come' unmistakably, but in judgment. The day of the Lord was right upon them, if only they would realize it; and they made the decision standing right there as to whether they would then be saved or condemned.

17:25 *But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected by this generation*- We wonder whether the Lord's tone of voice and body language changed; having talked of the glories of His second coming, He returns to the reality that He must be crucified by His people. The Lord's rejection by Israel is a major theme (Mt. 21:42; Mk. 8:31; 12:10; Lk. 9:22; 20:17; 1 Pet. 2:4,7 all use the same word). Any who

struggle with rejection find an instant connection with the Lord. It has been given to us to "suffer for His sake", the same word used here for "suffer" (Phil. 1:29). His sufferings are reflected in our experience, that we might experience in practice the status of being "in Christ". The passages just listed mainly state that the Lord would be rejected by "the builders", by the "elders... priests... scribes". Now He extends that to all "this generation". They followed their religious leaders- to reject God's Son and all His love. This is the danger of following religious leaders without thinking things through for ourselves from God's word.

17:26 *And as it was in the days of Noah, even so shall it also be in the days of the Son of Man*- See on 2 Pet. 2:5-8. "The days" are parallel with "the coming" of the Lord. The scenario outlined elsewhere is of the Lord 'coming' for the faithful, them consciously choosing to go to meet Him, and then their 'coming' along with Him in judgment upon the unfaithful and Israel's immediate enemies. Therefore a period of time is made parallel with the Lord's "coming". The "days of Noah" may refer to the way in which God told Noah of the flood, but in Gen. 7:1,4 told him that now there were "yet seven days" until the flood actually came, and he must now enter the ark. The gathering of the animals was done within those seven days (Gen. 7:1-3). In this lies the similarity with the last days. We know the outline picture- that judgment will come, and there are reasons and signs of that. But only a few days before judgment breaks will the faithful be invited to go to meet the Lord, to enter the ark. And in that period the Gospel will be spread to all nations, the last final appeal will be made. Just as Noah filled the huge ark, which could have saved so many people, with any animal willing to agree to come onboard. The shutting of the door of the ark would then directly correspond with Mt. 25:10; Lk. 13:25: "The door was shut". Just as desperate people would've knocked on the shut door of the ark, so the unfaithful will knock on the door which the Lord has now closed. In this life we can knock on the closed door, recognizing our condemnation- and it will be opened (Lk. 11:7; Rev. 3:8). But after the Lord has 'come' in the sense of inviting us into the ark, to go forth and meet Him, the door will be shut.

Perhaps those seven days were a period of feasting in the world around Noah, just as there will be a brief period of hedonistic prosperity in the world before Christ's coming, perhaps because of some international agreement which offers prosperity to the entire planet in return for some nominal acceptance of false religion [Islam?]. We note the period of "seven days" used for funeral celebrations (Gen. 50:10; 1 Sam. 31:13), wedding celebrations (Jud. 14:12,17) and general feasting (Esther 1:5; Job 1). The people around Noah were doing this right up until the last day of the seven days. Passover, a clear type of the final deliverance of God's people at the Lord's second coming, required a similar seven days preparation period (Ex. 12:19; 13:6) followed by a "day of the Lord", the actual feast, and "a solemn assembly" (Neh. 8:18). Indeed, the feasts of Yahweh all required a seven day period (Lev. 23), and each of them was in some way typical of the second coming.

A number of passages describe the AD70 judgments of Israel in terms of the flood; which suggests that they also have reference to the last days:
- 2 Peter 3 is a clear example, describing the destruction of the Jewish system in AD70 as being by fire as opposed to water used in Noah's time. Yet the chapter also has reference, e.g. through its links with the new Heavens and earth of Is. 65, with the destruction of the present age at the Lord's return.
- Nahum 1 describes the coming judgements on Israel in terms of mountains and hills splitting, and there being a great flood; all Genesis flood language.

- Dan. 9:26 describes the Romans in AD70 destroying "the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood", the LXX implying with a sudden flood, as in Noah's time.
- Is. 54:9 describes the judgments on Israel being "as the waters of Noah". The end of the flood, the end of Israel's judgments, therefore typifies the second coming.
- In the light of this the Lord's parable about the man building on sand whose house was destroyed when the heavy rain came (Mt. 7:25,27) must have primary reference (as so many of the parables do) to the judgement on the Jewish house in AD70. Those who built on sand as a result of not hearing Christ's words were the Jews- also described as shoddy builders in Mt. 21:42; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7; Mic. 3:10; Jer. 22:13.
- The flood waters were upon the earth for 5 months. The siege of Jerusalem in AD70 lasted for the same period, coming after 3 years of the Roman campaign against Israel which started in AD67. The three and a half year suffering of Israel which culminated in AD70 may well point forward to a similar period in the last days; in which case the flood would typify the final months of that period, during which the judgments will be poured out most intensely. The five month tribulation of Rev. 9:10 may also have some relevance here.

Thus the state of Israel in AD70 was typified by the world of Noah's time, which therefore looks forward also to the last days, in the light of the evident connections between that period and our last days which are made in 2 Pet. 3 and the Olivet prophecy.

17:27 *They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all*- Lk. 21:34 is specific: "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, so that day come upon you unawares". It could fairly be asked 'Why is there this warning, if the believers of the last days are to be actively persecuted?'. This verse implies that the world will be in a materially prosperous state in the last days; it will be possible for us to become so preoccupied with it that we do not prepare for the time of tribulation, so that it comes as a sudden surprise. Of if "that day" is the day of Christ's coming, then it may be that by opting out of the persecution, we will be able to continue to enjoy the materialism of the world, in which case we will be caught unawares by the second coming. Thus while the saints are persecuted, the world enjoys a time of prosperity as it did in the times of Lot and Noah.

The flood "came", Gk. *erchomai*. This is effectively the same word as used about Noah "entering" or 'coming into' the ark (*eis-erchomai*). The coming of the flood represents the coming of Jesus to the world- *erchomai* is so often used in the context in that connection (Mt. 24:30,42,43,44,46,48; 25:6,10). The 'coming in' of Noah into the ark seven days before the flood (cp. the response of the faithful to the call to go out and meet the returning Lord Jesus) is essentially the coming of the Lord, even if His public 'coming' may be a few days after the 'coming' to the believers. Keil translates Dan. 9:26,27: "The city, together with the sanctuary, shall be destroyed by the people of the prince who shall come, who shall find his end in the flood; but war shall continue to the end, since destruction is irrevocably decreed. That prince shall force a strong covenant for one week on the mass of the people, and during half a week he shall take away the service of sacrifice, and borne on the wings of idol abominations [cp. Ps. 18:10, where the true God is also borne on wings] shall carry on a desolating rule, till the firmly decreed judgment shall pour itself upon him as one

desolated" (*Commentary* p. 373). Antichrist's destruction with *the* flood [note the definite article] comfortably connects with the Lord's usage of the flood as a symbol of the latter day judgment upon His enemies (Mt. 24:39). The person spoken about will be involved in war until the end of his days; he will die at the end of his military campaign against God's people. This was certainly not true of Titus in AD70.

In *Contra Celsum* we read Origen justifying the Christian church against Celsus' criticisms that it is a church of poor, simple people. That the majority of Christians would be poor and simple was indeed the expectation of both the Lord Jesus and Paul. Yet Origen seeks to justify the Christian church as middle class and respectable, with respected intellectuals amongst its membership. It was and is this desire to be seen as worldly-wise and 'normal' which is the death-knoll for any revival of Christianity. It was this which led to the acceptance of the Trinity; and it is this which robs true Christianity of its radical nature and appeal today. Perhaps in our last days this lesson needs to be learnt as never before. The Lord's picture of the world of the last days is of a household eating and drinking, absorbed with being normal (Mt. 24:38; Lk. 17:27). But the Lord's point is that this very 'normal' behaviour done in the wrong spirit is what He finds so wrong.

17:28 *Likewise even as it came to pass in the days of Lot- they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built*- There can be no doubt that the sexual aspects of Sodom's sins have great similarity to the moral filth of our present world. But significantly it was not this aspect which our Lord chose to highlight when speaking of how "the days of Lot" typified those of His return. Instead He spoke of those things which were more likely to ensnare His people: "*They* (as well as our present world) did eat, *they* drank, *they* bought, *they* sold, *they* planted, *they* built". Their obsession with daily activities without an awareness of God was as bad as their other sins; a point we would do well to be aware of. However, their eating and drinking must have been to gross excess- Ez. 16:49 defines "the iniquity of Sodom" as being "fulness of bread" among other things. Some lavish Christian lifestyles frequently feature "fulness of bread" - but because it is not perceived as a gross sin, this unhealthy similarity with Sodom slips by unchallenged. "They bought, they sold" suggests that Sodom was a major trading centre, rapidly increasing in wealth; "they planted, they built" implies a real boom town. Such success resulted in the people being proud and haughty (Ez. 16:49,50); the wealth created at the expense of others brought about "abundance of idleness in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy" (Ez. 16:49). It is these aspects of Sodom which are so precisely matched by our self-centred, money mad world. As our Lord realized, it is these aspects which are most likely to ensnare the child of God. Yet Sodom's people were not completely unaware of their religious conscience. Jeremiah likened the false prophets of Israel to the people of Sodom, who effectively taught that sin was service to God, (Jer. 23:14). This is another hint that the people of Sodom had some degree of responsibility, as have latter day Israel whom they typify.

Lot is presented here as representative of the latter day believers. But he was hardly strong in faith. He chose to live in Sodom, first pitching his tent near it and then getting a house within the city and even becoming a judge. His wife was consumed in the materialism of the city as were most of his children. He argued with the Angel about leaving Sodom and was only saved by grace; and even after that, he slept with both his daughters whilst drunk. And yet he was counted as faithful. All the virgins in the parable slumber and sleep at the time their Lord comes; when clearly

the last generation is exhorted not to slumber but to keep awake. We can conclude that the last days will be a time of spiritual weakness for the church.

17:29 *But in the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all*- Lot in his last days in Sodom was a type of the believers living in the world at the time of the end. Lot in those last hours was walking around the streets of that city trying to save his family, walking amidst angry, blind people who hated him, drunk on their own lusts. Walking those streets must have been an uncanny experience. But that is God's picture of the world of our day, and our own uncanny, almost charmed life amongst the sleepwalkers. The whole human experience is analogous to sleepwalking; we go through the motions of reality, but actually (as a race) we are spiritually asleep. The world around us are sleepwalking, in God's eyes. And we too should share His perspective.

The Lord initially has in view that Jerusalem is as Sodom, an equation the Old Testament prophets make several times. The need to leave Sodom referred to the need to break with the temple cult, and the Olivet prophecy urges the faithful to flee out of Jerusalem to the mountains to avoid her judgment. This is the language of "Babylon" in Revelation, which in its primary application refers to the Jerusalem temple cult. All who remained in it would perish; hence the appeal of the letter to the Hebrews to leave it and resist the temptation to return to it.

17:30 *After the same manner shall it be in the day that the Son of Man is revealed*- This commonly used phrase "Son of man" (Mt. 16:28; 24:27,30,39; 26:64) clearly quotes from Dan. 7:13: “One like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven”. This prophecy clearly speaks of the giving of the Kingdom to the Lord Jesus and His people at the end of the dominion of the fourth beast and its related horns. The prophecy could have been fulfilled in the first century- but it was rescheduled. This is another example of the conditionality in Daniel’s prophecies which we discussed in an earlier digression. Dan. 7:13 speaks of how the Son of Man comes with the clouds of Heaven *before the Ancient of Days* and is given the Kingdom. What is in view is not so much the coming of Christ to earth but His coming to receive the Kingdom from the Father. Dan. 7:26,27: “The judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it to the end. The kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole Heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High: His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him”. “The Son of Man” is here interpreted as “the people of the saints of the Most High”. The Son of Man, therefore, refers not just to the Lord personally but to all those in Him. Having chosen to go out to meet Him once they hear the trumpet call, they are snatched away to meet Him in the air and the Lord comes with them in judgment. This is the picture presented in 1 Thess. 4:16,17 and elsewhere. This is why His “coming” is parallel with a period of time, "the days of the son of man".

The Son of man will be “revealed”; and yet the other references to the Son of man being revealed refer to the way He is even now revealed to His true followers by the Father (Mt. 11:27; 16:17 etc.). At the second coming, the real nature of God’s Son, the essence of His character, will be revealed to all. At the very time that the Wicked One will be revealed, so will the Son of God (2 Thess. 2:8). In the way God judges man, His character is again glorified and revealed; for in the way He judges, His essential characteristics are revealed. It is therefore possible to see anticipations of the day of future judgment in how God has judged in the past- thus incidents like Adam and Cain's rejection, the Babylonian and Roman invasions and the subsequent

condemnation of God's people, the flood... all these are prototypes of the future judgment. Take, for example, the prophecy of Obadiah against Edom. It is full of language elsewhere used about the judgment seat.

17:31 *In that day, he that shall be on the housetop with his goods in the house-* The idea is that flight could be taken by jumping from housetop to housetop, without going back into the house. Escaping that way would best be done in any case without carrying anything. This is clearly language relevant specifically to first century Palestine, and is a parade example of how the prophecy was ideally intended for fulfilment then. The latter day fulfilment of these words will therefore only be in essence, rather than in detail. That is a principle we must bear in mind when considering many other Bible prophecies; the essence but not necessarily the detail will be fulfilled in the rescheduled and delayed version of their fulfilment. The implication of the language here is that the sign to flee will be momentary; the signs are not, therefore, to be perceived over decades or even years, leading slowly towards the Lord's coming. Rather these signs, especially of the abomination, will appear suddenly, to the extent that the believer must flee immediately, quite literally without a moment to lose.

But this reflection leads us to wonder whether the fleeing away in a split second, be it from the field or housetop, is more likely a reference to the need to respond immediately to the call to leave secular life and go to meet the Lord. The example of a person in the field needing to leave immediately naturally connects with the words of :36 about the snatching away of the believers at the Lord's return: "Two shall be in the field, the one shall be taken, and the other left". This would dovetail well with the implication elsewhere that the immediacy of our response to the knowledge that 'He's back!' will effectively be our judgment. Those who themselves want to go to Him will be snatched away and meet Him, whilst those who delay will be rejected, as the foolish virgins who went first to buy oil.

Let him not go down to take them away, and let him that is in the field likewise not return back- See on Lk. 14:33. The allusion is clearly to Lot fleeing Sodom, also "to the mountains". This is a type of the response of the believers to the call to judgment at the Lord's return. If we don't separate from the world, we will share their judgment. The immediacy of response is so stressed, and will be ultimately indicative of where our heart is. Any desire to gather any material possessions will reveal that our heart is not wholly and solely with the Lord. All who love the Lord in spirit and in truth will respond to the sign or call to leave with immediacy.

Initially, it does not appear that there will be much compulsion to come to the judgment. After a meeting of the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17), both sheep and goats eventually appear before the judgment seat. When the Angels first come to call us to judgment at the second coming (Mt. 13:39), there will be an element of choice as to whether we immediately accept the call to go and meet Christ. "In that day" we will have the choice to go and take our goods from the house, or to go immediately with the Lord (Lk. 17:31). Under the law, the trumpet sounded and Israel had to gather themselves together (Num. 10:4); yet Paul says in Thessalonians that the Lord comes with a trumpet to gather His people together. If this is indeed based upon the Old Testament pattern, then there is an element of choice as to whether we gather ourselves unto Him- at least initially. Noah and Lot were invited, not forced, to leave the world. Those who respond to Christ's return "immediately" will be accepted, implying that the unworthy delay. This means that the response is optional in the first instance (Lk. 12:36). There are other indications of this. The most obvious is in the

parable of the virgins, where the wise go out to meet their Lord immediately, whilst the foolish delay in order to spiritually prepare themselves. Our attitude in that split second is so vital. The rejected will mourn and wail, in anticipation of their future condemnation, when they see the sign of the Son of man indicating His imminent coming (Mt. 24:30,31). And this is why there is the implication that effectively, the division between sheep and goats happens in the gathering process (Mt. 25:33); our response to the gathering is our judgment. The parables invite us to see the Lord gathering the wheat to one place and the tares to another, as if the gathering is the judgment (Mt. 13:30); the wheat is gathered to the garner, and the chaff to the place of burning (Mt. 3:12). The Angel who reaps for judgment 'thrusts in' his sickle, and 'casts out' the wicked in rejection (Rev. 14:19). But 'thrust in' and 'cast out' in that verse both translate the same Greek word *ballo*- the implication being that the gathering-to-judgment process is in fact the separation process. Likewise the net is "cast" into the sea in order to gather people for judgment, and then the rejected are "cast" away (Mt. 13:47,48).

The news that Joseph was alive and glorified was received rather like that of Christ's resurrection: initial disbelief, but then the family of Jacob who believed it rose up and left all they had to go to be with Joseph; Israel in AD70 and the last days are likewise bidden leave their stuff and go to be with Christ (Gen. 45:20 cp. Lk. 17:31).

17:32 *Remember Lot's wife!*- Lot seems to have gone to Sodom for material ends- our Lord holds up his wife as an example of those who love the materialism of this world more than the reality of his Kingdom. But the Angels speak of spiritually prepared people as being the only real possessions Lot had: "Whatever you have in the city, bring them out".

"But his wife looked back from behind him" (Gen. 19:26) suggests the picture of the wife following behind Lot, filled with remorse at the loss of all she had held dear. Our Lord comments concerning not desiring our "stuff which is in the house" in the day of his coming: "Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever (like her) shall seek (Greek: 'plot') to save his life shall lose it". We can infer from this that she plotted and schemed how to save her possessions- i.e. her 'life', seeing that for her, her life did consist of the abundance of the things which she possessed (Lk. 12:15). These feelings grew so strong that she paused to take a loving, wistful look at the city. Remember that the fire only fell after Lot was in Zoar; therefore the city was looking as it normally did. Their exodus was at night- "the sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar" (Gen. 19:23), so she would have seen the flickering lights of the city in the distance. Compare this with how the virgins of Mt. 25 go out to meet their Lord at night. "Remember Lot's wife" suggests that we should meditate upon her position as it has especial warning for the last days. Her leaving of Sodom appears to have been due to the personal influence of Lot her husband, yet ultimately she failed to have that personal desire to obey God. It would not be pushing the type too far to suggest that the wives of latter day believers may feel that they can enter the Kingdom in the spiritual shadow of their husbands. One cannot help wondering whether she left Ur not through personal response to the promises but because the others were leaving. Doubtless her uncle Abraham would have led her and the whole family in regular prayer and meditation during the journey towards Canaan. But somehow the reality of the God of Israel was never allowed to touch her inner being, and the years of the soft life in Sodom would have sealed her spiritual state. It is hard to avoid making the point that many of us may be in a similar position. Gen. 19:14 RVmg. brings out the

likely immediate background to her decision. Lot's sons in law "were to marry" his daughters. The Lord too perceived that they were marrying and giving in marriage the very day the flood came, and He pointed out the similarities with the Sodom situation (Lk. 17:27-29). Could it not be that the very day of the double wedding, they had to leave? With all the build up to the wedding, Lot and his wife would so wanted to have stayed just another day to see the wedding of their two daughters. It is to the girls credit that they both left. But Lot's wife had invested so much in it emotionally that she just had to look back.

17:33 *Whoever shall seek to gain his life shall lose it, but whoever shall lose it shall preserve it*- The Lord Jesus speaks of how a person can lose their place in the Kingdom as a person losing or forfeiting their own self; He was thereby teaching that a place in the Kingdom was possessing one's own real self (Lk. 9:25 RV). To lose life is paralleled with the Lord to unashamedly witnessing to Him in an unbelieving world; and He calls us each one to lose our lives in this way (Mk. 8:35).

The Lord had earlier taught in Mt. 10:28 that in the condemnation of the last day, it is God who will destroy [s.w. "lose"] life ["soul", s.w.]. But here the Lord says that a man will lose / destroy his own life if his life consists in what he owns (12:15) and seeks to save it. The point is that ultimately the condemned will have condemned themselves; the process of losing / destroying life is initiated and performed by people in this life, and the final condemnation is simply giving them what they themselves wished for. And the Lord goes further to say that whoever 'finds his life' will lose or destroy it (Mt. 10:39). To find life for ourselves, to think that by obtaining ['finding'] the world, the ideal life for ourselves, is to actually lose or destroy life. The Lord had earlier taught that He had not come to destroy [s.w. 'lose'] men's lives, but to save (Lk. 9:56). It is men who destroy / lose their own lives, they condemn themselves, rather than the Lord seeking to condemn them. The Father likewise has no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked. Rather does He simply confirm their own self-destruction. John's version of this saying about losing life is found in the context of the Lord speaking to Himself about the need to die on the cross: "He that loves his life shall lose it" (Jn. 12:25). To avoid the cross is to love life- this fleeting life. Attitudes like 'Spoil yourself!', 'You deserve it!' and 'Have a fun time- you only live life once' are all examples of loving life rather than losing it in self-condemnation for the hope of the eternal life. And so Lk. 17:33 repeats the words, in the context of commenting upon Lot's wife- her wistful look back to Sodom was because that was her life, the life she had loved.

17:34 *I say to you: In that night there shall be two men in one bed. One shall be taken, and the other shall be left*- Not only is the city of Sodom representative of the world of the last days, but Lot's calling out of Sodom by the Angels is typical of our being 'taken' by Angels to meet the Lord.

In that day, "One will be taken, whilst the other will be left [behind]" [Lk. 17:34]. The Greek for "taken" is the same as in Jn. 14:3- the Lord comes again to *take* us to be with Him. Seeing this passage also speaks of the second coming, it seems to fit more logically that the faithful are taken away; and the rejected 'left behind". The Greek word for "left" really has the idea 'sent away'. Whilst it's not the same Greek word, it is the same *idea* as in several pictures of the judgment- the rejected are 'sent away'; the idea of being 'left sitting' doesn't seem to be there. So in the very moment of the Lord's return, the essential division is made; the faithful are taken, whilst the rejected are "left", but their being "left [behind]" is actually their condemnation, their being sent away from the Lord.

17:35 *There shall be two women grinding together at the mill; one shall be taken and the other shall be left*- The present tense is used here: "One is taken, the other is left". Perhaps this was to heighten our sense that the essence of judgment is now; the call of the Gospel is a call to journey to judgment day. So much of the Lord's teaching sensitively gives examples including men, and then including women. He was so very far ahead of His time in being so gender inclusive. They were grinding using millstones, which are always used in the Bible as symbolic of condemnation. These people were working out their own condemnation. Perhaps the idea is that one [the responsible] would be taken away to destruction, the other [not responsible to Divine judgment] would be "left".

17:36 *There shall be two men in the field; one shall be taken and the other shall be left*- I suggested on :34 that the taking away is to salvation and those left behind are destroyed with the world, after the pattern of Lot being saved and his family destroyed. But a case can be made the other way around. The 'taking away' is in judgment / condemnation / destruction, just as the unbelieving world were 'taken away' (Mt. 24:39). The ambiguity in interpretation is intentional. For we are to reflect that we shall be taken or left, and to where shall we be taken, and for what shall we be left. "Left" in the Greek has a wide range of possible meanings here- the word is translated 'forgiven', 'sent away', and perhaps there is here the hint that they will be preserved to hear the Gospel of the Kingdom. In this sense we must remember the Lord's definition that "the field is the word" (Mt. 13:38). And in the Olivet prophecy He has foreseen that the faithful who are called away will be "in the field" (Mt. 24:18). The parable of the prodigal son likewise features the two sons, both in a field (Lk. 15:15,25 s.w.). The prodigal leaves the field and goes to the Father. The older son refuses to ultimately leave the field and go in to the Father. Legalism and judgmentalism is therefore quite enough to warrant being 'taken away' to condemnation. See on 1 Thess. 4:15.

17:37 *And they answered and said to him: Where, Lord? And he said to them: Where the body is, there will also the eagles gather together*- God sometimes uses language in a way which we may find embarrassing or inappropriate, reading from the distance of our age and culture, where there is an awkwardness at talking about the raw side of human nature. Thus when creating a mini-parable to explain the gathering of the responsible to him at the second coming, Jesus likens himself to a rotting carcass which will instinctively attract the eagles, representing the responsible. One of the well known shames of crucifixion was that the body was pecked by birds, even before death occurred. The idea of an uncovered body attracting birds (i.e. the believers) would have been readily understood as a crucifixion allusion. But within our use of language, it seems inappropriate to liken the Lord Jesus Christ to a decaying carcass. It seems similarly inappropriate to liken God's response to our prayers to an unjust judge who grudgingly answers requests (Lk. 18:1-7), or to repeatedly compare Jesus to a thief (Mt. 24:43; Lk. 12:39,33; 1 Thess. 5:2-4; Rev. 3:3; 16:15). It seems out of place to liken believers struggling to enter the Kingdom to violent people trying to storm a city by force (Mt. 11:12). The absentee landlords of Galilee were despised by all; and yet the Lord uses one of them as a figure for Himself (Lk. 20:9). Most stunning of all is Psalm 78:36,65,66: "They (Israel) did flatter Him (God) with their mouth… then the Lord awaked… like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine. And he smote his enemies in the hinder parts". This just isn't what we expect; to read about God being flattered by foolish men, and for Him to be likened to a drunken soldier who goes on the rampage kicking others in their private parts (this is alluding

back to 1 Sam. 5:9). And the Lord likens His final appeal to Israel to casting dung around them (Lk. 13:8).

This whole verse has various possible interpretations which each seem to me to have things to commend them and yet also their own problems. This verse is an expansion upon the Lord's teaching that His coming will be visible, will be as the lightning of judgment upon those who have not "gone forth" to Him, and no credence should be given to any claims He has come invisibly. The Lord may be likening His coming to the coming down from the sky of eagles upon the carcass- of Israel. This could have had an AD70 fulfilment in the 'eagles' of the Roman legions, just as Yahweh's Old Testament 'comings' in judgment upon Israel were at the hands of the Babylonian and Assyrian armies. But the final coming of Divine judgment will be in the literal, personal coming of God's Son to earth in judgment. The same Greek word translated "where" is found in Mk. 13:14- the abomination of desolation will stand "*where* it ought not". It could be that this location on the temple mount is what the Lord has in view. This is where He will come down in judgment. Upon the very location He was then standing upon with the disciples, the pride and glory of an apostate Judaism. It was already no more than a carcass in God's eyes. The temple was "where [s.w.] the Jews always resort" (Jn. 18:20). The carcass or dead body may not necessarily refer to Israel. In Rev. 11:8,9 we find the same Greek word used about the dead bodies of the faithful remnant who share their Lord's death in Jerusalem and lay exposed for three days- perhaps literal days. The metaphor of the eagles coming speaks of Divine judgment from Heaven, ultimately in the personal coming of Christ to earth. In this case, the eagles would come because of the dead bodies / carcass of those who had died the death of Christ in Jerusalem in the final tribulation. The Greek word for "carcass", *stoma*, literally means 'a fallen one', and is from the verb *pipto*, to fall. And this word is used about the fall of Jerusalem- also in Revelation 11. The city "fell" (Rev. 11:13), just as Jerusalem was to "fall by the edge of the sword" (Lk. 21:24).

It's possible that the Lord intended us to understand the carcass as Jerusalem, and the vultures as the latter day invaders of Israel (Jer. 4:13). Or it has been suggested by Harry Whittaker that "If you (my disciples) show yourselves to be spiritually a carcass (as in Rev. 3:1), you will certainly find yourselves the prey of these "vultures," the false teachers". "Where, Lord?" may not necessarily mean '*to* where'. That the Roman invasion of AD67-70 was a detailed fulfilment of some parts of the Mosaic prophecies of curses for disobedience is well known and chronicled; here the quotation would be from Dt. 28:26 "your carcasses shall be meat unto the fowls of the air".

So this may refer to the coming of Christ down from Heaven in judgment upon either the carcass of Israel, or for the sake of the carcasses of the slain believers. The Greek for "eagle", *aetos*, literally means 'one of the air [*aer*]', and *aer* is used of how the Lord Jesus will come in the "air" [*aer*] with the faithful in judgment (1 Thess. 4:17). This would be the pouring out of the seventh vial into "the air" [*aer*], when finally "It is done" (Rev. 16:17). Yet here in Lk. 17:37 the Lord speaks of the gathering of the eagles in terms of explaining how His people will be gathered to Him and judgment. The same word for 'gather' is used repeatedly for the gathering of the faithful in the last days (Mt. 3:12; 13:30; 25:26,32; Jn. 15:6). Most notably, we find it used in 1 Thess. 4:14, comforting the believers that God will at the last day 'gather' the dead believers at the last day (AV "will God *bring* with Him"). This will be the "gathering together unto Him" (2 Thess. 2:1 s.w.). This is all impressive evidence that the language of 'gathering' is used about the gathering of the believers to Christ at His

coming, and according to 1 Thess. 4:16,17 this will involve a literal being snatched away [from persecution, according to the Olivet prophecy]. Just as the believers will be led / gathered to human judgment seats (Mk. 13:11, *ago*), gathered / lead / brought [*ago*] before human kings (Lk. 21:12), so they will be gathered to the judgment seat of Christ the King [*sun-ago*].

The Lord responds to the question about how we will get to judgment by saying that eagles fly to where the body is. It's possible to interpret eagles as Angels- e.g. Rev. 8:13 speaks of an Angel flying through the sky in the last day, crying 'woe'- the Greek *ouai* would've been understood as an imitation of the noise an eagle makes. And there are other links between Rev. 8 and Mt. 24. So perhaps the Lord's answer was that we are not to worry about getting there, as our Angels will take us to judgment. Zech. 14:5 speaks of the coming of the Lord Jesus "and all the holy ones with him". But it is applied to the believers in 1 Thess. 3:13 and to the Angels in 2 Thess. 1:7. In this sense, the believers come with their Angels to judgment; but because the process happens in a moment of time, it appears that in fact Jesus returns with the faithful. This is why elsewhere the Lord Jesus is described as returning both with Angels (Mt. 16:27; 25:31; Lk. 9:26) and with the saints (Rev. 19:14 cp. 17:14).

And yet the Lord may simply be saying that questions like 'Where?' and 'When?' are irrelevant. We shall be taken to judgment just as eagles find their way to the carcass, but we are to ensure that we are not that dead carcass.

LUKE CHAPTER 18

18:1 *And he spoke a parable to them, that they should always pray and not lose heart, saying*- This comes straight after the teaching in chapter 17 about readiness for the Lord's coming; and continued, intense prayer is part of that preparedness. There are so many allusions by Paul to this verse and the ensuing parable. This shows just how like us Paul was; he had his favourite parables, one or two that really stuck in his mind, just as we do. And he alluded to them! They were in his heart, to inspire and motivate him, just as the Lord intended. Paul picks up the idea of not fainting in 2 Thess. 3:13: "Brethren, be not weary (s.w. "not to faint") in well doing" . What well-doing did Paul have in mind? Attending the Sunday meetings? Being patient with some difficult sister in the ecclesia? The connection with Lk. 18:1 tells us what he had in mind: keep on praying intensely. It's no co-incidence that Paul started that section of 2 Thess. 3 (in v.1) with the exhortation: "Brethren, pray for us". And he concludes it with the same rubric: "Brethren, be not weary" (faint not), in your prayers. He knew from the parable that repeated prayer was powerful. And so he asks them to keep at it for him, because he needed it. Perhaps Paul had the same thing in mind when he wrote to the Ephesians (3:13): "In (Christ) we have boldness and access with confidence (to God, in prayer, cp. Heb. 4:16)... *wherefore* I desire that you faint not (s.w. Lk. 18:1) at my tribulations"; is he not implying 'You know how powerful prayer is, so don't faint in it, you know what struggles I'm having, *please* keep on praying for me, like that persistent widow in the parable'. This fits in with a number of other passages in which Paul unashamedly begs his brethren to

pray for him. In this we see his humility, his high regard for other brethren who were almost certainly weaker than him, and also the physical desperation of his daily life.

18:2 *There was in a city a judge, who did not fear God and had no regard for man*- The judge, representing God, lived in the same city as the widow, representing us (:3). The Kingdom of God is likened to a city which we are to enter. We are in a sense within it now, having entered through the narrow gate. The unjustness of the judge is setting up the final point of this parable; the end stress of the parable is that if this is how an unjust judge acts, then how much more sensitive is God to our cries for justice. But we are to note that Israel were commended to appoint judges who feared God (Ex. 18:21). The existence in Israel of judges who did not fear God was therefore a criticism of Israel as a whole. The judge did not "regard" man; the word means to respect to the point of reverence (s.w. 20:13; Mt. 21:37; Heb. 12:9). The implication is that God so respects us, that He, unlike this judge, is eager to hear our prayers. And we are to respect others likewise; the implication here is that if we fear / respect God, we will respect men who are made in His image. And disrespect of human persons is thereby disrespect of God.

18:3 *And there was a widow in that city; and she came often to him, saying: Give me justice against my adversary*- Note the Psalmists' *joy* that judgment is coming (Ps. 67:4; 96:12,13). The same spirit can be seen in the parable of the woman who keeps begging the unjust judge to open her case. She may have had her little piece of land taken away from her, whatever it was, she is confident she has a watertight case and this is why she so pesters the judge to judge her (Lk. 18:1-5). Now this is a powerful challenge to those believers who seem to *fear* the judgment process. David shows the same spirit in asking God to 'avenge my cause' (Ps. 35:23). There is the same confidence that by grace, he is in the right and longs for justice to be done. So much of Romans is dedicated to the images of the court room; we are justified, and we should be earnestly seeking the vindication of Spirit against flesh.

The parable speaks especially of faith in prayer in the last days before the Lord's coming (:7,8). The implication is that the woman, the church, is under persecution from a great satan / adversary; and her earnest prayers will elicit God's dramatic judgment and intervention in this earth. This is all very much the language of the book of Revelation.

Much of the pain felt by the spiritually abused focuses upon the issue of injustice. They were treated like *this*, but others are treated like *that*; *you* can't break bread in a church, but *he* can; *she* isn't allowed to attend the gathering but *he* is, and so forth. The Lord told a parable about a woman who repeatedly asked for 'justice', with the implication that she would only eventually find it at the Lord's return. But He went straight on to tell another parable, about the repentant man who beat upon his breast saying "God have mercy upon me, the sinner"; this man "went down to his house *justified*". The theme of 'justification' is thus a thread which continues from the woman demanding 'justification' (Gk.) against her abuser (Lk. 18:3). The Lord's point wasn't merely that

justice will only be ultimately done at His return; but further, that we are all serious sinners, who have been 'justified' by God's grace; and this colossal-scale experience of receiving undeserved justice / justification should mean that we're not so concerned about receiving justice in human matters in this life. There cannot be perfection this side of God's Kingdom being established upon earth. To seek for perfection in relationships is perhaps reflective of a lack of faith or understanding relating to the Kingdom of perfection which is yet to come. One of the greatest things for me about that Kingdom is the unity and perfection of relationships which there will then be. It is, however, all so hard because the New Testament presents how the church should be- an ideal of loving, sensitive, caring relationships in the spirit of Christ. And this is very attractive to us. It's very hard, therefore, to face the reality that this great intention, this lofty possibility, has actually been left unachieved by the church. It's like reading the descriptions of God's house in Ezekiel 40-48. This wonderful temple could've come about in Ezekiel's time. The possibilities are given in such great detail- but their fulfillment was quite simply dependent upon whether Judah wished to make it come real by living up to it (Ez. 43:10-12). And they chose not to. It's the same with the ideal "house of God" presented to us in the New Testament. Those who tend towards perfectionism find this very hard to cope with. It is indeed a tragedy, that so much Divine potential is as it were wasted, not realized, by our dysfunction. But none of this should take away from the personal reality of salvation and relationship with God which we each have. This is not to say that exposing abuse and dealing with it shouldn't happen. It should. But let's not feel that if justice isn't done, we are somehow without justice. We are the ultimately justified, and our standing before God's judgment seat is far more significant that our standing before that of mere humans.

First century Palestinian peasant courts have been described in some detail. They involved a mass of men shouting at the judge, who usually decided cases according to who gave the largest bribe. Women never went to court. It was a man's world there. This woman had no male in her extended family to speak for her. She had no money to pay a bribe. But still she went to court and sought to persuade the judge. In this element of unreality we see the bravery of prayer, the height of the challenge; that we who have nothing and no human chance of being heard, will indeed be heard. It would've struck the initial peasant hearers of the story as strange that above all the male shouting, somehow this heroic woman was heard- and was heard repeatedly. Again, we see an encouragement to prayer. And to liken powerful praying to a woman was in itself unusual in that male dominated age.

18:4 *And for a while he would not, but afterward he said to himself: Though I neither fear God, nor regard man*- The idea is that eventually there is response even from one who has no sensitivity to people nor fear of God; and how much more quickly and deeply will

come the response from the just judge of all, who does "regard man" with great pity (Ps. 144:3).

18:5 *Yet because this widow troubles me, I will give her justice, lest she wear me out by her continual coming*- The connection is perhaps with the man of the parable in Lk. 11:8, who was so bold and confident in his request that he shamelessly 'troubled' the rich man to give him his request; and this too was explaining our confidence in prayer to the Father.

The widow by her continual coming in prayer 'wearied' the judge into responding; Strong defines this Greek word as meaning 'to beat and black and blue' (RVmg. gives "bruise"). It's a strange way of putting it, but this is another reminder of the intense struggle of prayer. Jacob's wrestling with the Angel was really a clinging on to him, pleading with tears for the blessing of forgiveness; and in this he was our example (Hos. 12:4-6). Lk. 21:36 RV speaks of the believer 'prevailing' with God in prayer. Our prayers are to give the Father no "rest" (Is. 62:7), no cessation from violent warfare (Strong). See on Col. 2:1. Again, the idea is that if the unjust judge is so sensitive to this woman's words, to the point he feels beaten up by them- how much more sensitive is the Father to our prayers!

The parable of the widow who keeps nagging the free-wheeling judge is rather humanly unlikely. Would such a tough guy really pay attention to the repeated requests of the woman? But although he considers himself independent of both God and men, he ends up being controlled by the widow. This reflects the immense power which there is in human prayer, and God's willingness to respond if we are importunate enough.

18:6 *And the Lord said: Hear what the unrighteous judge says*- Perhaps the fact the ungodly judge is worn out by the woman's requests is the element of unreality in the story; for usually, if she paid no bribe, she would not even get a hearing, let alone be repeatedly listened to. And it flags up the essential point of the parable, which is that God will be even more sensitive to us. The emphasis is on the word "unrighteous". The *righteous* judge is going to be even more sensitive and quicker to respond than the unrighteous judge. The justice of God as judge is emphasized throughout the Old Testament, and the Lord describes Himself likewise as a just judge who responds to what He hears [rather than to bribes or pressure from others in human society, Jn. 5:30].

18:7 *And shall not God give justice to His chosen, who cry to Him day and night?*- The unjust judge was worn down by the woman's repeated appeals. The implication is that God is far more sensitive and will therefore respond quicker. Even though His response may appear slow, compared to the magnitude of our request, His response is quick.

18:7- see on 2 Pet. 3:9.
The many connections between Revelation and the Gospels need to be followed up; the

incidents in Christ's earthly experience seem to be woven by him into the fabric of the visions he gives John. The theme of persecution is especially common. The widow crying to God because of persecution represents the prayers of the "elect" or "chosen" remnant of the last days (Lk. 18:7 cp. Mk. 13:20). They will be asking for vengeance against the beast which is persecuting them, and thus this parable is the basis for the souls under the altar crying out for vengeance (Rev. 6:9). Christ's return is therefore the day of vengeance (Lk. 21:22; Is. 34:8; 61:2; 63:4) of his persecuted latter day ecclesia. Despite the power of prayer in bringing about the Lord's return in vengeance, Lk. 18:9-14 continues in this same context to warn that despite this:
- Perhaps the Lord won't find such faith in prayer when he returns
- Many will pray but be so sure of their own righteousness that their prayers are hindered
- The disciples will tend to despise the little ones in the ecclesia.
All these are latter day problems: abuse of "the little ones", self-righteousness and lack of real faith in prayer.

Will He be slow to help them?- God *will* shorten the period of time of trouble before His return (2 Pet. 3:9); and we read that He *will* also lengthen the period of grace (Lk. 13:6-9)... *if* His people ask Him. What He 'will' do perhaps should be read as what He *can* do. And this is why so much prophecy is conditional. Significantly, no other religion that I know contains this feature- of a God so passionate and so real that He will change His stated will and intention for the sake of His people's prayers.

The AV "though he bear long with them" is accurate. 2 Pet. 3:9 uses the same word in teaching that "The Lord... is longsuffering to us-ward" (AV) of the last days. This longsuffering of Jesus spoken of by Peter alludes to this parable of the persistent widow, whose continued requests should match our prayers for the second coming (the vengeance of our adversaries which she requested will only come then). "Though he bear long" (s.w. 'longsuffering') with us, "God shall avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him" (Lk. 18:7 AV). The "us" whom Peter refers to as experiencing the Lord's longsuffering ('bearing long') are therefore to be equated with "the elect" in their fervent prayers for the second coming. The days being shortened for the elect's sake therefore refers to the hastening of the second coming on account of the elect's prayers (Mt. 24:22). In view of the later references to Mt. 24, it is not unreasonable to think that Peter is consciously alluding to Mt. 24:22 concerning the shortening of the days for the sake of the elect's prayers, through his allusion to the parable of the persistent widow of Lk. 18:7.

18:8 *I say to you, that He will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?*- "Nevertheless", despite the fact God answers prayer, being far more sensitive to our cries than the unjust judge- it is still a question as to whether there will be faith in prayer in the last days, at the Son of Man's coming. Whilst the article is indeed used, *"the* faith" doesn't have to mean 'the set of

doctrines which comprise the one faith'. It may refer to that, but the article may be used here simply for emphasis. Will He find faith, *the* kind of faith which there ought to be given His sensitivity to us? The implication is that the experience of answered prayer *ought* to develop faith, but such will be the spiritual perils of the last days and the lack of serious prayer, that there may well be no faith in the final generation. Lot has just been cited in chapter 17 as an example of the latter day believers- and he was weak in faith, although saved. Likewise even the five wise virgins of the parable are sleeping when they ought to have stayed awake for their Lord's return.

The theme of prayer continues. Despite the power of prayer in bringing about the Lord's return in vengeance, Lk. 18:9-14 continues in this same context to warn that despite this:
- Perhaps the Lord won't find such faith in prayer when he returns
- Many will pray but be so sure of their own righteousness that their prayers are hindered
- The disciples will tend to despise the little ones in the ecclesia.
May we not give way to these latter day temptations!

There is the real possibility that when Christ returns, none will hold the faith. Only eight people were truly watching when the flood came; and Peter cites this as an example for us at the time of Christ's return. No wonder there is such emphasis upon the need to watch. If we are the generation which will see Christ's appearing, we will be the only people who never physically die. And we will be those who welcome the Lord Jesus to this earth, who stand ready to welcome Him. This is an honour higher than we probably appreciate. No wonder there is this pressing need in these last days to watch our doctrine, our way of life, *to hold on* to the great salvation which we have been given in prospect.

18:9 *And he spoke also this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt*- The theme continues from the previous parable. There, the woman [representing us] prays for justice. "Justice" and "righteousness" are connected ideas in Hebrew and Greek thought. The woman wanted justice / righteousness; but she did not have it of herself. It had to be granted by a judge, and we are in relationship with the just judge, who alone gives justice / righteousness. Those who think they are righteous of themselves do not therefore fear God and they therefore despise men, just as the unjust judge did. The Pharisee who "treated others with contempt" therefore equates with the unjust judge of whom we have just read; and the woman desperately begging for justice is the tax collector begging for forgiveness, for rightness with God, who goes down to his house justified, with justice / righteousness, just as the widow went away with justice.

Paul alludes here when he says that the sentence of death we have within our bodies requires a bodily resurrection and transformation of the body far beyond our power to

achieve; and therefore we cannot trust in ourselves, i.e. our own righteousness (2 Cor. 1:9). Rather must we cast ourselves upon God's grace.

The Lord was "despised", the same word here translated 'to treat with contempt' (23:11; Acts 4:11). Those despised by religionists are fellowshipping their Lord's sufferings; and the religionists by doing so are taking the side of His abusers.

18:10 *Two men went into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector*- Many of the parables feature two people; the self-righteous, and the serious sinner. One saved, the other lost. The parable of the older and younger sons in chapter 15 is a clear example. We have it again here. If we don't identify with the serious sinner- then we have to identify with the self-righteous.

18:11 *The Pharisee stood and prayed thus*- AV "Prayed thus with himself". The OT idiom of prayer 'returning into one's own bosom' is surely the quarry from which the Lord dug His image of a man praying *with himself*. It isn't real prayer; it's one part of the brain talking to a black box in another part of the brain, that we call 'God'. We note how Luke especially records parables which focus upon the internal self talk of men; Luke introduces Jesus by recording that He would reveal the thoughts of many hearts (Lk. 2:35). For this is of such importance in the Lord's message of personal spirituality. The rich fool speaks within himself "What shall I do?" (indeed "I shall say to my soul, Soul, you have many goods stored up..."), the prodigal son and the unjust steward talk to themselves about their plans, the unjust judge talks to himself about what to do with the pesky widow, the owner of the vineyard talks to himself about sending his son, the unfaithful servant "shall say in his heart: My lord delays his coming" (Lk. 12:45). It is our self-talk which is clearly so significant to the Lord. The Gospel records themselves focus upon it- the Jews "said within themselves, This man blasphemes" (Mt. 9:3), they were warned not to "say within yourselves, We have Abraham..." (Mt. 3:9), the woman "Said within herself, If I may but touch..." (Mt. 9:21), the husbandmen said within themselves, This is the heir (Mt. 21:38 Gk.), in response to God saying within Himself "Surely they will reverence My Son", Simon the Pharisee says within himself that if Jesus were a true prophet, He would know the woman touching Him was a prostitute, Peter on release from prison says to himself "Now I know the Lord has sent His Angel..." (Acts 12:11), "Say not in your heart, Who shall ascend into heaven..." (Rom. 10:6). John's letters speak of the readership 'saying' things, and he surely means 'saying in your self-talk', that "we have fellowship with Him... we have no sin... we have not sinned" (1 Jn. 1:6,8,10)- because if we say we have not sinned, the word is not in us. If the word is in our hearts, our self talk within our hearts will not be like this. And this interest in human self-talk is reflected in the Old Testament too (e.g. Saul's self-talk about planning to make David be killed by the Philistines, 1 Sam. 18:17,21: "Saul thought, Don't let my hand be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him... Saul said, I will give her to him so that she can be a snare to him"). Once we appreciate this, it will not

seem at all out of place to consider the narratives of the Lord's wilderness temptations as a window onto His self talk.

God, I thank you that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector- Luke uses the same term in recording how "the rest of men" would seek and find the Lord (Acts 15:17). Those despised as secular, non-religious and the hopeless sinners are the very ones whom the Lord came to save; rather than the self-righteous religionists. And these are the ones we should be reaching out to, rather than attempting to convert religionists from one flavour to another. The same word for "rest" has just been used in :9 for how the Pharisee despised "others". It means to put down, to set at nothing; and this is how the tax collector, and those in his category, are made to feel by the self-righteous. It's a big reason why secular folk who are searching for God won't attend church.

"Or even as" could as well be translated to the effect that "this tax collector" was the epitome of an extortioner, unjust and adulterer. And his deep penitence could suggest there might have been some truth in that accusation. But he, the "unjust", was the one who went away "justified" (:14). Luke was personal friends with Paul, and it could be argued that his Gospel record was preparation for Paul's later theological writings. The idea of the unjust being justified by faith through grace is exactly the theme of Paul in Romans and elsewhere.

The Lord elsewhere makes the point that the Pharisees were all that this Pharisee prided himself upon not being. They were extortioners (Mt. 23:25), unjust (Mt. 23:23) and adulterous (so the Lord implies in Mt. 12:39; 16:4; 19:3-9). We have an example of their adultery in Jn. 8:1-11. So we have here a classic case of transference. The Pharisee clearly thought the tax collector was guilty of the very things which he himself did. He had transferred his sins onto that man, and now openly condemns the man for those sins. This is often seen in religious life; people condemn others for what they themselves commit, because they have transfered their sins onto those other people. This goes on at the level of the deeply subconscious. The point is, we are to face up to our sins and confess them, as the tax collector does. We are thereby justified; in this way our sins are removed by the process of God's forgiveness, and by those sins being as it were placed upon the Lord on the cross. And not by our subconscious transferal of them onto others.

18:12 *I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I get*- Fasting was only required by the Law on the day of Atonement; and tithing was only of cattle and agricultural produce. Obedience to law, and even exceeding legal requirements, was not the basis for justification; for it is the hopeless sinner who goes away justified (:14); as noted on :11, Luke seems to be preparing the way for Paul's later expositions on justification of sinners by faith and not legal obedience. Fasting in Biblical terms was associated with shame and desperate pleading for forgiveness; the Pharisee fasted only in a ritual

sense. It was the sinner who was accepted, without fasting. The point is that repentance cannot be ritualized. A blanket "And forgive me all my sins of this day" muttered each evening, is perhaps the dynamic equivalent of this ritualized fasting.

18:13 *But the tax collector, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but struck his breast, saying: God, be merciful to me, the sinner*- Ps. 51:1 “Have mercy on me, O God…” is quoted by the publican in Lk. 18:13. He felt that David’s prayer and situation was to be his. And he is held up as the example for each of us. In Romans 4, Paul quotes David's sin with Bathsheba as our pattern. We along with all the righteous ought to “shout for joy” that David really was forgiven (Ps. 32:11)- for there is such hope for *us* now. David is our example, and yet therefore the intensity of David’s repentance must be ours. He hung his head as one in whose mouth there were no more arguments, hoping only in the Lord’s grace (Ps. 38:14 RVmg.). Paul alludes here and sees this man as himself (1 Tim. 1:15,16). See on Lk. 23:48.

Usually men prayed with hands crossed over their chest. But men even at funerals don't usually beat upon their breast: "The remarkable feature of this particular gesture is the fact that it is characteristic of women, not men". The man was quite exceptionally upset and in grief- because of his sins. Beating his breast suggested a blow to his heart, as if confessing himself worthy of death. And personal recognition of private sin wasn't a big feature of first century life. The Lord's initial audience would've been amazed at the contrition and grief which this man had because of his secret sins; and this is the lesson for us. The times of prayer in the temple coincided with the offering of the daily sacrifices. The man asks for God to 'have mercy on me' (Lk. 18:13). But he uses a different word to that in Lk. 18:38, where the same translation commonly occurs. *Hilastheti moi*, he says; and the noun occurs only in Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:5; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10 to describe the atonement sacrifice. It seems the man was so extraordinarily moved by his own sin and the sacrifice offered. No wonder the same phrase occurs in Lk. 23:48 about people likewise beating their breasts in repentance when they saw the actual sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

The humble man “smote his breast, saying, God, be *merciful* to me a sinner". “Be merciful" translates the word elsewhere translated “make propitiation", in describing the atoning death of Jesus on the cross (Heb. 2:17). The man’s sinfulness drove him to plead for the cross: ‘Please God, make a propitiation for me’ was his plea. He realized his need for the cross. And we should look back at the cross and feel and know the same need. . According to the Lord's own teaching, there are in some ways only two types of believer: either we are the self-righteous Pharisee, or the publican who beats his breast in self-loathing, hating his corrupt heart, begging for “mercy” [Gk. propitiation], confessing that he is *the* sinner (Lk. 18:13 Gk.). Paul, in one of his many allusions to the Gospels, reached the same height of contrition when he said, in total honesty, that he was “[the] chief of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15,16). James 4:9 tells some

believers in the Jerusalem ecclesia that their joy ought to be turned to heaviness, implying the downcast look of the publican who could not so much as lift up his eyes to God. This man is held up by the Lord and James as some kind of hero and example to us.

The man who 'humbled himself' smote upon his breast in knowledge of his own sin and his Lord's grace. The Greek phrase occurs elsewhere only once, again in Luke's thought, in describing how those humbled by the vision of the cross beat upon their breasts (Lk. 23:48)- surely in recognition of their sin and contrition before the grace of God outpoured. In the cross, we see self-humbling that we might be exalted. And we respond by likewise humbling ourselves, that others may be exalted.

18:14 *I say to you, this man went home rendered righteous rather than the other. For everyone that exalts himself shall be humbled, but he that humbles himself shall be exalted*- This is alluded to in 2 Cor. 11:7. Paul told Corinth that he had abased himself so that *they* might be exalted, so that they could share the exaltation he would receive on account of his humility. In all this, of course, he reflected to his brethren the very essence of the attitude of the Lord Jesus for toward us. It was through refusing funding for his work from the Corinthians that he *abased* himself that they might be *exalted*- all language of the crucifixion (cp. Phil. 2:8,9). Thus his refusing of legitimate help to make his way easier was an enactment in himself of the cross. We live in a world which has made the fulfilment of personal aims of paramount importance. It has affected the fabric of every society, and become embedded in every mind. To *live to serve*, to put oneself down that others may rise... this is strange indeed. John the Baptist had this spirit, for he rejoiced that he decreased whilst the Lord's cause increased. Paul likewise abased himself that others might be exalted, after the pattern of the cross. God's gentleness, His humility / bowing down (Heb.) has made us great, lifted us up (Ps. 18:35). And we respond to it by humbling *our*selves.

So we are taught here that he who humbles himself in prayer will be exalted. Paul perhaps had this in mind when he spoke of how the Lord Jesus on the cross humbled Himself that He might be exalted (Phil. 2). Real prayer is a humiliating experience, a true humbling of self after the pattern of the Lord's crucifixion. We really need to ask ourselves whether this is anywhere near true of our prayer life.

"This man..." corresponds to how the Pharisee refers to the sinner as "this tax collector". "This..." person was a derogatory term. The older son speaks of "this son of yours" (Lk. 15:30); the Jews mocked the Lord as being "this man receives sinners and eats with them" (Lk. 15:2). We have again 'the great reversal'. The one despised is the one justified.

There was a saying amongst the Jews that "whoever brought a sacrifice to the temple returned justified". The Talmud said that while the Temple stood, when every Israelite had offered sacrifice, ‘his sin was pardoned and he departed justified.’ This man is presented as bringing the sacrifice of a broken spirit and penitent heart. This is another connection between this man and David in his repentance concerning Bathsheba.

To come before "the throne of grace" is to come in essence before the judgment and before the cross of our Lord. Inevitably these things convict us of our desperation. The publican who beat upon his breast "went down to his house justified". Yet we were justified by the shedding of the blood of Christ (Rom. 5:9). That man's faith was consciously focused upon the Lord's sacrifice. We believe on Him who justifies us, through the blood of the cross (Rom. 4:5), and this faith is manifested through focusing upon the cross, and expressing it in prayer to be justified. The publican went home after prayer "justified rather than the other". It has been suggested that this reflects "a Semitic idiom which describes... an anticipation of his acquittal in the final judgment".

The language of justification ["rendered righteous"] as noted on :11 and :12 is preparing the way for Paul's inspired expansion of these ideas in Romans. "Went home" is Gk. 'went down to his house', just as in :9 the two men both "went up to the temple". But only one went back 'down' justified. This is typical of the 'great reversal' often developed by Luke; the sinners, the humble, are exalted and saved and the proud self righteous are demoted and revealed as sinners. And here, the "unjust" (:11) went home 'justified'. This parable began in :9 with the Greek connecting word "also", linking it with the previous parable- which has spoken of the unrighteous, unjust judge hearing the petitions of the widow. The hint is that the just judge will justify the sinner. The Pharisee proclaimed his own righteousness to himself, but God will proclaim the righteousness of those He justifies- to all. Lk. 16:15 has just spoken of the Pharisees as “those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your heart”. Again, it's the great reversal. The sinner is counted righteous, but by the just / righteous judge. This is Paul's great theme in Romans 1-8, that the unrighteous are counted righteous by a just and righteous process, without any moral short cuts, no get around, and without turning a blind eye to the sins of those on your team. The Pharisee and others "trusted" in their own righteousness (:9), just as the man in Lk. 11:22 trusted in his own armour but had it taken away; whereas justification is by faith / trust in God counting us as righteous. All because we are "in Christ". This makes sense of how the tax collector prayed "afar off" (:10). The Pharisee would have gone to pray in "the courts of the righteous" but the tax collector was far away from that. Yet the Pharisee sees him because he mentions the tax collector in his prayer to God. So the "afar off" was largely in the sinner's mind.

The two men went into the temple at the same time, suggesting it was a time of corporate worship when Jewish males entered the temple for prayer. It could have been the day of atonement; or the time when the daily "sacrifice of atonement", as it was

called, was offered. The Pharisee commends himself for both fasting and tithing (:12), both of which were practiced on the day of Atonement. So like us in the presence of the symbols of the Lord's atonement, we can either consider ourselves righteous of ourselves; or be the smitten sinner who is justified at the end. Again we are left with the great reversal; humility is exalted, whereas in the first century world, humility was for losers and was something enforced upon a reluctant recipient. Whereas in the new spiritual world of the Lord Jesus, humility is to be aspired to, we are to humble ourselves, that we might be exalted in due time.

18:15 *And they were bringing to him even their babies, that he should touch them*- His blessing was and is mediated without physical contact. The need for physical contact in order to receive blessing was embedded in the religious mentality of the time, and is seen to this day in so many rituals and traditions of the Catholic and Orthodox churches. The sick woman thought to herself that if she could only *touch* Jesus, she would be made whole; but He responded that He made her whole because of *her faith* (Mt. 9:21,22). He was gently correcting her mistaken understanding of the power of touch. And yet the Lord made a concession to this misunderstanding by indeed touching the children as requested.

The touching was understood as a form of blessing. The implication is that the Lord agrees to the request, blessing little ones for the sake of the efforts of third parties who bring them to Him (as in Mk. 2:5 and so often in the work of saving and curing men). As the children 'received' this blessing, so the Lord urges the disciples to 'receive' the things of the Kingdom- for Mk. 10:15 records the Lord's further comment that "whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no way enter into it". Those children receiving His grace and blessing, all the more gracious because they received it thanks to others bringing them to it, represent each disciple who receives the grace and blessing of the Kingdom.

But when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them- Just as they had turned away the little one in Matthew 18, as they sought to send away the hungry crowds, forbad John's disciples and tried to turn away the Syro-Phoenician woman. And they did this despite the Lord's sober warning that turning away little ones is making them stumble, and will lead to eternal rejection from God's Kingdom. The disciples in their preaching, of which the Gospels are transcripts, were stressing how they had so failed to grasp this vital teaching.

18:16 *But Jesus called them to him, saying: Permit the little children to come to me, and do not forbid them. For to such belongs the kingdom of God*- The Lord rebuked the disciples for 'forbidding' John's disciples and the little ones to come to Him (Mk. 9:38); and yet He uses the same word to describe how the lawyers hindered [s.w. 'forbad'] people to enter the Kingdom. There's a very clear parallel here between the disciples and their Jewish teachers who had so influenced their thinking. But they finally got

there- for Peter insisted that Gentiles should not be forbidden [s.w. 'hinder'] baptism (Acts 10:47); and he uses the same word again when he says that now, he will not "withstand [s.w. 'hinder'] God in hindering people to come to Him (Acts 11:17). The awfulness of the disciples' attitude is brought out by the use of the word in 1 Thess. 2:16, where Paul says that the way the Jews 'forbad' or hindered the preaching of the Gospel was cause for the wrath of God to come upon them "to the uppermost". And the disciples initially followed their Jewish elders in this kind of behaviour. In passing, there is a sober warning here to those who would likewise 'forbid' baptism to those who sincerely seek it, and who will not allow 'little ones' to the Lord's table.

18:17 *Truly I say to you, Whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no way enter into it*- 'Be babes' Peter later exhorted, 'and grow as they do' (1 Pet. 2:2). The same word occurs here in Lk. 18:15 in description of the "infants" whom Peter rebuked. The Lord's response had been to tell Peter to be like them. And, having been humbled into learning something of a child's teachableness, a babe's desire for the sincere milk, Peter now asks others to learn the lesson.

The idea of "receiving" is often used about people accepting the Gospel. The implication is that one can receive the Gospel of the Kingdom of God- and yet not enter it, because we didn't receive it as a child. We didn't accept that we are the 'little ones', accepting we know so little, and just marvelling at the special grace being shown us which we accept in awed wonder. The language of 'entering the Kingdom' is used both of our final entry into the Kingdom when Christ returns (Mt. 25:10,21; Jn. 3:5), and of our current entering the Kingdom. The rich man can enter the Kingdom right now if he sheds the load of his wealth (Mt. 19:23,24). The Scribes stopped and hindered those who were entering the Kingdom from entering, locking the door through which the Kingdom could now be entered, all because they chose not to enter themselves (Mt. 23:13; Lk. 11:52). So it's a case of 'Now but not yet'. We do *now* enter into God's rest, and yet we are promised that we *will* enter that rest at Christ's return (Heb. 4:1-11). The Lord had warned that our righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes, or we will likewise not enter the Kingdom (Mt. 5:20); but that righteousness is in accepting the blessing of righteousness as a little child; for without *that* we shall not enter the kingdom. Those who do the will of the Father will enter the Kingdom (Mt. 7:21)- and that will is to be as little children and accept gifts without seeking to justify ourselves or earn them.

We will enter the Kingdom as shy children. It doesn't just mean that we must *now* be as little children, but more that we will enter the Kingdom as little children. For Jesus had just said that "of such is the Kingdom". Children unspoilt by the hardness of this world and this flesh... this is how we will be as we walk away from the judgment seat into the Kingdom. And we should live the Kingdom life now. See on Lk. 12:37.

The Lord perceived spiritual prompts in the ordinary things of every day life. He saw in

those children the qualities of those who would be in His Kingdom. Those kids weren't 'spiritual' in themselves. They were just Palestinian kids with well meaning, superstitious mums who believed in the power of the touch of the holy man. Yet, the Lord explained, that was no reason to disregard them. They should be seen as reminders of spiritual qualities which should be in us all. And this was how He perceived everything in His daily round of life. He raised everything to an altogether higher level.

18:18 *And a certain ruler asked him, saying: Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*- Mark adds that he came running to Him and kneeled before Him. The idea was: 'Give me a list of dos and don'ts, I'm game'. But the answer was ultimately: "Follow me" (:22)- 'don't worry about specifics, but have a spirit of life committed to following Me, bearing My cross'. For that is reward enough. Likewise Peter was interested in what the reward would be for having given things up for the Lord; and the final answer is really 'I'm going to die on the cross- please share that death with me' (Lk. 18:28-33 and parallels).

The man was clearly influenced by the Jewish idea that one supreme good deed could assure the doer of salvation. This was particularly popular amongst the zealots, who considered that suicidal attacks on the Romans could assure them of salvation; the same mentality is to be found in Islamic suicide bombers today. But in His typical manner, the Lord doesn't address the misunderstanding but rather works with it. He ends up telling the man that if he sells all he has and gives to the poor, then he will have "treasure in Heaven" (:22). This, therefore, isn't a global command to every Christian. It was designed especially for this young man who thought that just one great act of obedience would secure salvation. The Lord went along with this by giving him such an example; but added: "And come and follow Me", thus gently correcting the idea that one great act is enough for salvation.

Rom. 7:19 is Paul's allusion here, where he laments that like the young man, the good that he would do [same Greek words "shall I do"] he finds himself unable to do because of the sin that dwells within him. But instead of walking away from the Lord as this man did, Paul threw himself upon the Lord's grace. This zealous young man was also understood by Peter as representative of us all; for he clearly alludes to him in 1 Pet. 3:10,11: "He who would love life and see good days [cp. the young man wanting to "have eternal life"]... let him... do good" (same Greek words).

Mk. 10:17 notes that he also asked what he must do to "inherit" eternal life, as if he considered eternity a right that he must receive if he does only one great deed. The disciples heard the Lord assuring His people that those who follow Him will "*have* eternal life", enter the Kingdom, enter into life, etc. But having heard all that, Peter asked: "We have left all... what shall we *have*?" (Mt. 19:27). The irony of it all is tragic.

They'd just been promised they would "have" eternal life. But that wasn't enough. Their focus was very much on this life; what shall we have *here and now*? They couldn't see very much beyond the present, past the curvature of their earth. Ruth's unnamed relative could have been her redeemer; but when he realized he would have to marry her and have children, and split up his fields into more strips so as to give those children an inheritance along with that of his existing children- he pulled out. He wouldn't 'mar his inheritance'. He saw ahead to his death, to the next generation. His horizon was 20 years at most. But Boaz who didn't think like this established his spiritual inheritance eternally, and is therefore mentioned in the Lord's genealogy. Whilst the short sighted man passed off the page of history anonymously; his name wasn't preserved.

18:19 *And Jesus said to him: Why do you call me good? None is good, save one- God!*- The Greek may not mean that the Lord was implying 'Only God is good- I am not good'. Translators have added a number of words to try to flesh out the meaning of the words. The sense could just as well be 'None is as good as the one God'- and therefore, we should keep *His* commandments. In other words, the Lord is not so much saying that He Himself is not 'good' but rather refocusing the man's direction away from Himself towards the Father. For the man had come running to Him asking what he should do in order to inherit or rightfully have eternal life. And the Lord is refocusing the man upon the Father and the Father's commandments. The Lord may therefore have a rhetorical sense in His question '*why* do you call Me good?'. His sense would have been: 'Why are you so keen to call me "good", setting me on a level with God? Instead, focus on obeying God's commandments and tackle your hardest challenge- to give away your wealth, and then follow Me in the itinerant life towards the cross'. The man's overly high and unrealistic view of Jesus, as if He were God Himself, was really an excuse for his own refusal to face the challenge of living the Christian life. Every false doctrine has a psychological basis, and the idea that Jesus is God and the Trinity are no different. To accept Jesus as less than God, as totally human, is a far deeper challenge to our living than accepting Jesus as being God Himself. If Jesus was human, sharing our own flesh, in which there dwells no good thing (Rom. 7:18), and yet was able to be perfect- this lays down a huge challenge to each of us. It's far less challenging to accept Jesus as God and therefore good and perfect by nature. This is why I suggest the Lord is probing *why* the man called Him "good"- and redirected him towards the need for keeping the commandments and living the committed life in practice. So we have here a passage of deep significance for discussions about the Trinity. The Lord cites the unity of God as meaning that He alone is ultimately 'good', and challenges the man who wanted to treat Him as God as to whether this was not just an excuse for not doing the hard work of following Him in practice.

18:20 *You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery. Do not kill. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Honour your father and mother*- Harry Whittaker makes an interesting but not totally convincing case that the rich young man here was Barnabas

and these commands were very relevant to him as a Levite- see *Studies in the Gospels* chapter 148. Paul's references to the Gospels suggests that he had carefully meditated upon the passages to which he consciously alludes. The fact and way in which he *alludes* rather than quotes verbatim reflects the fact he had thought through and absorbed the teaching of the passages rather than learning them parrot fashion. Here the Lord Jesus combines two quotations from the Law: Ex. 20:12-16 followed by Lev. 19:18. Paul, in a different context, to prove a different point, combines those same two passages, although separating them by a brief comment (Rom. 13:9). This surely indicates that he had meditated upon how his Lord was using the Law, and mastered it so that he could use it himself.

18:21 *And he said: All these things have I observed from my youth*- The record in Mt. 19:20 stresses the incongruity and inappropriacy of the young man's self-righteousness: "The *youth* answered, all these have I kept from my *youth* up". He was young- and he says that since a young man he had kept all the commands. Now the Lord doesn't lecture him about self-righteousness, nor does He point out that the young man is way over rating his own spirituality and obedience. Instead, the Master focuses on the positive- as if to say 'You are zealous for perfection? Great! So, sell what you have and give to the poor. Go on, rise up to the challenge!'.

18:22 *And when Jesus heard it, he said to him: One thing you lack yet*- Matthew records that this was in response to his question: "What do I still lack?". And Lk. 18:22 provides the Lord's answer: "One thing you *lack* [s.w.]", but the "one thing" was to distribute his wealth and to follow Christ. The two things seem therefore related; it was the wealth which was stopping the following of Christ. The man had come to the Lord asking what great deed he must do to obtain eternal life, and so he was aware of his obedience to the commandments. He obviously felt that obedience to Mosaic law was not going to be the basis of eternal life, and he sensed that there was some great deed he must yet achieve. Therefore "What do I still lack?" shouldn't be read as an arrogant statement that he lacked nothing because he had been legally obedient. Rather is it a genuine question, seeking a concrete, clear and achievable answer.

The Lord was quoting from the LXX of Ps. 23:1. Because the Lord [Jesus] is our shepherd, "not one thing is lacking to me". The selling and sharing of his wealth is paralleled by the Lord with following Him. The one thing that was lacking was to shed his wealth *and* follow Christ. To follow Christ, to have Him as our shepherd, is therefore no merely intellectual affair, nor is it a question of legalistic obedience to a set of principles we inherited from our youth. It requires the most painful sacrifices.

Sell all you have and distribute to the poor- Luke again uses the word in describing how the early believers did indeed sell their possessions and 'distribute' to the poor within the ecclesia (Acts 4:35).

And you shall have treasure in heaven- Alluded to in James 1:12. We note that the Lord treated each person differently. He approved Zacchaeus' distribution of only half of his possessions- whilst demanding that this rich young man give away literally all. And He never seems to have demanded that those of His followers who owned houses should sell them. The same principle is seen in His preceding teaching about divorce and remarriage- His ideal standard is not 'given' to everyone, just as it is not a requirement of everyone that they sell and they have and give to the poor. The Lord taught that we receive the Lord's goods [s.w. "what you have"] on conversion to Him (Mt. 25:14). We resign all, but receive all. By giving away our earthly wealth, we directly receive wealth in Heaven. Lk. 12:15,33,44 make a sustained play on this Greek word: "A man's life doesn't consist in the abundance of the *things which he possesses* [s.w.]... sell *what you have* [s.w.] and give alms... [the Lord] will make [such a man] ruler over all *that he has* [s.w.]". Whilst the specific command to the young man to sell all he had and give it to the poor was not in one sense universal, i.e. not a command to every believer, yet the spirit of it (according to Luke 12) is indeed to be followed by us all. We must at least "forsake ['to bid farewell to'] all that [we] have [s.w.]" (Lk. 14:33). The early believers did not 'say' that anything they possessed [s.w.] was their own (Acts 4:32)- Luke surely intends us to connect this with his earlier record of how the Lord had taught that our attitude, at very least, must be that we do not really 'own' those things which we apparently 'have'.

And come follow me- See on Mk. 10:21; Lk. 10:42. In the first century, family and the family inheritance was everything. The way the Lord asked His followers to reject family and follow Him was far more radical than many of us can ever appreciate. Likewise His command to sell everything and follow Him implied so much- for the Middle Eastern family estate was the epitomy of all that a person had and stood for. And to be asked to give the proceeds of that inheritance to poor strangers... was just too much. It could seem, once one gets to know Middle Eastern values, that to abandon both family and the village home in favour of Jesus was just impossible- those things were more valuable to a Middle Eastern peasant than life itself. But still He asked- and people responded.

Consider the parallels between the Lord's demand of the young man, and Peter's comment (Lk. 18:22 cp. 28; Mk. 10:21 cp. 28):

	"We have left all
"Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor	
...and come, take up the cross	[no comment by Peter- he censored this bit out in his hearing of the Lord's words]

and follow me” …and have followed you”

Peter seems to have subconsciously bypassed the thing about taking up the cross. But he was sure that he was really following the Lord. He blinded himself to the inevitable link between following Christ and self-crucifixion; for the path of the man Jesus lead to Golgotha. We have this same tendency, in that we can break bread week after week, read the records of the crucifixion at least eight times / year, and yet not let ourselves grasp the most basic message: that we as followers of this man must likewise follow in our self-sacrifice to that same end.

18:23 *But when he heard these things, he became exceedingly sorrowful. For he was very rich*- Again Luke's record of the early church alludes here, speaking of how possessions were sold and the money distributed to the poorer believers (Acts 2:45; 5:1 s.w.). Mk. 10:22 describes him as "sad", literally the Greek means that he became overcast, as the sky clouding over. His joy, therefore, was because he had wrongly assumed that he could do some simple dramatic act well within his comfort zone, and thus attain an assurance of salvation. But his face clouded over when he realized that he was being called outside of his comfort zone. This is an exact picture of the disillusion which clouds so many once they perceive that the call of Christ is not to a mere social club or to surface level religion.

18:24 *And Jesus looking at him, said: How hard it shall be for those that have riches to enter into the kingdom of God!*- Mk. 10:24 speaks of the man who trusts in riches; the parallel Lk. 18:24 speaks of him who *has* riches. To have riches is, almost axiomatically, to trust in them. This is the nature of wealth 'possession'. For the man who has / trusts in riches, he must bow down like the camel wriggling through the small gate on its knees, having shed *all* its mountain of goods. This parable was given in the context of the Lord's straight statement: "He that humbles himself will be exalted" (Lk. 18:14 cp. 25). As the camel rose up from its knees the other side of the gate, so within the Kingdom's gates, those who have shed their trust in possessions will likewise be exalted.

The sense is not simply that it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom, but that he shall enter with difficulty. The Lord goes on to say that such shall enter the Kingdom only by God's grace and possibility of saving those who do not rise up to the higher levels that He bids us to (:27). In what, then, is the hardness or difficulty- if God is willing to accept our living on lower levels? The difficulty is in not walking away from Christ as the young man did, because of our pride; what is hard is to be like a child, the model throughout this entire discourse, and simply accept God's grace in Christ.

18:25 *For it is easier for a camel to enter in through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God*- The man walked away, whereas if he had cast himself upon the Lord's grace, or better still, sold what he had and given to the poor, then he

could have right then begun to enter into the Kingdom. We begin entering the Kingdom right now; we are, according to another teaching, walking on the road to the judgment, and must get right with our brother who walks on the way there with us. The parable of the camel (i.e. the rich would-be believer) being unloaded of its wealth before it enters the city (Mt. 19:23,24) represents a rich man entering the Kingdom (the city = the Kingdom, as in Rev. 22:14; 21:2; Heb. 13:14; 11:16; a city can also represent believers). If he sheds his riches now, it follows he is then able in some sense to enter the Kingdom now. In these few words is our highest challenge in this age.

In the beauty and depth of His simplicity, the Lord comprehended all this in some of the most powerful sentences of all time: *It is very hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom.* He *must* shed his riches, like the camel *had* to unload to pass through the needle gate. This is such a powerful lesson. And it's so simple. It doesn't need any great expositional gymnastics to understand it. Like me, you can probably remember a few things very vividly from your very early childhood. I remember my dear dad showing me this as a very young child, with a toy camel and a gate drawn on a piece of paper. And I saw the point, at four, five, maybe six. It is *so clear*. But what of our bank balances now, now we're old and brave? It's easier for a camel, the Lord said. Why? Surely because someone else unloads the camel, he (or she) has no say in it. But in the story, surely we must be the camel who unloads himself, who shakes it all off his humps, as an act of the will. And as we've seen, the spirit of all this applies to every one of us, including those without bank accounts.

Luke's writings bear the marks of a doctor writing; he uses exact medical terms. Luke's medical language is clearly seen in how he records the Lord's words about "passing through the eye of a needle". He uses the Greek medical term *belone*- a surgeon's needle. Matthew and Mark use the more domestic word *raphis* (Mt. 19:24; Mk. 10:25).

18:26 *And they that heard it said: Then who can be saved?*- They were really so shocked (Mt.) that wealth made it hard to enter the Kingdom, implying they were strongly persuaded that wealth was a gift from God and a sign of His approval of a man. This of course was quite foreign to the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount and other teaching of the Lord, and so we see how far they had been from understanding His most basic teachings.

"Can be..." translates the same word the Lord uses in the next verse to say that with God, even the saving of the wealthy who don't quit their wealth is "possible"- on the basis, therefore, of His willingness to accept a lower standard of achievement to that He ideally requires.

18:27 *But he said: The things which are impossible with men are possible with God*- The status of *para* God is often applied to the Lord Jesus (Lk. 2:52; Jn. 6:46; 8:40; 16:27; Acts 2:33). The suggestion could be that because of the status of the Lord Jesus with the

Father, such gracious salvation is possible which would be impossible if men simply had to have the steel will to obey the Father's ideal principles.

The idea of possibility with God is lifted from the Septuagint of the word to Sarah about the birth of Isaac (Gen. 18:14). Those Old Testament heroes were not merely stained glass figures- our own belief in salvation regardless of wealth is as dramatic as the belief of an old woman that she could have a child. The context here, however, is talking of how those who choose a lower level- in this case, *not* selling their wealth and giving to the poor- can still be saved by God's gracious possibility.

There are at least two instances in the Gospels where the Lord Jesus is quarrying his language from the book of Job, and shows a certain identification of himself with Job. Here the Lord explains the irrelevance of riches to the spiritual good of entering the Kingdom, saying that "with God all things are possible"- without money. This is almost quoting Job 42:2, where Job comes to the conclusion that all human strength is meaningless: "I know that You can do everything". It may be that Jesus is even implying that through the tribulation of his life he had come to the same conclusion as Job. See too Mt. 5:27-30.

18:28 *And Peter said: We have left our own*- See on Lk. 14:27. The family based structure of the first century is hard to fully empathize with from our distance. Family was all. Peter comments that the disciples had "left our own homes" (Lk. 18:28 RVmg.), and the parallel Mt. 19:27 says "left *all*". Your home was your all. To have to leave it for the sake of Christ was the most fundamental thing you could do. Hence the real meaning in the first century of the Lord's response that such converts would receive families in this life, i.e. in their relationships in the ecclesia. And yet the radical call of Christ is no less demanding and intrusive as men and women meet it today, the only difference being that the starkness of the choices is less pronounced today- but just as essentially real.

And followed you- Just as Peter's claim to have "left all" was perhaps questionable, likewise Peter seems to have under-estimated what 'following Christ' really meant- for the idea of carrying the cross is strongly connected with following Christ (Mt. 10:38; 16:24). And Peter failed to carry that cross to the end, for he denied the Lord when the going got tough.

18:29 *And he said to them: Truly I say to you*- This is in response to Peter's claim that they had "left all and followed You" (Mt. 19:27). The Lord doesn't comment upon Peter's claim. This may well have been because He knew that Peter had not in fact "left all" to the degree that Peter thought he had. They hadn't then grasped the idea of what really following involved; they hadn't in one way or another laid down their lives with Christ. The Lord was so generous spirited towards His disciples. He knew that Peter would not

follow Him as planned, to the cross- indeed, none of them would (Jn. 13:36,37), but He speaks to them as if they would be successful ultimately in following Him.

There is no one that has left house, or wife, or brothers, or parents, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake- See on Acts 8:12. This list of things to be forsaken, with Matthew adding houses and lands, recalls the language of the Levites forsaking these things in order to serve God (Ex. 32:26-29; Dt. 33:8-10). The secular disciples again are encouraged to see themselves as the Levites of the new Israel the Lord was creating. And note that the Lord speaks of how His followers will each have left mother, brother etc. to serve Him, referring to how Moses blessed Levi for forsaking these very things so as to God's service (Dt. 33:9). And there is no Christian who has heart and soul committed themselves to the Gospel's work, either in the world or amongst their brethren, who has not lived to see the truth of this definition of priesthood.

"For My Name's sake" is parallel with "The kingdom of God's sake" (Mt. 19:29). The things of the Name and the things of the Kingdom were therefore not two different things, rather were they different ways of referring to the same realities.

18:30 *Who shall not receive many times more in this time*- See on Mt. 10:27 for the allusion to Job. The Lord's prophecy that the believer receives fathers, mothers, houses, lands etc. only has its fulfillment insofar as the ecclesia is willing to share these things and relationships with its members. But the condition of the fulfillment was not explicitly stated. We forsake all human relationships to follow the Lord Jesus (Mt. 19:27-29). And He promises to compensate for this even in this life. But it depends to what extent we are willing to accept and perceive it. Through meaningful fellowship with our brethren we will find those relationships which we have given up compensated for, even if we aren't physically close to our brethren. In reference to Israel's deliverance from Egypt we read: "God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains" (Ps. 68:6). To be set in a new family is paralleled with being brought out from slavery. Part of the process of our redemption is that we are set in a new ecclesial family. This must be a reference to how Israel were brought out on Passover night, where the families and lonely ones had to join together into households big enough to kill a lamb for. The implication of Ps. 68 could be that it was in these family groups that they travelled through the wilderness. The N.C.V. reads: "God is in his holy Temple. He is a father to orphans, and he defends the widows. God gives the lonely a home. He leads prisoners out with joy...". The very house / family of God becomes the house / family of the lonely. Hence the ecclesia *is* the house of God (1 Cor. 3:16). We find true family in the new family of God. By baptism we are "added together" with those others who are likewise saved in Christ (Acts 2:47 RVmg.). We will live together eternally with the other members of this new body and community which we enter. The links between us within that new family are even stronger than those with our natural family;

and hence any division amongst the family of God is the greatest tragedy. What this means in practice is that we must fellowship each other. Even if we are isolated from other believers, one can always write letters, make phone calls, invite others to visit them, attempt to meet others...

And in the age to come, eternal life- These are the very words of the rich young man earlier in the chapter. The answer to that man's question was that we have to lose now, if we are to win eternally; we must forsake material things if we are to inherit the life eternal. As he was only a young man, it's likely that his wealth had been inherited. He was being told that the greatest inheritance was of life eternal, but this didn't come easily nor by good luck or circumstance, but in response to a lifetime of following Jesus. The things which were to be forsaken include [putting the records in Mark and Luke together with Matthew]: family, brothers, sisters, father, mother, lands, houses etc. These were all the things which the young man had received by inheritance, and to forsake association with his family, on behalf of whom he had received his wealth, would've been crazy and social suicide. It was as crazy as trashing a winning lottery ticket and walking away the same you were before you bought it. But this is the radical calling of those who must forsake materialism in order to inherit eternity. Therefore all seeking for material advantage in this life is surely inappropriate if in fact we are to forsake it even if it comes to us without our seeking it.

18:31 *And he took aside the twelve*- The implication is that there were others travelling with them, and the Lord wished to explain the reality of the cross to the disciples alone.

And said to them: We will go up to Jerusalem, and all the things that are written through the prophets about the Son of Man shall be accomplished- Mark adds: "And Jesus went before them, and they were amazed; and as they followed they were sore afraid". They went "up", uphill to Jerusalem. These small details all support the position that the Gospels were written by eye witnesses and were not created many years later by people who were not present. They were going the opposite direction of man in the parable of the Good Samaritan, who went *down* from Jerusalem to Jericho. We may be able to infer that the Lord intended us to read that man as one who was not going in the way of the cross, who was going away from Jerusalem rather than towards it- and who was still saved by the grace of the Samaritan / Jesus.

18:32 *For he shall be delivered up to the Gentiles, and shall be mocked and shamefully treated, and spat upon*- See on 1 Thess. 2:2. As noted on :15, this refers to the judgments upon Israel in Is. 50:2,6. The Greek for "delivered up" means literally 'to hand over'; the idea of betrayal was maybe implicit, but not as explicit as in the English word 'betrayed'. The word is very common on the lips of the Lord, as if He saw the moment of 'handing over' as the quintessence of all His sufferings- the hand over from God's providential protection to the powers of darkness. He has just spoken of how the Pharisee treated the tax collector shamefully, and the unjust judge had no shame in

shaming those who needed justice. The Lord is asking them to see that He is the one identified with those weak, marginalized, sinful people; and will suffer at the hands of those in secular power just as they had done.

18:33 *And they shall scourge and kill him, and on the third day he shall rise again*- The scourging alludes to the punishments upon Israel in Josh. 22:13. Indeed so many of the judgments on Israel were experienced by Jesus on the Cross:

Hos. 2:3,6 = Mt. 27:27-29; Jn. 19:28
Josh. 22:13 = Lk. 18:33
Ps. 89:30-32; Is. 28:18 = Mt. 27:30
Ez. 22:1-5 = Jesus mocked by Gentile Roman soldiers, Mt. 27:27-31
Is. 50:2,6 = Mt. 26:67; 27:30; Lk. 18:32
Jer. 18:16 = Mt. 27:39
These similarities are too close to have been engineered humanly; if it is accepted that Jesus was crucified, it does not seem unreasonable to accept that the sufferings of Jesus described in the New Testament really did happen. It therefore follows that Jesus of Nazareth did bear the sin and judgments of Israel, and therefore He is their saviour-Messiah. Judaism struggles with this observation.

The Lord's detailed knowledge of His sufferings could have been beamed into Him, or He could have worked some of it out from Old Testament types and prophecies. But it seems to me that because He gave His life of Himself, it was not taken from Him by the machinations of others, He therefore arranged the entire scenario so that these things would happen.

18:34 *And they understood none of these things, and this saying was hid from them, and they did not understand the things that were said*- See on Lk. 9:45. Luke earlier notes that the saying about the cross was “hidden” from them (Lk. 9:45), in confirmation of their own refusal to understand it because it demanded that they too suffer with their Lord. And yet in prayer to the Father, He rejoices that these things are not hidden from them (Lk. 10:21,23). This gives insight into the Lord’s present mediation for us in prayer- speaking of us as far better than we are. The message of Christ crucified was “hid” from them (Lk. 9:45; 18:34)- and Paul surely alludes to this when he says that this message is hid by the veil of Judaism from those who are lost (2 Cor. 4:3). Matthew adds that there arose a controversy as to who should be the leaders in the new community; and when the Lord earlier explained His passion, Luke also adds that straight afterwards, “there arose a dispute among them, which of them was the greatest” (Lk. 9:46). Time and again we see this in the Gospels- when the Lord speaks of His upcoming death, the disciples change the subject. This explains our own problem with mind wandering at the breaking of bread or in the study or even reading of the crucifixion accounts. This difficulty on

focusing upon Him there is likely because His death requires our death and suffering, and subconsciously we realize that- and would rather not.

18:35 *And it came to pass, as he drew near to Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging*- Matthew's account of the healing of the two blind men as they *left* Jericho must be compared with the healing of Bartimaeus as He left Jericho (Mk. 10:46), and now the healing of a blind man as He *approached* Jericho (Lk. 18:35). These accounts are not in contradiction. One of the two blind men was Bartimaeus, and he is the one Mark focuses on. The healing of the first blind man is indeed described in the same terms as the healing of the other blind men, but the similarity of the language is in order to demonstrate how the Lord worked in the same way in different lives at slightly different times. And there are other examples of incidents repeating in Biblical history but being described in similar language. We are left with an abiding impression that what happens in our lives has been in essence repeated in other lives. And surely the healing of the first blind man inspired the others to take the same leap of faith, just as we are to be inspired by the way others have responded to the Lord's hand in their lives.

If indeed there are major bloomers in the Gospels and in the Bible generally [as the critics suggest regarding these incidents of healing the blind men], then naturally the question arises as to how reliable the Biblical text really is. Liberal Christians tend to argue that some is, other parts aren't. But no basis is given for deciding which parts are reliable and which are not. Nor does there seem any reason why God would inspire some parts of the Bible but not others. But the wonder is that the Bible, and the Gospels particularly, can be analyzed at depth and found not to contradict but rather to dovetail seamlessly in a way in which no human piece of writing ever could. This is particularly seen in the four Gospels, and it is this seamlessness and lack of contradiction which led sceptics like Frank Morrison in *Who Moved the Stone?* to become committed believers in the bodily resurrection of Christ. In musical terms, the whole united record reads as a symphony. There is no need to remove one note from it, or a few notes here and there. The overall wonder is lost by doing so, to the point that it is a desecration of the Divine product. If there are passages which we cannot reconcile, the way of humility is surely to accept that we are still waiting for more insight and understanding- rather than arrogantly insisting that Divine inspiration somehow faltered at that point.

18:36 *And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant*- The idea is not 'What ever is going on?' but rather is he enquiring of the significance of all this. There is a similar incident in Mt. 21:10,11, where part of the crowd ask: "Who is this?", and the other part answer back: "This is Jesus the prophet". They were trying to echo Ps. 24:8,10: "Who is this king of glory?" is answered by "The Lord strong and mighty". This was understood as how the crowds were to call to each other in the Messianic procession. Perhaps this man was attempting to have a part in what he believed to be a Messianic event; in this case, he would have accepted that the Lord was Messiah. He was inspired

by previous healings of blind men in Mt. 9:27, who would have surely spread the message that they considered their healer to be Jesus the Messiah.

18:37 *And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passes by*- As noted on :36, this could be understood as their participation in some Messianic procession, whereby one shouted "Who is this?" and the answer was then given. This would explain why the man addresses Him as "Son of David", a title associated with Messiah's enthronement.

18:38 *And he cried, saying: Jesus, you son of David, have mercy on me!*- These were exactly the words of the two blind men of Mt. 9:27, who were likewise cured by the Lord on the outskirts a town, just as here the cure happened as He approached Jericho. They are also similar words to the healing of the blind men recorded after the Lord leaves Jericho. The similarity and connection is obvious. From God's side, we see how He works according to pattern in the lives of people. And humanly, the blind man had somehow passed on to other blind men the truth that there was mercy / grace in the Son of David, which could be manifested in the restoration of sight. In this lies the significance of the fact that according to Matthew and Mark, other blind men said exactly these words and made exactly this request as the Lord *departed* from Jericho. Far from being [as supposed by the critics] a jumbling up of material by uninspired writers, we see rather the development of a theme- that blind men at various places and times approached the Lord with the same words, and made the same connection between His mercy and Him being the Son of David. They may simply have thought that as the Son of David, He had the characteristics of David- which included remarkable mercy and grace to his enemies. We also see how once a community is broken into with the Gospel, it spreads within that community, expressed in the words and concepts which that community understands, and in the style which originated with the first ones in the community who accepted the Gospel. I have seen this happen in communities of the deaf, Gypsies, HIV patients, ethnic minorities under persecution, language groups etc. And so it happened amongst the blind beggar community in Palestine. Such communities have amazing links to each other and paths of communication.

The connection between "the son of David" and "mercy" is surely rooted in the description of the promises to David as "the mercies [*chesed*] of David" (Is. 55:3; Acts 13:34; 1 Kings 3:6; 2 Chron. 1:8; Ps. 89:49 "The mercies which You promised unto David"; Is. 16:5 "In mercy shall the throne be established... in the tent of David"). These promises were utter grace; "mercy" translates *chesed* , which is about the closest the OT comes to the NT concept of grace. David rejoiced in this *chesed* / mercy shown to him (2 Sam. 22:51; 2 Chron. 7:6; Ps. 101:1). Solomon pleaded for grace on the basis of the fact that God had shown such covenant mercies to David (2 Chron. 6:42 "Remember the mercies of David"). The mercies of David surely also refer to God's mercy, the mercy of grace, shown to David in forgiving him the sin with Bathsheba and Uriah- he begged for forgiveness on the basis of God's "tender mercies" (Ps. 51:1). It

could be argued that David's forgiveness was on account of his pleading for the mercies shown to him in the Davidic covenant to be continued to him. For in that covenant God had promised that *chesed* would not depart from David (2 Sam. 7:15), and David therefore begs for forgiveness on the basis that grace / *chesed* would indeed not be withdrawn from him (Ps. 51:1). From all this, David pleaded in crisis towards the end of his life to fall into God's hands because "His mercies are great" (2 Sam. 24:14). In response to the *chesed* ["mercy", or grace] shown David, he too was characterized by humanly senseless *chesed* to his enemies in the family of Saul (s.w. 1 Sam. 20:15; 2 Sam. 2:5 "you have shewed this kindness / *chesed* unto Saul"; 2 Sam. 3:8; 9:1,7) and to Hanun his Ammonite enemy (2 Sam. 10:2 "I will shew kindness / *chesed* unto the Hanun"). What is so impressive is that the network of blind men, from Galilee to Jericho, had figured this out, or at least part of it. They saw the connection between grace and David, and were inspired to throw themselves upon the grace of David's Messianic Son. There was in those times [as there is in much of the world today] a deep belief that blindness was the direct result of sin (Jn. 9:2). These blind men almost certainly felt that their blindness was a result of their sin, and so they felt a moral need for forgiveness, so that the blindness would be lifted. According to Mk. 10:46, one of the blind men was called Bartimaeus, literally 'Son of the unclean'- doubtless this was what he had been dubbed by others, for no Hebrew mother would have named her son that. And they believed that Jesus could indeed cleanse them, morally forgive them, and thereby restore their sight. This would explain why they screamed [Gk.] "Have mercy on us!". This was a moral request; they didn't simply call out for healing.

18:39 *And those who led the way rebuked him*- This is yet another example of where the Lord is presented as eager to accept, when men [including disciples] are more eager to reject. The same word has just been used for how the disciples rebuked the little ones from coming to the Lord- and were in turn rebuked. The impression is that in the disciples' exclusivity, they weren't being [as they supposed] more spiritual than the world around them, but rather were they being simply as that world. Soon afterwards, the Pharisees told the Lord to "rebuke" His disciples, and He replied that it was impossible for them to "hold their peace" (Lk. 19:39,40). These are all words and phrases taken from this incident. Now it is the disciples who refuse to be quiet, and it is the Pharisees who want them to be quiet. Again the point is made that the desire to silence and exclude others is from the world, and not of Christ. The Lord's acceptance of people is consistently painted by the Gospels as being far more inclusive and extensive than that of men. The human tendency to reject and erect barriers is simply not there in Christ.

Saying that he should be quiet; but he cried out all the more: You son of David, have mercy on me!- This could be seen as the result of the Lord's piquing their sense of urgency for Christ by not responding immediately. This is also a factor in some of His delayed responses to our own needs.

18:40 *And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him; and when he came near, he asked him*- The Lord could have walked up to the man as He did to others when curing them. But on this occasion He wished to teach that His calling of men to Him for healing often uses a human mechanism. The "call" comes through people bringing others to the Lord. The Lord "calls" just as the people "called" the man. The Lord's calling and our calling of men are thereby paralleled. The experience of being called by the Lord is not to be seen as an onerous call to responsibility before Him; rather is it the source of "courage". His calling is because He wants to do something good for us, rather than saddle us with the weight of responsibility to judgment.

18:41 *What do you want me to do for you? And he said: Lord, that I may receive my sight*- The Lord had a way of focusing men upon their need. Thus He would have passed by the desperate disciples as they struggled in the storm, He would have gone further on the road to Emmaus, and He later asked the blind men the obvious question: “What will you that I shall do unto you?” (Mt. 20:32). He only partially cured another blind man, to focus that man’s mind on the faith that was needed for the second and final stage of the cure (Mk. 8:23-25). He elicited from the father of the epileptic child the miserable childhood story of the boy- not that the Lord needed to know it, but to concentrate the man on his need for the Lord’s intervention (Mk. 9:21). He wanted them to focus on their need: in this case, for sight. He let Peter start to sink, and only then, when Peter’s whole heart and soul were focused on the Lord, did He stretch forth His hand. The Lord deliberately delayed going to see Lazarus until he was dead and buried; to elicit within His followers the acuteness of their need. And was He *really* sleeping in the boat with the storm all around Him? Was He not waiting there for them to finally quit their human efforts and come running to Him with faith in no other (Mk. 4:38,39)? Only when men were thus focused on their desperate need for the Lord would He answer them. The Lord further focused men’s need when he asked the lame man: “Do you want to be made whole?” (Jn. 5:6). Of course the man wanted healing. But the Lord first of all focused his desire for it.

The one thing he wanted was to see. The healed blind man is a type of us. True understanding (seeing) should be the one thing we want. "Wisdom is the *principal* thing; therefore get wisdom" Prov. 4:7). This was obviously a rhetorical question, and it succeeded in the intention of making the men verbalize their dominant desire. Likewise the Lord works with us to make us focus and understand what is our dominant desire- and then seeks to reposition that focus. In this section He has done that by placing all human desires and requests in the shadow of His death for us. For how could we want anything 'extra' after He has done that for us, with all it enabled.

18:42 *And Jesus said to him: Receive your sight; your faith has made you whole*- The Greek term for "receive your sight" is literally 'look up', and is the word used for how the Lord had a habit of praying to God with open, uplifted eyes. There is surely the hint that the gift of sight was to encourage the man in his relationship with God, and likewise "whole" suggests that the man as a person was now "whole". The miracle was a gift of spiritual things as well as literal sight; which is why the man now follows the Lord (:43). The 'gift of heavenly health' is by grace; the Lord is eager to act directly upon willing hearts to give us the spiritual energy to follow Him.

18:43 *And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God; and when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God*- As the Lord left Jericho, two other blind men were healed and they too followed the Lord in the way (Mk. 10:52). So surely they had heard of His healing power from the testimony of this blind man who followed Him throughout Jericho and then out the other side. We notice that he witnessed to blind men; we most powerfully take the gospel to those in our situation, and not to those in far off lands of other cultures. This is to be done; but witness is essentially personal and is to those of our own background and experience. And even before meeting those blind men, this man's praise of God influenced "all the people" to do likewise.

LUKE CHAPTER 19

19:1 *And he entered Jericho and was passing through*- As noted at the end of chapter 18, the blind man healed on the Lord's approach to Jericho followed Him through Jericho, and led to the conversion of two other blind men as the Lord left Jericho. So we can imagine this healed blind man following the Lord as He passed through Jericho.

19:2 *And a man named Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector, and rich*- Meyer suggests there was a profitable balsam trade in Jericho, which would have enriched the tax collectors. Lightfoot quotes evidence that such people were not allowed to be legal witnesses: "These are persons not capable of giving any public testimony, shepherds, exactors, and publicans". The same was true for women. And yet it was exactly these kinds of people and categories whom the Lord chose to be His witnesses. To this day, He delights in using those who have little human credibility nor ability as witnesses. In this sense our sense of inadequacy to witness is our adequacy; it is in fact the prime qualification. This incident is a natural follow on from the Lord's parable about the repentant tax collector and the Pharisee. Only Luke records that, and this historical account is also unique to Luke, so he appears under inspiration to be exemplifying how the parable worked out in practice. 'Zacchaeus' in Hebrew means 'pure'; he who was far from pure was justified by faith and grace, as was the tax collector of the parable.

"And rich" connects with the recently recorded teaching of the Lord that it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom; but with God it is possible, and the conversion of Zacchaeus is again a worked example of this. It is only by deep conviction of sin and fellowship with the Lord personally that the rich can be led to part with their wealth.

19:3 *Was seeking to see who Jesus was; but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small of stature*- The fact nobody made way for him is a tacit reflection of how his wealth had not bought him respect. As he was seeking Jesus, so the Lord was seeking him (:10). We see here the mutuality which there is between us and the Lord. Luke the doctor seems to pay special attention to those whose physical appearance was non standard; it is Luke who likewise records the healing of the woman bent over; just as Luke also focuses upon women and the marginalized. Those marginalized for whatever reason were now drawn in to the people of God- to such an extent that we get the impression that the new people of God are in fact those marginalized and rejected by society.

"Small of stature" is a Greek phrase used in contemporary literature for a dwarf. This would explain why he was so small that he literally couldn't see the Lord; and how a sycamore bush / tree could support him. Dwarfism was seen as a sign of Divine displeasure; outward appearance was seen as a reflection of a person's inward and spiritual state. Physical deformity was seen as reflective of spiritual disformation. Dwarfs were forbidden access to the temple on the basis of the Mosaic proscription of

men with *some* deformities [although dwarfism isn't specifically mentioned] being priests. Dwarfs were also thought to be comical characters. Running, climbing trees etc. was not seen as the behaviour of the wealthy or noble [hence the significance of the Father running to meet the prodigal]. This places Zacchaeus in a difficult position- seen as unable to come to God, thought to be non-standard and weird, wealthy in a generally poor society, seen as a national traitor, with a career that isolated him from people. But he saw that the Lord Jesus called individuals regardless of those things.

We note that the crowds were a barrier for him coming to the Lord- just as they were, Luke notes, for the blind beggar (Lk. 18:35-43) and the man who had to be let down through the roof because the crowds stopped him coming to the Lord (Lk. 5:17-19). Crowds, comprised of members of the people of God [Israel], with a professed interest in Jesus of Nazareth... stopped sincere individuals coming personally to the Lord. Just as the disciples tried to stop the little children and their mothers coming to the Lord, and also the Syro Phoenician woman. Luke notices this situation, and how the Lord was aware of it. And called people despite it.

19:4 *And he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way*- The Lord likewise foreknew Nathanael when he was far off under a tree (Jn. 1:48). The similarity simply shows that the Lord works in similar ways in parallel lives. And this is the basis of our fellowship in Him- shared experience of the same style of the Lord's operation with us. Running ahead of a person and association with tree leaves can be seen as heralding the triumphant entry of Messiah. This will be recorded later in this chapter, but perhaps the idea is that the Lord saw His triumphal entries at this stage as being into the homes of sinners rather than into the Jerusalem temple. On :8 I will suggest that this running ahead in "the way" is one of several hints that Zacchaeus was a convert of John the Baptist, who in this sense prepared the Lord's way before Him.

"Sycamore" really means 'fig tree'. Zacchaeus nestled amongst its branches suggests that he was the fruit on the fig tree, the sign of spiritual fruit in a repentant Israel.

19:5 *And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him: Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house*- The same words for "come down" and "house" have just been used in Lk. 18:14, where another repentant tax collector 'goes down to his house' justified. Tax collectors were baptized by John, and the Lord rather liked eating with them, in the hope they might repent. So clearly, there was interest in the Gospel amongst tax collectors. The Lord had taught His preachers to enquire who in a town was "worthy" and stay at their home (Mt. 10:11). He is forcing the conclusion that He can declare the unworthy to be worthy, just as the unjust tax collector of the earlier parable was declared just. We note that "Zacchaeus" means 'the pure / just one', and that is how the Lord saw him. This is all Luke's way of

paving the way for his friend Paul's later expression of all this in terms of justification by grace and faith.

By calling Zacchaeus by name, when apparently they had never before met, the Lord was showing that He knew His sheep and was calling him by name (Jn. 10:3). He urges him to respond quickly, and this fits in with a major theme in Luke of quick response to the Lord, culminating in the apparently 'quick' baptisms recorded in Acts. Speed of response is not only appropriate to any call from the Lord, but unless we respond quickly, the flesh tends to kick in and reason us out of the response we need to make.

19:6 *And he made haste and came down*- The speed of his response is significant. Subconsciously, the message of Jesus which he had heard must have been working within him. When he then encountered the Lord, it all came together. The word was made flesh. There was something in Him which was and is incredibly compelling.

And received him joyfully- Luke is presenting Zacchaeus as the parade example of how whoever receives the Son receives the Father, and Luke in 9:48 recorded Him saying that and immediately commenting that "the least", the littlest, is the greatest. The "little" height of Zacchaeus may also allude to the Lord's recent ultimatum that the Kingdom must be "received" (s.w.) as a little one (18:17). The joy of Zacchaeus is that joy which is so often mentioned in Luke-Acts as accompanying true conversion. We note that the Lord alludes to His parable of seeking and finding the lost sheep in the context of what His 'finding' Zacchaeus (:10). When the sheep was found, the shepherd rejoices (15:5). This is the same word translated "joyfully". There is a mutuality between the Lord and His people; His joy is their joy.

Receiving the Lord into his home presents Zacchaeus as the host. But he is a dwarf, who typically were used as comic characters to provide entertainment at a meal. But he is here presented as the host, showing the inversion of values which there is in the Lord and His ways.

19:7 *And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying: He is gone in to lodge with a man that is a sinner*- Presumably Zacchaeus had been disobedient to the teaching of John the Baptist to “Exact no more than is appointed". Here was a totally secular person, uninfluenced by John's preparatory work, simply coming to the Lord because he sensed the truth in Him. "Lodge" suggests He spent the night there (s.w. LXX Gen. 24:23). Again we notice the guilt by association mentality of the people. Who you stayed with and ate with was seen as a religious act; and the Lord was doing this without any statement of repentance from Zacchaeus. It was by offering this kind of open, outgoing fellowship that the Lord sought and found Zacchaeus; and the repentance was elicited from that radical acceptance. This was in marked contrast to the attitude that such signs of

fellowship should only be granted once a person had cleared certain bars and demonstrated their spiritual level.

19:8 *And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord: Behold Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have wrongfully exacted something from anyone, I restore fourfold*- To give away wealth is part of response to the Gospel, according to Luke (Lk. 12:33; 14:33). Zaccheaus is set up as a model convert. But the rich young ruler has recently been told, recorded by Luke, to sell *all* he had and give to the poor. Zacchaeus offered *half* of his wealth to the poor. And this was acceptable. Or it could be that he means that half of his goods would be spent restoring what he had stolen, and the other half would go to the poor. The fourfold restitution seems far above that of the Jewish law (which required a fifth to be added to the returned item, Lev. 5:24; Num. 5:6,7), but apparently Roman law required fourfold restitution of stolen goods. But I see this as an example of how God's law is not a chain; for man is not a dog, tied against his will by an inconvenient leash. Rather, Divine law is a springboard to greater devotion. The principle of restitution was followed by Zacchaeus to a far greater extent than the law required. Just as Boaz went far beyond the Mosaic legislation about gleaning and redeeming poor relatives, although the legislation was used by him as a springboard to far greater devotion.

The way he stands and addresses the Lord could perhaps be Luke framing this as a public confession of faith and repentance, of the kind seen before baptism in the early church. Zacchaeus is being set up as a role model.

However, there is another take on the story, although it requires attention to the tenses used here in this verse. The tense of *didomi*, "I *give* to the poor", is definitely indicative of regular, habitual action. Never is *didomi* used by Luke in the present tense [as it is here] in order to express intention or a future action. This point is argued at length in Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Zondervan, 1996) pp. 521,522. The same verb tense is used by the Pharisee in Lk. 18:12 when he says "I fast... I tithe". The present tense there means 'I regularly do these things'. Similarly in English, "I pay taxes" means I do so regularly, "I go to school" likewise; it doesn't mean 'I have not yet gone to school but from now on I will be going to school'. So we could read the incident as Zacchaeus vindicating himself, rather than repenting and promising to put things right in future. The way he "stood and said" could therefore imply 'standing his ground', standing up and saying something as a public statement. In response to the murmuring against him of :7, he justifies himself. And that would explain why several elements are missing here which we find in the other accounts of the Lord meeting sinners- they confess sin or there is at least remorse and contrition, they are deeply moved by His forgiveness, and we meet the language of forgiveness. There is also the declaration of forgiveness by the Lord Jesus (Lk. 5:20; 7:48; 8:48). But there is none of that here. In this case, the incident is an account of a man who appears sinful, who is the subject of all manner of gossip because of his employment and his physical appearance being like some Scrooge

character... when in fact he is very righteous, although condemned in the court of public opinion. The Lord knew all this, and justifies him. Which would be a comfort to all labouring under misunderstanding, gossip, inuendo and harsh, wrong judgment in the eyes of society. For it was not impossible for a tax collector to be a spiritual, committed Christian. We think of Obadiah, steward of the court of Ahab and Jezebel, who appeared to God's man Elijah to be apostate because of his secular position- when in fact Obadiah had done great things for Yahweh's people, despite his very difficult employment. Just as Joseph, Daniel and others worked in pagan courts at a high level, and still retained integrity. This approach would also explain why Zacchaeus addresses Jesus as "Lord"- because he already believed in Him, despite not having ever got close up to Him. But he surely had heard of His teachings, and had been persuaded by them. Perhaps he had stood at the edge of the huge crowds, and was impressed by the message.

Zacchaeus, according to this reading, would have been a victim of generalization and stereotyping; most tax collectors were corrupt, and so he was tarred with the same brush. Abnormally short people were understood as greedy and small minded; tall people were thought to be born leaders (hence Samuel being warned not to be impressed by human height in searching for a king, 1 Sam. 16:7). Just as people from certain towns were thought to have inevitably bad characteristics ["Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"], and physical handicaps and illnesses were thought to reflect sin (Jn. 9:1,2). And we have all surely been victims of generalization in some way at some point. But Jesus sees and knows, and fellowships with us at our table which becomes His table. The way the Lord speaks of His inviting Himself in to our table, and if we agree, then He sits down and eats with us... all sounds rather like the scene between Himself and Zacchaeus. Again, he becomes representative of us all. And that is what sitting at the Lord's table is all about.

In this case, Zacchaeus would be saying that whenever he in the course of his job had to "wrongfully exact" tax from people because of the policies of his employers / overlords, he always restored to the abused person four times over, from his own private wealth. Of course it could be that his wealth had arisen from unethical behaviour in the past, before his conversion by Jesus' teachings. The idea of being a true son of Abraham (Mt. 3:9) is in fact exactly what John the Baptist had taught. And there were tax collectors baptized by him: "And there came also tax collectors to be baptized; and they said to him: Teacher, what must we do? And he said to them: Collect no more than what you have been ordered to" (Lk. 3:12,13; 7:29). We note they were not told to resign from their jobs. The fact it is Luke who records this would suggest we are to assume Zacchaeus was one of those baptized tax collectors. Zacchaeus says he would restore whatever was "taken by false accusation", and the only other occurence of the Greek word is in John the Baptist's command to the soldiers he baptized not to take from others by false accusation (Lk. 3:14). These connections all lead us to understand Zacchaeus as a

convert of John's, who had not physically gotten close to Jesus but believed John's message about Him. John came to prepare the way of the Lord Jesus, to go before Him and prepare people. Zacchaeus was a parade example- he went ahead of the Lord Jesus in "the way" (:4) and was prepared for Him when He came to him. Indeed, Zacchaeus "ran before" Jesus just as John had done (:4). He had grasped the spirit of Jubilee which Luke so labours. He was into releasing debt, helping those oppressed by the taxation system, relieving poverty... and yet, like the Lord, was despised and rejected of men.

He regularly gave away half of his "goods", the payment in kind which he received for his work. For tax was paid in kind rather than cash, and he received his cut of that. But he gave half of it away. And yet for all that, just like the Lord Himself, he was misunderstood. And true to life, no good deed goes unpunished, and so often the kindest, most generous people are the ones most slandered and misrepresented in the court of public opinion. It is certainly true to my own experience in a lifetime of working with such fine individuals in the mission field. They are slandered and misjudged. And that misjudgment hurts them deeply. And the comfort of all this would be that (as ever), Jesus totally understands and fellowships with them. And the experience of misjudgment is far more common than might appear. So many, in various ways, labour beneath it. We note that Zacchaeus makes this statement directly to Jesus; he doesn't seek to justify himself to the crowd who are making the insinuations against him (:7). That too is a pattern for all who are misjudged by the court of public opinion, weighed down by the weight of public opinion, labour beneath the judgment that comes from generalization and not being judged as an individual person.

The climax of the incident however is the Lord's comment that He has come to seek and save the lost (:10). But so often, His parables and teachings have an end stress, which frequently is different to what we might expect. We think of His commendation of the unjust steward. In this case, although He was addressing Zacchaeus, He was actually speaking to the crowd. This is confirmed in :11: "And as they heard these things, he added and spoke a parable". "Forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham" certainly is effectively addressed to the murmuring, gossiping crowd. That day salvation had come to "this house"- the house of Israel, "forasmuch" or because of Zacchaeus being a true seed of Abraham, behaving in the saving spirit of the Lord Jesus. He had brought them a foretaste of Jesus- and they rejected it. They would have heard Him speak of salvation coming to this house and assumed He referred to salvation for sinful Zacchaeus. But the spiritually minded would then have perceived that He spoke about them. And relevant to them too, therefore, was His final comment that He has come to seek and save the lost- and *they* were the "lost", and not Zacchaeus. They would at first hearing have assumed He was speaking about Zacchaeus; but then would have realized that He was really addressing *them*. This would be so typical of how the Lord ends His teachings. Thus the parable of the good Samaritan, when thought about, is saying that

we are not so much called to be the Samaritan- as to recognize that we are the wounded man, needing the Samaritan's grace to save us. And this would be similar.

19:9 *And Jesus said to him: Today salvation has come to this house, as he also is a son of Abraham*- See on Acts 16:34. The idea of the "today of salvation" continues the allusions to the year of release, the Jubilee, the spirit of which Zacchaeus had entered into. Because he had released others, he himself was released. The stress on "house" was presumably to meet the criticism that He had entered the house (:7). But the "house" probably refers to the household. The family would see a huge drop in their wealth- and it was that which converted them to salvation. It was the very inverse of the claims of the prosperity gospel. It is as if Zacchaeus is being set up as the opposite of the rich young man of 18:23. When the synagogue excommunicated a man, he was stated to no longer be a "son of Abraham". The Lord is demonstrating His authority to utterly override all such statements that excommunication from a religious group means that a person is not in the wider community of God's true people. He sets Himself up as the ultimate deciding authority in a new Israel comprised of serious sinners and secular, non-religious types. Zacchaeus presumably continued in his daily work and therefore remained outside the synagogue system- but a "son of Abraham".

The Lord predicates salvation upon being a son of Abraham. But this man was Jewish already; the conclusion is that natural descent would not bring salvation, but rather a faith in Messiah as Abraham had, continuing the family characteristic. Perhaps Zacchaeus is called a son of Abraham in that he too repented of his self-centred materialism, walking away from much wealth to become a nomad.

19:10 *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost*- See on :8; Mt. 13:46; Lk. 9:54,55; 15:2; 1 Cor. 10:33. As noted on :7, the Lord extended fellowship to sinners in order to bring them to repentance; rather than giving it to them as a reward for attaining some level of understanding or spirituality. And this should be reflected in our open approach to people. The allusion is clearly to the parable of the shepherd seeking the lost sheep; the joy of the shepherd in that parable is described with the same word as the joy of Zacchaeus (:6; 15:5).

19:11 *And as they heard these things, he added and spoke a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was immediately to appear*- The question was: 'Will the Kingdom come really soon, like, in our lifetimes?'. Answer: the parable of the minas. Trade *your* personal talent- because there is such a thing as people being rejected at the last day because they didn't do this. See on Lk. 21:7. The disciples clearly thought that arrival at Jerusalem meant the appearing of the Kingdom of God in its political form. They had totally missed His teaching that Jerusalem meant death on a cross for Him; and that the gospel of the

Kingdom is now about life lived under God's Kingship and dominion, rather than political freedom from the Romans. They had missed the obvious and basic point of His teachings because they would not budge from their preconceived theological and natural convictions. And this happens with so many today, and in some ways with us all.

19:12 *He therefore said: A certain nobleman went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom and then return*- The Lord has recently spoken of how *we* are to 'receive the kingdom' as a child if we are to enter it (18:17). The nobleman here refers to the Lord Jesus. He doesn't ask us to do anything which in essence He has not done. He received the Kingdom as God's "holy child" (Acts 4:27,30), and He asks us to do likewise. This makes 'receiving the Kingdom' mean accepting that really, we shall be there. It is ours, even now. "Yours [God's] is the Kingdom", but it is give to the Lord Jesus "for himself", just as it is to us too. For us it is an ongoing experience- "we receiving a Kingdom... let us have grace" (Heb. 12:28).

The parable has some similarities with events recorded by Josephus. Herod Archelaus travelled to Rome in order to be given his kingdom; the Jews sent an embassy to Augustus, the Caesar, while Archelaus was travelling to Rome, to complain that they did not want Archelaus as their ruler; when Archelaus returned, he arranged for 3000 of his enemies to be brought to him at the temple, where he had them slaughtered. The palace of Archelaus was near Jericho, and as the Lord has just left Jericho, this would explain the allusion to him in this parable- perhaps the Lord was building on a passing discussion about Archelaus, ever eager to turn secular chit chat into spiritual teaching- just as we should be.

Absentee landlords were unpopular; and the accusation was that they reaped what they had not sown, demanding harvest which they had not laboured for. And the one mina man makes just this complaint. The Lord presents Himself in this parable as a man deemed to be unreasonable and unpopular- when in fact this was not the case.

19:13 *And he called ten servants of his*- A picture of how the Lord considers us to be His very own.

Gave them ten minas and said to them- A mina or "talent" was worth 6000 denarii, or pennies. And a penny a day was the going wage for a worker in time of harvest, according to another parable. This is therefore in total about 20 years salary. The element of unreality in this parable is that this was a huge amount of money to entrust in cash to only ten servants. And they are asked to "trade with this", to take the initiative, apparently without much prior instruction by their master. All is in their court. He has no mechanism in place to check up on them nor practically advise them on a day to day basis. They as slaves would not have been accustomed to taking much initiative. The only pattern they had was the example set by their master in *his* trading whilst he was

with them. All this speaks of the huge and risky delegation that was and is made to God's people. In a personal sense, according to the promise of the Comforter in Jn. 14-16, the Lord is no absent from us. He is not distant, He is with us by His Spirit, so that He is just as really present with us as He was during His ministry on earth. But for the purposes of the parable, emphasizing the huge extent of freewill and initiative required from us, He is 'absent'. He doesn't tell them to simply keep his property intact and maintained. He asks them to proactively trade and increase His wealth. This idea vastly broadens our horizons. Such work is to be our career, the ideal, Divinely intended outlet for all our creativity, resources and abilities.

Trade with this until I return- How far His affairs prosper is dependent upon the zeal and initiative of us His stewards (Lk. 19:12,13; 1 Cor. 4:1,2). In this parable, the servants as a group are given the wealth, but they trade with it as individuals. This is a helpful way to view all that has been given to the community of believers. Division and argument between them, arguing over who has what, is a sure way to impede the overall intention of the nobleman who has so trusted us on both a collective and individual level. All the riches are hidden "in Christ" and are displayed in the entire unity of the body of Christ across both Jew and Gentile (Col. 1:27; 2:2). What has been given to the church collectively is the Holy Spirit, in order to build up the church and powerfully witness in the world. The one talent man is in denial of this, without the Spirit, and simply holding onto the mina without using it.

As a whole, the church of all ages will fully have manifested His character, His total riches. This is why it may be that the true church has been concentrated on different aspects of spirituality at different times. It also explains why the final date of the coming of Christ is in some way dependent upon our spiritual development. And it also explains why the whole body of Christ is told collectively "trade until I return", using the Greek *pragmateuomai*, i.e. be pragmatic, be realistic, and develop these characteristics, so you may as a body reach the full reflection of Christ. See on Eph. 4:15.

The believer is called to his Lord to receive his minas, and yet is also again called to Him in judgment at His return (Lk. 19:13,15). The repetition of the idea of being called to our Lord surely suggests that our calling to Him in the first place is in fact a calling to judgment. We are being gathered to judgment *now* (Mt. 13:47; 22:10; Jn. 11:52) although we will be gathered then to meet the Lord (s.w. Mt. 3:12; 13:30). The point is, we must act now as men and women will do when they are on their way to judgment, and the meeting with their ultimate destiny. Then we will not be bickering amongst ourselves or worrying about our worldly advantage; then, only one thing will matter. And so now, only one thing matters. The Christian life is likened to a man on his way to his judge along with his adversary (Lk. 12:58); and evidently, he ought to settle his differences with his

brother before he arrives, for this judge will be extremely hard upon those who cannot be reconciled to their brethren.

We notice that in this parable, the Lord hints nothing about His death. He simply says He is going away and shall return. This was a concession to their weakness; He had explained His upcoming death many times, and they had ignored it. He accepted their blindness to His death, and worked with it by not featuring His death as part of the parable. We too need to work with an acceptance of others' blindness on some points.

The same word for "trade" is translated "work" in the parable of the sons working in the vineyard (Mt. 21:28). Whilst salvation is on the basis of grace and not works (Rom. 4:4,5), there is all the same a fundamental call to "work" in response to that grace. If we do not, then we have to remember that "faith without works is dead, being alone" (James 2:17). And this is a severe temptation. To believe, to assent to Christian and Biblical ideas, but not to respond further, thinking that the mere possession of the ideas is enough. This was the one talent man; his faith remained "alone". The "work" was to be done within the vineyard. The ecclesia of Christ, the body of Christ, is merely a structure enabling our response in practice. The "work" was to harvest the fruit of the vine- to work with others bringing them in to the final harvest of salvation. In another metaphor, we ourselves are to bring forth fruit on the vine; but the metaphor of harvesting used in 21:28 and in other parables of the vineyard surely speaks of harvesting others for the Kingdom. The same word will be used by the Lord in saying that the Son of Man has left his house and given to each man in the household his "work" (Mk. 13:34). We each have a specific work or trading to do, tailored personally to what the Lord has given us. Sadly, the structure of church life has often become so developed and defined that the average church member assumes that the work is being done by the specialists. "Get professional help" is the comment made on so many cases of personal need encountered; "Read the book... come to the seminars... to the meetings" can all be a passing up of our personal responsibility to work. The judgment seat is largely about presenting to the Lord our work in this life. And yet John uses the same word in recording the Lord's comment that the deeds ['trading', s.w.] of the faithful are even now "made manifest that they are wrought in God" if we come to the light of the cross which is the basis of all self-examination and self-understanding (Jn 3:21).

We can indeed prove / examine our own work [s.w.] even in this life (Gal. 6:4). People are never better than when they perceive clearly their calling and the work they are intended to do- and give their lives to doing it. Barnabas and Saul were 'called' just as the servants here were 'called' (:13) to do the 'work' [s.w. 'trading'] of spreading the Gospel (Acts 13:2), and experienced the Spirit confirming them in the "work" [s.w.] they were 'fulfilling' (Acts 14:26). The idea of 'fulfilling' a work given suggests that they were fulfilling God's intention for them. And again we note that the work was related to bringing others to Christ. Just as the servants 'went' to 'trade', so Paul talks of 'going' to

"the work" [s.w. 'trade'], again in the context of missionary work (Acts 15:38). God will render to every man according to his "works" (s.w. Rom. 2:6). Our trading is the basis upon which we will be judged. The gift has been given by pure grace, as it was to the servants; but we have to respond to that grace, lest we have believed and accepted in vain. It is the works *of the law* [of Moses] which will not justify (Rom. 3:20); rather our works are to be those in response to the Lord's great gifts to us. 1 Cor. 3:13-15 uses this same word for 'working / trading' and again applies it to our work in building others up- and the day of judgment will declare the quality of that work. The Corinthians were therefore Paul's "work in the Lord" (1 Cor. 9:1), even though he baptized virtually none of them, his efforts for them were his attempt to trade / work with the talents given him. God clearly has intended works / trading for each of us, "Good works [s.w.] which God has before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). And the NT usage of the idea of works / trading is nearly always in the context of preaching or caring for others. Paul may well have himself in mind when he promises the Philippians that "He who began a good work in you [Paul's initial preaching at Philippi] will work at finishing it right up to the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6 cp. 22). The key is to be open to God's leading. Thus Paul urged Timothy to purge himself from bad company so that he might be prepared or ready "unto every good work" (2 Tim. 2:21), and to devote himself to the Scriptures that he might be "equipped unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:17). These works are surely those "Good works [s.w.] which God has before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). And we should be "ready to every good work... thoughtful to be ready for good works" (Tit. 3:1,8), thoughtfully open to God's leading in response to our prayer to be shown what exactly is the work / trading intended for us. A functional church will be a place where the members are all devoted to this principle personally, and thus will "consider one another to provoke unto love and good works" (Heb. 10:24). And God will confirm our openness and willingness; He will "frame you in every good work to do His will" (Heb. 13:21 Gk.).

19:14 *But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying: We do not want this man to reign over us*- "They hated Joseph" because of his dream that one day he would reign over them (Gen. 37:4,8). The Lord Jesus likewise had problems with His brothers (Jn. 7:3); the Jews hated Him and would not have him reign over them even though they were potentially the citizens of His Kingdom. His Kingdom is that of the Father, and Israel at that time were His Kingdom. But because they refused His Son as King, they ceased to be the Kingdom of God (Ez. 21:25-27). The delegation gives no reason for their refusal; for there was and is no credible reason to refuse the Lord's kingship over men.

Here's a question. Luke clearly takes the side of the poor. But in this parable, an absentee landlord, hated by his tennants, represents the Lord Jesus. And the servants

who are left money to trade with are rewarded according to how they succeed in their homespun capitalism. The man who doesn't steal but is no good at that kind of thing is condemned. We could read the latter observations as a kind of Lucan inversion. Instead of homespun capitalism, the Lord's servants are to focus upon making spiritual increase for Him. Rather than increasing their stash of coins in life's game.

19:15 *And it came to pass, when he had returned, having received the kingdom, that he commanded these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by trading*- If we are to take the judgment figures literally, the question arises: Does the Lord know beforehand who will be accepted, and the degree of their reward? If we take the judgment figures to have a literal meaning, then it sounds as if He doesn't know. Lk. 19:15 suggests that perhaps He doesn't know; the Lord calls the servants "that he might know how much every man had gained by trading". He is ordained *to be* judge of all (Acts 10:42). However, as Lord of Heaven and earth, with all power given to him, this seems unlikely- although it must be remembered that in the same way as God is omnipotent and yet limits His omnipotence, so He may limit His omniscience. The shepherd sees the difference between sheep and goats as totally obvious. It needs no great examination. Surely the idea is that the judge, the omniscient Lord of all, will act at the judgment *as if* he needs to gather evidence from us and thereby reach his verdict. The parables give this impression because they surely describe how the judgment will feel to us.

The believer is called to his Lord to receive his pounds, and is called to Him in judgment at His return (Lk. 19:13,15). The repetition of the idea of being called to our Lord surely suggests that our calling to Him in the first place is in fact a calling to judgment. See on Mt. 13:47.

19:16 *And the first came before him*- He comes to us and the faithful come to Him. This will have a literal element to it. When we know for sure that the Lord has come, we will have the choice as to whether to go to Him immediately or delay. Those who go immediately will be confirmed in that by being snatched away to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:16,17). One of the great themes of Matthew's gospel is that various men and women 'came to Jesus' at different times and in a variety of situations. The Lord uses the same term to describe how at the last day, people will once again 'come unto' Him (Mt. 25:20-24). The same Jesus whom they 'came before' in His ministry is the one to whom they and we shall again come at the last day- to receive a like gracious acceptance. He will judge and reason the same way He did during His mortality.

Saying: Lord, your minas have made ten minas more- The purpose of the judgment is for our benefit, to develop our appreciation and self-knowledge. This is perhaps reflected by the ten pound man saying that the Lord' minas had gained, had worked to create (Gk.) the ten he could now offer. The man who achieved five pounds uses a different word in describing how the mina given him had made five minas, while the men in Mt.

25:20,22 use yet another word to say the same thing. This is surely a realistic picture, each of the faithful comes to the same conclusion, that what spirituality they have developed and the work of the Spirit which they did is an outcome of the basic Gospel given to each of us at our conversion; yet they have used them in different ways and they express this same basic idea in different words.

We note that it was "your minas" which produced the profit, not the wit nor effort of the user of them of itself.

All those who will be in the Kingdom will feel that really we should not be there, we don't deserve it, we will be hesitant to enter it and therefore Christ will have to almost make us go into the Kingdom. It's the same in the parables of Matthew 25, at the judgment Jesus will praise the righteous for doing so many good things, and then they will disagree with him, they will say 'No, we didn't do that, really we didn't', and He will say 'Yes, in my eyes, you did'. Their good works had not been consciously done. This is surely what the Lord was driving at in saying that our left hand must not know what the right hand does. We aren't to be self-consciously brooding on our own generosity. It would seem that with a spirit of amazement and surprise the man says 'Your minas gained [more] minas!'. It's the self-righteous, those who think they have done so much and therefore they must be in the Kingdom, who will be rejected.

“Made” translates *poieo*, a very common word; but it is used by the Lord, again in talking about His servants, in saying that the faithful servant will be found ‘doing’ care to his brethren (Mt. 24:46). And the word is twice used about ‘doing’ good unto the least of Christ’s brethren, and this being the basis for our judgment (Mt. 25:40,45). Again we see that our work / trading involves fruitfully sharing the spiritual riches we have received with others. It’s worth noting that this teaching is alluded to in the record of the woman anointing the Lord’s feet; and all the records of it use the same Greek words to describe it. She “did it” (*poieo*, Mt. 26:12,13), she “worked” (s.w. “traded”) a good work [‘trading’] on the Lord (Mt. 26:10). It’s as if her humanly senseless pouring out of her wealth for the Lord was in fact smart trading in the spiritual sense. The story line implies that we can add to the total wealth of the Lord Jesus. Yet the extension of His glory, the progress of His work, depends upon us, and we are left to our own initiative in this. This is the meaning of the element of ‘absence’ of the Lord, and the immediacy of His leaving the servants with such huge amounts of silver without instructing them specifically how to use them.

This idea of using one’s own initiative was more startling then than it is now. Today, students are 'trained' to think for themselves, be creative, develop their own opinions, push forward their own independent research, using question / problem-based learning as a paradigm for their education. 'Education' in the first century wasn't like that at all. The idea was that "every one when he is fully taught will be like his teacher" (Lk. 6:40). The idea was that a person born into a certain social situation was trained to take their

place in society, given that 'station and place' into which they had been born. Initiative in that sense was not encouraged; it was all about training up a person to correctly fulfill societies' expectation of them. The idea of being personally taught by the invisible Master / teacher Jesus, becoming like Him rather than like the person whom society expected, being given talents by Him which we are to trade and multiply at our initiative (Mt. 25:15-28)... this was all totally counter-cultural stuff. What was so vital in the Mediterranean world was that a person achieved conformity to accepted values. Cicero advised that in any good presentation of a legal case or encomium, emotions and passions shouldn't be referred to. Individualism was seen as a threat to tradition and the collective society. The huge New Testament emphasis on becoming disciples, learners, of an invisible Lord, Master and teacher located in Heaven, serving Him alone, worried about *His* standards, perceptions and judgment of us- that was and is so totally opposite to the expectations of society. People were educated to be embedded in society, rather than to come out of their world and live in the new world in which Christ was the light, and all things were made new in a new creation, a new set of values.

19:17 *And he said to him: Well done, you good servant. Because you were found faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities*- 1 Cor. 4:2 speaks of us as stewards being "found faithful" in this life by our actions; there is a definite sense in which the Lord's judgment and assessment of our stewardship is ongoing in this life. The judgment process, from His perspective, is now. And "we make the answer now".

"A very little" reflects how the sums were very small. Especially when compared to the talants of the Mt. 25 parable. “In a very little” (*elachistos*) is the very same word found later in Matthew 25, when we read that the final judgment will be based around how we have treated “the very least” of the Lord’s brethren (Mt. 25:40,45). The minas we have been given relate to them- how we have used them, what we have done for them, how we have served them with the riches given us by the Lord. There is obviously a connection between the manner in which we rule over the “few things”, and how we shall be given “many things” to rule over in the Kingdom age. Clearly what we are doing now is in essence what we shall eternally be doing, but on a greater level. If our lives are centered merely around ourselves and doing what we want, developing ourselves, rather than developing the Lord’s work and doing *His* work, then we will be out of step with the life eternal. We are to start living that now. And then we shall live it eternally. Our care for the little one or two individuals now is related to how we shall care for whole cities in the Kingdom.

The parable describes the reward of the faithful in terms of being given ten or five cities. This idea of dividing up groups of cities was surely meant to send the mind back to the way Israel in their wilderness years were each promised their own individual cities and villages, which they later inherited. The idea of inheriting "ten cities" occurs in Josh. 15:57; 21:5,26; 1 Chron. 6:61 (all of which are in the context of the priests receiving their

cities), and "five cities" in 1 Chron. 4:32. As each Israelite was promised some personal inheritance in the land, rather than some blanket reward which the while nation received, so we too have a personal reward prepared. The language of inheritance (e.g. 1 Pet. 1:4) and preparation of reward (Mt. 25:34; Jn. 14:1) in the NT is alluding to this OT background of the land being prepared by the Angels for Israel to inherit (Ex. 15:17 Heb.; 23:20; Ps. 68:9,10 Heb.). We must be careful not to think that our promised inheritance is *only* eternal life; it is something being personally prepared for each of us. The language of preparation seems inappropriate if our reward is only eternal life.

The reward was way out of proportion, both to what had been given, and to what they had achieved with it: ten cities! The Master's words almost seem to be a gentle rebuke: "Because you were found faithful in *a very little*, have authority over ten cities"; "you have been faithful over a *few things*, I will make you ruler over many things" (Mt. 25:23). The "Truth" we have now (and it is that) is "a very little... a few things". We mustn't see it as an end in itself. Yet because of our humanity, our limited vision, the way we are locked up in our petty paradigms and parameters, we tend to think that the Kingdom will be rather similar to our present experience of "the Truth". Yet the Lord emphasizes, at least twice, that what we have now is pathetically limited compared to the infinitely greater spiritual vision of the Kingdom. We (personally) will then be made ruler over *all* that Christ has (Mt. 24:47; the "many things" of Mt. 25:23); and in him are hid *all* the riches of spiritual wisdom (Col. 2:3).

19:18 *And the second came, saying: Your minas, Lord, have made five minas*- The faithful in the parable of the talents / pounds realize that "your minas have made" what spirituality they can now offer Christ at the judgment. They understand that their growth was thanks to that basic deposit of doctrine delivered to them. Each of us have been given different aspects of Christ's character to develop from the same basic doctrines, and therefore we will each have an individual discussion with out Lord. We shouldn't think of the judgment as being a process which is more or less identical for each of us. This misconception arises from failing to recognize that our meeting with Christ is only *likened* to a human judgment court. The similarities aren't exact.

We are to “gain” or 'make' more for the Lord on the basis of what He first gave us. The Greek word translated “made” is elsewhere usually used about gaining men and women for Christ- a wife ‘gains’ her unbelieving husband (1 Pet. 3:1); Paul sought to ‘gain’ people for the Lord (1 Cor. 9:19-22); we ‘gain’ a lost brother by pastoral effort with him (Mt. 18:15). Be that going for a coffee with him, sending an email, trying to imagine his feelings and approaching him appropriately.

Significantly, the other usages of this word translated ‘gain’ are about the folly of gaining

material wealth, even gaining the whole world. We can't be successfully about the Lord's business, of gaining folks for Him, if we are selling our soul to gain material things. That's the point. We were "delivered" talents by God. It's the same word used about how the Lord Jesus exhaled His last breath on the cross; how "that form of doctrine" was 'delivered' to us before baptism (Rom. 6:17; 1 Cor. 15:3; Jude 3). We can't say we have no talents. Christ died for you, for me; He bowed His head towards each of us personally and gave us His last breath, the riches of His Spirit within us who stand before His cross.

19:19 *And he said to him: And you are to be over five cities*- See on :17. We think of how in the Kingdom, "five cities shall speak the language of Canaan and swear to Yahweh" (Is. 19:18). Such groups will be under the authority of someone who in this life traded their talents well. Again we note the total lack of proportion of the rewards; a faithful slave who took some initiative and was faithful during the master's absence becomes a ruler over cities. And this is the lack of proportion we shall experience. What this means is that every moment of human life today has huge and eternal significance, and will have moment far beyond anything we can now imagine. The gross lack of proportion doesn't mean that there is no relationship between the trading of this life and the nature of our eternity. There is; and that is the point. Our entire lives therefore should be bent toward spiritual things and the Lord's work. No longer can this be mere religion, a Sunday hobby, a social network. We are right now forging the nature of our eternity. The trading of the minas refers to our usage of the Spirit for the benefit of others, to God's glory. It is related to what we shall be eternally doing; for our authority over the nations is in order to help them to glorify the Lord.

We have already been made ruler "over" and in the Lord's household in order to feed the members (Mt. 24:45 s.w.). Our whole church experience, our relations with others and efforts for them, is to prepare us for being made ruler over all the Lord's goods, over whole cities of persons in the Kingdom. We cannot of course accurately imagine what new dimensions await us, but all we can say is that we are in training for them, and that training involves the care of others within the household now; for this is in essence what we shall eternally do on a far grander scale. To separate ourselves from that household, or cast others out of it, is to deny both ourselves and others the environment required for us to prepared for eternity.

There is an element of unreality in the parable of the minas: wise use of a few coins results in power over several cities. We are left to imagine the men marvelling in disbelief at the reward given to them. They expected at most just a few minas to be given to them. And in their response we see a picture of the almost disbelief of the faithful at their rewards. In that moment we will grasp the deep significance of all we did in this life. And we need to perceive that now. For at times it can appear that we live the lives which our secular neighbours live, smelling, eating, acting, experiencing more or less as

they do; just that we have religious beliefs which they don't share. But this is an illusion. Our lives, decisions, attitudes, actions and spirit are freighted with an eternal significance which is not so in their lives.

he Lord gave a related teaching in Lk. 16:10-12: “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?”. What is given to us now is to test our faithfulness. If we don’t perceive what we have been given, and so many believers tell me they are unsure about this, *then you need to ask the Lord to show you*. Urgently. And give your life to developing those things. The Luke 16 passage appears to say that in this life, we are stewards of the Lord’s wealth, just as in this parable of the minas; but if we manage that well, then we will be rewarded with wealth which is actually and personally our own. For eternity. That ‘wealth’ will be of the same nature as that given to us by the Lord initially. Here we have a rare insight into the nature of our eternity. There is nothing that is the Lord’s which will not be shared with us and in some sense give to us to exercise our initiative over.

The "Truth" we have now (and it is that) is "a very little... a few things". We mustn't see it as an end in itself. Yet because of our humanity, our limited vision, the way we are locked up in our petty paradigms, we tend to think that the Kingdom will be rather similar to our present experience of "the Truth". Yet the Lord emphasizes, at least twice, that what we have now is pathetically limited compared to the infinitely greater spiritual vision of the Kingdom. We (personally) will then be made ruler over *all* that Christ has (Mt. 24:47; the "cities" of His Kingdom); and in him are hid *all* the riches of spiritual wisdom (Col. 2:3).

19:20 *And another came, saying: Lord, behold, here is your mina*- So many of the parables build up to a final climax which is the essence of the point the Lord was trying to get across; and this ‘end stress’ is also seen in the talents parable. The warning is not to be like the man who didn’t have the vision to do anything with his mina, but returned it unused to the Lord. This perhaps is our greatest temptation in our postmodern age of passivity, of staring at computer screens and clicking a mouse. “Behold, here is your mina” suggests an air of confidence in this man; he really didn’t get it, that he was asked to trade what he’d been given. The fact he had retained it pristine appears to have been his reason for thinking that he ought to be accepted, or at least, didn’t ought to be condemned. The story line penetrates deep into the mentality of many small time Protestant sects, according to which the ultimate test of loyalty to the Lord is whether we have retained our understanding of whatever curious or specific interpretations were entrusted to us via the charismatic founder of the sect. This man thought that that was all there was to it. He didn’t spend it on himself, he wasn’t like the prodigal son. But too

late he was to learn that sins of omission are the ground for condemnation. To do nothing with God's Truth is described by the Lord as 'wickedness'. The grammar emphasizes personal possession: *You* have what *belongs to You*. As if to say 'I didn't steal it! It's yours, and it remains yours'. But the whole point was that the Lord had given the talents to the servants and gone away- they had to trade in their own name, as if they were theirs. We're not simply receptacles of intellectual truths which are to be preserved for the sake of it until the end of our days. That would be of itself pointless, a kind of mind game played between God and man for no ultimate purpose. We are given God's Truth, the riches of Christ, in order to use it for others; the whole talk of 'preserving the Truth in its purity' is dangerously close to inculcating the mentality of the one talent man- the mentality that led to his condemnation.

I kept it laid away in a piece of cloth- The judgment of the righteous comes before that of the rejected. The faithful respond first to the news that 'He's back', and their willingness to go and be with Him is effectively their judgment. Those who delay are the unworthy and are therefore judged slightly later.

One of the Lord's pen pictures of the rejected included that of the man who thought that because he had preserved the mina (the basic doctrines of the Gospel) intact, therefore he was entitled to a place in the Kingdom. We are left to imagine him half-proudly, half sheepishly, holding it out to the Lord (Mt. 25:25). But he should have traded with his pounds (Lk. 19:13 RV)- done something with it all. The crowds hung upon Jesus' every word and teaching; it was so fascinating for them, so wonderful (Lk. 19:48 RV); and yet they still crucified Him. Those words, those wonderful ideas, didn't pierce deep within.

In the culture of the orient, it was not usual for a person to keep money in a cloth. Their culture was to trade and barter with what they had. That a man should just bury such a talent was therefore unreal for the original hearers. The point of this unreality is surely that spiritual laziness is *so* bad. It was better to have traded and lost through genuine mistakes, through naivety, through the betrayal and deception of others, than to simply *do nothing*. I fear, really fear, that our Christian culture has bred for many of us a 'do nothing' culture- which is exactly what this element of unreality is warning against. We can delegate responsibility to church committees, to others, to our leaders; or we can do nothing out of fear, fear of making a mistake, fear of taking a risk, fear of what other brethren may think of us... all the time denying this principle of Divine delegation. And it might be added that the 'do nothing' man of the parable emphasized that the talent or money was not *his*; he returned to his Lord what was his ["your [singular] mina"]. In order to trade it, or even to put it in the bank and get interest, he had to take personal ownership of it. And this he failed to do. And it is just this that we are being asked to do by our Lord- that His truth, all that He has given us, is in a sense *ours* now, to be used on our initiative, for His glory and service. Indeed, the reward of the faithful will be to be given *more* of their Lord's riches in the Kingdom, with which likewise to use their

initiative in order to bring Him glory. We are left to think how the story might have gone on- the faithful were given *more* talents and they go away and do, in the Kingdom age, what they did in this life- using what they were given for *His glory and service, on their own initiative*.

We are *expected* by the Lord to realize that our relationship with Him means total commitment to His cause. In this sense Jesus is a demanding Lord. Thus when He gave the talents to His servants, He doesn't tell them to trade with them; it seems that the one talent man is making this point when he says 'You gave me your money to look after, and I looked after it, I didn't steal it; you're unreasonable to think I should have done anything else with it, you're expecting what you didn't give'. And the Lord is; He expects that if we realize we have the honour of knowing His Truth, we should get on and do something with it, not just keep it until He comes back. He doesn't have to ask us to do this; He takes it as being obvious. The anger of the rejected man comes over as genuine; he really can't understand his Master. He's done what he was asked, and now he's condemned because he didn't do something extra. He was a Lord that man never knew- until all too late. You can imagine how you'd feel if someone gives you some money to look after, and then expects you to have doubled it, although he didn't ask you to do anything with it.

19:21 *For I feared you*- Fear of the judgment of others is a source of false guilt. It is this which militates against the true and free life of which the Lord speaks so enthusiastically. We fear showing ourselves for who we really are, because we fear others' judgments. This fear makes us uncreative, not bearing the unique spiritual fruits which the Lord so eagerly seeks from us and in us. The Lord said this plainly, when He characterized the man who did nothing with his talents as lamely but truthfully saying: "I feared you". Think about this: What or whom was he afraid of? His fear was not so much of his Lord's judgment, but rather perhaps of the judgments of others, that he might do something wrong, wrongly invest, look stupid, mess it all up... And thus John writes that it is fear that leads to torment of soul now and final condemnation. The Lord's words in the parable are almost exactly those of Adam. The rejected one mina man says 'I was afraid, and so I hid *my mina*'. Adam said: 'I was afraid, and I hid *myself*'. The talent God gave that man was therefore himself, his real self. To not use our talent, to not blossom from the experience of God's love and grace, is to not use ourselves, is to not be ourselves, the *real* self as God intended.

Because you are a hard man- The problem was the man's wrong attitude and laziness to do anything. The prodigal son was given much of his Father's wealth, and he wasted it rather than trading it. But he recognized the Father's grace and was prepared to work

just as a servant. And this attitude was his salvation. So this man's rejection wasn't simply because he had failed to do any trading.

Another take on this is that there is a sense in which the Lord is indeed a "hard man", a demanding Lord, His expectations were (and are) high. And yet His parables reveal an immense sympathy and empathy with our weakness. In a normal human situation, it would be difficult to build a relationship with someone who had such apparently contradictory trends in His character. Perhaps we have the same problem in our struggle to know the Lord. He never denied that He came over in some ways as "a hard man" with high expectations; all He said was that seeing this was the case, we ought to act accordingly (Mt. 25:24). And yet He is also a man of grace and understanding far beyond anything reached by anyone else. He is truly the Jesus who understands human weakness. And note that He is described even now as "the man Christ Jesus", able to feel the pulse of our humanity. This, in passing, opens a window into what Divine nature will be like: we will be able to completely feel the human experience, to the extent of still bearing the title 'men' even in immortality.

You demand what you did not deposit, and reap that which you did not sow- He clearly didn't know nor love his master; or else he would not have had this inappropriate fear. He is accusing him of being a typical absentee landlord. But his master was not away enjoying himself. He had gone to receive a kingdom and to return and share it with his workers. The man who didn't develop as he should have done accuses the Lord of reaping what He didn't sow. But the Lord does sow the seed of the basic Gospel, as the parable of the sower makes clear. The point is that the unworthy fail to let that seed bring forth fruit, they fail to see that the Lord expects fruit from those doctrines they have been given. But they fail to see the link between the basic Gospel and practical spirituality; they feel he's reaping where He didn't sow. They are in denial of "the power thereof", whilst theoretically possessing it. The Lord will require his own, i.e. that which he has sown, the basic Truths of the Gospel, the gift of the riches of His grace, His Spirit, with usury (Lk. 19:23). The parable of the tiny seed moving the great mountain was surely making the same point; the basic Gospel, if properly believed, will result in the most far reaching things (Mt. 17:20 cp. 13:31).

The moment of conversion is the beginning of the gathering to judgment (Lk. 11:23; Jn. 4:36). The one talent man didn't appreciate this; he objected to the Lord reaping and gathering him (Mt. 25:24). But whatever human objections, the responsible from all nations *will be gathered* to judgment (Mt. 25:32). The servants are called to receive their talents, and then called again to account (Lk. 19;13,15); there is something in common between the calling to know the Gospel, and the calling to judgment. If reaping refers to

judgment [which it clearly does in the Lord's teaching], then the man could hardly claim to have known the Lord on the basis of how He reaps. Because the man hadn't experienced the Lord's reaping. The man says he 'knows' [*ginosko*] the Lord is like this; the Lord answers that if indeed the man has 'known' [*eido*- which more means to see / experience] that He is like this, then he should have acted accordingly. The suggestion may be that even if a person's understanding of the Lord Jesus is slightly wrong, the important thing is to live within and according to that understanding, even if it involves breaking some Divine principles [lending for interest]. If the desire to respond to the Lord's gift was there, the desire to progress His work, then although such response was not ideal and not as good as that achieved by the other two servants, then the Lord would accept it. The language of sowing, reaping and gathering is all described using the same Greek words in the Lord's comment that the birds don't do these three things, and yet God still feeds them (Mt. 6:26). Perhaps the man was making a garbled, incoherent attempt to say that he had understood those words of the Lord to mean that He was somehow going to be an unreasonable judge with unreal expectations, therefore he had done nothing, although he had not spent the talent [unlike the prodigal son- who desperately wanted to be with the Father]. We may be intended to understand his reasoning as being 'You created birds who don't sow, reap nor gather into barns, they just expect food. And God thinks that's good. So, He is like what He creates'. And perhaps the man also had in view Jn. 4:38: "I sent you to reap that whereon you bestowed no labour. Other men laboured...". The harvest of people was reaped by those who hadn't fully worked for it, and the man desperately tries to turn that around to justify his own lack of action. Such desperate twisting of Bible verses can be seen at every hand today, as people wriggle by all means to justify their inaction and selfishness.

And gathering where you did not scatter seed- The Lord is clearly the sower of seed, the seed of the word of the Kingdom (Mt. 13:3). But the man is complaining that the Lord 'reaps' or calls to judgment those who had not received that seed. That is not the case- for knowledge of the Gospel is what makes responsible to judgment. The Lord could have corrected him by reminding him of the sower parable. But He doesn't. He reasons with the man according to the belief system which he claims to have, assuming for a moment that it is in fact true. His whole style ought to be programmatic for us in our frequent encounters with those who misuse Scripture and the Lord's words. The Lord does *not* expect a harvest from ground He has not sown; and in any case, the man had heard the word, received the talent. He was ground which had been sown, and the Lord could therefore expect a harvest from him. Like many people today, he started to raise philosophical questions about the fate of those who have not heard, and justified his own inaction [as one who definitely *had* heard and been called] on the basis of his doubts as to the Lord's justice in dealing with those who had *not* been called. Truly these ancient teachings speak to the heart of postmodern man today.

"Gathering" was highly relevant to the man, for the language of 'gathering' is often used about the gathering of God's servants to judgment (Mt. 3:12; 13:30; 25:32). The man was implying that his 'gathering' to judgment was unreasonable because the Lord had not sown in his land, had not strawed where he has. He felt he was being gathered to give an account when the Lord had given him nothing to account for. And yet the obvious fact was, the elephant in the room, that the Lord had given him minas, 20 years' wages, $1 million. And yet the man reasoned as if he had not been given anything to account for. He totally refused to perceive the immense value of what he had been given. And this is so true for us- we for whom Christ died, the blood of God's Son shed, we who have been called to eternity, who by status are "saved" and showered with all spiritual blessings... can complain that we have not been given anything. Because in our minds we have buried it away, and reason as if we never received it. Here again, the Lord's ancient words pierce to the core of modern Christian self-perception.

The Greek *diaskorpizo* can mean 'to scatter' and can therefore be used about sowing; but it also has the specific meaning 'to winnow'. In this case, the picture would be of a man who has not winnowed and yet expects to come and gather up wheat. Again, the man may be attempting to twist the Lord's words about 'gathering wheat into His barn' (Mt. 13:30, repeating John's words of 3:12). His idea would be 'You expect the wheat to be waiting for You without even winnowing it'. But of course the point was that winnowing represented judgment, and this was exactly what the Lord had come to do. But in His grace, the Lord doesn't make that obvious point, but runs with the man's words and reasoning and shows him that however wrong his imaginations were about the Lord, he should have acted according to them if he truly loved his Lord. But he hadn't done so; because he was selfish and lazy.

19:22 *He said to him: Out of your own mouth will I judge you, you wicked servant*- The Lord's only other reference to a wicked servant is in the parable of the wicked servant who runs up a huge debt, is forgiven, and then refuses to forgive a far smaller debt, putting the debtor in prison (Mt. 18:32). The two men are clearly intended to be compared. The one of Mt. 18:32 was dishonest with his Lord's money [for how else did he amass such a huge debt to his Lord? Was it not that he was found out for dishonesty?]; he was materialistic in the extreme; and he was incredibly ungrateful and unforgiving. He committed many sins. The "wicked servant" here does nothing wrong, is not overtly materialistic; but his sin of omission, meant that in reality he had done just the same as the man who committed so much wrong.

The Lord's parable was clearly alluding to a contemporary Jewish rabbinic parable later recorded in the Zohar Chadash, folio 47: "A certain king gave a deposit to three of his servants: the first kept it; the second lost it; the third spoiled one part of it, and gave the rest to another to keep. After some time, the king came and demanded the deposit. Him

who had preserved it, the king praised, and made him governor of his house. Him who had lost it, he delivered to utter destruction, so that both his name and his possessions were blotted out. To the third, who had spoiled a part and given the rest to another to keep, the king said, Keep him, and let him not go out of my house, till we see what the other shall do to whom he has entrusted a part: if he shall make a proper use of it, this man shall be restored to liberty; if not, he also shall be punished". The point of contrast is that the Lord is far more demanding. The Jewish story praised the man who simply preserved the deposit. The Lord Jesus condemned the same man for doing nothing positive with it. The third man in the Jewish parable was given the possibility of repentance. But the third man in the Lord's parable was condemned with no possibility of changing the verdict- for this life is our sole time of responsibility. The Lord is purposefully alluding to this parable, and deconstructing it. Passivity, 'holding on to the faith' in a passive sense, much glorified by both Judaism and Protestant Christianity, is what may be glorified in human religion; but it's exactly this attitude which will be the ground of condemnation.

You thought that I am a hard man, demanding back what I did not deposit, and reaping that which I did not sow?- The Lord's response could actually be translated as meaning: 'You [really?] saw Me reap where I did not sow...?'. The process of reaping definitely refers to the last judgment, and so the man had no basis upon which to make this claim, because he had never actually 'seen' the Lord act like that. But I prefer to understand the Lord as taking the man's ideas and working with them, without specifically correcting them- and saying that even if the man's understanding of Him was correct, then He expected him to act appropriately to that understanding. Instead of doing nothing.

The metaphor of a man travelling into a far country is a sign of His recognition that on one level, that is indeed how it will appear to us. And clearly the idea is based upon the experience of absent landlords, who left their estates in the hands of their servants and went away to enjoy the good life in some better part of the Roman empire. Such landlords were despised as non-patriotic and disinterested in the welfare of their people. And yet the Lord consciously employs this image concerning Himself. He is not ultimately like that, but through this choice of imagery He gives a nod of recognition towards the fact that indeed this is how it will appear to some. Joseph likewise appeared tough and disinterested to his brothers, when beneath that mask his heart was bursting for them; His whole plan of action was simply to lead them to repentance.

19:23 *Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest*- The Lord may have in view the money exchangers whom He so despised and whose tables He overthrew in Mt. 21:12. It's as if the Lord is saying that He was willing to make major concessions to the man- if he had done at least something, even if that 'something' was far less than ideal. A Rabbinic teaching claims that bankers

should never be trusted and therefore “Money can only be kept safe by placing it in the earth” (*b. B. Mes’ia* 42A, quoted in R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) p. 954). The Lord is consciously deconstructing Rabbinic views. If we had more access to such contemporary texts, we would likely understand many of the more enigmatic and difficult passages of Scripture- probably they are alluding to and deconstructing contemporary writings.

The Lord will *receive or* collect back His own. Strong defines this as "to carry off, away from harm" (the same word is used in Heb. 11:19 about Abraham *receiving* Isaac from the dead). There is the suggestion that the Truth which the Lord has given us is valuable to Him, and He fears our losing it; those who lose the faith lose the personal possession of the Lord Jesus. But at the judgment, when we hand it back to the Lord, He (not to say, we) will have that deep knowledge that now we can't fail Him any more, we no longer have the possibility of causing harm and loss to the treasured wealth which has been entrusted to us. We need to remember, however, that there was no banking system as we have today. Lending money to exchangers was a highly risky business and often resulted in the loss of money; money was safer stored in the earth, as the man did. So the Lord’s point was that he should have taken a risk; indeed, all such trading requires risk taking which may leave us looking foolish. But the Lord may be implying that if he had taken that risk for the right reasons, all ultimately would have worked out well.

"My own [money]" reminds us of the fact that He is Lord *of all* . This means He is owner of absolutely everything to do with us (Acts 10:36). At the judgment, this fact will be brought home. The Lord will ask for “my money… my own"; we will be asked what we have done with our Lord's money (Mt. 20:15; 25:27). All we have is God's; it is not our own. Therefore if we hold back in our giving and trading, we are *robbing God*. Israel thought it was absurd to put it like this: But yes, God insisted through Malachi (3:8-12), you are *robbing me* if you don't give back, or even if you don't give your heart to Him in faith. *And will a man rob God?* Will a man…? We must give God what has His image stamped on it: and we, our bodies, are made in His image (Mt. 22:21); therefore we have a duty to give ourselves to Him. We are not our own: how much less is 'our' money or time our own! Like David, we need to realize now, *in this life*, before the judgment, that all our giving is only a giving back to God of what we have been given by Him: "Of your own have we given you" (1 Chron. 19:14). The danger of materialism is the assumption that we are ultimate owners of what we 'have'.

Explaining how the man could have entered the Kingdom is surely the basis for the gnashing of teeth. To have it explained like that… is harder than any hell fire of classical imagination. He ought to have given the talent to the exchangers. Either he should’ve given it to the Gentiles, or he should have at least done something, in lending it to his Jewish brethren- even against the Law. Very possession of the minas meant we have to, we must, share it with others in some way- we are all preachers.

The man being told how he could have entered the Kingdom is after the pattern of rejected Adam and Eve having the way to the tree of life clearly shown to them after their rejection (Gen. 3:23,24). Again, notice how the judgment is for the education of those judged and those who witness it. He will shew them how they should have given their talent, the basic Gospel, to others, and therefore gained some interest. This has to be connected with the well known prohibition on lending money to fellow Israelites for usury; usury could only be received from Gentiles (Dt. 23:20). Surely the Lord is implying that *at the least* this person could have shared the Gospel with others, especially (in a Jewish context) the Gentile world. This would have at least brought some usury for the Lord. This would suggest that issues such as apathy in preaching, especially the unwillingness of the Jewish believers to share their hope with the Gentiles, will be raised by the Lord during the judgment process. Of course, the Lord hadn't told the servant (in the story) to lend the money to Gentiles; he was expected to use his initiative. The overall picture of the story is that at least the man should have done *something!*

Alternatively, it could be that we are intended to understand that the Lord would even have accepted him if he lent money on usury, something which the Law condemned; if he'd have done *something*, even if it involved breaking some aspects of God's will... Instead, his attitude was that he had been given the talent of the Gospel, and he saw his duty as to just keep hold on it. He was angry that the Lord should even suggest he ought to have done anything else! We really must watch for this attitude in ourselves. He justifies himself by saying that he has "kept" the money (Lk. 19:20), using the word elsewhere used about the need to *keep* or hold on to the doctrines of the One Faith (1 Tim. 1:19; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:13; Rev. 6:9). He had done this, he had held on, he hadn't left the faith. And he thought this was enough to bring him to the Kingdom. Sadly, many understandings of spirituality has almost glorified this very attitude. Any who show initiative have been seen as mavericks, as likely to go wrong. The emphasis has been on holding on to basic doctrinal teaching, marking your Bible with it, attending weekly meetings about it (even if you snooze through them), regularly attending... And, son, you won't go far wrong. The Lord, in designing this parable as he did, had exactly this sort of complacency in mind. In view of the man’s beliefs about the Lord, he still should’ve acted accordingly.

Both sheep and goats register their surprise at their Lord's comments on various specific actions of theirs which he discusses with them- "When did we see you...?" (Mt. 25:44). The thought that at least some of our deeds will be discussed with us at the judgment should surely make some impact on our present behaviour. Lk. 19:23 implies not only that there will be a discussion with our judge, but that Jesus will point out to the rejected what they should have done to be accepted.

The parables of the Kingdom speak of the eternal consequences of the judgment. The Lord will require His own at the judgment (Lk. 19:23). This doesn't mean, as the one talent man thought, that He will require us to give back to Him the basic doctrines of the Gospel which we were given at conversion. The Greek means to exact regularly, in an ongoing sense (s.w. Lk. 3:13); Strong defines it as meaning "to perform repeatedly... not a single act". When the Lord examines our lives at the judgment, He will expect to keep on receiving the result of what we have achieved for Him in this life. This is the ultimate encouragement for us in our preaching and encouraging of others, as well as ourselves; what we achieve now will yield eternal, continual fruit to the Lord. See on Mt. 25:27.

19:24 *And he said to those that stood by: Take away from him the mina and give it to him that has the ten minas*- "Them that stood by" must surely be a conscious reference by the Lord to Zechariah's prophecy of the Angels as "these that stand by" Christ (Zech. 3:4,7); note that he too speaks in a judgment/reward context. If our Lord is referring to the Angels, then we have a fascinating picture of them taking away the opportunities given to the unworthy and granting them to the accepted. Their query of the amount of reward being given fits in with what we know about their limited knowledge, and the fact that our reward will be far greater than their present status (Heb. 1,2). Hence their reverent questioning of the extent of reward being given (:25) suggests that "them that stood by" somehow questioned the Lord's judgment; their sense of equality was not that of their Lord. They felt that the gloriously strong brother with his wonderful reward didn't need it to be made even more wonderful. "Them that stood by" could refer to the Angels, or to the way in which the judgment will in some sense take place in the presence of all the believers. The fact is, even with God's nature, it will be difficult to appreciate the principles of judgment which the Lord uses; and so how much more difficult is it today!

The man 'having' ten talents as his own is in sharp contrast with the way the one talent man speaks of how the talent is not his but the Lord's: "Here You have what is Yours". The Lord is making the point that the faithful will now personally own the talents they were first given, plus they will be allowed to keep for their personal, eternal possession what talents they made during the trading of this life. The progress achieved in this life will be kept eternally. The Lord's teaching here must be given its due weight.

19:25 *And they said to him: Lord, he has ten minas!*- See on Mt. 20:11. The "they" could be the disciples; or the Angels at judgment; or the faithful at judgment day who still do not fully understand all things. If it was the disciples who interrupted the parable, clearly not understanding it, we must compare this against how the Lord said that His parables were only not understood by the unbelieving Jewish world. So we see His grace towards them, and their slowness to understand. If the "they" refers to saved believers at the last day, then we reflect that some will be in the Kingdom who have big questions about the

justice of God (Mt. 20:12,13 "friend"); the elder son is apparently accepted in the Father's fellowship, although his attitude to his weak brother is so wrong (Lk. 15:31); the wise virgins, apparently selfishly, won't give any oil to the others; some will sit in the Kingdom in "shame" because they thought they were greater than other brethren (Lk. 14:9- cp. the elder brother?); some remonstrate that a highly rewarded brother already has ten pounds, and surely doesn't need any more exaltation (Lk. 19:25).

19:26 *I say to you, that to everyone that has, shall be given*- This repeats the Lord's earlier teaching in Mt. 13:10-12 about the giving of understanding to those who have some: "And the disciples came and said to him: Why do you speak to them in parables? And he answered and said to them: To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whoever has, to him shall be given and he shall have abundance, but whoever has not, from him shall be taken away even what he has". Clearly there is an upward spiral in spiritual life, and this will come to ultimate term in the outcomes of judgment day.

But from him that has not, even that which he has shall be taken away from him- This is a paradox. Does the rejected man have minas, or not? He did, of course, have a mina; but as far as the Lord is concerned, we only have what we have developed. If we don't develop, we have nothing; the fact we received the talent at baptism won't save us. It's only what a man has developed from that in the service of others which counts as truly "his". This likewise is the sense of "To him that has shall be given"; all we have is what we have developed.

"Taken away" is perhaps a special reference to the Kingdom of God being "taken away" [s.w.] from Israel and given to the Gentiles (Mt. 21:43). The same Greek word is used about the taking away of the rejected individuals at judgment day (Mt. 22:13; 24:39). But here, it is the unused mina that is "taken away". The man was therefore to be identified with the mina- it was to be him. And yet he is most careful to speak of the mina as not his, but the Lord's: "Here you have what is yours". The Lord intended that we identify with the mina, rather than see it merely as His.

At judgment day, the rejected who have nothing will find that even what they have is taken from them. This surely means that the spirituality they appeared to have, what they thought they had, actually they never had, and even the appearance of it will be taken away from them. We can appear to have spirituality, when in fact we have nothing, nothing at all. The man who built his house on the sand had the sensation of spiritual progress; he was building, he was getting somewhere, apparently. Likewise Israel were an empty [fruitless] vine, but they brought forth fruit- to themselves. In reality they had no fruit; but they went through the fruit-bearing process (Hos. 10:1). In Jer. 5:13, God mocks the false prophets as being "full of wind", or 'ruach'- with which His true prophets

were filled. This play on words reveals that spirituality is either the real thing, or a being filled with wind in such a way that apes the true spirituality.

19:27 *But bring here my enemies, and slay them before me, those who did not want me to reign over them*- See on Rev. 14:10. We do well to try to imagine the tone of voice in which the Lord spoke these words. For in :41,42 He weeps over Jerusalem at the thought of her coming judgment. They did not wish to be under His Kingship; and so they will not be in His Kingdom. They made the choice.

It is fairly certain that time will be compressed at the judgment seat; there will therefore be no problem in such an individual discussion between each of the responsible and Christ. Several Bible passages suggest a going through of *works;* and yet we know that the basis of acceptability with God is not works but rather faith. The judgment of our works seems not to be related to as it were weighing up our salvation chances. For salvation is a gift, unrelated to works. That's what grace is about. But our use of our talents will be related to who and how we will eternally be.

A case could be made that the word "but" suggests that the one talent man is saved and doesn't share in the condemnation of the wicked which will happen at the final judgment. The 'going through' of works is therefore for our benefit, to teach us- not as a basis upon which the Lord decides worthiness. Salvation itself is not on the basis of our works (Rom. 11:6; Gal. 2:16; Tit. 3:5); indeed, the *free gift* of salvation by pure grace is contrasted with the *wages* paid by sin (Rom. 4:4; 6:23).

19:28 *And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem*- It was as if the Lord was determined Himself to trade His wealth, regardless of whether others did. And for Him, this required death in Jerusalem. We note His feature of walking ahead of them; we are left with the image of them following, setting us a pattern.

19:29 *And it came to pass, when he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet*- 'The house of figs'. There is likely a connection to the incident when the Lord curses the fig tree (:19). Perhaps we are to assume that He hoped for figs in Bethphage too, and was likewise disappointed. Bethphage has even been given the meaning 'House of unripe figs', which would confirm this impression (See Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (Jerusalem: Horeb, 1903, reprint) p. 1132).

He sent two of the disciples- The question arises as to why He didn't simply take the two animals Himself. The practical answer would be that if He had gone further into Jerusalem to get them, then he would as it were have entered Jerusalem but not in the way He intended to, which was to consciously fulfil the prophecy about the humble King entering Jerusalem on a donkey. But that explanation throws the question one stage further back. Why was it specifically a donkey from that village and person which was required? Could He not have found one in Bethphage? The effort required to send two

disciples ahead of Him to get the animals and then bring them back to Bethphage seems considerable, when donkeys were common enough. The answer is not clear, but it could be that there was an anonymous person who specifically wanted to give those animals to the Lord in order to fulfil that prophecy. The Lord knew this and had obviously discussed it with the owner previously, because the owner would recognize Him as "the Lord" (:31), and would provide them once he perceived the Lord wanted them. In this little incident we see therefore the extent the Lord will go to, now as well as then, in order to take up the initiative of those who love Him. If we take that initiative in service, the Lord will surely use it, and make every effort to do so.

19:30 *Saying: Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here-*

The Greek words translated "tied" and "untie" occur together several times, usually rendered 'bind' and 'loose'. Earlier, the idea of binding and loosing has been used about the way that the decisions and actions of believers can have eternal consequence upon others, and our bind and loosing is to some extent reflected in and confirmed by Heaven (Mt. 16:19; 18:18). This conception of binding and loosing was surely intended by the Lord. Verse 4 makes clear that all this was done in order to fulfil the prophecy of Zech. 9:9 that Messiah would come to Zion riding on a donkey and her foal. But that prophecy had to be consciously fulfilled. Whether or not the Messianic prophecies were fulfilled was therefore left to the initiative of the Lord and His followers. And it's the same in our last days- if, e.g., we choose to fulfil the prophecy that the Gospel must go into all the world before the end comes, then in that sense the actual time of Christ's coming is left in our hands. There are other Messianic associations with a donkey- Abraham took Isaac to be sacrificed on a donkey (Gen. 22:3,5); Solomon rode to his coronation on David's donkey (1 Kings 1:33-44).

The question arises as to why both a donkey and foal were required. He surely didn't straddle both at the same time. He rode on the donkey whilst the colt followed. Perhaps this has reference to the way that the Lord's final entry into His Kingdom would be on the backs of both Jews and Gentiles; the immature foal with no rider would therefore look forward to the Gentiles. Another possibility is that "A donkey, *and* on a colt, the foal of a donkey" is a Semitic parallelism effectively meaning 'A donkey, actually, a foal of a donkey'. If that's the case, then the Lord rode the foal of a donkey, not yet broken in. It would've been hard to ride, probably trying to throw Him; His journey into the city would've been almost comical, because He would nearly have been thrown and would've hardly made a sedate, solemn procession. The parallel records stress that no man had ever sat upon it (Mk. 11:2; Lk. 19:30). This would've spoken clearly of the difficulty of the Lord's entry to His Kingdom whilst riding on Israel. However, Mt. 21:2 speaks in the plural, of loosing the animals and bringing *them* to the Lord. It may simply be that a donkey nursing her foal, distracted by this, was the most unmilitary, non-

glorious form upon which the Lord could've entered Jerusalem. Perhaps it was a parody of how triumphal entries require a King to be on a charger pulling a chariot. The Lord had a donkey instead of a charger, and instead of a chariot being pulled by the charger, the foal was in tow behind the donkey.

Mk. 11:4 says that the donkey was tied at a gate, at "a place where two ways met". This translates the word *amphedon* which in the LXX (e.g. Jer. 17:27) is used for a palace. Herod had a palace on the Mount of Olives and maybe this is what is being referenced. It could be that the donkey and foal were provided by Herod's servants, because Joanna was a disciple of Jesus who provided for Jesus from her "substance"- and she was the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward (Lk. 8:3). In this case, the Lord was further parodying a King's triumphant entry by riding upon Herod's donkey.

19:31 *And if anyone asks you: Why do you untie him? You are to say: The Lord has need of him*- God in a sense is in need of man, just as Jesus was, or allowed Himself to be. See on :30.

19:32 *And they that were sent went away and found as he had said to them*- This is to note their obedience to an otherwise very strange command. They surely secretly hoped that He would achieve a dramatic Messianic salvation. And He was teaching them that that salvation was not now, and He was deconstructing the whole idea of a triumphal entry, as noted on :30. It is to their credit that they humbled themselves beneath this idea.

19:33 *And as they were untying the colt, the owners of it said to them: Why do you untie the colt?*- This was all clearly part of a prearranged plan, as noted on :30. But there was a purpose in it. The Lord wanted them to ask the question as to why ever He was making a triumphal entry on a colt and not a charger. Perhaps the stress was on the word "colt", when perhaps a finer horse stood there. He wanted them to realize that He was deconstructing a triumphal entry.

19:34 *And they said: The Lord has need of him*- The usage of the term "the Lord" suggests that the owners were also believers. I suggested on :30 that they were believing members of Herod's household.

19:35 *And they brought it to Jesus, and they threw their garments upon the colt and sat Jesus on it*- Using their garments as saddles. The fact both animals were saddled (Matthew) was to make the point that one rider was missing. For according to the other Gospels, the Lord sat upon the colt. The mother donkey was saddled, but without a rider. This added to the strangeness of the spectacle. The missing rider was perhaps a reference to how Israel had not as a whole responded in bringing Messiah to Zion. Maybe it referred to the Gentiles who had yet to be converted. Or perhaps to the fact that Israel had rejected John the Baptist and he had been killed- and therefore there was no Elijah prophet bringing Messiah into Zion. Elijah was the great horseman of the Divine

chariot (2 Kings 2:12; 13:14; he is called the “horsemen” plural, but this is an intensive plural for ‘the one great horseman’). Elijah was the chariot horseman, the one who was to ride on the horse which pulled the chariot in which there was Messiah [this was a Rabbinic understanding of the Elijah prophet]. But he was strangely absent in this acted parable. The saddle was there for him, provided by the few disciples who had responded to John / Elijah; but he wasn’t there. This absence of the Elijah prophet was surely indicative of the fact that John had not been the Elijah prophet for most of Israel- they hadn’t responded properly to his message. Therefore the true triumphant entry of Messiah was yet future. This is why the phrase “bringing salvation” is excluded from the quotation of Zech. 9:9. It was not so much a ‘triumphant entry’, but a *parody* of a triumphant entry.

When they put their clothes on the colt and started mistakenly proclaiming Jesus as the triumphal Messiah entering Jerusalem to begin His political Kingdom, the Lord doesn’t rebuke their misunderstanding. Instead, He defends them to the critical Pharisees (Lk. 19:35-37,40). He imputed righteousness to them, as He does to us today.

19:36 *And as he went, they spread their garments on the road*- Matthew says that "the crowd" did this. The crowds who accepted Him in the wrong way very soon rejected Him; so in a sense, they cut themselves off. And they did this because they misunderstood Him, expecting Him to give immediate deliverance.

Jn. 12:13 says they waved palm branches. But palms and the shout of "Hosanna" (Mt.) are associated with the feast of Tabernacles. And this was Passover, not Tabernacles. All the way through this brilliant visual stunt by the Lord, there was the message that He was not as they had imagined, He had come to die as the Passover Lamb, not to immediately give them the Tabernacles celebration which they wanted to see there and then.

The behaviour in this verse was exactly that associated with the triumphant entry of a victorious king. The much laboured account of the Lord’s obtaining a donkey and her foal and thus riding into the city was really a studied parody of that whole conception of Messianic victory. For Him, the victory would be to hang lifeless upon a cross. True greatness was in humility. And instead of beaming with pride, Lk. 19:41 adds the detail that He wept over the city, knowing how they had rejected Him. According to Harry Whittaker, *Studies in the Gospels, "*The rabbis had a saying: "If Israel be worthy, Messiah comes with the clouds of heaven (Dan. 7:13); if unworthy, riding upon an ass" (Zech. 9:9)". So the entire triumphant entry was indeed a parody which sooner or later the Jews came to grasp. Hence their anger- for the whole incident declared them unworthy.

Whilst what the Lord arranged was indeed a parody of a triumphant entry, designed to highlight the importance of humility and sacrifice, He was surely conscious that He was acting out, however dimly, the prophesied future and ultimate triumphal entry of

Messiah into Jerusalem and the temple, coming from the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4; Is. 62:11).

19:37 *And as he was now drawing near, at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works which they had seen, saying*- Jn. 12:16 specifically states that they misunderstood at this point. They were so ecstatic because they really believed that He was going to establish the Kingdom there and then. His previous parable about going away to receive the Kingdom had fallen upon deaf ears. The gospel records are transcripts of how the disciples preached the Gospel; and continually they emphasize their own weakness and slowness to understand, thereby reaching out to their hearers, urging them as it were to do better than they had done.

19:38 *Blessed is the King that comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!*- As noted on :37, they thought that finally the Kingdom was being established. They failed to perceive that the Lord was mocking and deconstructing the whole idea of a triumphal entry, instead glorying in humility and the need to die on a cross in order to establish His Kingdom.

The Lord didn't turn round and correct them for their misapplication of Scripture. Neither did He reject them or call fire down from Heaven upon them because of their misunderstanding. He said nothing, and let the crowd live on in their misunderstanding and see His death – in order to teach them something about what was needed in order to enable the Kingdom. And the same 'long term' approach of the Lord is found in His dealing with the demons issue. The elder son in the parable falsely claims to God that he has never broken one of His commands; but although this is evidently untrue, the father (representing God) does not correct him in so many words (Lk. 15:29–31).

God has inspired His word in order to interpret certain facts to us. This is further proof that we are not intended to insist on a strictly literal meaning to everything we read (for example, that the sun literally rises). Thus Matthew records that the people cried 'Hosanna' at Christ's entry into Jerusalem (Matt. 21:9). Seeing that first century Israel spoke Aramaic, this is doubtless what did actually come out of their lips. But Luke says that the same group of people shouted "Glory" (Lk. 19:38). Luke's Gospel seems to be designed for the Greek speaking world, and so he uses the Greek equivalent of 'Hosanna', even though they did not actually say that word. The way the New Testament quotes the Old with slight changes without pointing this out is another example of how God's word mixes interpretation with direct transmission of facts (e.g. Ps. 32:1-2 cp. Rom. 4:6-7). This fact is not irrelevant to the issue of demons. We have seen that the accounts of demons being cast out are framed in such a way as to show the supremacy of God's power over the vain traditions of the first century world.

19:39 *And some of the Pharisees from the crowd said to him: Teacher, rebuke your disciples*- Even though the disciples were so deeply mistaken and inappropriate, as explained above, the Lord always takes their side when they are under criticism. The same defensive, justifying Lord is ours too, and looks at our weaknesses and refusals to understand in the same way.

19:40 *And he answered and said: I tell you, that if these shall hold their peace, the stones will cry out*- See on :39. Often Scripture alludes to or quotes other Scripture which may seem out of context, if we insist on seeing everything from our viewpoint of time. Thus Lk. 19:40 quotes Hab. 2:11 concerning the stones of apostate Israel crying out, and apparently applies it to the misguided acclamation of faithful men. Matthew particularly seems to quote Scripture which is relevant to the Lord's second coming as applying to His first coming. Indeed, the way the NT quotes the OT apparently out of context is a sizeable problem. There are times when we may quote or allude to the words of a Bible passage quite out of context, just because the words seem appropriate. And it seems the NT sometimes does just the same. Search and try as we may, the context seems just inappropriate. This may be explicable by understanding God to have the ability to take words from one time-context and insert them into another, in a way which to us is not contextual. *We* have no authority to do this; but He can. *He* can speak as if "the resurrection is past already"; but for us to do so is to deny the Faith.

19:41 *And when he drew near, he saw the city and wept over it*- His previous parable about slaying those who refused Him was therefore said with deep sadness in His voice. 1 Pet. 2:12 defines the "day of visitation" as that of the Lord's return to earth to establish His Kingdom. But a similar idea is to be found in Lk. 19:41-44, where the Lord 'sees' or visits / views the city on 'this day'. See on Lk. 21:20-24.

19:42 *Saying: If you had known in this day, even you, the things which belong to your peace! But now they are hid from your eyes*- On :44 I will observe that the Lord has the potentials in view. The whole planned program of His death and the AD70 judgments could have been averted. The time of Zion's peace could have come there and then if they accepted Him on His true terms.

The pain that arises from knowing what might have been is so poignantly brought out by the grief of Martha and Mary over their brother's death- they knew that if Jesus had have been there, Lazarus wouldn't have died (Jn. 11:21,32). Jesus as God's Son had something of this ability to see what might have been- hence He could state with absolute confidence that if Gentile Tyre and Sidon had witnessed His miracles, they would've repented in sackcloth and ashes (Lk. 10:13). He lamented with pain over the fact that things would have been so much better for Jerusalem if she had only known / apprehended the things which would bring her ultimate peace (Lk. 19:42). The Lord

Jesus was deeply pained at what might have been, if the things of God's Kingdom had not remained willfully hidden from Israel's perception. His pain was because of realizing what might have been. In this He was directly reflecting the mind of His Father, who had previously lamented over Jerusalem: "O that you had hearkened to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river" (Is. 48:18).

19:43 *For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies shall set up a barricade around you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side*- These were the days that would come, when instead if they had accepted the Lord, there would have been days of peace, the Messianic Kingdom, when Israel would not be fenced in by Gentiles but would instead remove the barriers and go forth to the Gentiles with peace "on every side".

19:44 *And shall dash you to the ground, and your children within you; and they shall not leave in you one stone upon another*- The judgment of the leprous house was to be thrown down, stone by stone (Lev. 14:41). At the time of the final assault on Jerusalem in AD69, Titus commanded that the temple was to be spared. But the Lord's words came true, just as all prophetic words will, despite every human effort to deny their power. Josephus claims that the gold of the temple melted and therefore each stone was prized apart to remove the gold.

There was a strong belief in Judaism that the temple would last eternally. Hence the disciples' question about "the end of the age" was because for them, any talk about the end of the temple meant the end of the world. This prophecy of the destruction of the temple implied an ending of the Mosaic law.

All this will happen because you did not perceive the time of your visitation- Because Jerusalem knew not "the time of your visitation", she didn't perceive the things of "her peace" "in this day" (:42), *therefore* days of destruction would come upon her in AD70. The implication surely is that had Jerusalem accepted Jesus as Messiah, the events of AD70 need never have happened, and His first coming could have been the day of "visitation" to establish God's Kingdom. Of course God's program functioned differently because this never happened; but that doesn't take away from the fact that it was truly possible.

All major events in God's purpose have occurred within the approximate period when true students of the word expected them to - the Flood, the desolation of Jerusalem and its rebuilding, the Lord's first coming, the events of A.D. 70 etc. are all good examples. How much more then with the time of the second coming and the consummation of God's purpose? "The Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto His... prophets" (Amos 3:7), and the purpose of their writing was so that we might understand. The Lord rebuked the Jews because they couldn't discern the signs that Messiah's first advent was with them (Mt. 16:3; Lk. 19:44); and his first advent was a

type of his second. The coming of judgment through the Babylonians was another type of the last days; and Israel were criticized for not perceiving the approach of that day, whereas "the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed time; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming" (Jer. 8:7). This means that as the natural creation have an inherent knowledge of the seasons, so God's people should have a sense of the time of the Lord's coming. The Lord said the same when he spoke of how our internal awareness of the approach of Summer should correspond to our certain knowledge of the Kingdom's approach.

The grace of Jesus and His Father, so great, *so* free, was a challenge for even the Lord to express in any verbal medium. The way He spoke was grace itself. He wept over the men of Jerusalem, sorrowing that their destruction must come because "you knew not the time of your visitation". He could have quite well said: "because you have rejected me...". But His grace was greater than to say that. The utter inappropriacy of our salvation is brought out time and again in His teaching. The oil lamp with the bruised reed and smoking flax which annoyingly filled the house with smoke was nurtured and tolerated in hope by this Lord of ours.

19:45 *And he entered into the temple*- This again was a conscious parody of Judaism's Messianic hopes. Their idea was that Messiah would enter Jerusalem in triumph against their Gentile enemies, and enter the temple. This was based upon their reading of Mal. 3:1: "The Lord whom you seek shall suddenly come to His temple". But the context of Malachi 3 required a positive response by Israel to the herald of Messiah, i.e. John the Baptist. And this had not been forthcoming. And the next verse goes on to suggest that this coming of Messiah will not be of much blessing to Israel- "But who may abide the day of His coming [i.e., "to His temple"]? And who shall stand when He appears?" (Mal. 3:2).

Mark's record appears to state that the Lord first entered the temple, looked around and walked out (Mk. 11:11) and the next day returned to cleanse the temple of traders. It could be that He cleansed the temple twice. Or it could be that this silent looking around and walking away, returning to Bethany, 'the house of the poor', was another intentional creation of an anti-climax. The Jews expected Him to do something dramatic- and He simply looked around in sadness and left for 'the house of the poor'- to return and cast out the traders and thus make the performance of sacrifice impossible there.

And began to throw out those that were selling there- A verb elsewhere used by the Lord about condemnation (Mt. 8:12; 21:39; 22:13; 25:30). Instead of bringing salvation to Israel's temple, He entered it and condemned the orthodox, casting them out of God's house and forbidding them to enter it to carry things through it (Mk., Lk.). Instead of them, the Lord in their place welcomed children and the handicapped into God's house. Sacred space was a major concept in Judaism; the Lord's expulsion of the Orthodox

from it and replacing them with those considered unworthy of entry was a highly significant thing to do.

The Lord had not long earlier described Sodom as the place where the wrong kind of buying and selling went on, and He had likened His generation to Sodom (Lk. 17:28). This, again, was hardly what the crowds expected to hear- a likening of their most sacred place to Sodom, and a prophecy of its destruction at the hands of the Gentiles. The Lord was thereby proclaiming the court of the Gentiles, where such trading was allowed to be conducted, as being as holy as the rest of the temple building. Note that in Matthew the Lord also expelled those who were *buying* the animals for sacrifice- ordinary Jews wanting to offer sacrifice. Sacrifices were therefore unavailable, because the Lord stopped the sale of them. This surely hinted at an ending of the Mosaic law in view of the Lord's upcoming sacrifice. This was all so much what the Jewish masses did *not* want to hear. There needed to be no more sale of animals for sacrifice; for the Lord was paying the price, and was the final sacrifice.

19:46 *Saying to them*- The Lord several times quoted an Old Testament passage which if quoted further would have made a telling point. Thus here He quoted Is. 56:7: “My house shall be called a house of prayer”, leaving His hearers to continue: “...for *all* people”. He recited Ps. 8:2: “Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings you have perfected praise”, leaving them to complete: “...that you might still [through their witness] the enemy and the avenger”. For the Bible minded, these things ought to have taught them. There is reason to think, in the subsequent response of a Jewish minority after Pentecost, that at least some did make these connections. They made use of the spiritual potential they had been given.

It is written- The Lord quotes from Is. 56:7, but the surrounding context of the quotation is relevant to the Jewish leadership who were present and deeply critical of the Lord's actions. Is. 56:10,11 condemns Israel's elders as "blind watchmen... dumb dogs... greedy dogs which can never have enough, shepherds that cannot understand, every one looking for gain". "Dogs" was understood as a reference to the Gentiles- and the Lord is saying that they are effectively Gentiles. Significantly, Is. 56:6 has spoken of "the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord... taking hold of His covenant". This is often how God works- for those who are sensitive to His word, the quotations given speak far more deeply. The potential for greater understanding is thereby given to those familiar with His word. This is one reason why I encourage perseverance in reading the Bible even if at the point of reading we feel we are not understanding much and simply building up a familiarity with the text. That familiarity can be a basis for later revelation to us.

My house- Just as the "feasts *of the Lord*" are described as "feasts *of the Jews*", *God's* house becomes "*your* house" (Mt. 23:38). They had hijacked God's religion

for their own ends, just as so many do today.

Shall be a house of prayer- Luke uses the present tense, implying "*is* called". The Lord surely said both, His point being that prophecies of the future Kingdom are to be lived out by us in essence today.

But you have made it a den of thieves- The Kingdom prophecy of Zech. 14:21 that there will no longer be a trafficker in the Lord's house was fulfilled by the Lord's casting out the traders from the temple. Many of the Kingdom prophecies of healing were it seems consciously fulfilled in the Lord's healings: Is. 35:6 LXX the stammerer healed = Mk. 7:32-35; Is. 35:3 = Mk. 2:3-12; 3:1-6; Is. 35:8,10 = Mk. 11:1 Bartimaeus following on the Jerusalem road. This doesn't mean that these passages will not have a glorious future fulfillment. But in the person of Jesus and in the record of His life we see the "Kingdom come nigh", as He Himself said it did. We can so focus on the future fulfillment that we can forget that He was the Kingdom in the midst of men; the essence of our eternal future, of the coming political Kingdom of God, was and is to seen in Him. Satan fell from Heaven during His ministry ((Lk. 10:18), as it will at the second coming (Rev. 12).

This invites us to see the thieves who robbed the man in the Samaritan parable as the Jewish leadership, whose priests and Levites refused to help people after the damage they themselves had caused (Lk. 10:30). The thieves "stripped him of His clothing" just as they later did to the Lord Jesus. The Lord uses the same figure of thieves for the Jewish leadership in Jn. 10:1,8. The Lord quotes here from Jer. 7:11, which speaks of the temple being profaned by adultery and Baal worship, resulting in the Babylonian invasion. He is saying that Israel's hypocritical piety in His day was none less than Baal worship, and therefore the Gentiles would come and destroy that place.

19:47 *And he was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scribes and the leading men of the people sought to destroy him*- I have argued elsewhere that the Lord gave His life, in the way and at the time He wished. It was not taken from Him. The role of His mock 'triumphal entry' was to whip up enthusiasm for Him- and then purposefully self-deflate it, so that the people would turn against Him and empower the Jewish leaders to do what they wished, in getting him crucified that Passover. This verse notes the success of His plans. He really was the master psychologist, the chess grandmaster who foresaw every possible move, and accommodate them all within a program and progression of events which He was supremely in control of. This is one reason why He could predict with such detail the events to be associated with His death that Passover.

19:48 *But they could not figure out what they might do, because all the people so hung upon his words*- See on Lk. 19:13. The Lord's mass popular support is what had apparently stymied their desire to murder Him on previous occasions. I suggest His

purpose behind the mock 'triumphal entry' was to whip up that support to a crescendo, and then bitterly disappoint it. In this way, He left the Jewish leadership free to pursue their long held plans to destroy Him. And we observe too how unstable is human nature, how fickle is apparent devotion to the Lord… that the crowds could turn so quickly.

LUKE CHAPTER 20

20:1 *And it came to pass, on one of the days he was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, there came to him the chief priests and the scribes with the elders*- Matthew says the Lord "entered" the temple to teach. "Entered" is *erchomai* , and is matched by the priests and elders 'coming' to Him, *proserchomai*. The impression is created of direct confrontation, head on. His teaching was the preaching of the Gospel- of the Kingdom of God. But His take on the good news of the Kingdom, as witnessed by multiple parables about the Kingdom, was that the principles of the future political Kingdom on earth must be lived now. All the people wanted was to see the Messianic Kingdom come literally. In chapter 19 we saw how He set up a mock triumphal entry to explain that this was not for now. And now He backs that up by explaining what "the Kingdom" at this stage was really all about in personal terms. Indeed, His view of the Kingdom was totally opposed to theirs. And so in His next parable, He explains that actually Israel must kill their king as they killed their prophets, in order for the Kingdom to come as they wished.

20:2 *And they spoke, saying to him: Tell us. By what authority do you do these things?*- Presumably they thought they had Him caught out, because *exousia* was supposedly solely with Rome. He could hardly say the Romans had given Him such authority. And yet if He said anything other than 'Rome', then He could be reported to the Roman authorities. However, their reference may have been to what we noted at Mt. 21:14- the Lord had held back the temple guard from arresting Him and stopping His forceful overthrowing of the temple traders. This question was quite to be expected of a man who had recently used violence to overthrow tables and force men off the premises. Who had given Him such authority?

Or, who is he that gave you this authority?- To this day this question is heard. People, especially religious people, find it so hard to accept that somebody can have a personal relationship with God which enables and empowers them to operate as sovereign free agents amongst mere men. This cry is especially heard from those who themselves think they have authority and seek to hold on to their petty power at all costs. It is the typical cry when someone obeys their Lord's command to baptize people, takes the initiative to extend fellowship to another etc.

20:3 *And he answered and said to them: I also will ask you a question. Now tell me*- It is not necessarily wrong to avoid answering a question- although few of us could do so in the spiritually and logically flawless way the Lord did here, let alone at a moment's notice.

The AV is mistaken in translating "If you tell me, I will tell you". The sense rather is: 'If you

answer this question, then in that answer you will have My telling you the answer to your question'. They finally answered in :7 that 'We cannot know' (Gk.).

20:4 *The baptism of John*- Perhaps John's message was so centred around the appeal for baptism that "the baptism of John" is being put for 'the teaching and ministry of John'. Or maybe the Lord has in view His own baptism by John. In this case, His reasoning would be that His authority came from the fact that He had been baptized by John. Seeing John's work was from God and had Divine authority, this meant therefore that the Lord was empowered by that baptism to operate with God's authority. If that is indeed what the Lord intended, then we have another window onto the perplexing question of why the Lord was baptized by John.

Was it from heaven, or from men?- Gamaliel uses the same logic in Acts 5:38,39 in urging the Jews to boil all the personal feelings and doubts down to a simple issue: Are these men and their work of God or man? This approach is helpful to us too, assailed as we are by unclarity about others. Is a man in Christ or not? Does God work through him or not? Is he of God or men? There is no middle ground here. This is what I submit concerning myself to those who doubt me, and it is the approach I seek to take with others with whom I have to engage in spiritual life. And Gamaliel rightly concluded that if something is of man and not of God, then we have little to worry about. Finally it will come to nothing. We should be concerned rather with the eternal consequence of refusing those who are clearly of God. If of God, we must accept them.

20:5 *And they discussed it among themselves, saying: If we shall say from heaven, he will say, why did you not believe him?*- This could imply they withdrew for discussion amongst themselves. But such a withdrawal would've been a sign of weakness. More likely we have here an insight into their own internal reasonings. In this case, the statement in :7 that they answered that they couldn't tell was uttered by each of them in turn as the Lord asked them individually.

20:6 *But if we shall say, from men, all the people will stone us*- The punishment for religious heretics. They all considered John as a prophet, whereas the chief priests and elders did not. We see here a marked difference between the people and their religious leaders. Indeed, the leaders despised the common people: "This people who know not the Law are cursed" (Jn. 7:49). And yet very soon now, the leaders would be apparently controlling the people to cry for the blood of Jesus. But this chapter so far has shown that this was not really the reason why the masses turned against Jesus. They turned against Him because of His dashing of their hopes and refusal to pander to their expectations, exemplified by His wilful parody of a triumphal entry into the city and temple. The huge gap between the elders and the masses was so great that it cannot be

credible that the elders managed to manipulate them so quickly to turn 180 degrees and to reject the Jesus whom their hero John had insisted was the Messiah.

For they are persuaded that John was a prophet- And yet the Lord had said that "the men of this generation" held John to be demon possessed, i.e. crazy (Lk. 7:33). We can on one hand feel and state respect for someone, whilst in reality not accepting them as any authority at all, and effectively considering them as if they are mad, not to be taken seriously.

20:7 *And they answered that they did not know*- They had set themselves up as defenders of the Faith, whose duty it was to analyse the claims of teachers and decide whether or not they were false prophets. But now they are beaten in fair intellectual fight. They can give no answer, and yet by saying they could not judge John's claim to be a prophet, they were abdicating the very role of assessors of teachers which they claimed to have, and which they were using against the Lord.

20:8 *And Jesus said to them: Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these thing*s- He meant that they knew in their consciences and did not need Him to spell it out to them in words. This was again His style in His silence before His judges, and in His brief answer to Pilate: "You are saying it" (Lk. 23:3). The answer was in Pilate's own words rather than the Lord's.

20:9 *And he began to speak to the people this parable*- 'From where do you get your authority? What is your exact nature and relationship to God?' was answered by the parable of the servants who refused to receive the Son and give fruit to the owner (Lk. 20:9-16). The Lord could've answered: 'My authority? From God, He's my Father, I had a virgin birth, you know'. But He wasn't so primitive. Instead He appealed to them to realize their own responsibilities to their creator and to accept His authority by giving fruit to the Father. The absentee landlords at times demanded fruit in lieu of repayment of debt. Perhaps the idea was that Israel were deeply in debt to God. Matthew 21 prefaces this parable with the one about the son who refused to even work in the vineyard.

There are strong similarities between the Lord's parable and the song of the vineyard of Isaiah 5:1-7, especially in the LXX:
"*Let me sing for my well beloved a song of my beloved about His vineyard* [The genre is significant; what begins as a joyful, idyllic harvest song turns into bitter disappointment and declaration of judgment]. *My beloved had a vineyard on a very fruitful hill* [The environment was ideal]. *He dug it up* [to dig was the work of the lowest servant, but God did this]*, gathered out its stones* [the effects of the curse were ameliorated]*, planted it with the choicest vine* ["the men of Judah"]*, built a tower in its midst, and also cut out a wine press therein. He looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, please judge between Me and My vineyard.*

What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it? [Absolutely all has been done to enable our fruitfulness. The Father wants fruit above all- in the Lk. 20 parable, the owner seeks the actual fruit, rather than cash payment. This element of unreality serves to show His passionate interest in fruit] *Why, when I looked for it to yield grapes, did it yield wild grapes? Now I will tell you what I will do to My vineyard. I will take away its hedge, and it will be eaten up. I will break down its wall of it, and it will be trampled down* [The downtreading of the temple at the hands of the Gentiles]. *I will lay it a wasteland. It won't be pruned nor hoed, but it will grow briers and thorns* [The language of the curse in Eden. The land was as the Garden of Eden, but Israel sinned "as Adam"]. *I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it* [the language of Elijah, prototype of John the Baptist]. *For the vineyard of Yahweh of Armies is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant: and He looked for justice, but, behold, oppression; for righteousness* [the fruit required was justice and righteousness- instead, as Isaiah 5 goes on to explain, there was materialistic selfishness]*, but, behold, a cry of distress*".

A man planted a vineyard- The language of planting a vineyard and eating the fruit of it is used in 1 Cor. 3:6; 9:7 about *our* work of preaching. Paul was unafraid to interpret the parable on multiple levels. We are to be fruitful; but in our work of sharing the Gospel with others we are also the planters who come seeking fruit on our converts. The suggestion could be that the owner personally did the planting and preparing. I say this because Isaiah 5, upon which the parable is based, includes this feature- of the owner doing so much personally. Matthew's version stresses that all has been done so that we can produce spiritual fruit; but so often we excuse our lack of fruitfulness by blaming environment factors. The situation in our country, our town, workplace, marriage, family, health etc. And we can put huge effort into trying to change environment because we consider that we can be more fruitful for God in a different environment. But whilst passivity and fatalism are just as wrong, it must be accepted that our environment in the bigger picture has been uniquely and thoughtfully prepared by God so that we might be fruitful. For it is clear from the parable that our fruitfulness is God's most passionate desire and intention for us. He would hardly place us in any other environment, therefore, than one ideally prepared by Him in order to enable and enhance our fruitfulness.

And rented it to husbandmen, and went into another country for a long time- Not necessarily the ascension of the Lord Jesus. It could be a reference to God's entry of covenant with Israel, at which "God came down on mount Sinai" (Ex. 19:20; 20:19) and then "ascended up on high" (Ps. 68:18). The Greek specifically means to go into a foreign, i.e. Gentile, country. It is used of the prodigal son going into a far country (Lk. 15:13). Let us remember that the Son in the parable represents the Lord Jesus, the owner is clearly God. This going away is not therefore representative of the Lord's ascension to Heaven, although it appears to be used that way in Mt. 25:14,15; Mk. 13:34

["the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey"]. This may just be the furniture of the parable, alluding to the common experience of absentee landlords. These were often characterized by being uncaring for their land; but this owner was particular careful for his project to the point of obsession. He wanted the fruit, not money. It therefore may be part of the impression given, that the owner appears to be absent and disinterested- but in reality He is passionately interested. And this is exactly the position with God, who is perceived as somehow distant and passionless about His project on earth. There may also be the hint that even before He considered giving His precious vineyard to the Gentiles, which appears at the end of the parable, He had in fact initially envisaged this, and had in some form gone to the Gentiles right from the start of His project with Israel.

Initially, the parable would've got the hearers on the side of the labourers; because it was a frequent complaint that absentee landlords abused their tenants, who worked hard just to send cash off to the landlord in another country. But the parable twists around, so that after initially identifying with this group, the people came to see that it was they who stood condemned.

20:10 *And when the time came*- A phrase used by Matthew about the drawing near of the Kingdom at Christ's time (Mt. 3:2; 4:17). But by the end of His ministry, the Lord was warning that false teachers would wrongly claim that "the time draws near" (Lk. 21:8). Clearly He taught that the time had drawn near, but not come. He taught at the end of His ministry how He was as a man who had gone to a far country for a long time. This invites us to understand that with each appeal of the prophets, and of John as the last prophet, the time potentially could have come. God's purpose is thus open ended. Peter uses the same word to speak of how the end of all things is drawing near (1 Pet. 4:7), and Paul likewise (Rom. 13:12). It could have come in AD70- but again, a great delay, until our last days. This is why setting any date for the second coming is inappropriate- for it is a case of fulfilling preconditions, rather than awaiting a day fixed on a calendar. "The season" for fruit (Mk. 12:2) had indeed come, many times- all was potentially ready for it, but human failure meant there was no harvest.

He sent- The Greek *apostello* again encourages the apostles to see themselves as the equivalent of the Old Testament 'sent ones'- the prophets.

To the husbandmen a servant, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard; but the husbandmen beat him, and sent him away empty handed- The prophets (2 Kings 9:7 and often). Note that the prophets were sent from God, as the Lord Jesus was; but this doesn't imply they were in Heaven with God before their sending, and neither was the Lord.

20:11 *And he sent yet another servant, and him also they beat, and handled him shamefully, and sent him away empty handed*- When the world reviled him, Paul saw himself as the beaten prophets Jesus had spoken about (2 Cor. 11:24,25). The first

servant could be the former prophets, the second servant the latter prophets; for Judaism strongly recognized this distinction. Beating, shaming, stoning and killing [according to Matthew's version] are Mosaic punishments for apostasy, and so the idea may be that Israel excused their lack of spiritual fruitfulness by judging as apostate the prophets who demanded this of them. This is typical- the unspiritual transfer their own anger with themselves and awareness of their own coming judgment onto others, whom they condemn as worthy of judgment and punishment.

20:12 *And he sent yet a third, and him also they wounded and threw him out*- Mk. 12:4 adds that the last servant was “wounded in the head”, surely a reference to the beheading of John the Baptist and shameful treatment of his severed head. He was the last of the prophets; their ministry was until John the Baptist. Although we have just read that the crowds recognized John as a prophet (:6), in reality they didn't. They rejected his message of the true nature of Messiah. Mass enthusiasm for a Christian teacher is not the same as real belief and spirituality, and acceptance of the real spirit of Christ. We note that the "beloved son" was "sent" (:13) after John the Baptist. 'Sending' was therefore at the start of the Lord's ministry, and not at His birth, as Trinitarians like to think.

20:13 *And the lord of the vineyard said: What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. It may be they will respect him*-God sent His Son to Israel, thinking "they will reverence him when they see him" (Lk. 20:13 AV). But Isaiah 53 had prophesied that when Israel saw Him, they would see no beauty in Him and crucify Him. Yet God restrained that knowledge, in His love and positive hope for His people. Likewise Jesus, it seems to me limited His foreknowledge of Judas. He knew from the beginning who would betray him. One of the 12 was a traitor. Yet Judas was His own familiar friend in whom He trusted. "It may be they...", Gk. *isos,* is tantalizingly hard to understand. It could mean 'Perhaps'; or equally it could mean 'They will, surely'. We wonder of course how the Father could truly feel like this if He is omniscient. My suggestion is that He limits His omniscience in order to enter fully into our human experience; which means that His expressions of shock and disappointment are legitimate reflections of how He actually feels.

“My beloved Son” means that the joyful harvest song of Is. 5:1, the "song of my beloved”, becomes the tragedy of "My beloved son".

We have here an example of how several of the parables recorded in Luke all feature this internal dialogue- in this case, the owner asking Himself 'What shall I do?'. This features here in Luke's version of this parable, but not in Mark's version. Luke as a doctor was perhaps interested in things like self-talk and psychology. He also begins his Gospel by recording that the Lord Jesus would reveal the thoughts of many hearts, i.e. to ourselves (Lk. 2:35). He personally, and the things concerning Him, elicit the question "What shall I do?". The rich fool asks himself the same question: "What shall I do?" (Lk. 12:17). The outcome of God's internal dialogue is to give His Son, in the face of every evidence that

gift will not be appreciated, and that it will cost Him all He has. The allusion is to Is. 5:4,5 LXX where God twice asks Himself "What shall I do to my vineyard?". He had "done" everything for it. The answer is provided in more detail by the Lord Jesus, here in this parable. What God decided to "do" was not simply to destroy the vineyard; but rather to send His Son, destroy the tenants but not the vineyard- and preserve the vineyard by giving it to other tenants. We could perceive here a slight change of plan within God, brought about by the experience of His Son. The vineyard is now not destroyed- the tenants are. God does not give up on His project, i.e. His strong desire for spiritual fruit in His land. The question "What shall I do?" may well have been a cliffhanger moment in the first telling of the story. The audience was left to think about it. They naturally would have wondered why the owner took such a risk in sending His Son. Surely the landowner guessed what was likely to happen to His Son? And so the audience would have wondered whether this landowner was perhaps so obsessed with getting the rent, i.e. the fruit, that He did take the risk. That surely is the conclusion any audience is led to at this point. And that indeed is the point- that God is so passionate for spiritual fruit that He would risk and give His Son for it. But we surely have here another element of unreality- no matter how he wanted the rent, no owner would surely send His beloved Son given the previous history with His servants. This unreality in the story serves to highlight God's desperate desire for fruit. And we see here His supreme interest in our developing the fruit of the Spirit. Our perspective should be the same, seeking to exclude influences which damage the fruit, and practically surrounding ourselves with influences which elicit spiritual fruit. And this has huge impact upon what we watch and listen to.

The Bible is full of people who are brought to ask themselves "What shall I do?". The answer is the same as God's answer to Himself- to give all. He had asked Himself the same question about His people earlier: "Ephraim, what shall I do to you? Judah, what shall I do to you?" (Hos. 6:4). And the painful answer was 'Keep on loving you'. The rich fool instead thinks only about where he can store his wealth, talking to himself from the wrong assumption that wealth lasts and can be stored up. The idea of course is that all of us, God and man, debate "What shall I do?". Saul / Paul asked "What shall I do?", the dishonest steward likewise when he is convicted of sin (Lk. 16:3), "What shall I do with Jesus?" Pilate effectively asked himsef (Mt. 27:22), the rich young ruler also ["What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"], the jailor ["What shall I do to be saved?"] as did the crowds at Pentecost (Lk. 18:18; Acts 2:37; 22:10) and the crowds who came to John ("What shall we do then?", Lk. 3:10,12,14) and the Jews who saw the Lord's miracles twice asked themselvs the same ("What shall we do? This man does many miracles", Jn. 11:47; Acts 4:16). The answer was begged really by the question; the questioners knew the answer was always to repent, resign all they had once held dear, and cast themselves and their lives upon the Lord Jesus. The rich fool debates with himself about how he is going to treat and pamper his "soul"; but then his soul or life is required of

him, in that he dies. The reality of death just didn't figure in the man's self talk. He talks about his plans for his soul / life, and doesn't consider that God has other plans for his soul; he has left the Divine perspective quite out of account, speaking to himself about his life rather than to God, who in fact owns his soul / life. The answer ought to have been, to give his all for God and His people, and to repent of his materialism. The fool "said within himself", not 'thought within himself'. The idea is definitely of internal monologue and self talk.Job 31:14 has Job asking himself the same question but with the correct perspective, of final judgment: "What then shall I do when God rises up?".

The prodigal son asks himself what he could do in his predicament; the unjust judge and dishonest steward likewise. And in Lk. 12:45, the unfaithful servant reasons "My lord delays his coming...". All the humans in these parables are spiritually weak; their self-talk, we can assume, was related to their weakness and, in some cases, condemnation. Here we see the huge importance the Bible places upon internal dialogue and thought processes. And here in Lk. 20 we see how this is also a feature of God, in whose image man is made. Our self talk is therefore of critical importance; and it is this which God judges. The things of the deepest and most essential spirit. It is therefore no surprise that the records of the wilderness temptations are in fact perfectly in line with the general focus of the Gospels upon self talk and internal dialogue. The Old Testament has a similar focus- consider how Saul 'said within his heart...' in 1 Sam. 18:17,21.

20:14 *But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned one with another, saying*- That is, they conspired. This is quoting the LXX of Gen. 37:18. And the allusion is also to *"When they shall see him,* there is no beauty that they should desire him" (Is. 53:2). "Shamefully handled" (Mk. 12:4) is s.w. Is. 53:3 LXX "despised".

This is the heir!- The leaders of first century Israel initially recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (cp. Gen. 37:20; Jn. 7:28). They saw (i.e. understood, recognized) him, but then they were made blind by Christ (Jn. 9:39). It was because they "saw" Jesus as the Messiah that the sin of rejecting him was counted to them (Jn. 9:41). This explains why the Roman / Italian nation was not held guilty for crucifying Christ, although they did it, whereas the Jewish nation was. And yet there is ample Biblical evidence to suggest that these same people who "saw" / recognized Jesus as the Christ were also ignorant of his Messiahship. "You both know me, and you know whence I am... You neither know me, nor my Father... when you have lifted up the Son of man, then shall you know that I am he" (Jn. 7:28; 8:19,28) were all addressed to the same group of Jews. Did they know / recognize Jesus as Messiah, or not? As they jeered at him on the cross, and asked Pilate to change the nameplate from "Jesus, King of the Jews", did they see him as their Messiah? It seems to me that they didn't. In ignorance the Jewish leaders and people crucified their Messiah (Acts 3:17 RV). And yet they knew him for who he was, they saw him coming as the heir. I would suggest the resolution to all this is that

they did recognize him first of all, but because they didn't want to accept him, their eyes were blinded, so that they honestly thought that he was an impostor, and therefore in ignorance they crucified him. And yet, it must be noted, what they did in this ignorance, they were seriously accountable for before God.

Let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours- Their assumption therefore was that the landlord must have died, for otherwise, killing the son would not have given them the inheritance. They acted, as we can, as if God is dead; although they would never have admitted that. The apparent non-action of God can likewise lead to the wrong impression that He is effectively dead. Seizing a vineyard for personal possession reminds us of Ahab's actions in 1 Kings 21:15,16- making Naboth a type of Christ, and associating the Jewish religious leadership with wicked Ahab. However, Ahab did repent- and one wonders whether the Lord built in this allusion in reflection of His amazing hopefulness for Israel's repentance. The allusion to Ahab may have been born in the Lord's Bible-saturated mind by the way that Isaiah 5:6 spoke of rain being withheld from the vineyard, as happened in Ahab and Elijah's time. The confirmation of Israel in their evil way was brought to its climax in the crucifixion of Christ.

20:15 *And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do to them?*-Surely a reference to the Lord being crucified outside Jerusalem. In this case, the vineyard specifically speaks of Jerusalem and the temple. Mk. 12:8 appears in English to suggest a different order: Took, killed, cast out of the vineyard. But the Greek text doesn't have to be read strictly chronologically. The killed-and-cast-out need not be chronological. Or it could be that the Lord is teaching that effectively, they had killed Him before casting Him out and crucifying; the essence of the cross was ongoing in His life. That is clear enough in a number of Gospel passages.

"Cast Him out" has obvious connection to the way in which the Lord was crucified outside the city limits of Jerusalem. But 'cast him out' is parallel with the stone being "rejected" by the builders (:17). The 'casting out' therefore speaks of religious rejection from the community. The same word is used of how the Lord was cast out of Nazareth (Lk. 4:29), and how believers would be cast out from Judaism (Lk. 6:22) and the synagogue (Jn. 9:34); and even from the legalistic church (3 Jn. 10 "casts them out of the church"). Any who experience being cast out of the visible body of God's people are thereby fellowshipping the Lord's crucifixion sufferings. Yet sadly the experience destroys many- when it can be taken as a share in His sufferings, knowing that if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. It is the same word used for the casting out of the rejected from the Kingdom to final condemnation (8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk. 13:28); those who cast out of the vineyard, which is the Kingdom, will themselves be cast out of the Kingdom at the last day.

The invitation "O inhabitants of Jerusalem... judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard" (Is. 5:3) is matched by the rhetorical question: "What therefore will the lord of

the vineyard do unto them?" (Lk. 20:15). This too was addressed by the Lord to Jerusalem's inhabitants.

20:16 *He will come and destroy these husbandmen*- The Lord spoke of how the owner Himself would "come and destroy these husbandmen". This is a shocking change in tempo- the owner has appeared impotent, distant and naive, to the point that the husbandmen considered He was effectively dead. They reasoned that if they killed the Son, then the vineyard would be theirs. But this is exactly the nature of Divine judgment. The God who appears effectively dead, at least impotent, distant and naïve, will suddenly reveal Himself in direct judgment. We believe that now by faith, but it shall surely happen.

And will give the vineyard to others. And when they heard it, they said: God forbid- The Lord will *give* the vineyard to the others. And yet He will come and destroy the vineyard, and the new nation He will choose will not just give Him some of the fruit, but will themselves become part of the vine, and themselves bear fruit to Him (Mt. 21:43; Jn. 15).

The Lord's initial Palestinian hearers were well used to the scenario of absentee landlords. The parables of Israel would have been easily understood by them. The landlords lived far away, were never seen, and sometimes their workers took over the whole show for themselves. The Lord's parable of the absentee landlord in Lk. 20:9-16 alludes to this situation. He sends messengers seeking fruit from the vineyard, but the tenants abuse or kill them, and he does nothing. When his son shows up, they assume that he's going to do just as before- ignore whatever they do to him. After all, they'd got away with not giving him any fruit and ignoring his messengers for so long, why would he change his attitude? He was so far away, he'd been in a "far country" for a very long time (Lk. 20:9), they didn't really know him. The Lord asked the question: "What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them?" (Lk. 20:15). The obvious answer, from the context provided within the story, would be: "Judging on past experience, not much at all". But then the Lord presented the element of unreality in the story, as a sudden, biting trick of the tail: No, the lord of the vineyard would actually personally come and destroy them, and give the vineyard to other tenants. Even though his experience of having tenants farm his land had been a fruitless and painful experience that had cost him the life of his son. And it was that element of unreality that brings home to us the whole point of the story. The Father does appear distant and unresponsive to our selfishness, our rebellion, and our refusal to hear his servants the prophets. But there is a real judgment to come, in which He will personally be involved. And yet even His destruction of the Jewish tenants hasn't taken away His almost manic desire to have workers, in His desperate desire for true spiritual fruit. The parables of Israel surely speak encouragement to each of us. The parable of the absentee landlord has a telling twist to it. Absentee landlords who had never visited their land for ages, and found the

people they sent to the property beaten up, would usually just forget it. They wouldn't bother. In the parable which draws on this, the Lord asks what the landlord will do (Lk. 20:15). The expected answer was: 'Not much. He got what he could, he was never bothered to go there for years anyway'. But *this* landlord is odd. He keeps on sending messengers when any other landlord would have given up or got mad earlier on. But God's patience through the prophets was likewise unusual. And then, when the tenants thought they must surely be able to get away with it because the Lord seemed so distant and out of touch... He suddenly comes Himself in person and destroys them. He doesn't hire a bunch of people to do it. He comes in person, as the Lord will in judgment. And instead of deciding he'd had his fingers burnt and giving up vineyards as a bad job, this Lord gives the vineyard to others- He tries again. And so the Lord is doing with the Gentiles.

20:17 *But he looked upon them, and said: What then is this that is written*- Mt. 21:42 "Did you never read in the scriptures". They spent their whole lives reading Scripture, and Ps. 118 was a well known Passover Hallel. But we can read and yet never really read as God intends.

The stone which the builders rejected- The Lord would be "rejected of the elders, chief priests and scribes" (Mk. 8:31 s.w.); indeed, "rejected by this generation" (Lk. 17:25).

The same was made the headstone of the corner?- If the builders rejected this stone, the implication is that another set of builders used it in another building, which became the temple of God. This is precisely the situation with the vineyard being taken away from the Jewish tenants and another group of workers being taken on. The quotation is seamlessly in context with the parable.

20:18 *Everyone that falls on that stone shall be broken to pieces, but on whoever it shall fall, it will grind him to dust*- There is an unmistakable allusion here to the stone destroying the image, the Kingdoms of men, in Dan. 2:44. The choice we have is to fall upon Christ and break our bones, to get up and stumble on with our natural self broken in every bone; or to be ground to powder by the Lord at his return, to share the judgments of this surrounding evil world- being "condemned with the world...". Yet strangely (at first sight) the figure of stumbling on the stone of Christ often describes the person who stumbles at his word, who rejects it (Is. 8:14,15; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:7,8). In other words, through our spiritual failures we come to break ourselves, we become a community of broken men and women; broken in that we have broken our inner soul in conformity to God's will. As Simeon cuddled that beautiful, innocent baby Jesus, he foresaw all this: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again (resurrection) of many in Israel... that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk. 2:34). If we are to share his resurrection, if we are to experience such newness of life in this life, we must fall upon him, really feel the cutting edge of his word. We must be broken now; or be broken and ground to powder at the judgment. See on Mt. 3:11.

A passage in Ps. 118 is referred to in Lk. 20:18; Acts 4:11; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6-8. One wonders if this was a proof text which the early believers would have known by heart. And one wonders likewise about Psalm 2- it is referred to so often.

20:19 *And the scribes and the chief priests sought to arrest him in that very hour, but they feared the people. For they perceived that he spoke this parable against them*- The connection with Isaiah 5 was so clear, and that song of the vineyard was a well known passage understood as the justification for the destruction of the first temple. The fear of the people was the reason why they didn't take the Lord. He realized this, and I suggested on chapter 19 that His mockery of a triumphal entry into Jerusalem was calculated to turn the people violently against Him. He was the psychologist *extraordinaire*. By manipulating things in this way, the Lord held total control over His death and the timing and manner of it, so that His arrest and crucifixion were in fact His giving of His life, rather than it being taken away from Him.

20:20 *And they watched him and sent out spies, who pretended to be sincere*- Rightly had the Lord called them hypocrites. Their attempt at acting as sincere enquirers would have been laughable. All the way through, the Lord is presented as the one totally in control, with the Jews and Romans acting exactly as He had set them up to act.

So that they might catch him in something he said; so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the Roman governor- The same word used of how *they* were to be entangled in condemnation (Lk. 21:35; Rom. 11:9). As they treated the Lord, so they were treated. Our attitude to Him is in a way our attitude to ourselves and our eternal destiny. We note they could *not* in fact catch hold of His words (:26). His death was not going to be because they outsmarted Him, but rather because He willingly set up a situation through which He willingly gave His life rather than it being taken from Him.

20:21 *And they asked him, saying: Teacher, we know you say and teach rightly*- Gk. *orthos*, from whence 'orthodox'. They were thereby trying to lead Him to make a right wing, conservative answer, namely, that tribute should be given to God and not Caesar. And then the Herodians with whom they were working in this plan (see Matthew) could legally swoop upon Him and have Him arrested for disloyalty to the empire.

And show no favouritism to any person- This was an appeal to Jewish orthodoxy, whereby the righteous Jew was supposed to be obedient to God regardless of what others thought. They were trying to lead the Lord into a position whereby He said 'No' to the question about giving the tribute money. And the Herodians were ready to pounce on Him if He did; for according to Matthew, they were working together with the Pharisees in this. We can reconstruct how the Pharisees and Herodians worked together in this; the Pharisees were trying to lead the Lord by a path of theology and logic to a position whereby He denied the need to pay tribute- and then Herod's

supporters could pounce on Him. The verisimilitude and internal agreement of the record is again strong encouragement to accept this as the inspired word of God, recording he actual words spoken rather than giving a mere summary or imagination of them from a distance of time and space.

But in truth teach the way of God- John the Baptist had attempted to prepare the way or path over which God's glory in Messiah could come to Zion. The only other occurrence of "the way of God" is when we read that Apollos, who knew only John's teaching, had to have "the way of God", i.e. John's message about the way, explained more fully to him (Acts 18:26). It may be that John had been so unworldly that he had not paid tribute to Caesar, or at least, he had been interpretted that way; and so now the Pharisees were commenting that if the Lord truly upheld John's teaching, then what was his answer about paying the tribute money? Because it was perceived, at very least, that John had advocated not paying it.

20:22 *Is it lawful*- This was purposefully vague, because they didn't clarify whether they meant the law of Moses or that of Rome. This was part of the trap. If the Lord said it was lawful according to Roman law, then they could accuse Him of breaking the law of Moses. If He said it was lawful according to the Law of Moses, and therefore that law must surely be obeyed, then He was breaking the law of Rome. But the Lord majestically rises above the trap, by (as usual) taking the whole issue to a far higher level.

For us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?- The word translated "tribute" was used by the Jews for the poll tax of Ex. 30:12-16; the argument was that this should be paid to the temple and not to Gentiles. By pushing the Lord for a yes / no answer, they thought they would force Him into an untenable position. Judas of Galilee had agitated about not paying the tribute money to the Romans (Acts 5:37) and had been executed for this in around AD6, in recent memory. The Lord as always appealed to higher principle- if it has Caesar's image, then give it to him; but what has God's image, your own body, then give it to God. The giving of our entire person to God made paying an annual tax to the temple seem cheap and irrelevant.

20:23 *But he perceived their craftiness, and said to them*- Mt. 22:18 says He perceived their wickedness. The wickedness could be their hypocrisy. But their "wickedness" could refer to their personal sins, and because in that moment the Lord perceived those sins, He thereby perceived their hypocrisy and therefore challenged them about their hypocrisy. He may have been given that perception of their sins by some flash of Divine insight, or it could be that His supreme sensitivity to people led Him to imagine correctly the kind of stuff going on in their secret lives.

20:24 *Show me a denarius*- The Pharisees claimed that pagan coinage should not be brought into the temple courts. This is why the coin had to be brought to the Lord,

according to Matthew. By so doing, the Lord was purposefully provoking the Pharisees; likely the Herodians (Mt. 22:16) brought it, not the Pharisees.

The tribute money had the inscription *Tiberius Caesar Divi Augusti Filius Augustus Pontifex Maximus*- "Tiberius Caesar, august son of the divine Augustus, High Priest". Pedants would've quickly assumed that such blasphemous language and appropriation of titles appropriate to the Lord Jesus would mean that such coinage should not be used, nor should such tribute be paid to any man on this basis. But the Lord saw a bigger picture. He was quite OK with such token behaviours, but the far bigger issue was giving to God our own bodies and lives which bear His image.

The coin bore an image which strict Jews considered blasphemous, denoting Tiberius as son of God, the divine Augustus. The Lord doesn't react to this as they expected – He makes no comment upon the blasphemy. He lets it go, but insists upon a higher principle. 'If this is what Caesar demands, well give it to him; but give what has the image of God, i.e. yourself, to God'. He didn't say 'Don't touch the coins, they bear false doctrine, to pay the tax could make it appear you are going along with a blasphemous claim'. Yet some would say that we must avoid touching anything that might appear to be false or lead to a false implication [our endless arguments over Bible versions and words of hymns are all proof of this]. The Lord wasn't like that. He lived life as it is and as it was, and re-focused the attention of men upon that which is essential, and away from the minutiae. Staring each of us in the face is our own body, fashioned in God's image – and thereby the most powerful imperative, to give it over to God. Yet instead God's people preferred to ignore this and argue over the possible implication of giving a coin to Caesar because there was a false message on it. Morally and dialectically the Lord had defeated His questioners; and yet still they would not see the bigger and altogether more vital picture which He presented them with.

Whose image and superscription has it? And they said: Caesar's- He was setting them up for His point that whatever bears God's image and superscription is to be given to Him (:25); and that refers to our body and whole lives. We have His signature on us; perhaps the Lord had in mind by this the idea that Israel were God's covenant people, His servants bearing His marks.

20:25 *And he said to them: Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's*- The Jews were looking for immediate deliverance from Caesar. The Lord's parody of a triumphal entry into Jerusalem was designed to show that He was not bringing that kind of a Kingdom, that sort of salvation. By saying that tribute must indeed be rendered to Caesar, He was further dashing their Messianic hopes concerning Him, and further demonstrating that He was not the Messiah they were looking for. Thus He was consciously bringing about a situation whereby His popularity was turned into hatred, because of the whole psychology of dashed expectations making love turn to hate. The

accusation that "We found this fellow... forbidding to give tribute to Caesar" (Lk. 23:2) was so utterly untrue.

The memories of the Maccabean heroes and their rebellion were strongly in the minds and consciousness of first century Israel. Their exploits were recited yearly at the feast of Hanukkah. Yet the Lord purposefully subverts the history of the Maccabees. Mattathias had taught violent resistance to Gentile occupation in the slogan: "Repay the Gentiles in their own coin" (1 Macc. 2:68 N.E.B.). But the Lord alludes to this, at least to the LXX form of the saying, when He advocated paying the Roman temple tax, giving the coin to them, and not violently resisting. See on Heb. 5:6.

And to God the things that are God's- The Lord taught that whatever bear's God's image must be 'rendered' to God, just as what bore Caesar's image must be rendered to Caesar (Lk. 20:25). Seeing that the human body bears God's image, He was clearly teaching that we should 'render' to God our whole being in the course of our human lives. But the same idea of rendering to God is picked up in 1 Pet. 4:5, where we are told that in the final judgment, we will 'render' [s.w.] ourselves to God. By the way we live now, the manner in which we render to God all that is not Caesar's, we are effectively rendering to Him our judgment account. And so we also find this Greek word for 'to render' in Rev. 22:12; Mt. 16:27; 20:8; 2 Tim. 4:8 and Rom. 2:6- at the day of judgment, where we render ourselves to God, He will "give" [s.w. 'render'] to every man according as his works have been. We're rendering ourselves to God right now, here in this life. And He will render that back to us in the last day- for we are right now giving our account to God. And there are times in life where perhaps God specifically intervenes in order to give us a taste of that final day of 'rendering' of ourselves to God- hence in the parable of Lk. 16:2, the man is asked to 'render an account' of his stewardship [s.w.]. It may be through illness, tragedy, loss, the intense introspection of depression, conviction of sin... in these things we are led to a specific preview of the 'rendering an account' which lies ahead. And we should be grateful that we have such opportunities.

What bears God's image, which is our whole body and mind (Gen. 1:26), is to be given to God. We have God's superscription written upon us, moreso if we are in Christ (Rev. 3:12; 7:3; 14:1). "It is he that hath made us, and [therefore] we are his" (Ps. 100 RV). We must be His in practice *because* He is our creator. So it is not that we merely believe in creation rather than evolution; more than this, such belief in creation must elicit a life given over to that creator.

The things which are God's are to be 'rendered' to Him. The Greek word means to pay back, to return; even giving our very bodies only giving back what He has given us. The same word had been used recently by the Lord in teaching that we have a huge debt to God which must be 'rendered' or paid back to Him (Mt. 18:25,26,28). We can read the Lord's words here as meaning that concerns about pedantic issues relating to coinage

are irrelevant compared to the paramount issue- that we owe God everything. Because we are created in God's image, the structure of our very bodies is an imperative to give ourselves totally to His cause (Mt. 22:19-21). Whatever bears God's image- i.e. our very bodies- must be given to Him. "It is he that hath made us, and [therefore] we are his" (Ps. 100:3 RV). We must be His in practice *because* He is our creator. So it is not that we merely believe in creation rather than evolution; more than this, such belief in creation must elicit a life given over to that creator.

"Should we give tribute to Caesar?" was answered with the comment that whatever has God's image on it should be given to God- and seeing we're made in God's image, the Lord was asking that they gave their very personal selves to God, every part of their mind and body- rather than worrying about the 'guilt by association' that might come from paying your taxes to Caesar (Lk. 20:23-25).

20:26 *And they were not able to catch him in what he said in the presence of the people, so they marvelled at his answer and held their peace*- The Greek for "catch him" is elsewhere used about the Jews finally taking hold of the Lord in arrest and crucifixion. The Jews are also recorded as not being able to do this physically to Him in public, "before the people". But Luke speaks of the Jews doing these things in relation to "His words". This is Luke's way of saying what John says in so many words- that the Lord Jesus was so identified with His words, which were God's words, that He was "the word made flesh", the living personification of His own words, in whom there was perfect congruence between His essential self and His words.

They perceived what He was saying- for they "marvelled". Just as in the parable, the Jews heard the invitation to the banquet, and perceived that "this is the heir". But Matthew records that they went their way- and that way was the way to crucifying the Lord, killing the messenger of God.

20:27 *And there came to him*- Over 100 times we read in the Gospels of various people coming to Jesus- His enemies, the crowds, His disciples, people in need. Each came with their various motivations, agendas and pre-understandings of Him. His invitation to 'come to Him' was to come *in faith*. The repeated repetition of the phrase 'came to Him' is perhaps to invite us to see ourselves likewise as amongst those who 'come to Him' as we read or hear the Gospel record, ensuring that we are truly coming to Him and not merely on a surface level as so many did.

Certain of the Sadducees, they that say that there is no resurrection- The obvious response to a question from such people about the resurrection would be 'But you don't believe in a resurrection!'. They *antilego,* spoke against publically, the resurrection. Mark's record adds that they also said that "In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise..." (Mk. 12:23). But the Lord was not so primitive as to point out their obvious untruth. He took their position as they stated it, and worked to demonstrate that even

given that position, they were woefully ignorant of Divine truth. Long term, His approach stood a chance of working. If He had simply denounced them as liars and self-contradictory, there was no chance He would've ever contributed towards their possible repentance and change of heart. This approach needs to be take to heart by us. For there are large numbers of believers who seem to think that their service to God involves cruising internet forums or endlessly arguing with their neighbours in order to prove them wrong and self-contradictory about doctrinal matters. This may give a slight ego rush for a moment, but it is not in fact any real victory. For the victory we seek is not to tie another up in mental knots, but to lead them to repentance, to the Lord Jesus, and to His Kingdom. We also need to note that recently the Lord had resurrected Lazarus, with the result that He appeared to have won over many who had previously supported the Jewish leadership. They were now trying to prove that resurrection doesn't happen. The Lord could've called many witnesses to the resurrection of Lazarus, but instead He takes their argument and works from it.

It has been observed that the Sadducees were generally hedonistic- and this surely was a result of their denial of the future resurrection and judgment. Their belief was that only the Torah was inspired, and it was Israel's duty to live according to it in this life. They were a parade example of the effect of doctrine in practice.

20:28 *And they asked him, saying: Teacher, Moses wrote to us*- Matthew: "Moses *spoke* unto us". The Lord picks this up in His answer in Mt. 22:31: "Have you not read that which was *spoken* unto you by *God*". He is telling them that God and not Moses was the ultimate speaker to them; and that the word was not merely *written* but is a living word, actively *speaking* unto them. For all their much vaunted belief in Divine inspiration of the Scriptures, these men had failed to perceive that God was speaking to them personally through the human authors. And that criticism needs to be remembered today by those equally wedded to a declared belief in Divine inspiration of the Bible. It is to be to us a word *spoken* and not a dead letter written on paper.

That if a man's brother dies, having a wife but he is childless, his brother should take the wife and raise up seed to his brother- The Lord could have replied that if they read the entire passage in Dt. 25:5-7, they would see that God actually made a concession in this matter; and the whole principle only applied to "brethren dwelling together". A man did not *have to* marry his brother's wife. In any case, as most adult men were married, it would have usually been a case of polygamy. But again, the Lord didn't point out that expositional error, but goes on to develop a far greater and higher principle concerning the nature of His Kingdom, in which such casuistry about marriage will be simply irrelevant. And again, He sets an example to those who have spent their religious lives arguing about divorce and remarriage and fellowship issues. Their arguments could be demonstrated to be expositionally faulty. But the higher principle is that such issues shall be irrelevant in God's Kingdom; and we are to live the essence of the Kingdom life

now as far as we can, in spirit at least. The Sadducees made a big deal of the fact that the word translated “raise up seed” is that used generally in the Septuagint for resurrection. Their idea was that resurrection is not of the body but through family life. To die childless was therefore tragic indeed. The same error is made by many today who effectively believe that family life is the ultimate form of spirituality. It is not, and God seeks to build a personal relationship with each of us, He is the personal God of Abraham, Isaac etc., and we shall experience a personal bodily resurrection at which we shall appear before God stripped of our family, and relate to Him as a single individual.

20:29 *There were therefore seven brothers; and the first took a wife and died childless*- This must have been a most unfortunate family. The Old Testament speaks of the failure to build up a house / family and the death of men in youth as being a curse from God for disobedience (Job 18:19; Ps. 107:38,39). Again, the Lord could have made capital of this- but He didn’t. There was no element of personal attack, but rather an appeal to higher principle.

20:30 *And the second*- As noted on :29, this was clearly not a true story.

20:31 *And the third took her, and likewise the seventh also left no children, and died*- Instead of asking 'And who and where was this family?', picking up the obvious contradictions within the story, the Lord let all that go. He wanted to focus upon essential principles, rather than getting caught up in proving that His opponents were lying. He sets an example which so many of His followers have not well followed.

20:32 *Afterward the woman also died*- She would have been judged to be a most unfortunate woman, likely under God’s judgment (see on :29). But the Lord doesn’t question the very unlikely story nor the contradictions within it- instead He works from what was presented to Him.

20:33 *In the resurrection, whose wife of these shall she be? For the seven had her as wife*- The Lord could’ve pointed out that they were well known for denying / speaking against the resurrection. But He doesn’t make that obvious point, instead focusing on the higher principles rather than point scoring.

'Who will be married to whom in the Kingdom?' was well answered by the Lord, but His final cut was that God is the God of the living and "all live unto Him", i.e. the fact *we* are alive means we are responsible for our actions to Him right now- and we must be moved by that, rather than by speculation about the physicalities of how *others* may be in God's Kingdom (Lk. 20:33-38).

20:34 *And Jesus said to them: The children of this world marry and are given in marriage*- The Lord attacks their assumption that the Kingdom will be a continuation of life as it is

in this world, just minus some of the limitations and complications. That is not the case; "this world" is contrasted radically to "that world" (:35). Whilst we rightly look forward to seeing beloved family members again who were believers, we have to be aware that family relationships as we now know them are for "this world". The age to come will not be "this world" and its relationships somehow revived in a human sense. The question of the Jews was therefore a reflection of deep immaturity. And this was the context at the time- the Lord was being asked to set up a literal Kingdom in Israel, with Israel 'marrying and giving in marriage' in their own kingdom, totally independent of Rome. But His message was far beyond that. His Kingdom was to come in an age where all such things would be no more. The world of Lot and Noah's time married and gave in marriage right up until the day of judgment- and no longer, after that.

20:35 *But they that are accounted worthy to attain to that world and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage*- See on :34. "Accounted worthy" means to be counted totally without blame and thereby totally worthy. I suggest this is another example of where Luke is preparing his readers for the Pauline explanations in Romans- that only through imputed righteousness, by faith through grace, can anyone be saved. The same word is used when Paul prays that God would count the Thessalonians "worthy" of their calling (2 Thess. 1:11). The Jews were assuming that they would be in the age to come, on account of their relation to Abraham by the flesh; and the Lord is saying that the only ones who shall be there are those counted totally worthy. The thoughtful hearer would have realized that this would mean that worthiness and righteousness had to somehow be imputed.

20:36 *Neither can they die any more; for they are equal to the angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection*- Note the present tenses. They are most striking in Greek: “Neither *can they die*… they *are* equal to the Angels: and *are* sons of God, being sons of the resurrection”. Greek tenses, unlike Hebrew tenses, are precise. We would expect ‘They shall not die… shall be equal… shall be…’. But the present tenses are striking. The Lord is building up to His point that the question about marriage is inappropriate because God is outside of our kind of time; He sees the believers in Him as even now immortal, a point made more strongly in John’s Gospel. This is not the same as having an immortal soul, nor does it imply conscious survival of death. Rather is it a reflection of how God from His perspective outside of time sees His children. Jn. 3:3-5 makes the same point, that we are born again of water and spirit even in this life, and thereby are living the life eternal. But that is from God’s standpoint outside of time as we experience it.

The Sadducees denied the existence of Angels (Acts 23:8). The Lord’s teaching that Angels do not marry was surely additionally an attack on the Jewish myths becoming popular at the time concerning the supposed marriage of Heavenly Angels with the daughters of men in Gen. 6. These myths are deconstructed in Jude and 2 Peter, but the

Lord here is also correcting them. We marvel at how apparently 'off the cuff' He could speak in such a multi-faceted and profound way, addressing various issues simultaneously. Although His intellectual and spiritual ability was doubtless capable of such instant responses, I prefer to imagine the Lord reflecting deeply upon God's word and preparing His ideas throughout the years of spiritual mindedness that preceded His ministry.

"We shall be as "the sons / children of God", thereby answering the Sadducees' idea that it is a human duty to have children and thereby continue the race, for therein do we have our 'resurrection'. Again the Lord is lifting the whole question to a far higher level. Luke adds that the Lord first said that "the children of this world marry...". The Sadducees were assuming that the Kingdom of God would be a kind of continuation of this present life, just with eternity of nature. Whilst there are similarities and aspects of continuity between who we are and who we shall eternally be, we are mistaken in imagining the future Kingdom of God as some kind of ideal earthly situation, a tropical paradise holiday, which shall last eternally. This is the same mistake as thinking that we shall eternally be doing what "the children of *this* world" currently do. Instead of criticizing and exposing the faults in the argument presented, the Lord makes the point that the Kingdom of God will not be about marriage nor about casuistic arguments about the definition of marriage- the very arguments which have occupied the minds of far too many of His children. Paul uses the same logic in reasoning that arguments about food are irrelevant because the Kingdom of God will not be about such behaviour, but about love, peace and joy (Rom. 14:17). Paul, like the Lord here, could have exposed the fallacies of exposition being engaged with, but instead reasons on a higher level- that seeing we shall not be arguing about such things eternally, let us not do it now.

The fact Angels cannot die means they can't sin, for sin brings death (Rom. 6:23). This is therefore a fairly strong argument against immortal Angels being sinful.

20:37 *But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, when he called the Lord: The God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob*- The Greek here says that Moses "calls" [present tense] God "the God of Abraham...". Not only does this imply a living word which speaks to us today, but again the point is made throughout the passage that God is outside of time. This choice of tenses in this passage is purposeful, for elsewhere we read of how Moses said or commanded things in the past tense (e.g. Mt. 8:4 "things which Moses commanded", "Moses wrote", Lk. 20:28; "Moses gave you...", Jn. 6:32).

If the Lord was looking merely for a reference to God being the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He had many places He could have quoted from. I suggest He chose Ex. 3:6 partly to show that the supremely intimate, personal revelation of God to Moses was just the same now to all individuals within Israel. It was a living word spoken to them personally. But also because the Lord wants to make the point that God is outside of

time- and that passage goes on to climax in the revelation of that same God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the “I am that I am” (Ex. 3:14). The God outside of time, witnessed by the way the tetragrammaton somehow straddles past, present and future tenses, therefore sees the dead as alive “unto Him”. The question put to the Lord was very much rooted in the assumption that time as we now know it is going to continue in the Kingdom of God, and the Lord is making the point that this is an immature way of looking at it; and therefore the question was irrelevant. The Exodus 3 passage also contains repeated assurance that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will receive what God has promised- which requires bodily resurrection for them. We need to ever remember that the Lord was not merely demonstrating intellectual prowess in all this reasoning and allusion. He considered them as the sheep who erred / were astray, and through all His teaching here He was merely seeking to steer them to Him and ultimate salvation.

At the time of the burning bush, Moses seems to have forgotten God's covenant name, he didn't immediately take off his shoes in respect as he should have done, he feared to come close to God due to a bad conscience, and he resisted God's invitation for him to go forth and do His work (Ex. 3:5-7,10,11,18; 4:1,10-14). And yet at this very time, the Lord says that Moses showed faith in the way he perceived God. This is indeed imputed righteousness.

God is His word (Jn. 1:2). Moses is likewise spoken of as if he is his word (Acts 15:21; 21:21; 26:22; 2 Cor. 3:18), so close was his association with it; just as we shall be judged by our words. The words and commands of Moses were those of God. “In the bush God spoke unto (Moses), saying, I am the God of Abraham… Isaac and Jacob” (Mk. 12:26; Mt. 22:31; Ex. 3:6). Yet Lk. 20:37 says that “that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when *he calls the Lord the God of Abraham*” etc. Yet this was what God said of Himself.

20:38 *Now He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. For all live to Him*- This Greek construction could mean ‘Not only the God of the dead, but also of the living’. But the context is the Lord demonstrating that the understanding of the Sadducees was very much a dead religion and their God was effectively dead. They denied the resurrection and considered that we have reward only in this life. In this case, God was the God of Abraham only in the past. The Greek phrase could literally mean ‘Not the God the dead, but the living [God]’, alluding to the well known phrase “the living God”. If God only acted for Abraham etc. in the past, then the God Abraham knew effectively died when Abraham died. But the living God seeks to impart life to the faithful.

"All live to Him” is the Lord is critiquing their division between this life and the life to come- by saying that the faithful live on now in God’s memory as they will eternally; He speaks of things which are not as though they are (Rom. 4:17), and in this sense whether we live or die we are the Lord’s (Rom. 14:8). Although the soul is mortal, the

spirit returns to God and will be eternally “saved” at the last day. And the spirit refers to who a man essentially is, his thinking and character. This is preserved by God in His memory, and in that sense the faithful dead “live” before Him now. John’s Gospel puts this in so many words by saying that we can live the eternal life right now. Whilst bodily resurrection is so significant from our point of view, the God who is outside of our kind of time sees the dead as effectively living as He extends forwards into eternity from the present- in a way we cannot now do. I made the point above that recently the Lord had resurrected Lazarus, with the result that He appeared to have won over many who had previously supported the Jewish leadership. They were now trying to prove that resurrection doesn’t happen. The Lord at that time had emphasized that the resurrection of Lazarus was a visual reminder of the new life which those who believed in Him could experience right now: “Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (Jn. 11:26). Luke’s comment that “all live unto Him” is saying roughly the same thing. If our spirit is focused upon living and thinking the Kingdom life now, then this spirit is preserved by God upon death. And it is this which God sees after our death, and the sense in which we live unto Him. See on Rom. 14:8,9.

"All live to him" is a phrase used by the Rabbis concerning the existence of the faithful Jews as immortal souls in Heaven; Adam Clarke quotes several examples from Jewish writings. It seems the Lord uses their phrase in order to deconstruct it. Salvation is through being 'counted worthy' by grace (:35), the same idea as being counted as live "to Him", and depends upon the resurrection of the body (:35). It is not at all automatic, as would be required by the idea of immortal souls.

20:39 *And certain of the scribes answering said: Teacher, you have said well*- This was the kind of admission of defeat which was not typical of the Lord's enemies; perhaps these were the scribes of the Pharisees who did later believe in the Lord Jesus (Acts 15:15).

20:40 *And after that they dared not question him anymore*- They dared not even try to engage Him in debate because He was as it were winning, and the crowds were realizing this. These very words are used of how the disciples after the resurrection dared not ask who Jesus was (Jn. 21:12), which is the very context here. The connection is clearly to show that they too through their being too influenced by Jewish thinking found themselves in the same category as the unbelieving Jews- the difference being that they repented of it. The Greek for “questions” isn’t in the original; they dared not ask Him again. The implication from the context could be that they dared not ask Him ‘Who are You?’, for the answer was clear in their consciences. They knew, on one level, that He was Messiah, that He was the heir to the vineyard, whom they knowingly sought to murder.

20:41 *And he said to them: Why do they say that the Christ is David's son?*- The Lord had clearly done well in answering the questions, and it’s easy to misinterpret this as Him

now going onto the thrust of an offensive, having successfully parried the attacks. But He was trying to steer them to Him, to repentance and salvation, and not to merely win an intellectual battle for its own sake. All the same, He capitalized upon their continued presence to seek to correct another major misunderstanding. His desire to save them is breathtaking. The fact there were Pharisees who later converted to Christ is proof enough that His strategy worked, at least for some (Acts 15:5). And remember that Saul the Pharisee was living in Jerusalem at the time, and may well have been listening carefully.

They were surely aware that Jesus was a son of David, on both the sides of Mary and Joseph. For the Jewish leaders would've done their homework as to His [apparent] family of origin.

Matthew records that the Lord addressed a question to the Pharisees about Messiah as David's son. Having let the Pharisees give the answer, He then asks others how this can be the case. Again, the Lord's dialogues with the Pharisees was not simply to try to convert them, but in order that the audience would learn. See on Mt. 22:33 *When the multitude heard this*. Mk. 12:37 concludes the section by observing that "the common people heard Him gladly", so again we see how the records seamlessly complement each other.

20:42 *For David himself said in the book of Psalms: The Lord said*- Clearly Yahweh. If the Divine Name was to be used in the New Testament, surely this would be the place for it. The fact it is not, when some Hebrew words are used (e.g. 'Sabaoth'), shows clearly enough that the literal usage of the Tetragrammaton is not something God sees as important or even required.

To my Lord, Sit on My right hand- Biblically and historically, David's immediate 'Lord' was Saul. Ps. 110 was originally a revelation to David of the potential possible for Saul, who was an anointed 'Messiah' figure. But Saul failed, and so the fulfillment of the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied to the Lord Jesus. The "how" doesn't imply that David's Lord is not his son, but rather is a rhetorical question. How is the Messianic son of David, David's "Lord", to be his son or descendant? Mk. 12:37 says the Lord reinforced the question by asking "*From whence* is He his son?". The answer had to be: 'Through a woman in David's direct line giving birth to Him'. And the questioners were fully aware that Jesus was in the direct line of David through Mary.

20:43 *Until I make your enemies the footstool of your feet*- The Lord's enemies stood around Him as He applied this Psalm to Himself. And yet being at the footstool of the Lord doesn't have to mean being dominated by Him in judgment. It can refer to the great paradox whereby the Lord's enemies become His loyalest and most humble citizens, at His feet in submission, and thereby also at the Father's right hand of acceptance.

20:44 *David therefore calls him Lord, so, how is he his son?*- Judaism's concept of Messiah has always been vague and not commonly agreed, but there was and is the idea that the likes of Abraham, Moses and David are greater than Messiah. The Lord is pointing out that David considered Messiah to be his "Lord", just as Messiah was greater than Abraham (Jn. 8:58).

20:45 *And in the hearing of all the people, he said to his disciples*- This is typical of how the Lord intentionally focused upon the disciples. The accounts of the sermons on the mount and on the plain have the same feature; the crowds are gathered, but the Lord addresses the disciples. He realized they were His only hope; the masses were fickle, and He focused upon those who were open to His real teaching.

20:46 *Beware of the scribes, who desire to walk in long robes and love greetings in the marketplaces*- The Lord's reason for going to the market was to invite men to work in the vineyard and receive the penny of salvation (Mt. 20:3); and His people sitting in the markets sought to persuade others of the need to respond to the Gospel (Mt. 11:16). The Pharisees went to the markets to simply flaunt their external spirituality. Again, note how their behaviour was the very inversion of true spirituality.

And chief seats in the synagogues, and chief places at feasts- They wanted to be publically seen as spiritually superior. The whole structure of church life, whereby some must have public roles, is such that people can fall so easily into a love of publicity. The Lord realizes this, and often removes His beloved from such temptations. This explains the otherwise inexplicable way in which the Lord allows some of His most talented and capable servants to be removed from the public eye to serve Him in human obscurity. Note that the Lord here is repeating almost word for word what He has previously said about the Pharisees in Luke 11. To repeat so much text twice in the Gospel records, and for the Lord to give identical word-for-word teaching on two occasions, shows how important these warnings are for all readers. This consideration alone suggests that we each have the same tendency as the Pharisees; they are but epitomes of our own deepest tendencies and desires.

20:47 *Who devour widows' houses*- The language used here about the behaviour of the Scribes and Pharisees is elsewhere used about the righteous behaviour of the Lord and His followers; the Jewish leaders were living a religious life, but it was but a parody of true spirituality. The same words for "devour" and "house" are used of how the Lord Jesus was 'eaten up' or 'devoured' with zeal for His Father's "house". But by contrast the Scribes thought only of how they could devour the houses of widows, scheming how to get the house of a vulnerable single old woman left to them, and how they could devour that wealth upon themselves. We note that Mark and Luke conclude this section with the account of the widow who gave her entire wealth to the temple coffers (Mk. 12:42; Lk. 21:1). This was surely to add assurance that although her donation was misused, it was carefully noted by God to her eternal credit.

And for a pretence make long prayers- They were hypocrites. The word was used about an actor's cloak, and thus connects with the theatrical term 'hypocrites', play-actors. The Lord uses the same word in Jn. 15:22: "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no *cloak* for their sin". When did He come and speak unto the Jews about their hypocrisy? Surely here in Mark 12. Although they did have a cloak for their sin before men, the Lord is saying in John 15 that they have no such cloak before Him.

These shall receive greater condemnation- There will be degrees of punishment, although it will be self-inflicted.

LUKE CHAPTER 21

21:1 *And he looked up and saw the rich men that were casting their gifts into the treasury-*

The context is at the end of Luke 20, where the Lord is recorded as telling the disciples to beware of the Scribes. He said this, we can infer, looking at the ground, surrounded by the disciples. He said it, therefore, in sadness. Not aggressively shouting out warning. Condemnation saddens Him, because in essence He is a saviour. *The* saviour. And He is the same yesterday, today and forever. At the day of judgment, it will be men who condemn themselves more than Him condemning them. We note too how the cameraman is zoomed close in on the Lord at this point; even the movement of His eyes is noted and relayed to us. The word becomes a living word, and the real Lord Jesus comes over alive to we who read and hear these words and think about them.

He "looked up" because Mark notes He was sitting. There was no seating in the temple. It was not like a church building today, with benches and seating. The Rabbis made a great deal of the fact that God alone was seated in the temple, and in line with their targum on 2 Sam. 7:18, only Messiah would sit there in the same way as His ancestor David had sat in the temple in gratitude for the Messianic promises ("David the king went in and sat before Yahweh; and he said, Who am I, Lord Yahweh, and what is my house, that You have brought me thus far?"). The Lord sitting in the temple, and sitting in judgment, was therefore a Messianic claim. But His judgment is shown for what it really is- a searching of hearts and motives, and a positive noticing of obscure people and their obscure acts of devotion.

As he looked up and saw Zacchaeus, so the same term is used here of how He looked upon this poor widow; who was clearly another one of His people known to Him ahead of time. The many small coins the rich threw in make a loud clanging noise in the collection trumpets. They were literally trumpeting their good deeds before men in God's house. The widow threw in the same kind of coins which they threw in in abundance. What she threw in was scarcely audible to men; but the Lord noticed. The only other references to the Lord sitting are to Him sitting in judgment. And that judgment was ongoing even then; it does and will finally take into account the things not audible to men.

21:2 *And he saw a certain poor widow throwing in there two small coins*- She could have kept one of the coins; but she threw both of them in. The thin coins (Mk.) were what were typically thrown to beggars; we are left to conclude that she gave to God all that was given to her. We must be ever aware of our tendency to come to the Biblical text with our mind already made up about what it means, viewing it through the lens of our pre-existing images of what we are going to read. The incident of the poor widow is a classic case. We tend to imagine the Lord "sitting opposite the treasury" as meaning He

sat opposite the 'trumpet' into which people poured their coins. But the Lord taught the people "in the treasury" (Jn. 8:20 cp. 2 Kings 23:11; Ezra 10:6; Neh. 10:38,39), so the reference is to the chamber called "the treasury". And we too easily assume that she was an old, wizzened woman, leaning heavily on a cane. But seeing male life expectancy in Palestine was so low, the image of a "widow" would more likely refer to a woman around 30 years old, with dirty children in tow, looking malnourished. Likewise we assume an overall positive image, in spiritual terms: 'What a wonderful example of poor people being generous!'. And that cannot be denied. But there is also a strongly negative image evoked by the incident, when we bear in mind that the Gospel records have just noted that the Jews were covetous and avaricous; and built their wealth through "devouring widows' houses" (Mk. 12:40). The image, in this case, is negative; we are intended to contrast her with the wealthy, public donors- and be incensed that she had been so spiritually abused and mentally manipulated that she believed that giving her two coins to those men was in fact serving God. We leave the incident lamenting spiritual abuse, rather than simply being inspired to generosity. And yet without doubt, the image of total sacrifice must be given its due weight. Mark's record appears to use this incident to unite the two halves of his Gospel; Mark 1-12 concern the Lord's public ministry, and Mark 13-16 focus upon the events in the last week or His life. But those sections are linked with this picture of total sacrifice, as if to preface what we will go on to read about the Lord's total sacrifice. We note that we are provided with the context about how the religious leaders were "devouring widows' houses" (Mk. 12:40). It could even be that we are to conclude that this woman's poverty was because she had been financially abused by the scribes. The Lord condemns the temple as a den of robbers (Mk. 11:17), with specific reference to the treasury. And yet she returns to the temple to give her pennies to them. In this case, she is being held up as an example of a woman who still served God despite spiritual abuse, and didn't allow her bad experience with church to stop her serving God. And we see too how despite her loyalty to and membership of a corrupt system, the Lord still noticed her sincerity and did not at all reject her for the sake of any kind of guilt by association. This is ultimate comfort for many who laboured beneath spiritual abuse and corrupt systems. The incident is the prelude to the Olivet prophecy- of destruction of the temple and all its wealth. Criticism of the temple cult is therefore a big factor in the story.

From what we know of the second temple, there were several 'trumpets' for financial offerings. The offerer told the priest what the offering was for; and there are records of the offerer being told that their offering couldn't be accepted as it was too small for the purpose stated. What is noteworthy, therefore, is that the priests allowed the woman to make such a tiny offering. Perhaps we are to imagine the priest not noticing her as she crept up to one of the "freewill" offering trumpets and threw in her coins; but the Lord did notice her. The sound of the coins in the trumpets apparently indicated to the priest the size of the gift. Her coins would have made no recognizable noise; but the Lord

noticed, and the Gospel records immortalized the otherwise imperceptible sound of her offering. As the Lord taught, our giving is to be by its nature unnocited by men, in order for it to be noticed by God. And we must examine ourselves as to when we last did this. The record goes straight on to mention that the temple was adorned with costly gifts (Lk. 21:5)- which were all to soon be destroyed. Exactly because of the systemic abuse of people like that widow. We note that her giving was at Passover time- which was the time for almsgiving to the poor and widow. The clear irony is that she gave what little she had, and got nothing from the temple cult.

Mark's record stresses how the focus of the record zooms in upon the widow; from the crowd casting in money, to the rich doing so, and then to the poor widow. His use of tenses assists the effect. Literally 'the crowd are throwing money [present tense]... the many rich were throwing [imperfect tense]... the widow threw [aorist tense, a completed, once and for all action]' (Mk. 12:41). The idea may be that the rich were regularly throwing money into the trumpets; but the widow made just her one offering at one point in time, because she was not accustomed to go there and make offerings. The suggestion, therefore, is that their 'giving' was a regular religious observance; but her giving was of all that she had, and so by nature could only occur once. Likewise the focus upon the woman is achieved by speaking of "the crowd" (Mk.), then the "many that were rich"- whereas the woman comes alone, literally "one widow, a poor one" (Mk. 12:42). Her giving was not therefore inspired by any crowd mentality or herd psychology, giving because others give. Just as our giving must be a totally personal response to God's grace in Jesus, inspired by Him alone.

The two *lepta* ["small coins"] were the smallest coinage in the Roman system. They amounted to 1/64 of a denarius, the "penny" paid for a day's work in harvest time. They could buy a handful of flour, seen as the measure of a meagre meal. Eight lepta made one ass, and inscriptions from Pompeii show that daily bread for four people cost around four asses or 32 lepta coins. Cheese for four people for one meal cost one ass or eight lepta. Remember that as a "widow" she may well have had young children to provide for as well. Her gift, which is held up as our pattern, was ultimately insignificant in secular terms. And this is the point. Our giving is of itself insignificant, but the spirit behind it is eternally important. The woman likely thought that she may as well not offer her tiny gift. But she did so. Exactly because she understood that she was giving of her spirit, giving her all, symbolized in sacrificing at best a day's food. The Lord understood that she who gave least actually gave most- because His scale of measurement is of the spirit and not of the external. He commends her for giving all- in that going to the effort to give that tiny amount reflected how she wanted to give her all. She likely had a few material things somewhere and a place where she slept. But she is not recorded as giving these. But her attitude of giving is seen as reflective of a desire to give, and a total surrender of herself to God.

The impression we get is that these were her last coins, all that she had. The same idea is found in Lk. 12:59, where the man who will not settle things with his brother must pay all that he had, down to the last *lepton*. That is a picture of condemnation. The man will pay his last "mite" / *lepton*, but still not be saved. The woman gave her last mite to the Lord now. It's bankruptcy, giving all, right now, for His sake- or the loss of all things at the day of judgment. There is an absolute logic to the path of total devotion.

21:3 *And he said: Of a truth I say to you: This poor widow threw in more than all of them*- The Lord condemned how the Pharisees "devoured widow's houses"- and then straight away we read of Him commending the widow who threw in her whole living to the coffers of the Pharisees. It wasn't important that the widow saw through the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and didn't 'waste' her few pennies; her generosity was accepted for what it was, even though it didn't achieve what it might have done, indeed, it only abetted the work of evil men.

The Lord taught that one must forsake all that he has in order to truly be His disciple (Mt. 13:44; Lk. 14:33). But at the end of His ministry, He as it were chose to exemplify this aspect of discipleship by drawing attention to a woman who gave to God "all the living that she had" (Lk. 21:3). Putting the passages together, the Lord is saying that she is to be the model for us all in this aspect of devotion.

So clearly, God accounts not as man does. We are judged according to our possibilities and not according to volume of achievment. She threw in "more", literally she 'exceeded', that the others had thrown in. The same word is used of how our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (Mt. 5:20). She is again presented as the model disciple. The word has just been used in Mk. 12:33 of how love of God and neighbour is "more" than all sacrifices. She achieved that love not by volume of achievment but in her attitude.

21:4 *For all these out of their abundance have put in offerings, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on*- The Lord pointed out to the disciples how the extreme generosity of the widow, giving the two pennies of her business capital, her "living", to the Lord, was worth far more than the ostentatious giving of the wealthy Jewish leadership (Mk. 12:44); but the next incident recorded by Mark is the disciples marvelling at the ostentatious buildings of the temple, and the Lord explaining that all this needed to be thrown down (Mk. 13:1,2). Their slowness to perceive is such a theme of the gospel records. To give from that which is over and above and remaining, "abundance", is not giving much at all really. "Out of her poverty" could suggest that it was her poverty which motivated her gift, as if to say that her greater generosity was not surprising, because she was poor; and in her case, total giving was motivated by her poverty. So it is poverty and not wealth which, as the Lord observed, motivates to the kind of radical giving which He seeks.

21:5 *And as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and offerings, he said*- These words are taken over in the later New Testament to describe the adorning of a new temple with precious stones, comprised of the believers in Christ (Rev. 21:2,19). Their praise of the ostentatious "offerings" reflects how they had apparently failed to grasp the lesson about the real nature of offerings just given by the incident with the widow woman (:1-4).

The temple buildings were thrown down *in order that* a new and spiritual building comprised of believers could be built up through the Lord's work in the hearts of His people. The group of believers are "All the building [which] grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:21). Paul, writing before AD70, may have had this contrast indirectly in mind when he wrote that when the earthly house is destroyed, we should remember that we have a "house not made with hands" built by God (2 Cor. 5:1). The same struggle and angst at the loss of physical structures of our religion can be seen today; some find it hard to believe that relationship with God is ultimately personal, and that relationship continues even when surrounding, much loved traditional structures are removed.

21:6 *As for these things which you behold, the days will come, in which there shall not be left here one stone upon another; all shall be thrown down*- This expands upon His previous use of this word in Mt. 23:38: "Your house is *left* unto you desolate". He is asking the disciples to see with the eye of faith- that effectively, the great stones of the temple were already thrown down, the temple was already "desolate" (Gk. 'a deserted place'). The judgment of the leprous house was to be thrown down, stone by stone (Lev. 14:41). At the time of the final assault on Jerusalem in AD69, Titus commanded that the temple was to be spared. But the Lord's words came true, just as all prophetic words will, despite every human effort to deny their power. Josephus claims that the gold of the temple melted and therefore each stone was prized apart to remove the gold.

There was a strong belief in Judaism that the temple would last eternally. Hence the disciples' question about "the end of the age" was because for them, any talk about the end of the temple meant the end of the world. They are not therefore asking about different chronological events when they ask when this shall be, and what sign would indicate the end of the age. This prophecy of the destruction of the temple implied an ending of the Mosaic law. Hence the same word translated "thrown down" is ascribed to Stephen when he was accused of preaching that the Lord Jesus would "*destroy* this place and [therefore] change the customs which Moses delivered us" (Acts 6:14). Paul uses the same word about his 'destruction' of the things of legalistic dependence on the law for salvation, by preaching salvation by grace in Jesus (Gal. 2:18). It is also the word used in 2 Cor. 5:1, a passage which seems to have some reference to the impending destruction of the temple and its replacement with the spiritual house of God's building: "Our earthly house of this tabernacle be *destroyed* [s.w. "thrown down"], we have a building of God, an house not made with hands...". All this would suggest that there was

a changeover period envisaged between the Lord's death and the final ending of the jurisdiction of the Mosaic law. Seeing the end Lord ended the Law on the cross, this again is to be seen as a concession to the conservatism of the Jews.

21:7 *And they asked him, saying: Teacher, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign when these things are about to happen?*- They clearly expected one particular sign, and *semeion* is typically used of a miraculous wonder. Instead, the Lord gave them a series of signs which they were to discern. The fulfilment of these signs in our times is no less than a miracle- that such detailed predictions could start to come true before our eyes. Such fulfilment of prophecy is therefore itself a miracle. The disciples repeat the Pharisees' question about when the end will come- in almost the same words. They were clearly influenced by them (Lk. 17:20 cp. Mk. 13:4).

Martin Hengel concludes that the early Gospel records were so radical that they would've been part of an "underground literature". He suggests that the Roman law forbidding oral or written prophecies about the fall of the Roman empire- on pain of death- was enough to make the Olivet prophecy alone a highly illegal document.

If none of us can know the time of the Lord's return, the whole spirit of the Olivet Prophecy is hard to come to terms with. When the disciples asked "When shall these things be, and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?" (Lk. 21:7), the Lord didn't cut short the conversation by saying 'Well actually you can't know, so your question isn't appropriate'. He gave them just what they asked for: signs whereby the faithful would know "when these things shall come to pass". The primary application of all this was that the faithful knew exactly the approaching end of the Jewish age in AD70- everything went according to plan, for those who correctly understood the prophecies. Therefore James, Peter and Paul could assuredly teach that "the judge stands before the door" (James 5:9) etc. And it is apparent that the situation in the run up to AD70 was typical of that in our last days. Likewise, the position of the faithful remnant in Babylon at the time of the restoration is another type of latter day events. And they too had an opening of their eyes to the prophetic word, resulting in an ability to clearly see where they were, and that the time of restoration of Israel's Kingdom was imminent.

'What will be the signs of the last days?' was indeed answered quite directly, but building up to a personal, incisive appeal to pray constantly that we will be preserved from those horrors and be accepted before the final judgment seat of God's Son (Lk. 21:7,36). It was as if the Lord was adding a powerful caveat- as if to say 'Now don't go and get obsessed and distracted trying to match these signs to current events- worry about how *you* will survive the last days, and whether, when you stand before Me in the very end, you will stand or fall before Me'. And 'Are you really the Messiah? Do you really fulfil all the Old Testament prophecies?' was met by an appeal to not stumble in faith (Lk. 7:21-23). See on Lk. 19:11.

21:8 *And he said: Take heed you are not led astray. For many shall come in my name, saying: I am he, and, The time is at hand*- Coming in the name of the Lord was the formula used in Judaism to describe Messiah (Mt. 21:9; 23:39). The false claims to be Jesus the Christ are hardly persuasive nor vaguely credible. That they should be a source of mass falling away amongst the Lord's people seems hardly likely. We must assume, therefore, that such persons will have a credibility or a surrounding context which makes them far more attractive than they currently are. Revelation speaks of false miracles being done in the last days. Perhaps views of prophetic fulfilment will become so dogmatically held, suggesting that Christ *must* come once certain things happen in the world, that the believers will be open to easy deception. This scenario would be the more likely if a doctrine of *parousia*, the "coming" of Christ", is adopted which postulates that His coming will be somehow secret, invisible to the world and perceived only by the faithful.

Josephus describes the period before AD70 as being when “The country was full of robbers, magicians, false prophets, false Messiahs and impostors, who deluded the people with promises of great events” [*Antiquities* 20.10.13 5,6].

Do not be led astray by them- “Be not deceived" is extensively quoted later in the NT concerning the need not be deceived by false teachers *within the ecclesia* (1 Cor. 6:9,15,33; Gal. 6:17; 2 Tim. 3:13, as Mt. 24:4 = 1 Jn. 3:7). The deceivers the Lord spoke of were not just bogus Messiahs out in the world, but apparently Spirit-gifted brethren who will arise within the ecclesia.

Warnings against being deceived are a major theme in the Lord's message here (Mt. 24:5,11,24). Paul read the prophecy of deceivers arising in the last days as referring to deceivers arising within the ecclesia, i.e. people who were already baptized, consciously deceiving the majority of the ecclesia. He repeats this conviction at least three times (Mt. 24:4 = Eph. 5:6; Col. 2:8; 2 Thess. 2:3). The later NT writers make the same appeal using the same Greek words, with reference to not being deceived by the allurements of the fleshly life (1 Cor. 6:9; 15:33; Gal. 6:7; James 1:16). And warnings against "them that deceive you" are common, along with lament that many believers in the first century had indeed been deceived (s.w. 2 Tim. 3:13; James 5:19; 2 Pet. 2:15; 1 Jn. 2:26; 3:7; Rev. 2:20). Indeed, Revelation is full of warnings and judgment against "the devil" who deceives God's people (s.w. Rev. 12:9; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20; 20:3). Perhaps this is one reason why the Olivet prophecy was not fulfilled in AD70- the warning with which the Lord opened the prophecy was not heeded by the majority.

21:9 *And when you shall hear of wars and revolutions, do not be terrified. For these things are necessary and must happen first, but the end will not be immediately*- The dramatic growth of the media and communication will mean that everyone 'hears' of such things. And our generation as none before is in this situation. We can likewise understand the related word (in the Greek): "*rumours* of wars". Lk. 21:9 adds to the other

records "and commotions", disquiet, mental upset and confusion. Hence the appeal not to be "troubled" within our hearts. Lk. 21:26 speaks of human hearts failing them for fear in worry and expectation (AV "looking after") about the world's future. This sign, therefore, is not so much concerning the proliferation of war, but of human worry about the geopolitical situation. And our generation has been the only one capable of fulfilling this situation. Note, however, that *you* shall hear these things- and the "you" was initially the listening disciples. Clearly the prophecy was intended to have fulfilment in the lifetime of the disciples, but this didn't happen. Because the Divine program was rescheduled.

They were not to be terrified / disturbed. The word is only used outside the Olivet prophecy in 2 Thess. 2:2, where Paul warns that believers should not be "troubled" by any idea that "the day of Christ is at hand", because the prophecy concerning the great falling away and the man of sin sitting in the temple of God must be fulfilled first. This connection shows that the prophecy of 2 Thess. 2 must have a specific latter day fulfilment on the very eve of the Lord's visible return in glory when "the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to nothing by the powerful glory of His coming" (2 Thess. 2:8). The "day of Christ" is therefore the visible return of the Lord, and this, therefore, is the burden of the Olivet prophecy too. For Paul is taking that language and applying it to the second coming of Christ. And that did not happen in AD70. In Lk. 21:11 the Lord spoke of "fearful sights" being seen in latter-day Israel. During their tribulation, Israel will experience intense "terror" (Lev. 26:16), which would be enough to kill them (Dt. 32:24). This extraordinary level of fear will be modelled upon that of Jacob as he faced Esau- representing Israel's confrontation with the Arabs in the last days (Jer. 30:5,7). This state of fear will result in many Jews going to live in Jerusalem, as happened during the Babylonian and Assyrian invasions (Jer. 35:11). Ezekiel had prophesied of this time: "Terrors (perhaps an intensive plural - i.e. 'the one great terror') by reason of the sword shall be upon My people" (Ez. 21:12).

These things were necessary (Mt.), they must happen (Lk.), must take place (Mk.). Quoting Dan. 2:28 LXX, as if the prophecy of Daniel 2 could have had its fulfilment at the time of the destruction of the temple in AD70. Again we encounter the idea of potential fulfilments of prophecy which in fact didn't happen when they could have done. The AV inserts in italics "all these things", but the Lord has only given the sign of worry about wars at this stage in the discourse. He used the identical phrase in predicting that the "all things" of the Mosaic system were to be fulfilled in His death on the cross (5:18). The same term is used in Jn. 1:3: "All things were fulfilled [AV "made"] in Him"- surely a reference to the fulfilment of the Mosaic law in Christ. The "old things" of the Mosaic system passed away, and in Christ "all things are fulfilled [AV "made"] new" (2 Cor. 5:17- same Greek words). There was a changeover period permitted between the Mosaic system and that of Christ, which finished when the temple was destroyed in AD70 and obedience to the Mosaic law thereby became impossible. If this line of interpretation is

correct, then we have the Lord hinting that the Mosaic system would be ended, the temple destroyed, but the end was still not to be then. This would again indicate that the events of AD70 were not the "end" which the Lord had in view. "The end" (s.w.) would only come when the Gospel was preached in the entire habitable world (Mt. 24:14) and the believers had been persecuted of all men (Mk. 13:13). But again, the Lord had in mind the possibility that the disciples themselves would endure "unto the end" (10:22; 24:13). It could have come in their lifetime; but it didn't. John's Gospel replaces the Olivet prophecy with the upper room discourse, in which the Lord spoke of His spiritual presence in the hearts of believers through the Comforter. And John's equivalent of "the end" in that discourse is the comment that the Lord Jesus loved His people "unto the end" through dying on the cross (Jn. 13:1 s.w.). This is not to downplay the reality of the second coming, but it is a foil against a mindset that thinks solely in terms of fulfilling prophecy and the literal coming of the Lord. True and wonderful as that is, the essence of the Lord's presence is in His abiding presence in the hearts of spiritually minded believers in Him, and the "end" is His death for us, which in one sense is enough for us all regardless of when He will literally return. But again, Paul, like his Lord, felt that "the end" could have come in the first century; for he writes of how the believers then were living at "the end [s.w.] of the age" (1 Cor. 10:11), when God's wrath against Israel was about to burst "unto the end (AV "to the uttermost"; 1 Thess. 2:16). Likewise Peter: "The end [s.w.] of all things is at hand" (1 Pet. 4:7). Likewise Dan. 9:26 could then have had its fulfilment.

21:10 *Then said he to them: Nation shall rise against nation*- Any first century fulfilment is unlikely because the *Pax Romana* meant that the Roman empire was firmly in power and such a situation did not therefore occur. *Ethnos* is the word commonly translated "Gentiles". The picture of nations and kingdoms rising up against each other was simply not fulfilled in the run up to AD70- the Roman empire with their *Pax Romana* did not permit such a situation. And the system of world empires which disintegrated in the 20th Century likewise didn't permit much of this in recent times, especially in the area around Israel, or in the land promised to Abraham, which is the focus of all Bible prophecy. Only in our times has this become a reality, especially in the Arab world and amongst the nations located in the territory promised to Abraham. The language of 'rising up' in revolt is now common amongst them. The picture, however, is of the Gospel going into all those "nations" at this time (Mt. 24:14), all those nations persecuting the believers (Mt. 24:9), and the nations [AV "Gentiles"] taking Jerusalem and treading it down (Lk. 21:24); despite their internal struggles, these same "all nations" will be confederated under a latter Babylon (Rev. 17:15; 18:3,23). The overall picture is of Gospel preaching going on at a time when the nations are rising up against each other, and at the same time persecuting the believers. This scenario is developing- but is as yet unfulfilled on a global scale. But it is daily fulfilling in the nations surrounding Israel, who are persecuting Christians, rising up against each other, and to

whom the Gospel is being powerfully preached. Never before has my own mission organization received such major expression of serious interest from the Muslim nations surrounding Israel, thanks largely to the growth of the internet and the growing disillusion with the existing social and religious situation. People from all nations will be gathered before the Lord for judgment (Mt. 25:32) and people from every nation will be saved (Rev. 5:9; 7:9)- confirming that the Gospel will indeed spread to all nations before the Lord's return; it must at least be "proclaimed" to them all, thereby making people amongst them responsible to judgment; the "fullness of the Gentiles" must "come in" to Christ before the end comes and Israel repent (Rom. 11:25). The Lord sent the disciples out to "all nations" (Mt. 28:19 s.w.); the implication is that they failed to take the Gospel to them all, and therefore the intended scenario didn't fulfil as initially intended in the first century. Lk. 21:25 speaks of how there will be "upon the earth [land- that promised to Abraham] distress of nations", suggesting that the situation amongst the Gentile nations living within the land promised to Abraham is the particular focus of the prophecy. The same language is used of how there were devout Jews in "every nation under Heaven" (Acts 2:5)- and the list of nations in Acts 2 corresponds with the Middle Eastern Moslem world of today. We note that the promise that Abraham should be father of "many nations" was fulfilled in a literal sense in that Abraham is the ancestor of the Arab nations living in the land promised to him (Rom. 4:17). And it is those nations particularly who have stated their desire to take Jerusalem out of the hands of the Jews, as required in Lk. 21:24.

And kingdom against kingdom- It seems likely from Revelation that 'Babylon' of the last days will rise to political and military dominance in the territory promised to Abraham, the earth/ land of which the Bible speaks so much. The 10 nations / horns / leaders which exist in the land promised to Abraham- the "kings of the earth / land"- will give their power to Babylon, by force and by political manoeuvre, and this system will then invade Israel. The horns hating the whore implies there will be inter-Arab friction apparent in the beast system throughout its existence. "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (Mt. 24:7) will be a sign of the last days. In the AD70 context, this referred to friction between the Semitic peoples living around Israel; and the Lord's words are clearly an allusion to 2 Chron. 15:6, which specifically uses the phrase about inter-Arab friction. The fragile alliance between them will then be broken by the Lord's return, the horns will hate the whore and destroy her. They give their power to the beast for but "one hour". Daniel seems to associate a covenant which is then broken with the latter day Antichrist. Is. 30:27-31 speaks of the latter day Assyrian as placing "a bridle in the jaw of the people causing them to err", referring to some kind of covenant / agreement which forces others to follow their direction. The Lord's especial fury will be against the individual latter day Nebuchadnezzar who leads the invasion. The future leader of Babylon, the whore riding the beast, will see themselves as Nebuchadnezzar. Isaiah and Micah describe the latter day invader of the land as "the

Assyrian" (Is. 10:5; 14:25; 30:31; Mic. 5:1-6). This itself suggests we are to see the individual who heads up the invasion, the rosh / chief prince of Ez. 38:2, as an ethnic Assyrian / Iraqi. Dan. 8:24,25 invites us to see the same- the "king of fierce countenance" stands up out of the area of northern Iraq / northern Iran.

21:11 *And there shall be great earthquakes*- Just as there was at the crucifixion (Mt. 27:54), yet another reason for thinking that the tribulation of the last days will enable Israel to identify with the sufferings of their crucified Messiah. Again, earthquakes feature in the seals of Rev. 6:12; and in the judgments upon Israel's enemies in Rev. 11:13,19; 16:18. Again, it seems that Israel will initially experience the judgments upon their enemies, just as they did in the lead up to their Passover deliverance in Egypt which also prefigures their final salvation. The fig tree nation- Israel- is to be shaken of a mighty wind (Rev. 6:13), and the word "shaken" is a form of that translated "earthquake". The forcing of fruit from the fig tree will be brought about by the experience of the earthquake.

And in various places- The word "various" is added by the translators to try to make sense of the otherwise obvious statement that earthquakes will occur in "places". There is no suggestion in the Greek text that earthquakes will occur in various places worldwide where they have not been known to occur. But maybe we have here an intensive plural- the one great place. The same word is used in Mt. 24:15 about "the holy *place*". There are rumours that an earthquake hit the temple area around AD70. But seeing that the temple mount is the bone of contention between Israel and her neighbours, an earthquake splitting the mount would be appropriate. And of course this would link directly with the prediction of Zechariah 14, that when Christ returns there will be an earthquake which splits it. And yet this is used by the Lord as a sign of His coming, rather than a statement about what will happen at His return. It could be that this is an example of how the meaning of time will be somehow collapsed around the second coming; a sign of His return is in effect His return. Or it could be that the events described in the Olivet prophecy will all happen in a very short period of time, a matter of days rather than years or decades [as is assumed by those who seek to connect the predictions with current world events]. Mk. 13:8 and Lk. 21:11 speak of the earthquakes in *kata* places, but this doesn't necessarily mean 'various' places, but could equally mean 'around'- earthquakes around the holy place would then be signs and portents of the earthquake under the Holy Place which will happen when Christ returns. In Acts 6:13,14 Stephen's enemies appear to have twisted his quotations of the Lord's Olivet prophecy to mean that Christ would destroy the "holy place" [s.w. "places" here in Mt. 24].

Famines and pestilences- There was an acute famine in Israel during Elijah's ministry of three and a half years, as part of God's appeal for Israel to repent and respond to Elijah's message (Lk. 4:25). And so it will be in the final three and a half year tribulation.

Likewise it was famine which led the prodigal to repent and return to the Father (Lk. 15:14,17), a clear prototype of Israel's repentance. And perhaps the greatest prototype of their repentance is in the coming of Joseph's brothers to bow before Him; and this too was provoked by famine throughout the region around Israel (Acts 7:11). There will be a purpose in all the sufferings which precede the Lord's return- and that purpose is to bring about Israel's repentance, which is the key condition required for His second coming. There were indeed major famines in the lead up to AD70 (Acts 11:28 "a great famine throughout all the world"); again, the signs which depended upon Divine intervention were fulfilled in the first century, but those which depended upon Israel and the believers did not, because they chose not to. And thus the second coming was delayed. “In the reign of the Emperor Claudius (AD41-54) there were four seasons of great scarcity. In the fourth year of his reign, the famine in Judea was so severe that the price of food became enormous and great numbers perished. Earthquakes occurred in each of the reigns of Caligula and Claudius” (R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2000: Baker Books), p. 36). Paul encourages his first century readers that famine and other elements of the Olivet predictions would not separate believers from the love of God- as if he expected those signs to be fulfilled in their lifetimes (Rom. 8:35). The seals of Revelation 6 are full of reference to the Olivet predictions, as if they could all have been fulfilled in the first century (Rev. 6:8 speaks specifically of "famine"). Famine can come quicker than ever in our modern world, where most countries depend upon imported food; and this is especially the case in the area around Israel, where the climate doesn't enable the support of the relatively large population living in the area without food being imported. This explains how Babylon's famine comes in one day (Rev. 18:8). This could never have been possible in the ancient world, where famine required a period of time to develop. Just as Israel initially experienced the early plagues upon Egypt, so it may be that the judgments poured out upon the [Arab?] world at the very end do initially affect Israel too, and lead them to repentance.

And there shall be terrors and great signs from heaven- During their tribulation, Israel will experience intense "terror" (Lev. 26:16), which would be enough to kill them (Dt. 32:24). This extraordinary level of paranoia will be modelled upon that of Jacob as he faced Esau - representing Israel's confrontation with the Arabs in the last days (Jer. 30:5,7). This state of fear will result in many Jews going to live in Jerusalem, as happened during the Babylonian and Assyrian invasions (Jer. 35:11). Ezekiel had prophesied of this time: "Terrors (an intensive plural - i.e. 'the one great terror') by reason of the sword shall be upon my people" (Eze. 21:12). Likewise our Lord spoke of "fearful sights" being seen in latter-day Israel (Luke 21:11).

21:12 *But more significantly than all these things, they shall lay their hands on you and shall persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you*

before kings and governors for my name's sake- "The synagogues... the prisons" - implying both a religious and civil persecution of the saints? The Lord predicted that His people would be cast out of the synagogues, as if He was happy that Christianity remained a sect of Judaism until such time as Judaism wouldn't tolerate it. His prediction that His people would be beaten in synagogues (Mk. 13:9) implies they would still be members, for the synagogues only had power to discipline their own members, not the general public. The Lord had no fear of 'guilt by association' with wrong religious views such as there were within Judaism.

They were to be "delivered up" just as the Lord was 'betrayed' [s.w. 10:4; 20:18,19; 26:2,15,16,21,23,24,25,45,46,48; 27:3,4; 17:22 "the Son of Man shall be betrayed"] to the Jews and 'delivered up' to the Gentiles [s.w. 27:18,26,2 "delivered Him to Pontius Pilate"] for suffering, death- and thereby to resurrection. Again, there is an attempt to make those enduring these things identify with Him in His time of suffering. They too would be delivered up to both Jews and Gentiles- to synagogues [Jews; 10:17; Lk. 21:12] and to prisons, rulers and kings [Gentiles; Lk. 21:12; Mk. 13:9]. Mark adds "They shall deliver you up to councils and in the synagogues you shall be beaten". Clearly the Lord had in mind a first century fulfilment of His words, but as we have seen, not all the signs fulfilled in the first century and the Lord's *parousia* did not literally happen when the temple was destroyed. We therefore have to look to a re-scheduled fulfilment of these words in the persecution of the disciples in the last days.

The "persecution" is in Matthew "to tribulation", the "great *tribulation*" (Mt. 24:21,29). The Lord was addressing the disciples, and yet their sufferings were not completely in line with the picture presented here, whereby their suffering was at the same time as Jerusalem was surrounded by armies. Clearly the intended program was delayed. John's equivalent of the Olivet prophecy is the upper room discourse, and the same idea of a woman in the sorrows of labour is to be found there, and also this same word for 'afflicted' is found, translated "anguish" and "tribulation": "A woman when she is in labour has... *anguish*... in the world you shall have *tribulation*" (Jn. 16:21,33). The Lord seems to speak as if these experiences will be those of all His true followers, but just as His anguish and sorrow came to term in His triumphant resurrection, so for all who are in Him. John uses the language of the Olivet prophecy but seems to apply it in more general terms to the suffering of the believer in all ages. Surely this was consciously done as a response to the fact that the Olivet prophecy had been rescheduled in fulfilment. Again we find the idea of 'affliction' associated with the Lord's sufferings. Joseph, His clearest prototype, was 'afflicted' (Acts 7:10 s.w.), just as his brothers were 'afflicted' to lead them to repentance and acceptance of how badly they had treated Joseph / Jesus (Acts 7:11 s.w.). Stephen's use of the same word for the sufferings of both Joseph and his brothers was surely to teach that Israel's affliction was in order to teach them what they had done to Joseph, and to thereby identify with Him and repent. And this is exactly the purpose of Israel's latter day afflictions as outlined in the Olivet

prophecy, and likewise the reason for the new Israel experiencing them- to help us identify with our crucified Lord. The same word is used in Rom. 8:35: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?". Here Paul lists the kinds of tribulation outlined in the Olivet prophecy and assures his first century readers that these will never separate them from God's love- he clearly expected the prophecy to have a first century fulfilment. Likewise the Lord foresaw the possibility of the "great tribulation" coming upon the first century church (Rev. 2:22), and uses the same term "great tribulation" to describe the experiences of those Jewish Christians who would finally be saved (Rev. 7:14).

21:13 *It shall turn out to be your opportunity to give a witness*- This is Luke's equivalent of Matthew and Mark predicting that the Gospel will be preached to all nations. Luke's angle on this is that the preaching will arise out of persecution and fleeing from it- which is just what happened in the first century.

But the AV speaks of how when a believer is persecuted, “it shall turn to you for a testimony”. What does this really mean? For me, the most satisfactory explanation would be that the Angels give a positive testimony of the faithful believer in the court of Heaven. Or could it mean that the way we respond to our trials during the tribulation will determine our verdict at the judgment? It will be a testimony in our favour at the day of judgment. In view of this, "Settle it *therefore* in your hearts" to make this witness in God's strength (Lk. 21:14). "In the endurance of you (in the tribulation), ye will gain the souls of you" (Lk. 21:19 Marshall's Interlinear). The run up to the tribulation will provoke a "praying always, that ye may be accounted worthy... to stand before the Son of man" (Lk. 21:36). Peter describes the tribulation of the believers in the run up to AD70 (and therefore the last days too) as judgment taking place on the house of God, in which even the righteous are "scarcely saved" (1 Pet.4:17,18). This suggests that the last generation of believers will only be saved due to their response to the tribulation which comes upon them; but even then, only by the skin of their teeth. Lot in Sodom and the parable of the virgins, among others, are hints that the last generation of believers will be in a weak state.
For those who suffer persecution, prison etc. for the Lord's sake, "it shall turn to you for a testimony" (Lk. 21:13). When? How? Surely in that these things will be 'gone through' with them at judgment as a testimony to their faithfulness.

21:14 *Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate beforehand how to answer*- They were to decide so definitely not to work out their answer ahead of time, because their answer or testimony was with God (:13). He had made an answer / testimony for them in the court of Heaven; and He would put that in their mouths at theright time.

21:15 *For I will give you the words and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to withstand or to contradict*- This is alluding to Ex. 4:12, where God tells Moses at the time of the Egyptian persecution of God's people, "I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say". This persecution lead to intensified prayer to God, resulting in the deliverance of the suffering saints at Passover time, after a period of especial distress and 'time of trouble' for the surrounding world due to the plagues. After this deliverance, God's people went into the wilderness and were declared God's Kingdom. We have earlier shown how all these events form a remarkable latter day prophecy. This verse also suggests that the gifts of the Spirit may be given to some in the Elijah ministry in order to enable them to make a more powerful witness (as in Rev. 11:6). The fact they are given personally by Christ would indicate that in some way, Christ is already back at this stage. Time and again we will see how the prophecies of events in the last days are ambiguous as to whether Christ is already back at the time of their fulfilment, or whether they herald his return. Seeing that we will never know the exact time of Christ's return, this is understandable. Similarly Joel 2 prophesies the pouring out of the gifts " before the great and terrible day of the Lord" (:31). Malachi surely refers to this passage when prophesying the Elijah ministry "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5). This suggests that the three and a half year Elijah ministry of the last days (James 5:17) will be accompanied by Spirit gifts, and will coincide with the time of persecution. Note that the gifts were given "before the day of the Lord" in AD70 too. It is possible that because of this possession of the gifts by 'Elijah', false teachers within the ecclesia at the end will also claim to possess them (Mt. 24:24), so convincingly that all but the elect within the ecclesia will be duped into following them. Yet it must be stressed that it is a feature of the gifts that they are unmistakable and obvious to identify (cp. Acts 4:16); it will be evident enough if and when they are poured out in the last days.

21:16 *But you shall be delivered up even by your parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they shall kill some of you*- This indicates that the persecuting power will infiltrate the ecclesias, as the Jews and Romans did to the early church in order to bring about their persecution. Mic. 7:2-9 is a clear prophecy of Christ's sufferings. But embedded in it are words which are quoted in Lk. 21:16 and Mt. 10:36 concerning the latter day tribulation of the believers: "the son dishonoureth the father...a man's enemies are the men of his own house". In similar manner, some of the prophecies of Israel's latter day sufferings speak in the same context of those of Christ. Mic. 5:1 is an example: "...he hath laid seige against us: they shall smite the judge of Israel (Christ) with a rod upon the cheek". The whole of Amos 5 can be scanned for connections with both the future tribulation of Israel, and also the sufferings of Christ. See on Mk. 13:13. "Some of you shall they cause to be put to death... but there shall not an hair of your head perish" can only be reconciled by appreciating how miraculously the disciples

were preserved in order to inspire and co-ordinate the rest of the body. Perhaps a similar group of elders ("the two witnesses"?) will be preserved in the last days too.

21:17 *And you shall be hated of all men for my name's sake*- This hating by all men may imply a world-wide persecution. Matthew: "hated by all nations". But the Gospel will then be preached to “all nations” (Mk. 13:10). It seems that the persecution will result in preaching, perhaps through highly publicized legal cases. If the Gospel is taken to all nations, then this will not need to happen. "For my Name’s sake" is a phrase which rarely occurs outside of the Olivet prophecy; one other time is in the upper room discourse, which is John’s parallel with the Olivet prophecy as recorded in the synoptic Gospels. Here we read again that the believers will be “hated... for My Name’s sake” (Jn. 15:18,21). But in John 15 the Lord seems to be angling His words not just to the twelve, but to all in Him; for His reasoning is that the world’s attitude to Him will be their attitude to us, and all in Him will suffer as He did. Again we can conclude that John, the latest of the Gospels, was re-adjusting the emphasis of the Olivet prophecy, knowing that it had been rescheduled and would not fully come true in an early coming of Christ in the first century.

21:18 *But not a hair of your head shall perish*- Primarily concerning the disciples, seeing that some believers were to die for their faith in the period around AD70 (cp. :16). The figure of not a hair of the head perishing is used in the Old Testament concerning sudden deliverance from what seemed like certain death, e.g. Jonathan in 1 Sam. 14:45. This is fitting, seeing that "except those days should be shortened there should no flesh be saved" (Mt. 24:22). It is also the language of the faithful few among an Israel who wouldn't stand up and be counted being miraculously preserved from Babylonian tribulation (Dan. 3:27). There are many instructive parallels here with the latter day tribulation, which the majority of natural and spiritual Israel may try to avoid by some tokenistic acquiescence to the dictates of the King of Babylon.

We must lose our lives, one way or the other. If we lose them for Christ, we will find eternal life. If we keep them for ourselves, we will lose that eternal life. This teaching is picked up by the Lord in Lk. 21:16-18, in stating that some of His people would be put to death, but actually, not a hair of their heads would perish. Surely He was saying that yes, they would lose their lives, but in reality they would find eternal life. Those men and women who died on crosses, were burnt as human torches, were thrown to the lions... the Lord foresaw them, and implied that their sacrifice was *in principle* the process that must be gone through by each of us: a losing, a resigning, of our life and all the things that life consists of in everyday experience. Either we die to sin now, living out in practice the theory of baptism, or we will die to sin in rejection at judgment day; sin has

it's end in death (Ez. 21:25; Dan. 9:24), either now, or then. So we may as well die to the things of sin in this life.

21:19 *In your patience, you shall win your souls*- The idea may be that those who endure the final tribulation will be saved; they will be the only generation who will not die. For they will be immortalized at the Lord's return. The same group are in view in Mt. 10:22: "He that endures to the end shall be saved". Although it is the Lord who purchases / redeems ["wins"] our souls, we must play our part in this. It is our endurance in faith in His work for us which enables all this to become true for us in reality.

21:20 *But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that her desolation is at hand*- Jerusalem was truly "compassed with armies" in Hezekiah's time, and perhaps the Lord has this in mind when He predicted that Jerusalem would again be like this in the last days. His subsequent warning to those in the country areas not running into Jerusalem for refuge is also an allusion to the situation in Hezekiah's time- for this was exactly what happened then.

We need not get overly worried about the supposed discrepancies between prophecy and its historical fulfillment. Such differences don't negate the Divine inspiration of the original prophecy- rather do they show how God's intentions can be worked out in different ways because of the open-ended approach He takes to human response. Thus it's been observed that the siege of Jerusalem in AD66-70 doesn't exactly follow the descriptions in Lk. 19:41-44 and 21:20-24. This would be because there were within the Olivet prophecy a number of possible scenarios of what could happen *if* the believers fled the city as commanded; and of course, *if* Israel repented and accepted Christ at His AD70 'coming' in judgment. Additionally we must remember that this prophecy was only having its initial fulfillment in AD70- the final fulfillment will be in our last days.

The placing of the abomination is what will bring about the desolation, according to Mk. and Mt. On Revelation 17 and 18 I suggest that the whore Babylon will enthrone herself in Jerusalem, through the building of some Islamic and blasphemous religious building or capital there. And this will lead to her desolation. Luke records the Lord as saying that *when* Jerusalem was surrounded by armies, *then* His people should know that the "desolation" of it was near. The desolation is therefore of Jerusalem rather than specifically the temple (Lk. 21:20). The abominating desolation could therefore refer to the invading armies. Seeing *them* was the signal to flee. "Abomination" in the Old Testament typically refers to idolatry or paganism. One interpretation is that the desolator would place some pagan religious symbol in the temple. But this is the sign to flee, and this was only done by the Romans after the city had fallen. That, therefore, doesn't really fit the requirements of the prophecy. The AD70 interpretation notes the pagan standards of the Roman legions, but even they were not placed in the temple. This was defended until the end, until the Romans forced entry, pulled it down and burnt it. As with many details of this prophecy, a future fulfilment is required. And yet we

need to note that such desolation was only a visual reflection of the abomination the Jews had committed in the temple: "Because of the evil of your doings, and because of the *abominations* which ye have committed; therefore is your land a *desolation* and an astonishment, and a curse, without an inhabitant, as at this day" (Jer. 44:22). The abomination which caused desolation may not simply refer to some pagan symbols in the temple area. Josephus records that the Jewish zealots came into the Most Holy place, "placed an imposter in office as high priest, and ordained unqualified misfits to the priesthood" (*The Jewish Wars* 4.3.6–9; 4.5.4). The pagan Idumeans were invited into the Most Holy by the zealots in order to murder the chief priest Annas.

The word "desolation" is used again about the desolation of the Babylon system (Rev. 17:16; 18:17,19). Yet Babylon will be judged according to what it did to God's people- the judgment for 'desolating' will be 'desolation'. Yet the Olivet prophecy clearly intended the Roman armies to be the means of the desolation, but I suggest that Revelation extends the prophecy by giving more detail, and describing the system of desolation as 'Babylon'. And that system clearly has similarities with Rome- it could have been fulfilled in Rome, but because the fulfilment of the prophecy was rescheduled, we can look for another equivalent of the enigmatic 'Babylon' of the last days. The "desolation" referred to is clearly to be understood as the fulfilment of Dan. 9:26,27 LXX, which says that the abomination that desolates will come "after the cutting off of Messiah the Prince". Whilst how long "after" is not defined, we are surely intended to understand that the desolating abomination comes soon after the death of Messiah: "The people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and *the end* thereof ("then shall *the end* come", Mt. 24:14) shall be with a flood, ("as the days of Noah..."), and unto *the end* shall be war; *desolations* are determined . . . and upon the temple of *abominations* shall come one that makes *desolate* (cp. "your house is left unto you desolate", Mt. 23:38), even unto the consummation, and that determined shall be poured out upon the desolated" (LXX). And yet note that that prophecy itself had had various potential fulfilments which didn't come true. So it is fair to think that it could have had a fulfilment in AD70, but this was again deferred- for the same reason as ever, Israel's lack of repentance.

21:21- see on Rev. 11:1.

Then let them that are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let them that are in the midst of her depart, and do not let them that are in the countryside enter therein- As the faithful remnant were miraculously allowed to leave Sodom, immediately unleashing the Divine judgments by doing so, the faithful Christian remnant were allowed to leave Jerusalem just before the final Roman onslaught of AD70, doubtless spurred on by their Lord's command: "Let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it (Jerusalem) depart out" (Lk. 21:21). The reference to fleeing to the mountains would have suggested a conscious allusion back to the command to

Lot to flee out of Sodom "to the mountain" (Gen. 19:17). "Then let them which be in Judaea flee to the mountains" means that there will be Jewish believers in Jerusalem in the last days, seeing the whole prophecy has a latter day application. Dan. 12:1 says that in the final tribulation of Israel, those Jews who are "written in the book", i.e. who are acceptable saints (Ex. 32:32; Rev. 21:27) will be delivered. So there will be a minority in latter day natural Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal, as in Elijah's time- which is typical of the situation at the latter day Elijah ministry.

This is the equivalent of the plea in Revelation to flee out of Babylon, the latter day Islamic complex to be built in Jerusalem on the temple mount.

The same word was used by the Lord in introducing the Olivet prophecy in Mt. 23:33: "How can you *escape* the condemnation of Gehenna?". The way of escape was through obedience to His word. Clearly the Lord intended His words to be fulfilled in that immediate generation; but fleeing to the mountains did not bring ultimate salvation because the Lord did not return as intended. His coming has been rescheduled, and perhaps utter salvation for the Jewish remnant in the land will likewise depend upon 'fleeing'. The Old Covenant had specified that Israel would flee before their enemies if they broke the covenant; the command to 'flee' may therefore be an invitation to accept guilt for their sin, and thereby be saved through the very act of recognizing the justice of their judgment. For this is the essence of the salvation of every man in Christ. It could be that Rev. 12:6 provides more details, in speaking of the faithful fleeing into the wilderness and thereby being saved. This was the way to flee the coming condemnation (Mt. 23:33; Lk. 3:7). The Lord's words require[d] some faith to accept, because if Jerusalem were surrounded by armies, how could the faithful flee? Josephus explains that the Roman legions did in fact withdraw for a time, allowing civilians to flee (B.J.2.19.6,7).

"To the mountains" is better, 'toward'. Clearly this was capable of fulfilment in the Jewish war, in a fairly literal sense. But what is the latter day equivalent? "The mountains" could be an intensive plural for the one great, special, obvious mountain. The same word is found earlier in the chapter- the Lord is saying these words sitting on "the mount" of Olives (Mt. 24:3). And it is to that mount that He will return, according to Acts 1:12 and Zechariah 14. It could be, therefore, in a literal or figurative sense, an appeal to move towards the mount of Olives to meet Him at His return. Perhaps in a literal, geographical sense, that area will be the only area left by the invading armies, and they will surround the faithful Jewish remnant on that mount- and then the Lord shall come. But such speculation is unhelpful, because the principle of prophecy is that when it happens, then we shall understand. I do not believe we are intended to work out a sequence of events ahead of time. Indeed, given the conditional nature of Bible prophecy, that is impossible to do anyway.

21:22 *For these are days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled*- This is the day ["days" may be an intensive plural referring to the one great day] when vengeance will be poured out; God will take revenge on the system which has persecuted His natural and spiritual people (2 Thess. 1:8 s.w.). Revelation puts this in terms of the beast system receiving revenge for all she has recently done to the Lord's people. In a sense, "all" the written prophecies and words of God shall come to their final fulfilment in the Lord's return.

21:23 *Woe to them that are with child in those days, and to those nursing babies!*- This may well match Paul's warning against marrying in the last days in 1 Cor. 7. He understood the Olivet prophecy as having the real prophecy of fulfilment in his generation. As He hung on the cross, our Lord quoted this part of His Olivet prophecy to the women who stood by (Lk. 23:29 “blessed are [those] who never gave suck” = Mt. 24:19 “Woe to them... who give suck”, s.w.), concerning the sufferings of the believers in the 'last days'. Here we see His matchless selflessness; going out of His own sufferings, to think, with anguish, how they would be experienced by His followers in the tribulation. "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves... for if they do these things (to) a green tree (the spiritually healthy Lord Jesus), what shall be done (to) the dry", the spiritually barren tree of Israel. This is a superb essay in the Lord's selflessness and minimizing of his own sufferings: he felt that what he was going through was less than what the spiritually weak would have to go through in the AD70 tribulation (and that of the last days). In the other 11 occurrences of “woe” in Matthew, the objects of the “woe” are clearly the unfaithful and the condemned; this category of those “with child” are therefore not amongst those who obediently ‘flee’. Lk. 21:23 states that they would be amongst those who would suffer the “wrath upon this people”. In Lk. 23:29 the Lord clearly envisaged the women of His generation, the ones who lined the road to Golgotha, as experiencing the trauma He predicted in the Olivet prophecy. And yet it is clear enough that the final fulfilment is yet to come- because His coming was rescheduled.

For there shall be great distress upon the land, and wrath upon this people- Paul's later comment that "Wrath is come upon them to the uttermost" (1 Thess. 2:16) suggests he believed that these words were being fulfilled completely at his time. But the Lord did not come, many aspects of the prophecy were left unfulfilled, and the complete fulfilment has yet to come.

"Great distress" could mean 'the greatest ever distress'. This would connect with Dan. 12:1- that immediately prior to the Lord's return, there will be a time of distress for Israel such as they have never experienced- far worse than the holocaust. The LXX uses this same word for "distress" or "tribulation2 in several passages pregnant with latter day significance:
“The day of my [Jacob’s] *distress*” at the hands of Esau (Gen. 35:3)

“The *anguish* of his [Joseph’s] soul” at the hands of his half brethren and the Ishmaelites (Gen. 42:21)
“I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and *troubles* shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?” (Dt. 31:17)- a passage in the Song of Moses regarding Israel’s latter day tribulations.
“Thus says Hezekiah, This day is a day of *trouble*, and of rebuke, and blasphemy” (2 Kings 19:3)- Sennacherib’s Assyrian invasion at this time was a clear prototype for the latter day invasion described in Ezekiel 38 and elsewhere.
“The time of Jacob’s *trouble”* from which he will be delivered (Jer. 30:7)
“There shall be a time of *trouble*, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time your people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book” (Dan. 12:1). This time of trouble is specifically for Israel in the last days.

21:24 *And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led captive into all the nations*- The downtreading of Jerusalem during the tribulation, the "times" of the Gentiles, the three and a half year [1260 days, 42 months, "time, times and a half"] domination of the land, will be long enough for some Jews to led captive into the "all nations" surrounding Israel who form the coalition of the beast. Such mass deportations would be performed in conscious imitation of the Babylonian and Assyrian dominations. The Greek word for "sword" is literally a dagger; we would have expected the more common word for sword to be used. But we recall images of Islamist extremists killing those whom they consider apostate by cutting their throats with the edge of a knife / dagger; and it seems this is what we can expect. The phrase is alluding to Jer. 21:7 LXX, where those in Judah who escaped the plagues and other calamities [which have also been mentioned here in Lk. 21] are then slain by the edge of the sword of the Babylonians. The Babylonian invasion clearly is the prototype of Jerusalem's latter day tribulation.

And Jerusalem shall be trodden under foot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled- The "times of the Gentiles" (Lk. 21:24) appears to refer to the time of Gentile opportunity to learn the Gospel, according to how Paul alludes to it in Rom. 11:25. This however is going to be particularly true of the final period when Jerusalem falls to the Gentiles and is trodden underfoot. When that downtreading is completed, then likewise the opportunity for Gentile response will close.

Zech. 12:3 is being alluded to: "In that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people (i.e. all around Israel, as this often means): all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it". The Septuagint renders the first phrase as "a stone trodden down by the Gentiles", clearly alluded to here. Those who are 'gathered together' against Jerusalem must be

the Arab neighbours of Israel, according to the Zechariah context. The rejected likewise will be burdened with a heavy stone (Mt. 18:6), showing that they will share the judgments of Israel's enemies.

The allusion is to Dan. 8:13: "The transgression of desolation gave both the sanctuary and the host (i.e. the people of Israel) to be *trodden underfoot"*. This part of Luke 21 is clearly alluding to Zechariah 14, a prophecy about the final desolation of Jerusalem:

Luke 21	Zechariah 14
20. Jerusalem surrounded by armies	2. All nations against Jerusalem to battle
20. The desolation of Jerusalem is near	2. The city shall be taken
21. Let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains	5. You shall flee to the ... mountains
22. Great distress in the land	2. Houses ransacked, women raped.
24. Led away captive into all nations	2. Half the city shall go into captivity
24. Jerusalem trodden down by the Gentiles.	12:3 LXX Jerusalem a stone trodden down by the Gentiles.

The context of Zechariah 14 is clearly concerning the last days and the literal appearance of Messiah in Israel. The way the Olivet Prophecy alludes to it, indeed is based upon it, shows that it too requires reference to the last days. Any limited fulfillment in AD70 was only a partial foretaste of the final outworking of the prophecy. Dan. 8:13 itself was a prophecy which had already had various possible fulfilments and had already had its fulfilment rescheduled a few times. It is therefore unsurprising if its intended, or possible, fulfilment in AD70 was again rescheduled.

It may well be that the "all" which will be fulfilled in Lk. 21:32 is to be equated with "the times of the Gentiles" being fulfilled (Lk. 21:24). "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles" for three and a half years, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. 'Jebus', the old name for Jerusalem, means 'downtrodden'. This hints that the liberation of Jebus at the beginning of David's reign was seen by Christ as typical of the time when He would liberate Jerusalem from downtreading, at his return. This suggests that the times of Gentile domination of Jerusalem are to be ended by the establishment of the Kingdom at Christ's second coming; we are yet to see, therefore, a Gentile domination of Jerusalem before Christ's coming.

"The times of the Gentiles" are often taken to have finished in 1967. But at least three major problems arise with this:
1) The temple site, Biblical 'Zion', is still not totally under Jewish control due to the

presence of the Mosque there.
2) "Trodden down" has clear links with Dan. 8:13 and Rev. 11:2, which describe the temple being blasphemously desecrated for certain periods of time. How can they have ended in 1967, seeing the 'Dome of the Rock' still stands there? And 1967 minus 2300 day/years (Dan. 8:13) or 1260 day/years (Rev. 11:2) do not appear to yield any significant starting points.
3) The times of Gentile opportunity, as some read it, are still with us now as much as they were in 1967. If anything, numbers of baptisms have mushroomed *since* 1967, notably in distant Gentile lands.

21:25 *And there shall be signs in sun, moon and stars*- Joseph's dream clearly identifies these symbols as representing Israel. The passages which make this same identification are many: Gen. 37:9,10; 15:5; 22:17; Amos 8:8-10; Micah 3:6; Song of Solomon 6:10; Is. 24:23; Jer. 33:20-26; Joel 2:10,30-32; 3:15; Acts 2:20; Rev. 6:12; 8:12; 12:1. Jer. 31:35,36 is likely the Old Testament passage the Lord specifically had in mind: "Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divides the sea when the waves thereof roar; the Lord of hosts is his name. If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever".

And upon the earth distress of nations- The reference is to distress amongst the nations within the earth / land promised to Abraham. There are many prophecies in Jeremiah and Ezekiel of Babylon being at war with the neighbouring nations who supported her in the attack on Jerusalem, e.g. concerning Ammon (Ez. 21:20) and Tyre (Ez. 26:7). Ammon is mentioned as *escaping* out of the hand of the king of the North during his invasion of Israel and Jerusalem (Dan. 11:41). This shows that there will be much inter-Arab conflict both before and during Israel's prolonged desolation period. "The sea and the waves roaring" at the time of Israel's final suffering is a figure taken from Jer. 49:23 concerning the nations around Israel being like the troubled sea in their fighting with each other. However, the outstanding inter-Arab conflicts will be temporarily forgotten in the last days to concentrate on a combined push against Jerusalem. But once this is captured, the old rivalries will suddenly violently surface, which is how God will destroy the invaders and save the righteous remnant who are still barely alive in the sewers and basements of Jerusalem.

In perplexity for the roaring of the sea and the waves- The Greek word translated "perplexity" is used in the LXX concerning the final tribulation of Israel (Lev. 26:16; Dt. 28:22; Is. 5:30; 8:20 LXX). It seems that the beasts of Dan. 7 are only different aspects of the one great beast which finally emerges. Daniel sees them all come up together after the waves of the sea are troubled (Dan. 7:3), connecting with the Lord's description of the last day powers around Israel in the same way (Lk. 21:25).

21:26 *Men will be fainting for fear in expectation of the things which are coming on the world*- We are to be in expectation of the Lord's return (s.w. 2 Pet. 3:12,13,14); the Lord comes on the unworthy when they are not expecting Him (Lk. 12:46 s.w.). The magnitude of the world's problems will block the vision of worldly people, so that they refuse or are rendered unable to look beyond them to the things of the Lord and His Kingdom "coming on the world".

For the powers of the heavens shall be shaken- The Greek phrase is used only elsewhere in Rev. 6:13. This vision is clearly an expansion upon the Olivet prophecy. There, the stars fall “as a fig tree casts her unripe figs”. This too is the language of the Olivet prophecy (Mt. 24:32). The lack of spiritual maturity in Israel is related to the stars [of Israel- see on *Sun... moon... stars*] falling. The appearance of comets would certainly give the impression of falling stars, and I suggest that the main fulfilment will be in terms of things visibly seen in the sky, as hard proof to all the world that the Lord Jesus is returning. And it is this which provokes chronic fear in the hearts of the worldly. The events of judgment day will be a ‘shaking’ of the world, including the faithful (Lk. 6:48 the house built on the rock could not be “shaken”, s.w.). Heb. 12:26,27 surely allude here, saying that just as the earth shook when the old covenant was instituted, so the “heavens” would also be shaken. The suggestion of the context is that this day of shaking both heaven and earth was almost upon the readership- who were Hebrews, Jewish Christians.

21:27 *And then shall they see*- In Matthew, when “all the tribes of the earth / land mourn [in repentance]... then shall they see the Son of man coming”. Some in Israel must repent before Christ returns. The Lord refers to this in speaking to the Jews who crucified Him: "You shall see [s.w.] the Son of Man... coming in the clouds of Heaven" (Mt. 26:64). They would see that all too late, as part of the process of their condemnation- to realize it was all true, and it is too late to do anything about it. The Lord had earlier used the same idea, in saying that that group would only "see" Him again when they said "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord" (Lk. 13:35). They would see that and say that all too late. The Lord's words clearly suggest they of that generation would see His return in glory. But His coming was delayed, and they did not. But they will at the last day, for they will be resurrected to face judgment and condemnation. The chronological issues need not worry us too much- i.e. when will they be resurrected, at precisely what point on the timeline of these events. The meaning of time will surely be collapsed around the Lord's return. This will be the final fulfilment of the prophecy that they shall look upon Him whom they pierced and mourn (Rev. 1:7; Jn. 19:37; "look" is s.w. "see" in Mt. 24:30). The invitation of course is to look upon the crucified Christ now and mourn in repentance; for we shall have to do this one way or the other, either now in repentance, or too late in condemnation.

The Son of Man coming in a cloud- Dan. 7:14. The language of clouds and then Angels (Mt. 24:31) is reminiscent of the Lord's ascension, at which the Angels promised His return "in like manner"; and the same language is used of His return in Acts 1:7. This precludes any invisible 'coming' in AD70. Rather than thinking that the Lord somehow 'came' in AD70 in some metaphorical manner, I would suggest that the literal language is such that we can only conclude that His literal return has been delayed. Otherwise we end up forcing the obviously literal into the metaphorical.

The moment of the second coming is likened to a flash of lightning and the beginning of rain at the time of Noah's flood. This makes any application of *parousia* to the prolonged series of events in A.D. 69/70 at least tenuous when compared to the obvious application to the moment of the second coming. There are many links between Mt. 24,25 and 1 Thess. 4,5 which have been tabulated by several expositors. According to these connections, the Lord's 'parousia' mentioned in Mt. 24 is interpreted by Paul as referring to the literal second coming (Mt. 24:30,31 = 1 Thess. 4:15,16). In view of all this, it is desirable to interpret the 'coming' of the Lord in Mt. 24 as referring to the literal presence of Christ at His return, although this is not to rule out any primary reference to the events of A.D. 70. Indeed I would argue that since *parousia* means a literal presence, it's not the case that the prophecy received a primary fulfilment in AD70; rather is it that the literal return of Christ was intended then, but was rescheduled. At best, the *parousia* element of the predictions had no partial fulfilment in AD70. The flow of the prophecy is indicated by the repetition of words like "then" : "*Then* shall they deliver you up... *then* shall many be offended... *then* shall the end come... *then* let them which be in Judea... *then* shall be great tribulation... *then* if any man shall say unto you, Here is Christ... *immediately after the tribulation of those days* ("in *those days*, after that tribulation", Mk. 13:24)... *then* shall appear the sign of the Son of man... *then* shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the son of man coming" (Mt. 24). There is no suggestion here of any break in application, from AD70 to the last days. If the reference to Christ coming in glory with the Angels is accepted as referring to the last days, but the earlier verses of the prophecy to AD70 alone, we have to find the point where Christ breaks from AD70 to the last days. And I would suggest such a point cannot be found.

"In the clouds" clearly alludes to His ascension in clouds, and the promise that He would return "in like manner" (Acts 1:11), presumably meaning in clouds to the same Mount of Olives. Again we are invited to understand these as literal clouds, just as the signs in the heavenly bodies are likewise to be understood. At His coming, the figurative will pass away and planet earth and those who dwell upon it will be faced with the ultimate reality- the personal, literal coming of God's Son to earth.

With power and great glory- The very words used by the Lord in the model prayer of Mt. 6:13 concerning the power and glory of the Kingdom of God. The coming of the Lord to establish the Kingdom is clearly yet future and did not occur in AD70. This is the time when “the Son of Man shall come in the glory [s.w.] of His Father with His angels, and then shall He repay every man according to his deeds” (16:27; 25:31). Likewise, this is “the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory [s.w.], [and] you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Mt. 19:28). Such a judgment and coming with Angels never occurred in AD70. John’s equivalent of this is to emphasize that in essence, the believers behold Christ’s glory now, insofar as they perceive the wonder and moral pinnacle of His achievement for us on the cross (Jn. 17:24). Col. 3:4 teaches that “When Christ who is our life [i.e. our basis of resurrection] shall appear, then shall [we] also appear with Him in glory”. His coming in glory will be ours, in that we will have been snatched away to meet with Him and will come with Him to Zion. And yet the next verse speaks as if now, at this point, the Angels are sent to gather the elect. But these chronological discrepancies are no real issue for the believer if we accept that the meaning of time must be changed around the time of Christ’s coming, as must the meaning of space [if Einstein’s theory of relativity is correct]. This would explain all practical concerns about space and time issues relating to the day of judgment. Another window on the apparent chronological discrepancies is the consideration that there are various possible potential scenarios, which will work out according to the speed and nature of the spiritual response of both natural and spiritual Israel.

21:28 *But when these things begin to happen, look up, lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near*- Ps. 24:9 clearly states that when the gatekeepers of Zion lift up their heads [to God in truth], then the King of glory will come in. And the Lord here applies these words to His true people of the last days- they are to likewise lift up their heads [so that] their redemption will draw nigh, or be hastened.

"When these things begin to come to pass, then look up (Gk. un-bend), and lift up your heads" may suggest that the believers will be bowed down in bondage in some sense. Alternatively, we can read it simply as a command to stand up (as NIV), which would connect with the slumbering virgins, *none* of them standing ready to welcome their Lord as they should have been. It is evident from a close reading of the Olivet prophecy that the Lord is using his pronouns carefully. Sometimes He speaks of "ye", sometimes of "they". It seems that the “ye" refer to the disciples and the faithful remnant in the latter day ecclesia, and the "they" either to the natural Jews or to "the many" (majority) in the ecclesia who will fall away. "*They* shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud… when these things (leading up to the Son of man coming) begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up *your* heads" (Lk. 21:27,28). This may suggest that the majority, the "they"

category, are shocked by the coming of the Lord, but the faithful minority stand up from their slumber and are expecting his coming.

“When these things begin to come to pass, then look up (Gk. 'unbend'- as if the depression of the faithful is partly lifted by discerning the nearness of Christ's return), and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh". These are words which can only apply to the last generation; and they self-evidently imply that therefore that last generation does know for sure that Christ is about to come. Just two verses later, the Lord spoke of how in the Spring "Ye see and know *of your own selves* that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the Kingdom of God is nigh" (Lk. 21:30,31). There is an instinctive sense within us concerning the change of the seasons; and this will be the same in the minds of the faithful as they sense the Lord's return approaching. There will be no need for magazine articles expounding "signs of the times"; we will not need any man to say unto us "The time draweth near" because we will know *of our own selves* that the coming of Christ is near (Lk. 21:7,8 should be read in the context of v.30,31). The relationship between Solomon and his bride in the Song of Solomon is typical of that between Christ and His church; and significantly, therefore, she senses his approach, she hears his voice telling her that he is coming, even before she sees him (Song 2:8).

We were redeemed by the blood of Jesus; and yet His return and judgment of us is also our “day of redemption" (Lk. 21:28; Rom. 8:23; Eph. 4:30). Yet that day was essentially the cross; but it is also in the day of judgment. Likewise, we are “justified" by the blood of Jesus. Yet the idea of justification is a declaring righteous after a judgment; as if the cross was our judgment, and through our belief in the Lord we were subsequently declared justified, as we will be in the Last Day.

21:29 *And he told them a parable: Behold the fig tree and all the trees*- Lk. 13:6-9 records another parable of the fig tree, upon which that in the Olivet prophecy is based. Jesus, the dresser of God's vineyard of Israel, came seeking spiritual fruit on the fig tree, for the three years of his ministry. Because of the lack of it, the tree was cut down. Christ said "Now (i.e. towards the end of the tribulation period?) learn a parable of the fig tree" (Mt. 24:32). It is tempting to read this as effectively meaning 'Now learn *the* parable of the fig tree', seeing that the parable of the Olivet prophecy is so similar to the previous fig tree parable. Spiritual fruit on the fig tree of Israel is to be associated with spiritual fruit on "all the trees" within the Eden / earth / land promised to Abraham; this will be the fruit of the witness made to them all by the Elijaj ministry and the two witnesses of Rev. 11.

21:30 *When they shoot forth, you see it, and know of yourselves that the summer is now near*- Or, “you know in your own selves”. Seeing the repentance of Israel will lead to the faithful perceiving that the end is near. This perhaps alludes to the same idea as in 2 Pet.

1:19, that the day star shall arise in the hearts of the believers just before the Lord comes.

One way to look at this is that summer stood for harvest, obviously so in this context of fruit on a fig tree. But harvest was clearly a metaphor for judgment upon Israel, which is the context and burden of the Olivet prophecy. The Lord has lamented that the fig tree of Israel has nothing but leaves- and because of that, He had uttered judgment upon her (Mt. 21:19,20). So the Lord could be simply repeating this is parabolic terms. The judgment / harvest / Summer was to come upon the fig tree whilst she had only leaves [and not fruit] on her tender branch. And yet the language of 'shooting forth' [Gk. germinating] in Lk. 21:30 suggests that more than mere leaves are in view. Summer will only come once there is fruit to harvest. That seems the point.

The shooting forth of the fig tree is given as the special sign that the Lord will return (Lk. 21:30). This must be understood in the context of the Lord coming to the fig tree in Mk. 11; He sought for at least the beginnings of fruit shooting forth, but found only leaves. And therefore He cursed the fig tree. He evidently saw the shooting forth of the fig tree as a figure of Israel's acceptance of Him, however immaturely. Likewise the parable of Lk. 13:6-9 makes the same connection between fruit on the fig tree and repentance within Israel. "Learn a (the) parable of the fig tree" (Mt. 24:32) may suggest that we are to understand the fig tree parable in the light of these other fig tree parables. And there are several OT links between fruit on the fig and spiritual fruit in Israel (Mic. 7:1 cp. Mt. 7:15,16; Hos. 9:10; Hab. 3:17,18). When the branch of Israel "is now become tender", i.e. immediately this happens, we are to know that the eternal Summer of God's Kingdom is nigh (Mt. 24:32 RV). The tenderness of the branch is surely to be connected with the hard heart of Israel becoming tender through their acceptance of Jesus and the new covenant. When we see just the beginnings of Israel's repentance, through a remnant responding, we are to know that "He is near, even at the doors" (Mt. 24:33 RV). All this evidence steers us away from the idea that the fig tree became tender through the re-establishment of the nation of Israel- and towards an understanding that this is all about Israel's repentance.

The fig tree was to "shoot forth" (Lk. 21:30) or 'germinate' (Young), witnessed by its putting forth of leaves (Mk. 13:28) and tender branches (Mt. 24:32). When the fig tree puts forth leaves there are often immature, unripe figs amongst them. Thus Jesus inspected the fig tree outside Jerusalem to see if it had any fruit, and cursed it because it did not. "The time of *figs* was not yet", i.e. it was not reasonable to find fully developed fruit on it. The fig tree referred to the nation of Israel; Jesus expected to find at least the beginnings of some spiritual fruit, but due to the chronic dearth of response to his message, Jesus cursed the nation and dried it up (Mk. 11:13,14,20). This would lead us to interpret the putting forth of leaves on the fig tree as the signs of an initial repentance

and indication that real spiritual fruit is developing. It may well be that the whole of the Olivet prophecy has reference to a final three and a half year tribulation of the believers just prior to the second coming, and that during this time there will be a period of zealous witnessing to both Jews and Gentiles. This fits into place with the fig tree parable; this preaching starts to produce some degree of response from Israel, and then "all (is) fulfilled" in the full manifestation of Christ's Kingdom. The parable says that as surely as Summer follows Spring, so those who see the blossoming of the fig tree in the parable, will see the Kingdom. Maybe this is to be taken literally; there may be a literal gap of a few weeks/months (as between Spring and Summer) between the first signs of Jewish repentance, and all being fulfilled. It may well be that the "all" which will be fulfilled in Lk. 21:32 is to be equated with "the times of the Gentiles" being fulfilled (Lk. 21:24). The Greek *kairos* translated “times” is also translated “opportunity”; the Gentiles’ opportunity to hear the Gospel is fast running out. There will be a call to Israel to repent in the last days, and a remnant will respond. This Elijah ministry [and maybe our present witness to Jewry prepares the way for this?] must occur “before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord”. We could interpret the putting forth of leaves on the fig tree as the signs of an initial repentance and indication that real spiritual fruit is developing.

21:31 *Even so, you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near*- The structure of the argument suggests that “these things” specifically refers to the shooting forth of the fig tree:

Mt. 24:32	Mt. 24:33
When [Gk. *hotan*]	When [Gk. *hotan*]
His branch is yet tender and puts forth leaves	You see all these things
You know [Gk. *ginosko*]	You know [Gk. *ginosko*]
That summer is near [Gk. *eggus*]	That it is near [Gk. *eggus*]; Lk. 21:32 “That the Kingdom of God is near [Gk. *eggus*]”.

The “Summer” meant ‘harvest’, and that was a metaphor for judgment. Verse 33 parallels this by saying that “it” is near. The “it” may well refer to the destruction of the temple, which is the context of the whole discussion; although Lk. 21:32 supplies “the Kingdom of God”. The Lord is bringing the discourse to a close by returning to the question which provoked it: “”When shall these things be?”. And He appears to be saying in the first century context that so long as only leaves remained on the fig tree of Israel, then the Summer of harvest judgment upon her was going to come. And yet the Lord here is using language with two or more meanings, as Scripture often does. In the

latter day context, He seems to be saying that once spiritual fruit is beginning on the Israel fig tree, then this is the ultimate sign that the ultimate end is near.

The Lord introduces his Olivet prophecy by saying that it was no use listening to those who said "The time draws near"- instead, he went on to say, 'You must personally match the spiritual and physical situation you find yourself in with what I'm describing'. And at the end of the prophecy, he hammered this home again: "When (the trees) now shoot forth, ye see it, and know of your own selves that Summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things... know ye" (Lk. 21:30,31 RV). The very personal feeling within us that Summer is near is likened to our knowledge of the imminence of the Lord's coming; you can't be told by anyone else that Summer's coming, you see the signs, and you know within your own self.

Perhaps the very last generation *will* know the time of Christ's return. "Likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, *know ye* that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand" (Lk. 21:31). As surely as trees bud and then Summer comes, so when we see the signs of Lk. 21:24-26 in Israel, we will know that the Lord is really at hand. It is only to the unworthy that the Lord comes unexpectedly. The majority of generations, including the disciples to whom Christ primarily spoke those words concerning not knowing the hour, have of course not known the day or hour. But there seems absolutely no point in the Lord giving us *any* signs if in fact the last generation cannot foresee with some certainty the time of His coming. Surely Yahweh has revealed all His plans to His servants the prophets? As a woman knows within herself the approximate time of childbirth although not the day or hour, so we should know that the day of new birth is approaching- so Paul's reasoning goes in 1 Thess. 5. He warns that for those who do not watch, the day of Christ's coming will be a day of "sudden destruction... as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape" (1 Thess. 5:3). Surely the picture here is of a woman whose time of delivery comes unexpectedly upon her, with complications that result in her dying in childbirth. As a woman who knows the time of delivery is very near will behave in an appropriately careful way, so will the faithful of the last generation who likewise know that the Lord's coming is nigh. The same mixture of seriousness and joyful anticipation will be seen in us too, who are watching and loving the appearing of Christ.

21:32 *Truly I say to you: This generation shall not pass away*- This is similar to the Lord's teaching that some of His generation would not die until they had seen the coming of the Kingdom (Mk. 9:1; Lk. 9:27). His saying may not be linked directly to the fig tree parable, as if to say 'The generation that sees the fig tree fruit will not pass away until...'. Rather He may be concluding His message by again making clear that the entire prophecy was going to come true in that generation. Seeing that lifespans were not much over 40 years at that time, even AD70 would not have seen many of that generation alive. He says elsewhere that the actual people He was speaking with would see these things come true and see Him coming in glory. But this potential possibility

was disallowed from happening in that generation by the refusal of Israel to repent and the weakness of spirituality and effort to spread the Gospel in those who did apparently believe into Christ. The transfiguration was hardly the main fulfilment of the Lord's words, even though the record of it directly follow the Lord's predictions. Like the events of AD70, it was at best a shadow fulfilment of the final coming of the Kingdom in visible power and glory. The use of "*this* generation" rather than "*that* generation" surely suggests the Lord hoped for and indeed intended a fulfilment of His words literally in that very generation. But that generation passed- because fruit on the fig tree was not found. Israel did not repent, and there was little spiritual fruit on those Jews who did accept Christ. All 38 NT occurrences of *genea*, "generation", clearly refer to the contemporary generation or group of listeners. Any attempt to interpret *genea* as referring to the race or nation of Israel becomes impossible because the text would require that the race or nation of Israel pass away at the Lord's second coming, but Israel are clearly envisaged as existing as a separate entity in the Millennial Kingdom.

Until- If the Lord had meant simply 'until' we would read simply *heos*. But here we have two Greek words- *heos an*, which together denote a sense of conditionality and uncertainty. This is understandable if we understand that the Lord is talking of how His coming *could be* in that generation- but that depended upon some conditions which were beyond Him to fulfil and which depended upon men.

All things are accomplished- AV "Be fulfilled". There is surely a word play between *ginomai* ["fulfilled"] and *genea* ["generation"]. That generation would not pass until all has 'become'. This is not the usual word used for the fulfilment of prophecies. When Matthew writes of the fulfilment of prophecies (and he does this often), the word *pleroo* is used. But here a much vaguer and more general word is used. Mark's record brings this out- the disciples ask when "all these things" would be "fulfilled" (*sunteleo*), and the Lord concludes the fig tree parable by saying "all these things" would be *ginomai* (Mk. 13:4,30). That would appear purposeful; the Lord held out the definite possibility for His return in the first century and the fulfilment of all things He had spoken of. But He was surely aware that this could be rescheduled, and so He used a word pregnant with the possibility that "that generation" would see the 'coming into being' of the scenario He was presenting. That generation [*ginomai*] could have been the fulfilment [*genea*] of all things, or they could have been at least the coming into being of that fulfilment; even if they failed to respond, they would not be without significance in bringing into being the ultimate fulfilment.

21:33 *Heaven and earth shall pass away*- This could simply be saying to the effect 'Even if heaven and earth could pass, which they cannot, there is even less possibility that My words shall not be fulfilled'. Mt. 5:18 seems to use the term in that sense- "Even until [*heos*, i.e. 'even if'] heaven and earth pass...". In this case, we are not to even bother

trying to understand 'heaven and earth' as 'a system of things', although this is certainly how the term is used, especially in the context of the Jewish system. And yet later New Testament allusion to this passage seems to suggest we are justified in seeing some reference to the Jewish, Mosaic system of the first century. Heb. 12:26 speaks as if heaven and earth are to be so shaken by the blood of Christ and the new covenant that they will pass away just as Sinai shook at the inauguration of the old covenant. 2 Pet. 3:7-13 is perhaps the clearest statement- the 'heaven and earth' which "are now" in the first century were to pass away and be replaced by a new heaven and earth in which righteousness dwells. Clearly 'heaven and earth' are not literal, because righteousness already dwells in literal Heaven, and the earth shall not be literally destroyed; this passing of 'heaven and earth' is patterned after the destruction of sinful *society* in Noah's time (2 Pet. 3:5). We note that the Olivet prophecy concludes with a warning that society would become like it was in the days of Noah. Clearly this major changeover did happen in the first century in that the Jewish and Mosaic system did finally pass away in AD70 with the destruction of the temple. And yet Peter's words also seem to demand application to the second coming of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. Clearly the heaven and earth of the Kingdom could have come in the first century, but 'all' that happened was that the Jewish and Mosaic systems were ended; this was in itself created a requirement for a *new* 'heaven and earth' in which dwells righteousness, but that system has evidently not yet physically come on earth. In this sense, what happened in AD70 was a guarantee and a creation of the requirement for the new Kingdom to come- see on :32 *Be fulfilled*.

The Greek word *ge* ["earth"] is used often for the ‘land’ of Israel in the NT. We must remember that although the NT is written in Greek, it strongly reflects Hebrew usage of words. Again, the word commonly refers to the land of Israel. Consider some examples:
- “But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King” (Mt. 5:34,35). This is alluding to the Jewish habit of swearing by their own land.
- “The kings of the earth take custom or tribute" (Mt. 17:25). The rulers of the earth were those ruling over Israel.
- “That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth" (Mt. 23:35). The blood shed on the earth means that which was shed in the land.
- Heaven and earth passing away (Mt. 24:35) follows on from the Lord speaking of how all tribes of the earth / land would mourn in repentance (:30). He was speaking in the common OT idiom that used ‘heaven and earth’ for Israel. The nation would pass away in AD70, but His words would not.

But my words shall not pass away- The Lord uses *logos* here rather than any other term for ‘words’, perhaps because He perceived that it was the essence of what He was saying that would be fulfilled, rather than necessarily the very letter.

There seems a parallel with :30. "My words shall not pass away" is parallel with "This generation shall not pass away"; "Heaven and earth shall pass away" is parallel with "All these things [being] fulfilled". 'Heaven and earth' passing is therefore in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth in fulfilment of all that was prophesied by the Lord. But there is then a parallel between "My words" and "this generation". The intention may be to show that that generation were to be identified with the Lord's words, and thereby with Himself. For whenever He elsewhere uses the term "My words", it is always in parallel to 'I Myself' (Mk. 8:38; Jn. 12:48; 14:23; 15:27). He was His words; He was the quintessential logos. And that generation were to be identified with them. If they did so, if the tender branch of the fig tree became one with the Messianic branch of the Old Testament prophecies, then all would be fulfilled in that generation.

21:34 *But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with partying, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day come on you unexpectedly*- It could fairly be asked 'Why is there this warning, if the believers of the last days are to be actively persecuted?'. This verse implies that the world will be in a materially prosperous state in the last days; it will be possible for us to become so preoccupied with it that we do not prepare for the time of tribulation, so that it comes as a sudden surprise. Of if "that day" is the day of Christ's coming, then it may be that by opting out of the persecution, we will be able to continue to enjoy the materialism of the world, in which case we will be caught unawares by the second coming. Thus while the saints are persecuted, the world enjoys a time of prosperity as it did in the times of Lot and Noah.

Even in the first century context, Paul has to use these same Greek words in warning the believers not to be caught up in drunkenness (Rom. 13:13; Gal. 5:21). And "cares" is the word used in the parable of the sower; the thorns represented the cares of this life (Mt. 13:22). The appeal is therefore to those who have received the seed of the word, and have responded. Attempting to enjoy the good life will make believers no longer expectant of the Lord's return. "Unexpectedly" translates a Greek word only found elsewhere in 1 Thess. 5:3, of the "sudden destruction" which is to come upon those within the church who are saying "peace and safety". The attitude of "peace and safety" is therefore within the church rather than in the world; for it is here paralleled with eating and drinking without awareness of the imminence of the Lord's return. The state of the world in the very last days is going to be crying out for interpretation as a fulfilment of prophecy predicting the Lord's coming. And yet, it seems many within the church will be spiritually asleep and so engrossed with the good life that they do not perceive it. This is the distracting power of materialism and self-indulgence.

21:35 *For so shall it come upon all those that dwell on the face of all the earth*- As noted on :34, the unexpected nature of the Lord's coming is pertinent specifically to the believers who are engrossed with the good life and not aware of the imminence of His return. But they are associated here with all dwellers on the earth / land, for whom the

Lord's coming will likewies be an abrupt, unexpected interruption. The dwellers on the earth / land in Revelation appear to specifically refer to those within the territory of the land promised to Abraham.

21:36 *But watch continually, praying that you may have strength to prevail against all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man*- See on Lk. 18:5; Rev. 8:1. It is by being continually aware of the Lord's presence, and the closeness of His coming, that we find moral strength to overcome. And this will be especially true of the final generation. Spiritual strength is clearly given in response to prayer and desire. The Lord doesn't simply adovcate Bible study as the method for gaining strength.

"Prevail" or "escape" can mean 'to suddenly flee away from'- the same idea of sudden deliverance from persecution which cropped up in our notes on :18. Those who do not watch and pray will be unable to flee out of the tribulation, as Lot's wife was unable to. This idea of escaping connects with 1 Thess. 5:3 (this is just one of many links between the Olivet prophecy and Thessalonians): "When they shall say (in the ecclesia) Peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them... and they shall not escape". The language of "peace and safety" is often used in the Old Testament to describe the calm words of Israel's false teachers, as they confidently asserted that all was spiritually well within Israel (Jer. 6:14; 5:12; 14:13; Mic. 3:5; Ez. 13:10; Dt. 29:19). Those who do not think that there is peace and safety in the ecclesia and who face up to the reality of 'watching and praying' to spiritually survive the last days, are those who will 'escape'.

Jacob's wrestling with the Angel was really a clinging on to him, pleading with tears for the blessing of forgiveness; and in this he was our example (Hos. 12:4-6). Lk. 21:36 RV speaks of the believer 'prevailing' with God in prayer. The 'struggles' of Moses in prayer are an example of this; through the desperation and spiritual culture of his pleading, he brought about a change even in God's stated purpose. See on Col. 2:1.

If our prayers really can help others' on their salvation road- how we should use this! Remember Lot's deliverance for the sake of Abraham's prayers, whilst he unknowingly went about his daily life in those last hours. Reflect too how the Lord told us: “Pray *ye* may be accounted worthy to... be stood before the son of man". Not 'pray for thyself', singular, but for the whole community of the last days.

Angelic appearances to men have so often included an encouragement to "fear not" that we have every reason to imagine that those same words will be repeated to us when the angel calls. The Greek text of Lk. 21:36 further fills out the place of the angels in our judgment: "Pray always, that you may be accounted worthy... to be stood before the Son of man". This creates the picture of our guardian angel literally standing us up in

acceptance before our Lord, as happened to Daniel. Ps. 1:5 can now take on a literal aspect: "The ungodly shall not stand [up] in the judgment". It is so fitting that the angel who is with us now in our every situation, will be with us in that supreme moment too.

Throughout Christ's discourses concerning his return, "watch" is the key-word (Mt. 24:42; 25:13; Mk. 13:33-37; Lk. 12:37; 21:36). There are at least ten New Testament allusions to Christ's command for us to "watch" in the last days, and thus be found loving the appearing of Christ; this alone indicates how our lives should be characterized by this spirit of watching. I would go so far as to say that generally we seem almost unaware of this emphasis. "Watch... watch... watch" is the cry that comes out from our Lord himself. It seems almost unknown to us that we are *commanded* by the Lord Jesus Christ himself, with a great sense of urgency, to live in this spirit of watchfulness for His return. It is easy to think that the command to watch means that we should scan Bible prophecies and compare them with current world events, and thereby see the coming of Christ approaching. However, this is not the idea behind the word "watch". We are told to watch precisely because we do *not* know the time of Christ's appearing; therefore Jesus cannot be telling us (in this command) to watch political developments as pointers towards the date of His return. "Watch" nearly always refers to watching our personal spirituality, and concerning ourselves with that of others'. The Hebrew word translated "watch" carries the idea of defending, holding on as a matter of life or death, enduring with stamina, being awake. Thus Habakkuk speaks of "watching", i.e. being spiritually sensitive, to what God is going to tell him (Hab. 2:1). Doing a study of New Testament allusions to Christ's command to "watch" yields conclusions which may seem unpleasantly negative to some. In Greek, the verb 'to watch' is related to the noun 'watch', referring to soldiers guarding something, or the period of guard duty. The idea behind 'watching' is definitely defensive rather than aggressive. In the same way as the gate keeper of a large house has to watch, to guard and protect, so should we in the last days (Mk. 13:34-37). Lk. 21:36 defines watching as praying always, concentrating our faith upon the fact that ultimately we will stand acceptably before the Lord Jesus at the day of judgment, and by His grace be saved from the great judgments which will surely come upon this world. The ideas of watching and praying often occur together (Lk. 21:36; Mk. 14:38; Mt. 26:41; Eph. 6:18; 1 Pet. 4:7). Prayer for our forgiveness, for acceptance by our Lord, must therefore characterize our watching in these last days. We must " watch" in the sense of being on our guard against the possibility of personal and communal apostacy from the faith (Acts 20:31); "watching" is standing fast in the doctrines of the one faith (1 Cor. 16:31), exhorting and encouraging others in the household of faith (1 Thess. 5:6,11), holding fast in ecclesias swamped by apathy and apostasy, strengthening what remains (Rev. 3:2,3; 2 Tim. 4:3-5), keeping the oil of the word burning in our lamps even though others have let it burn out (Mt. 25:13).

21:37 *And every day he was teaching in the temple, and every night he went and stayed on the mount that is called Olivet*- Perhaps He didn't wish to draw attention to the Bethany home. Or perhaps He found Gethsemane especially conducive to the prayer which filled His final nights. Maybe He wanted to reduce His journey time each day to the temple, in order to provide maximum teaching and final appeal to Israel. He must surely have had sympathizers within the city who would have let Him spend the night there. But He didn't wish to make them a target for the Jews, nor give them the appearance of some special blessing after all the grief was over and He was glorified. He likely wanted to have the 12 with Him as much as possible, and it's unlikely such a large group could have been accommodated under one roof. And so they slept rough for those final nights, with Him using every moment in prayer, teaching and appeal.

21:38 *And all the people came early in the morning to him in the temple, to hear him*- The "early morning" eagerness for His teaching explains why He reduced His journey time to the temple each day by sleeping rough on Olivet rather than in Bethany (:37). Their attraction to His teaching was deep; for He carefully avoided doing miracles at this stage.

LUKE CHAPTER 22

22:1 *Now the feast of unleavened bread drew near, which is called the Passover*- This clarification would have been unnecessary for a Jewish audience, so we can see that Luke was aiming at preaching to the Gentiles even before generally this was acceptable within the church. Taking the Gospel to those whom the main body of believers hold to be unacceptable is a lonely and visionary task.

22:2 *And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might put him to death, for they feared the people*- This 'seeking' to kill the Lord connects these orthodox Jews with Herod, who 'sought' to kill the Lord at His birth (s.w. Mt. 2:13,20). The seeking of the Jews to kill the Lord coincided with the seeking of Judas to betray Him to them (s.w. Mt. 26:16). In this sense the Jewish satan entered into Judas (:3). And the Lord was aware of all this; as noted on Mk. 14:1, He brought about the circumstances so that He died as the Passover lamb at that feast. He did so by provoking Judas to 'seek' to betray Him through the incident of the 'waste' of wealth at Bethany; when He knew that the Jews were also 'seeking' His death.

22:3 *And Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve*- It was the Jewish 'satan' that put the idea of betraying Jesus into Judas' mind, so Lk. 22:2,3 implies: "the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him...then entered Satan into Judas". See on :2. The Jewish ideas of an immediate Kingdom and the throwing off of the Roman yoke by a glamorous, heroic Messiah entered Judas, and caused him to become so bitter against Christ's Messiahship that he betrayed Him. The Jewish Satan, in the form of both the Jews and their ideology, was at work on the other disciples too: "Satan has desired to have you" (plural), Jesus warned them. Especially was the High Priest seeking Peter: "I have prayed for you (Peter – singular), that your faith doesn't fail you" (Lk. 22:31,32). Could Jesus foresee the Satan – High Priest later arresting Peter and his subsequent trial in prison? Throughout the first century, the Jewish and Roman Devil sought "whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8).

Note how "enter" is used in a non-physical sense in Mt. 25:21: "Enter into the joy of your Lord", entering in at the narrow gate (Mt. 7:13), entering into another's labours (Jn. 4:38). 'Satan' enters a man's heart in the sense that "the lusts of other things enter in" (Mk. 4:19); in this sense we can "enter into temptation" (Lk. 22:46).

The link between Judas and the 'Devil' is brought out by a consideration of Luke's comment that Judas "sought an opportune time [*eukairan*] to betray Jesus" (Lk. 22:6). But Luke earlier used this word in Lk. 4:13 to describe how the "Devil" in the wilderness departed from the Lord "until an opportune time" [*achri kairou*]. The Lord's victory in the wilderness prepared Him for the victory over the 'Devil' which He achieved in His final passion. Just as the temptation to 'come down from the cross' was a repetition of the temptation to throw Himself down from the temple. John's Gospel often repeats the

history of the other Gospels, but in different language. In Mt. 26:46, the Lord comments upon the arrival of Judas: "Rise, let us be going; my betrayer is coming". But Jn. 14:30,31 puts it like this: "The prince of this world [a phrase understood as meaning 'the evil one', the Devil] is coming... Rise, let us be going". John is picking up the mythological language of the 'Satan' figure, and applying it to a real person with real attitudes and sinful intentions – i.e. Judas, who is presented as a personification of the 'Satan' / 'Devil' / 'Prince of this world' principle.

We can easily overlook the huge significance of Mk. 14:21 recording the Lord's words that Judas personally was guilty for betraying Him, and would suffer accordingly – even though Lk. 22:22 says that Judas did this because the Satan [i.e. the Jews] 'entered him'. *Whatever* that means, it doesn't mean that Judas nor anyone is thereby not personally responsible for their actions.

The translation of the Greek text in Jn. 13:2 has been problematic. "The Devil having put into the heart of Judas" doesn't quite do justice to what the Greek is really saying. The respected expositor and Greek student C.K. Barratt insists that strictly, the Greek means 'the Devil had put into his own [i.e. the Devil's] heart, that Judas should betray Jesus' (C.K. Barratt, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978) p. 365. Barratt's view of the Greek is confirmed in D.A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1981) p. 131). This translation is almost impossible to make any sense of given the orthodox understanding of the 'Devil'. And so most popular translations ignore the obvious difficulty by glossing over the strict meaning of the Greek. Understanding the 'Devil' as the innate source of temptation within the human heart, the picture becomes clearer. The idea is surely that the thought of betraying Jesus began within the Devil–mind of Judas; he 'put the thought in his own mind', as if to stress how Judas conceived this thought totally of himself and within his own mind, just as later Ananias and Sapphira [in an analogous incident] 'conceived this thing within their heart'. So properly translated, Jn. 13:2 actually supports our general thesis about the Devil – it is stressing that the heart of Judas was itself responsible, that heart put the idea of betraying Jesus into itself – and nobody else was responsible. Note how the Lord addresses Judas as if Judas had full responsibility for his actions and control over them – e.g. "What you are going to do, do quickly" (Jn. 13:27), and Mk. 14:21 "Woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! Good were it for that man if he had never been born". Those two passages alone surely make it clear that Judas was no robot, no puppet on a satanic string. He had full responsibility and choice over his actions, hence these words of the Lord to him. Summing up, we are left with the question: Did *Judas* betray Jesus, or did *Satan*, working through Judas, betray Jesus? The answer, surely, is that it was Judas, and he must bear full responsibility for that.

22:4 *And he went away, and discussed with the chief priests and captains how he might betray him to them*- The Jews discussed amongst themselves how they might arrest and kill Jesus: "And they plotted together how they might seize Jesus using trickery and kill him" (Mt. 26:4). Again we see a parallel between the Jews and Judas; the Jewish 'satan' entered into him (:3).

22:5 *And they were glad, and agreed to give him money*- Matthew says they gave him 30 pieces of silver immediately, but this would have been a down payment for a future promise of money.

22:6 *And he consented*- This Greek word is usually translated "confessed", in the sense of repenting of sin. He may have assured them that He felt the Lord's movement was wrong and that he had been sinful to support it.

And looked for an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of the crowd- Perhaps this was why the Lord chose to spend His nights sleeping rough on Olivet rather than in the home at Bethany or of sympathizers in Jerusalem. He was giving Judas the chance to betray Him. If we look for an opportunity to sin, the Lord in a way provides it in that He can 'lead into temptation' unless we pray not to be so led.

22:7 *And the day of unleavened bread came, on which the Passover must be sacrificed*- The Lord was aware that the Passover sacrifice was Himself. He wanted to die when the lambs were killed. And He did. His psychological manipulation of it all went perfectly. We can read "the day" of unleavened bread as meaning "the time", rather than referring to a particular period of 24 hours.

22:8 *And he sent Peter and John on an errand, saying: Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover*- This is the language of the 'preparing' of the Marriage Supper (s.w. Mt. 22:4). And yet at that meal, He explained to them how in fact He had been sent by God on a mission to "prepare" a place in God's Kingdom for them, and this preparation required His death on the cross (Jn. 14:2,3). They would later have reflected that their journey and efforts to prepare were representative of His own work for them.

22:9 *And they asked him: Where do you want us to prepare for it?*- Perhaps we are intended to see a veiled allusion to Dt. 16:2, where we learn that the Passover was to be kept in the place which Yahweh chose. And they are asking the Lord where He has chosen to eat the Passover. Whilst He was and is not God, He functions as God and manifested Him in flesh.

22:10 *And he said to them: When you enter into the city, there you shall meet a man carrying a pitcher of water. Follow him into the house to which he goes*- This water was carried upstairs into the upper room, and became, as it were, the wine of the new covenant. Carrying water was woman's work, and the Lord surely arranged this special sign in order to show how at His table, there was gender equality. He was so far ahead of

His time. The vague "such a man" is perhaps to conceal the identity of the householder, given that the Gospels were distributed at a time of persecution. Or perhaps it was in order to avoid the identifying of the house and turning it into some kind of shrine, or special honour being given to the householder.

22:11 *And you shall say to the master of the house: The Teacher says to you*- The anonymous man, unnamed perhaps for security reasons, was presumably a believer for this title to mean anything to the man. Likewise the reference to the Lord's time being at hand (Mt.) would've only been understandable by a disciple. The Lord wishes to assume that the man will appreciate that if the Lord's time of death was at hand, then He must first keep the Passover.

Where is the guest room, in which I shall eat the Passover with my disciples?- The "guest room" is the same concept as in Jn. 14:2, where there in that very guest room which they had "prepared", the Lord says that He is now going to the cross to prepare *them* a room, an eternal place in the Father's house. He wished them to perceive a mutuality between them and Himself; what they had done, He was now going to do on a far greater scale. And to this day, we sense this mutuality between us and our Lord.

22:12 *And he will show you a large furnished upper room. There make ready*- Mk. 14:15 brings out the paradox more strongly. The room was "ready" and yet there they were to "prepare"; "prepare" translates the same Greek word as "ready". All was prepared; the Lord was the Passover lamb and had prepared Himself for an untimely death, just as they were to keep Passover in advance of the 14th Nissan. They were to show willingness to do their part, but they could not fully do it. It has been done for them already. And we get this impression in all our attempts at labour for the Lord.

22:13 *And they went and found as he had said to them, and they made ready the Passover*- As noted on :12, it was already "made ready", so they just did the cosmetic arrangements. We likewise can add nothing really to the Lord's sacrifice.

22:14 *And when the hour had arrived, he sat down with the apostles*- There is no actual mention of the slaying of the paschal lamb, which should have been done that evening. It had already been strangely provided for them. "Sat down" is "dining" in Matthew; the idea is of reclining.

Joachim Jeremias gives a whole string of quotes from Rabbinic and historical writings that indicate that “At the time of Jesus the diners sat down" to eat. Yet the Gospel records are insistent that Jesus and the disciples *reclined* at the last supper (Mt. 26:20; Mk. 14:18; Lk. 22:14; Jn. 13:12,23,25,28). Yet at the Passover, it was apparently common to recline, because as Rabbi Levi commented “slaves eat standing, but here at the Passover meal people should recline to eat, to signify that they have passed from slavery to freedom". The breaking of bread is thus stressed in the records as being a symbol of our freedom from slavery. It should not in that sense be a worrying

experience, taking us on a guilt trip. It is to celebrate the salvation and release from bondage which has truly been achieved for us in Christ our Passover.

"With the apostles" doesn't mean that only the twelve partook or were present. There are reasons to think that there were others present too.

22:15 *And he said to them: I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer*- It was 'with desire that He desired' [a real emphasis] to eat the Passover with His men. He so wants us to break bread with Him; He so wants us to partake of and with Him. He abides in us and we in Him; see on Jn. 17:24.

22:16 *For I say to you, I shall not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God*- The Lord told us that the Passover feast would "be fulfilled in (i.e. by?) the Kingdom of God". This is confirmed by the description of "the marriage supper of the lamb" in Rev. 19:9. Likewise the parable of Lk. 14 speaks of "a great supper" at the beginning of the Millennium. As we share this feast together now, we are acting out a parable of the feast to be kept at the Lord's return. In the light of this, how important it is to ensure that there is no bitterness and disunity at the breaking of bread meeting! To be invited to sit at the King's table is an honour indeed (cp. 2 Sam. 19:28). Remember that we are reaffirming our covenant. "This is the blood of the covenant" is a reference back to the blood of the Old Covenant being sprinkled upon the people, with their response of vowing obedience unto the end (Ex. 24:7). The solemnity of that distant moment should be ours, weekly.

22:17- see on Mk. 14:23.

And he took a cup- This was by no means easy for Him, because in Gethsemane He struggled so deeply in order to take it. Surely Luke was aware of this and wishes us to remember it every time we break bread. He *did* take the cup- the cup we go on to read about, that was so difficult for Him to accept. Luke's record records the taking of the cup twice. This could be a reference to multiple cups of wine drunk at the Passover; or it could be that Luke simply records the incident twice. Or perhaps the Lord was simply drinking from the common table wine, and more than once drew out the symbology.

And when he had given thanks- Here *eucharisteo* is used, but *eulogeo* for the 'blessing' of the bread. The difference may be in that the Lord took the bread, an accessory to the meal, and turned that which was so ordinary into something of spiritual symbolism; and His blessing of the bread was necessary for this. But *eucharisteo* includes the idea of grace, *charis*, and suggests more thankfulness for grace- a thought appropriate to the meaning of the Lord's blood shed for us by grace. And naturally we wonder whether the wine that was taken was one of the Passover cups, or simply some of the table wine, an accessory to the meal just as the bread was. Whilst there was a taking of four cups of wine at the Passover, this may not be the only explanation for Luke recording the taking of two of them. It could simply be that as they were eating the Passover lamb, they ate

bread and drunk weak wine as part of the accompaniments which went with every Palestinian meal. And the Lord twice passed comment on the wine, that it represented His blood. This would be similar to the manner in which He chose the bread, the *artos*, the ordinary word for bread rather than one referring specifically to unleavened bread, as the symbol for His body- rather than the meat of the Passover lamb. He could have made use of the blood of the Passover lamb as a symbol in some way- e.g. He could have asked a servant to bring the blood of the lamb and asked the disciples to all dip their fingers in it. But instead He uses wine as a symbol of His blood. My hunch is that the wine was the ordinary table wine accompanying the meal, just as the bread was, and was not the ritually significant Passover cup. In any case, the tradition of drinking cups of wine at Passover was non-Biblical, and somehow out of keeping with the original spirit of Passover, which was to remember the haste with which the first Passover was eaten. 1 Cor. 10:16 speaks of "the cup of blessing which *we* bless", with the emphasis on the "we". We are to do what the Lord did that night- not be mere audience figures, but actually do what He did.

He said: Take this and share it among yourselves- "Among yourselves" carries the idea of 'among all of you'; Mt. "All of you, drink it". The appeal for all to drink it was surely said because some were doubtful as to whether they should take it. Perhaps there were others in the room apart from the twelve. But most likely this was yet another appeal to Judas- to drink the cup of salvation and forgiveness. He gave the reason in Mt. 26:28- "For", or because, this was the symbol of the means for the forgiveness of sins. The Lord's attitude to Judas leaves us realizing we should never give up with the lost. Even the very worst of them. And given the Lord's eagerness that Judas break bread, we can hardly conclude that any sinner is thereby unworthy of participation at the breaking of bread. It is after all His table and not ours. This isn't to say that forms of discipline may not be required at times, but welcome at the Lord's table should never be withdrawn.

22:18 *For I say to you, I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine from this time forward*- An allusion to how the priest on duty was not to drink wine during his service. The Lord foresaw His work from then on, beginning with the cross, as an active doing of priestly work for us. This would imply that the essence of His work on the cross is the essence of His work for us today; there is a continuity between Him there and His work for us now, with elements of the same pain and passionate focus upon us and the achievement of our salvation. He is not waiting passively in Heaven for the time to return; He is actively busy for us. There is also the implication in His words that His future 'drinking' will be literal- He was holding literal wine in His hand, and He said He would not again drink it until the Kingdom. This suggests that at very least, He invites us to understand His future Messianic banquet as being in some ways a literal feast.

The Lord clearly taught the continuity between the breaking of bread and the future marriage supper by observing that He would not again drink the cup until He drinks it

with us in the Kingdom. The parables of how the Gospel invites people as it were to a meal are suggesting that we should see the Kingdom as a meal, a supper, of which our memorial service is but a foretaste. We are commanded to enter the supper and take the lowest seat (Lk. 14:10), strongly aware that others are present more honourable than ourselves. Those with this spirit are simply never going to dream of telling another guest 'Leave! Don't partake of the meal!'. But this is the spirit of those who are exclusive and who use the Lord's table as a weapon in their hands to wage their petty church wars. The very early church didn't behave like this, but instead sought to incarnate and continue the pattern of the meals of the Lord Jesus during His ministry. And this is one major reason why their unity drew such attention, and they grew. To exclude someone from the Lord's table is to judge them as excluded from the Kingdom banquet. And those who make such judgment will themselves be rejected from it.

Until the kingdom of God shall come- The reference is primarily to the literal Kingdom to be established on earth at His return (Lk. 22:29,30 goes on to speak of the disciples eating and drinking in the Kingdom as they sit with Christ on His throne judging Israel), but there is a sense in which His word is fulfilled in the breaking of bread service, where He drinks wine with us as the invisible guest. For His parables of the Kingdom all speak of the experience of God's reign / Kingship as a present experience in the lives of His people. Lk. 22:16 adds with reference to the bread: "Until it be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God". The fulfilment of Passover deliverance is finally in the last day, and yet the fulfilment of Passover is also to be seen in the breaking of bread service. Note in passing that the Lord's predilection for the term 'Kingdom of God' or 'Father's Kingdom' was perhaps to counterbalance the Jewish emphasis upon the Kingdom as being that of *our* father *David* (Mk. 11:10). The Kingdom was God's, "*Yours* is the Kingdom", rather than simply and solely the re-establishment of Israel's Kingdom.

22:19 *And he took bread*- Taking bread, blessing and breaking it and giving to the disciples was exactly what the Lord did at the feeding of the 5000 and 4000 (14:19; 15:36), and we are thereby justified in seeing what He did then as having a religious dimension, practicing thereby an extremely open table. To 'take bread' can mean [although not always] to actually eat bread. Consider: "The disciples had forgotten to take bread,*neither* did they have with them more than one loaf" (Mk. 8:14)- the force of "neither..." is that they had not eaten bread, rather than that they had forgotten to bring any with them. Philip complained that there would not be enough bread for each of the crowd to 'take' even a little, i.e. to eat just a little (Jn. 6:7). So it could be that the Lord took and ate bread, blessed it, and then asked the disciples to eat it. This sequence of events would then make the eating of bread a more conscious doing of what Jesus had done. He took the bread, and then He asks them to take the bread ("Take, eat"). He is inviting them to mimic Him.

And when he had given thanks- It was usual to bless a meal, especially the Passover lamb, but here the Lord offers a special prayer for the accessory to the meal, the side dish of bread. He wanted to highlight the significance of the most ordinary thing on the table and show that it represented Him.

He broke it- Not referring to any breaking of His body, for not a bone of Him was broken, but rather to the sharing of every part of Himself with us all; one aspect of Him to this one, another to that one.

And gave it to them- The use of *didomi* is set in the context of all the talk about how the Lord would be *para-didomi*, betrayed / handed / given over to the Jews. The idea is that what happened was ultimately the Lord's choice. He gave Himself, to God and to His people, rather than being given over to death against His will. The giving of the bread to them was symbolic of how He would give His body to crucifixion, and how the 'giving over' of Jesus by Judas was not something outside of the Lord's control. It was not a misfortune which changed plans, rather was it precisely in line with the Lord's own giving of His body.

Saying: This is my body which is given for you- He said "This is My body which is given for you" (Lk. 22:29), and also "This is My body which is broken for you" (1 Cor. 11:24). He surely said both, repeating the words as the disciples ate the bread. He chose bread and not lamb to represent His body because He wished to emphasize His ordinariness and thereby His presence in the human, daily things of life. To give ones' body is a very intimate statement, almost to the point of being sexual. This is the sober intensity and extent to which the Lord gave Himself for us.

When Jesus said "this is My body" we are to understand that 'this *represents*, this is [a symbol of] my body'. Jesus was clearly referring to what was usually said at the Passover: "This is the bread of affliction which our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt". It wasn't of course literally the same bread. "This is" clearly means 'this represents' in Zech. 5:3,8; Mt. 13:19-23,38; 1 Cor. 11:25; 12:27. In some Bible versions, when we read the word 'means', it is simply a translation of the verb 'to be' (Mt. 9:13; 12:7; Lk. 15:26; Acts 2:12). 'This is' should be read as 'this means / this represents'. The deftness of the way He broke that bread apart and held the cup comes out here in Mt. 26:26. He knew what that breaking of bread was going to mean.

Do this in remembrance of me- By inviting the disciples to share His cup and His baptism, He was offering them there and then a part in the life of self-crucifixion, which found its natural and final articulation in the death of the cross. He deftly poured out the wine as a symbol that His life was even then being poured out (Lk. 22:19).

The breaking of bread is intended as a special gift to us. Let it have its intended power. "Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk. 22:19) is an inadequate translation of the Greek

text – “the words do not indicate a mere memorial meal in memory of a man now dead, but strictly mean “making present reality” of Christ’s saving death”. So let the bread and wine truly be an *aide memoire*. That on a Friday afternoon, on a day in April, on a hill outside Jerusalem, around 2000 years ago, Jesus died for me. Three days later, a man dressed as a working man, a humble gardener, walked out of a tomb, perhaps folded His grave clothes first, and saw the lights of early morning Jerusalem twinkling in the distance. And 40 days later ascended through cotton wool clouds and blue sky, with the necks and throats of watching disciples moving backwards as they gaped at the sight; and will just as surely come again, to take you and me unto Himself. These things, and the endless implications of them, are what will fill our minds if they impress us as having really happened. If we believe the Bible is inspired, it will have the result of what Harry Whittaker called “Bible television”; we will see these things as if they happened before our eyes.

22:20- see on Mk. 14:23.

And the cup in like manner after supper, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood- The promises to Abraham were effectively the new covenant, even though they were given before the old covenant [the law of Moses] was given. The Lord's death confirmed those promises made to the Jewish fathers (Rom. 15:8). But God's word is true as it stands and in that sense needs no confirmation, no guarantee of truthfulness. But in an effort to persuade us of the simple truth and reality of the promises of eternity in the Kingdom which were made to Abraham, God confirmed it through the death of His Son. This was foreseen in the horror of great darkness which Abraham experienced in Genesis 15. Abraham did nothing to confirm his side of the covenant; it was God who passed between the pieces of the slain animal, during a time of Divine darkness as there was on the cross, in order to demonstrate to Abraham and to us all how serious He was about keeping His promise. Through the death of Christ, God commended His love to us (Rom. 5:8), He confirmed the covenant; not that He needed to do so, nor that His love needs any more commendation to us. But He did, in order to seek to persuade us of the truth of the promises which comprise the Gospel (Gal. 3:8). In this sense "the promise was made sure [s.w. 'confirmed'] to all the seed" (Rom. 4:16); the extra element of making sure or confirming the promise was in the death of God's Son. Our hope is therefore "sure *and* confirmed [AV "steadfast"]" (Heb. 6:19). Heb. 9:17 puts it another way in saying that a will or legacy is only confirmed [AV "of force"] by the death of the one who promised the inheritance, and the death of Christ was God's way of confirming the truth of what He had promised. This same word meaning 'confirmed' is used by Peter in writing of how we have "the word of prophecy made sure / confirmed" (2 Pet. 1:19). The prophesied word is the word of the Gospel, the promise of the Kingdom which began in Genesis, and this has been confirmed to us, made even more sure, by the Lord's death. Peter isn't referring to prophecy in the sense of future events being predicted in the arena of world geopolitics; the prophesied word is the word of our

salvation, of the Gospel- which is how Peter elsewhere uses the idea of "the word". God can save who He wishes, as, how and when He wishes. He was not somehow duty bound, left with no option, forced by an unpleasant logical bind to suffer the death of His Son. He gave His Son, according to His own plan from the beginning. But He did it that way in order to persuade us of His love and simple desire to give us the Kingdom He has promised from the beginning of His revelation to men. The Lord's blood is "of the new covenant" not in that it *is itself* the new covenant, but rather in that it is the blood associated with the confirmation of that covenant as true. And so it is understandable that the Lord should wish us to understand His blood as the blood of the new covenant, the supreme sign that it is for real, and desire us to regularly take that cup which reminds us of these things. Heb. 6:17,18 carries the same idea- that in order to demonstrate the utter certainty of the things promised to Abraham's seed, God confirmed it by an oath so that we might a strong consolation and persuasion of the certainty of the promise. The death of God's Son was not therefore unavoidable for Him; He could save us as He wishes. But He chose this most painful way in the ultimate attempt to persuade men of the reality of His Son. With this understanding we can better appreciate the tales of the old missionaries who went to pagan and illiterate tribes and reported a strange response to their message once they explained the idea of the Son of God dying on a cross to show us God's love. It must be persuasive to us too, week by week as we reflect on the blood of the covenant.

"Covenant" literally means that which is to be disposed of or distributed, and was used about the distribution of property upon decease. The Lord's parables about the Master who distributes all His wealth and possessions to His servants were surely looking forward to His death, at which He gave us all He had- and that was and is visually symbolized in the breaking of bread, the division even of His body and life blood amongst us, for us to trade with.

Moses bound the people into covenant relationship with the words: “Behold the blood of the covenant" (Ex. 24:8). These very words were used by the Lord in introducing the emblems of the breaking of bread (Mk. 14:24). This is how important it is. We are showing that we are the covenant, special Israel of God amidst a Gentile world. Indeed, “the blood of the covenant" in later Judaism came to refer to the blood of circumcision (cp. Gen. 17:10) and it could be that the Lord was seeking to draw a comparison between circumcision and the breaking of bread. For this is how His words would have sounded in the ears of His initial hearers. This is how vital and defining it is to partake of it.

Which is poured out for you- He perhaps followed this by saying "Shed for you" (Lk. 22:20). This is often the way with Biblical statements- the general and global is stated, and then the scale is focused down to you personally. His blood was shed for many... but for you. However we may also have here a similar idea to that expressed in the

parable of the man [Christ] who finds treasure [us] in the field of the world, and therefore gives all in order to redeem the field, in order to get us as His own (13:44). Likewise His blood was shed for many, the redemption price was paid for humanity, that He might redeem us. Putting Lk. 22:20 and Mt. 26:28 together, the Lord may have said: "... My blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins of you / for the remission of *your* sins". One wonders whether the Lord actually was pouring out the wine as He spoke the word "shed". The same word for "shed" is used of how the new wine put into old bottles "runs out". The idea may be that if we don't change, then we crucify Christ afresh. But the Lord may also have in mind that if Israel had accepted the wine of the new covenant which He preached, then the shedding of His blood could have been avoidable. The fact it could have been avoidable- for Israel didn't *have* to crucify their King- doesn't mean that God was not behind it, using it to confirm the covenant with us, nor that Christ did not of Himself give His own life. "Poured out" is ongoing, Gk. 'is being shed', another hint at the ongoing nature of His death.

22:21 *But behold, the hand of him that betrays me is with me at this table*- To be together at table meant to be in fellowship and mutual acceptance of each other; one ought to trust those with whom he sat at table. This was the huge significance of the Lord's open table policy, dining with questionable and unholy characters, thereby overturning all the religious hangups about guilt by association.

22:22 *For the Son of Man indeed goes*- The Lord's 'going' was His going to the cross. The Lord used the same word in Mt. 13:44 in describing Himself as the man who 'goes' *with joy* and sells all that He has in order to buy / redeem [s.w.] the field (representing the world) in order to gain for Himself the treasure (the redeemed). His 'going' to the cross was therefore done with some form of "joy". Even when the only visible representative of the treasure were that band of mixed up men and a few doubtful women. He uses the word again in telling Peter to 'go' behind Him and carry His cross (Mt. 16:23). Yet the Lord looked beyond the cross; He saw Himself as 'going' to the Father (Jn. 7:33; 8:14,21,22 s.w.), in the same way as we do not only 'go' to our death, but ultimately even death itself is part of an onward journey ultimately towards God and His Kingdom. The Lord's attitude to His death was that He *knew* that He was now 'going to the Father' (Jn. 13:3; 14:28; 16:5,10,16,17 s.w.). This unique perspective upon death and suffering is only logical for those who have a clear conception of future resurrection and personal fellowship with the Father in His future Kingdom.

As it has been determined- Mt. "as it is written".

But woe to that man through whom he is betrayed!- The Lord typically pronounced 'Woe' upon the Jewish world and their religious leaders. He classes Judas along with them, because his actions had been inspired by them. The devil, in this context referring to the Jewish opposition to Jesus, had put the idea of betrayal into the heart of Judas (Jn. 13:2). "Woe" translates *ouai*, an intensified form of *ou*, "no". Perhaps in His word choice the

Lord was still desperately saying to Judas 'No! No! Don't do it!'. He knew that He had to be betrayed, but His appeals for Judas to repent were therefore rooted in an understanding that the Bible prophecies would come true in some other way than through Judas. For otherwise, Judas would have had no real possibility of repentance, and no real choice but than to do what he did.

22:23 *And they began to question among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing*- "Is it I, Lord?" lead to them asking each other rather than being satisfied with the Lord's cryptic response. Perhaps "every one of them" excludes Judas, because he apparently asked the question later, and replaces 'Lord' with "Master"[Gk. 'rabbi'] when he asks: "Master ['rabbi'], is it I?" (Mt. 26:25). His usage of 'rabbi' to address the Lord may reflect how influenced he was by Judaism, and how he failed to appreciate the utter Lordship of Jesus. Judas maybe persuaded himself that this Jesus was just another itinerant rabbi, who Judaism would be better off without. Note that "Is it I?" is *eimi ego*, literally 'Am I?'. This is one of many examples of where *ego eimi* means simply 'I am', and [contrary to Trinitarian claims] the words do not mean that the speaker of them is claiming to be God.

22:24 *And there arose also a dispute among them, as to which of them would be counted as greatest*- Even after the acted parable of the feet washing, there was still a strife amongst them about who should be greatest. They'd clearly not grasped the Lord's teaching and example about not worrying about what place we take at a dinner. It could be that they accepted the Lord's upcoming death, and were wondering which of them ought to replace Him. They had thereby clearly missed His teaching in Jn. 14-16, that although He was going away, He was coming again and would permanently be with them as Lord, master and leader through the gift of the Spirit.

22:25 *And he said to them: The kings of the Gentiles have lordship over them, and they that have authority over them are called Benefactors*- We must be aware that in helping people, be it in teaching them the Truth of Christ, or in materially supporting them in their needs, we must never allow our position of 'superiority' become a vehicle for abusing their person, however unintentionally. The Lord in Lk. 22:25 spoke of how in the world, "benefactors" have power over people. His idea seems to have been: 'If you show generosity in the world, you have authority over others; but you, after my example, must show generosity to others in humble acts of service but not expect authority over others as a result of this'. The giving of help or welfare in any form should therefore never become a source of control over another person. Their integrity and independence as a person must never be in this sense 'abused' by us or simply lost sight of, because we have helped them. Peter took due note of this teaching, repeating it in 1 Pet. 5:3.

22:26 *But you shall not be so, but he that is the elder among you, let him become as the younger, and he that is chief, as he that does serve*- Again, these words remained in Peter's mind and he faithfully teaches them to his converts in his letters. Perhaps Peter

was especially sensitive to these words (see on :25) because he was the eldest among the group, and also the one who had been given a chief role at various times in the ministry. The Lord's words here were specifically directed at him.

The Lord was addressed as 'Rabbi' and to some extent acted like one. It was the well known duty of a rabbi's pupils to serve their teacher and do menial chores for him; the Jewish writings of the time and the Mishnah are full of references to this. Yet the Lord treated His 'servants' radically differently- His behaviour at the Last Supper was just the opposite. And He even taught that He, the Lord of all, would be so happy that His servants were waiting for Him that He would "come forth and serve them" (Lk. 12:37). He was a most unusual "Lord and Master", one who served His servants, and whose death for them was His ultimate act of service.

22:27 *For which is greater, he that sits at the table, or he that serves? Is not he that sits at the table? But among you, I am he that serves*- The parallel record in Jn. 13:4-17 describes the Lord actually serving as a servant, when He was the greatest. This was John's way of showing how the word [in this case, the Lord's own words as recorded here by Luke] became flesh in Him.

22:28 *But you are those who have stayed with me in my time of trial*- The disciples' persistent failure to grasp our Lord's teaching must have been a great source of trial and frustration for Him. Despite His warnings about His coming sufferings, the disciples failed to comprehend this; perhaps partly due to Jesus Himself fluctuating between talking of his death in both literal and then figurative terms. In His time of greatest need of encouragement He found them sadly lacking in any real degree of spirituality beyond a fanatic allegiance to Him. And yet He graciously thanked them for continuing with Him in His temptations, even though they fell asleep. We can under-estimate how sensitive He is to our feeble spirituality, and how even the basic will to be loyal, no matter how much we fail in practice, means so much to Him. Yet their lack of comprehension must have been especially tragic, since one of the reasons for the gift of the disciples was to help Jesus through the pain of His ministry, and this was to culminate in the cross. After the Jews' first council of war against Christ, He prayed for strength and was answered by being given the twelve (Lk. 6:11-13).

The disciples slept in Gethsemane, despite being asked to stay awake and encourage the Lord in His hour of need (Lk. 22:45). Yet He thanks them for being those who continued with them in His temptations. When the Jews agreed at a council to kill Him, the Lord went to be alone with the twelve (Jn. 11:53,54). He took such comfort from them even though they did not or would not understand the reality of His upcoming death. He, like us, could only take such comfort from His brethren if He viewed them positively.

22:29 *And I appoint to you a kingdom, even as my Father appointed me*- The Greek for "appoint" is always elsewhere used about a covenant. They had just celebrated the new covenant in the Lord's blood. Participation in that new covenant meant that for sure, a Kingdom had been covenanted to them. The cup of the covenant speaks the same assurance to us today. All that is true of the Son becomes true for all those in Him. As He has been covenanted a Kingdom, so have we. The certainty of the Kingdom for Him is as sure as it is for we who are in Him. This takes some believing, but it is all part of our status "in Christ".

22:30 *So that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom; and you shall sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel*- This is an allusion to the happiness of Solomon's servants as they sat down to food and wine; they listened to Solomon's wisdom as they ate. Lk. 14:15 speaks of us as happy servants. The idea is that the eating and drinking at the Lord's Passover table was to be repeated in the Kingdom to come. Joseph celebrated his brothers' repentance with a meal together, at which they sat in their proper places (Gen. 43:16). Likewise at the marriage supper of the lamb, with each in his proper place (Lk. 14:10; 22:30; Rev. 19:9).

It was apparent that in the breaking of bread meetings, there had to be a host. The host was a vital figure. And yet herein lay the huge significance of breaking of bread meetings being held in homes- presumably the home of a richer believer- and yet it was the table *of the Lord*. *He* and not the master of the house was the host of that meeting. It's for this reason that it was unthinkable for any invited by grace to their Lord's table to turn away other guests- for it wasn't *their* table, it was the table of another One, and they were but guests. Attempts to bar others from the Lord's table in our own time are equally rude and deeply lacking in basic spiritual understanding. There are evident similarities between the breaking of bread experience and the marriage supper which we shall eat with the Lord Jesus in His Kingdom. The breaking of bread assembly is called "the table of the Lord"- and yet He says that we shall eat at "My table" at His return.

22:31 *And the Lord said: Simon, Simon, Satan has asked for you that he might sift you as wheat*- The fact an Angel was called 'satan' in Num. 22 and in Job's case means we can maybe have another look at Luke 22:31, where Jesus tells the disciples "satan has desired to have you (lit. 'demanded you for trial') that he may sift you as wheat". Wheat is normally a symbol of the righteous after a process of tribulation or judgement. The satan here could be an Angel, demanding them for trial from God, as Job's satan Angel did. The Lord's comment that satan had demanded to have the disciples, especially Peter is clearly based upon the experience of Job, whom satan also demanded. The Lord saw a similarity between Job and Peter, in that Job's sufferings were to be repeated in their essence in the experience of Peter. Only through that bitter weeping and

reflection upon it, corresponding in the Lord's analogy to all that Job went through, would Peter like Job emerge triumphant.
The Old Testament prophecies also give insight into the actual process of the betrayal. The Hebrew for "equal" in "a man my equal" (Ps. 55:13) is invariably translated elsewhere as 'price' or 'estimation'; possibly implying that the Jews had set the same price on Judas' head (in the sense of a bribe offered to them) at one stage as they had on Jesus. The Jewish satan seeking Peter and the other disciples ("Simon, Satan has desired to have you", plural) implies an organized attempt to subvert each of the twelve, perhaps by offering a financial reward for becoming a secret agent for the Jews. Judas having an equal price in the Jews' eyes as Jesus indicates how highly he was seen to rank among the disciples in the public eye- as important to the Jews as Jesus himself. This further strengthens the impression that Judas was highly esteemed by both Christ and the other disciples. It would appear that the love of this money was a significant factor in Judas' downfall; in the same way as Joseph's brethren were blinded by a money motive in betraying him rather than being interested in his death for its own sake. In addition, Judas' motives seem to have also been from being influenced by the thinking of the Jewish satan, offering the chance of an immediate Kingdom. He is alluded to in 1 Jn. 2:19 (cp. Jn. 13:30) as the prototype of all who left the true faith to be influenced by Judaist doctrine. See on 1 Pet. 5:8.

It is noteworthy that the Lord had previously warned that the Jewish Satan / world would be actively trying to influence the disciples to stumble: "Woe unto the world (often referring to the Jewish world in the Gospels) because of the offences!... but woe to that man by whom the offence comes!... whoso shall offend one of these little ones (the disciples – Zech. 13:7 cp. Mt. 26:31) which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned" (Mt. 18:6,7). This invites comparison with "Woe unto that man by whom the son of man is betrayed... it had been good for that man if he had not been born" (Mt. 26:24). Notice that this stumbling of the disciples at the hand of the Jewish world and its servant Judas was to be around the time of Christ's capture (Mt. 26:31); which is what Luke 22:31 is warning the disciples ("you" plural) about, and which proved to be so relevant to Peter in the hours after the Lord's capture. Further proof that "the world" that was to cause these offences was the Jewish world is found by comparing Mt. 13:38,41. It's also been pointed out that 'Satan desires to sift you as wheat' "is a proverbial expression" (H.A. Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2006) p. 312). Schleiermacher therefore observes about this passage: "There is no intention to teach anything with regard to Satan or to confirm that older belief" (F.E. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (London: Clark, 1999 ed.) p. 165).

There's also some evident allusion back to the record of Job in the Septuagint version. "The Lord said to the Devil, 'Behold I give him over [*paradidonai*] to you; only preserve his life" (Job 2:6 LXX). *Paradidonai* and related words are very frequently used of how the

Lord Jesus was 'handed over' to the systems of the Roman and Jewish Satan (e.g. Mk. 14:41), and yet ultimately His life was preserved by God. Here in Lk. 22:31 we have the Jewish Satan desiring to have the disciples, just as Job's 'Satan' desired. If the disciples grasped the allusion, they would perceive that they were to be as Job, and believe that ultimately the 'Satan' was under God's control, and through prayerful endurance they would come to victory as Job did.

22:32- see on Mt. 16:18; Lk. 22:3; Acts 3:19; 8:24; 2 Cor. 13:7; 2 Pet. 1:12.

But I prayed for you, that your faith should not fail-

To sin, to fail, is to be human. The Lord foreknew Peter's failure, but He was more concerned that Peter's faith or trust in His grace and forgiveness shouldn't fail. And He looks at us the same way. It seems it wasn't so much the sin of Peter's denials that was the Lord's concern, as faith that sin is covered and dealt with. For the Lord didn't pray that Peter wouldn't deny Him, but rather that Peter's faith [in His forgiveness] wouldn't fail.

Not only did the Lord pray that Peter's faith wouldn't fail. He repeatedly made the point in the lead up to Peter's temptations that His disciples really *did* know Him, therefore they should never deny this (Jn. 14:7,17; 15:21; 17:3), and He taught them that all men *must* know they were His disciples, if they truly were (Jn. 13:35). He was trying to strengthen Peter against the trial He knew would come: to deny that he knew Him. Likewise we may try to strengthen those prone to specific temptation, but the power of it depends on their recognition of their own weakness, and whether they have ears to hear. It would seem Peter didn't, so confident was he of his own strength. Moses of his own freewill chose to intercede for Israel, concerning things which at the time they knew nothing about; things which were almost against their will, in fact. And this is the prototype of the Lord's mediation for us who know not what to pray for as we ought. Consider how he prayed for Peter when Peter didn't realize he was being prayed for.

And when you have been converted, strengthen your brothers- Paul referred to the Jews to whom he preached as his "brothers" (Acts 13:26), and it may be that Peter at least initially understood his commission to "strengthen your brothers" as meaning preaching to his unbelieving Jewish brethren (although the same Greek word is used by Peter regarding his work of upbuilding the converts, 1 Pet. 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:12). Gal. 2:8-10 informs us that Peter had a ministry to the Jews of the diaspora in the Roman empire just as much as Paul did to the Gentiles living in the same area (Gal. 2:8-10). Because the Acts record focuses more on Paul's work rather than Peter's doesn't mean that Peter was inactive. 1 Peter is addressed to Jewish converts living in the provinces of Asia Minor, and we can assume that Peter had spent years travelling around building up groups of believers based around the families of the individual Jews he had converted in Jerusalem at Pentecost. It would seem from 1 Cor. 1:12 that Peter had made a number

of converts in Corinth, and 1 Pet. 5:13 strongly suggests Peter lived for a while in “Babylon” and had begun an ecclesia there. Whether this be taken as a code name for Rome or as literal Babylon (where there was a sizeable Jewish community), this was somewhere else Peter reached. All through this remarkable life of witness, he was motivated by his own experience of the Lord’s greatness, and His all sufficient grace toward him in his weakness. And a similar life of powerful witness lies before any who are touched likewise.

The command to strengthen brothers is given again in the Lord’s interview with Peter in Jn. 21. Three times He asks him: ‘do you love me?’, and three times he invites Peter to care for the lambs and sheep- to strengthen his brethren. The triple denial and the triple re-instatement and triple confession of love both occurred by a fire, a *charcoal* fire on each occasion (Jn. 18:18; 21:9) just to heighten the evident connection. Peter’s conversion can therefore be equated with his response to the denials- the repentance, the realization of his own frailty, and desperate acceptance of the Lord’s gracious pardon. Yet Peter invites his fellow elders: “feed the flock of God”, repeating the Lord’s commission to him, as if he saw in himself a pattern for each man who would take any pastoral role in Christ’s ecclesia. The implication is that each man must go through a like conversion. And Peter points out that we are “a royal priesthood”, as if he saw each believer as a priest / pastor. Peter is our example. We all deny our Lord, camouflage it and justify it as we may. We all stand in Peter’s uncomfortable shoes. We do in principle what Judas did.

“When you are converted..." elicits the obvious response that Peter was converted already! The Lord had spoken of conversion as really seeing, really hearing, really understanding, and commented that the disciples (including Peter) had reached this point (Mt. 13:15,16). But He also told them that they needed to be converted and become as children, knowing they knew nothing as they ought to know (Mt. 18:3). Quite simply, there are different levels of conversion. Baptism isn’t conversion: it’s a beginning, not an end.

22:33 *And he said to him: Lord, with you I am ready to go both to prison and to death*- Peter imagined himself going to prison and death "with you", walking alongside the Lord. But the reality of prison and death is that these things are faced alone. Walking with the Lord on the water, Peter could do it. But not alone. His impetuosity is indeed noticeable, but this should not make us unimpressed by his genuine level of dedication to his Lord. Peter did indeed go to prison and death with his Lord, but he was not then "ready" for that. That process of preparation was still ongoing.

John's version is “I will lay down my life for Your sake” (Jn. 13:37). By saying that, Peter seems to be alluding to the Lord's words in Jn. 10:11, where He predicts that He will lay down His life for the sake of the sheep. Peter apparently didn't like that, just as he didn't want the Lord to wash his feet. Peter felt it was for him to die for the Lord, and not the

Lord to die for his sake. So as ever, pride preceded a fall. He felt the cross was unnecessary for him, and that he could die for the Lord's sake, rather than having the Lord die for his sake.

22:34 *And he said: I tell you Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, until you shall deny three times that you know me*- Peter's problem with the cross was perhaps at the root of his denials of the Lord. Before the cock crowed twice, he denied Jesus twice (Lk. 22:34). It's been pointed out that chickens couldn't have been anywhere near the High Priest's house because the priests forbad anyone in Jerusalem from keeping chickens, lest they stray into the temple. The *Encyclopedia Judaica* points out that the priest who was the temple crier was called the *Gaver*, Hebrew for 'cock' or 'rooster'. This man opened the temple before dawn and called the priests and people to make the morning sacrifice. And he did this two or three times. Surely the Lord was referring to this when He spoke of the 'cock' crowing. Each time, Peter was being called to make the sacrifice with Jesus; but instead he denied knowledge of Jesus and the call to the cross which that knowledge entails. The context of the Lord's warnings to Peter about his forthcoming denial was that Peter had insisted he *would* die with Jesus, sharing in His sacrifice. And the Lord was foretelling that when that call came, Peter would deny the knowledge of Jesus.

22:35 *And he said to them: When I sent you out without purse and wallet and shoes, did you lack anything? And they said: Nothing*- We are to realistically grasp the fact that His mission and ministry is in fact ours. And the total insecurity, exposure to danger, misunderstanding, slander, sudden calls of God to change direction and move way out of our comfort zone etc. are all part of participating in the short term fate and eternal victory of the One whom we follow. His call to each of us to preach Him is radical. He sent out His preachers with *no* money, *no* food etc. He didn't tell them to go out without *extra* money, *extra* food nor clothes etc. He instead told them to take *none* of these things. Why? Surely because He wanted them – and us- to understand that the preacher of Christ is to be *totally* dependent upon His provision for them. It was a high challenge. When the disciples faltered at the Last Supper, the Lord told them that OK, if you have a purse, take it; if you want a sword for protection, then buy one. Surely He was saying, as He is to us today: 'OK, I want you to rise up to the spirit of My 'Let the dead bury their dead' and 'Take no money with you' exhortations. But if you can't, OK, take a lower level, but all the same, go forth and be My witnesses. *Please!*'.

22:36 *And he said to them: But now, he that has a purse, let him take it, and likewise a wallet, and he that has none, let him sell his cloak and buy a sword*- As noted on :35, the Lord could be saying that He had intended them to learn from their experience when sent out on the preaching tour by Him; but they had not. He clearly didn't intended them to take Him literally, because there and then they had no chance to go buy swords. And

then Peter pulled out a dagger the Lord tells him that that is quite enough. I take this verse as a lament that they had not retained the lessons learnt; for the Lord foresaw how they were going to all dramatically fail in Gethsemane and the subsequent events.

22:37 *For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: And he was numbered with the transgressors*- The Lord was reckoned "with" sinners, but not as a sinner. And therefore there was no point in the disciples fighting to stop Him being numbered with the transgressors. The prophecy had its specific fulfilment at the crucifixion (Mk. 15:28).

For what is written about me must have its fulfilment- "Fulfilment" is not the best translation. AV "have an end" struggles towards expressing the idea of "to be finally settled" (Vine). We may have here another insight into the open nature of prophecy. The exact outcome and nature of events was variable to some extent; it depended to what extent the Lord wished to fulfil them. The prophecies came to be "finally settled"; and were then "fulfilled in me".

22:38 *And they said: Lord, look, here are two swords. And he said to them: That is quite enough*- Again their literalism reflects a lack of faith and understanding. He is telling them that there is no point in fighting, because He must be crucified in the spirit of Isaiah 53. As noted on :35 and :36, He was lamenting that they had not learnt the lesson, that no sword or wallet was necessary. He dismisses any attempt to use those swords by saying "That is quite enough".

22:39 *And he came out and went, as his custom was, to the mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him*- His custom for the last few nights of His life was to sleep there on Olivet; because He knew that Judas was wanting an opportunity to betray Him out of sight of the crowds. In the middle of the night in Gethsemane would be ideal; and the Lord set up this situation.

22:40 *And when he came to the place, he said to them: So that you do not enter into temptation, pray*- "The place" may refer to Gethsemane, where He often went (Jn. 18:2). This would have been in view of the temple, and we wonder whether the Lord knelt down and prayed towards the temple; or whether He prayed with eyes uplifted to the Father. It was perhaps the choice between religion and spirituality. But the language is reminiscent of Abraham and Isaac coming "to the place" of sacrifice. It was as if He saw that spot in Gethsemane as His place of death. Perhaps He did hope that a ram would as it were be provided; for He did pray there for the cup to pass from Him. It is a mark of His supremacy as a spiritual man that He was not solely focused upon Himself, but instead was concerned about the spiritual pressure on His men.

The relationship between prayer and temptation may not simply be that the Holy Spirit will be provided to fortify us against temptation if we pray. If we are in prayer, in the Father's presence, then we are less likely to just give in to temptation. However, the connection between prayer and strength against temptation is proof enough that Bible

reading is not the only strength against temptation. So much more help and succour of the Holy Spirit is available (Heb. 4:15,16).

22:41 *And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw away, and knelt down and prayed*- "A stone's throw" is an allusion to David and Goliath near the brook.

Paul's description of himself on the Damascus road falling down and seeing a Heavenly vision, surrounded by men who did not understand, is framed in exactly the language of Gethsemane (Acts 22:7 = Mt. 26:39); as if right at his conversion, Paul was brought to realize the spirit of Gethsemane. His connection with the Gethsemane spirit continued. He describes himself as "sorrowful" (2 Cor. 6:10), just as Christ was then (Mt. 26:37). His description of how he prayed the same words three times without receiving an answer (2 Cor. 12:8) is clearly linked to Christ's experience in the garden (Mt. 26:44); and note that in that context he speaks of being “buffeted” by Satan’s servants, using the very word used of the Lord being “buffeted” straight after Gethsemane (2 Cor. 12:7 = Mt. 26:67).

To fall on the face is used in the Old Testament to describe men like Abraham and Moses falling on their face in the visible presence of God, e.g. before an Angel (Gen. 17:3; Num. 16:4; 22:31). Yet there was no visible manifestation of God’s presence at this time; so we are to assume that the Lord Jesus intensely perceived the Father’s presence even though there was no visible sign of it. It could be that the Angel from Heaven strengthening the Lord had already appeared, but this appears to come *after* the Lord had fallen on His face.

The Lord had foreseen how He must be like the grain of the wheat (note the articles in the Greek) which must fall to the ground and die, and then arise in a glorious harvest (Jn. 12:24). But soon after saying that, the Lord fell to the ground (same Greek words) in prayer and asked the Father if the cup might pass from Him (Mk. 14:35). It seems to me that He fell to the ground in full reference to His earlier words, and asked desperately if this might be accepted as the falling to the earth of the grain of the wheat, i.e. Himself, which was vital for the harvest of the world. Don’t under-estimate the amount of internal debate which the Lord would have had about these matters. The spirit of Christ in the prophets testified Messiah’s sufferings “unto Christ" (1 Pet. 1:11 RVmg.), but He still had to figure it all out. And this enabled an element of doubt, even though in the end He knew “all the things that were coming upon him" (Jn. 18:4). To doubt is not to sin. Another Messianic Psalm had foretold: “In the multitude of my doubts within me, thy comforts delight my soul" (Ps. 94:19 RVmg.). This aspect heightens the agony of His final crisis, when He unexpectedly felt forsaken.

22:42 *Saying: Father, if You be willing, remove this cup from me*- This may not simply mean 'If it's possible, may I not have to die'. The Lord could have meant: 'If *it*- some unrecorded possible alternative to the cross- is *really* possible, then let *this* cup pass'-

as if to say 'If option A is possible, then let the cup of option B pass from me'. But He overrode this with a desire to be submissive to the Father's preferred will- which was for us to have a part in the greatest, most surpassing salvation, which required the death of the cross.

“Such *great* salvation" (Heb. 2:3) might imply that a lesser salvation could have been achieved by Christ, but He achieved the greatest possible. "He is able also *to save them to the uttermost* that come unto God by him" (Heb. 7:25) may be saying the same thing. Indeed, the *excellence* of our salvation in Christ is a major NT theme. It was typified by the way Esther interceded for Israel; she could have simply asked for her own life to be spared, but she asked for that of all Israel. And further, she has the courage (and we sense her reticence, how difficult it was for her) to ask the King yet another favour- that the Jews be allowed to slay their enemies for one more day, and also to hang Haman's sons (Es. 9:12). She was achieving the maximum possible redemption for Israel rather than the minimum. Paul again seems to comment on this theme when he speaks of how Christ became obedient, "*even* to the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8), as if perhaps some kind of salvation could have been achieved without the death *of the cross*. Perhaps there was no theological necessity for Christ to die *such* a painful death; if so, doubtless this was in His mind in His agony in the garden.

The Lord had taught more than once that “with God all things are possible” (Mt. 19:26; Mk. 9:23), and yet He inserts here a condition: “If it be possible”. He recognized that God’s plan was possible of fulfilment by any means, and yet He recognized that there was a condition to that. This issue is not really resoluble, at least not by any intellectual process. If, or rather when, we struggle with these issues, this balance between God’s ultimate possibility and the fact there appear to be terms and conditions attached- then we are there with the Lord in Gethsemane. But we need to note that it was God who was being pushed to the limit here as well- for literally all things are indeed possible to Him, and He could have saved the world any way He wished. In His allowing of this chosen method we see the degree to which the cross was indeed His plan that He so wanted to see worked out.

"Let this cup pass" is interpreted in Mk. 14:35 as “That the hour might pass”. He saw the cup and His “hour” of death as the same thing. The challenging thing is that He invites us to drink His cup, to share in His final hour... even when He Himself found this so hard to drink.

Paul uses the same Greek term "from me" in describing how also three times he asked for the thorn in the flesh to “depart *from me*” (2 Cor. 12:8). He saw his prayers and desires as a sharing in the Lord’s struggle in Gethsemane, just as we can too.

Nevertheless- The saying of these brief words lasted long enough for the disciples to fall asleep. “Could you not watch with Me for one hour?” (Mt. 26:40) suggests not ‘even just

for one hour' but rather 'We've been here an hour, and you couldn't watch with me even for that short period of time'. So it took the Lord an hour to say the words recorded here, which can be spoken in a few seconds. We have a window here into the essence of prayer; the words can be spoken quickly, but saying with meaning can take far longer. There may well have been many minutes in between each word here. And doubtless He said the same words and repeated the ideas several times, which would explain the slight differences in wording at this point between the Gospel records.

Let not my will, but Yours be done- Trinitarians need to note that the Lord's will was not totally the same as that of His Father. We should not take this as mere resignation. "Let not my will" could suggest that God would have allowed the will of the Son to be done, if that will was to not die on the cross. And in this was the depth of the temptation. No wonder Heb. 5:7 comments that these prayers were "with loud cries and tears". And yet the disciples slept through those loud cries. We also see here the Lord's practice of the model prayer, "Your will be done". And He demonstrated for all time how hard it is to pray that prayer. His mind was clearly in that prayer, for He tells the disciples to pray that they do not enter into temptation- just as He had taught them in the model prayer.

22:43 *And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him*- See on Ps. 80:15. The son of man was "made strong" by the Father through Angelic ministration, as happened after the wilderness temptations. The strengthening may have been in order to pray to the Father "more earnestly" in :44. "Strengthening" is *enischuo*, literally, to in-strength, to in-possible. The same word *ischuo* is used in the Lord's lament that at this time, Peter, James and John "could" not watch in prayer (Mt. 26:40). They were not 'strong' because they had not allowed themselves to be 'strengthened'. To not make use of empowerment is therefore sinful. We have huge potential power available to us through the Holy Spirit, the direct succour of the Lord in our hearts (Heb. 4:15,16). To claim that this is not available is a serious false teaching.

22:44 *And being in anguish he prayed more earnestly*- "Anguish" is the language of a man in his death throes; thus the Greek is classically used. We are invited to see the Lord's death as occurring at this point. Because He was at this point 'alone' in that He could choose to die the death of the cross, or not. And God was waiting to confirm Him in whichever choice He made. He was the most alone of all men at this point. When He decided to take the path according to God's will, and not His own, then He was strengthened in confirmation. Once He made that choice, He was as it were already in His death throes. We note that the strengthening of the Angel resulted in the Lord praying to God even "more earnestly". The strengthening was in the confirmation of His own spirit, rather than some kind of rush of Divine energy to the point that what He was now to do was merely as God's puppet.

We enquire why there was so much "anguish" in the Lord. When His side was pierced, there flowed out blood and water and apparently nothing else. That would suggest He

had emptied His bowels some time before, presumably here in Gethsemane after eating the Passover. All this mental trauma was not, it seems to me, simply a case of shrinking back before death. He could surely have faced death as many men do, calmly. I suggest this intense internal trauma was rather a reflection of His deep internal struggle against sin, and against the possible option of taking an easier path. Or there remains another possibility- that He was weak in the face of death, and didn't face it calmly. He did shrink back from death, especially death on a cross. Another option is to reflect that His mental trauma is connected with being "sorrowful unto death". During His ministry, we see the Lord rejoicing when men respond to God's love, and sorrowful when they reject it. Possibly His sorrow in Gethsemane was related to this awareness that the amazing sacrifice He was about to make would not in fact save many. Relatively speaking. And that sorrow was piqued in the immediate context by His acute awareness of the apostacy of Judas, and how the disciples would soon flee from Him. This agony was therefore quite simply, the agony of love.

And his sweat became as it were great drops of blood falling down upon the ground- The mental intensity within His mind had physiological effects. His skin became thin and the sweat dropped as blobs. Only Luke the doctor notes this. This was the focus of a human mind upon God such as has never been seen. The shame is that the Lord's men drifted off to sleep whilst He was achieving it. What was He praying for? Perhaps there were no requests as such, but a mind locked in contact with the Father. For that is the essence of prayer. This is the strong crying and tears of Heb. 5:7. The whole condition was enough to have killed Him of itself; it was indeed sorrow unto death (Mt. 26:38). It would have left His skin very sensitive and thin- and that skin was now to be subjected to whipping, piercing and other abuse.

We note also the connection with the curse in the garden of Eden- man was to live in his own sweat until He died. And now in another garden, the Lord sweated more than any man. He is presented as bearing the full effects of our human state, unto death. Any lament we may make about having to labour in the sweat of our face... connects us to Him there, who experienced the curse to the ultimate term.

We need to give due weight to the way that in the surrounding world at the time, stoicism was seen as the most admirable characteristic of a true hero. Cicero writes of only grieving upon invitation, and of the hero replacing all emotional promptings with acts of the will. Seneca writes of how a true hero will never allow circumstance or situation to provoke emotional response. The hero was supposed to suffer without emotion. Even blushing was seen as weakness, and never seen on the face of the true hero. Socrates was held up as the example, taking his own life by drinking poison with no emotion nor passion. For Seneca himself had taught that tears are simply from the promptings of the natural man. And the true sage or wise man will resist those promptings. Whereas the Lord Jesus is described as weeping and groaning at the

resurrection of Lazarus, and now profusely in His own time of crisis. Emotion was seen as weakness, and the gods were without emotion. But the record of the Lord Jesus here, at His finest and most defining hour, is oozing passion and emotion. Rightly is the scene called "the passion in Gethsemane". Humanity, at its most raw in the face of death, is glorified- when it is submitted to God's will.

There is surely an allusion to this scene in the reminder that like the sleepy disciples, we have not yet resisted unto blood in our striving against sin (Heb. 12:4). We are saved by grace, by His striving unto blood against sin... We would have failed. Truly He trod the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with Him (Is. 63). His loneliness is what we must respect and gratefully love about Him.

22:45 *And when he rose up from his prayer, he went to the disciples, and found them sleeping from sorrow*- See on Mk. 14:72; Lk. 22:27. The manner of inspiration reflects how God sees His servants. Often the Spirit caused the Bible writers to portray God's children in an extremely positive way. Thus Lk. 22:45 says that the disciples fell asleep from sorrow, when in reality this was due to their lack of spiritual awareness and sense of spiritual urgency. Likewise, Lk. 1:18 records only a few (apparently harmless) of the many words which Zacharias doubtless said, not without strong disbelief, during the abnormally long time he remained in the temple. These examples illustrate how God looks so positively upon His children.

"Comes... and finds" are the very words used of the Lord's coming in judgment to 'find' the state of His people (Mt. 21:19; 24:46 "whom his Lord when He *comes* shall *find* so doing"; Lk. 18:8 "When the Son of Man comes, shall He find faith...?"). And His 'coming' to the disciples found them asleep and unprepared. This was exactly the picture of Mk. 13:36 (and Lk. 12:37), using the same Greek words: "Watch... lest coming suddenly, He find you sleeping". We can be condemned in this life, as Peter was when he denied his Lord, and yet be saved out of it by repentance.

The image however is of the Lord resurrecting His weak people from sleep- because of His death. Which confirms the idea that His agony was effectively His death, because this was the point at which He accepted the death of the cross.

First century folks were accustomed to stories of martyrdom and heroic men facing death, strengthened to do so by their loyal friends. It's as if the Gethsemane narrative is a deconstruction of all this. The Lord's friends are weak, and separated from Him mentally, not quite understanding His mission, not totally sharing His values. And He Himself meets death with fear, with tears, with nervous sweat rather than "gentle resignation still" and calmly uplifted eyes as in the paintings. He was instead begging for the cup to be removed- rather than bravely taking the cup "like a man", staring death defiantly in the face or meeting it like Socrates with calm philosophical beliefs. The Lord clearly entertained the possibility that there may be alternative ways of achieving God's

desired ends. He doesn't meet the cross with an attitude of simplistic obedience unto death, the loyal soldier running to his death in mindless obedience to a superior. He struggles between doing His will or God's. The Lord is presented here as a very weak human, full of nervous fear and desperate for a hand to hold, in fear of death and the process of it, having to withdraw / drag Himself away from His friends to face this (:41 Gk.). Wanting sympathy and company... but His friends fell asleep. Three times. Their weakness likewise resonates with us, and studs the entire record. The Lord has just predicted that Peter will three times deny Him, and Peter has dismissed that. And now Peter three times [combining Matthew and Mark] falls asleep and fails his master. All this weakness of men makes the Lord's strength stand out the more clearly. And yet His very evident weakness perhaps explains the otherwise enigmatic 2 Cor. 13:4: "For though He was crucified through / in weakness, yet He lives through the power of God. For we also are weak in Him; but we shall live with Him through the power of God toward [us]". This makes absolute and perfect sense and has utter reality, cogency and relevance to every man- once we understand that He faced death in weakness, no iron will, no disdaining of death, no gentle calm resignation to the Father's will, no heroic bravery, but as a weak man shaking for fear and nervousness in the dentist's chair and so far beyond that... and we are weak in Him.

22:46 *And said to them: Why do you sleep? Get up and pray, so that you will not enter into temptation*- Each statement of the apparently simple model prayer needs careful reflection. The Lord told the disciples in Gethsemane to earnestly pray the simple saying: “Pray not to fail in the test” (Mt. 26:41 cp. 6:13). The prayer that they could gabble mindlessly must be prayed with intense attention to every phrase. They presumably did pray as directed, but the Lord later warns them: “Why do you sleep? Get up and pray, so that you will not enter into temptation”. He intended them to keep on praying, as He spent an hour praying the same words; and not just rattle off a few words and think we have done our praying. Just as the tribulation of the last days seems to be conditional upon our faith, so the Lord may imply that entering into the time of trial or testing was avoidable by their prayer and faith. Again we see the final time of tribulation as reflective of the Lord’s sufferings, enabling the very last generation to identify with the Lord’s death so that they might share in His resurrection.

Without being ostentatious in the eyes of others, try to use a physical position in prayer which is conducive to concentration. There are Biblical examples of prayer standing, kneeling, sitting, sitting cross-legged, with hands uplifted... Remember how the Lord told the disciples to *rise* and pray; He could see that curled up as they were, they were more likely to nod off to sleep than intensely pray (Lk. 22:46). He had already told them to pray (v. 40), and doubtless they had obediently started praying, but had fallen asleep while doing so. "*Rise* and pray" surely suggests: 'Come on men, I told you to pray, but

you can't pray lounging around like that!'. And I would bet many of us need the same words.

How He prayed is an example of the Lord's words being made flesh in His living. He taught His men to pray "Your will be done"; and in Gethsemane, He prayed those very words Himself, even though praying them meant an acceptance of crucifixion (Mt. 26:52). In that same context, the Lord asks His men to pray that they enter not into temptation (Lk. 22:46). He was asking them to pray His model prayer just as He was doing. His own example was to be their inspiration. I wonder too, in passing, whether the Lord's request at that time that the cup of suffering pass from Him (Mk. 14:35) was His way of praying not to be led into temptation- for perhaps He momentarily feared that He would finally spiritually stumble under the burden of the cross? This surely is the meaning of the hymn that speaks of living more nearly as we pray.

Each statement of the apparently simple model prayer needs careful reflection. The Lord told the disciples in Gethsemane to earnestly pray the simple saying: "Pray not to fail in the test" (Mt. 26:41 cp. 6:13). The prayer that they could gabble mindlessly must be prayed with intense attention to every phrase. They presumably did pray as directed, but the Lord later warns them: "Why do you sleep? Get up and pray, so that you will not enter into temptation". He intended them to keep on praying, as He spent an hour praying the same words; and not just rattle off a few words and think we have done our praying. Just as the tribulation of the last days seems to be conditional upon our faith, so the Lord may imply that entering into the time of trial or testing was avoidable by their prayer and faith. Again we see the final time of tribulation as reflective of the Lord's sufferings, enabling the very last generation to identify with the Lord's death so that they might share in His resurrection.

22:47 *While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them*-This was a tacit recognition of the fanatic loyalty of the eleven; Judas reckoned that they could put up enough of a fight to require this great multitude.

He drew near to Jesus to kiss him- It could be that the crowd of armed men were still hidden, and he came alone to make this act of identification of Jesus- again suggesting that the crowd of hired hoods were unclear as to which one of the group of disciples was Jesus. This is why Mt. and Mk. say that after the kiss, "then came they"- Judas was alone when he first approached the Lord. Although the Lord later protests that He had been with 'them' in the temple teaching, presumably that comment was directed only at the leadership of the group. Or perhaps it was simply because in the darkness it was not clear who was who, and Judas needed to make the identification for that reason. He needed to be alone to make that identification- he would've been unable to do it if he had approached Jesus and the disciples with the crowd of men next to him.

22:48 *But Jesus said to him: Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?*- This was not to merely point our irony. The Lord didn't waste His words on throwaway remarks. This was a last minute, desperate appeal for repentance. The Lord's desire for Judas' repentance speaks volumes of His basic love; there was no vindictiveness, just a desire for the man's salvation. He is the same with each of us, and we should be the same to those who abuse us.

22:49 *And when they that were about him saw what would follow, they said: Lord, shall we strike with the sword?*- Peter asked if he should strike with the sword (Mt.) and then did so without waiting for a response. This is rather typical of us all. We assume Divine response, and thus play God. We note the parallel with Jn. 18:4: "Jesus knowing all the things that must come upon him, went forward and said to them: Whom do you seek?". The Lord, as man amongst men, humanity at its finest and eternally unequalled, "went forward" in the full knowledge of what was ahead. The disciples, perceiving something of what was ahead, "what would follow", instead tried to desperately avert it. The spotlight in Gethsemane is so much upon the Lord and His resolution, man at his finest. "When Jesus had spoken these words, he went with his disciples over the brook Kidron" (Jn. 18:1). We have the image of His men following Him, but wavering. Truly is He Lord, Master and Captain for all true men. He had no commanding officer in front of Him who went over the top and whom He followed. No cheering crowd inspiring Him, no loyal men behind Him. They would flee from Him, Judas betrayed Him, Peter denied Him. He had no historical precedent from which to take inspiration. All before Him had failed. And He perceived the vast dimensions of what was before Him, in a way no other man could. Our hopes and fears of all the years were met upon Him that night. The eternity of all God's people, as many as the stars in the sky, hinged upon His endurance and obedience. He was alone amongst men. And the force of "Let not my will but Yours be done..." could be that God would have agreed to the Lord not going ahead. The situation from God's side was surely that 'You must decide, although I will strengthen you in that decision'. As happened when the Angel appeared. I think it was in the moments before the appearance of the Angel that the victory was won. And so He was moreso totally alone, in that God would not force Him to die on the cross. We should never complain of loneliness after what He went through. And because He endured, we are assured of His abiding and eternal presence. Truly we exalt Him as Lord and Master, He was the One, the only One, now totally magnetic and inspirational for every true man and true woman.

Peter’s objection to the Lord’s going to die at Jerusalem surfaced several times. He wanted to build tents so that Jesus wouldn’t go down from the mountain to the strange *exodos* which the prophets declared. When he wanted to “smite with the sword” in the Garden, it was to get the Lord out of the cross. Peter was willing to suffer, to fight, to even die in what would have been a hopeless combat, outnumbered dozens to one. But he just didn’t want the cross to be the way. It is recorded that when Peter saw “what

would follow" in the Garden, he wanted to start a fight in order to at least have some slim chance of avoiding that inevitable crucifixion which now looked so certain (Lk. 22:49). He didn't want the path of events to "follow" to that end. He again denied the connection between following and cross carrying. Later, the Lord told Peter in categorical terms that he personally was to follow Him to the death of the cross. And Peter turns round, sees John following, and gets sidetracked by the question of what the Lord thinks about John. As with us, quasi spiritual reasoning and issues were allowed to cloud and dilute the essential and terrifying truth- that we are called to bear Christ's cross to the end.

An essay in unquestioning loyalty to the Lord and Master is found in Lk. 22:49: "When they which were about him saw what would follow (i.e. arrest and attack), they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword?". That grim faced band of men standing in a protective circle around their Lord knew that they had no chance of victory against the mob with Judas, armed to the teeth as they were. Yet they were willing, to a man, to heroically sacrifice their lives- the inevitable result of starting a fight- as a token of loyalty to a man who humanly speaking was a lost cause, and whose demise seemed so unexpected to them compared to their hopes of a glorious Kingdom being established there and then.

22:50 *And a certain one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear*- Perhaps the detail is provided as backdrop for the Lord's response- that whoever *takes* the sword shall perish by it (Mt. 26:52). Peter did indeed take the sword- but by grace was saved from the consequence. He clearly aimed to strike off the man's head, but he ducked and Peter only caught his ear.

The material from Mark is about the same as in Matthew, but Luke and John add various details. Here is Matthew's account of the arrest in the Garden, with the details from Luke 22 and John 18 (on which see commentary) added in square brackets:

"The hour is at hand and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise! Let us be going. He that betrays me is nearby. And while he yet spoke, Judas, one of the twelve, came; and with him a great crowd with swords and staves, from the chief priest and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying: Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is he. Take him. [Lk. 22:47,48 He drew near to Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus said to him: Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?] And immediately he came to Jesus, and said, Greetings, Rabbi; and kissed him. And Jesus said to him: Friend, do what you came to do. [Lk. 22 And when they that were about him saw what would follow, they said: Lord, shall we strike with the sword?]. Then they came. [Jn. 18:4-9 Jesus knowing all the things that must come upon him, went forward and said to them: Whom do you seek? They answered him: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them: I am he (Judas, the one who betrayed him, was standing with them). When

he said to them: I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them: Whom do you seek? And they said: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered: I told you that I am he. If therefore you seek me, let these go their way- that the word might be fulfilled which he spoke: Of those whom you have given me I lost not one]. [then they] laid hands on Jesus and took him. And one of those with Jesus [Jn. 18 Simon Peter] stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear [Jn. 18 his right ear. Now the servant's name was Malchus]. Then said Jesus to him: [No more of this Lk. 22:51] Put away your sword into its place, [into its sheath, Jn. 18] for all that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Do you think I cannot ask my Father and He shall, even now, send me more than twelve legions of Angels? [Jn. 18:11 The cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?] [Lk. 22:51 And he touched his ear and healed him]. But how then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way? In that hour Jesus said to the mob: Have you come out as against a robber with swords and staves to seize me? I sat daily in the temple teaching and you did not take me. [Lk. 22 But this is your hour, and the power of darkness]. But all this is happening so that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples left him and fled. [Lk. 22 And they seized him and led him away, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed from a distance]".

22:51 *But Jesus said: No more of this! And he touched his ear and healed him*- This is another example of where healings do not elicit faith. Judas and those men were so blindly committed to their path that even a plain miracle would not stop them. The Lord could have spoken the word, but He touched the man; another indication that He was totally in control and was giving His life rather than having it taken from Him.

22:52 *And Jesus said to the chief priests and captains of the temple and elders that had come against him: Have you come as against a robber, with swords and staves?*- The same word used about Jesus and the disciples 'going out' from the Upper Room to Gethsemane (Mt. 26:30; Jn. 18:1), and Jesus 'going forth' to meet the crowd of armed men who were coming against Him (Jn. 18:4). The impression is given of a head on meeting between the forces of light and darkness.

22:53 *When I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness*- The Lord was addressing the leadership of the group, who had sat daily in the temple over the past week and heard Him. They knew what He looked like, He had sat *pros humas,* "with you" (AV), not so much "with you" as 'directly facing you', sitting down in front of them and therefore at close range. Therefore the need for Judas to identify the Lord with a kiss, to prove "that same is He", was because the mass of armed men didn't know who He was, and had therefore not sat in the temple. Again we see the Lord recognizing that men are only who they are, the hired

thugs were no more than hired thugs acting in ignorance; but the leaders who were present were the ones He wanted to address. This is confirmed by Lk. 22:52 stating that "Jesus said to the chief priests and captains of the temple and elders that had come against him: Have you come as against a robber, with swords and staves?". The priests and elders were in that large crowd, and the Lord directly addresses them. So although He addressed "the multitudes", His message was aimed at specific individuals within the crowd. This is true of much of Scripture; perhaps those parts we personally fail to understand are speaking to a particular group in need of that message, perhaps in a previous age, and it may not be as directly intended for us as it was to them. The correspondence between the narratives is detailed and deeply credible. Uninspired writers would surely not only contradict themselves, but lack this artless congruence between each other which we find in the inspired Gospel records. Lk. 22:53 adds that the Lord continued to say: "But this is your hour, and the power of darkness". The sense is surely that in broad daylight they dared not lay hold on Him- they had to do it under cover of darkness, because they were of the darkness.

22:54 *And they seized him and led him away, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed from a distance*- There is great emphasis on the Lord being *led* (Mt. 26:57; 27:2,31; Mk. 15:16; Jn. 18:13,28; 19:16). And notice how Acts 8:32 changes the quotation from Is. 53 to say that Christ was *led*(this isn't in the Hebrew text). His passivity is another indication that He was *giving* His life of His own volition, it wasn't being taken from Him. As noted on Mk. 14:51, it seems that Peter was the young man who followed dressed in a linen cloth.

This is recorded in the same words by all three Synoptics. It impressed them all as perhaps typical of so much of their 'following' the Lord; it was a following, but far off from Him. His challenge to Peter had been to not just physically follow Him, but to pick up His cross and walk behind Him on His way to His cross (Mt. 16:24 s.w.). Following Jesus in the shadows and avoiding identification with Him was hardly the kind of following which He intended. Yet Peter recognized this, because his appeal for repentance describes his audience as likewise "afar off" (Acts 2:39 s.w.); he is asking them to make the conversion which he did, and he thereby considers his 'following afar off' as not really following at all, and being in a 'far off from Christ' position from which he repented and thereby 'came near' to Christ in conversion. The Greek words for 'followed' and 'afar off' are also used about how the few remaining disciples stood 'afar off' from Christ on the cross. The sense is perhaps that the Gospel writers recognized how far they were from co-crucifixion with Christ, and this sense is one we can identify with. And we are those likewise described in Ephesians as "far off" as Peter was, but are now likewise reconciled.

Luke uses an imperfect for "following", suggesting Peter was always following from a distance. He uses just the same term and tense in Lk. 23:49, of how those who followed the Lord stood at a distance from Him on the cross. Luke perceived the distance between the Lord and His followers, and in this Peter becomes representative of us all. For we all know this distance. Our frustrating apparent inability to collapse that distance is shared in fact by all who have ever followed Him.

22:55 *And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat among them*- Mt. "and sat with the officers". The presence of the definite article suggests that "the servants" [the Greek also means "officers"] are a group which has already been mentioned, and surely they are the "servants" who comprised the crowd of armed men who arrested Jesus in the Garden. The same word is used three times about them in Jn. 18:3,12,18. The risk Peter was taking was considerable, seeing he had visibly been with the Lord in the Garden and had tried to kill one of the servants. We must give due weight to this- his devotion to his Lord was incomplete but all the same must be recognized for what it was as far as it was. So often those who aim higher than others in their spiritual devotions are those who fall the most publically, and yet their devotion to their Lord should not be forgotten- for it is higher than the mass of other disciples.

Luke says Peter sat, John says he stood (Jn. 18:18). This is a classic example of how the records perfectly mesh together, as it is psychologically credible that the nervous Peter would have kept alternating between sitting and standing. His body language reflected his nervousness.

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Accusation 1	Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a maid came to him, saying: You also were with Jesus the Galilean.	And as Peter was downstairs in the courtyard, there came one of the maids of the high priest. And seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said: You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus!	And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat among them. And a certain maid seeing him as he sat in the light of the fire and looking earnestly upon him, said:	Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest; and he entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest. But Peter was standing outside the door. So the other disciple, who was known to

			This man also was with him.	the high priest, went out and spoke to the maid who kept watch at the door. The maid keeping watch at the door said to Peter: Are you also one of this man's disciples?
Denial 1	But he denied before them all, saying: I do not know what you say.	But he denied it, saying: I neither know, nor understand what you say; and he went out into the porch; and the cock crew.	But he denied it, saying: Woman, I do not know him.	He said: I am not!
Accusation 2	And when he went out to the entrance, another maid saw him and said to the bystanders: This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.	And the maid saw him and began again to say to them that stood by: This is one of them!	And after a little while another person saw him and said: You also are one of them.	Now the servants and the officers were standing there, having made a fire of coals. For it was cold, and they were warming themselves; and Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself... Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said to him: Are you also one of his disciples?
Denial 2	And again he denied with an	But he again denied it.	But Peter said: Man, I am not.	He denied and said: I am not!

	oath: I do not know the man.			
Accusation 3	And after a little while they that stood by came and said to Peter: Of a truth you also are one of them, for your dialect makes you known.	And after a little while, again they that stood by said to Peter: Of a truth you are one of them; for you are a Galilean.	And after the space of about one hour another confidently affirmed, saying: Of a truth, this man also was with him. For he is a Galilean.	One of the servants of the high priest, being a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said: Did I not see you in the garden with him?
Denial 3	Then he began to curse and to swear: I do not know the man! And immediately the cock crowed.	But he began to curse and to swear under oath: I do not know this man of whom you speak. And immediately the second time the cock crew	But Peter said: Man, I do not know what you say. And immediately, as he spoke, the cock crew.	Peter denied again; and immediately the cock crew.
Peter's response 1	And Peter remembered the words which Jesus had said: Before the cock crows, you shall deny me three times.	And Peter remembered what Jesus had said to him: Before the cock crows twice, you shall deny me three times.	And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord that he had said to him: Before the cock crow this day, you shall deny me three times.	
Peter goes out	And he went out and wept bitterly.	And as he thought upon it, he wept.	And he went out and wept bitterly.	

22:56 *And a certain maid seeing him as he sat in the light of the fire and looking*

earnestly upon him, said: This man also was with him- For the significance of the firelight, see on Jn. 3:14-21. Gk. 'a servant girl', "one of the servant girls of the High Priest" (Mk. 14:66). Her claim that "You also were with Jesus" may specifically refer to Peter's presence with Jesus in Gethsemane, for "the servants" of the High Priest had been there. Perhaps she was one of them. She describes Peter as being *meta* Jesus ["you were with Jesus"], and the same phrase *meta* Jesus is used to described the disciples being *meta* Jesus in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:36,51). Or since the Lord was a public figure in Jerusalem, it would be likely that Peter was known as one of those ever to be seen hanging around Him. Jn. 18:17 gives further information about her: "The maid keeping watch at the door said to Peter: Are you also one of this man's disciples? He said: I am not!". The only other time we read of a servant girl who was a door keeper is in Acts 12:16, where the servant girl [s.w.] called Rhoda was the door keeper at the home of the disciples in Jerusalem, and is thrilled when she realizes that it is Peter knocking at the door asking her to let him in. Note that "door keeper" is likely a technical term, a kind of profession. This heightens the similarity between the two characters. The similarities with the scene in Jn. 18:17 are too strong to be passed off as unintentional; for here Peter has to have the door to the courtyard opened by the servant girl, and it is at the gate that she recognizes him. Peter's failure, his denials, were the basis of his successful appeals for Israel to follow his pattern of repentance. Thousands heard him make those appeals in Jerusalem, for if a few thousand were baptized in one day, we can be sure that many others heard the message and didn't act upon it. It's highly likely that that servant girl was in the crowd, and was one who responded. I suggest that Rhoda was that servant girl, converted by Peter's failure, repentance and experience of forgiveness. She converted from serving the Jewish High Priest to serving the Heavenly High Priest, the Lord Jesus; from being one of the crowd who went out to arrest Jesus, to being one who glorified His resurrection.

22:57 *But he denied it, saying*- Matthew stresses the denial was before them all. Peter was living out the scene of condemnation at the last day, where the verdict likewise will be manifest "before all". The Lord had used the same word in saying that whoever denied Him "before men" [cp. "before all"], He will deny before the Father at the last day (Mt. 10:33). Peter appealed for Israel to repent on the basis that they had "denied" Christ (Acts 3:13,14 s.w.)- he is appealing for them to realize that they had done what he had done, and yet they could repent, convert and experience the same grace he had done. His appeal, made a stone's throw from where the denials were made and only 6 weeks later, was therefore so powerful. Peter likewise used his failure in his pastoral work with his converts, warning them that to even deny the Lord who redeemed us is the worst possible thing we can do (2 Pet. 2:1). Likewise 1 Jn. 2:22,23 speaks of denying Christ as being the characteristic of the AntiChrist. And John wrote in the context of the early church having Peter as its first leader, and John of course was fully aware of Peter's failure that night.

Peter in this life denied his Lord *in front of men* (Mt. 26:70)- and the record of his failure intentionally looks back to the Lord's warning that whoever denies Him *before men* will be denied by Him at judgment day (Mt. 10:33). He sinned, and in the court of Heaven was condemned. There is a passage in Proverbs 24:11,12 which has a strange relevance to Peter's self-condemnation. Having spoken of those being led away to death (the very context of Peter's denial), we read: "If thou sayest, Behold we know not this man: doth not he that weigheth the hearts consider it? And shall not he render to every man according to his works?". This last phrase is quoted in Rev. 22:12 about the final judgment. Paul seems to consciously link Peter's church hypocrisy and legalism with his earlier denials that he had ever known the Lord Jesus. He writes of how he had to reveal Peter's denial of the Lord's grace "before them all" (Gal. 2:14), using the very same Greek phrase of Mt. 26:70, where "before them all" Peter made the same essential denial.

Woman, I do not know him- Again, Peter was acting as the condemned, to whom the Lord will say "I know you not" (Mt. 25:12; Lk. 13:25). The whole idea of 'I don't know Him' must, sadly, be connected with the Lord's words in Mt. 7:23 and 25:41, where He tells the rejected: "I never knew you". By denying knowledge of the Saviour, Peter was effectively agreeing that the verdict of condemnation could appropriately be passed upon him. In one of his many allusions to the Gospels, Paul wrote that "If we deny him, he also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2:12). Peter in this life denied his Lord *in front of men* (Mt. 26:70)- and the record of his failure intentionally looks back to the Lord's warning that whoever denies Him *before men* will be denied by Him at judgment day (Mt. 10:33). He sinned, and in the court of Heaven was condemned; and yet he could change the verdict by repentance.

22:58 *And after a little while another person saw him and said: You also are one of them. But Peter said: Man, I am not*- John says that a group of men made the second accusation; see the parallel texts at the commentary on :55. Luke says that Peter replied to the second accusation [which Matthew says was made by a *woman*] by saying "*Man*, I am not". Clearly the accusations and denials were in groups- the second 'denial' involved a number of people [a man, a woman and plural men] making accusations and Peter denying them all. If we put together the various records of Peter's three denials, it seems clear that a number of accusations were made, and he replied slightly differently each time. But there were three groups of accusations and denials. We can imagine the scene- there was a whole group of men and women present, all within earshot, and once one person made the accusation, others would've chimed in. But the account is stylized to group the denials in three groups, and Peter obviously perceived this after his final oath of denial. But in fact it seems that each denial was a series of separate denials. Indeed the tense of the verb "denied" suggests he kept on and on denying.

"I am not", *ouk eimi*, was uttered just as the Lord was answering Caiaphas' question "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?". The Lord replied "I am" [*ego eimi*]" (Mk. 14:61,62). The contrast is intended. The Lord was faithful to who He was, whereas Peter denied it. The Lord stands out, a man amongst men, as peerlessly perfect despite the failure of all around Him, including His very own. And for this we salute Him.

22:59 *And after the space of about one hour another confidently affirmed, saying: Of a truth, this man also was with him. For he is a Galilean*- Matthew says it was a group of men, Mark says it was a maid; Luke says it was one individual who made the third accusation, and John says it was specifically a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off. The three episodes of accusation and denial were therefore each comprised of a series of accusations and a series of denials. This means that the Lord was being generous in saying that Peter would deny Him three times before the cock crowed. Each episode of denial contained many separate denials.

Matthew explains that his Galilean accent gave him away. "The Galilæans were unable to pronounce the gutturals distinctly, and they lisped, pronouncing sh like th. Perhaps Peter said, "I know not the *ith*," instead of, "I know not the *ish*" (man)". The Lord was a Galilean and therefore, we can infer, know for His Galilean accent. He too perhaps had a tendency to lisp. Such was His humanity.

22:60 *But Peter said: Man, I do not know what you say. And immediately, as he spoke, the cock crew*- The problem is that Mark says that the cock crowed after the first denial; and it is Mark who says that the Lord's warning was that "Before the cock crows *twice*, you shall deny Me three times". Matthew and the others seem to speak of only one cock crow. There are various solutions. One is that we give full weight to the fact we are dealing with three episodes or groups of denials. If the first 'denial' involved three separate denials, then this fulfilled the prediction that there would be three denials before the cock crew. And the third episode of denials occurred before the second cock crow, this fulfilling the Lord's word as recorded by Mark "Before the cock crows *twice*, you shall deny Me three times". Another is to go with the NIV footnotes on Mk. 14:30,72, which claim that earliest manuscripts omit the word "twice" and "second time". Another textual approach is to reflect that the record of the cock crowing after the first denial (Mk. 14:68) is omitted by most later translations after the AV. The text also could be suspect at that point. But I am distinctly uneasy at resolving apparent difficulties by claiming that verses are spurious and uninspired. Issues of translation, however, are of another order. I submit that Mk. 14:72 is capable of another translation. Most versions have to the effect that "Before the cock crows twice, you shall deny Me three times". But it could equally be translated 'You shall deny Me three times for each two crows of the cock'. This would make a total of six denials. I suggest therefore that there were three denials from Peter during the first denial episode, before the first crowing of the cock; then another one or two denials during the second denial episode,

and then another one or two during the third denial episode- and then the cock crew a second time. Another possible reconstruction was offered by Michael Cortright:

First denial:
A girl at the door to the courtyard (John 18:17).
Second denial:
A servant girl, by the fire in the courtyard (Matthew 26:69, Mark 14:66, Luke 22:56).
Third denial:
A man by the fire in the courtyard (Luke 22:58).
First crow.
Mark 14:68 (King James Version).
Fourth denial:
Another girl, at the gateway (Matthew 26:71) or entryway (Mark 14:68,69).
Fifth denial:
Some anonymous (standing) people by the fire in the courtyard (Matthew 26:73, Mark 14:70, John 18:25).
Sixth denial:
Another man who happens to be a male servant of the high priest (Luke 22:59, John 18:26).
Second crow.
Matthew 26:74, Mark 14:72, Luke 22:60, John 18:27.

And he went out and wept bitterly- There are connections between Peter's position at this time and that of the rejected before the judgment seat. His bitter weeping connects most obviously with the weeping and gnashing of teeth of the rejected. He was 'remaining outside' of the Palace where the Lord was (Mt. 26:29 AV "sat without"). Yet the Greek *exo* translated "without" or "outside" is elsewhere used about the rejected being "cast out" (Mt. 5:13; 13:48), 'standing without' with the door shut (Lk. 13:25,28), like a fruitless branch cast out into the fire (Jn. 15:6). When we read that Peter "went out" from the Lord's presence (Mt. 26:75), the same Greek word is used. The oaths which Peter used would probably have included 'Before God!'. He was anticipating the judgment seat: before God he admitted he did not know His Son. But in this life we can be condemned- and yet be reprieved through repentance. But remember that Judas likewise "went out" into the darkness. Judas is described as "standing with" those who ultimately crucified Jesus in Jn. 18:5. Interestingly the same idea occurs in Jn. 18:18 where Peter is described as standing with essentially the same group; point being, that Judas and Peter in essence did the same thing, they both denied their Lord and stood with His enemies. But one repented real repentance, whereas the other couldn't muster the faith for this. Lesson: We all deny the Lord, but the two paths before us are those of either Peter or Judas. Peter of course is our pattern. Perhaps Peter was encouraged

towards repentance by recalling that just hours before, the Lord had predicted that the disciples would weep [s.w.], but their sorrow would be turned to joy (Jn. 16:20), in harmony with the Lord's earlier teaching of blessedness for those who weep now. His weeping was intense, and he must've wondered how ever such weeping could be turned to joy. The only answer was that Jesus would have to die for Peter's sin, be resurrected, forgive Peter and restore fellowship with him, even using him again in His service. It was upon this, then, that Peter desperately set his hope and faith- and it was rewarded.

22:61 *And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter*- The "day of *visitation*" is coming for us all (1 Pet. 2:12). The Greek is related to the word describing how after the denials, Christ turned and *looked* upon Peter (Lk. 22:61). This was for him his day of judgment, which we must all pass through. He called down Divine curses *upon himself* if he knew Jesus of Nazareth- and thus brought the curse of God upon himself (the record of his cursing and swearing refers to this rather than to the use of expletives).

We do well to imagine that look, mixing sorrow, pity and saving love. Disappointment was surely there, and concern lest Peter lose his faith because of his shame and failure. For it is how the Lord looks on us all. The Lord had prayed Peter's faith wouldn't fail, his faith in His love and mercy to denial.

And Peter remembered the word of the Lord that he had said to him: Before the cock crow this day- "Peter remembered" the Lord's words. The letters of Peter urge his readers to "be mindful of the words which were spoken before" (2 Pet. 3:2). Yet this is evidently alluding to the frequent references to the disciples being slow to "remember" [s.w. "mindful"] the words which their Lord had "spoken before" (Lk. 24:6,8; Jn. 2:17,22; 12:16). Indeed, the same word is used about Peter 'remembering' [s.w. "be mindful"] all too late, the words which his Lord had "spoken before" to him (Mt. 26:75). So Peter was aware that his readers knew that he had not 'remembered' the words his Lord had "spoken before" to *him*- and yet, knowing that, he exhorts his readers to 'remember' or 'be mindful' [s.w.] of words which had been previously spoken. His readers likely had memorized the Gospels by heart. And yet Peter asks them to learn from his mistake, not to be as slow to remember as the disciples had been, and he especially. This is the basis of powerful exhortation- a repentant life, not an appearance of sinlessness. See on 2 Pet. 1:12.

Appreciating the extent of Peter's devotion to the Lord's words enables us to more fully enter into the man's spiritual and emotional tragedy when he denied the Lord. He paid no attention to His words of warning concerning Peter's own spiritual weakness. After that third cock crow, "Peter remembered *the word of* the Lord, *how* he had said unto

him..." (Lk. 22:61; "how" may refer to the physical manner in which Christ spoke to Peter, as well as to the content of his words).

You shall deny me three times- Pliny records how Christians were asked to make a threefold denial of Christ (*Epistles* 10.97). It has been suggested that the account of Peter's threefold denials of Christ has been included in the Gospel records as an encouragement to those whose faith failed them that still there was a way back to restoration with the Lord Jesus, just as there had been for Peter. When Peter encourages his persecuted brethren to resist the "roaring lion" of Roman / Jewish persecution (1 Pet. 5:8), he is therefore to be seen as writing against a background in which he had actually failed the very test which his brethren were facing. Yet he can therefore even more powerfully encouraged them, because he had also experienced the Lord's restoring grace.

22:62 *And he went out and wept bitterly*- Peter “went out” from the Lord. “Went out” is the language of Judas going out (Jn. 13:30- in essence, Peter and Judas did the same thing at the same time). Other prototypes of the rejected likewise had gone out from the Lord. Cain “‘went out” (Gen. 4:16), as did Zedekiah in the judgment of Jerusalem (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). Esau went out from the land of Canaan into Edom, slinking away from the face of his brother Jacob, sensing his righteousness and his own carnality (Gen. 36:2-8). Yet Peter in this life “went out” from the Lord (Mk. 14:68) and then some minutes later further “went out and wept bitterly” (Lk. 22:62), living out the very figure of condemnation- and yet was able to repent and come back. In this life we can be judged, condemned, weep... but still repent of it and thereby change our eternal destiny. But at the final judgment: it will be just too late. That ‘judgment’ will be a detailed statement of the outcome of the ongoing investigative judgment which is going on right now. See on Mk. 14:68.

here are connections between Peter’s position at this time and that of the rejected before the judgment seat. His bitter weeping connects most obviously with the weeping and gnashing of teeth of the rejected. He was ‘remaining outside’ of the Palace where the Lord was (Mt. 26:29 AV “sat without”). Yet the Greek *exo* translated “without” or “outside” is elsewhere used about the rejected being “cast out” (Mt. 5:13; 13:48), ‘standing without’ with the door shut (Lk. 13:25,28), like a fruitless branch cast out into the fire (Jn. 15:6). When we read that Peter “went out” from the Lord’s presence (Mt. 26:75), the same Greek word is used. The oaths which Peter used would probably have included ‘Before God!’. He was anticipating the judgment seat: before God he admitted he did not know His Son. But in this life we can be condemned- and yet be reprieved through repentance. But remember that Judas likewise “went out” into the darkness. Judas is described as "standing with" those who ultimately crucified Jesus in Jn. 18:5. Interestingly the same idea occurs in Jn. 18:18 where Peter is described as standing

with essentially the same group; point being, that Judas and Peter in essence did the same thing, they both denied their Lord and stood with His enemies. But one repented real repentance, whereas the other couldn't muster the faith for this. Lesson: We all deny the Lord, but the two paths before us are those of either Peter or Judas. Peter of course is our pattern. Perhaps Peter was encouraged towards repentance by recalling that just hours before, the Lord had predicted that the disciples would weep [s.w.], but their sorrow would be turned to joy (Jn. 16:20), in harmony with the Lord's earlier teaching of blessedness for those who weep now. His weeping was intense, and he must've wondered how ever such weeping could be turned to joy. The only answer was that Jesus would have to die for Peter's sin, be resurrected, forgive Peter and restore fellowship with him, even using him again in His service. It was upon this, then, that Peter desperately set his hope and faith- and it was rewarded.

22:63 *And the men that held Jesus mocked him and beat him*- This was done by men who just minutes beforehand had been carefully upholding some isolated principles of Divine law and general legal integrity. Their appearance of culture vanished. They only could have been so crude and cruel if they first justified it in terms of their religion; spitting and beating would have been justified by them as the punishment due to a heretic. But here we see how they were justifying their own natural anger and jealousy by taking a tiny shard of Biblical precedent- for only in Dt. 25:2 do we have any justification for legal beating, and once it was finished, then there was to be no other punishment. The beating was to be on his back and not on his face; and there was no talk of spitting. But the Jews took that and used it to justify spitting in the Lord's *face*, beating Him with their fists and then further condemning Him to death. The only command to spit in the face of a man was if he refused to raise up children for his dead relative (Dt. 25:9); but this was totally irrelevant to the Lord Jesus. He in any case was the ultimate example of a man who did build up His Father's house. There is anger in each of us, and religious people at times give full vent to that anger by justifying it as righteous anger, grabbing hold of the vague implication of some Bible verse and taking it way beyond the obvious meaning of the verse. In doing so, they are behaving no better than these the very worst of men who have ever lived, committing the worst ever crime ever committed in the cosmos. The face of Jesus shone at times with God's glory; He was the face of God to men. And they spat in that face, and beat it. The wonder was that the Lord had specifically foreseen this- He had predicted that they would spit at Him (Mk. 10:34). He foresaw how they would fuel their anger against Him with their persuasion that He was a heretic.

22:64 *And they blindfolded him and questioned him saying: Prophesy- who is he that struck you?*- They had blindfolded Him, and were challenging Him to exercise the prophetic gift of discernment by saying the name of the soldier who had struck Him. We note that 'prophesy' is not to be understood solely as the prediction of future events.

The fact is, the Lord did know who had struck Him. They were clearly alluding to the fact that the Jews had concluded the Lord was a false prophet and false Christ and were punishing Him as such. See on Lk. 7:39.

22:65 *And many other things they spoke against him, reviling him*- "Blaspheming"; this was exactly the charge the Lord was being crucified for (s.w. Mt. 26:65), and so they blasphemed *Him*. We note how the Lord ahead of this had promised that all blasphemy against Him would be forgiven (12:10). Again, it seems the Lord foresaw these details of His death and sufferings; and forgave it ahead of time.

22:66 *And as soon as it was day, the assembly of the elders of the people was gathered together, both chief priests and scribes; and they led him away into their council, saying*- They were careful to appear to obey their own laws and bylaws, whilst breaking God's law entirely. Again we have the impression of Psalm 2 being fulfilled, in the gathering together of Gentile powers against Messiah. The most orthodox and pious within Judaism were no more than Gentiles.

22:67 *If you are the Christ, tell us. But he said to them: If I tell you, you will not believe*- The Lord had been careful in His ministry not to specifically claim to be Messiah. Rather He had left His personality, words and works to leave those who encountered Him with the conviction that He was indeed Messiah. To simply 'tell' people truth doesn't mean they will believe; the word must be made flesh.

22:68 *And if I ask you, you will not answer*- As noted on :67, the Lord left individuals to be convicted in their own consciences. Formal telling and asking people will not elicit a response worth having; because the conviction is in their hearts.

22:69 *But from this time forward shall the Son of Man be seated at the right hand of the power of God*- The allusion is clearly to Daniel's vision of the Son of Man coming in glory to judge the Gentile world. And the Lord is saying that those hyper religious Jews were effectively condemned Gentiles before God. But those men to whom He spoke died in their beds. Lifespans were short in first century Palestine, most males were dead by 40. Most of them wouldn't even have lived to experience the calamity of AD67-70. They will only therefore "see the Son of Man sitting..." at His return, when they are resurrected and see Him in His glory. And this will be of itself their condemnation- to see Him there enthroned in glory, and themselves not in His Kingdom. This was exactly His teaching to them in Mt. 23:39: "You shall not see Me from this time forward, until you shall say: Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord". They will then bless Him- but all too tragically late.

At His trial, the Lord warned them that He would come again as judge (Mt. 26:64,65), as if He realized that they were living out a foretaste of the final judgment. The thief likewise understood the Lord's presence as being the presence of the judge who would finally judge him (Lk. 23:44). The cross divided men: there were women who followed and

mourned insincerely, and the women who really followed. There were soldiers who gambled over the Lord's clothes, and one who really repented. There was a thief who repented and one who wouldn't. There were those who mocked and others who watched and believed.

22:70 *And they all said: Are you then the Son of God? And he said to them: You say that I am*- "You say..." shows how the Lord sought to elicit confessions from men in their own words. The Lord's sensitivity is revealed in how He comments upon the Jews' question: "Art thou then the Son of God?". He replies: "Ye say it because I am" (Lk. 22:70 RVmg.). The Lord perceived that men ask a question like that because subconsciously, they perceive the truth of the matter, and in their conscience, they already know the answer to their question. Perhaps for this reason He simply ceased answering their questions as the trial went on (Lk. 23:9). He realized that the questions they asked were actually revealing the answers which were already written in their consciences. For a man of this psychological insight to have lived and died amidst and for such a primitive rabble is indeed amazing.

22:71 *And they said: What further testimony do we need? For we ourselves have heard it from his own mouth*- They themselves thus became the witnesses responsible for the Lord's death. Again, legal procedure, which they had tried so carefully to follow, was made a mockery of. They began with a conviction of plotting to destroy the temple buildings, then turned that into an accusation that He was a "Christ, the Son of God", a rival to Caesar; and now they jump on the charge of blasphemy, for which they gave Him the death penalty. And yet the Jews had no legal power to execute people; they had to present their case to the Roman authorities. And blasphemy was not a capital offence under Roman law. Their careful attempts to follow legal integrity broke down in pathetic collapse, and thereby they condemned themselves. The same word, *blasphemeo*, is then used of how the Jews "reviled" or blasphemed the Lord as He hung on the cross (27:39; Lk. 22:65). They had earlier accused the Lord of blasphemy at least twice during His ministry (Mt. 9:3; Jn. 10:36 s.w.). So they should have thought of that earlier in the trial, seeing they themselves were the witnesses of that supposed crime. We are left with the impression of a judge and jury increasingly desperate to find the Lord guilty, progressively throwing their integrity and legalism to the winds in their obsession to make Him guilty of death. Little wonder that Pilate later remonstrated with them that Jesus was simply not legally guilty of any capital offence. But the more he made that point to them, the more they screamed for His death.

LUKE CHAPTER 23

23:1 *And the whole company of them rose and brought him before Pilate*- Early in the morning, after an illegal night time trial. Their 'rising' may refer to a judge rising to give a

verdict. They rose in condemnation of Him and went to Pilate to get the sentence carried out.

Israelites binding a man and delivering him over to Gentiles sounds very much like what Israel did to Samson. The Lord must've reflected how easily He likewise could have burst those bands and destroyed them all. The similarity with Samson is surely to remind us that He had those possibilities, but He was consciously choosing to give His life. The great paradox was that by accepting those bonds, He was thereby binding the strong man of sin and sin as manifested in the Jewish system (Mt. 12:29).

23:2 *And they began to accuse him, saying: We found this man perverting our nation and forbidding giving tribute to Caesar, and saying that he is Christ a king*- These were not the reasons for which they had condemned the Lord. The whole legal process was illogical and inconsistent from start to finish. The Lord had stated that tribute should be given to Caesar; no matter how well He had answered their earlier trick questions, they still decided He was guilty. He had also not stated that He was a king, except by implication; and He had carefully deconstructed any idea that He was in His lifetime a political king seeking His own kingdom.

23:3 *And Pilate asked him, saying: Are you the King of the Jews?*- Out of the various Jewish accusations against the Lord, this was the only one which directly affected the Romans, and was the technical reason for Pilate agreeing to the death penalty; it was this reason which was written over the Lord's head on the cross. The irony of the situation must have rubbed hard upon the Lord; He was dying as the King of a people, not one of whom would openly show loyalty to Him. In any suffering we may have because of feeling utterly alone, betrayed, having lived life to no end, not being shown loyalty by those we expect it of- we are connected with the spirit of the cross.

And he answered them and said: You say it- Jesus before Pilate said just one word in Greek; translated "You say it". It is stressed there that Jesus said nothing else, so that Pilate marvelled at His silent self-control. Yet Paul speaks with pride of how the Lord Jesus "before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession" (1 Tim. 6:13). You'd expect him to be alluding to some major speech of Jesus. But it seems, reading his spirit, Paul's saying: 'Lord Jesus, your self control, your strength of purpose, was great. I salute you, I hold you up to Timothy as the supreme example. Just one word. What a witness!'. As He witnessed in His ministry, so must we (Rom. 2:19 cp. Mt. 4:16). As He witnessed before Pilate, so must we witness (1 Tim. 6:12,13).

23:4 *And Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds: I find no fault in this man*- We would have imagined that the talk of the Lord forbidding tribute to Caesar and proclaiming Himself a King would have led Pilate to at least pronounce some kind of guilty verdict. His insistence that there was "no fault in this man", especially as he was renowned for his lack of conscience, is all indication that he was deeply impressed with

the Lord's righteousness, and even prepared to publically defend it. According to John, it was only when the claim that Jesus was God's Son surfaced that Pilate felt the need to take the Lord aside to learn more. His reactions are very clear evidence of the Lord's self-evident righteousness and connection to the Father.

23:5 *But they were the more urgent, saying: He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee even to this place*- We sense their increasing desperation as the evident righteousness and innocence of the Lord was testified to by the clearly troubled state of Pilate's conscience.

23:6 *But when Pilate heard it, he asked whether the man were a Galilean*- Again we see Pilate's troubled conscience. He dearly wished to palm off responsibility for this case, and he pricks his ears up when he considers that the Lord is a Galilean.

23:7 *And when he knew that he was of Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem in those days*- As noted on :6, this was a reflection of Pilate's desperate conscience. For it was his responsibility and not Herod's to deal with issues in Jerusalem, and it was down to him to authorize capital punishment and not Herod. So sending the Lord to Herod was a desperate attempt to get out of the situation.

23:8 *Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad. For he had for a long time been desirous to see him, because he had heard about him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by him*- Yet Herod had earlier desired to kill the Lord (Lk. 13:31). Again, we see the power of conscience at work in Herod; for he was more than fascincated by the Lord and wanted to personally hear His teaching and see His miracles. Instead of just passing the death sentence for a known trouble maker, these rulers were clearly aware that they were dealing with no ordinary case.

23:9 *So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer*- As noted on 22:70, the Lord preferred to be silent because the answer was given within the consciences of the questioners. The Lord perceived that men ask their questions l because subconsciously, they perceive the truth of the matter, and in their conscience, they already know the answer to their questions. Perhaps for this reason He simply ceased answering their questions as the trial went on. He realized that the questions they asked were actually revealing the answers which were already written in their consciences. For a man of this psychological insight to have lived and died amidst and for such a primitive rabble is indeed amazing.

23:10 *And the chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him*- 'Devil' means 'false accuser'; here we have established the major theme which will dominate the later New Testament- that the Jews and Judaism was the great satan / adversary, the embodiment of false accusation against the Lord and all those in Him. They "stood by" Herod, identifying themselves with Him rather than with the Messiah of Israel.

23:11 *And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him, and dressing him in gorgeous apparel, sent him back to Pilate*- We see here human nature at its most raw and primitive. That is one feature of the crucifixion accounts. They were also motivated by a desire to test His claims to royalty. He had made it clear that His Kingdom was not of this world; His teaching about the Kingdom, largely in the parables, was about life lived now under domination of the Father's principles. And yet they willingly overlooked that and focused on mocking Him as a king. We note that Babylon too is arrayed in purple as the Lord was (Mk. 15:17; Rev. 17:4 s.w.), making her a veritable anti Christ, a fake imitation of Him.

23:12 *And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day. For before they had been enemies*- This is phrased in terms of Ps. 2:1-3, where Messiah's enemies were to unite together against Him. The psychology presented here is absolutely true to observed human experience; a common focus upon a perceived enemy creates an illusion of unity, which then evaporates once the common enemy is no more. The same idea is to be found in the descriptions in Revelation of Israel's enemies uniting against her in the last days and then self-destructing. The unity between Jew and Gentile was to become typical of how the early church were persecuted in the same way as their Lord, as they fellowshipped His sufferings. The enmity may have been related to how Pilate had slain those of Herod's jurisdiction when they were offering sacrifices in the temple, mixing their blood with the temple offerings (Lk. 13:1,2). This shows Pilate's callous nature, and points up the power of the Lord Jesus in touching even a conscience like that.

23:13 *And Pilate called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people*- This reflects the complete guilt of Jewry; from the common people through to their political and religious leadership. They too were "called together" against the Lord, just as Gentile power was united in Herod and Pilate.

23:14 *And said to them: You brought to me this man, as one that perverts the people; and I, having examined him before you, found no fault in this man concerning those things of which you accuse him*- Pilate may have carefully chosen his word for "perverts". For it can also mean 'to bring again', specifically in repentance (s.w. Mt. 27:3 "brought again", Acts 3:26 and Rom. 11:26 "turning away" from sin). The Lord's mission was to turn Israel away from their sin. A man of Pilate's callousness was touched to insist time and again that the Lord was without fault. We should never therefore assume that anyone is beyond the reach of His spirit and personality. "No fault" is a phrase used three times by Pilate about the Lord (:4,14,22). This is one of Luke's tripilisms, designed so that illiterate people could remember it more easily.

23:15 *Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him*- Again and again, the otherwise conscienceless Pilate stresses the Lord's innocence. Neither he nor Herod had any worry about murdering innocent men. But the Lord's death worried them when they came up close to Him. Such is His power even today. We should never therefore write off anyone as beyond the power of the Gospel which is in Him. Herod had once wanted to kill John the Baptist, but now, encountering the One whom John had testified of, he had to admit the man's innocence.

23:16 *I will therefore chastise him and release him*- The crowd hated the Lord and wanted to see Him crucified. So they were coming to ask for the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of Jesus, according to Matthew and Mark. But Pilate is so desperate to get the Lord off, so screaming was his conscience, that he misread the situation and grasped at this tradition of releasing a prisoner, hoping the Jews would want their King released and not crucified. Actually his offer only fomented their passions the more. According to Luke here, Pilate attempted to take the decision out of their hands by saying that Jesus was to be the prisoner to be released; and this also had the effect of piquing their desire for His crucifixion the more. For nobody, especially a mob, likes to feel railroaded out of their desired outcome at the last moment.

23:17 *(For it was necessary for him to release one to them at the feast)*- This word for "release" is used of how Paul could have been released or "let go" because after examination by the Romans, "there was no cause of death in me" (Acts 28:18). Paul's trials are full of connection with those of the Lord, and Paul (like us) took special comfort in any similarity between the Lord's sufferings and his own. For this is indeed why we have such a mass of detail about the Lord's final sufferings- we are to see endless points of connection between His experiences and our own. And as Paul says, if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. It was to this process which we signed up to at baptism, in which we dedicated ourselves to a life of dying and living with Him.

23:18 *But they cried out all together, saying, Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas*- Son of Abba, the father. This man was clearly an anti-Christ, a fake Christ, a man set up in appearance as the Christ, the son of God, when he was the very opposite. And Israel chose him. His similarity with the Lord is made even more interesting by the fact that some early manuscripts (such as the Caesarean, the Sinaitic Palimpsest and the Palestinian Syriac) here read 'Jesus Barabbas' (Referenced in Craig A. Evans, *Matthew (New Cambridge Bible Commentary)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012 p. 453.). The four gospel records only occasionally all record the same incident. When they do all mention the same thing, it seems that the Spirit intends us to see an especial significance in this. The fact that the crowd chose Barabbas rather than the

Lord of glory is one of those aspects of the Passion which is recorded by all four writers. There is much information given about Barabbas, emphasizing the kind of criminal he was (Mt. 27:16; Mk. 15:7; Lk. 23:19; Jn. 18:40). That men would reject the righteousness of God, the Spotless Lamb of God, for such a man... this is the tragic story of our race and our nature. And it was the ecclesia of those days which made this dastard choice, and crucified the Lord Jesus. The same nature, the same blindness, is in us all.

They cried out "together", despite their individual pangs of conscience. We see here the power of group think and culture, leading individuals to behaviour and positions which are far beyond where they personally stand. No wonder we are warned to watch those groups with whom we identify and join.

23:19 *(One who had been cast into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder)*- Both Barabbas and the thieves are described with the same Greek word, translated "robber" (Jn. 18:40; Mk. 15:27). The Lord uses the same word when He points out that His persecutors were treating him as a "robber" (Mt. 26:55; Mk. 14:48; Lk. 22:52); He seems to be aware that what the experience He is going through is setting up Barabbas as a kind of inverse type of Himself, the true 'Son of the Father' (= 'Barabbas'). Those low, desperate men, the dregs of society, were types of us. Barabbas especially becomes a symbol of us all. According to Jewish tradition at the time (*Pesach* 8.6) “They may slaughter the Passover lamb...for one whom they [the authorities] have promised to release from prison". The Passover amnesty freed a man justly condemned to death- on account of the death of the lamb. We can imagine the relief and joy and almost unbelief of Barabbas, as he watched or reflected upon the crucifixion of Jesus- that he who rightfully should have been there on the cross, was delivered from such a death because of the cross of Christ. The image of condemned prisoners being released due to the death of Messiah is an undoubted Old Testament figure for our redemption from slavery. Some of the legal terms used in the NT for our redemption imply that Christ redeemed us from slavery through His death. And yet one could redeem a slave by oneself becoming a slave (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Gal. 3:13; 4:5). This is why the crucified Jesus is typified by the suffering servant / slave of Isaiah’s prophesies. And Paul seems to have risen up to something similar when he speaks of giving his body to be branded, i.e. becoming a slave (1 Cor. 13:3 Gk.).

23:20 *And Pilate spoke to them again, desiring to release Jesus*- We see here Pilate's persuasion of the Lord's sinlessness; and how he discounted even the talk about the Lord seeking to stop tribute being given to Caesar and to start a revolution. Pilate knew that they had delivered Jesus to him from envy, and that there was no legitimate reason for the death sentence. I suggest he is not so much seeking to change their minds, but rather purposefully seeking to elicit from the Jews a clear statement that they wanted Him crucified.

23:21 *But they shouted, saying: Crucify, crucify him!*- When people are pressed for a reason for their unreasonable positions and behaviours, they simply say the same thing again, but more loudly (in various ways). This is the classic example- they repeated their cry "Let Him be crucified!". Surely Pilate knew that they would respond like this, and I see him as stage managing the entire crowd, purposefully leading the crowd to cry out ever louder, in order to set the stage for his public washing of his hands. But he played this elaborate game because he had a conscience, and wanted to try to separate himself from the decision to crucify the Lord.

23:22 *And he said to them the third time: Why! What evil has this man done? I have found no cause of death in him. I will therefore punish him and release him*- Pilate knew that they had delivered Jesus to him from envy, and that there was no legitimate reason for the death sentence. I suggest he is not so much seeking to change their minds, but rather purposefully seeking to elicit from the Jews a clear statement that they wanted Him crucified. "The third time" is another of Luke's tripilisms, a feature included in the record to enable the memorizaton of the gospels; and to emphasize the point, that even the callous Pilate really struggled to not allow the murder of an innocent and righteous man. Pilate's attempt to "just" punish the Lord was however only going to pique the wrath of the crowd, as they sensed the Lord's crucifixion slipping out of their grasp. And by saying this, Pilate was effectively robbing them of the choice as to which man should be released. So his desperate attempt to save the Lord only backfired upon him.

23:23 *But they were insistent with loud voices, asking that he might be crucified. And their voices prevailed*- Where and how did *their* word prevail? Surely in the conscience of Pilate. The implication is that there was a struggle within him between their voice / word, and another word- that of God, made flesh in the man before him.

23:24 *And Pilate gave sentence that what they asked for should be done*- The record here clearly states Pilate's responsibility; he gave sentence. We may excuse our misbehaviours on the basis that there would have been huge consequences if we had not... disfellowshipped that brother, rejected that sister. But our actions remain as they are. Circumstance will never be too overpowering that we have no option but to sin (Ps. 125:3; 1 Cor. 10:13).

23:25 *And he released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will*- The delivering of the Lord to the will of the Jews is all written from a human perspective. For it was by the determinate will of God, and not of man, that the Lord was handed over to death; and He Himself gave over His life, it was not in fact taken from Him. We have here a parade

example of how things may appear one way from a secular standpoint, when they are in fact quite different from heaven's perspective.

This handing over of the Lord to crucifixion was ultimately done by God, the "power" behind and through Pilate. There is an unmistakable Biblical link between the term "Son of God", the idea of God giving, and the death of the Lord Jesus. Whatever else this means, it clearly shows the pain to God in the death of His Son. Paul only uses "Son of God" 17 times- and every one is in connection with the death of the Lord. And often the usages occur together with the idea of God's *giving* of His Son to die- "He who did not spare His own son but gave him up for us all" (Rom. 8:32). This sheds light on the otherwise strange use of another idea by Paul- that Jesus was 'handed over' to death (Rom. 4:25; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2,25). It was the Father who ultimately 'handed over' His Son to death. The idea of God's Son being *sent* to redeem us from sin is perhaps John's equivalent (1 Jn. 1:7; 4:10; Jn. 3:16). Jesus was the Son whom the Father sent "last of all" to receive fruit (Mk. 12:6)- and it is reflection upon God's giving of His Son on the cross which surely should produce fruit in us. For we can no longer live passively before such outgiving love and self-sacrificial pain. And we are invited to perhaps review our understanding of two passages in this light: "When the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son... to redeem" (Gal. 4:4) and "God sending His son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for [a sin offering] condemned sin, in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). These verses would therefore speak specifically of what happened in the death of Christ on the cross, rather than of His birth. For it was in the cross rather than the virgin birth that we were redeemed and a sin offering made. It was on the cross that Jesus was above all in the exact likeness of sinful flesh, dying the death of a sinful criminal. The "likeness" of sinful flesh is explained by Phil. 2:7, which uses the same word to describe how on the cross Jesus was made "in the likeness of men". We can now better understand why the Centurion was convicted by the sight of Christ's death to proclaim: "Truly this was the Son of God" (Mk. 15:39).

Pilate's guilt here is plainly stated, especially as he himself realized he had the power to release the Lord. He delivered Him "to their will" (Lk. 23:25), tacitly accepting that their will was stronger than his; although all this happened according to the will of the Father and Son. The Gospels carefully omit any record of Pilate pronouncing a judgment of condemnation upon the Lord, as was required and usual. He did not do so because of the deep weight of conscience within him.

23:26 *And when they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon of Cyrene, coming from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it after Jesus*- Simon is a Greek name, and the names of his sons are Greco-Roman. The way he is described as “coming out of the field" (Lk. 23:26) could imply that he was working, doing what was improper on a feast day, because he was a Gentile. It could be that he simply lived and

worked near Jerusalem, he wasn't a religious guy, and like Saul out looking for lost cattle, he was going some place else... until the Lord as it were arrested him with the message of the cross.

Cyrene was where there was a strongly orthodox Jewish community (cp. Acts 6:9). Simon was probably dark skinned, a countryman, a simple man, who had perhaps come up to Jerusalem in his zeal to keep Passover. What a comfort it was to the Lord to see a black man carrying His cross; for He had earlier said that *all* His true followers would carry the cross behind Him (Mt. 10:38; 16:24). The Hebrew writer seemed to see Simon as typical of us all when writing of how we must go out of the city with the Lord, "bearing his reproach" (Heb. 13:12,13, probably using 'reproach' as a parallel to 'the cross'). He would have seen in Simon a prototype of all His future, suffering, humiliated followers; "impressed" by the predestined calling, almost against our will, to carry His cross (Mt. 27:32 RV mg.). And was it accident that this prototype was almost certainly a black man, when perhaps ultimately it may appear that a large proportion of the faithful body of the Lord Jesus will have been black people? If indeed Simon was a black Jew (cp. modern Falashas) who had come up to keep the Passover, it would have been annoying beyond words for him to be made unclean by the blood of the Lord, which was inevitably on the stake after His first attempt at bearing it after His flogging. Not to mention the shame for a zealous Jew in having to carry the cross of this Jesus of Nazareth. Yet it would seem that he was later converted, and he in turn converted his wife and son (Mk. 15:21 cp. Rom. 16:13). Mark rarely records proper nouns, but he makes a special effort to mention that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. It would therefore seem that these men were well known in the early church. Simon may be the "Simeon called Niger" ('the black one') of Acts 13:1. He is listed there next to Lucius, who was also from Cyrene. The thief and the centurion were likewise converted, and the faith of Joseph, Nicodemus and probably others was brought out into the open by the cross. Like Samson, the Lord won victories even in His death. The spiritual turn-around in Simon is a type of what is experienced by all whom the Lord compels to carry His cross. He was passing by, going somewhere else, full of his own plans, going about to establish his own righteousness... and then, out of the blue, he was called to what he much later realized was the greatest honour a man could be called to: to accompany the Son of God and carry His cross, right to the end. We are left to imagine him plonking it down, as if to say to Jesus 'Now you've got to do the rest', and then slipping off into the crowd.

John says that the Lord went out bearing His cross. Luke says that Simon was asked to carry the hinder part of the cross behind Him. Matthew and Mark say Simon carried the cross. Mk. 15:22 (Gk.) says that the soldiers carried Jesus to Golgotha. J.B. Phillips renders it: "They got him to a place Golgotha". It would seem that the Lord collapsed, perhaps fainting. If He was crucified on an olive tree (excavations of crucified men suggest this is what was used), it would not have been simply because of the weight of

the stake. Take a picture of Him lying there, with the face that was marred more than the children of men pressed into the hot dust of that Jerusalem street. And some human fool probably said something like 'Come on, get up' (doubtless with embellishments). If indeed He did faint, there would have been that sense of 'coming round', the "Where am I?", the memory and consciousness flooding back. "Have I died and been resurrected?" No, as some nameless soldier kicked Him and told Him to get up.

23:27 *And a great crowd of the people followed him, and women mourned and wailed for him*- As unworthy people wailed before Him on the cross (the Lord knew they would be condemned in the AD70 judgment rather than obey his words and flee the city), so they will wail (s.w.) before Him at the judgment (Mt. 24:30). The cross and the judgment are definitely connected. Men's feelings at the cross are a foretaste of our feelings before the enthroned, glorified Lord. And hence there is a connection between the breaking of bread, the judgment, the crucifixion, self-examination... it all comes together.

23:28- see on Lk. 7:9.

But Jesus turning to them, said: Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children- He turned and spoke to the women. Luke as a doctor knew that suffering makes one self-centred. It is perhaps because of this that he especially seems to concentrate on the wonder of the way in which the Lord looked out of His own agony to be so concerned with that of others. A.D. Norris has commented (*The Gospel Of Mark*): "It is he who reports the Lord's prayer for Simon Peter (22:31); who recounts the Lord's sympathetic warning to the women of Jerusalem (23:27-31); and who speaks of the Lord's forgiveness for His crucifiers, and remission for the penitent thief (23:34,43)".

Reflect for a moment upon the fact that the women wept, and amongst them were the Lord's relatives (Lk. 23:27). Lamentation for criminals on their way to die was not permitted in public. Suetonius (*Tiberius* 61) reports that "the relatives [of the crucified] were forbidden to go into mourning". Likewise Tacitus (*Annals* 6.19), Philo (*In Flaccum* 9,72) and Josephus (*Wars Of The Jews* 2.13.3,253). This is all quite some evidence, from a variety of writers. So why did they make this great sacrifice, take this great risk? The cross has power. Whether we feel it is impossible for us to be emotional, given our personality type, or whether we feel so lost in our own griefs that we cannot feel for Him there, somehow sustained reflection on the cross will lead us out of this. We will mourn, come what may. Yet the tragedy is that those women who risked so much didn't necessarily maintain that level of commitment to the end. For the Lord had to tell them that they should weep for themselves given the calamity that would befall them and their children in AD70- for they would not listen to Him.

23:29 *For the days are coming in which they shall say: Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!*- Josephus records that during the AD70 siege of Jerusalem, "one rich and noble woman, whose name was Mary, the daughter of Eleazar, being stripped of all she had, by the seditious, killed her own child, and dressed it, and ate part of it". In that day, the Lord's words would have been remembered. And this judgment would come upon those who had disobeyed the Lord's words to flee the city. The Lord is alluding to the curses for disobedience in Dt. 28:53-57. Those women weeping for Him were in fact the disobedient who would be cursed. The emotion of a moment for the sake of the suffering Lord Jesus is simply not enough. We must challenge ourselves with this thought. The Lord is also quoting from the words of Jer. 19:9 about the sufferings which the Babylonian siege would bring upon Jerusalem. He had no problem in seeing the events of the Babylonian invasion as relevant to His day, and we likewise can see the large bulk of Old Testament material about Israel's historical sufferings as likewise coming true in the last days. Revelation presents those sufferings in language absolutely loaded with Old Testament allusion.

23:30 *Then shall they begin to say to the mountains: Fall on us, and to the hills: Cover us*- The Babylonian siege would be repeated in AD70 (Hos. 10:8); and these words are quoted about the feelings of the impenitent within the land of Israel in the last days, when every prophetic word shall come to its climax (Rev. 6:16). "Begin to say" could imply that the Lord was hopeful that they would repent. But Josephus says that during the AD70 siege "Hundreds of the Jews at the end of the siege hid themselves in subterranean recesses, and no less than 2000 were killed by being buried under the ruins of these hiding-places". In Rev. 6:16, the desire for the hills to fall upon them was because they sense that the wrath of the once crucified Lamb is even greater. The Lamb for sinners slain also has anger; He saw through the tears of those women, and was warning them of the huge price to be paid for what they were doing to Him.

23:31 *For if they do these things in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?*- He turned and spoke to the women on the walk to Golgotha; He looked out of His own agony to the needs of others. This is another theme of the cross. He was even thoughtful for weak Pilate (Jn. 19:11); for the thief, for the forgiveness of those mocking soldiers, for His mother, for John, for those women lining the Via Dolorosa... And those women, He said, would be destroyed in the condemnation of Jerusalem in AD70. Phil. 2:2-4 makes the point that the essence of the cross is in the way the Lord's mind was so full of concern for *others* throughout the whole wretched process. The Lord's Bible-filled mind would have been aware of Jer. 9:20-22, which prophesied special woe to women in the holocaust of AD70. Those women were condemned. Yet the Lord turned, in His desperate agony, to speak to them. I admit, as I must through every stage of the cross, that I wouldn't have done this. I wouldn't have bothered with them. But He made such effort to at least try to get them to change their minds. They were weeping for Him, but He knew they would not obey His command to leave Jerusalem when it would be

surrounded by armies. Neither would their children. On a human level, they must have been so annoying. Young women (if they were alive in AD70 40 years later), probably passively in love with Him, moved to tears at His passion but with no regard for His words and the real implications of His cross. Yet still He tried for them, running the risk of cat calls of 'You can't carry your own cross but you can talk to the girls'. "If they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" is packed with allusion to O.T. Scriptures (Ez. 17:24; Jer. 11:16,19; Ps. 1; Jer. 17:5-8). His preceding words to the women were likewise; his quotation from Hos. 10:8 is set in a context so appropriate to the situation He was in. If they did these things to Him, the green and healthy shoot, what would be done to the dry dead wood of Israel...? His concern was always with the sufferings others would experience rather than being lost in His own introspection. Without getting too deeply involved in the actual exposition, a simple lesson emerges: He was not so overpowered by the terrible physicality of His human situation that He ceased to be spiritually aware. His mind was full of the word, not just out of place quotations flooding His subconscious, but real awareness of the spirit of the Father's word and its' intensely personal relevance to Himself. In this He sets a matchless example. If the crossbeam was tied to the nape of the Lord's neck, it would have been impossible for Him to turn round and talk, as it is specifically stated that He did. I would reconstruct that the Lord collapsed, and Simon was forced to carry the cross, whilst the Lord followed on, scarcely conscious. Before collapsing again, with the result that He was carried to the cross, He used His last and final energy at the time to speak to those women. He used His last bit of mental and physical strength to preach- to women whom He knew were not going to really respond. For He said they should weep for themselves, He knew they would not listen to His warning to flee Jerusalem in AD70. But such was His hopefulness for people, that He still made the effort to communicate rather than get lost within Himself and His own thoughts as I would have tended to.

The humility of Mary was the pattern for the Lord's self-humiliation in the cross. Here above all we see the influence of Mary upon Jesus, an influence that would lead Him to and through the cross. Her idea of putting down the high and exalting the lowly (Lk. 1:52) is picking up Ez. 17:24: "I have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish". And yet these very words of Ezekiel were quoted by the Lord in His time of dying. With reverence, we can follow where we are being led in our exploration and knowing of the mind of Christ. His dear mum had gone around the house singing her Magnificat. He realized that she felt the lowly who had been exalted [and perhaps in some unrecorded incident before her conception she had been recently humbled?]. And Jesus had realized her quotation of Ez. 17:24. And He had perceived His linkage and connection with her, and how she saw all that was true of Him as in some way true of her, and vice versa. And now, in His final

crisis, He takes comfort from the fact that like His dear mother, He the one who was now humbled, would be exalted. How many other trains of thought have been sparked in men's minds by the childhood instructions of their mothers...?

23:32 *And two others, both criminals, were led out with him to be executed*- Mt. 27:38 RV has a dramatic change of tense: "Then are there crucified with him...". Mark's present tenses are also arresting: "plaiting... they clothe him... they smote..." (Mk. 15:17,19 RV). Perhaps Mark is seeking consciously to make us imagine it all as going on before our eyes. Take just Mk. 15:23-26: "They offered... they crucify... and part... casting lots... crucified... was written". These arresting changes are surely to encourage us to re-live it all. Mark speaks of "they crucify him", going on to say that "then are there two crucified with him" (Mk. 15:38 RV), whereas Luke records the act in the past tense. Significantly, very few actual details are given by the Gospel writers of both the scourging and the crucifixion. It could be that they felt it impossible to dwell upon these things; or it could be that they and their readers knew what was involved in these practices, and we are left to dwell upon them in our own imagination. We are intended to reconstruct in our own minds what may have happened... We have a solemn duty towards Him to do this. This is perhaps why the tenses change so dramatically in the records.

23:33 *And when they came to the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left*- Note the emphasis in the records on "unto", "to", "the place". They arrived. They stopped there. This was it. Golgotha possibly means 'The skull of Goliath'. In this case, we have opened up a detailed typological meaning to David's victory over Goliath. He was there as the Lord Jesus fighting sin, and then burying the head of Goliath, the 'man of sin', near Jerusalem. "Ephes-Dammim", where David killed Goliath, meaning 'border of blood' suggests 'Aceldama', the "field of blood". Goliath coming out to make his challenges at morning and evening (1 Sam. 17:16) coincided with the daily sacrifices which should have been offered at those times, with their reminder of sin and the need for dedication to God. The thoughtful Israelite must surely have seen in Goliath a personification of sin which the daily sacrifices could do nothing to overcome.

The crucified Christ is portrayed as King of criminals, King of the basest sort, enthroned between them, taking the place of their leader Barabbas, who ought to have been where the Lord was. Both Barabbas and the thieves are described with the same Greek word, translated "robber" (Jn. 18:40; Mk. 15:27). The Lord uses the same word when He points out that His persecutors were treating him as a "robber" (Mt. 26:55; Mk. 14:48; Lk. 22:52); He seems to be aware that what the experience He is going through is setting up Barabbas as a kind of inverse type of Himself, the true 'Son of the Father' (= 'Barabbas').

John's Gospel has many references to Moses, as catalogued elsewhere. When John records the death of the Lord with two men either side of Him, he seems to do so with his mind on the record of Moses praying with Aaron and Hur on each side of him (Ex.

17:12). John's account in English reads: "They crucified him, and with him two others, on either side one" (Jn. 19:18). Karl Delitzsch translated the Greek New Testament into Hebrew, and the Hebrew phrase he chose to use here is identical with that in Ex. 17:12. Perhaps this explains why John alone of the Gospel writers doesn't mention that the two men on either side of the Lord were in fact criminals- he calls them "two others" (Jn. 19:18) and "... the legs of the first and of the other" (Jn. 19:32). Thus John may've chosen to highlight simply how there were two men on either side of the Lord, in order to bring out the connection with the Moses scene.

It is likely that the Lord was crucified naked, thereby sharing the shame of Adam's nakedness. The *shame* of the cross is stressed (Heb. 11:26; 12:2; Ps. 31:17; Ps. 69:6,7,12,19,20). And we are to share those sufferings. There *must*, therefore, be an open standing up for what we believe in the eyes of a hostile world. Preaching, in this sense, is for all of us. And if we dodge this, we put the Son of God to a naked shame; we re-crucify Him naked, we shame Him again (Heb. 6:6). He was crucified naked, and the sun went in for three hours. He must have been cold, very cold (Jn. 18:18). Artemidorus Daldianus (*Oneirokritika* 2.53) confirms that the Romans usually crucified victims naked. Melito of Sardis, writing in the 2nd century, writes of "his body naked and not even deemed worthy of a clothing that it might not be seen. Therefore the heavenly lights turned away and the day darkened in order that he might be hidden who was denuded upon the cross" (*On the Pasch* 97). The earliest portrayals of the crucified Jesus, on carved gems, feature Him naked. There is reason to think that the Jews put the Lord to the maximum possible shame and pain; therefore they may well have crucified Him naked. T. Mommsen *The Digest Of Justinian* 48.20.6 reports that "the garments that the condemned person is wearing may not be demanded by the torturers"- the fact that they gambled for His clothes shows that the Lord was yet again treated illegally (quite a feature of the records) and to the maximum level of abuse. We not only get this impression from the Biblical record, but from a passage in the Wisdom of Solomon (2:12-20) which would have been well known to them, and which has a surprising number of similarities to the Lord's life amongst the Jews (Susan Garrett lists several Greek words and phrases found in the Gospel of Mark which are identical to those in this section of the Wisdom of Solomon. It would seem that Mark was aware of this passage in the Wisdom of Solomon, and sought to show how throughout the Lord's ministry, and especially in His death, the Jews were seeking to apply it to Him in the way they treated Him. See Susan Garrett, *The Temptations Of Jesus In Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) p. 68):

"Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man, since he annoys us and opposes our way of life, reproaches us for our breaches of the law an accuses us of playing false... he claims to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a son of the Lord. Before us he stands, a reproof to our way of thinking, the very sight of him weighs our spirits down; His way of

life is not like other men's... in His opinion we are counterfeit...and boasts of having God as His father. let us see if what he says is true, let us observe what kind of end he himself will have. If the virtuous man is God's son, God will take his part and rescue him from the clutches of his enemies. *Let us test him with cruelty and with torture, and thus explore this gentleness of His and put His endurance to the proof. Let us condemn him to a shameful death* since he will be looked after- we have his word for it".

The idea of the Lord being subjected to the maximum pain and mocking must, sadly, be applied to Seneca's description of how some victims of crucifixion were nailed through their genitals (*Dialogi* 6.20.3). In this sense the paradox of Is. 53 would have come true- through losing His ability to bring forth children, the Lord brought forth a huge multitude of spiritual children world-wide. It's an honour to be one of them.

Did they throw the die on top of His outer garment? Note the focus of the soldiers upon the dividing up of the clothes, whilst the Son of God played out the ultimate spiritual drama for human salvation just a metre or so away from them. And our pettiness is worked out all too often in sight of the same cross. As those miserable men argued over the clothes at the foot of the cross, so when Israel stood before the glory of Yahweh at Sinai, they still suffered "disputes" amongst themselves (Ex. 24:22 NIV cp. Heb. 12:29). So pressing and important do human pettinesses appear, despite the awesomeness of that bigger picture to which we stand related.

The sheer and utter reality of the crucifixion needs to be meditated upon just as much as the actual reality of the fact that Jesus actually existed. A Psalm foretold that Jesus at His death would be the song of the drunkards. Many Nazi exterminators took to drink. And it would seem almost inevitable that the soldiers who crucified Jesus went out drinking afterwards. Ernest Hemingway wrote a chilling fictional story of how those men went into a tavern late on that Friday evening. After drunkenly debating whether "Today is Friday", they decide that it really is Friday, and then tell how they nailed Him and lifted Him up. "When the weight starts to pull on 'em, that's when it gets em... Ain't I seen em ? I seen plenty of 'em . I tell you, he was pretty good today". And that last phrase runs like a refrain through their drunken evening. Whether or not this is an accurate reconstruction isn't my point- we have a serious duty to seek to imagine what it might have been like. Both Nazi and Soviet executioners admit how vital it was to never look the man you were murdering in the face. It was why they put on a roughness which covered their real personalities. And the Lord's executioners would have done the same. To look into His face, especially His eyes, dark with love and grief for His people, would have driven those men to either suicide or conversion. I imagine them stealing a look at His face, the face of this man who didn't struggle with them but willingly laid Himself down on the wood. The cross struck an educated Greek as barbaric folly, a Roman citizen as sheer disgrace, and a Jew as God's curse. Yet Jesus turned the sign of disgrace

into a sign of victory. Through it, He announced a radical revaluation of all values. He made it a symbol for a brave life, without fear even in the face of fatal risks; through struggle, suffering, death, in firm trust and hope in the goal of true freedom, life, humanity, eternal life. The offence, the sheer scandal, was turned into an amazing experience of salvation, the way of the cross into a possible way of life. The risen Christ was and is just as much a living reality. Suetonius records that Claudius expelled Jewish Christians from Rome because they were agitated by one Chrestus; i.e. Jesus the Christ. Yet the historian speaks as if He was actually alive and actively present in person . In essence, He was. All the volumes of confused theology, the senseless theories about the Trinity. would all have been avoided if only men had had the faith to believe that the man Jesus who really died and rose, both never sinned and was also indeed the Son of God. And that His achievement of perfection in human flesh was real. Yes it takes faith- and all the wrong theology was only an excuse for a lack of such faith.

Several crucifixion victims have been unearthed. One was nailed with nails 18c.m. long (7 inches). A piece of acacia word seems to have been inserted between the nail head and the flesh. *Did the Lord cry out in initial pain and shock?* Probably, as far as I can reconstruct it; for He would have had all the physical reflex reactions of any man. But yet I also sense that He didn't flinch as other men did. He came to offer His life, willingly; not grudgingly, resistantly give it up. He went through the panic of approaching the pain threshold. The nailing of the hands and feet just where the nerves were would have sent bolts of pain through the Lord's arms every time He moved or spoke. The pain would have been such that even with the eyelids closed, a penetrating red glare would have throbbed in the Lord’s vision. Hence the value and intensity of those words He did speak. The pulling up on the nails in the hands as the cross was lifted up would have been excruciating. The hands were nailed through the 'Destot gap', between the first and second row of wrist bones, touching an extra sensitive nerve which controls the movement of the thumb and signals receipt of pain. They would not have been nailed through the palms or the body would not have been supportable . It has been reconstructed that in order to breathe, the crucified would have had to pull up on his hands, lift the head for a breath, and then let the head subside. The sheer physical agony of it all cannot be minimized. Zenon Ziolkowski (*Spor O Calun*) discusses contemporary descriptions of the faces of the crucified, including Jehohanan the Zealot, whose crucifixion Josephus mentions. Their faces were renowned for being terribly distorted by pain. The Lord's face was marred more than that of any other, so much so that those who saw Him looked away (Is. 52:14). That prophecy may suggest that for the Lord, the crucifixion process hurt even more. We suggest later that He purposefully refused to take relief from pushing down on the 'seat', and thus died more painfully and quicker. Several of the unearthed victims were crucified on olive trees. So it was perhaps an olive tree which the Lord had to carry. He would have thought of this as He prayed among the olive trees of Gethsemane (perhaps they took it from that

garden?). I would not have gone through with this. I would have chosen a lesser death and the achieving of a lesser salvation. I would have had more pity on myself. But the Lord of all did it *for me*, He became obedient *even* to death on a cross (Phil. 2:8), as if He could have been obedient to a lesser death, but He chose this ultimately high level. I can only marvel at the Father's gentleness with us, that despite the ineffable trauma of death, the way He takes us is so much more gentle than how He allowed His only begotten to go.

Presumably there were many soldiers around. The temple guard which was seconded to the Jews (Mt. 27:65) was doubtless there in full force, lest there be any attempt to save Jesus by the crowd or the disciples. And yet Jn. 19:23 suggests there were only four soldiers, each of whom received a part of His clothing. This must mean that there were four actually involved in the crucifixion: one for each hand and foot. He had signs of nails (plural) in His hands. We are left to meditate as to whether He was nailed hand over hand as tradition has it (which would have meant two very long nails were used); or both hands separately.

Despite much prior meditation, there perhaps dawned on the Lord some 'physical' realizations as to the nature of His crucified position: the utter impossibility of making the slightest change of position, especially when tormented by flies, the fact that the hands and feet had been pierced in the most sensitive areas; the fact that the arms were arranged in such a way so that the weight of the body hung only on the muscles, not on the bones and tendons. The smell of blood would have brought forth yelping dogs, circling birds of prey, flying insects...an incessant barrage of annoyances, things to distract the Lord's mind. As we too also face. He would have realized that the whole process was designed to produce tension in every part of the body. All His body, every part of it, in every aspect, had to suffer (and He would have realized the significance of this, and seen *all* of us as suffering with Him). The muscles were all hopelessly overworked, cramps due to the malcirculation of blood would have created an overwhelming desire to move. All victims would have writhed and wriggled within the few millimetres leeway which they had, to avoid a splinter pushing into the back lacerated from flogging... But my sense is that the Lord somehow didn't do this. He didn't push down on the footrests for relief (see 54), He didn't take the pain killer, He didn't ask for a drink until the end, when presumably the others accepted. Every muscle in the body would have become locked after two hours or so. Every part of His body suffered, symbolic of how through His sufferings He was able to identify with every member of His spiritual body- for "we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones" (Eph. 5:30). He had perhaps foreseen something of all this when He likened the killing of His body to the taking down of a tent / tabernacle- every bone and sinew, like every pole and canvass, had to be uprooted, 'taken down' (Jn. 2:19,21).

The moment of lifting the stake up vertical, probably amidst a renewed surge of abuse or cheering from the crowd, had been long foreseen and imagined by the Lord. "If, if I be *lifted up*..." (Jn. 12:32). He foresaw the physical (and spiritual) details of the crucifixion process in such detail. Recall how He foresaw that moment of handing over to death. And yet still He asked for the cup to pass, still He panicked and felt forsaken. If the theory of the cross was so hard to actually live out in practice for the Lord, then how hard it must be for us. The Lord's descriptions of Himself as being 'lifted up' use a phrase which carried in Hebrew the idea of exaltation and glory. As He was lifted up physically, the ground swaying before His eyes, His mind fixed upon the Father and the forgiveness which He was making possible through His sacrifice, covered in blood and spittle, struggling for breath... He was 'lifted up' in glory and exaltation, to those who have open eyes to see and hearts to imagine and brains to comprehend.

Imagine yourself being crucified. Go through the stages in the process. The Lord invited us to do this when He asked us to figuratively crucify ourselves daily. Consider all the language of the sacrifices which pointed forward to the final, supreme act of the Lord: poured out, pierced, parted in pieces, beaten out; the rock smitten... and this is the process which we are going through, although the Father deals with us infinitely more gently than with His only Son.

It is one of the greatest internal proofs of inspiration that this climactic act is recorded by each of the Gospel writers as a participial or subordinate clause. The concentration is on the splitting up of the clothes, which happened, of course, after the impaling. It is as if the record at this point is from the perspective of the soldiers. Get the job done, and *then*, on with the important bit!- the dividing of the clothes! No human author would ever have written like this. It's rather like the way Mary thinks that the risen Lord is a gardener. There is something artless and utterly Divine about it all. The record is full of what I would call spiritual culture. It has the hallmark of the Divine. This may be why some of the 'obvious' fulfilments of prophecy aren't mentioned, e.g. Is. 53:7 concerning the Lamb dumb before her shearers. Likewise there is no record of the faithful women weeping, or moaning as the body was taken down.

23:34 *And Jesus said: Father, forgive them. For they do not know what they do*- The Lord prayed that the soldiers would be forgiven [without repentance] because "they know not what they do". The fact He asked for their forgiveness shows that they were guilty of sin, although they were ignorant of it- and had therefore not repented. How could they repent of crucifying Christ while they were actually doing it? They may well have regretted doing what they were forced to do by reason of the circumstances in which they found themselves. Thus Christ knew that forgiveness was possible without specific

repentance and forsaking. The reply 'But that only applies to sins of ignorance!' is irrelevant- Christ's attitude still disproves the hypothesis that forgiveness can *only* be granted if there is a forsaking of sin. See on Acts 3:17.

Note the Lord's appreciation of the Fatherhood of God throughout His passion: Lk. 22:42; Mt. 26:39,42,44; Lk. 23:34,46. Throughout the Gospels, the Lord calls God His Father around 170 times (109 of them in John, as if he noticed this as especially significant). This was a real paradigm breaker for the Jews, who even from the 15 Old Testament references to God as Father, only understood His fatherhood in a national, not personal, sense. Yet the Son's relation to the Father has been passed on to us (Mk. 14:36 cp. Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). The closeness of the Father to the Son, prefigured by that between Abraham and Isaac, is something to be wondered at.

The Seven Last Sayings Of Jesus From The Cross	Number of words in Greek
1."Father forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34)	12
2."Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Lk. 23:43)	9
3. "Woman behold thy son!... Behold thy mother!" (Jn. 19:26)	4
4. "My God, my God, Why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34)	3
5. “I thirst" (Jn. 19:28)	1
6. "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30)	1
7. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Lk. 23:46)	8

The pain and difficulty of speech in the position of crucifixion was such that it is apparent that the Lord meant us to hear and meditate upon the words He uttered from the cross. Perhaps it would have been far easier for Him to have prayed those words to Himself, within His own thoughts; but instead He made the effort to speak them out loud. The passion of the Lord's intercessions on the cross is matchless. He roared to God in His prayer, regardless of whether there was light or darkness (Ps. 22:1,2). He reflected there that His prayer was offered to God "in an acceptable time" (Ps. 69:13).

And yet this very passage is taken up in 2 Cor. 6:2 concerning the necessary vigour of *our* crying to God for salvation. That the intensity of the Lord's prayerfulness and seeking of God on the cross should be held up as our pattern: the very height of the ideal is wondrous.

It is worth noting that if the Lord's seven recorded utterances are placed in the conventional chronology, the number of words He actually spoke can be seen to steadily decrease until the final utterance (although it should be noted that in our reconstruction, saying 3 comes before no. 2). Not only does this serve to illustrate the intensity of effort wrung forth from our Lord in His final utterance, but we also sense that He found physically speaking increasingly difficult.

"Father forgive them" were the first words said by the Lord Jesus as He hung on the cross. It seems from the context that they were said soon after the cross was lifted up into a vertical position and dropped down into the hole prepared for it. Physically, this would have been the time of greatest shock and pain, as the body of Jesus came to rest with its full weight upon the nails, as they tore into the flesh and sinews of His hands and feet. As His nervous system began to fully react, He was in great pain and shock. And yet immediately His thoughts went to forgiving those who had brought this upon Him; and, as we hope to see, His thoughts were immediately with us, with the possibility of our salvation and forgiveness. In this we see a matchless example of being so concerned for the salvation of others, so taken up with a desire to show love to those who hate us, that the physicality of our own sufferings, however immediately and insistently they press, becomes totally relegated.

We must face up to a fundamental question: Who was it that the Lord was asking God to forgive? By eliminating who He did *not* pray for, we can come towards an answer. He did not pray for the world (Jn. 17:9), which in the context seems to refer to the unrepentant Jewish world (cp. Jer. 11:14; 1 Jn. 5:8) as well as the surrounding (Roman) world.

Forgiveness is related to repentance. There would seem little point in the Lord praying for the Roman soldiers to be forgiven. It would be rather like a believer praying for some youths to be forgiven for vandalizing a bus shelter; to what point would this be? Would such a prayer really lead them towards salvation? Would it be an appropriate thing to pray for?

Throughout the Acts, both Peter and Paul accuse the Jews of having crucified the Lord, even though the Roman soldiers physically did it. Peter even goes so far as to say that it was their *hands* which placed Jesus on the cross and nailed Him (Acts 2:23- notice how

their physical contact with the Lord's body is stressed in Mk. 14:46,53). The Roman hands which did this were effectively Jewish hands. Psalms 22 and 69 outline in some detail the things done to Christ on the cross. Some were done by the Jews, others by the Romans. And yet the same pronoun "they" is used, as if these things were all done by the same group of people. This further suggests that the Spirit saw the actions of the Romans as being attributable to the Jews. There seems no reason to think that the Roman or Italian nation were held guilty by God for the part they played in the death of His Son.

The Jewish people generally were punished because they saw the Son of God coming to their vineyard, and yet they killed Him, despite recognizing who He was. "This is the heir", they recognized (Mt. 21:38). Pilate *therefore*, because of the Jews, ordered the death of the Son of God (Jn. 18:40 cp. 19:1). They must take full responsibility for it. The Roman soldiers set Christ at nought (Lk. 23:11); but this very act (the same word is used) is counted to the Jews (Acts 4:11). The Lord Jesus shouted out to them that He knew that they realized who He was: "Then cried Jesus in the temple as He taught, saying, You both know me, and you know from where I am" (Jn. 7:28). His allusion to the memorial Name ("I am") suggests that He recognized that they knew His Divine origin and manifestation of His Father's Name. The Lord was responding to their claim that they did not think He was Messiah (Jn. 7:27)- by saying 'You do know, deep inside, that I am He; but you won't face up to your conscience about it'. It was in this sense that Jesus frequently said in John's Gospel that the Jews did not know Him nor His Father. However, this does not mean that they did not recognize who He was. To "know" Christ in the Johanine sense is to believe in Him, not just to give Him cognizance. It would be a massive contradiction within the thinking of Jesus for Him to ask God to forgive the whole Jewish people *because* they didn't realize what they were doing. According to His parable of the men recognizing the heir and killing him, they did know, perfectly well, what they were doing. If indeed He was praying for the entire Jewish nation, His prayer went unanswered. He had said Himself that if the Jews did not repent and believe in Him, they would die in their sins; He said that an impressive three times (Jn. 8:21,24).

It seems that the Lord was in some way praying for those among the Jews who would later repent of what they had done. This suggestion must almost certainly have some truth about it because of the way Peter alludes to Christ's words: "Forgive them, for they know not what they do". He seems to apply these words to the Jews, and uses them to encourage the Jews to repent and thereby take unto themselves the forgiveness which Christ's prayer had made possible: "And now, brethren, I wot that through (RV "in") ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers... repent ye *therefore*" (Acts 3:17,19 AV). Paul makes a similar allusion in Acts 13:26,27: "Men and brothers, children of the stock of Abraham... they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers (cp. 3:17), because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him" .

There is a clear principle throughout God's self-revelation that ignorance does not atone for sin. "Father forgive them *for* they know not what they do" therefore does not mean that their ignorance plus Christ's prayer equalled forgiveness and therefore salvation. We have to conclude that He was saying 'They don't *now* know what they are doing, please forgive them on account of my death, they'll repent and realize later'. Despite Peter's allusion to Christ's prayer for their forgiveness, Peter still asks the Jews to repent so that they could be forgiven and saved. Therefore Christ's prayer for their forgiveness was not offered or answered in the sense that they would be forgiven without repentance. That forgiveness was only granted in prospect. They had to 'claim' it by their own repentance. However, it is still wondrously true that Christ understood that God was willing to grant forgiveness to people in prospect, even though they had not actually repented. If God is willing to do this, to forgive in hope of future repentance in response to such great grace, how much more should we behave likewise to each other. And yet we struggle with this, even though we each have received such grace ourselves.

The Lord's death was fundamentally for the salvation of Israel. His prayer was gloriously answered in that soon afterwards, 8,000 Jews were baptized (Acts 2:41; 4:4). Such is the power of anguished, heartfelt prayer for others- even when it seems there is no chance it will be heard. And such is the power of prayer for a third party. The Lord's attitude was not that they simply had to decide. He prayed they would be converted. It only applies to us insofar as we unite ourselves with the Israel of God. That minority within Israel who were crucifying Christ in ignorance ("they know not what they do") were the same category into which we fall. Christ praying on the cross for men to be forgiven ought to send the mind back to Is. 53, which prophesied that on the cross, the Christ would "justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities", be wounded for our transgressions, be bruised for our iniquities, make a sin offering for His seed, heal us through His stripes, achieve our peace with God through His chastisement, bear the sin of many, be numbered with the transgressors, be stricken "for the transgression of my people", and make "intercession for the transgressors". These are all broadly parallel statements. "The transgressors" are primarily "my people", Israel, who despised and rejected him (Is. 53:3). And yet they also refer to us, insofar as we become identified with Israel in order to be saved. The prophesy that Christ would make "intercession for the transgressors" in His time of dying was surely fulfilled when He prayed "Father forgive them". There seems no other real alternative.

And so we come to an awe-inspiring conclusion: the Lord was lifted up on the cross, and immediately His mind was full of us, all those who would repent and become the seed of Christ, full of our need, of the huge weight of all our sins. And He knew that through His death all that sin would be forgiven. It was by the Lord's one act of righteousness, one act of obedience, that we are justified (Rom. 5:18,19). He was obedient to the death of the cross (Phil. 2:8); and yet Heb. 5:8 and Phil. 2:8 RV imply that

He only became obedient whilst He was actually on the cross. Was it that there, whilst hanging there, He more deeply perceived that really, this was indeed the only way to meet our need- and therefore He made that one-off act of obedience in death which Rom. 5:19 speaks about. And that supreme love for us, that willingness to die “for us", is still part of His wonderful character; for there He “loved us" [the love of Christ and the cross are so often connected ideas], and yet He still has that same “love of Christ" for us today (Rom. 8:35,37).

As soon as the cross was lifted up, despite the sudden searing pain, His mind was fixed upon our desperate need: "Father forgive them". Each one of us who have now believed down through the subsequent years was forgiven then, in that moment, of all our sins we would ever commit. Through one act of righteousness [i.e. the cross], we were justified (Rom. 5:18 RV). There was such intensity of achievement in those moments of His death. Here on earth, on a mere speck of a planet in the outer suburbs of a galaxy that is only one of about a billion such galaxies in the observable universe, what happened on the cross determined the future of that universe. For all things both in heaven an in earth were reconcile by the blood of the cross. And yet throughout the Gospels Christ had taught that the Father would only forgive those who themselves live a forgiving life. Yet at that time we had not repented; "When we were yet without strength, Christ died for the ungodly... God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us... when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his son" (Rom. 5:5-10).

Our Lord's prayer was heard; our sins, unrepented of, were forgiven, in prospect we were forgiven and saved. In the same way as Peter used the wonder of this to appeal to the Jews to repent, so we should heed the appeal. All our sins were forgiven as a result of that prayer, in prospect we were saved. God for the sake of that prayer of Christ forgave us all our sins then (Eph. 4:32), the whole concept of sin was ended in prospect (Dan. 9:24), one final sacrifice was offered for sins (Heb. 10:12). The result of this is that we should repent, search ourselves and confess as many of our sins as possible, knowing they have been conquered. And we too should forgive each other in the same manner as we have been forgiven (Eph. 4:32), not waiting for repentance, but learning the spirit of Christ and the attitude of our Father.
The extreme seriousness of our position prior to our reconciliation with God is easy to underestimate. We were "enemies... sinners". We have seen that "Father forgive them" refers to both us and the ignorant Jews who were crucifying Christ. And yet in the first instance, the "them" referred to the Roman soldiers; *they* crucified the Lord, they parted His garments; and it is in that context that He asked for "them" to be forgiven. There is a certain relevance of Christ's words to those ignorant soldiers. And yet we have seen that they really refer to us, to all those who will truly repent of their sins. It follows that those

soldiers represent us, as the Jews who rejected and despised Christ in Is. 53 represent us too. Truly do we sing that "*We* held him as condemned by Heaven", albeit in ignorance. The roughness and ignorance of those soldiers typifies our life before baptism. If we continue sinning, we crucify again the son of God, this time not in ignorance. The consequences of that are almost too fearful to imagine.

Ignorance is no atonement for sin, as the Law taught. "Forgive them *for* they know not what they do" sounds as if Christ felt that He was the offering for ignorance, which was required for both rulers and ordinary Israelites (cp. how Peter and Paul describe both the rulers and ordinary people as "ignorant", implying they had a need for the ignorance offering of Christ, Acts 3:17; 13:27). Indeed, Is. 53:10 NIV describes the Lord's death as a "guilt offering". And significantly, Heb. 5:2 describes Him as a good priest who can have compassion on those (i.e. us) who have sinned through ignorance and want reconciliation. As we come, progressively, to realize our sinfulness, we need to make a guilt offering. But that guilt offering has already been made, with the plea "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do".

"Father forgive them" was uttered with His mind on all our future sins, He foresaw them all, He felt them upon Him, He saw they could not be forgiven without repentance, and yet He asked the Father to forgive them as sins of ignorance, believing that we would repent in the future. No wonder Peter and Paul use these words of the Lord as the basis of their appeal to Israel to repent! And if we appreciate them, we will be inspired to truly examine ourselves, to realize our secret sins, to search the word in order to reveal our sins to us, to ask God after the pattern of David to reveal our weakness to us, to truly confess our sins, knowing that each and every one of them was recognized by the Father and Son as Christ hung on the cross. Every one of them was a weight upon Christ, and every one of them was forgiven in the hope that we would later appreciate the wonder of such grace, and repent. This means that as with Israel in Acts 3, our repentance is what makes the cross of Christ powerful for us, it is what makes the victory of Christ all the greater if we accept it; for when we repent, "our unrighteousness commends God's righteousness", in the language of Romans.

In some sense, then, the Lord was aware of each of us and each of our sins as He hung there. "Forgive them" was wrung out of this deep appreciation. Just one word (in the Greek) expressed such intensity of appreciation of our need. It seems that as Christ hung on the cross He had a vision of the faithful. How this was achieved is hard to imagine, but it is not beyond the realms of Divine possibility that somehow Christ was made aware of each and every one of us, and each of our sins. Consider the following hints concerning the Lord's vision of His ecclesia on the cross:
- "*When* You shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed… he shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (Is. 53:10,11). "*When*" would suggest

that the Lord had some kind of vision of those He was offering Himself for, especially in their future, forgiven state.
- Psalms 22 and 69 describe Christ on the cross foreseeing "the great congregation" gratefully and humbly eating in memory of Him (cp. the breaking of bread), serving Him, inheriting Zion and declaring His righteousness and His victory on the cross to others down the generations. Let us remember this as we break bread and witness to Him (Ps. 22:30,31).
- On the cross the Lord saw all His bones, which represented the future members of His body (Ps. 22:17 cp. Eph. 5:30).
- The Lord prayed just before His passion in a way which would almost imply that He had some heightened awareness of the redeemed as a group: "...for them also which shall believe in me... that they also may be one".
- "For the joy that was set before him" the Lord endured the cross (Heb. 12:2). "Set before" can imply a vision, as if He saw something in front of Him as He hung on the cross. The spirit of Christ in Ps. 16:11 describes the Lord looking forward to fullness of joy in God's Heavenly presence, because "at your right hand are pleasures for evermore". He is now at God's right hand interceding for us. Therefore we suggest that the joy set before Christ in vision as He hung on the cross was the joy of His future mediation for our sins as we repent of them and confess them in prayer.

The intensity of feeling behind those words of our Lord almost defies exhibition through the medium of human words or language. Heb. 5:1-7 describes the Lord on the cross as a priest offering up a guilt offering for our sins of ignorance. He did this, we are told, through "prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears". This must surely be a reference to "Father forgive them". Those were said with a real passion, with strong crying, with tears as He appreciated the extent of our sinfulness and offence of God. There is a connection between these words and those of Rom. 8:26,27, which describes the Lord as our High Priest making intercession for us "with groanings". "Groanings" is surely the language of suffering and crucifixion. It is as if our Lord goes through it all again when He prays for our forgiveness, He has the same passion for us now as He did then. Think of how on the cross He had that overwhelming desire for our forgiveness despite His own physical pain. That same level of desire is with Him now. Surely we can respond by confessing our sins, by getting down to realistic self-examination, by rallying our faith to truly appreciate His mediation and the forgiveness that has been achieved, to believe that all our sins, past and future, have been conquered, and to therefore rise up to the challenge of doing all we can to live a life which is appropriate to such great salvation.

23:35 *And the people stood watching*- The other two were there, but the people all watched Jesus. He was lifted up, and He drew all men (all men's eyes, in the primary sense) unto Him (Jn. 12:32). And the cross has that same magnetism today.

And the rulers also scoffed at him, saying: He saved others- A tacit recognition that His healing miracles and the resurrection of Lazarus were undeniable. “He saved others" would have been a reference to Lazarus. His was a well-known case among the Jews (was Lazarus there? It would have been strange if He had not been). The Lord's mind would have choked at the memory of dear Lazarus, Martha, Mary, the now shattered family whom He had loved and still loved.

Let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, His chosen!- All the emphasis on save *yourself* was a temptation for Him to forget *us*. He would have reflected that He was saving Himself and us by staying where He was; coming down from the cross wouldn't lead to salvation. What the flesh understands by salvation and what the spirit understands by it are vastly different.

23:36 *And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him offering vinegar, and saying*- Matthew notes that the Lord refused to drink it after tasting it. The tenses imply that the offer was made continually.

To give strong drink to those ready to perish was a well-known custom at crucifixion. The fact victims survived two or three days was only because they were given drink. The Lord didn't simply refuse the pain killer. He took it, tasted it, and then refused it. Why did He first taste it? Surely He knew the custom, and He knew what it was. Various alternatives arise in the mind, each a source of devotional inspiration:

- Was it that His eyesight was damaged by the punches and He didn't see what it was until He tasted it? "When Jesus therefore saw his mother..." may suggest that He didn't initially recognize her. The Messianic Scriptures mention the affliction of eyesight in Messiah's final suffering. Early crucifixion art shows the Lord with His right eye damaged (as does the Turin shroud). The mucous membrane (the thin slippery tissues which lubricate the human body) would have dried so that “they rip layers of tissues from the eyes every time the pupil is moved or blinked" (C.M. Ward).
- Maybe He realized as He had the cup on His lips that they were giving this to Him in the spirit of Jer. 23:15: to show that He was a false prophet. In this case, for the sake of His respect for the implications of Holy Scripture, He endured a far higher degree of pain.
- Another explanation is that He wanted to speak out loud, saying (several times?) "Father, forgive them", and to perhaps recite Psalm 22. He was so parched from thirst (He had lost body fluid in Gethsemane) that He knew He couldn't speak out loud without some liquid. The dehydration would have made His tongue thicken so that speech was eventually almost impossible. But He only drank enough to moisten His throat, not to deaden any pain. This shows the majestic self-mastery within the Lord; He knew just when to stop, even though it must have been so tempting to keep on drinking.
- Taking the pain killer would not have been a sin, neither would it have theologically damaged the atonement. Perhaps the Lord took it, as doubtless the others did, and then had the self-control to think better of it and give it back. Such was His devotion to

the absolute height of identity with us. It makes His action all the more poignant if He first tasted and then refused, rather than just refusing outright.

He was *repeatedly* offered the pain killer, the tense implies. Men offering Him myrrh in (mock) homage would have sent His mind back to the story dear Mary had told Him about the wise men bringing myrrh. And inevitably her tortured mind would have gone back there too. But I have another suggestion. When we read that “someone" offered him a sponge with wine mixed with myrrh (Mk. 15:36; Mt. 27:48), we recall the use of myrrh in preparing bodies for burial (Mk. 14:3; Lk. 23:56; Jn. 12:3; 19:39). Pliny (*Natural History* 14.15.92,107) records: “The finest wine in early days was that spiced with the scent of myrrh... I also find that aromatic wine is constantly made from almost the same ingredient as perfumes, from myrrh". This alerts me to the real possibility that the unnamed bystander who did this was Mary Magdalene. Earlier she had anointed the Lord’s body with myrrh “to the burial". And now she has prepared the most expensive form of wine as some sort of pain killer. Perhaps the Lord was so touched by this that He accepted it, but didn’t drink it. His doing this is otherwise very hard to understand. Her love was on one hand inappropriate, and yet the Lord still accepted it, even though He couldn’t use it. He could have felt angry with her for tempting Him to the easier way. But He didn’t. And in so doing He showed her that the essence of the cross is that there is no easy way. The principles of all this are to be reflected in our cross carrying.

Another alternative presents itself from the Hebrew text of Ps. 69:21: “They gave me also gall". The Hebrew can stand the translation ‘poison’ (see RSV). Given the extended, agitated torture of crucifixion, there was a custom for close friends to get close enough to the cross to lift up a poisonous substance which the crucified would lick, and thereby die quickly. It is just possible that a friend (or even his mother?) or a sympathetic soldier did this. Again, in this case it would seem that the Lord chose the highest level; our salvation would surely have been theologically achievable if He had taken it. But He chose to attain for us not only salvation, but “such *great* salvation" (Heb. 2:3) by always taking the highest level. He became obedient not only to death, but “even the death of the cross".

One feels that the Lord would have been justified in accepting the pain killer that was offered Him in His final agony; but He refused it, it seems to me, in order to achieve the *greatest* salvation for us. He never once used what I have called the principle of Jephthah's vow. In the same spirit, some faithful men of old refused legitimate deliverance from torture so that they might obtain "a better resurrection" (Heb. 11:35). The record of the cross is full of examples of where the Lord in physical terms rejected legitimate comforts in His final hours. Yet throughout His life, He was ever ready to concede to the weakness of those who would genuinely follow Him. The way He spoke about demons without giving His hearers a lecture about the folly of such belief is proof of this. He could have insisted, as we do, on the rejection of such superstitions. But this

was not His way. I am not suggesting that *we* have the right to make such concessions in our preaching and baptizing. But He did.

23:37 *If you are the King of the Jews*- His claims to Kingship, and the claim of His placard, was a repeated jibe. It must have seemed so incongruous that this wretchedly suffering man actually thought Himself to be a King. "If... let him come down" may have been followed by a pause: is He going to do anything? In their hearts they must have known that He had had the ability to pull off this kind of thing. Those silent pauses must have been an agony for the Lord. There were probably many in that crowd half sympathetic to His wretched cause, who, on the surface, really might have believed if He had come down. But He had learned the lesson in the Galilee days, that impressive miracles didn't really instil faith (Pentecostals etc. still fail to realize this).

The mocking Jews fall strangely silent in the crucifixion accounts. The Lord had plainly foretold that when they had lifted up the Son of man, then they would know “that I am he", and would recognize His Divine Sonship (Jn. 8:27). There was something about the vision of Christ crucified which convicted them of their folly and of the Divinity of God’s Son. And that power burns on today.

Save yourself- All the emphasis on save *yourself* was a temptation for Him to forget *us*. He would have reflected that He was saving Himself and us by staying where He was; coming down from the cross wouldn't lead to salvation. What the flesh understands by salvation and what the spirit understands by it are vastly different.

23:38 *And there was also a written notice above him: This is the King of the Jews*- It was also written in Hebrew (Jn.), and putting together the gospel records, it said "This is Jesus of Naareth, the king of the Jews". Did Pilate write it in his own handwriting? Did they use the same ladder to place the inscription which Joseph later used to retrieve the body? Why do the records suggest that the inscription was placed after the stake had been erected? Was there initial resistance from the Jews? Was He impaled with the placard around His neck, and then the ladder was put up, and a soldier lifted it off and nailed it above His head? "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would have used words whose first letters created the sacred Name: YHWH. Perhaps this was why there was such opposition to it. "King of the Jews" would have been understood as a Messianic title. Either Pilate was sarcastic, or really believed it, or just wanted to provoke the Jews. In any case, somehow the Yahweh Name was linked with the Messiah: King of the Jews. The Name was declared in the Lord’s death, as He had foretold (Jn. 17:26). Forgiveness of sins is through baptism into the Name (Acts 2:38), as even in OT times forgiveness was for the sake of the Name (Ps. 79:9). And yet through the cross and blood of Christ is forgiveness made possible. His blood and death therefore was the supreme declaration of God’s Name; through His cross the grace and forgiveness, love, salvation and judgment implicit in the Name was all enabled and revealed in practice. Ps. 22:22 prophesied that “I will declare thy name unto my

brethren, in the midst of the congregation [*ekklesia*, LXX]". It was to us His brethren that the Name was declared; in the eyes of an unbelieving world, this was just another crucified man, a failure, a wannabe who never made it. But to us, it is the declaration of the Name. It was and is done in the midst of the ecclesia, as if the whole church from that day to this beholds it all at first hand. And our response is to in turn “Declare his righteousness" (Ps. 22:31), in response to seeing the Name declared, we declare to Him…in lives of love for the brethren. For the Name was declared, that the love that was between the Father and Son might be in us.

It is possible to argue that "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would require the use of words, the first letters of which created the word YHWH:

y Jesus- Yeshua
h The Nazarene- Ha’Natzri [cp. “the sect of ‘The Nazarene(s)’, Acts 24:5]
v and King- u’Melek
h of the Jews- Ha’Yehudim
giving the Yahweh Name:
hvhy

This is why the Jews minded it so strongly when the title was put up. Pilate’s retort “What I have written I have written" may well have been an oblique reference to ‘I am that I am’. It was his attempt to have the last laugh with the Jews who had manipulated him into crucifying a man against whom there was no real charge. It was as if the Lord suffered as He did with a placard above Him which effectively said: 'This is Yahweh'. The Name was declared there, as the Lord had foreseen (Jn. 17:26). The declaration of Yahweh’s Name to Moses in Ex. 34:6 thus becomes a foretaste of the Lord’s crucifixion. Some LXX versions render Ex. 34:6 as ‘Yahweh, Yahweh, *a man* full of mercy….’. In the crucifixion of the man Christ Jesus the essence of Yahweh was declared. And we, John says with reference to the cross, saw that glory,as it were cowering in the rock like Moses, *full* of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14 cp. Ex. 34:6 RV).

There are other reasons for thinking that there was the supreme manifestation of Yahweh in the cross of His Son:
· It has been observed that the blood of the Passover Lamb on the lintels of the doors at the Exodus, three sides of a square, would have recalled the two repeated letters of ‘Yahweh’ (see above panel), as if His Name was manifested in the blood of the slain lamb.
· Yahweh laid on the Lord the iniquity of us all, as if He was present there when the soldiers laid the cross upon the Lord's shoulders (Is. 53:6).
· Yahweh had prophesied of what He would achieve through the crucified Christ: “I am, I am: He that blots out thy trangressions" (Is. 43:25 LXX). He declares His Name as being supremely demonstrated in His forgiveness of our sins through and in the Lord’s cross.
· Jehovah-Jireh can mean “Yahweh will show Yah" (Gen. 22:14), in eloquent prophecy of

the crucifixion. There Yahweh was to be manifested supremely.
· Paul speaks of how the cross of Christ should humble us, so that no flesh should glory in God's presence (1 Cor. 1:29); as if God's presence is found in the cross, before which we cannot have any form of pride.

· The LXX uses the word translated "propitiation" in the NT with reference to how God forgave / propitiated for Israel's sins for His Name's sake (Ex. 32:14; Ps. 79:9). That propitiation was only for the sake of the Lord's future death, which would be the propitiation God ultimately accepted. Having no past or future with Him, Yahweh could act as if His Son's death had already occurred. But that death and forgiveness for "His name's sake" were one and the same thing. The Son's death was the expression of the Father's Name.
· There was a Jewish tradition that the only time when the Yahweh Name could be pronounced was by the High Priest, when he sprinkled the blood of Israel's atonement on the altar. The Name was expressed in that blood.
· Zech. 11:13 speaks of Yahweh being priced at thirty shekels of silver by Israel. But these words are appropriated to the Lord in His time of betrayal. What men did to Him, they did to the Father.
-The Red Heifer was to be slain before the face of the priest, "as he watches" (Num. 19:3-5 NIV), pointing forward to the Lord's slaughter in the personal presence of the Father.

- The blood of the sin offering was to be sprinkled "before the LORD, before the veil" (Lev. 4:6,17). Yet the veil was a symbol of the flesh of the Lord Jesus at the time of His dying. At the time of the sprinkling of blood when the sin offering was made, the veil [the flesh of the Lord Jesus] was identifiable with Yahweh Himself. The blood of the offerings was poured out "before Yahweh" (Lev. 4:15 etc.), pointing forward to how God Himself, from so physically far away, "came down" so that the blood shedding of His Son was done as it were in His presence. And who is to say that the theophany that afternoon, of earthquake and thick darkness, was not the personal presence of Yahweh, hovering above crucifixion hill? Over the mercy seat (a symbol of the Lord Jesus in Hebrews), between the cherubim where the blood was sprinkled, "there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee" (Ex. 25:22). There we see the essence of God, and there in the cross we hear the essential word and message of God made flesh.
· The smitten rock was an evident type of the Lord's smiting on the cross. And yet in Deuteronomy especially it is made clear that Israel were to understand Yahweh as their rock. And yet "that rock was Christ". God Himself said that he would stand upon the rock as it was smitten- presumably fulfilled by the Angel standing or hovering above / upon the rock, while Moses smote it. And yet again it is Yahweh who is described as smiting the rock in Ps. 78 and Is. 48:21. He was with Christ, directly identified with Him, at the very same time as He 'smote' Him.

Lk. 22:36,38 record that the inscription on the cross was “also" written- connecting with how the soldiers “also" mocked Him. The inscription was intended as another mockery; but it was a vital part in declaring God’s glory. The incident is typical of how those things which seem the most negative and unspiritual are used by the Father to His and our glory in the end.

23:39 *And one of the criminals that hung there hurled insults at him, saying: Are not you the Christ? Save yourself and us-*

It is all too easy for us to see the thief on the cross as a pawn in the game of the Lord's crucifixion. But there is real New Testament evidence that we are to see in Him our personal representative. Thus Paul challenges us to be "co- crucified" with Christ (Rom. 6:6 "our old man was crucified with Him"; Gal. 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ" cp. 1 Cor. 11:1). To be crucified together with Christ immediately sends the imaginative mind to the thief on the cross- the one who was literally crucified together with Christ. It is doubtful if the Spirit in Paul would speak of 'co- crucifixion' without deliberate reference back to the thief. Our Lord matched the idea of the word "Kingdom" in the thief's plea with the word "paradise". Occurring only three times in the New Testament, it is hard to resist the conclusion that in Rev. 2:7, our Lord's mind was back in the agonizing conversation with the thief: "To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God". It was to the thief on the cross, some years earlier, that Christ had made the same promise of paradise. It may be significant that Rev. 2:7 was specifically addressed to those who were zealous by nature, hating laxity, yet who had left their first love. The thief may well have been a 'zealot' who had once turned to Christ having been converted by John the Baptist, but whose real faith had slipped away. But to any who overcome, the same promise of paradise is made. The Lord’s promise to him that he would ‘be with him’ is the very language of 2 Cor. 5:8 ["we would rather be absent from the body and at home with the Lord"] and 1 Thess. 4:17 ["so shall we ever be with the Lord"] about us all.

According to Mk. 15:32, both criminals "reviled" Jesus, just as the crowd did (Mk. 15:29). They were caught up in the world's view of the crucified Jesus; they were led into sin, including the thief who repented. But the Lord understood the pressure of the surrounding world, and was eager to forgive a man for a temorary slip under heavy pressure. He treated it as a surface level sin. Not that it was not a sin. Nor that we are able to shrug off our sins as surface level failure. The man fell into the typically human way of taking out your anger on whoever happens to be next to you. That was how He died, to remind us that the Jesus who was yesterday is the same today, and for ever. The crowds who began reviling (Mark) are described by Luke as simply watching (Lk. 23:35) and then returning home beating their breasts (Lk. 23:48,49)- clearly to be connected with Luke's record of the Lord's parable of the repentant tax collector, who beats upon his breast in repentance and also returns home. The idea is surely that some in the

crowd, those at least upon whom Luke focuses, stopped reviling the crucified Jesus and then repented. Just as did the repentant thief. The thief is thereby set up as a pattern to be followed- by both the crowds, and ourselves. This is not mere history. God's word is a living word that speaks to us. The impenitent thief then connects with those in the crowd who refused to repent. Before the cross, men are divided into two groups- desperate sinners who repent, and those who refuse to repent right up to their grave planks. The parables make the same division- e.g. the son who goes to work for his father, and the one who doesn't, the prodigal or the elder brother, the Pharisee or the tax collector. This is our choice. And this is why self-examination is a natural outcome of beholding the cross.

It is recorded in the other Gospels that both the thieves "railed on" Christ, joining in with the crowd to "cast the same in his teeth" (Mt. 27:44). We must see the words of the repentant thief in Lk. 23 against this background. There he was, knowing the truth, having fallen away, now facing his death. In his self- centredness, he grew bitter against the one he knew to be his saviour. Despite the difficulty and pain which speaking whilst crucified involved, he made the effort to lambaste his saviour, as well as he knew how. But as he watched the Lord's silent response, sensing the deep spiritual communion with the Father which was then happening, he experienced a wave of even greater anger and remorse- this time, against himself. 'I could have made it, I could have repented, but now it's too late. I've added insult to injury, I've blasphemed and mocked my only possible saviour, in this my hour of desperate need'. So he fell silent, whilst (we may infer) the other thief kept up his insults and selfish pleas for immediate salvation. And he watched the suffering saviour, literally from the corner of his eye. Remember, the thieves were crucified next to Jesus. Indeed one wonders whether the other thief had also once been a believer when he says “Art not thou the Christ?" (Lk. 23:39 RV).

The impenitent thief believed Jesus was Christ, but he understood the Messiah as offering immediate salvation. And the Lord's whole teaching was that the Kingdom was about delayed gratification, coming to its full term in the future establishment of His Kingdom at His return and the resurrection of the dead. We learn from this that mere acceptance that Jesus of Nazareth was someone special, even very special, is no guarantee of salvation. It is His message, the word which was made flesh in Him, which has to be obediently believed.

23:40 *But the other answered, and rebuking him said: Do you not even fear God, seeing you have the same judgment?-* The thieves had the same judgment as the Lord Jesus; death on a cross. It was God who needed to be feared, rather than asking favours of Jesus as Messiah. And yet the second thief clearly believed the Lord was God's Son who would return as judge to establish His Kingdom. He displays therefore a fine appreciation of the relationship between the Father and Son. He urges the first thief to not ask favours of the dying Jesus, but to instead "fear God", appreciating that His Son

was sharing in their deaths, and yet in the power of God would resurrect, and return in glory to judge men and establish His Kingdom. He clearly understood that both he and the other thief would come to judgment, and needed to fear the prospect of God condemning them. But although the Lord Jesus had "the same judgment" of crucifixion and death, He did not need to "fear" Divine condemnation. Because He was perfect. And so the repentant thief came to glimpse the final truth- that in fact, the Man dying next to him was his of his nature, his representative; but perfect. And therefore, He would be the judge at the last day. For He was Messiah. And the thought formed in his mind, to ask Him even now for mercy. The other thief merely saw the Lord as a fulfilment of Bible prophecy, and "Messiah" for the sake of it, but unable to give immediate salvation.

23:41 *But we indeed justly*- It has often been pointed out that the brief words of the thief encompass all the basic beliefs of the One Faith. He believed in the sinfulness of man, the supreme righteousness of Christ, salvation by grace, the second coming and judgment seat of Christ, and the Kingdom. Yet not only did he believe those things as abstract principles. As he beheld, at close range, the sufferings of God's peerless son, the reality of those principles really came home to him. Perhaps he was a slave who had committed a relatively petty crime, but as a slave he had to be crucified. All prisoners and most condemned men feel keenly their relative innocence and the unfairness of it all. But with quite some pain he gasped: "...and we indeed justly". He came to deeply understand the basic principles, and appreciate their personal bearing to himself. He knew the basic principles of the true Gospel, but it was his co- crucifixion with Christ that made him grasp hold of them for dear life. Job too went through the same process, thanks to his typical suffering together with Christ: "I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees you" (Job 42:5). And us? The thief, not to say Job, represents us. If we are truly co- crucified with Christ, the basic elements of our faith will not be just a dry doctrinal skeleton. The coming of the Kingdom, the doctrine of judgment and the atonement, these will be all we live for! For they were all the thief had to live for, during his hours of co- crucifixion.

For we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong- The cross is capable of interpretation as some kind of judgment seat or throne. And significantly, there are men on the right hand and left of the Lord, one rejected, the other gloriously accepted. It is possible to translate the repentant thief as telling the other: "Do you not fear God *when* you stand condemned?". Before Jesus crucified, we all stand condemned. And he stresses that "we are condemned justly" (Lk. 23:41), for it was evident to all that here hung a just / righteous man. He, there, the just hanging for the unjust, convicts us of sin. Somehow the repentant thief came to know Jesus in the deepest possible sense. Truly could he address him as "Lord", perceiving already how the cross had made Him "Lord and Christ". The thief knew that judgment day was

coming, and asked to be remembered for good there. He was surely alluding to Ps. 106:4: “Remember me, Lord, in the course of favouring your people. Visit me with your salvation". And this connection between the cross and the judgment was evidently impressed upon the thief. Doubtless he also had in mind the desperate plea of Joseph: “Have me in remembrance when..." you come into your position of power" (Gen. 40:14 RV). The thief had perhaps meditated upon the implications of the Lord’s prayer: “Your kingdom come". He saw it as now being certain because of the cross- “when you come in your Kingdom...". And yet he felt as if he was in prospect already there before the coming King, as he hung there before Him on the cross. We are the same. To come before Him on the cross is to have elicited within us self-examination, a kind of preview of the last judgment. For truly had the Lord foretold of the cross that "now is the judgment of this world".

23:42 *And he said: Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom*- Note the Joseph allusions- in prison with two malefactors (one good and one bad?) as Christ on the cross with two criminals (one good, one bad). "Remember me when it shall be well with you" (Gen. 40:14) = "Remember me". The contrast is with the words of the first thief, who wanted 'salvation' immediately. The repentant thief perceives that salvation is not now, but "in Your kingdom". And he sees his death as absolutely necessary and right, because he is a sinner. We see here perhaps a case of faith in the things of the Name of Jesus and the things of the Kingdom of God, an idea Luke develops in Acts. The first thief accepted Jesus as Christ; but rejected the things of the Kingdom, because he wanted salvation right now without the cross and wouldn't accept [even in his death throes] that he was a sinner who deserved death and therefore ought to die. This kind of petty pride in the face of death itself is seen today.

It is possible that the thief had a really deep Bible knowledge. “Remember me when you come in your Kingdom" is almost certainly reference to Gen. 40:14, where Joseph desperately and pathetically asks: “But think on me when it shall be well with you...". Joseph went on to say “...here also have I done nothing that they should out me into the dungeon" (Gen. 40:15). This is very much the spirit of “This man has done nothing amiss...". It could be that when he asks to be remembered for good, he had in mind Abigail's words: that when David returned in glory in his Kingdom, "my Lord, then remember your handmaid". This was prefaced by her asking: "Forgive the trespass of your handmaid... a man is risen to pursue you, and to seek your soul: but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord your God: and the souls of your enemies, them shall he sling out" (1 Sam. 25:29-31). And David's response was marvellously similar to that of the Lord to the thief: "Go up in peace to your house; see, I have hearkened to your voice, and have accepted your person" (1 Sam. 25:35). It would seem that the thief saw in David a type of the Lord, and saw in Abigail's words exactly the attitude he fain would have. And the Lord accepted this.

23:43 *And he said to him-*
The Lord had felt forsaken by the Father. "Why / how have You forsaken Me" was reflective of introspection and depression. But it was the question of the thief, and the Lord's attention to Him, which led Him to be confident that He, as well as the thief, would be "in Paradise". Our engagement with others, not least through evangelism and comforting the desperate, is so often the path out of our own self-focus.

Truly, I can say to you today right now, that you will indeed be with me in Paradise- "Luke elsewhere uses "today" to refer to immediate salvation (2:11; 4:21; 5:26; 13:32; 19:9); Luke's Gospel, then, insists that salvation is not simply a radically future experience but a thing of the present". Always in the OT, "I say unto you this day" was used as a Hebraism to bring home the utter solemnity of some great truth (e.g. Dt. 4:26,39; 8:19).

The Lord could have responded to the question in various ways. He could have assured the man of forgiveness, not least of cursing him just minutes earlier. And perhaps that was in the man's mind and preying on his conscience. Instead, the Lord assures the criminal that he will be saved, and His vision of eternity for the man was that he would simply be "with Jesus" in "paradise". Perhaps the Lord used the idea of paradise in allusion to the restored garden of Eden. All the background noise caused by personal sin, and living in a fallen world with fallen people, will be no more. There will be nothing in our surrounding environment to distract us. And we shall simply be 'with Jesus'. Many visions of the Kingdom seem to overly dwell upon the wonder of there not being this or that imperfection in the planet any longer. But the Lord's vision was that the Kingdom will essentially be about relationship with Him. And indeed, the background noise of sin and all its consequences will be no more.

The thieves (and Barabbas) would have been tried along with Jesus; they would have been present at His trial. Roman law required that the death penalty be executed the same day as it was given. The crucifixion being quite early in the day, it seems almost certain that the four cases to be tried that day would all have been heard in the same room. The behaviour of the Lord must have really given those other three something to reflect on. An interesting point comes out of the Greek text of Lk. 23:39: "One of the criminals who were *suspended* reviled him" (Diaglott). Ancient paintings show the thieves tied by cords to the crosses, not nailed as was Christ. *Hanging* on a tree became an idiom for crucifixion, even if nails were actually used (Dt. 21:23 cp. Gal. 3:13; Acts 5:30; 10:39). If this were so, we see the development of a theme: that the whole ingenuity of man was pitted against the Father and Son. Christ was nailed, not tied; the tomb was sealed and guarded; the legal process was manipulated; the Lord was flogged as well as crucified.

Such was the holiness, the supreme righteousness of the Lord, that the thought grew within him: 'Perhaps even now, while I've got life, I could ask for forgiveness, and a place

in the Kingdom?'. As with us, beholding the cross and the death of God's Son inspired him to believe that no sin is unforgivable by Him. It is in fact His desire to forgive; He died to forgive us. We can be sure that he grappled within himself with this thought, before ever presenting it verbally to Jesus. He would have seen the Lord's demeanour under trial, and the beauty and graciousness of His character and essential being must have made a deep impact upon the thief. When he speaks about Jesus having "done nothing amiss", he is repeating what he had heard hours before (Mk. 14:56); and the Lord's confident words of Mt. 26:64 were still ringing in his ears [" from this time forward you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power"], when he spoke of wanting mercy when this crucified man came again in glory to establish His Kingdom (cp. Lk. 21:42). And yet this perceptive man had just blasphemed Jesus with all the vicious vitriol he knew ("cast the same in his teeth" is the forerunner of 'a kick in the teeth'). It was supreme faith in and appreciation of the love and mercy of Christ which led him to make his request. I see the very fact he could make that request as a wonderful triumph of human faith over the weakness of human flesh when afflicted. That request was born out of a healthy fear of God. Before speaking to Jesus, he rebuked the other thief: "Don't you fear God...?" (Lk. 23:40). Appreciating the enormity of his sin, the repentant thief had come to fear God, to imagine the day of judgment and condemnation of sin. We dare to imagine the nervous tone of voice in which he then spoke to Jesus: "Lord, remember me (i.e. for good) when you come into your Kingdom" (Lk. 23:42). He was pleading for acceptance at the day of judgment, provoked to do so by a fear of God's coming judgments. This was surely a spiritual pinnacle. The pain of his own sufferings, coupled with his close observation of the Lord's supreme holiness as He hung on the cross, had led him to appreciate his own sinfulness, and had inspired one of the greatest levels of faith in the mercy of Christ which mankind has reached. And so he received the ultimate assurance: You *will* be with me, in the Kingdom. The question of where the comma should be placed becomes irrelevant when we imagine how the Lord would have gasped for each word. There would, as it were, have been a comma between each word.

The thief was confident, in faith, that he would be heard. But how he would have hung upon every one of the quiet words which the Lord muttered in response, travelling over the few metres which separated them. "Verily I say unto thee this day: with me shalt thou be in Paradise" (Rotherham). We believe that to have been the emphasis in His words. 'Yes, I can really tell you, here and now, you will be in the Kingdom!'. Think of the spiritual ecstasy which would have come over the thief! God had caused him to triumph in Christ! He, the lowest sinner, had entered the highest rank of saints- those who have been directly assured that they will be in the Kingdom. Daniel, the disciples and Paul seem the only others in this category- along with the thief.

But like the repentant thief, our mind must be full of the vision of our dying saviour, triumphing in His holiness, freely confessing our sin and the justice of God's condemnation of it, thrilling with the certainty of our Hope- of being in the Kingdom with Christ. Not for the repentant thief the increasing bitterness of the other man. As his bitterness grew, so the serenity and hope, and anticipation and joyful expectancy of the Kingdom rapidly increased for our crucified brother. The bitterness and disillusion of the world should not be ours, as the pain rages within and around us. Ours should be the strength and (somehow, amidst it all) *peace* of Christ's example. And the thief is alluded to later on in the NT as a symbol of us all. The Lord's promise to him that he would 'be with him' is the very language of 2 Cor. 5:8 and 1 Thess. 4:17 about us all.

And they divided up his clothes by casting lots- Note the focus of the soldiers upon the dividing up of the clothes, whilst the Son of God played out the ultimate spiritual drama for human salvation just a metre or so away from them. And our pettiness is worked out all too often in sight of the same cross. As those miserable men argued over the clothes at the foot of the cross, so when Israel stood before the glory of Yahweh at Sinai, they still suffered "disputes" amongst themselves (Ex. 24:22 NIV cp. Heb. 12:29). So pressing and important do human pettinesses appear, despite the awesomeness of that bigger picture to which we stand related.

There seems to have been something unusual about the Lord's outer garment. The same Greek word *chiton* used in Jn. 19:23,24 is that used in the LXX of Gen. 37:3 to describe Joseph's coat of many pieces. Josephus (*Antiquities* 3.7.4,161) uses the word for the tunic of the High Priest, which was likewise not to be rent (Lev. 21:10). The Lord in His time of dying is thus set up as High Priest, gaining forgiveness for His people, to 'come out' of the grave as on the day of Atonement, pronouncing the forgiveness gained, and bidding His people spread that good news world-wide. The robe was not to be torn, *schizein*. There was to be no schism in it. Ahijah tore his garment into twelve pieces to symbolize the division of Israel (1 Kings 11:30,31). The Lord's coat being unrent may therefore be another reflection of how His death brought about unity amongst His people (Jn. 11:52; 17:21,22). Before Him, there, we simply cannot be divided amongst ourselves. Likewise the net through which the Lord gathers His people was unbroken (Jn. 21:11). Note how all these references are in John- as if he perceived this theme of unity through the cross.

Crucifixion was a slow death. Mercifully, our Lord died abnormally quickly. Remember how Pilate "marvelled that he were already dead". Normally men lingered in agony for days before death. The thief lived a little longer. He would have seen Christ's death, "the lonely cry, the anguish keen"; the men taking the body from the cross. We can infer that he was still conscious when the soldiers broke his legs- if he was obviously dead, they would not have bothered. "But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already..." (Jn. 19:33) seems to imply this. The reason for breaking the legs was to stop

the criminal having any chance of running away. Surely, amidst the waves of his pulsating pain, he would have marvelled at the way in which Christ was truly the lamb of God, seeing that "not a bone of him (was) broken". There he was, assured of the mercy of the Lord at judgment day, hanging on the cross, in physical agony which it is hard for us to enter into. In some ways, he continues to be a type of us. Whether we are dying of cancer, crippled with arthritis, emotionally trapped in a painful relationship, chained to a demanding job, we too can have every assurance of the Lord's mercy. "To him that overcomes", He has promised the paradise of the Kingdom, just as He did to the thief.

23:44 *And it was now about the sixth hour; and a darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour*- The way the sun was eclipsed at the Lord's death is recorded in terms which clearly contrast with the prevailing view that at the demise of the emperors, the light of the sun was eclipsed. Both Plutarch (Caesar, 69.4) and Josephus (Antiquities 14.12.3,409) speak of eclipses of the sun at the death of Julius Caesar. The Lord Jesus in His death is thus being proclaimed as the true Caesar. Likewise Cassius Dio *History* 51.17.5) claims that at the fall of Alexandria to the Romans, "the disembodied spirits of the dead were made visible". Similar claims were made for other Roman victories. And yet this is clearly put into context by the record that around the Lord's victory, the graves were opened and the dead actually came forth.

23:45 *The sun's light failing; and the veil of the temple was torn in the middle*- The way into the most holy was now open to all, the veil torn from top to bottom because this was done by God. The High Priest's garments had been torn by him, and now the veil itself was open. Judaism was effectively over. Direct fellowship with God was now made possible through the Lord's death. We note by contrast how the same word is used to describe how the Lord's garment was *not* rent (Jn. 19:24). The rending of the veil is clearly alluded to in Heb. 9:3; 10:19; but as noted there, we must have boldness to enter in to the holiest. We all now are to act as the High Priest, going into the very presence of God for the same of others.

23:46 *And Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said: Father, into your hands I commend my spirit. And having said this, he breathed his last*- These were the final words of the Lord Jesus. It must surely be significant that this final statement addresses God as "Father", just as the first of His seven last sayings did ("Father forgive them"). He used the same title in His agony in the garden (Lk. 22:42; Mt. 26:39,42,44). Putting those four passages together we can visualize the prostrate figure: "Father... Father... Father... Father" . Evidently the Fatherhood of God was something which the Lord found extremely appealing and comforting. We have seen that if we place the seven last sayings of Christ chronologically, we find that the number of words Christ uttered runs 12-9-4-3-1-1-8. We have suggested that this indicates that Christ found speaking increasingly difficult on the cross. This final cry therefore involved supreme effort, every word was meaningful,

and surely our Lord intended us to closely meditate upon the implication of every valuable word He uttered here.

There can be no doubt that the Lord Jesus was not just saying something like 'Well, that's it, my life force is going back to you, Father'. We need to pause for a moment to consider exactly what we mean by the spirit of man. It is perfectly true that often, the spirit refers to the life force and / or the mind, and the soul refers to the physical body. However, this is not true in every case. Sometimes the soul basically means 'you / me, the whole person in every sense'. The soul and spirit are therefore interchangeable in this sense. The spirit / mind *is* the fundamental person, the soul, in that sense. The spirit which returns to God does not *always* refer to merely the life force; it can refer to the mind and personality too. Likewise the Spirit of God is not just naked power, but power that expresses His Spirit / mind. When the Lord Jesus commended His Spirit to the Father, He was offering Him not just the life force which is in every animal and plant, but His character and personality too, the result of the supreme spiritual effort made throughout His life.

The Lord Jesus *commended* His spirit to the Father's hands. The Greek translated "commend" means literally to place beside, to lay down beside. The Lord Jesus had a sense that His character would not be forgotten by the Father, it would take it's place beside the Father as it were, as He later would physically. This is not, of course, to give any support to the notion of disembodied spirits. Existence can only be in an animate, bodily sense. Yet the word "commend" in the Greek does suggest that Christ felt that the place He would soon take beside the Father was due to the fact that His spirit / mind had found acceptance with Him first. The Father's hands no doubt is an idiom for His care, His preservation (cp. Mt. 4:6). Christ was taking comfort in the fact that His character, those endless minutes of spiritual effort, of struggle to develop and preserve a spiritual mind, would surely not be forgotten, it would be preserved in the Father's hands.

We can go too far in reacting against the apostate dogma of the immortality of the soul. Whilst this is an evidently false doctrine, it is equally untrue that the Father forgets His children between the point they die and the resurrection. Therefore God thinks of Abraham as if he is still alive, speaking of "those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:16,17). God is the God of Abraham here and now, even though Abraham is dead and unconscious, because "he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all (His people) live unto him" (Lk. 20:36,37). Because the dead are unconscious, because our memories of them fade and distort, we tend to think subconsciously (and even doctrinally, according to some lectures on the state of the dead) that this is how God too sees the dead saints. But “all live unto him", the souls under the altar cry out to Him for vengeance; in other words, His constant, detailed awareness of their characters

provokes Him to act in world affairs even now (Rev. 6:9; 20:4). The Heavenly Jerusalem with which we are associated in Christ is composed of "the spirits (characters) of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:23). As we strive to develop a spiritual character now, our spirit becomes associated with those pleasing characters ("spirits") who reached a level of spiritual completion (“perfection") and were then absorbed into God's consciousness.

The hands of God are also connected with the Angels, the means by which God performs His actions. Moses' hands being upheld by the hands of others can be seen as a type of the Lord Jesus being sustained by Angelic hands on the cross, connecting with the Messianic prophecy of Gen. 49:24 concerning the hands of Messiah being strengthened for His mediation by the hands of God. Throughout Scripture, God's hands are associated with His creative work in the natural creation (e.g. Ps. 8:6; 95:5; Heb. 1:10)- work which was and is performed through the Angels. The Lord Jesus was aware of the Angels in His final agony; He was painfully aware that they were at His command to lessen the physical torment (Mt. 26:53). And yet He seems to have felt their absence when He complained that His God (His Angel?) had forsaken Him- or so He felt. Perhaps He felt that His spirit / mind was not being taken care of by them, that His mental being was being placed beside the Father, in the company of the surrounding Angels. Our struggle to remain aware of Angelic presence in the midst of intense pain and trial should surely be inspired by this; in His very last words, our Lord was demonstrating His awareness of His relationship to the Angels, and His belief that although they seemed so distant from Him in His agony, yet surely He believed that ultimately they would take care of Him.

There were several times in the Lord's ministry when He chose to escape from death. This adds significance to the fact that finally the Lord gave up His life rather than having it taken from Him. By His Divine power, He passed through the crowd who sought to throw Him over a cliff (Lk. 4:29). Several times the Lord withdrew from an area that opposed Him because He knew they sought to kill Him (Mk. 3:7; 7:24; 9:30; Jn. 4:1-3; 7:1-9; 10:40); and He almost goes into hiding from His persecutors for a while until the final reappearance in Jerusalem (Jn. 11:54). What all this means is that He could likewise have avoided His final death; but He chose not to, and in this sense He willingly gave His life rather than had it taken from Him. The death of human beings can be seen as a result of physical processes over which they have no control. They are killed, often against their will, or disease takes hold of them and eventually forces them to a point where they breathe their last. There is never a conscious giving up of the last breath as an act of the will. Death either occurs in a state of semi-consciousness or unexpectedly, in a moment. We usually, in the final analysis, cling to life at all costs, throwing our feeble best into the fight we have no chance to win. Truly did Dylan Thomas observe that men do not "go gentle into that good night" but "‘rage, rage against the dying of the light".

The death of the Lord Jesus Christ was altogether different- and the death of the thieves next to Him would have highlighted this. It is so often emphasized that He *gave* His life for us:
"Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" in itself suggests that the death of Christ was an act of the will
Christ gave His flesh for us (Jn. 6:51)
Moses and Elijah spoke of the cross as "the Exodus which he should accomplish at Jerusalem" (Lk. 9:31)- He would accomplish it to Himself, the Greek suggests.
The breaking of bread (a highly conscious act) recalls how Christ gave His body for us (Lk. 22:19)
Christ's death was the result of His obedience to God's command to die on a cross (Phil. 2:8)
Christ poured out His soul unto death as a conscious act performed to enable our redemption (Is. 53:12). Materially, this may refer to the way in which every respiration of the Lord would have scraped His sensitive skin against the rough wood, so that there would have been constant blood flow from His back. This was sometimes a cause of death through crucifixion: blood loss through repeated agitation of the wounds by lifting up the body to breathe and exhale. In this sense He poured out His soul unto death. Muscle cramps would have tended to fix the muscles and make respiration difficult without a wilful yanking of the body weight upwards on the wounded nerves.
"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn. 15:13)
The Lord was at great pains to emphasize this aspect of His death, saying the same thing time and again: " I lay down my life for the sheep…therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life…no man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself…this commandment have I received of my Father" (Jn. 10:15-18).

The death of Christ was therefore a conscious act of giving, it was not simply a result of being murdered by the Jews or Roman soldiers. No man took Christ's life from Him, He laid it down of Himself, i.e. of His own will. It is therefore apparent that Christ's death was not solely a physical result of being impaled on the stake. The fact He died abnormally quickly is proof enough of this. And it explains why the centurion when he saw how the Lord *so* cried out was by this fact persuaded that He was the Son of God (Mk. 15:39). That last outbreathing, that death as an act of the will, was something henomenal. We are therefore driven to the conclusion that Christ was in a position to give His life at a certain point in time chosen by Himself. "He poured out his *soul* unto death" (Is. 53:12) suggests that the actual point of His death was a result of mental activity within the mind of the Lord Jesus. He was the servant who "*makes himself* an offering for sin" (Is. 53:10). Physically this would be explicable by the way in which His life of intense physical and mental trauma had resulted in Him coming to an early death,

quite probably through heart-related problems. "My *soul* is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Mt. 26:38) suggests that the mental agony in the garden almost killed the Lord Jesus. Such was the intensity of His mind in His final suffering for us. Such was His awareness of our need, of the problem of our sins, and the majesty of God's righteousness. In the physical agony of crucifixion, it was only His will to live which kept Him alive. He was therefore able to keep Himself alive until He had said what He wanted to, and then He was able to consciously give His life for our sins, to offer *Himself*, as both sacrifice and priest, to the Heavenly Sanctuary. This means that Christ did not just hang on the stake waiting to die, and the process of death was mercifully speeded up by the Father. Every moment there was necessary for the perfecting of His character, making Him perfect through suffering, and once He knew He had reached that point of total spiritual completeness, He was able to give up His life as a conscious act of love for us and sacrificial dedication to the Father. The strength of will power which enabled Him to give up His life force at a specific time is something to be marvelled at. Occasionally we glimpse it in His ministry; the way He sent the people away, walked through the crowds who wanted to kill Him (Lk. 4:30; Jn. 8:59; 10:39), spellbound His would-be arresters, "suffered no man to follow him" (Mk. 5:37)- His strength of will and personality shines through.

The Lord Jesus 'commended' His spirit to the Father. The Greek *para-tithemi* means literally to place or lay down beside. *Tithemi* is the same word translated "lay down" when we read of Christ laying down His life for us. It is the word used to describe the palsied man being laid down at the feet of Jesus (Lk. 5:18), or the laying of a foundation stone (1 Cor. 3:11). It is also translated to bow down. The point at which Christ laid down His life, bowing down before the Father, was therefore when He commended His spirit to the Father. When Christ "*yielded up* the spirit" (Mt. 27:50), He was commending His spirit to God, laying down His life for us. The Greek for "yielded up" is *para-didomi*, to yield or give beside, and is evidently related in meaning to *para-tithemi*, to commend, to lay down beside.

So the idea of Christ *giving* Himself for us therefore refers to that final moment of giving up, yielding, laying down His breath for us. Paul was evidently moved by this; he marvelled at how Christ "*gave himself* for me" (Gal. 2:20), using the same word as in Jn. 19:30 concerning him giving up His spirit. And we can enter into that sense or marvel and wonder. Paul again alludes to this in Eph. 5:2: "Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath *given himself* for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour". And therefore, Paul goes on, fornication, covetousness, foolish talking etc. should not even be *named* amongst us, "but rather giving of thanks" (Eph. 5:3,4). That wondrous moment when Christ reached such self-control as to give His life for us, to breathe out His last breath for us as an act of the will, that moment was evidently deep within the mind of Paul. Because of it we should find ample inspiration to "walk in

love" towards each other, to be so full of praise for this that we have no time to even speak about the sins to which are earthly nature is so prone. These are high ideals indeed, yet in Paul (another sin-stricken human) they began to be realized. They *really can* be realized in our lives, we truly can begin to appreciate the intensity of that yielding up, that laying down of the life spirit of our Lord Jesus- and therefore and thereby we will find the inspiration to respond in a life of true love for each other.
The same word crops up later in the chapter: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church, and *gave himself* for it" (Eph. 5:25). Now this is high, heavenly, indeed. Husbands are asked to consider the intensity of that moment when Christ, rigid with self-control, gave up His life for us, breathing His last as a controlled act of the will. And the Spirit through Paul asks husbands to reflect this in their daily lives, in the petty day by day situation of life. No wonder he asks wives to deeply respect their husbands if they at least try to rise up to this spirit (Eph. 5:33). Real meditation upon the implications of all this, the very height of the challenge, will surely do more good to a marriage than any amount of counselling and reading of human words.

Another thought arises from Eph. 5:25,26. The Lord *gave Himself* for us in that final breath, "*that* he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing (laver, baptismal bath) of water by the word". This is the language of Tit. 3:5 concerning baptism and spiritual regeneration. Is it too much to believe that the Lord in His final moments had visions of men and women being baptized into His triumphant death, being regenerated by His Spirit / word, and thereby being saved?
The Father loved the Son *because* He laid down His life in this way; there was an upwelling of love within the soul of Almighty God as He beheld it (Jn. 10:17). And ditto for all those who try to enter into the spirit of laying down their lives after the pattern of our Lord's final moment. But well before His death, our Lord could speak of how "I lay down my life" (Jn. 10:17); His whole life was a laying down of His innermost spirit, His final outbreathing was a summation of His daily attitude. He saw His death as the baptism with which He must be baptized (Lk. 12:50 cp. Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:10-12, His 'baptism-unto-death' Gk.); and yet He spoke of the baptism with which He was being baptized in an ongoing sense (Mt. 20:22). In this same vein, Ps. 69:8,9 is a prophecy about the final sufferings of the Lord in crucifixion, and yet these verses are elsewhere quoted about the experiences of His ministry. And “they hated me without a cause" (Ps. 69:4) was true throughout the Lord’s life (Jn. 15:25) as well as particularly in His death. The Lord spoke of the manna as being a symbol of His body, which He would give on the cross. He described the gift of that bread, that figure of His sacrifice, as not only bread that would come from Heaven but more accurately as bread that *is coming down* , and had been throughout His life (Jn. 6:50,51 Gk.). The spirit of life-giving which there was in His death was shown all through His life.

The fact the Lord died not just because events overtook Him and happened to Him is perhaps reflected in Paul's speaking in Rom. 6 of "the death that he died... the life that he liveth". He died a death; he Himself died it; and yet just as truly, He lived a life. He didn't just let events happen to Him. He was not mastered in His life by human lusts and selfish desires; He was in that sense the only ultimately free person. When He "bowed his head", the same Greek is used as in Mt. 8:20: "The Son of man has no place to lay / bow his head". It was as if He only lay His head down, giving out His life, when He knew it was time to rest from a day's work well done. He lived a surpassingly free life, and freely gave that life up; it was not taken from Him.

That we should be called to imitate our Lord in this should truly fill us with a sense of highness, that we should be called to such a high challenge. 1 Jn. 3:16 takes us even further in this wondrous story: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he *laid down* His life for us: and we ought to *lay down* our lives for the brethren". So intensely was God in Christ on the cross that in a sense He too laid down His life for us, He bowed down for us, laid Himself before our feet as that palsied man was laid before (same word) Jesus. In that final cry from the cross we perceive God's love for us. We perceive the humility of God, fantastic concept that that is. No wonder then that we should lay down our lives for each other. No wonder than that we *must* achieve a true humility in service to each other. Christ (and God, in Him) laid down His life for us while we were yet sinners. We too, therefore, should not be put off from laying down our lives for each other because we feel our brethren are spiritually weak. This is the very essence of laying down our lives for each other; we are to replicate the laying down of the life of Christ for us *while we were weak* in our giving of our innermost being for our weak brethren. We are truly at the very boundary of human words to express these things. We must, we *must* respond in practice. And the wonder of it all is that in this final, supreme moment of self-giving, the Lord was identifying with apostate Israel, of whom it had been prophesied: "She hath given up the spirit; her sun is gone down while it was yet day: she hath been ashamed" (Jer. 15:9- all crucifixion language).

It seems likely that Peter was at the cross, and therefore his letters are packed with allusions to it. What he saw there had a lifelong impact upon him. He makes at least two allusions to the words of Christ on the cross, and bids us enter into the spirit of it. "Hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps... who... when he suffered, threatened not; but *committed himself* to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Pet. 2:21-23). This is the same word as used about Christ commending His spirit to God in that final agony. *We really are bidden enter into His example and follow Him*. Christ overcame the temptation to react wrongly to His sufferings by *instead* committing Himself to God. This idea of laying

Himself down for us was what enabled Him not to get bitter. The antidote to our own bitterness is likewise to enter into this spirit of laying down our lives.

1 Pet. 4:13-19 likewise invites us to enter into Christ's final sufferings: "Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings... let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer (cp. the two thieves next to Jesus on the cross)... yet if any man suffer as a Christian (i.e. with Christ), let him not be ashamed (as Christ "despised the shame" on the cross, Heb. 12:2) ...wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God (as Christ did, Acts 2:23; Is. 53:10; Lk. 22:22) *commit* the keeping of their souls (same word as Christ *commending* His spirit to God) to him in well doing, as unto a faithful creator". *We really are bidden enter into His example and follow Him*. I want to stress this point. The sufferings of Christ are so deep that we can shy away from them, gaping in incomprehension at the records without grasping this sense that we really are invited to enter in to them. It has been suggested that since the Lord's last words were "Father into thy hands I commend my spirit", His first words on resurrecting would have been a continuation of the Psalm 31:5 which He had quoted: "Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth". But this verse was the usual evening prayer of Jews in the first century. It could well be that the Lord had prayed those words every evening of His mortal life, and said the rest of the verse each time He awoke. In this we see yet again that the cross was a living out of patterns and attitudes which He had already developed during His life. It also needs to be noted that David didn't say Ps. 31:5 on his deathbed, but rather it was an expression of his desire to commit his soul to the Father in gratefulness and praise. There was something of this in the mind of Jesus at His end.

23:47 *And when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying: Certainly this was a righteous man*- He said it twice: "This was a righteous man (Lk.), "truly this man was the son of God" (Mk.). And he might well have added in his own thoughts: "And I've crucified him". The Lord died through an act of utter self control; consciously breathing out His last breath in the form of the words "Father into your hands I commit my spirit". He gave His life, it was not taken from Him (Jn. 10:18).

23:48 *And all the crowds that came together to this sight, when they saw the things that were done, returned, striking their breasts*- Contemplation of the death of the Lord Jesus is intended to stimulate our self-examination and self-knowledge. Those who saw it "smote upon their breasts" (Lk. 23:48), an idiom only used elsewhere for true penitence and realization of personal sinfulness (Lk. 18:13). See on Mt. 27:5. The whole structure of the records of the crucifixion are to emphasize how the cross is essentially about

human response to it; nothing else elicits from humanity a response like the cross does. People 'beheld... the sight' (Lk. 23:48) - the verb *theoreo* and the noun *theoria* here suggest that people 'theorized', what they saw inevitably made them think out a response. See on Mk. 15:33.

The disciples kept changing the subject whenever the Lord started speaking about His death. As He hung in ultimate triumph and suffering on the cross, men came and looked, and turned away again (Is. 53:3; Lk. 23:48). The spiritual intensity of it couldn't be sustained in their minds, as it cannot easily be in ours. The more we break bread, the more we try to reconstruct Golgotha's awful scene, the more we realize this.

Those who beheld the cross “beat their breasts", Luke records. The only other occurrence of this phrase is again in Luke, concerning how the desperate, sin-convicted publican likewise beat his breast before God in contrition (18:13). Does this not suggest that those breast-beaters were doing so because “that sight" convicted them of their own sinfulness? Their “return" to their homes uses the Greek word usually translated ‘to repent’. The cross inspired their repentance. The records of the crucifixion are framed to focus upon the response of individuals to the cross. The response of those who beat their breasts is very similar to that of the Centurion:

Centurion	Crowds
Having seen	Having observed
Happening	Happenings
Was glorifying	Returned / repented
Saying	Striking breasts

The parallel is between his glorifying God, and their returning / repenting. The need for repentance is a strong theme in Luke (10:13; 11:32; 13:3,5; 15:7,10; 16:30; 17:3,4)- as if he perceived that the ultimate motivation to repentance was in the cross. The apocryphal *Acts of Pilate* 4.5 claims that “all the crowds who were gathered together for the observation of this...returned striking their breasts and weeping awful tears". And yet the record of the cross also leads to faith, not only conviction of our desperation (Jn. 19:35, “these things" = the record of the cross).

Appreciation of the cross will create unity between us; a common sense of failure, and yet also a common appreciation of the utter grace which we have been invited to behold and actually taste of. "All the people that *came together* to that sight" (Lk. 23:48) uses a

word which really means to bond together in close association. This is the effect of the cross. Those who stared in wonder, yearning for a deeper appreciation, were somehow bound together by their experience of the cross.

The people 'coming together to that sight' might imply that the crowd which was milling around came clustering around the cross once the Lord uttered His final cries and so evidently died. The women also beheld His dead corpse from afar. This seems to be encouraging us to imagine the picture of the Lord just at that point; the dead body on the cross, the victory achieved. It was only at this stage that the curse of Dt. 21 came into effect: "cursed (Heb. a curse; the Hebrew is *always* translated this way) is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Dt. 21:22,23). These words have been misunderstood as meaning that the Lord as a living being was under one of the Law's curses of condemnation. This cannot be. It must be remembered that crucifixion was a Roman, not Jewish method. The Deuteronomy passage was not written with reference to crucifixion, but rather to the custom of displaying the already dead body of a sinner on a pole as a witness and warning (cp. the display of Saul's body). Sin brought the curse; and so every sinful person who died for their sin was bearing the curse of God. They were to be buried quickly as a sign of God taking no pleasure in the death of the wicked. The Lord died the death of a sinner; He bore our sins, and therefore our curse (Gal. 3:13,14). Every condemned sinner whose body had been displayed had been a type of the sinless Son of God. He was exhibited there for one or two hours (until Joseph got the permission to take the body), totally, totally united with sinful man. And then, because God had no pleasure in this condemnation of sin, the body was taken and buried. Smiting the breast connects with the sinner smiting his breast in repentance (Mt. 11:17 RVmg.). The thoughts of many hearts are revealed by meditation on the cross (Lk. 2:35). It leads us to repentance. The prophecy that the Jews would look on His they pierced and mourn in repentance may have had an incipient fulfilment at the crucifixion.

23:49 *And all his acquaintances, and the women that had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance watching these things*- The connection is between following the Lord in the easier times, at the height of His popularity in Galilee; and also following Him when all seems hopeless, and there seems absolutely no human advantage from identity with Him. Mark's reference to "many" women coming up to Jerusalem in support of Him would suggest that He may have had more female supporters than male. John says that the women were standing at the cross. To show such sympathy for the crucified could lead to their own arrest and crucifixion. They were perhaps asked by the Lord to draw back from Him. Or perhaps they are pictured here just before they summoned the courage to walk out across the no man's land between the crowd and the cross, to show their open devotion to the Lord.

It was only close family members who could beg for the body of the crucified. The way Joseph of Arimathaea is described as doing this is juxtaposed straight after the description of the Lord's natural family standing afar off from Him (Lk. 23:49,52). The effect of the cross had brought forth a new family in that the Lord had now broken all His natural ties, not least with His beloved mother.

23:50 *And a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man*- He was 'also' a disciple (Mt.), in God's eyes, in the same category as the women disciples who were so public about their discipleship (Mt. 27:56). Whilst secret discipleship is not the Lord's intention, and He will arrange circumstances so that we 'come out' publically, it is not for us to say that He doesn't count secret disciples as also His disciples, just as He did Joseph.

23:51 *(He had not consented to their decision and deed), a man of Arimathaea, a city of the Jews, who was looking for the kingdom of God*- The entire Sannhedrin had unanimously agreed to the deed, but Joseph's internal lack of agreement was noted by the Father and this apparently weak man now comes out openly, and is spoken of so highly in the inspired record.

23:52 *This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus*- Remember that it was only close family members who could beg for the body of the crucified.

Joseph is now showing his open affinity with this crucified man. At that time, he didn't firmly believe in the resurrection. For sheer *love* of this crucified man, he was willing to sacrifice his standing in society, his economic position, risk his life, grovel before the hated Pilate to beg (Lk.), crave (Mk.) the body. This was something which only the close relatives of the crucified could presume to do. But he felt already that new relationship to the Lord, and whether or not He would ever be raised he wanted to show openly to the world his connection with Him, come what may. This was the effect of the Lord's death upon him.

The text records that the Jews desired Pilate for the death of Jesus; but the very same Greek words are used to describe how Joseph desired Pilate to let him have the body of Jesus (Mt. 27:58)- as if to show how Joseph openly undid his request for the crucifixion, by requesting the body. It is twice stressed that Joseph was on the Sanhedrin council. So was Nicodemus (Jn. 3:2). Yet the whole council unanimously voted for the crucifixion (Mk. 14:64). "The whole Sanhedrin" (Mk. 15:1 NIV) agreed the High Priests' plan of action. They *all* interrogated Him and "the whole multitude of them" led Jesus to Pilate (Lk. 22:66,70; 23:1). This is some emphasis. Joseph "was not in agreement" with them, we are told, but it seems this was a position held within his own conscience; indeed, "many" of the elders actually believed in Jesus (Jn. 12:42). It was only the actual cross

which brought faith into the open. “You shall not be in agreement with the wicked as an unjust witness" (Ex. 23:1) probably tore out his heart. It may be that these men weren't present and that the Jews broke their own law, that the death sentence must be unanimously agreed. However, I have an intuitive sense (and nothing more) that these men voted for the Lord's death; and that they went along with the discussion in which " all" the council were involved, as to which incidents in His life they could remember for which they could condemn Him (Mk. 14:55) . They may not have consented to what was done in their hearts, but they still went along with it all on the surface. Acts 13:28,29 is at pains, almost, to associate Joseph, Nicodemus and the rest of the Sanhedrin: "*They* have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though *they* found no cause of death in him, yet desired *they* Pilate that He should be slain… *they* took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre".

They were secret disciples, fearing the loss of standing among the Jews. It was only after the Lord's death that they came out in the open. It seems to me that they voted for the Son of God to die. But in His grace, the Father emphasizes in the record that Joseph was a good man, and a just; a disciple, although secretly. The grace of God shines through the whole record. Thus only Matthew speaks about the suicide of Judas; the other three records are silent. A human god would inevitably have stressed that the betrayer of His Son went out in shame and took his own life. But the God of all grace is higher than reflecting vindictiveness in His word.
If the Lord died at 3p.m. and sunset was at 6p.m., there were only three hours for Joseph to find Pilate, gain a hearing, make his request, for Pilate to verify that the body was dead, and then for Nicodemus to buy the spices and for the burial to be done. Joseph and Nicodemus must have decided almost immediately what they were going to do. And the lesson for us: Beholding the cross makes us see what we ought to do, it becomes urgently apparent, and then we give our all, with the spirit of 'nothing else matters', to achieve it as far as we can. But we can enter into their thoughts: I wish I'd done more for Him while He was alive, and now, even now, because of the pressure of time, I just can't bury and honour this body as I'd like to. All these things are against me. The self hate and loathing and regret would have arisen within them, mixed with that love and devotion to the Lord of all grace. And there would have been an earnest desire for God to accept what little they could do, with time, the surrounding world, the Jewish culture, the unchangeable past, and their own present natures, all militating against the height of devotion they fain would show.

John gives the additional detail about the concern that Jesus might not be fully dead, and the piercing of His side. It is difficult to tell if a body is dead or not. But there was something about the Lord's corpse which somehow shone forth the message that He had given up His life. " He that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth

that he saith true, that ye might believe" (Jn. 19:35). Do we not get the sense here of a man, even under inspiration, grasping for adequate words and finding there are none? This is an experience beyond the paradigm of verbal description. The description of blood and water flowing has raised the question as to whether the Lord had been fasting, or had emptied His bowels in Gethsemane, before the crucifixion. It has been suggested that for this to have happened the Lord would have been pierced from the right hand side above the fifth rib, piercing the right auricle of the heart (from which the blood came) and also the pericardium, from where the serum came which appeared like water. However there are critics of these suggestions, which leaves the possibility that the flow of blood and water was in fact a miracle- hence John's insistence that yes, he actually saw this happen. And he says that he records it so that we might believe. The implication is that meditation upon the cross is what inspires faith, as well as conviction of sin and repentance. The way the Lord's blood flowed out from His heart is highly evocative of powerful lessons. He gave out from the very core and foundation of His being. We may serve God in good deeds, in writing books, in labouring for Him, without any real demand being made on our innermost self. The challenge of the cross is to give from the very centre and fountain of our life, our very selves, our person, our most vital soul.

23:53 *And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid him in a tomb that was hewn in stone, where never man had yet been laid*- Luke's record that Joseph himself took the body down invites us to imagine him using a ladder, perhaps that used to place the title. He identified himself with the crucified Lord, and laid Him where his own body should be laid. He lived out the essence of baptism. However, Acts 13:29 suggests that the Roman soldiers on behalf of Jewish people (i.e. Joseph) took the body down; Pilate "commanded the body to be delivered", implying he gave a command to underlings. So in what sense did *Joseph* take the body down and wrap it? Are we to imagine him humbling himself before the crowd to assist those soldiers in the physical act of taking the nails out and lowering the body down? Or it could be that he attracted so much attention to himself and had to humble himself so much to ask the soldiers to do it, that it was effectively as if he did it. But there is no reason to think that he himself didn't walk out in that no man's land between the crowd and the cross and humble himself to take it down, hearing the gasp from the crowd as he touched the blood and dead body which would make him unclean for the feast. His act was a tremendous mental sacrifice as well as a social and physical one. He is described as "honourable", literally 'well-formed / bodied', as if to emphasis his deportment befitting a leader of men. But he humbled himself before that stake. "He took it down" may imply that the stake was left standing. Or was it laid backwards and lowered down horizontal, with Joseph's anxious hands guiding it down? His contact with the body meant that he couldn't keep the Passover (Num. 9:9,10). The people would have watched incredulous

as one of the leaders of Israel openly showed his preference for the crucified Nazarene as opposed to keeping the Mosaic Law. The phobia for cleanliness at Passover time would have meant that everyone was extremely sensitive to what Joseph did.

23:54 *And it was the day of the preparation; and the Sabbath drew on*- Businesses would have been closing. John records that Joseph bought a huge amount of spices, more than what was used to bury the Caesars. The cost would have been huge. To raise the cash he would surely have needed to capitalize his own possessions. And he did all this as business was aclosing. He gave all in response to the Lord's death, without, it seems, any hope of future personal reward or resurrection.

23:55 *And the women, who had come with him out of Galilee, followed and saw the tomb, and how his body was laid*- It is worth putting together two passages, both from Luke: "The women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after..." (Lk. 23:55); and Acts 13:30,31: "God raised him from the dead and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, and they are now his witnesses". Surely Paul and Luke have in mind here the ministering women. They had followed from Galilee to Jerusalem, the risen Lord had appeared to a woman first of all, and now those women were witnessing to the people. Perhaps 1 Cor. 15:3-7 is relevant here, where we read that the Lord appeared after His resurrection to the twelve, and yet on another occasion to "all the apostles"- perhaps referring to the group that included the women. An empty tomb was no proof that Jesus of Nazareth had risen- unless there were witnesses there present at that empty tomb who could testify also that it was in that very tomb that Jesus had been laid. And only women, not men, were witnesses of this. The Greek world placed great emphasis upon sight- "Eyes are surer witnesses than ears", Heraclitus said. They related to the past visually; for a group of people to be eyewitnesses was considered conclusive. Hence the enormous significance of the way in which the Gospels repeatedly make the women the subjects of verbs of seeing (Mt. 27:55; Mk. 15:40; Lk. 23:49,55). They were the eyewitnesses.

The women who stood afar off and watched in helplessness and hopelessness and lack of comprehension *also followed* the Lord (:49) and ministered to Him in the Galilee days. Their standing there like that was still reckoned to them as active following and ministry to Him. They also serve, who merely stand and wait.

23:56 *And they returned and prepared spices and ointments. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment*- The point is surely that this was the last Sabbath which needed to be kept. For the Lord's death had now ended the old covenant, the veil had been torn down. But they were ignorant of all that, and yet they

were still loyally committed to the Lord Jesus, despite lacking full understanding. This is both comfort to ourselves, and also a lesson in tolerance towards others who likewise misunderstand aspects of the Lord's sacrifice but still love Him.

LUKE CHAPTER 24

24:1 *And on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices which they had prepared*- The language hints very much at a new creation beginning. And yet it began in darkness, not only literally, but also in the darkness of the disciples' disappointment, misunderstanding and weak faith. From all this, great light was to arise.

Mary came seeking the Lord early in the morning... and this inevitably takes our minds to some OT passages which speak of doing just this:

- "O God, thou *art* my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory" (Ps. 63:1,2). The resurrection of Jesus showed clearly both the power (2 Cor. 13:4) and glory (Rom. 6:4) of the Father. For Mary, life without her Lord was a dry and thirsty land. This was why she went to the grave early that morning. She was simply aching for Him. And she had well learnt the Lord's teaching, that her brother's resurrection had been associated with the glory of the Father (Jn. 11:40). She went early to the tomb to seek the Father's glory- so the allusion to Ps. 63 implies. She was the one person who had actually believed in advance the Lord's teaching about resurrection. And yet even she was confused- half her brain perceived it all and believed it, and was rewarded by being the first to see the risen Lord; and yet another part of her brain was simply overcome with grief, believing that the gardener had somehow removed the body some place else. And our own highest heights of spiritual perception are likewise shrouded by such humanity too.
- "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me" (Prov. 8:17) is written in the first instance of wisdom. And yet the Lord Jesus has "wisdom" as one of His titles (Mt. 12:42; 1 Cor. 1:24,30). Mary sat at the Lord's feet to hear His wisdom; to her, she showed in practice what it means to comprehend Jesus as "the wisdom of God". She anxiously heard His words. And thus she sought Him early...because she so wanted to hear His wisdom again. Of course, she loved Him. But that love was rooted in respect and almost an addiction to His wisdom. It was this that she loved about Him, and it was this which led her to the grave early. And it was this which led her to the honour of being the first to see the risen Jesus.
- "Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of *our* soul *is* to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in

the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early" (Is. 26:8,9) makes the same connection between seeking the Lord early, and loving His words.

On Jn. 19:39 I commented that the huge amount of spices arranged by Nicodemus was greater than the weight of spices used to bury the Caesars. Despite that huge donation from Nicodemus, the women still brought the relatively little that they had prepared. Again we note that apart from Mary, they had no clear faith in His resurrection. This was all devotion to a dead man, just from love of Him, with no hope of some future reward for their devotion. We should likewise be motivated; even if I am not to be saved, I will still give all I can for Him, from love for Him and devotion to Him.

24:2 *And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb*- The Angel descended and did this before the women arrived; for on the way, they had worried about how they would roll the stone away, but when they got there, they found it done already (Mk. 16:2,4). Women unable to roll away a stone recalls the scene when Rachel and her girls were unable to roll the stone away from the well until Jacob did it (Gen. 29:3,10). The idea would therefore be that the Lord's tomb was in fact a well of living water which would flow for God's people after and on account of His resurrection; and this idea is elsewhere stated specifically by the Lord in John's Gospel.

24:3 *And they entered in, and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus*- The first reference to "the Lord Jesus"; His resurrection declared Him as Lord and Christ. They had observed where the body was laid, and so their surprise is the more understandable.

24:4 *And it came to pass, while they were wondering about this, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel*- Their "wondering" was reflective of their lack of faith and understanding, and they are gently rebuked for it in :5. They should have assumed that now on the third day, His body indeed would not be there as He had predicted. We get the impression that this was the first time they had seen the Angels; the Angel sitting on the stone in Mt. 28:2 was therefore invisible to them, and his words to them of Mt. 28:5 were perhaps at this point, rather than at the point of entry into the tomb.

24:5 *And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them: Why do you seek the living among the dead?*- The women had come to anoint the Lord's dead body, with apparently no expectation that He would indeed rise the third day as He had predicted. And yet the Angel generously counts this to them (Mt. 'I know / perceive / accept / count it') as if they were actively looking for Jesus. Their obvious error- that they assumed Him to still be dead- is not rebuked because the good news is

simply so much greater. The resurrection records are full of such imputed righteousness. Lk. 24:5 enquires why they are 'seeking the living amongst the dead'. They were not seeking the living- they had come to anoint a dead body. Yet they are graciously counted as seeking Jesus as if they were seeking for a living person. John's record has the Lord asking Mary *whom* she is 'seeking', and this is how John's Gospel opens, with the Lord enquiring of His followers *whom* they were seeking (Jn. 1:38; 20:15). This question as to the Lord's identity echoes down to us, for we too can feel a devotion and identity with the idea of 'Jesus' without perceiving that He really is alive and active. The Lord counted righteousness to them, they are commended by the Angels for 'seeking the Lord'- even though that seeking was deep in their subconscious. Yet the record notices that even incipient faith and understanding in those women, and counts it to them. Would that we would be so generous in our perception of others. The weeping, helpless standing afar off at the cross are described as still following the Lord Jesus and ministering to Him, as they did in the happier Galilee days (Mk. 15:41). Their essential spirit was understood and credited to them, even though their actions seemed to belie this. Likewise our essential desires are read as our prayers, even if the words we use seem quite different.
Meetings with two separate Angels didn't make the women understand; now two Angels appear together and tell them the same words as the other Angels had said.

"Why do you seek the living among the dead?" was a rhetorical question. Why? Because they didn't believe His words about resurrection. The other records record the Angels reminding them of His promise to resurrect and meet them in Galilee. They ought to have been racing up to Galilee, not hanging around His tomb. His appearance to them at the tomb [rather than as He intended, in Galilee] reflects how He rearranged His intended actions, in order to take into account the weakness of their faith. This was about the first decision He made after His resurrection, and so He has done from then on. Ever seeking to accept His people and work with them in their weakness.

24:6 *He is not here, but is risen! Remember in what way he spoke to you when he was still in Galilee*- After He rose, the Angels pointed out this sense to His men: "...remember *how* [the Greek sense is: 'with what urgency'] he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, Saying, The Son of man *must* be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again" (Luke 24:6,7 AV). Like us, they heard and saw the compulsion, that Messianic *must*, but didn't really appreciate it. The Lord was no fatalist, simply reflecting that what was to be 'must' be. Rather He meant that it 'must' be and therefore He strove to fulfil it. There was no fatalistic compulsion about the cross- for He need not have gone through with it. But He 'must' do so for the sake of that indescribable compulsion to save us, to glorify Yahweh's Name, which He felt within Him. He reminded the two on the way to Emmaus: "*Ought* [s.w. 'must'] *not* Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26). And consider Heb.

2:17: “Wherefore in all things it *behoved him* to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people". It was in His death that the Lord’s blood acted as a reconciliation for the sins of the people- an evident reference to the ritual of the day of atonement, which the same writer shows spoke so eloquently of the cross. And yet he was “behoved" to do this, it was an obligation He felt intrinsic within His very being. The same word occurs later: “And by reason hereof he *ought*, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. And no man takes this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ..." (Heb. 5:3-5). See on Mk. 14:49.

24:7- see on Mt. 27:26.

Saying that the Son of Man must be delivered up into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again- The Angels quoted the Lord's words, perhaps because they had been watching and listening to Him throughout His ministry. The reference seems to specifically be to the Lord's words of Mk. 9:31, which the disciples had not understood because of their own obsession with who should be the greatest.

24:8 *And they remembered his words*- if the reference is to Mk. 9:31-35, they would have recalled how their lack of belief in and understanding of the Lord's words was because of their own obsession with who was to be the greatest amongst them.

24:9 *And returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven, and to all the others*- Mk. 16:7,8 says that initially their fear was so great that they were resolved not to tell anyone anything, i.e. to be disobedient to the commission to tell their brethren the good news. And so according to Matthew the Lord Himself intervenes to urge them to go tell their brethren.

24:10 *Now they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them, who told these things to the apostles*- Most of the references to Joanna occur within Luke’s writings, and the central placement given to her in the passage in Lk. 24:9,10. It would seem that Luke had an especial interest in chronicling the women who went with Jesus- his material accounts for two of the four parables that feature women (Lk. 15:8-10; 18:1-14), and he has seven passages / incidents where women are central (Lk. 7:11-17, 36-50; 8:1-3; 10:38-42; 11:27,28; 13:10-17; 23:27-31). And it is Luke alone who gives the impression that the Lord was not followed around Palestine by twelve men alone, but by a further group of ministering women. See on Lk. 8:2.

24:11 *And these words appeared in their sight as idle talk, and they disbelieved them*- There is a strong theme in the Gospels that the disciples repeatedly disbelieved the news of the resurrection. And yet they were appealing for people to believe the message of the Lord's resurrection and be baptized into it. But they made that appeal on the

basis of their own weakness and slowness to believe. "Idle talk" means literally the talk of the crazy. They assumed this was a story of the once demon-possessed Mary Magdalene, an outcome of her previous mental disturbance. When the Lord had so clearly foretold His resurrection. Luke is pointing out their own disbelief, implying it was almost to the point of blasphemy.

Each of the Gospel writers brings out a sense of inadequacy about themselves or the disciples, this self-criticism, in different ways. Luke's account of the rich man in the parable of Lk. 16 has several consciously-inserted connections with how he later describes the disciples:

Lk. 16	Lk. 24
Disbelief in the face of meeting the resurrected man (Lk. 16:31)	"They did not believe...slow of heart to believe" (Lk. 24:11,25,41)
Double mention of Moses and the prophets as proofs of resurrection (Lk. 16:29,31)	Ditto in Lk. 24:27,44
"Should rise from the dead" (Lk. 16:31)	"Should rise from the dead" (Lk. 24:46)
"They will repent" (Lk. 16:30)	Forgiveness of sins was to be preached because of Christ's resurrection, as Luke brings out in Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 17:30; 26:20.

Thus the tragedy and foolishness of the rich man in the parable is seen by Luke as applying to the disciples in their disbelief of the resurrection. And yet the purpose of Luke's Gospel, as all the Gospels, was to proclaim the need for belief in the resurrection.

24:12 *But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he departed to his home, wondering about what had happened*- Peter and John went to the tomb after having first of all disbelieved Mary Magdalene (Lk. 24:11). "Myrrh... glues linen to the body not less firmly than lead" (Leon Morris, *John* p. 736). The fact the cloths were neatly placed as they were was therefore a powerful evidence that the Lord had risen, and not been extricated from the cloths by any human effort.

The various records all use the same word for how Peter, John and Mary all 'stooped down' (Jn. 20:5,11) at this time; as if bowing before the resurrected Lord.

24:13 *And two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was sixty furlongs from Jerusalem-*

The "them" surely refers to those mentioned in :9, where the women told the gospel of the empty tomb to "the eleven, and to all the others". "The others" included these two, for they refer to how "certain women of our company" had told them of the empty tomb (:22). Half of Luke's account of the resurrection is taken up with the story of these two. We know nothing of Cleopas. Possibly we who are also as it were anonymous, random people are drawn in to their characters.

Seven miles would have taken just over two hours to walk. The conversation would likely not have been very long, as the Lord was not walking with them the whole time. Perhaps Cleopas is the same "Clopas" of Jn. 19:25 whose wife Mary stood by the cross. The other unnamed disciple would then refer to Mary his wife.

24:14 *And they discussed with each other about all the things which had happened-* "Happened" translates a Greek word which means literally 'to walk together', just as they were doing; the idea is that they recognized that there was a meeting together of various threads, and they were struggling to understand what all the coincidences meant. The Lord had plainly stated His death and resurrection, and this alone made sense of the things they were noticing; but they failed to make the obvious connections. It was only when the Lord 'walked with them' that everything became clear.

24:15 *And it came to pass, while they talked and questioned together, that Jesus himself drew near and went with them-* As noted on :14, there is a play on ideas here. Whilst they perceived how the various recent events 'walked together', the Lord Himself walked together with them. The lively intellectual dialogue suggested by "talked and questioned together" was likely between Cleopas and his wife Mary (see on :13); a great pattern for Christian marriage. But "talked and questioned" could also imply [in the Greek] that they were arguing with each other.

24:16 *But their eyes were kept from recognizing him-* It seems that the eyes of the women were likewise kept from seeing the Angel seated on the stone in Mt. 27:2. The blinding and opening of eyes is typically in response to whether a person themselves wishes to open or close their eyes. They did not perceive the Lord because they didn't want to; and were confirmed in that attitude. "Kept" is too mild; the Greek is usually used of violent 'taking hold' or arrest of a person, especially of the Lord Jesus and His preachers by the Jews. perhaps we are to assume that it was the Jewish mindset which likewise had taken hold of their mental outlook and was stopping them from seeing the obvious fulfilment of the Lord's words.

24:17 *And he said to them: What communications are these you have one with another as you walk? And they stood still, looking sad*- The standing still may have been a way of saying they didn't want Him to travel with them, becuase they were in grief and wanted their own company. Hence the link between standing still and looking sad. But as He does to this day, the Lord persisted in walking with them, until they no longer resisted but earnestly invited Him into their home. The interactions between the Lord and these two is rather 'rough'. He, a stranger, insists on intruding into the journey of two people who are grieving. Instead of sympathizing with them, He calls them foolish, idiots [a strong term in Greek]. They in turn had responded by saying He must be some isolated street person if He doesn't know what's just happened in Jerusalem. And He enters their home and acts as the host rather than the guest, in taking the bread and blessing it. And so it can appear between the Lord and us, in the early stages of our interactions with Him.

Perhaps they stood still because they were embarassed and ashamed, realizing that a stranger had overheard their depressed conversation. Being challenged with this question stopped them in their tracks. And the Lord so often used, and uses, questions- in order to likewise stop us in our tracks, as we come to self-realization. The Lord's questions were rhetorical, because He wanted to elicit self-understanding. "Looking sad" is a word only found elsewhere about the Jewish orthodox in Mt. 6:16. As noted on :16, their eyes, their worldview and outlook, were influenced by them, they looked like them; and so refused to perceive the Lord.

24:18 *And one of them, named Cleopas, answering said to him: Do you live alone in Jerusalem, and therefore do not know the things which have happened there recently?-*

Cleopas may be a diminutive of Cleopatras- a Gentile name. We note the Lord appeared to Mary and to this random "Cleopas", who we know nothing about, and some anonymous disciple. And only then to the eleven. The whole record shows His style, of engaging with random people who then come together as a group and share their experiences of encountering the risen Lord.

The zeal of Mary to be an obedient witness is remarkable. All Jerusalem knew the story of the risen Jesus still on “the third day” after His death- only someone totally cut off from society would have not heard this news, as Cleopas commented (Lk. 24:18 Gk.). If the whole of Jerusalem knew the story about the resurrected Jesus on the third day after His death, and the male disciples were evidently still nervous and doubtful about everything, it must be that this tremendous spread of the news had been achieved by Mary and the women.

Even after His resurrection, in His moment of glory and triumph, the Lord appeared in

very ordinary working clothes, so that He appeared as a gardener. The disciples who met Him on the Emmaus road asked whether He 'lived alone' and therefore was ignorant of the news of the city about the death of Jesus (Lk. 24:18 RV). The only people who lived alone, outside of the extended family, were drop outs or weirdos. It was almost a rude thing for them to ask a stranger. The fact was, the Lord appeared so very ordinary, even like a lower class social outcast type. And this was the exalted Son of God. We gasp at His humility, but also at His earnest passion to remind His followers of their common bond with Him, even in His exaltation.

24:19 *And he said to them: What things? And they told him the things concerning Jesus the Nazarene, that he was a prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all the people*- So often, if not always, the Lord's questions are to elicit self knowledge from us. "The things concerning Jesus..." is a term Luke's record will later use as a definition of the Gospel (Acts 8:12; 19:8). And the Lord will go on to expound to them "the things concerning" Himself (:27). But they knew these "things concerning" Him. They knew, but did not believe the reality of "the things" they knew. This progression from knowledge to belief is the essence of our conversion and reconversion. We note they style the Lord "a prophet". Yet John the Baptist had taught the Lord was greater than a prophet. And the Lord Himself had taught them that He was God's Son. Had this registered with them, they would have known that as God's Son He would surely resurrect. It was their 'low' view of Him that led to their lack of faith in His resurrection.

24:20 *And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him*- Even at that early stage it was clear to all that the responsibility for the Lord's death was with the Jews and not the Romans. The very words for "delivered up to be crucified" were several times on the Lord's lips, predicting His fate. But He had always continued with the prediction that then after three days, He would rise again (:7; Mt. 20:15). They were repeating His words but had subonsciously removed the idea of resurrection from them. All was in place for the penny to drop- in realizing that now, after three days, the Lord had indeed risen and appeared.

We note that the two fully recognized that it was their own people the Jews who crucified the Lord, even though the Romans did it. This of itself reflects quite some humility and lack of national pride.

24:21 *But we had hoped that it was he who should redeem Israel. Moreover besides all this, it is now the third day since these things came to pass*-

They thought the Lord would "redeem Israel" in the sense of establishing God's Kingdom. Yet He had taught that His death would be a ransom or redemption for all (Mt. 20:28 s.w.). Paul and Peter later use the word for the Lord's redemption of all believers from their sins (Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 1:18). The disciples were so focused upon their idea of a

physical Kingdom that the wonder of redemption from sin failed to register with them. Doubtless because they lacked deep conviction of their sins, and so failed to see the good news of redemption from sin. The Old Testament types, the Lord's teaching and the later teaching of the NT are that our redemption was achieved on the cross. Not by the resurrection. Whilst "we are saved by His life", the essence of forgiveness and redemption is in the Lord lifted up on the cross. Had they given due attention to this, they would have rejoiced in what had been achieved- they had been forgiven and redeemed from their sins. But their focus was on immediate personal benefit, and so they overlooked that.

When the night seems darkest, dawn often breaks. And so it was again here; the passing of three days meant they assumed that His body had now decomposed. When in fact the passing of those three days meant that now was the time to expect His predicted resurrection.

The two on the way to Emmaus commented that they thought Christ would have “redeemed” Israel (Lk. 24:21). A.D. Norris makes a powerful case for one of those two being Peter (*Peter: Fisher Of Men* p.109). The only other time the Greek word is used is (again?) by Peter in 1 Pet. 1:18,19, where he reassures his weary sheep that “You were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ”- as if to say ‘it’s really all wonderfully true! I too doubted it, as you know. But I know now that it is true; even I was redeemed, from the shame of those denials, and so much else. Believe it with me!’. After all the Lord had taught about salvation, the eloquent and yet simple explanation of salvation in the Kingdom through His death, Peter and the others thought that His cross (“precious blood”) hadn’t brought redemption. How weak their understanding was, how slow they were. And Peter again is gently prodding from his own example and pattern of growth: ‘Can’t you see the reality of it all? Or are you still as inexplicably slow to see it all as I was?’. However, :34 rather precludes the idea of Peter being one of the two, for on their return to Jerusalem they are greeted with the news that "The Lord has indeed risen, and has appeared to Simon!".

The disciples on the road to Emmaus were like Nicodemus. They made a great commitment to tell a stranger that they had believed in Jesus of Nazareth and His words about resurrection (Lk. 24:19-21). Remember how at that very time, the disciples locked themselves indoors for fear of the Jews. They said what they did and took the ‘chance’ they did, without believing Jesus would rise. They were motivated by the cross to simply stand up and be counted, with no hope of future reward.

The Jewish public looked for Jesus to release them from Roman bondage; but He patiently and repeatedly explained that His Kingdom was not of this world, rather would it come in a political sense at His second coming; and the essence of the Kingdom and liberation He preached was spiritual and internal, rather than physical and external. Yet

the disciples didn't get it- they thought Jesus would've redeemed Israel there and then (Lk. 24:21). Their total lack of attention to the Lord's words is brought out by their lament that now was "the third day" after His death- when this ought to have been the very day they were looking for His resurrection!

24:22 *Further, certain women of our company amazed us, having been early at the tomb*- The disciples were "astonished" (Lk. 24:22) and "marvelled" (Lk. 24:12,41). The same two Greek words recur together in Acts 2:7,12, describing how the crowd to whom the disciples preached soon afterwards were likewise "amazed and marvelled". Perhaps this was how and why the disciples (and Peter especially) could achieve such a rapport with that crowd- because they had experienced those very same feelings when their faith and understanding was so weak. "Further..." suggests that they saw the women's testimony as a further reason to be sad. For they were giving the stranger an answer to His question as to why they were sad. The good news from the women was perceived by them as yet more bad news. This is how narratives develop in human minds; all evidence is seen negatively, no matter how positive it is. We think of how Israel very quickly adopted a positive narrative about Egypt and a negative narrative about Canaan and God's love for them.

24:23 *And when they did not find his body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive*- The women said they had seen "a vision of Angels" rather than actual Angels (Lk. 24:23). They like the disciples later (Lk. 24:37) wished to spiritualize everything rather than face the fact that the real Christ had risen in concrete and actual reality. The theological tendency to spiritualize the person of the Lord Jesus likewise has its psychological roots in a difficulty in believing the wonderful literal truths of the Lord's resurrection, current personal existence, and His literal return. Their strong [but wrong] belief in disembodied spirits may have been one reason why they were so slow to believe in His bodily resurrection. Each time He appeared to them post resurrection, they would have later rationalized it as an appearance of a disembodied spirit. This is why there is a connection between eating and resurrection- to show that He was bodily alive again, and not a spirit. Yet after three appearances to them, they still "went fishing". Perhaps this is one reason the Lord had to remain 40 days amongst them.

24:24 *And some of them that were with us went to the tomb, and found it even as the women had said. But him they saw not*- Luke stresses that they had failed to believe the chosen witnesses of the Lord's resurrection; they were caught up in the secular spirit of their age, which refused to accept female testimony. And all this paves the way to the commission for them, the one time disbelievers and doubters without excuse, to go out and tell the world to believe in the Lord's resurrection, warning that there was going to be condemnation for those who disbelieved their message (Mk. 16:16). Their appeal to

men was therefore on the basis that they themselves had so miserably failed to believe. We note too that the claim that John saw and believed (Jn. 20:8) was perhaps only momentary faith that then dwindled; or maybe the idea was that he only later believed.

"But Him they saw not" refers to Peter and John not seeing the Lord. But Mary Magdalene and the women had testified that they had seen the Lord. The couple on the road to Emmaus 'sincerely' didn't believe their testimony. In fact they found it almost a cause for further depression; in that 'reliable' witnesses hadn't seen Him, but unreliable ones [as they saw the women] claimed to have seen Him- and, by implication, were only wildly fantasizing. They felt, as we all do at times, that *others* are talking about their meetings with the Lord, but it's only talk, and we personally have not had the direct personal experience of it. Nor do we see concrete evidence for their claims. This of course was to suddenly change! They said these words to the Lord who was standing in front of them, but they didn't see Him: "Him they saw not". They surely later saw the irony. Likewise they surely later saw the strange appropriacy of His promise that where two or three gather in His Name, He would be present in their midst (Mt. 18:20). Even if at the time, His presence is not recognized by the "two". This explains the promise of the Comforter; whether or not we feel it, He is present. Because a person can be present even if those he is present with aren't aware of His presence.

24:25 *And he said to them: O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!*- On one hand their hearts raced, on the other, their hearts were slow. Faith and unbelief coexist. The Lord by contrast had been of quick understanding in spiritual things (Is. 11:3). Their slowness was inexcusable; it was related to a "hardness" of heart (Mk. 16:14). They ought to have connected the events experienced not simply with the Lord's own predictions, but with the words in "all" the prophetic scriptures about the sufferings and resurrection of Messiah. We might be inclined to think that it is a tall order to discern these things in "all" the prophets. But the Lord expected it of His men. Misunderstanding and blindness to the things of God's word are therefore presented here as worthy of rebuke by the Lord Jesus. Our insistence that 'I just didn't see it' is not of itself an excuse. This should provide us every motivation in our Bible reading. The Father and Son are eager to reveal themselves to us. We are asked to have active minds, ever sensitive to the implications of God's words; just as we would be to the words of the 'other' in any human relationship. Although their hearts raced, the Lord calls them "slow of heart". Even that racing of heart was slow compared to what it should have been.

24:26 *Was it not necessary that the Christ suffer these things and so enter into his glory?*- The idea of a suffering Messiah is somewhat veiled in the Old Testament, we might think. But the Lord expected them to see the obvious necessity of what had happened; that glory could only be entered through suffering. We note that the Lord felt

He had 'entered glory' even before His ascension. And yet there is not a word about this in the historical account of His resurrection.

24:27 *And beginning from Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted for them from all the scriptures, the things concerning himself*- This way of beginning in the prophets and explaining the "things concerning" the Lord Jesus was copied by Philip (Acts 8:35). Luke, who also wrote Acts, is seeking to develop the idea of a continuity of witness between the Lord and all those in Him. "The things concerning" the Lord Jesus were the same things taught by Philip (Acts 8:12). "He interpreted for them" may be seen as an act of His grace; for He has just implied that they were unreasonably slow to have interpreted the prophets; He had expected them to interpret them as pointing to the things of His sufferings and resurrection. And so He does it for them here.

24:28 *And they drew near to the village where they were going, and he made as though he would go further*- We recall how the Lord appeared as if He would have walked past the suffering disciples in the boat, and how He surely pretended to be asleep in the midst of a storm in another boat. He has this style to this day, not responding immediately to requests, or appearing to be distant- in order to pique our desire for Him. And so it worked here; they responded by desperately urging Him to abide with them, to eat with them in their home- the ultimate sign of spiritual fellowship and acceptance. But this was provoked by His apparent distance from them and appearance of wanting to go away from them.

24:29 *And they urged him, saying: Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent. And he went in to stay with them*- This is all very much the language of John's gospel about the Lord wanting to abide with people. We also have here presented the ideal image of a house church, with the Lord welcomed in and abiding through His Spirit. The Comforter passages assure us that the Lord's presence is just as much with us through His Spirit as it was in physical terms.

24:30 *And it came to pass, when he had sat down with them to eat, he took the bread, and blessing and breaking it, he gave to them*- This is framed in the language of the breaking of bread service. It leads us to conclude that the 'breaking of bread' was simply an eating together; for to share food together at the same table was a religious act. Likewise Paul's sharing of food with his fellow passengers during the storm of Acts 27 is presented as a breaking of bread. Clearly the table was open to all, and was devoid of the fences placed around it by later Christian development. The story line has the guest becoming the host- speaking of how the Lord Jesus, once invited in, takes over our table and family life. This is an intended and classic fulfilment of the Lord's promise that where two or three gather in His Name, He is present in their midst.

24:31 *And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight*- The opening of their eyes is not to be taken as meaning that it was not their fault that they failed to perceive Him. For they are upbraided for being so slow of perception; but that hardness of heart (Mk. 16:14) was confirmed, as Pharoah's was, by the Lord hardening their hearts. And that was only removed by grace.

He was recognized by the Emmaus disciples in the way that He broke bread. The way He handled the loaf, His mannerisms, His way of speaking and choice of language, were evidently the same after His resurrection as before (Lk. 24:30,31). The Lord is the same today as yesterday.

In classical Greek, the idea of opening the eyes is associated with a new born first opening their eyes. This could be Luke's version of the teaching recorded in John about the new birth. They were born again, they received the Spirit, the Comforter; which meant that although He vanished from their physical sight, they "knew him", they had His abiding presence now with them.

24:32 *And they said to each other: Was not our heart burning within us, while he spoke to us on the road, while he opened up the scriptures to us?*- The Codex Bezae reads "Was not our heart veiled..." which makes sense. Or we can read that the word of God burnt in their hearts, Jer. 20:9 LXX is alluded to here. They knew the word of resurrection on one level but they needed to be opened to it on another. Their hearts were burning, on fire, with the unexpressed sense that this just might be the Lord. The opening of their eyes is paralleled here with the opening of the Old Testament scriptures. But academic understanding, the gift of hearing correct interpretation, left their eyes still closed, although their hearts / minds were on fire. It was still by grace that their eyes were opened to the real implications of all that wonderful Biblical exposition; that of itself did not open their eyes. There still had to be that higher hand, that other element. The Lord had just told them in :25 that they were slow to believe, and was to rebuke them for being "slow of heart to believe" (:45). Now their hearts were finally racing. They on one hand subconsciously understood that this was in fact the Lord Jesus who was talking to them. But they dared not believe it. The breaking of bread changed all that. This is a grand theme of the resurrection records- that what man subconsciously believed was true is made actual and brought into open reality. Indeed this is what happens whenever man openly confesses to faith in the Gospel, in the things he on some level was already aware of. For eternity is in our hearts. Like a great wave breaking all over us, we will finally realize that what we just dared to believe is true... that God does actually love us and I shall live eternally with Him... is in fact gloriously and eternally true. Their eyes were held back from recognizing Him physically, implying that His physical features were the same post-resurrection. This perhaps was because the Lord wanted them to

recognize Him by His words; their ears were not held back. He had a unique way of speaking: “Never man spake like this man” (Jn. 7:46). And that was unchanged.

24:33 *And they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem and found the eleven gathered together, and those that were with them*- Note that the great commission to preach which follows was first given to “the eleven and those with him”, i.e. the women. Acts 1:13,14 speaks of “the eleven and the women”- the same two groups. The great commission was not therefore solely given to the eleven. Their finding the "eleven" there rather precludes the otherwise attractive suggestion of Lightfoot and A.D. Norris that one of the two on the road to Emmaus was Peter. Likewise the two were told that the Lord had appeared to Peter (:34).

24:34 *Saying: The Lord has indeed risen, and has appeared to Simon!*- See on Mt. 17:1. The graciously unrecorded appearing of the risen Lord to Peter (1 Cor. 15:5; Lk. 24:34) may have involved the Lord simply appearing to Him, without words. It was simply the assurance that was there in the look on the face of the Lord. It was not until the meeting by the lake in Galilee in John 21 that the Lord raised Peter's denials with him. And this sets us an example in when and how to deal with issues. There is a time and place, and not always at first meeting.

This is not necessarily to be taken as a triumphant statement that they believed that the Lord had risen. Jn. 20:19,20 is clear that He appeared to them all, minus Thomas, the very day He rose: "When it was evening, on that day, the first day of the week, and for fear of the Jews, the doors were locked where the disciples were; and Jesus came and stood in their midst, and said to them: Peace to you. And when he had said this, he showed to them his hands and his side". But still they doubted. Even when He appeared to them in Galilee, "some doubted". The accounts present men struggling to accept an obvious reality. He had cut short the intended plan of meeting in Galilee by appearing to them anyway, the day He rose. They refused to believe in the face of obvious evidence.

We get the impression of huge joy at that meeting. But it was because it was a gathering of individuals like Mary and Peter, and Cleopas and his companion, who had had individual meetings with the risen Lord. And they now gathered together to joyfully celebrate that. This is in contrast to the classical Christian position that faith is found in the church, in community. It isn't. It is found in personal meeting with the Lord. We meet with others to share the further joy of discovering that others have had that same personal meeting with Him as we did. It is a confirmation of faith, not the source of faith.

24:35 *And they told the things that had happened on the road, and how he was known to them by the breaking of the bread*-

The implication is that they had seen Him breaking bread many times before, and they noticed the similarity of body language. The two disciples were therefore surely amongst those who "companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us" (Acts 1:21). They noticed the distinct similarity in body language between the mortal Jesus and the risen Lord. We shall be changed, Paul says, but resurrection will not obliterate personality, nor even body language. Luke will use "the breaking of bread" as a technical term for the communion service, through which the Lord likewise is made known to His people. There is intended to be a similar opening of our eyes to the Lord's presence through the symbols of His body and blood.

The Lord held the memorial meeting as a keeping of a Passover, and yet He changed some elements of it. In like manner He was made known to the disciples “in the breaking of bread", perhaps because it was usual for the host to say the blessing before the meal, and yet Jesus the stranger, the guest, presumed to lead the prayer. We have established here the idea of the Lord's special manifestation at the breaking of bread meeting. He was and still is known to us in the breaking of bread.

We must remember that Mark's record says that the testimony of the Emmaus disciples was not accepted by the others: "And after these things he was manifested in another guise to two of them as they walked on their way into the countryside. And they went away, and told it to the rest, who did not believe them either" (Mk. 16:12,13).

24:36 *And as they spoke these things, he stood in the midst of them, and said to them: Peace to you!*- The Lord was aware of their sense of guilt over deserting Him, and in not perceiving the obvious necessity of His resurrection. His first word to them was therefore an assurance of "peace", a term usually used in the Bible in the context of peace with God through forgiveness.

24:37 *But they were terrified and afraid, and supposed that they saw a ghost*- Yet again they are presented as lacking in faith and discernment; even the two who had just met the Lord in their own home. They preferred to think of Him as some disembodied spirit rather than face up to the amazing truth that He was before them in real, bodily, personal form. The theological tendencies towards belief in disembodied existence and the spiritualizing of the Lord's resurrection are likewise reflections of a basic lack of faith in the most challenging of realities; that the body of Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead, and He exist now in a personal form, and shall likewise return.

24:38 *And he said to them: Why are you disturbed? And why do questions arise in your heart?*- The group of disciples are parallel with Cleopas and his companion. Both have the scriptures opened to them; both are rebuked; both question with each other (:15). "Questions" is literally 'reasonings'. 'It could be this, might be that... who knows for sure' is therefore exposed as at times an excuse for lack of faith in chellenging realities. Noting this is not to say that all things Biblical are clear and capable of simplistic

explanation. Rather is it a caveat against dodging the requirement of simple faith by complex reasoning. We think of the Lord's criticism of "the depths of satan as they speak" noted on Rev. 2:24. The disciples likely had considered all manner of conspiracy theories and wild possibilities, rather than face up to the simple requirements of faith. They had likewise been "disturbed" when they saw the Lord walking on the water and had again concluded it was a ghost (s.w. Mt. 14:26). They were intended to have learned from that failure, just as we too are taught by our failures and are expected to build upon them for greater tests yet to come. The Lord had urged them not to be "troubled" (s.w. "disturbed") in Jn. 14:1,27. He is now enquiring why those words of His had been ignored by them.

24:39 *See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Handle me and see! For a ghost has not flesh and bones, as you see me having*- See on 1 Cor. 5:5. He is concerned at their excusing their lack of faith in Him by their various wrong ideas about disembodied existence. Here we see how theological error, such as belief in ghosts or an immortal soul, leads us away from simple faith.

Note that whilst flesh and *blood* cannot inherit the Kingdom, the risen, immortal Lord Jesus described Himself as flesh and *bones*. In fact, we find that "flesh and bones" are often paralleled (Gen. 2:23; Job 10:11; 33:21; Ps. 38:3; Prov. 14:30), and simply mean 'the person', or as the Lord put it on that occasion, "I myself". We ourselves will be in the Kingdom, with similar personalities we have now [that's a very challenging thought of itself]. "Flesh" doesn't necessarily have to refer, in every instance, to something condemned. Who we are now is who we will essentially be in the eternity of God's Kingdom. Let's not allow any idea that somehow our flesh / basic being is so awful that actually, the essential "I myself" will be dissolved beneath the wrath of God at the judgment. The Lord is "the saviour of the body" and will also save our "spirit" at the last day; so that we, albeit with spirit rather than blood energizing us, will live eternally. Understanding things this way enables us to perceive more forcefully the eternal importance of who we develop into as persons, right now. The Buddhist belief that we will ultimately not exist, that such 'Nirvana' is the most wonderful thing to hope for, appears at first hearing a strange 'hope' to be shared by millions of followers. But actually, it's the same essential psychology as that behind the idea that 'I' will not exist in the Kingdom of God, I will be given a new body, person and character. It's actually saying the same- I won't exist. And it's rooted in a terribly low self-image, a dis-ease with ourselves, a lack of acceptance of ourselves as the persons whom God made us and develops us into. Whilst of course our natures will be changed, so that we can be immortal, it is *we* who will be saved; our body will be resurrected, made new, and our spirit "saved" in that day, reunited with our renewed and immortal bodies. We have eternal life in the sense that who we are now, in spiritual terms, is who we will eternally be. Our spirit, the essential us, is in this sense immortal; it's remembered with the Lord. In this sense, not even death itself, nor time itself, can separate us from the love of God

which is in Christ (Rom. 8:35-39). Just as we still love someone after they have died, remembering as they do who they were and still are to us, so it is with the love of God for the essential us. Hence 1 Pet. 3:4 speaks of how a “gentle and calm disposition” or spirit is in fact “imperishable” (NAB)- because that spirit of character will be eternally remembered. This is why personality and character, rather than physical works, are of such ultimate and paramount importance. How we speak now is in a way, how we will eternally speak- I think that's the idea of Prov. 12:19: "The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment". Our "way" of life and being is how we will eternally be- and for me that solves the enigma of Prov. 12:28: "In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death". In Jeremiah 18, God likens Himself to a potter working with us the clay. We can resist how He wants us to be, and He can make us into something else... we are soft clay until the 'firing'; and the day of firing is surely the day of judgment. The implication is that in this life we are soft clay; but the day of judgment will set us hard as the persons we have become, or have been made into, in this life.

The disciples thought the resurrected Christ was a spirit, a ghost. They returned to their old superstitions. Yet He didn’t respond by lecturing them about the death state or that all existence is only bodily, much as He could have done. Instead He adopted for a moment their position and reasoned from it: “A spirit has not flesh and bones as you see me have”. The essence of His concern was their doubt in Him and His resurrection, rather than their return to wrong superstitions.

24:40 *And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet*- He wanted them to handle Him; and John opens his letters in 1 Jn. 1:1-4 by saying that this was exactly what they had done. Their reticence to touch Him was perhaps due to their sense that by doing so they would have to jettison all beliefs in ghosts and disembodied existence. We too can refuse to even consider evidence because too much is at stake if it is true.

24:41 *And while they still disbelieved for joy and wondered, he said to them: Have you here anything to eat?*- The disciples are described as sleeping for sorrow, not believing for joy. Both their unbelief and their sorrow and failure to support the Lord in His time of need are not really excusable by either sorrow nor joy. And yet the Lord generously imputes these excuses to His men, such is His love for them. They are described as being “glad” when they saw the risen Lord (Jn. 20:20). Yet actually they didn’t believe at that time- for Lk. 24:41 generously says that they “believed not for joy”. And they assumed that Jesus was a phantom, not the actual, concrete, bodily Jesus. Placing the records together doesn’t give a very positive image of the disciples at this time. And yet

the record is so positive about them. The disciples are said not to have believed "for joy" (Lk. 24:41). But the Lord upbraided them for their arrant foolishness and plain unbelief. They slept, we are told, “for sorrow”- when they should have stayed awake as commanded.

One hallmark of the spiritual way of life is an indomitably *positive spirit*. Not a simplistic naivety, blindly hoping for the best in an almost fatalistic way. But as the Father and Son are so essentially positive, so will we be, if we absorb something of His Spirit. Thus the disciples are said not to have believed "for joy". But the Lord upbraided them for their arrant foolishness and plain unbelief.

Joy isn't really a cause for disbelief. It's the grace in the inspired record which makes that excuse for them. They preferred to spiritualize everything, as many do today, rather than face the actual implications of a Lord who is for real. They accepted it was Jesus, and yet they still disbelieved. Note in this context how the women said they had seen "a vision of Angels" rather than actual Angels (Lk. 24:23).
This incident of eating was to yet again reassure them that He was for real. Note how later on, by the sea of Tiberias, Jesus again ate before them- He had to keep repeating Himself to get it home to them, that He was for real. If those men, who had heard the many predictions of resurrection from the lips of the Lord Himself, found it hard to believe He was for real when He stood before them- how understandably hard it is for us to grasp that He is for real.

24:42 *And they gave him a piece of a boiled fish*- Eating fish was something which they had likely seen Him do in their days together in Galilee. There was a continuity between His mortal life and His immortal life. The same Jesus who walked the streets of Galilee shall come again, and be essentially the same. For immortality does not swallow up basic personality; it is that which is in fact saved.

24:43 *And he took it and ate before them*- Taking and eating before the disciples is the very language of the last supper (Mt. 26:26; 1 Cor. 11:24). He was replicating both the last supper and the meal He had just had with the two in Emmaus. Eating together was a sign of acceptance and religious fellowship; the Lord was and is demonstrating that He accepts us in that He shares food with us. The form of that food is not important; here He uses fish rather than bread.

24:44 *And he said to them: These are my words which I spoke to you while I was yet with you, that all things necessary be fulfilled which are written in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms concerning me*- As the resurrected Lord stood before the disciples, he says: “These are my words which I spoke to you”, and goes on to say that His resurrection had been predicted throughout the Old Testament words of God. He had made both His words and the words of God into flesh as He stood there. His words were as it were of the same nature as the words of the Old Testament about Him. He

didn't say 'Look everyone, I've risen!'. He just stood there, reminded them of the words of the prophets, and His own words, and said "These are my words". He was so powerfully and completely the word made flesh.

24:45 *Then opened he their mind so that they might understand the scriptures*- He had already opened the Scriptures to the two from Emmaus, and had opened their eyes. Now He does that to the whole group, and therefore does this a second time to the two from Emmaus.

Prophecy does not have to refer to specific, lexical statements; it can refer to the spirit and implication behind the recorded words. Thus "the Scriptures" prophesied Christ's resurrection after three days (Lk. 24:45; 1 Cor. 15:3,4); but nowhere is this explicitly prophesied. It is implied in the spirit behind the types, e.g. of Jonah and Gen. 22:4. So as 'prophecy' is not just the words but the spirit behind them, so prayer is not just the words, but the spirit in the man's heart who prays, even if the words come out wrong. See on Acts 10:4.

24:46 *And he said to them: Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day*- This may be the rubric He used; quoting various Old Testament passages ["Thus it is written"] and then explaining how they meant that the Christ should suffer and rise again. This is how our teaching should also proceed; quoting the actual text of Scripture and then offering interpretation of the words read.

24:47 *And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem*- See on Acts 10:35,36. The parallel record to the preaching commissions of Mk. 16 and Mt. 28 is found in Lk. 24:45-47. There we read how the Lord explained to the disciples that their preaching of the Gospel "among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" was foretold in the Psalms and prophets. So the Bible student asks: *Where* in the Psalms and prophets? The Lord spoke as if the prophecies about this were copious. There do not seem to be any specific prophecies which speak of the twelve spreading the Gospel from Jerusalem in the first century. Instead we read of the Gospel being spread from Jerusalem *in the Kingdom*, and often the phrase "all nations" occurs in a Kingdom context, describing how "all nations" will come to worship Christ at Jerusalem (Ps. 22:27; 67:2; 72:11,17; 82:8; 86:9; 117:1; Is. 2:2; 66:18,20; Jer. 3:17; Dan. 7:14; Hag. 2:7; Zech. 8:23). This selection of "Psalms and prophets" is impressive. Yet the Lord Jesus clearly interpreted these future Kingdom passages as having relevance to the world-wide spreading of the Gospel. "All nations" also occurs in many passages exhorting us to praise Yahweh among all the nations of this world. The reason for this is that God's glory is so great it should be declared as far as possible by us. 1 Chron. 16:24,25 is typical of many such verses: "Declare his glory among the heathen; his marvellous works among all nations. *For* great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised... for all the gods of the people are idols". World-wide preaching is therefore

an aspect of our praise of Yahweh, and as such it is a spiritual work which is timeless. Because the Kingdom is to spread world-wide, we should therefore spread the Good News of this coming Kingdom world-wide. In prospect- and no more than that, let it be noted- the Kingdom has been established in that Christ has all power in Heaven and earth (Mt. 28:18). This is the language of Dan. 7:14 concerning the future Kingdom. The believer must live the Kingdom life now, as far as possible (Rom. 13:12,13). In the Kingdom, we will be spreading the Gospel throughout this planet. In this life too we should live in the spirit of the Kingdom in this regard.

The preaching of the Gospel was prophesied as *beginning* at Jerusalem, Jesus said. If this world-wide preaching abruptly finished at the end of the first century, to begin again at Jerusalem in the Kingdom, surely this would be prophesied in the Old Testament? The impression one gets from the Old Testament passages listed above is that the Gospel would begin to spread from Jerusalem, and would *go on spreading* until the full establishment of the Kingdom. This explains why Christ's command to get up and go world-wide with the Gospel stands for all time. The command to preach to "all nations" would ring bells in Jewish minds with the promises to Abraham, concerning the blessing of forgiveness to come upon "all nations" through Messiah (Gen. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4). Therefore God's people are to preach the Gospel of forgiveness in Christ to "all nations". The offer of sharing in that blessing did not close at the end of the first century. Putting the "all nations" of the Abrahamic promises together with Christ's preaching commission leads to a simple conclusion: The Hope of Israel now applies to all nations; so go and tell this good news to all nations.

Luke uses the same word translated 'preach' in both Luke and the Acts [although the other Gospels use it only once]. In Luke we find the word in 1:19; 2:10; 3:18; 4:18,43; 7:22; 8:1; 9:6; 16:16; 20:1; and in Acts, in 5:42; 8:4,12,25,35,40; 10:36; 11:20; 13:32; 14:7,15,21; 15:35; 16:10; 17:18. Luke clearly saw the early ecclesia as preaching the same message as Jesus and the apostles; they continued what was essentially a shared witness. This means that we too are to see in the Lord and the twelve as they walked around Galilee the basis for our witness; we are continuing their work, with just the same message and range of responses to it. Lk. 24:47 concludes the Gospel with the command to go and preach remission of sins, continuing the work of the Lord Himself, who began His ministry with the proclamation of remission (Lk. 4:18 cp. 1:77). Acts stresses that the believers did just this; they preached remission of sins [s.w.] in Jesus' Name, whose representatives they were: Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18. See on Acts 1:1.

As the Lord appeals to all nations, so should we. The prophecies which He interpreted as referring to the church spreading the Gospel world-wide are specifically described as

prophecies about Him personally (Lk. 24:44,47: "All things which were written in the prophets and in the psalms, concerning *me* … that repentance and remission of sins should be preached…"). Thus the preachers of the Gospel would personally manifest Christ; which accounts for the special sense of His presence which they experience as they do this work (Mt. 28:20).

Such is the power of our preaching, the possibility which our words of witness give to our hearers. We have such power invested in us! If we are slack to use it, the Lord's glory is limited, and the salvation of others disabled. As if to bring this home, the New Testament quotes several passages evidently prophetic of the future Kingdom as having their fulfillment in the preaching of the Gospel today:
- Is. 2:2-4 (the word of Yahweh *will* go out from Jerusalem) = the ecclesia's witness to the world today, "beginning at Jerusalem" (Lk. 24:47). This, the Lord said, was in fulfillment of the OT prophets- and He could only be referring to those like Isaiah.
- Am. 9:11,12 had its fulfillment in the work of preaching to the Gentiles (Acts 15:13-18; 26:16-18).
- Likewise Is. 54:12 = Gal. 4:27; we extend the joy of the Kingdom to our hearers.
- Is. 52:7 = Rom. 10:15.
- Is. 11:10 = Rom. 15:12.
The apparent inappropriacy or lack of context of these quotations need not worry us. It is not that they have no future fulfillment They evidently will have, at the Lord's second coming. But God sees that which shall be as already happening; His perspective is outside of our kind of time. The ecclesia's preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom to the world is effectively a spreading of the Kingdom to them; in that those who respond properly will ultimately be in God's Kingdom. But God sees through that gap between their response and the final establishment of the Kingdom; He invites us to see it as if we have spread the Kingdom to them. As we present the Gospel to men and women of all races, we are enabling the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham. The more we preach, the more glorious is their fulfillment This is the power of our Gospel and the preaching of it. Let's not treat it as something ordinary or optional or to be fitted in to our spare time.

Luke records how the Angel summarised the Lord's work as good news of great joy for *all men* (Lk. 2:10). The Gospel concludes by asking *us* to take that message to *all men*. Straight away we are challenged to analyze our preaching of the Gospel: is it a telling of "great joy" to others, or merely a glum 'witness' or a seeking to educate them 'how to read the Bible more effectively', or a sharing with them the conclusions of our somewhat phlegmatic Biblical researches? Whatever we teach, it must be a joyful passing on of *good* news of "great joy". The Lord began His ministry by proclaiming a freedom from burdens through Him (Lk. 4). And He concludes it by telling the disciples to proclaim the same deliverance (Lk. 24:47). Consider how He brings together various passages from Isaiah in His opening declaration in Lk. 4:18:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach [proclaim] [Heb. 'call out to a man'] the acceptable year of the Lord". This combines allusions to Is. 61:1 (Lev. 25:10); Is. 58:6 LXX and Is. 61:2.
Is. 58:6 AV: "To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free (cp. Dt. 15:12 re freedom of slaves, s.w.), and that you break every yoke" is in the context of an insincerely kept year of Jubilee in Hezekiah's time, after the Sennacherib invasion. Is. 58 has many Day of Atonement allusions- the year of Jubilee began on this feast. We are as the High Priest declaring the reality of forgiveness to the crowd. Hence Lk. 24:47 asks us to proclaim a Jubilee of atonement. The Greek for "preach" in Lk. 24:47 and for "preach / proclaim the acceptable year" in Lk. 4:19 are the same, and the word is used in the LXX for proclaiming the Jubilee. And the LXX word used for 'jubilee' means remission, release, forgiveness, and it is the word used to describe our preaching / proclaiming forgiveness in Lk. 24:47. It could be that we are to see the cross as the day of atonement, and from then on the Jubilee should be proclaimed in the lives of those who accept it. It's as if we are running round telling people that their mortgages have been cancelled, hire purchase payments written off…and yet we are treated as telling them something unreal, when it is in fact so real and pertinent to them. And the very fact that *Yahweh* has released others means that we likewise ought to live in a spirit of releasing others from their debts to us: "The creditor shall release that which he hath lent… *because* the Lord's release hath been proclaimed" (Dt. 15:2 RV).

We can't have a spirit of meanness in our personal lives if we are proclaiming Yahweh's release. This is one of many instances where the process of preaching the Gospel benefits the preacher. The jubilee offered release from the effects of past misfortune and even past foolishness in decisions; and our offer of jubilee offers this same message in ultimate term. Incidentally, the Lord had implied that we are in a permanent Jubilee year situation when He said that we should "take no thought what you shall eat… Sow not nor gather into barns" and not think "What shall we eat?" (Mt. 6:26,31 = Lev. 25:20). There must be a spirit of telling this good news to absolutely *all*. And yet according to Luke's own emphasis, it is the poor who are especially attracted to the Jubilee message of freedom (Lk. 6:20-23; 7:1,22,23; 13:10-17). There are several links between Is. 58 and Neh. 5, where we read of poor Jews who had to mortgage their vineyards and even sell their children in order to pay their debts. The "oppressed" or "broken victim" of Is. 58, to whom we are invited to proclaim deliverance, were therefore in the very first instance those under the throttling grip of poverty, who had become bondslaves because of their debts and now had no hope of freedom, apart from the frank forgiveness of a year of Jubilee. We take a like message to Westerners

overburdened with mortgage payments, to those suffering from absolute poverty in the developing world, and to all those with a sense of debt and being trapped within their life situation. We pronounce to them a year of Jubilee, a frank forgiveness, a way of real escape and freedom.

To preach [proclaim] the acceptable year of the Lord (Lk. 4:19) is thus parallel with "You shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants" (Lev. 25:10). Likewise there are to be found other such allusions to the proclamation of Jubilee: "We as workers together with him, beseech you also that you receive... the grace of God... a time accepted... in the day of salvation [the Jubilee] have I succoured you: behold, now is the accepted time" (2 Cor. 6:1,2) "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached [proclaimed, s.w. 4:19] in his name among all nations" (Lk. 24:47).

24:48- see on Lk. 1:45; Acts 5:32.

You are witnesses of these things- He died and rose as the representative of all men; and therefore this good news should be preached to all kinds and all races of people. Men from all nations were in prospect sprinkled by His blood (Is. 52:15); and therefore we must extend the knowledge of this to all men, both in our collective and personal witness. Lk. 24:48 simply comments that the disciples were witnesses to the resurrection and the fact that forgiveness and salvation was therefore potentially available to all men. The parallel records in Mt. and Mk. say that they were told to go out and witness to the resurrection world-wide. Putting them together it is apparent that if we are truly witnesses of the resurrection in our own faith, then part and parcel of this is to take this witness out into our own little worlds.

Matthew and Mark record how the Lord told the disciples to go world-wide with the message of His death and resurrection; He commanded them to do this. Luke's account is different. He reminds them of His death and resurrection, and simply adds: "And you are witnesses of these things". Not 'you *will be*, I'm telling you to be, witnesses...'. The very fact of having seen and known them was of itself an imperative to bear witness to them. This is the outgoing power of the cross.

Lk. 24:46-49 records Luke's version of the great preaching commission given in Mk. 16 and Mt. 28. He doesn't record that the Lord actually told the disciples to go out and preach. Instead He says that the OT prophets foretold the world-wide preaching of the Gospel of His death and resurrection, "and you are witnesses of these things". It's as if He's saying, 'If you are a witness to all this, you must be a witness of it to all' (cp. Acts 1:8). If we are witnesses, we will bear witness; we will naturally. We have to; and note

how Lev. 5:1 taught that it was a sin not to bear witness / testify when one had been a witness. This may well be consciously alluded to in the language of witness which we have in Lk. 24:48.

24:49 *And I will send to you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high*- John's record shows that they disobeyed this, returning to Galilee in disillusion, where the Lord met them again. The disciples then returned from Galilee to Jerusalem and were given the great commission again, as recorded in Matthew and Luke. The sending of what the Father promised refers to the Comforter, the abiding presence of the Lord Jesus in the hearts of His people, to such an extent that His physical absence is more than compensated for by this very real sense of His presence. Being clothed with heavenly power refers to the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, given to the disciples to help them take the Gospel to all the world. This is why the implication is that once they had received them, they were not to remain in Jerusalem, but to leave the city and go into all the world. The clothing with miraculous power was the first century manifestation of the gift of the Comforter, but the Comforter was and is a gift for all time.

24:50 *And he led them out until they were as far as Bethany, and he lifted up his hands and blessed them*- Whilst the disciples went from Bethany to the mount of Olives and there met the Angels, the point of ascension was from Bethany. It has been argued that Bethany counts as part of the mount of Olives, but checking out a map will indicate that this is a forced and desperate claim. He ascended from Bethany; and the next we know we read of them being told by Angels on the mount of Olives that the Lord shall return (Acts 1:12). I suggest they hurried the two miles to the highest point nearby to watch His slow ascent into Heaven. He is therefore pictured in the house church at Bethany, and ascending from there, with hands raised in blessing upon His church, as the High Priest of the new Israel (Lev. 9:22).

24:51 *And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven*- The blessing would likely have been that of Numbers 6:23, with uplifted hands (:50). And He ascended with those uplifted hands, still uttering blessing upon them. This is how He was to be imagined in Heaven, blessing us, His wondering but obedient people. He died on the cross with hands likewise uplifted, so we are invited to see Him living out the spirit of His death for us even in His ascension and subsequent heavenly glory.

24:52 *And they did homage to him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy*- Humanly speaking, they would have felt sad at His departure. But they had great joy. This is in

exact fulfilment of the promise of the Comforter; that His physical departure would be more than compensated for by the gift of His spirit in their hearts which would result in His joy being within them. At His physical departure, this blessing was given to them.

24:53 *And were continually in the temple, praising God*- They continued to hold the wrong idea that the temple was somehow the sacred space where God was to be praised. Their misunderstandings did not however mean that they were not legitimately in fellowship with the Father and Son. We have noted elsewhere that Luke's concluding words are connected with words at the opening of his gospel (see on :47). And here we have a clear connection with Anna, who was continually in the temple praising God (2:37). That woman is presented as representative of the disciples at this point, and thereby of the entire body of Christ, who are to be continually occupied in God's house with His service, based upon our experience of His Son.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: JOHN

JOHN

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

If you would like to enable the NEV Bible and associated material to remain freely available, do consider making a donation to Carelinks. And please pray that our sending forth of God's word will bring back glory to His Name and that of His dear Son whom we serve.

Duncan Heaster

JOHN CHAPTER 1

1:1 *In the beginning*- John's Gospel expresses the same truths as the other Gospels, but in more spiritual and abstract terms. He chooses to record the Lord's

more enigmatic and spiritual words, whereas the synoptics tend to record His more plain speaking. The Gospel records are transcripts of how men like John taught the Gospel message. John's Gospel was clearly aimed by him at Jewish people who were under the influence of pagan ideas and concepts which later morphed into Gnosticism. He uses the very terms they used, but redefines them. This takes some getting used to, and we are handicapped by not knowing the full range of terms he was seeking to redefine and reposition in a Christian context.

"The beginning" refers to the beginning of the Lord's ministry, both later in John (Jn. 2:11; 8:25 "the same I said unto you from the beginning"; 15:27 "You have been with me from the beginning"; 16:4 "These things I did not tell you at the beginning"; also 1 Jn. 1:1; 2:7,13,14,24; 3:11); and in the other Gospels too ("The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus", Mk. 1:1; "[we] who from the beginning were eyewitnesses", Lk. 1:2). But there can be no doubt that the allusion is to the creation at the beginning of the physical world; but John is to use that in order to describe the huge power unleashed through the Spirit in the creation of a new world, a world of persons reborn, what Paul later terms the "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17).

The Comforter passages make it clear that the disciples were to witness as Christ to this world exactly because they had been with the Lord from the beginning. John's gospel is his obedience to that. And so he explains that he is recounting how things were from the beginning off the Lord's ministry. And Luke does the same, writing that he too was a witness from the beginning and is therefore testifying to what he had seen (Lk. 1:2).

But just as the Lord's words can be read on various levels, so the ideas of John's Gospel can be. "The beginning" translates a noun, *arche*, a word which can just as comfortably be translated 'the chief one'. And indeed it is translated similarly at times throughout the New Testament- "magistrate", "corner", "prince" etc. The ultimate "beginning", *arche*, chief one, was of course the Lord Jesus. Col. 1:18 is clear: "Who is the beginning [*arche*], the firstborn from the dead", of the new creation, the world of persons created in and through Him. So in the beginning, in the Lord Jesus, was the word, the *logos*, the message preached which had perfect congruence with His person. John's later writings also call Him "the beginning" (Rev. 1:8; 3:14; 21:6; 22:13).

The whole prologue is set out as a hymn. The New Testament is full of very high adoration for the Lord Jesus. Since those words and phrases were chosen under the inspiration of God, His Father, we would be better advised to stick with them rather than try to invent our own terms and analogies in order to express His greatness. The structure of the original text of the prologue to John's Gospel regarding the word, and also Phil. 2:9-11 regarding the exaltation of Jesus, are arranged in such a way that they appear to be hymns which were sung by the believers. Pliny the Younger (*Epistle* 10.96.7) writes of the Christians "singing hymns to Christ as to a god"; surely he had in mind these passages. It can often be that we adopt the very position falsely ascribed to us by our critics; and perhaps that's what happened here. The critics of early Christianity wrongly claimed that the Christians thought of Jesus as God; and this eventually became their position for the most part, *although it was not originally.*

Was the Word-

The essential *logos* of the Gospel is the message of Christ crucified. There in the cross is the kernel of everything; there was the “beginning" of the new creation. John later speaks of the Lord Jesus as being the ‘faithful martyr’ in His death, and thereby being “the beginning [saw] of the [new] creation of God" (Rev. 3:14). The beginning was not only at the beginning of the Lord’s ministry; the essential beginning of the new

creation was when the blood and water came out of His side. Yahweh Himself was totally bound up in the death of His Son. God was there with Him and in Him, to the extent that He was in Christ there, reconciling the world unto Himself. In this sense, the *logos* of Christ and the death of the cross “was God". There the Father “was with" the Son [see notes under 16:25,32].

In Hebrew thought, it was quite common to speak of God as having an intention which was then fulfilled. Indeed, this kind of thing is found in the literature and epics of other Semitic languages. Thus the Exodus record records God's commands regarding the tabernacle, and then Moses' fulfilment of them. The prologue to John speaks of God's *logos*, His word or intention, coming to "flesh" in the Lord Jesus. This is classic Hebrew thinking, albeit written in Greek. We will demonstrate below that in Hebrew thought, a representative can be spoken of as being the person who sent them, or whom they represent. Thus the Hebrew way of reading John 1:1-14 would never come anywhere near interpreting it as meaning that 'Jesus is God'. This is a result of not reading the passage against its Hebrew background.

“The word”

Just look at the many times this phrase occurs in the Gospel records. It doesn’t mean ‘the whole Bible’. It means clearly enough and without any dispute ‘the Gospel message’ (e.g. Mk. 2:2; 4:33; 16:20; Lk. 3:2; Jn. 12:48; 14:24; Acts 4:4; 11:19). The Gospel was preached to Abraham in that it comprises the promises to Him and their fulfilment in Jesus (Gal. 3:8). That word of promise was “made flesh” in Jesus; “the word of the oath” of the new covenant, of the promises made to Abraham, “maketh the son” (Heb. 7:28). This is just another way of saying that the word– of the promises, of the Gospel- was made flesh in Jesus. Note how in Rom. 9:6,9 “the word” is called “the word of promise”- those made to Abraham. The same Greek words translated 'Word' and 'made' occur together in 1 Cor. 15:54- where we read of the word [AV " saying"] of the Old Testament prophets being 'made' true by being fulfilled [AV " be brought to pass"]. The word of the promises was made flesh, it was fulfilled, in Jesus. The 'word was made flesh', in one sense, in that the Lord Jesus was " *made*...of the seed of David according to the *flesh*" (Rom. 1:3)- i.e. God's word of promise to David was fulfilled in the fleshly person of Jesus. The Greek words for " made" and " flesh" only occur together in these two places- as if Rom. 1:3 is interpreting Jn. 1:14 for us. But note the admission of a leading theologian: “Neither the fourth Gospel nor Hebrews ever speaks of the eternal Word…in terms which compel us to regard it as a person”(1).

" In the beginning was the word"

John’s Gospel tends to repeat the ideas of the other gospel records but in more spiritual terms. Matthew and Luke begin their accounts of the message by giving the genealogies of Jesus, explaining that His birth was the fulfilment, the ‘making flesh’, of the promises to Abraham and David. And Mark begins by defining his “beginning of the gospel” as the fact that Jesus was the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophets. John is really doing the same, in essence. But he is using more spiritual language. In the beginning was the word- the word of promise, the word of prophecy, all through the Old Testament. And that word was “made flesh” in Jesus, and on account of that word, all things in the new creation had and would come into being. Whilst John is written in Greek, clearly enough Hebrew thought is behind the words. "The Hebrew term *debarim* [words] can also mean 'history'" (2). The whole salvation history of

God, from the promise in Eden onwards, was about the Lord Jesus and was made flesh in His life and death.

Luke's prologue states that he was an "*eyewitness* and minister of *the word*…from *the beginning*"; he refers to the word of the Gospel that later became flesh in Jesus. John's prologue is so similar: "That which was from *the beginning*, that which we have heard, which we have *seen with our eyes*, that which we *beheld*…*the word* of life" (1 Jn. 1:1 RV). Jn. 1:14 matched this with: "*The word* was made flesh, and *we beheld* his glory". John 6 shows how John seeks to present Jesus Himself as the words which give eternal life if eaten / digested (Jn. 6:63). And some commented: "This is a hard saying, who can hear him?" (Jn. 6:60 RVmg.), as if to present Jesus the person as the embodiment of His sayings / words.

Jesus was the word of God shown in a real, live person. All the principles which Old Testament history had taught, the symbology of the law, the outworking of the types of history, all this was now living and speaking in a person. Luke's Gospel makes the same point as John's but in a different way. Over 90% of Luke's Greek is taken from the Septuagint. All the time he is consciously and unconsciously alluding to the Old Testament as having its fulfilment in the things of Jesus. As an example of unconscious allusion, consider Lk. 1:27: "A virgin betrothed to a man". This is right out of Dt. 22:23 LXX "If there be a virgin betrothed to a man…". The context is quite different, but the wording is the same. And in many other cases, Luke picks up phraseology from the LXX apparently without attention to the context. He saw the whole of the OT as having its fulfilment in the story of Jesus. He introduces his Gospel record as an account "of those matters which have been fulfilled" (Lk. 1:1 RV). And "those matters" he defines in Lk. 1:2 as the things of "the word". The RV especially shows his stress on the theme of fulfilment (Lk. 1:20, 23, 37, 45, 54, 55, 57, 70). In essence he is introducing his Gospel just as John does.

In passing, it is interesting to reflect upon the Lord's comment that where two or three are gathered together in His Name, He is in their midst. For this evidently alludes to a Rabbinic saying preserved in the Mishnah (*Aboth* 3.2) that "If two sit together and study Torah [the first five books of Moses], the divine presence rests between them". The Lord was likening Himself (His 'Name') to the Torah, the Old Testament word of God; and His presence would be felt if that Law was studied as it ought to be.

In confirmation of all this, it has been observed that " The numerical use of *logos* in the Johannine writings overwhelmingly favours " message" (some 25 times), not a personified word; and elsewhere in the NT the use of " word" with genitival complement also support the message motif: " word of God" ..." word of the Kingdom" ..." word of the cross" " (3). So our equation of " the word" with the essence of the Gospel message rather than Jesus personally is in harmony with other occurrences of *logos*. That said, there evidently is a personification of sorts going on. Personifications of the word of God weren't uncommon in the literature of the time. Thus Wisdom of Solomon 18:15 speaks of how "Thine all powerful word leaped from heaven down from the royal throne". Because "for the Hebrew the word once spoken has a kind of substantive existence of its own" (4) , e.g. a blessing or curse had a kind of life of their own, it's not surprising that *logos* is personified.

One way of understanding the prologue in Jn. 1 is to consider how it is interpreted in the prologue we find in John's first epistle. It appears that John's Gospel was the standard text for a group of converts that grew up around him; John then wrote his epistles in order to correct wrong interpretations of his Gospel record that were being introduced by itinerant false teachers into the house churches which he

had founded. For example, " God so loved the world..." (Jn. 3:16) seems to have been misunderstood by the false prophets against whom John was contending, to mean that a believer can be of the world. Hence 1 Jn. 2:16 warns the brethren that they cannot 'love the world' in the sense of having worldly behaviour and desires. On the other hand, John saw the faithful churches to whom he was writing as those who had been faithful to the Gospel he had preached to them, as outlined in the Gospel of John. He had recorded there the promise that " You will know the truth" (Jn. 8:32), and he writes in his letters to a community " who have come to know the truth" (2 Jn. 1), i.e. who had fulfilled and obeyed the Gospel of Jesus which he had preached to them initially. This thesis is explained at length in Raymond Brown(5) .

With this in mind, it appears that the prologue of 1 Jn. is a conscious allusion to and clarification of that of Jn. 1. Consider the following links:

In the beginning was the word	What was from the beginning
The word was with God	The eternal life which was with [Gk. in the presence of] God
In [the word] was life	The word of life
The life was the light of men	God is light
The light shines in darkness	In Him there is no darkness at all
The word became flesh	This life was revealed
And dwelt amongst us	
and was manifested to us	
We beheld his glory	What we looked at
Of his fullness we have all received	The fellowship which we have is with
Through Jesus Christ	the Father and with his son
The only Son of God	Jesus Christ

You will note that the parallel for "the word" of Jn. 1 is 'the life' in 1 Jn. 1, the life which Jesus lived, the type of life which is lived by the Father in Heaven. That word was made flesh (Jn. 1:14) in the sense that this life was revealed to us in the life and death of Jesus. So the word becoming flesh has nothing to do with a pre-existent Jesus physically coming down from Heaven and being born of Mary. It could well be that the evident links between the prologue to John's Gospel and the prologue to his epistle are because he is correcting a misunderstanding that had arisen about the prologue to his Gospel. 1 Jn. 1:2 spells it out clearly- it was the impersonal "eternal life" which was "with the Father", and it was this which "became flesh" in a form that had been personally touched and handled by John in the personal body of the Lord Jesus. And perhaps it is in the context of incipient trinitarianism that John warns that those who deny that Jesus was "in the flesh" are actually antiChrist.

Notes

(1) G.B. Caird, *Christ For Us Today* (London: SCM, 1968) p. 79.

(2) Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology Of The New Testament* (London: SCM, 1971) p. 261.

(3) Raymond Brown, *The Epistles of John* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1982) p. 164.

(4) C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation Of The Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1960) p. 264.

(5) *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist, 1979) and in his *The Epistles of John* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1982). These are lengthy and at times difficult reads, and I can't agree with all the conclusions, and yet I'd heartily recommend them to serious Bible students. One pleasing feature of his writings is his frequent admission that Trinitarian theology is an interpretation of what the NT writers, especially John, actually wrote- and they themselves didn't have the trinity in mind when they wrote as they did. He comments on the hymn of Phil. 2 about Christ taking the "form of God": "Many scholars today doubt that "being in the form of God" and "accepting the form of a servant" refers to incarnation" [*The Community Of The Beloved Disciple* p. 46].

And the word was towards God, and the word was Divine- That is a strictly correct translation. The word of the Gospel, which is epitomized in the life and person of the mortal Lord Jesus, was Divine. John is writing for Jews, whose supreme focus upon God led them to ignore the possibility of His deep manifestation in other persons or things. John is emphasizing that the message of the Gospel, the life and person of His Son, is the essence of Him. To believe in God meant to believe the Gospel of the Lord Jesus. To reject that was to reject God Himself.

Not believing in God and not believing in His word of the Gospel are paralleled in 1 Jn. 5:10. God is His word. The word "is" God in that God is so identified with His word. David parallels trusting in God and trusting in His word (Ps. 56:3,4). He learnt this, perhaps, through the experience of his sin with Bathsheba. For in that matter, David "despised the commandment (word) of the Lord... you despised me" (2 Sam. 12:9,10). David learnt that his attitude to God's word was his attitude to God- for the word of God, in that sense, was and is God. By our words we personally will be condemned or justified- because we too 'are' our words. When Samuel told Eli of the prophetic vision which he had received, Eli commented: "It is the Lord" (1 Sam. 3:18). He meant 'It is the word of the Lord'; but he saw God as effectively His word. "The word", the "word of the Kingdom", "the Gospel", "the word of God" are all parallel expressions throughout the Gospels. The records of the parable of the sower speak of both "the word of God" (Lk. 8:11-15) and "the word of the Kingdom" (Mt. 13:19). The word / Gospel of God refers to the message which is about God, just as the "word of the Kingdom" means the word which is about the Kingdom, rather than suggesting that the word is one and the same as the Kingdom. "The gospel of God" means the Gospel which is about God, not the Gospel which is God Himself in person (Rom. 1:1; 15:16; 2 Cor. 11:7; 1 Thess. 2:2,8,9; 1 Pet. 4:17). So, the word of God, the word which was God, the Gospel of God, was made flesh in Jesus. "The word of Jesus" and "the word of God" are interchangeable (Acts 19:10 cp. 20; 1 Thess. 1:8 cp. 2:13); as is "the word of the Gospel" and "the word of Jesus" (Acts 15:7 cp. 35). The word wasn't directly equivalent to Jesus; He manifested the word, He showed us by His life and words and personality what the Kingdom was like, what God is like; for the word which He "became" was about God, and about the Kingdom. He was the entire Gospel, of God and of His Kingdom, made flesh. He could speak of His words abiding in us (Jn. 15:7), and yet make this parallel to He personally abiding in us (Jn.

15:4,5; 14:20). "The word was God" can't mean that the word is identical with God- for the word "was with God", or "was in God's presence". The NEB therefore renders: "What God was, the Word was". G.B. Caird suggests the translation: "In the beginning was a purpose, a purpose in the mind of God, a purpose which was God's own being" (1).

In the person of Jesus, there was an uncanny and never before, never again experienced congruence between a human being and his words. And our witness should be modelled on His pattern- we should be the living embodiment of the doctrines we preach. The message or word of Jesus was far more than the words that He spoke from His lips. In one sense, He revealed to the disciples everything that He had heard from the Father (Jn. 15:15); and yet in another, more literal sense, He lamented that there was much more He could tell them in words, but they weren't able to bear it (Jn. 16:12). His person and character, which they would spend the rest of their lives reflecting upon, was the 'word' of God in flesh to its supremacy; but this doesn't necessarily mean that they heard all the literal words of God drop from the lips of Jesus. I have shown elsewhere that both the Father and Son use language, or words, very differently to how we normally do. The manifestation of God in Christ was not only a matter of the Christ speaking the right words about God. For as He said, His men couldn't have handled that in its entirety. The fullness of manifestation of the word was in His life, His character, and above all in His death, which Jn. 1:14 may be specifically referring to in speaking of how John himself beheld the glory of the word being made flesh. It seems to me that many of us need to learn these things in our hearts; for our preaching has so often been a matter of literal words, Bible lectures, seminars, flaunting our correct exposition of Bible passages and themes. When the essential witness must be of a life lived, a making flesh of the word which is God. To ignore this will lead us into literalistic definitions of literal words, arguments about statements of faith, endless additions of words and clauses to clarify other words...whereas " the word" which the Lord Jesus manifested was not merely human words. There was far more to it than that. It was and is and must ever be a word made flesh. This is why nothing can replace personal witness and personal, one on one teaching as the way that conversions are really made. And yet increasingly we tend to try to use media to preach- TV, CDs, internet, video, tapes etc. There is nothing personally 'live' in all this; there can be no communication of truths through their incarnation in our own personalities. And yet this was how God communicated with us in His Son; and how we too reveal His word in flesh to others.

“The word was God”. The words of the Lord Jesus were the words which He had 'heard' from the Father. But this doesn't mean that He was a mere fax machine, relaying literal words which the Father whispered in His ear to a listening world. When the disciples finally grasped something of the real measure of Jesus, they gasped: "You do not even need that a person ask you questions!" (Jn. 16:30). They had previously treated Jesus as a Rabbi, of whom questions were asked by his disciples and then cleverly answered by him. They finally perceived that here was more than a Jewish Rabbi. They came to that conclusion, they imply, not by asking Him questions comprised of words and hearing the cleverly ordered words that comprised His answers. The words He spoke and manifested were of an altogether higher quality and nature than mere lexical items strung together. Here was none other than the Son of God, the Word made flesh in person. And this, of course, was why the unbelieving Jews just didn't understand the literal words which He spoke. They asked

Him to speak plainly to them (Jn. 10:24); and the Lord's response was that their underlying problem was not with His language, but with the simple fact that they did not believe that He, the carpenter from Nazareth, was the Son of God. Is it going too far to suggest that all intellectual failure to understand the teaching of Jesus is rooted in a simple lack of faith and perception of Him as a person?

As the word of God, the message of God in flesh, Jesus was God's agent, and as such could be counted as God, although He was not God Himself in person. P. Borgen brings this out in an article 'God's Agent In The Fourth Gospel' (2). He quotes the halakic or legal principle of the rabbis, that "An agent is the like the one who sent him", and quotes the Babylonian Talmud Qiddushin 43a: "He ranks as his master's own person". This, therefore, was how those in the 1st century who understood Jesus to be God's agent would have understood Him. John Robinson, one time Anglican Bishop of Woolwich, observed that popular Christianity "says simply that Jesus was God, in such a way that the terms 'Christ' and 'God' are interchangeable. But nowhere in Biblical usage is this so. The New Testament says that Jesus was the Word of God, it says that God was in Christ, it says that Jesus is the Son of God; but it does not say that Jesus was God, simply like that"(3). And he goes on to apply this good sense to an analysis of the phrase "the word was God" in John 1. He argues that this translation is untenable because: "In Greek this [translation "the word was God"] would most naturally be represented by 'God' with the article, not theos but ho theos. Equally, St. John is not saying that Jesus is a 'divine' man… that would be theios. The NEB, I believe, gets the sense pretty exactly with its rendering, 'And what God was, the Word was'. In other words, if one looked at Jesus, one saw God"- in the sense that His perfect character reflected that of the Father (4). The lack of article ["the] before "God" is significant. "In omitting the article before theos, the author intends to say that the Logos is not actually God but only... a divine emanation" (5).

Notes

(1) G.B. Caird, The Language And Imagery Of The Bible (London: Duckworth, 1988) p. 102.
(2) In Religions In Antiquity (Leiden: Brill, 1968) pp. 137-148.
(3) John Robinson, Honest To God (London: S.C.M., 1963) p. 70.
(4) Ibid p. 71.
(5) Oscar Cullmann, The Christology Of The New Testament (London: S.C.M., 1971) p. 266.

1:2 *This existed, in the beginning, with God-*

There is a Hebraism whereby something being 'with' someone means they have an intention to do something. Thus "This is done by you" (1 Kings 11:11) is literally "Forasmuch as this is with you". Job 10:13 likewise: "And these things hast thou hid in thine heart, I know that this is with thee" (see too Job 9:35). Likewise in John 1, the word was "with" God not literally but in the sense of a plan and intention being "with" a person.

The word, not the Lord personally, existed in the beginning with God. As noted above, the essence of the Gospel was not made up by God at the time of Jesus, as John's Jewish audience tended to think. His purpose in His Son had been from the beginning; in whatever way one wants to read "the beginning". Be it the beginning of the Christian message or the beginning of creation. God is not making up His story as He goes along, as it were. That was the typical Jewish objection to the Gospel; that it is something new, and they preferred to stay with what they considered to be the

original. The point is that the original essence of God was the things concerning His Son and His Kingdom.

The Hebrew idea of being "with" someone can carry the idea of being 'in their presence'. 2 Kings 5:1,2 speak of how Naaman was "with" his master, and the RVmg. gives "before" or 'in the presence of' as a translation of this idiom. He is paralleled in the record with the maid who was "before" (RVmg.) her mistress, Naaman's wife. When we read that the word was "with" God, the idea is that the word was always before God, in His presence, in His perspective. Applied to an abstract idea like the logos, surely the idea is that God always had this plan for a Son before Him, in His presence / perspective.

The idea of a “word” being “with” God or even another person has an Old Testament background. Job comments: “Yet these things you have concealed in your heart, I know that this is with you" (10:13; NIV “in your mind”). Similarly Job 23:13, 14: "What his soul desires, that he does, for he performs what is appointed for me, and many such decrees are with him". God’s essential plans are therefore ‘with Him’, in this figure of speech. When those plans are revealed in words, i.e. they are openly verbalized, it would be true to say: "I will instruct you in the power of God; what is with the Almighty I will not conceal" (Job 27:11). Wisdom, personified as a woman, was “with God” before creation- it was not ‘with’ the sea, but it was ‘with’ God (Job 28:14; 8:22,30). To hold a plan in one's own mind is to have it ‘with’ them. The Hebrew text of Gen. 40:14 bears this out, when Joseph is begged: “Remember me with yourself”. So for the essential purpose of God in His Son to be ‘with’ Him does not in any sense imply that a person was literally ‘with’ God in Heaven. Note the parallel between the word of God and the work of God in Ps. 106:13: “They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel”. Whatever God says / plans comes to concrete fulfilment; and the idea of a Son was always in His mind. That word became flesh, became real and actual, in the person of Jesus.

The basic idea in John 1 is repeated in Proverbs 8. In the beginning, there was a logos / word / intention with the Father. His ‘idea’ of having a Son was not thought up at the last minute, as some sort of expediency in order to cope with the unexpected problem of human sin, as some of the critics and false teachers of the first century taught. In fact, it wouldn’t be going too far to say that John actually has Proverbs 8 in mind when speaking about the logos being in the beginning with the Father. Prov. 8:22-31 (ASV) reads: “Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his way, Before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, Before the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth, When there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, Before the hills was I brought forth; While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, Nor the beginning of the dust of the world. When he established the heavens, I was there: When he set a circle upon the face of the deep, When he made firm the skies above, When the fountains of the deep became strong, When he gave to the sea its bound, That the waters should not transgress his commandment, When he marked out the foundations of the earth; Then I was by him, as a master workman; And I was daily his delight, Rejoicing always before him, Rejoicing in his habitable earth; And my delight was with the sons of men”.

The key issue is whether “wisdom” in Proverbs is in fact the Lord Jesus personally. A brief glance at Proverbs surely indicates that wisdom is being personified as a woman. Wisdom in Proverbs stands at the gates and invites men to come listen to her. She dwells with prudence (Prov. 8:12), and in Solomon’s time cried out to men as they

entered the city (Prov. 8:1-3). None of these things are intended to be taken literally. "Wisdom" is wisdom- albeit personified. Wisdom was "possessed" by God- and yet the Hebrew word translated "possessed" is defined by Strong as meaning 'to create'. When God started His "way" or path with men, He had principles and purpose. He didn't make up His principles as He went along. And this was what was being said by John's first century critics. Therefore John alluded to Proverbs 8 in explaining that the essential purpose of the Father was all summarized and epitomized in the person of His Son; and that logos was created / conceived by the Father from the very beginning. Note that Prov. 8:24,25 describes wisdom as being "brought forth" by the Father from the beginning. Again, God as it were hatched a plan. Even if we were to equate wisdom with Jesus personally, He was still created / brought forth from the Father. Somewhat different to the false Trinitarian notion of an 'uncreate' Jesus who 'eternally existed'. Wisdom was the "master workman" (Prov. 8:30), or 'the one trusted / believed in' (Heb.)- in the sense that all of God's natural creation was made according to and reflective of the principles of "wisdom". John's allusion to Prov. 8 shows that this "wisdom" was above all to be embodied and epitomized in God's Son. From this it follows that the whole of the natural creation was designed with the Lord Jesus in mind. Somehow it speaks of Him; will be used by Him; and will in some sense be liberated and redeemed by Him from "the bondage of corruption" to share the glorious liberty of us God's children (Rom. 8:21-24). And perhaps this is why we sense that the Son of God was strangely at peace with the natural creation around Him, and could so effortlessly extract deep spiritual lessons from the birds, flowers and clouds around Him. "Then I was by [Heb. toward] him" (Prov. 8:30) is the idea behind the Greek text of Jn. 1:1: "The word was [toward] God". It wasn't Jesus personally who was with God or God-ward; it was the word / wisdom / logos which was, and this was then "made flesh" in the person of the Lord Jesus. And this logos was the "wisdom" in Proverbs.

We've demonstrated that John's Gospel begins with the idea that the "word" of God in the Old Testament was made flesh in the person of the Lord Jesus. But John actually continues that theme throughout his Gospel. He continually refers to things which the Jews saw symbols of the Torah- and applies them to Jesus. Examples include the bread / manna and water, and also light. The Assumption of Moses speaks of the Torah as "the light that enlightens every man who comes into the world"- and this is exactly the language of Jn. 1:9 about Christ. Bearing this in mind, it is interesting to discover that nearly all the phrases used in the prologue to John's Gospel are alluding to what Jewish writers had said about the "Wisdom of God", especially in Proverbs and the apocryphal writings known as the Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus (1). And they understood "Wisdom" to primarily refer to the Torah. For example, Jn. 1:14 RVmg. states that the Lord Jesus as the word made flesh "tabernacled amongst us". Yet Ecclus. 24:8 speaks of Wisdom 'tabernacling' amongst Israel. Skenoo, the verb 'to tabernacle', is of course related to the noun skene, the tabernacle. As Israel lived in tents in the wilderness, God too came and lived with them in a tent- called the tabernacle, the tent where God could be met. The idea was that God wasn't so far from them, He chose to come and be like them- they lived in tents, so He too lived in a tent. He didn't build a huge house or palace to live in- because that's not how His people lived. He 'tented' in a tent like them. This pointed forward to the genuine humanity of the Lord Jesus; for the human condition is likened to a tent in 2 Cor. 5:1. So rather than proving that 'Jesus was God', this whole prologue to John's Gospel actually proves otherwise.

The language of pre-existence was applied by the Jews to the Torah and Wisdom, and so when John demonstrates that the ultimate Wisdom / Torah / logos / word which was from the beginning has now been fulfilled in and effectively replaced by Jesus, he's going to reference that same 'pre-existence' language to make his point. As an example, the Mishnah stated (Aboth Nathan) that "Before the world was made the Torah was written and lay in the bosom of God"(2). John's desire is that his fellow Jews quit these fanciful ideas and realize that right now, in Heaven, the Son of God is in the bosom of the Father (Jn. 1:18). He right now is the word-made-flesh. The uninspired Jewish writings spoke of the descent and re-ascent of Wisdom (1 Enoch 42; 4 Ezra 5:9; 2 Bar. 48:36; 3 Enoch 5:12; 6:3), and Philo especially connects Wisdom and the Logos. It seems that these wrong Jewish ideas found their ways into Christianity, and were taken over and wrongly applied to Jesus. Indeed I would go so far as to argue that John's 'Logos' passage in Jn. 1:1-14 is in fact a deconstruction of those wrong ideas; he alludes to them and corrects them, just as Moses alluded to incorrect pagan myths of creation and shows a confused Israel in the wilderness what the true story actually was.

Notes

(1) This is shown at great length throughout Rendel Harris, *The Origin of The Prologue To St. John's Gospel* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1917).

(2) Cited in C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation Of The Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1953) p. 86.

1:3 *All things created came into existence on account of it; and without it nothing created came into existence*- The "it" can as well be translated "him". Speaking of the *logos* as a person was quite common amongst the Jews- and they in no way understood that God could have any other god in existence or equal with Him. One of the most thorough surveys of the logos theme concludes: "It is an error to see in such personifications an approach to personalisation. Nowhere either in the Bible or in the extra-canonical literature of the Jews is the word of God a personal agent" (1). It was the apostate Jew Philo who began to speak of the logos as "the second God, who is his logos... God's firstborn, the logos" (2). And it was this interpretation which obviously came to influence Christians desperate for justification of their idea of a Divine Jesus; but such justification is simply not to be found in God's word. All talk of a "second God" is utterly unBiblical.

However, whilst in a sense the logos was God's word, plan and intent personified, it became actual flesh / concrete reality in the person of Jesus. That God created and accomplished the physical creation by His word was an obvious Old Testament doctrine (Is. 55:11). By the time John was writing his Gospel [somewhat later than the others], the idea of believers being a new creation in Christ would have been developed in the early ecclesia (2 Cor. 5:17 etc.). The Greek translated "made by…" occurs often in John's Gospel. It clearly describes how the Gospel of the Lord Jesus 'made' new men and women; lives were transformed into something new. The phrase is used in the immediate context of John 1: "to become ['be made'] the sons of God" (1:12), in that grace and truth came ['were made'] by Jesus (1:17). "All things" therefore refers to the "all things" of the new creation. Note how Jesus came unto "his own things" (1:11 N.I.V.), i.e. to the Jewish people. "All things" which were made by him therefore comfortably refers to the "all things" of the new creation- which is just how Paul uses the phrase (Eph. 1:10,22; 4:10; Col. 1:16-20). Quite simply all of us, in

“all things” of our spiritual experience, owe them all to God’s word of promise and it’s fulfilment in Christ. This is how totally central are the promises to Abraham! “All things were made by him”!

Consider other occurrences of “made by” in John’s Gospel:
4:14 The water of the life of Jesus shall be [‘made’] in the believer “a well of water springing up into everlasting life”
5:9,14 the lame man “was made” whole
10:16 the believers shall be made (RV ‘shall become’) one flock
12:36 may be [‘made’], RV ‘become’, “the children of light”
15:8 So shall ye be [‘made’] my disciples
16:20 Your sorrow shall be turned [‘made’] into joy.

All these examples speak of the creative power of the Lord Jesus in human lives, through the agency of the Spirit. This Spirit was poured out as a result of His sacrifice. The very same Greek words are used in 19:36 [cp. Lk. 24:21] in describing the cross: “These *things* were *done* [s.w. ‘made’]". All things of the new creation were made on account of His cross.

"Apart from him not a thing came to be" (Jn. 1:3) is a phrase repeated by the Lord Jesus in Jn. 15:5, where He says that "apart from me" we can bring forth no spiritual fruit. The things that came into being in Jn. 1:3 would therefore appear to be the things of the new life enabled and empowered in Christ. In this sense Jesus can be described as the creator of a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17), a new world, but a world of persons. The allusion is indeed to the power unleashed at the natural creation but the reference is not to that, but to the new world of believers in Christ. But in practice, it is the word of the Gospel, the message of Jesus, which brings this about in the lives of those who hear and respond to it. We are born again by the word, the “seed” of the living God (1 Pet. 1:23 RV mg.). In this arresting, shocking analogy, the “word” of the Gospel, the word which was made flesh in the person of Jesus, is likened to the seed or sperm of God. We were begotten again by “the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creations” (James 1:18). In God’s word, in all that is revealed in it of the person of our Lord Jesus, we come face to face with the imperative which there is in what we know of Him to be like Him. In this feature of God’s word, as it is in the Bible record and therefore and thereby as it is in and of His Son, we have the ultimate creative power, the dynamism so desperately needed by humanity, to transform our otherwise shapeless and formless lives. And in a multitude of lives, “All things were made by him”. As the Lord Jesus was sent into this world, so are we. We evidently didn’t personally ‘pre-exist’; and so we cannot reason that He did because He was sent by the Father. ‘Sending’ in Scripture can refer to being commissioned to speak forth God’s word (Is. 48:16; Jer. 7:25; Ez. 3:4,5; Zech. 2:8-11). Thus God is often described as sending forth His prophets. We too must allow ourselves to be sent forth as our Lord was, making the word of the Gospel flesh in us as it was in Him. For like Him, we personally are the message which we preach. The word of God / the Gospel is as seed (1 Pet. 1:23); and yet we believers end our probations as seed falling into the ground, which then rises again in resurrection to be given a body and to eternally grow into the unique type of person which we are now developing (1 Cor. 15:38). The good seed which is sown is interpreted by the Lord both as the word of God (Lk. 8:11), and as “the children of the Kingdom” (Mt. 13:38). This means that the word of the Gospel becomes flesh in us as it did in our Lord. The word of the Gospel is not, therefore, merely dry theoretical propositions; it elicits a

life and a person. We will be changed; not just physically, but we will each be given our own, unique 'body', as Paul puts it. There will be eternal continuity between who we now become, and who we grow into throughout eternity. This is the amazing power of the word of the Gospel; for this is the seed, which transforms the essential you and me into a seed which will rise up to great things in God's future Kingdom. In all this, the Lord was and is our pattern. "All things were made by him".

Notes
(1) G.F. Moore, *Judaism In The First Centuries Of The Christian Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927) Vol. 1 p. 415.
(2) References in James Dunn, *Christology In The Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980) p. 221.

1:4 *In it was life, and that life was the light of men*- "Life", *zoe*, in John's Gospel means spiritual life, the life which is eternal in the sense that it is the kind of life we shall eternally live. Many times, John records the Lord offering eternal life to us now. We shall of course die, but we can live today the life we shall eternally live. The "it" or "he" here is clearly to be understood as the Lord Jesus; He was "the word made flesh" according to :14, but even before :14 the idea is presented to us. The prologue to John's letter states that the Lord is "the word of life" (1 Jn. 1:1). The life was "in", within, the Lord Jesus in the sense of 5:26: "The son has life in Himself". "Eternal life... is in His Son" (1 Jn. 5:11,20). He was the life as He was the light; "I am the life... I am the light" (11:25; 14:6). His Spirit, His mind within, was the life which is to be the light of our whole existence. In this sense the believer in Him, through receiving His Spirit of life and living, has life within (6:53).

The real life was lived in the human Jesus. His life was the life which we shall eternally live in God's Kingdom. It's why such a relatively large percentage of the New Testament is taken up with the four Gospel records of His life. It is that life which is the light of men, i.e. those who believe. For John goes on to lament that many in the Jewish world had refused that light and life. Indeed, they had sought to kill that life in crucifixion. The light of our lives is to be the life the Lord lived and still lives. Our focus is to be wholly upon Him. This is the essence of Christianity, Christ-ness; and not true theology in itself. The connection between the life and 'seeing' it is found several times later in John. Those who disbelieve in the Son of God do not "see life" (Jn. 3:36). His life is not their light. Those who follow Him have "the light of life" (8:12). John's Gospel consistently speaks of "life" being given to the believer by the Lord; but the "life" in view is His own life. This is another way of expressing the gift of the Spirit.

"The light" is used by the Lord in John's Gospel to refer to His living amongst men. His brief life in first century Palestine was the time when "the light" was seen by the world; but He urged men to believe in Him whilst they had that light. His life was the light- the believer will "have the light of life" (Jn. 8:12), the Lord's life. As long as He was in the [Jewish] world, He was the light to that world (9:5). They were to walk after Him whilst they had that light (12:35); "while you have light, believe in the light" (12:36). And yet there are clear statements that the light continues to shine now in the lives of the believers. The paradox is resolved by connecting it with the promise of the Holy Spirit comforter. The Lord comforted the disciples that although He was indeed physically leaving them, yet through the gift of His Spirit it would be as if He were still present amongst them. And so indeed the Lord was "the light" during His mortal life, lived amongst the darkness of men in Palestine. But that light continues to

shine, in that He is present amongst the believers, and they live as if in the light of His presence. To join in the first century disciples in following the Lord Jesus, focused on living His life, having His Spirit, thinking His thoughts... is to "walk in the light". And that is the closest the NT ever comes to offering a 'basis of fellowship'; if we walk in the light, then we have fellowship with one another (1 Jn. 1:7), even if we may have differences of interpretation and theology. Or as Paul puts it, we are "of one mind" if we strive to have the one mind, that of the Lord Jesus. John's later work, Revelation, concludes by speaking of how the light of the Lord Jesus shines both now and eternally. Our living in the light of Him is what shall eternally continue, and defines the nature of our eternal experience. It is utterly critical, therefore, that in this life we come to a total focus upon Him.

1:5 *This light shines in the darkness, but the darkness cannot understand it*- As noted on :4, "the light" was the life lived within the mind of the Lord Jesus during His mortal life. But He shines on, in that those who follow Him in turn have His life and light within them, and thus become "the light of the world" just as He was. It is true in Him as well as in us, that we are the light that shines in the darkness (1 Jn. 2:8). But "the darkness" refused to understand it. Judaism therefore was "the darkness"; John saw no common ground between true Christianity, and those who rejected the Lord Jesus as the total and defining light of their path. They were in darkness; for not following Him means walking in the darkness, stumbling around with no ultimate sense of direction (12:35). And that is the Lord's opinion of all non-Christian religion. Those who preferred the darkness did so because they didn't want the light of the Lord's perfect character to reveal their sins (3:20,21). The darkness refers to hating ones' brother (1 Jn. 2:9,11), and Judaism hated their brother Jesus, as well as being characterized by bitter hatred amongst themselves, as witnessed by the various opposing sects within Judaism. To walk focused upon the life and character of the Lord Jesus means we are walking in the light, and hatred of our brethren will not characterize that walk. This is a sober warning to those who name the name of Christ but hate their brethren in Christ. They are clearly not focused upon Him and His light, having refused to receive His Spirit.

The allusion is clearly to how the light shone out of the darkness at creation. The Lord Jesus is therefore "light" to us in the sense that He illuminates. The initiative is His; we are the subjects of His action. This is the grace / gift of the Spirit. Paul understood the illumination of the light as something happening within the hearts of believers: "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). I have to emphasize- this is His action, performed by grace upon the hearts of His people.

3:19-21 and 12:32-46 [see commentary there] suggest that one level of meaning of Jesus as “light of the world" was that in the darkness that came over the land at the crucifixion, He upon the cross was the light of a darkened world. The Lord was “the beginning of the [new] creation of God" (Rev. 3:14); each believer who enters the spiritual world is enlightened by the light of Christ crucified. The Lord on the cross is the epitome of all that He was and is; His life, His word / *logos*, His Spirit.

John’s Gospel is full of reference to Essence concepts. It’s been widely argued that John’s language alludes to the threat of incipient Gnosticism, and this may be true. But it’s likely that John was written quite early, even before AD70. In this case, when John speaks of light and darkness, children of light and darkness, the Jewish ‘Satan’ /

adversary to Christianity as “the ruler of this world”, he would also be alluding to these common Essene ideas. For John, following the light means following Jesus as Lord; the darkness refers to the flesh, the desires within us to conform to the surrounding world and its thinking. His point, therefore, is that instead of fantasizing about some cosmic battle going on, true Christians are to understand that the essential struggle is within the mind of each of us.

1:6 *It happened that a man of God was sent. His name was John*- AV "Sent from God", *para* God. The similarity of language was in order to emphasize that the in the same way as the Lord was sent from God, so was John. There is no way therefore that such language refers to any superhuman descent of a pre-existent being, because it is used of John the Baptist. Indeed this is but one of many examples of where John’s Gospel uses exalted language to describe the person of Jesus- but actually, if one looks out for it, John uses the very same terms about all of humanity. Here are some examples:

About Jesus	About humanity generally or other human beings
Came into the world (9:39; 12:46; 16:28; 18:37)	1:9 [of “every man”]; 6:14. ‘Came into the world’ means ‘to be born’ in 16:21; 18:37
Sent from God (1:6; 3:28)	3:2,28; 8:29; 15:10
A man of God (9:16,33)	9:17,31
‘What I saw in my Father’s presence’ (8:38)	The work of ‘*a man* who told you the truth as I heard it from God’ (8:40)
God was His Father	8:41
He who has come from God (8:42)	8:47
The Father was in Him, and He was in the Father (10:37)	15:5-10; 17:21-23,26
Son of God (1:13)	All believers are ‘the offspring of God Himself’ (1:13; 1 Jn. 2:29-3:2,9; 4:7; 5:1-3,8)
Consecrated and sent into the world (17:17-19)	20:21
Jesus had to listen to the Father and be taught by Him (7:16; 8:26,28,40; 12:49; 14:10; 15:15; 17:8)	All God’s children are the same (6:45)
Saw the Father (6:46)	The Jews should have been able to do this (5:37)

Not born of the flesh or will of a man, but the offspring of God Himself	True of all believers (1:13)

1:7- see on Lk. 1:14.

This one came as a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe in the light- Potentially, all Israel could have believed in the light and been saved. John's mission could have been totally successful; but human beings were allowed their freewill, and so that potential wasn't realized. The Gospel of John is a transcript of his preaching of the gospel, and it seems that he was involved with preaching to converts of John the Baptist. He writes to his converts perhaps alluding to this by saying that although they had believed / received the witness of men, i.e. John the Baptist, they needed to accept that the far greater witness to the Lord Jesus was that given by God in the gift of the Spirit, the life of Jesus within them (1 Jn. 5:9,10,11). This general scene is not unknown today- those who say they are convinced Jesus is the Messiah because He fulfilled prophetic witness about Himself; and yet they are apparently resistant to receiving the gift of His Spirit within them.

1:8- see on Lk. 12:49,50.

John was not the light, but was sent that he might testify concerning the light- As noted on :7, John was witnessing to the disciples of John the Baptist, and some of them apparently felt that he was an end in himself. They were not giving due weight to his message about the Lord Jesus; instead they were just approvingly focusing upon his calls for repentance and criticism of Jewish society.

1:9 *The true light, who by coming into the world enlightens every man*- The true light may refer to the Lord as the antitype of the *shekinah* glory which appeared in the darkness of the tabernacle. Judaism in moral darkness are thereby associated with the tabernacle system. The AV offers "which lighteth every man that cometh into the world". But whichever translation we choose, the parallel is still established between "the world" and "every man". The world is the world of believers. Those who enter that world of newly created persons are enlightened by the Lord Jesus as "the true light". This is something He does to them, and is not merely a function of their own academic study of Scripture. The same word is used of how the Spirit enlightens our eyes to perceive that which cannot be 'seen' by natural unaided faculty (Eph. 1:18; 3:9). We have been "enlightened" by the Spirit (Heb. 6:4; 10:32; 2 Tim. 1:10). And the same word is used of how we shall eternally be enlightened; but that process begins now (Rev. 21:23; 22:5).

1:10 *He was in the world, and though the world had originated on account of him, the world recognised him not*- "The world" in :9 is the world of the believers. The world "originated on account of him" = AV "the world was made by him". The parallel is clear with "All things were made by him" (:3), and as noted on :3, the "all things" refer to the "all things" of the new creation. The phrase is used that way by Paul several times. "He was in the world" could likewise be understood as referring to the "world" of the new creation; for if the reference is to the literal world, then the statement seems too obvious to need making. The parallel in the prologue of 1 Jn. 1 would be John's reference to how the early believers had seen, touched and handled the word, the Lord Jesus. He had been amongst them. But then "the world recognised him not" appears to shift the reference of "the world" away from the world of believers, the new creation, to the Jewish world- defined in :11 as "His own", i.e. the

Jewish people generally, or perhaps those of Nazareth in particular, who did not accept Him. At first blush, this may seem unacceptable to have two different meanings for "the world" within one verse. But I suggest the contrast is purposeful; the point being that there are two worlds in view, that of the believers or the new creation; and the Jewish world, who rejected the Lord. They were literally worlds apart; there was no overlap between them. And that is a theme of John's message.

John appeals for men to be baptized with the twice repeated personal comment: "...and I knew him not", in the very context of our reading that the [Jewish] world "knew him not" (Jn. 1:10, 31,33). He realises that he had withstood the knowledge of the Son of God, just as others had. See on Jn. 3:29.

Understanding "the world" as a world of persons rather than the physical world of material "things" is reflected in the way that John uses the term *kosmos*. So many interpreters have assumed that *kosmos* refers to the physical, literal world; whereas deeper reflection surely indicates that it refers rather to the world of *persons*. Thus "the world was made on account of Him [Christ], and the world did not know him" (Jn. 1:10; 1 Jn. 3:1-3) doesn't mean that Jesus created the literal planet; but rather that the world of persons was made on account of Jesus, but that world didn't know or accept / recognize Him. It is this "world" into which 'every believing man comes' (Jn. 1:18); and it is the "sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29) which Christ bore- not the sin of the literal planet, but the sin of the world of persons who want their sins to be carried by Him. God sent His son into the world to save it, and loved this world through giving Christ for it (Jn. 3:16)- clearly referring to the world of persons rather than the physical planet. The Lord in Lk. 11:49-51 speaks of the creation of humanity as "the foundation of the world"- for He says that Abel was slain at "the foundation of the world"- i.e. of the world of persons. In the same way as these passages in John have been misread as referring to a literal, physical, concrete world, so we too tend to see this world more as a world of things than a world of persons. For seeing the world as a world of persons demands a huge amount from us, and the kind of sensitivity to humanity which leads ultimately to the death of the cross. The new creation was brought into being by the cross. The Jewish world's rejection of the Lord was crystallised in the crucifixion.

1:11 *He came to his own people*- This may specifically refer to the Lord's rejection by "His own" at Nazareth. The context here speaks of both the word which was "in the beginning", and of Jesus personally, whom John had witnessed to. Acts 10:36-38 RV puts this in simpler terms: "He sent the word unto the children of Israel, preaching the gospel of peace by [in] Jesus Christ… that word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, beginning from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; even Jesus of Nazareth". The sequence and similarity of thought between this and John 1:1-8 is so great that one can only assume that John is deliberately alluding to Luke's record in Acts, and stating the same truths in spiritual terms: 'In the beginning was the word of the Gospel which was with God. And then John came witnessing to Jesus, and then the word as it was in Jesus came to the Jews…'. Paul pleaded with his fellow Jews: "Brethren, children of the stock of Abraham…to us is the word of this salvation sent forth" (Acts 13:26 RV). Yet he also wrote that in the fullness of time, God "sent forth His Son, made of a woman" (Gal. 4:4). The Son of God was "the word of this salvation" / Jesus. "The word was God".

And they of his own people rejected him- The Greek specifically avoids stating that all His own people rejected Him; for the faithful minority accepted Him. "His own people" is a clear statement of the Lord's humanity, wedged within a context

which is a hymn to His greatness. Frequently in the New Testament we meet this kind of juxtapositioning of language emphasizing Christ's humanity alongside terms which emphasize His Divine side. This is typical Hebraic logic, whereby blocks of material are placed next to each other, in order to create a dialectic between them which leads to the intended conclusion. Back in Exodus, we find Pharaoh's heart hardened by God, and yet him hardening his own heart. Greek thinking panics here- for it works by step logic, logically reasoning from one statement to another. There appears to our European minds to be a crisis of contradiction, which many find worrying. But the Hebrew mind is far less phased. Rather the two seeming contradictions are weighed up and the conclusion reached- e.g. that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, but God confirmed him in this. The language used about the Lord Jesus in the New Testament is similar. John Knox got somewhere close to understanding this when he wrote that "we do not experience the humanity and divinity of Christ in ways as separate as this language suggests; we are aware of them together". John's Gospel is maybe the most evident example. In the context of all the high, lofty language relating the Lord Jesus to the *logos*, that was God from the beginning, we read of Him coming "to his own", *eis ta idia*, his own heritage of people and place; and being rejected by "his own people", *hoi idioi*, the Jews of his time and setting (Jn. 1:10-12). It is the "son of *man"* who is spoken of as having descended from Heaven (Jn. 3:13; 6:62). Truly "the Christ of John is actually more human than in almost any of the other New Testament writings". So often does John's Gospel baldly speak of the Lord Jesus as "the man": Jn. 4:29; 5:12; 8:40; 9:11, 24; 10:33; 11:47, 50; 18:14, 17, 29; 19:5.

1:12- see on Jn. 3:3; 3:13.

But whoever accepts him, those who believe in his name, to them he gave the right to become children of God- "Accepts" or "receives" is the term used of receiving the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:38; Rom. 5:17; 1 Pet. 4:10). The idea is not of our intellectually accepting truths, but of receiving what we are given. And we are given Him, His life, His Spirit; or as it is here expressed, the power or force to become God's children. This power is clearly that of the Spirit, given to those who show their belief in His Name by baptism into it. This gift of the Spirit is alluded to in the next verse, and the ideas here are developed further in 3:3-5 in talking of the birth of the Spirit rather than that of the flesh. Rom. 8:16 is clear that we become "the children of God" (same Greek words as here) through the work of the Spirit. John four times uses the term "children of God" when writing to his converts, those who had heard the gospel of John and been baptized (1 Jn. 3:1,2,10; 5:2). He saw them as God's children because the Spirit had worked in them to make them His.

God's forgiveness and salvation can never be presumed upon; even if we are genuinely repentant. For the wages of sin has always been death (Rom. 6:23); we as sinners have no right to life. This is a theme stamped right across the Old Testament. Consider: "You have sinned a great sin. Now I will go up to Yahweh. Perhaps I shall make atonement for your sin" (Ex. 32:30). "Hate evil, love good, and establish justice in the courts. It may be that Yahweh, the God of Armies, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph" (Am. 5:15). “Rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious... Who knows whether He will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him?” (Joel 2:13,14). "Let them turn each one from his evil way... Who knows whether God will not turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we might not perish?" (Jonah 3:8,9). Possibly we could add Esther 4:14 to this list: "Who knows if you haven’t come to the kingdom for such a time as this?". This is why Daniel's friends can reason: "Our God whom we serve is

able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods" (Dan. 3:17,18). They believed in Yahweh's salvation, but were quite prepared not to receive it. They knew that His ability to dramatically save them at that moment was not at all certain of fulfilment for them. The same words "is able" and "save" are used by Darius in Dan. 6:21 when he again expresses a doubt as to whether God is able to save in this case: "Was the God whom you served so regularly able to deliver you from the lions?". Against all this we must balance the fact that those in Christ have been given the "right" to be God's children (Jn. 1:12). But the bold confidence we have in the Lord Jesus must somehow never fail to be nuanced by an awareness of our total unworthiness and inability to presume upon God's forgiveness.

1:13 *These were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*- The context has spoken of the work of the Spirit in forging the children of God (see on :12); and these words are taken further in 3:3-5 where we find that birth of the flesh is contrasted to the birth of the Spirit which comes through water baptism.

The contrast between human will and God's will recalls the two kinds of "world" spoken of (see on :10). The Lord's death was as a result of Him being given over "to their [man's] will" (Lk. 23:25 s.w.), but the birth of the new creation was by the will of God. This phrase is frequently associated with the Lord's death (e.g. Acts 2:23; Lk. 22:22; Mt. 26:42; Jn. 4:34; 5:30; Heb. 10:9,10; Gal. 1:4; 1 Pet. 3:17,18). We were born by the will of God, i.e. the death of the Lord fulfilling that will. The later references in John to the Lord coming to do God's will refer to His coming in order to die the death of the cross. John's account of how blood and water issued from the Lord's pierced side is an evident allusion to childbirth; he saw the ecclesia as being born out of the pierced body of the Lord at the time of His death.

1:14 *For this, the word became flesh, and indwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth*- The climax of this verse is "Full of grace [gift] and truth". The gift or grace of the Spirit was given as a result of the Lord's death and glorification. Here we have the explanation of "For this..."; the preceding verses have spoken of the gift of the Spirit, and this was made possible by the Lord's humanity, death and resurrection.

Because Jesus was the *only* Son of God, therefore He is *full* of the Father's grace and truth. Jn. 1:14 makes this connection between fullness and only Sonship. Because of the wonder of this, we should therefore hear Him, respecting and thereby obeying His word simply because of our appreciation of who He is and was- the Son of God (Lk. 9:35). And yet this description of Him as the begotten Son of God connects with how we have just read that we too are to be born of God and not of the flesh, if we accept the spirit of Jesus.

It seems that in the Lord Jesus alone we see the perfect fusion of "grace and truth" (Jn. 1:14); in Him alone mercy and truth met together, in His personality alone righteousness and peace kissed each other (in the words of the beautiful Messianic prophecy of Ps. 85:10). Somehow it seems that we both individually and collectively cannot achieve this. We are either too soft and compromise and lose the Faith, or we are too hard and lose the spirit of Christ our Lord, without which we are "none of his" (Rom. 8:9).

"We beheld his glory" makes John's Gospel his personal testimony. It would seem

that the Gospels were so clearly etched in the minds of the first century believers because the message of the Gospel was preached in the form of reciting a 'Gospel', a record of the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. This is why 'gospel' as in the message and 'Gospel' as in the four Gospels are the same word, although this seems to be overlooked by many. The Gospel according to Matthew is the good news about Christ which Matthew preached and then wrote down. John of all the Gospel writers makes it openly apparent that his preaching of the Gospel is based around a recital of the things which he himself saw and heard in the Lord's life (1:14; 19:35; 21:24). His Gospel is full of what have been called "the artless notes of the authentic eye-witness" (e.g. his comment that "the house was filled with the odour of the ointment"). John begins his preaching of the Gospel by saying that he had beheld the glory of the Lord Jesus (Jn. 1:14)- and I suggest he was referring to how he beheld the cross and the Lord's manifestation of the Father's glory there (Jn. 17:24). The cross, the glory of the Lord shown there, was what motivated John's preaching, just as it should ours. The cross impels us to witness.

The continuity of personality between the human Jesus and the now-exalted Jesus is brought out by meditation upon His "glory". The glory of God refers to His essential personality and characteristics. When He 'glorifies Himself', He articulates that personality- e.g. in the condemnation of the wicked or the salvation of His people. The Lord Jesus had that "glory" in what John calls "the beginning", and he says that he and the other disciples witnessed that glory (Jn. 1:14). "The beginning" in John's Gospel often has reference to the beginning of the Lord's ministry. There is essentially only one glory- the glory of the Son is a reflection or manifestation of the glory of the Father. They may be seen as different glories only in the sense that the same glory is reflected from the Lord Jesus in His unique way; as a son reflects or articulates his father's personality, it's not a mirror personality, but it's the same essence. One star differs from another in glory, but they all reflect the same essential light of glory. The Lord Jesus sought only the glory of the Father (Jn. 7:18). He spoke of the glory of God as being the Son's glory (Jn. 11:4). Thus Isaiah's vision of God's glory is interpreted by John as a prophecy of the Son's glory (Jn. 12:41). The glory of God is His "own self", His own personality and essence. This was with God of course from the ultimate beginning of all, and it was this glory which was manifested in both the death and glorification of the Lord Jesus (Jn. 17:5). The Old Testament title "God of glory" is applied to the Lord Jesus, "the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8; James 2:1). It is *God's* glory which radiates from the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Jesus is the brightness of God's glory, because He is the express image of God's personality (Heb. 1:3). He received glory from God's glory (2 Pet. 1:17). God is the "Father of glory", the prime source of the one true glory, that is reflected both in the Lord Jesus and in ourselves (Eph. 1:17). What all this exposition means in practice is this. There is only "one glory" of God. That glory refers to the essential "self", the personality, characteristics, being etc. The Lord Jesus manifested that glory in His mortal life (Jn. 2:11). But He manifests it now that He has been "glorified", and will manifest it in the future day of His glory. And the Lord was as in all things a pattern to us. We are bidden follow in His path to glory. We now in our personalities reflect and manifest the one glory of the Father, and our blessed Hope is glory in the future, to be glorified, to be persons (note that- *to be persons*!) who reflect and 'are' that glory in a more intimate and complete sense than we are now, marred as we are by our human dysfunction, sin, and weakness of will against temptation. We now reflect that glory as in a dirty bronze mirror. The outline of God's glory in the face of Jesus is only

dimly reflected in us. But we are being changed, from glory to glory, the focus getting clearer all the time, until that great day when we meet Him and see Him face to face, with all that shall imply and result in. But my point in this context is that there is only one glory. The essence of who we are now in our spiritual man, how we reflect it, in our own unique way, is how we shall always be.

It's evident to even the most casual reader that there are many connections between John's Gospel and the Revelation. John's later writing, just like Paul's, was shot through with references to the Gospels. The same phrases and words are used. But the question is, What is the connection between them? One comment I have in answer to this is to observe that much of the language of the Gospel of John relating to the *present* status of the faithful is repeated in Revelation and applied to the faithful in their *future* glorification. This observation is best explained by examples:

John's Gospel	The Revelation
God tabernacled amongst us in the person of Jesus (Jn. 1:14 RVmg.)	"The tabernacle of God is with men" at the second coming of Jesus (Rev. 21:3)
Rivers of water flow now in the experience of the believer (Jn. 7:38,39)	The river of water of life bursts forth once Jesus is enthroned upon earth in the future (Rev. 22:1)
The manna / bread of life is given to the believer now (Jn. 6)	Those who overcome will be given "the hidden manna" to eat at the Lord's return (Rev. 2:17)
At the crucifixion, the prophecy of Zech. 12:10 was fulfilled when the Jews looked upon the Christ whom they had pierced (Jn. 19:37)	The same Zech. 12:10 passage is quoted in Rev. 1:7 and given a future application, to the response of the Jews at the Lord's second coming.

I would suggest a chronological progression in Jn. 1:14:
"The word was made flesh"- His birth
"And dwelt among us"- His life
"And we beheld his glory, full of grace and truth"- His death on the cross. Christ's glory is elsewhere used by John with reference to the glory He displayed on the cross (Jn. 12:38-41; 12:28; 13:32; 17:1,5,24). John thus begins his Gospel with the statement that he saw the Lord's death. However, it is also so that John "saw his glory" at the transfiguration; and yet even there, "they saw his glory" (Lk. 9:32) as "they spake of his decease which he should accomplish". His glory and His death were ever linked. The fullness of grace and truth is one of John's many allusions to Moses' experience when the Name was declared to him- of Yahweh, a God *full* of grace and truth (Ex. 34:6 RV). The Name was fully declared, as fully as could be, in the cross. The Law gave way, through the cross, to the grace and truth that was revealed by Christ after the Law ended (Jn. 1:17). In His dead, outspent body grace and truth finally replaced law. John goes on to say that the Son has *declared* the invisible God (Jn. 1:18)- another reference to the cross. The implication may be that as Moses cowered before the glory of the Lord, *even he* exceedingly feared and quaked, we likewise should make an appropriate response to the glory that was *and is* (note John's tenses) displayed to us in the cross. Mark how the naked man, covered in blood and spittle, was there declaring God's glory. Aaron the High Priest bore the judgment for Israel's sins, in another anticipation of the cross, whilst arrayed in garments of glory and beauty (Ex. 28:30). And so was the naked Lord arrayed, for

those with spiritual sight. Thus the word was manifested in glory through the cross; and thus 1 Cor. 2:1,2 links the crucified Christ with “the testimony of God". See on Jn. 19:19.

The essential *logos* of God in Christ was articulated not only in the birth of the Lord, not only at the start of His, but supremely in His death. John’s Gospel is packed with allusion to Moses. Here the reference is to Moses cowering in the rock, beholding the glory of Yahweh and hearing the declaration of the Yahweh Name. Speaking of His forthcoming death, the Lord was to say: “And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17:26). This second declaration of the Name was to be in His death. The same allusion back to the declaration of Yahweh in Ex. 34 is to be found in John 12:27-28: “Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again". This second glorifying of the Name was surely in the Son’s declaration of the Name in His death. And this connects will with the evidence elsewhere presented that the Yahweh Name was closely connected with the Lord’s death, in that ‘Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews’ in Hebrew would have used words, the first letters of which spelt ‘Yahweh’. John’s claim that he beheld the glory of God’s Son may therefore be a specific reference to the way he describes his own ‘seeing’ of the crucifixion in John 19:35: “And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe". He seems to be saying: ‘I saw Him there. I really and truly did’. He uses the same kind of language in 1 Jn. 4:14: “we have seen and do testify [cp. “his record is true"] that the Father sent the son to be the saviour of the world" in the cross.

“The only begotten of the Father" is a phrase nearly always used in the context of the Lord’s death (e.g. Jn. 3:16). The love of God was defined in the way the Lord laid down His life in death (1 Jn. 3:16); but it is equally defined in that “God sent his only begotten son into the world, that we might live" (1 Jn. 4:9). God sending His son into the world was therefore in His death specifically [see notes under 3:14-18]. And it was through this that life was won for us. As He hung covered in blood and spittle, as He gasped out forgiveness for His enemies, God’s Son as it were came into the hard world of men. The light shone in the darkness, and the darkness did not and does not overcome it. There, the word, the essential love and grace and judgment and mercy of Yahweh, was made flesh, and tabernacled amongst us.

The common translation “dwelt" can give the sense that John is merely saying ‘Jesus lived in Israel’; but there is far more to it than that. In clear allusion to his Gospel, John opens his first letter by speaking of the Lord Jesus, whom “we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled [a reference to the taking down of the body and embalming?], of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness [cp. 19:35] , and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us" (I Jn 1:1-3). The manifestation of the Son was supremely in His death (1 Jn. 3:5,8; 4:9 cp. Jn. 3:16; Heb. 9:26 Gk.; 1 Tim. 3:16; Jn. 17:6 cp. 26). And John exalts that they saw this, and now they too declare / manifest it to the world. One cannot behold the cross of Christ and not witness it to others. John says that he beheld “his glory". Christ’s glory is elsewhere used by John with reference to the glory He displayed on the cross (Jn. 12:38-41; 12:28; 13:32; 17:1,5,24). However, it is also so that John “saw his glory" at the transfiguration; and

yet even there, “they saw his glory" (Lk. 9:32) as “they spake of his decease which he should accomplish". His glory and His death were ever linked. The fullness of grace and truth is one of John’s many allusions to Moses’ experience when the Name was declared to him- of Yahweh, a God *full* of grace and truth (Ex. 34:6 RV). The Name was fully declared, as fully as could be, in the cross. The Law gave way, through the cross, to the grace and truth that was revealed by Christ after the Law ended (Jn. 1:17). In His dead, outspent body grace and truth finally replaced law. John goes on to say that the Son *has declared* the invisible God (Jn. 1:18)- another reference to the cross. The implication may be that as Moses cowered before the glory of the Lord, *even he* exceedingly feared and quaked; we likewise should make an appropriate response to the glory that was *and is* (note John’s tenses) displayed to us in the cross. All of God’s word was made flesh in the crucified body of the Lord Jesus. The very essence of Yahweh and all His self-revelation was epitomised there. Therefore when the Son of man was lifted up, men knew the truth of all God’s words [see notes on 8:21-28].

The Lord was “full of grace and truth". Yet according to Phil. 2:7 RV, on the cross the Lord emptied Himself. Yet there He was filled with the essence of Yahweh’s own character; for the RV of Ex. 34 stresses that Yahweh is a God whose name is *full* of grace and truth. On the cross He was emptied of self and yet totally filled. The fact that the word was made flesh in the crucifixion explains why the atonement is described time and again with metaphors, as if it is a struggle for language alone to convey what happened. In the person of the crucified Christ, the ideas, the language, the words… became real and concretely expressed in a person. There is far more revealed by meditation upon the cross than can ever be put in words. There, the word, all the words, were made flesh. It is possible to see the fulfilment of the idea of the word being made flesh in Pilate's mocking presentation of the bedraggled Saviour: "Behold the man!”. Rudolph Bultmann commented: "The declaration "the Word became flesh" has become visible in its extremest consequence”. There in the spat upon Son of God we see humanity as it is meant to be; "the flesh", "the man" as God intended, unequalled and unmatched in any other human being.

John uses the same word for 'dwelling' in writing in Revelation of how the Father and Son shall dwell with men, and shall be their sole light, the only light that shines forth in their experience and existence. These ideas are all used here in 1:14 and the context regarding what He is doing now in the hearts of His people. This gift of His life is therefore a pre-experience, a foretaste, of the life we shall eternally experience. In this sense we "have eternal life" now. We live the life we shall eternally live- His life. Paul puts in another way when he says that the Spirit is given to us as the foretaste or deposit guaranteeing our final salvation (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5).

How exactly was the word made flesh in the person of Jesus? It was not simply a question of the nature of His birth. ‘The word’ was a title given to the Lord in recognition of His achievement in being and becoming the ‘word made flesh’. It wasn’t something which automatically happened to the Lord, as an irresistible process in which He played no part. The Lord’s Old Testament allusions, His familiarity with and use of His Father’s words doubtless had a lot to do with His becoming ‘the word made flesh’. If Paul alluded to the words of the Lord Jesus once every four verses on average, it is to be expected that the Son of God quoted and alluded to His Father’s word even moreso. And this is what we find, when we search the Lord’s words for their allusions to the Old Testament.

An example of the Lord's perhaps unconscious usage of His Father's words is to be found in His exasperated comment: "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?" (Mt. 17:17). Of course the Lord would have spoken those words and expressed those ideas in Aramaic- but the similarity is striking with His Father's Hebrew words of Num. 14:27: "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation…?". As a son comes out with phrases and word usages which 'Could be his father speaking!', so the Lord Jesus did the same thing. What I am saying is that the Lord was not merely quoting or alluding to the Father's Old Testament words, in the way that, say, Paul or Peter did. As the Father's Son, He was speaking in the same way as His Father, no doubt saturated with the written record of the Father's words, but all the same, there were those similarities of wording and underlying thinking which are only seen between fathers and sons. And His words of Mt. 17:17 = Num. 14:27 seem to me to be an example of this.

The level, depth and multiplicity of Old Testament allusions becomes the more amazing when we accept that these were spoken words, some of them clearly spoken unprepared and off-the-cuff. Literature can be crafted to pack multiple allusions. But when a speaker produces such a depth of allusion, one can only marvel at his intellectual depth. But with the Lord, it reflects His utter familiarity with the Father's word, grasping the real spirit of it all. He breathed it, thought it, spoke it, lived it. And in all He said, this was reflected. He truly was "the word made flesh". The following are just a few examples from the first words of Jesus; but the list can be continued. The simple fact is that on average, the Lord is alluding to the Old Testament at least 3 times in every verse! This means that every phrase of every sentence He is recorded as speaking- is alluding to His Father's word. It would've been like an orphaned son 'finding' his late father's words. He would read the words with such delight, and somehow eagerly pick up their sense in the way nobody else could.

The Words Of Jesus	Old Testament Allusions
Mt. 3:15 Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.	Ez. 18:19,21 fulfill righteousness
Mt. 4:4 It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, butby everyword that proceedeth out of the mouth of God	Dt. 8:3 direct quote
Mt. 4:7 It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.	Dt. 6:16 direct quote
Mt. 4:10 Get thee hence, Satan: forit is written, Thou shalt worshipthe Lord thy God,and him only shalt thou serve.	Dt. 6:13 direct quote

Mt. 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.	Ps. 40:17; Is. 41:17; 61:1
Mt. 5:4 Blessed are they that mourn:	Is. 61:1-3; 66:2
for they shall be comforted.	Is. 40:1
Mt. 5:5 Blessed are the meek:	Ps. 37:11,20; Is. 60:21; Prov. 22:24,25; 25:8,15
for they shall inherit the earth.	Gen. 15:7,8; Ex. 32:13
Mt. 5:6 Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.	Gen. 49:18; Ps. 17:15; 119:20; Jer. 23:6; Is. 45:24; 51:1; 55:1; 65:13
Mt. 5:7 Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.	2 Sam. 22:26,27; Ps. 18:25,26
Mat 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.	Ex. 33:20; Job 19:25-27; Ps. 17:15; Is. 6:5; 38:3,11

If you follow through some of those allusions- and there are surely many more that I've not picked up- it becomes apparent that the Lord had a mind capable of operating on several different levels of allusion at once. So it was not simply that He was hyper-familiar with His Father's word. He had the intellectual ability, with all the intelligence of God's very own Son, to think and speak on several levels at once. Hence His words were absolutely *full* of God's thoughts and words. He was so fully and deeply "the word made flesh". And in analyzing *from where* in the Old Testament the Lord quoted, we find that He had His favourite places- just as we'd expect from a genuine man. He appears to have been especially fond of the references to the "Servant" in the latter half of Isaiah; and also of the Psalms. He quotes from them both literally and freely, with all the confidence and appropriacy of a person who is thoroughly familiar with the text. But the way and extent to which He applied it all to Himself makes Him in very reality "the word made flesh".

It wasn't only in words but in actions too that the Lord was the word made flesh. The Lord Jesus lived life; He didn't just let events happen to Him. Much as I respected Harry Whittaker both as an individual and an expositor, I can never understand why throughout his monumental *Studies In The Gospels*, he repeatedly makes the point that the Lord Jesus didn't go around consciously trying to fulfil Bible prophecy. My reading of the Gospels tells me that the Lord did do exactly this. The writers stress that He did action X or spoke word Y in order to fulfil Bible prophecy A and B. He consciously made the word flesh in Himself. A case can be made that He carefully planned out His ministry; He didn't just let events happen to Him. I don't find it hard

to believe that He consciously engineered the timing of His own death to be at Passover time, after a three and a half year public ministry. He purposefully seems to have pressed all the buttons in Jewish expectations to lead them to revolt against the dashed expectations they had of Him. His actions in the temple could be read as almost asking to be killed. He knew what makes people tick and act to an an extent we can't begin to understand. He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem to die there (Lk. 9:60). He laid down His life- it wasn't taken from Him.

1:15 *John testifies of him and cries out, saying: This was he of whom I said: He that comes after me is ranked above me! For he was senior to me*- The record of John urgently crying out is perhaps mentioned because John was preaching to some who considered John the Baptist as the saviour, and were focused upon him rather than the Lord Jesus. John's message repeatedly featured his statements that he was nothing and the Lord everything.

John's comment that he came "after" Jesus, and that Jesus was the redeemer rather than he himself contain a strange allusion to the words of the redeemer-who-was-incapable-of-redeeming in Ruth 4:4- Boaz told him that "I am after thee", but in the end the incapable-redeemer plucked off his shoe as a sign of unworthiness to redeem (Ruth 4:7). And John surely also had this in mind when he commented that he was unworthy to unloose Messiah's shoe (Jn. 1:27). The allusions are surely indicative of the way John felt like the unworthy / incapable redeemer, eclipsed before Boaz / Jesus.

1:16- see on Eph. 3:19.

Of his fullness we all received, with grace upon grace- As noted on :14, the allusion has been to Moses nervously beholding God's glory and the declaration of His Name, Yahweh the God full of grace and truth. Moses was seen as the unapproproachable acme of spirituality; but now all who have perceived the Lord's glory have seen as Moses did. And so much more. That fullness of the name declared in Ex. 34:4-6 ["A God full of..." grace and truth] has now been received by us. And it is piled on- grace upon grace. We are not like Moses merely beholding a theoretical statement of these things, but actually participating in them and receiving them, through the power of the Spirit. The Spirit is clearly in view as "grace" is used, 'gift', so often referring to the gift of the Spirit.

"His fullness" is literally 'His filling'. The word and idea is often used in the context of being filled with the Spirit. We have been filled with what the Lord Jesus was full of- the Spirit, the characteristics of the Name. Again, the idea of filling suggests something done to us, so long as we are open to it, rather than a self-filling by our own intellectual effort. If we are in the body of Christ, in that body we receive "the fullness of Him that fills all in all" (Eph. 1:23). Eph. 3:19 is specific that it is through the indwelling of the Spirit, in the "inner man", "in our hearts by faith", that we are "filled with all the fulness of God". Through the Comforter, the gift of the Holy Spirit which "shall be within you", "your joy may be filled up" (Jn. 16:24 s.w.); hence the Lord's disappointment that at that time, "sorrow has filled up your heart" (Jn. 16:6). He wished for that to be displaced by the filling of the Spirit, which would be of joy and not sadness. The Lord's spirit of joy would be filled up in the hearts of His followers, "within themselves" (Jn. 17:13). The reference is continually to internal filling, "within", rather than to the external miraculous gifts of the Spirit. Rom. 15:13 uses the same word: "The God of hope fill you [up] with all joy and peace... through the power of the Holy Spirit". The Lord ascended to Heaven and received the Spirit so

that He might fill up all things of the new creation (Eph. 4:10). And thus Eph. 5:18 simply exhorts: "Be filled with the Spirit". We are to be open to it, and we shall be filled with it. The same word and appeal is to be found in Phil. 4:19; Col. 1:9; 2:10; 4:12. It is a major New Testament teaching that cannot be ignored. Hence John later appeals to his converts to allow themselves to be filled with joy (1 Jn. 1:4; 2 Jn. 12).

The Father's whole spirit / attitude is of wanting to lavish grace. Our spirit likewise must not be mean- totting up the cost of all the things the visitors have eaten, etc. But God's lavishing of grace is not only in material things, but supremely in His patient forgiveness and salvation towards us. Are we super abounding in forgiveness, or do we grudgingly offer it only upon evident repentance from others? Such legalism is associated with Moses, but grace and truth, "grace upon grace", came by the Lord Jesus (Jn. 1:16). Grace is 'ever increasing' ("grace upon grace") in that as we grow in Christ, we perceive that grace more and more. God not only forgives, but He *delights* in doing so (Is. 62:14; Mic. 7:18); the way He is spoken of as 'delighting' in spiritually weak Israel is part and parcel of Him lavishing grace as He does (Num. 14:8). It must be so awful to have such a wonderful spirit of lavishing grace and love, consciously giving out life and patient forgiveness to so many; and yet not be appreciated for it, to have puny humans shaking their fist at God because they die a brief moment of time sooner than they think they should, to have tiny people arrogantly questioning His love.

1:17 *For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*- The Lord is here presented as the mediator of a different covenant, with far superior blessing mediated. The contrast is between the law being "given", and the gift / grace of the Spirit 'coming'. We have not been given a set of commandments and left to get on with it. Grace and truth have come to us, and we saw on :16 that these things have entered within our very hearts. There are many Christians today who have received nothing from their religion but a set of commandments 'given' to them; they need to open themselves to allow the coming of grace into their hearts, the gift of the Spirit. We have just read that it was the personality of the Lord Jesus which was full of grace and truth (:14). But His personality, His Spirit, enters ['comes'] to us. For through the Comforter, the promised Holy Spirit which "shall be within you", He 'comes' to us, in the fulness of His personality and character (Jn. 14:18). John's later greeting to his converts "Grace be with you... in truth" (2 Jn. 3) was therefore no mere standard introduction to a letter; he believed that grace and truth really could enter them in abundance, and he wished this for them.

1:18 *No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made Him known*- "Made Him known" or [AV] "declared" is another allusion to the declaration of God's Name and the fullness of His character and glory in physical form to Moses (see on Ex. 32:30-32; Lk. 16:23; 1 Cor. 8:4-6). Again, all believers are positioned with Moses, who was denied his request to see God. But effectively, we have seen God in His Son; he who perceives / sees the Son has seen the Father. John parallels the word becoming flesh, with the Son declaring the Father who cannot be seen (Jn. 1:18). This is a reference to the declaration of Yahweh's Name to Moses, at which time Moses was reminded that God cannot be physically seen. Thus the declaration of the Yahweh Name to Moses is paralleled with the word / Name being made flesh. The Father glorified His Name in the Son (Jn. 12:28), who was the word of God.

John here makes clear allusion to Moses. This alludes to Moses being unable to see God, whereas the Lord now is cuddled in the bosom of the Father- such closeness, such a soft image, even now in his heavenly glory! The Lord declared God's character in His perfect life and above all on the cross (Jn. 17:26).

Again, the making known or declaration of God is something done to us. And it is done to us by the Lord Jesus through His Spirit. We are given "the spirit of... knowledge in the revelation [declaring / making known] of Him" (Eph. 1:17).

1:19 *And this is the witness of John, when the Jews sent from Jerusalem priests and Levites to ask him: Who are you?*- We wonder if that delegation included the zealot Saul of Tarsus, for as noted elsewhere, he continually alludes to the words and character of John the Baptist. These priests and Levites had been sent from the Jerusalem Pharisees, with whom Paul was associated (:24).

1:20 *He confessed, he did not deny, but confessed: I am not the Christ!*- This is a play on ideas. We would rather expect: 'He denied that he was the Christ'. But John did not deny- i.e. that Jesus was the Christ; he proclaimed that *he* was not the Christ, but Jesus *was*. The same word for "confessed" is to be found in 9:22, where any who confessed Jesus as Christ was to be put out of the synagogue. It was this threat which kept many from believing openly in the Lord, and some were even led to deny the Lord Jesus as Messiah and instead claim to be followers of John the Baptist. But John points out that John the Baptist bravely refused to deny Jesus as Christ, he confessed Him as Christ.

John's Gospel features the Lord Jesus confidently stating "I am...". The context is set for this by the way John's Gospel begins by describing how John the Baptist said "I am not..." ("I am not the Messiah", Jn. 1:20; 3:28; "I am not [Elijah]", Jn. 1:21; "I am not worthy", Jn. 1:27. By confessing his own weakness, who he was not, John the Baptist was paving the way for the recognition and acceptance of Jesus. And our self-abnegation will do likewise.

1:21 *And they asked him: What then? Are you Elijah? And he said: I am not. Are you the prophet? And he answered: No*-John knew surely that he was the Elijah prophet- for he consciously was preparing the way of Messiah and calling Israel to repentance. He was preaching in the very wilderness area from where Elijah had been taken up at the conclusion of his ministry; and he surely consciously chose to dress with the hairy garment and leather belt which had been Elijah's badge of office (1 Kings 1:8; 2:13,14). It's also been pointed out that the Essenes and other Jewish groups at the time taught self-baptism, whereas John was consciously baptizing people himself, as if he saw himself as specifically preparing them for something. The Lord Himself of course understood John to have been the Elijah prophet. And yet- John denies he is Elijah, but focuses instead on how he is but a "voice". I therefore conclude that his humility was such that he was totally downplaying his office- as if to say 'I am so much a mere voice, that effectively I'm not the Elijah prophet- the message I preach is so far more important than the office I bear'. Those who bear 'offices' in the church of Jesus would do well to have his spirit. Perhaps this is why he seems to have made very few personal disciples- although thousands were baptized by him, having been so impressed by his message. The Epistles of Clement number his disciples at about 30; and Jn. 4:1 comments that the Lord Jesus made more disciples than John did. I take this as a fine reflection upon his selfless witness, focusing so much on his message rather than developing any personal following. He was 'the friend of the

bridegroom', the one who arranged the marriage of the bridegroom and sought out the bride. And that, really, is what we are about too, with all the sense of dedication and earnestness which a such a person has when aiming to find a partner for one they know to be a truly good man.

1:22 *They replied to him: Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. How do you describe yourself?*- This recalls the concern of the local Roman governors to have some reason for sending Paul to Rome for trial. The Jewish angst about men like John the Baptist was not because they had done anything wrong, but because of the hard to define touching of conscience achieved by their preaching of the Lord. The AV "What sayest thou of thyself?" alludes to the way that a teacher was supposed to confidently introduce themselves and their mission in words which were uniquely theirs. The Lord alludes to this when He insists that He does not "speak of Myself" (12:49; 14:10) but only speaks the Father's words. Perhaps He learnt that from John's example, who refused to speak of himself but just quoted the Father's words (:23).

1:23 *John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet: I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord*- When asked who he was, John's reply was simply: "a voice". He was nothing; his message about Jesus was everything. In all this there is a far cry from the self-confident, self-projecting speaking off the podium which characterizes so much of our 'preaching' today. So John's appeal to repentance was shot through with a recognition of his own humanity. It wasn't mere moralizing. We likely don't preach as John did because we fear that confronting people with their sins is inappropriate for us to do, because we too are sinners. But with recognition of our own humanity, we build a bridge between our audience and ourselves. See on Lk. 3:7.

"Make straight" translates a Greek word which without doubt means "immediate", or in old English "straightway". It is translated like this multiple times. The way for the Lord Messiah to come to Jerusalem in glory could have been made immediate if Israel had truly responded to John's message. There was therefore a passion and urgency in John's call for repentance. "The way of the Lord" is the term later used for the Christian path (e.g. Acts 18:25). The implication is that the Lord is ready to come any moment, is on His way to Zion- and the quicker we make His way "straight", the quicker He will arrive.

1:24 *These priests and Levites had been sent from the Pharisees*- As noted on :19, Saul may well have been amongst them. The message of John the Baptist would have been another of the goads of conscience which he was kicking against by refusing to accept the Lord.

1:25 *Again they asked him: Why then do you baptize, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?*- Like many today, they mistakenly assumed that to baptize people, you need authority. They also indicate their belief that before Messiah's revelation, there is to be mass baptisms of Jews. The command to all in Christ to go forth and preach-and-baptize (the command is all one) would have been shocking to a first century Jewish audience, who believed that only Messiah Himself or "the prophet" could baptize (Jn. 1:25). The implication of the Lord's command was that all in Him are in fact Him, in their preaching of Him.

John's humility is brought out by the way John fields the question as to whether he is "the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?". He could have answered: 'I am the Elijah

prophet'- for the Lord Himself said of John that "this is Elijah", with perhaps conscious reference back to this question (Mt. 11:14). But John didn't answer that way. His reply was simply to speak of the greatness of Christ and his unworthiness to be His herald (Jn. 1:26,27). John's humility is brought out yet further by reflection on the fact that he clearly baptized huge numbers of people, and yet also had a group of people known as 'the disciples of John'. Clearly he didn't intend to found a sect, and was so taken up with trying to prepare people for the Lord's coming that he simply wished to lead them to some level of repentance and baptize them, without necessarily making them part of 'his disciples'. John's low self-estimation is seen in how he denied that he was "Elijah" or the "prophet" whom the Jews expected to come prior to Messiah (Jn. 1:21). The Lord Himself clearly understood John as the Elijah prophet- "this is Elijah" (Mt. 11:14), He said of John. John wasn't being untruthful, nor did he misunderstand who he was. For he associates his "voice" with the voice of the Elijah prophet crying in the wilderness, and appropriates language from the Elijah prophecy of Mal. 4 to his own preaching. His denial that he was 'that prophet' therefore reflects rather a humility in him, a desire for his message to be heard for what it was, rather than any credibility to be given to it because of his office. There's a powerful challenge for today's preacher of the Gospel.

1:26 *John answered: I baptize in water; but in the midst of you stands one whom you do not know*- The other Gospels all go on to say "I baptize in water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit". That latter teaching is pointedly omitted in John, and we wonder why, given the frequent references to the gift of the Spirit earlier in this chapter. Perhaps the idea is that those addressed in the synoptics were indeed baptized with both water and Spirit, but the group addressed here were baptized in water but rejected baptism of the Spirit, because they refused to know or recognize the Lord Jesus as Messiah. The gift of the Spirit involves the Lord Jesus being in our midst, and He was in their midst, but they did not know or recognize Him; rather like the Corinthians having the Spirit amongst them, but not being spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1).

1:27 *He that comes after me, his shoelace I am not worthy to untie*- Untying the shoelaces, or carrying the sandals, are idioms for 'being a herald'. John doesn't mean that he did not do this because he was not worthy to do so; he means that he was doing the work of a herald, which he was not worthy to do. His witness to the Lord is continually laced with his own confession of weakness and unworthiness. Given that his moral standards were apparently radically higher than those around him, such humility has much to commend it. It ought to be the hallmark set upon all our witness to the Lord, and it will make our appeal the more compelling. Perhaps John was somehow aware that any who would not carry the Lord's cross with Him were "not worthy" of Him (Mt. 10:38 s.w.).

1:28 *This incident took place in Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing*- Wherever this place was, it was "on the other side" of the Jordan river, on the East bank. We wonder why John chose to baptize there, rather than on the West bank. The other name given in the manuscripts for this place is Bethabara, 'house of the ford / crossing point'. Perhaps John wanted them to perceive their baptism as a crossing over Jordan with Joshua / Jesus into a promised land.

Perhaps John's Gospel purposefully inserts the comment that John the Baptist baptized many people after stating that he was not worthy to be doing what he was doing as the Lord's herald. It is as if to draw a link between his humility, and the success in preaching which he had. Paul perhaps directs us back to John when he says

that we are not “sufficient” to be the savour of God to this world; and yet we are made sufficient to preach by God (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5,6 RV). How terribly wrong it is for missionary service to be gloried in and somehow a reason for those who do it to become puffed up in self-importance.

1:29 *The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him, and he said: Behold! The Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world!*- John the Baptist beheld the Lord Jesus walking, and commented that He *was then*, as He walked, the lamb of God (with all the sacrificial overtones of that phrase), that *takes away*, right then, three years before the cross, the sin of the world. The essence of what the Lord did on the cross was in fact ongoing throughout His life. John saw every man as in the desperate, urgent intensity of Passover night, needing to identify with the slain lamb. John sees Jesus and says “Look! The lamb of God…". The three words for “see", “says" and “Look!" are uniquely repeated in Jn. 19:26, where again we have the lamb of God, now sacrificed, on the cross. "Takes away" is the word used by John to describe the cry of the Jews: "Away with Him!" (19:15). Here we see how human volition, however bad, is used within God's plan of salvation. The "world" whose sins are taken away is the world of believing persons, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. The Lord was thereby the creator of that world. The "world" simply cannot be understood as the literal universe. For it is persons who sin and whose sin is taken away by the Lord.

1:30 *This is he of whom I said: After me comes a man who is ranked above me. For he was senior to me*- Again we see John's repeated self deprecation in presenting the Lord Jesus to others. John the Baptist was actually older than the Lord Jesus; he therefore meant that Jesus was “before” him in the sense of being more important than him. C.H. Dodd interprets this passage as meaning: “There is a man in my following who has taken precedence over me, because he is… essentially my superior- C.H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition In The Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976) p. 274. See on Jn. 8:58.

1:31 *I did not perceive him, but so he should be made manifest to Israel, for this reason I come baptizing in water*- John has just lamented that his audience do not know or perceive the Messiahship of Jesus (:26). Now he uses the same word in saying that he too did not know or "perceive Him". He is seeking to build a bridge between himself and his audience, admitting that he who is now heralding Jesus as Messiah did not at one stage "perceive Him", presumably referring to how whilst they were growing up and in their 20s, John did not perceive that the Lord was in fact God's Son. This shows that John did not spend his entire time from childhood to 30 years old in the deserts. He had met his relative Jesus of Nazareth in that period, but had not perceived Him as Son of God and Messiah. This itself is an artless testament to the Lord's perfection and humility; He who never sinned, neither by ommission nor commission, was never perceived as anything unduly special. Not even by someone as spiritually inclined as John, who would surely have heard the stories of the virgin birth from his mother Elizabeth.

One obvious encouragement to be hopeful in our witness is the Biblical implication that all men and women, potentially, have the possibility of responding to the Gospel. It was so in the first century- John the Baptist had the *potential* to convert all Israel, for He came "that all men through him might believe" (Jn. 1:7), so that Christ "should be made manifest to (all) Israel" (Jn. 1:31). The entire nation *could* have converted; but they didn't.

"That (Christ) should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water" (Jn. 1:31) seems to make baptism a pre-requisite for accepting Christ. Indeed, Jewish theology expects baptism to be associated with the coming of Messiah and the Elijah prophet. Therefore the Jews asked John: "Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias?" (Jn. 1:25). See on Mt. 17:11. For Israel to call upon themselves the Name of the Lord when they repent, it is fitting that Elijah baptizes them into His Name. Zech. 13:1 may hint at latter day baptisms among repentant Jewry: "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David... for sin and for uncleanness". Israel will call upon themselves the Name of Yahweh our righteousness by being baptized into the Name of the Father and Son (Jer. 33:16).

1:32 *And John testified, saying: I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and it remained upon him*- As noted on :31, John did not perceive that his relative Jesus was God's Son. It was not until he saw the Spirit descending on the Lord that he realized that his relative Jesus was the Son of God. It was by the activity of the Spirit that he came to this perception. His earlier not knowing or perceiving who Jesus was thereby enabled him to build a common platform with the Jews who still would not know or perceive Him (:24 s.w.).

1:33 - see on Mt. 3:8.

I would not have perceived him except He that sent me to baptize in water, He had said to me: Upon whomsoever you shall see the Spirit descend and remain upon him, the same is he that baptizes in the Holy Spirit- As noted on :31 and :32, John was preaching preparation for the coming of Messiah without knowing who Messiah was. It was not until the Lord's baptism that he realized. We wonder why, therefore, he met Jesus with the comment that 'I have need to be baptized of You, and not You by me'. Maybe he said that out of deep respect of his relative Jesus as a better man than him, which again reflects his humility. For it was only after the Lord's baptism that the Spirit came upon Him, and John realized that this was the Son of God.

The Spirit descending *and remaining* upon the Lord was the sign that He was God's Son. The same word, often translated "abide", is used of how the Spirit is to both come and abide with all believers after they receive it at baptism. The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, was intended to come and dwell / remain within the hearts of the recipients (Jn. 14:17 s.w.).The gift of the Spirit is the proof that God abides / remains within us if we allow the Spirit to abide / remain within our hearts; and this is the proof that we are "the sons of God" (1 Jn. 3:24; 4:13). The Lord's baptism is therefore intended to be programmatic for us all. All who are baptized receive the gift of the Spirit, which accounts for that zeal and verve within them after baptism; but so many do not let it abide. The Corinthians had been given the Spirit, but by the time Paul wrote to them, they were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1).

1:34 *I have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God*- John's later references to our need to testify that Jesus is Son of God, to witness publically to what we "have seen", is therefore all an appeal to follow the example of John in witnessing.

1:35 *The next day John was standing with two of his disciples*- Out of those who came out into the desert to be baptized, some remained with John and devoted themselves to his teaching. We must remember that not until he had baptized the Lord did John understand that He was the Son of God. We can better understand why his disciples needed to be properly baptized into Jesus in Acts 19; for if they were John's

disciples before the Lord's baptism and had then returned from the desert, they would not have been taught that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God.

1:36 *And he watched Jesus as he walked and said: Behold! The Lamb of God!*- We sense here John's deep love and admiration of the Lord, watching His from a distance and uttering words of adoration. Again we see his selfless spirit, asking his own followers to instead follow Him. John's usage of the term "Lamb of God" suggests he was one of the few who perceived that the Lord must die, and His blood was required to save Israel.

We can read of the cross, speak of it; and yet totally fail to realize the powerful imperatives which abound in its' message. Andrew and John heard John the Baptist call Jesus the "lamb of God", and followed Him, in apparent acceptance that He was the Messianic sacrifice. And yet in reality, they could not at that time accept the saying that Jesus was to die at Jerusalem in sacrifice, and that they were to shoulder His cross and follow Him there.

1:37 *And the two disciples, hearing him speak, followed after Jesus*- The followers of John went off and followed the Lord. This was just what John wanted. This is in sharp contrast to the gaining of personal following which so many Christian preachers have been guilty of. The two disciples were Andrew (:40) and presumably John, who always avoids mentioning his own name in his preaching of the Gospel which we have transcripted here in the Gospel of John. John's encouragement of others to "follow after Jesus" is therefore based upon his own personal example. And in this again we have a pattern for our witness.

1:38 *Jesus turned around, and observing they were following him, said to them: What do you seek? And they replied: Rabbi (we would say Teacher). Where are you staying?*- The disciples were asked: "What seek ye?", and they reply: "Where dwellest thou?". Remember that this is John, one of them, recording their response (see on :37). It's as if he's pointing out how inappropriate was their response to Jesus; rather like the record of Peter wanting to build a tent for Jesus, Moses and Elijah so they stay a bit longer. *They* had responded inappropriately- and yet they urged their hearers and readers to respond appropriately.

John is highlighting how they misunderstood. They asked where the Lord was abiding that night, thinking in terms of a physical house, and for a limited time- maybe just that night. But as John will demonstrate at length, the Lord abides not in houses, nor temporarily, but permanently in the hearts of believers through His Spirit. 'Abiding' is a major theme in John. Several times he records how the Lord Jesus 'abode' in houses or areas during His ministry (Jn. 1:38,39; 2:12; 4:40; 7:9; 10:40; 11:6), culminating in the Lord's words that He would still abide with them through the Spirit gift, but would physically leave them soon (Jn. 14:25). The repeated teaching of the Lord is that actually, He will permanently abide in the heart of whoever believes in Him. And all the stories of Him 'abiding' a night here or there prepare the way for this. Those hearts become like the humble homes of Palestine where He spent odd nights- the difference being that there is now a permanent quality to that 'abiding', "for ever". This is how close and real the Lord can come to us, if His words truly abide in us.

1:39 *He said to them: Come, and you shall see. They went therefore, and saw where he stayed; and they stayed with him that day. It was about the tenth hour*- As noted on :38, the Lord abides in hearts through the Spirit. But that will only be perceived if we ourselves come after Him, consciously following Him in our thinking and life decisions.

Consider the way that Jesus says: "Come and see"- and somehow Philip finds himself soon afterwards using those very same words when talking with his friend Nathanael: "Come and see" (:46). And so reflection upon the actual words of Jesus, a love of them, allowing them to abide in us, is a major part of what it means to be a Christian, a Christ-like one. Consciously or unconsciously, we shall beging to speak, think and reason as He did; to have His spirit in us, both developing it consciously, and being open to receiving it. This is where those red letter Bibles, which print the words of Jesus in red, are really a helpful focus for us.

In John, the Lord often invites men to "come" (Jn. 1:39; 4:16; 5:40; 7:37; 21:12); and members of "the bride" also, quite naturally and artlessly, invite others to "come" too (Jn. 1:41,45,46; 4:29). My point is that the natural response of the one who hears is to say to others "come". It won't be something which has to be done as a great act of the will, we won't need to be fed with ideas by some preaching Committee; he that hears will say, "Come".

1:40 *One of the two that had heard John and had followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother*- We wonder why in :35 and :37 "the two" were not immediately introduced to us in the narrative as Andrew and the disciple whom Jesus loved (John). I suggest it is in order to help us play Bible television with the scene, of men totally transfixed in observing the Son of God; all personal issues, even their names, became subsumed beneath He was and is all and in all.

1:41 *The first thing he did was to find his brother Simon; and he said to him: We have found the Messiah (we would say Christ)*- Andrew "found" Christ and then [s.w.] 'finds' his brother for Christ. What we hear and learn we naturally desire to spread to others. To immediately share ("the first thing he did") the good news about the Lord Jesus is something which comes absolutely naturally to those who find Him. It is this spirit which needs to be, and indeed can be, even in those who were as it were schooled into Christ through a Christian upbringing.

Peter's proclamation of Jesus as Messiah half way through Mark's record of the Gospel (Mk. 8:29) is presented by him as a climax of understanding. And yet according to Jn. 1:41, Andrew and Peter had known this right from the start. The implication is surely that they, as simple working men, probably illiterate, had merely repeated in awe words and phrases like "Messiah" and "Son of God" with no real sense of their import. Yet again, the Lord gently bore with their misunderstandings, and Peter of his own initiative, 18 months later, came to gleefully blurt out the same basic ideas but with now far deeper insight- although he still incorrectly perceived the Messiah as one who would not suffer but provide instant glorification. Thus the spiritual growth of the disciples is revealed.

1:42 *He took him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said: You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas (we call him Peter)*- There is reason to think that like Paul, Peter is held up as a pattern for all who would afterwards believe. The way Peter is brought to Jesus and named by him has evident connection with the bringing of Eve [cp. the whole bride of Christ] to Adam [cp. Christ] to be named (Gen. 2:22,23 = Jn. 1;41,42).

"Son of John" is "Barjona", and could as well be read as 'Son of Jonah'. The Lord's comment 'Simon bar Jona' may have reflected His understanding that Simon Peter had the characteristics of Jonah even then. The incident of Peter being called to accept the Gentiles occurred in Joppa, where Jonah likewise had struggled with the problem of preaching to the Gentiles.

"Cephas" or "Peter" means literally 'rocky', and Peter of course is portrayed as anything but rock-like in his faith. He started drowning on the water, denied the Lord, was later influenced by the Judaizers to betray the principles of Gentile salvation by grace. But with righteousness imputed, he was counted indeed as a rock. He did endure to the end; and the Lord sees not as we do. He saw Peter's basic faith as solid and loved him for it; the temporary moments of weakness were insignificant in the final picture of the man. We too need to stop focusing upon the temporal failures of others and respect them for their continued faith; for so many fall away from their basic faith despite appearing the pictures of stable church members.

1:43 *The next day Jesus decided to go into Galilee; and he found Philip. Jesus said to him: Follow me*- Jesus 'found' Philip, and he in his witnessing 'found' Nathanael (Jn. 1:43,45). Our finding of men for the Lord reflects His finding of us. The Lord realized His new converts were from Galilee; perhaps they even knew Him from His earlier life there. He may have fixed holes in their boats for all we know. But He realized that their faith would be deepened by having to witness to Him, and demonstrate their association with Him, in their home area. See on 2:1. The command to witness is largely for our benefit; for we become more deeply conscious of our faith when we have to explain it to others, especially family members and acquaintances.

1:44 *Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter*- "City" is misleading. These fishing villages were just hamlets, collections of houses where most people were either relatives or related by marriage. A fair case can be made that many of the disciples were related to each other. See on :43.

1:45- see on Lk. 2:49.

Philip found Nathanael and said to him: We have found him, of whom Moses in the law and the prophets wrote! Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph- See on :41 for the significance of finding others for the Lord as a result of our being found by Him. Truly, God is in search of man; and so is His Son. As we distribute invitations to this world to know Him, He is not indifferent. He wishes their success. All the apparent disinterest in our witness is not met by Him indifferently, nor should we ever consider it a reflection of His displeasure or distance from us. The way Philip speaks of "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" suggests that they had earlier known Him, but never had any clue that He could be the Messiah. John the Baptist likewise knew Him but didn't realize He was Messiah until the theophany after the Lord's baptism. In this we see an artless insight into the Lord's utter perfection; that despite never sinning, nobody had the slightest suspicion that He was God's Son or Messiah. He achieved His sublime perfection and the good deeds that went with it somehow incognito.

1:46 *And Nathanael said to him: Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Philip said to him: Come and see*- Like many primitive people, there was the sense that all people from a particular town or area are "not good". We have here an insight into the Lord's utter humanity; He was known as one "out of" Nazareth, He spoke and acted like a man from Nazareth. We can also reflect that His earlier history of having been born in Bethlehem was presumably unknown to people. Mary and Joseph had kept all that to themselves, and the Lord Himself had not spoken of it.

The teaching of both Old and New Testaments concerning the ultimate value and meaning of the individual person was radical stuff, so radical that it was rarely fully understood even amongst the people of God. For example, it was important to know where a person was from- because people from certain areas were understood as

being a certain person. Hence the Jewish refusal to accept that Jesus could be Messiah, because He was from Galilee, and "out of Galilee arises no prophet" (Jn. 7:52), indeed nothing good could come out of Nazareth (Jn. 1:46). This led to what we would call today stereotyping and racism. People didn't travel very far, and so this of itself reinforced some of the stereotypes. Horizons were extremely limited for the average person. Vergil could say that "to know one Greek is to know them all"; and Philo likewise made total generalizations about Egyptians in his writings. Paul refers to the common maxim that "Cretans are *always* liars... lazy drunkards" (Tit. 1:12)- but goes on to appeal to the Cretan believers to *not* be like that, to challenge and break the stereotype! It's the same with the Corinthians- the very term "Corinthian" meant a drunkard, shameless man. And yet it was in this very city that so many were called to the Lord, and He attempted to turn them away from that very stereotype they had been born into. And the very fact that the Son of God was from "that despised Nazareth" was the ultimate deconstruction of this understanding- that leaders, kings etc. could only come from some areas and not others. We need to ask ourselves whether we don't follow the same kind of stereotypes when we assume things about people- he's from *that* family, she's from *that* country, they're from *that* church / ecclesia... These attitudes deny the wonderful meaning and value of the individual of which our Lord showed us in His teaching, life, death and current work amongst us.

He was “despised and rejected of men”, as Isaiah had foretold so long before. It’s perhaps hard to feel from our distance the extent to which Galilee was despised by the Jerusalem Jews. Although Jerusalem to Galilee is only around 100 km., “only in exceptional circumstances will someone living in Jerusalem have travelled to the distant province of Galilee, as the *Life* of Josephus shows… a journey to Rome would be more likely for a better class Jerusalem dweller than one to provincial Galilee, which was the back of beyond… the people of Judaea despised the uneducated Galileans and were not particularly interested in this remote province”. Yet it was exactly from *here* that the Son of God came! It was from the parochial, the ordinary, from the nothing special, that God’s holy child came forth to change this world. So if you too feel a nobody, a cut below the rest, held back by your background… this is the very wonder of God manifestation. It’s through you and me, the kids from the backstreets, the uneducated, the duffers, the dumbers… that God Almighty reveals Himself to this world.

1:47 *Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, and said of him: Behold, a true Israelite in whom is no deceit!*- This is surely another case of imputed righteousness; for Nathanael had just discounted the Lord's Messiahship on the basis that He was unlikely to be a good man, seeing He haled from Nazareth. The allusion is to Ps. 32:2 "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity and in whose spirit there is no guile / deceit". There is deceit in the spirit of every man; but imputed righteousness means that this is not the case for the believer before God.

The Lord’s basic understanding of us is that we are to become brethren *in Him*. He ever sought to teach the disciples to not only worship and respect Him, but to rise up to emulate His example, and to act and feel as part of Him. When He saw Nathanael under the fig tree, He commented that here was a man who had the good side of Jacob, an Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile. But the Lord then goes on to liken *Himself* to Jacob, saying that Angels would ascend and descend upon Him as they had upon Jacob (Jn. 1:47,51). What He was basically trying to say to His new disciple was that ‘You’re like Jacob! But, I’m like Jacob too. And you will powerfully realize the significance of this a bit later on’. He was seeking always to build up an

identity between Himself and His followers. This is so different to admiring a man as one admires a picture, and assenting to him as a leader. This is about a unique and intimate relationship, bonding and identity with Him. Nathanael no doubt puzzled over the Lord's enigmatic words, as we likely have also done. His enigmatic style was to provoke just such reflection, to lead Nathanael to realize the force of the identification with Him which the Lord was inviting.

1:48- see on Mk. 7:29.

Nathanael said to him: How is it you know me?- The Lord had not mentioned Nathanael's name; instead He had imputed righteousness to him (see on :47) and called him a man in whom is no guile, i.e. He had used a Messianic title (1 Pet. 2:22) about a man. So by asking "How is it you know me?", I suggest Nathanael is questioning how this man from Nazareth could talk of him in such exalted terms.

Jesus answered: Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you- An Israelite dwelling under his fig tree is the language of Israel at peace with God, especially in the future Messianic Kingdom of God on earth (Mic. 4:4). The Lord is saying that even before Nathanael had been called to the Gospel, he had been foreknown and had been imagined as in the future Kingdom, written in the book of the redeemed from the foundation of the world. This predestination is an aspect of God's grace, as Paul explains in Romans 8. As noted above, the Lord had imputed righteousness to Nathanael, and asks him to respond to the fact that he had been chosen for the Kingdom from the beginning.

1:49 *Nathanael answered him: Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are King of Israel*- When the disciples first encounter Jesus, they heap upon Him the Messianic titles of Judaism: Rabbi, Messiah, the one described in the Law and prophets, Son of God, King of Israel. And yet the other Gospels bring out how Peter's confession that Jesus is the Son of God is in fact due to a special revelation from the Father, and was somehow a seminal point of faith and comprehension which Peter had reached (Mt. 16:16,17). Surely the point of the apparent contradiction is to show that over time, the disciples started to put meaning into words; the Jewish terms and titles which they had once so effortlessly used, they came to use with real appreciation. We have shown elsewhere that a mature appreciation of the name and titles of the Father and Son is indeed a mark of spiritual maturity.

1:50 *Jesus replied: Because I said to you: I saw you underneath the fig tree- do you believe? You shall see greater things than these!*- Grasping the wonder of foreknowledge and predestination (see on :48) is indeed a reason to believe. But the wonders of our personal salvation are far smaller than the greatness of God's total activity in and through His Son (:51).

Nathanael had been sitting under a fig tree when he was called to the Lord- and this was apparently the classic place where trainee rabbis sat and studied. If this is indeed the case, then the Lord's calling of him to be a disciple / follower was saying: 'Don't seek to be a rabbi. Be a disciple / follower of me, as a way of life, always'. Nathanael's focus was to be upon the wonder of God's work in His Son, rather than aiming to be a spiritual teacher of others. Our aim must be to make men and women sit at the Lord's feet and learn of Him themselves. Discipleship is to be what we are all our lives. Consider the contrast: 'disciples' in the schools of other rabbis expected to one day graduate and become teachers themselves, with disciples at *their* feet. But no, the Lord saw all of us, including those who have learnt of Him the longest and deepest, to always be disciples, awed by God's activity in His Son (:51).

1:51 *And he said to him: Truly, truly, I say to you. You shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man*- See on :47 for the connections with Jacob, and Nathanael being a Jacob-ite.

The allusion to Jacob's vision of Gen. 28:18 is clear. That vision was to show Jacob the extent of Angelic care of Him- and this was repeated for Jesus. However, the context of v. 50 is that Nathanael marvelled at Jesus' knowledge. Jesus seems to be saying that they would see even greater spiritual revelation ("Heaven open") because of the ministry of the Angels to Him, ministering spiritual knowledge to Jesus to communicate to His disciples. This would imply that apart from directly ministering spiritual revelation to Jesus, the Angels also imparted specific 'physical' knowledge to Jesus- e. g. about Nathanael under the fig tree.

Nathaniel thought he really believed in the Lord Jesus. The Lord commented: "You shall see (usually used in John concerning faith and spiritual perception) greater things than these... you will see heaven opened, and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the son of man" (Jn. 1:51 RSV). It was Jacob who saw Heaven opened and the Angels ascending and descending. And Christ's comment that Nathaniel was "an Israelite (Jacob-ite) indeed, in whom is no guile" (i.e. Jacob without his guileful side) is a reference to Jacob's name change. It confirms that Nathaniel was to follow Jacob's path of spiritual growth; he thought he believed, he thought he saw Christ clearly; but like Jacob, he was to comprehend far greater things.

"Hereafter you will see heaven opened, and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" was a prophecy of what was to happen “hereafter", and it seems relevant to the cross. Heaven, in the sense of the Most Holy place, was opened by the veil being torn down at the Lord’s death. By the blood-shedding of Jesus, the way into the Holiest was made manifest. There is evident allusion to Jacob’s vision of the ladder reaching to Heaven; and surely the Lord is saying that He is going to become the ladder to Heaven, linking Heaven and earth, when Heaven is opened by Him in the future. And that point was surely the crucifixion. Significantly, He says: “You will see...", another hint that the disciples, especially John, saw the crucifixion. They may well have “seen" in the Johanine sense of perceiving that there, unseen, Angels were ascending and descending in ministration. John also records how the Lord saw Himself as the gate / door (10:9), just as Jacob described what he had seen as “the gate of heaven". The stone upon which he slept, lifted up and anointed with oil to become the corner-stone of the house of God, Beth-el, was all prophetic of the Lord’s death and rising up again (Eph. 2:20-22).

The theme of the Spirit is never far away in John's writings. "Greater things" is the language of what would happen when the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, was given (Jn. 14:12). The Lord foreknew Nathanael, but after His death the Spirit would be released [Angels ascending and descending] and under His command [upon the Son of Man] would be involved even more powerfully in the lives of God's children like Nathanael.

JOHN CHAPTER 2

2:1 *On the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee*- I suggested on 1:43 that the Lord went to preach in Galilee because He wanted to take His new

disciples back to their home areas and help them make public identification with Him before their families and friends. Chapter 1 closed with the conversion of Nathanael, who was from Cana (21:2). So the Lord's visits to Cana would have been to help Nathanael make a public witness and identitication with the Lord.

The mother of Jesus was there-The incident at Cana shows her lack of perception of the true nature of her son's work at that time. The *mother of Jesus* is said to be *there,* and not to be *called,* as Jesus and his disciples were (Jn. 2:1,2), which suggests that she was following Him around, fascinated and prayerfully concerned as He began His ministry. He hadn't done any miracles before, so was she asking Him to begin His ministry with a miracle? She knew He had the power to do them- she had perceived that much. When the Lord speaks about His hour not having yet come, He is clearly alluding to His death. For this is how "the hour" is always understood in John's Gospel (Jn. 4:21, 23; 5:25, 28, 29; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 16:25; 17:1). So Jesus replies to Mary's nudge 'make them some wine!' by saying that the time for His death has not yet come. He assumes that by 'wine' she means His blood. He assumes she is on a higher level of spiritual symbolism than she actually was. He wouldn't have done this unless He had previously communed with her on this level. But apparently she was no longer up to it. She was correct in expecting Him to do a miracle [for Cana was His beginning of miracles]; and she was right in thinking that the need for wine was somehow significant. But she didn't see the link to His death. Her perception was now muddled. Yet even at this time, she is not totally without spiritual perception. When she tells the servants to do whatever Jesus says (Jn. 2:5), she is quoting from the LXX of Gen. 41:55, where Joseph's word has to be obeyed in order to provide food for the needy Egyptians. The world had ground her earlier spirituality away, but not totally. For it would in due time revive, to the extent that she would risk her life in standing by the Lord's cross, and then later join the early ecclesia (Acts 1:14).

2:2 *Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the marriage*- As noted on :1, they were invited, but Mary is said to be "there". The invitation confirms our suggestions in chapter 1, that the Lord was known to people in Galilee. He may well have known Nathanael, seeing that Nathanael was from Cana (21:2) and the Lord was invited to a wedding in Cana. He was known there- but all were surprised that the carpenter from Nazareth was in fact God's son and Messiah.

2:3 *When they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to him: They have no wine!*- Although the Lord had never done miracles before He began His ministry, Mary sensed His ministry had now begun and that He could likely save the situation through a miracle. "Ran out of" translates a term elsewhere used about man's moral deficit before God, our need for Him (Mt. 19:20; Mk. 10:21- even after apparently keeping all commandments; Lk. 15:14; Rom. 3:23; 1 Cor. 12:24; Heb. 4:1; 12:15). These people were in moral need of the wine of the new covenant; but they didn't realize their need, nor all that was being done to meet it. This was to teach Nathanael who was from Cana (21:2- perhaps the invitation was because it was a member of his family getting married). For he had been amazed that the Lord had foreknown him, sitting under the fig tree. And he is being taught that on a far wider level, the Lord foreknows human need for His blood and life, and would provide even whilst they were yet sinners and ignorant.

2:4 *Jesus said to her: Woman, what have I to do with you?*- When He says "What have you to do with me?" (AV), He seems to be struggling to dissociate Himself from her; for the idiom means 'How am I involved with you?' (2 Kings 3:13; Hos. 14:8). It

can be that “My hour has not yet come” can bear the translation “Has not my hour come?” (Jn. 2:4), as if to imply that, as they had previously discussed, once His ministry started, their bond would be broken in some ways. And yet Mary understandably found this hard to live up to, and it took the cross to lead her to that level of commitment to her son’s cause.

My hour is not yet come- This may refer to the ‘hour’ of the cross, whereby the true wine / blood would be outpoured, that which had been offered before being inadequate. The governor of the feast, cp. the Jewish elders, “knew not whence it was" (2:9), using the same words to describe how they knew not from whence was the Lord, and didn’t ‘know’ / comprehend to where He was going in His death (7:27; 8:14; 19:9). The Lord saw His giving of His life blood on the cross as prefigured by His provision of wine to ignorant people in Cana in their unknown need. But He transforms that which is most ordinary- water- into that which is the most refined, fine wine. His ultimate provision for human need was not prefigured by turning wine into water, as we would expect if He were some pre-existent God who became man. Instead, the most ordinary, water, is turned into wine. It was His humanity which enabled our salvation.

Perhaps when Jesus said to Mary “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come” (Jn. 2:4 RSV), He was trying to get her back to spiritual mindedness and is frustrated with her low level of spiritual perception. He tries to lead her back to a higher level by linking the giving of wine with His hour which was to come, i.e. the cross. In Lk. 1 her song shows how spiritually perceptive she was- now she seems to have lost that. She is concerned with the immediate and the material rather than the spiritual. "Woman" was a polite form of public address, but apparently it was unusual for a man to use it to his mother. The Lord felt and stressed that separation between her and Him right now at the start of His ministry, coming to a climax at His death where He told her that He was no longer her son but John was. She must have been *so* cut by this, if indeed as I have suggested it was the first time He had said this to her.

2:5- see on Jn. 2:1.

His mother said to the servants: Whatever he commands you, do it!- This uses three Greek words which recur in Mt. 7:24,26: "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them". Mary had heard these words but applies them in a more material way rather than the spiritual, moral way which Jesus intended. Is this another indication she had slipped from her teenage intensity and spirituality by the time His ministry began?

The theme of John’s writings is that “the word” which was in the beginning, the word of the Gospel, the word of command which brought forth all creation in the first place, is the same word that has been made flesh in Jesus, and which can likewise work a powerful new creation in the lives of all who allow that word to abide in them. Hence the emphasis of John upon the manner in which the *word* of the Lord Jesus was sufficient to bring about amazing miracles. Even Josephus noted this unique feature of the Lord’s ministry: “Everything that he [Jesus] performed through an invisible power he wrought by word and command”. It can be argued that all the historical incidents recorded by John are exemplifications in visual terms of the principles outlined in the prologue in chapter 1.

2:6 *Nearby there were six stone waterpots, placed there for the Jewish custom of purifications, each holding 75 to 115 litres*- The idea was that Mosaic purification ritual was not the answer to human need. The Lord's life and blood, encased as it were within the strictures of the Mosaic system, was what was required. Waterpots of that size were all made of stone; but the point is made to emphasize how the Lord was like the stone of Daniel's image, a stone cut out from the earth. It was His humanity which was so necessary in order to bring forth the wine of the new covenant. The wine was poured out from the waterpots into another vessel; there was no way the servants would pour directly into the cups from a 100 litre capacity stone waterpot, that no man could carry alone. So the source of the new wine was in a sense hidden; and John has been developing the point that although John and the disciples knew of Jesus, His humanity had shielded their eyes from knowing what was within Him.

We note the super abundance of wine. At least 600 litres was created, maybe as much as 700 litres. The Lord would have left them with the question: 'What ever is such a huge amount of wine doing in our waterpots? Who put it there? Didn't we see you all pouring water into the pots, as if preparing for cleansing from some major defilement?'. The answer would have been: 'This is Jesus of Nazareth...'.

2:7 *Jesus said to them: Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them to the brim*- "To the brim" again speaks of the vastness of the provision (see on :6). We need have no fear that our sins somehow cannot be dealt with by the Lord's sacrifice. His provision is of a massive scale. The filling demands reference back to how "of His fulness have all we received" (1:16). Again we see how historical incident in John's Gospel is an exemplification of the principles with which he begins in his prologue. We are filled with His fullness, His Spirit (see on 1:16), so that we might bear out of ourselves to others in their unperceived spiritual need.

2:8 *And he said to them: Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast. So they took it*- "Draw out" is only used elsewhere in speaking of how the Samaritan woman drew out water from the well, which symbolized the water of life which believers in Jesus could now draw out to meet the thirst of others, drawing from the Spirit deep within themselves (4:7,15). So the servants who 'knew' the Lord's work were to draw out His wine to the Jewish leaders, those in the best places of the banquet, as they are elsewhere described. They took or better 'carried' the wine, as John envisages his converts taking or carrying the message of Jesus to others (2 Jn. 10 s.w.).

2:9 *When the master of the feast tasted the water which had now become wine, and not knowing where it came from (but the servants that had drawn the water knew), he called to the bridegroom*- The contrast between knowing / perceiving and not doing so continues the message of chapter 1. The Lord's servants knew Him, but the Jewish world generally did not. The way the wine was to be taken to the master of the feast may speak of the Lord's desire to convert the Jewish leadership; and in chapter 3 He calls Nicodemus the master of Israel (3:10). The proximity to this account makes us wonder whether Nicodemus was the master of this feast in Cana; at the very least, the Lord's appeal to this "master" was repeated in His appeal to "the master of Israel" in the next but one historical incident which John records.

2:10 *And said to him: Everyone serves good wine first, and when all have drunk freely, serves something inferior. But you have kept the good wine until now!*- The wedding feast at Cana had been going on for some time, to the point that men had

drunk so much wine that they could no longer discern its quality. For *methuo* = 'to drink to intoxication', not simply "drunk freely". The Lord didn't say, as I might have done, 'Well that's enough, guys'. He realised the shame of the whole situation, that even though there had been enough wine for everyone to have some, they had run out. And so He produced some more- actually, over 600 litres of it. He went along with the humanity of the situation in order to teach a lesson to those who observed what really happened.

The Lord clearly had no problem in making wine at Cana. Would He have shared a mug of wine with the boys when, say, someone had a birthday? And therefore would a 21st century Jesus have shared a beer with His fellow workers? Now in my image of Jesus I'm not sure He would have done. But perhaps in your image of Him, He would have. Apart from the memorial meeting, I don't drink, and haven't done for many years. I know how in many cultures this seems to erect a barrier between me and those I seek to make contact with. But when Jesus made the water into wine, He provided about 180 gallons [400 litres] of it. At a time when surely some were already rather the worse for wear from alcohol- for the master of the feast pointed out that the best wine [i.e. with higher alcohol content!] was brought out only when people couldn't tell the difference, because they had "well drunk" (Jn. 2:10- Gk. *methuo*, 'to drink to intoxication'). I wouldn't have done that. At least, not to that extent- for you can be sure, they drank it all up. But He did, so comfortable was He with His humanity. And this perhaps was what made all kinds of people so comfortable with Him, prostitutes and old grannies, kids and mafia bosses, saints 'n' aints. We seem so often ashamed of being human, indeed, some have taken their understanding of 'sinful human nature' to the extent that it's almost a sin to be alive. Whatever we say about human nature, we say about our Lord. Let's remember this. But Jesus was happy with who He was.

2:11 *This, the first of his signs, Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, thereby revealing his glory; and his disciples believed in him*-"Jesus... manifested forth his glory" through his miracles. His miracles therefore were a demonstration of the character ("glory") of God, not just to relieve human grief as he came across it. Therefore they are all capable of allegorical interpretation; there are seven miracles in John called "signs". Contrast how the glory of God was manifested to Moses, who peeped at it from the rock. Yet Jesus was the glory of God, higher than the Angel who actually manifested the glory.

The real Christ must be the concealed basic pattern behind a person. But one of the problems in seeking to build up an image of the man Jesus is that He Himself didn't proclaim so much about Himself in so many words. He never specifically announces that He is Messiah- that fact is stated by who He was in life. His miracles were a *phanerosis*, a rendering apparent, of His glory (Jn. 2:11). The glory of God is essentially His character (Ex. 33:18). The Lord started to reveal this, to let this show, after age 30- beginning, it seems, with His *arche-miracle* of making the wine at Cana (Jn. 2:11 Gk.). But even that was a revealing of His glory to only a few- because even the governor of the feast thought that it was the bridegroom, and not Jesus, who had somehow pulled out new supplies of wine. The guests were drunk (see on :10). The revealing of His glory, spoken of by John in such startling terms as His arch-miracle, was in fact only to the disciples and perhaps a few others who perceived what had happened. This, I submit, is how to understand the Biblical references to the glory which the Lord Jesus had "from the beginning"- i.e. of His life and His ministry, but which was only made apparent later. Certainly until that point at Cana, He somehow

restrained that glory within His very ordinariness- to the extent that people were utterly shocked when He stood up in the synagogue and basically proclaimed Himself to be Messiah.

The language of "He manifested forth his glory″ is used of how He would do so on the cross, which was to be a greater manifestation of his glory (see on Jn. 1:14). The historical incidents in John so often are a foretaste of the Lord's final death; for He lived the Spirit of that death and self-sacrifice throughout His life.

2:12 *After this he went down to Capernaum, he and his mother and brothers and disciples; and there they stayed for a few days*- "Went down" reflects the topography of the area, and is the kind of thing a genuine eyewitness like John would recall. The mention of His "brothers" being with Him could suggest that they initially followed Him, but then disbelieved in Him as the pressure got tougher (7:5); with James and Jude then returning to faith in Him after the resurrection. This meant that James and Jude had for a time left the faith; and yet were greatly used by the Lord in His early work in the church.

2:13 *The Passover of the Jews was at that time; and Jesus went to Jerusalem*- John repeatedly describes the Jews feasts and temple as being "of the Jews", whereas the Old Testament refers to them as "of Yahweh". The Jews had hijacked God's religion and made it serve their own ends. This is a stern warning for us all. Rarely is the Lord called simply "Jesus"; usually some title is added. But John juxtaposes his frequent references to the Lord's very high status with such statements of His utter humanity; in order to deliver the right balance in impression concerning the person of the Lord Jesus.

2:14 *And he found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers sitting at their tables*- These were the sons of Annas, the High Priest. This deepened the anticlimax- the Lord entered Jerusalem and the temple- and cast out the sons of the High Priest.

Instead of entering the temple in glory, fulfilling the hope of Ezekiel's vision of the temple where Messiah enters the temple from the East, instead the Lord entered the temple- and in a huge anti-climax, castigates the Jewish religious leadership, throwing them out of the temple. This cleansing of the temple was repeated at the end of His ministry; see on Mt. 21:12.

2:15 *He made a whip out of cords and drove them all, with the sheep and oxen, out of the temple; and he poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables*- The Lord had the power to make them disappear. He could do all things. But His making of a whip and getting so physical with them, driving them out along with their cattle, all rather sounds like He was treating them as if they were in spiritual Egypt. The language recalls how the Egyptians treated the Israelites and then drove them out of their land to the Red Sea. So this was not simply unrestrained anger on the Lord's part; in the same way as the judgment wrath of His Father was also intended to bring about spiritual realization and a movement further in the correct direction. It was surely miraculous that the Lord was not seized and charged for this kind of behaviour. This of itself demonstrated to the thoughtful that His final arrest and crucifixion was only because He and His Father allowed it; in that sense, He gave His life rather than having it taken from Him.

2:16 *To them that sold the doves he said: Take these things away! Do not make my Father's house a market*- Doves were the offering of the poor. Mary would have bought doves for the Lord's presentation from the same or similar men, 30 years previously. The Lord doesn't tell them to charge reasonable prices for the doves. Even though they were a necessary part of Mosaic ritual, He demands that they been taken

right away and not sold at all. This suggests that even then He saw Mosaic ritual as dispensible. And perhaps His idea was that sacrifices should not be bought for money, which turned spirituality into mere religion. The doves could be caught, or even brought with the worshipper on their journey to the temple. There was to be a more personal relationship between offerer and sacrifice than merely passing over coins to a merchant to meet the correct ritual requirement. This speaks to us today.

2:17- see on 14:29; Mk. 10:38.

His disciples remembered that it was written: Zeal for Your house shall consume me- This would have been an example of how the Comforter brought such things to their rememberance (14:26). He knew himself that "the zeal of thine house hath *eaten me up*" (Ps. 69:9); the same Hebrew word is used as in Lev. 6:10: "take up the ashes which the fire hath *consumed*". Even in His life, the Lord felt that He had reached this point of total consumption as a living sacrifice. A Psalm evidently relevant to the final crucifixion is applied to the Lord's behaviour; as if the disciples later realized that this early visit to Jerusalem was a living out in the Lord of the final one. As so often, the spirit of the Lord's final death was seen in Him and His ways throughout His ministry.

2:18 *The Jews therefore answered and said to him: What sign will you show us, seeing you do these things?*- Paul alludes to this when writing later that "the Jews require a sign" (1 Cor. 1:22). Perhaps he was amongst those Jews who asked this question; for Paul would have been living in Jerusalem at this time. Time and again, Paul's preaching and pastoral work reflects his own weaknesses, just as ours should. Cynical Israel asked exactly the same of Moses, in effect; superficially, "the people believed" (Ex. 4:31) after they saw the signs. The hollowness of Israel's 'belief' in Moses was matched by the experience of Christ. And yet they still both loved Israel to the end despite this desire for the visible and concrete rather than the internal and spiritual.

2:19 *Jesus answered and said to them: Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up*- In what sense did the Lord raise up His own body? I think the answer lies in Jn. 5:19-21: "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father doing: for what things soever he doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner. For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth: and greater works than these will he show him, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth the dead and giveth them life, even so the Son also giveth life to whom he will. For neither doth the Father judge any man, but he hath given all judgment unto the Son; that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father". This makes it clear that all power and possibilities that Jesus had, were in fact given to Him by God. In fact, whatever God is spoken of as doing, it would be appropriate to speak of the Son doing it. This was and is the nature of their relationship. The one thing that it would seem God did for Jesus, in a way that Jesus could not do for Himself, was the resurrection of Jesus from the dead by God. It is emphasized so many times that God raised Jesus from the dead. And yet it's as if Jesus almost enjoys making the point that even in the matter of resurrection, so connected is He with the Father, that in a sense, He raised Himself up- because whatever, literally whatever, God does, in a sense Jesus therefore does it too. This is why He could say about His life in Jn. 10:18: "I have power [authority] to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment received I from my Father". He was given this authority by the Father (1). But even in the very thing where it seems God would be separate from His Son- i.e. in resurrecting the Son- Jesus wanted to emphasize that in a sense, He was still united with the Father. Because the Father so loved the Son, that whatever the Father did, He

wished His Son to somehow be associated with. And so Jesus can speak of how in that sense, He [Jesus] was involved in His own resurrection- even though the repeated and obvious Biblical emphasis is upon the Father resurrecting His Son back to life. We see this theme touched on again in Jn. 10:18, where the Lord teaches that He has received a commandment to lay down His life and take it again, and yet He says that He has been given the authority / empowerment to do this, and therefore He will not die merely because of being unable to avoid the machinations of His murderers. So we could conclude that He obeyed a command to die and rise again- but was empowered by God to do this.

Another consideration in Jn. 2:19-21 is that Jesus speaks specifically about the 'raising up' of His body as a tabernacle. The 'body' of Christ frequently refers not so much to His literal body as to His spiritual body, i.e. the body of believers. In a sense, it is Jesus who has raised them up.

Notes
(1) It has been suggested to me by Chris Clementson that the Greek word *exousia* translated "power" or "authority" in Jn. 10:18 can mean 'privilege'- and this is a possible meaning given for the word by James Strong in his concordance. Other N.T. usage of the word definitely suggests 'power' or 'authority', but this idea of 'privilege' is worth bearing in mind.

2:20 *The Jews replied: Forty six years was this temple in building, and will you raise it up in three days?*- The connection between temple and building is intended to recall how God does not dwell in buildings made with hands. The Lord was saying that if *they* destroyed the temple [cp. killing His body], then in three days He would raise it up. His idea was clearly that *they* would destroy the temple; but at His trial, this is turned around against Him to imply that He had threatened to destroy the temple. But the Jews were in fact guilty of what they considered the most heinous crime-the destruction of the temple. Their killing of the Lord Jesus therefore meant that their temple would be destroyed in AD70; and they were responsible for that rather than the Romans.

2:21 *But he spoke of the temple of his body*- I noted on :18 that Paul may have been present at this time, and he alludes to some of the Lord's words here in 1 Corinthians. We have another such allusion here; for the other time we read of the body as a temple is in 1 Cor. 6:19, where the indwelling of the Spirit means that our bodies become the temple. The Lord's body becomes ours, ours becomes His, through the presence of His Spirit within. What was true of Him becomes true of us, if we are truly "in" Him.

2:22 *When he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he spoke this, and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had spoken*- This 'remembering' would have been the result of the function of the Comforter (14:26), which likewise works with us to illuminate Scripture so that we see its personal relevance. Unaided intellectual effort will not achieve this. Which is why there is no direct link between academic Bible study and personal spirituality.

Both Matthew and Mark record how the people later mocked the Lord Jesus over His comment that if the temple were destroyed, He would rebuild it in three days (Mt. 27:40; Mk. 15:29). This had also been an issue at the Lord's trial (Mt. 26:60). Yet John records that when the Lord actually said those words, the disciples didn't believe those words and actually forgot them until the time of the resurrection (Jn. 2:22). The

implications of that are tragic. The Lord's critics remembered His words more than His disciples did. And as He stood there in the awful loneliness of His trial, and hung there in the desolation of crucifixion, and heard those taunts based around His earlier words... He would've known that His own men had forgotten those words and likewise disbelieved them. No wonder after the resurrection He raised the matter with them. My point in this context is that John's comment in Jn. 2:22 about the fact the disciples forgot those words until after the resurrection... is actually a conscious recognition by the disciples of their own tragic weakness in understanding and support of their Lord. And it is within their own preaching of the Gospel that they make this point. Our witness likewise should be shot through with allusion to our own moral fallibility.

2:23 *Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs which he did*- Israel also saw signs and believed for a moment, but not for long. As noted on :24 and :25, such belief is merely surface level. But it is still noted for what it was; it was not insignificant. The Lord Himself learnt from this, so that when faced with the appeal to come down from the cross so that they would believe, He resisted. Faith comes by hearing God's word; not by seeing miracles. The miracles recorded by John were all object lessons, intended to visually enhance the message being taught, and were not performed simply to meet human need.

2:24 *But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he understood mankind*- Reflect a while on what is really being taught in Jn. 2:23-25: "Many *believed* on his name, beholding his signs which he did. But Jesus did not *trust* [s.w. 'believed'] himself unto them, for that he knew all men, and because he needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man; for he knew what was in man". When a person trusts / believes in the Lord properly, unlike those who believed only a surface level, then the Lord trusts Himself unto them. He believes in them as they have believed in Him. Paul often speaks of how the Lord has trusted / committed [s.w.] the preaching of the Gospel unto him (1 Cor. 9:17; Gal. 2:7; 1 Thess. 2:4; 1 Tim. 1:11; Tit. 1:3). We believe, and therefore we speak forth the Gospel (2 Cor. 4:13).

Perceive the parallels within the Jn. 2:23-25 passage:
He knew all men = He knew what was in man
Jesus did not *trust* [s.w. 'believed'] himself unto them = because he needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man.
If we truly believe in Jesus, He believes in us, and we therefore bear witness concerning Him. If we don't truly believe in Him, He will not commit / trust / believe Himself unto us. But by grace we have truly believed. It is therefore axiomatic that we bear witness of Him. God has therefore trusted us with the job of preaching His Gospel. That He trusts us, believes in us, is a surpassing thought. If you trust someone completely with a task, to the point it is clear that now if they don't do it, it won't be done, they often respond with a maturity and zest which wouldn't be seen if they merely were given partial responsibility [children are a good example of this]. And so God has done with us.

There seems a purposeful ambiguity in how the process of calling upon the name of the Lord is described in the Greek text; it can mean both us calling upon ourselves His Name, and also His Name being named upon us by Him. Joel 2:32 says that all those whom *the Lord* calls will *call on His Name*, a prophecy fulfilled in baptism. In similar vein, the Lord Jesus lived, died and rose as the representative of all men; and those who know and believe this chose to respond by identifying themselves with Him in the symbolic death and resurrection of baptism, and subsequent life in Christ-

they make Him their representative, as He has chosen to be theirs. They respond to His willing identification with them by living a life identified with Him. Likewise if a man truly believes in Christ, He will 'commit himself' unto that man- the very same word for 'believe in[to]'. We believe into the Lord, and He believes into us.

2:25 *And because he did not need any testimony concerning himself from any human being. For he understood what was in man*- See on :24. One repeated theme of the Gospel records is that "Jesus perceived / understood…" (Mt. 22:18). We read this so often. Now it could mean that a bolt of Holy Spirit informed the Lord of the contents of men's minds. But I prefer to think that He was so sensitive to people that somehow He was able to read minds, to read body language, to be perceptive to a very high degree (Jn. 2:24,25). And so as the mind and compassion of Jesus become ours, so it seems to me that we too will develop better people skills, become more perceptive of what a contact is really driving at, what their real hang ups are… what they really and truly seek and need. "He knew what was in man" (Jn. 2:25) may be a description of how far the Lord got in this kind of thing; rather than an indication of some magical gift He was given. And so when I am asked 'How best to preach? What to say to people…?', there is no simplistic answer. It's a matter of who we are, of our own perception and reflection of Jesus and of others, not the specific form of words we may use. The Lord doesn't need testimony from us as men; but He asks us to make it. All the work of preaching and witness is therefore for our benefit; it is we who learn and have our faith deepened by articulating our faith to others. He Himself has no need of it in itself.

JOHN CHAPTER 3

3:1 *Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews*- There were no more than 5000 Pharisees. The chances are that Saul the Pharisee knew him, and the conversion of Nicodemus would have been another prod in Saul's conscience which he kicked against. I suggested on 2:9 that he may have been the "master of the feast" to whom the Lord's new wine was brought.

3:2 *The same came to him by night, and said to him: Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God. For no one can do the signs you do, except God be with him*- Although miracles do not lead to permanent faith, the Lord's miracles all the same demonstrated that He was from God. Even His hardest enemies could not deny that His Spirit could produce notable miracles (Acts 4:16). "*We* know..." may well be a tacit admission that even the Pharisees recognized the Lord's connection with God. The fact many Pharisees later "became obedient to the faith" would suggest that their madness against Him was a function of their bad conscience. "This is the son, come let us kill Him" likewise reflects their passive, maybe subconscious, recognition that He was from God.

Nicodemus says that he perceives that Jesus is "from God" because of His miracles. But the Lord replies that only if a man is born again can he see or perceive the Kingdom of God; and only if he is born again by baptism of water and spirit can he enter into the Kingdom. It's easy to overlook the fact that the context of the Lord's comment was about His being Messiah, and how men could perceive / recognize that. If we read "the Kingdom of God" as a title of Himself, all becomes clear. Through baptism, birth of water and spirit, we enter into Christ. He was then and is now, the very essence of the Kingdom; the ultimate picture of the Kingdom life. There was a perfect congruence between His message about the Kingdom, and His own character.

And this is what will give our preaching of that very same Kingdom a like power and convicting appeal to men and women.

3:3 *Jesus answered and said to him: Truly, truly, I say to you: Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God*- "Anew" is literally 'from above'. Natural descent was not enough to see the Kingdom; which was a direct hit on the Jewish idea that by reason of birth they were the children of the Kingdom. Again we see a connection to the prologue; we are to be spiritually born not of the will of the flesh but "of God" (1:13).

Seeing the Kingdom is developed in :5 to "enter the Kingdom". The contrast between seeing and entering is clearly alluding to Moses, who was allowed to see the Kingdom but not enter it. The Lord is inviting His followers to imitate Moses- a very high challenge to those under the influence of Judaism, who considered Moses to be the unreachable pinnacle of human spirituality. The Lord gently makes this challenge by firstly inviting Nicodemus to become as Moses who saw the Kingdom- and then saying that actually, he could come to a higher status than Moses, and actually enter the Kingdom. We find here the Lord equating the promised land, which Moses saw but could not enter, with His Kingdom. Given the many allusions to Moses in John's Gospel, I submit that the Lord was surely saying something about Moses' seeing of the land before he died (Num. 27:12). It's as if He felt that Moses' seeing the land meant that he would ultimately enter it. To be enabled to see the land, with 'born again' special eyesight, was therefore a guarantee that Moses would enter the Kingdom. And Is. 33:17 speaks of beholding the King in his beauty and seeing "the land that is very far off" [an obvious allusion to Moses seeing the land] as a picture of ultimate salvation. Note the parallel in Jn. 3:3,5: "Except a man be born again, he cannot *see* [perceive] the kingdom of God… he cannot *enter* into the kingdom of God". If we truly see / perceive the things of the Kingdom in this life, then we will enter it in the future. Israel 'saw' the land physically through the spies (Num. 13:18; 32:8), but were told that they would "not see the land" (Num. 14:23; 32:11; Dt. 1:35). Again, as in the Lord's teaching, 'seeing the land' is put for 'entering' into it. Knowing facts about the future Kingdom doesn't mean we will enter it. But really 'seeing' the things of the Gospel of the Kingdom will by its very nature change us into people who will enter it. For we will be living the essence of the Kingdom life right now. Israel through the spies went to 'see' the land (Num. 13:18), but could not *enter* it because of their unbelief (Heb. 3:19). They didn't 'see' it in the sense of perceiving what God's Kingdom was all about. They only saw the physicality of the land; and this wasn't enough to enter it. The synoptics' formula that he who believes the Gospel and is baptized will be saved is matched by John in Jn. 6:40: "every one that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day". Believing the Gospel of the Kingdom is matched by seeing / perceiving the Son. This is the basis.

3:4 *Nicodemus said to him: How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?*- When Nicodemus asked "How can a man be born [again]…?", he wasn't being facetious. He was asking a genuine question, which we've all had in one form or another. Can a person really totally change? Aren't the influences of our past life, our humanity, simply too great to break totally? Aren't there human ties that bind, bind so closely that they can never be completely thrown off? "Truly truly I say unto you", the Lord replied, 'Yes'. There is a doctrine of a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), whereby we really can be made new people. This is a ladder to reach to the stars. We can overcome sin, bad habits

and thought patterns. We may well think that we can't; the way was set, the die cast, the destiny mapped out, the genes determined; our background, upbringing, life path was as it was, and so we are as we are. But we *can* be made new. Sin need no longer have dominion over us, as Paul says in Romans 6; or as early Genesis put it, "you shall rule over [sin]" (Gen. 4:7).

The extent of grace is reflected in the Lord's teaching about being born again. A person neither begets nor bears himself; but the Lord says that this must happen. The born again person has to receive a new origin- evidently something we can't give ourselves. The new birth is therefore only possible through an acceptance of grace. Thus in Jn. 1:12,13 a parallel is drawn between "all who receive him" and those "who were born… of God". Going even further, 1 Jn. 5:1 and 1 Jn. 4:8 [noting the tenses and context] suggest that faith and love are the evidence of this new birth rather than the cause of it.

Dodd in *The Interpretation Of The Fourth Gospel* shows how constantly John is referring to Philo- e.g. Philo denied any possibility of spiritual rebirth, whereas John (Jn. 3:3-5) stresses how needful and possible it is in Christ. The very abstract views of Philo are challenged when John comments that the *logos* has become flesh- real and actual, handled and seen, in the person of the Lord Jesus. Clearly those to whom John was preaching were influenced by Philo and he seeks to address their issues. Philo claimed that the *logos* was an Angel- whereas John effectively denies this by saying that the *logos* became a real and actual human being. Those Christians who claim Jesus was an Angel- and they range from Jehovah's Witnesses to those who claim Jesus appeared as an Old Testament Angel- should all stand corrected by John's argument against Philo. In chapter 11 of his book, Dodd makes the observation that there was a tension between Jewish monotheism, and the many gods of Greek mythology. He shows how these ideas were reconciled by bringing the gods into some kind of family relationship with each- thus Hermes and Apollo became sons of Zeus, and all were seen as emanations of the one God. This is highly significant for any study of how the Trinity came into existence- the stage was set for the idea of a small family of gods to develop, all supposedly emanations of one God. See on Jn. 5:39.

3:5 *Jesus answered: Truly, truly, I say to you: Except one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God!*- Tit. 3:5 clearly alludes here: "He saved us by the washing [laver] of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit". The gift of the Spirit associated with baptism is vitally necessary; water alone will not save. At baptism we are born of (or by) water-and-spirit (the Greek implies one act, combining water and spirit). See on 1 Cor. 12:13. As the prologue states, birth is not of ourselves; we were born not of the will of the flesh but of God (1:13). It is Christ, not the actual baptizer, who brings a person to new birth and actually does the moral washing of a person from their sins when they are baptized. Consider these simple parallels within John's Gospel:

John 3:5	John 13:8
Unless	If
One is born of water and Spirit	I do not wash you
He cannot enter into the Kingdom	You have no part in me

Not only does this reflect the crucial importance of baptism; it indicates that it is the Lord Jesus who does the moral washing of a person when they are baptized. Once

we accept that, then *who* performs baptisms becomes irrelevant. And all the way through, we see His grace; our spiritual life and existence has its source in His activity and not our own.

3:6 *That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit*- I have consistently noted that the ideas of the prologue are developed throughout John's Gospel. Here, the allusion is again to 1:13. Those in the new creation are born not of the will of the flesh but "of God", or as is stated here, "of the Spirit", seeing that "God is Spirit" (4:22). We had no say in our coming into existence, neither physically nor spiritually. It is for us to use the grace of life, both natural and spiritual, to the best of our ability. But the initiation of that life was not from us, it was of the Spirit. We did not come to the new creation through our own Bible study or good living. It was all of the Spirit. The idea here in :6 is that like produces like; he that is born of the Spirit is spirit. And yet this is true only potentially; the Corinthians received the Spirit but were later "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1).

3:7 *Do not marvel at what I said to you: You must be born anew*- Nicodemus considered himself spiritually mature, hence the appeal for him not to marvel that he must be born again. The idea that we must fundamentally change and be changed, become someone we were not previously, allow our innermost person to be radically reborn... is not really what established, middle aged, middle class people want to hear. And so the Lord had to urge Nicodemus: "Do not marvel...".

3:8 *The wind blows where it wills, and you hear its sound, but do not know from where it comes and where it goes. So is every one that is born of the Spirit*- Nicodemus was from the mindset that we are masters of our own spiritual destiny; by dint of academic, syllable by syllable Bible study, poring over the ancient texts, we can forge our own path towards the Kingdom. But the Lord had told him that we must be born of the Spirit and not of the will of man; to be born of something implies process beyond our direct, conscious control and volition. What is born of the Spirit is spirit; for like begets like. If we are to be spiritual people and thus see the Kingdom, we are to allow to operate a process greater than ourselves, preceding the time of our conscious choices. Those born of the Spirit sense this; remember that in Hebrew, "wind" and "spirit" are the same word. Here, "wind" translates the same Greek word translated "spirit" in the same verse. As the wind comes from somewhere and goes somewhere, so the Spirit works to bring about our spiritual birth.

Those born of the Spirit cannot clearly define from where or how they came about, at least not in secular terms. If we ask ourselves how it is that at this moment, we believe... the answers are so nuanced that we cannot but avoid the impression that on a secular, material level, it is indeed all somewhat mysterious. In the first century, a person was understood in connection with who their parents and ancestors were. Hence some Biblical characters are referred to as the son of X who was the son of Y who was the son of Z. Plato summed it up when he said that good people were good "because they sprang from good fathers". This is where the genealogies of Jesus would've been so hard to handle for some- because Matthew stresses how the Lord had whores and Gentiles in His genealogy. And it's also where the New Testament doctrine of the new birth and the new family in Christ were radical- for it was your family and ethnic origin which were of paramount importance in defining a person within society. John's Gospel especially emphasises the great desire to know from whence Jesus came (Jn. 3:8; 6:41,42; 7:27,28; 8:14; 9:29)- and the lack of any solid, concrete answer. To say that God was quite literally His Father was just too much for

most people to handle. And here we are being told that every one born of the Spirit is the same.

But birth of the Spirit depends upon 'hearing the sound' of the wind / spirit. This phrase 'hear the sound' is literally 'to understand the voice'. The same words are found in :29 of how John heard the Lord's voice; those who "hear the voice" of God's son shall live (5:25,28); His sheep "hear His voice" (10:3,16,27); those "of the truth hear My voice" (18:37); the Lord knocks, but He enters in to those who "hear My voice" (Rev. 3:20). Birth of the Spirit is not therefore completely arbitrary; there must be a hearing of the Lord's voice in His word. But even then, there is the mystery of grace attached to quite where the call came from, and to where we are being led. Just as the wind of the Spirit can be felt by its effects, but not concretely seen and defined.

Perhaps the idea is that Nicodemus heard the sound, recognized that this man was from God; but could not tell / discern further. The position of the Jews was that "we cannot tell" (Mt. 21:27 s.w.) the authority of John the Baptist and his message about Jesus as Messiah. The same phrase "cannot tell" was used by John in rebuking the Jews for not being able to tell or know the Messiah in their midst (1:26 "Whom you know not"); the Jews at the wedding could not tell from whence the new wine came (2:9 s.w.); and the Lord has just used the term in :3 about 'not seeing' the Kingdom of God unless we are born again. This all encourages us to read "You hear the sound but cannot tell..." as meaning 'Yes, Nicodemus, you recognize My miracles, but you are not allowing yourself to perceive from whence I am and to where I go'- and He came from God and went to God. Nicodemus didn't want to recognize the intangible, the spiritual; to surrender the issues of the past and future to the movement of the Spirit, to grace.

3:9 *Nicodemus answered and said to him: How can these things be?*- The academic Old Testament scholar, the theologian, struggled to accept that the Spirit could operate like this. It was the struggle of head against heart, of visible against invisible, of secular against spiritual, of law against grace.

3:10 *Jesus answered and said to him: Are you the teacher of Israel and yet do not understand these things?*- "*The* teacher" could imply he held some specific office of theological teaching. The Lord seems to have expected Nicodemus to have figured out the Old Testament's teaching about the new birth (presumably from Ps. 51:10; Is. 44:3; Ez. 11:19; 18:31; 36:26; 37:14; 39:29; Ecc. 11:5). And the Lord castigates Nicodemus for not having figured it out. The very high standards which He demanded of His followers would only have had meaning if it was evident that He was Himself a real human who all the same was sinless. This was [and is] why the words of Jesus had a compelling, inspirational power towards obedience; for He Himself lived out those words in human flesh. The Lord of all grace was and is amazingly demanding in some ways. And He has every right to be.

Or it could be that the Lord is saying that if Nicodemus had studied Scripture as God intends, then he would have perceived that all is of grace and God's initiative, rather than of academic study.

3:11 *Truly, truly, I say to you: We speak that which we know and testify of that which we have seen; and you do not welcome our witness*- Note how the Lord changes pronouns: "*I* say to you, *We* speak…". He clearly identifies the preaching of His followers with His own witness. We are the branches, we make up the vine, we make up the Lord Jesus. Thus He spoke of "we..." to mean 'I...' here, such was the unity He

felt between Himself and His men who witnessed for Him. He asked Saul "Why persecutest thou *me*?" (Acts 9:4), again identifying Himself with His people. But this leads us to wonder whether John is not also speaking here; for the Gospel records are transcripts of the original teaching of the Gospel by, e.g., John and his team. The only other time we encounter the term "our witness" is again in John's writings, describing his own witness as "our witness" in 3 Jn. 12. The "you" who are addressed as not receiving the witness would connect with those Jews referenced in the prologue, who saw the light but remained in the darkness through not accepting it. In this case, John is here addressing that category, the "you [who] do not welcome / receive our witness", in the hope of converting even them. But primarily of course, the reference is to Nicodemus. He accepted that Jesus of Nazareth was clearly "from God" because of the miracles, but he did not really accept the witness of the Gospel- for it asked too much of him. And here we have a direct attack upon all nominal, surface level Christianity that refuses to openly come out for the One who lived and died for them. Quiet, private admission that He was "of God" is not enough; and this is a theme in John's Gospel. In his context, the tendency was to inwardly accept the truths of Jesus as God's prophet, but remain within the synagogue system acting as if they were Jews and not Christians.

3:12 *If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things?*- What were these earthly things that Nicodemus did not believe? In the same as Paul at times 'says things in human terms', so the Lord had likened the new birth to the earthly analogy of insemination, pregnancy and birth. Nicodemus failed to believe that; and so there was no point in telling him heavenly things. He needed to be born from above, from Heaven (:5); but there was no point telling him about the things of Heaven if he refused to believe and grasp the simple requirement for new birth, expressed as it had been in earthly language. The Lord is saying in more abstract terms what Paul had in view when he writes to his converts of how he cannot write to them of the meat because they can't even grasp the milk.

But I suggested on :11 that these words of the Lord may also be applicable to John personally in his preaching of the Gospel. He chooses to record the more heavenly, spiritual sayings of the Lord, whereas the synoptics record His more direct, earthly statements. These words would therefore be true of John too, as the Lord's representative. He had told his audience earthly things, explained the Gospel history just as [e.g.] Mark had done, in straightforward language. And they had not believed. So there was little chance they were going to now believe His presentation of the more Heavenly words of the Lord.

3:13 *No one has ascended into heaven, but he that descended from heaven, the Son of Man, who is in heaven*- Moses' ascents of the mountain were seen as representing an ascension to Heaven; but he had not ascended up to the "heavenly things" of which Christ spoke. Consider the spiritual loneliness of rising to heights no other man has reached, as far as Heaven is above earth. John the Baptist recognised this (Jn. 3:31).

This man Jesus standing before them was saying [in figurative terms] that He was in Heaven, had been in Heaven, had ascended there. Surely His abrupt shift of tenses and places is to suggest the Yahweh Name being manifested in Him. The language of 'coming down' is classically used in the OT in the context of Yahweh manifestation in theophany; yet it often occurs in Acts in the context of the preaching of the Gospel, as if our witness is a manifestation of the Name (Acts 8:5; 10:21; 12:19; 14:25; 18:22; 25:6).

John's Gospel especially makes many references to the idea of Christ's judgment being right now. Why is this? John was clearly written some time after the other Gospels. The early community of believers were expecting the Lord's return at any moment; but by the time John wrote, it was apparent that He hadn't returned as soon as they had hoped for. Perhaps his point was that much of what we are expecting at the second coming is in essence going on right now. The very 'coming' of Jesus was judgment (Jn. 3:13; 6:62; 16:28). Those who refuse to believe have already been condemned (Jn. 3:17-21). Whilst the other Gospels stress that we will receive eternal life at the second coming (Mk. 10:30; Mt. 18:8,9), John stresses that the essence of the life eternal is our present experience; we have passed from death to life (Jn. 5:24). We will be made children of God at the last day (Lk. 6:35; 20:36); but the essence of being God's children has begun now, when we are born again (Jn. 1:12). Yet John brings out his continuity with the other Gospels by speaking of both future and present condemnation (Jn. 12:48 cp. 3:18; 9:39); of future eternal life and present eternal life (Jn. 12:25 cp. 3:36; 5:24); and future resurrection and present 'resurrection' to new life (Jn. 6:39,40,54 cp. 5:21,24).

The context of John 3 is the Lord's discourse with Nicodemus. This passage highlights the difference between flesh and spirit, human understanding and spiritual perception, literal birth and the birth "from above" (Jn. 3:3,5). All this suggests that we are to understand 'Heaven' and (by implication) 'earth' in a figurative manner. The Lord Jesus speaks as if He has already ascended into Heaven- yet He spoke these words during His ministry. In any case, He speaks of how "the Son of man" will do these things, and not 'God the Son', as would be required by Trinitarian theology. To suggest that Jesus as Son of Man literally ascended to Heaven and descended to earth during His ministry is surely literalism's last gasp. There are many allusions to Moses throughout John's record, as if both the Lord Jesus and John were seeking to impress upon the audience that the Lord Jesus was indeed the Messianic "prophet like unto" Moses predicted in Dt. 18:15,18. Jewish writings of the time [e.g. *Wisdom of Solomon]* spoke of Moses' ascent of Sinai as an ascension into Heaven, descending to Israel with the Law (more references to this effect in Ben Witherington, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995) p. 100). This language is being picked up and applied to the Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus has just spoken of how believers in Him are to be "born from above" and "born of the Spirit" (Jn. 3:3,5). However, the same Greek words for "born" and "Spirit" are found in Mt. 1:20 and Lk. 1:35- in description of the virgin birth of Jesus. He was the ultimate example of one "born of the Spirit". And yet John's Gospel applies the language of the virgin birth to believers. We have another example in Jn. 1:13- the believers "were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God"- i.e., they were born "of the Spirit". My suggestion is that the Lord Jesus is saying in Jn. 3:13 that of course, He is the only one fully born of the Spirit, the only one in Heavenly places; but the preceding context makes clear that He is willing to count believers in Him as fully sharing His status. Further, we need no longer complain that His virgin birth makes Him have some unfair advantages in the battle against sin which we don't have. The spiritual rebirth experienced by all those truly born again by God's word, His "seed" (1 Pet. 1:23), is such that we in some way are given all the inclinations towards righteousness which the Lord Jesus had by virtue of His birth.

"Even the Son of Man who is in Heaven" may be John's comment rather than the Lord's actual words. Any serious student of John's Gospel will have come across this

problem of deciding what are John's inserted comments, and what are the actual words of Jesus (e.g. 3:13-17). The problem arises because the written style of John is so similar, indeed identical, to the style of language Christ used. The conclusion from this feature is that *the mind of John was so swamped with the words and style of the Lord that his own speaking and writing became after the pattern of his Master.* And he is our pattern in this. Not only are his comments within his Gospel exactly in harmony with the Lord's style, but also the style and phrasing of his own epistle reflects that of the Lord (e.g. compare Jn. 15:11; 16:24; 17:13 with 1 Jn. 1:4; 2 Jn. 12). Perhaps he *so* absorbed the mind of the Master that he was used to write the most spiritual account of the Lord's life. In a different way, Peter also absorbed the Lord's words to the point that they influenced his way of speaking and writing (his letters are full of conscious and unconscious allusions back to the Lord's words). He seems to have noted some of the Lord's catch phrases, and made them his own (as an Englishman may say "I guess..." after prolonged contact with an American). Thus "of a surety / truth" was one of the Lord's catch phrases (Lk. 9:27; 12:44; 21:3; Jn. 1:47; 6:55; 8:31; 17:8), repeated by Peter in Acts 12:11.

So in summary. The context of John 3 is the Lord's discourse with Nicodemus. This passage highlights the difference between flesh and spirit, human understanding and spiritual perception, literal birth and the birth "from above" (Jn. 3:3,5). All this suggests that we are to understand 'Heaven' and (by implication) 'earth' in a figurative manner. The Lord Jesus speaks as if He has already ascended into Heaven- yet He spoke these words during His ministry. He has just said in :12 that they will not believe / understand if He tells them Heavenly things. They weren't spiritually on His level. But He was. He was "in heaven" in that His mind was completely attune with God's in Heaven. In this sense He was "in heaven" as He spoke to them. But He had 'descended' from Heaven in that He didn't as it were sit in a cave nor a monastery, just enjoying His relationship with the Father. Instead He condescended to men by living and talking with them on a more human, understandable level; He 'descended' from Heaven and heavenly things to relate to those simple folk He had come to save. But at the same time, He was in His holy mind still with the Father; and that explains His present tense, that He "is in Heaven" as He spoke those words. He wasn't as it were so heavenly that He was no earthly good.

3:14 *As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up*- Perhaps these were the "heavenly things" which the Lord had intimated He wanted to tell Nicodemus of in :12. The simple idea is that during the 32 years of His life on earth, the Lord was "in heaven" in His mind. Just as we can be in this life, colonies of heaven on earth, as Paul would put it.

It was the serpent which gave salvation to sin-stricken Israel, not Moses; and the *serpent* represented Christ in this case. It was as it were a dead serpent; the Lord had put to death the power of sin within Himself. Moses "lifted up" the serpent in the same way as the Jews "lifted up" Christ in crucifying him (8:28). Moses drew attention to the serpent and its power to save, in the same way as his Law drew attention to how sin would be condemned in Christ as the means of our salvation. The connection between Moses “lifting up" Christ and Israel doing likewise is another indicator of how Moses was representative of Israel (cp. Christ). The altar "Jehovah-Nissi" connected Yahweh personally with the pole / standard / ensign of Israel (Ex. 17:15). Yet *nissi* is the Hebrew word used for the pole on which the brass serpent was lifted up, and for the standard pole which would lift up Christ. Somehow Yahweh Himself was essentially connected with the cross of Christ. “There is no God else

beside; a just God and a Saviour (Jesus)... look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth" (Is. 45:21,22) is evident allusion to the snake on the pole to which all Israel were bidden look and be saved. And yet that saving symbol of the crucified Jesus is in fact God Himself held up to all men. The Hebrew word *nasa* translated "forgive" is also translated 'bear' as in 'bearing / carrying iniquity'. When God forgave, He bore / carried sin; and the idea of carrying sin is obviously brought into visual, graphic meaning in the literal carrying of the cross by the Lord Jesus. Indeed, the Hebrew word *nes*, translated "pole" in the record of the bronze snake being lifted up on a "pole", is the noun for which *nasa* is the verb. The essence of cross carrying had therefore been performed by God for millennia, every time He forgave human sin. It's understandable, therefore, that He had a special manifestation in the final sufferings and death of His Son. See on Jn. 19:19.

Jn. 3:13,14 link the Lord's ascension to Heaven, and His 'lifting up' on the cross. They were all part of the same, saving process. Likewise the atonement is a function of His death and resurrection combined; it was only the empty tomb that gave the cross any power at all. "Lifted up" is literally to exalt; His lifting up by His enemies was in their eyes His final disgrace, to die the death of the cross; but to spiritual eyes, it was His greatest exaltation. There are many similar things in life today which from a secular viewpoint may be a man's nadir, but which from a heavenly perspective are his greatest exaltation. The process of death itself is often an example.

The same *must* which led Him to His passion (see on Mk. 14:49; Lk. 2:49) is the very same compulsion which "behoves" us to preach that passion which we have witnessed and benefited from. In His ministry, He had taught that we *must* be born again, and in the same discourse spoke of how He *must* be lifted up in crucifixion (Jn. 3:7,14). His cross, His will to die in the way He did, must be our inspiration. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and *we ought* to lay down our lives for the brethren" (I Jn. 3:16).

3:13,14 follow straight on from the discourse about being born again. John very much saw the new birth of the believer as a coming out of the Lord's pierced side; this was what enabled the new birth [see under 1:1 and 1:13]. 2 Cor. 5:17 likewise speaks of the new creation in the context of expounding the Lord's death. "Lifted up" translates a Greek word usually translated "exalt", and is used about the Lord's exaltation after His resurrection (Acts 2:33; 5:31). Although "no man hath *ascended up* to heaven" uses a different word, the idea is just the same. The word is usually used by John to describe the Lord's 'going up' to Jerusalem to keep and finally fulfil the Passover (2:13; 5:1; 7:8,10,14; 11:55; 12:20). John's comment that only the Lord Jesus has "ascended up to heaven" may therefore be a reference to both His crucifixion and ascension. His 'coming down' may have a hint of how John records His body being 'taken down' from the cross.

3:15 *That whoever believes may in him have eternal life*- Or, "Whoever believed in Him". 'Belief in Him' therefore specifically refers to looking upon the cross in understanding, and believing it, just as Israel had to look to the serpent to be saved from the death which was already in their blood stream. In John, 'seeing' is 'believing'. 'He' was and is His cross. There we see the epitome of Him. Jesus "by himself purged our sins" (Heb. 1:3) and yet it was by His cross and His blood that sin was purged. But He Himself was epitomized in His blood / cross. And so to believe in Him is to believe in Him crucified (Jn. 3:15,16). In the context, Nicodemus had claimed to kind of believe in Jesus in that he recognized the miracles must be of God. But the Lord is

saying this is not enough; to believe in Him is to believe in Him as the crucified saviour from our personal sins and death sentence within our blood stream. God's so loving the world was in the giving of His son to die. His sending His Son into the world was specifically through the cross [see on Jn. 1:14- this is another development of the prologue]. One wonders whether we gaze enough upon the cross.

Clearly enough, the bronze serpent lifted up on the "standard" was a symbol of Christ crucified. But time and again throughout Isaiah, we read that a "standard" or ensign will be "lifted up" in order to gather people together to it (Is. 5:26; 13:2; 11:12; 18:3; 62:10). This was the idea of an ensign lifted up. Thus our common response to the cross of Christ should be to gather together unto Him there. And we need to take note that several of those Isaiah passages are speaking about what shall happen in the last days, when divided Israel will unite on the basis of their acceptance of the crucified Jesus.

3:14-21 One of the most powerful links between the cross and the judgment is to be found in Jn. 3:14-21 (which seems to be John's commentary rather than the words of Jesus Himself). Parallels are drawn between:
- The snake lifted up on the pole (=the crucifixion), teaching that whoever believes in the crucified Christ should live
- God so loving the world (language elsewhere specifically applied to the crucifixion: Rom. 5:8; 1 Jn. 3:16; 4:10,11)
- God giving His Son (on the cross, Rom. 5:15; 8:32; 1 Cor. 11:24), that whoever believes in Him should live
- God sending His Son to save the world (1 Jn. 4:10; Gal. 4:4 cp. Jn. 12:23,27; 13:1; 16:32; 17:1)
- Light coming into the world (at His death, the darkness was ended).

All these phrases can refer to the life and person of the Lord; but sometimes they are specifically applied to the cross. And further, they are prefaced here in Jn. 3 by a reference to the Lord as the snake lifted up on the pole. The essence of the Lord, indeed the essence of God Himself, was openly displayed in its most crystallized form in the cross. There was the epitome of love, of every component of God's glory, revealed to the eyes of men. There above all, the light of God's love and glory came into the world. In this context John's comment continues: "This is the condemnation / judgment, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest". If we understand "the light" as pre-eminently the cross, we see further evidence that there indeed was and is the judgment of this world. The Lord described His impending death as "the judgment of this world" (Jn. 12:31); and here He says that the judgment of this word is that He is the light of the world and men shy away from Him. The link between the light of the world and the snake being lifted up on the pole would have been more evident to Hebrew readers and thinkers than it is to us. The "pole" on which the snake was lifted up was a standard, a pole on which often a lamp would be lifted up: "a beacon upon the top of a mountain... an *ensign* (s.w.) on an hill" (Is. 30:17). The 'light' would have been understood as a burning light rather than, e.g., the sun. The light of which the Lord spoke would have been understood as a torch, lifted up on a standard. The same Greek word is used in describing how the jailor asked for a "light", i.e. a blazing

torch, in order to inspect the darkened prison (Acts 16:29). Speaking in the context of the snake lifted up on a pole, Jesus would have been inviting His audience to see Him crucified as the light of their lives. And this would explain why Isaiah seems to parallel the nations coming to the ensign / standard / pole of Christ, and them coming to the Him as light of the world (Is. 5:26; 11:10,12; 18:3; 39:9; 49:22; 62:10 cp. 42:6; 49:6; 60:3).Lk. 1:78,79 foretold how the Lord would be a lamp to those in darkness- and this had a strange fulfilment in His death. His example there on the cross was a light amidst the darkness that descended on the world. In the light of His cross, true self-examination is possible. Significantly perhaps, the Greek word for “light" occurs in Lk. 22:56, where Peter sits by the “fire" and was exposed. It was as if Peter was acting out a parable of how the “light" of association with the suffering Christ makes our deeds manifest. The day of “light" is both the crucifixion, and the last day of judgment, when all our deeds will be made manifest before the light (Lk. 12:3). By coming to the cross and allowing it to influence our self-examination, we come to judgment in advance.

3:16 *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life*- The having of eternal life in John usually refers to something right now. The context is how stricken Israel looked upon the serpent and were given life; but he who looks in faith upon the lifted up Lord Jesus shall receive *eternal* life. In its present sense, this means that through the Spirit we can begin to live now the life we shall eternally experience in God's Kingdom. But that life is based upon our comprehending in faith the crucified Lord Jesus. He there becomes the practical inspiration for the new life. For 'seeing' Him there means we can no longer be passive; every aspect of daily living and thinking is affected.

“God *so* loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son" implies that the love of God for the world was channeled through the work of Christ. Note the import of the word "*so*" - not 'so much', but 'so, in this way...'. There are many connections between the love of God and the death of Christ, and it is easy to overlook them. For example, "God loved us, and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins... hereby ('in this') we perceive the love of God, because he laid down his life for us" (1 Jn. 4:10; 3:16). The love of God is "*in* Christ Jesus". Likewise, the love of Christ is so often linked with His death. Christ "Loved us, and washed us from our sins" (Rev. 1:5). He gave His life so that the world might have life (Jn. 6:51); and yet He gave His life for *us*. My conclusion is that the love of Christ was paraded for the whole world, especially the Jewish world, just as the serpent was available for all Israel. But only those who look to Him there in faith shall receive the life eternal. We thereby become "the world", we who *to God*, from His perspective, constitute "the world" with which He deals. "The world" in John's Gospel often means the Jewish world. The Lord died for *their* salvation fundamentally (Gal. 4:5), and we only have access to this by becoming spiritual Israel through baptism. See on 1 Jn. 2:15.

3:17 *For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through him*- It was absolutely possible that all Israel could have been saved. It was through their rejection of this plan that they condemned themselves. God's intention in giving His Son was that the Jewish world might be saved, in the first instance. For that is the common referent of "the world" in John. But if we wish to apply "the world" to "the whole world", we must grapple with the question: Why, then, the masses of humanity who never heard the name of Jesus? My comment would then be that it was potentially possible for the whole world to hear, it was God's wish and intention; but it was the dysfunction of His church, and His

refusal to intervene to force us another way, His commitment to honouring our freewill, which left those masses without the saving knowledge of Jesus. And the tragedy continues to this day.

3:18 *He that believes in him is not condemned. He that does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God*- Condemnation was not God's aim (:17); condemnation is therefore always self-condemnation. Whenever we encounter the message of salvation in Him, we face our judgment; and some even now are "condemned already" by their rejection of salvation in Him.

For we who believe, it is in this sense that in prospect we can be assured that we are saved by being in Christ. We can therefore live as "the sons of God, without rebuke... blameless" (Phil. 2:15) in God's sight (being so in the eyes of the world is almost impossible for a true believer!), in the same way as at the judgment we will be presented "holy and unblameable and unreproveable". It must be significant that the language of forgiveness in the New Testament constantly alludes to judgment: justification, appeal, counsel for the defence, advocate, accusation etc. are common ideas, especially in the Greek. The point of this may be to teach that the experience of forgiveness now does stand related to the judgment which we will receive at Christ's return. Thus if we are convicted of sin now, but aided by Christ as our advocate and therefore justified, we will have the same experience at the judgment seat.

3:19 *And this is the ground of condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light- for their works were evil*- Another reference to the prologue. But now "the light" is defined further as the lifted up Son of Man; perhaps the connection is in the way that a "light" was usually a torch, a fire lifted up, just as the serpent on the pole was lifted up. John is therefore speaking after the crucifixion; even after that, the Jews preferred darkness rather than to accept the crucified Jesus as light of their lives. Accepting Him there meant the new life, and an exposure of their works as evil. This is why people refuse the message of Jesus as light of their world- because morally it demands too much of them. Yet they excuse it as not getting the idea, misunderstanding, having genuine intellectual doubts. But here the Biblical reason is given, probing as it does to depths of the subconscious that are not knowable by the person themselves. The reason for not accepting the light is that men love darkness because their works are evil and they don't wish to have them exposed.

However, although these words are true of John's witness after the Lord's death, they are just as appropriate to the Lord Jesus, who was speaking them *before* His death to Nicodemus who had come to Him by night. Why by night? Because he feared openly demonstrating his faith. He would not come out in the light, because his works were evil.

The light coming into the world is parallel with God’s son coming into the world in the cross [see on Jn. 1:5,9]. Men “came to that sight" and turned away from it (Lk. 23:48). Our natures likewise resist us concentrating upon the cross. Something in us makes our minds wander at the breaking of bread. There our deeds are manifested. Thus the breaking of bread naturally brings forth self-examination as we focus upon and reconstruct His death. There are our deeds reproved, and also made manifest. In murdering the Son of God, Israel showed how they hated the light; the same word is used in describing how “they hated me without a cause" (Jn. 15:25). John develops the idea in 1 Jn. 2:9,11, in teaching that to hate our brother is to walk in darkness;

whereas if we come to the light of God's glory as shown in the cross, we will love our brother. The cross is the ultimate motivator to love our brethren; this was one of the reasons why the Lord died as He did (Jn. 17:26). The light of the cross is the light of all men in God's world (1:4). The Lord later associates His being the light of the world with following Him; and 'following him' is invariably associated with taking up the cross and following Him. To follow the light is to follow Christ crucified (8:12). He there is to be the practical focus of our lives. Recall how the prologue states that His light is to be our life, we are to live life in the light of Him; and more specifically, in the light of the fact He died for us.

3:20 *For every one that does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, in case his works should be reproved*- If men love darkness, they are not therefore passive nor indifferent to the light. They hate it. John uses the same word four times in his first letter, warning that those who claim to believe but hate their brother are still in darkness. The division is not, therefore, simply between those who claim to believe and those who do not. If we hate our brother, we hate the Lord Jesus whom he represents; we hate the light, we are not led by the light of Him crucified. For if we are so led, hatred of our brother will simply not happen. And this is how to overcome feelings of hatred against others; not to steel will ourselves not to feel like that, but to positively focus upon the crucified Lord as light of our lives.

The Greek phrase "come to" has been used in the context for how Nicodemus had "come to Jesus" by night (:2; stressed again in 7:50). But the Lord seems to be saying that he had not truly come to Him. And He locates the deep subconscious reason as a fear that his works should be reproved. And this for all time is the reason why people will not come to Him completely, regardless of all the excuses they make. On the surface, "all men came to" Jesus (3:26); but He later comments: "But you will not come to me, that you might have life" (5:40). The feeding of the multitude likewise features multitudes 'coming to Him', and the Lord using the same phrase in explaining that if they truly came to Him, they would never again hunger and would certainly be eternally saved (6:5,35,37,44,45,65). There is a major play on the idea of 'coming to' Jesus. The warning is against surface level coming to Him, as if trooping out to church; and coming in truth, in which case we shall be utterly assured of our salvation. And our coming to the Lord will be matched by His coming to us, right now in this life, through the gift of the Spirit in our hearts. The same phrase is again used of this wondrous experience, where the Lord meets with man in man's own heart (14:18,23,28; 16:7).

Whenever God's Truth is presented to a man, the raw nerve of his conscience will somehow be touched. He is in God's image, and knows somehow he should respond to this. He may react by flinching away, covering up his weakness; He will not come to the light, lest his deeds are reproved. Or he may realise that he has been touched, and respond in humility. So often the introduction of the Gospel is treated by people with indifference: 'Oh, another leaflet', a woman may jovially respond when she's handed one of our tracts. But when she realises it's about Jesus… then, things will change. 'Oh, I see…' she may say, and her body language will change. She has been touched on the raw nerve. She may get angry because of this, or quickly change the subject- or let her conscience be touched.

3:21 *But he that does the truth comes to the light, that his works may be revealed, that they have been done in God*- Remember however that John's Gospel is a transcript of his preaching the Gospel to people who had lived both before and after the Lord's

death. Here he may be explaining why some in Israel accepted the light and others didn't. "The truth" is a phrase used about the covenant promises to the fathers- "the truth to Jacob and the mercy to Abraham which You promised to our fathers" (Mic. 7:20). Those who grasped the real implications of that covenant 'did the truth' and were looking for the light. I suggest this is the idea here, rather than the impression that people who did good works would find in the Lord Jesus a justification of themselves. The Greek is however difficult here, and one manuscript reads "that the work which is between God and him may be known".

But these words are also true for our later generations. John later defines 'doing the truth' as walking in the light (1 Jn. 1:6). A healthy conscience provides some foretaste of the final judgment. He who does truth comes to the light, "that his deeds may be made *manifest*" (Jn. 3:21), the reproof of a healthy conscience makes our failings *manifest* (Eph. 5:13) as they will be made *manifest* at the future judgment (Lk. 8:17; 1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5; 1 Tim. 5:25). This is why Solomon when reflecting on the human seats of judgment so wished that God would *now* make men manifest to themselves, make them realize the animal depravity of their natures, because there would be a *future* judgment of every purpose and work (Ecc. 3:16-18). If we love darkness and refuse to come to the light that our deeds may be manifest (Jn. 3:20), then we will be returned to the darkness in the last day. Therefore willing self-examination and self-correction now, a true response to God's word, a realistic coming to the light- this means we will not be thrown into the darkness in the end. But the question of course occurs: do we *really* let God's word influence our behaviour to the extent that we *really* change? Or are we just drifting through the Christian, church-going life...? The children of God and those of the devil are now made manifest (1 Jn. 2:19; 3:10), even in the eyes of other believers (1 Cor. 11:19). His judgments are now made manifest (Rom. 1:19) in that we know His word, His judgments; in advance of how they *will* be made manifest in the future judgment (Rev. 15:4). We must all be made manifest before the judgment seat, but we are made manifest unto God (s.w.) even now (2 Cor. 5:10,11).

There’s a clear connection here with how Nicodemus came out into the light after the crucifixion. Nicodemus had come to the Lord by night, scared to make the total commitment of coming out into the open. But the purpose of the cross was so that we might be separated out from this present evil world (Gal. 1:4). To remain in the world, to stay in the crowd that faced the cross rather than walk through the no man's land between, this is a denial of the Lord's death for us. The Lord's discourse that night three years ago had emphasized the need for every believer to come out into the light, not hide under the cover of darkness as Nicodemus was doing: "Men loved darkness... for every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be discovered. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest" (Jn. 3:19-21). This must be read in the context of the fact that this discourse was spoken to Nicodemus when he came to Jesus secretly, at night. It took three years and the personal experience of the cross to make Nicodemus realize the truth of all this.

3:22 *After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judea; and there he stayed with them and baptized*- He did not baptize, His disciples did (4:2). We see here the idea developed that the Lord's witnesses are Him, in essence. And the same connection between Him and ourselves is especially seen and felt in the work of witnessing for Him.

3:23 *And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there; and people came to be baptized*- This is clear evidence that John was baptizing by immersion, seeing he chose a place with "much water". It appears this was a fairly remote place; as the Lord went to the top of a mountain to teach, so John seems to have required some effort to be shown by his listeners.

3:24 *For John had not then been thrown into prison*- This information is added perhaps to give the impression that right up until his arrest, John was teaching and baptizing.

3:25 *Then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification*- Presumably because both the Lord and John were baptizing at the same time. 'Whose baptism is valid?' would have been the question. Full Christian baptism of the kind commanded in the great commission was into the Lord's death and resurrection, and the whole symbolism of burial and resurrection with Him required that it could only happen after He had died and risen. So the baptisms performed before that were not full Christian baptisms, but rather statements of repentance and a desire to receive cleansing / purification. If Israel had indeed repented then the path would have been prepared and the Lord could have come in glory. But many of those baptized turned around and crucified their Saviour.

3:26 *And they came to John, and said to him: Rabbi, he that was with you on the other side of the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, the same baptizes, and all men come to him*- I suggested on :25 that the baptisms of the Lord and John were essentially the same. We get the impression that there were some loyalists to John the Baptist who were alarmed that the Lord was achieving more baptisms than he was. I noted earlier that John's Gospel was partly directed at those who clung to loyalty to John the Baptist even after his death. John's total disinterest in a personal following is therefore emphasized in John's Gospel.

3:27- see on Lk. 1:14.

John answered and said: A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven- The particular thing 'received' here was the Lord's apparent success in preaching. Those who came to the Lord were given to Him by God. John the Baptist understood what is later made explicit in John's Gospel; that nobody can come to the Son unless they are called by the Father (14:6).

3:28- see on Mt. 3:7.

You yourselves can testify that I said: I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him- It was only at the Lord's baptism that John the Baptist realized that Jesus of Nazareth, his relative, was in fact the Christ. But now, John is clearly stating that this Jesus is the Christ and they ought to follow Him instead. The Gospel of John is therefore making the point that those disciples of John who were still loyal to him rather than the Lord were out of step with John's own clear words.

3:29 *He that has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, that stands by and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. In this my joy is made full*- This is supreme Christ-centredness in witness. His joy was made full to see the Lord, the groom, united with His bride- that group of uncertain, little understanding folks who were coming out to profess repentance of their sins. John's words remained with the Lord; for He later speaks of how His joy is fulfilled in the disciples, and their joy is fulfilled in Him (15:11; 17:13). The idea was not lost on John himself, who later writes to his converts that "my joy" is that they walk in truth,

focused on the Lord Jesus (3 Jn. 4). All gathering of a personal following is here utterly precluded. Our work is to bring people to the Lord Jesus; and the mutual fulfilment of their joy in Him, and His in them, is to be the fulfilment of our joy. Hence Paul can reason that his eternal joy will be to see his converts eternally united with the Lord.

Although John preached the excellence of Christ, he didn't even consider himself to be part of the mystic bride of Christ; for he likens himself to only the groom, watching the happiness of the couple, but not having a part in it himself (Jn. 3:29). See on Jn. 1:10.

3:30- see on Eph. 3:8.

He must increase but I must decrease- John is surely alluding to the LXX of Is. 9:7: "Of the increase of his kingdom and peace there shall be no end, sitting upon the throne of David". John naturally hoped that Israel would indeed accept the Lord Jesus, and thus the glory could come to Zion over the road John the Baptist had prepared. This was not to be, although ultimately the eternal increase of His Kingdom shall indeed come upon this earth. And the prospect of that Kingdom should lead us to proclaim with thankfulness that "I must decrease". The things of His Kingdom and Name, which we profess faith in through accepting the Gospel, shall then be all and in all. Whilst we as persons shall eternally exist in our own unique form, the "I", the unpleasant ego, shall be no more. John was deeply mindful of his weaknesses and perhaps he had this ego in view.

3:31- see on Mt. 3:7.

He that comes from above is above all. He that is of the earth is of the earth, and of the earth he speaks. He that comes from heaven is above all- As noted on :30, John felt his own diminution in the face of the eternal Kingdom, and before the Lord Jesus. The higher we perceive the Lord Jesus, the less problem we will have with ego, the more attainable will be the idea of truly selfless service. Nicodemus and the Jews didn't understand earthly things, and so they would not understand heavenly things (:12). This is a tacit admission that they did not [at that point] accept John's message, the earthly voice as opposed to the heavenly. See on :34.

3:32 *What he has seen and heard, of that he testifies; and no one receives his witness*- "We" testify what "we" have seen and heard (:11); and John later writes that "we", he and his fellow disciples, testified to their converts what they had seen and heard (s.w. 1 Jn. 1:1,3). "No one" may mean 'very few'; the majority preferred the darkness. Or it could be that :32 is the recorded speech of John the Baptist, lamenting that although many had been baptized, not one of his disciples was accepting the testimony of what he had seen and heard at the Lord's baptism- the statement that Jesus of Nazareth was Messiah and Son of God. But John picks up these words later in 1 Jn. to show that in fact all was not lost, as John had felt in his depression. For John and the disciples had received his testimony, and passed it on to their converts. In this case, John the Baptist would be a true Elijah-type prophet, for he too felt that he alone was faithful, when there in fact another 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Indeed, the next verse :33 is John the Gospel writer's comment to the effect that actually, some did receive his witness.

3:33 *He that has received his witness has certified that God is true*- See on :32. John in his depression though that nobody had received his passing on of the vision he beheld at the Lord's baptism, connecting Jesus of Nazareth with Messiah and Son of

God. But John the Gospel writer now adds that some had received John the Baptist's witness; indeed, John was one of them (1 Jn. 1:1,3). "Truth" is a concept associated with the promises to the fathers (Mic. 7:20). By accepting Jesus of Nazareth as the seed / Messiah promised to Abraham and David, the believer has certified God's truth, the truth of His promises of salvation. By accepting those words of God (:34) to be truly of God and fulfilled in Christ, we set or affix our seal to them- we undertake to have them as binding upon us in daily life. Accepting the proposition that the Bible is inspired is therefore not a merely academic thing, assenting to a true proposition. It has to affect our lives. And note the humility of God here- that human beings can affix the seal of validation to the truth of God's word. This works out in the way in which lives of obedience to God's word are actually an affixed seal and testament to the truth of those words. Thus it becomes our lives which are the greatest proof of Biblical inspiration and the truth of God's word of promise. We each have a personal seal, as it were, with our own personal characteristics on it; and we set to our seal the fact that God is Truth, that He is the God of our covenant ("Truth" is a word associated throughout the OT with God's covenant relationship with men).

3:34 *For he whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He does not give him the Spirit by measure*- John was given the Spirit to speak as he did, but by specific measures. The Lord had the Spirit generally and constantly, not just measured out for some specific works. John sees a direct connection between the Lord's words and the Spirit. His words were directly inspired; and the Lord Himself states that His words are Spirit in 6:63. The "For he whom God has sent..." links back to the statement in :31 that John speaks of the earth, but the Lord from Heaven. The Lord's being "from Heaven" refers therefore to the fact that He had been given God's Spirit without measure in order to speak from Heaven, from God. There is no reference to any descent of some pre-existent Jesus from Heaven to earth. That is to miss the context and force a crude literalism on the clearly more abstract language being used here.

3:35 *The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand*- We have just read that God so loved the world that He gave His Son (:16). That love for the world was focused through His love of the Son. The "all things" are those spoken of in the prologue- the all things of the new creation, of persons who believe into Him. We as believers are in His hand. Mt. 11:27 contains this thought too, when the Lord explains that the Father's giving all things to Him means that men can only know the Father if the Son reveals Him to them. The "all things" again refers to believers. John 10 expresses similar ideas; we are as the Lord's sheep safe in His hand and cannot be snatched away. This leads on to the assurance that we have right now the eternal life (:36).

3:36- see on Eph. 2:3.

He that believes on the Son has eternal life; but he that does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains upon him- When we read of "eternal life" being granted to us now, we are reading about "the life belonging to the age", i.e. the Kingdom of God in the future. The idea is that we can live the life which we will eternally live- right here and now. We can experience the quality of that life now. And if we don't… we don't have the guarantee of eternity in the Kingdom. For in spiritual terms, in terms of essential spiritual experience, there will be a seamless transition between the spiritual life we now enjoy, and that which we will experience in the future Kingdom. The location of that eternity will be on earth; and yes, there must be death, resurrection, judgment and immortalization of our body. But those more

‘physical’ realities don’t figure so deeply in the message which John is putting across in his record of ‘the Gospel’. Notice how in Jn. 3:36, 'having everlasting life' is paralleled with 'seeing life'; to perceive and live what God's Kingdom life is all about, is in a sense to 'have' it.

For those who refuse to obey the Gospel, having heard it, then God's wrath will come and remain upon them right now, until judgment day. The idea is not that God is angry with all men and that wrath abides on everyone who is outside the Lord Jesus. These words are alluded to several times later in the New Testament, about the wrath to come upon the Jews, the "children of disobedience", in that they heard the Gospel and rejected it by killing God's Son (Rom. 1:18; 2:5; 3:5; 9:22; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6).

JOHN CHAPTER 4

4:1 *When therefore the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John*- When some want to see spiritual work in competitive terms, it's better to just not play that game at all, and move away or onwards. Making and baptizing disciples is the language of the great commission (Mt. 28:19). We are to follow the Lord's example in our own outreach; not merely baptizing but making men disciples, independent learners of Him.

4:2 *Although Jesus himself did not baptize but his disciples*- As noted on 3:22, the Lord is described as doing the baptisms, and indeed the Pharisees perceived it that way too (:1). Especially in the doing of His work of witness, we are counted as Him. We recall that at this stage the disciples still believed in ghosts, demons and the associated wrong ideas of immortal souls and disembodied existence. But still they baptized people. The Lord hardly made the bar very high, right from the start of His ministry.

4:3 *He left Judea and departed again into Galilee*- It could be that as today, numbers of converts and baptisms led to jealousy which soon morphed into violent opposition, and the Lord therefore withdrew from the Jerusalem area.

4:4 *It was necessary for him to pass through Samaria*- This is significant, as this was not from geographical necessity. The Lord was in the Jordan valley (Jn. 3:22) and could easily have taken the valley road north through Bethshan into Galilee, avoiding Samaria entirely. See on Lk. 2:49. Pious Jews avoided travelling through Samaria; the Lord was demonstrating that He was not interested in the lines of separation drawn by the pious. The necessity however may have been because of some plot against Him arising from jealousy over the baptisms (see on :3), and so He took the route which He knew the Pharisees would not take for fear of defilement by the Samaritans. It is yet another window onto His humanity that He faced things like geographical and logistical necessity.

4:5 *Sychar, near to the parcel of ground which Jacob gave his son Joseph*- This place was rich in Jewish history; it was the parcel of ground purchased by Jacob, where Joseph's bones were buried (Josh. 24:32), and where Jacob had built an altar (Gen. 33:18-20), called 'The mighty one, the God of Israel'. Jacob had also conquered territory there with his own sword and bow, fighting the people of the land. Abraham had been there (Gen. 12:6), and Shechem ['Sychar'] was one of the oldest towns in Israelite history. But at the time of the Lord Jesus, it was inhabited by the despised Samaritans. It's rather like a town square with a war memorial and traditional British architecture in the United Kingdom- which is now inhabited by Moslem immigrants,

with the Anglican church now turned into a Mosque. And one of the local women with a clearly immoral background- was one of the Lord's star converts. And she in turn converts the local menfolk to Christ. Just as traditional white churches in the West would view the conversion of asylum seekers and recent darker skinned immigrants with suspicion and disgust, so we can imagine people responding to the Lord's conversion of this woman.

4:6 *Jacob's well was also there. Jesus, being tired from his journey, sat tired by the well. It was about the sixth hour*-Incident after incident in the mortal life of Jesus had echoes of the crucifixion to come. Consider how He met the woman at the well "at the sixth hour" (Gk.), He was thirsty, a woman got Him something to drink and encouraged Him in His work (Jn. 4:6 cp. 19:14,28). No wonder He spoke of His meeting with her as a finishing of the Father's work, which is the very language of the cross. He lived out the essence of the cross in that incident, just as we do, day by day.

The Lord's humanity is clearly indicated here. The sixth hour by Jewish time was midday; if Roman time, it was around 6 PM, when women went to get water. But the woman being separated rather from society may have come at midday, on her own.

4:7 *A woman of Samaria came to draw water, and Jesus said to her: Give me a drink*- Jewish men, especially religious leaders, were not supposed to speak with women publically- let alone with Samaritan women. Therefore we see here the Lord's open attitude and intentional breaking of such human taboose and barriers. The well was deep and the Lord had no rope or bucket; presumably the women brought their own equipment with them to the well. We see here His need; He had little strength, having walked all night, and He also lacked a rope and / or bucket to get water from the well. He in no way was "very God of very Gods".

4:8 *His disciples had gone into the city to buy food*- This doesn't necessarily mean that the Lord was left there alone. The disciples were likely more than "the twelve" [there were at least also Matthias and Joseph Justus present at this time, Acts 1:24-26]; and there were likely the ministering women too. Would they all really have gone into town to buy food and left the Lord exhausted and alone by a well? Surely some would have remained with Him. But there is also the possibility that the Lord sought time and space alone in prayer (as in Mk. 1:35; Lk. 6:12; 9:28). It could be that He told them all to go into the town, whilst He prayed alone, by the well. The Samaritan woman's appearance was therefore a direct answer to His prayers, which perhaps had focused upon the salvation of the Gentile Samaritans.

4:9 *The Samaritan woman replied to him: How is it that you, being a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink? (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans)*- The Lord's clothing and accent gave Him away as a Jew rather than a Samaritan. All through this record we see every evidence of His total humanity.

The woman of John 4 grew in her appreciation of Jesus, quickly. She addressed the Lord as: a Jew (4:9); "sir" (4:11); greater than Jacob (4:12); a prophet (4:19); the Christ (4:42); saviour of the world (4:42). M.R. Vincent (*Word Studies In The NT* Vol. 1 p. 113) has observed that Christ is progressively addressed as "Lord" as the NT record progresses; as if the community's perception of Him increased over time.

Being a Jew- The whole nature of being human means that we must live in this world, although we are not of it. Consider how Daniel's friends wore turbans (Dan. 3:21 NIV), how Moses appeared externally to be an Egyptian (Ex. 2:19), and how the Lord Himself had strongly Jewish characteristics (Jn. 4:9).

4:10 *Jesus answered and said to her: If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that said to you: Give me a drink, you would have asked of him and he would have given you living water*- The Lord's "living water", i.e. spring water, was offered in return for her well water. Surely this contrasts with Moses meeting his Gentile wife by a well; a relationship in which he gave her very little, and which was an indicator of a spiritual weak cycle in his life. The Samaritan woman immediately recognised Jesus as Jewish, just as Zipporah thought that Moses was an Egyptian (Ex. 2:19)- which is another comforting type of Christ's humanity.

"The gift of God" is clearly to be understood in John's thinking as the gift of the Spirit. The same phrase is used about it in Acts 8:20; 11:17; Rom. 5:15; Eph. 3:7. The living water is explained later as the same gift of the Spirit: "If anyone thirsts, let him came to me and drink. He that believes on me, as the scripture has said: From within him shall flow rivers of living water. He spoke of the Spirit, which they that believed in him were to receive. For the Spirit had not yet been received, as Jesus had not yet been glorified" (7:37-39). But that gift of the Spirit would only be given after the Lord's glorification. He was not therefore offering the woman anything immediately; He had in view what could be given her once His work on earth was completed. He could give her the living water right then in the same sense as He could give eternal life immediately; the promise was as good as the receiving, so certain was His word of promise. I noted in commentary on Acts that the gift of the Spirit is presented as an evidence that Gentiles also have equal access to the Father seeing they received the same gift. Hence the significance of this promise to a Gentile that she could receive this gift which would meet the spiritual thirst which the Lord correctly perceived in her.

We live in *newness* of life. The life in Christ is not a stagnant pond, but rather living water, spring water, bubbling fresh from the spring. And this is what we give out to others- for “he that believeth in me, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of springing water” for others (Jn. 4:10; 7:38). We can experience the life of Christ right now. His life is now made manifest in our mortal flesh (2 Cor. 4:11), insofar as we seek to live our lives governed by the golden rule: ‘What would Jesus do…?’.

4:11 *The woman said to him: Sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. From where then have you that living water?*- The well presumably required users to bring their own bucket or even rope. She had power over this exhausted Jew. But "living water" was known as the language of the Messianic age, and as a Samaritan, this woman would not have been unaware of it. I suggest that she is responding to the Lord's figurative language on the same level. How could this exhausted, very human Jew give this Messianic water- the well was deep, and spiritually speaking, it was very hard for Him to get it for her, surely... for after all... *He* surely was not the Messiah. His lack of a bucket to get the literal water was reflected in His obvious [to her] lack of ability to give the Messianic gift.

4:12 *Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his cattle?*- She is alluding to Jewish ideas of how Messiah would be greater than Jacob but not greater than Abraham or David. Not only was this man not Messiah, but Jacob was "our [Samaritan] father", she had a right to drink of this well, so she reasoned, because she [unlike Jesus the Jew] as a Samaritan was the legitimate descendant of Jacob. But the Lord didn't rise to her provocations; just as we need to ignore the petty aggression, subtexts and barbs of others in order to bring them to the greater truth.So much religious and doctrinal

controversy is hampered by this desire to correct the mistaken other on peripheral issues, and the essential issues are thereby overlooked and not engaged with.

4:13 *Jesus answered and said to her: Every one that drinks of this water shall thirst again*- The Lord doesn't argue with her over her take on descent from Jacob, even though she was wrong about it. He lost that battle to win the war. Even if the water in that well was hers and not His, it could not ultimately quench the human thirst for salvation. It is that thirst which our witness should address; we are perhaps "the salt of the earth" in that salt provokes thirst.

4:14 *But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst. The water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water, springing up to eternal life*- The human thirst for the Spirit would be met by the gift of the Spirit *within* our hearts. The water given would be the life eternal- the kind of life we shall eternally live. The reference is not to miraculous gifts, but to the ongoing gift of the Spirit within.

"With joy shall you draw water out of the wells of salvation" (Is. 12:3) is applied by the Lord to the present experience of the believer in Him (Jn. 4:14; 7:38). But Isaiah 12 continues to explain how the joy of that experience will lead to men saying: "The Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation [as He was for Israel at the Red Sea, cp. our baptism experience]... Praise the Lord, proclaim his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted". The exaltation of the Yahweh Name, the wonder of it, the sheer height of who Yahweh is, these things and our personal part in them is an unending imperative to witness these things world-wide. Men did not confess Jesus to others, despite nominally believing in Him, because they did not love the concept of the glory of God (Jn. 12:43 RV). To perceive His glory, the wonder of it all, leads to inevitable witness to others.

It was from the smitten rock that springing water came out. There is an endless inspiration in the cross, an endless source of that spirit of new life. And the influence of the cross cannot be passive; we will also give out living water, *we* will become as the smitten rock, and through our share in His crucifixion we will give out to others that same new and eternal life. But in the context of the Samaritan woman, the rock at that time was not yet smitten, the living waters of the Spirit not yet given as the Lord was not yet glorified.

Repeatedly, the Lord Jesus carefully worded His teaching in order to use the same words about Himself as about His disciples. He was the lamb of God; and He sent them forth as lambs amongst wolves; He was "the light of the world", and He stated that they too must be likewise. As He was the source of living water to us, so we are to be to others (Jn. 4:10,14). The Samaritan woman could be the source of living water to others, as indeed she was. John grasped this, by using even some of the language of the virgin birth about the birth of all God's children. It's as if even the Lord's Divine begettal shouldn't be seen as too huge a barrier between us and Himself. The wonder of the virgin birth is something which elicits the "Wow!" mentality; but the miracle continues into *our* lives.

4:15 *The woman said to him: Sir, give me this water, that I do not thirst ever again, nor come all the way here to get water*- I have earlier suggested that the woman perceived the Lord was using figurative language. And she now comes to believe that

the exhausted Jew by 'her' well can actually give her this water. It was quite a treck from the town to the well; spiritually, she wanted an end to the apparently endless journey to quench spiritual thirst. In our terms, an end to the reading of endless self-help books, hanging out on various 'spiritual' forums online; but actually have the Spirit within us.

Whoever drinks of the water of life will have *within* them a spring that also gives eternal life (Jn. 4:15). The purpose of a spring is to give water to men. The way the woman immediately led others to Him is proof enough of this. Experiencing the Lord's words and salvation *inevitably* leads to us doing likewise to others, springing from somewhere deep within. This was in fact one of the first things God promised Abraham when He first instituted the new covenant: "I will bless you (i.e. with forgiveness and salvation in the Kingdom)... and *you* shalt be a blessing" , in that we his seed in Christ would bring this same blessing to men of all nations by our witness (Gen. 12:2,3). When the Lord offered salvation to the woman at the well, He spoke of how it would be a spring of life going out from her. She wanted it, but apparently just for herself. Therefore when she asked to be given such a spring, the Lord replied by asking her to bring her husband to hear His words (Jn. 4:15,16). Surely He was saying: 'If you want this great salvation for yourself, you've got to be willing to share it with others, no matter how embarrassing this may be for you'. In a similar figure, the Bible begins with the tree of the lives [Heb.], and concludes with men eating of the tree and there appearing a forest of trees-of-life.

4:16 *Jesus said to her: Go, call your husband and come back here*- See on :15. Receipt of the spring of the Spirit is related to our desire to want to reach out and share spiritually with others. It also requires repentance; and she needed to repent. The Lord wanted her right away to be a source of Spirit to others, hence He asked her to return to Him with her "husband". Although the Spirit was not yet given, He realized that in prospect it could still be granted in some form because He was certain that He would indeed fulfil His mission and be "glorified" so that the living water of the Spirit could be poured out.

4:17 *The woman answered and said to him: I have no husband. Jesus said to her: You said well that you have no husband*- We note the Lord's positivity. Bear in mind that in their languages, "man" and "husband" are the same word. He could have said 'Wrong. You are living with a man. Don't lie to Me. Fess up and admit it, and then we can go further'. But He turned it around positively. He commends her for saying she has no man in the sense of a husband. The Lord picks up her deceptive comment positively, agreeing that her latest relationship isn't really a man / husband as God intends. I find His positive attitude here surpassing.

4:18 *For you have had five husbands; and he whom you now have is not your husband. This you have said truthfully*- See on :17. What was apparently an untrue, or less than fully truthful comment is turned around positively by the Lord, to demonstrate His style of imputing righteousness. The woman was evidently a sinner; and the Lord made it clear that He knew all about her five men. But He didn't max out on that fact; His response to knowing it was basically: 'You're thirsty. I've got the water you need'. He saw her spiritual need, more than her moral problem; and He knew the answer. When she replied that she had no husband, He could have responded: 'You liar! A half truth is a lie!'. But He didn't. He said, so positively, gently and delicately, 'What you have said is quite true. You had five men you have lived with. The one you now have isn't your husband. So, yes, you said the truth' (Jn.

4:16-18). He could have crushed her. But He didn't. And we who 'have the truth' must take a lesson from this.

4:19 *The woman said to him: Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet*- Now she is sure that this exhausted, dehydrated Jew is more than a random guy sitting by a well, cadging a drink off a Gentile. Yet having been convicted by Him of a sinful life, even though He did it in the kindest possible way, she prefers to wiggle out of those personal issues by getting into theology. We know from Acts 8 that people from Samaria formed a significant part of the earliest Christian community. Yet all converts are prone to return to their former beliefs in some ways at some times. The Samaritan view of Messiah was likewise that he would be the re-incarnation of a prophet, specifically Moses (Jn. 4:19,25). It therefore seems likely that the idea of a pre-existent Christ / Messiah developed as a result of the early Jewish and Samaritan converts returning to their previous conceptions of Messiah. For these were less taxing to their faith than the radical idea that an illiterate Jewish teenager called Marryam in some dumb Galileean village actually conceived a baby direct from God Almighty. Uninspired documents such as the *Preaching Of Pete*r and the *Gospel Of The Hebrews* also make the false connection between Jesus and a re-incarnated Moses, Elijah etc. Clearly enough, the idea of a pre-existent, incarnated Jesus had its roots in paganism and apostate Judaism.

4:20 *Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship*- Sin is serious. This is one of the most recurrent themes in the Bible. Yet with the characteristic blindness of human nature, it is one which fails to register with us as it should. 'Just' one sin in Eden led to death- and so much more than death. Time and again people missed the Lord's attempt to convict people of their sin. When He tells the Samaritan woman of the five men she'd had in her life, she responds by ribbing Him about whether God should be worshipped on Gerazim or in Jerusalem. She tried to move off the delicate issue of her morality into theological argument and strife about conflicting traditions (Jn. 4:18-20).

4:21 *Jesus said to her: Woman, believe me, the hour is coming, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father*- The Lord had promised the gift of the Spirit *within*. This made all arguments about sacred space utterly irrelevant and at best obsolete. We sense His eager hopefulness for response when He said to the woman: "Believe me, woman..." (Jn. 4:21 GNB). Even though she was confrontational, bitter against Jewish people, and perhaps [as it has been argued by some] pushing a feminist agenda in an inappropriate way... the Lord sought for *faith* in her above correcting her attitude about theological things.

4:22 *You worship that which you do not know. We worship what we know. For salvation is from the Jews*- The Lord went along with her as far as He could, but as in our witness to folks, there comes a time when we have to put our foot down. Salvation was "from the Jews" in that the Messianic saviour would be from them. And the identity of the Messiah was the issue here. The Lord doesn't take away from the Samaritans the fact they worshipped; but they worshipped in ignorance without accepting Messiah as being a Jew rather than one of their re-incarnated prophets (see on :19). There is a very similar situation in Acts 17:23, where Paul declares to people the God whom they had worshipped in ignorance through sacrificing to "the unknown God". The "we" cannot refer to Jews generally; for they did not know the Father nor His Son (8:19,27). He meant "we" as in Himself and the disciples who were now regrouping around Him. "We worship *what*" we know could as well be translated

"*who* we know". Acceptable worship of the Father was predicated upon acceptance of Himself as Messiah, the salvation of and from the Jews.

4:23 *But the hour comes and now is, when true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such worshipers are who the Father seeks*- The Lord's 'hour' which was to come was His death (2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23,27; 13:1; 16:32 Gk.; 17:1; 19:27). Yet in a sense the essence of His death was ongoing throughout His life; the 'hour' was to come, and yet was. Then, through the cross, true worship of the Father in spirit and in truth was enabled, when the veil of the temple was torn down, and the system of Mosaic worship ended. I have noted above that the Spirit was only to be given when the Son was glorified; but that hour was then and was also to come; therefore in a sense the Spirit could be given even then.

The 'true' worship of the Father doesn't imply necessarily a 'false' worship prior to it; it is the 'true' in contrast to the shadow that had existed before it (cp. the true vine, the true manna). But the true worship was to be in the Spirit, in the heart, the place where the fountain of living water could be placed.

There are many examples of where God and man are portrayed as being in some kind of mutual relationship. Consider Jn. 4:23: "The Father seeks such to worship Him". The Hebrew / Greek idea of 'seeking' God implied to worship Him. Understanding that, albeit through the mask of translation, we see that the Father is seeking seekers. We seek Him, He seeks us; and thus we meet. Men were found by Jesus, just as they were seeking to find Him (Jn. 1:39,43); there is an electric moment when the Lord and man meet. He seeks for us, and we seek for Him; and we find each other.

4:24 *God is Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth*-

"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for such doth the Father seek to be his worshippers" (Jn. 4:23) was spoken by the Lord early in His ministry. Even at that stage ["and now is..."], there were some worshipping in spirit and in truth. If the Lord is referring to the disciples, and if the "truth" in Jn. 4:24 is to be understood in theological / doctrinal terms, then "the truth" which they at that time possessed was very far less than what we might think today. The disciples at that time had many misbeliefs and misunderstandings; they believed in demons, were unclear about important aspects of the Lord's work, death and resurrection, and believed in ghosts. But they worshipped in spirit and in truth. However, I suspect that "spirit and in truth" doesn't refer to 'A spiritual attitude *plus* theological purity' (which none of us have anyway). That was how I once read the phrase. But "truth" would seem to me to refer more to truthfulness, and to reality as opposed to shadow- e.g. Jesus as the true light, the true bread refers not to His intellectual purity but to the way in which He was the fulfillment of the things of "the true tabernacle" as Hebrews puts it, and thus His truth / reality stood over against the shadows. In the context, the Lord is making a point to the Samaritan woman about where geographically God's house and place of worship should be- Zion or Gerizim. And as He often does, the Lord takes the question onto another level. 'The place of worship doesn't matter, the worship must be in spirit and in truth', i.e. the presence of God in the temple was to be ended, the Mosaic worship system with its need for geographical place and focus was about to end, and worship was to be internal, in the heart. And some, the Lord noticed, had already perceived that. So the context of Jn. 4:24 wasn't about the need for doctrinal / theological / intellectual truth. In Jn. 4:18 the Lord commends the woman because she "spoke truthfully / truly" about her marital state. As the Father was seeking "spirit and truth" worshippers, it was apparent to the disciples that the Lord Jesus was "seeking" this

woman for God (Jn. 4:27). Her honesty meant she was beginning to worship in truth. And so He goes on to encourage her to worship God in spirit and truth[fulness]; her humble recognition of failure was the "truth" required for worship. But she needed to also accept the Spirit. She had the mind of David, who worshipped with 'truth in the inward parts' after recognizing his sin with Bathsheba. Notice how David says that God 'desires truth in the inward parts' (Ps. 51:6), and the Lord seems to be alluding to that when He says that God desires worship in spirit [inward parts] and truth. The context of sexual failure is the same for both the Samaritan woman, and David. If my reading of the allusions to David and Ps. 51 is correct, then the Lord wasn't talking at all about "truth" in the sense of pure theology. Rather was He referring to the "truth" of confession of sin and worship with a humble heart. It is the desperately repentant person who will fall down and worship God (Mt. 18:26 s.w.); this is the "spirit and truth" worshipper. And such a spirit is ultimately "the truth" which we are to finally arrive at.

The Jews and Samaritans had the idea that all they needed to do was to occasionally visit a place of worship in order to have a relationship with Him. The Lord, as His manner was, cut right across this by saying that as God is Spirit, so the true worshippers would worship Him in Spirit. If we believe that God is Spirit, if all He does and says constantly expresses His Spirit, then our lives likewise must be of non-stop worship, not through going occasionally into a temple or ecclesial meeting, but in living a spirit of life that worships Him in every situation (Jn. 4:20-24).

"God is a Spirit"

God’s spirit is His power or breath by which His essential self, His being and character, is revealed to man through the actions which that spirit achieves. Thus “God is spirit”, as Jn. 4:24 should be properly translated (see R.S.V., N.I.V.), because His spirit reflects His personality.

God is described as being many things, e.g.

- “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29)
- “God is light” (1 Jn. 1:5)
- “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8)
- “The word (Greek *logos* - plan, purpose, idea) was God” (Jn. 1:1).

Thus “God is” His characteristics. It is clearly wrong to argue that the abstract quality of love is ‘God’, just because we read that “God is love”. We may call someone ‘kindness itself’, but this does not mean that they are without physical existence - it is their manner of literal existence which reveals kindness to us.

The spirit being God’s power, we frequently read of God sending or directing His spirit to achieve things in harmony with His will and character. Examples of this are numerous, showing the distinction between God and His spirit.

- “He (God) that put His Holy Spirit within him” (Is. 63:11)
- “I (God) will put My spirit upon him (Jesus)” (Mt. 12:18)
- “The Father give(s) the Holy Spirit” (Lk. 11:13)
- “The Spirit descending from heaven” (Jn. 1:32)
- “I (God) will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh” (Acts 2:17).

Indeed, the frequent references to “the spirit of God” should be proof enough that the spirit is not God personally. These differences between God and His spirit are another difficulty for those who believe that God is a ‘trinity’ in which God the Father is equated with Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Very importantly, a non-personal God makes a nonsense of prayer - to the point where prayer is a dialogue between our consciousness and a concept of God which just exists in our own mind. We are continually reminded that we pray to God who is in heaven (Ecc. 5:2; Mt. 6:9; 5:16; 1 Kings 8:30), and that Jesus is now at God's right hand there, to offer up our prayers (1 Pet. 3:22; Heb. 9:24). If God is not personal, such passages are made meaningless. But once God is understood as a real, loving Father, prayer to Him becomes a very real, tangible thing - actually talking to another being who we believe is very willing and able to respond.

4:25 *The woman said to him: I know that the Messiah is coming (he that is called Christ). When he comes, he will declare to us all things*- The Lord had just declared to her all about her previous immoral life. So her statement here may not be scepticism, but rather daring to join the dots and make the connection that this tired, dehydrated Jew sitting before her was in fact Messiah.

4:26 *Jesus said to her: I that speak to you am he*- This is one of the clearest statements the Lord ever makes as to His self identity. And even here, I suggest He is confirming as correct the woman's hunches about Him as being Messiah (see on :25).

4:27 *And upon this scene came his disciples, and they marvelled that he was speaking with a woman. Yet no one said: What are you seeking? Or, Why do you speak with her?-Seek* for response in people. As the disciples came upon the Lord talking to the woman by the well, it looked as if He were *seeking* something (Jn. 4:27). But they didn't ask what- for it was obvious. His body language reflected how He was *seeking* her salvation. He seeks the lost until He finds them, even now (Mt. 18:12; Lk. 15:8); as He looked up into the branches of the sycamore tree seeking Zacchaeus, He was epitomising how He came (and comes) to seek and save *all* the lost (Lk. 19:5,10). Our preaching to others isn't a cold-hearted witness, or a theological debate; it is a *seeking* of glory to the Father; we exhort one another, *considering* how we may provoke to love (Heb. 10:24).

The Rabbis taught that a man should not salute a woman in a public place. For Jesus to talk to the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn.4) was therefore an indication of his studied disregard of local tradition concerning women when it clashed with spiritual principles. The incident was "a strange innovation on Rabbinic custom and dignity". The Talmud taught: "Six things are a disgrace to a disciple of the wise: He should not…converse with a woman in the street" (Babylonian Talmud: Berakoth "Benedictions" 43b). A woman could only be alone with two men, never with one, and this was within a town; outside a town, she had to be in the presence of three men (Babylonian Talmud: Kiddushin "Betrothals" 81a). But the Lord spoke to her alone. A woman could even be divorced for speaking to a man. "What conduct transgresses Jewish custom? If she…speaks with any man" (Mishnah: Ketuboth "Marriage Deeds" 7:6). There can be no doubt that the Lord didn't accept the prevailing view of women. The Lord's conversations with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman are recorded in an intentional parallel in John 3 and 4. The man doesn't get it, he fails to perceive the double entendre in the Lord's words, and struggles with their deeper meaning. The Samaritan woman gets it straight away, and even responds to the Lord with the same kind of language.

4:28 *So the woman left her waterpot and went away into the city, and said to the people*- She had once been rather proud that she had something to draw with, and the Lord didn't. Leaving her waterpot was a statement that now she had found the living water which quenched thirst, and she no longer needed the natural water. She

specifically "said to the men" (as AV). Were these "the men" of her former life? Why go to men in particular? The same word is used in :29 about the "man" she had found who she thinks is the Christ. She went to those with whom she had sinned.

4:29 *Come, see a man who told me all things that I have ever done. Can this be the Christ?*- She tells the men with whom she had sinned (:28) that she has found a man who told her all about their sins. There were no secrets any more; one man at least knew the entire story. And she believes she may well have found the Messiah. He let Himself be encouraged by her response to Him, even though her comment "Could this be the Messiah?" (Jn. 4:29) implies she was still uncertain. Raymond Brown has commented: "The Greek question with *meti* implies an unlikelihood" (*The Gospel According To John*, Vol. 1, p. 173). But we see throughout this incident how faith in Him as Messiah passes through stages- and of course John is appealing in his Gospel for others to likewise come to this faith to follow the path of this woman. She now understands Messiah as most importantly one who realizes our sins and can deal with them- rather than as some conquering hero. And this again was a necessary issue to emphasize in preaching in John's context.

4:30 *They went out of the city and came to him*- There was something in the frank witness of this sinful woman which was compelling. Just as biography is always interesting to us fellow humans, so confession of sin and faith it has been dealt with in Christ is the most compelling witness. 'Coming to Christ' is very much the language of conversion.

4:31 *In the meantime the disciples pleaded with him, saying: Rabbi, eat*- The disciples are presented here as focused on the material rather than the spiritual and symbolic. And it is John himself writing or speaking the Gospel message in this way, like the woman, admitting his own weakness in order to bring others to the Lord.

4:32 *But he said to them: I have food to eat that you do not know*- Dehydrated at the well, very hungry, the response of the Samaritan woman revived His spirits to the point that the disciples assumed He must have been give a meal (Jn. 4:32,33). He goes on to say that working with a woman like that is His "meat" or food, the 'doing of the will of him that sent Me and to accomplish His work' (4:34 RV). Yet the will of God and accomplishing of His work was evidently the cross (Lk. 22:42; Jn. 6:38; Heb. 10:9,10). In preaching to that woman and converting her, the Lord was living out the essence of the crucifixion that awaited Him. Preaching work isn't glamorous. It is a living out of the cross.

4:33 *The disciples queried each other: Has anyone brought him something to eat?*- As noted on :31, the male Jewish disciples are presented as lacking the spiritual perception of this female Gentile. The disciples in their own preaching of the Gospel, of which John's Gospel is a transcript, were admitting their own petty literalism. And urging others to not be as they had been.

4:34 *Jesus said to them: My food is to do the will of Him that sent me and to accomplish His work*- See on :32. After the Lord converted the Samaritan woman at the well, He commented to His disciples that such work was His food- "to do the will of Him that sent me and to finish His work" (Jn. 4:34). But soon afterwards He claimed that "the works which the Father has given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me" (Jn. 5:36). It's tempting to think that the "works" He spoke of were His miracles- but the linkage with Jn. 4:34 suggests that they were also references to the change He achieved within people. These transformed people were His witness- and the Samaritan woman is a classic example. For when He had done

the Father's work in her, she rushed off to witness to the world. In Jn. 6:28,29 the Lord seems to consciously steer us away from understanding His "works" as merely the miracles of e.g. feeding and physical healing. In response to the question "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" He responds: "This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He has sent".

The Lord saw His preaching work as a carrying of the cross. He spoke of how His witness to the Samaritan woman was a 'finishing of the Father's work' (Jn. 4:34). The 'finishing' was clearly only accomplished upon the cross, when He cried "It is finished", and He "fulfilled" or [s.w.] "finished" the Scriptures (Jn. 19:28). Thus in His life, He lived out the essence of His future cross by witnessing to others. Like Paul, we need to grasp what this means for us in practice. Crucifixion was a public, painful, sacrificial act; and true effort in witness will be the same. And this is exactly why Paul can speak of "the preaching of the cross", the preaching which *is* the cross (Gk.). In His preaching to the woman at the well, the Lord saw Himself as 'finishing God's work' (Jn. 4:32,34). And yet John evidently intends us to connect this incident with the Lord's final cry from the cross which he records: "It is finished!". Only on the cross was the work finished; but by pushing aside His own hunger, tiredness and desire for solitude in order to convert that woman, the Lord even then was 'finishing the Father's work', in that in essence He was living out the spirit of crucifixion. And so with us; the life of ongoing crucifixion demands that we consciously push ourselves in the service of others. The finishing of the Father's work was accomplished in the cross- hence the final cry of triumph, "It is finished!" (19:30). But this meat was not appreciated by them in His lifetime. The work of sharing in Christ's cross should be our meat and drink, to the eclipsing of the pressing nature of material things. For this was the context in which the Lord spoke; His men were pressing Him to attend to His humanity, whereas His mind was filled, even in tiredness and dehydration, with the living out of the cross unto the end. As He was exhausted and dehydrated by the well, so He was on the cross. He saw that "meat" in the conversion of the Samaritan woman. He saw the connection between His cross and the conversion of that woman; thus "the meat... the will... [God's] work" was the cross, and yet it was also the conversion of the woman. The cross is essentially the converter of men and women, and thereby our crucifixion-lives are likewise the power of conversion.

4:35 *Do you not say: There are yet four months and then comes the harvest? Behold, I say to you, Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white, ready to harvest*- If they lifted up their eyes, they would see a file of Gentile men headed by a fallen woman coming towards them. And this was the whiteness of the harvest. Grain turns from green to yellow to white. Those people who were apparently expressing an initial interest were seen by the Lord as ready for harvest. Be believed the process of conversion could happen that quickly. And His disciples, from that day to this, struggle to believe it. They want to first see some course of instruction and a socializing of converts into their community. However it must be also noted that harvest in Palestine typically began after Passover; so the Lord may be hinting that it was after His death that the harvesting would begin. But then on the other hand, He has said that His "hour" of death was right then, it was both coming and yet "now is" (see on :23). The way of the Spirit involves working outside of time as we know it; as the essence of the hour of the cross was then, so the moment of sowing was also that of harvesting, the Spirit was not yet given because the Lord was not glorified, yet it

could still be given; and so eternal life could be given now to people who remain still mortal.

The Gospel writers were preaching the words of the Gospels in response to their Lord's command to go preach. Yet Jn. 4:35,38 records them recognizing that they didn't appreciate how great the harvest was, and indeed the harvest was spoilt because of the weakness of the disciples. For the whiteness of harvest rather than it being yellow might hint that it was overdue for harvest. The Lord Himself was of the persuasion that people are more interested than His brethren may think. "You say 'Four months from sowing to harvest: the time is not yet'... [But I say that] the fields are already white for reaping. Already the reaper is taking his pay" (Jn. 4:35). Four months was the time reckoned proverbially for the sown seed to come to harvest in Judea. It seems that the disciples thought there had to be a gap between sowing and reaping, whereas the Lord is saying that people were more ready for harvest than His preachers thought. The Kingdom prophecies speak of a time when the sower shall overtake the reaper, i.e. there is immediate fruition of the crop planted. And so it was in the Lord's spiritual Kingdom; the seed had fruit immediately. And it can be the same with us- our insistence that there has to be a respectable gap between sowing the Gospel and reaping the harvest isn't a concept upheld by the Lord. There's more of a harvest out there than we think. And perhaps the relatively poor response to the preaching of Jesus in AD30-33 was because His disciples didn't do their part?

4:36 *He that reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit to everlasting life; that he that sows and he that reaps may rejoice together*- The reapers were the disciples (:38). If they reaped, they would receive wages, and the fruit of the converts they gathered would be that those converts received eternal life. Not just at the last day, but in the sense John's Gospel speaks of- receiving the gift of life after the pattern of the Lord's life, right now. The "wages" surely suggests that work with the likes of the Samaritan woman has its blessings in this life, as well as having eternal consequence.

The experience of preaching is in itself a foretaste of the future world-wide Kingdom. The harvest is both at the end of the age, according to the parables of Mt. 13, but also is ongoing right now (Jn. 4:36) as we gather in the harvest of converts. The Lord in Jn. 4:35,36 took this figure far further, by saying that the harvest is such that the interval between sowing and harvesting is in some sense collapsed for those who engage in preaching. The reaper was already collecting his wages; the harvest was already there, even though it was four months away (Jn. 4:35). This clearly alludes to the promises that in the Messianic Kingdom there would also be no interval between sowing and harvest, so abundant would be the harvest (Lev. 26:5; Am. 9:13). And hence, we are impelled to spread the foretaste of the Kingdom world-wide by our witness right now.

The final judgment will be of our works, not because works justify us, but because our use of the freedom we have had and exercised in our lives is the basis of the future reward we will be given. Salvation itself is not on the basis of our works (Rom. 11:6; Gal. 2:16; Tit. 3:5); indeed, the *free gift* of salvation by pure grace is contrasted with the *wages* paid by sin (Rom. 4:4; 6:23). And yet at the judgment, the preacher receives *wages* for what he did (Jn. 4:36), the labourers receive *hire* (s.w. wages) for their work in the vineyard (Mt. 20:8; 1 Cor. 3:8). There is a *reward* (s.w. wages) for those who rise to the level of loving the totally unresponsive (Mt. 5:46), or preaching in situations quite against their natural inclination (1 Cor. 9:18). *Salvation* itself isn't given on this basis of works; but the nature of our eternal existence in the Kingdom will be a reflection of our use of the gift of freedom in this life. In that sense the

judgment will be of our works. There are many passages which teach that our salvation will be related to the extent to which we have held forth the word both to the world and to the household (Prov. 11:3; 24:11,12; Dan. 12:3; Mk. 8:38; Lk. 12:8; Rom. 10:9,10 cp. Jn. 9:22; 12:42; 1:20; 1 Pet. 4:6 Gk.). Those who reap the harvest of the Gospel will be rewarded with salvation (Jn. 4:36). Such work *isn't* just an option for those who want to be enthusiastic about it.

4:37 *For herein is the saying true: One sows and another reaps*- This is perhaps John's equivalent to the parable of the sower in the synoptics. The Lord is the sower. The Lord likened His preachers to men reaping the harvest. The implication is that He had done His work with the woman, and they were to now work with the crowd of Gentile men she was bringing to Him. He speaks of how they fulfilled the proverb that one sows and another reaps (Jn. 4:37,38). Yet this 'proverb' has no direct Biblical source. What we *do* find in the Old Testament is the repeated idea that if someone sows but another reaps, this is a sign that they are suffering God's judgment for their sins (Dt. 20:6; 28:30; Job 31:8; Mic. 6:15). But the Lord turns around the 'proverb' concerning Israel's condemnation; He makes it apply to the way that the preacher / reaper who doesn't sow is the one who harvests others in converting them to Him. Surely His implication was that His preacher-reapers were those who had known condemnation for their sins, but on that basis were His humbled harvesters in the mission field.

4:38 *I sent you to harvest that upon which you have not laboured; others have laboured, and you are taking over their labour*- Harvesting what one has not worked for is the language of Israel receiving the promised land (Josh. 24:13). The Kingdom blessings were to be understood spiritually- harvesting people for the Lord for whom they had done none of the hard, preparatory ground work. "Laboured" is used only elsewhere in John in :6 about how the Lord sat at the well "wearied" or 'laboured'; He had laboured, although He graciously includes others in His work, and He invited the disciples to now go reap the harvest for which they had not laboured. Perhaps the others who had laboured is some reference to an outreach toward Samaritans made by John the Baptist and his disciples. The language of taking over their labour would be appropriate to how the Lord's disciples were to build upon the earlier spade work done by John's ministry. Or perhaps the other labourers referred to the Samaritan woman and her initial group of converts; the idea would then be that the disciples ought to return to the area and secure a great harvest as a result of their witness. But such was their slowness to perceive the Lord's openness to Samaritan Gentiles that the disciples did not do this in time. To see themselves as taking over the labour of despised Samaritans was too much for them; their prejudices had been too great. And perhaps John records this in order to demonstrate the weakness of himself and his team, a lament over the potential they had let go.

4:39 *And from that city many of the Samaritans believed in him because of the word of the woman, who testified: He told me all things that I have ever done*- The Samaritan woman at the well had a sense of shame and deep self-knowledge over her, as she realised that Christ knew her every sin. It was with a humble sheepishness that she confessed: "I have no husband", because she was living in sin. She was converted by that well. Immediately she "left her waterpot, and went her way into the city (the record inviting us to watch her from a distance), and saith to the *men* (significantly), Come, see a man... is not this the Christ?" (Jn. 4:17,28,29). There was a wondrous mixture of enthusiasm and shyness in those words: "Come, see a man...". It is a

feature of many new converts that their early preaching has a similar blend. It is stressed that men believed because of the way the woman told them "He told me all that ever I did" (Jn. 4:39). He had recounted her past sins to her (4:18,19). And she now, in matchless humility, goes and tells her former life to her associates, using the very words of description which the Lord had used. He convicted her of her sins, and this conviction resulted in her unashamed witness.

We see how belief is predicated at times upon the word of a third party other than the Lord. We can bring people to faith, and also stumble them in their walk.

4:40 *So when the Samaritans came to him, they pleaded with him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days*- Coming to Jesus in John's Gospel means to believe in Him. They wanted Him to "stay" or "abide" with them, a common theme in John of the Lord abiding in the hearts of believers. They are set up as model converts, in whom the Lord 'abode' after conversion. As John's Gospel later explains, this is achieved by Him through His Spirit, which means that He is present as really as if He were physically present with us. His abiding by the Spirit is a sign of acceptance, and His abiding with them at a time when a Jew like Peter could not go inside the home of a Gentile was surely a public indication of His acceptance of Gentiles. Peter and others who so objected to such fellowship after His resurrection were clearly forgetting, willfully, the implication of such incidents.

4:41 *And many more believed because of his word*- Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by God's word; it's as if these Gentile converts are being set up as role models for all who should thereafter believe. Their belief was as valid as those who believed for the sake of the woman's testimony, that she had met a man who knew all of her sins, and was thereby, by implication, able to deal with them. This large scale conversion is significant because there is no hint that any miracle was done in order to provoke faith. It was conversion on the basis of the Lord's power to know human personal history and to forgive. It becomes even more programmatic for all who would afterwards believe.

4:42- see on Jn. 20:31.

And they said to the woman: Now we believe, not because of your speaking; for we have heard for ourselves and know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world- They realized that the true Messiah was not Saviour solely of Israel, but of the *kosmos*, which John has defined in the prologue as the new world of persons who believe in Him. Acts 5:31 defines His 'salvation' in terms of Him giving both repentance and forgiveness to people; and this is exactly what the Lord had done to the woman and other Samaritans. He had given provoked in her repentance, and empowered her forgiveness. This is all the work of the Spirit.

4:43 *And after two days he left for Galilee*- Perhaps He wanted to give the disciples a break from attention, and so He went somewhere where He thought they would not have much acceptance nor attention (:44). But in the same way as during His working life the Lord could have made technical mistakes in His manual work, so here, things didn't turn out as He had perhaps intended. In John's Gospel more than the others we see the Lord's deep humanity, mixed with the highest terms of praise for Him.

4:44 *Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honour in his own country*- As noted on :43, the Lord assumed He would not be welcomed there and He could have some quality time teaching the disciples in their native environment. The common proverb was repeated or testified to with approval by the Lord. But things turned out

not as He had expected (:45)- another window onto His humanity, as is the description of Galilee as "His own country". See on :48.

4:45 *So when he came into Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all the things that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they also had gone up to the feast*- As noted on :43 and :44, this welcome was perhaps not what the Lord had expected. Their belief however was because they had seen miracles at the feast (2:23); unlike the Samaritans, of whom we have just read, who believed without having seen miracles.

4:46 *He came again to Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum*- The Lord's return to Cana was perhaps as a follow up to His witness there previously. Perhaps He sought to try again with Nicodemus, whom I suggested on 2:1 was there. His attempt to follow up with individuals, despite the large scale of His ministry, is a reflection of the huge value the Lord attached to the individual.

4:47 *When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to him and pleaded that he would come to Capernaum and heal his son. For his son was at the point of death*- To make that 20 mile journey over mountainous terrain displayed quite some faith. Perhaps this nobleman was one of those who had encountered the Lord at the feast in Jerusalem (:45). The fact he came personally rather than send messengers or servants again indicates a genuine personal faith. The Greek is literally "come down to Capernaum", which reflects the topography (as 2:12); all encouraging confirmations that we are reading a genuine account rather than one fabricated for personal reasons.

4:48 *Jesus replied to him: Except you see signs and wonders, you will in no way believe*- The Lord criticized the people for their refusal to believe apart from by seeing signs and wonders. In line with this, the Lord attacks Nicodemus' belief on the basis of the miracles, saying that instead, a man must be born again if he wishes to see the Kingdom (Jn. 3:2,3). But later He says that the disciples were being given miraculous signs greater than even healing to help them believe (Jn. 11:15); He bids people believe because they saw signs, even if they were unimpressed by Him personally (Jn. 5:20; 10:37; 14:11). Clearly enough, the Lord was desperate for people to believe, to come to some sort of faith- even if the basis of that faith wasn't what He ideally wished. And it's possible that His initial high demand for people to believe not because they saw miracles was relaxed as His ministry proceeded; for the statements that faith was not to be based upon His miracles is found in Jn. 3 and 4, whereas the invitations to believe because of His miracles is to be found later in John. This challenges the attitude that sets a bar of faith and understanding over which people must first leap before we work with them.

I noted on :43 and :44 that the Lord had expected little response in Galilee, and yet there was response. In this we have a window onto His utter humanity. Likewise perhaps in this comment that faith would only come from *seeing* miracles; for the nobleman did not see the miracle, but believed.

4:49 *The nobleman said to him: Sir, come before my child dies*- The man thought that the Lord's physical presence was required for the miracle. His faith was therefore incomplete, but all the same, the Lord worked with Him. And just as He does today with us, sought to stretch the faith of the man.

4:50 *Jesus said to him: Go your way. Your son lives. The man believed the word that*

Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way- The man of course could have disbelieved; yet the Lord had done the miracle anyway. So the Lord was as it were desperately hopeful that his challenge to the development of the man's faith would work- and it did. And yet his faith was still immature; for although it is stated that the nobleman believed the Lord's words, it was only once his son was healed that he *really* believed (Jn. 4:50 cp. 54).

4:51 *And as he was going home, his servants met him, saying that his son lived*- They would have known that he had gone to Cana to seek the Lord Jesus and healing from Him. They were so thrilled that they began the 20 mile journey to meet Him. They met their master as he "was going down" (AV)- i.e. as he was coming down the final slope toward Capernaum. We wonder why they had delayed coming to him; perhaps they wanted to be sure the child had really recovered. All this has the circumstantial ring of truth to it which permeates the inspired records.

4:52 *So he inquired of them the hour when he began to get better. They replied to him: Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him*- If "the seventh hour" means 1 p.m. [assuming counting time from sunrise- although there are various possibilities; Roman time would have been 7 p.m.], then the man would have walked or travelled home through the night, arriving the next day, so that the servants spoke of "Yesterday". Travelling overnight was a risky undertaking as Galilee was full of road thieves. But he was so eager to see the result of faith. "Began to get better" is also an indication of incomplete faith; he imagined that the Lord's healing word would have only gradual effect, whereas the child had perhaps died and been resurrected at that time ["your son lives"]. In any case, the fever abruptly "left him" at a specific time and not as part of any gradual process of feeling better, as the nobleman with his limited faith had imagined.

4:53 *The father knew that that was the hour when Jesus had said to him: Your son lives. And so he and his household believed*- As noted on :50, the man's initial belief had not been strong; but now it became stronger. Or it could be that he had set himself the condition to the effect that if his son was really healed, then he would believe; and that condition was met. Christ saw that man's low level of faith, and took him where he was, with the result that he soon rose up to a higher level. The Lord must have reflected on the wide differences between the various levels of faith and commitment He encountered. Jairus besought Him to lay His hands on his daughter (Mk. 5:23); whilst the Centurion's attitude was "say the word only" (Lk. 7:6). His faith was undoubtedly on a higher level (Lk. 7:9), but still the Lord accepted the lower level of Jairus and worked with it. He was manifesting His Father in this. Reflect how Daniel refused to eat the food sent to him from the King of Babylon; but God arranged for this very thing to be sent to Jehoiachin as a sign of His recognition of his repentance (Jer. 52:34)! God saw that Jehoiachin wasn't on Daniel's level, and yet He worked with him.

The idea of whole households "believing" is common in the New Testament; the early church was largely a network of household churches.

4:54 *This was the second sign that Jesus did, when he had gone from Judea to Galilee*- There is a question as to whether this is the same miracle of the centurion's servant being healed in Capernaum which we have in Mt. 8:5 and Lk. 7:2. I would argue that they are similar, but different:

(1) Here a 'king's man' pleads for his son; there a centurion for his servant.
(2) Here he pleads in person; there the Jewish elders plead for him.
(3) Here the father is probably a Jew; there the centurion is certainly a Gentile.

(4) Here the healing words are spoken at Cana; there at Capernaum.
(5) Here the malady is fever; there paralysis.
(6) Here the father wishes Jesus to come; there the centurion begs him not to come.
(7) Here Christ does not go; there apparently he does.

The similarity I suggest is that the faith of the Gentile centurion is presented as far stronger than that of the spiritually immature Jewish nobleman. The similarities suggest that perhaps that Gentile had heard of the healing of the nobleman's child, and was motivated by it to complete faith, just as we are motivated by accounts of faith rewarded in others' lives to ourselves have even stronger faith than in the cases we heard about.

JOHN CHAPTER 5

5:1 *After these things there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem*- So often John describes what the Old Testament repeatedly calls "the feasts of the Lord" as "feasts of the Jews". They had hijacked Yahweh's religion and turned it into their own, just as so many do today.

5:2 *Now there is in Jerusalem*- It's worth noting the evidence that the entire New Testament was written before AD70:

- If any of the Gospels were written after AD70, their total silence as to that cataclysmic event is strange. The synoptics all record a prophecy of the events of AD70, and yet there is no reference by any of them to its fulfillment; whereas the Gospel writers aren't slow to comment on the way the Lord's words came true. Mt. 24:20 speaks of those events as being in the future- "Pray that it may not be winter when you have to make your escape". Surely there'd have been some reference to the fulfillment of the Olivet prophecy, if the records were written after AD70? Jn. 5:2 speaks as if Jerusalem and the temple area were still standing when John was written: "Now there *is* at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool". The record of the Jews' proud comment in Jn. 2:20 that Herod's temple had taken 46 years to build includes no hint nor even presentiment that it had now been destroyed.
- Paul on any chronology died before AD70, so his letters were all before that. We need to marvel at the evident growth in spirituality and understanding which is reflected within Paul's letters, and realize that he grew *very* quickly.
- Hebrews speaks of the temple and sacrifice system in the present tense, as if it were still operating (note Heb. 10:2,11,18). The 40 years of Israel's disobedience in the wilderness are held up as a warning to an Israel approaching 40 years of disobedience after the death of Jesus (Heb. 3:7- 4:11). "You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (Heb. 12:4) sounds like Nero's persecution hadn't started.
- The letters of Peter warn that a huge calamity is to come upon the Jewish churches, couched in terms of the Olivet prophecy. Thus they were written before AD70. 2 Peter also speaks as if Paul is still alive at the time.
- Acts stops at the point where Paul is living in his own house in Rome quite comfortably, and spreading the Gospel (Acts 28:30). And yet we know from 2 Tim. 4 that ultimately he died in Rome, presumably after being released and doing more work for the Lord. The obvious conclusion is that Acts was written before Paul died. Acts also implies that Jews were living at peace with Rome (Acts 24:2; 25:1-5; 15:13-26:32)- a situation which didn't apply after AD70.

By the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porches- The five porches could refer to the five books of Moses, the Torah, which failed to provide healing. "Bethesda" is obviously significant in meaning, because

attention is called to the Hebrew name. The Hebrew is literally *beth* [house] *chesed*, the Hebrew word usually translated "mercy" and about the nearest the Old Testament comes to speaking of "grace". But beneath the five porches of the Mosaic law, the Torah, there was no grace or mercy being found by those who sat beneath them. They hoped for it, but Israel did not find that which he looked for. "Bethesda" may well have been a kind of institution providing very basic care for the incurables and handicapped whose families would not care for them. Hence *beth*, "house", can mean both a house as well as a family. It really was a picture of stricken humanity, whom legalism couldn't help. Yet before them was the pool or "bath", as Adam Clarke suggests the Greek should be rendered. Immediately we make the association with baptism. There are Old Testament prophecies of how in the Messianic Kingdom, healing water would come forth from Jerusalem (Joel 3:18 etc.). The Lord was going to demonstrate that in His gift of the water of life, the essence of the future Kingdom was to be experienced right now. The sheep gate was on the east of the temple (Neh. 3:1,32; 12:39), from where Messiah was to enter in the day of His Kingdom (Zech. 14:4).

If indeed this pool was one used for ritual cleansing by Jews who had come up to keep the feast at Jerusalem, then we see the Lord possibly teaching that one must be born of water and Spirit to enter His Kingdom. Simply bathing there would not save, just as the water in that pool did not have any magic powers- contrary to what the man believed. We have to leave that place after true encounter with the Lord and "sin no more".

5:3 *In these lay a crowd of those who were sick, blind, lame, paralysed, waiting for the moving of the water*- The "sick" or "impotent" are those without power. The same word is used of how whilst we were all "without strength, Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6). They were waiting, just as Israel ought to have been waiting for Messiah. But the law was itself "impotent" (s.w. "sick"), unable to cure or change the human moral condition (Heb. 7:18 s.w.). The same word for "moving" is used of how the Jewish religion could not "move" the heavy burdens of legalism and human guilt before God (Mt. 23:4).

5:4 *For an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and disturbed the water. Whoever was first to step into the pool, after the waters were disturbed, was healed of whatever disease he had*- The Bible records things at times from how they appear to men at the time; hence the language of demon possession and exorcism, even though the real existence of demons is denied in the Bible. Here we have another example. The Lord's miracle of healing the lame man at the pool was to show the folly of the Jewish myth that at Passover time an angel touched the water of the Bethesda pool, imparting healing properties to it. This myth is recorded without direct denial of its truth; the record of Christ's miracle is the exposure of its falsehood. Another example would be the Jewish myth that the High Priest's Passover address was a direct speaking forth of God's words; this wrong idea isn't specifically corrected, but it is worked through by God – in that Caiaphas' Passover words just before the crucifixion came strangely true, thus condemning Caiaphas and justifying the Lord Jesus as Israel's Saviour (Jn. 11:51).

5:5 *One man there had been ill for thirty eight years*- The paralysed man had waited by the pool 38 years, waiting for someone to cure him. There was no cure in those 38 years- only in the word of Christ (John 5:5). Israel were actually in the wilderness for 38 years; the similarity implies Moses' leadership could not bring salvation, only the word of Christ.

5:6- see on Mt. 20:32.

When Jesus saw him lying there, knowing he had been there a long time, he said to him: Would you be made whole?- The Lord asks these basic questions in order to elicit in a person what is their greatest, dominant desire. Thus He asked a blind man what he wanted; He made as if He would have gone further on the walk to Emmaus, and appeared as if He would walk past the drowning disciples on the lake. He knows of course the answers ahead of time but He wishes to elicit in us an articulation of what is our dominant desire. The Lord is the same yesterday as today; He likewise brings us to realize what are our dominant desires. All sick people would say they wish to be cured, but actually for some it is not their dominant desire- especially after 38 years. He asked the question exactly because He knew the man had "been there a long time". Human nature develops coping mechanisms to the extent that our natural conservatism can mean that we do not actually have change as a dominant desire. And the Lord sought to elicit such desire in the man; perhaps He cured that man rather than the other long term residents of Bethesda because He knew that he alone really wanted to change. Or perhaps the question was to make the man face the issue of whether he really wanted a radical change. So many seek for truth but don't actually want it when they are given it. Because the search is better for them than the actual reality of living in that Truth. The man's "will" for that new life was not that strong, because his response when probed about his "will" is not a "Yes", but rather a continued moping about his friendless, hapless lot in life. The Lord cured him because of *His* will, as is made clear in the allusion to the incident in Jn. 5:21 "For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom he will". This is grace indeed. No wonder Paul goes on to speak of predestination, Divine will over human will, as the parade example of Divine grace.

5:7 *The sick man answered him: Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is disturbed. As I approach someone else steps in front of me*- The man was totally focused on the myth. He felt his salvation could only be achieved by his own works and strength, of which he didn't have enough; and he didn't have the right friends, who could put him into the pool. He was looking for a helper, who would be with him all the time and would be ready to get him into the pool whenever the Angel supposedly came. He was looking for a saviour; not just for the coming of an Angel. Perhaps it was this dominant desire which the Lord was attracted to and felt he could work with.

5:8 *Jesus said to him: Arise, take up your bed and walk*- The nature of the healing in this case was a test of the man's respect of the Lord's spoken word. He could have argued back that no, he needed help to get into the pool when the Angel came. But he was looking for a personal Saviour and was willing to accept His word, and make the first movement to try to "arise". The command to take up his bed was also a psychologically intentional statement; the man would have walked off holding his mat in his hand, a powerful visual image that would have remained in the memories of many. And he would have had to dispose of it somewhere, another psychological underlining to him of the reality that he was really cured. We see here the same sensitivity in the Lord which He still shows in His dealings with people today.

"Arise" is the same word used later in the Lord's discourse when He teaches that "For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom he will" (Jn. 5:21). Again we see how the Lord's encounters with people are

the basis for His later spiritual teachings; John is full of this. The Lord's discourses after a miracle are full of allusion to the miracle. "To whom He will" could suggest the Lord decided to heal that man by His sovereign will and not because of any preexisting faith or understanding in him. The man was 'given life' here and now, in that instead of living a lonely, friendless, family less, miserable existence in a false hope of winning the lottery, as it were, he was empowered to go forth and live a real life.

"Arise" is therefore the key word. But when the man repeats the Lord's words to the Jews, he omits it. The Lord told him "Arise, take up your bed and walk". He repeats this as Him having simply said "Take up your bed and walk". The wonder of the new life was lost on him. The Father and Son make men "arise" even if at that point, they don't get it. And the healed man makes no defence of the Lord Jesus, unlike the healed blind man. He displays no gratitude. And yet still he is saved. He is a parade example of the Lord intervening in a man's life by grace alone.

5:9 *And straightway the man was made whole and took up his bed and walked. Now it was the Sabbath on that day*- The immediacy of the Lord's cures has been noted on 4:52. Claims of healing typically required a period of time; but the Lord's miracles were total and instant rather than requiring periods of time to take effect. The man's obedience to the command to take up his mat and walk is noted; for as noted on :8, it was his obedience to the Lord's spoken word which was so significant.

5:10 *So the Jews said to him who had been cured: It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed*- The actual law of Moses did not condemn people for carrying their mat after being healed, but the Jews had come to assume that their fences around the Law were in fact the Law itself. And that is the problem with fences around laws; they come to be perceived as the law itself. Faced with the evident power of the Spirit, the legalist must either capitulate or madly insist upon the consequences which arise from infringement of the letter of their own laws. And we see such anger today elicited from legalistic minds when the Spirit is clearly operative. Baptize 50 people, and the legalistic mind will bet angry rather than rejoicing that Christ is preached, insisting upon the consequences of breaking their own by-laws which they have in their own minds turned into God's laws. Fences around laws invite men to play God, and indeed they do so. As noted on :1, such people have hijcaked God's law and way and turned it into their own.

5:11 *But he answered them: He that made me whole, the same said to me: Take up your bed and walk*- The man correctly reasoned that One who operated by the power of the Spirit was clearly above all human by-laws and religious regulations of mere men. The Lord had designed the nature of the cure to depend upon obedience to His word, which of itself required the man to break the Jewish regulations about not carrying a mat on the sabbath. The Lord had intentionally provoked this conflict, because He saw that it was necessary in the ultimate spiritual path of this man. And He does the same with us, carefully tailoring experiences and conflicts in order that our faith might grow.

5:12 *They asked him: Who is the man that said to you: Take up your bed and walk?*- Their focus was not on the miracle, which they also considered "work", but on the specific command to carry a mat on the sabbath. They surely knew who it was- only

Jesus of Nazareth did this kind of thing. They were looking for legal evidence from this man.

5:13 *But the man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in that place*- The Lord could have course orchestrated this miracle in any way He chose. But He did it in this way, leaving Himself anonymous, so that the man would be earnestly asking himself every moment: "Who is this man?". And that of course is the question which John's Gospel puts to his audience. For the man to truthfully answer the Jews' questions with "I don't know, He slipped away in the crowd..." would have likewise made the Jews ask themselves the same question, and reflect that Jesus of Nazareth was no standard miracle worker, but of an altogether higher order.

5:14 *Afterwards, Jesus found him in the temple and said to him: Look, you are made whole. Sin no more, lest a worse thing befall you*- The man had sought to express his gratitude by going to the temple, perhaps wondering whether he ought to offer a sacrifice for his cleansing. But the Lord was sensitive to the fact that ritual obedience to law can lead us away from the imperative which must be keenly felt- to sin no more. We can infer that his condition was a result of sin and his tendency was now to return to the sinful life.

The Lord told him: "Sin no more, lest a worse thing (than those years of sitting by the pool) come upon you" (Jn. 5:14). That "worse thing" was rejection at the judgment- which, it could be inferred, would be like earnestly desiring salvation but not finding it. For that will be the fate of the rejected at the last day. None will be shrugging their shoulders, indifferent to the eternity they have missed.

There was a strong connection in the Jewish mind between sin and physical suffering such as the man had endured. The Lord's healing of him was therefore perceived tantamount to forgiving him, or at best, undoing the chains they [wrongly] supposed some satan figure had put upon him. The man likely was under the same wrong impression. But all the same the Lord uses that to remind him- to sin no more. Lest the worse thing of condemnation at the last day come upon him.

The Lord's later discourse in John 5 is absolutely tied in to this healing miracle. The later references to condemnation by the Son, and the possibility of becoming free from condemnation, must be read in the context of the Lord having freed the man from the perceived condemnation for sin in this life: "He that hears my word and believes Him that sent me has eternal life, and comes not into condemnation, but has passed out of death into life. Truly, truly, I say to you: The hour comes and now is ["now is" in that the Lord had just healed a condemned man who had heard His voice], when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has given the Son life in himself. And He has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is a Son of Man. Marvel not at this! For the hour comes, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (Jn. 5:24-29). But the wonder of the allusion back to the healed man is that he had not really obediently, faithfully heard the Lord's voice. Yet he had been brought from death to life. But that huge prevenient grace required his response- to sin no more. This healed man makes no expression of gratitude [unlike the healed blind man], and his response to "sin no more" is to report the Lord to the Jewish authorities: "Sin no more, lest a worse thing befall you. The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him whole" (:14,15). Perhaps this is an encounter with the Lord where the

person remains in unbelief. He was given a foretaste of resurrection to eternal life by being caused to "arise", just as people are when they are baptized. But he failed to be grateful, instead of thanking the Lord he went to the temple, and remained within the merely religious mindset.

5:15 *The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him whole*- As noted on :12 and :13, the Lord structured the miracle so that the whole style of it made it clear that it had been Him. So he was telling the Jews what they knew already in their consciences.

5:16 *And for this cause the Jews persecuted Jesus, because he did these things on the Sabbath*- Some manuscripts add "and sought to kill him" (AV). They were seizing upon the Mosaic commands to kill the sabbath breaker (Ex. 31:15; 35:2). This is the blind anger of those who think their religious organization is the only one God recognizes, and cannot cope with someone operating succesfully outside of it. The same mindset is still seen today within Christian groups. "He did these things" translates an imperfect tense in the Greek which suggests the Lord habitually did miracles on the Sabbath. He was certainly seeking to provoke the Sabbath issue with the Jews, because here most clearly, they had hijacked God's laws and made their own fences around them equivalent to Divine law, thus playing God.

5:17- see on 2 Cor. 4:6.

But Jesus answered them: My Father works even until now and therefore I also work- The cosmos hasn't been created, wound up by God as it were on clockwork, and left ticking by an absent creator. There are many Bible verses which teach that God is actively, consciously outgiving of His Spirit in the myriad things going on in the natural creation, every nanosecond He is sensitive to the needed input from Him- and He gives it. Therefore we are never far from Him. The Lord Jesus defended working for His Father on the Sabbath because God was also at work on the Sabbath.

That God's Son could be a normal working class person actually says a lot about the humility of God Himself. Jn. 5:17 has been translated: "My Father is a working man to this day, and I am a working man myself". No less an authority than C.H. Dodd commented: "That the Greek words could bear that meaning is undeniable". I find especially awsome the way Mary mistakes the risen Lord for a lowly gardener- He evidently dressed Himself in the clothes of a working man straight after His resurrection, a far cry from the haloed Christ of high church art.

5:18 *For this cause the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only broke the Sabbath law, but he called God his own Father, making himself seem like God*- The Jews only had authority to ask the Romans to carry out a death sentence if it involved desecration of the temple; but their rage was such that they countenanced extra-judicial murder, as witnessed by Saul murdering Christians. It was a long stretch to say that claiming Divine Sonship was claiming to be God personally, and the Lord brings out their error in chapter 10. This is especially so as the Old Testament calls men "gods" and the term "God" was applied by the Jews to Moses. It is tragic indeed that standard Christianity through the false doctrine of the Trinity has made the same logical error. We must note that the Greek translated "seem like" means just that; it does not mean 'directly equal to' (it is translated "agreed together", Mk. 14:56,59). The same phrase is found in Phil. 2:6 where perhaps in allusion to this incident, Paul states that the Lord did not consider such 'equality with God' a thing to be even grasped at.

5:19 *Jesus therefore answered and said to them: Truly, truly, I say to you: The Son can do nothing of himself but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever*

works He does, these the Son does in like manner- The statement that He can do nothing of Himself is an answer to their mistaken idea that He was making Himself in some way equal to God (:18). "The works… The Son can do nothing *of himself*" recalls Moses' words: "All these works… I have not done them of my own mind" (Num. 16:28). The Lord was claiming to be as Moses, and a prophet greater than Moses; but not God.

This passage gives a window into the Lord's self-perception here. He says that whatever He sees the Father / abba / daddy do, He does "in like manner". It is the language of a young child mimicking their father. And He speaks of Himself as an adult behaving just like this. There was a child-likeness about Him in this sense. And the disciples seem to have noticed this- for no less than four times in Acts (Acts 3:13,26; 4:27,30) they refer to Jesus as the "holy child" of God. Their image of Jesus had something in it which reflected that child-likeness about Him which still stuck in their memories. And may we too "ceaseless... Abba, father, cry". The haunting melody of that hymn well expresses the utter wonder of it all, as we too struggle to find our true Father. The spirit / attitude of the Son of God should be ours, in that we like Him cry "Abba, father" (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15). His spirit / attitude to the Father should be ours; He stressed that His Father is our Father (Jn. 20:17). Jesus acted and 'was' for all the world as if He had had His natural Father with Him from the start of His life. This was how close the Father became to Jesus; the extent to which He successfully 'found' Him; to the point that the 'mere' invisibility of that Father was not a major issue or barrier in their relationship. And so it should be for us, in the life of believing in that which is unseen, and in them who are invisible to us.

5:20 *For the Father loves the Son and shows him all things that Himself does; and greater works than these will He show him, that you may marvel*- As noted in commentary on chapter 4, the Lord did not consider that seeing miracles was a solid basis for faith. "Marvel" has connotations of disbelief; the more miracles which would be done, the "greater works" which the Lord would do through the apostles (14:12), would not so much create faith as lead them to marvel in incomprehension. The connection with the "greater works" to be done by the apostles is clear (14:12); they were empowered to do what the Lord had been shown needed to be done by the Father.

In Jn. 5:19,20 we read that the Son does (*poieo*) what He sees the Father doing, and the Father shows Him (*deiknumi*) all (*panta*) that He does. This is referring to Ex. 25:9 LXX, where Moses makes (*poieo*) the Tabernacle according all (*panta*) that God shows him (*deiknuo*). The reference of Jn. 5:19,20 is therefore to the Lord working with His Father in the building up of us the tabernacle… and *all* things God planned for us were revealed to the Son even in His mortality. What great wealth of understanding was there within His mind, within those brain cells… and how tragic that the head and body that bore them was betrayed and ignored and spat upon and tortured by men…

There is here what C.H. Dodd has called 'the parable of the apprentice': "A son…does only what he sees his father doing: what father does, son does; for a father loves his son and shows him all his trade". Now just imagine what that meant for the Lord Jesus, growing up with Joseph, who appeared to be His father, learning Joseph's trade. Yet He knew that His true Father was God, and He was eagerly learning *His* trade.

5:21 *For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom he will*- The present tenses mean that the Son now gives life, and this is a development of the ideas of the prologue. The life given is the life of the

Spirit, the power to live the kind of life the Lord Jesus lived. The same word is found in 6:63: "It is the Spirit that quickens"; so the Son "gives life" [s.w. "quickens"] through giving of His Spirit, the ability to live and think as He did and does. This promise is at the core of Christianity, of being like Christ. It is for all time. The Lord gave His life for us on the cross, but He gives His life to us in an ongoing sense. It is the Spirit of Christ in us now which shall quicken or make alive our mortal bodies in the process of resurrection to life at the last day (s.w. Rom. 8:11, see note there). He is a "quickening spirit" now as He shall be in granting the resurrection to life at the last day (1 Cor. 15:45).

Abiding in the word of Christ, His words abiding in us, abiding in love, abiding in the Father and Son (1 Jn. 4:16) are all parallel ideas. Jesus Himself 'quickens' or breathes life into us (Jn. 5:21)- but His Spirit does this, in that His words 'are spirit' (Jn. 6:63). Again we see how His personal presence, His life and Spirit, are breathed into us through His words being in us. In the mundane monotony of daily life, doing essentially the same job, travelling to work the same route, the alarm clock going off the same time each morning… there can be breathed into us a unique new life through having His words ever abiding within us. And this 'quickening' in daily life now is the foretaste of the 'quickening' which we will literally experience at the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:22- 'made alive' is the same Greek word translated 'quicken' in Jn. 5:21; 6:63). If the Spirit of Jesus now dwells in us, then that same Spirit shall immortalize our mortal bodies into immortality at the Lord's return (see on Rom. 8:11). In this sense, receiving and living the Lord's Spirit now is receiving life, the kind of life we shall eternally live- "eternal life". The Son giving life now is therefore related seamlessly to how the Father shall give life at the resurrection to life at the last day.

5:22 *For neither does the Father judge anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son*- Even the most basic reading of the New Testament will reveal that the Greek *krino* (usually translated "judge") is used in more than one way. The same is true of the idea of 'judgment' in many languages. Thus in English, "judgment" refers both to the process of deciding / judging a case, and also to the final judgment of condemnation. We read that the Father judges no one (Jn. 5:22); but (evidently in another sense), He does judge (Jn. 8:50). Christ did not come to judge (Jn. 8:15), but in another way He did (Jn. 5:30; 8:16,26). Paul tells the Corinthians to judge nothing, and then scolds them for not judging each other (1 Cor. 4:5 cp. 6:1-3). *Krino* (to "judge") can simply mean to make a decision, or think something through (Acts 20:16; 26:8; 27:11; 1 Cor. 2:2; 7:37; 2 Cor. 2:1; Tit. 3:12). And because of this, we are encouraged to "judge" situations according to God's word and principles; thus 'judging' can mean forming an opinion based on correct interpretation of the word (Jn. 7:24; 1 Cor. 10:15; 11:13; 2 Cor. 5:14). Therefore judging or opinion forming on any other basis is 'judging after the flesh', and this is wrong (Lk. 12:57; Jn. 8:15); judging rightly is part of our basis of acceptability with the Lord Jesus (Lk. 7:43). It is a shameful thing if we can't judge our brethren (1 Cor. 5:12). "Judge not" must be understood in this context.

In the context here, the Lord is warning the Jews who were seeking to kill Him that all judgment is actually His, and not theirs. He is their judge, and shall be their judge at the last day. His very presence amongst men was His judgment of them; the same word is used in 3:19 in stating that the judgment of the Jewish world was simply because the light of Christ had come into it.

5:23 *That all may honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that does not*

honour the Son does not honour the Father that sent him- The honour of the Son is on the basis of the fact that He is our judge (:22). The true glory to God was to be through the lonely rejection of the cross. He who quietly honours / glorifies the Father (Jn. 5:23; 8:49) in the life of self-crucifixion will be honoured / glorified by the Father quietly in this life, and openly in the age to come (Jn. 12:26); such is the mutuality between a man and his God. See on Rev. 7:9.

To love God and Christ is to love our neighbour as ourselves. This is because of the intense unity of God's Name. Because our brethren and sisters share God's Name, as we do, we must love them as ourselves, who also bear that same Name. And if we love the Father, we must love the Son, who bears His Name, with a similar love. The letters of John state this explicitly. If we love God, we *must* love our brother; and if we love the Father, we *must* love the Son. This is why we must honour the Son as we honour the Father (Jn. 5:23); such is the unifying power of God's Name. So the Father, Son and church are inextricably connected. Baptism into the name of Christ is therefore baptism into the Name of the Father, and associates us with the "one Spirit" (Mt. 28:19; Eph. 4:4). In the same way as we cannot choose to live in isolation from the Father and Son, so we cannot separate ourselves from others who bear the same Name. The Scribe well understood all this: "There is one God... and to love him... and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mk. 12:32,33). Those whole offerings represented the whole body of Israel (Lev. 4:7-15). The Scribe understood that those offerings taught that all Israel were unified together on account of their bearing the same Name of Yahweh.

5:24- see on Jn. 3:13; 1 Jn. 3:14.

Truly, truly, I say to you: He that hears my word and believes Him that sent me has eternal life, and comes not into condemnation, but has passed out of death into life- In the immediate context, the hearing of the word alludes to the way the healed impotent man had heard the Lord's word and believed; see on :8. The same word for passing over from death to life is used when John writes to those who had been converted as a result of hearing his Gospel. He says that they know they have passed over from death to life because they live in love (1 Jn. 3:14). Hearing the Lord's word, living in the Spirit, which means living in love, as He loved, living with the spirit of life which He had and has... are all the same thing. "My word" is effectively "my life", His Spirit of life, as established in the prologue. Remember too that John is writing in Hebrew thought to Jewish people. Hebrews are those who have 'passed over', as Abraham their father did geographically so long ago. But the definition of the new Israel, the new Hebrews, are those who have passed over from the darkness of Judaism to live in the light of Christ. If we are walking in the light, with His Spirit, then we shall not be condemned. That judgment [s.w. "condemnation"] is for those who see but reject the light and prefer to remain in darkness.

5:25 *Truly, truly, I say to you: The hour comes and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live*- As explained above, if we have the spirit of Christ, we are living the eternal life. In that sense the resurrection has happened to us; but the physical transformation of our body from mortal to immortal is yet to happen, at the resurrection to life at the last day. And so He says that that hour comes and yet now is. Just as they shall come forth to life at the sound of the Lord's literal voice at His coming, so we come to spiritual life now as a result of hearing His word / voice. "Hearing" here implies more than literal hearing, but hearing with belief, just as 'seeing' in John means seeing and believing.

But the Lord's "hour" in John also has reference to His death. The judgment quality of the crucifixion is reflected by the way in which the Lord speaks of both the cross and the day of future judgment as "the hour" (Jn. 5:25-29). When the Lord taught that "the hour" is both to come and "now is", He surely meant us to understand that in His crucifixion, properly perceived, there is the judgment of this world, the end of this age for us who believe in Him, the cutting off of sin. The way that the Lord Jesus is 'sat down upon' the Judgment Bench by Pilate, as if He is the authentic judge, is further confirmation that in His Passion, the Lord was truly Judge of this world. The hour that was coming and yet was refers to the Lord's death. There, the voice of the Son of God was made clear. We have shown elsewhere how the Lord's blood is personified as a voice crying out. Those who truly hear that voice will be raised to life. The way the graves opened at His death was surely a foretaste of this. See on Jn. 16:25.

5:26 *For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has given the Son life in himself*- This seems to mean that because spiritual life is so inherent in the Son, He therefore has the ability to give that life or spirit to others. We cannot really give our lives to others in any literal sense because we do not have life inherent within ourselves, it is a gift. But the Father and Son have the life which is themselves, and can gift that to others.

5:27- see on Mk. 2:10.

And He has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is a Son of Man- His humanity is His ability to judge us. We will then realize the extent to which He succeeded in every point where we realize we failed, despite being strapped with our same nature. And thus we will respect Him yet the more for His perfection of character, and for the wonder of the salvation that is thereby in Him. We cannot judge because although we too are 'sons of men', we have sinned. Any such judgment would be hypocritical. But the Lord can judge, because He had human nature, being the archetypical "son of man", and yet never sinned.

Even in His life, the Father committed all judgment unto the Son (:22). The Lord can therefore talk in some arresting present tenses: "Verily, verily, I say unto you [as judge], He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation". According to our response to His word, so we have now our judgment. He goes on to speak of how the believer will again hear His voice, at His return: "The hour is coming, and [also] now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live". Our response to His word now is a mirror of our response to His word then. Hence the hour is yet future, and yet now is. 'The Son right now has the authority to execute judgment on the basis of response to His word. He will do this at the last day; and yet even as He spoke, He judged as He heard' [paraphrase of Jn. 5:27-30]. Because He *is* the Son of man, He even then had the power of judgment given to Him (Jn. 5:27). These present tenses would be meaningless unless the Lord was even then exercising His role as judge. When He says that He doesn't judge / condemn men (Jn. 3:17-21), surely He is saying that *He* won't so much judge men as they will judge themselves by their attitude to Him. His concentration was and is on saving men. The condemnation is that men loved darkness, and prefer the darkness of rejection to the light of Christ. Likewise Jn. 12:47,48: "If any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to [so much as to] judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me... hath one that judgeth him: the word [his response to the word, supplying the ellipsis] that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day".

5:28 *Marvel not at this! For the hour comes, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice*- The Lord repeatedly tells the cynical and unbelieving Jews of His day *not* to marvel / wonder, but to *believe*. Perhaps we're intended to read in an ellipsis to these passages: '[Don't only] marvel / wonder [but *believe*]'. John later used the same phrase himself in 1 Jn. 3:13- he was so influenced by reflecting upon the words of the Lord Jesus that His words became John's words. Our language and thought processes should be likewise changed as we come to have Christ in us, and His spirit becomes ours.

"The tombs" translates a Greek term rooted in the idea of rememberance; 'memorial tombs' or 'cenotaph' would be no bad translation. The "all" in view are therefore those within the 'memory' of God, the believers. This is established by the context, which has spoken of how all who now receive the life of the Spirit shall also rise to life in the last day. We who have heard His voice now shall again hear it at the resurrection. It is that word of command which is therefore presented here as the basis for resurretion to life, just as Lazarus is later depicted as coming out of the tomb at the sound of the Lord's voice, as a worked example of what the Lord means here.

5:29 *And shall come forth; they that have done good, to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation*- The 'coming forth' is another connection with the resurrection of Lazarus, who was bidden "Come forth!" by the voice of the Lord Jesus. He was a worked example ahead of time of the Lord's teaching here. Although "life" and "condemnation" are ministered in this life according to a person's response to encounter with the Lord Jesus, their final outworking and moment will be at the resurrection of the last day. That is when immortality begins in a bodily, material sense.

5:30 *I can of myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is righteous, because I seek not my own will, but the will of Him that sent me*- This is another reflection of the Lord's humanity. Our will is not yet coincidental with God's; even the will of the Son was not perfectly attuned to that of the Father (Lk. 22:42; Jn. 5:30; 6:38), hence the finally unanswered prayer for immediate deliverance from the cross. Yet as we grow spiritually, the will of God will be more evident to us, and we will only ask for those things which are according to His will. And thus our experience of answered prayer will be better and better, which in turn will provide us with even more motivation for faith in prayer.

The Lord was and is 'seeking' the Father's will not in the sense that He is unsure of it, but in the Hebrew sense of 'seeking', i.e. respect and worship. The Lord's thinking or spirit is that of the Father. Therefore God's will is His will, and this is reflected in the way the Lord judges. Yet we bear in mind that God's will is for human salvation, that none be lost but all the called should be saved (6:39; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). And that same will is in the Son, who will judge according to this "will".

Am. 7:8 describes Israel's condemnation as a plumb line, a measurement and assessor, being applied to them. Here the figure of weighing up evidence is made to mean condemnation; so immediate is God's judgment. He needs no time to draw a conclusion; being outside of time, He can see a situation and make the judgment immediately, and implicit within the information gathering process. The Lord Jesus likewise judged as soon as He heard (Jn. 5:30). His very existence among men was their judgment- for judgment He came into this world, the light of His moral excellence blinded the immoral (Jn. 9:39).

5:31 *If I testify of myself, my witness is not true*- Having presented Himself as the ultimate judge, the Lord now changes the metaphor to say that He is a witness in His own trial. He requires witnesses to testify about Him. So He is now recognizing that He stands under the judgmental eyes of the Jews, and is presenting His witnesses in His defence.

5:32 *It is another that testifies of me; and I know that the witness which He testifies of me is true*- Codex Beza reads "You know...". The Jews had set themselves up as the Lord's judges. He calls God as a witness in His case (7:28; 8:26). The whole picture of the Father as a witness, the Son in the dock, and the Jews as judges... is all rather bizarre. Who were they to judge God and choose to reject His testimony to His own Son, when in fact they knew ["You know...", Codex Beza] in their consciences that God's witness was true. But this was what the Jews were doing. But in fact anyone who rejects the Lord Jesus as their judge when they encounter Him... is in fact judging Him, and thereby treating God as a witness whose testimony they can reject. The encounter with Jesus, the light of the world, can only really result in total surrender to Him and His cause. Any rejection of Him is to play God, to set oneself up as judge of God, and to remain in the darkness with only condemnation awaiting.

5:33 *You asked John the Baptist, and he has testified to the truth*- The 'asking' is presented by the Lord in the context of legal metaphor. They had as it were summoned John the Baptist to give testimony; not perhaps literally, but in that these Jews now judging the Lord were those who had gone out into the wilderness to hear John, and had asked who he was- and been directed by him to the Lord Jesus.

5:34 *Not that the testimony that I receive is from man; but I say these things so that you may be saved*- This is perhaps saying the same as Paul's references to 'speaking after the manner of men', putting things in human terms in order to persuade those who still thought as men (Rom. 6:19; Gal. 3:15). The testimony of John the Baptist wasn't relevant testimony when God Himself is called as a witness. But because the Lord wished even the salvation of these wicked, bitter, jealous men who even judged God Almighty... He put things in human terms. He reminded them therefore of the testimony of John the Baptist. The Lord wanted men to accept His Father's witness; but He was prepared to let them accept John's human witness, and actually this lower level of perception by them, preferring to believe the words of a mere man, would still be allowed by the Lord to lead them to salvation.

And we might well note that a great number of priests and Pharisees did in fact later get baptized; so the Lord's desire for their salvation did in fact pay off. We should learn from that never, ever to write off anyone as a hopeless case for the Gospel.

The Lord said that He didn't receive witness from men; but, because He so wanted men to be saved, He directed them to the witness of John the Baptist. This in essence is the same as the way in which some people believed the testimony of the Samaritan woman, but others said they only believed once they heard Jesus Himself, as they discounted the testimony of men / women (Jn. 4:42). And so in our day, the ideal witness is that of the Father and Son themselves directly through their word. And yet there are others who are persuaded not by that so much as by the testimony of others who have believed. This may be a lower level compared to the Lord's ideal position of not allowing the testimony of mere men; and yet He makes this concession, for the sake of His burning desire for human salvation.

5:35 - see on Mt. 3:11.

He was the lamp that burns and shines, and you were willing to rejoice for a period in his light- John's message was hard hitting, critical of his audience, and demanding radical repentance. And masses of people rejoiced in it. They liked the hard line, and were joyfully proud that they had apparently responded to it. But they had not come to total commitment to the Lord Jesus, so their apparent repentance was merely a psychological experience of no lasting value. There is true repentance, and surface level repentance. We must perceive the allusion here to the prologue. John "was not the light" in the sense that he was not Jesus personally (Jn. 1:8 RV); but he was in another sense "a burning and shining light" (Jn. 5:35) in that he like us was "the light of the world" on account of his connection with Jesus. We too are to be the light of the world insofar as we are in Christ, who is the light of the world. Yet it could be said that the Jews rejoiced in the light of John the Baptist, but would not come to the true light, of the Lord Jesus.

"You were willing to rejoice for a period" sounds like John's version of the parable of the sower, where the seed is sown but some enthusiastically respond "with joy" only for a while and then fall away (Mt. 13:20). The sower parable therefore had an immediate reference to the lack of lasting response to John's ministry.

5:36- see on Jn. 4:34.

But the witness which I have is greater than that of John. For the works which the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I do, testify that the Father has sent me- As noted above, the Jews sat in judgment on the Lord, and He calls as witness for the defence the Father's empowerment of His miracles. To ignore that testimony or judge it as not significant to the case of Christ was to judge God. Those works came to the final 'accomplishment' of the cross, when "it is finished". And His death there was the final testament to God's love, the light shining in darkness.

"The work that the Father gave me to finish... testifies" (Jn. 5:36 NIV); and thus when "it [was] finished" in the death of the cross, the full testimony / witness of God was spoken and made. When He was lifted up in crucifixion, the beholding Jews knew that His words were truly those of the Father; they saw in the cross God's word spoken through Christ, they saw there the epitome of all the words the Lord spoke throughout His ministry (Jn. 8:28). The Lord's blood was thus a spoken testimony to all men (1 Tim. 2:6 AVmg.).

5:37 *And the Father that sent me, He has testified of me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape*- They, sitting as judges of the Lord Jesus, had refused to hear His testimony about His Son. God's testimony to his Son was in the works or miracles (:36). But although like Nicodemus the Jews had no choice but to accept they had been done, they refused to accept the testimony made by them. Hearing God's voice and seeing His shape allude to Moses; and the Jews would of course agree that Moses was supreme in Judaism, and indeed they had not heard God's voice or seen the outline of His personal shape [another argument for the existence of God in a corporeal form]. But the Lord's idea was that those who had heard His voice and 'seen' / perceived Him, had witnessed a theophany far greater than what Moses saw- the allusions are to the prologue again, where the similarities with Moses are outlined.

It could be of course that the Lord is speaking here by way of glaring contrast: Moses earnestly desired to see God's shape, to view Him, to completely understand Him. This was denied him- but not Jesus. The similarity and yet difference between Moses and Jesus is really brought out here. And again, Moses is shown to be

representative of sinful Israel; as he lifted up the serpent, so they would lift up Christ; as he failed to see the Father's "shape", so they did too.

5:38 *And you do not have His word dwelling in you, for you do not believe the one whom He has sent*- They searched the Scriptures (:39) but the word did not abide in them. The idea of 'abiding' is frequently associated with the abiding of the life, spirit and word of Jesus in the hearts of those who believe in Him. So I would read this as saying that because they did not believe in the sent One, therefore God's word, His seed, His Spirit, His life, did not abide in them; rather than reading it as meaning that if the Old Testament word of Moses abode in them, then they would believe in the sent One. I read it as suggested because the promise of the 'abiding' is clearly presented in John as a consequence which follows and not precedes believing in Christ.

5:39 *You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of me*- This is so tragically true of so many Protestant groups today. Bible study is not necessarily the way to coming to the Lord Jesus. In fact, it was their academic approach to the Bible which actually stopped them coming to Him (:40). Surely the Lord is using irony here: as if to say, 'Go on searching through the scrolls, thinking as you do that finding true exposition will bring you eternal life. But you must come to *Me*, the word-made-flesh, the living and eternal life, if you wish to find it'.

We must see in that Man who had fingernails, hair, who needed to shave, who sneezed and blinked, the very Son of God; the Man who should dominate our thinking and being. And we must grasp the wonder of the fact that from the larynx of a Palestinian Jew came the words of Almighty God. All that was true of natural Israel becomes a warning for us, Israel after the spirit. The tension between the following of Jesus and merely studying the pages of the Bible for academic truth is brought out in the Lord's encounter with the Jews in Jn. 5:39: "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: [but] ye will not come to *me* that ye might have life". Surely the Lord is using irony here: as if to say, 'Go on searching through the scrolls, thinking as you do that finding true exposition will bring you eternal life. But you must come to *me*, the word-made-flesh, the living and eternal life, if you wish to find it'.

C.H. Dodd throughout chapter 3 of his classic *The Interpretation Of The Fourth Gospel* gives ample reason to believe his thesis that John's Gospel was written [partly] in order to deconstruct the popular teachings of Philo in the first century- and there are therefore many allusions to his writings. Thus John records how in vain the Jews searched the Scriptures, because in them they thought they had eternal life (Jn. 5:39)- when this is the very thing that Philo claimed to do. This approach helps us understand why, for example, the prologue to John is written in the way it is, full of allusion to Jewish ideas about the *logos*. How John writes is only confusing to us because we're not reading his inspired words against the immediate background in which they were written- which included the very popular false teachings of Philo about the *logos*. Thus Philo claimed that God had two sons, sent the younger into the world, and the elder, the *logos*, remained "by Him"- whereas John's prologue shows that the *logos* was an abstract idea, which *was* sent into the world in the form of God's one and only Son, the Lord Jesus. See on Jn. 3:3.

The Lord was unlike any other Rabbi- He wasn't a verse-by-verse expositor of the Old Testament, neither did He like to argue case law. He told parables to exemplify and clarify His message- not in order to explain an Old Testament verse, as the Rabbis

tended to. He drew lessons from nature in a way the Rabbis simply couldn't do. Rabbi Jakob, a first century Rabbi, stated: "He who walks along the road repeating the Law and interrupts his repetition and says: How lovely this tree is! How lovely this field is! To him it will be reckoned as if he had misused his life" (The Mishnah, *Pirqe Abot* 3.7b). By contrast, the Lord stopped and looked at the flowers of the field and drew His teaching from them. The Rabbinic way was to write and study endless *midrashim* on Bible verses, a kind of verse-by-verse exposition. The Lord's approach was more holistic and natural. The word *Midrash* comes from *darash*, to search, and perhaps the Lord had this style of 'Bible study' in mind when He said: "Ye search [i.e. midrash] the scriptures because ye think that in them ye have eternal life… [but] ye will not come unto me, that ye may have life" (Jn. 5:39). Neither the Lord nor myself are against careful Bible study. But the Lord was warning against the attitude that eternal life comes from midrashing the Scriptures, writing dry analytical commentary, labouring under the misapprehension that this somehow will give life. Eternal life comes from knowing the life of Jesus, for His nature and quality of life is the life that we will eternally live, by His grace.

They didn't *feel* the wonder of inspiration in their attitude to Bible study- even though they would have devoutly upheld the position that the Bible texts were inspired. And here we have a lesson for ourselves. The Lord brought this out in Jn. 5:39, in saying that "Ye search the Scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life… and ye will not come to *me*, that ye may have life" (RV). Their Bible study did not lead them to Him. And is just as possible that we too can be Bible-centred and not Christ-centred. For to academically study a document and perceive its connections and intellectual purity does not require the living, transforming, demanding relationship which knowing Jesus does. See on Acts 13:27.

The Lord told the Jews to "search the scriptures" so that they would have the word of God and the love of God abiding in them (Jn. 5:38-42). They academically knew "the scriptures", but the voice of God, the presence of God, and the love of God this reveals, was simply hidden from them. They weren't *really* studying. But the Saviour also upbraided His very own men for their lack of true Biblical perception: "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken" (Lk. 24:25). Note that He did not upbraid them for not understanding His own clear prophecies concerning His passion; instead He rebukes them for not grasping the OT teaching about His death and resurrection. Yet if we try to prove from the OT alone that Messiah would die and resurrect, we are largely forced to reason from types. Even Isaiah 53 is only a prophecy of Christ insofar as Hezekiah (to whom it primarily refers) was a type of Christ. Stephen in Acts 7 resorts to typology to prove his points about the Messiahship of Jesus. The point is, the Lord expected those simple fishermen to have worked these things out, to have heard the voice of God in those OT types. And He upbraided them because they failed to do so.

5:40 *But you will not come to me, so that you may have life*- The Jews searched the scriptures, thinking that by their Bible study alone they would receive eternal life. But they never came to Christ that they might know the eternal life that is in Him (Jn. 5:39,40). They thought "eternal life" was in a book, a reward for correct intellectual discernment and exposition, rather than in the man Christ Jesus. And for all our Biblicism, we need to examine themselves in this regard. For like Peter, we must be Christ-centred more than purely Bible-centred; we must see Him "in all the Scriptures", knowing that the whole word of God's revelation was made flesh in Him.

The gift of life, the life and living of Jesus, His Spirit, was not predicated upon academic Bible study. We could not ask for a clearer argument against the argument that God's Spirit is only active today through the so-called "Spirit-word". The "life" or Spirit given to those who "come to me" is a gift; and the Jews were in fact hindered from receiving it by their excessive Biblicism.

5:41 *I receive not glory from men*- We are commanded to honour or give glory to the Son (:23). So the Lord is not against being honoured. So He may be lamenting here that He is not receiving honour from those men, they were not believing in Him but rather judging Him. Of course, He may have meant as GNB "I am not looking for human praise", i.e., as much as looking for their belief in the Father's offer of salvation. Or maybe the Lord's point was that He received glory from the Father (2 Pet. 1:17), from God Himself, and so any human testimony to Him was of little value (Jn. 5:34). In this case the Lord is alluding again to their standing in judgment upon Him and requiring witnesses to testify.

5:42 *But I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts*- Understanding "the love of God" as the love we have for God opens up several passages. The Jews didn't have the love of God inside them, i.e. love for God, because they didn't have His spirit. Love is the ultimate fruit of the Spirit; there was no love in their hearts because they had no Spirit. All they had was an academic, slavish devotion to academic Bible study. But they had no heart, no Spirit and so no love for God. No wonder their Bible study didn't lead them to grasp the most fundamental theme of the Old Testament- that the Messiah was to be God's Son. But their lack of "love of God" doesn't mean God didn't love them. They *are* beloved for the father's sakes; as a Father always loves His wayward son. But they didn't have love of God in their souls. Paul's prayer that God would direct hearts "into the love of God" (2 Thess. 3:5) surely means that He would influence their consciousness to be more filled with an upsurging love of God, rather than meaning that God would bring them into a position where He loved their hearts.

5:43 *I come in my Father's Name, and you do not accept me. If another shall come in his own name, you will accept him*- This again connects to the prologue. The Jews did not accept / receive Him; but those who did receive Him, received the Spirit. This is the mutuality between the believer and the Lord; if we receive Him, we receive the gift of His Spirit. The Jews were more likely to receive another Messiah, because he would not ask them to receive the kind of all demanding spirit which the Lord breathed in to those who accepted Him. The Father had testified to His Son's claims by the miracles done; the Lord came in His Father's Name / authority (GNB) in the sense that the miracles showed that He was clearly of God, as Nicodemus accepted. A claimant with lesser credentials, who came only in his own name, was more likely to be accepted because there was less personally at stake.

5:44 *How can you believe, you who accept praise from each other, but do not seek the praise that comes from the only God?*- The 'belief' in view is surely belief in Jesus as the Christ and Son of God. Being in a self-regarding, self-congratulatory religious environment, even if it is nominally Christian, is not the way toward faith in the Lord Jesus. The Greek seems to carry the idea: 'Glory can only be given to God, whereas you want glory from each other, effectively making yourselves equal to God as you falsely accused me of. You cannot believe in God whilst you are playing God, wanting glory to yourselves rather than to Him'. It is such arrogance, petty pride and positioning in the eyes of others which stops millions if not billions from believing.

Because there is only one God, there is only one glory, one Name of God, one standard of spirituality, one judge, one justifier. Whilst men seek glory and approbation and acceptance and justification from other men, they are denying the principle of one God. If there is only one God, we should seek His honour and justification, to the *total* exclusion of that of men. Hosea had revealed this truth earlier: "I am the Lord thy God... and thou shalt know no god but me: for there is no saviour beside me... neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee [i.e. thee alone] the fatherless findeth mercy" (Hos. 13:4; 14:3). Because God alone can give salvation and mercy, therefore there is no space for worshipping or seeking for the approbation of anything or anyone else; for the receipt of mercy and salvation are the only ultimate things worth seeking. There is only one God who can give them, and therefore we should seek for His acceptance alone.

5:45 *Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one that accuses you, Moses, on whom you have set your hope*- They who were judging the Lord Jesus were now put into the dock. An Moses was called as witness against them. They were condemned by Moses' law. And God was the judge to whom they were accused. Their judgment of the Lord, requiring Him to call God and John the Baptist as witnesses, was effectively their playing God. For any such judgment is playing God. And such will have to face God Himself as judge.

5:46 *For if you believed Moses, you would believe me. For he wrote of me*- The allusion is to the way Israel were intended to believe Moses because of the "great work" of the Red Sea and Passover lamb deliverance (Ex. 14:31). God came to Israel personally in the thick cloud; the great theophany was so that Israel would believe Moses (Ex. 19:9). But they did not believe Moses; and Israel too were blind to the great theophany of God in Christ [see allusions to it in the prologue], and did not believe either Moses or Christ.

Disbelief of Moses and rejection of His writings as inspired (:47) was the cardinal sin according to Judaism. But the Lord accuses these men of it- men who spent their lives poring over the scrolls. Their rejection of the message of Moses meant they rejected Moses. They had wrongly assumed that devotion to the Bible assured them of acceptability with God. But to miss the message of Christ is to be left without God and effectively despising those writings. The essence of this conundrum is seen in many Christians to this day.

5:47 *But if you do not believe his writings, how shall you believe my words?*- This is John's equivalent to Lk. 16:31: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, even if one rises from the dead". The Lord's resurrection is here paralleled with "my words". The risen Lord was and is His word to men. And in the Jewish context, it would only be accepted if they had firstly believed Moses. Of course, they would have been indignant at the idea that they did not believe the writings of Moses; they held a doctrine of hyper-inspiration of the text of the Torah, whereby every letter was inspired and seen as full of meaning. But such a reverent view of the Bible text can lead to Bibliolatry, rather than to faith in the Christ who is witnessed to throughout that text.

JOHN CHAPTER 6

6:1 *After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias*- We get the sense of the Lord increasingly trying to retreat from attention. He had withdrawn from Judea to Galilee on the hunch that He

would not be accepted in His home area; and was found wrong on that. Now, He goes to the other side of the sea, but the crowd follows Him. And then He goes up into a mountain (:3)- and sees a great crowd still coming to Him (:5). His patience and loving care for the masses is wonderful; when He really wanted a break from the attention.

6:2 *And a great crowd followed him, because they saw the signs which he performed on those that were sick*- As argued throughout chapter 5, the Lord's miracles were undeniably Divine and were as it were a legal testimony to His authenticity as God's Son in the court of public opinion. Even Nicodemus had recognized this. But from the way the Lord speaks later in the chapter, their motivation was for healing of sickness, for personal benefit rather than the bread of life.

6:3 *And Jesus went up into the mountain, and there he sat with his disciples*- This clearly echoes the description of the sermons on the mount and plain in Matthew and Luke. The message that He taught them all the hours it took for them to get hungry isn't recorded. But we can perhaps infer from the connections with Matthew and Luke that it was the same basic content- the manifesto of the Kingdom of God which was preached elsewhere.

6:4 *Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand*- As noted on 5:1, "the feast of the Lord" had been hijacked by the Jews, so that it had become instead *their* feast. This is the problem- when mere religion swamps and takes over real spirituality.

6:5 *Jesus therefore lifting up his eyes, and seeing that a great crowd came to him, said to Philip: Where are we to buy bread that these may eat?*- The "therefore" apparently connects with the coming of Passover (:4). He saw a parallel between the provision of food for that crowd, and the provision of the Paschal lamb, Himself, for Israel's salvation. We wonder why Philip particularly is given this test (:7). The Lord saw perhaps that there were specific issues with Philip that could be addressed and perfected by the whole experience. Or it could be that because Philip was from the immediate locality where they were, Bethsaida (1:44; 12:21). And so the Lord asked him where the local shops were.

It makes a good exercise to re-read the Gospels looking out for cases of where the Lord urged the disciples to not look at Him as somehow separate from themselves, an automatic Saviour from sin and problems. Thus when it was apparent that the huge, hungry crowd needed feeding, the Lord asked the disciples where "*we*" could get food from to feed them (Jn. 6:5). In all the accounts of the miraculous feedings, we see the disciples assuming that Jesus would solve the situation- and they appear even irritated and offended when He implies that this is *our* joint problem, and *they* must tackle this seemingly impossible task with *their* faith. The mentality of the disciples at that time is that of so many Trinitarians- who assume that 'Jesus is the answer' in such a form that they are exempt from seeing His humanity as a challenge for them to live likewise. See on Mk. 11:20.

6:6 *And this he said to test him. For he knew what he would do*- So often the Lord's style with us is just the same. We are given testing situations and questions, purely for the development of our own faith and understanding. The phrase "knew what He would do" is similar to the idea that the Lord knew that He would die on the cross. And so again, the whole incident can be understood on at least two levels. The Lord knew He would make bread to meet their hunger; and He knew that He would on the cross be the bread of life to meet human hunger for salvation.

6:7- see on Jn. 14:8.

Philip answered him: Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one may take a little- We see here the dead literalism of Philip, and how faith sees in completely different terms to the detailed literalism of unbelief, which focuses on the dimensions of the problem rather than the possibility of solution. Energy so often goes into carefully calculating the difficulties, the height and nature of the mountain, rather than into faith that the whole situation can simply be moved.

Andrew's comment that they had five loaves and two fishes surely carried the undertone that '…and that's not even enough for us, let alone them- we're starving too, you know!'. The disciples wanted the crowd sent away, to those who sold food, so that they might buy for themselves (Mt. 14:15). As the Lord's extended commentary upon their reactions throughout John 6 indicates, these responses were human and selfish. And yet- and here is a fine insight into His grace and positive thinking about His men- He puts their very words and attitudes into the mouth of the wise virgins at the very moment of their acceptance at the day of judgment: "The wise answered [the foolish virgins] saying, Not so, lest there be not enough [s.w. "not sufficient", Jn. 6:7] for us and you; but got ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves" (Mt. 25:9). Clearly the Lord framed that parable in the very words, terms and attitudes of His selfish disciples. He counted even their weakness as positive, and thus showed His desire to accept them in the last day in spite of it. Another reading of the connection would be that the Lord foresaw how even in the final moment of acceptance into His Kingdom, right on the very eve of judgment day, His people would still be as hopelessly limited in outlook and spiritually self-centred as the disciples were that day with the multitude. Whatever way we want to read this undoubted connection of ideas, we have a window into a grace so amazing it almost literally takes our breath away.

6:8 *One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him*- Andrew was also from Bethsaida (1:44), so he may have known the boy personally. The villages were very small and everyone would have known each other. The focus of this incident is upon relatively unknown disciples, Philip and Andrew, instead of the usual Peter, James and John.

6:9 *There is a lad here, who has five barley loaves and two fishes; but what are these among so many?*- Barley loaves were the food of the very poor (Ez. 4:12; 13:19), costing a third the cost of wheat (Rev. 6:6); and the Greek means 'little fishes'. It was all the very lowest of human provision which was turned into so much. The food provided is later interpreted by the Lord as His own flesh and blood, sacrificed to meet human hunger. The poorest, roughest of food was used to represent the Lord's nature and origins. It was God's blessing upon this which led to the abundant spiritual filling of all those who hungred for Him and His word.

6:10 *Jesus said: Make the people sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand*- The command to recline at banquet ["sit down"] was to set up the similarity with the Messianic banquet, to which the Lord provided an open invitation to whoever wished to hear His word. Who could "sit down" at a feast was a major issue with the Jews; only those from whom there would be no guilt by association were invited to recline together. But the Lord operated no screening process, and goes on to compare this feast with the breaking of bread and the final Messianic banquet. From our side of things, we are not to screen, the invitation to the Lord's feast in this life and that to come is to be offered by us without screening. "Whoseoever will" is to be welcome. The only other time John uses the verb "sit down / recline" is in describing the scene at the last supper (13:12).

The mention of grass is to highlight the fact that Passover was about to begin, for grass is mowed in Palestine in April. Or it could be that the grass refers to hay from the recent mowing. The point is that this feast was the Lord's equivalent of the Passover feast, and later in this chapter He predicates salvation upon participating in it.

6:11 *Jesus therefore took the loaves and having given thanks, he distributed them to those that were sitting down. Likewise also the fishes, as much as they could eat*- Other manuscripts as AV add: "Distributed them to the disciples and the disciples to those that were sitting...". Time and again, it becomes apparent that the Lord especially designed incidents in His men's experience which they would learn from, and later be able to put to use when similar experiences occurred after He had ascended. This was essential to the training of the twelve disciples. Thus He made *them* distribute the food to the multitude (Jn. 6:11); yet after His ascension, we meet the same Greek word in Acts 4:35, describing how they were to distribute welfare to the multitude of the Lord's followers. The visual image suggested of the Lord holding the bread in His hands, blessing and giving to the disciples is so clearly recollective of the scene at the last supper. "As much as they could eat" is unique to John, and emphasizes the super abundance of the Lord's spiritual provision.

6:12 *And when they were filled, he said to his disciples: Gather up the broken pieces which remain over, so nothing goes to waste*- The language of 'filling' must be in understood in John's Gospel as referring to filling with the Spirit. The Lord's body, His being, His Spirit, His life, His word, was to fill His people, mediated through the work of the disciples.

The gathering up is twice mentioned (:13). The same word is used of the gathering together of the Gentiles in one with the Jews (11:52). "Waste" is a word commonly used of the lost, of how the Lord wants none to perish. It is His will that none should perish, and that was the reason for His death (3:15,16 s.w.). The intention of His cross is therefore lived out in all our efforts to bring others to salvation, to keep them in the path, and not to "perish". All such efforts will have His special blessing and Spirit behind them. The Lord uses the same word in describing the food He had created as 'perishing' (:27; s.w. "goes to waste"). He is making the point that if the food was gathered then it would *not* perish. The allusion is clearly to the gathering of the manna, but the idea is that the food created represented something that would not perish, eternal life. The gathering in of the Gentiles is in view, but so is the simple fact that the broken ones, the fragments, are also to be saved. And the Lord has delegated that work of gathering them to us His disciples.

6:13 *So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten*- The twelve baskets clearly suggest the formation of a new Israel from the broken ones ["fragments"], through the work of the disciples. We recall how the Gentile woman wished to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the table of the Jewish Kingdom (Mk. 7:28). This again encourages us to see this ingathering of broken ones, that left over by the Jewish crowd, as symbolic of the ingathering of the Gentiles by the disciples taking the Gospel to the Gentile world- a commission they were terribly slow to perceive.

6:14- see on Jn. 12:42.

When the people saw the sign which he did, they said: This is of a truth the prophet that comes into the world!- The miracle of the loaves and fishes made men see the similarity between the Lord and Moses, whom they perceived to have provided the manna (:32). Therefore they thought that Jesus must be the prophet like

Moses, of whom Moses wrote. But the Lord goes on to explain that He was greater than Moses, because Moses' bread only gave them temporal life, whereas if a man ate of Him, he would live for ever; His words would give spiritual life which was part of that "eternal life" of the Father (6:49,50). The Jews thought that the prophet like Moses of Dt. 18:18 was a prophet equal or inferior to Moses. John's Gospel records how Christ was showing that the prophet would be greater than Moses. Martha understood that when she said that "the Christ... which should come into the world" (i.e. the prophet of Dt. 18:18) was "the Son of God", and therefore Jesus of Nazareth (11:27).

"Groups" or "ranks" is a military term; "Hundreds and fifties" may allude to the divisions within a unit of Roman soldiers, and 5000 was the number of soldiers in a Roman legion (Mk. 6:40). The idea may be that the Lord was forming a new army out of this rag tag bunch of people fascinated in His teaching, and fed by Him with rations which didn't run out. But the war of occupation was spiritual. The Lord is hereby subverting the expectation that Messiah would raise a literal army to fight the Romans. A general was seen as having personal responsibility for feeding his soldiers; and the Lord takes that responsibility by feeding this rabble of people. Perhaps this is why Jn. 6:15 notes that after this miracle, the people tried to forcibly make the Lord Messianic king. The feeding miracle played directly to their Messianic expectations: "When the people saw the sign which he did, they said: This is of a truth the prophet that comes into the world!" (Jn. 6:14).

6:15 *So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take him by force to make him king, withdrew again to the mountain by himself*- "Take him by force" could even imply kidnapping, taking Him away to be their puppet in a revolution against Rome. The Lord clearly felt the need for intense personal prayer at this time; the temptation to attempt to become an immediate Messianic King was great for Him, and this was a recurrence of the wilderness temptation to that same effect. John doesn't record the wilderness temptations, but he records how the same temptations returned to Him throughout His ministry, in fulfilment of the Synoptic observation that the devil of temptation departed from Him only for a while, implying it returned later.

Prayer in one sense has to be a lonely experience. This is all surely why the Lord Himself is frequently pictured by the Gospel writers as making an effort to be alone in prayer to the Father (Mk. 1:35; 3:13; 9:2; Mt. 14:13,23; 17:1; Lk. 6:12; 9:28; 22:39,41). This is all some emphasis. Be it rising in the early hours to go out and find a lonely place to pray, or withdrawing a stone's throw from the disciples in Gethsemane to pray… He sought to be alone. Jn. 6:15 emphasizes this repeated feature of the Lord's life: "He departed again into a mountain himself alone". The fact He often ["again"] retreated alone like this is emphasized by three words which are effectively saying the same thing- departed, himself, alone. Much as we should participate in communal prayers or in the prayers of our partner or our children, there simply has to be the time for serious personal prayer in our lives. And I have to drive the point home: *Are you doing this?* Putting it in other terms- are you alone *enough?*

6:16 *And when evening came, his disciples went down to the sea*- Jn. 6:15-17 implies they got tired of waiting for the Lord Jesus to return from prayer, and so they pushed off home to Capernaum, leaving Him alone. Yet by grace He came after them on the lake, to their salvation.

6:17 *And they entered into a boat and were going over by sea to Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them*- "Not yet" suggests, as hinted at

in the synoptics, that He had promised to rejoin them. He wanted them to exercise their minds and assume that He would indeed keep His promise and come to them- but by walking on the water. His promise of returning to us likewise demands faith and a stretching of our paradigms. For the promise of the Comforter was that the Lord would indeed 'come to them', but through the indwelling of the Spirit. He was training them- trying to get them to consider the words 'I will come to you' as being capable of fulfilment in ways they could not previously imagine. He likewise works in educating us.

6:18 *And the sea was rising because of a great wind that blew*- The similarities with Jonah are apparent. The storm was to bring them to repentance, to make them appreciate their mission to the Gentiles which had been implicit in their gathering up the fragments dropped by Israel, and forming 12 baskets of a new Israel. But as with Jonah, they needed a near death experience in a storm to get them to perceive this.

6:19 *When therefore they had rowed about five or six kilometres, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat; and they were afraid*- They rowed rather than sailed because the wind was against them; and recall that in Hebrew thought, wind and the spirit are the same words. Their desire to run back home to Capernaum, away from this challenge to harvest the Gentiles, was resisted by the Spirit. Their fear of the approaching Lord Jesus was perhaps because they did subconsciously recognize Him, but feared a meeting with Him again, as they were fleeing from His work of grace towards the Gentiles.

6:20 *But he said to them: It is I! Be not afraid!*- It was not that they thought He was someone else, like a ghost. "They saw Jesus" (:19). So His assurance to them was that "It is I", the "I am" (Gk.), the One with the character and Name of God, who above all wanted their salvation. And there was no need to fear Him; He was their saviour. For salvation by grace is at the heart of the memorial Name "I am". "It is I" recalls many Old Testament passages where God declares Himself as Israel's saviour, the "I am", who also walks upon the waves of the sea and brings peace to the storm. The Lord was asking them to see in Him the human face of that saviour God, the manifestation of that Name in a human person; and to accept that for them it meant salvation, and they need not fear, even their own sins and rejection of the commission to the Gentiles.

6:21 *Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going*- John speaks in his Gospel of those who received Christ (Jn. 1:12,16; 3:32 etc.)- and it is in allusion to this that he speaks of how the disciples ‘received Christ’ into their ship whilst about to drown on Galilee. Their desperation as they faced death was understood by John as a symbol of the desperation of all those who truly receive Christ. But without perceiving our desperation, can we properly ‘receive’ Him? The Lord did not stop them from their plan to return home; He made the boat arrive immediately at the land where they intended going, "to which they were going away" (Gk.). This is typical of His ways with men; we are not stopped from our path, but His intervention on the way is such that with Him now with us, we see the end point so differently.

6:22 *On the next day the people who remained on the other side of the sea noticed that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone*- Incident after incident shows the Lord doing something alone, and then the disciples somehow being presented as doing the same. Take the way He departed “himself alone” when

the crowd wanted to make Him king; and then soon afterwards we read that the crowd perceived that the disciples had likewise departed 'themselves alone' [same Greek phrase and construction, Jn. 6:15,22]. The point is that the world is presented as perceiving the disciples in the same terms and way as they did Jesus, even when, in this case, Jesus was not physically with them. And we too are to be "in Him" in our work of witness for Him.

The incident was intended to teach that the Lord's presence could be achieved without His literal presence at all times. This was to prepare the audience for the amazing promise of the Comforter, that through the Spirit, the Lord could be present as really as He had been during His ministry.

6:23 *(Some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks)*- John was himself a fisherman and knew Tiberias boats from those of Capernaum. This is typical of the inspiration process; personal knowledge is worked with through the process of inspiration. They came searching for Him, noting He had not got into the single boat the disciples used. They then went to Capernaum and found Him there- the miracle of His walking on the water was left for them to figure out, for there is more subtly in the Divine than to trumpet His achievments in a primitive way. The wonderful things He does for us today likewise need to be meditated upon to be perceived.

6:24 *When the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus*- They assumed He was still somewhere in the area, since He had not gone in the boat with the disciples. They thought that His physical presence was required for miracles and blessing; hence the Lord left them to meditate upon His crossing of the stormy sea and presence in Capernaum, where in physical terms He could not have become immediately present without the Spirit.

Their "seeking" of the Lord was on a prely surface level. Like Israel we can seek God daily, taking delight in approaching unto Him; and yet need the exhortation to urgently seek Him (Is. 55:6 cp. 58:2). We can appear to seek unto Him in prayer and attendance at our meetings, and yet not seek Him in the real sense at all. Likewise men came to Jesus physically, at quite some effort to themselves, and yet He tells them that they have not truly come to Him at all (Jn. 6:24 cp. 35-37). We can draw near with our mouth, honour Him with our lips, "but have removed [our] heart far from me" (Is. 29:13). Only those who call upon Him "in truth", with "unfeigned lips" will he heard (Ps. 145:18). Men repeatedly 'sought for' the Lord Jesus (Mk. 1:37; Jn. 6:26), but He told them to *truly* seek Him (Mt. 6:33; 7:7; Lk.12:31). "Strive to enter in [now] at the strait gate: for many [at judgment day] will seek to enter in, and shall not be able" (Lk. 13:24). Our attitude to seeking the Lord now will be the attitude we have then. The emotion and reality of the judgment experience will not essentially change our attitude to the Lord. If we have "boldness" in prayer now (Heb. 4:16), then we will have "boldness in the day of judgment". How we feel to Him now is how we will then.

6:25 *And when they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him: Rabbi, when did you come here?*- Often we ask questions which disguise our essential question, which we are afraid to ask or verbalize. The real question was *how* He had come to Capernaum. But they covered this by eenquiring *when*. In their hearts they must surely have sensed that He had also performed a miracle in terms of His presence. And He wished to stretch the thinking of His true followers on this point, leading them up to His paradigm breaking promise of the Comforter, His presence

realized by the Spirit and without His physical presence. Their seeking and 'finding' Him was on a purely human level; see on :24.

6:26 *Jesus answered them and said: Truly, truly, I say to you: You seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled*- They did not see the signs in the sense that they did not perceive the intended teaching of the miracle. They were focused purely on the immediate benefit of food. John records the Lord's discourse to the end we might see or perceive the sign of the miracle. The allusion is to Ps. 74:9 LXX, where Israel did not 'see their signs' because there was no prophet amongst them. They didn't see the sign because they failed to really perceive Him as the ultimate prophet. They claimed to see Him as the prophet (:14), but not in reality. The whole record brings out the tension between surface level spirituality and true faith.

6:27 *Do not labour for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set His seal of approval*- The people laboured in that they walked around the lake in the boiling midday sun in order to be with Christ and perhaps benefit from the physical food He might provide. He tells them not to labour for the food which would perish, but for that which would endure for ever. The labouring of those people, trekking around that lake in the heat of the day, or crossing it by boat, should be the effort we put in to eating the manna of God's word- according to how the Lord. There was a theme of urgency in Israel's gathering of the manna; it had to be gathered before the sun was up, or it would be lost. Would that we could have that same sense of urgency as we read, realizing that the rising of the sun at the second coming of will put an end to our opportunity to feed and grow. If Israel didn't gather the manna, or if they left it to another day, it bred worms and stank. The active anger of God was to be expressed against those who didn't take the wonder of the manna seriously. So our gathering of the manna / word must be taken seriously; it's not a question of skim reading familiar words, or doing mental gymnastics with it in an intellectual world of our own.

The food which the Lord provided was His body and life, given above all upon the cross. He urges His hearers to labour to possess this, because this is the food that will abide in / into [Gk. *eis*] the life eternal (Jn. 6:27-AV ‘endures unto’ is a poor translation). The essence of having and ‘eating’ of the Lord’s sacrifice now, is what eternal life is to be all about. Through the gift of the Spirit, the Lord was giving them His life, the eternal life. Absorbing Him, His sacrifice, the food which is Him, begins now… and in so doing, we are eating of the food / bread that will abide into the life eternal. He surely had in mind too the manna stored in the ark, which was eaten in the wilderness and yet abode / endured into Israel’s life in the promised land. And that bread, of course, was symbolic of Him; it is the “hidden manna” which His followers will eat in the future Kingdom (Rev. 2:17). Eph. 1:17,18 puts it another way, by paralleling "the knowledge of [Christ]" with "knowing what is the hope of his calling... the riches of the glory of his inheritance". The blessed hope of our calling is not simply a life of bliss in ideal conditions, but more specifically it is the hope of 'knowing Christ' as person eternally, in all the glorious fullness of that experience.

6:28 *They replied to him: What must we do, that we may work the works of God?*- They ignored His challenge regarding accepting His life, by enquiring how they too could do miracles. This is the same wrong perspective which is characteristic of Pentecostalism: How can I do miracles?

The people had walked all round the lake to see Jesus and get some food from Him. They ask what they can *do* that they might work / labour [same Greek word] the

works of God; and they are told that the real work / labour which God requires is to believe (Jn. 6:28). To truly believe, to the extent of being sure that we will surely have the eternal life promised, is the equivalent of walking round the lake. We like those crowds want to concretely *do* something. The young man likewise had asked what good thing he must *do* in order to get eternal life (Mt. 19:16). But the real work is to *believe*. To really make that enormous mental effort to accept that what God has promised in Christ will surely come true for us. The proof that this is so is because Jesus really said these words, and "him hath God the Father sealed", i.e. shown His confirmation and acceptance of. So again we come down to the implications of real basics. Do we believe Jesus existed and said those words? Yes. Do we believe the Biblical record is true and inspired? Yes. Well, this Jesus who made these promises and statements about eternal life was "sealed" / validated by God. Do we believe this? Yes. So, what He said is utterly true. He will come and live within us, if we eat of Him, if we are open to Him.

6:29 *Jesus answered and said to them: This is the work of God- that you believe in him whom He has sent*- God's work is understood in the context here as miracles. The people wanted to know how they might perform God's works, miracles like making free bread. And as was ever His style, the Lord turns the words of the question another way. God's work is that we believe. Human belief is therefore His work- which we must allow to happen to us, rather than seeking to do works. It's rather like David asking to build God a house, and being told that instead, God would build him a house- if he and his children allowed the way of the Spirit to operate. But this response was totally missed by the crowd- they wanted another miracle (:30), clearly in the hope that again they might materially benefit from it.

6:30 *They replied to him: What then will you do for a sign, so that we may see and believe you? What work will you do?*- The Lord could have spoken words similar to Heb. 11:1 to them- He could have corrected them by saying that actually, faith is not related to what you can see. You cannot "see and believe" in the true sense of belief. But the Lord doesn't do that. He says that He in front of them is the bread of God, miraculously given. And their critical tone changes: "Lord, evermore give us this bread!" (:34). This surely is our pattern- not to necessarily correct every error when we see it, but to pick up something the other person has said and develop it, to bring them towards truth.

The sign or miracle they wanted was of yet more free bread, in order to compare with Moses who had given Israel manna. They had been given that sign- but they wanted it again, that they might benefit from it. They were missing the point that the Lord was greater than Moses.

6:31 *Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: He gave them bread out of heaven to eat*- The Lord's reply shows that the "he" they had in view was Moses. They wanted Him to again demonstrate that He was the prophet like Moses (Dt. 18:18). But He was greater than Moses, and the manna He would give was of salvation, and not temporary food for the day.

The living word of God which speaks to us each personally. In this sense, we are constantly being invited to place ourselves in the position of those who played a part in the historical incidents which that word records. The Jews quoted to the Lord Jesus: "He gave *them* bread from heaven to eat", to which the Lord replied [after the teaching style of the rabbis to which they were accustomed] by changing and challenging a word in the quotation they made: "It is not Moses who gave *you* the

bread". He wanted them to see that the account of bread being given to Israel in the wilderness was not just dry history. *They*, right there and then, were as it were receiving that same bread from Heaven. See on Mt. 22:31; Heb. 11:4.

6:32 *Jesus replied to them: Truly, truly, I say to you: It was not Moses that gave you the bread out of heaven, but my Father; who now gives you the true bread out of heaven*- They were so focused upon Moses that they failed to appreciate the operation of God through Him by the Spirit. This is the typical failure of religious people- to focus upon the structure, the means to the end, rather than perceive the ultimate source and end, that which is before and behind and beyond the religious structure or individual they are so focused upon. And we can take that message to ourselves.

6:33 *For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world*-

These words, and others like them, are misused to support the wrong idea that Jesus existed in Heaven before his birth. Trinitarians take these words as literal in order to prove their point. However, if we are to take them literally, then this means that somehow Jesus literally came down as a person. Not only is the Bible totally silent about this, but the language of Jesus being conceived as a baby in Mary's womb is made meaningless. Jn. 6:60 describes the teaching about the manna as a saying "hard to take in" (Moffatt's Translation); i.e. we need to understand that it is figurative language being used. The Lord Jesus is explaining how the manna was a type of himself. The manna was sent from God in the sense that it was God who was responsible for creating it on the earth; it did not physically float down from the throne of God in Heaven. Thus the Lord's coming from Heaven is to be understood likewise; he was created on earth, by the Holy Spirit acting upon the womb of Mary (Lk.1:35).

The Lord Jesus says that "the bread that I will give is my flesh" (:51). Trinitarians claim that it was the 'God' part of Jesus which came down from Heaven. But the Lord says that it was his "flesh" which was the bread which came down from Heaven. Likewise He associates the bread from Heaven with himself as the "Son of man" (Jn. 6:62), not 'God the Son'. In this same passage in Jn. 6 there is abundant evidence that He was not equal to God. "The living Father has sent me" (Jn. 6:57) shows that He and God do not share co-equality; and the fact that "I live by the Father" (Jn. 6:57) is hardly the 'co-eternity' of which Trinitarians speak.

It must be asked, When and how did Jesus 'come down' from Heaven? The Lord Jesus speaks of himself as "he which cometh down from heaven" (:33,50), as if it is an ongoing process. Speaking of God's gift of His Son, the Lord said "My Father is giving you the bread" from Heaven (v.32 Weymouth). At the time the Lord was speaking these words, he had already 'come down' in a certain sense, in that He had been sent by God. Because of this, He could also speak in the past tense: "I am the living bread which came down from Heaven" (:51). But he also speaks about 'coming down' as the bread from Heaven in the form of His death on the cross: "The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (v.51). So we have the Lord Jesus speaking here of having already come down from Heaven, being in the process of 'coming down', and still having to 'come down' in His death on the cross. This fact alone should prove that 'coming down' refers to God manifesting Himself, rather than only referring to the Lord's birth. This is conclusively proved by all the Old Testament references to God 'coming down' having just this same meaning. Thus God saw the affliction of His people in Egypt, and 'came down' to save them through Moses. He has seen our bondage to sin, and has 'come down' or

manifested Himself, by sending Jesus as the equivalent to Moses to lead us out of bondage.

A Devotional Appeal

The Lord's language of coming down from Heaven can be understood from a very powerful devotional aspect. He reasons that because He had *come* down from Heaven, therefore, whoever *comes* to Him, He would never reject (Jn. 6:37,38). The connection is in the word "come". We 'come' to Jesus not by physically travelling towards Him, but in our mental attitudes. He likewise 'comes' to us, not by moving trillions of kilometers from Heaven to earth, but in His 'coming' down into our lives and experiences. If He has come so very far to meet us, and we come to Him... then surely we will meet and He will not turn away from us, exactly because He has 'come' so far to meet us. This theme continues throughout John's Gospel. "What and if you shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?" (Jn. 6:62) is therefore not a reference to Him physically travelling off anywhere- He is saying that if people would not 'come' to Him in meeting, then He would withdraw the opportunity from them. He wouldn't stand waiting for them indefinitely. This explains the urgency behind His appeals to 'come' to Him. He had 'come down', and was waiting for people to 'come' to Him. He's come a huge distance, from the heavenly heights of His own spirituality, to meet with whores and gamblers, hobby level religionists, self-absorbed little people... and if we truly come to Him, if we want to meet with Him, then of course He will never turn us away. For it was to meet with us that He 'came down'. This approach shows the fallacy of interpreting His 'coming down' to us and our 'coming' to Him in a literal sense.

And yet this Lord of all grace also sought to confirm men and women in the path they chose. He admitted that His comment about Himself being the manna which descended from Heaven was a "hard saying". And yet He goes straight on to say [perhaps with a slight smile playing at the corner of His lips] something even more enigmatic: "What and if you shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?" (Jn. 6:62). Surely He is here chosing to give them yet another, even harder "saying"; and goes on to stress that His sayings, His words, are the way to life eternal (Jn. 6:63). For those who didn't want His words, He was confirming them in their darkness. And He did this by the mechanism of using an evidently "hard saying". Therefore to simplistically interpret the saying as meaning that the Lord had literally descended from Heaven through the sky just as literally as He would ascend there through the clouds... is in fact to quite miss the point- that this is a "hard saying". It's not intended to have a simplistic, literalistic interpretation.

Life was given to the world not only in the sense of eternal life. A way of life was shown to us, the only way of life- the life of the cross. It is a frequently found paradox in Scripture that life comes through death. The Lord’s cross and resurrection are the prime example. However, it is not simply that His death opened the way to eternal life for us at His coming. It gives us spiritual life now, in that all that we do in our being and living should be motivated by the spirit of the cross. Each of the myriad daily decisions we take should be impacted by our knowledge of the cross. In this way, the cross gives life right now.

6:34 *They replied to him: Lord, always give us this bread*- "Always" or 'for ever' could mean that they simply wanted an eternal bread making machine to ease their material burden in their hand to mouth existence. But the sense of 'eternity' in their words leads us to wonder whether they were beginning to grasp His point. The Samaritan woman likewises starts off talking about literal water, and then comes to

perceive that the Lord is offering an altogether different kind of water. It could be that the same shift in understanding, from the literal to the spiritual, is happening here too.

6:35 *Jesus said to them: I am the bread of life. He that comes to me shall not hunger, and he that believes on me shall never thirst*- "The bread of life" was a Messianic term, and the Lord here makes one of His most direct claims to actually be Messiah. Several times the Lord stresses His personal identification with the manna / bread. But this was His flesh, which He gave for the life of the world. The cross epitomised the man Jesus. Thus He could take the bread and deftly insist: “This is my body". There and then, He was to be identified with the slain body that hung upon the cross. In death, in life, this was and is and will be Him. But He was right then the bread of life. The essence of the cross was lived out in His daily life. And He was certain that He would be obedient to the final crisis of crucifixion, and would then and thereby become the ultimate "bread of life".

"He that comes to me shall never hunger" is a reference to men and women ‘coming to’ the cross to behold “that sight" of the cross, just as men came to the lifted up snake. But the Lord clearly has in mind how the believer in Him would be regularly fed, filled up with water so that "he that believes on me shall never thirst". The Spirit is given not just once, but in an ongoing sense we are filled up with it, if we are open to it. Only in a personal appropriation of the cross to ourselves can we find an inspiration that is utterly endless. No wonder the Lord insists we remember His cross at least weekly in the breaking of bread.

The Lord challenged us that if we truly eat His words, we'll never hunger or thirst; but 30 years or so later, He said that in the Kingdom, He will stop us hungering and thirsting (Rev. 7:16,17). He realizes that although we have it within our potential to live this kind of fulfilled spiritual life, in practice we will only get there in the Kingdom. The idea may be that we shall hunger and thirst for righteousness and spirituality now, but we are filled in this life by being incrementally filled up by the Spirit, as it is poured out in an ongoing sense. But the the final ending of all such hunger is in the Kingdom, when we shall have Spirit nature, and our spiritual deficiency and need shall be no more.

6:36 *But I say to you: That you have seen me, and still you do not believe*- "Seeing" may be being used here as it is often in John- to refer to understanding. The Jews saw the Son coming to them and said "Come let us kill Him". They knew Him, and His relationship to the Father (7:28). But still they refused to believe. They wanted to be given the bread of life, Messiah, and He was standing before them. They had seen Him, and seen His creation of manna / bread, but still did not believe. Miracles do not produce lasting faith- that is one of the subtexts of John, especially relevant as he was preaching and ministering to converts in days when the miraculous gifts were disappearing.

6:37- see on Mk. 6:36.

All that the Father gives me shall come to me, and him that comes to me I will in no way reject- The language of 'coming to Jesus' is appropriate in the context to the Jews having made great efforts to come to Jesus, walking around the lake or getting shipping in order to hopefully see another food miracle. The Lord is saying that those who truly came to Him in faith, as the Messianic bread of life, would in no way be rejected, never ever [the Greek is insistent upon this]. He will reject some at the last day, indeed Judaism generally would be cast out [s.w. "reject"] at that day (Lk.

13:28), and His death would cast out the prince of the Jewish world (12:31). But those who came to Him in faith He would not reject.

The Father has given all things of the new creation to the Son (3:35; 13:3), He gives the sheep to the Son (10:29; 17:11,24); the Lord was very aware of how the believers had been given to Him. In practice, this works out through how the Father gives individuals the ability to come to the Son (:65). The Father's gift is supremely the Spirit, the Comforter given by the Father (14:16); through this we come to the Son, and are finally given the ultimate gift of eternity. If we ask why one person comes to the Son and another doesn't, the answer is of course multi factorial, and includes issues of human freewill. But one element in the final algorithm of salvation is the gift / grace of God's calling. Paul uses this in Romans as a parade example of how salvation is of grace and not works.

The parable of the fig tree appears to show the Lord Jesus as more gracious and patient than His Father- the owner of the vineyard (God) tells the dresser (Jesus) to cut it down, but the dresser asks for another year's grace to be shown to the miserable fig tree, and then, he says, the owner [God] Himself would have to cut it down (Lk. 13:7-9). But in Jn. 6:37-39 we seem to have the Lord's recognition that the Father was more gracious to some than He would naturally be; for He says that He Himself will not cast any out, exactly because it was the Father's will that He should lose nothing but achieve a resurrection to life eternal for all given to Him. And the Lord observed, both here and elsewhere, that He was not going to do His own will, but rather the will of the Father (:38). And that will was to totally save all who wish. But that, by implication, was not necessarily the natural will of the Son. For He says in this context that He does not His will, but the Father's. Now this is exactly the sort of thing we would expect in a truly dynamic relationship- on some points the Father is more generous than the Son, and in other cases- vice versa. And yet Father and Son were, are and will be joined together in the same judgment and will, despite Father and Son having differing wills from one viewpoint. But this is the result of process, of differing perspectives coming together, of a mutuality we can scarcely enter into comprehending, of some sort of learning together, of a Son struggling to do the will of a superior Father rather than His own will, of conclusions jointly reached through experience, time and process- rather than an automatic, robot-like imposition of the Father's will and judgment upon the Son. And the awesome thing is, that the Lord invites us to know the Father, in the same way as He knows the Father. His relationship with the Father is a pattern for ours too.

6:38 *For I came down from Heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him that sent me*- As noted on :37, the implication appears to be that the Father's will is to save, and so the Son will therefore not do His will, but the Father's- and never therefore reject any who come to Him in faith. This is huge assurance. The Father's will for our salvation is even stronger than that of His dear Son.

The Lord accomplished the will of God on the cross (see on Jn. 4:32-34). On the cross He came down from Heaven, there He manifested Yahweh in the greatest theophany of all time. The darkness over Him is to be read in the context of the OT theophanies which involved darkness at the time of the Lord's 'coming down'. But the Lord here speaks in the past tense. The essence of His cross was right then, before their eyes. In Him and His offer of free salvation, there was the assurance for all time to all men. He knew He would pass through the crucifixion experience, and that therefore the offer of life on account of His work was real right then and there.

6:39- see on Jn. 3:13.

And this is the will of Him that sent me, that of all which He has given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day- The Father's will for our salvation was perhaps stronger than the Lord's, for it is in this context that He says that He was doing not His will but the Father's (:38). But human dysfunction and love of materialism is such that even the strength of God's will can be resisted by us. For in 17:12 the Lord speaks as if He has succeeded in spiritually keeping all those given to him, except Judas: "I kept them in Your Name which You have given me, and I guarded them; and not one of them perished except the son of perdition". We have been given by the Father to the Son, with the express will that we should not be lost, and the end point of His care would be our resurrection to life at the last day.

"Lose nothing" is the phrase which has just been used about the gathering of the fragments, that none be lost (:12). The Lord's will that not one be lost is manifest through our gathering of them. And He died so that none might perish (3:15,16). He 'loses' none of His people in that He give us right now the life, the eternal life, which shall never 'perish' [s.w.] or 'be lost' (10:28). Those who live that life now are assured of being raised up at the last day. The outcome of the last day is therefore no unknown question; if we are living the eternal life now, then we shall be immortalized in order to continue doing so. But it is the nature of the life lived, rather than immortality of itself, which is of the essence.

6:40 *For this is the will of my Father*- The will of the Father is a major theme in John, perhaps to counter erroneous notions about this term in the communities to whom John was preaching and pastoring. The connection is again back to the prologue, where we learn that all in the new creation are spiritually born by the Father's will (1:13). This will was His desire for our salvation, and it meant the Lord's death in order to bring it to reality (4:34). The will of God is for our salvation; if we ask anything according to that will, with the end of salvation in view, then we shall be heard (1 Jn. 5:14). Doing that will, living according to the eternal life, is living according to the will of God (1 Jn. 2:17).

That every one that sees the Son and believes in him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day- This is similar language to that concerning the lifted up snake. God’s will is that we should look upon the cross, with the faith that comes from a true understanding, and accept that great salvation. This is why the cross must be central to our whole living and thinking and conception of our faith and doctrine. The comment that “Every one that beholdeth the Son and believeth on him [shall] have eternal life" (Jn. 6:40) is another allusion to the serpent lifted up on the pole, where everyone who “looked upon the serpent of brass… lived" (Num. 21:9). The 'having eternal life' is different to being 'raised up at the last day'. We are given the gift of life now, through the gift of His Spirit in our hearts whereby we live and think as He did and does. That is the essence of the life we shall eternally live in the Kingdom; and so we shall be changed into immortality to enable that life to be eternally lived.

6:41 *The Jews therefore murmured concerning him, because he said: I am the bread which came down out of Heaven*- They understood the Heavenly bread as a reference to Messiah; and they doubted as to how a man they knew could in fact be Messiah. Israel continually "murmured" against Moses (Ex. 15:24; 16:2,7,8; 17:3; Num. 14:2,27,29 cp. Dt. 1:27; Ps. 106:25; 1 Cor. 10:10). Nearly all these murmurings were

related to Israel's disbelief that Moses really could bring them into the land. Likewise Israel disbelieved that eating Christ's words (Jn. 6:63) really could lead them to salvation; and their temptation to murmur in this way is ours too, especially in the last days (1 Cor. 10:10-12).

6:42 *And they said: Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, I came down out of Heaven?*- As noted on :41, they perceived clearly enough that the Lord was claiming to be Messiah. The crowd knew Him, and Joseph and Mary. Galilee was small, both in population and geography. The folks who lived around the lake would have all known each other, and would have also known the carpenter from Nazareth. That He should now miraculously feed them, and claim to be Messiah and Son of God... was all so hard for them to grasp. It is a window onto the Lord's artless perfection that He could live amongst them for so long, never sinning neither by omission nor commission, and yet not be perceived as anything more than the son of a carpenter.

6:43 *Jesus answered and said to them: Murmur not among yourselves*- The record of the disciples' murmuring in John 6 reflects how influenced they were by the Jews around them. "The Jews then murmured at him", and the Lord rebukes them: "Murmur not among yourselves". But then we read of how "Jesus knew in himself that his disciples were murmuring" (Jn. 6:40,43,61). And again, remember that these gospel records were written by the repentant disciples, and they were using the example of their own weakness in order to appeal to others. The disciples appeared to share Judaism's idea that Moses never sinned. When the Lord challenges them to find food for the crowd in the desert, they quote Moses' hasty words: "Whence shall I have flesh to give unto all this people?"; and note Moses almost mocks God by saying that all the fish of the sea wouldn't be enough to feed the people (Num. 11:13,22). Faced with the same need for bread and fish, the disciples justified their lack of faith by quoting Moses, apparently unwilling to accept that Moses' words at that time were not of faith. The way everything worked out, they doubtless learnt that Moses, like them, was of imperfect faith and spirituality.

6:44 *No one can come to me, except the Father that sent me draws him; and I will raise him up in the last day*- See on :40- the drawing power is surely in the cross itself, for this is what draws all men unto the lifted up Christ (12:32 s.w.). There was and is a magnetism about Him there. And yet the Lord said this before His death, to people who had walked and sailed in order to 'come to Him'. Now He says that the real coming to Him requires the Father's drawing, or dragging, as the Greek means. Paul in Romans cites this idea of calling, of one called and another not, as a parade example of how salvation is by grace and not works. Yet the Father's work of drawing or dragging people to Himself is still effected through human agency. John uses the same word in describing how the disciples "drew" the net containing 153 fishes to shore (21:6,11), clearly symbolic of the great catch of the Gospel.

6:45- see on Mt. 12:18.

It is written in the prophets: And they shall all be taught by God. Everyone therefore who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me- The drawing of the Father is through hearing and learning from Him, about His Son. "The prophets" who spoke of how all shall be "taught by God" do so in the context of prophesying about the Messianic Kingdom on earth (Is. 54:13; Jer. 31:34; Mic. 4:2). But the Lord applies these clearly future Messianic prophecies to the essential spiritual experience

of the believer today; for we are now living the eternal life, the Kingdom life, the kind of life we shall then live.

The Lord Jesus often stressed that He was the only way to the Father; that only through knowing and seeing / perceiving Him can men come to know God. And yet in Jn. 6:45 He puts it the other way around: "Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me". And He says that only the Father can bring men to the Son (Jn. 6:44). Yet it is equally true that only the Son of God can lead men to God the Father. In this we see something exquisitely beautiful about these two persons, if I as a non-Trinitarian may use that word about the Father and Son. The more we know the Son, the more we come to know the Father; and the more we know the Father, the more we know the Son. This is how close they are to each other. And yet they are quite evidently distinctly different persons. But like any father and son, getting to know one leads us to know more of the other, which in turn reveals yet more to us about the other, which leads to more insight again into the other… and so the wondrous spiral of knowing the Father and Son continues. If Father and Son were one and the same person, the surpassing beauty of this is lost and spoilt and becomes impossible. The experience of any true Christian, one who has come to 'see' and know the Father and Son, will bear out this truth. Which is why correct understanding about their nature and relationship is vital to knowing them. The wonder of it all is that the Son didn't automatically reflect the Father to us, as if He were just a piece of theological machinery; He made a supreme effort to do so, culminating in the cross. He explains that He didn't do *His* will, but that of the Father; He didn't do the works *He* wanted to do, but those which the Father wanted. He had many things to say and judge of the Jewish world, He could have given them 'a piece of His mind', but instead He commented: "*But*... I speak to the world those things which I have heard of [the Father]" (Jn. 8:26). I submit that this sort of language is impossible to adequately understand within the trinitarian paradigm. Yet the wonder of it all goes yet further. The Father is spoken of as 'getting to know' [note aorist tense] the Son, as the Son gets to know the Father; and the same verb form is used about the Good Shepherd 'getting to know' us His sheep. This wonderful, dynamic family relationship is what "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit", true walking and living with the Father and Son, is all about. It is into this family and wonderful nexus of relationships that trinitarians apparently choose not to enter.

6:46 *Not that anyone has seen the Father, save he that is from God, he has seen the Father*- The Lord adds this as a foil or caveat to His teaching in :45 that the one who has learned of God comes to His Son. He means to say that total knowledge of Him is not possible, just as Moses could not 'see' the Father, neither can anyone claim to have fully 'seen' or perceived Him, except the Son. The point is to guard against the Jewish idea of justification by knowledge, as if 'learning' of the Father meant totaly 'seeing' him. Such total, perfect knowledge is not necessary nor even attainable; what is of the essence is to allow ourselves to be drawn by the Father towards His Son.

The fact the Lord *had* see God, as the One "from God", contrasts powerfully with how Moses could *not* see Him.

6:47 *Truly, truly, I say to you: He that believes has eternal life*- The utter truthulness of the Lord's promise to give us right now the life eternal is on the basis of the fact that He alone has "seen", completely perceived and understood, the Father (:46). The Father's will was totally about our salvation (:39,40). It was because the Son knew His Father's will that He could so solemnly protest that He was able and willingly eager to give eternal life to believers.

6:48 *I am the bread of life*- The emphasis is now placed upon "bread of life" rather than the Messianic term "bread of Heaven" because He wanted to explain how the believer has eternal life (:47). Bread must be eaten regularly; the idea is that we are regularly filled up with His life, His Spirit. But our spiritual life comes from eating Him. He is the source of life, rather than the entire text of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation including the Chronicles genealogies.

6:49 *Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died*- Judaism had the idea that Moses created manna and this was the ultimate miracle. But the Lord's bread gave life, eternal life, rather than just temporarily making life more bearable on a daily basis. We must ask ourselves whether we are using Christianity in the same way- a temporary boost in the daily grind, rather than perceiving the wonder of the life offered both now and eternally.

6:50 *This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die*- The idea is not that a man eats once and never hungers again. The gift of the Spirit, of the Lord's life, is ongoing, but is predicated upon eating of Him.

The Lord spoke of the manna as being a symbol of His body, which He would give on the cross. He described the gift of that bread, that figure of His sacrifice, as not only bread that would come from Heaven but more accurately as bread that *is coming down*, and had been throughout His life (Jn. 6:50,51 Gk.). The spirit of life-giving which there was in His death was shown all through His life. He could take the bread and say that “this *is* my body which *is being given* [Gk.] for you"; He saw His sacrifice as already ongoing even before He left the upper room. The cross therefore manifested the real Christ, the One who had been giving of Himself throughout His life.

As the manna was regularly eaten of, so the Lord’s cross should be our daily inspiration and food. We must ask whether we personally and collectively have appreciated this. We obtain eternal life from the cross in the sense that we see there the definition of the true life; the life of crucifying self, slowly and painfully, for others; of enduring injustice and lack of appreciation to the very end, of holding on in the life of forgiveness and care for others in the face of their bitterest rejection... we see there the life we must lead, indeed the only true life. For all else is ultimately only death. And it is “eternal" in its quality more than in its length, in that this is the type of life which will be lived eternally in the Kingdom. It is in this sense that John later comments that eternal life is “in" Christ (1 Jn. 5:11,20 cp. 3:14,15).

6:51 *I am the living bread which came down out of Heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever. Yes! The bread which I will give is my flesh – given for the life of the world*- John’s Gospel points out how the Lord often changed tenses so strangely- to the extent that many have concluded that some of the strange combinations of tenses are a result of John’s later editing. But it could be that the Lord used past, present and future tenses in close proximity in order to show His manifestation of the Name. He is the bread which was, is and will be on the cross. He came, is coming down, and will come (Jn. 6:50,51). The hour was coming and yet “now is” (Jn. 4:23; 5:25; 16:31,32). These mixing of tenses must have seemed strange to the hearers, and they read strangely in the tense-conscious Greek language. About 50 times in John’s Gospel we read the phrase “I am” as having been on the lips of Jesus. And it gets more and more frequent as He nears the cross, as if He was aware of an ongoing manifestation of the Name which reached its climax there.

Not for nothing do some Rabbis speak of 'eating Messiah' as an expression of the fellowship they hope to have with Him at His coming. The sacrificial animals are spoken of as "the bread of your God" (Lev. 21:6,8,21; 22:25; Ez. 44:7 etc.), pointing forward to the Lord Jesus Christ. In addition to alluding to the manna, the Lord must have been consciously making this connection when He spoke about himself as the bread of God. The only time "the bread of God" could be eaten by the Israelite was at the peace offering. When in this context the Lord invites us to eat the bread of God, to eat His flesh and drink His blood (Jn. 6:51,52), He is looking back to the peace offering. But this is also an evident prophecy of the breaking of bread service. Many of the Jews just could not cope with what Christ was offering them when He said this. They turned back, physically and intellectually. They just could not grapple with the idea that Christ was that peace offering sacrifice, and He was inviting them to sit down with God, as it were, and in fellowship with the Almighty, partake of the sacrificed body of His Son. But this is just what Christ is inviting each of us to do in the memorial meeting and in life generally lived in Him, to sit down in fellowship with Him, and eat of His bread. God really is here with us now. He is intensely watching us. He is intensely with us, He really is going to save us, if only we can have the faith to believe how much He loves us, how much He wants us to share His fellowship and know His presence.

The Lord taught the crowds to focus more on the gift of Him as a person and His sacrifice, than on the literal achievement of the Kingdom there and then. The Jews understood the coming of manna to be a sign that the Messianic Kingdom had come. Their writings are full of this idea:

- “You shall not find manna in this age, but you shall find it in the age that is coming” (Midrash Mekilta on Ex. 16:25)
- “As the first redeemer caused manna to descend…so will the latter redeemer cause manna to descend” (Midrash Rabbah on Ecc. 1:9)
- “[The manna] has been prepared for…the age to come” (Midrash Tanhuma, *Beshallah* 21:66).

Yet the Lord told them in Jn. 6 that the true manna was His flesh, which He was to give for the life of the world. Some have supposed from Josh. 5:10-12 cp. Ex. 16:35 that the manna fell for the first time on the eve of the Passover, thus adding even more poignancy to the Lord’s equation of the manna with His death. Yet all this painstaking attempt to re-focus the crowds on the spiritual rather than the literal, salvation through His death rather than an immediate benefit for them, patient eating / sharing in His sufferings rather than eternity here and now…all this went so tragically unheeded. And it does to this day.

There are evident parallels between Paul’s account of the breaking of bread, and the Lord’s words about the giving of His body. There is no record of the great preaching commission in John, but he does in fact record it in more spiritual and indirect ways. And likewise there is no account of the breaking of bread, but in fact he has already recorded the essence of it in the discourse about the bread and wine of life in Jn. 6:

Jn. 6:51	1 Cor. 11:24
The bread which I will give	This
Is my flesh	Is my body
For the life of the world	Which is for you

Note in passing how ‘we’ are ‘the world’ to Jesus. And He likewise should be our world, as we are to Him. The word of interpretation which the Lord Jesus spoke over the emblems was a reflection of the way the head of the family explained the meaning of the Passover lamb and unleavened bread to the participants during the Passover meal. But before His death, during His life, the Lord Jesus as it were proclaimed this word of interpretation over His own body. The conclusion is clearly that He saw Himself even during His life as the slain Passover lamb. This explains why so much stress is made upon His “blood" saving us, when crucifixion was in fact a relatively bloodless death. It wasn’t as if the Lord was killed by His blood being poured out. But it was the life which the blood represented which was the essential basis of our redemption. And that life was lived out over 33 years, not just in the 6 hours of crucifixion. All this means that the spirit of the cross must be lived out in daily life; not merely in occasional acts of heroism, nor only in occasional acts of commitment or religious duty, such as attending ecclesial meetings. The cross was and is a life lived.

The link between the Lord’s death and the true word / voice of God is made in Jn. 6:51 cp. 63: the words of the Lord give life, whereas also His flesh “which I will give for the life of the world" on the cross would also be the source of life. The giving of His flesh was in essence His word to man; the word made flesh. This phrase, we have suggested elsewhere, also refers to the Lord’s death rather than His birth. See on Heb. 12:25.

The Lord died so that the world may have life (Jn. 6:51); but only those who eat His words and assimilate the true meaning of His cross will share this life; therefore "the world" refers to all who would believe. It is for them (us, by His grace), not even for those who respond but ultimately fall away, that the Lord gave His all. We are "the world" to Him. Let's not dilute the specialness of His love and the wonder of our calling to these things. We ought to be deeply, deeply moved by the fact that we have been called into God's world, into His sphere of vision. He even created the different types of meats "to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth" (1 Tim. 4:3); they were made for us, not the world, and therefore we ought to give thanks for our food with this realization.

6:52 *The Jews therefore argued with each other, saying: How can this man give us his flesh to eat?*- The argument being "with each other" suggests that some of the crowd correctly understood the Lord's sense, whereas others still read Him on a literal level, recoiling at the idea of cannibalism, eating raw flesh, which was so disgusting to the Jewish mindset. I suggest the Lord intentionally framed His words in this way in order to provoke, in order to deepen the rift between those who insisted on reading Him literally, and those who grasped the spiritual sense of His words. And that is perhaps an explanation of why there are so many 'difficult passages' in the Bible; those who want to read them literally, without spiritual discernment, end up thinking that His flesh literally came down from Heaven. Those who read with a spiritual sense have no problem grasping His intended meaning.

6:53 *Jesus replied to them: Truly, truly, I say to you: Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves*- There is nothing else of meaning in human experience. His life, as shown in His death, is the only true and lasting sustenance for the believer. As noted on :52, the Lord chose images which

He knew would provoke the divide between the literalists, the unspiritual, and those with spiritual discernment. To drink blood was deeply obnoxious to Jews. But unless they would see He referred to His life, and allow that life or spirit to displace their own, then they would have no life in themselves. The life He offers, like the gift of the Spirit, is "in" or 'within' the heart and mind.

6:54 *He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day*- The assimilation of His life and person is to take over our lives, so that our life is His. And His life is eternal, and therefore we shall be raised at the last day to continue living it.

There is also evident reference here to the breaking of bread. In our absorption of the bread and wine into our bodies, we symbolise our desire to appropriate His life and death into the very fabric of our lives. It is a symbol of our total commitment to living life as He did, and as it was epitomised in His time of dying. The breaking of bread is therefore not something which can be separated from the rest of our lives; it is a physical statement of how our whole lives are devoted to assimilating the spirit of this Man.

6:55 *For my flesh is the true food, and my blood is the true drink*- "The true" contrasts with that which is not the real thing but only masquerades as such; the contrast is with the Mosaic symbols which could not give life. And that Mosaic system was perhaps spoken of by the temporal gift of bread the Lord had given the crowds the day before.

6:56 *He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him*- This mutual 'abiding' is at the utter heart of what it means to be in Christ, a Christian. We assimilate His life into ours, especially appreciating that the cross was the epitome and intensest summation of that life. It may be expressed in physical symbol by the breaking of bread, but the essence is of mental life lived in a way that has absorbed Him into us. This requires conscious effort on our part. Habits like prayer, reflection, meditation, Bible reading become a vital part of our daily experience. But allowing His life to be in us is responded to by Him abiding in us. He abides in us through the gift of His Spirit in our hearts, the Comforter, the anointing abiding within us (14:17; 1 Jn. 2:27; 3:24 "He abides in us by the Spirit which he has given us"; 4:13).

One of the common Aramaic Passover sayings at the time of Jesus was: “Behold this is the bread of affliction which our fathers did eat as they came out of Egypt. Whoever hungers, let him come and eat, and whoever is in need, let him come and keep the Passover". The Passover Haggadah of today includes virtually the same words. It is evident that the Lord Jesus several times in the course of His life alluded to these words. He spoke of how all who were hungry, who were heavy burdened, should “come" unto Him. And the bread which He gave would constantly satisfy. The conclusion surely is that He saw Himself even during His life as the slain Passover lamb. He lived out the essence of the cross in His life. Our carrying of His cross likewise speaks of life daily lived, rather than occasional heights of devotion or self-sacrifice.

6:57 *As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he that eats me, he also shall live because of me*- The Lord likens His relationship with the Father to our relationship with Him. The metaphor of eating suggests something regular and not simply a one time act. The Lord was regularly receiving the life or spirit of the Father as He progressed in daily relationship with Him, praying alone, meditating on His word. And we can have the same relationship with the Lord Jesus, receiving the

same Spirit. The Father is "living" and not passive; His ongoing, outgiving relationship with His Son is to be reflected in our relationship with the Son.

6:58 *This is the bread which came down out of Heaven. Not as the fathers ate and died; he that eats this bread shall live forever*- "This is the bread" may have been spoken with the Lord pointing to Himself, or with some sign that He referred to Himself. Or He may have had in view the "life" of which He has just spoken in :57. The coming down out of Heaven is not to be taken literally, just as the manna didn't float down through the sky, but was of Divine origin. The life we can now live is that of God, that lived by the Lord Jesus in His mortal life; it is out of Heaven in that there is direct connection between that life we can live, and the life or Spirit of God in Heaven itself.

6:59 *These things said he in the synagogue, while teaching in Capernaum*- A synagogue has been unearthed in Capernaum which was called "the house of bread". He purposefully used such challenging language right there in the seat of Orthodox Jewish learning, in order to accelerate the process of choice in His hearers- to accept what He was offering, or remain 'safe' within a literal hearing of His words which would result in their utter rejection of Him. And the subsequent revolt against Him, and the protestation of the disciples' loyalty to His words, shows that He succeeded.

6:60 *Many therefore of his disciples, when they heard this, said: This is a hard saying; who can hear it?*- As noted on :59 and earlier, the Lord phrased Himself in such a way as to provoke a choice in the hearts of those who heard Him. They had just witnessed the miracle of the bread; but the claim He really was Messiah, and they could live for ever, with the life and spirit of God, was too much for them. For all time, the idea that miracles lead to faith is demonstrated as false. John 6 shows how John seeks to present Jesus Himself as the words which give eternal life if eaten / digested (Jn. 6:63). And some commented: “This is a hard saying, who can hear him?” (Jn. 6:60 RVmg.), as if to present Jesus the person as the embodiment of His sayings / words.

There's something in our nature which shies away from the true Gospel because it's too good to believe. Paul had this struggle with the Jews, both in and outside of the church. They heard the offer of life from the Lord Himself, and rejected it: "This is an hard saying: who can hear it?" (Jn. 6:60). It was just too good to believe. There is something in our natures which is diametrically opposed to the concept of *pure* grace. We feel we must *do* something before we can expect anything from God. And yet in condescension to this, the Father sometimes almost goes along with us in this. See on Mt. 8:34.

6:61 *But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples murmured at this, said to them: Does this cause you to stumble?*- The talk of :60 was therefore carefully out of the Lord's earshot. But He perceived that many were now stumbling; and I have suggested that He intentionally phrased Himself in such ways as to provoke such a decision. The murmuring of the disciples was influened by the murmuring of the Pharisees; see on :41. It was the equivalent of Israel's murmuring against Moses (1 Cor. 10:10 s.w.).

6:62 *What then if you should see the Son of Man ascending where he was before?*- I have suggested that the Lord spoke of eating His blood and body in order to deliberately provoke the audience to accept Him and His Spirit; or to remain on the level of the literal, meaning they would reject Him as heretical and weird. And so He now utters another such saying, which the unspiritual to this day also stumble over, thinking that He speaks of a literal ascent to literal Heaven where He had literally

been before. But as noted earlier, literal pre-existence in a personal form in Heaven is not at all what He meant, nor what the Bible teaches. He was "with the Father" just as John the Baptist had been with the Father. He is rhetorically asking whether they would wish for this whole wondrous offer of salvation, this theophany of God coming down before them, to just abruptly end. For 'coming down' is the language of theophany. "Where he was before" may refer to how He had been before age 30, when He gave no hint of His Divine origins. This point becomes more probable when we recall as noted on :42 that this crowd of people personally knew Him and His family, and felt He could not be God's Son nor Messiah exactly because they had known Him "before", in His life before His ministry. He would then be asking them: 'So do you want the wonderful offer and theophany to end, and me to just go back to being the Nazareth carpenter? Would you then feel better and less challenged?'.

6:63 *It is the spirit that gives life. The flesh profits nothing*- I suggested on :62 that their problem was with the fact that they had known Him after the flesh, as He was "before"; for they had earlier known Him and His apparent family of origin (see on :42). They were not a crowd of anonymous people; they knew Him personally from His life before His ministry had begun. He may be saying to the effect: 'I as you knew me after the flesh will not save you. Nor will the bread I gave you physically. It is my words, my spirit, which is now available, which will give you eternal life'.

The words that I have spoken to you are spirit, and are life- The Lord in Jn. 6 taught parallels between belief in Him leading to eternal life, and His words, blood and body having the same effect. The word of Christ is in that sense His body and blood; it speaks to us in "the preaching (word) of the cross". There are parallels between the manna and the word of Christ; yet also between the manna and His death. His words give life as the manna did (:63), and yet the manna is specifically defined as His flesh, which He gave to bring life (:51). In this context He speaks of gaining life by eating His bread and drinking His blood, in evident anticipation of the memorial meal He was to institute (compare 'the bread which I *give* is my flesh' with 'this is my body, *given* for you'). Eating / absorbing His manna, the sacrifice of the cross, is vital to the experience of eternal life now and the future physical receipt of it.

Assimilating the spirit and life of His cross into our lives is the vital essence of eternal life; and He foresaw that one of the ways of doing this would be through remembering that cross in the breaking of bread service. And yet notice how the Lord took that bread of life and gave it to the disciples as His guests at the last supper. To take the bread is to show our acceptance of the gift of life which is in Jesus. The Lord stated that when He had been lifted up on the cross, *then* the Jews would realize the truth and integrity of the words that He had spoken (Jn. 8:28). Again, the cross is presented as a confirmation of all the words / verbal teaching of the Lord.

"Bread" or manna was a phrase the Rabbis commonly applied to the Torah- e.g. they interpreted Prov. 9:5 ("Come, eat ye of my bread") as referring to the Law. And the Lord was clearly playing on and extending this idea in John 6. The Lord taught that in the same way as Moses gave Israel manna, so He was giving them Himself, and His word. He defines the meaning of the manna in Jn. 6:63 as His words. He is inviting us to eat Him in the sense of His words; He is the word of God. Remember how Jeremiah says that he found God's word and ate it, God's word was unto him the joy and rejoicing of his heart. Think too of the words of Job in 23:12, speaking as a type of Christ on this occasion: "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food". We tend to think that as we eat physically, so we should eat spiritually. The point is often made amongst us that as we always find time to eat physically, so we should to eat God's word. But this is not quite what Job is saying.

He says that we should relate to our spiritual food even *more* importantly than to our natural need for food. It's second nature for us to eat regularly, every day; we don't have to schedule time to eat, it flows naturally into our daily organization of life.

There are a number of similarities between the record of the gathering of the manna and that of the Passover. They could seethe the manna, as the Paschal lamb could be seethed. They were to gather the manna according to the size of their families, and the collection was to be organized by the head of the house. This is all the language of the Passover. The lamb represented Jesus, and so did the manna. The saving work of the lamb of God is further mediated to us through the medium of His word. In John 6 the Lord says that we must eat His flesh and drink His blood to have eternal life; and He says the same about eating His words (v.63). So often the Lord says that we have got eternal life, here and now. He keeps on saying it in John 6.

The parallel between the Lord's word and His Spirit should not be taken as justification for believing in a so-called 'spirit word', and assuming that He is here exhorting us to read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, including the Chronicles genealogies, in order to get His Spirit; as if Bible reading somehow equals getting the Spirit. The words spoken by the Lord refer specifically to His words, and not the whole Bible. This is not to in any sense decry study of the Bible. But here, the Lord is saying that the abiding of *His* words within us is associated with His Spirit abiding with us. Those words are the message of Him. We can understand why early Christian converts were required to memorize the Gospels, Mark especially. The word of Him, which John is teaching in this Gospel of John, was to abide in them. There may even be a suggestion that they were to repeat His words as recorded in the Gospels, for most converts would have been illiterate and without access to written versions of the Gospels. Having Him, His manner of life and being, ever before us... this is having His Spirit, eating Him, abiding in Him.

6:64- see on Jud. 16:13; Jn. 13:11.

But there are some of you that do not believe. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that did not believe, and who it was that would betray him- Many of the crowd had now walked away in disgust. But lest those who remained now thought that they were the chosen ones, the Lord warns that there were even some of them who did not.

The impression of a close spiritual relationship and subsequent shock on appreciating that Judas was a traitor that we see expressed in the Psalms is hard to reconcile with our Lord knowing Judas' motives from the beginning. Jesus knew from the beginning that some would betray him: "There are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him... Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto me of my Father" (Jn. 6:64,65). Our Lord knew that not all were called by God to be able to come to Him- He knew who would not believe. And yet He suppressed this knowledge in his love and hope for Judas- just as it could be that God limits His omnipotence and omniscience in His dealings with us [hence His sense of hurt, shock and genuine disappointment with human behaviour]. If this passage does imply Christ's knowledge of Judas' intentions (as Jn. 6:70 seems to), these words were spoken in the final year of the Lord's ministry, when Christ's sensitive spirit would have noticed the tell tale signs in Judas. [Or is "He spake of Judas... that should betray him" (Jn. 6:70) a comment added by John, which would mean that Jesus was not necessarily thinking of Judas when he said "One of you is a devil"?].

The Lord was human, and there is a capacity within human nature to know something on one level and yet deny it in practice. Samson surely knew what Delilah was going to do to him, yet his love for her made him blind. And so it could be that on one level the Lord knew Judas' apostacy; and One of His sensitivity would likely have perceived anyway the man's dishonesty and wrong motivations. But His love and hope for him was such that He acted and felt with genuine surprise and shock when Judas actually did what the Lord foreknew he was going to do. We have here a profound windom onto the Lord's humanity.

6:65 *And he said: For this cause have I said to you, that no one can came to me, except it be given to him of the Father*- As noted on :44, we must be "drawn" to the Father. But as Paul develops at length in Romans, the very existence of such things as calling and predestination indicate that the final algorithm of human salvation includes God's grace at a personal level. For not all are called. The calling is itself a gift, a term often used about the gift of the Spirit.

6:66 *Upon this many of his disciples withdrew, and no longer walked with him*- Just as today, the teaching that some are called and some are not (:65) makes some turn back. Already, many had turned away, and the Lord was left with a smaller crowd; and now many of them "withdrew". But "withdrew" is literally 'to go back from', 'to go behind', and is also used of men following the Lord, behind Him. The same word is used of turning back, going behind; and also of going behind in the sense of following. This is intentional. The idea may be that it is not a question of literally following after Him, behind Him; but of following Him in the heart. Peter was taught this when he walked behind the Lord physically, but was told that if he were to really follow Him, he must take up the cross daily and follow. And John's Gospel ends with a play on the same theme, of following behind. The same word is used of how the Jews perceived that the whole Jewish world had gone behind Jesus (12:19); but in fact very few were really following Him. To not walk with Him, the light of the world, was to walk in darkness (12:35; 1 Jn. 1:6,7). And they did so because they thought it unreasonable that some are called and others are not (:65). They played God, and thus turned away from the greatest grace- of having been called to see and know Him.

6:67 *Jesus asked the twelve: Would you also go away?*- The large crowd had diminished twice, as the Lord purposefully provoked them with His language and ideas. Perhaps now only the twelve and a few others were left. And He asks them if they will also "go away", using the term used for their 'going away' from Him and seeking to return to their home area in Capernaum (see on :21).

6:68 *Simon Peter answered him: Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life*- It was the Lord's "words", His use of language about drinking blood, ascending where He had been before, and about not all being called... which had caused the majority to go away into the darkness. Hence the significance of Peter's comment that His words were those of life eternal. His life was His words, and Peter was abiding with thos words and that life. Peter was one of the few who really grasped the meaning of the Lord's miraculous provision of bread, and the discourse which followed. The Lord had said that He was the living bread, of which a man could eat and live forever. Peter's comment that only the Lord had the words of eternal life showed that he quite appreciated that it was the *words* of the Lord Jesus which were the essential thing, not the physicality of the miracle (fascinating as it must have been to a fisherman; Jn. 6:51 cp. 68).

The Spirit of Jesus, His disposition, His mindset, His way of thinking and being, is paralleled with His words and His person. They both 'quicken' or give eternal life, right now. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth [present tense]… the words that I speak unto you, they are [right now] spirit, and they are life… thou hast [right now] the words of eternal life" (Jn. 6:63,68). Yet at the last day, God will quicken the dead and physically give them eternal life (Rom. 4:17; 1 Cor. 15:22,36). But this will be because in this life we had the 'Spirit' of the eternal life in us: "He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by [on account of] his spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8:11). Again we have the same words, 'quicken' and 'his spirit'. And Paul says that our resurrection will have some similarities with that of our Lord- who was "put to death in the flesh but quickened by [on account of] the spirit" (1 Pet. 3:18). It was according to the spirit of holiness, of a holy life, that Jesus was raised and given eternal life (Rom. 1:4). What all this means in practice is that if we live a 'quickened' spiritual life now, a life modelled around what Jesus would have done or said in any given situation, then we have the guarantee that we will be 'quickened' in the Kingdom. Thus Rom. 8:2 speaks of "the law of the spirit of life in Christ". Having "the spirit" in our hearts is therefore the seal, the guarantee, of our future salvation (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14).

6:69- see on 1 Thess. 1:3.

And we have believed and know that you are the Holy One of God- The people's real problem was that they could not accept a man well known to them as Messiah. Out of all the range of Messianic titles which Peter could have chosen, he choses one which implies the Lord was God's "One", His begotten Son. The Lord must have been greatly encouraged, but He instead takes issue with Peter's statement that "*we* have believed and know...". For one of them did not. The implication could be that Judas did what he did not simply for money, but from a disbelief that Jesus was in fact Messiah and Son of God.

6:70- see on Jn. 6:64; 8:44.

Jesus answered them: Did not I choose you the twelve, and one of you is a devil?- As noted on :64, the crowd had progressively diminshed as they all became offended at the Lord's words. Perhaps only the twelve remained, and the Lord didn't want them to think that even they were all going to abide. Even one of them was an opponent, a false accuser. Judas was 'chosen'; but being chosen is not of itself enough. We must make our chosing or election "sure" (2 Pet. 1:10- perhaps written by Peter with his mind on Judas).

6:71 *Now he spoke of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot; for he was the one of those twelve who would betray him*- Clearly the term "devil" doesn't refer to an Angelic being who fell off the 99th floor in Eden. The term is here applied to Judas, just as "satan" is to Peter. Perhaps this is another of the points of similarity between Peter and Judas, who in essence did the same thing in denying the Lord; and yet Peter's core faith triumphed and he repented, whereas Judas could not believe in the Lord's grace as Peter did.

JOHN CHAPTER 7

7:1 *And after these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for he would not walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill him*- This is an exemplification in practice of how the Lord's life was not taken from Him, but He gave it at the time and in the manner which He Himself wished. He knew that if He went to Judea and walked openly, He would be killed. And He wished to die at Passover, not tabernacles (:2). This conscious self-giving of the Lord is hard to plumb, but it remains our constant pattern. Yet we note that the Lord did in fact teach openly at the feast of tabernacles. He did go into Judea. His reasoning may have been that He could be killed on the way, but He judged [rightly] that public opinion was sufficiently for Him that He would not be killed by the Jews within Jerusalem at the time of the tabernacles feast. This could have all been beamed into Him by the Father, but I prefer to imagine His own sensitivity and spiritual reasoning leading Him to these conclusions.

7:2 *Now the feast of the Jews, the feast of tabernacles, was at hand*- Again, what the Old Testament describes as "the feasts of Yahweh" are spoken of as the feasts of the Jews; the law of God through Moses became "their law", and the temple of Yahweh became the temple of the Jews. They had hijacked God's ways and turned them into their own mere religion.

7:3 *His brothers said to him: Depart from here and go into Judea, so your disciples may also see the works you do*- The disciples in view were presumably the Lord's sympathizers in Judea. "The works" refer to miracles. The Lord had been rejected by many exactly because the Galilean audience knew Him before His ministry began, and now He was claiming to be Son of God and Messiah, unwelcome public attention would be focused upon His family of origin. They therefore wanted Him to go to Judea, and taunted Him as to why He didn't do His miracles there too. Both his family and the men of Israel generally rejected David's claims to be able to save Israel (1 Sam. 17:28-30), and this pointed forward to the Lord's rejection by His brothers. Eliab's "Why camest thou down hither?" matches the Lord's brothers telling Him "depart from here".

7:4 *For no one does anything in secret while he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, manifest yourself to the world*- This was another form of the temptation to "come down from the cross" and the wilderness temptations, to persuade the Jewish world by visible miracle. But the Lord's experience in chapter 6 had prepared Him for this; the miracle of the feeding had only led to men turning away from Him once it was explained to them. As explained on :3, the Lord's family didn't want all the public attention now given to them because of His claims to be God's Son and Messiah. They taunted Him that doing miracles in backwater Galilee was effectively being secretive; if He were indeed Messiah then He surely would want to be "known openly", and so they urged Him to leave them and go to Jerusalem and manifest Himself openly to the Jewish world there. Just as the Lord's synagogue-influenced brothers wanted Him to show Himself openly to the world (Jn. 7:4), so did the disciples (Jn. 14:22). There was that hankering for Him to openly display Himself as the Messiah which Judaism had created within its own mind. This was all a repeat of the wilderness temptation.

Perhaps they were alluding to the Rabbinic idea that as Moses hid himself and then re-emerged from obscurity, so Messiah would. Rabbi Berekiah said: “As the first deliverer [Moses] was revealed, then hidden and afterwards appeared again, so will it

also be with the last deliverer [Messiah]". John's record is clearly presenting the Lord as Moses in this sense.

In collective societies, where life was totally lived in the public realm and anything done 'in private' is seen as deviant (cp. Jn. 7:4; 18:20), shame was related to how *others* saw you, not your internal reflections and assessment of your guilt or innocence for things like private thoughts and unknown deeds. And there's every reason to think that the global village of the 21st century is an equally conscience-less place, where so long as you talk in nice speak and don't get caught actually *doing* anything society thinks is wrong, you can exist with no internal, personal conscience at all. Indeed, the word "conscience" originated from words which literally mean 'common / with others / knowledge'- conscience was collective, whereas the Biblical understanding of it is more on a personal level.

7:5 *For even his brothers did not believe in him*- The later New Testament records that they did later believe in Him. This would have required fair humility on their part. His behaviour in family life would have been perfect before God; no sins of omission nor commission. But the beauty of it all was that nobody perceived that. And it was His very humanity which stopped them believing in Him, just as it is His humanity which has been such a barrier to faith for so many, leading them to create false doctrines such as the Trinity in order to try to get over the problem, and thereby make Him the less challenging to we who share His same nature.

7:6 *Jesus replied to them: My time is not yet come; but your time is always ready*- "My time" surely refers to the time for Him to die on the cross. The phrase is only used elsewhere by Paul about "my time of departure" (2 Tim. 4:6), reflecting how he saw the Lord's death in his death, and thereby was confident in sharing in His resurrection. We need to have the same attitude. The word *kairos*, "time", can also refer to a specific time, i.e. a Jewish feast. It is used like this in Lk. 13:1 AV: "There were present at that season some...", the idea being that there is reference to some who were present [in Jerusalem] at that feast. So the Lord may mean that *His* feast, the one at which He was to die, Passover, had not yet come. For the debate was about going up to the feast of Tabernacles, not Passover. But their feast was always prepared [NEV "ready"], for they were participating in the feast in a literal manner. The idea seems to be that the Lord's feast, the Passover when He was to die, was not yet prepared. He, and other factors, were not yet prepared. But for their feast of tabernacles, everything was ready for them and they might as well go to it at any time.

7:7 *The world cannot hate you, but it hates me, because I testify of it, that its works are evil*- The Lord's brothers were on the side of the Jewish world. They feared they would be hated by Jewish society because of their connection with the Lord, but He assures them that they have nothing to fear. Because it was His testimony against their evil works which was the basis for hate. The Lord did not specifically state that the works of the Jewish world were evil; but the phrase issued in 3:19 of how the Lord's life was such a light that the Jews shrunk back from it, preferring the darkness, lest His light reveal their works as evil. His life lived was therefore a testimony. Just as our most powerful witness is our life lived rather than words spoken or theology preached. The Jewish world hated the Lord's true disciples because they were not "of" that world (15:18,19; 17:14). Separation from the world elicits hatred from the world simply because we are different. This is basic human group psychology, to hate any outside the group or who leave the group. It has to be, therefore, that the true believer is hated by the world; we should not marvel at it (1 Jn. 3:13). Our positions are an implicit criticism and rebuke of them, which they 'hear' and respond to with hatred

rather than indifference or the 'religious tolerance' which is the talk of the West at this time.

7:8 *You go up to the feast. I will not be going up to this feast, because my time is not yet fulfilled*- The AV adds "I go not up *yet*". Perhaps He is using spiritual language in order to confuse those who did not wish to spiritually perceive Him. He was going to the feast of tabernacles; but He means that He is not 'going up' to it in the sense of making His self-offering there at that feast, because His hour has not yet come for that. He knew He must wait until Passover for that. He may simply have meant that He perceived that He could be killed on the way to the feast, and so He was not going to go up at that time, because that was not the intended time for His death.

7:9 *And having said these things to them, he stayed in Galilee*- Perhaps He did not want to join the caravan of travellers going to the feast from Galilee, for this would have involved Him camping out with His family. They did not want association with Him, and He did not wish to force the issue. It was perhaps this gentle, sensitive policy which led to many of them coming to believe in Him after His death.

7:10 *But when his brothers had gone to the feast, then he also went to it, not publicly but as it were in secret*- The caravans descending upon Jerusalem for the feast were strictly organized according to families and towns of origin. The Lord did not wish to have to raise His earthly background because this would distract from His self-presentation as the One "from Heaven", of Divine origin, as emphasized in chapter 6. He therefore "in secret" joined the caravans, disguising His identity. There were many who would have been eager to use His presence amongst the pilgrims as an opportunity for staging a revolution and enthroning Him as king. Remember that this was one of His wilderness temptations, which returned to Him at times like this. His wisdom in avoiding such a situation is a mark of His recognition of His own frailty. He avoided temptation.

7:11 *The Jews searched for him at the feast, and asked: Where is he?*- This question "Where is he?" is recorded three times in John, and nowhere else in the New Testament (9:12; 20:15). The Lord's apparent absence was in order to elicit that question and a seeking for Him. His apparent absence and silence in the traumas of life is to likewise provoke in us the same question. I suggest in John's context this is all to add background to the momentous statements we have in the promise of the Comforter- that the Lord who was physically absent is present through His Spirit. His physical absence is not critical. And those who seek for Him shall find Him.

7:12 *And there was much murmuring among the crowds concerning him. Some said: He is a good man. Others said: Not so. He deceives the people*- The miracles done were clear enough, but still some thought He was a deceiver. Again John is making the point that miracles do not play a great role in eliciting faith. And this was a necessary point to be made, seeing John was writing at the time when the miraculous gifts were being withdrawn and phased out.

7:13 *Yet no one spoke openly about him for fear of the Jews*- Another theme of John is that belief in Jesus as Messiah and Lord must be openly stated. He records the examples of the healed blind man, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who 'came out' for the Lord. The Greek word for "openly" is used around 30 times in the New Testament for the 'openness' of the Lord's witness and that of the disciples. It is a

characteristic of those who believe they are living the eternal life and have been filled with the love and Spirit of the Father and Son. But it is fear of our image before others which stymies that boldness. The same word is used of how the Lord spoke openly or boldly (:26); seeking those who heard Him to likewise be open and bold in coming out for Him. Joseph of Arimathea is presented as a secret disciple who "for fear of the Jews" did not come out openly for the Lord (19:38 s.w.), and John uses the same term to describe how they the disciples were likewise living "in fear of the Jews" (20:19). It was the experience of the Lord's death and resurrection which results in the Acts record so often describing how they "spoke openly" of the Lord, now fearless of the Jews. The Lord's crucifixion and rising again should have a similar impact upon us.

7:14 *When the feast was half way through, Jesus went into the temple and taught*- "Half way through" is "in the midst", and the term is usually used not of time but of being in the midst of persons. His entry into the temple in the midst of Israel could have been seen as a triumphal entry, in preparation for what He planned to do at the next Passover feast. If the reference is to waiting half way through the eight days of the feast, then we see how the Lord was carefully calculating His impact. He knew that if He were to openly preach for eight days, He could be arrested or provoke a revolution. So He timed His appearance at the optimal time- to get His message over to as many as possible without provoking the events which would lead to His death. He of course planned His Passover appearances to lead to His death. We see here something of the degree to which the Lord gave His life, it was not taken from Him; He Himself carefully planned things rather than being a mute puppet in the Divine hand.

7:15 *The Jews marvelled, saying: How is it that this man has learning, when he has never had an education?*- As the Son of God, the Lord would or could have been an intellectual without compare. The fact He had not been educated would have been revealed in all the background checks they had run on Him. And His lack of education speaks of the abject poverty in which He had grown up- out working from a child rather than studying. But in the Lord we see a challenge for all time to the effect that lack of time, long hours, little cash, demanding domestic situations... are no ultimate barrier to developing God's mind and growing spiritually.

7:16 *Jesus answered them and said: My teaching is not mine, but His that sent me*- The Lord says nothing of how He had figured out Hebrew and Aramaic letters because of His own intelligence. Rather He says that His ability to teach when He was uneducated was yet another sign that He was sent from God with God's message. The differentiation made by the Lord here between Himself and the Father is yet another problem for the Trinitarian paradigm.

7:17- see on Jn. 8:43.

If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know of this teaching, whether it is of God, or I speak from myself- Most of the audience were illiterate and had no access to the Hebrew scrolls of the Old Testament in order to check out whether the Lord's doctrine was of God or simply from Himself, His own philosophy. The will of God is of our salvation and sanctification; this has been developed so far throughout John's Gospel. He who wishes above all things to live God's life, to have His Spirit, to live the life eternal with Him... they will intuitively know whether the Lord's doctrine is right or not. This intuitive element is in fact what leads to faith in the first place. There is a strong tendency to talk this down, and assume that it is by intellectual process that a person decides what is true or otherwise. But all appeal to intellectual

process alone to decide 'truth' is flawed. For we are talking of spiritual things and not material. And legitimate intellectual process varies between persons. They may come to different conclusions about the same teaching which they analyze. And some are far more capable of intellectual analysis than others. There has to be something beyond intellectual process to decide truth. Here the Lord expresses this as a willing to do God's will, a heart for God, a desire for eternity. In a word, we must be open to the things of the Spirit. And then, the teachings make sense and there is an intuitive congruence between them and our own spirit.

7:18 *He that speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but he that seeks the glory of Him that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him*- The Lord here discerns that all public teaching tends towards self-glorification. If a teacher is totally concerned with God's glory and not at all for his own glory, then he is of God. Indeed, the Lord here defines having "no unrighteousness" with not seeking ones own glory. He sees this principle as so fundamental that He considers that a person who seeks totally God's glory is therefore from God. This is a sober warning to all who teach publicly. Only the perfect, in whom is no unrighteousness, can say that they totally seek God's glory and not at all their own. There is in all of us [for none are without unrighteousness] a tendency towards our own self glory. This must be accepted, and struggled against. Nor should we seek to give glory to teachers. We must remember the principle here- that the Lord Jesus alone had no unrighteousness in Him, and therefore He sought only and totally God's glory in His teaching; and thereby He was validated as a teacher from God.

Seeking His glory is to be the essential issue in our lives. If we seek God's glory- i.e. the development of the attributes and characteristics of His Name- He will seek ours (John 8:50), and our glory is His glory. The Lord sought the Father's glory as the Father sought His glory (8:50). The word for 'seek' used here can imply 'worship'- we must worship this concept of giving glory to God in our lives. God's glory is His essential self (17:5), yet He is willing to give us His glory. He will not give His glory to anyone apart from His people (Is. 48:11). What higher honours can be revealed to us?

Fear of false teachers, even paranoia about them, is what has led to so much division in practice. The Lord Jesus tackled the issue of whether a person is a true or a false teacher. He didn't make the division so much on the *content* of their teaching, as we usually do, but rather says that the true teacher is motivated by seeking the Father's glory, whereas the false teacher seeks only his own glory (Jn. 7:18). Yet it is the endless fear of 'false teachers' in terms of the *content* of their teaching which has led to so much division- and often the process of it seems to have led to self-glorifying individuals establishing their own followings. It is by their *fruits* that they are known / discerned, rather than the analysis of their *content* by intellectual process alone.

7:19 *Did not Moses give you the law and yet none of you does the law? Why do you seek to kill me?*- Jews sought the death penalty for a person who broke the Mosaic law; yet the Lord points out that they were not obedient to that law themselves. He had taught in 5:45 that Moses actually condemned them.

7:20 *The crowd answered: You are crazy! Who seeks to kill you?*- The crowd surely knew the Jews were plotting to kill the Lord; hence their fear of speaking openly about Him (:13). But the Lord did not get engaged in trying to persuade them of a different version of events and history. Instead He focused on the essence, which was their marvel instead of true faith (:21). "You are crazy" is literally 'you have a

demon'. Unexplained illnesses, especially mental conditions, were understood as demon possession. And the Lord went along with that misunderstanding. Here too He doesn't stop to argue with them about their false theology of demons; His concern is with their deeper unbelief (:21).

7:21 *Jesus answered and said to them: I did one work and you all marvel because of it!*- The Lord said this in response to their denial that anyone was out to murder Him. He could have responded by giving quotations of words and statements both heard and reported. But He rarely answers questions on their own terms. Such point for point debating, striving to enforce one version of events upon another, virtually never succeeds in bring about understanding. Instead He comments further on how just one miracle had led to "marvel", to disbelief rather than belief; and had led some to plan to kill Him. He doesn't say 'I did a miracle, and some got so jealous they tried to kill Me'. Instead He argued that 'I did a miracle and *you* didn't believe as you should, you just marvelled'.

7:22 *Moses has given you circumcision (not that it is of Moses but of the fathers) and on the Sabbath you circumcise a man*- The crowd had not responded to the Lord's accusation that they broke the Law. But He knew that they were angry about that, filling their minds with lists of their own righteousness and legalistic obedience to laws. But again He rises above the temptation to comment upon their major disobedience in other areas. Rather does He seek to demonstrate that within the very legal structure of the Mosaic law, there was the requirement to break one law in order to keep another. The reason for that was to drive the thoughtful Israelite to throw themselves upon grace, and to realize that justification could not be achieved by obedience to law.

7:23 *If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me, because I made a man completely whole on the Sabbath?*- As noted on :22, the structure of the Mosaic law was in order to make legalistic obedience impossible if one insisted upon a casuistic, literalistic reading of it. For one command resulted in another being broken. And the Lord is pointing the contrast between their cutting off a piece of flesh, and Him making a man completely whole- implying His cure of the lame man was a total cure of every part of the man's wasted body. The Lord rightly perceived their 'anger' with Him for doing a good work. The reference is back to how the healing of the impotent man led to the Jews seeking to kill the Lord (5:18). The implication is that on His current visit to Jerusalem, He had done no miracles. They were still remembering with indignation that previous incident. We see here how the Lord worked with an economy of miracle.

7:24 *Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment*- The Lord is still alluding to the incident in chapter 5, where He cured the impotent man on the Sabbath and the Jews plotted to kill Him. He had explained that He had done so because "My judgment is just" (5:30). These are the same words as used here in inviting the crowd to "judge righteous ["just"] judgment". John will later again emphasize how God's judgments are just (Rev. 16:7; 19:2). We are not to judge in the sense of condemning, pre-judging in an ultimate sense; but rather is the invitation to see things from God's perspective.

As recipients of God's grace through the experience of His way of working with us reflecting His character, we too must reflect those same characteristics to others.

This is why we *must* judge- for in doing so, we have the opportunity to reflect God's character. We must judge righteous judgment (Jn. 7:24) in reflection of that of "the Lord, the righteous judge" (2 Tim. 4:8). David was almost eager to replicate the principles of God's judgments in how he judged issues (Ps. 75:10 cp. 7; 75:7 cp. 2). And therefore Asaph poses the question to Israel's judges: 'Because God judges justly, why don't you?' (Ps. 82:1-3). As we judge, we will be judged; even Babylon will be judged as she judged others (Rev. 18:20 RV), and Edom's judgments in Jer. 49:9 are an exact reflection of how she judged Israel (Obad. 5). And therefore we should almost jump at the opportunity to judge. "Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the... fatherless and widow" (Dt. 27:79) because "A father of the fatherless and a judge of the widow is God in his holy habitation" (Ps. 68:5). Israel were to reflect God's judgments in their judgments.

7:25 *Therefore, some of those from Jerusalem asked: Is this not he whom they seek to kill?*- "Those from Jerusalem" knew that indeed the Jewish leadership wanted to kill the Lord. It was the crowd of visiting pilgrims from the provinces who seemed quite unaware of this (:20). The Lord could so easily have responded to the mocking claim that nobody sought to kill Him by arguing that yes, indeed there are such people here in Jerusalem, and you provincial folk are ignorant of that fact. But that is not His style, and such point blank confrontation should likewise be avoided by us. Instead as ever He cut to the essential spiritual point and issue.

7:26 *And lo, he speaks openly and they say nothing to him. Can it be that the rulers indeed know that this is the Christ?*- They wondered whether the rulers had abandoned their well known plans to kill the Lord because actually they now recognized Him as Messiah. The Lord's openness of 'boldness' of speaking was emulated by the disciples- the same word is used throughout Acts of their witness. He wished that His hearers would come out as openly as He had; for we learnt in :13 that His hearers feared to speak openly of Him as He did of Himself.

7:27 *However we know from where this man is; but when the Christ comes, no one knows from where he is*- The Lord's claims had been researched, and it had been discovered that He was the son of a questionable woman called Maryam who had gotten pregnant out of wedlock and the whole thing had been covered up. We note Mary [and the Lord] did not publicize His real history, His birth in Bethlehem, the visit of the wise men etc. Perhaps this was news indeed for those who first read or heard it in the accounts of Matthew and Luke. Thirty years earlier, the Jews had known full well the answer to the question 'Where does the Christ come from?'. They had given the correct answer- from Bethlehem, as stated in Micah. But now, their theology had changed and veered into mysticism, claiming that the origins of Messiah would be unknown. We see here a classic example of how theology changes in order to cope with inconvenient truths. The mysticism of the Trinity would be a parade example; it is an attempt to cope with the human Christ whose achievement of perfection within human nature requires much faith, and is a challenge to all of us who bear the same nature. And so the height of the challenge was blunted, the height of the demand minimized, by a slide into mysticism, abstracting the amazing concrete achievement into mere theological terms which are words with no weight in practice.

If He were really like us, then this demands an awful lot of us. It rids us of so many excuses for our unspirituality. And this, I'm bold enough to say, is likely the psychological reason for the growth of the Jesus = God ideology, and the 'trinity' concept. The idea of a personally pre-existent Jesus likewise arose out of the same

psychological bind. The Jews wanted a Messiah whose origins they wouldn't know (Jn. 7:27), some inaccessible heavenly figure, of which their writings frequently speak- and when faced with the very human Jesus, whose mother and brothers they knew, they couldn't cope with it. I suggest those Jews had the same basic mindset as those who believe in a personal pre-existence of the Lord. The trinity and pre-existence doctrines place a respectable gap between us and the Son of God. As John Knox concluded: "We can have the humanity [of Jesus] without the pre-existence and we can have the pre-existence without the humanity. There is absolutely no way of having both". His person and example aren't so much of an imperative to us, because He was God and not man. But if this perfect man was indeed one of us, a man amongst men, with our very same flesh, blood, sperm and plasm… we start to feel uncomfortable. It's perhaps why so many of us find prolonged contemplation of His crucifixion- where He was at His most naked and most human- something we find distinctly uncomfortable, and impossible to deeply sustain for long. But only if we properly have in balance the awesome reality of Christ's humanity, can we understand how one man's death 2,000 years ago can radically alter our lives today. We make excuses for ourselves: our parents were imperfect, society around us is so sinful. But the Lord Jesus was perfect- and dear Mary did her best, but all the same failed to give Him a perfect upbringing; she wasn't a perfect mother; and He didn't live in a perfect environment. And yet, He was perfect. And bids us quit our excuses and follow Him. According to the Talmud, Mary was a hairdresser [*Shabbath* 104b], whose husband left her with the children because he thought she'd had an affair with a Roman soldier. True or not, she was all the same an ordinary woman, living a poor life in a tough time in a backward land. And the holy, harmless, undefiled Son of God and Son of Man… was, let's say, the son of a divorcee hairdresser from a dirt poor, peripheral village, got a job working construction when He was still a teenager. There's a wonder in all this. And an endless challenge. For none of us can now blame our lack of spiritual endeavour upon a tough background, family dysfunction, hard times, bad environment. We can rise above it, because in Him we are a new creation, the old has passed away, and in Him, all things have become new (2 Cor. 5:17). Precisely because He blazed the trail, blazed it out of all the limitations which normal human life appears to impress upon us, undeflected and undefeated by whatever distractions both His and our humanity placed in His path. And He's given us the power to follow Him.

7:28 *Therefore Jesus cried out in the temple, teaching and saying: You both know me, and know from where I am, and that I have not come of myself. But He that sent me is true, whom you do not know*- The Lord's appeal was so emotional and direct because He knew that subconsciously, they recognized Him for who He was. They were in denial. They were so near to salvation, but so far. The leaders of first century Israel initially recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (Mt. 21:38 cp. Gen. 37:20; Jn. 7:28). They saw (i.e. understood, recognized) him, but then they were made blind by Christ (Jn. 9:39). It was because they "saw" Jesus as the Messiah that the sin of rejecting him was counted to them (Jn. 9:41). This explains why the Roman / Italian nation was not held guilty for crucifying Him, although they did it, whereas the Jewish nation was. And yet there is ample Biblical evidence to suggest that these same people who "saw" / recognized Jesus as the Christ were also ignorant of his Messiahship. "Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am... Ye neither know me, nor my Father... when ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he" (Jn. 7:28; 8:19,28) were all addressed to the same group of Jews. Did they know /

recognize Jesus as Messiah, or not? As they jeered at him on the cross, and asked Pilate to change the nameplate from "Jesus, King of the Jews", did they see Him as their Messiah? It seems to me that they didn't. In ignorance the Jewish leaders and people crucified their Messiah (Acts 3:17 RV). And yet they knew Him for who He was, they saw Him coming as the heir. I would suggest the resolution to all this is that they did recognize Him first of all, but because they didn't want to accept Him, their eyes were blinded, so that they honestly thought that He was an impostor, and therefore in ignorance they crucified Him. And yet, it must be noted, what they did in this ignorance, they were seriously accountable for before God.

7:29 *I know Him, because I am from Him, and He sent me*- The Son's knowledge of / relationship with the Father was partly because of His being God's Son, "from Him". He had a natural aptitude for the things of the Father. For all their searching of the Scriptures, they did not know God (:28). The Hebrew sense of 'knowing' is of relationship, rather than academic knowledge.

7:30 *Therefore they sought to take him, but no one laid his hand on him- because his hour had not yet come*- The upsurge of hatred against Him was not just because He claimed to be Messiah; for there were many who claimed to be Messiah and who were greeted with jovial skepticism. The anger was because as explained on :28, they did actually realize in their subconscious that He was both Messiah and Son of God. Their desire to catch and kill Him at that feast was somehow frustrated; He had an intended time to die, and it was not yet. The details are not given, but the overall picture is that the Lord's death was not achieved by the Jews just wanting Him out of the way, murdering Him. It was orchestrated by the Father, in response to the Son's desire to give His life.

7:31 *But of the crowd many believed in him; and they said: When the Christ comes, will he do more signs than those which this man has done?*- John is generous in crediting them with belief, because he goes on to explain that they were not completely sure if He were Messiah or not. And they also predicated His Messiahship upon the number of miracles performed, whereas John's theme is that the Lord used an economy of miracle, and that the miracles in any case did not elicit lasting faith. Our view of others' immature faith ought to be similarly positive. For often our own faith is not actually much more mature.

7:32 *The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things concerning him, and the chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to take him*- There is fair emphasis upon the 'murmuring'. It was all very undercover. We may well ask, why the Jewish leadership minded so much that a claimant to Messiahship was so popular? Was it not that subconsciously, they felt it took away their power? They were playing Messiah, as men play God today. They didn't actually want Him to come because they had too much vested interest in Him actually not coming. Likewise there were those in Am. 5:18,19 who desired the day of the Lord, in words at least, and yet not really. We have to ask whether our desire for the Lord's coming is more than a matter of words, a respectably expressed public dissatisfaction with things as they are... when in real spiritual and psychological terms, we actually prefer all things to continue as they are.

7:33 *Jesus replied: Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go to Him that sent me*- The Lord's ministry was incredibly short. Three and a half years within the entire span of human history, and indeed, all existence and time as we know it.

The disciples were all too influenced by Judaism, the "generation" or world around them. The disciples and Judaism / the Jewish world are paralleled in Jn. 7:3,4: "Let your disciples see your work… shew yourself to the world".
The Lord Jesus has to say the same words to the Jews as He does to the disciples:

Phrase	To the Jews	To the disciples
"I am to be with you only a little longer"	Jn. 7:33	Jn. 13:33
"You will look for me"	Jn. 7:34; 8:21	Jn. 13:33
"Where I am going, you cannot come"	Jn. 7:34; 8:21	Jn. 13:33

Greek (unlike Hebrew) uses tenses in a very precise way. There are some real problems in understanding exactly why the Lord changes tenses so often, e.g. in Jn. 7:33,34: "Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am [we would expect: 'Where I will go / be'], thither ye cannot [not 'will not be able to'] come". He saw Himself as both with the Father, already glorified, and yet also still in mortal life. Another example is in the way He speaks of how the faithful *are* equal to the Angels, *being* the children of the resurrection (Lk. 20:35,36- in the context of explaining how 'all live' unto God)- we would rather expect Him to speak of how the faithful *will be* equal to Angels, *will be* resurrected etc. But He pointedly speaks in the present tense. He realized that He had not yet made the required sacrifice and broken the power of death in resurrection. But He also was confident in faith that He would achieve these things, and He looked at things from outside of time as we know it- from His Father's perspective.

7:34 *You shall seek me, and shall not find me; and where I am, you cannot come*- This sounds like Moses ascending the Mount, leaving Israel behind him. Yet "Where I am" refers to the Lord's unity with God; the heights of His relationship with God connect with the physical ascent of Moses into the mount to hear God's words. "I will that they also... be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me" (17:24) alludes to the 70 elders sharing Moses' experience in the Mount (Ex. 24:70); it is as if the Lord is saying that His disciples really can enter into His relationship with God, we can be where He was spiritually in His mortal life. The Jews would seek that, and not find it. Their window of opportunity was incredibly brief. There is no evidence that they sought the Lord and didn't find Him in their mortal lives; I suggest the reference is to the awful time of condemnation at the last day, when they shall seek Him too late but not find Him. The window of opportunity we have in this life is very small. Every moment is of intense, eternal significance. This motivated the Lord to shout out and appeal for them to respond (:28,37); and we must likewise see our witness as having the same urgency.

John 7:33-34: "Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come". He then went on to foretell how that out of His pierced side

there would come the water of the Spirit. “Where I am" is parallel with “I am going...". He was going to the cross, but He speaks as if He was there right then at that moment. The cross was ongoing in His life. His going unto the Father was how He understood going to the cross (13:1,3 make the connection clear). Later, the Jews would recollect Golgotha’s scene and seek Him, but not find Him. There was a time for them to accept the cross, but there would come a time when they would not be able to accept it. This surely cannot refer to their mortal lives; for whoever comes to the Son, He will in no wise cast out. So it presumably means that at the judgment, as they wallow in the wretchedness of their condemnation, they will recall the cross and wish desperately to appropriate that salvation for themselves. They will seek Him, but be unable then to find Him.

7:35 *The Jews queried among themselves: Where will this man go that we shall not find him? Will he go to the diaspora among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles?*- Where He was going, as noted above, was to the cross, to the Father, and to His "I am" relationship with Him. As noted earlier, they actually understood on one level what He meant. The possibilities they offered as to His intended meaning were really a smokescreen to cover over their own bad conscience. For they both knew Him and from where He had come (:28). So they knew where He was going to, for He had said He was going to where He came from. And again we see the Bible revealing core human psychology to us. Misunderstanding is so often psychologically motivated. It wasn't that they simply failed to make the right intellectual connections in order to accept Him. Accepting Him is not therefore something which some 'get' and some 'don't get' with no further culpability. The apparent misunderstandings and misconnections are all a reflection of a determined desire within, not to accept Jesus of Nazareth as Lord of our lives.

7:36 *What is his meaning when he said: You shall seek me and shall not find me; and, Where I am, you cannot come?*- As noted on :35, they knew His meaning. This is why there is no recorded response of the Lord to their questions. Instead we read of the Lord's impassioned plea to come to Him (:37). He had spoken of their condemnation at the last day, how there would come a time when they would seek and not find Him, and not be able to come "Where I am", with the Father- even though they would then dearly wish to. And people today likewise pretend they do not see the possibility of future condemnation, the reality of their answerability at the last day... they may shrug it all off with nonchalance and raise various questions, as if to say that the interpretation of all these things is far from clear and who can be sure... But this is all a smokescreen for their own bad conscience, their own realization [well beneath the realms of conscious awareness] that in fact these things are true.

7:37 *Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying: If anyone thirsts, let him came to me and drink*- "The last day" suggests the Lord saw this as a preview of judgment day; and they could even now come to Him and drink. The invitation to drink from Him is to be connected with the Lord's words to the Samaritan woman, where the water offered was of the Spirit. The gift was for all those who realized their Spiritual thirst. The self-satisfied religionists were not those who hungered and thirsted to be righteous. This is John's equivalent of the Lord's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, that those who long to be righteous would be filled. Those who thirst for the Spirit will be given it. And the water given, the spirit of life given, was "eternal life" in that this is how we shall eternally live.

7:38- see on Jn. 1:14.

He that believes on me, as the scripture has said: From within him shall flow rivers of living water- The connection is again with the teaching to the Samaritan woman at the well. The water given was of the Spirit, and would provide springs of living water of the Spirit in an ongoing sense to the believer.

But clearly the idea is also that those who receive the Spirit become a source of Spirit life to others: "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly ("innermost being", NIV) shall flow rivers of living (Gk. spring) water". What "scripture" did the Lord have in mind? Surely Ez. 47:1,9, the prophecy of how in the Messianic Kingdom, rivers of spring water will come out from Zion and bring life to the world; and perhaps too the references to spring water being used to cleanse men from leprosy and death (Lev. 14:5; 15:13; Num. 19:16). Out of the innermost being of the true believer, the spring(ing) water of the Gospel will *naturally* spring up and go out to heal men, both now and more fully in the Kingdom. The believer, *every* believer, *whoever* believes, will preach the word to others *from his innermost being*, both now and in the Kingdom - without the need for preaching committees or special preaching campaigns (not that in themselves I'm decrying them). The tendency is to delegate our responsibilities for evangelism to others. But here the Lord speaks as if we have no option but to bubble out the water of the Spirit to others.

There is no essential difference between faith and works. If we believe, we will do the works of witness, quite spontaneously. And note how the water that sprung out of the Lord's smitten side is to be compared with the bride that came out of the smitten side of Adam. We, the bride, are the water; thanks to the inspiration of the cross, we go forth in witness, the water of life to this hard land in which we walk.

Living water was to come out of the smitten rock. When He was glorified on the cross, then the water literally flowed from His side on His death. He paralleled His 'smiting' on the cross with His glorification (Jn. 7:38). And He elsewhere seems to link 'glory' with His death rather than His ascension (Jn. 12:28,41; 13:32; 17:1,5 cp. 21:19). The Hebrew idea of 'glory' means that which is lifted up; and thus His references to His death as a lifting up suggested that He saw His death as His glory. And we with Isaiah and with John and the Lord Himself should find in the glory and terror of the cross the vision which will endlessly inspire our ministry. Ps. 96:10 in some LXX versions reads: "Say among the nations, The Lord reigned from the tree". What would have looked like the utter, pathetic humiliation of the Man from Nazareth was in fact His glorification, His moment of triumph and victory; just as the pathetic death of a poor saint may be their glorious triumph over their mortality. And He there was and is our King. And this has implications for us; we were constituted a people over whom God reigns by the cross (Rev. 1:5 Gk.). Because of His utter victory there, He becomes our all controlling Lord, King and Master. We are no longer free to do what we want. This is why baptism into His death is an acceptance of His Lordship, of His will being the command of our lives.

7:39- see on Jn. 12:24,28.

He spoke of the Spirit, which they that believed in him were to receive. For the Spirit had not yet been received, as Jesus had not yet been glorified- Some manuscripts read "The Holy Spirit had not yet been received". This parallels the Spirit and the Holy Spirit- once the emphasis upon the word "yet" is appreciated. "Ye are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you" (1 Cor. 3:16) is matched

later in the same epistle by "Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you" (1 Cor. 6:19). See on Rom. 8:26. No great difference can be argued between "Spirit" and "Holy Spirit".

The Lord invites His audience right then to receive the water of the Spirit, and yet John notes that the Spirit was not then given. Clearly the Lord was speaking of future realities as if they already were. The gift of the Spirit in view was that within the human heart, within the "innermost being" (:38 NIV). This gift is not therefore referring to miraculous gifts. The power of internal transformation was therefore the gift of the Spirit given at the Lord's glorification. And the activity of the Spirit in transforming human minds into His mind is therefore His glorification.

7:40 *Therefore some of the crowd, when they heard these words, said: This is truly the prophet!*- "The prophet" (also in :52) is clearly a reference to "the prophet" like Moses, i.e. Messiah. There are many other allusions by John's record to the Dt. 18:18 passage: "I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I command him". References to the Son only speaking what the Father commanded Him are to be found in Jn. 4:25; 8:28; 12:49. John perhaps emphasizes that at this time, the Lord did no miracle. It was by hearing "these words" that they were persuaded He was a prophet. There was something about His claims which was intuitively attractive and credible; see on :17.

7:41 *Others said: This is the Christ. But some said: What! Does the Christ come out of Galilee?*- As noted on :27, the Jews had changed their theology over the last 30 years regarding the origin of Messiah. In any case, some were sold on the idea that geographical origin must produce people of a certain character- a common source of prejudice in first century Mediterranean society. No matter what else was done by the Lord, if He were from Galilee- then they would not accept Him. Their prejudices were stronger than the argument of miracles. Their predispositions were so strong that they were not open to any spiritual argument.

7:42 *Has not the scripture said that the Christ comes of the seed of David and from Bethlehem, the village where David was born?*- It seems that the Lord, along with Mary and Joseph, had somehow kept His origins from Bethlehem a secret. One would expect to read Him making a big point about His origins from there, in order to back up His claims to Messiahship and in order to answer the objections to His Messiahship on the basis that He was from Galilee. But He doesn't. It was not His style to get involved in horns-locked debate in this manner, overpowering arguments by dismantling them. He hardly appeals to Old Testament prophecy being fulfilled. The Gospel writers do at times, but the Lord does not. He as He was, His personality, His lack of sin... this was who He was and it was persuasive enough to those who were spiritually minded. He could so easily have made capital out of the fact He was born in Bethlehem, and Messiah was prophesied as coming from there. But He doesn't, and I find profound the way He doesn't even rise up to the opportunity now offered Him to do so. Fulfillment of Bible prophecy on some point or other was not His style. Instead He asks those who were thirsting for spirituality to come to Him, and have springs of the Spirit open up within their innermost being. And there was a powerful credibility about Him which did not depend upon argumentation about His Bethlehem origins.

There are very few direct statements from Jesus about Himself- e.g. He never actually says He had a virgin birth, nor does He explain that He was born in Bethlehem as required by Micah 5:2. He left people assuming He was born in Nazareth (Jn. 7:42).

7:43 *So there arose a division in the crowd because of him*- Division over the Lord's origin and credibility has always been. John emphasizes this (s.w. 9:16; 10:19). He is not a source of unity amongst people generally; only those who are of His Spirit find themselves united with each other. All others find themselves bitterly divided over Him. This is why a divided church is not the Lord's church, at least on a collective level. The net which caught the 153 fishes was not 'divided' despite the large number (21:11).

7:44 *And some of them would have taken him; but no one laid hands on him*- Again we sense that those who wanted to kill Him could not do so because His death was a function of His self-giving, and the Father's empowerment of the process. It was not yet time, and so somehow, all the plans didn't come to anything. And further, when His arresters came close to Him, there was clearly something unusual about Him to the extreme. The "some" refers to the officers sent by the priests and Pharisees to arrest Him (:45). The implication is that as they pushed through the crowds to arrest Him, the power of His words somehow repelled them and made them retreat.

7:45 *The officers went to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them: Why did you not bring him?*- This was surely the only time they had been sent to arrest someone but had felt stopped from doing so by the power of His words, so that they had to beat a shamefaced retreat back through the crowd and thence back to those who had sent them.

7:46 *The officers answered: Never has a man spoken like this man!*- As noted on :44 and :45, it was the power of the Lord's words alone which stopped these officers from arresting Him. This is a theme we have noted in John- the power of the Lord's word and personality, even when no miracles were being done by Him. This was necessary for John to underline seeing he was writing at around the time when the miraculous gifts were fading. The repetition of "man" suggests that they perceived Him as unique amongst men, whilst being man, because of His words. He was a man, with a message which was clearly from God- somehow fused with the texture of His personality in a way and to an extent that no other messenger of God had ever been.

7:47 *The Pharisees therefore answered them: Are you also led astray?*- The officers could have given any number of reasons why they had not managed to arrest the Lord. But they spoke the truth. The Pharisees considered Him a deceiver (s.w. :12) and yet the Lord and John often warn that it was the Jews who were the great deceivers, leading astray the converts. John's language allows no middle ground between Judaism and Christianity. One is a deceiver, the other is the truth; and both consider the other to be deceitful.

7:48 *Have any of the rulers believed in him, or any of the Pharisees?*- Truth, and the true identity of Messiah, was posited by them on who else had believed in Jesus as Christ. If no rulers or Pharisees had done, then whatever miracles were done or words spoken, He could not be Messiah. And this is the problem with so many to this day- they will only believe, or claim to believe, if others do; and if those others are suitably respectable. They judge the person of Christ by those who follow Him. And whilst that is understandable on a secular level, the idea of John's Gospel is that we are to be impressed by personal encounter with the Lord, and respond to Him regardless of whether others have, or which others have. This is how the Gospel ends, with the idea that we are to personally follow the Lord whether or not others do.

7:49 *But this rabble, which does not know the law, are accursed!*- "Rabble" was a technical term used by the Pharisees for the mass of Israel, whom they considered apostate. "Accursed" is their allusion to the cursing promised for all who were not completely obedient to the law. The same word is used by Paul when he quotes that cursing, probably alluding to this incident, which he may well have been present at: "For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse. For it is written: Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do all things that are written in the book of the law". The Pharisees were implying that they were completely obedient to the law; but the Lord has just demonstrated that the law is structured in such a way that to obey one commandment, e.g. to circumcise a child on the eighth day, could break a legalistic interpretation of another, e.g. to not work on the Sabbath.

7:50 *Nicodemus (he that had earlier come to him by night, being one of them)*- This continues the theme noted on :13 of the secret believers slowly coming out in the open. He was "one of them" at this stage. See on Jn. 3:5.

7:51 *Said to them: Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and knowing what he is doing?*- He is alluding to how the Jews proudly considered that the provision of Roman law to only judge / condemn after giving the accused a hearing was in fact based upon Jewish law. He appeals to their national pride in order to save the Lord's life. However, there is no specific statement in the Law of Moses requiring this principle to be followed. Nicodemus may well be alluding to rabbinic law which required that a death sentence [using "judge" in the sense of condemning to death] could only be asked for after a man had appeared before the Sanhedrin and been condemned by them.

7:52- see on Jn. 1:46.

They answered and said to him: Are you also of Galilee? Search the scrolls and you will see, that no prophet is to rise from Galilee- They were in fact wrong, for Jonah [a great type of the Lord Jesus] was from Galilee. But the record has more spiritual culture than to point out this obvious error. We are left to perceive it, and the silence regarding their ignorance becomes the more powerfully deafening exactly because the obvious point is not made. The Jewish leadership were trying to paint the Lord as supported only by some of the Galilean pilgrims who had come up to that feast of tabernacles. Their damaged consciences are revealed in their over sensitivity to merely being asked to apply their own law to the case of Jesus of Nazareth. They jump to the conclusion that Nicodemus is also on the Lord's side and must therefore also be Galilean. Recall how Peter is unmasked as one of the Lord's followers because of his Galilean accent.

7:53 *At that, each of them went home*- As noted on :52, the glaring error in claiming that no prophet is from Galilee, when Jonah was from there, is left without comment. The implication is that alone at home, away from the group mentality, they would have reflected upon that error. And thought about Jonah, who the Lord had said was a sign to them about His own death and resurrection (Mt. 12:39). The Sanhedrin now broke up; the members returned to their own homes in the various towns of Palestine, without having made a formal conclusion about how to proceed with the case of Jesus of Nazareth.

JOHN CHAPTER 8

8:1 *Jesus went to the Mount of Olives*- This may be in contrast to the Sanhedrin members going back to their own homes (7:53); the Lord by contrast slept rough on Olivet. The Lord's coming from Olivet to the temple (:2) was the route expected of Messiah when He returned. We note that this chapter follows on from John 7, which occured on the last day of the feast of tabernacles (Jn. 7:37). But there was a Sabbath to be kept the day after the feast of tabernacles ended (Lev. 23:39). It could be that on the last night of the feast, the Jews had partied and slept with the prostitute whom they now bring before the Lord. The Lord came down from the mount and wrote with His finger, clearly alluding to Moses' descent from the mount Sinai with the old covenant written with the finger of God. That old covenant was now being replaced with grace and forgiveness and certain salvation.

8:2 *And early in the morning he again went into the temple, and all the people came to him; and he sat down and taught them*- Presumably in the court of the women, because the adulterous woman was brought to Him there. "The treasury" where He gave His next discourse (:20) was next to the court of the women. So the teaching about Himself as the light of the world and the Truth which makes free must follow as a direct commentary upon the incident with the woman. "Jesus went unto the mount of Olives... he came again into the temple, and all the people (i.e. the leaders and the crowd, see context) came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them" (John 8:1,2). This is framed to recall Moses coming down from Sinai: "The Lord came (down) from Sinai (manifest in Moses)... yea, he (God) loved the people (in the fact that) all his saints (Israel) are in thy (Moses') hand (as we are in the hand of Christ, Jn. 10:28-30): and they sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words... the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel (i.e. both leaders and ordinary people) were gathered together (to Moses)" (Dt. 33:2-5). And as we will later note, He was giving them a new law- of non condemnation and salvation by grace, written by His finger as the old law had been written with God's finger.

Sitting down and teaching may simply be stating the obvious, for many rabbis taught sitting down. But given the large crowd and the need to project His voice, we wonder why it is so stressed. Surely given the situation and size of the crowd, most teachers would have stood. But the Lord was totally focused upon seeking the Father's glory (see on 7:18) and totally not upon His own glory as a teacher; and this may have been reflected in His choice at this point to teach sitting, on the level of His immediate audience, rather than standing.

8:3 *And the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in the act of adultery; and having placed her before him*- "Brought" can be translated 'dragged'. Our sympathy is set up for the woman, even though she was told to "sin no more". The later discourses in this chapter will show her to be every one of us. Our sin, to whatever extent it was our fault totally or only partially as a result of others' railroading, is dealt with in the freedom we are granted by the Lord's judgment not to condemn us. This was surely a set up. The Lord was apparently obligated to agree that she should be stoned. But this was against Roman law, which only considered recommendations from the Sanhedrin for death sentences in the case of desecration of the temple. The woman was used as a pawn; her feelings were unimportant to these men, bent as they were upon finding a case against the Lord. And of course the guilty male was not brought to Him for judgment.

8:4 *They said to him: Teacher. This woman has been caught in the very act of adultery!*- Seeing it was early morning at the end of the Tabernacles festival (:2), we

assume she had been dragged fresh from her sin into the temple. They presumably had the witnesses and were setting themselves up as a kangaroo court, at which they invited the Lord to be judge. Indeed, their comment that they ["us"] were commanded to stone her suggests they were the witnesses. This forms the background for what He later says in His discourses in John 8; they are all based upon this incident with the woman.

8:5 *Now, in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?*- They were seeking to set the Lord either against Moses or against Rome (see on :2). "Such women" is only partially true; because the law required that the man and the woman be stoned. This was also only the case if the woman was married or engaged to be married (Lev. 20:10; Dt. 22:22-25); that may or may not have been the case. The specific command to stone was only if the woman was engaged to another man. If she was, then we would definitely suspect her actions, whilst sinful, were the result of manipulation and abuse. And of course the man too would need to be stoned; but they carefully omit reference to him.

The entire discourse in John 8 is connected to this opening account of the woman taken in adultery. It concludes with the Jews wanting to stone the Lord; and it opens with them wanting to stone the woman. We see here the Lord presented as identified with that woman. And yet that woman is every man and woman in Him.

8:6 *And this they said to test him, so they might have some reason to accuse him*- I have explained in *The Real Devil* that the Jewish opposition to the Lord and His church is often described as "the devil" or "Satan". They were quite literally false accusers and were ever looking for false accusations to make, seeking to spin situations so that they could accuse the Christians to the local authorities and get them shut down. They were thinking that if the Lord agreed she should be stoned, then He was usurping the right of the Romans to alone utter the death sentence and they could report Him for this. But if He argued she need not be stoned, then He would be unfaithful to the law of Moses.

But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground- He could have been doodling, or have done so just from plain male awkwardness before a naked woman. In these suggestions we see so clearly His humanity. If this is so, then there would have been an artless mix of His Divinity, His utter personal moral perfection, and His utter humanity. Embarrassed in front of a naked woman, crouching down on His haunches, doodling in the dust... that, it seems to me, would've been the ultimate conviction of sin for those who watched. It would've been surpassingly beautiful and yet so challenging at the same time. And it is that same mixture of utter humanity and profound, Divine perfection within the person of Jesus which, it seems to me, is what convicts us of sin and leads us devotedly to Him. Maybe I'm wrong in my imagination and reconstruction of this incident- but if we love the Lord, surely we'll be ever seeking to reconstruct and imagine how He would or might have been.

But the way He challenges them with their personal sins (:7) suggests He was writing their sins in the dust, or perhaps their names: "They that depart from me shall be written in the earth" (Jer. 17:13). Or He could have been using a well known way of communicating deafness. Hence AV adds, with Codex Beza: "As though he heard them not". He would have been thereby saying that He was deaf to the accusations, possibly alluding to Messiah as the deaf servant who was morally perfect (Is. 42:19). Just as we are commanded not to be interested in hearing about others' sins, neither is the Lord Jesus. Or perhaps He meant that He was deaf to their accusations, because they too were sinners. If He wrote their sins, then they were written in the dust, only

temporarily. They too could be brushed out by the Lord with ease; and they too were but dust.

"Wrote", *grapho*, is the standard word for 'to write'. But it has a wider range of meaning, including also the sense of 'describing'. John in Revelation is asked to "write" the visions he saw, but you can't write a visual impression; the sense is, to describe it. And so Paul uses the word in talking about the righteousness 'described' in the Mosaic law (Rom. 10:5). Revelation uses the word in referencing "the plagues written", "the things written" in the book according to which men shall be judged. Again, 'description' is within the semantic field. This makes it almost certain that the Lord described their sins. Writing the sins in the dust meant they were quite capable of being easily erased by Him. But His later discourses go on to lament that although He has in fact many [other] things to judge them for, they will die in their sins.

Where else do we read of writing with a finger? The writing with a finger recalls the giving of the law by God (Ex. 31:18; 34:1-4). Possibly the Lord did this in response to the question as to whether He would apply the Mosaic law to the adulterous woman. He is suggesting that He is rewriting that law on God's behalf- by simply forgiving and removing judgment of proven sinners, through His death and resurrection. Here we have an exemplification of how the law *was given* through Moses, but grace and truth [the truth which is grace, the NT equivalent and development of "mercy and faithfulness" of the Old Covenant] *came* ['came into being', Gk.] in or through Jesus Christ. By being in Him we have access to this amazing grace. "The truth" that the Lord will now proceed to say "makes free" is the Truth of grace, God's mercy and His faithfulness, His trustworthiness, that that grace is real to us. As it was to the sinful woman here.

AV adds "as though He heard them not", and that is indeed the implication. This was the response of a deaf man. Perhaps that is the sole significance of His writing in the dust as though He heard them not. He chose not to hear them, and He asks the woman to likewise understand that He did not condemn her, there was no accusation against her- because He didn't hear it. He asked her to look at herself as He looked at her. And this is the challenge of believing in the Lord's love for us. 'Do you believe the Lord Jesus loves you?' is the key question. Here was fulfilled the otherwise strange Isaianic prophecy "Who is deaf as My servant?" (Is. 42:19).

8:7 *But when they continued asking him, he stood up and said to them: He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her*- The trick of the question had been to get the Lord to agree to what the Romans would have called extra-judicial murder. Here, the Lord asks them to be obedient to the Mosaic law and stone her- but adding the rider that only if they were "without sin". He is introducing a dimension not found in the Law of Moses- that we cannot actually judge with integrity because we too are sinners and deserve death. He was of course also addressing Himself, for He was the only one "among you" who was "without sin". He could have thrown the first stone, leading others into condemning the woman; but He would not, because He sought to save not to condemn. The Lord viewed obedience to such laws as voluntary. The fact there was a command to do something doesn't mean that we must do it; there are other factors. This is and was impossible for the legalistic mind to get around. The way to the Father is not by such casuistic obedience, but through the Spirit.

The way the Lord "stood up" or 'lifted Himself up' here and in :10 has connection with how He was lifted up on the cross. His death was the judgment of this world, and He stood up to declare the verdict- of freedom from sin and accusation for the worst sinners. "Stooped down" in John's Gospel inevitably connects with Mary stooping down to look for the Lord's body in the tomb. "He lifted up himself" (:7 AV) connects

with His words, again in John, that He had power to lay down His life and take it again. It was because of His death and resurrection that the sins of the unbelieving world would be revealed, the world would be convicted of sin just as these men were convicted in their consciences; and the sins of a sorry for herself busted whore would no longer exist. She walks free. We of course are led by the record to suspect that this was a set up, that she had been abused and manipulated, but we must give full weight to the Lord's charge to her "Go and sin no more". The weight of all guilt, false and real, of all sin, whether or not we were railroaded into it, is dealt with in Him. The Son makes us free.

8:8 *And again he stooped down and with his finger wrote on the ground*- The second writing on the ground may have been of their sins, perhaps writing them next to the names of the men which He had written earlier (:6). The record seems to imply that it was the way Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust which convicted the accusers of the adulteress in their consciences. As He kept on writing, they one by one walked away. It's been speculated that He was writing their deeds or names there, fulfilling Jeremiah's prophecy of how the names of the wicked would be written in the dust (Jer. 17:13). Perhaps He wrote their names, and next to them the names of the women they'd committed adultery with. Shmon = Maryam and Zippy; Shaul = Rivka. Something like that. Seeing they claimed to be the witnesses against the woman, it could be that she was a prostitute with whom all present had had group sex on the final evening of the tabernacles celebrations.

8:9- see on Mt. 27:5.

And they, when they heard it, went out one by one, beginning from the eldest, to the last; and Jesus was left alone with the woman, with her still standing in the middle- It can be no coincidence that the Lord Jesus is described as being “left alone” twice in the New Testament, and they are both within a few verses of each other: “They which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was *left alone*, and the woman standing in the midst” (Jn. 8:9)... “Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not *left me alone*; for I do always those things that please him” (Jn. 8:28,29). He didn't feel alone because He had that woman with Him, a forgiven sinner assured of His acceptance and salvation from her condemnation. He likes sinners, He takes comfort from us, He is the sinner's friend and thereby, sinners are His friends. He was not alone because the Father confirmed Him in the judgments He made (Jn. 8:16). What is the meaning of this connection? As the peerless Son of God stood before the repentant sinner, with all others convicted by their consciences to one by one slink away from His presence, He was left alone with His perfect Father as well as the repentant woman. Jesus saw in that scene a prefiguring of His death on the cross. There, lifted up from the earth, He was left alone with the Father, a repentant sinner [the thief], and again, one by one, the condemning onlookers smote their breasts in conviction of their sin and walked away. The cross was “the judgment of this world” (Jn. 12:31). There men and women are convicted of their sin and either walk away, or take the place of the humbled woman or desperately repentant thief. This alone should impart an urgency and intensity to our memorial services, when through bread and wine we come as it were before Him there once again, facing up to the piercing reality of our situation as sinners kneeling before the crucified Son of

God. One aspect of the loneliness of the cross was that simply the Lord's righteousness set Himself apart from humanity- and He so intensely felt it: "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me" (Jn. 16:32). Yet it was the loneliness which drew Him to the Father. For the isolated believer, the loneliness of being in some sense more righteous living than e.g. your alcoholic husband, your atheist daughter, the materialistic women at work...is a burden hard to live with. Yet in this, we are sharing something of the cross of our Lord. And if we suffer with Him, we shall also share in the life eternal which He was given. Being "left alone" with the Father and your humbled, repentant brethren is a sharing in the cross of the Son of God. This is the gripping logic, the promise of ultimate hope, which is bound up with the sense of spiritual loneliness which is in some ways inevitably part of the believing life.

8:10 *And Jesus stood up and said to her: Woman! Where are your accusers? Did no one condemn you?*- There are many links between Romans and John's Gospel; when Paul asks where is anyone to condemn us (Rom. 8:34 "Who is he that condemns? It is Christ Jesus that died, yes rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God"), we are surely intended to make the connection here to Jn. 8:10, where the Lord asks the condemned woman the very same question. It's as if she, there, alone with the Lord, face down, is every one of us. His question "Did no one condemn you?" was rhetorical, in order to help the point be underlined to her- that all are sinners, and she should not feel nor fear the condemnation of men, for they too are sinners, equally condemned. The healing she needed was partly to do with this; for the shame of condemnation at the hands of her religious elders was utterly traumatic. And the Lord removed that, as well as assuring her of her acceptability before God.

The Lord freed the woman from the guilt laid upon her by others, especially her religious leaders; and from guilt before Him. The freedom granted from the condemnation of others is surely felt by Paul when he says that he has only one who judges him, the Lord, and the judgment of others means nothing to him.

8:11 *And she said: No one, Lord. And Jesus said: Neither do I condemn you. Go your way. From this time forward, sin no more*- He was the only one without sin who could stone her; but He chose not to, He chose to not obey the Mosaic commandment to stone her. Thus by obeying the spirit of the law He broke the letter, at least in the legalistic, casuistic understanding of the Pharisees. To judge sin is not absolutely essential, as many legalistic Christians today seem to think. Not walking in darkness in the next verse [12] connects with the "sin no more" spoken to the woman. We are each in her position. "Neither do I condemn you" is clearly behind Paul's statement that "There is *now* no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus who walk not according to the flesh but in the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1). The woman represents us all.

"Go your way" is to be picked up in the later discourse in this chapter, where the Lord will talk about how "the truth" sets free, so that we too can 'go our way' free from religion, accusation and condemnation. This is why this narrative about the 'set free' woman is placed as a kind of acted parable and illustration of the teaching which follows.

"Sin no more" must be understood within the Johanine context of how he speaks of living without sin. It doesn't mean not to ever sin, but rather to abide "in Christ" and not "in sin". So we need not read the Lord as sending her away with a finger wagging at her as if to say, "Now mind that you behave yourself in future". But rather as a statement describing the new path of life she could now walk.

8:12 *Again Jesus spoke to the crowd, saying: I am the light of the world. He that follows me shall not walk in the darkness but shall have the light of life-*

The Jews have just spoken of how nothing good can come from Galilee (Jn. 7:52), and now the Lord talks of Himself as the rising light- nicely fulfilling the prophecy of how light would arise from Galilee (Is. 9:12). And He says these words at dawn (Jn. 8:2 Gk.) as the sun arose. What was the light of the world, the truth and freedom now revealed, was the experience of total forgiveness and assurance of salvation.

The Lord's subsequent teaching in this chapter is allusive to the incident with the woman taken in adultery, so I would not be supportive of any attempt to exclude that section as uninspired. If indeed the Lord has just written the sins of those men on the ground, then they would have indeed felt that He was the light exposing their sins. But those men are the whole world. The Lord had told the woman "Go your way", free from guilt, from accusation, grateful that the only man who could condemn her didn't do so and didn't want to hear about her sins- He was as deaf to the accusations. This is 'walking in the light' and that woman is the model. "I am the light of the world" alludes back to the prologue; the life the Lord lived is to be our light, which we live by and understand life according to. Hence here we read of the "light of life". Life lived any other way is lived in darkness. John's letters develop the thought in practice by saying that if we live in hatred towards our brother, we walk in darkness. Such a hateful life is lived because the heart is focused upon the life of Jesus, His Spirit, His life, doesn't live within us. Having the light of life may be another way of saying what we read in Mt. 5:14: "You are the light of the world". In His light we become light to others.

The teaching of Jesus was very much centred around Himself. Other religious teachers tend to say 'This is the truth, these are the ideas I have put together: follow them'. But Jesus says: "I am the truth; follow *me*". His formula was not "Thus saith the Lord", but rather "Truly, truly *I* say unto you…". The personal pronoun forces itself upon our attention as we read His words:
"I am the bread of life; he who comes to *me* shall not hunger"
"I am the light of the world; he who follows *me*..."
"I am the resurrection and the life… whoever lives and believes in me shall never die"
"I am the way and the truth"
"Come to *me* … learn of *me*".
He called people to Himself- to come to Him, learn of Him, follow Him. He knew, too, that the example and achievement of His death would exert a certain magnetism upon men and women: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto myself". He is drawing them not primarily to a church, to a statement of faith, to a 'truth'…but to Himself.

The "light" was a lifted up torch of fire, exactly as He was to be lifted up on the cross (see on Jn. 3:19-21). But He saw Himself as there and then lifted up as the light of the world. The principles of the cross must be the light, the only light, of our lives. When the Lord speaks of Himself as the light / burning torch of the Jewish world, He continues: "He that follows me shall not walk in darkness" (Jn. 8:12). Nobody follows the sun when they walk- so the "light" referred to is hardly the sun. Surely the reference is back to the fiery pillar in the wilderness, which gave light by night so that the Jews could walk in the light even when darkness surrounded them. And there's an upward spiral in all this. If "the light" is specifically a reference to God's glory manifested through the crucifixion, then this must provide the background for our

understanding of Jn. 12:35-50. Here the Lord teaches that only those who walk in the light can perceive who He really is, and "the work" which was to be "finished" on the cross. It is the light of the cross which reveals to us the essence of who the Lord really is... and this in turn leads us to a keener perception of the light of the cross. Which in turn enables us to see clearer the path in which we are to daily walk.

Is. 42:16, amidst many exodus / Red Sea allusions, speaks of how God makes the darkness light before His exiting people. The many Johanine references to the Lord Jesus being a light in the darkness for His followers would then be yet more elaborations of the idea that the Lord Jesus is the antitype of the Angel that led Israel out of Egypt (Jn. 8:12; 12:35,46)

The light of the Gospel is not just light which we behold and admire for its beauty; it is a light which by its very nature opens the eyes of blind people (Jn. 8:12)!

Many passages in John speak of the believer as being in a state of constant spiritual strength; e.g. "he that followeth me shall never (Gk.) walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (Jn. 8:12). These kind of passages surely teach that God does not see us on the basis of our individual sins or acts of righteousness; He sees our overall path in life, and thereby sees us as totally righteous or totally evil. Thus Proverbs contains many verses which give two alternative ways of behaviour, good and evil; there is no third way. Thus, e.g., we *either* guard our tongue, *or* we speak rashly (Prov. 13:3). At baptism, we changed masters, from 'sin' to 'obedience'. It may seem that we flick back and forth between them. In a sense, we do, but from God's perspective (and Rom. 6:16-20 describes how *God* sees our baptism), we don't. The recurring weakness of natural Israel was to serve Yahweh *and* the idols (1 Sam. 7:3; 2 Kings 17:41; Zeph. 1:5).

8:13 *The Pharisees replied to him: You testify of yourself. Your witness is not true*- As noted on :12, the Lord did indeed focus heavily upon presenting Himself as the life to be lived, the light to be followed. The Pharisees were judging the Lord, and they claimed that He had no witnesses to testify for Him apart from Himself. See on :17

8:14- see on 1 Jn. 5:9.

Jesus answered and said to them: Even if I testify of myself, my witness is true. For I know from where I came and where I go; but you do not know where I come from, nor where I go to- This appears to contradict His statement in 5:31 "If I testify of myself, my witness is not true" (the same words are used in the Greek). Likewise "You do not know where I come from" contradicts 7:28 "You both know me, and know from where I am, and that I have not come of myself". Few commentators have engaged with these intentional paradoxes. I suggest the Lord is probing the fact that in their consciences, they knew He came from God. Their confidently proclaimed, quasi logical legalistic arguments were but a smokescreen to disguise their inner voice of conscience. So I suggest His sense is: 'Even if I am My own witness, My witness is true because both I and you know from where I came- from God!'. "You do not know where I come from" is allusive to their own position expressed in 7:27: "When Messiah comes, nobody knows from where He comes". Their claim to not know where He came from was in fact an admission that they accepted He was Messiah.

8:15 *You judge after the flesh. I judge no one*- Their legal language of 'witnesses' reflects how they were judging Him in the sense of condemning Him. He condemned nobody- and the context is His refusal to condemn the woman taken in adultery. This

connection further strengthens the case that the incident with the woman is the basis of His later teaching here, and should not be removed from the text.

8:16 *Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone that judge, but I and He who sent me*- "I judge no one, yet even if I do judge..." recalls His argument that He did not testify of Himself (5:31), and yet even if He did... (:14). 'Not A, but sometimes A' is a common construction in Semitic languages as it is in several Eastern European languages to this day. "Not A" doesn't mean 'Never ever A'. Their judgment "after the flesh" (:15) is contrasted with how He judges with God's judgment, i.e. 'after the Spirit'. His judgment "is true" because He seeks the Father's will, which is of human salvation (5:30 and context). Any condemnation uttered by the Son is made having done God's will to the full, i.e. to save men rather than condemn them. Condemnation is therefore only for those who have refused the will of God for them, His will for their salvation.

The Lord would not judge / condemn the woman (:15), but His judgment is truth. That truth is that she would not be condemned and was free of accusation.

8:17 *Even in your law it is written, that the witness of two men is true*- "Your law" could mean that He considered that God's law had now been hijacked by them, just as the house of Yahweh had become the temple of the Jews, the feasts of Yahweh had become the feasts of the Jews. The requirement of two witnesses is to be found in Dt. 17:6; 19:15; but the Lord carefully changes "two witnesses" to "two men". His point is that the witnesses to Himself are more than men; He has God Himself, and Himself as Son of God.

8:18 *I am he that testifies of myself; and the Father that sent me testifies of me*- If the witness of two *men* was acceptable, then the Lord argues that the testimony of God Himself and of Himself as God's Son was far more conclusive.

The Lord's sense of authority helps explain His mysterious logic in Jn. 8:17,18. The Jews accuse Him of bearing witness of Himself, and that therefore His witness is untrue. The Lord replies that under the Law, two witnesses were required in addition to the accused person. And He argues that He is a witness to Himself, and His Father is too: "I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness". But this was exactly their point- He was bearing witness of Himself, and therefore "thy witness is not true" (Jn. 8:13 RV). Yet His reply seems to have silenced them. Clearly the authority attached to Him was so great that effectively His bearing witness of Himself *was* adequate witness.

The Lord often began His statements with the word "Amen" - 'truly', 'certainly', 'surely... I say unto you...'. Yet it was usual to *conclude* a sentence, prayer or statement with that word. But the Lord *began* His statements with it. And this feature of His style evidently caught the attention of all the Gospel writers. Mark mentions it 13 times, Matthew 9 times, Luke 3 times and John 25 times. And it should stand out to us, too. Joachim Jeremias mentions that "according to idiomatic Jewish usage the word *amen* is used to affirm, endorse or appropriate the words of another person [whereas] in the words of Jesus it is used to introduce and endorse Jesus' own words... to end one's own prayer with *amen* was considered a sign of ignorance". Thus Jesus was introducing a radically new type of speaking. The Lord's extraordinary sense of authority was not laughed off as the ravings of a self-deluded 'holy man'. For the crowds flocked to Him, and even hardened guards sent to arrest Him had to give up on the job for the humanly-flimsy excuse that "never man spake like this man". And it is that very sense of ultimate authority which amazingly comes through to us today,

who have never met Him nor heard His words with our own ears. This is the power of the inspired Gospel records, yet it is also testimony to the extraordinary, compelling power of the Personality which is transmitted through them.

I don't think the Lord meant 'I am testifying of Myself, and so is God, so therefore, my testimony must be true because two witnesses are required by the Mosaic law'. That would be logically fallacious, if an accused man needs two witnesses to his innocence and he claims one witness is himself. The Lord is saying that He and His Father are witnessses. But to what, in what court case? Again the context is of the woman just freed from accusation by the Lord's judgment; for He had been invited to be judge at a kangaroo court earlier in this chapter. I suggest that "of Myself" and "of Me", *peri* Myself, *peri* Me, simply mean that He Himself is a witness and so is God, backing up His witness. There are no accusers of the woman. There are two witnesses, the Father and Son, who witness to her innocence; and the Lord Jesus as the judge pronounces her uncondemned. This is is the very scene pictured in Romans, albeit in more theological abstract language.

8:19 *They replied to him: Where is your Father? Jesus answered: You know neither me, nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also*- There seems to be a verbal connection at least between the Jews' mocking question of Christ "Where is your father?" (Jn. 8:19) and Saul's "whose son is this youth?" (1 Sam. 17:55); David was indeed a type of the Lord. On one hand they did know Him and His Father: "You both know me, and know from where I am, and that I have not come of myself" (7:28). But it is a theme of John's Gospel that one can see and not see, hear and not hear, know and not know. The appeal is to actualize that knowledge, to follow the likes of Nicodemus in allowing our encounter with the Lord to take over our lives, so that we know Him not theoretically, as propositions, but in the Hebrew sense of 'knowing', i.e. being in an ongoing relationship with. We can note here that knowing the Father is predicated upon knowing the Son. It is encounter, experience and relationship with Him which leads us to know the Father; He is the way to the Father. Archaeology, creationism, science, arguments from nature and logic... will not provide lasting relationship with the Father. All is predicated upon the Son. "Through Him we believe in God" (1 Pet. 1:21).

8:20 *These words spoke he in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; and no one took him- because his hour had not yet come*- Again we see that the Lord only died because the Father and Himself allowed it to happen; His life was not taken from Him against His will, He gave it freely. "The treasury" was in the Court of the Women, the busiest and most public place in the temple (hence the public show of giving money at that place), with the Hall Gazith where the Sanhedrin met right next to it. Yet even there, in the busiest thoroughfare, "no one took him". It was here where it seems the Lord often sat and taught (Mk. 12:41, note the Greek tense there). We might perceive from this choice too that He was eager to get His message to the women; for the treasury was within the Court of the Women.

8:21- see on Jn. 7:33.

He replied again to them: I go away, and you shall seek me, and shall die in your sins. Where I go, you cannot come- The context is of how the Lord has listed "your sins" whe writing on the ground. "I go away..." is what He has just told the woman to do. He identifies with her, and we see this in the way this chapter begins with the Jews wanting to stone her, and concludes with them wanting to stone the Lord. There is never a time in mortal life when a man cannot seek the Lord and find Him; indeed,

many of the Pharisees were later baptized, according to Acts. So this time of seeking and not finding must refer to the last day. They could not come to the relationship He had with the Father because He was going away, they were going to kill Him on the cross, and would never after that find the humility to repent. For they need not die in their sins, if they accepted that "I am He" (:24).

"I go my way" was to the cross. He was and is the way, the cross is the only way to the true life, both now and eternally. "Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know" (14:4) further cements the connection between His "way" and the cross. From here up to :25, the Lord twice seeks to confront them with their sin, and yet they ignore this matter and get lost in speculation about His more cryptic statements. And this is why a man can spend hours or even a lifetime in 'Bible study' and come out with a conscience untouched as to his personal sin. Because humanity has a terrible way of footnoting the Lord's conviction of our sins and getting endlessly lost in striving about words and their interpretations.

8:22 *The Jews replied: Will he kill himself? Because he said: Where I go, you cannot come*- The Lord's death was not suicide, but it was also not a cessation of life as a result of murder. For He gave His life, and it was not taken from Him. I have argued throughout that subconsciously, they knew the truth about Him; of His origin and upcoming death and ascension to the Father. Here they come very close to stating that truth, even cloaked in apparent jest and skepticism.

8:23 *And he said to them: You are from beneath. I am from above. You are of this world. I am not of this world*- "Not of this world" cannot mean that He personally pre-existed in Heaven before His birth, for He uses the same phrase as to how His followers were not of this world as He was not (17:14). His Kingdom was "not of this world" (18:36). He was very much "in" this world, as He states often in John 17:11,12,13 etc. His being "from above" referred to how He was in relation to the world, rather than His literal origins. It was this which meant that they did not perceive His language correctly.

8:24 *I replied to you, that you shall die in your sins. For unless you believe that I am he, you shall die in your sins*- As explained on :21, this dying in sins refers to their final destruction in "the second death" at the last judgment. But they could avoid it, by accepting Him as the "I am". Just as He so often uses the term, *ego eimi*, "I am..." (e.g. :23). In :21 He seems to say that because they would crucify Him, they would die in their sins. But they could still have repented of that. His sense was therefore that by doing such a huge sin, they were going to find repentance hard, and He knew many of them would not come to it, for it would require too much sacrifice of vested personal interest and standing. And thus at the last day, they would die in their sins, seeking Him all too late at that day (:21).

8:25 *They replied to him: Who are you? Jesus said to them: Even that which I have spoken to you from the beginning*- Most of His messages are hidden in His lifestyle and in the way He treated people. He left it to those who watched Him to see how the word was being made flesh in Him. In this sense Jesus' words really were eminently deeds. He was the word made flesh. When the Jews asked Him "Who art you?", He replied: "How is it that I even speak to you at all? I have many things to say…When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he" (Jn. 8:25,28 RVmg.). Jesus didn't have to speak anything about Himself; He was the word made flesh, His deeds and above all His death would declare who He was. This self-

proclamation that didn't require any self-advertisement or even self-explanation was so wonderfully unique to Jesus. Thus Peter says that a wife should convert her husband without needing to speak a word- and there we have something of the same idea.

We have here yet another allusion to the prologue. The word spoken from "the beginning" was the person of the Lord Jesus as exhibited and spoken from the beginning of His ministry- not of the present creation.

8:26- see on Jn. 6:44.

I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you. However, He that sent me is true, and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world- Having written their sins on the ground, quite capable of being easily erased by Him, He warns them that He knows many more things about them and He will judge them for them. Even when making the profoundest claims to be God's Son, sent from God and destined to ascend to Heaven, the Lord in the same context emphasizes His humanity- e.g. in Jn. 8:26, having spoken of His origins, Father, and destiny, He stresses that *He* has much He'd like to say and judge of His generation, but He could only share what His Father had taught Him to speak. This was a very pointed presentation of His humanity, and He made it lest His hearers think that He was altogether other-worldly.

How the Lord heard things from the Father is not defined. It could have been from His own study of the Father's word mixed with direct revelation. Is. 50:4 may suggest early morning teaching sessions in communion with the Father: "The Lord Yahweh has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with words him who is weary: He wakens me morning by morning, He wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught". Jn. 15:15 states that all He heard from the Father, He declared to the disciples. The things He heard were therefore nothing more than what He told them during His ministry, and which we can read in the Gospels. It was not that He had huge revelations of material which remained private between Him and the Father. What He was told, He told them. It was enough to motivate them, as it was to motivate Him. And it should be enough for us too. This of course heightens our need to apply ourselves to His words as found in the Gospels.

Consider how here and in 12:49,50 He says that He *says* only what the Father taught Him to say; whereas here He says He *does* nothing of Himself but only what the Father taught Him. His words and His doings are thereby paralleled. See on Lk. 9:44; Jn. 14:10. Again in allusion to the prologue, the word was made flesh, completely actualized in a person and a life lived (1:14).

8:27 *They did not understand that he spoke to them of the Father*- On one hand they did know Him and His Father: "You both know me, and know from where I am, and that I have not come of myself" (7:28). But again we see the difference between knowledge on a theoretical level, and on the level of true understanding and relationship.

8:28- see on Jn. 5:36; 6:63; Jn. 20:28.

Jesus continued: When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me- The Jewish conscience about the cross is predicted by the Lord here. But the Jews generally were not subsequently persuaded that Jesus was indeed Messiah, bearer of the "I am" Name of God. Potentially, in their consciences, they *did know* that He was, once they crucified Him. The words of Jesus were of course true. But they didn't confess that faith, because they suppressed it in their conscience. This is

why to this day there is this Jewish conscience about the cross. And it's why conversion to the Lord Jesus cannot be far from the heart of every Jew. They perceived the manifestation of the great "I am" there, Yahweh Himself, but unless they gave themselves to it in total commitment, they would die eternally. Eternal life therefore depends upon an appreciation of the cross. For this reason, the atonement must be the central doctrine of the Gospel, and those who believe it must feel it and know it personally if they are to be saved in the end. This is why 20:27-29 seems to show that the Lord understood the essence of faith in all His people as meaning that they would discern and believe the marks in His hands where the nails were. The cross would confirm all He had spoken. There the words of Jesus were made flesh (1:14). In the lifted up Jesus, we see all His words, God's words, brought together in that body.

He predicted that when He was crucified, then His people would believe on Him; yet "As he spake these things, many believed on him", there and then (:30). There was such congruence between His message of crucifixion and His actual life, that people believed there and then, even before seeing the actual crucifixion. His life was a crucified life, and it elicited faith in those who perceived this.

In many discussions with Trinitarians, I came to observe how very often, a verse I would quote supporting the humanity of Jesus would be found very near passages which speak of His Divine side. For example, most 'proof texts' for both the 'Jesus=God' position and the 'Jesus was human' position- are all from the same Gospel of John. Instead of just trading proof texts, e.g. 'I and my father are one' versus 'the Father is greater than I', we need to understand them as speaking of one and the same Jesus. So many 'debates' about the nature of Jesus miss this point; the sheer wonder of this man, this more than man, was that He was so genuinely human, and yet perfectly manifested God. This was and is the compelling wonder of this Man. These two aspects of the Lord, the exaltation and the humanity, are spoken of together in the Old Testament too. A classic example would be Ps. 45:6,7: "Thy throne, O God, is for ever [this is quoted in the New Testament about Jesus]… God, thy God, hath anointed thee [made you Christ]". It was exactly because of and through His humanity that His glory, His 'Divine side', was and is manifested. His glory was 'achieved', if you like, not because He had it by nature in Heaven before His birth; but exactly because He as a human of our nature reflected the righteousness of God to perfection in human flesh. Thus "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He"(Jn. 8:28)- the 'I am' aspect of Jesus was manifested at the point of His maximum humanity. Thus He was 'made sin for us' so that we might have the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21; 8:9). It was only because the Word was made *flesh* that the glory of God was revealed (Jn. 1:14).
"I do nothing of myself, but as the Father taught me" (Jn. 8:28). "The Lord hath sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of myself" (Num. 16:28 LXX).

8:29 *And He that sent me is with me. He has not left me alone. For I always do the things that are pleasing to Him*- This idea of not leaving but present with is repeated by the Lord in His promise of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. The Father's presence was by the Spirit, and the Lord wishes to share His relationship with the Father with us. His presence however was due to always pleasing the Father. The Lord's sense of being forsaken on the cross (Mt. 27:46) was therefore because He so identified with our sins that He was identified with those who were not pleasing to the Father, and so felt the lack of His presence. "Pleasing" is a reference to doing the Father's pleasure or will. That will is explained in chapter 5 as being for our salvation. All the Lord did

was for the end of our salvation. And to that end He had the Father's presence through the Spirit always with Him; just as we will, if human salvation is our constant focus.

We are the witnesses in the same way as the Lord Jesus was the word made flesh- in His very person, He was the essential witness and message. When He said "I do always those things that please [God]", it is recorded that "As he spake these words, many believed on him" (Jn. 8:29,30). There was something real and credible. He was His words made flesh.

When the Jews lifted up Christ in crucifixion, then they would know that the words He spoke were the words of God, that the Father had not left Him at all, and that Jesus had done "always those things that please Him" (Jn. 8:28,29). Surely this implies that His death, His dead body motionless there, was in fact some sort of word of testimony, a voice from God. Note too that when He looked as if He was forsaken by God, it was apparent that He was not. The Jews had jeered at Him as He still clung on to life, implying that God and the prophet Elijah had now abandoned Him- clearly, they mocked, He was not the Son of God. But when He was lifted up by them- i.e. in death- the lifeless body must have spoken to them of something. Somehow [and the earthquake and darkness doubtless confirmed this], there was the very real presence of God evident in the scene once He had died. The Centurion realized that "truly, this was the Son of God"- and from these prophetic words of the Lord, it appears that the Jews generally had to face the same conviction. This is the sort of paradox God delights to use- the humanly hopeless and God forsaken, the lost cause, becomes the very convicting proof of just the opposite- that we are *not* forsaken. In all this there was the word of the cross.

8:30 *As he spoke these things, many believed in him*- Many of the Jews believed on Jesus as Christ- but He rebukes them for not being His " disciples indeed", not really having the freedom which a true acceptance of this Truth will bring, not really being children of Abraham, still living in sin, not really hearing His word, and passively wanting to kill Him (Jn. 8:33-44). Yet He spoke all these criticisms to those whom the record itself describes as believing in Him (Jn. 8:31). It's as if the Spirit wants to show us that belief in Christ can exist on a completely surface level. Earlier on this chapter I have noted that one can know Him but not really know Him; and here, one can believe but not really believe. He says they were Abraham's seed (Jn. 8:37,56); but almost in the same breath, He says they weren't anything of the sort in spiritual reality (Jn. 8:39).

8:31 *Jesus replied to those Jews that had believed him: If you abide in my word, then are you truly my disciples*- This credits some of the Jews with believing on Jesus- and yet the Lord goes on to show how they didn't 'continue in His word', weren't truly confirmed as His disciples, and were still not true children of Abraham. Yet it would appear God is so eager to recognize any level of faith in His Son that they are credited with being 'believers' when they still had a very long way to go.

The idea that the Gospels are transcripts of the early preaching of the Gospel becomes more obvious when we start to probe how the Gospels would have originated. As accounts and rumours about Jesus and His teaching began to spread around, some would have been sceptical. Those who had met Jesus would have wished to persuade their neighbours and friends that really, what they had seen and heard was really so. People who had met Jesus would share their impressions together and reflect upon the striking things He had said and done. The beginnings of the Gospels were therefore rooted in preaching the good news about Jesus. The Lord

speaks of us abiding in His word (Jn. 8:31) and yet also of His word abiding in us, and us abiding in Him (Jn. 15:7). I suggest this refers in the first instance to the new Christian converts reciting over and over in their minds the Gospel accounts. In all situations they were to have the 'word of Jesus' hovering in their minds. To abide in Christ was and is to have His words abiding in us. Paul's evident familiarity with the Lord's words is an example of how one of our brethren lived this out in practice. We have to ask how frequently in the daily grind the words of the Master come to mind, how close they are to the surface in our subconscious… for this is the essence of Christianity. It's not so much a question of consciously memorizing His words, but so loving Him that quite naturally His words are never far from our consciousness, and frequently come out in our thinking and words. No wonder it seems the early church made new converts memorize the Gospels. See on 1 Jn 2:24.

Jn. 8:30,31 records how He spoke about how the Father was with Him, "that I am he", with full reference to the Yahweh Name. As He spoke the words, it was evident that they were more than words, they were an expression of the truth that was in this Man. He was the word made into flesh. People are tired of words, of language… which in any case doesn't convey as well as we may think any lasting impression. People need to see what we believe lived out. They need to see, e.g., that our understanding of the representative nature of Jesus issues forth in our praying and in our feeling for this man "whom having not seen ye love". And perhaps this is why it can be observed that Jesus almost never "went out of his way" to help people but rather walked along and helped the people He met in His path.

8:32- see on 1 Thess. 1:3.

And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free- The freedom and truth in view is that which the woman experienced at the start of this section. To be freed from accusation and guilt, to be justified and assured of the Lord's gracious pardon and salvation- that is the truth. Freedom from fear and guilt, that is the issue- not freedom from intellectual error. Truth as a set of correct theological propositions will not save anyone of itself. That isn't in view. The Comforter guides us into "all truth". It's not that we will get everything right in our interpretations, but that we will come to the final truth- which is that I really am forgiven and saved. That is the end point of maturity for the Christian, rather than some intellectual completion of understanding and resolution of every question of interpretation. 'Knowing' [*ginosko*] in John rarely means intellectual knowledge. The idea is more of experience. The "truth" to be known / experienced here is that of forgiveness and salvation. This is why John can say that if we live in sin, we do not "know" the Lord; to "know" Him is to have an assured heart before Him, in His judgment presence (1 Jn. 3:6,19). He that loves knows God (1 Jn. 4:7 "he that loves knows God"). You can technically "know" doctrinal propositions and yet still lack such assurance, lack love and still live in sin. It is the knowledge / experience of forgiveness and salvation that gives assurance and motivation against a sinful life. Sets of theological propositions can never do that.

The Lord is "the truth" in that in Him our forgiveness and eternity is totally assured. He is "faithful and true" in the sense that His faithfulness to us, that He will come through for us in forgiveness and ultimate salvation, His trustworthiness, is the ultimate truth. "And" doesn't have to mean that He is two things- His faithfulness is the truth. Man at his last end, in death or extremity of life, doesn't recite a statement of faith, intellectual propositions carefully retained and arranged. He clings to the ultimate and final truth- that he is right with God through the Lord Jesus. And we are

to live in that Truth now, as John's Gospel and letters make clear. Hence the Lord will continue to basically tell the Jews that whilst they lived in sin, they were not free, they did not know the truth. To live in that truth and not continue in sin [as the Lord told the sinful woman whom He saved] doesn't mean sinlessness, perfection, scotching every temptation that arises. It means living in belief, in trust, which is what "faith" means, that we are indeed *redeemed from sin and confident of life eternal*. This is freedom as secular man can never know it, "free indeed", freedom of a far higher order than anything else known to man. This is the ultimate reality for us- "the truth". All secular man understands as freedom is 'being yourself', self expression, autonomy, freedom to do what you want. Christian freedom 'indeed' is different. It is the most radical, existential freedom, that will actually lead you to willing servitude. But that freedom is spurned by most. Spurning true freedom was in fact the first sin, which is the essence of all sin: "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" (Gen. 2:16-17, RSV). God's intended way is to "run the way of His commandments" in freedom. Any choice otherwise leads to the bondage of corruption.

The Lord and the Gospel writers seem to have recognized that a person may believe in Christ, and be labeled a 'believer' in Him, whilst still not knowing the fullness of "the truth": "Then said Jesus to those Jews which had believed on him, If you continue in my word, then are you truly my disciples; and you shall know the truth" (Jn. 8:31,32). Clearly the Lord saw stages and levels to discipleship and 'knowing the truth'. The truth makes free; and yet it is Jesus who makes free (Jn. 8:32,36). The Truth in the person of Jesus, not just in our perception of doctrines in intellectual purity, is what liberates our personhood. "The truth" is defined in :34 as meaning being made free from sin. Following Him, as His followers / disciples (:31), means that we are made free from sin as we walk in the light of His life. Freedom from sin is no longer attempted by steel-willed struggle against hot temptation; but as part of a way of life in the Spirit of the life the Lord Jesus lived. We will 'do the truth' in that we begin to live the only ultimately true and free life- the life He lived. Truth and freedom are popular ideas in religion, everyone aspires to them; but the ultimate truth is the life of the Lord Jesus, and freedom from sin.

Therefore the Lord Jesus told the truth to this world in the sense that He was sinless (Jn. 8:47). Likewise in Jn. 17:19 He says that He sanctifies Himself, so that “the truth”, i.e. His perfect life and death, might sanctify us; so that His freedom from sin might become ours. This was His telling of truth to men. By continuing in the word of Jesus we will know the truth (Jn. 8:31,32)- not so much that we will attain greater doctrinal knowledge, but that our lives will reflect our knowledge of Jesus who is “the truth”. The truth sets us free; the Son sets us free (Jn. 8:32, 36). “The truth” is therefore a title for Jesus. Mere academic knowledge alone cannot set anyone free from sin; but the living presence and example and spirit of life of another Man can, and does. And so in Jn. 14:6 the way, truth and life are all parallel- truth is a way of life; “truth is in Jesus” (Eph. 4:21 RV), we are to "do the truth", to walk in it (3:21; 1 Jn. 1:6,8; 2:4; 2 Jn. 4; 3 Jn. 3). This is all empowered by the gift of the Spirit of Jesus, the Comforter, "the spirit of truth" (14:17; 15:26), which guides us into truth (16:13)- not in an intellectual sense, but guiding us into the way of life and being which is "truth", which is freedom from sin. For the Spirit is the truth (1 Jn. 5:6); the gift of the Spirit empowers us to live "in truth", according to the life and spirit of Jesus.

The naturalness which Jesus had with people reflects His respect for the freedom which God has given His people to chose for themselves. He was Himself supremely

free, due to His pure conscience before the Father. He was the red heifer "upon which never came yoke" (Num. 19:2). We were set free from sin by Christ through "freedom" (Gal. 5:1 RV). But we were set free by Him as a person. His freedom, His freedom from sin and the freedom that must have characterized His person, is what liberates us too. And it is the experience of that freedom, the freedom from sin that comes through forgiveness (Jn. 8:32), which can be 'used' to love others (Gal. 5:13). He didn't spell things out to His followers in the detailed way many religious leaders do. And yet it is surely related to a sense one gets from re-reading the Gospels that Jesus was in tune with nature. He so often uses examples and parables grounded in a perceptive reflection upon the natural creation. He spoke of the carefreeness of birds and other animals; and yet He had the shadow of the cross hanging over Him. The way He was evidently so relaxed with people is a tremendous testimony to Him, bearing in mind the agony ahead. All this is what makes and made Jesus so compelling. On one hand, an almost impossible standard- to be perfect, as the Father is. And yet on the other, an almost unbelievable acceptance of fallen men and women. He didn't criticize those who came to Him. He Himself was the standard by which their consciences were pricked, and yet not in such a way that they were scared away from Him. This mixture of high standards and yet acceptance of people wherever they were is what we all find so elusive. The fact none of us get it right is what turns so many away from our preaching. How compelling He was is shown by how He polarized people- He sought to provoke a final decision in people for or against Him personally- not a yes or no to a particular dogma, rite or law. His compelling power is associated with the sense of urgency which there was in His teaching. The Lord repeatedly spoke of His return as being imminent- and surely His intention was to inspire in us a sense of urgency about His return, a living for His kingdom today rather than delaying till tomorrow.

8:33 *They answered him: We are Abraham's seed, and have never yet been in bondage to anyone. What do you mean, you shall be made free?*- The life of freedom from sin is predicated upon living with the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, and not physical descent. "Truth" came by Jesus Christ, as the prologue states (1:17); and that truth is defined here as the life in the spirit of the Lord Jesus, free from sin.

8:34 *Jesus answered them: Truly, truly, I say to you: Everyone who commits sin is the servant of sin*- For all their detailed Bible study, they were servants of sin. To habitually live in sin ["commits" in the ongoing sense] is because we serve sin and have not been set free. Not sinning is not therefore just a question of white-knuckled struggle against temptation; it is more about an allowing of the Lord Jesus to free us from sin by His Spirit. The Lord is clearly accusing them of being sinners. Which again fits the context of the narrative which opens this section, where He wrote their sins on the ground.

8:35 *And the servant does not stay in the house for ever. The son stays forever*- The Lord tweaks the metaphor a little, to argue that sinners are servants of sin; but the Lord is making us free from that servitude, turning us into freedmen, permanent members of the actual household. This metaphor of freedom from slavery is used heavily by Paul in his later explanations of the meaning of the Lord's death. A slave might spend his life in slavery within a household, but could never actually enter the family. The Son is master of the household, for ever.

8:36 *If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed*- The force of

the "therefore" is surely that only one who is free can make another free. The Lord's ultimate freedom was in that He had never sinned. This is why being "free indeed" means being free from sin; not being sinless, but due to the Lord's work, being freed from the results and guilt of sin and having salvation assured. This is being "free indeed". Not freedom as the secular world understands- having the health and wealth to be and act as we wish, to find and be ourselves. Whatever that means in real terms. But rather to be made free from sin and condemnation just as the woman was, whether that sin is wholly our fault or completely ours, just as the woman sinned but it's open to reflection as to the degree to which she was culpable. So much 'anxiety' is the result of feeling that our real self in practice is not what we are actually experiencing, our 'perceived self'. Anxiety is often related to feeling we lack 'truth' in a holistic sense. In the redemption from sin that there is in the Lord Jesus, we have truth and freedom indeed. We can face our pasts, our real self, and be somehow content that all the same, we are ultimately "all good". Not for us the need of secular man to endlessly prop up his own ego, to make himself feel or look better, to himself or to others. Seeing ourselves as fallen-yet-beloved of the Lord Jesus gives us the true freedom- from fear, anxiety, condemnation and pride, less defensive and more happy with who and where we are.

As noted on :34, Paul also uses this metaphor of redeeming us from slavery to sin into free and actual members of the household family. But he sees this as an outcome of the crucifixion and resurrection. The Lord at this stage was confident as to the outcome of His mission.

8:37 *I know that you are Abraham's seed. Yet you seek to kill me, because my word finds no place in you*- The Jews could be described as both Abraham's seed (Jn. 8:37) and not Abraham's seed (Jn. 8:39); as having Abraham as their father (Jn. 8:56), and yet also having the devil as their father (Jn. 8:39-41,44). This connects with the theme that the Jews on one level knew who the Lord was, and on another, did not. In John, one can see but not really see; believe but not really believe. The Lord Jesus described the unbelieving Jews as having Abraham as their father, and yet He also said that they weren't the real children of Abraham. They appeared to believe in Him, but effectively denied Him (Jn. 8:37,39,56). Like Israel, we can have an appearance of faith, an assumption that we believe because we are through baptism the children of faithful Abraham, when the real, house-on-the-rock faith is unknown to us.

The Jews thought that they were righteous because they were the descendants of Abraham. The Lord Jesus therefore addressed them as "the righteous" (Mt. 9:12–13), and said "I know that you are Abraham's seed" (Jn. 8:37). But He did not believe that they were righteous, as He so often made clear; and He plainly showed by His reasoning in John 8:39–44 that they were *not* Abraham's seed. So He took people's beliefs at face value, without immediately contradicting them, but demonstrated the truth instead. We have shown that this was God's approach in dealing with the pagan beliefs which were common in the Old Testament times. His attitude to demons in New Testament times was the same; His God–provided miracles made it abundantly plain that illnesses were caused by God, not any other force, seeing that it was God who had the mighty power to heal them.

The argument was that if they were Abraham's seed they would not be seeking to kill the pre-eminent seed of Abraham, Messiah. "My word" had no place in them; and that word was therefore His self-proclamation of Himself as the seed of Abraham, a proclamation made through His life and character rather than any specific statement that "I am Messiah". "My word" therefore refers not to the whole Bible, nor to any

specific spoken words of the Lord; but to His whole life and being, which was His word to men. His word was the Father's word (14:24), just as the prologue had declared the word, which was all about Jesus, to be God. His word was Him, His spirit, His life, His spoken words- which were to abide within them (:31).

8:38 *I speak the things which I have seen with my Father, and you also do the things which you heard from your father*- The parallel indicates that being 'with the Father' was not to be understood in a literal sense. It was not that He heard words from God in Heaven which He then transported to earth, just as they did not hear words from a literal being called the devil in some underworld. He spoke not only what He heard, but what He 'saw' with the Father. His life and teaching was a reflection, an articulation in words, of what it meant to see the Father. Moses had been denied that honour, but the Son 'saw' the Father and reflected it to us in the 'word' or *logos* which was His life.

8:39 *They answered and said to him: Our father is Abraham. Jesus said to them: If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham*- When the Jews proudly said “Abraham is our father!” (Jn. 8:39) they were showing the very same spirit as Ishmael- in persecuting Isaac / Jesus. They were proclaiming themselves to be the seed by the flesh but not of the Spirit nor according to the promise in Isaac. See on Jn. 12:31. Intentionally, the Lord was saying that in one sense they were the seed of Abraham (:37) but in another sense they were not. Likewise they knew Him, but in another sense didn't know Him. The work of God is to believe in His Son (6:39), and it seems the Lord had that idea in view here. He appealed for them to be like Abraham in his belief in his Messianic seed.

8:40 *But now you seek to kill me, a man that has told you the truth, which I heard from God. This Abraham did not do*- "The truth" has been defined earlier as a way of life free from sin, the life of the Lord Jesus, His Spirit, living now the eternal life ; see on :32. "The truth" that the Lord "told" them was not in learned lectures of courses of dissertations, but in the life lived which was a reflection of all He had heard and seen with the Father.

8:41 *You do the works of your father. They said to him: We were not born of fornication. We have one Father, even God*- They insisted that God and not "the devil" (:44) was their father. By insisting upon this, they were condemning themselves. For they sought to kill the Lord because He claimed to be God's Son. And now He had cleverly led them to make the same claim about themselves. He didn't do this to score debating points; He really wanted them to realize that in condemning Him, they were condemning themselves. They were furious that He should imply they were not full Israelites, of Abraham. "Born of fornication" was how the Jews referred to the descendants of Abraham through his other partners apart from Sarah, such as Hagar and Keturah.

8:42 *Jesus said to them: If God were your Father, you would love me. For I came forth and am come from God. For neither have I come of myself, but He sent me*- It is impossible to love God without loving His Son, Jesus (Jn. 8:42); and 1 Jn. 5:1,2 is alluding to this, saying that this principle means that we can't love God without loving *all* His sons, those who are in Christ, the Son of God. Christian disillusion with Christianity is disobedience to this. If we think we can love God while disregarding His sons, we are making the same mistake as the Jews; they confidently thought they could love God and disregard His Son. And this faulty logic led them to crucify the Son of God.

The fact that Jesus was humanly fatherless has been extensively commented upon by Andries van Aarde. He points out that: "Against the background of the marriage arrangements within the patriarchal mind-set of Israelites in the Second Temple period, a fatherless Jesus would have been without social identity. He would have been excluded from being called a child of Abraham, that is, a child of God. Access to the court of the Israelites in the temple, where mediators could facilitate forgiveness for sin, would have been denied to him. He would have been excluded from the privilege of being given a daughter in marriage". Behold the paradox. Because He was the Son of God, He was written off by Israel as not being a child of God; because He was *the* seed of Abraham, He was rubbished as not being a son of Abraham. We can now understand better how He could attract other social outcasts to Him; we have another window into the fact He never married; we appreciate more deeply the significance of His offering forgiveness and fellowship with God to those who were outside of the temple system. He could offer a new social identity to people on the basis that He knew what it was like to be without it. All this is confirmed in the Biblical record. This is why the Jews accused the Lord of being both not a "child of Abraham" and also illegitimate" (Jn. 8:42), a "sinner" (Jn. 9:16). And He was also called a "Samaritan" (Jn. 8:48). According to the Mishnah, "… they are the people of uncertain condition, with whom one may not marry: those of uncertain parentage, foundlings and Samaritans". Refusing to declare Joseph as His father meant that the Lord would've been unable to marry, at least not any girl from a religious family. See on Jn. 19:9.

8:43 *Why do you not understand my speech? Because you cannot hear my word!*- They could not, it was not in their power [Gk.] to hear His *logos,* and so how He spoke, the language He used, was as it were foreign to them. They were not empowered to hear His *logos*, which according to the prologue was Him, His life and spirit, because they did not allow the movement of the Spirit in their hearts. And this is why people today cannot understand the Lord's teaching; it is because they refuse to accept His *logos*, His life and person coming into their lives as the light of their thinking and practice. And so His words / speech remain a jumble to them. Interpretation fails them, because they were refusing to hear Him as a person, His *logos*.

Intellectual failure to understand the teaching of Jesus is rooted in a resistance to having our lives disturbed in a moral sense. How many have started studying true doctrine, only to draw back, perhaps unconsciously even, because they sense that this stuff is life-changing, and altogether too demanding for them to handle in practice? This inextricable link between doctrine and practice is brought out by the Lord in Jn. 7:17: "If any man willeth to *do* his will, he shall know of the doctrine…". My expanded paraphrase of this would be: 'If you want to do right before God in practice, then you will discern between right and wrong doctrine, because true doctrine leads to true practice. If you really want to be *doing* the right thing, then God will lead you to true doctrine'. And not long afterwards, the Lord hammers home His point: "Why do you not understand my speech [teaching]? Even because you cannot hear [i.e. accept] my word" (Jn. 8:43).

That refusing to believe or understand truth has a moral basis is brought out by the Lord's comment in Jn. 8:46: "If I say the truth, why do you not believe me?". He surely implies that it's not hard in itself to believe and accept His words as true- but He explains that the Jews didn't believe because they preferred to believe the words of the "devil". The "devil" speaks his own language (Jn. 8:44 NIV), the Lord says, and

the Jews preferred to hear *that* language because it was actually their own language. They did not "understand my word" because they preferred to do 'their own lusts' (Jn. 8:43). Those 'lusts' are paralleled with the language of the devil- which is exactly what 'the devil' refers to in so many Biblical contexts. The point of all this is that misunderstanding God's word is because we prefer to hear the language of our own self talk, our own lusts, the Biblical 'devil'. "The lusts of the [devil] it is your will to do", the Lord commented (Jn. 8:44 RV). This was their "language", and therefore any other language which was not of their own self talk was 'foreign' to them. And in this we have the essential basis for why people misunderstand the Lord's words today.

The Lord's cryptic manner of speaking at times yielded "hard sayings"; and yet He utters most of them in conversation with His critics. Thus having said that "If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death", and the Jews predictably responded with misunderstanding and confusion, He goes straight on to utter an even harder saying: "Your father Abraham... saw my day, and was glad". And they again come back at Him with the anger born of misunderstanding. And so He rounds off the episode with a yet harder saying: "Before Abraham was, I am" (Jn. 8:51-58). In all this He was using "hard sayings"- which have come down to us as 'wrested scriptures, 'difficult passages'- in order to drive the unbelievers further down the downward spiral. And He does the same today, with the same passages. Because the Jews didn't "hear my word / logos", therefore they couldn't understand His speech, i.e. the words as individual words which He spoke (Jn. 8:43). They stumbled over each word, as a child struggling to read a text way too advanced for her. Because they didn't hear His logos, the essence of Him. This is why the simplest minds which firmly understand the logos, the essential idea, the bigger picture, don't find the "hard sayings" to be hard for them, they aren't stumbled by them. But the word-by-word theologian does stumble at them, if he doesn't believe the simple logos of Jesus.

8:44- see on Hos. 6:7.

You are of your father the Devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies- The Jewish religious leaders were “of your father the Devil” (Jn. 8:44). This would explain the Lord’s description of Judas as a Devil (Jn. 6:70) because the Jewish Devil had entered him and conceived, making him a ‘Devil’ also. In the space of a few verses, we read the Lord Jesus saying that “the Devil” is a “liar” – and then stating that His Jewish opponents were “liars” (Jn. 8:44,55). These are the only places where the Lord uses the word “liar” – clearly enough He identified those Jews with “the Devil”. If the Jews’ father was the Devil, then ‘the Devil’ was a fitting description of them too. They were a “generation of (gendered by) vipers”, alluding back to the serpent in Eden, which epitomized “the Devil”; “that old serpent, called (i.e. being similar to) the Devil and Satan” (Rev. 12:9). In the same way as Judas became a Devil, the “false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-Jesus” is called a “child of the Devil” (Acts 13:6,10), which description makes him an embodiment of the Jewish opposition to the Gospel. There are many other connections between the serpent and the Jews; clearest is Isaiah 1:4 “A people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters”. This is describing Israel in the language of Genesis 3:15 concerning the serpent. Thus the Messianic Psalm 140:3,10 describes Christ reflecting that His Jewish persecutors “have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders’ poison is under their lips... let burning coals fall upon them: let them

be cast into the fire" (referring to the falling masonry of Jerusalem in A.D. 70?). It is quite possible that Christ's encouragement to the seventy that "I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy" (Lk. 10:19) has a primary reference to their ability to overcome Jewish opposition during their preaching tour.

We all personally struggle to accept basic Bible teaching about generosity, materialism and money. Think of what the Hebrew word "Cain" means- for he is alluded to by the Lord as the epitome of the "devil", the "murderer from the beginning", the archetypical sinner (Jn. 8:44- perhaps because Adam and Eve's sin was forgiven, whereas Cain was the first impenitent sinner). "Cain is defined on the basis of a double Hebrew etymology, as 'possession' (from *qana* = acquire) and 'envy' (from *qana* = be envious)". Personal possession is almost- almost- inextricably linked with envy, and led to the lies and murder for which Cain was noted by the Lord. To have a strong sense of our personal 'possessions' will lead us into the same sins. Indeed, it's the epitome of 'the devil'. The concept of 'private property' is indeed a myth. For we die, and leave it all behind.

Ensure that all you are saying to yourself, even if it's not about spiritual things, is at least truthful. This is where this great theme of truth starts and ends. Ideally, our self-talk should be of Jesus, of the Father, of the things of His Kingdom. Of anything that is just, true, of good report... Yet our self-talk is closely linked to what Scripture would call the devil- the constant fountain of wrong suggestions and unspiritual perspectives that seem to bubble up so constantly within us. The devil- the Biblical one- is "the father of lies" (Jn. 8:44). And untruthfulness seems to begin within our own self-talk. I would even go so far as to almost define the devil as our own self-talk. And it's likened to a roaring, dangerous lion; a cunning snake. And it's there within each of us. The control of self-talk is vital. And the Biblical guidance is to make sure it is truthful; for lack of truthfulness is the root of all sin. The account of the wilderness temptations is in my opinion a wonderful window into the self-talk of the Lord Jesus. He set the example there, of dealing with internal temptation by a self-talk based solidly on the truth of God's word. Sin is normally committed by believers not as an act of conscious rebellion, but rather through a complex process of self-justification; which on repentance we recognize was the mere sophistry of our own self-talk. This is why truthfulness is the epitome of the spiritual life. To deny ever being untruthful is to deny ever sinning. We all have this problem. It's why the assertion of Jesus that He was "the truth" was tantamount to saying that He was sinless. Only thus is He thereby the way to eternal life.

For those who believe in an orthodox devil, bear in mind that the use of the pronoun "he" does not indicate that the Devil is a person. "Wisdom" is personified as a woman house–builder (Prov. 9:1) and sin as a paymaster paying wages (Rom. 6:23). Human lust is personified as a man who drags us away to enticement. If it is accepted that sin and sinful tendencies are personified, there should be no problem in imagining that persona being given a name – "Satan", the adversary. There is no specific reference here to the serpent in Eden. We sin because of the lusts that begin inside us (Mk. 7:21–23; James 1:14; Jer. 17:9). Our evil heart – the real Devil – is the father of our lusts and sins. "The lusts of your father" the Devil, are thus the same as the lusts of our evil heart – the Devil. The Devil is a murderer. But "no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 Jn. 3:15). The Devil must, therefore, die – but as angels cannot die (Lk. 20:35,36) they are therefore immortal, and have eternal life abiding in them. As noted on Mark 4:15, the children of the Devil are those who obey their evil desires – the real Devil. The Jews had not literally seen a person called the Devil; the Lord

was clearly using figurative language. They were *of* the Devil in the sense that "you do the deeds of your father" (:41), i.e. they continued the family likeness. If the Devil is a murderer then he isn't immortal, for in commentary on this verse John later explained [as if there had already arisen misunderstandings in the time between John's Gospel and epistles]: "No murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 Jn. 3:15). Angels are immortal (Lk. 20:36), so therefore this "murderer" wasn't a 'fallen Angel'.

The Devil, the desires which are in our heart forming and stimulating an evil inclination, has the characteristics of the serpent, but it does not mean that the serpent was the Devil itself. The serpent was "subtil" (Gen. 3:1; 2 Cor. 11:3); this may well be behind the description of the Jews consulting "that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him" (Mt. 26:4). The serpent in Eden was the prototype of the Jewish system; their killing of Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophecy that the seed of the serpent (sin manifested in the Jews, Mt. 12:34; Lk. 3:7, in its primary meaning) would wound the seed of the woman, Christ, in the heel (Gen. 3:15).

John 8:44 is also a reference to Cain, the first murderer – "he was a murderer from the beginning" (Gen. 4:8–9). He "abode not in the truth" as he was the father of the seed of the serpent who corrupted the true way of worshipping God. The letter of John often alludes to the Gospel of John, and 1 John 3:12,15, is an example; it confirms this interpretation: "Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one (i.e. the Devil – Mt. 13:19 cp. Mk. 4:15) and slew his brother...Whosoever hateth his brother (as Cain did) is a murderer". However, it is also true that John 8:44 alludes to the serpent as well. The serpent told the first lie, "Ye shall not surely die" (Gen. 3:4); he did not abide in the truth; he was a murderer in the sense that he brought about the death of Adam and Eve. "He is a liar, and the father of it". Cain was not a super–human person called the Devil, but an ordinary man. He characterized sin, the Devil. The way in which the fire consumed Abel's offering but not Cain's is paralleled by the fire burning up Elijah's offering but leaving those of the apostate Jewish Baal worshippers (1 Kings 18:19–40). This would associate Cain with apostate Jews, i.e. the Jewish Devil.

Note: "...he is a liar, and the father of it". The Lord Jesus does not say "he was a liar". If we tell a lie, it is a result of the Devil, in the sense of our evil desires prompting us – not due to any force outside of us. Lying is one of those things that Jesus lists in Mk. 7:15,21–23 as not entering a man from outside him, but originating from within him. The Devil is the 'father' of lies in the sense that they originate from within us – which is where the Biblical Devil is located.

"When he speaks a lie" – when someone lies, it is not a super–human person called the Devil standing in front of him, it is the Devil, in the sense of the man's evil desires speaking to him. "Deceit" – i.e. lies – proceed "from within, out of the heart of men" (Mk. 7:21–22).

8:45 *But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me*- Truth is what makes a person believe the speaker. But the Jews did not believe exactly because the Lord told them "the truth". The "truth" in view is not therefore intellectually pure exposition. They did not believe because they were dominated by sin, "the devil", and sin is essentially a lie. So their sense of truth and error was inverted. "The truth" as explained on :32 was the Lord's sinless life, His Spirit; hence He challenges them in :46 as to who could convict Him of sin. "The truth" He told was that He was sinless. They did not want to believe that; it demanded too much, that a man of their nature could be sinless, and that His Spirit could enter them and transform their lives so as not to be servants of sin.

8:46 *Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?*- As noted on :45, "the truth" was the Lord's sinlessness. They could not accept that, because it demanded too much of them. So much of the Trinitarian theological fog cast over the person of the Lord Jesus is psychologically rooted in a refusal to be so challenged; that our nature is capable of far more than we like to think; and that His spirit can be our spirit. Earlier in this chapter, the Lord has been invited to be the judge of the fallen woman. Her accusers or convicters have one by one walked away, smitten by awareness of their own sinfulness. By asking this question, as a mirror of His words to the woman "Are there none who convict you of sin?", He is identifying with her. And He is implying that He tells and offers the "truth" that makes free exactly because He like her cannot be convicted of sin. She is as free from conviction of sin as He is. She is counted righteous by Him, totally so. This is the truth that makes us free indeed.

8:47 *He that is of God hears the words of God. For this cause you do not hear them, because you are not of God*- If they were the children of God, then the Father's words would be naturally discernible. There would be an intuitive sense toward them. In this we see the upward spiral of spirituality which belief in God's word creates. In the same discourse the Lord reasoned "If you continue in my word... you shall know the truth (the word- Jn. 17:17)" (Jn. 8:31,32). Note that believers in the Lord Jesus are here called "of God", just as the Son was "of God"; not in that they literally descended from Heaven, as required by the pre-existence idea; but in that they were His children rather than the children of this world.

8:48- see on Jn. 8:42.

The Jews answered and said to him: Say we not well that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?- Perhaps the emphasis was upon "*you*". They complained that the Lord was casting aspersions about their purity of descent from Abraham (see on :41). Now they suggested that *He* was in fact the one of questionable descent from Abraham. Their 'research' of His family of origin had led to this aspersion- that Mary and / or Joseph had Samaritan connections. The Lord purposefully framed Himself as a Samaritan in the parable of the good Samaritan; perhaps they willfully misinterpreted that as meaning that He was in fact a Samaritan.

It has been widely recognized that John's Gospel often refers to the same themes found in the Synoptics, but in different language and from a different perspective. The account of the virgin birth as the word being made flesh is one such example. Another would be the effective repeating of the great commission in different terms. Yet another would be the description of water baptism as being born of water (Jn. 3:3–5). The accounts of casting out demons which we have in the Synoptic Gospels are not found in John – not in so many words. But I suggest that the essence of it all is there in John, too. The battle between Jesus and the 'Devil' is referred to there frequently. He is accused of being in league with the Devil (Jn. 7:20; 8:48; 10:20); but He labels His critics as being of the Devil (Jn. 8:44). And in that same passage He redefines their view of "the Devil" as being a question of doing sinful "desires". Judas is portrayed as being "of the Devil" (Jn. 6:70,71; 13:2,27). John speaks of an epic struggle between life and death, light and darkness, truth and error, faith and unbelief, God and evil / sin. In this struggle, the forces of evil have no real power over the Lord Jesus; He is greater than them and overcomes them to such an extent that they are effectively non-existent for those in Him. The Synoptics speak of the opposition to Jesus as being from Scribes, Pharisees etc. John describes this opposition as the Jewish 'Satan' or adversary to the Lord. John presents the opposition to Jesus from

the Jews as being symbolic of evil and sin itself. Effectively, the more literal accounts of the Synoptics are saying the same thing – that the Lord showed that the power of God is so great that effectively, demons don't exist as any realistic force in the lives of both Jesus and His people. John puts this in more epic and symbolic language – the forces of evil were overcome and revealed to be powerless by the Lord Jesus, ultimately expressing this through His death. And perhaps that's why John's Gospel doesn't speak of the Lord casting out demons – because his record has made it clear enough that effectively, those things don't exist.

8:49 *Jesus answered: I do not have a demon. I honour my Father, and you dishonour me*- When He was wrongly accused of being a Samaritan, Jesus did not deny it (Jn. 8:48,49 cp. 4:7–9) even though his Jewishness, as the seed of Abraham, was vital within God's plan of salvation (Jn. 4:22). Even when the Jews drew the wrong conclusion (willfully!) that Jesus was "making himself equal with God" (Jn. 5:18), Jesus did not explicitly deny it; instead He powerfully argued that His miracles showed Him to be a man acting on God's behalf, and therefore he was *not* equal with God. The miracles of Jesus likewise showed the error of believing in demons. But here He does baldly deny the accusation that He 'had a demon' and was mad; because such dishonour of Him personally was a dishonouring of God. Attitudes to the Son were a statement about the Father. He therefore implies that by dishonouring Him, they were not honouring the Father; whereas He was all about honouring the Father. He is explicit in 5:23 that honour of the Son is honour of the Father, and vice versa. One cannot therefore claim to be honouring God when they are not honouring His Son. This means that all non-Christian religions are not offering any legitimate relationship with God the Father; for they do not honour His Son.

8:50 *I do not seek my own glory. There is One that seeks and judges*- God is seeking our salvation, and our glory in the true sense. If we believe this, we will not seek our own glory. The Father loves us, and is seeking out an eternal future for us, optimal for us personally. He is not simply passively prepared to grant us eternity; but is seeking our glory. The wonder of this means that like the Lord, we shall not seek glory of men, because it is God who wants to give us glory (5:41). This amazing Father who seeks our glory is also our judge; His judgment will be in accordance with His seeking out of glory for us. We need not therefore fear Him and His judgment.

8:51 *Truly, truly, I say to you: If a man keeps my word, he shall never see death*- 1 Jn. 2:4-6 defines keeping the Lord's word as keeping His commandments, walking as He walked, abiding in Him, living with His Spirit. We shall therefore live the kind of life we shall eternally live; we live the eternal life now, and in this sense we shall never see death in the sense of eternal death. We shall die, but not rise again. Death itself will be perceived differently by us, if our hearts are ever with Him who conquered death, and is the resurrection and the life. If our view of death itself, the unspoken deepest personal fear of all humanity, is different… we will be radically different from our fellows.

8:52 *The Jews said to him: Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets, but you say: If a man keep my word, he shall never taste of death*- Again, they misunderstand His use of language. By "death" He refers to eternal death; there is "death" and "the second death"; but they did not perceive that difference. Just as unspiritual people can read God's words in the Bible and find it all a haze of contradiction and uncertainty, because they are not reading in a spiritual way. The Lord had promised that those who kept His word would never "see death"; but they misquote Him as saying that they would never "taste of death".

8:53 *Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died, and the prophets who died? Whom do you make yourself?*- The Lord was not making Himself anything, because it was the Father who was glorifying Him (:54). The Jews perceived that offering eternal life was making those who received it greater than the prophets and Abraham who had died. The Sadducees disbelieved any resurrection; the Pharisees, according to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, believed in existence as an immortal soul. Their views of immortality and "eternal life" were deeply wrong; they considered Abraham to be permanently dead. They didn't understand that he must rise again to inherit the land promised to him for an eternal possession. The Lord was teaching a resurrection of the body to eternal life, for those who lived that eternal life now in that they had His Spirit and lived His life.

8:54 *Jesus answered: If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father that glorifies me, whom you say is your God*- As the Father glorified the Lord, so He seeks out the glory of all his children (:50). If the Father was truly their Father, then they would perceive that the Lord was already being glorified by the Father. Again, there is an appeal to an intuitive sense which was lacking amongst the Lord's critics. These appeals to intuitive sense all reference the work of the Spirit and a person's acceptance or rejection of it.

8:55 *You have not known Him, but I know Him*- There are two different words used here. They did not know God, but the Lord had seen Him. The allusion is to Moses who desired to see God and could not. And the Lord implies that He all the time was seeing God, not just for a passing moment, but walking in the light of knowing Him.

And if I should say I know Him not, I shall be like you, a liar; but I know Him and keep His word- The statement that He 'saw' God was deeply blasphemous to the Jews. He was tempted not to make it, knowing the persecution and anger it would create. But to do so would be to lie. To see / know God was to keep His word, living according to God's word.

8:56 *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and rejoiced*- This is surely an allusion to how he laughed [for joy] at the promise of Isaac. He "gladly received the promises" (Heb. 11:17 RV). And realizing that through baptism the promises are made to us ought to inspire a deep seated joy too. The only time Abraham is recorded to have laughed and been glad was when he was given the promise that he would have a seed; he understood that ultimately that promise had reference to Jesus (Gen. 17:17). Abraham “saw” ahead to Christ through the promises made to him concerning Jesus. He cryptically commented about the future sacrifice of Jesus: “In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen” (Gen. 22:14). It was in this sense that Jesus speaks of Abraham as having seen him. It is in this context of speaking about the promises that Jesus could say “Before Abraham was, I am”. He appreciated that God’s promises to Abraham were revealing the plan about Jesus which God had known from the beginning of the world. That purpose, which had been “before Abraham was”, had been revealed to Abraham in the promises to him, and was now being fulfilled in the eyes of the Jews of the first century, as they stood in a ring around Jesus, “the word (of promise) made flesh”.

It seems reasonable to conclude that Isaac was offered on or near the hill of Calvary, one of the hills (Heb.) near Jerusalem, in the ancient “land of Moriah" (cp. 2 Chron. 3:1). The name given to the place, Yahweh-Yireh, means ‘in this mount I have

seen Yahweh'. The events of the death and resurrection of the Lord which Isaac's experience pointed forward to were therefore the prophesied 'seeing' of Yahweh. When Abraham '*saw* the place [of Isaac's intended sacrifice] afar off" (Gen. 22:4), there is more to those words than a literal description. Heb. 11:13 alludes here in saying that Abraham *saw* the fulfillment of "the promises" "afar off". The Lord in Jn. 8:56 says that Abraham *saw* His day or time [usually a reference to His sacrifice]. And yet that place of offering was called by Abraham 'Jehovah Jireh', 'Jehovah will be *seen*'. Note the theme of *seeing*. In some shadowy way, Abraham understood something of the future sacrifice of the Lord Jesus; and yet he speaks of it as the time when Yahweh Himself will be 'seen', so intense would the manifestation of God be in the death of His Son. See on Jn. 19:19.

8:57 *The Jews replied to him: You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?*- Again they did not follow His reasoning. The Lord had said that Abraham had seen Him, not that He had seen Abraham. He was not saying that He was older than Abraham- obviously He was not older than Abraham. We observe that their guess at the Lord's age placed Him somewhat older than He was. Days and nights spent in prayer and focus upon the Father and others would have been reflected in His face and body; such was His humanity.

8:58 *Jesus said to them: Truly, truly, I say to you: I am of higher status than Abraham ever was*- When the Jews mocked Him for saying that He had seen Abraham, the Lord didn't respond that of course that wasn't what He meant; instead He elevated the conversation with "before Abraham was I am" (AV). These words are often misapplied to teach that the Lord Jesus existed before Abraham did. However, closer investigation reveals the opposite to be true. He did not say 'Before Abraham was, I was". He was the promised descendant of Abraham; we make a nonsense of God's promises to Abraham if we say that the Lord Jesus physically existed before the time of Abraham. The context is the discourse with the Jews concerning Abraham. As far as they were concerned, Abraham was the greatest man who would ever live. The Lord Jesus is saying "I am now, as I stand here, more important than Abraham". As they stood there, He was the one to be honoured rather than Abraham. He is saying 'I am now, more important than Abraham ever was'. It is possible to understand "before" in Jn. 8:58 with some reference to time, in the sense that before Abraham existed, Christ had been in God's plan right from the beginning of the world. It was because Jesus was "before" Abraham in this sense that he was "before" him in terms of importance. But the more comfortable reading is to understand "before" as referring to importance rather than time. In 2 Sam. 6:21 there's a good example of "before" meaning 'before' in importance rather than time. David tells his wife: "The Lord chose me *before* your father [Saul]". Actually, in terms of *time*, God chose Saul well before He chose David. But God chose David *above* Saul in terms of importance and honour.

"I am" may indeed be a reference to the Divine Name which Jesus, as the Father's Son, carried (Jn. 5:43). But "I am" is also used by the healed blind man in Jn. 9:9 with no apparent reference to the Name. The same Greek words are also used by Asahel in the LXX of 2 Sam. 2:20. Jesus and the Father were "one" and so for Jesus to bear the Father's Name is no reason to think that 'Jesus = God". Note however that the unity between Father and Son spoken of e.g. in Jn. 10:30 is the same kind of unity possible between the Father and all His children (Jn. 17). The use of the neuter form for "one" (*hen esmen*) in Jn. 10:30 shows that the Father and Son aren't interchangeable- they are at one with each other, not one and the same. And sharing such unity it is quite appropriate for them to share the same Name. A related misunderstanding is often

applied to the comment of John the Baptist about Jesus- that “He was before me” (Jn. 1:30). John the Baptist was actually older than the Lord Jesus; he therefore meant that Jesus was “before” him in the sense of being more important than him. C.H. Dodd interprets this passage as meaning: “There is a man in my following who has taken precedence over me, because he is… essentially my superior”(C.H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition In The Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976) p. 274).

8:59 *Therefore they took up stones to cast at him; but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple*- They wanted to kill Him for blasphemy, as in 10:31,33; for He had just alluded to the "I am" Name of Yahweh. Perhaps He miraculously avoided them (as in Lk. 4:30), or maybe as in:20 the very public spotlight upon them somehow held them back from stoning Him to death. It has been suggested that the stones were the stones left around as a result of the temple construction project. Again we see that the Lord gave His life, and it was not taken from Him.

This incident opens with their desire to stone the woman caught in adultery, and it ends with them wanting to stone the Lord. He and her were thereby united. Likewise the woman was "left alone" with the Lord after her accusers slunk away; and He goes on to say that He is "not alone" because the Father is with Him. With Him in the person of that weeping woman. She represented God to Him. Thus he and her were united.

JOHN CHAPTER 9

9:1 *And as he passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth*- The same terms for "passed by" is used in the preceding 8:59. As the Lord was ‘passing by’, more like quickly rushing away from His persecutors and would-be murderers, He takes time to heal a blind man, with quite a lengthy process. He didn’t allow His own fears and self-preservation instinct to make Him so self-centred that He didn’t notice and engage with others’ physical and spiritual needs.

All the Lord's encounters with people in John's Gospel are followed by a theological teaching from him, and something in the spiritual path of all those people resonates with every believer. We were born blind spiritually, and the Lord is "The true light that enlightens every man" (Jn. 1:9). We were all fumbling around in darkness prior to our enlightenment by Him. After that encounter, we see life with colour and dimension, we understand life as it truly is, and the comparison with our former lives is as stark as between blindness and vision, light and darkness. We note that "light" means living life with vision; "darkness" means living blind to the true reality that is the life in Him. The "light" is not simply a logical, persuasive set of theological propositions that make sense of and shed light upon the Bible text. The true light is a person, the Lord Jesus.

9:2 *And his disciples asked him: Rabbi, who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind?*- The section begins with the issue of sin and blindness, and ends with it (:41). D.A. Carson’s commentary on John lists Talmudic citations which show that the Jews considered each disability to be the result of specific sin; to be born blind was listed as the result of the mother committing adultery (hence their claim he was born in sin, 9:34). This connects the incident with the previous chapter, as does the phrase “passed by” in 8:59; 9:1. The Lord is consciously seeking to challenge the Jews’ false theology at the points in which it was devaluing to the human person- He wasn’t seeking theological controversy for the sake of it. See on

Jn. 9:6. Their question assumes that being born blind was an outcome of sin- their question was 'whose sin?'. As ever, the Lord attacks the terms of the question and lifts the issue far higher. He now dismantles the connection between sin and blindness.

9:3 *Jesus answered: Neither did this man sin, nor his parents; but that the works of God should be revealed in him*- The Lord isn't saying that they were not sinners, but that the issue of how a person got in the situation they were in wasn't the essential issue. We can learn a lesson from that, for so often, we like to focus on past behaviour as being so significant in present suffering. But the Lord urges us not to have that perspective, but rather to see the present suffering as an opportunity for God's works to be revealed within a person. "The works of God" is a phrase previously used in John's Gospel for miracles. The Lord is saying that the unleashing of power within the man was as great as the performance of any miracle, including healing from literal blindness. "*In* him", rather than on or through him, suggests that the manifestation of God was to begin *within* the man, and the essential miracle was to be on his internal spiritual vision, through the work of the Spirit within him.

The Lord refused to get caught up in the philosophical questions about 'Why suffering?'. Instead He saw the simple reality of human suffering as a call to do God's work; the disciples like so many were caught up on the 'fairness of suffering' question to the extent that they didn't perceive the extent of human need and try to do something about it.

"But that the works of God should be manifest in him, I must work..." (Gk.) would suggest that God has prepared potential 'works' but we must do them; if we don't, they will not be done. This is perhaps the sense of 9:4- we only have limited opportunity to do this, life is brief, the night comes when no man can work. If we don't use those opportunities, they are gone forever, and the works God potentially enabled will not be performed. Yet time can be frittered away today as never before.

'Revealed or "manifested" within him' may mean that the whole drama of blindness and healing happened so that God's work could be revealed within the man's heart. In this sense the Lord manifested God's Name to His disciples (17:6), His life, *the* life, was manifested in the hearts of His followers (1 Jn. 1:2). All that happens physically, externally in our lives is so that internally we might perceive spiritual things. Understanding God's revelation occurred in the heart of the man, and this was in fact the true vision that he was given. The chapter concludes by making the same point, that 'seeing' means understanding and trusting in the Lord Jesus, and not merely physical sight.

9:4 *We must work*- We are lights in the dark world (Mt. 5:14; Phil. 2:15), because we are in Christ, the light of the world (Jn. 9:5). Notice how in the preceding verse, Jesus said spoke of how "I must work the works of him that sent me" (Jn. 9:4 AV), yet the RV reflects the manuscript difficulties by giving "We must work". Could it be that the Lord said: 'I must work, we [you in me] must work'? The Lord Jesus was the light of the world on account of His resurrection: "He first by the resurrection from the dead should proclaim light both to the [Jewish] people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:23 RV). If we are baptized into His death and resurrection, we too are the light of this world in that the light of His life breaks forth in us. And this is exactly why belief in His resurrection is an imperative to preach it. And it's why the great commission flows straight out of the resurrection narrative.

The works of Him that sent me, while it is day. The night comes, when no one can work- In the prologue, the night is the darkness of Jewish unbelief, and the light is that

of the person of the Lord Jesus and His life. The coming of the night therefore refers to the Lord's death, the temporary extinguishing of the light by the darkness. There would be no works / miracles doable then, so the Lord was keen to bring light to people whilst He could. And likewise people only had a very short frame of opportunity to be in the light. Perhaps the Lord was speaking in a kind of soliloquy when He mused that "the night comes, when no man can work", and therefore man should walk and work while he has the light (Jn. 9:4, quoting Ecc. 9:10). He was speaking, in the context, not only of His own zeal to 'work' while He had life, but also applying this to His followers.

9:5 *While I am in the world, I am the light of the world*- The Jewish world only had the chance to see the light whilst the Lord was with them. His presence, His light, would continue for the believers in Him, but as the prologue puts it, the light shone [briefly] in darkness but they did not accept it. The Lord Jesus calls both Himself and us "the light of the world". He is "the light of the world" whenever we, who are in the world, are His light to people.

9:6 *When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle, and anointed his eyes with the clay*-D.A. Carson's commentary on John cites Talmudic evidence that there were specific regulations against ploughing (cp. rolling spittle in the dirt), kneading (the clay), anointing and curing on the Sabbath. In this case, the Lord was purposefully seeking to provoke issues with the Jews regarding their false theology- see on Jn. 9:2. The paradox was that the man was made yet further blind in order to have his sight restored. Commentators note that putting saliva on weak eyes was common in the first century; the Lord's point was that *His* saliva, Him, His word, the word that was Him, His Spirit (for His words were His Spirit, 6:63) mixed with human flesh, the dust of humanity, could achieve permanent cure. The anointing with saliva was usually accompanied by some imprecation, cursing Satan or appealing to the gods. The Lord did none of that; instead, He mixed His saliva with the dust of humanity and there was permanent cure.

9:7 *And said to him: Go, wash in the pool of Siloam (which means Sent). He went away therefore and washed, and went home seeing*- In John's Gospel, the Lord Jesus is the one "sent" from God- He has just stated this in 9:4. The Siloam pool therefore represented washing / baptism in Him, becoming the 'sent one' just as He was. The cure was not immediate; it required washing. This speaks of how baptism was to be the requirement for the giving of the Spirit, the new psychology, the new vision, the new worldview. The significance of the Lord 'sending' the man is stressed. John's Gospel stresses how the Lord was "sent" by the Father (Jn. 3.17,34; 5:35; 9:4). And He says that "as the Father has sent me, even so send I you" (Jn. 20:21). The "sent" blind man is therefore to be seen as every man who believes.

9:8 *His neighbours and those that had seen him previously, as a beggar, said: Is this not he that sat and begged?*- He "went home" (:7) but perhaps he had not been home for a long time, hence the difficulty in recognizing him. "Neighbours" may well imply 'relatives'. His blindness had cut him off from his family, a situation made worse by all the myths about blindness being a punishment for sin. His cure therefore potentially enabled the re-establishment of relationships within his family, just as it can mean in lives today.

9:9- see on 9:27.

Others said: It is he. Others said: No, but he is like him. He said: I am he- He repeated the "I am" used by Jesus in Jn. 8:58, because God's Name was now being

manifested in him. As Jesus was the light of the world, so should we be. His usage of "I am" is perhaps recorded intentionally, in order to demonstrate that usage of the term did not make a man God Himself, but rather spoke of the manifestation of God's Name through him. Trinitarian apologists need to accept this point more readily.

9:10 *They replied to him: How then were your eyes opened?*- Perhaps they wondered whose saliva and with what incantation his eyes had been opened. They were clearly struggling to believe that such a miracle could have been done.

9:11 *He answered: The man that is called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes, and said to me: Go to Siloam and wash. So I went away and washed, and I received sight*- "The man" is yet another indication of the Lord's humanity. He was well known- He was a public figure in Jerusalem. He was known as "the man called Jesus"; He never gave any encouragement to see Him as anything other than a man, and certainly not as God. But consider how the healed blind man grew in his appreciation of the Lord: a man (Jn. 9:11), a prophet (:17), the leader of disciples (:27), a man sent from God (:33), and finally, one to be worshipped as God is worshipped (:38). Because we've gone up one level in our appreciation of the Lord, don't think that we're there. Progressive growth in appreciation of Him should be true of us too. This experience of a growing appreciation of the Lord is in fact a foretaste of the Kingdom; for this will feature an everlasting growth in appreciation of the Lord's excellence (Is. 9:7). For us, that process has already begun. When Christ comes, we will say in that day "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: *this is the Lord*; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation" (Is. 25:9). It doesn't mean we'll turn into Trinitarians. It means we will behold and marvel at the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ, to an extent hidden from mortal eyes.

9:12 *And they said to him: Where is he? He said: I do not know*- The questions 'Who is He?' and 'Where is He?' are commonly provoked in John's Gospel. The first hearers of the Gospel were encouraged to see themselves as these unbelievers, asking these same questions, and coming to faith. We are invited to enter into the feelings of all present then- that the Lord was not physically present, but clearly He was somewhere, and had power and authority beyond the level of any human miracle worker or quack doctor.

9:13 *They took him that was previously blind to the Pharisees*- "They took" may imply they marched him off, whether he wanted it or not. They considered the Pharisees as the judges of truth in these matters; the evidence before their eyes they didn't want to see nor judge. They, like many today, based their judgments upon what others thought.

9:14 *Now it was the Sabbath on the day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes*- The man's relatives and neighbours knew that the Pharisees would consider such healing to be working on the Sabbath. Even quack doctors were not allowed to work on the Sabbath, and they thought they had a great opportunity to get the Lord in trouble- One who had clearly done nothing but good to this man. No good deed goes unpunished, in our experience; and in those moments when we lament that fact, we find fellowship with our Lord's experiences.

9:15 *So the Pharisees asked him how he received his sight. And he said to them: He put clay upon my eyes, and I washed and I could see*- Perhaps the man was at pains to point out that this was no quack doctor miracle involving putting saliva on weak eyes; because he actually had to wash to remove the Lord's saliva before he could see. The further shutting of his eyes with clay was to underscore the point that he had to

become yet more blinded before he could properly see. He was born blind, but he had to recognize this. This is the same logic behind the Lord's asking another blind man "What do you want Me to do for you?". Recognition of blindness is critical, and that is the point of the final verses in this chapter. For man naturally assumes that he is no fool and does in fact perceive this world more or less correctly. When in fact he is totally blind and clueless about reality. This blind man had to wash off that clay from his eyes before he could see (the washing of :7 was specifically washing off the clay on his eyes).

9:16 *Therefore, some of the Pharisees said*- We notice it was only "some" of them who said this. Some Pharisees later believed and became Christians, and it is a theme of John that there was a significant sense amongst the Jews that the Lord was Messiah. His crucifixion was a result of the suppression of conscience, and of an embittered minority leading a majority to do the unthinkable, as so often happens in human societies.

This man is not from God, because he keeps not the Sabbath. But others said: How can a man that is a sinner do such signs? And there was division among them- This division amongst the Pharisees even at this stage, relatively near to the Lord's crucifixion, shows how His destruction was the result of a weak minded majority, overly sensitive to their image, being lead to do the unthinkably evil. For the Pharisees as a group numbered no more than 5000 throughout the Roman empire. And even they were divided about the Lord. In :18 the language of 'belief' is even credited to them; but they still crucified the Lord. And so often this sad scenario plays out amongst religious people; fear of image and possible corollaries leads a majority to do evil which they would not otherwise have done.

9:17 *Therefore they said to the man born blind: What do you say concerning him, in that he opened your eyes? And he said: He is a prophet!*- The Gospel records are full of questions posed about the person and nature of the Lord Jesus. "What do you think about the Christ?... What do you think? Is He worthy of death?... What do you think... about the portrayal of the Father and son in various parables..." (Mt. 21:28; 22:42; 26:66; Jn. 11:56). And we have another example here. In teaching his Gospel, John would have laboured these questions- 'What do *you* say concerning Him?'. It is hard for some of us to get a second naievite and enter into the feelings of a secular person, or a Moslem or Buddhist, as they read the Gospels for the very first time. These questions are powerful, and they would have been powerful to the audiences to which the Gospel records were first read or recited.

"He is a prophet!" was the response of the Samaritan woman (4:19). Miracles were understood as the validation of a prophet (6:14). There was no doubt the man considered that this miracle marked out the Lord as one sent from God. The Pharisees were seeking to elicit the answer "I think He is Messiah!" so they could excommunicate him (:22). But the man didn't think that, at this stage. He had no knowledge about the Lord Jesus beyond the fact that He had done a miracle. We see here grace- that the Lord took the initiative to work in a man's life to bring him to faith, before the man had any faith or the knowledge upon which to base faith.

9:18 *The Jews did not believe him, that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called his parents*- The implication is that they did believe once they were satisfied that he had indeed been born blind. See on :16.

9:19 *And asked them: Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?*- The implication was that the parents were lying. They asked the questions in a legal style, pressuring the parents to disown their son. This is so often

the outcome of legalistic religion, when religious leaders have a point to make and have no thought for the collateral damage to human relationships caused by their obsession in proving someone else wrong.

9:20 *His parents answered and said: We know that this is our son and that he was born blind*- We sense their nervousness in answering up before this kangaroo court. They feared more than anything the social exclusion which would come as a result of excommunication.

9:21 *But how he now sees, we do not know. Or who opened his eyes, we do not know. Ask him! He is of age. He shall speak for himself*- The Jews considered that any over 13 years of age were "of age" to answer for themselves in such cases. Surely they had been present at his "home" when he first returned with the amazing information about "the man called Jesus" and how his eyes had been opened by saliva and washing. They surely were aware of this information, and likely believed it in their hearts. But unlike their son, they feared excommunication. They would not come out openly in confessing faith, or even in accepting the simple reality that the Lord had performed a miracle. This theme of open confession rather than secret acceptance is significant in John, for he was probably using his Gospel record to preach to other Jews who were likewise cowed by the synagogue system into not openly confessing their faith.

9:22- see on Jn. 12:42.

These things said his parents, because they feared the Jews. For the Jews had agreed already, that if anyone should confess him to be Christ, he should be thrown out of the synagogue- The fear of excommunication has stymied so much spirituality and faith over the centuries. John's initial audience were facing the same problem. "The Jews had agreed already" on this policy, but it was only some of them who forced it through; see on :16 and :18. This policy was apparently dropped when thousands of Jews were baptized into Christ at Pentecost, and remained within the synagogue system. The Lord however predicted that the time would come when this policy would again be enforced, and His followers would be excommunicated from the synagogues (16:2). And so it happened. Hebrews was apparently written to the last remnants of the Christians in Jerusalem, the majority of whom had caved in and returned to Judaism because of this policy.

Excommunication from the synagogue meant total social isolation; such a person could not buy from or sell anything to another Jew. The language of the mark of the beast in Rev. 13:17 is virtually quoting from Jewish synagogue excommunication language. Whatever later applications the beast has, John saw it in terms of the evil system of Judaism, based upon Jerusalem, the city spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, persecuting the saints and having its total destruction in the events of AD70.

The "man born blind" in John 9 was an eloquent type of the believers: the unclean one had the spittle (word / spirit) of the Lord Jesus mixed with dust (flesh) and placed on his eyes. Then he had to go and baptize himself at Siloam, and then his blindness was lifted. It is stressed, really stressed (12 times in 32 verses) that the man was "blind"; as if to emphasize how totally blind we are before our "washing", and how blind the unsaved world is. The result was that the man was “put out of the synagogue” (Jn. 9:22)- and the very same phrase is used about all the other first century Jewish believers (Jn. 16:2). They were to go through exactly what he did. The Lord Jesus was well known for His many miracles of curing blind people (Lk. 7:21,22; Jn. 10:21; 11:37); it was as if he healed this affliction especially. All these miracles were surely

acted parables of His work in saving men from the spiritual blindness of their earlier life. The figure of blindness being lifted is truly a powerful picture of what happened at our conversion. From then on, we began to see (i.e. understand) for the first time. We began to understand something properly for the first time. We were *blind* beforehand. Previously, all our 'knowledge' was just perception, passing through paradigms.

9:23 *Therefore his parents replied: He is of age, ask him!*- Despite knowing the facts about their son's healing and the association of "the man called Jesus" with it, they refused to openly testify to what they knew. Fear of religious excommunication has led many over the centuries to put religious acceptance by others far before truth and basic family relationships.

9:24 *So they questioned the man that was born blind a second time, and said to him: Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner*- The demand to "Give God the glory" was an admonition to repent and tell the truth (Josh. 7:19). But the man refused to take false guilt, piled onto him by his religious elders. There is true guilt, the guilt we should feel for actual sin; and false guilt, which is placed upon us by others. The man refused to take this, as we should. To receive grace is no crime.

9:25 *He answered: Whether he is a sinner, I do not know. One thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see*- We see here how little the man knew about the Lord. Yet the Lord worked in his life to bring him to faith, before he believed. This is grace itself. It also puts a stop to all Pentecostal claims that faith is required before miracles can happen. The Lord's cures were by the power of the Spirit, and were not some form of faith healing, which requires the healed person to focus their minds in faith.

9:26 *They replied to him: What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?*- Playing the role of prosecutors, they asked him the same questions, hoping his answers would contradict themselves. But truth was on the man's side and his account was consistent. He refused to be brow beaten by them, unlike his parents.

9:27 *He answered them: I told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Would you also become his disciples?*- His styled was copied by the Lord Jesus- 10:25. As Jesus was the "I am", so this man too manifested God and uses the same phrase *ego emir,* 9:9. They would have considered his attitude to be some form of contempt of court. He rightly perceived that they had been told the truth but did not 'hear' it. He is unconsciously repeating the Lord's own comment that they could not understand His speech because they did not hear His word (8:43). We can only respect the man; for he appeals to them to "become His disciples". If they would wish to become disciples, then he would repeat his testimony. But he wouldn't waste his breath for any other reason. As noted on :17, these questions are recorded in the way they are because they are the questions a person is being asked as they first hear the Gospel of Jesus. 'Will *you* also be His disciple?'.

9:28 *And they reviled him and said: You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses*- The man could hardly be described as a disciple of the Lord as he knew so little about Him. And yet his challenge to them to become the Lord's disciples (:27) was understandably read by them as meaning that he was a disciple of the Lord. Just as 'belief' is credited to people in John's Gospel when they still have major problems in their faith, so this man is presented as a disciple when he knew hardly anything. It was by their questioning of him that he came to articulate his own understanding and faith.

9:29 *We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know from where he came*- Yet they were claiming that nobody would know from where Messiah came; their position here flatly contradicts the statement in 7:27: "However we know from where this man is; but when the Christ comes, no one knows from where he is". The sensitive reader is left to perceive this; neither the Lord, nor John the narrator, makes big capital of this glaring contradiction in their position. That is not the way of the Spirit, and it will not be fruitful for us to use this style either- even though religious debate is full of this kind of thing.

Guilt by association is deeply ingrained in the human psyche- it's one of the most obstinate parts of our nature with which we have to do battle. We tend to assume that people are like those with whom they associate. The association of God's Son with us just shows how totally untrue that assumption is- and He went out of His way to turn it on its head by associating with whores and gamblers. You can see an example of the guilt by association mentality in the incident of the healed blind man here. The Jews accused Jesus of being illegitimate- they mocked the former blind man about his healer: "as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is" (Jn. 9:29). When the healed man stands up for Jesus, the Jews get really mad with him: "You were completely born in sin!"- i.e. 'you're illegitimate' (Jn. 9:34). But the record reveals that the Jews knew the man's parents and had just spoken with them (Jn. 9:20). Clearly the mentality of these learned men was: 'You follow a bastard; so, *you* are a bastard'. Simple as that.

9:30 *The man answered and said to them: This is the marvel! You do not know from where he came, even though he opened my eyes*- The man may be alluding to their position that none would know from whence Messiah comes (7:27). But his reasoning was that since they accepted a miracle had been done, why then did they not perceive that this man was from God? Even Nicodemus thought as much, although he would not at that time confess it (3:2). The years of blindness had not been wasted on this man. He had thought things through and displays a fine command of logic and spiritual insight, although he knew nothing of the Lord Jesus.

9:31 *We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone be a worshiper of God and does His will, him He hears!*- Paul Tournier in *The Meaning Of Persons* perceptively comments: “We become fully conscious only of what we are able to express to someone else. We may already have had a certain intuition about it, but it must remain vague so long as it is unformulated”. This is why anyone involved in preaching, public speaking, writing or personal explanation of the Gospel to someone else will know that *they* have gained so much from having to state in so many words what they already ‘know’. And in the course of making the expression, our own understanding is deepened, our personal consciousness of what we believe is strengthened, and thereby our potential for a real faith is enhanced. Tournier’s observation is validated by considering the record of the healed blind man in Jn. 9. Initially he says that he doesn’t know whether or not Jesus is a sinner, all he knows is that Jesus healed him. But the Jews force him to testify further, and in the course of his witness, the man explains to them that God doesn’t hear sinners, and so for Jesus to have asked God for his healing and been heard… surely proved that Jesus wasn’t a sinner. He was sinless. The man was as it were thinking out loud, coming to conclusions himself, as he made his bold witness (Jn. 9:31,33).

9:32 *Since the world began it has never been heard of a man born blind having his eyes opened*- There are no O.T. accounts of a born blind person being healed; this was

specifically the work of God (Ps. 146:8) and His Messiah (Is. 35:5). The healed man seems to have been aware of this and therefore came to the conclusion that his healer must be Messiah. It wasn't that he believed and therefore was given the benefit of healing; by grace, God first of all healed him and this grace, reflected on and believed, led him to faith in Christ. The man was coming to see that his healing, of a man born blind, was an indication that the Kingdom of God was breaking in amongst men.

9:33 *If this man were not from God, he could do nothing*- Truth is arrived at by different paths. The Lord had clearly stated that He could "do nothing" apart from the fact He was empowered by the Father (5:30). The man arrived by reflection at the very positions which the Lord had Himself taught, although it seems he had never heard the Lord's teaching. Or perhaps he had heard some garbled versions of the Lord's message, and now he was joining the dots and all was making perfect sense.

9:34 *They answered and said to him: You were altogether born in sins, and you teach us! And they excommunicated him*- By saying he was born in sin, they were admitting that he had indeed been born blind- for they believed blindness was a result of the mother's sin (see on 9:2). Yet they had refused to believe that he had been born blind (9:18,20). Thus the Lord worked to even move them onwards in their faith; He gave up on nobody (cp. His efforts to witness to the priests by asking the cleansed leper to offer a sacrifice for cleansing). They had insinuated that the Lord was illegitimate because His family origins were unclear, and their 'guilt by association' mindset led them to assume that as the Lord was, so was anyone who openly stood up for Him. We can make this same basic human psychological error so easily, especially when it comes to religious issues. They excommunicated for believing Jesus was the Messiah (:22). The man did not believe that, but they took his criticism of them as meaning he did. Their logic is continually exposed as false- to those who join the dots. The contradictions are not explicitly exposed. They claimed he was illegitimate, when his parents had just given sober legal testimony that he was their legitimate son. But the way of the Spirit is not to make capital out of the contradictions in others' positions. Such contradictions are left to work on the conscience.

9:35 *Jesus heard that they had excommunicated him; and on finding him, he said: Do you believe on the Son of God?*- Perhaps the Lord wondered whether the man's logical and spiritual process had led him to conclude that "the man called Jesus" was in fact Son of God. As noted on :17 and :27, John's Gospel is full of questions which would have jumped out at the initial hearers- 'Do *you* believe on the Son of God?'. The man is clearly set up as representative of all who would afterwards believe. John's Gospel was written, and the "signs" such as the healing of the blind man were recorded, so that others would make this very same confession of faith in the Son of God (20:31). John urges his converts to continue their 'belief in the Son of God' (1 Jn. 5:13). Surely he is alluding to this man as the prototype of all the Christian converts.

9:36 *He answered and said: Who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him?*- When the blind man asks Jesus to tell him who the Son of God is, I don't think it was because he didn't recognize Jesus to be Messiah. He was surely saying 'Tell me more about Him / you, that I may believe properly' (Jn. 9:36). The Lord Jesus didn't give a doctrinal exposition. But instead He just tells the man to keep looking at Him and hearing Him. And in the next chapter, the Lord says that His sayings and His works are the same thing (Jn. 10:32,33,38)- whereas the Jews kept making a distinction between them. They said that His words, not His works, were the problem. His works, they said, were OK. But not His words. And Jesus tells them to "*believe* the works" -

for they are His words to men. Thus the Lord showed that His actions were His words made flesh.

The blind man asked about Jesus: “Who is he, that I may believe on him?”. True belief depends upon having the true image of Jesus. The goal of conversion to Him is love from a pure heart (1 Pet. 1:22). To know Him properly leads to love within us. 1 Jn. 3:22 brackets together believing in His Name and loving one another. Again and again we say: images and understanding of Jesus matter.

9:37 *Jesus said to him: You have both seen him, and he it is that speaks with you*- 'Seeing' in John means 'understanding in faith'. The Lord is saying that the man has indeed figured things out correctly. In literal terms, the man had to be first given the gift of sight in order to see the Lord. And there was a spiritual equivalent. There is an element of calling, of enlightenment by the Spirit (Eph. 1:18); so that within the final algorithm of human salvation, there is the factor of God's grace. This is why Paul starts talking about predestination and calling in Romans; they are parade examples of how salvation is by grace and not of works nor of human tenacity or correctness of Biblical interpretation. These things are not outside of the algorithm, but they are not the only factors, lest salvation be of works and human ability.

9:38 *And he said: Lord, I believe. And he worshiped him*- This is a climactic moment. The once blind man realizes that this man standing before him is in fact God's Son. These are the very words of the man of Mk. 9:24, of Martha in Jn. 11:27 and effectively of Thomas in Jn. 20:25. The whole incident is definitely set up to present the man as a prototype of all who come to faith in the Lord. The significance of the man's confession is that it was made in the presence of the Pharisees (:40); he openly confessed his faith before the Jewish world, which again was intended to be a pattern for all.

9:39 *And Jesus said: For judgment I came into this world, that they that cannot see may see, and that they that see may become blind*- Remember the Lord had cured the man by first making him more blind. His judgment of the world, in blinding them, was still done in the hope that they would come to sight. Saul's blindness leading to his conversion and washing in baptism was surely allusive to the Lord's teaching here. Receiving sight was a result of judgment. The man was made to realize that his blindness was symbolic of judgment for sin, although the Lord had no interest in the history of or guilt for that sin. It was through that judgment that the man came to see.

"They that see" may require an ellipsis to be read in, to the effect 'those who think that they see'. Or the Lord may be alluding to the way that on one level, they did 'see' that He was from God, but because they had refused to follow the Spirit's leading, they were blinded so that they could not further perceive Him.

The Lord's very existence among men was their judgment- for judgment He came into this world, the light of His moral excellence blinded the immoral (this is again alluding to the prologue's description of the Lord as light). Bright light shows up every shadow. Whenever men were in Christ's presence, they were judged. The very presence of His light amongst men was their condemnation (Jn. 3:19; 5:27; 12:31; 16:8,11). In this sense He could say that for judgment He came into this world (Jn. 9:39).

9:40 *Those of the Pharisees who were with him heard these things, and said to him: Are we also blind?*- As noted on :39, they considered that they 'saw' and were not spiritually blind. The Lord had said that they were blinded- not from birth, but blinded by Him, as a result of the process of refusing to believe what on one level they had

'seen'. They sensed they were the ones being referred to as blind- and yet they considered themselves the most spiritually perceptive in Israel.

9:41 *Jesus said to them: If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say: We see, therefore your sin remains*-There was a difference between being born blind, and being blinded. The Lord has said that they were in the category of those who had been blinded, because they had seen but not believed (:39). It was because they refused to accept this that their sin remained. The implication was that being cured of blindness, receiving spiritual sight, meant forgiveness of sin; but blindness meant that sin remained. It is only by walking in the light of the Lord Jesus, with the eyes of the Spirit, that sin no longer remains in our lives. John develops this point in his later pastoral appeals to his converts to not remain in sin if they were really in the light. Living in the light of His presence and with His life ever before us as our life... means that we will not remain in sin. Blindness in the sense of genuine ignorance is not therefore reckoned as sin by the Lord. It is refusal to 'see' what we have 'seen' that makes us culpable for sin; it is this kind of blindness that is associated with condemnation (2 Pet. 1:9).

JOHN CHAPTER 10

10:1-see on Mk. 13:34.

Truly, truly, I say to you: He that enters not by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber- The good shepherd searches for the sheep until He finds it. John 10 is full of reference to Ezekiel 34, which describes God's people as perishing on the mountains, eaten by wolves. Ezekiel 34 was the synagogue reading at the time of the Feast of Dedication; and this incident is placed at this time (:22). But the Lord Jesus set Himself to do that which was impossible- to search *until He found*, even though He knew that some were already lost. Our attitude to those lost from the ecclesia and to those yet out in the world must be similar. The material in John 10 follows straight on from the incident in chapter 9, where the Lord had sought out the healed blind man and brought him into the fold, in the teeth of the terrible behaviour from Israel's false shepherds. "Truly, truly..." is a phrase used in John 25 times; and always it never begins a new discourse, but follows on from some previous situation or teaching. So we must understand John 10 in the light of the preceding events in John 9, which has spotlighted the bad shepherding of the healed blind man. The parable here seems to have two stages. Firstly, the shepherd leads out His sheep because He knows the gatekeeper. They follow Him, and then He sets up another fold, with another flock in it, somewhere in the pasture lands, where the sheep can freely come in and out. I will suggest that this alludes to sheep being led out of their Winter fold at Passover, and through the Lord's death, people were led out of the fold of Judaism and the synagogue system, indeed were cast out out of it [s.w.], and thus entered the freedom there is in Christ; whereby we pasture freely, but under His care.

In this connection we must bear in mind that shepherds were perceived as poor, marginalized, often criminal- and the Pharisees forbad a righteous man from being a shepherd. The job was often done by illegitimate children or slaves. Lk. 17:7 speaks of how a slave would be typically "keeping sheep". Shepherds were armed, and moved with the flocks; they were of no fixed abode, and often associated with

bandits, cattle rustlers and those on the run from justice. Some were not even paid, because they made a living from theft and banditry. Others supplemented their very low wages by theft; shepherd's wages were proverbial for being the lowest. Diocletian's price edict described a shepherd's income in proportion to other wages. The wage for shepherds was set at less than for a farm labourer, a water carrier or sewage cleaner; the shepherd's wage was to be half the wages of a carpenter. This is taken from E.R. Graser, 'The Edict of Diocletian on Maximum Prices', in *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome, Volume 5* [ed. T. Frank; Baltimore 1940] pp. 305–421. The Talmud puts shepherds together with the most despised elements of Jewish society: "For shepherds, tax collectors and revenue farmers it is difficult to make repentance" (B. Qam. 94b). Because of this, Josephus and Philo try to re-cast the account of Moses as if he were not in fact a shepherd for 40 years, but rather the manager of Jethro's wealth. They totally miss the point of servant leadership, of the humblest being the greatest. The Lord's choice of imagery therefore reflects how radically counter-cultural and anti-religious was His message. He was and is the shepherd; but the *good* shepherd. Serving in the lowest, most despised job, openly associating with sinners. And shepherds were often female- to be a female shepherd was about the lowest level of employment for a woman. The Lord's identification of Himself (and the spiritual pastors of His new community) with 'shepherds' would have been quite startling. For the association of "shepherd" were with illegitimate birth, criminals, questionable people, the marginalized, children and women. The work of shepherding is to be done for love for the sheep; not because of any hope of personal benefit or reward. We note in the parable of Luke 15 that the shepherd has 100 sheep under his personal care; the point has been made that typically a flock of that size would require more than one shepherd. We recall the plural "shepherds" watching their flocks in Luke 2. But the idea is that the Lord, along with all true shepherds, are as it were overworked, with little support nor encouragement in the work. There are statements at the end of John 10 about the son's unity with the Father. I suggest these are in the context of the allusions to Ezekiel 34; God Himself is the shepherd who "seeks the sheep". But He does so through His Son, and through us. He too is thereby associated with being a despised, obscure shepherd.

The Lord will go on to define Himself as the only door into the fold. He is speaking in the context of the healed blind man being excommunicated from the synagogue in 9:34 and the threat of excommunication for any who believed in Him in 9:22. This was a major issue at the time and also for the communities to whom John was preaching his Gospel.

The Lord is saying that He is the only way into the fold, and therefore the threats of excommunication are irrellevant; especially as they were made by unbelievers in Him, who were only apparently within the fold by illegimitate means. This is all comfort to those who are excommunicated for whatever reason. So many lose their faith or spirituality because of it, but the Lord is saying that the definition of who is within the fold is not in the hands of the men who practice this evil. For He is the door, and whoever enters by Him shall be saved and is within the fold. Those who excommunicate have not really known the spirit of Christ, and so their claims to authority are illegitimate. They were thieves and robbers- in that the Jewish leadership were covetous and were using religion as a source of money. Elsewhere the Lord speaks of "the thief" coming to rob the master's household (Mt. 24:43) and in the first instance He may have had in view the Jewish attempt to take over the Christian movement. He had labelled the temple "a den of thieves" (Mt. 21:13). And Israel chose a robber rather than the Lord Jesus (Jn. 18:40; Mt. 27:38). The "thieves" who

robbed the man in the Samaritan parable may well refer to this same category of Jewish religious leaders (Lk. 10:30).

10:2 *But he that enters in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep*- The Lord was both the door and the shepherd. But the context in chapter 9 is of people the parents of the blind man being so fearful of the religious leaders. The Lord is perhaps saying that any spiritual shepherd will have entered the fold through the door, which is Him. Only those who have become in Christ are shepherds; the Jewish converts need not fear nor respect any others who claimed to be shepherds, and that included the entire Jewish religious leadership at that time.

10:3 *To him the gatekeeper opens the gate, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his sheep by name and leads them out*- As noted on :2, the Lord is speaking in the context of the excommunication of the blind man by the Jewish religious leaders. He is teaching that the only legitimate shepherds in God's flock are those who have passed through Him, the door. "The gatekeeper" may be another reference to the Lord; He is the One who allows the legitimate shepherd access to the flock. They need not therefore fear excommunication, because those practicing it were not legitimate shepherds, and instead were the incarnations of the false shepherds of Israel which the Old Testament condemns. But we could also understand the gatekeeper as representing John the Baptist, who responded to the voice of the Lord Jesus (3:29), and who opened the way for the flock to enter through the Christ-door into the new fold.

The sheep hear the voice of the shepherd, whereas the Jewish leadership had shown many times over that they did not understand the Lord's speech because they did not hear His word (8:43); they were continually misunderstanding His language. The events and dialogues of chapter 9 were proof enough of this; the flock should not therefore respect the voices of these men, seeing they did not hear the Lord's voice. Indeed, the Lord considered that the flock of Israel at that time were without any shepherds apart from Himself (Mt. 9:36).

The Lord knows each of His sheep and has given us a unique name. John's Gospel records how the Lord gave names to His disciples, and knew Nathanael by name before He had even called him. This is a picture of the very personal relationship between the Lord and each of His sheep. We hear His voice in different ways, for He speaks with a different intonation to each of us. This is not to say that false teaching is not false teaching; but all the same, each sheep has a different, although not contradictory, nuance of understanding the Lord's voice. The idea of being known by name recalls Yahweh's statement to Moses, that He knew him by name (Ex. 33:12,17). The Lord is encouraging the flock that each of them could have no less an intimate relationship with the Father and Son as Moses had. No longer should they see Moses as some unreachable climax of spirituality; they could all reach that level of intimacy, through the Lord's work and word.

If we respond to the Lord's voice, then we are 'led out' by Him; a word used of Israel's being led out of Egypt and through the wilderness. But the word is also used of the leading by the hand of the blind man in Mk. 8:23, and I have shown that this teaching in chapter 10 is clearly developing the themes of chapter 9 where a blind man was cured. The leading of the sheep is by the Lord's voice. The place of His word can never be underrated. Bible reading is to characterize the flock; and yet beyond that, hearing the voice of Jesus, discerning His personal call, is of the essence.

10:4- see on Mt. 16:22-25.

When he brings out all his sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice- The personal knowledge of every sheep (:3) is stressed again

by the "all". The connections continue with the preceding chapter, as "brings out" translates the same Greek word translated "excommunicate" in 9:34,35. Unlike the false shepherds, the Lord doesn't drive out as punishment and leave the sheep alone. He leads His sheep out by going before them, and not by driving from behind or scaring them with sheepdogs. The image of the Lord going ahead with the disciples following Him connects with the idea of the Lord carrying His cross and bidding us follow Him on that last walk. John's Gospel concludes with the disciples following the Lord Jesus, focused upon Him solely. And the same image is used when He says that after His resurrection, He would "go before them into Galilee" (Mt. 26:32; 28:7).

The bringing out of the sheep was typically at Passover time; and so again we see a connection with the Lord's death at Passover, which resulted in the sheep being led out of the folds to pasture in the mountains. A typical reference is found in the Mishnah, b. Besa 40a: "Our Rabbis taught: The following are pasture animals and the following are household animals. Pasture animals are such as are led out about [the time of] Passover and graze in [more distant] meadows". This may well be the sense of the Lord's language of 'bringing out' His sheep. It is His death on the cross which inspires men to leave the fold of mere religion, indeed by believing in Him, they will themselves be 'cast out' of the folds of religion. The Lord's fold, the church, would be like the folds in the mountains, where the sheep sometimes spent the night, coming in and out to find pasture.

John's record stresses that the key to following Jesus to the cross is to hear His word, which beckons us onwards (Jn. 10:4,27). All our Bible study must lead us onwards in the life of self-sacrifice. The Lord Jesus "*putteth forth* his own sheep by name" (Jn. 10:4); the same word is used by Him in Lk. 10:2 concerning how He *sends forth* workers to reap converts in preaching. Each of those He calls has a unique opportunity ["by name"] to gather others to Him.

The idea of 'following' Jesus is invariably associated with the carrying of the cross. Why do this? Because of the voice / word of Jesus, of who He is, of His Spirit. This must be the ultimate end of our Bible study; a picking up of the cross. For there we see God's words made flesh.

10:5 *A stranger they will not follow, but will flee from him. For they do not know the voice of strangers*- This is again an appeal to the intuitive sense within those who are of the Spirit; they instinctively discern those whose voice is not of God. The Lord puts it another way in 7:17, where [see note there] He explained that whoever has a heart for God's will can intuitively sense true and false teaching.

Remember that it was in full knowledge of the disciples' impending collapse of faith and feeling from Him, that the grace of Jesus confidently spoke of how His men would not follow "a stranger... but will flee from him". But the disciples fled from their Lord in Gethsemane, as He knew they would (from Zech. 13:7, cp. Mt. 26:31) at the time He said those words. He knew that He must die for the sheep who would scatter each one to His own way (Is. 53:6). "The time comes... when you shall be scattered, every man to his own" (Jn. 16:32); and true enough, they all fled from Him (Mt. 26:56). But in Jn. 10 He spoke of His followers as calm, obedient sheep who would not scatter if they had a good shepherd (Jn. 10:12); even though He knew they would. The Lord's way of imputing such righteousness to His followers seems to be brought out in Jn. 10:4 cp. 6: "The sheep follow Him: for they know (understand, appreciate) His voice... this parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake", i.e. they didn't know His voice.

10:6 *This parable spoke Jesus to them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them*- This 'not understanding' seems an exemplification of His words in :5 that the true sheep will not follow the voice of strangers; and likewise, thoses who were not the Lord's sheep would not understand His voice. However, there is a purposeful ambiguity about who it was who "did not understand"; for that comment is often made about the disciples. As noted on :5, they did in fact "flee" from the Lord Jesus instead of remaining faithful to Him. Even although they did not understand His voice as they should have done, still He counted them as His sheep. This was grace itself.

10:7 *Jesus then said to them: Again, truly, truly, I say to you: I am the door of the sheepfold*- The statement in :23 that the Lord was teaching in Solomon's Porch appears to apply to all the material in this chapter; for the same themes of sheep and folds continue seamlessly. The ideas of a "fold" and that of the "courts" of the temple are very similar. Solomon's Porch was as a colonnade area that ran along the east side of the court of the Gentiles. There was a sign warning that any Gentile going further into the temple court was liable to death. The Lord surely alludes to these courts as He was standing right next to them- teaching that being in Him was the only source of entry into the fold / court, and that He was creating only one court / fold. The various courts, of the women, of the Gentiles etc. were to all be merged into the one fold / court, into which He alone gave exclusive access.

The Lord presents Himself as both the gatekeeper and the shepherd. The idea seems to be that in a sense, He is the shepherd and we are the sheep, and He was allowed in to the fold by John the Baptist, who recognized His voice as that of God's Son. But in another sense, the Lord is saying that *He* is the gatekeeper, and *we* are the shepherds who have a relationship with Him. He knows our voice and we know His, and so He lets us in- to pastor His flock. This apparent confusion is to be found in a number of parables. The key figure can be interpeted as both Jesus personally, and ourselves. The good Samaritan parable on one level presents Jesus as the good Samaritan, and us as the wounded man. But on another level, we are to "go and do likewise"; we are to be the Samaritan, saving the wounded man of humanity. The parable of the sower raises the question as to who exactly the sower refers to- and it can refer both to the Lord, and to our own preaching. Likewise the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin of Luke 15. We on one level are the lost; on another, we are the shepherd or woman who are searching for the lost. And likewise here. On one level, we are the sheep, and He is the shepherd. On another, He is the gatekeeper and we are the shepherds. This is because we are called to do His work, to be Him to this world; for we are "in Christ" and all true of Him becomes true of us. In the parable of John 10, the Lord twice uses the "I am..." sayings which John carefully notes. "I am the good shepherd... the gatekeeper". It would seem that these "I am..." sayings are John's equivalent of how the synoptics record "The Kingdom of Heaven is like...". That latter phrase begs application to the Lord Jesus, who is titled "the Kingdom", so identified is He personally with His Kingdom. But it is equally applicable to us all, who are under the kingship of God and therefore translated into His Kingdom now. I also note that most of the parables have polyvalence, that is, they seem to have more than one legitimate, intended interpretation. Because their intention is to tease us into thought and reflection.

10:8 *All that came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them*- Messiah was "he that comes", the 'coming one'. These others who 'came before Me' could refer to false Messiahs. It was their teaching which meant they did not

persuade the sheep to follow them; and again the Lord appeals to an intuitive sense that the sheep have as to whose is the true voice. And He clearly locates the motives for these false Messiahs and teachers as being materialistic- "thieves and robbers". The false teachers as mentioned both in the Gospels and epistles were teaching as they did for money or personal gain.

10:9 *I am the door*- It could be that "the door" stands for 'the door keeper'. But the connection between the door and the shepherd is because the shepherd would 'lay down' and sleep across the doorway of the fold. Again we have the idea of the Lord's death, His 'laying down' of His life which He will go on to speak of, being the guarantee of safety for His sheep in this new fold.

By me if anyone enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and go out, and shall find pasture- The going in and out is hard to interpret. I suggested on :8 that the Lord was standing near the divide between the court of the Gentiles and the further courts; He was alluding to them in His talk about creating one fold, and He being the door of entry into the fold / court. I suggest this is the best understanding of going in and out freely- no longer passing a sign threatening death for going further, if you were a woman or a Gentile. No longer going out, looking at the excluded ones in another court, feeling more righteous than them by reason of ethnicity or gender. But going out and in is also a Hebraism for leadership. Moses sought for a prophet / successor like unto him, who would lead out and bring in the sheep of Israel (Num. 27:17,21). The descriptions of the good shepherd not losing any sheep (Jn. 10:28; 17:12) perhaps allude to the well known Jewish stories about Moses being such a good shepherd that he never lost a sheep. So the idea may be that true shepherds of the new flock would be believers in Christ, the door, and only through Him would enter in and lead the flock. For the Lord is emphasizing the danger of false shepherds, of the kind who had excommunicated the blind man, the sheep, of chapter 9.

Ex. 38:18 describes the curtain over the door of the tabernacle in similar language to how the veil hiding the Most Holy is described. The Lord Jesus is the door of the tabernacle through which we enter at our conversion. By doing so we also enter, in prospect, through the veil into the Most Holy of eternity and Divine nature.

The idea of 'going in and out' may connect with how the Lord has said that He would lead out His own sheep, by going before them. The connection is with how the healed blind man has been cast out of the synagogue system, just as Jesus had been. This parable is His commentary upon that. His death would lead His followers "out" of the wrong fold of Judaism; and in the new fold, of His creation, there would be the "other sheep" of the Gentiles as well. But the sheep could go in and out freely, they were not kept penned up in the bondage of Judaism or any merely religious system.

10:10 *The thief only comes so that he may steal and kill and destroy*- Again the Lord is stating that the motive of the false shepherds was solely materialistic. And because of that, they ended up spiritually destroying the flock. The allusions are clearly to Ezekiel 34 and the condemnation of Israel's greedy, destructive shepherds.

I came that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly- The life more abundant refers to the gift of the Spirit, the gift of His life lived in us, whereby we have His presence. Belief on the Son means that we "have [everlasting] life" right now (3:36; 5:24; 6:47,54; 1 Jn. 5:12,13). And that life shall eternally endure; it is the kind of life we shall eternally live in the Kingdom. Yet the gift of this life was made available by the Lord's death. It was the smitten rock that gave abundant, springing life. “I am come" seems to refer to His ‘coming down’ on the cross, as if it were

already happening. Think for a moment of *how* the death of a man on a stake, 2000 years ago, on a day in April, on a Friday afternoon, irritated by flies and barking dogs... could actually give us life "more abundantly"? What was the process, what *is* the process, going on here? What's the connection between that dying man, and a transformed life in you and me today in the 21st century? Surely the connecting power is that the spirit / disposition of the Lord there and then has an inevitable, transforming influence upon those of us who believe in Him; the super-abounding grace and generosity of spirit that was in Him there, which was epitomized in the hours of public, naked exhibition... can't fail to move our spirits to be likewise. Paul speaks of this when He says that God does for us exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think, by the spirit / power / disposition that works in is (Eph. 3:20). That power, that spirit, is surely that of the crucifixion of Christ. For we cannot be passive to it, if we really 'get it'. It is a power that "works in us". See on 2 Cor. 8:7.

10:11- see on Jn. 13:36-38.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep- It was through His death that the abundant life was created for the sheep; see on :10. Moses was a shepherd for 40 years, and then for 40 years he put this into practice by leading Israel as God's shepherd for 40 years in the same wilderness (Num. 27:17; Ps. 80:1; Is. 63:11). As Moses was willing to sacrifice his eternal life for the salvation of the sheep of Israel (Ex. 32:30-32), so the Lord gave His life for us. John's Gospel normally shows the supremacy of Christ over Moses. In this connection of them both being shepherds willing to die for the flock, Moses is not framed as being inferior to Christ- in that in his desire to die for Israel, he truly reached the fullness of the spirit of Christ. "The good shepherd" may well have been a Rabbinical title for Moses; the Lord therefore was saying "I am Moses, in his love for your salvation; not better than him, but exactly like him in this". In a sense, Moses' prayer was heard, in that he was excluded from the land *for their sakes* (Dt. 1:37; 3:26; 4:21; Ps. 106:33); they entered after his death. This was to symbolise how the spirit of his love for Israel was typical of the Lord's for us. The Lord Jesus likewise died the death of a sinner; He was "forsaken" in the sense that God forsakes sinners, whilst as God's Son He was never forsaken by the Father.

The Lord's life was laid down on the cross, and yet in another sense He was laying it down in the process of His mortal life, in which He gave His life to us. Yet in the shepherd metaphor, He laid His life down for the salvation of the sheep from danger. He was temporarily slain by the wolf seeking to attack them; and He was slain by the Jews. They were the wolves attacking the flock just as Paul foresaw the Judaist attacks on the fledgling ecclesia as being the attacks of wolves upon sheep.

10:12 *He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them*- The disciples were indeed scattered when the shepherd, the Lord Jesus, was smitten. The analogy suggests that He died fighting for their protection. He temporarily died and they were scattered by the wolf of Jewish persecution. But His resurrection led to a gathering together of all His true people, in the face of the wolf's persecution. This general picture is developed in John's later writing, Revelation, where the beasts persecute the sheep; and whatever later application that has, the initial application was to Jewish persecution in the first century.

All this implies that the Lord, the good shepherd, saw the wolf coming. He didn't flee, but fought with this ferocious beast until the death. He says that if He had not

done this, the sheep would be scattered. The struggle between Christ and the devil / flesh was therefore at its most intense on the cross, in His time of dying. The cross was not only a continuation of His struggle with the (Biblical) devil. It was an especially intensified struggle; and the Lord foresaw this fight coming. There is an element of unreality in this story that serves to make two powerful points. Firstly, no normal shepherd would give his life in protecting his sheep. The near fanaticism of this shepherd is also found in Am. 8:4, which describes the Lord as taking out of the mouth of the lion the legs or piece of ear which remains of the slain sheep; such is the shepherd's desperate love for the animal that now is not. The love of Christ for us on the cross, the intensity and passion of it, is quite outside any human experience. Hence the command to copy His love is a new commandment. And secondly, wolves don't normally act in the way the story says. They will only fight like this when they are cornered, and they aren't *so* vicious. But the point the Lord is making is crucial to us: the devil, the power of sin in our natures as manifest in the Jews,was far more powerful than they thought, and the struggle against it on the cross was far far harder than we would think. And there's a more tragic point. In the short term, the sheep *were* scattered by the wolf, even though Christ died so this wouldn't happen. And Christ knew in advance that this would happen (Is. 53:6; Mk. 14:27; Jn. 16:32). The Lord faced His final agony with the knowledge that in the short term, what He was dying in order to stop (i.e. the scattering of the sheep) wouldn't work. The sheep would still be scattered, and He knew that throughout the history of His church they would still keep wandering off and getting lost (according to Lk. 15:3-6). Yet He died for us from the motive of ultimately saving us from the effect of doing this. He had clearly thought through the sheep / shepherd symbolism. Unity and holding on to the faith were therefore what He died to achieve (cp. Jn. 17:21-23); our disunity and apostasy, each turning to his own, is a denial of the Lord's sufferings. And this is why it causes Him such pain. Not only is the shepherd unreal. The sheep are, too- once we perceive the link back to Ez. 34:17-22. They tread down the good pasture so others can't eat from it; having drunk clean water themselves, they make the rest of the water dirty by putting their feet in it; and the stronger sheep attack the weaker ones. This isn't how sheep usually behave! But these sheep are unusually badly behaved. And they are symbols of us, for whom this unusual shepherd gave His life. See on Lk. 15:5.

10:13 *He flees because he is a hired hand and does not care about the sheep*- Again the Lord is saying that the Jewish shepherds were motivated solely by money, their "hire". There may be here an allusion to Judas, who "did not care for the poor" (s.w., 12:6).

The Gospel writers three times bring out the point that people perceived that the Lord Jesus didn't "care" for people. The disciples in the boat thought that He didn't care if they perished (Mk. 4:38); Martha thought He didn't care that she was left in an impossible domestic situation, doubtless assuming He was a mere victim of common male insensitivity to women (Lk. 10:40); and twice it is recorded that the people generally had the impression that He cared for nobody (Mt. 22:16; Mk. 12:14). And yet the Lord uses the very same word here to speak of the hired shepherd who cares not for the sheep- whereas He as the good shepherd cares for them so much that He dies for them. I find this *so* tragic- that the most caring, self-sacrificial person of all time wasn't perceived as that, wasn't credited for it all. The disciples surely wrote the Gospels with shame over this matter. It points up the loneliness of the Lord's agonizing last hours. And yet it provides comfort for all unappreciated caregivers, as spouses, parents, children, servants of the ecclesia... in their suffering they are sharing

something of the Lord's agony.The Lord's "care" for the sheep led Him to lay down His life for them; but people thought that He did not "care" for His sheep. Each time the Lord heard this accusation, He must have reflected that actually He cared so much for them that He was laying down His life. Love unperceived is one of the hardest things to live with, and discourages many from abiding in the life of love. In those moments of discouragement we can remember the Lord, whose love was likewise unperceived, and continues to be in millions of hearts to this day.

The Lord even saw the unconverted and the unreached as His potential sheep. He criticizes the “hireling” who has “no concern for the sheep” (Jn. 10:13) with the same expression as is used in Jn. 12:6 to describe how Judas was “not concerned for the poor”. He parallels “the sheep” with the “poor” whom He and His group sought to help materially as best they could; He saw those crowds, whom we would likely have dismissed as just of the “loaves and fishes” mentality, as potential sheep.

10:14 *I am the good shepherd, and I know my own and my own know me*- Again the Lord is imputing righteousness and perception to His followers; for He lamented that although they had been with Him so long, they still apparently did not "know" Him (14:9). And yet 'knowledge' is being used in the Hebraic sense of relationship. His relationship with His sheep is mutual.

10:15 *Even as the Father knows me, and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep*- His mutual relationship with the Father, the Hebrew sense of both sides 'knowing' each other, was to be reflected in His knowing His sheep and them knowing Him (:14- a theme developed at length in chapter 17).

There is and will be something dynamic in our relationship with the Father and Son. The Lord Jesus spoke of how He ‘knows’ the Father and ‘knows’ us His sheep in the continuous tense (:14,15)- He was ‘getting to know’ the Father, and He ‘gets to know’ us. And this is life eternal, both now and then, that we might *get to know* the one true God and His Son (Jn. 17:3). The knowing of God and His Son is not something merely academic, consisting only of facts. It is above all an experience, a thrilling and dynamic one. I am the good shepherd, and know (Gk. 'am getting to know', continuous tense) my sheep, and am known (*being known*) of mine. As the Father *knoweth* (is knowing) me, even so know I (I am getting to know) the Father". The relationship between us and our Lord will therefore be one of progressive upward knowledge, as He has with God. Thus a state of ultimate knowledge of God will not be flashed into us at the moment of acceptance at the judgment. For this very reason, the Kingdom cannot be an inactive state. God is dynamic. For us to grow in His knowledge will be a continuously dynamic process. It is pointed out in John's Gospel that those who will truly know God will not fully know Him now, in this life. Thus the blind man in 9:12 said that he did not know where Jesus was; Thomas likewise said that the disciples did not know where Jesus was going 14:5,7); in 4:32 the Lord Jesus said that He had meat which we do not know of. Those who said (in John's Gospel) that they *did* know Jesus, often found that they did not. Thus the Lord said that the Samaritans worshipped what they did not know (4:22), although they were convinced that they did. Nicodemus thought that he knew Jesus, when he did not (3:2); the Jews thought that they knew whence Jesus was (7:26); "now we know that you have a demon", they boasted (8:52); "we know that this man is a sinner" (9:34)- and how wrong they were. Those who accepted they did not fully know the Lord Jesus will spend eternity coming to know Him (17:3).

It was due to His *knowing* that the Lord gave His life. Knowledge, in its active and true sense of relationship, does have a vital part to play. Otherwise spirituality becomes pure emotion alone. To "follow after righteousness" is paralleled with "to know righteousness" (Is. 51:1,7). To know it properly is to follow after it.

10:16- see on Jn. 17:23.

And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold. Them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and they shall become one flock with one shepherd- I suggested earlier that the Lord was saying these things standing by the court of the Gentiles, and the idea of the 'fold' is associated with that of the 'courts', for Jews, Gentiles and women. The Greek for "fold" is translated "court" in 18:15; Rev. 11:2. The true fold or court was only one, and entered into through the Lord Jesus. Instead of threatening death to those who crossed into the wrong courts, the Lord was the door through which *life* was offered. *This* fold may have been said with a motion toward the inner court. The women, Gentiles, the unclean and outcasts were to be brought, in obedience to His voice, and moulded into one flock with only one shepherd. The 'bringing' preceded the 'hearing My voice'. It's not that the Lord has given us His written word and whoever figures it out becomes part of the flock. He brings people, called by grace; and then it is over to them whether they further 'hear His voice'. Revelation develops the idea where we have a vision of the Lord as a shepherd leading His flock, on account of being Himself a lamb. But that vision refers to the Kingdom age. It could be argued from the force of "they shall *become*..." that the Lord is working to bring together His sheep into one fold, but that final unity will only be achieved at His return. The present divided state of the flock is therefore envisaged, although the Lord works to bring down the barriers between sheep and sheep.

We note that it was not uncommon for smaller, poorer farmers to merge their flocks, so that only one shepherd had to be employed to care for them all. The impression given, therefore, is that the Lord Jesus is a *poor* shepherd, and not a wealthy one.

Time and again the Lord Jesus reapplies the language of the restoration from Babylon to what He is doing to all men and women who heed His call to come out from the world and follow Him. The ideas of bringing His sheep, "other sheep of mine", who will hear His voice and form one flock under one shepherd- all these are rooted in the restoration prophecies (Ez. 34; Ez. 37:21-28; Jer. 23:1-8; Jer. 31:1-10). When the Lord spoke of His people as being raised up put of the stones, as living stones, He surely had Neh. 4:2 in mind- where the stones of Zion are described as reviving, coming alive, at the restoration. The second coming is to be the restoration *again* of the Kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6), as if the first restoration is to be understood as a type of that to come.

The way in which we are seen by God as if we are already saved on account of our being in Christ is also explicable by appreciating His timelessness. Rom. 8:29 says that the whole process of our calling, justification and glorification all occurred at the foundation of the world. In God's eyes, those of us in Christ are already saved and glorified. The Lord spoke of "other sheep I have" (Jn. 10:16) when at that time we never existed. Likewise in God's eyes there was only one resurrection, that of the Lord Jesus. The resurrected Lord is compared to the sheaf of firstfruits (1 Cor. 15:20),

as if those in him rose with him and were glorified together, in God's eyes. Perhaps the Lord Jesus had this in mind when he said: "I *am* the resurrection".

10:17 *For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so that I may take it again-*

The idea of Christ *giving* Himself for us refers to that final moment of giving up, yielding, laying down His breath for us. He did not die, as most men do, against their will, fighting for the continuation of life at all costs; in the words of Dylan Thomas, dying men “Go not gentle into that good night / But rage, rage against the dying of the light”. The Lord died by breathing out the last breath in His lungs, His spirit, toward His disciples. Paul was evidently moved by this; he marvelled at how Christ "*gave himself* for me" (Gal. 2:20), using the same word as in Jn. 19:30 concerning him giving up His spirit. And we can enter into that sense or marvel and wonder. Paul again alludes to this in Eph. 5:2: "Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath *given himself* for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour". That wondrous moment when Christ reached such self-control as to give His life for us, to breathe out His last breath for us as an act of the will, that moment was evidently deep within the mind of Paul. Because of it we should find ample inspiration to "walk in love" towards each other, to be so full of praise for this that we have no time to even speak about the sins to which are earthly nature is so prone. These are high ideals indeed, yet in Paul (another sin-stricken human) they began to be realized. They *really can* be realized in our lives, we truly can begin to appreciate the intensity of that yielding up, that laying down of the life spirit of our Lord Jesus- and therefore and thereby we will find the inspiration to respond in a life of true love for each other.

The same word crops up later: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church, and *gave himself* for it" (Eph. 5:25). Now this is high, heavenly, indeed. Husbands are asked to consider the intensity of that moment when Christ, rigid with self-control, gave up His life for us, breathing His last as a controlled act of the will. And the Spirit through Paul asks husbands to reflect this in their daily lives, in the petty day by day situation of life. No wonder he asks wives to deeply respect their husbands if they at least try to rise up to this spirit (Eph. 5:33). Real meditation upon the implications of all this, the very height of the challenge, will surely do more good to a marriage than any amount of counselling and reading of human words.

The Father loved the Son *because* He laid down His life in this way; there was an upwelling of love within the soul of Almighty God as He beheld it (Jn. 10:17). And ditto for all those who try to enter into the spirit of laying down their lives after the pattern of our Lord's final moment. But well before His death, our Lord could speak of how "I lay down my life" (Jn. 10:17); His whole life was a laying down of His innermost spirit, His final outbreathing was a summation of His daily attitude. He saw His death as the baptism with which He must be baptized (Lk. 12:50 cp. Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:10-12, His 'baptism-unto-death' Gk.); and yet He spoke of the baptism with which He was being baptized in an ongoing sense (Mt. 20:22). In this same vein, Ps. 69:8,9 is a prophecy about the final sufferings of the Lord in crucifixion, and yet these verses are elsewhere quoted about the experiences of His ministry. And “they hated me without a cause" (Ps. 69:4) was true throughout the Lord’s life (Jn. 15:25) as well as particularly in His death. The Lord spoke of the manna as being a symbol of His body, which He would give on the cross. He described the gift of that bread, that figure of His sacrifice, as not only bread that would come from Heaven but more accurately as bread that *is coming down*, and had been throughout His life (Jn. 6:50,51

Gk.). The spirit of life-giving which there was in His death was shown all through His life.

The fact the Lord died not just because events overtook Him and happened to Him is perhaps reflected in Paul's speaking in Rom. 6 of "the death that he died…the life that he liveth". He died a death; he Himself died it; and yet just as truly, He lived a life. He didn't just let events happen to Him. He was not mastered in His life by human lusts and selfish desires; He was in that sense the only ultimately free person. When He "bowed his head", the same Greek is used as in Mt. 8:20: "The Son of man has no place to lay / bow his head". It was as if He only lay His head down, giving out His life, when He knew it was time to rest from a day's work well done. He lived a surpassingly free life, and freely gave that life up; it was not taken from Him.

That we should be called to imitate our Lord in this should truly fill us with a sense of highness, that we should be called to such a high challenge. 1 Jn. 3:16 takes us even further in this wondrous story, alluding to Jn. 10:17: " Hereby perceive we the love of God (cp. "For this reason the Father loves me", because he *laid down* His life for us: and we ought to *lay down* our lives for the brethren". So intensely was God in Christ on the cross that in a sense He too laid down His life for us, He bowed down for us, laid Himself before our feet as that palsied man was laid before (same word) Jesus. In that final cry from the cross we perceive God's love for us. We too, therefore, should not be put off from laying down our lives for each other because we feel our brethren are spiritually weak. This is the very essence of laying down our lives for each other; we are to replicate the laying down of the life of Christ for us *while we were weak* in our giving of our innermost being for our weak brethren. We are truly at the very boundary of human words to express these things. We must, we *must* respond in practice. And the wonder of it all is that in this final, supreme moment of self-giving, the Lord was identifying with apostate Israel, of whom it had been prophesied: "She hath given up the spirit; her sun is gone down while it was yet day: she hath been ashamed" (Jer. 15:9- all crucifixion language).

10:18 *No one takes it away from me, but I lay it down myself. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it again. This command I received from my Father*- See on :17. He had the right ["authority"] to receive His life again, from the Father, for the Father raised the Son. The resurrection process means that the life we had before resurrection, in our mortal life, is that same life we shall live eternally. And the Lord was our pattern. In this sense we live the eternal life now, living the kind of life, spiritually, which we shall eternally live. Note that He spoke with arresting continuous tenses of how 'The good shepherd *is laying* down his life for the sheep... I *am laying down* my life of myself' (Jn. 10:11,18). He *would be* delivered up, but in principle He went through it in His daily life beforehand.

10:19 *Because of these words, again a division arose among the Jews*- The Lord's presence amongst men does cause division; that is quite a theme of the New Testament. Families divide, and even amongst the Jews there was division over Him. And yet as the New Testament clearly teaches and historically testifies, His presence amongst believers forges a unity of a unique nature, powerful enough to convert the world. This is all foreseen in the prologue, where the separation between light and darkness which occured at creation is used as representative of the fundamental division which must occur between believers and disbelievers in the light. This principle affects who we marry, what we watch and think about, our associations on absolutely every level of thought and practical existence.

10:20 *And many of them said: He has a demon and is mad. Why do you listen to him?*- Madness was attributed to demon possession, and the language of casting out demons often effectively refers to curing mental illness. But "has a demon and is mad" suggests two separate, if related, things. This group of accusers were not simply saying that the Lord was mad. They were implying that His supposed possession by a demon meant that He was on the side of the cosmic enemies they supposed existed- and therefore, His words were madness. "Listen" here implies listening favorably. Clearly amongst the Jewish leadership there were some like Nicodemus and Joseph with some level of belief in Him; but it is a theme of John's Gospel that men must come out for the Lord, and not simply hold a level of quiet, positive view of Him somewhere deep within their hearts.

10:21 *Others said: These are not the sayings of one possessed with a demon. Can a demon possessed person open the eyes of the blind?*- The Lord's miracles were used with economy, but they were necessary in order to demonstrate beyond doubt that the Lord was from God. This was especially necessary in a society where only a few % were literate, and there was no easy access to the Old Testament scrolls for personal study. And the miracles were self-evidently good; the suggestion that the Lord was an agent of some supposed 'Satan' or evil empire was absurd if He was using His supernatural powers to do good.

10:22 *It was the feast of the dedication at Jerusalem*- John's material almost exclusively records what the Lord did and said around the time of the Jewish feasts.

10:23 *It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple along Solomon's porch*- As noted earlier, the material which follows is seamlessly connected with the theme of shepherd and sheep earlier in this chapter. So I suggest that this is read as a general positioning statement for the material both before and after this point in the chapter. I have earlier pointed out the similarities between the idea of a "fold" and of the 'courts' of the temple, for women, Gentiles and Jews. The Lord was standing at the division between the courts of the Gentiles and Jews, and His language of creating only one fold, entrance to which was only through Him, must be read in this context.

The Bible does use (at times) the language of the day, contemporary with the time when it was first inspired. Jn. 10:23 speaks of “Solomon’s colonnade”, but as the NIV Study Bible correctly points out, this was “commonly but erroneously thought to date back to Solomon’s time”. But the error isn’t corrected. The language of the day is used, just as it is concerning demons.

10:24 *The Jews surrounded him and said to him: How long do you hold us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly*- A theme of John's Gospel has been that the Jews did know that the Lord was Messiah, but their dislike of the light, and all it demanded, meant they didn't believe in Him. Hence His answer to this apparent desire for plain clarification was that 'You do not believe' (:25). It's basic human psychology that we put off accepting truth under the smokescreen of needing more information. This is why some will apparently 'search for truth' all their lives- because they don't want to accept the truth they have found, as it demands too much of them personally.

The Lord's response was that their underlying problem was not with His language, but with the simple fact that they did not believe that He, the carpenter from Nazareth, was the Son of God. Is it going too far to suggest that all intellectual failure

to understand the teaching of Jesus is rooted in a simple lack of faith and perception of Him as a person? See on Jn. 16:30.

He had indeed spoken plainly to them- the crowds use the very word in remarking that the Lord spoke plainly / boldly (7:26). He Himself reflected that He had spoken plainly to the Jewish world (18:20). But the disciples too seem to have felt that the Lord was not "plain" in His speech (16:25,29). The reason for 'not getting it' is not because the information has been presented in a hazy manner, or because the intellectual processing of it is too demanding for the hearer. The message of the Lord was plain. But it was the pre-existing sense of self-preservation, of keeping ones own way of life and thinking intact, which meant that the hearers complained about lack of clarity. The Lord predicted His death and resurrection in great detail, in language which could never have been plainer. But the disciples were slow of heart to believe it. The simple message of the Lord Jesus, as explained in the prologue, is light compared to darkness; and it demands our all. Every part of life and thought has to be surrendered to it. And so hearers usually choose to misunderstand, or beg off with excuses about 'not enough information'. John alludes to this issue of speaking plainly when he tells his converts that the Lord's plainness, boldness, is to become ours (1 Jn. 5:14). Life becomes so simple once we have surrendered to Him as the light, and wholeheartedly walk in it.

10:25 *Jesus answered them: I told you and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, these testify of me*- See on :24. There was no unclarity in the Lord's message, and the miracles done were beyond question His authentication as having come from God. Of course, they'd have complained that He had *not* told them in so many words. His comment was that His "works", His life, His being, showed plainly who He was, His personality was "the [plain] word" which they were demanding. He was the word made flesh in totality and to perfection. See on Jn. 14:10. John uses *ergon*, "works", for far more than miracles; effectively the term means 'way of life' in 3:19-21; 6:29; 8:39,41; 1Jn. 3:12). The Lord's being and person, as well as His miracles, was His testimony to men, just as ours should be. It is not publicly performed good works [cp. miracles] which have lasting power in their testimony, but the works of a life worked or done in the Lord.

10:26 *But you do not believe, because you are not of my sheep*- Belief was related to accepting the Lord's words (:27). Those words, His claims, were and are to be accepted without concrete proof [and there is no such thing as concrete proof or else faith would not be faith]. The claims of His person are presented as they are in the Gospel and clearly in the Gospel records. Once they are accepted, then we are His sheep, and are led further if we wish to follow further. It is not that there is something magic in the words of the book called the Bible which creates faith. For many read it and do not believe. The idea is that the words and salvation promises of the Lord Jesus are heard or read, and accepted. The leap in faith is taken. And then all starts to make sense. The Samaritan woman is a case in point. No miracles were done to back up the Lord's claims. She simply believed them.

10:27- see on Mt. 19:28.

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me- The Lord takes the initiative in speaking His word to men, but they must still respond in following; and this is how He 'knows' them, in the Hebraic sense of having a relationship. The "voice" they hear is His words, the essence of Him; not the Bible in its entirety, but "My words". The Lord's references to "My words" in John must be understood as a

reference to Him, the news about Him, His Spirit, the essence of Him as a person. Although His words were the words of God, for the word was God as explained in the prologue, that is not to say that "My words" refer to the Bible as a whole. That would be a confusion of category; rather like saying that Mercedes are cars; but not all cars are Mercedes.

The Hebrew word for 'hear' is also translated 'obey' (Gen. 22:18; Ex. 19:5; Dt. 30:8,20; Ps. 95:7). We can hear God's word and not obey it. But if we *really* hear it as we are intended to, we will obey it. If we truly believe God's word to be His voice personally speaking to us, then we will by the very fact of hearing, obey. The message itself, if heard properly and not just on a surface level, will compel action. We can *delight* to know God's laws and pray daily to Him, when at the same time we are forsaking Him and His laws; if we are truly obedient, *then* we will *delight* in God's law (Is. 58:2 cp. 14). We have a tendency to have a love of and delight in God's law only on the surface. John especially often uses 'hearing' to mean 'believing' (e.g. Jn. 10:4,26,27). And yet the Jews 'heard' but didn't believe. We must, we really must ask ourselves: whether we merely hear, or hear and believe. For we can hear, but not really hear, if we lack the "obedience of faith".

The Lord knows His sheep according to whether they follow Him, i.e. whether they take up His cross and follow Him. The question of cross carrying therefore reveals a man to his Lord for what he is. And it also reveals the Lord to His would be followers for who He really is. His words, that which is seen and heard in Him, is a call to follow Him to the cross.

10:28 *And I give to them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand*- The gift of eternal life is in the present tense, in that the Lord gives His spirit to us, the kind of life we can eternally live. "They shall never perish" refers to the condemnation of the last day; if we continue living the Kingdom life now, we shall not be condemned. If the Spirit of the Lord Jesus abides in us now, that same Spirit shall energize our bodies after the power of an endless life (Rom. 8:11).

The eternal type of life being given is an ongoing process. Consider the repeated parallelisms in the Lord's teaching:

Labour / work, as Israel worked to gather manna, as the crowds walked around the lake to get to Jesus	For the food that gives eternal life
Believe in me	Receive eternal life
Eat me daily, eat / absorb my body and blood, the essence of My sacrifice; have this as your real food and drink in life	Receive eternal life
Come to me, having heard and learnt of the Father	Never hunger, never perish, receive eternal life
Behold the son, believe on him	Receive eternal life

"I am", God manifested in the person of Jesus	The bread that gives eternal life
The manna of Christ	Gives eternal life
Jesus came down from Heaven [i.e. manifested the Father]	Gives life unto the world
By Jesus doing God's will	I get eternal life for you ("the world" of believers)
By giving His blood to drink and flesh to eat	Gives eternal life
The Spirit and words of Jesus	Quickens / gives eternal life

The Spirit of Jesus, His disposition, His mindset, His way of thinking and being, is paralleled with His words and His person. They both 'quicken' or give eternal life, right now. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth [present tense]… the words that I speak unto you, they are [right now] spirit, and they are life… thou hast [right now] the words of eternal life" (Jn. 6:63,68). Yet at the last day, God will quicken the dead and physically give them eternal life (Rom. 4:17; 1 Cor. 15:22,36). But this will be because in this life we had the 'Spirit' of the eternal life in us: "He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by [on account of] his spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8:11).

This unreal shepherd not only dies for the sheep but gives them eternal life, making them eternal sheep (Jn. 10:28). We'd understand it more comfortably if He spoke of giving His life for people, and then them living for ever. But He speaks of giving eternal life to a sheep, who wouldn't have a clue what that really entailed. But that's just how it is with us, who by grace are receiving an eternal Kingdom, the wonderful implications of which are beyond our appreciation, due to the intrinsic limitations of who we are as sheep. See on Jn. 15:15.

The context of chapter 10 is the shameful treatment of the blind man by the Jewish shephereds in chapter 9. The Lord is assuring His flock that if they hear His voice, then He will preserve them from any robbers who seek to grab them for themselves.

10:29 *My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand*- The gift of the sheep was before the Lord called the sheep with His voice / word, and they responded. This reference to the gift of the sheep surely speaks of the predestination, foreknowledge and calling which Paul cites in Romans as the parade example of God's grace. The Father being greater than the Son means that the Lord's assurances of *His* protection and eternal salvation are made yet the more sure, because the Father was greater than Him but upholding the same passionate desire for our preservation unto salvation.

10:30 *I and the Father are one*- The protective, saving hand of the Son is that of the Father, for they both have the same will and determination for human salvation. This is the context of their being "one", in purpose and function rather than in person and nature, as wrongly supposed by Trinitarian thinking. In chapter 17, the Lord envisages the unity between the Father and Son being that between all His people, and

between themselves and the Father and Himself. Clearly, the unity spoken of is not any support for the confused theology of Trinitarianism.

10:31 *Once again the Jews took up stones to stone him*- This was anger on the spur of the moment; there had been no trial, no verdict issued; and the Jews could only recommend the death penalty for the Romans to carry out. I suggest that their excuse that He was blaspheming was a cover for the fact that their consciences had been pricked by the Lord's challenge that belief in Him meant they were the Father's sheep and would be protected unto life eternal. And if they didn't believe- they were not the Father's flock at all.

10:32- see on Jn. 9:36; 17:20.

Jesus said to them: Many good works have I shown you from the Father. For which of those works do you stone me?- I noted on :25 that "works" refer not only to the miracles but to the Lord's whole life. But here the reference appears to be to His miracles, and the Lord's logic appeals to those who had likewise concluded that a bad man could simply not do such wonderful miracles unless God was intimately with Him. The Lord's miracles were "shown to the Jews just as the Father had "shown" Him which works to perform (5:20 s.w.). The idea surely is that the Lord did not merely encounter human need and use His power to resolve it; for He offered walked by such need without intervening. Rather He was shown miracles to perform, and did them accordingly, in an attempt to show the Father to the Jews. However in 14:8,9 we see that the disciples had failed to perceive this 'showing' of the Father to them. Their belief and perception was very weak, but the Lord still worked with them to perfect what they had- just as He does with us.

10:33 *The Jews answered him: For a good work we do not stone you, but for blasphemy, and because you, being a man, make yourself as God!*- John's Gospel records many interactions between the Lord and the Jews. Every single time they misunderstand Him and wrongly interpret His words and positions, often intentionally in order to make an accusation against Him. And so it is here. Trinitarians have to assume that this time, they got it right- that the Jews correctly interpreted Him; whereas the Lord Himself stated that they did not understand His words (8:43). Not only would such a reading be quite out of step with the emphasis upon the Jews' misunderstandings of the Lord, but He Himself goes on to demonstrate that their claim was inappropriate because men can be called "God", and He was only claiming to be the *Son* of God.

10:34 *Jesus answered them: Is it not written in your law: I said, you are gods?*- "Your law" is another example of how God's law had become their law; His feasts were now "feasts of the Jews". They had hijacked His way and turned it into their own religion. The Lord Jesus is really saying ‘In the Old Testament men are called ‘gods’; I am saying I am the *Son* of God; so why are you getting so upset?’. The Lord Jesus is actually quoting from Ps. 82, where the judges of Israel were called ‘gods’. And yet the context is critical of those judges; to bear the name of 'God' didn't mean one was acceptable to God. And it is no accident that the Lord chose to quote an example of where Israel's leaders bear God's Name but are apostate. He was turning the tables on the Jewish leadership who were accusing Him of claiming to be God. It was in fact they who bore the name of God- and yet were to be condemned for not responding to the word / *logos* of God which had come to them.

10:35 *If he called those men gods, to whom the word of God came (and the scripture*

cannot be broken)- As noted on :35, the apostate leaders of Israel were the ones who bore the Name of God. The word / *logos* of God had come to them in that as pictured in the prologue, the *logos* of God in Jesus of Nazareth had 'come' to Israel and they had rejected it. The word of God came to the Old Testament judges of Israel [the context of Psalm 82] in that they were to judge according to His word. The Lord may have in mind the LXX of 2 Chron. 19:6 where the judges of Israel are warned to judge rightly, because the *logos* of God is with them, had been given them, to judge rightly. The same idea is found in Dt. 1:17 where again the judges of Israel are warned in the LXX to judge according to the *logos* of God and not reject it in favour of human sympathies. In this sense perhaps Heb. 4:13 speaks of being judged by the *logos* of God. In the person of the Lord Jesus, the *logos* of God had come to the judges of Israel- and they were refusing to judge rightly because of their own agendas and personal investments.

The Lord adds that "the scripture cannot be broken" or dissolved / unloosed, quoting a common Rabbinical saying found often in the Talmud. The Lord didn't mean that 'the Bible doesn't contradict itself', because there are contradictory statements in the Bible, and God often teaches through paradox. And the Mosaic law part of Scripture has indeed been unloosed in Christ; the word is used by John of how the Lord unloosed the Sabbath legislation (5:18). The Lord had used the very same word in 7:23, arguing that in order not to break or unloose the Law of Moses, the Jews circumcised boys on the Sabbath- but thereby they broke or unloosed the laws about the Sabbath. So He is using their own misplaced ideals, quoting their own maxim about Scripture not being broken, appealing to their claim that such paradoxes could not be countenanced. If indeed there was to be no possible contradiction between Scripture verses, then they were trounced. Logically, the case was watertight. Bible verses, Scripture, state that men carry the Name of God. And condemn such men, because the *logos* of God came to them and they did not judge according to it. And so there was no reason to stone a man, even if he claimed to carry God's Name. And further, the Lord was not stating that, rather was He claiming to be God's Son. And further; by not judging according to the word / *logos* which had come to them, it was they who were breaking or unloosing Scripture, leaving God's word broken by them, in that they judged by the outward appearance rather than by the word which demanded right judgment on their part. And if indeed Scripture could not be broken, they could not walk away from the fact the word had come to them. The passage of time would never take away their responsibility to respond to that word.

10:36- see on Jn. 17:20.

Do you say of him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world: You blaspheme, because I said: I am the Son of God?- As noted on :34 and :35, the Lord was not claiming to be God; the accusation was misplaced and a wilful misinterpretation. His claim was to be the Son of God. However, that claim is nowhere recorded. It was insofar as the word was made flesh that He proclaimed the Father in a way that only the begotten Son could do. His life was therefore effectiely the statement that He was God's Son; but He never actually uses those words in any recorded speech in the Gospels.

We have here a brief and rare window into how the Lord perceived His life before age 30. The Lord Jesus says that He was "consecrated" [as a priest or High Priest], and then sent into the world, at age 30. That's how He looked back and understood those 30 years of mundane village life- a process of consecration, of purifying, of preparation. He saw that none of the multitude of daily frustrations was without purpose- it was all part of His preparation. And perhaps we'll look back on

these brief years of our humanity in the same way. But the point is that the Lord's mundane life before 30 was actually an active preparation of Him for service.

10:37 *If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not*- Here and in :38 the Lord seems to countenance and encourage a level of belief which was simply an acceptance that the Father was working through Him; even if they disliked Him personally, and His personality and Galilean background, or other trappings of His humanity, were simply too obnoxious to them. John's Gospel positively and generously reports that many "believed" in Him perhaps in this way. And yet John's Gospel also emphasizes the need to ultimately come out for Him, and to accept that He as a person, with all His humanity, was and is the only light of life. So I would conclude that the Lord was eager for them to at least accept His "works" or miracles as being done from God; for He knew that with that level of acceptance, He could go further and work with them towards a higher level of commitment. His work with Nicodemus woud be a case in point.

10:38 *But if I do them, though you do not believe me, believe the works; that you may know and understand, that the Father is in me and I in the Father*- See on :37 for discussion of this apparently lower level of faith being encouraged. The Lord had just quoted Psalm 82 about these men, implying they as the judges of Israel stood condemned. But He didn't want them to stay like that; He urges them toward at least some level of faith that the miracles He was doing were indeed from God.

This verse parallels knowing and believing, as in 17:8. Jn. 10:38 in the AV has the Lord Jesus beseeching men to "know and *believe*", whereas the RV/ NEV has "know and *understand*". Understanding was not therefore related to academic prowess in interpretting Scripture; the Lord was challenging their Jewish supposition that knowledge of itself was so critical. Instead He is saying that the real understanding or knowledge is belief in Him. To know Him is to believe in Him; that is the understanding required. And the illiterate masses could in any case not attain much academic understanding of Scripture at that time; but they could understand / know / believe in the Lord Jesus.

10:39 *Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands*- He wished to die at a specific point, at a Passover; and as stated in :17,18, He gave His life and it was not taken from Him. He therefore had the power to avoid arrest and stoning; the fact He used it at times like this underlines the fact that it was indeed His love and self-control which kept Him on the cross, rather than the nails. He could have come down from the cross and avoided it in the form it was. He had that power, and had exercised it at times like this. Truly He gave His life for us; it was not taken from Him.

10:40 *He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at first, and there he remained*- Perhaps we see here the Lord's sentimentality, which is a legitimate part of human nature. He returned to the place where He was baptized, far from anywhere, to meditate. And again we note that "at the first", the beginning, is used in John for the beginning of the Lord's ministry, as made clear in the prologue.

10:41- see on Gal. 3:5.

Many came to him. And they said: John did no miracle, but everything that John said about this man was true- Several times during his ministry Elijah did spectacular miracles to confirm the validity of his message. The fact that "John did no miracle" is perhaps recorded in order to show that he was not the supreme fulfilment of the

prophet who would come "in the spirit and power of Elias" (Luke 1:17), i.e. doing similar miracles to those of Elijah. John could have been the Elijah prophet in fullness, for in a sense he was Elijah; but Israel would not. We see here how potentials are set up, which may never be realized because of our weakness or that of others. The Holy Spirit was upon John from the womb; but he did no miracle. Here we see encouragement for us- that the activity of the Spirit in our lives, which John's Gospel continually alludes to, doesn't require that we perform miracles. It is very wrong to assume as Pentecostalism does that the Spirit = miracles; just as it is so wrong to assume that because the miraculous gifts are no longer available, therefore the Holy Spirit is not given to men today. Perhaps this observation about John doing no miracle is purposefully included in John's Gospel because he was writing at a time when the miraculous gifts were disappearing, but there was an urgent need to accept the Holy Spirit in the sense of the internal strengthening which is critical to the Christian life.

10:42 *And many believed in him there*- The fact many came to Him (:41) and believed is maybe another example of how the Lord went away to seek solitude, but the crowds still followed Him. Perhaps hearing Him speak at the spot where He had been baptized inspired the crowds to also believe and be baptized. This remains the abiding power of the example He set in being baptized Himself.

JOHN CHAPTER 11

11:1 *Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, of the village of Mary and her sister Martha-*

"Now" can as well be translated "but". In this case, we have yet another example of how the Lord's plans were interrupted by human need. At the end of John 10, the Lord has gone for some break into Peraea, but now He must return to Judea. The disciples will comment upon this abrupt change of plan. And so we see that the Lord didn't have every detail of His ministry foreknown; He allowed human need to bring about changes of plan. Just as it seems He still does today.

The 'sickness' is emphasized (:1,2,3,6). Presumably he had only recently fallen sick (the Lord heard about it at this time, :4,6). Otherwise, the question is raised as to why he had not been cured when so many other "sick" people had been cured by the Lord and His disciples. Lazarus is introduced as a sick man from Bethany, which was also the home town of Martha and Mary. Why not introduce him immediately as the brother of Mary and Martha? Here we have an example of where the Gospel writers operate as a cameraman, focusing on a particular aspect of a person. The focus is hereby placed upon the man Lazarus and his human situation, he stands as an individual in need rather than being presented as someone defined by his family members. This is of course how the Lord looks upon each of us- as independent individuals, even if society looks at us in terms of our being defined by our relatives and social situation.

11:2 *And it was that Mary who had anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick*- The anointing of John 12 is after this; so presumably it is the anointing by the "woman in the city who was a sinner" of Luke 7 which is in view. And that woman was Mary, a repentant prostitute. The fact the Lord and His men often stayed at her family home in a poor out of town dormitory settlement ["Bethany" = 'house of the poor'] would surely have elicited all manner of gossip. A very interesting picture of Mary emerges when the pieces of the Biblical jigsaw are put together.

11:3 *The sisters therefore sent to him, saying*- The "therefore" may refer to the fact that it was that Mary who had anointed the Lord (:2). They knew that He knew and recognized her love for Him and total devotion to Him. On that basis they feel confident to ask His action for a third party. For Lazarus himself could not pray to the Lord- but He is open, as today, to the requests of third parties.

Lord, he whom you loves is sick- This is *phileo* , whereas the Lord loved them with *agape;* see on :5. There was no request for specific action, just a statement of the problem. David's Psalms so often simply inform God of the situation, rather than suggesting specific answers. In this case, the Lord read their unspoken desire- that death would not triumph. Although they had not articulated it, verbalization isn't required. The Lord read their spirit and responded. And this is why the events of Jn. 11 are alluded to in Romans 8, where we read of the Lord's intercession for our groanings and unspoken desires through absorbing them into His own spirit.

John 11 several times presents Lazarus as the one the Lord loved. From now on in John, we read of the "disciple whom Jesus loved", who is clearly the author of John's Gospel. This gives rise to the speculation- and it is no more than that- that the beloved disciple was in fact Lazarus. A letter written by Clement referenced a young man named John Eleazar [a form of 'Lazarus'] whom Jesus raised from the dead, and this may account for the name. The gospel of John is centered in Judea, the place Lazarus lived, whereas the synoptic gospels, which do not mention the Lazarus story, center more on Galilee. John's Gospel has previously identified Lazarus as the disciple whom Jesus loved: "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus" (Jn. 11:5); and Lazarus is presented in Jn. 12:2 as sitting with Jesus at another such meal, being "one of them that sat at the table with him". The anonymity would be understandable in order to protect him from persecution as the Gospel accounts were distributed. Mark's Gospel likewise speaks of "a certain young man" (Mk. 14:51). Bullinger in The Companion Bible suggests this person was also Lazarus: "That this might be Lazarus, is probable: (1) because the Lord had returned to Bethany each preceding night of that week; (2) because Lazarus would be looking out; (3) because of the linen robe, betokening his social position; (4) and especially because he was wanted: "The chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death" (John 12:10). None of the apostles were arrested. Peter (though suspected) and another (John 18:15) were unmolested; (5) his name is not given here by Divine guidance, because Lazarus was probably still alive and therefore in danger". If "the disciple whom Jesus loved" was in fact Lazarus, this sheds some light on the ending of John's Gospel in Jn. 21:20-23. Some confusion is clarified over the supposition and rumour that "that disciple should not die". Because Lazarus had been resurrected by the Lord there was naturally a question as to whether he would die again- and that question is clarified. Note that it is John's Gospel which alone records Lazarus' resurrection, and it is that Gospel which understandably clarifies the question. In this case we need to revisit Jn. 21:24- "This is the disciple which testifies of these things". The "things" in view would then not be the entire Gospel, but the incident by the sea, and it was Lazarus therefore who would've written John 21. That there was a Divinely inspired editorial hand at work in John's Gospel is evident from the comment that "we know that his testimony [Lazarus', the eye witness] is rrue". This suggestion about Lazarus explains the old question as to why John didn't refer to himself more directly in his own Gospel and appears to present himself as anonymous. These are of course just suggestions, but if they appeal to you- then we have another non-member of the twelve present at the Last Supper. Joachim Jeremias is still likely unsurpassed in the amount of scholarly attention he gave to the Last Supper. And he concludes:

“According to Mark 14 and Mt.26,20, Jesus was surrounded by his twelve disciples at the Last Supper. But we may not without further ado conclude from this that the women mentioned in Mark 15,40 and Luke 23,49-55 had been excluded. An Oriental text does not allow this kind of argument from silence. Neither may we attach too much importance to the fact that this composition of attendance at the meal (Jesus and the Twelve) reported in Mark 14,17 is nowhere else expressly mentioned in the Gospels: it is certainly a pure coincidence. On the contrary, it is almost certain that during his ministry of preaching, Jesus had the habit of taking his meals with the great circle of those listening to him. That follows from the warning given to hypocrites that it would serve them no purpose to be able to state that they had eaten at the same table as Jesus during his preachings in their country (Luke 13, 26ff). Mark reports that quite often Jesus was so pressed by the crowd around him that is was impossible for him to take his food (Mk. 3,20; 6,31). Often, and especially on sabbaths (Mk. 1,29-31; Lk. 14,1), Jesus was invited to meals with other participants (Mk. 14,3; Lk. 7,36;11,37; John 2,1-11). Occasionally he himself entertained invited guests (Lk.15,1f; compare Jn. 1,39). On one occasion he even had a great number of invited guests (Mk. 2,15). The characterisation of Jesus as ‘a glutton and drunkard, friend of Publicans and sinners’ (Mt. 11,19) confirms the fact that meals in large assemblies happened frequently. Often during his travelling around, it was quite natural for Jesus to take his meals surrounded by his disciples and fans... (Mk. 6,32-44; 8,14; Jn. 4,8.31;21,12)”.

11:4- see on Jn. 1:14;13:32.

But when Jesus heard it, he said: This sickness is not to death- But it obviously was, humanly speaking. His point would later become clear- that death is now reinterpreted by Him, and is to be understood differently by those in Him. Death means something radically different for us, in comparison to unbelievers. Again we see how the Lord is using language and seeing things differently to those around Him. He was trying to get the disciples to perceive a difference between the death of a believer in hope of resurrection, and "death" in the sense of total, permanent loss of existence. For He goes on to say plainly that "Lazarus is dead". Through this apparent contradiction, the Lord was seeking to help them develop a realization that death is not ultimately death for those associated with Him. But as so often, the disciples failed to catch on. Yet later in the discourse, He again seeks to encourage Martha to believe that His promises of life beyond death actually have application in this life too.

But for the glory of God- The glory of the Son of God was and is the glory of God. The Lord stated that the sickness of Lazarus “is not unto death, but for the glory of God”. That sounds like a predictive statement. But it seems to have been conditional. For one thing, that sickness did lead to the death of Lazarus. But notice the Lord’s later comment to Martha when her faith wavered in the possibility of immediate resurrection for Lazarus: “Said I not unto you, that if you would believe, you would see the glory of God?” (Jn. 11:40). But the Lord isn’t recorded as actually having said that. What He had said was that the sickness of Lazarus would reveal the glory of God, in a way as dramatic as an Old Testament theophany, when God's glory was literally revealed in visible terms. But He had intended Martha to understand the conditionality of that statement- i.e. ‘If you can believe Martha, Lazarus can be saved from that sickness and its effects, and thus glory will be given to God’. But again, we see the Lord’s grace. She didn’t have that faith. She was concerned that even the taking away of the grave stone would release the odour of her brother’s dead body.

But Jesus didn't say 'Well Martha, no faith on your part, no resurrection of Lazarus, no glory to God this time'. By grace alone, He raised Lazarus. He overrode the conditionality. And so it must happen so often, and so tragically unperceived, in our lives.

That thereby the Son of God may be glorified- This is very much the language of the glorification of God's Son through His death and resurrection (Jn. 12:23; 13:31; 17:1). But the essence of His experience on the cross was worked out in His life before that time came. Perhaps this was why the Lord specifically waited two days where He was, knowing that the time it took to get to Bethany would occupy another day, so that Lazarus would be resurrected after three days in the grave wrapped in graveclothes, as He was to be. Perhaps His reference to "twelve hours" and walking through a day or night is to be understood as alluding to how far away they literally were from Bethany (:9). The "four days" in the grave of :17 could refer to two full days and two partial days. The Lord wanted to see Himself in Lazarus, and He arranged situations to that end; just as He desires to see Himself in us all, and allows suffering and delays His responses to that end. This is the essence of Christianity- being made into the *morphe* or form / image of the crucified, resurrected and victorious Christ; being made conformable unto His death, that the power of His new life might be seen in us (Phil. 3:10).

11:5 *Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus*- This is *agape*. The sisters had said that Jesus 'loved' Lazarus, using *phileo* (:3 "He whom you love"). They considered Him a friend with *phileo* love, but He actually loved them with *agape* love. We may consider the Lord Jesus to be on our side because He has fellowshipped with us and helped us out in times of need. But the essence of His love is *agape*, the love of the cross, so far above how we perceive His love for us in more material, earthly terms.

11:6 *When he heard that Lazarus was sick, he therefore stayed two days longer in the place where he was*- The "therefore" perhaps relates to His *agape* love for them introduced in :5. It was because of this love that He allowed Lazarus to die; because He had a longer term, loving plan for their ultimate salvation. Spirituality can affect third parties; in this case, Lazarus was raised because of Martha and Mary's faith. And so it can be that our prayers and intercessions for others can bring about some degree of salvation for them which otherwise wouldn't happen. We also see that the Lord can delay things, not least His second coming, because He is working along with human freewill in order to achieve a greater glory for the Father. His delay in responding to prayer and entreaty is not because of inattention or deafness; rather is it because He has a far wider purpose, to an even greater glory than providing instant response to our needs.

11:7 *Then after this, he said to the disciples: Let us go into Judea again*- He had specifically withdrawn from Judea because the Jews sought to kill Him, and His game plan was to die not then but at the Passover. Remember that He gave His life of Himself in His own time and of His volition (10:17,18).

Although the disciples marvelled at His miracles at the time He did them, they seem to have doubted at times whether He was really that super-human. When He said "Let us go up to Judaea again", they respond like He is crazy: "Goest *thou* [you singular] there again?" (AV), they respond. They feared the Jews would kill Him, even though they had seen Him walk through the Nazareth crowd who tried to throw Him over a cliff.

11:8 *The disciples said to him: Rabbi, only a few days ago the Jews wanted to stone you; and you want to go there again?*- The implication of how the disciples reason is that they were unaware that Lazarus was seriously ill. Perhaps the messenger delivered the message to the Lord Jesus alone. He didn't share the news with the disciples. They would've wondered what His game plan was, making them stay two more days where they were. We likewise don't know His full game plan with us, and there are inexplicable delays and sitting around in the same place, in various ways; but one day we shall understand why this was. And even in this life, as in this case, we may come to understand later. Although they had seen the Lord walk through aggressive crowds and lynching situations, they feared that He would die. We see here how they had zoned out to the Lord's frequent predictions of His upcoming death. Rather should they have been wondering whether these words were the sign that the Lord's predicted death was now to happen. But like Peter in Matthew 16, they wish to discourage Him from death.

11:9 *Jesus answered: Are there not twelve hours in the day? If a man walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world*-

The Lord as a labourer alludes to the idea of a working man working a 12 hour day. His idea is: 'I have not yet reached the end of My working-day, and so can safely continue the work I came to do. The night comes, My death, when I can no longer work; but it hasn't yet come'. And if they walked with Him in His light, they would likewise be unharmed by this proposed journey into hostile territory.

The Lord is replying to the disciples' apparent concern that *He* is risking His life by going again into Judea. But His response challenges *their* fears, by assuring them that if they 'walk in the light', "the light of the world", they will 'not stumble'. All these ideas are used elsewhere in John concerning the walk of *the disciple* in the light of Christ, the light of the world. He thereby perceives that their concern about *His* suffering and death is actually because they are concerned about themselves. Elsewhere, Peter expresses concern about the Lord's prediction of His death, that "this shall not be unto you" (Mt. 16:22). But again the Lord's response is to encourage Peter to follow Him, carrying His cross. Our barrier in considering the physicalities of the Lord's crucifixion may likewise not simply be because we love Him and fear to see again His sufferings; but because unconsciously, we realize that His death is to be ours. And we would rather not focus upon His death, for it is to be ours. The Lord is encouraging them here that if they are focused upon Him, walking in the light of Himself, then they will not stumble spiritually, and can also confidently walk into Judea, to Jerusalem and even to death itself, knowing that most importantly, they will not spiritually stumble. No test will be so great as to make us fall spiritually: "God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

11:10 *But if a man walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him*- "In him" shows the Lord has in view the internal light in the heart, the presence of His Spirit amongst those who accepted Him. In John's letters, there are many allusions back to John's Gospel. This is an example. The reason for the connections is because the gospel of John is as it were a transcript of John's preaching of the Gospel; it became written down as a text for the basic instruction of John's converts. Once communities of believers had been baptized and established on this basis, John then wrote letters to them. And it is understandable that he would base his appeals for Christian living on the facts of the Gospel message which the converts had first learnt

in the Gospel of John. The allusion to Jn. 11:10 is in 1 Jn. 2:10,11: "He that loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he goes, because the darkness has blinded his eyes". The context of Jn. 11:10 is about a beloved brother, Lazarus, brother of sisters Martha and Mary. John is surely making the point that if the Lord and the disciples had not gone to raise Lazarus, because they feared for their own wellbeing, then this would effectively have been hating their brother. Here we see powerfully presented the full extent of sins of omission; to not respond to the need of Lazarus, citing fear of the Jews, would be to effectively hate that brother. And we all likely need such exhortation as to the real import of omitting to do what we could. The Lord walked those 12 hours to Bethany with the disciples following, willing if necessary to "die with Him". And the context in 1 Jn. 2 also alludes to this: "He that says he abides in him, ought also walk even as he walked" (1 Jn. 2:6).

11:11 *These things he spoke, and after this he said to them: Our friend Lazarus is fallen asleep, but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep*-

Sleep is a common figure for death (Mt. 27:52; Acts 7:50; 13:36; 1 Cor. 7:39; 11:30; 15:6,18; 1 Thess. 4:13; 2 Pet. 3:4). 'Cemetery' means literally a sleeping place.

I suggest on :19 that the presence of "the Jews" at the funeral suggests Lazarus had not 'come out' for the cause of Jesus as he might have done. But the Lord still considered Lazarus as His "friend", a term used for those He accepted as His disciples (Jn. 15:13-15; 3 Jn. 14).

Jesus believed that He had already raised Lazarus back to life and so He was now asking him to come out of the grave. Presumably there were just seconds in it- He raised Lazarus, and then, invited Lazarus to come out. Jesus spoke to Lazarus as a person speaks to another living person. He didn't invite the immortal soul of Lazarus to reunite with the body. He raised Lazarus from the dead- that was the miracle. Jesus said that He 'awoke Lazarus out of sleep'- not reunited a 'soul' with a body.

11:12 *The disciples replied to him: Lord, if he is fallen asleep, he will recover*- The Lord Jesus speaks of sleeping in death, and going to resurrect Lazarus; they understand 'sleep' as literal sleeping, which they think will cure Lazarus. Time and again, we sense how the Lord's thinking was out of step with those closest to Him. His mother asks Him to make more wine, and He replies that His hour [of death] has not yet come; she thinks of literal wine, whereas His thought is on the blood which wine represented. He tells Nicodemus to be born again, and the man thinks He means entering again into his mother's tubes. He tells the disciples that He has food to eat which they don't know about, referring to the work He was doing with the Samaritan woman- and the disciples think someone has brought Him literal food without their knowledge. As the Son of God, the Lord was of super high intelligence, and this was particularly acutely honed when it came to spiritual things. Those with above average IQ frequently experience frustration, angst and existential loneliness as they have to exist amongst the mass of smaller minded folk who comprise humanity generally. Yet the Lord clearly rose above all that, because despite this spiritual and intellectual distance, He was naturally attractive to children and to the poorest and simplest of society. And in this He sets us an example, if we struggle with a sense of distance between ourselves and others. See on 11:14 *Then Jesus said to them plainly*.

11:13 *Now Jesus had spoken of Lazarus' death; but they thought that he spoke of Lazarus taking rest in sleep*- See on :12. Constantly, the figurative is taken literally by

them, and they only think of the secular rather than the spiritual. This was just as the Jewish leaders did. So it is not that the disciples understood the Lord better than they did; they had the same misunderstandings as the Jews, but somehow believed in Him. This observation is proof enough that intellectual clarity of understanding is not the same as faith.

11:14 *Then Jesus said to them plainly: Lazarus is dead*- See on :12 *Lord, if he is fallen asleep, he will recover.* Was there a sense of frustration in the tone of the Lord, that they hadn't 'got it' when He had spoken of Lazarus sleeping? I like to think not, but rather the gentleness of a parent explaining something a second time but in more simple language. It makes a good exercise to think what tone of voice the Lord spoke in whenever we read His reported speech. We also sense a relief amongst the disciples, that now their Lord was talking to them on their own level. We get the same feeling at Jn. 16:25,29: "These things have I spoken to you in figurative language. The hour comes, when I shall no longer speak to you in figurative language, but shall show you plainly about the Father... His disciples said: Now you speak plainly". John's Gospel records the Lord speaking in "figurative language", to the point that the Jews demanded He tell them "plainly" whether He was Messiah (Jn. 10:24); the other Gospels tend to focus on His 'plain speaking', and the same word is found in Mk. 8:32 for how Jesus "spoke plainly" (AV "openly"). In this sense, the Lord insisted that He had 'spoken plainly' to the Jewish world (Jn. 18:20). Higher critics like to imagine that the words of Jesus recorded in John were never spoken by Him because they are so different in tone to those recorded in the Synoptics. It could appear that we are being presented with two different personalities, the Jesus of John and the Jesus of the Synoptics. I don't accept this; rather does the evidence in John suggest that He spoke in two different styles, "figurative" [which John tends to record] and "plainly", and the disciples struggled to understand the "figurative" parts. Just as we do. But see on :16.

11:15- see on Lk. 8:27.

And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe- The Lord would weep at the grave; yet He also had joy at the prospect of God's glory being achieved. We see an insight into His humanity; for we can have the emotions of joy and sorrow at one and the same time. Again we see the psychological credibility of the record. We will note on :33 the Lord's emotions of anger and sorrow at the same time. The Lord's joy was that the disciples would believe. So His joy was that He had not been there, because He knew that His resurrection of Lazarus would develop their faith. And He did this even though He wept for the loss of His friend Lazarus which was temporarily required for this.

So the Lord Jesus seems to have purposefully not gone to Lazarus immediately, knowing that the longer he remained dead, the greater would be the impression made upon the disciples when they saw the miracle He planned to do (Jn. 11:15). He was even glad that Lazarus died- even though He wept over the loss of His friend. Thus His joy, which He invites us to share, is not mere personal joy- it was the joy for the sake of others' spiritual growth.

The Lord knew that His love of Lazarus was such that had He been present, He would have stopped Lazarus from dying. We have here another insight into His humanity. He knew that His emotions would have led Him to do the cure. From a distance He still could have cured Lazarus, for distance was no barrier to His healings, His physical presence wasn't required (Lk. 7:7-10). So the Lord is recognizing that His human senses and emotions would have been such that He would have cured Lazarus, but because they were not exercised so strongly, by reason of His not being physically present, He therefore restrained Himself and allowed Lazarus to die. And

He was "glad" about that, because the resurrection of Lazarus would result in their 'believing'. Again we see how there are levels of faith. The disciples already believed; but He saw that their faith would increment to another level on witnessing the resurrection of Lazarus. Martha knew that if Jesus had been physically present, her brother would have been healed: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (:21). We can understand this as meaning that she knew Him well enough to know that His pity would have been so deeply aroused by the sight of the terminally ill Lazarus that He would have cured Him. In this we see another insight into His humanity. His followers certainly didn't think He was God Himself. But see another possibility on :21.

Nevertheless let us go to him- The meaning of the "nevertheless" is hard to find, unless we follow the reasoning presented above about physical presence; see 11:15 *I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe*. Although the Lord's physical presence wasn't required for the miracle, nevertheless, He wanted to go there and raise Lazarus in front of them all- "so that you may believe". In this case, as often in the Gospels, the Lord was speaking a word more to Himself than to His listeners; the "nevertheless" was relevant to His own deep awareness that He could merely say the word, and Lazarus would rise from the dead. The language of "let us go to him" implies that His dead friend was alive; which is how He looks at all who have fallen asleep in Him. For all live unto God (Rom. 4:17,18).

11:16 *Thomas therefore, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples: Let us also go, that we may die with him*-

"Didymus" can simply mean that he was a twin, but in the deeper, more figurative background of John's gospel we wonder whether this simply means that he was twin minded (James 1:8; 4:8). Faith and unbelief, understanding and misunderstanding, were within him at one and the same time. Here we have an example; on one hand he fails to understand the Lord, but on the other, he is willing to "die with Him".

See on :14. There is no record that the Lord corrected the disciples' misunderstanding that He was going to commit suicide in order to "go unto" Lazarus. He let events take their course and allowed the disciples to reflect upon the situation in order to come to a truer understanding of His words. He was willing to accept their simple devotion, despite their lack of understanding. And surely He looks at misunderstanding folk today in the same way; and that includes all of us in some ways.

When the Lord spoke of going to Lazarus, they thought He was going to commit suicide. They hoped He would redeem Israel in glory, there and then. But such was their devotion to Him as their Saviour, even though they didn't understand how He was going to work it out, that Thomas solemnly ordered them, as they huddled together out of the Lord's earshot: "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (Jn. 11:16). I imagine dear Peter solemnly nodding in agreement, thinking of his wife and dear children back in that fisherman's cottage. But he was serving for nothing, for sheer love of his Lord. And he was prepared to die for Him, even if it meant receiving nothing of the present benefits he thought Jesus of Nazareth might bring for him. And yet the Lord demands such devotion from all of us. The tired servant can labour all day for Him, but immediately he returns, the Lord expects him to *immediately* prepare a meal, and doesn't expect to thank us. As it happens, He elsewhere intimated that He will praise us at the judgment, He Himself will serve us

(Lk. 12:37). But the attitude of serving for nothing, for no thanks even, must be with us now, in this life.

"Let us also go, that we may die with him" is yet another example of the disciples being out of step with their Lord, understanding Him on a more human, literal level when He was speaking on another level. But John's Gospel was written, under inspiration, by John. By recording all these examples of the different levels between the Lord and His followers, he is expressing what the Synoptic writers state more directly- that the disciples did not understand. And this was and is a great comfort to those encountering the Gospel for the first time today. Complete understanding is not required of disciples, but rather simple faith. There is no record here that the Lord corrected their misunderstanding, indeed in most of the incidents where they misunderstand, He doesn't specifically correct them, but rather left time and the Father's further leading to clarify the point to those who were thoughtful and reflective. The same can be seen in His attitude to the language of demons.

11:17 *So when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in his tomb for four days*- "He found" could possibly suggest that He was unaware Lazarus had been dead so long. Perhaps He had intended to perform the resurrection three and not four days after the death of Lazarus, in order to encourage them all to believe that He too after three days would rise again. But see on :4 *That thereby the Son of God may be glorified.* The period could refer to two full days and two part days.

11:18 *Now Bethany was near to Jerusalem, about three kilometres away*- This is the reason why many of "the Jews" came to the funeral (:19), and confirms our suggestion under :19 that "the Jews" were the Jewish leadership, specifically the Jerusalem leadership.

11:19 *And many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother*- Literally "from among the Jews". "The Jews" refers to the Jewish leadership, and suggests that Lazarus had not been cast out of the Synagogue. Perhaps Lazarus had not stood up for Jesus as he might have done and was therefore still popular amongst the Jewish leadership; yet still the Lord loved him. Remember that the disciples feared going to Judea because "the Jews" sought to kill the Lord, and they only went to Bethany because they were willing to die with the Lord there.

11:20 *Martha, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him*- Literally "Jesus is coming". They believed in His coming but considered it too late to change anything- just as many in the first audience of John's gospel. This is all very much the language of the Lord's second coming especially as described in Mt. 25:6: "Look! The bridegroom! Come out to meet him". John's Gospel continually repeats the Synoptic material, but presents it differently. And the similarity of language in this case leads us to think that the connection is intentional. That Mary 'stayed' would therefore appear to reflect badly upon her. The parable of Mt. 25:6 is about the response of different groups of *young women*, and both Martha and Mary were presumably young, unmarried women. Perhaps Mary simply plays the role of the foolish virgins who didn't respond immediately, but came later. The resurrection of Lazarus was clearly a foretaste of the resurrection at the last day: "Jesus said to her: Your brother shall rise again. Martha said to him: I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said to her: I am the resurrection and the life. He that believes on me, though he die, yet shall he live". The similarities with the last day judgment scenario are so many that it's difficult to avoid the conclusion that they are being consciously referred to.

Jesus was coming- Literally, "Jesus is coming". The present tense suggests this is to be read as reported speech. Again, the perspective of the Gospel writers can be seen to change very quickly.

But Mary stayed in the house- Luke notes the tension between Martha and Mary over domestic issues. She perhaps remained in the house because she wished to meet the Lord without her dominant sister. Or perhaps the whole incident is being recorded as a foretaste of the Lord's resurrection; some disciples ran out to see the risen Lord whilst some remained in the house.

11:21 *Martha said to Jesus: Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died*- This level of faith, which required the literal presence of the Lord in order to perform healing, contrasts unfavourably with the faith of others, even Gentiles, who believed that the Lord's physical presence was not required for His miracles to be performed. But the Gospel records present the key believers as having been weak in faith during the Lord's ministry- surely as encouragement to others to believe. But we see here the growth in Martha's faith, just as we did in the encounter with the Samaritan woman and the man born blind. At this point she believes the Lord would have healed Lazarus had He been present. Mary uses the same phrase in :32; they had obviously discussed this and said these words to each other several times. But she proceeds in :22 to dare to believe the Lord could ask God for a resurrection "even now", now Lazarus was dead.

11:22 *And even now, I know that whatever you shall ask of God, God will give you*-

Martha understood the Lord's power to help, and she prayed to Him (Jn. 11:22 cp. 16:23). But she didn't make the obvious, blindingly desperate request which filled her heart: to bring Lazarus back to her. She simply stated that the Lord could do all things. And she knew He would read her spirit, and see what she wanted.

"Even now" hints that she did wonder if the Lord could even now raise him. Martha's hope that the Lord just might raise Lazarus was not based simply upon a vague whim that the Lord might just do her a favour this time, on this issue. "Even now", *kai nun*, was a phrase she had previously heard on the lips of the Lord as He sought to explain that the realities of His future Kingdom were also capable of some present experience: "But the hour comes *and now is* [*kai nun*], when true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit" (Jn. 4:23). And most significantly Jn. 5:25: "The hour comes and *now is*, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live". So her vaguely expressed request was actually a result of her attention to the Spirit words of the Lord Jesus. And thus she was in harmony with the movement of the Spirit, and the Lord's Spirit was therefore aligned with her spirit in intercession before the Father- as Romans 8 makes explicit. The powerful lesson is that prayer is heard not because of how we verbalize things, the word choice we achieve- for that would be some kind of paganism, whereby certain words elicit Divine responses. As we read in this context in Romans 8, "we know not how to pray as we ought". "The Lord the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18 RV) looks upon the spirit, the deepest heart desires, and responds to them rather than to our clumsy attempts to formulate those deep desires as words and sentences.

She wasn't asking for a resurrection, she left it to the Lord to decide how best to respond; and in doing so reveals a parade example to us all. Clearly it was her unspoken, vaguely conceived and unverbalized desire that the Lord would raise Lazarus immediately. And the Lord (as explained in Romans 8) took this unspoken desire of her spirit and revealed it to the Father. Romans 8 says that He does the same for us today.

"Whatever you shall ask of God, God will give you" are the very words the Lord elsewhere used urging *us* that whatever *we* ask will be *given* (Mt. 21:22; Jn. 16:23). Perhaps her emphasis was upon the word "you". Martha clearly felt an inadequacy in prayer. Like us, she wanted the Lord to do it all for her. The whole story reveals that such feelings of inadequacy are unnecessary. Because her spirit, her deepest heart desires, were what the Lord would raise Lazarus, and this was indeed read by the Lord as prayer.

11:23 *Jesus said to her: Your brother shall rise again*- The Lord is purposefully ambiguous about the timing of the possible resurrection. He could have meant 'right away', or, 'at the last day'. That ambiguity was to elicit a response from Mary, to make her too wonder what His reference was to. And the Lord leaves things hanging at times in our interactions with Him and reading of His word- in order to exercise our own faith and reflection.

11:24 *Martha said to him: I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day*- First century Judaism generally believed in immortal souls, passage to Abraham's bosom etc. The fact Martha didn't believe this was surely due to her attention to the Lord's teaching about the resurrection of the body. She is quoting verbatim the Lord's laboured emphasis upon how He would "raise up" believers in Him "at the last day"- the same Greek words are used (Jn. 6:39,40,44,54). Perhaps Martha had been present at the incident in John 6, or probably the Lord repeated His teachings in different places, and she had heard this teaching and absorbed it into her deepest belief system.

But the Lord was perhaps hoping that His ambiguity would provoke her to state that she believed the Lord could raise Lazarus immediately. But she didn't quite get there, and so the Lord takes here there in :25 by speaking of how He *is* the resurrection.

11:25 *Jesus said to her: I am the resurrection and the life*- Here and in :26, the Lord seeks to develop the idea that the language of latter day resurrection and salvation at "the last day" is in fact applicable to life in Him right now. Under :22 *Even now* I suggested that Martha had heard the Lord's discourses on this theme earlier, and was even quoting from them. But now He asks her whether she really believes it- because if she does, then she may indeed entertain the idea that it was possible to raise Lazarus immediately.

He that believes on me, though he die, yet shall he live- A repeat of the Lord's teaching in Jn. 6:58 about how those who eat the Christ manna shall live and not die. Martha had already alluded to His teaching on that occasion in her reference to being raised again at the last day. Now the Lord is trying to take her further, as if to say: 'And what did I go on to say? I spoke later on in that same discourse about 'life' in Me as a present experience... that ought to confirm your hope and faith that I could raise Lazarus even now'. Likewise the Lord's description of Himself in this verse as "the life" uses a phrase only found in Jn. 6:51, where He speaks of His flesh giving "the life" to the believers. And this is how He seeks to work with us, always leading us on, and so patiently and in such hope that we will 'get it'. We read or hear His word, and then we encounter another part of His word which is Him gently prodding us to reflect upon the word we previously heard or read. This all helps us understand why regular Bible reading and reflection on His word is such an important part of our daily walk with Him.

11:26 *And whoever lives and believes on me shall never die*- "Lives" therefore comes before 'believing'. Yet in the preceding verses, the Lord has spoken of 'living' as if He meant 'life at the last day as a result of resurrection': "... he shall rise again in

the resurrection at the last day. But the eternal life, the kind of life we shall eternally live, can be lived right now. "Whoever lives" therefore refers to whoever has His life in them and continues that life of believing.

He is suggesting that this 'life' can be lived now, and if we have it, and continue to believe in Him, then we will literally "never die". Again, the Lord is encouraging Martha to believe that in some sense the resurrection life can be experienced now. And He is doing this, in the immediate context, to deepen her faith in the Lord's possibility to raise Lazarus to life- so that He could indeed raise Lazarus from the dead in response to her faith, rather than solely from the motive of His own personal compassion. And He works in this same multi-level way with millions of people simultaneously... the extent of His activity is breathtaking.

Do you believe this?- Is not the implication that Lazarus was raised partly because of *her* faith…? And yet when asked whether she believed the Lord could raise the dead right now, she slips back to simply stating she believed in Jesus as the Christ (:27). And that imperfect faith was as it were added to by the Lord, to achieve the immediate resurrection of Lazarus.

11:27 *She said to him: Yes, Lord. I have believed*- Implying she had taken a one time specific act of faith; the very specific confession of faith which John's Gospel was seeking to elicit in its audience.

I have believed you are the Christ- This is in answer to the question as to whether she believed that "He that believes on me, though he die, yet shall he live" (:25,26). She still dare not make the specific statement that she believes in life after death. On one hand, we could read her answer negatively, as if she fails to make the answer the Lord was trying to elicit- that yes, she believed in Him as the resurrection and the life, both now and at the last day. On another hand, we could read her answer positively, in that instead of saying she believed in a future gift of life, both in this life and the next, she simply says that she believes in Jesus as the Christ, making no presumption about getting any personal blessing out of that belief, and content with whatever He in His wisdom may give her. We noted this when considering how the sisters simply informed the Lord of Lazarus' grave sickness, without presuming to ask for His specific resolution of the issue (:3).

The Son of God, He that is to come into the world- Every believer likewise 'comes into the world' (Jn. 1:9- the same Greek words are used). There is therefore no requirement to interpret this as meaning that the Lord Jesus personally pre-existed and literally came from Heaven to this earth. The Lord had spoken of how He 'came into the world' (Jn. 3:19; 9:39), and again Martha is quoting His words. Whilst Mary is framed as the one who loved hearing the Lord's words, clearly Martha likewise loved His words and based her faith upon them.

11:28 *And when she had said this, she went away, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Teacher is here*- Or, the Master. A nice insight into how the earliest disciples spoke of the Lord Jesus to each other when not in His presence.

And calls you- The same word is used for how the Lord 'called' Lazarus out of the grave (12:17). This develops the theme that the essence of resurrection happens in the Lord's interactions with those He calls to Himself. See on :25 and :26. The call to Mary was therefore in essence the same call to Lazarus, to come from death to life.

11:29 *And she, when she heard it, arose quickly and went to him*- As noted on :28, the response to the call in this life reflects our response to the call to life in the last day. Hearing the call, quickly responding and coming to the Lord immediately is surely being presented as a template for all John's audience to follow. The hearers

would have been challenged by these words to themselves respond- just as we should be.

11:30 *(Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still in the place where Martha met him)*- All the communication being through messengers, privacy would have been hard to achieve. The Lord wanted to meet Martha and Mary alone, as far as possible, because He sought to develop their faith away from "the Jews" who were swamping the home. And He was also aware that "the Jews" sought to kill Him; that may have been another consideration, or at least, He was being sensitive to the fears of the disciples.

11:31 *The Jews then who were with her in the house and were consoling her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up quickly and went out, followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there*- This means that the tomb was located the same side of the village as where the Lord entered. He was therefore left waiting somewhere near the tomb. Therefore the question 'Where have you laid him?' (:34) was likely rhetorical.

11:32- see on Lk. 19:42.

Therefore, when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying to him: Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died- She repeats the words of Martha, suggesting they had said this to one another in conversation beforehand. And she too displays the limited faith that assumes only the Lord's literal presence could achieve miracles, and that healing from a distance was impossible. The way she repeats the same words as her sister, and with the same understandable anger frustration with the Lord that He had not come quicker [for the messenger would have returned with the news that the Lord had not followed him back to Bethany immediately]... this all adds to the sense that we are indeed reading words actually spoken, and feelings really felt.

11:33 *When Jesus saw her weeping*- This is the same word used for the [same?] women weeping before the stone which covered the Lord's tomb (Jn. 20:11,13). Clearly the Lord saw the whole scene as pointing forward to His own death and resurrection, and He sought to use the similarities to inculcate faith in His resurrection.

And the Jews also weeping who had come with her- The grief of "the Jews", even though they "sought to kill Him", still stirred parallel emotions within the Lord. For He had our nature, and such sympathetic response to others' grief is natural. And yet the Lord felt this psychological response even for His enemies; and in this we see the core love for them which was at His heart. His ability to respond even now to our emotions and tears, as He did toward Stephen at his time of dying, all makes Him a living Lord and matchless mediator.

He groaned in the spirit and was disturbed- Their weeping, just like ours, provokes a reflection deeply within the Lord. He groaned "in Himself" (:38); He took their grief deeply within Himself. This is again a reflection of His humanity; for it is normal to absorb the emotions of those we love deep into ourselves. But He is the Son of God, and Romans 8:26 clearly alludes to this incident by saying that "the Spirit" (a title of the Lord Jesus, "the Lord the Spirit" of 2 Cor. 3:18) intercedes even now with groanings which cannot be uttered. He is the same today as yesterday. The Greek translated "disturbed" is twice used in John of the Lord's feelings as He faced the cross (Jn. 12:27; 13:21). So clearly did He see the whole incident as pointing forward to His own death and resurrection. And it was an existentially lonely feeling, because He uses the same word to urge His followers: "Let not *your* [and this perhaps is where

the emphasis was] be troubled" (Jn. 14:1,27). This deep troubling / disturbance was felt uniquely by the Lord. We need to be aware that the Lord knew what He would do- He knew that within maybe as little as ten minutes, the sisters would be ecstatic with joy as they met their resurrected brother. For me, this knowledge would have mitigated against entering into their emotions of grief. But His unity with them, His love, was such that He all the same wept for their tears. With us too, He knows that we shall eternally rejoice, relatively soon. And yet He still enters fully into our grief of the moment. Such is His love. Truly, man is not alone. God is with us, right now, through His Emmanuel.

It must be noted that the Greek word translated "groaned" means literally to snort with anger [s.w. Mt. 9:30; Mk. 14:5 same LXX in Dan. 11:30; Lam. 2:6]. There is definitely the sense of anger within the verb. Why was the Lord angry at this point, whilst at the same time weeping in grief? Anger and grief commonly occur together at the same time when facing bereavement, so this is psychologically credible. And a profound insight into His absolute humanity. But in the Lord's case, the anger may well have been because He knew that even this supreme miracle of resurrection, the seventh sign miracle in John's Gospel, would be disbelieved. His anger follows on from the notices that the Jews were weeping with Martha. Perhaps He was angry with insincere weeping by those He knew would soon slay Him, and seek to slay Lazarus.

11:34 *And said, Where have you laid him?*- Was this a rhetorical question, perhaps in order to focus them on the deadness of their brother as a prelude to the wonder of his resurrection? See on :31. Or is it a reflection of how the Lord had limited knowledge? The same word is repeatedly used of how the Lord's body was "laid" in the tomb (Mt. 27:60; Mk. 15:47; 16:6; Lk. 23:53,55; Jn. 19:41,42; 20:2,13,15). But the Lord also often uses the same word, at least in John, for how He 'laid down' His life (Jn. 10:11,15,17,18; 15:13). Again, the Lord is developing the idea that life is laid down both in death and during this mortal life; that the power of new life might break through into our mortal flesh, both now and through the resurrection of the body to the life eternal. Consciously or unconsciously, Mary uses the same original words in enquiring where the Lord's body has been laid (Jn. 20:2,13,15). Surely she must have seen the similarities, as the Lord intended. He knew she would one day soon be asking where *His* body had been laid, and He lovingly, gently sets her up for this.

They said to him: Lord, come and see- Again, the Lord is setting her up to see the similarities at the time of His resurrection; for in response to the same question, as to where the body had been laid, the same answer would be given by the Angel who represented Jesus: "Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (Mt. 28:6). But it's all the other way around; the words of Jesus ("Where have you laid him?") become the words of Mary, and the words of the Angel who represented the Lord Jesus become Mary's words ("Come and see"). By so cleverly and profoundly setting this up, the Lord sought to demonstrate the connection between Him and her and all those who seek His body; His words become her words, her words become His words. He would soon make this explicit when speaking of how His words were to abide in His people, so that their will and His were the same, and therefore whatever they asked would be granted without needing His formal intercession (Jn. 15:7).

The Greek thinking minds who read the New Testament were sadly divorced from the Hebrew background which is the backdrop for God's revelation in the Bible. In the lead up to the AD381 Decree of Constantinople, which declared Trinitarianism as the only acceptable form of Christian faith, Gregory of Nazianzus preached a series of sermons in defence of the Trinity. He dealt with the two blocks of Biblical

evidence as saying that e.g. in John 11:34, Jesus resurrected Lazarus by His Divine nature, and then wept in His human nature. Gregory utterly failed to appreciate Hebrew thought; he ended up splitting up the Lord Jesus effectively into two persons, rather than seeking to harmonize the two strands which there were within the one person of Jesus.

11:35 *Jesus wept*- He of all men knew the reality of future resurrection at the last day, and He knew what He was going to do. So why then did He weep? He saw how unnecessary was their grief, how misguided. For He knew what He was going to do. And yet He wept with them because His heart bled for them, because He shared their grief (on whatever basis it was) to the extent that He too wept with them. And the love of Christ will constrain us to have His bleeding heart (2 Cor. 5:14). We need not think that our griefs and sorrows are too petty for the Lord to engage with. Our feelings are reflected in His, quite simply because He loves us.

11:36 *The Jews said: Look how he loved him!*- They perceived His love as *phileo* love, whereas the inspired record says that the Lord's love was of the *agape* quality (:5). The misunderstanding of the Lord's love was and is tragic. Some see this as evidence of a parallel between *phileo* and *agape*, but I would argue against that position. If they are interchangeable terms, then why use them both. Rather I suggest we see His *agape* as being misunderstood as the far lower level of *phileo* love.

11:37 *But some of them said: Could not this man, who opened the eyes of him that was blind, have also caused that this man should not have died?*- Here we see yet another point of connection with the Lord's crucifixion; for "the Jews" made similar accusation as justification for their demand that the Lord "come down from the cross". The line of argument they were presenting, introduced by the ominous words "But some of them...", suggests that they may have been sarcastic and cynical in saying that the Lord had opened the eyes of the blind man. But we see again some sort of division amongst "the Jews"; the Lord's grief was evidently genuine, indicating He has a good friend and good man (:36). But others chose to find any excuse to disbelieve Him.

11:38 *Jesus therefore again groaning in himself, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave*- The whole process of mediation takes place within the Lord's mind, with the sort of groanings He had as He begged the Father to raise Lazarus (Rom. 8:26 cp. Jn. 11:38), and as on the cross He prayed with strong crying and tears for our redemption (Heb. 5:5 cp. Is. 53:12). The Lord Jesus is the same yesterday and today. That same passion and intensity of pleading really is there. This is why the state of our mind, our spirit, is so vitally important; because it is this which the Lord Jesus interprets to the Father. The Lord's Spirit struggles in mediation with crying and groaning (Rom. 8:26), as He did for the raising of Lazarus. There is a further connection with Heb. 5:5, where we learn that the Lord prayed on the cross with a like intensity. And this Lord is our Lord today. He can be crucified afresh, therefore He has the capacity for struggle and mental effort.

And a stone lay across it- The same word used about the stone that lay over the Lord's tomb (Jn. 20:1). The whole incident was to provoke faith in the Lord's resurrection after three days were fulfilled. But the disciples didn't 'get it', and John may be making that point- that they failed to believe, to take the lesson from the resurrection of Lazarus which was clearly a foretaste of the Lord's. This is part of the wider theme of the Gospel writers emphasizing their own slowness and weakness of faith- which likely made them the more compelling and credible.

11:39 *Jesus said: Take away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, said to him: Lord, by this time the body stinks. For he has been dead four days*- Female concern about taking the stone away from the tomb was another point of contact with the Lord's resurrection. The Lord's body did not "see corruption" because of the huge amount of expensive spices placed upon it, but with Lazarus, the body was already decomposed. The contrast with the Lord's corpse was perhaps to make the point that *His* body did not "see corruption". And although our corpses do "see corruption", this is no barrier to resurrection.

11:40 - see on Jn. 11:4.

Jesus said to her: Did I not say to you, that if you believed, you should see the glory of God?- The raising of Lazarus was on one level predicated upon the faith of Martha and Mary. But all the indications are that they didn't get to it. Yet Lazarus was still resurrected, and the Lord clearly foreknew that He was going to raise him. We can conclude that a potential bar was set, the sisters failed to reach it, but the Lord made up for their failure by His faith. And so it seems He works oftentimes with man.

The Lord Jesus encourages us to see ourselves as Moses. This is without doubt an allusion to Moses' experience of seeing God's glory- an experience which in Jewish eyes marked Moses out as the greatest man who had ever lived. The veneration in which Moses was and is held in the Jewish world is hard for Gentiles to enter into. A glance through rabbinical commentaries on the Pentateuch will illustrate this well. And here was the Lord Jesus saying that through faith in him, we can share the experience of Moses, we can rise to the spiritual heights of the man who spoke to God face to face as a man speaks to his friend.

We are being invited to be equal to Moses, seeing from the cleft in the rock the awesome majesty of the perfection of Christ's character; the full glory of God. But do we appreciate his righteousness? Paul likewise invites us to behold with unveiled face, as Moses did (2 Cor. 3:18 RV), and thereby, just from appreciating the glory of Christ's character, be changed into the same glory. Note too how in Rom. 11 we are each bidden “behold the goodness and severity of God”- a reference to Moses beholding all the goodness of Yahweh. We are in essence in his position right now (Ex. 33:19).

John's Gospel contains several references to the fact that Christ 'shows' the Father to those who believe in him, and that it is possible to "see the Father" and his glory through seeing or accurately believing in him as the Son of the Father (Jn. 11:40; 12:45; 14:9; 16:25). Moses earnestly wished to see the Father fully, but was unable to do so. The height which Moses reached as he cowered in that rock cleft and heard God's Name declared is hard to plumb. But we have been enabled to *see* the Father, through our appreciation of the Lord Jesus. But does an appropriate sense of *wonder* fill us? Do we really make time to *know* the Son of God? Or do we see words like “glory" as just cold theology?

Martha clearly believed Lazarus was now decomposed, and it would make a smell if the stone over his tomb was rolled away. “Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?” was the Lord’s response (Jn. 11:40). Clearly she didn’t have that faith. So, on one level, she shouldn’t have seen God’s glory revealed in the resurrection of Lazarus (Jn. 11:4). And yet we read straight away that then, Lazarus was raised- despite Martha’s ‘unworthiness’ of it. Such was the Lord’s love for them all.

11:41 *So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said: Father, I thank you that you have heard me*- The way the Lord characteristically lifted His

eyes to Heaven to pray reflects His complete unity of spirit with the Father, with no barriers nor issues of guilty conscience standing between them. Even before the body of Lazarus emerged, the Lord knew that He had been heard. He had earlier spoken of doing the works / miracles which He had seen / been shown by the Father (5:20,36). We get the impression that the Father had shown the Lord this "work", and He was totally confident that it would be performed. It was of course a huge encouragement to the Lord that He too would emerge from the grave.

11:42 *And I know you hear me always, but because of the crowd that stands around I said it, that they may believe you did send me*- Said what? The past tense suggests the reference is not to His word of command to Lazarus to "come forth", for He had not yet spoken that. Was the reference therefore to His command "Take away the stone" (:39)? Was it to His "groaning"? But this was "in the spirit... within Himself", not publically stated. I suggest that the "it" which He "said" was in prayer to the Father. The Father always heard Him, He did not need to ask for specific things in order to get them, for the Spirit was given to Him without measure. Perhaps He is saying that in this case, He had specifically prayed to the Father, and received a positive response- in order that the crowd might realize that indeed He had been sent by the Father. But there is no record of any prayer prayed publically by the Lord in front of the watching crowd. Maybe He meant that He had already said "it" in prayer to the Father and been answered, and He was now going to say publically "Lazarus, come forth"; but that also is hardly a public prayer to the Father. The GNB tries to avoid the problem by offering a more vague interpretation of the tense: "I *say this* for the sake of the people here". But this seems questionable in terms of the Greek grammar. My conclusion is therefore that the prayer to the Father was private, but the raising of Lazarus would have been seen by the thoughtful amongst the crowd as clearly an answer to the Lord's private prayer. Such resurrection could only come from God, and seeing it was done at the hands and word of Jesus, it followed that He had therefore prayed to the Father for it. In this way, the Lord demonstrated that the essence of prayer was within the heart of the believer, whereas at that time prayer was generally conceived as a matter of public activity, with words spoken out loud. It's the same lesson as taught by Hannah's silent prayer. This is why the Lord *says out loud* in the audience of the crowd that He "said it" for the sake of the crowd. John's Gospel draws a distinction between "the crowd" and "the Jews", the Jewish leadership. The Lord's intention was that both groups would be converted (recall His desire that the cured leper made a witness to the priests), but the resurrection of Lazarus was aimed at converting the masses- "because of the crowd I said it". The Jewish leadership were not likely to reflect upon what the Lord had said and done, because their hearts were hardened. But "the crowd" contained at least some open minds.

So it seems to me that Jesus had asked / commanded / said to the Father to resurrect Lazarus. Jesus believed that this had happened. And so, in utter faith, he thanks the Father for raising Lazarus- even though Lazarus was still silent in the grave and there was at that point no actual physical evidence Lazarus had come back to life. But then Jesus says, believing so firmly the prayer had already been answered 'OK Lazarus, well, come out and see us then' [my paraphrase!]. The whole point was to demonstrate that "I am the resurrection and the life", to confirm Martha's faith that indeed there would be a resurrection "at the last day" (Jn. 11:24,25). It wasn't to demonstrate that Jesus could reunite 'soul' and body- it was to prove a resurrection.

I know you hear me always- Both David and Christ panicked when they felt their

prayers weren't being answered; they felt that this meant they had sinned (Ps. 22:1-4; and consider too 17:15; 24:5; 27:4,8). Clearly they understood answered prayer as a sign of acceptability with God. the Lord knew that God *always* heard Him. When apparently God didn't hear His prayer for deliverance on the cross, He for a moment supposed that He'd sinned and therefore God had forsaken Him.

Lazarus had died, and the evident desire of Martha was to see her brother again, there and then. But she didn't go running to the Lord with this desire. She simply and briefly stated her faith in the Lord's limitless power to resurrect, and her knowledge that He could use the Father's power as He wished. He read her spirit, He saw her fervent desire. And He responded to this as if it had been a prayer. He groaned deeply within Himself, and wept- not the tears of grief, as the Jews mistakenly thought (note how throughout the record they misunderstand what is really going on), but the tears which go with the groaning of serious prayer (Jn. 11:33-39). Having done this, He comments: "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me *always*". Because His spirit, His mind, was in constant contact with the Father, His prayers / desires were always communicated to Him, and always being heard. "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me" could almost imply that the Lord prayed for something, and then, after some interval, the answer came. We have an exquisite insight into the Lord's mind and the highly personal relationship between Father and Son in the words that follow: "I knew (not 'I know') that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe". This almost certainly was not spoken out loud; this is a very rare and privileged glimpse into the unspoken communication between the Son and Father. The Lord seems to be adding this almost in half apology, lest it should seem that He prayed for Lazarus' resurrection, the answer came, and He then thanked the Father for it. It seems that this would be too primitive a sequence of events. He says that He *knew* that His request had been granted, and His utterance of thanks for the answer was for the peoples' benefit: that *they* might perceive that whatever the Son asked for, He received from God. But in reality, the Lord's thoughts to the Father seem to suggest, it wasn't a question of His prayers being accepted and answered. His Spirit, His thoughts, were one with the Father, and therefore it was not that His thoughts were considered, accepted and then God granted the request. What He thought was the prayer and it was the answer all in one. His 'mediation' for us is in the sense that He is the Lord *the Spirit*. There is no barrier (and was not any) between His mind and that of the Father.

11:43 *And when he had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice*- Yet another connection with the crucifixion; for this was how the Lord ended His mortal life, crying with a loud voice (Mt. 27:46,50).

Lazarus, come out!- The Greek is only elsewhere used in the Gospels for the Lord calling men to come 'here' to Him and follow Him in service (Mt. 19:21; Mk. 10:21; Lk. 18:22). This was also His personal intention for Lazarus. Again we have the hint that Lazarus may not have been a full believer at the time (see on :19). And the miracles were not done simply to meet human need as the Lord encountered it- for He walked past so much of it, without addressing it. The intention was that those cured or assisted would come to Him in faith. Our good works and social welfare outreach should therefore likewise be intimately connected to evangelism and not done for their own sake.

11:44 *He that was dead came out, bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus said to them: Loose him, and let him*

go away- "Grave clothes... napkin" are all yet again reminiscent of the Lord's burial and release from death; the same word for "napkin" is used in Jn. 20:7. His emergence, when so tightly bound, was also of itself a miracle; and it may have been an encouragement to the Lord Jesus, who may likewise have been interested to know how He would emerge from bound graveclothes. The command to "loose him" also had a deeper hint within it; "the Jews" were to release people like Lazarus and allow them to come to the Lord and walk thereafter in freedom. But it was ultimately the Lord who not only healed and resurrected, but also loosed men from bondage to what which was associated with death- the Jewish system. The same word is used for unloosing the Jewish legislation in 5:18 and 7:23.

11:45 *Therefore, many of the Jews who had come to Mary*- I have tried to demonstrate in this exposition that "the Jews" referred to the Jewish leadership, and "the crowd" are mentioned separately to them in John's Gospel (the definition of "the Jews" begins in Jn. 1:19). The Lord had intended this miracle to specifically convert some from "the crowd" (see on :42). But it appears that His expectations were proven wrong, for actually it was some from "the Jews" who believed. He was after all of human nature. Likewise we noted on Jn. 4:44 that the Lord had expected no response from His own "country" but actually there was response. If even the Lord found that some responded whom He didn't expect to, we must surely approach our own witness in a spirit of mere sowing, not attempting to foresee the response.

And saw what he did, believed in him- Faith of course is ideally believing without visual evidence (Heb. 11:1), and the Lord lamented that many wanted to 'see' before believing (Jn. 4:48). The example of Thomas, demanding to see before he believed, is surely recorded in a negative light (Jn. 20:25), leading the Lord to pronounce blessing on those who have not seen yet believe (Jn. 20:29). But all the same, such lower level 'belief' is still counted to folk, by the Lord of all grace who is so enthusiastic to notice human faith on whatever level. This serves as an encouragement to us, to view positively those with apparently weak faith; and also, to not think that our faith is so weak that our Lord doesn't notice it. So again we see evidence that some of "the Jews" believed in the Lord- but would not 'come out' for Him until after His resurrection. The thousands baptized a few weeks later on Pentecost were all devout Jews "dwelling in Jerusalem", and we wonder whether these were those who at various times in John are described as having 'believed in Him' but had not openly confessed Him. Public baptism was an ideal way to do so. It would also explain why they were converted so quickly, and clearly were struggling with conscience issues.

11:46 *But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done*- Again and again, the Jews were divided by the Lord's work. Even resurrection from the dead would not persuade them; perhaps it was to the resurrection of Lazarus that the Lord referred in his parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:31). There are some for whom the opinion of others, especially religious leaders, is paramount. They can be shown the clearest truths, such as the resurrection of Lazarus, or the clear teaching of Scripture- and it means nothing, because they have elevated their religious leaders to an absolute position. We read these things in the Bible because we encounter the same psychologies today.

11:47 *The chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said: What will we do? For this man does many miracles*- The idea in the Greek is that if He is 'doing' so much, then what are *we* 'doing' in response. Again the Jews have to admit the Lord was indeed doing miracles, as Nicodemus stated at the start of the Gospel. We learn from this that miracles alone will not convict a person of faith; but we also see that clearly they were responsible toward God now that they had seen them. The most

aggressive people, in a given context, are those who know they are wrong and are desperately seeking to destroy the evidence which is too inconvenient for them. And so those who encounter the Lord have to either capitulate to His claims, or go away as did the Jews in bitterness and wild attempts to destroy the evidence and inconvenient truths- no matter how much they disguise all that beneath nicespeak.

11:48 *If we leave him alone, all men will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation*- Like so many, they resisted the powerful claims of the Lord upon them because of their own petty vested interest. Just as so many will not sacrifice their family relationships or business or living place for the Lord's sake. Their *topos*, "place", could be the Jerusalem temple; but their essential fear was that they would lose their own "place". They recognized that belief in the teaching of Jesus meant that no priesthood or religious leadership such as theirs was in fact necessary. Which means that to return to such a system is to not follow the true teaching of Jesus. Yet they disguised all this under the excuse that the Lord's miracles would get Him a mass following, which would lead to a revolution which the Romans would crush, resulting in their loss of all their vested interests. This kind of logic is so typically human. If this respecting Jesus of Nazareth... then A could happen, then B might happen, and then the unthinkable might happen- I lose my "place" in society and the eyes of men. This is why the New Testament records the Lord's claims being acted upon immediately, with believers being baptized straight away. Response to the Lord needs to be quick, before the mind of the flesh kicks in with its delaying tactics and endless chains of 'what if...'.

11:49 *But a certain one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them: You know nothing at all*- The Mosaic High Priest did the job for life, but the work had been reduced by Judaism into a much coveted position which was shared each year. The thrust of the argument seemed to be that they 'knew nothing' of the real threat posed- which was the whole Jewish nation "perish" in some terrible holocaust which would aim to destroy every Jew within Palestine. Caiaphas argues that they "knew nothing at all" compared to what really could happen; not just *they* would lose their place, but every Jew in Palestine would be murdered by the imagined Roman response to a Messianic revolution. This was taking their 'what ifs' to the ultimate moment. It was extremely unlikely that the whole Jewish nation would perish because of any Roman response. And the Old Testament promises would surely not allow that to happen; although Caiaphas had no faith in them to reason like this. He was of course leading up to his decision that one man must die so that Jewry did not perish completely.

11:50 *Nor do you take account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, so that the whole nation does not perish*- The paradox of course was the Lord's death was so that all who believed in Him, the new Israel, would "not perish". Caiaphas seems to be arguing that they had not even considered the idea of killing the Lord in order that the Jewish people "not perish". "Expedient" is the same word used by the Lord in saying that His death was "expedient" in order that the Holy Spirit be sent and God's people be saved (16:7). So whilst the reasoning was that of Caiaphas, the words came out in a way which spoke clearly of the Lord's death.

That one man should die for the people- Adam Clarke claims that "This saying was proverbial among the Jews"; it was an allusion to the scapegoat slain on the day of Atonement. It was the High Priest's duty to slay the scapegoat; and here he says that the Lord's death was to be seen as just that.

Not perish- The same Greek phrase is used by the Lord about how faith in Him will mean that individuals will "not perish" (Jn. 3:15,16; 6:39). He saw salvation on

an individual level, whereas Judaism and Caiaphas wrongly thought of salvation as being a concept applicable only on a *national* level. And yet the death of Jesus was primarily for Israel; and that whole nation need not have perished, due to the cross. Here we see the depth of grace; their rejection of Him, their doing of their Saviour to death, was actually the means for their salvation. We would have made it the basis of their condemnation, were we in the Father's position. But potentially, it was the means of their salvation. But such grace was incomprehensible to them. The whole nation, or many of them, *did* perish. And thereby we learn that the extent of the Lord's victory is dependent upon our response to it; so much was made possible through it, but human response is still required. John evidently intended us to see the connection with his earlier comment that the Lord was lifted up *that whosoever believeth on Him* should "not perish" but have eternal life.

11:51- see on Jn. 5:4.

Now this he said not of himself- An example of where the power of inspiration is such that men were moved to speak far beyond their own personal understanding or intention.

But being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation- The terms he used and the logic followed was all as it were put in his mouth. But "the nation", the true Israel, was thereby redefined as those who believe in the Lord and accept His death for them.

11:52 *And not for the nation only, but that he might also gather together into one the children of God that are scattered abroad*- This may have been added by John. Or perhaps it was the vision of Caiaphas that the Lord's death would enable Judaism to rally their troops as it were, and the diaspora Jews would return to Jerusalem as the Rabbis taught, and establish an independent Kingdom in Palestine.

The Lord Jesus died as He did in order that all who benefit from His cross should show forth the love, the glory and the Name of the Father and Son, and thus have an extraordinary unity among themselves- so powerful it would convert the world (Jn. 17:20-26). This theme of unity amongst us played deeply on His mind as He faced death in Jn. 17. He died that He might gather together in one all God's children in that His death would enable the giving of the Holy Spirit within the hearts of His people; and the result of spiritual mindedness would be unity between persons. Those who advocate splitting the body, thereby showing the world our *dis*unity, are working albeit unwittingly against *the most essential intention of the cross,* and declare themselves to not have received the Holy Spirit. And in this, for me at least, lies an unspeakable tragedy. The atonement should create fellowship. His death would create a new synagogue- for "gather together" translates *sunago*. But it would be a meeting of minds, based around Him and His cross; rather than in a building centered around a religion and human priesthood.

Do we find a true unity with our brethren impossible? He died *that* He might gather together into one all God's children. Before His cross, before serious and extended personal meditation upon it, all our personal differences will disappear. A divided ecclesia is therefore one which is not centred upon the cross. Whether or not we must live our ecclesial experience in such a context, the barriers which exist within us personally really *can* be brought down by the humbling experience of the cross, and the way in which we are forced to see how that death was not only for us personally. The wonder of it was and is in its universal and so widely-inclusive

nature. Again, the basis of our unity is a sustained, individual appreciation of the cross.

The children of God that are scattered abroad- The Lord uses the same word in predicting that initially, His death would result in His sheep being "scattered abroad" (Mt. 26:31; Jn. 16:32). Response to His death therefore involves a scattering, in order for each man to individuate; and then a coming together in the profoundest unity of the cosmos. We see this in the experience of Paul, who spent three years in the wilderness after his conversion, out of contact with the big name brethren of the time; and then became the most passionate preacher of unity in Christ.

11:53 *So from that day forward, they took advice how they might put him to death*- AV "Took counsel together". The element of 'together' is implied in the Greek. But Jn. 18:14 uses the same word to say that "Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people". One individual gave the advice or 'counsel', but the decision was formally taken by a committee under his influence. This is how apparent 'democracy' so often works in religious groups; the voice of a dominant individual speaks through an appearance of group speak, supposed peer review and joint 'decision making'. Comparing the two passages, it would seem that Caiaphas indeed played a hugely significant role in the Lord's death. This would therefore justify him being called the "prince of this world" and the significant adversary / satan who is associated with the Lord's death.

11:54 *Therefore Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews, but departed from there into the country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim; and there he stayed with the disciples*- The Lord gave His life of Himself, it was not taken from Him. We therefore see Him here consciously acting in a way which took control over the timing of His death.

Ephraim- "Fruitful". The blessing on Ephraim spoke clearly of the acceptance of Gentiles through him: "The younger brother shall be greater, and his seed shall become the fulness of Gentiles" (Gen. 48:19 Heb., cp. Rom. 11:25). This is in the context of :52, which speaks of how Gentiles also would be gathered together by the Lord's death.

11:55 *Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand; and many from the countryside went to Jerusalem to purify themselves before the Passover*- This would have included the Lord's family from Nazareth. The Jewish ritual of purifying oneself before Passover is alluded to by the requirement to 'examine ourselves' before breaking bread, the Christian equivalent of the Passover feast. Again, Passover is no longer a feast "of Yahweh", but "of the Jews". They had hijacked God's law and turned it into their own religion.

11:56 *They looked for Jesus, and spoke one with another, as they stood in the temple: What do you think? That he will not come to the feast?*- Every male should come to the Passover; so they wondered whether He would break the Law because He was clearly going to be arrested and maybe killed. They were apparently assuming the Lord would enter the temple, and so they were watching as to whether He would enter it.

11:57 *Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, they were to inform them, so that they might arrest him*- Yet, remarkably enough, nobody did perform such a betrayal. Except one of those in the Lord's very inner circle... The fact nobody else apparently did so is surely a reflection of how the Lord was deeply respected- up until the moment of His refusal to give people the Kingdom now.

JOHN CHAPTER 12

12:1 *Therefore, six days before the Passover, Jesus went to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead*- The "therefore" is significant. We are each called to witness; and there is no way out. That witness flows out of our deeply personal experiences. If we won't make that witness, then God will work in our lives to bring us to a position where we have no choice but to do so. This was how the Lord worked with the family of Lazarus. The Jews had commanded "that if any man knew where he was, he should shew it" (Jn. 11:57). And "Jesus *therefore*… came to Bethany" (Jn. 12:1 RV). He purposefully attracted attention to His connection with the Bethany home. And so it was that "much people of the Jews learned that he was there" (Jn. 12:9), and the context makes it clear that this was a source of witness to them (Jn. 12:10,11). The Lord sought to expose their secret discipleship, to take the bucket off their candle. And He will do likewise with us. *Therefore* Jesus came to Mary and Martha's home. Why? So that they could no longer keep secret their faith in Him. The meal they put on was not just female, standard hospitality. It was, in this context, a brave public declaration of their identification with this wanted man. And the way in the last week of His life the Lord chose to sleep there each night was surely done for the same reason: to lead them to open identity with His cause and His cross. "Much people therefore of the Jews knew that he was there" (Jn. 12:9). And so with us, the Lord brings about circumstances so that our light can no longer remain under a bucket.

The anointing recorded in Mark 14 is clearly the same as that here in Matthew 26. But the anointing in Luke 7 appears to have occurred in the house of a Pharisee called Simon somewhere in Galilee. The anointing recorded in John 12 is very similar, but occurred six days before the Passover and one day *before* the triumphal entry (Jn. 12:12), whereas the anointing recorded here in Matthew and Mark occurred *after* that. There are other differences, too. In Jn. 12:3 Mary uses "a pound of spikenard" whereas the anointing in Matthew seems to emphasize the use of spikenard as a liquid, in an alabaster flask that had to be broken to release the liquid. The spikenard was worth *more* than 300 pence (Mk. 14:5), whereas that of Jn. 12:5 was worth 300 pence; it was used to anoint the Lord's *feet* (Jn. 12:3), whereas that of Mt. 26:7 was used to anoint His *head*. In Jn. 12:4 it is Judas who complains at the apparent waste of the money, whereas in Mt. 26:8 it is the disciples. Mt. 26:11,12 record the Lord's word about "You will always have the poor with you" and goes on to record His explanation that the woman had done this for His burial; whereas in Jn. 12:7,8 these two sayings are the other way around. The wiping of His feet with her hair is stressed in Jn. 12:3, but Matthew and Mark are silent about this. Jn. 12 clearly identifies the woman as Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus; whereas Matthew and Mark are careful to preserve her as a nameless "woman" who "came unto Him" (26:7). I therefore have no doubt that Jn. 12 and Mt. 26 / Mk. 14 speak of two separate anointings, both in Bethany, separated from each other by four days. The anointing in Luke 7 is clearly framed as a similar incident, also in the house of a man called Simon.

The question, of course, is why these three anointings are described in such similar language. Higher critics immediately speak of textual dislocation and mistakes made by the writers in their chronology of events. These kinds of approaches arise from a focus upon the text before our eyes, rather than having a wider perspective on

Scripture earned by years of careful Bible reading of the entire Bible text. Those who read the entire Scriptures over a period of time cannot fail to be impressed by the repetition of situations and events. The way Joseph is called out of prison to interpret a King's dream and is then exalted to rulership in a pagan land is clearly the basis for the language used about Daniel's experience in Babylon. This is not to say that text got dislocated, that Daniel was Joseph or vice versa. Rather do we perceive a single Divine mind behind the production of the Bible as we have it; and God's intention was clearly to show that circumstances repeat within and between the lives of His people. And the language He uses in recording history seeks to bring out those repetitions. This is why the lament of Jeremiah in depression is so similar to that of Job in his depression. And of course we are free to assume that Biblical characters were aware of and took inspiration from those who had gone before them. I suggest that this is what we have going on in the records of these three anointings of the Lord by despised and misunderstood women. They were inspired by each other- for the Lord comments that what the women did was to be told worldwide. This was a command, and it was surely obeyed. Mary of Bethany was inspired by the woman of Luke 7, and the anonymous woman of Matthew 26 was inspired by Mary's anointing of four days previously. Mary had given spikenard worth 300 pence; this woman used even more expensive ointment. And in this is our lesson- to be inspired by the devotion of others to their Lord. Heaven's record of our response is as it were recorded in similar language, in recognition of the inspiration provided by earlier acts of faithfulness by those we know or who have gone before us.

The similarities between the anointing record in Lk. 7 and those of Jn. 12 etc. require an explanation. Could it not be that the Gospels are showing us that the intensity of Mary's faith and love at first conversion was held by her until the end of the Lord's ministry? We need to ask ourselves whether the fire of first love for Him has grown weak; whether over the years we would do the same things for Him, feel the same way about Him, cry the same tears over Him… or have the years worn our idealism away?

12:2 *So they made him supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of them that sat and ate with him*- Given the obsession of Martha with serving in an earlier incident (Lk. 10:40), we can assume she continued doing what she liked doing, but with a more spiritual attitude than before. The Gospels several times use eating as a proof of resurrection; perhaps to prepare us for the idea of eating at the Lord's table in celebration of His resurrection. His ongoing eating with us at the communion service is likewise a testament to His resurrection.

12:3 *Then Mary*- RV "Mary therefore". In gratitude for the resurrection of Lazarus, "Mary therefore" anointed the Lord 'for his burial'. It was as if she perceived that the resurrection of Lazarus was only possible on account of the resurrection of Jesus which was soon to come. But after the Lord's death, her faith in His resurrection seems to have taken a nose dive. Mary's response to 'the gardener' reveals that despite it being the third day after the crucifixion, Mary Magdalene wasn't apparently open to the possibility that the Lord had risen. Yet surely she had heard Him specifically, categorically predict His death and resurrection. One can only conclude that she was so consumed by the feelings of the moment that she like us failed to make that crucial translation of knowledge into felt and real faith. As with us as we sit through Bible studies and revel in our own perception of Scripture, her so fine and correct understanding was suddenly without power when reality called.

Took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair- Peter's letters are packed with allusions back to the

Gospels. When he writes that to us, the Lord Jesus should be "precious" (1 Pet. 2:7), he surely has in mind how Mary had anointed the Lord with her "very precious ointment" (Jn. 12:3 RV). He bids us to be like Mary, to perceive "the preciousness" (RV) of Jesus, and to respond by giving up our most precious things, mentally or materially, in our worshipful response to Him.

The question arises as to why Mary anointed the Lord's feet, when anointing is nearly always of the head. The only time the foot of anything was anointed was in Ex. 40:11, when the pedestal / "foot" of the laver was anointed in order to consecrate it. This pedestal was made from the brass mirrors donated by repentant prostitutes (Ex. 38:8 = 1 Sam. 2:22). In this there is the connection. Mary the repentant whore wanted to likewise donate way she had to the true tabernacle and laver, which she perceived to be the Lord Jesus. Her equivalent of brass mirrors was her pound of spikenard. And it could be that she had been baptized at her conversion, and saw the Lord as her laver. And this was her response- to pour all her wealth into Him. She anointed him for His death- for she perceived that it was through death that the Lord would fulfill all the OT types of the laver etc.

And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil- Yet every one of the 11 OT references to a house being filled refers to the temple being filled with the Shekinah glory (1 Kings 8:10,11; 2 Chron. 5:13,14; 7:1,2; Is. 6:4; Ez. 10:3,4; 43:5; 44:4). John's sensitive use of language is surely seeking to draw a parallel. She was glorifying the Name by her gift, senseless as it may have seemed in the eyes of less spiritual people. There is a definite connection between spikenard and what incense was made from. What may seem to have no practical achievement in the eyes of men can truly be a sweet smelling savour to God. We need to remember this at times in bearing with our brethren's efforts for Him. To judge them in a utilitarian way is to fall into the same error as the disciples did. The efforts of others are described later in the NT in the same language- the same word for "odour" occurs in Phil. 4:18 to describe the labour of believers which is "wellpleasing to God". The way Mary anoints the Lord with spikenard is surely to be connected with how earlier she had washed His feet with her tears. The spikenard was "precious" (Jn. 12:3 RV), not only in its value materially, but in the way Mary used it in some kind of parallel to her tears. She perceived the preciousness of her tears, her repentance, her grateful love for her Lord. And any tears we may shed in gratitude of forgiveness are likewise so precious in His sight

12:4 *But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples, the one that would betray him, said*- The other Gospels say that it was some of the disciples who said this. The disaffection of one disciple to this day so easily influences others, to the point that their words are effectively the words of the disaffected, bitter individual who stands behind them.

12:5 *Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred dinarii and given to the poor?*- This kind of secular approach to spiritual devotion is of the flesh and not the Spirit. What is done with money and how it is done is all on one level; the essence is of devotion to the Lord. A denarius was the penny paid for a day's hard work (Mt. 20:2). The figure of 300 denarii may therefore be a round figure referring to the money earned in a year. The implication is that the disciples had a common fund from which they donated to the poor; such almsgiving was common in first century Palestine, and for the Lord to have pointedly not given alms would have been controversial. We note that He had the power to totally heal the sick, provide food and transform the material lives of people. But He used a great economy of miracle. He must have allowed this small scale poor fund to continue for the sake of developing the attitudes of the donors amongst His disciples- rather than for the sake of what the

donations would achieve. There are many principles which arise out of reflection on these things, living as we do in a grossly unequal world.

12:6 *Now this he said, not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it*- The Lord evidently knew how Judas was taking money out of the bag. As the Son of God He was an intellectual beyond compare, and sensitive and perceptive beyond our imagination. And He noticed it; and yet said nothing. He was seeking to save Judas and He saw that to just kick up a fuss about evident weakness wasn't the way. If only many of our brethren would show a like discernment. As noted on :5, the whole existence of this Poor Fund was not because it was effective in alleviating human need [the Lord had the power to achieve that by direct intervention]- but in order to develop the attitudes and devotions of the disciples.

Judas' lack of "care" for the poor uses the same word as recently used in 10:13 about the false shepherds who cared not the flock. So the point is being made that the Lord's disciples were now the shepherds of the new Israel- but there was a bad shepherd amongst them as there had been amongst Israel of old. And those poor beggars, requiring alms, were the Lord's "flock".

12:7- see on Mk. 14:53.

Jesus replied: Leave her alone - This translates a Greek phrase which essentially means 'to forgive', and it is usually translated like this. The Lord isn't just saying 'leave off her, let her be as she is'; He is saying 'Let her be forgiven', which is tantamount to saying 'let her express her gratitude as she wants'. The root for her gratitude was her sense of forgiveness. This heightens the connection between Mary and the woman in the city who was a sinner of Lk. 7.

She intended to keep it for the day of my burial- But Mary's beloved brother Lazarus had only recently died, and been embalmed. Yet she had not used her precious possession for that, but rather kept it for her Lord's burial. Mary Magdalene's understanding of the Lord went far beyond that of anyone else at the time. The record of Mary after the crucifixion has many links back to the woman of Luke 7. She *came to the sepulchre,* to wash the dead body with her tears, for she *went to the grave, to weep there,* and to *anoint it with the ointment* she had prepared. It's as if in her anointing of the Lord she really did see forward to His death and burial. And yet her initial motivation in doing it all was gratitude for what He had done for her through enabling her forgiveness. The Lord's power to forgive was ultimately due to His death, resurrection and ascension (Acts 5:31; Lk. 24:46,47). Yet Mary believed there and then that all this would happen, and thus she believed in His forgiveness. Her second anointing of the Lord has within it the implication that she somehow perceived that her adoration was motivated on account of the death that He was to die. "It was right for her to save this perfume for today, the day for me to be prepared for burial" (Jn. 12:7 New Century Version). The RV of Jn. 12:7 gives another suggestion: "Jesus therefore said [in response to Judas' suggestion she sell the ointment and give him the money to distribute to the poor], Suffer her to keep it against the day of my burying". Mary Magdalene had kept the precious ointment to anoint Jesus with when He died; and yet Judas was pressurizing her to sell it. And yet she used at least some of it then. This would indicate that she perceived Him as good as dead; she alone it seems perceived the frequent implications in His teaching that He was living out an ongoing death. She fully intended to pour the ointment on His dead body, but she did it ahead of time because she wanted Him to know right then that she understood, and that she loved Him.

The argument of Judas for efficiency, central administration etc. is contrasted most unfavourably with her personal, simple and deeply felt emotional response to the Lord's death. She did it at supper time (Jn. 12:2). In Jewish culture of the time, a meal together had religious significance. It could be that she so dwelt upon the Lord's teaching in Jn. 6 that she perceived the broken bread of the meal to be symbolic and prophetic of His upcoming death. Her generosity and totality of response to His death was therefore inspired by what we would call a breaking of bread, which made real to her yet once again the endless implications of His self-sacrifice.

12:8 *The poor you have always with you, but me you do not have always*- We note the Lord's grace and wisdom in not confronting Judas about his petty theft. Rather did the Lord focus upon protecting the dignity of Mary. His allusion is clearly to Dt. 15:11: "For the poor will never cease out of the land, therefore I command you, saying, You must surely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and to your poor". The context of this statement is that if Israel were obedient, then there would be no poor in the land (Dt. 15:4), but because of their disobedience which Moses foresaw, there were commandments about being generous to the poor. So perhaps there was a hidden message here to Judas, if he perceived it. If he were to be obedient, then he would not be poor, he would be blessed, and there would be no need for petty theft. The Dt. 15 passage also has the context of urging generosity to the poor, and not in any way seeking to get around it, nor begrudging any gift to them: "You must surely give to him, and your heart must not be grieved when you give to him" (Dt. 15:10). This was precisely what had happened- Judas and all the disciples were grieved at Mary's generosity. But clearly "the poor" was Jesus Himself personally. We see here not only an insight into the Lord's personal poverty, but also into how He perceived Himself as the poor in spirit. For Biblically, "the poor" refers not simply to the financially hard up, but to the depressed, the poor in spirit. The Messianic Psalms feature David describing himself as the "poor man", although the context of many of them doesn't refer to material poverty but to David's poverty of spirit at the time. We see therefore that the Lord of the universe can totally identify with the feelings of "the poor". Though He was rich, He made Himself a pauper for our sakes (2 Cor. 8:9 Gk.). That doesn't seem true in financial terms, for the Lord was never at any point financially rich (although one can speculate as to what happened to the gifts of the magi), but rather is the reference to the Lord's poverty of spirit and depression.

12:9 *The common people of the Jews learned that he was there, and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead*- This confirms the contrast in John between "the Jews", referring to the Jewish leadership, and "the common people". Another possibility is that John uses it specifically for those who were inhabitants of Jerusalem. Perhaps it was the literal smell of the powerful perfume which brought the people to the knowledge of the Lord's presence in that home. The resurrected Lazarus would have been a hugely powerful exhibit in favour of the Lord's power and message of life in Him.

12:10 *But the chief priests took counsel that they might put Lazarus also to death*- This is the classic response of those who refuse to capituate; they try to destroy or nullify the evidence and all the inconvenient truths. Those who don't wish to believe in the Father and Son are full of such desperation. Jealousy and fear of losing position, converts and vested interest leads to a crazed attempt to denigrate and deny the validity of another's faith or witness. Lazarus had done nothing wrong- he was simply the subject of a resurrection. The fact the highest leaders of Judaism wanted to give him a death sentence simply reflects how corrupt they were.

12:11- see on Jn. 12:42.

Because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus- The idea of the Greek is that they 'withdrew'; understanding "the Jews" as the Jewish leadership, there is no evidence they actually did this at this stage, but rather that they secretly believed. If as suggested on :9, "the Jews" refers to the Jerusalem Jews; then these people would have been amongst those who came out openly for the Lord at Pentecost. Perhaps here we see how inspiration records the weak faith and commitment of others in generous, positive terms (e.g. the disciples 'sleeping for sorrow'). The tragedy is that the Jewish leadership condemned the Lord to death when 'many' of them believed in Him. This is a classic feature of human beings once they get into groupings together; a group position is upheld even when the majority are against it, and even when the position is the most terrible of all, in this case, the killing of God's Son. Again we note how the Lord had thought that some from "the crowd" would be converted (see on 11:42), when what happened was the opposite; the crowd, of whom we read in 12:12 (RV and some manuscripts "*the* crowd"), were those who violently turned against Him, and the converts were made from within the Jewish leadership. The Lord was human, and misplaced hopes and inaccurate suppositions of the immediate future are all part of being human.

Many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus- The chief priests wanted Lazarus put to death simply because “many of the Jews went away” from the synagogue because of him, and it would have meant the tithes were lost or at least put in jeopardy. And this cannot be ruled out as a major factor why they wanted Jesus out of the way too, and why they persecuted the early church so fiercely, seeing that thousands of tithe-paying members were being turned against them.

12:12 *The next day, a great crowd that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem*- On the triumphal entry, see on Mt. 21:1-8. John's chronology suggests that the triumphal entry took place once there were gathered together a mass of people who were pro-Jesus, because of the witness made by the resurrection of Lazarus. I have repeatedly emphasized that events did not overtake the Lord; He used His own planning and awareness of human psychology, as well as the Father's direct power, to orchestrate things so that He gave His life precisely when and how He did. It was not taken from Him, He laid it down (see on 10:17,18). So it could be that the Lord raised Lazarus, knowing that such a spectacular miracle would provoke support for Him and also the desire to kill Him at all costs. And He orchestrated the triumphal entry in order for it to be a total come down and dashing of Messianic expectation for all who apparently supported Him, so that they would turn against Him and empower the Jews to crucify Him.

12:13 *Took the branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, and cried out: Hosanna! Blessed is he that comes in the Name of the Lord, the King of Israel!*- It has been so often pointed out that the crowd who welcomed the Lord into Jerusalem with shouts of “Hosanna!” were the very people who days later were screaming “Crucify him!”. It’s been suggested that the crowds were comprised of two different groups; those who shouted “Hosanna!” were those who had come up from Galilee, and the Jerusalem crowd shouted “Crucify Him!”. But Jn. 12:13 and Jn. 19:14,15 seem to encourage us to make a connection between the two scenes, for “the crowd” *shouts* both times- firstly “Hosanna!”, and then “Crucify Him!”. Personally I am convinced it was the same basic crowd. They were a classic witness to the fickleness of human loyalty to God’s Son. And remember that only a few months after

Jerusalem slew Him, the leaders of the Jews feared that "the people" would have stoned them if they acted too roughly with the followers of Jesus (Acts 5:26). Popular opinion had swayed back the other way again. And a while later, it was to sway against the Christians again, when "there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem" (Acts 8:1). But this leads to questions, questions which aren't answered by a simple acceptance of humanity's fickleness. Why this *anger* with Jesus, a man who truly went about doing good, caring for little children, impressing others with the evident congruity between His words and His person? How could it have happened that the anger of His people was so focused against Him, leading them to prefer a murderer as against a Man who clearly came to give life, and that more abundantly…?

Branches of palm trees- They welcomed Him into Jerusalem with the waving of palm fronds. These were a symbol of Jewish nationalism- hence the palm appeared on the coins of the Second Revolt (AD 132-135). Back in 164 BC when Judas Maccabeus rededicated the temple altar, palms were brought to the temple (2 Macc. 10:7); and Simon Maccabeus led the Jews back into Jerusalem with palm fronds in 1 Macc. 13:51. The crowd were therefore welcoming Jesus, expecting Him to announce His Messianic Kingdom there and then. The "Hosanna!" of Jn. 12:13 was used in addressing kings in 2 Sam. 14:4; 2 Kings 6:26. It meant literally "Save *now*!". They wanted a Kingdom there and then. His whole interpretation of the Kingdom, extensively and so patiently delivered for over three years, had simply failed to register with them. It seems that only after the crowd had started doing this, that the Lord consciously dashed their expectations by sitting on a donkey.

12:14 *And Jesus, having found a young donkey, sat upon it- as it is written*- The Lord sat upon the donkey, to fulfill the prophecy of Zech. 9:9 that Israel's King would come to them "humble, and riding upon a donkey"- not a warhorse. And, moreover, Zechariah says that He would come commanding peace [and not bloodlust] *to the Gentiles*, with a world-wide dominion from sea to sea, not merely in Palestine. Those who perceived the Lord's allusion to Zechariah 9 would have realized this was what His acted parable was trying to tell them- the Lord Jesus was not out to destroy Rome but to bring peace to them as well as all the Gentile world. A humble, lowly king was a paradox which they could not comprehend. A king, especially the Messanic King of Israel, had to be proud and war-like. The crowd must have been so terribly disappointed. He purposefully abased Himself and sat upon a donkey. This Jesus whom they had liked and loved and hoped in, turned out to totally and fundamentally *not* be the person they thought He was- despite Him so patiently seeking to show them who He really was for so long. He had become an image in their own minds, of their own creation, convenient to their own agendas- and when the truth dawned on them, that He was *not* that person, their anger against Him knew no bounds. The Russian atheist Maxim Gorky commented, in terrible language but with much truth in it, that man has created God in his own image and after his own likeness. And for so many, this is indeed the case. The image of Jesus which the crowds had was only partially based on who He really was. Some things they understood right, but very much they didn't. And they turned away in disgust and anger when they realized how deeply and basically they had misunderstood Him. They angrily commented: "Who is this son of man?" (Jn. 12:34). In that context, Jesus had not said a word about being "son of man". But they were effectively saying: 'What sort of Messiah / son of man figure is this? We thought you were the son-of-man Messiah, who would deliver us right now. Clearly you're not the type of Messiah / Christ we thought you were'. All

this would explain perfectly why the awful torture and mocking of Jesus in His time of dying was based around His claims to be a King. The crown of thorns, the mock-royal robe, the 'sceptre' put in His hand, then taken away and used to beat Him with, the mocking title over His body "This is the King of the Jews", the anger of the Jewish leaders about this even being written as it was, the jeers of the crowd about this "King"- all this reflects the extent of anger there was with the nature of His 'Kingship'. All the parables and teaching about the true nature of His Kingship / Kingdom had been totally ignored. The Lord had told them plainly enough. But it hadn't penetrated at all… The Lord was not only misunderstood by the crowds, but His very being amongst men had provoked in them a crisis of conscience; and their response was to repress that conscience. As many others have done and do to this day, they had shifted their discontent onto an innocent victim, artificially creating a culprit and stirring up hatred against him. Their angry turning against Him was therefore a direct outcome of the way He had touched their consciences. Such tragic misunderstanding of persons occurs all the time, to varying intensities. One frequently finds married couples with such anger against each other that it seems hard for an outsider to appreciate how two such nice people could be so angry with each other. The source of that anger is often traceable to a misunderstanding of each other during courtship. Each party built up an idealized or simply incorrect image of the other; and once they really got to know the other, in the humdrum of daily life, there was a great release of anger- that the spouse was not the person the other partner had imaged. The goodness of who they really goes unperceived and is readily discounted- simply because they don't live up to the mistaken image which the spouse had of them in other areas.

12:15 *Fear not, daughter of Zion! Look, your King comes, sitting on an donkey's colt*- The colt would not have been broken in; it would have careered all over the place in a most unseemly way. It would be like a president elect driving through the streets of his capital city in an old, backfiring two door economy car- rather than a brand new Mercedes. But this humility was the special sign that was to be looked for ["Look...!"]. It was the sign that the faithful remnant ["the daughter of Zion"] would take encouragement from. Those who looked only for immediate Messianic blessing would be bitterly disappointed and let down; but that was the Lord's design.

12:16- see on Jn. 14:29.

These things his disciples did not understand at first; but when Jesus was glorified- This is associated in John with the giving of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 7:39). The suggestion is surely that the Holy Spirit enabled them to understand the significance of events during the Lord's ministry. The Comforter was promised to enable them to do this, and in this sense the Comforter brought about the Lord's glorification (Jn. 16:14; Acts 3:13). In a sense, the Lord was glorified in the events of the cross (Jn. 13:31,32 "Now is the Son of Man glorified"). And yet the perception of that glory was only achieved by the disciples some time later.

Then they remembered that these things were written about him, and that they had done these things to him- The Comforter brought things to their attention and helped them see the significance and meaning in the Lord's words and actions. For it was after all His personal presence in the hearts of the disciples. That same power and gift of the Spirit is for all time, and can have the same effect upon us.

The purpose of prophecy such as Zechariah 9 is that we shall be able to recognize the signs when they appear, not that we shall be able to predict the future:

· The disciples did not expect the Lord Jesus to enter into Jerusalem "sitting on an

ass's colt" in fulfilment of Zech. 9:9. But when He did, then soon afterwards, all became clear to them- that He had fulfilled this prophecy (Jn. 12:16).

· "I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe" (Jn. 14:29).

· Likewise with prophecies such as "the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" in Ps. 69:9, and even the Lord's own prophecies of His resurrection. When it happened, "his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture (Ps. 69:9), and the word which Jesus had said" (Jn. 2:17-22).

12:17 *The crowd that was with him, when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead, made testimony*- As noted on :12, I would say that the Lord psychologically orchestrated the flow of events which would lead to His death. "The crowd" who were the basis of His triumphal entry, who were stirred up in wanting Him to "save now" ["Hosanna!"], were the crowd who had been motivated by their experience of Lazarus' amazing resurrection. It was their manic enthusiasm which led the Jews to panic and seek to murder the Lord at all costs. When their expectations were dashed by the whole style of the triumphal entry, this same crowd then turned violently and disappointedly against the Lord, and this fitted in perfectly with the Jewish plot to kill the Lord without problems from the masses. Yet the whole thing was orchestrated by the Lord- for He gave His life, when and how He wished; it was not taken from Him (see on 10:17,18).

12:18 *For this cause also the crowd went and met him, for they heard that he had done this miracle*- As noted on :17, John is stressing that the crowd so manic for the Lord to "save now!", who welcomed Him into Jerusalem, was the crowd motivated by the resurrection of Lazarus. This was all planned by the Lord; He was winding them up to a peak of popularist support for Him, and then through the triumphal entry being the very opposite of their hopes, in fact a mocking of traditional Messianic expectiation... He was setting them up to then turn against Him. See on :12 and :17.

12:19 *The Pharisees complained to one another: You see that you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him*- As noted on :12 and :17,18, the Lord intended His miracle to have this effect. He intended the Jewish world to momentarily turn after Him whilst their leadership became the more committed to murdering Him at all costs; so that if He then disappointed the masses of the Jewish world, then His demise would be brought about. In all this we see the Lord scheming to give His life for us, because He loved us. It was not taken from Him (see on 10:17,18).

12:20 *Now there were certain Greeks among those that went to worship at the feast*- These were presumably prosleytes, like the Ethiopian eunuch, who had travelled to Jerusalem in order to keep Passover as far as they could. Perhaps the Ethiopian eunuch was present at this time amongst them. This would explain why Philip was sent to baptize him, for this group approached Philip at this time (:21).

12:21 *These went to Philip, who was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him: Sir, can we see Jesus?*- The Gentiles perhaps approached Philip because he was known to be from an area which was mocked as being alrgely Gentile. When men asked “We would see Jesus” (AV), He responded by giving a prophecy of His death (Jn. 12:21)- just as the broken bread *is* Him; His death is the essence of Him. To know Him crucified was and is to know Him. He continues by saying that if a man lost his life for Him, then that man would be with Jesus where He is. Those who want to know where Jesus is, to see Him, have to die His death (Jn. 12:25,26). The fact the disciples did *not* appreciate His death meant, therefore, that they didn’t really appreciate *Him*. And they so openly stress this in their Gospels.

12:22 *Philip went and told Andrew, and then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus*- Andrew and Philip occur together in Jn. 1:45; 6:7,8; Mk. 3:18. Such friendship between two of a group of twelve is normal, and is another evidence that the Gospel records are true to reality accounts.

12:23- see on Rev. 7:9.

Jesus told them: The hour comes that the Son of Man should be glorified- It can be inferred from :23 that the Lord perceived that His hour had come to lay down His life when He was told that there were Gentiles who wanted to "see" [Johanine language for 'believe'] Him. It was as if this were the cue for Him to voluntarily lay down His life. The conversion of the whole world was a major reason for the Lord's death; and thus there is the inevitable connection between His death, and the need to take the knowledge and power of that death to the whole planet.

Through John's Gospel, the Lord inspired an awareness that the *essence* of His coming, the day of judgment and the future Kingdom was in fact to be realized within Christian experience right now. John's Gospel brings this out clearly. The Synoptics all include the Lord's Mount Olivet prophecy as a lead-in to the record of the breaking of bread and crucifixion. In John, the record of this prophecy is omitted and replaced by the account of the Lord's discourse in the upper room. "The day of the son of man" in John becomes "the hour [of the cross]… that the son of man should be glorified" (Jn. 12:23). "Coming", "that day", "convict / judge the world" are all phrases picked up by John and applied to our experience of the Lord right now. In our context of judgment now, we have to appreciate that the reality of the future judgment of course holds true; but the essence of it is going on now. As John Robinson put it, "the Last Assize is being accomplished in every moment of choice and decision… Judgment Day is a dramatised, idealised picture of every day".

The Synoptics record several references to "the day of the Son of Man" as the day of His second coming. But in John, this becomes the time when the Son of Man is glorified- which refers both to His death, and to the subsequent glorification through the giving of the Spirit into the hearts of the believers. For this was the effective 'coming' of the Lord to the believers, as they await His literal return. This is only one of many examples of where the language and events of Matthew, Mark and Luke are alluded to and expressed by John in more spiritual and abstract terms. Here are some examples:

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The Synoptic Gospels	John's Gospel
Mt. 16:19 the keys of the Gospel of the Kingdom	Jn. 20:21,23
the more literal accounts of the birth of Jesus	Jn. 1: 1-14
The great preaching commission	Jn. 14:12; 17:18; 20:21; Jn. 15:8,16; Jn. 17:23 RV
Lk. 16:31	"If you believe not (Moses') writings, how shall you believe my words?" (Jn. 5:47). This is John's equivalent of the parable of

	the rich man and Lazrus, which concluded with the same basic point (Lk. 16:31).
The transfiguration	Whilst there is no account of the transfiguration in John, he repeatedly stresses how the Lord manifested forth His glory and was glorified. For John, the Lord's whole life was in a spiritual sense a form of the transfiguration experience which the synoptics described.
The Synoptics all include the Lord's Mount Olivet prophecy as a lead-in to the record of the breaking of bread and crucifixion	In John, the record of this prophecy is omitted and replaced by the account of the Lord's discourse in the upper room. "The day of the son of man" in the synoptics becomes "the hour [of the cross]… that the son of man should be glorified" (Jn. 12:23). "Coming", "that day", "convict / judge the world" are all phrases picked up by John and applied to our experience of the Lord right now. In our context of judgment now, we have to appreciate that the reality of the future judgment of course holds true; but the essence of it is going on now.
The three synoptic gospels all include Peter's 'confession', shortly before Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain.	In John's gospel the account of the transfiguration is lacking. Are we to assume that Thomas' confession in chapter 20 is supposed to take its place?
The need for water baptism The account of the breaking of bread	Jn. 3:3-5 John's version is in John 6:48-58. He stresses that one must absorb Christ into themselves in order to really have the eternal life which the bread and blood symbolize. It seems John puts it this way in order to counter the tendency to think that merely by partaking in the ritual of breaking bread, believers are thereby guaranteed eternal life.
The many quotations from the Old Testament, shown to be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus. The synoptics each	

give some account of the literal origin of Jesus through giving genealogies or some reference to them.	John expresses this in more abstract language: “The word was made flesh” (Jn. 1:14). John’s Gospel speaks of Jesus as if He somehow existed in the plan of God from the beginning, but “became flesh” when He was born of Mary.

The transfiguration is recorded in the synoptics, and their records include the idea that it happened “after six days” (Mk. 9:2). John speaks of the same theme of Christ manifesting God’s glory, but he sees it as happening not just once at the transfiguration, but throughout the Lord’s ministry and above all in His death. Interestingly, John’s record also has the idea of the Lord manifesting the Father’s glory after six days. The Gospel opens by describing events on four successive days (Jn. 1:19,29,35,43), and then we read that “the third day” [i.e. six or seven days after the story has begun], Jesus “manifested his glory” (Jn. 2:1,11). Again in Jn. 7:37, it was on the last great day of the feast of Tabernacles, i.e. on the 7th day, that the Lord Jesus manifests Himself. Perhaps too we are to pay attention to the six days mentioned in Jn. 12:1, after which the Lord was crucified and manifested the Father’s glory.

12:24- see on Mk. 14:35.

Truly, truly, I say to you: Except a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit - Gk. 'The grain'. Vine observes that this was spoken to some Greeks (:20); it was "addressed to Greeks, familiar with the Eleusinian mysteries... the risen Dionysus in the freshness of his second life was conducted from Athens to Eleusis in joyful procession. An ear of corn, plucked in solemn silence, was exhibited to the initiated as the object of mystical contemplation, as the symbol of the god, prematurely killed, but, like the ear enclosing the seed-corn, bearing within himself the germ of a second life". Here we have an example of the Lord speaking to people in terms which they could relate to. He of course didn't believe the Eleusinian mysteries were true, just as He didn't believe in demons, but He alludes to their incorrect ideas in order to realign their thinking towards God's power in Himself. We likewise are to engage with this world in their own terms and language, in order to lead them to the better way.

In the parable of the sower, the Lord likened the preaching of the Gospel to a seed falling onto various types of ground, good, stony, etc. In all the synoptics, the account of the sower parable is recorded at length; and within that parable, the Lord emphasizes this falling of the seed onto the ground. Likewise He likens response to the Gospel message to “a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth… but when it is sown…” (Mk. 4:31,32). But the Lord clearly understood the image of a seed falling into the ground as prophetic of His forthcoming crucifixion (Jn. 12:23-25). The connection in His mind is surely clear- the preaching of the Gospel is a form of death and crucifixion, in order to bring forth a harvest in others. Through preaching, we live out the Lord's death for others in practice, we placard Him crucified before the world's eyes. We are not simply "Him" to them; we are Him crucified to them. The honour of this is surpassing.

It abides alone- The Lord Jesus died a lonely death. Loneliness is a part of sharing in

the crucifixion life. The Lord hinted at the loneliness of the cross in saying that the seed falls into the ground and 'dies' "alone"- but then brings forth much fruit as a result of that alone-ness (Jn. 12:24). The High Priest entered alone into the Most Holy place with the blood of atonement (Heb. 9:7). Any stepping out of the comfort zone is an inevitably lonely experience, just as the crucifixion life of Jesus was the ultimately lonely experience. For nobody else knows exactly how you feel in e.g. turning down that job, giving away those savings, quitting that worldly friendship, quietly selling something...

It bears much fruit- He mused that if He didn't allow Himself to fall to the ground and die, no fruit could be brought forth (Jn. 12:24). The fact He did means that we will bring forth fruit. It could be that the reference in Jn. 7:39 to the Holy Spirit being given through the Lord's death (His 'glory'), as symbolized by the water flowing from His side, means that due to the cross we have the inspiration to a holy, spiritual way of life. It is not so that His death released some mystical influence which would change men and women whether or not they will it; rather is it that His example there inspires those who are open to it. We have been reconciled to God through the cross of Jesus, and yet therefore we must be reconciled to God, and take the message of reconciliation to others. What has been achieved there in prospect we have to make real for us, by appropriating it to ourselves in repentance, baptism and a life of ongoing repentance (2 Cor. 5:18-20 cp. Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:14,15).

The fruit brought forth depends upon our freewill bringing forth of that fruit: "I chose you, and appointed you to go and bear fruit [s.w. 12:24], and that your fruit should remain" (Jn. 15:16, as in the parable of the sower, Mk. 4:8). The more fruit we bring forth, the more His work and death is glorified. And the language in 15:16 of *going* and bearing fruit is surely John's version of the great preaching commission recorded in the Synoptics.

Here the Lord assumes that His death, His falling into the ground, would be matched by His followers also hating their lives, that they might rise again. And He connects His death with glorification. Soon afterwards, the Lord spoke of how his followers would likewise "bear much fruit", and thus *glorify* God. And in this context He continues with words which can be read as John's record of the great preaching commission: "I have chosen you... that ye should *go* [cp. "Go ye into all the world..."] and bring forth fruit" (Jn. 15:8,16). Clearly the Lord connected His bringing forth of "much fruit" through His death with the same "much fruit" being brought forth by the disciples' witness. It follows from this that the fruit which He potentially achieved on the cross is brought to reality by our preaching. And perhaps it is also possible to see a parallel between our preaching and His laying down of His life on the cross, as if the work of witness is in effect a laying down of life by the preacher, in order to bring forth fruit. Likewise the Lord had earlier linked the life of cross carrying with bearing witness to the world around us (Lk. 9:23,26). As His witnesses we bare His cross as well as share His glory. See on Jn. 17:20.

12:25 *He that loves his life*- "Life" translates *psuche*, "soul". This is surely the Gospel of John's equivalent of the parable of the rich fool, who so loved his own soul but lost it: "I will say to my soul: Soul, you have many goods..." (Lk. 12:19). But here in John we see that the Lord half spoke that parable to Himself; if He refused the cross, He would be loving His own soul, trying to be briefly rich for himself in this world.

Loses it- As so often, the Lord was clearly half talking to Himself here. For in the immediate context, it was His life which was to be lost, or could be temporarily kept if He were to refuse the cross. We are right now losing our lives if we love ourselves.

The final judgment is likened to a winnowing process. But right now, according to Ps. 139:3 RVmg., God winnows our path [our daily living], all day ("my path") and every evening (at my "lying down"). "The Lord sat as king [in judgment] at the Flood. Yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever" (Ps. 29:10 RV); He is just as much sitting in judgment now as He was at the flood, which is a well known type of the judgment to come. He speaks of our death in the context of His death. Baptism is a statement that we are prepared to identify with His death as the guiding principle for the rest of our eternal existence.

He that hates his life in this world, shall keep it to everlasting life- The Lord carefully doesn't speak of 'losing' life and then receiving it. Instead, He speaks of keeping life and that life becoming everlasting. As He made clear in the events and teaching of the resurrection of Lazarus in Jn. 11, death for Him was not death. The important thing was the kind of life we now live; for He is often recorded by John as teaching that we can live the eternal life right now. We can live the kind of life we shall eternally live. Note that we 'keep' our current spiritual life eternally; we will eternally be who we are spiritually today. In this lies the paramount and eternal importance of spiritual mindedness and character development.

12:26- see on Lk. 9:54,55.

If anyone desires to serve me, he must follow me- Whoever serves [Gk. 'is a deacon of'] the Lord Jesus must follow Him, and the idea of following Him is usually connected with His walk to death on the cross (Jn. 12:26). We are all asked to follow Him, it is all part of being His disciples, and so we are all asked to be 'deacons' in this sense. Our service is of *each other*; to walk away from active involvement because of personality clashes etc. is to walk away from true, cross-carrying Christianity. In unfeigned humility, let us by love serve one another, and in so doing know the spirit of the Lord who served, and thereby share together His exaltation.

I have suggested that John's Gospel record had a missionary intention and background. It was the transcript of how John preached the Gospel to a particular Jewish interest group, and he backed it up by his three letters which are full of allusion to the Gospel. The Greek for "serve" here is elsewhere translated "use the office of a deacon". There could well be a specific localized point being made to the Johanine community of converts- any desiring to be a deacon in the church community must be aware that such service is all about sharing in the spirit of the Lord's cross. Truly, "If anyone serves me [as a deacon, in this initial context], the Father will honour him". Honour is what church servants receive (1 Tim. 5:17)

He must follow me- "Follow me" is usually used by the Lord in the context of taking up the cross and following Him. True service is cross-carrying. It cannot be that we serve, truly serve, in order to advance our own egos. It is all too easy to "serve" especially in an ecclesial context without truly carrying the Lord's cross.

And where I am, there shall also my servant be- Where He was right then was at a place where He saw so clearly the cross beckoning, and desperately wished there might be another way. When there was not. We can know something of the spirit of His cross. We can be where He was and where He is, in spirit. The life of cross carrying, devotion to the principles of the cross, will lead us to be with Him always wherever He leads us. In John 12:24-26 losing life as the Lord lost His, serving Him, following Him, being "where I am" are all parallel. "I am" can legitimately be read as an allusion to the Yahweh Name, and this was manifested supremely in the Lord's death. The sense is therefore that where "I am" would be, i.e. on the cross, to there those who follow the Lord will also come.

If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him- It makes an interesting exercise to compare all the Lord's references to "*My* Father" and to "*The* Father". So much of what He says about His relationship with "My Father" He says about our relationship to "The Father". He was seeking to inculcate an awareness of what He finally states in so many words in Jn. 20:17- that His Father is our Father. His relationship with the Father can be replicated in ours with the same Father, through the spirit of adoption which makes us His dear sons too.

12:27 *Now is my soul disturbed*- The same word used about the Lord's disturbed soul at the death and resurrection of Lazarus (Jn. 11:33). He saw in the death and resurrection of Lazarus a foretaste of His own, hence His groaning in spirit.

What shall I say?- This is often read as the Lord meaning: 'Shall I say 'Save Me from this hour?", as if He is going through various options of possible prayer. But He does indeed ask to be saved from the hour. Therefore I see this as Him wondering how to find the right words with which to verbalize His emotions. The language of the Lord's intercession with groanings which cannot be spoken (Rom. 8:26,27) clearly alludes to His groanings at the resurrection of Lazarus and now as He faces His own death. In that very context, Paul says that we [too] know not how to pray as we should (Rom. 8:26). The Lord also was at that place.

Father, save me from this hour?- Jesus seems to have prepared His words before praying them. But it appears He decided against praying that. The question mark isn't required by the Greek. The sense is 'save me *out of* this hour', and we read in Heb. 5:7 that the Lord prayed this and was heard because of His groanins in prayer. So this was not just a prayer He contemplated praying. He prayed it, and it was answered in His resurrection.

12:28 *Father, glorify your name*- The Lord Jesus struggled in Gethsemane between "save *me*..." and "Father, glorify Your name". The glorifying of the Father's Name meant more to him than his personal salvation. Likewise Moses and Paul [in spirit] were prepared to sacrifice their personal salvation for the sake of Yahweh's Name being glorified in the saving of His people (Ex. 32:30-34 cp. Rom. 9:1-3).

When He addressed God as *abba*, 'dad', the Jews would have been scandalized. But this was the experience He had of God as a near at hand, compassionate Father. He purposefully juxtaposed *abba* with the Divine Name which Jews were so paranoid about pronouncing: "Abba, glorify your name" (Jn. 12:28). This was nothing short of scandal to Jewish ears. And we are to pray as the Lord prayed, also using "Abba, father" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). Seeing it was unheard of at the time for Jews to pray to God using 'Abba', Paul is clearly encouraging us to relate to God and pray to Him as Jesus did (cp. Jn. 20:17). The Lord made a big deal of calling God 'Abba', even forbidding His Jewish followers to use the term about anyone else (Mt. 23:9).

The Lord Jesus prayed out loud: "Father, glorify Your name". A voice came from Heaven saying that God had already done this and would do it again. And the Lord told the listeners that this response came not for His sake, not really as an answer to His prayer, but for their sakes, that in the apparent 'answer' to His words, they might see the power of prayer and the extent of the Father's relationship with the Son (Jn. 12:28-30). But He knew that the prayer had already been answered before it was prayed. And even with us, answers can come not necessarily for the sake of the answer, but to demonstrate other principles. Likewise the Lord asks us to pray for the

Kingdom to come, not because this means that a certain number of prayers will change the date, but surely because the process of petition for the Kingdom is for our benefit.
"Father, glorify your name" could have been a request for the whole crucifixion and resurrection event to start there and then. It would only be natural for any genuine human to wish for it to start and be done with. There is good reason to understand that in those wretched hours of crucifixion, God was especially manifested to the world. There was a matchless, never to be surpassed partnership between Father and Son on the cross. God was in Christ on the cross, reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). There the Lord Jesus manifested and declared the Father's Name, His essential character, to the full (Jn. 12:28; 13:31,32; 17:5,6,26). The Lord's references to 'going to the Father' referred to His coming crucifixion. That was where the Father was, on the cross. In the very moment of His death the observing Centurion gasped, twice: "*Truly* this was the Son of God" (Mk. 15:40; Lk. 23:46). There was something so evidently Godly in that death. God was so near.

"Hallowed be your name" isn't merely an ascription of praise- it's actually a request for God to carry out all the implications of His Name in practice. When we sing praise to God's Name, we ask for it to be glorified- and here is where praise isn't mere painless performance of music. Once we bring the Name of God into it, we're actually asking for action in our lives. Jesus Himself prayed that part of His model prayer- "Father, glorify your name" (Jn. 12:28)- and soon afterwards He could comment that in His death, "Now the Son of man is glorified, and in him God is glorified" (Jn. 13:31). Thus in the Lord's case, a request to glorify God's Name lead Him ultimately to the cross.

The continuity of personality between the human Jesus and the now-exalted Jesus is brought out by meditation upon His “glory”. The glory of God refers to His essential personality and characteristics. When He ‘glorifies Himself’, He articulates that personality- e.g. in the condemnation of the wicked or the salvation of His people. Thus God was "glorified" in the judgment of the disobedient (Ez. 28:22; 39:13), just as much as He is "glorified" in the salvation of His obedient people. God glorified Himself in redeeming Israel, both in saving them out of Babylon, and ultimately in the future. Thus He was glorified in His servant Israel (Is. 44:23; 49:3). There are therefore both times and issues over which the Father is glorified. He was above all glorified in the resurrection of His Son. Each of these 'glorifications' meant that the essential Name / personality of the Father was being manifested and justified. The glory of the Lord Jesus was that of the Father. He was glorified in various ways and at different times within His ministry (e.g. Jn. 11:4); but He was also glorified in His resurrection and exaltation (Jn. 7:39). As the Lord approached the cross, He asked that the Father's Name be glorified. The response from Heaven was that God had already glorified it in Christ, and would do so again (Jn. 12:28). At the last Supper, the Lord could say: "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him" (Jn. 13:31). And yet various Scriptures teach that the Son of man was to be glorified in His death, in His resurrection (Acts 3:13), at His ascension, in His priestly mediation for us now (Heb. 5:5), in the praise His body on earth would give Him, in their every victory over sin, in every convert made (Acts 13:48; 2 Thess. 3:1), in every answered prayer (Jn. 14:13), and especially at His return (2 Thess. 1:10)... So the glorification of the Lord Jesus wasn't solely associated with His resurrection, and therefore it wasn't solely associated with His nature being changed or His receiving a

new body. In each of these events, and at each of these times, the Name / glory / personality of the Father is being manifested, justified and articulated.

I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again- The Name was glorified in the Lord's perfect life, and would be supremely in His death. There, in the nakedness, blood and spittle of the cross, the Name of God was declared. And yet the Name is glorified in that the characteristics of God are declared in the willing response of people ("Who shall not fear You and glorify Your Name?", Rev. 15:4 s.w.). But here, God speaks of how He will glorify His Name; the revealing of His characteristics in people is not only over to them to achieve; God through the Spirit will do His part in bringing this about.

12:29 *The crowd that stood by and heard it*- They heard the "voice" from Heaven (:28). Significantly, Jn. 3:29 has spoken of John the Baptist as 'standing and hearing' [same Greek words] the Lord's voice. The voice came for their sakes (:30), so we are led to imagine this crowd as containing believers, perhaps prepared by John the Baptist's preaching. "The crowd" had heard God's voice; to turn away from His Son was to totally deny His personal appeal to them. And yet this "crowd" were the very group who soon were to turn against the Lord and cry for His crucifixion, because their expectations of Messiah had been dashed.

Said that it had thundered. Others said an angel had spoken to him- This is all the language of Old Testament theophany, especially to Moses. The Lord is clearly being established as greater than Moses, and they are being called to be a new Israel obedient to a new covenant.

12:30 *Jesus responded: This voice has not come for my sake, but for your sakes*- To hear the actual voice of His Father might seem the ultimate encouragement to the Lord. After all the years of abstraction, of praying to the Father and reading His voice in His written word... to finally hear His actual voice would seem to be a case of faith gloriously and triumphantly turned to sight. But the Lord emphasizes that hearing the Father's actual voice was not for His sake. It did not as it were encourage Him. We are reminded of Elisha being so sure there were Angels surrrounding him that he asked for only the eyes of his servant to be opened to behold them (2 Kings 6:17). And so we are set up for the momentous teaching about the Comforter which is to come in chapters 14-16. Physicalities like seeing or hearing a person are on a very low level. The presence of the Comforter in our hearts will actually be more significant than having the Lord's literal presence. And likewise, the manifestation of the Father in the Son is far more than hearing His literal, physical voice. This is a huge challenge to us. To read the Bible and have the Spirit operative in our hearts, and the Lord's presence there, as of the word made flesh, is *more than* actually hearing the voice of God almighty.

12:31 *Now is the judgment of this world*- The coming of the voice was to encourage that crowd that the Lord was indeed of God, and that the Jewish world which had such a pull on them [against Him] was actually under judgment, just as He had proclaimed. The Lord plainly described His death as "the judgment of this world". Because there was "no judgment" in the ultimate sense as there was no justice, therefore the Lord Jesus died on the cross (Is. 59:15,16). This was the ultimate judgment of this world. There the Lord God, through His Son, acted as judge in condemning sin (Rom. 8:3).

Now shall the prince of this world be cast out-

The “prince of this world” is described as being “cast out”, coming to the Lord Jesus, having no part in Him and being “judged”, all during the last few hours before

Christ's death (Jn.12:31; 14:30; 16:11). All these descriptions seem to fit the Jewish system as represented by the Law, Moses, Caiaphas the High Priest, Judas and the Jews wanting to kill Jesus, and Judas. Note that "the prince of this world" refers to Roman and Jewish governors in 1 Cor. 2:6,8. At the Lord's death the Mosaic system was done away with (Col. 2:14–17); the "bondwoman", representing the Law in the allegory, was "cast out" (Gal. 4:30). "The prince of this world" is described, in the very same words, as being "cast out" (Jn. 12:31).

Caiaphas?

Wycliffe in archaic English renders Mt. 26:3: "Then the princes of priests and the elder men of the people were gathered into the hall of the prince of priests, that was said Caiaphas". The "world" in John's Gospel refers primarily to the Jewish world; its "prince" can either be a personification of it, or a reference to Caiaphas the High Priest. Caiaphas' equivalent name in Hebrew could suggest 'cast out'; his rending of his priestly clothes at Christ's trial declared him "cast out" of the priesthood (see Lev. 10:6; 21:10). "This world" and its "prince" are treated in parallel by John (12:31 cp. 16:11) – just as Jesus, the prince of the Kingdom, can be called therefore "the Kingdom" (Lk. 17:21). Colossians 2:15 describes Christ's ending of the Law on the cross as "spoiling principalities and powers" – the "prince" of the Jewish world being "cast out" (a similar idea in Greek to "spoiling") would then parallel this. The Jews "caught" Jesus and cast Him out of the vineyard (Mt. 21:39) – but in doing so, they themselves were cast out of the vineyard and "spoiled" by Jesus (Col. 2:15).

If indeed "the prince of this world" is a reference to Caiaphas, then we have to face the fact that this individual is being singled out by the Lord for very special condemnation, as the very embodiment of 'Satan', sin and its desires, all that was then in opposition to God. This is confirmed by the Lord's comment to Pilate that "he that delivered me unto you has the greatest sin" (Jn. 19:11 Gk. – "greater" in the AV is translated "greatest" in 1 Cor. 13:13; Mk. 9:34; Mt. 13:32; 18:1,4; 23:11; Lk. 9:46; Lk. 22:24; Lk. 22:26). It was Caiaphas and the Jews who "delivered" Jesus to Pilate to execute (Mt. 27:2,18; Jn. 18:30,35 s.w.). But the Lord speaks as if one person amongst them in particular had delivered Him to Pilate – and that specific individual was Caiaphas. If Caiaphas had the "greatest sin" in the crucifixion of God's son, we can understand how he is singled out by the Lord Jesus for such description as the "prince of this world". A number of expositors have interpreted "the Devil... that had the power of death" in Heb. 2:14–17 as an allusion to Caiaphas.

Judas and "The prince of this world"

There are points of association between "the prince of this world" and Judas; I suggest, because Judas was the agent of Caiaphas and the Jewish world. After Judas left the upper room we get the impression that Jesus started to talk more earnestly and intensely. Immediately after Judas went out Jesus said, "*Now* is the Son of man glorified... Little children, yet a little while I am with you... Hereafter I will not talk much (longer) with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me" (Jn. 13:31,33; 14:30). Because He knew Judas would soon return with his men, Christ wanted to give the disciples as much instruction as possible in the time that remained. This would explain the extraordinary intensity of meaning behind the language used in John 14–17. After He finished, "Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, *cometh*..." (Jn. 18:3); "The prince of this world *cometh*", Jesus had prophesied, epitomized in the person and attitude of Judas. Christ had told the disciples that "the prince" "hath nothing (cp. no part) in Me" (Jn. 14:30). Not until Judas appeared with the men would the disciples have realized that he was the betrayer (see Jn.18:3–5). Jesus knew this would come as a shock to them,

and would lead them to question whether they themselves were in Christ; therefore He warned them that Judas, as a manifestation of "the prince of this world", had no part in Him any longer. For "the Devil" of the Jewish authorities and system, perhaps Caiaphas personally, had put into the heart of Judas to betray the Lord (Jn. 13:2). The whole Jewish leadership were the "betrayers" of Jesus (Acts 7:52) in that Judas, the one singular betrayer, was the epitome of the Jewish system and the agent of Caiaphas. The prince having nothing in Christ suggests a reference to Daniel 9:26: "And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, and shall have nothing (A.V. margin – i.e. have no part): and the people of the prince that shall come (the Romans) shall destroy the city and the sanctuary". Thus it was the Jewish world as well as Judas which had nothing in Messiah, and the system they represented was to be destroyed by another (Roman) "prince that shall come" to replace the (Jewish) "prince of this world". The occurrence of the phrase "prince" and the idea of having nothing in Messiah in both Daniel 9:26 and John 14:30 suggest there must be a connection of this nature.

Judas betrayed the Lord Jesus because he was bought out and thus controlled by the Jewish 'Satan'. The fact that Judas was "one of the twelve" as he sat at the last supper is emphasized by all the Gospel writers – the phrase occurs in Matthew 26:14; Mark 14:20; Luke 22:47 and John 13:21. Thus later Peter reflected: "he was numbered with us (cp. "one of the twelve"), and had (once) obtained *part* of this ministry" (Acts 1:17), alluding back to Christ's statement that "the prince of this world" ultimately had *no* part in Him. Similarly 1 John 2:19 probably alludes to Judas as a type of all who return to the world: "They went out from us, but they were not of us" (cp. "Judas, one of the twelve"). Judas is described as a Devil (Jn. 6:70), and his leaving the room may have connected in the Lord's mind with "the prince of this world" being cast out. Those who "went out from us" in 1 John 2:19 were primarily those who left the Jewish ecclesias (to whom John was largely writing) to return to Judaism, and they who left were epitomized by Judas. 2 Peter 2:13,15 equates the Judaizers within the ecclesias with Balaam "who loved the wages of unrighteousness". The only other time this latter phrase occurs is in Acts 1:18 concerning Judas.

"Cast out"

Apostate Israel are described in the very language of the adversaries / Satans of God's people. Because they acted like the world around them, from which they had been called out, they were ultimately judged by God as part of that world. Consider all the times when God's apostate people are recorded as acting in terms of their Arab cousins; thus apostate Israel and the Jewish system were to be "cast out" (Jn. 12:31) just as Ishmael had been (Gen. 21:10).

"Cast out" in the Old Testament at times refers to Israel being cast out of the land for their disobedience (cp. Lk. 19:45). This was what was to happen to the first century Jews. The Law itself was to be "cast out" (Gal. 4:30). The idea of being cast out recalls the casting out of Hagar and Ishmael. The Lord commented concerning the end of the Mosaic system: "The servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever" (Jn. 8:35). The description of apostate Israel as being "cast out in the open field" with none to pity them except God must have some reference to Ishmael (Ez. 16:5). Galatians 4:29–30 specifically connects the Law with Hagar, and the source of this passage in Isaiah 54:1–7 concerning the calling again of a forsaken young wife who had more children than the married wife has similarities with Hagar's return to Abraham in Genesis 16. After Hagar's final rejection in Genesis 21, she wandered through the Paran wilderness carrying Ishmael – as Israel was carried by

God through the same wilderness. The miraculous provision of water for Israel in this place is a further similarity, as is Ishmael's name, which means 'God heard the cry' – as He did of His people in Egypt. Thus Hagar and Ishmael represent apostate Israel, and both of them were "cast out". Romans 9:6–8 provides more confirmation: "For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel... but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God". Paul's reminder that the seed was to be traced through Isaac, and that the apostate Israel of the first century were not the true Israel of God but the children of the flesh, leads us to identify them with Ishmael, the prototype child of the flesh. In the same way, Jeremiah describes wayward Israel as a wild ass (Jer. 2:24), perhaps inviting comparison with Ishmael, the wild ass man (Gen. 16:12).

12:32- see on Jn. 3:14-21; 19:13.

And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself- The Lord's lifting up on the pole resulted in all men being drawn unto him (Jn. 12:32); but this is taking language from Isaiah's prophecies of how the Lord Jesus at His return would be raised up like an ensign (s.w. pole, Num. 21:9), and all people would be gathered to Him for judgment (Is. 5:26; 11:10; 18:3; 49:22; 62:10). There is evidently a connection between the Lord's lifting up on the pole / cross and gathering all men to Him, and the way in which all men will be gathered to Him at His return. His cross was a foretaste of the judgment. Our feelings before His cross *now* will be those we experience before Him at the final judgment. See on Jn. 19:37.

The Lord foresaw that if He were lifted up, He would *thereby* draw all men [men of all types, of all nations and languages] unto Him in truth (Jn. 12:32). And a brief reflection upon the effect of the cross in human lives will reveal that this has indeed been the case. The cross was an instrument of torture; yet it inspires men to write hymns of praise about it [e.g. "When I survey the wondrous cross…"]. Men have never written hymns of praise to the guillotine or hangman's rope. Nor have men made small relics of an electric chair and glanced towards them for inspiration at hard times.

From the earth- Gk. *out of* the earth. The reference is not only to the lifting up in crucifixion, but to the lifting up in resurrection and then ascension glory.

All men- "All men" would be drawn together unto the crucified Christ (Jn. 12:32). There is a theme in John's Gospel, that there was disunity amongst the Jews whenever they rejected the message of Christ crucified (7:43; 9:16; 10:19- which implies this was often the case). Conversely, acceptance of His atonement leads to unity. The crucified Son of Man must be lifted up by our preaching before the eyes of all, so that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish (Jn. 3:14,15). "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (Jn. 12:32)- but we draw men by our spreading of the Gospel net, preaching to "all men". Thus the extent of the Lord's achievement on the cross depends upon our preaching of it.

Whenever we come into contact with Him, or reflect upon Him and His death, we are in some sense coming before Him in judgment. Indeed, *any* meeting of God with man, or His Son with men, is effectively some kind of judgment process. The brightness of their light inevitably, by its very nature, shows up the dark shadows of our lives. In the cross we see the glory of the Lord Jesus epitomised and presented in its most concentrated form. In Jn. 12:31,32, in the same passage in which Isaiah 6 and 53 are connected and applied to the crucifixion, He Himself foretold that His death would be "the judgment of this world". And He explained in the next breath that His being 'lifted up from the earth' (an Isaiah 6 allusion) would gather all men unto Him

(cp. “all men" being gathered to the last judgment, Is. 49:22; 62:10; Mt. 25:32). When He was lifted up, then the Jews would know their judgments (Jn. 8:26-28).

The whole congregation (LXX *ekklesia*) of Israel were "gathered together" before the smitten rock, which "was Christ" crucified (Num. 20:8 cp. 21:16; 1 Cor. 10:4). The "ensign", the pole on which the brazen serpent was lifted up, would draw together the scattered individuals of God's people (Is. 11:2); and as stricken Israel were gathered around that pole, so the lifting up of the crucified Christ brings together all His people (Jn. 12:32 cp. 3:14). See on Jn. 17:21.

12:33 *But this he said to signify by what manner of death he should die*- The Lord intended to die by crucifixion. "Should", *mello*, has a strong flavour of intention and self-purpose. This was the manner of death He chose. He became obedient to death, even the death of the cross; and yet that death was also of His own device. This gives even more significance to "the cross"; for it was His own intention to die that way. He could have legitimately sacrificed Himself in many ways; for He gave His life totally of Himself and it was not taken from Him. But He chose this cruellest and most public form because He so wanted to appeal to men and women to repent. May we respond to it and not shrug and walk on by.

12:34- see on Jn. 12:13.

The crowd asked him: We have heard out of the law that the Christ abides forever; and how do you say: The Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?- This same "crowd" had been enthused by the resurrection of Lazarus and were welcoming the Lord as Messiah on the basis that He would establish an eternal Messianic Kingdom there and then. As explained on :12 and elsewhere, the Lord purposefully deflated their expectations. They were in love with an image of Him and not He Himself; and when He brought that to their attention, saying that He had come to die and not start a political Kingdom; it had the desired effect. They turned against Him. "Who is this Son of Man?" can imply 'We don't need a Son of Man Messiah of *this* kind'. A crucified Messiah was anathema to them, so much so that they actually went and got Him crucified.

12:35 *Jesus replied to them: Yet a little while is the light among you. Walk while you have the light, so that darkness does not overtake you. He that walks in the darkness does not know where he goes*- He had earlier spoken of Himself as the light of the world, meaning a torch lifted up, just as the snake was lifted up on a standard pole. And He had spoken this in evident anticipation of the manner of His death. Yet He speaks as if He was in His life the light of the world, by which men must walk; the prologue introduces this theme. His life exhibited the spirit of His final death. And this is the light, lifted up, by which we must live. There can be no sense of direction to life unless it is guided by the principles of the cross- we will know not whither we go. For those whose lives seems a long tunnel, through reason of their jobs or family burdens, let His cross enlighten our darkness. The light of His example was literally only to be with them a few more days before He would die. The darkness which could overtake them was that of Judaism, according to the prologue; and John's letters define that darkness as hating our brother. For those Jews to not accept the Lord as their Messiah and to crucify Him, and then persecute His followers, is all not living in love towards our brother. This is to live in darkness.

12:36 *Believe in the light, so that you may become sons of light*- Our belief in any statement of faith should be just that- a statement of our living faith, rather than a mere statement of our intellectual, academic, theoretical opinion. Our lives and personalities above all are our individual statement of faith. The doctrine of the cross,

of the Gospel, of the man and Lord Christ Jesus, is to be the centre of not merely our mind and reason, but at the core of our actual life and conscience. For we become like what we believe in- if we believe in the light, we become children of light (Jn. 12:36). The Lord had stated that "you are the light of the world", just as He was "the light of the world". If we walk by His light, we shall in turn become light in the darkness- which in John's first context referred to the darkness of the Jewish world.

12:36 *While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become sons of light*- This is an intensely urgent appeal to the crowd who had apparently believed in Him. The Lord had set them up to turn against Him (see on :12) but all the same, He begs for them to not do the psychologically inevitable- and to believe in Him.

John's later interpretation of this is in 1 Jn. 1:7: "But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin". The light is ultimately God, but we see His light reflected in the face of the Lord Jesus. Walking in the light refers to the Lord's desire that they make the most of every minute of His mortal company. Soon the light would be taken from them, in that He would die. He urges His followers the same way in Jn. 11 . By walking with Him in the light, believing in Him, walking as He walked, they would become sons of light, true believers. But 1 Jn. 1:7 is saying that we who never met the Lord Jesus can walk in the light as much as those who walked with Him in Palestine two millenia ago. And that is indeed the promise of the Comforter- that although He was to be taken from the disciples in death, the ministry of the Spirit would mean that He was as real to believers as He had been to the disciples who literally touched and watched Him. This is quite the challenge to us all. That man is not alone; God with us, in Christ, walks that close, as if literally with us.

Jesus spoke these things, then he departed and hid himself from them- He had just spoken of Himself as the light of the world, which must be viewed and walked in, but having said that, He hides Himself. The idea is that He is the light to those who seek Him, who find where He is 'hidden'; the metaphor of light doesn't mean that He is shining like the sun, obvious to all. He is- but in the spiritual world and heart of the believer.

12:37 *But though he had done so many signs before them, yet they did not believe in him*- This was the identical experience of Moses, described in just the same language (Num. 14:11). And this was despite His desperate appeal to the crowd to truly believe in Him (see on :36).

12:38 *So that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, when he spoke: Lord, who has believed our report?*- The prophecies of Isaiah 53 had fulfilment in the Lord's life as well as in His death. His crucifixion in that sense was the essence of His life. His whole life was a being acquainted with grief (Is. 53:3); and yet we read in this same context that He was put to grief in His death (:10). The grief of His death was an extension of the grief of His life. “Who has believed our report?" (Is. 53:1) was fulfilled by the Jewish rejection of Him in His life, as well as in His death (Jn. 12:38)."He bore the sin of many" (Is. 53:12) is applied by Jn. 1:29 to how during His ministry, the Lord Jesus bore the sin of the world. He was glorified in His death (although the world didn’t see it that way), as well as in His life (Jn. 12:23,29). The Jews refused to believe in Jesus whilst He was still alive- and yet by doing so, John says, they fulfilled Is. 53:1:"Who hath believed our report". But the “report" there was

clearly the message of the cross. It's as if John applies a clear prophecy about the cross to people's response to Jesus during His lifetime.

Jn. 12:38 parallels our preaching or "report" of the Gospel with the Lord Jesus, the "arm of the Lord", being 'revealed' through us. The body of Christ thus witnesses to itself by simply *being* Christ to this world. This is the essence of our calling and of our lives- to manifest / reveal the Christ.

And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?- "The arm of the Lord" is the Father's operation in human individuals and society. Only those who accept the crucified Messiah will perceive that. For it is through the crucified Saviour that God works in hearts and minds and whole groups of people. But that is only revealed to believers in the cross. Those who 'believe the report' about the crucified Lord Jesus see the arm of the Lord revealed.

12:39 *Because of this they could not believe, because Isaiah also said*- In Jn. 12:39-42 we find John quoting the words of Isaiah about how Israel would not believe the message of Jesus: "Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again, He hath blinded their eyes… *nevertheless* even of the rulers many believed on him" (RV). "Nevertheless" shows the wonder of it all; despite clear prophecy that they would not believe, some of them did. The Lord's hopefulness paid off. And so can ours. It is not that God doesn't want people to believe; but those who refuse His voice, who will not see with their eyes, are blinded so that they will not see. They are confirmed in their attitudes.

Here the Lord combines quotations from Isaiah 53 and Isaiah 6, applying them to His cross. There He was lifted up in glory, with the power to both convict Isaiah of his sinfulness and also inspire his service of the Gospel. Yet Is. 53:1 also applies to Israel's refusal to hear the "report" of the Lord's miracles. The Lord saw His death as summing up the message of all the "works" of miracles which He had done, at least those recorded by John. This opens up a fruitful line of investigation of the miracles; they all show something of the spirit of the cross, and find their final fulfilment in the cross. In 4:34 [see notes there] He had spoken of His death as the final, crowning "work" of His ministry. If men understand the cross, then they see with their eyes, understand with their heart, and are converted.

12:40 *He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes, lest they should understand with their hearts, and turn, so that I should heal them*- As noted on :39, this blinding of Israel is not because God wanted to. It was because He was confirming them in attitudes they had themselves adopted. Seeing / understanding is paralleled with believing; the understanding in view is simple belief in the Lord Jesus. This would then lead to the Lord's healing- which speaks in the context of a healing of hearts, the kind of thing spoken of in the beatitudes. So belief / understanding / seeing leads to the Lord's action on the heart, in the healing of human hearts or minds. This speaks of the work of the Spirit in the hearts and psychology of the believer. "Turn" is 'be converted / turned'. The work of turning a heart around is a matter of the spirit, and happens when one believes. We see here a difference between initial belief, and the process of conversion / turning and healing of the heart which is done by the Lord in response to belief. Note that these words of Isaiah are quoted five times in the New Testament (Mt. 13:13; Mk. 4:12; Lk. 8:10; Acts 28:26). This is a major teaching which we need to give due weight to.

12:41 *These things said Isaiah, because he foresaw his glory, and he spoke about him*- The hour of glory was the hour of crucifixion. The son of God, naked, covered in blood and spittle... was the Son of man glorified. And likewise when we are fools for

Christ's sake, then we know His glory. John 12:37-41 tells us that Isaiah 6 is a vision of the Lord Jesus in glory; and in this passage John quotes both Isaiah 6 and 53 together, reflecting their connection and application to the same event, namely the Lord's crucifixion. So it is established that Is. 6 is a vision of the crucified Lord Jesus, high and lifted up in glory in God's sight, whilst covered in blood and spittle, with no beauty that man should desire Him. The point is, when Isaiah saw this vision he was convicted of his sinfulness: "Woe is me, for I am undone...". And yet the same vision comforted him with the reality of forgiveness, and inspired him to offer to go forth and witness to Israel of God's grace. Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord "high and lifted up", with the temple veil torn (Is. 6:4 cp. Mt. 27:51), and was moved to realize his sinfulness, and vow to spread the appeal for repentance (Is. 6:1,5). The high, lifted up Lord whom he saw was He of Is. 52:13- the crucified Lord. And yet He saw Him enthroned in God's glory, as it were on the cross. John links the visions of Is. 6 and 52/53 as both concerning the crucifixion (Jn. 12:37-41); there the glory and essence of God was revealed supremely. Jn. 12:38-41 draws a parallel between being converted, and understanding the prophecies of the glory of the crucified Christ. To know Him in His time of dying, to see the arm of Yahweh revealed in Him there, is to be converted.

Isaiah's vision of "the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up" (Is. 6:1) connects with the description of the crucified Lord high and lifted up (Is. 52:13). This vision, John tells us, was of Christ in His glory. And John combines his citation of this passage with that of Is. 53 concerning the cross (Jn. 12:41,42). The Lord, high and lifted up in glory, was the crucified Lord. There He was enthroned, in God's eyes, in His throne of glory. When He comes again and sits in the throne of His glory, He will be repeating in principle the glorification of the cross. The very vision of the lifted up Lord convicted Isaiah of his sinfulness, and steeled his faith in forgiveness (Is. 6:5-8). See on Jn. 19:37.

12:42- see on Rom. 10:9.

Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue- Why then did they turn so quickly against Him? The answer, I suggest, lies in the way that they misunderstood Him. They liked Him; the Jewish authorities despaired even just prior to His death that "the world is gone after him", because so many of the Jews were [apparently] "Believing in him" (Jn. 12:11,19); His popularity seems to have resurged to an all time high on his final visit to Jerusalem. The crowds liked some aspects of the idea of this man Jesus of Nazareth; they are described in John's Gospel as "believing on him", and yet John makes it clear that this was not the real belief which the Lord sought. John makes this point within Jn. 6:14,26: "When therefore the people saw the sign which he did, they said, This is of a truth the prophet that cometh into the world… Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves, and were filled". The crowd appeared to respond and perceive the significance of the sign-miracles; but the Lord knew that they had not properly understood. They apparently "believed", but would not confess Him before men (Jn. 12:42)- and such 'confession' is vital for salvation (Rom. 10:9,10 s.w.). For all their liking of Jesus and some of the things that He stood for, they willingly closed their hearts to the radical import of His essential message of self-crucifixion, of a cross before the crown, of a future Kingdom which inverts all human values, where the humble are the greatest, the poor in spirit are the truly rich, the despised are the honoured...

Any who openly confessed Jesus as Messiah were put out of the synagogue (Jn. 9:22). The chief rulers are described as believing on Christ (Jn. 12:42), even though their faith was such a private affair at that time that it was hardly faith at all. The positivism of Jesus counted them as believers. Perhaps Jn. 1:12 alludes to them: "*Whoever* accepts him, those who believe in his name, to them he gave the right to become children of God". The "whoever" would then be implying that even if their faith was so weak that they would not publically confess it, all the same they were counted as God's children. Yet we could read Jn. 12:42 the other way- belief alone is not enough, there must be public confession. It could be that we are to see a parallel between not confessing and not believing. We were called and converted *so that* we might give light to others. These Jewish leaders who believed wanted praise / glory of men (:43), and this desire to receive praise from men was exactly what led men *not* to truly believe (Jn. 5:44). The expositional choice before us is purposefully ambiguous- was the 'faith' of these leaders accepted, or was it nullified by their refusal to 'confess'? The ambiguity is to exercise our own consciences, as we naturally look within to enquire whether we have simply believed but not confessed... for we all will have a tendency to do this. In any case, there was a terrible outcome of not confessing their faith publically- the condemnation and crucifixion of God's Son. Whether or not their faith was counted as acceptable, this was the outcome of not confessing it. And it is John who demonstrates how Joseph and Nicodemus 'came out' publically after the Lord's death. See on 12:46 *So that whoever believes in me may not remain in the darkness*.

Note the grace reflected in the record here, where we read that some Jews were credited with having believed in Jesus, even though they did *not* confess Him (Jn. 12:42), presumably because those who confessed Jesus as Christ were excommunicated from the synagogues (Jn. 9:22). Those will not confess Jesus are antichrist (1 Jn. 4:3)- and yet the inspired record is so eager to note that these weak 'believers' were still believers, and their weak faith appears still to have been credited to them. This is a comfort to us in the weakness of our faith- and yet also a challenge to us to accept weak believers as believers. It seems that the record is prepared to accept that some achieved a valid faith in Jesus, even though they didn't confess Him. And yet there are abundant reasons for understanding that unless we witness to our faith, it isn't a faith that's worth much. And yet the record still accounts these who didn't testify as they ought to have done as 'believers'. This is a comfort for us in those times when we know we chose a far lower level than we should have done, and simply kept quiet about the wondrous hope within us. Perhaps the idea was and is that an initial belief can be worked upon by the Lord, in order to bring it to open confession. We see several examples of this in John's Gospel, e.g. Nicodemus. And perhaps multitudes of these secret believers 'came out' in baptism on the day of Pentecost a few weeks later.

12:43- see on Jn. 4:14.

For they loved the glory that is of men more than the glory that is of God- The cause of unbelief and refusal to see / understand is not because a person doesn't 'get it' intellectually, or they fail to rightly process the information received. Disbelief is here blamed upon pride; a desire for glory to themselves from men, rather than as men giving glory to God, and seeking His glory above all. No amount of clever intellectual argument or accommodation with the latest science will elicit faith. Unbelief is not

because of not being able to answer academic arguments. It is because of human pride.

12:44 *And Jesus cried and said: He that believes on me does not believe on me, but on him that sent me*- The crying out of the Lord was a reflection of His earnest desire that they should believe. He knew that those who had welcomed Him with cries of "Hosanna!" would turn against Him. And He urges them to really believe, and to realize that their rejection of Him was a rejection of God. Not because He was God Himself, but because the Father was manifest in the Son.

12:45 *And he that sees me, sees him that sent me*- Again, seeing is used to mean understanding and believing. To see God was instinctively known by all Jews to be impossible. But as noted on :30, such physical seeing of God or His Son, or literally hearing His voice, is irrelevant. The spiritual 'sight' of Him and sense of the Son's presence through the Spirit is worth far more than that. And to see the Son was and is to see God; not literally, but because the Son manifests the Father.

12:46 *I have come into the world as light*- This is how the prologue opens the Gospel, with the Lord personally represented as light shining in the darkness of the Jewish world. His 'coming into the world' was insofar as He revealed the light, and that only happened at the start of His ministry at age 30. This was when He came into the world. He was not the light of the world as a newborn baby desperate only for milk. His point of 'coming' into the world is defined as when He was the light of the world, which was at the beginning of His ministry. As He was sent into the world, so are we sent; and there is no question in our case that we were sent literally from Heaven to earth. Trinitarian thinking is very shoddy when it comes to verses such as these.

So that whoever believes in me may not remain in the darkness- What in practice does this mean, to have Jesus as our light, and not to be remain in darkness? John's letters allude to this and in clear practical terms inform us that not loving our brother is abiding in darkness (1 Jn. 2:9,11). We cannot claim to believe in Jesus, to have Him as a merely intellectual light of correct theory- and not love our brother. Perhaps this explains the question raised in the commentary on :42 as to whether the unconfessed, very private and theoretical 'faith' of many of the leaders was acceptable. Because it was not confessed, it resulted in their condemning and crucifying God's Son- the deepest depth of not loving our brother.

12:47 *And if anyone hear my sayings and keep them not, I judge him not. For I came not to judge the world but to save*- For judgment He came into this world (Jn. 9:39), although He Himself came not to judge so much as to save (Jn. 12:47; "not" is also used in the sense of 'not so much to... but rather to...' in 2 Cor. 7:12: "I did it not [so much] for his cause ....but that our care...". Likewise in Mk. 10:45, the Lord came not *so much as* to be ministered unto, but to minister. He was and is ministered unto, but His focus is upon *His* ministering to us: Mk. 1:13,31; 15:41; Col. 1:7; 1 Tim. 4:6). God said He judged His people 'according to their way… according to their judgments I will judge' (Ez. 7:27 LXX). A man's way, freely chosen, is his judgment. We truly 'make the answer now'. The Saviour came more to save than condemn (Jn. 12:47); it is men who condemn themselves as inappropriate to receive eternal life. It is *their* words, not His, which will be the basis of their rejection.

12:48- see on Lk. 14:18; Jn. 3:13.

He that rejects me and receives not my sayings has one that judges him. The word that I spoke, the same shall judge him in the last day- Our conscience is not going to jump out of us and stand and judge us at the day of judgment. There is one thing that

will judge us, the word of the Lord (Jn. 12:48), not how far we have lived according to our conscience. They crucified Him because they rejected the words He spoke from God (Jn. 12:48). The language of rejection is used both about the Jews' crucifixion of Christ (Lk. 17:25; Mk. 12:10) and their rejection of His words. Thus Heb. 6:5,6;10:28,29 connect despising the word with crucifying Christ afresh. As the prologue explains, He was the word made flesh. To not receive His sayings [*rhema*] meant that His *logos* ["word"] would judge them. His teachings had an essential *logos* to them. And that singular word is spoken of in :49 and :50 as God's singular "commandment"- the offer of eternal life in His Son (see on :50).

12:49 *For I spoke not from myself, but the Father that sent me, He has given me a commandment, what I should say and what I should speak*- Just as the Lord's miracles were revealed to Him by the Father ahead of time (5:30), so were the words which He should teach. To reject the Lord's words was to therefore reject God's word; and as the prologue states, "the word was God". To reject His words is to reject Him. Judaism was so deeply into theism, it was so God centred, that such ideas were repugnant to them. But this is what they were doing by rejecting His word as it was in His Son. The "commandment" is singular, and parallels the singular *logos* or word of :48.

12:50 *And I know that His commandment is everlasting life. The things therefore which I speak, even as the Father has said to me: So I speak*- "The commandment" is surely put for all that the Lord said and spoke (:49). It was His *logos* (see on :48). His words and person were an imperative to respond to; He was in Himself a command to be obeyed in following Him in total surrender. To believe in Him was the everlasting life. The commandment, the *logos*, was and is to believe in Him and receive everlasting life, in the sense of allowing Him to live in our lives. All He spoke was summed up in that. To refuse that eternal life meant therefore to remain in eternal death, and that would therefore be the outcome of the final judgment (:48).

JOHN CHAPTER 13

13:1 *Now before the feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that his hour had come*- I argued on 12:12 and throughout chapter 12 that the Lord arranged the exact point of His death; for He gave His life, it was not taken from Him (10:17,18). He wanted to die at that particular Passover feast, which explains why John records how at other feasts, the Jews tried to kill Him but He somehow avoided them. The implication here in 13:1 is that the coming of Passover meant that the Lord knew His hour of death and glory had come.

That he should depart out of this world to his Father- The Lord saw His death as an exodus, as He had been taught at the transfiguration. And He saw the whole process of death, resurrection, 40 days on earth and ascension as a going to the Father. His prayer that the Father not take His disciples "out of the world" could be understood as asking that their lives, for the time being, be preserved; they should be "kept from the evil" (Jn. 17:15). For He understood departing out of the world as a referernce to His death. And yet the word for 'departing' is used of how believers in Him depart or pass from death to life, right now (5:24; 1 Jn. 3:14). The essence of His experience becomes ours if we walk in the light of life we have seen and known in Him.

The language of departing from this world to the Father is a quotation from a common Rabbinic claim that these were the words of Moses before he died (Targum on Song of Solomon i. 1, 7, Bereshit Rabba, sect. 96. fol. 84. 1. and Debarim Rabba,

sect. 11. fol. 245. 2). The Lord clearly understood Himself as the greater than Moses (Dt. 18:18). Without any doubt there is also reference to the well known [at the time John was writing] Jerusalem Targum on Dt. 32: “And when the last end of Moses the prophet was at hand, that he should be gathered from the world…”.

Having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them to the end- His love for His own during His ministry is part of His final love for them unto the end. The essence of His self-giving for them throughout His life was seamlessly continued in His death. "His own" is another allusion to the prologue, where the Lord comes to "His own" and they do not receive Him; but others do (1:11,12). Israel becomes redefined; no longer are "His own" His own kith and kin of Israelites, but those who receive Him.

The 'love to the uttermost' here can of course be applied to the crucifixion. But the Lord at this point felt He had now departed from this world (17:11 "I am no longer in the world"), and so it could be that the following account of the foot washing is to be understood as a preview of the Lord's death on the cross. The grammar of the whole verse implies that "Before the feast of the Passover... He loved them to the end", as if the 'love to the end' was before the feast, before His death. When did He loved them to the end? Before the Passover. That is the idea. The last supper therefore becomes the love feast, the exemplification of His love unto the end; and it is to be felt like that by us as we partake to this day.

The Lord’s conscious attempt to develop the twelve appears to have paid off to some extent, even during His ministry. For there was evidently some spiritual growth of the disciples even during the ministry. There are indications that even before the Lord’s death, the disciples did indeed progressively grasp at least some things about Him. John’s Gospel is divided into what has been called ‘The book of signs’ (Jn. 1:19-12:50) and ‘the book of glory’ (Jn. 13:1 and following). In the book of signs, the disciples always refer to the Lord as “rabbi” or “teacher”; whereas in the book of glory, they call him “Lord”. We have seen in other character studies how spiritual maturity is reflected in some ways by a growth in appreciation of the titles used of God. Although Jesus was not God Himself, so it seems was the case in how the disciples increasingly came to respect and perceive the Lordship of Jesus.

In the New Testament, we see the love of Christ directly, openly displayed. Particularly on the cross we see the very essence of love. Having loved His own, He loved us there unto the end, to the end of the very concept of love and beyond. He knew that in His death, He would shew "greater love" than any man had or could show. There He declared the Name and character of God, "that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them" (Jn. 17:26). "Walk in love, as Christ hath loved us (in that) he hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2). "Hereby perceive we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:16 Gk.).

The cross is therefore love "to the end". The ultimate definition of love. Love elicits love; we see this in the cycle of life between children, parents and relatives. But at times, the dysfunction of humanity means that true love is rejected, families fall apart, parents and children hate each other and disregard all the love once shown. And so it is with the love of God in the gift of His Son. Some will be motivated to love; His love, His huge initiative, is responded to, and it elicits love. But not always. Others see the cross of Christ and refuse His beckoning arms, seeing the Lord as a hard man.

Love "to the end", to *telos*, to completion, to maturity, is to be seen in us- for His love there elicits our love. The same phrase is used in John's letters about the believer

in that love. Whoever keeps His word, the word of the new commandment to love as He loved, "in him verily is the love of God perfected" (1 Jn. 2:5). The love to the end of Jesus, on the cross, becomes perfected / comes towards its full term in us- if we start to reflect it. And so if we love one another, God's love [which was seen supremely in His Son's death] is perfected in us" (1 Jn. 4:12). When we are secure in having accepted the Lord's 'perfect love', and in knowing that we are part of the process of reflecting it, then we can confidently look ahead to eternity after the day of final judgment: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love [the love to the end / perfection of Jn. 13:1] casts out fear. He that fears is not made perfect in love" (1 Jn. 4:18). The love-to-the-end, the love of Jesus to us on the cross, has not perfected / had process in us, if we still fear the outcome of the day of judgment. "Herein is love made perfect: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment" (1 Jn. 4:17). To look forward to judgment day with confidence... this is how the Lord's love for us becomes perfect / works its intended process / comes to final intended maturity. It does not make us sinless [and the old English word "perfect" has muddied the waters of interpretation here]. But it makes us confident of His gracious acceptance.

13:2- see on Lk. 22:3.

And during supper- Adam Clarke 'While supper was being prepared'. This would explain the timing of the footwashing incident, which would come before eating, not during the meal.

When the Devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him- "Supper" is literally 'a supper'; not 'the feast' as we would expect if this was indeed the passover feast of 14 Nissan. It was a Passover supper, but kept earlier and perhaps in a slightly different way. The whole style in this section suggests that when certain conditions were fulfilled, then the Lord could die on the cross. I have suggested on 12:12 that the Lord arranged the entire scenario, as He gave His life as He did of His own choice of time and place. The account here reads as if the Lord knew that Judas had in his heart to betray Him, and so knowing this, He acts out the essence of His future service for others on the cross by washing the disciples' feet. He knew this would offer Judas the chance to repent, but if he would not, then it would be the psychological trigger for Judas to go off and hand Him over to the Jews. And that is indeed how it worked out.

"The devil" in the New Testament, including in John's writings, refers to organized, systemic opposition to the Lord's person and work, and in the first instance refers to the Jewish opposition. I have exemplified this at length in *The Real Devil* especially section 2-4, 'The Jewish Satan'. The thought to betray the Lord had been put into the heart of Judas by the Jewish opposition, who were the great 'satan' [adversary] and false accuser ['devil'] with regard to the Lord and His work. This explains why when 'satan entered into Judas', he goes to the Jewish leadership to arrange the betrayal (Lk. 22:3-6). It could even be that "the devil" here is to be paralleled with "the prince of this [Jewish] world" whom I have suggested on 12:31 had specific reference to Caiaphas the High Priest, who is presented as the one who came up with the specific scheme to kill the Lord (see on 11:49).

The reference to "Simon's son" would be appropriate if the reference is to the Simon the Pharisee of Lk. 7:40, in whose house Mary Magdalene had previously anointed the Lord. I noted on 11:2 that the woman who was a sinner who anointed the Lord in Simon's house was Mary Magdalene. The fact she had access to the meal table suggests she was a close relative. And Judas was the son of Simon. We therefore can conclude that Judas was a relative of Mary, Martha and Lazarus; perhaps even

their brother. This would explain his anger at her wasting of family wealth by anointing the Lord in chapter 12 (see on Mt. 26:14). If the family had Pharisee connections, then this would explain why "the Jews" came from Jerusalem to their home in Bethany, as they were relatives.

13:3 *Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God*- This may seem axiomatic, but the text seems to be saying that as He sat at supper, the Lord had a deep sense of utter certainty that He was from God and was going to succesfully accomplish what lay before Him, and this 'go to God'. The "all things" refer to the believers (Eph. 1:22); He had earlier spoken of the Father having given Him the sheep, who were safe in His hands (10:28,29). He was deeply aware that we were in His hands, and He must now go and die for us.

13:4 *Rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel*- We note the emphasis upon the Lord's actions, inviting us to play Bible television with these words. His rising from the table, laying down / aside His several layers of garments and girding Himself... all bid us imagine His body language. It was all a foretaste of His laying down His life on the cross, where the same body language would have been apparent. We note how having washed their feet, He does everything in the reverse order- having washed the disciples' feet, he puts on his outer garment and again reclines at the supper table.

He dressed Himself as He would for the crucifixion, naked but for a loincloth, with His outer clothing taken away, as Johns crucifixion account emphasizes. Phil. 2 seems to allude to the descriptions here of the Lord progressively setting aside all human trappings in order to humble Himself to serve and thence to actually die the death of the cross for us. "Laid aside", literally 'laying down', is the same term used for the Lord's giving over of His life (10:11,15,17,18; 15:13; 1 Jn. 3:16). It was on the cross that the Lord was the suffering servant to the ultimate extent. And to love is to serve.

13:5 *Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded*- This was the work of the lowest slave, and Phil. 2 alludes to this in saying that the Lord took upon Himself the form of a slave- not in adopting human nature, but in His mental attitude in the lead up to the cross, and in His final death there. The record is as it were zoomed up close upon the Lord, with every action recorded. This action of foot washing is seen as highly significant; it was the essence of his death. And it was, as suggested on :1, the epitome of love unto the end. The usage of water could look forward to baptism, but the idea is that He does something to the disciple- His death was not just something to be emulated. It is His action upon us; as a result of it, the Spirit was to be given, whereby He would cleanse / sanctify the disciples. But the outpouring of water is used as a figure for the outpouring of the Spirit which would come as a result of the Lord's death and glorification (7:38,39). John's crucifixion record notes how the Lord's death resulted in water issuing from His side toward the disciples; and here, the towel from His side is used to wash the disciples' feet. The gift of the Spirit is in view, and connects with the frequent references to our sanctification or being made clean by the Spirit. The mention of the basin is perhaps to recall the Mosaic rituals whereby blood and water were taken from a basin to sanctify the priests. This motley crew of mixed up men were being declared the priesthood of the new Israel, and the prayer of chapter 17 is full of allusion to the theme of sanctification. This, it must be emphasized, is something done to a willing person, and not done by themselves. This is the picture of the Lord's activity in our lives through the Spirit.

13:6 *When he came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him: Lord, are you going to wash my feet?*- "When He came..." suggests Him going to each of them personally. This spoke of how His death and cleansing work is somehow for us each individually. And we pause with deepest respect at the thought of the Lord kneeling before Judas and washing his feet. Here for all time is the paradigm for our attitude to the worst of the worst amongst the Lord's supposed followers.

The Lord had taught that when one was invited to a feast, they should take the lowest seat. It seems that at the last supper, Peter did just this. There would likely have been petty jealousy over who sat next to Jesus, and there may have been a desire to sit closest to Him as a sign of faithfulness to their beloved teacher. John was clearly sitting next to Jesus, as he was able to have his head on Jesus' breast. And the fact the Lord dipped in the dish at the same time as Judas may imply that Judas was also next to Him. It's tempting to imagine John at Jesus' right hand and Judas at His left. But it seems Peter was the last to have his feet washed. Jesus "came to Simon Peter" to wash his feet, and when he had done so, He commented that now, all His men were clean (Jn. 13:6). This implies to me that Peter was sitting at the end of the couch, furthest away from Jesus. He certainly wasn't that close to Jesus, because he had to signal [Gk. 'to nod'] to John to ask the Lord who the betrayer was (Jn. 13:24). So I conclude from all this that Peter took the lowest seat at that feast- in conformity to what the Lord had taught them earlier. And I imagine it would have been especially difficult, as the order of seating at the Jewish Passover was a classic opportunity to demonstrate a pecking order within a group of friends or family. But despite taking the lowest seat, Peter's pride objected to the Lord washing His feet. The Lord had taken more than the lowest seat at the table; He had shown Himself to be the lowest slave who was present but not seated even at the table.

13:7 *Jesus answered and said to him: What I am doing you do not comprehend now, but later you shall understand*- This would appear to be an allusion to how the Comforter / Holy Spirit would give them understanding of the Lord's words and ministry. The Holy Spirit was not yet given (7:38,39), so the sense of His work would still be not fully understandable. The idea surely is that "later", after the Lord's death on the cross, they would perceive that the spirit He showed in that death was epitomized in this footwashing.

13:8- see on Jn. 3:5.

Peter said to him: You shall never wash my feet! Jesus answered him: If I do not wash you, you have no part with me- The critical importance of washing could speak of how baptism is connected to salvation. But "no part with me" is surely alluded to by Paul in writing that if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is "none of His" (Rom. 8:9). The sanctifying work of the Spirit is clearly in view, bearing in mind that "wash", *nipto*, has ceremonial associations; it spoke of sanctification for priestly service. And to accept that sanctifying work of the Spirit requires a humility which Peter initially struggled with. Resistance to the idea of the internal work of the Spirit is likewise associated with pride and self-confidence in the flesh.

"Part", *meros*, is really 'inheritance'. I suggest this is John's equivalent of 'He who believes and is baptized shall be saved'. Salvation, eternal inheritance in the Lord, depends upon letting Him wash us. We are to note that baptism represents [amongst other things] the Lord Jesus washing us, cleansing us with the gift of His Spirit.

13:9 *Simon Peter said to him: Lord, wash not only my feet but also my hands and my head*- Peter got the Lord's drift, and wanted not only cleansing of his feet, his path

in life; but of his actions [hands] and head [thinking]. We note how Peter is presented here as impetuous and primitive. And yet he was the undoubted leader of the early church. The Gospel records are full of reference to the disciples' immaturity- because the disciples' preaching of the Gospel was full of such admission of their own weakness, just as our witness ought to be.

13:10 *Jesus said to him: He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over; and you are clean, but not every one of you*- This is surely suggesting that all baptized believers ("washed") were like the priests, who firstly washed their bodies and then their hands and feet, before entering on service (Ex. 30:21). "He who has bathed" could be about the only discernible hint that the disciples had been baptized. But they needed to be born of water and of the Spirit as well. Surely the Lord was saying that baptism is a one time event- he has been thus bathed does not need to wash again, or be re-baptized. But, he does need to periodically wash his feet, which I would take to be a reference to the breaking of bread and acceptance of the sactification of the Spirit which Peter seemed to want to avoid. The idea may also be that after baptism, it is seen by the Lord as inevitable that we are going to dirty our feet in life's path. Whilst technically, sin is not inevitable, it is the observed reality in all men [apart from Jesus] that they do sin. And we can be comforted by the Lord's recognition of that here. However, He seems to imply that the disciples were all clean, they had all been bathed, apart from Judas. So He has far more in view than literal water baptism. The baptism experience is defined by Him in Jn. 3:3-5 as being of water and the Spirit. There is a spiritual cleansing that takes place, which doesn't totally stop us from sin, for the disciples still sinned despite having been 'cleansed'. But, if accepted, it does keep us from falling away as Judas did. Through the Spirit, willingly accepted, He is able to "keep us from falling".

The Lord's argument is that footwashing is always going to be necessary. There will always be the 'dirt' picked up on the feet of a man who has been washed overall in baptism. These sins and failures of the baptized will always be there, almost inevitably. And it is these we are called upon to wash or cleanse / forgive in each other. In the spirit of the Lord's death for us on the cross.

"You are clean" is developed in 15:3, where the Lord teaches that we are clean by the word He spoke. But here, the cleansing is on account of His death and sacrifice. His death and work of saving is His "word" to us. His "word" is not therefore necessarily a reference to His actual sayings, but is used as it is in the prologue, for His whole being and message which was lived out in His person; for the word was made flesh in Him, supremely in His death on the cross.

The importance of self examination at the breaking of bread is indirectly hinted at here. This is surely a reference to how Num. 19:19 prescribed that a Levite was required to take a plunge bath in order to be clean. The Lord is therefore saying that *all* His people, when they partake of His feast, are to present themselves as cleansed Levites. He understood His people as *all* being part of a priesthood. Additionally, we need to bear in mind that the Lord spoke those words just before the breaking of bread, in response to how Peter did not want to participate in the Lord’s meal if it meant the Lord washing him. Thus whilst forgiveness is not mystically mediated through the bread and wine, there is all the same a very distinct connection between the memorial meeting and forgiveness, just as there is between baptism and forgiveness. To not break bread is to walk away from that forgiveness in the blood of Jesus, just as to refuse baptism is to do the same. Whilst forgiveness itself is not mediated in any metaphysical sense by the memorial meeting, it is nonetheless a vital

part of the life of the forgiven believer. When Peter didn't want to break bread, the Lord reminded him that he who has been baptized / washed is indeed clean, but needs periodic feet-washing. This, surely, was a reference to the breaking of bread (Jn. 13:10). The same word for 'wash' is found in Jn. 15:2, where we read of how the Father washes / purifies periodically the vine branches. Could this not be some reference to the effect the breaking of bread should have upon us?

13:11 *For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said: Not all of you are clean*- The cleansing was not therefore simply a question of being baptized; for Judas had presumbly been baptized along with the others. But he had not allowed the sanctifying work of the Spirit within him, and was therefore not cleansed or sanctified within.

The Lord Jesus knew from the beginning who should betray Him; and yet He went through the pain, shock and surprise of realizing that Judas, his own familiar friend in whom He trusted, had done this to Him (Ps. 41:9; Jn. 6:64; 13:11). He knew, and yet He chose to limit that foreknowledge from love. This is in fact what all human beings are capable of, seeing we are made in the image of God. Thus Samson surely knew Delilah would betray him, and yet his love for her made him trust her. And we as observers see women marrying alcoholic men, wincing as we do at the way their love makes them limit their foreknowledge. There is an element of this in God, as there was in His Son as He faced the cross. Thus we read of the Lord Jesus being silent before His slaughterers, being led out to death as a sheep (Is. 53:7). But this idiom is used about Jeremiah to describe his wilful naivety about Israel's desire to slay him: "I was like a lamb or an ox that is brought to the slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices against me" (Jer. 11:19). In this Jeremiah was indeed a type of Christ.

13:12 *So when he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and sat down again, he said to them: Do you comprehend what I have done to you?*- The putting on of His clothes speaks of His resurrection after the death on the cross which His washing their feet spoke of. The sitting down would then correspond with His sitting down at the right hand of the Father after His work had been accomplished (Heb. 1:3; 10:12). "Do you comprehend...?" was presumably asked with the implication that 'No, you do not- because if you did, you would be on your knees washing each others' feet (:15)'. If we comprehend the Lord's work, we shall do likewise, living out the essence of His cross for others. Whilst there is nothing wrong with literal footwashing in response to this incident, "Do you understand what I have done...?" of itself suggests that we are to see in the Lord's footwashing something far deeper. We are not to simply interpret on the literal level, of like for like. The incident spoke of the spirit that was behind His death for each of us, a kneeling down before us to serve us, and the challenge is to die that death for our brethren. To love as He loved, with all the vast dimensions of that truth.

13:13 *You call me teacher and lord, and you say well; for so I am*- The Lord reasons that He is no mere teacher of ideas and doctrine, as the Jewish rabbis were. He was their teacher by example, and they therefore ought to fall to their knees in washing each others' feet (:15). He was the word made flesh; His word was not just what He spoke, but His example and very being (see on :10). To call Jesus 'master' and 'Lord' was meaningless unless the pupils *did* what He said; so closely were His words associated with action, a word made flesh. See on Mt. 7:22.

13:14 *If I then, your lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash*

one another's feet- The Lord is the most astute psychologist. He knew at this point that they were all deeply aware that they ought to have washed His feet. And knowing that, He teached them to was one another's feet. He is is asking them to treat one another as if they were Him. And to also learn from their error and do what He had done to them, the superior to the inferior, in the spirit of "Let me be the Christ to you".

His teaching was therefore not so much by spoken words but by example. He was His word made flesh. His example was to be taken as His word to His disciples. Because Jesus is Lord and Master, and because He is our representative in every way, therefore all that He did and was becomes an imperative for us to follow. They called Him "Lord and Master", but *wouldn't* wash each other's feet. Like us so often, they had the right doctrinal knowledge, but it meant nothing to them in practice. They failed to perceive that "my word" referred to His whole being and personality rather than the words which came from His mouth in teaching sessions. To know Him as Lord is to wash each others' feet, naked but for a loincloth, with all the subtle anticipations of the cross which there are in this incident. "Wherefore [because of the exaltation of Jesus] [be obedient and] work out your own salvation with fear and trembling [i.e. in humility]" (Phil. 2:12).

We would so dearly wish for the suffering Christ to be just an item in history, an act which saved us which is now over, an icon we hang around our neck or mount prominently on our study wall- and no more. But He, His cross, His 'last walk', His request that we pick up a cross and walk behind Him, the eerie continuous tenses used in New Testament references to the crucifixion- is so much more than that. If He washed our feet, we *must* wash each others'. Everything He did, all He showed Himself to be in character, disposition and attitude, becomes an imperative for us to do and be likewise. And it is on this basis that He can so positively represent us to the Father: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (Jn. 17:16).

13:15 *For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you*- The 'doing' of the Lord was to die for us in service (14:31). The height of the challenge is so high- to have the cross as our pattern, and not just something to be looked to with thanksgiving. This challenge transforms all departments of human thought and action. The immediate context of course was the Lord's attitude to His brethren at the last supper; and this should be reflected in our attitude to others at the breaking of bread. That so many of His disciples have lost their way here is tragic, for closed table policies and exclusion of His people from the table is the very opposite of His example.

As often in John's Gospel, the incidents are later commented upon. "Do as I have done to you" is expanded into the principle of :34: "Just as I loved you, you also should love one another". The footwashing, with all the humility it involved, being the servant to those in many ways our inferiors, was the epitome of loving as He loved us on the cross. Whether our superiority is actual or perceived, the challenge remains.

13:16 *Truly, truly, I say to you*- "Truly, truly" occurs more in John 13 than any other chapter (:20,21,38). The issues connected with the Lord's death are the ultimate truth.

A servant is not greater than his lord, neither is one sent greater than he that sent him- To act as if the Lord's attitude at the last supper and on the cross is *not* our example is effectively to consider ourselves greater than Him. If our Lord and master acted and thought as He did- we His servants can do nothing else; we are to be as the Master (Mt. 10:24,25; Lk. 6:40). If we do not emulate the spirit of feet washing and

death on the cross, then we are pronouncing ourselves greater than Him. The logic requires an urgency in seeking by all means to follow His example. The apostles were those sent; and the Lord frequently refers to Himself as the One sent, and the Messianic servant. He as the sent One was therefore also living out the essence of the Father who sent Him. To have acted otherwise would have suggested He was greater than the One who sent Him, the Father. See on :20.

13:17 *If you know these things, and if you do them, you will be blessed*- The Lord sensed the tension between knowing and doing. To know but not do would not lead to being happy / blessed. And this is the root cause of a lack of joy amongst many believers; they know but do not do. The doing, of course, is radical- to be the lowest servant, to wash the feet of others, living out the spirit of the cross. To know this but not do it is to not attain happiness. The only path to Christian joy is to surrender all in the emulation of the Lord's spirit in these ways. The Lord had concluded the sermon on the mount with a similar challenge, to do what we know (see on Mt. 7:22). The "things" immediately in view here in John 13 were the spirit of foot washing, of radical servanthood, and death on the cross. But these were all a fulfilment in practice of the various principles outlined in the sermon on the mount.

13:18 *I speak not of you all. I know whom I have chosen; but the scripture must be fulfilled: He that eats my bread lifted up his heel against me*- I have suggsted on 12:12 and elsewhere that the Lord arranged the entire scene in order to die by crucifixion at that Passover. It could be that He means here that He knew Judas whom He had chosen; and He chose him to perform the role of betrayer which He knew was necessary in order to bring about the intended final scene. But that is not to say that Judas had no choice in the matter; he did, and the Lord urged him against his path. But He also knew the outcome, and in that sense knew the betrayer whom He had chosen for this role. He was led to plan things as He did by Scripture, which required that one who ate His bread would then betray Him. And so He set things up so that an offended Judas would be present at the last supper, and then do the act of betrayal.

The implication is that Judas had a heel to crush the Lord with, as if Judas was the seed of the woman and He was the seed of the serpent due to His close association with sin and sinners. However, it has also been pointed out that “To show the bottom of one’s foot to someone in the Near East is a mark of contempt”- E.F. Bishop, *Evangelical Times* Vol. 70 p. 331. The non-violent resistance to evil and the message of grace led Judas to despise the Lord; and the outpouring of the precious ointment upon Him appeared senseless to the materialistic Judas. His despite of the Lord was therefore a factor in his betrayal.

Ps. 41:9,10 is quoted from the LXX in Mk. 14:18,21. Yet Jn. 13:18 quotes the same passage from the Hebrew text, with a slight difference. Which was inspired? Surely, both sources of the original were accepted as worthy of quotation. So from this evidence alone we should be wary of concluding that the differences between LXX and the Hebrew text are mutually incompatible. See on Acts 15:16.

13:19 *From this time forward I will tell you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe that I am he*- This refers to the Lord's prediction of Judas' betrayal. He knew that later, they would reflect on all things and perceive that the Lord was master of the whole situation. He had set up the entire stage, including with one of His disciples betraying Him, in order to bring about the end which *He* intended- that He would be crucified that Passover. His total mastery of the scene (see on 12:12) was a declaration of the Yahweh Name, "I am", and a sign of His identity with the Father.

We also see here the intention of prophecy- not in order to predict the future in detail, but so that when things happen, we perceive that they were exactly foretold. This needs to be remembered- for so many attempts to foretell sequences of political events heralding the Lord's return have been proven wrong, and have ended up damaging faith rather than building it up. Bible prophecy is not, therefore, to be appealed to in order to support faith, unless we are pointing out how predictions or required scenarios have already been fulfilled.

13:20 *Truly, truly, I say to you: He that receives whoever I send receives me, and he that receives me, receives Him that sent me*- The Lord has just reasoned that if He has washed their feet, and they are sent by Him, then they are to do likewise (:16). In doing as He did, their witness was a manifestation of Him. And more than that, of the Father who had sent Him. See on :16. In this sense, God was in Christ on the cross, reconciling the world to Himself. The 'receiving' in John's writings speaks of receiving a message. The assumption is that the message we preach will be "Him", centred upon and about Him. Those who accept the Lord Jesus at our word thereby receive the Father too. So much hinges upon our witness. We represent so much- even God Himself.

13:21 *When Jesus had said this, he was disturbed in his spirit, and testified: Truly, truly, I say to you: One of you shall betray me*- The Lord has just spoken of how His followers are representatives of Him and thereby of the Father; and attitudes to Him are attitudes to the Father. Perhaps this was why He was so upset, remembering that what Judas was doing to Him was in effect to God, and there would be such terrible judgment for it.

The Lord was able to attract all kinds of sinners to Him, when those who are spiritually marginalized tend normally to steer away from those who exude righteousness but no humanity. He was real, He really was who He appeared to be, there was total congruence between His words and actions; and He encouraged others in the same spirit to simply face up to who they were. And He would accept them at that. Yet He was real and human; although there was this congruence between His words and actions, consider how His spirit was “troubled”; “now is my soul troubled” (Jn. 12:27; 13:21). Yet He goes on to use the same word to exhort the disciples hours later: “Let not your heart be troubled” (Jn. 14:1, 27). Was this inconsistency, “Do as I say, not as I do”? Of course not. The strength and power of His exhortation “Let not your heart be troubled” was in the very way that His heart *had been troubled* but He now had composed Himself in calm trust in the Father. And Peter remembered that, as he later in turn exhorted *his* flock to not be troubled nor afraid under persecution (1 Pet. 3:14).

13:22 *The disciples looked at each other, wondering of whom he spoke*- We see here the ability of Judas, as of all men, to disguise real motives. The others had absolutely no inkling that Judas would betray the Lord. This stands as a warning for all time not to attempt to judge who is sincere and who is not amongst the Lord's people. We cannot judge not least because we *cannot* judge. They were so unable to do this that having looked at one another, wondering who it was, they concluded that it might be them- for after trying to decide which of them it was, they began to ask Him "Is it me?" (Mk. 14:19). We simply cannot tell the wheat from the weeds.

"He spoke" is a continuous present tense- 'Of whom He is speaking'. This change of tenses in the Gospels is to enable to us to relive the situation, playing as it were Bible television with the record.

13:23 *There was at the table reclining on Jesus' chest one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved*- John's Gospel is the personal testimony of the beloved disciple (Jn. 19:35; 21:24). Not that John was loved any more than the others- his point is surely that 'I am one whom Jesus so loved to the end'. He describes himself as resting on Jesus' bosom (Jn. 13:23); yet he writes that Jesus is now in the Father's bosom (Jn. 1:18). He is saying that he has the same kind of intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus as Jesus has with the Father. Yet John also records how the Lord Jesus repeatedly stressed that the intimacy between Him and the Father was to be shared with all His followers. So John is consciously holding up his own relationship with the Lord Jesus as an example for all others to experience and follow. Yet John also underlines his own slowness to understand the Lord. Without any pride or self-presentation, he is inviting others to share the wonderful relationship with the Father and Son which he himself had been blessed with. John knew his Lord. He repeatedly describes himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved (Jn. 13:23; 20:2; 21:7,20). Doubtless John was aware that Jesus loved all His people; but John is surely exalting in the fact that the Lord loved him personally.

13:24- see on Jn. 13:6.

Simon Peter motioned to him, and said to him: Tell us who it is of whom he speaks- This all has the ring of truth to it. He would not have called across the table to John, but could easily have motioned with his eyes and other non-verbal language. We have an example here of non-verbal communication being counted as words- for the motioning was in effect saying to him the words. This is significant because the references in John to the Lord's "word" or "words" are not necessarily referring to His literally spoken words; but to all the other communication from Him that went on. For He as a person and character was His word, as the prologue begins by explaining.

13:25 *He leaning back, as he was on Jesus' breast, said to him: Lord, who is it?*- As noted on :23, John saw his own intimate relationship with the Lord as reflected in how close the Lord was to His father (1:18). We could infer from 21:20 that John's close access to the Lord was a cause of jealousy for Peter.

13:26 *Jesus answered: It is he to whom I gave the morsel of bread after I dipped it. When he had dipped the morsel, he had given it to Judas the son of Simon Iscariot*- The motive of the question had surely been 'Tell us who it is, and we shall stop him forcibly'. But the Lord is saying that they were too late; He had chosen Judas to do this job. And yet the "morsel" may refer to the prized portion of the bread which a father would give to a favoured child at the Passover feast. It could be read as a sign of the Lord's special love and care for Judas. He so wanted him to repent. But it was the sign of the Lord's extreme love for him, to the point of apparent favouritism, which made Judas then go out into the darkness and betray the Lord. This was all according to the Lord's plan, but there was still the absolute possibility for Judas' repentance. The Lord's psychology was superb; He knew the things of the human spirit. He realized that the special exposure to His love would make Judas either collapse in repentance, or harden him in his fell purpose. And this is true throughout John's Gospel; encounter with the Lord as the only light of the world made men either live in that light, or recoil deeper into their darkness. And Judas was the parade example.

13:27 *Then after Judas had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him*- As noted on :2, the devil and satan, the false accuser and adversary to the Lord's cause, refers in the immediate context to the Jewish system. It could be that a representative from "the satan" entered into the upper room, and Judas went out with him, as if doing some

errand. This would make good sense in the context of :29. Or it could be that as elsewhere, "satan" refers to the great adversary, sin within. And in the face of the Lord's supreme and special love for Judas, Judas was faced with the choice to accept it or be hardened by sin, personified as the great satan / adversary to all human spiritual endeavour.

The breaking of bread brings us face to face with the need for self-examination and the two paths before us. It is a T-junction which reflects the final judgment. Judas' reaction to the first memorial meeting exemplifies this. The Lord took the sop (of bread) and dipped it (in the vinegar-wine, according to the Jewish custom), and gave it to Judas. This was a special sign of His love and affection, and one cannot help wondering whether Peter and John observed it with keen jealousy. Yet *after taking it,* after that sign of the Lord's *especial love* for him, "satan entered into" Judas and he went out and betrayed the Lord of glory (Jn. 13:27). In that bread and wine, Judas was confronted with the Lord's peerless love for the very darkest sinner and His matchless self-sacrifice; and this very experience confirmed him in the evil way his heart was set upon. And it also works, thankfully, the other way. We can leave that meeting with the Lord, that foretaste of judgment, that conviction of sin and also of the Lord's victory over it, with a calm assurance of His love which cannot be shaken, whatever the coming week holds.

Jesus said to him: What you are about to do, do quickly- I somewhat doubt that the Lord meant 'Please, get it over with quickly, don't draw out the agony for Me'. That seems out of character with the Lord, and certainly with the nature of John's highly spiritual record. So we can assume that the Lord wished for Judas to repent, and He urged him to do so quickly, knowing that human nature ever seeks to procrastinate, and thus lose the power of decision against the flesh. In this case, "you are about to do" would suggest that Judas was on the verge of repentance, and the Lord urges him to go all the way with it quickly. But it could be that the Lord perceived that Judas had sold himself completely to the evil he had allowed to develop within him; and He is now encouraging Judas in the path he had embarked upon.

13:28 *Now no one at the table knew for what reason Jesus spoke this to Judas*- This is an open admission from John that they did not understand at the time, but now they did- all confirming the truth of the Lord's promise of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to bring all things to their rememberance and understanding.

13:29 *Some thought because Judas had the money bag, that Jesus said to him: Buy what things we have need of for the feast, or that he should give something to the poor*- This supposition would rather support the idea suggested on :29 that a member of the Jewish 'satan' came into the upper room, requesting Judas' attention. We can maybe infer that Judas had gone out with the money bag in his hand. For we know that he kept the money bag, from which the group made donations to the poor. So we imagine Judas leaving the room clutching the bag, hence the supposition that he was going to buy something or donate to the poor. The association between Judas and money is very clear; although his motivations were multi-factorial, Mt. 26:15 is clear that Judas went to the priests and asked what they would give him if he betrayed the Lord to them. It may seem incredible that a man would do such evil for money; but we constantly see the power of covetousness and materialism leading men to throw away life eternal. The power of these things is great indeed.

13:30- see on Mk. 14:68; Lk. 22:62.

He then having received the morsel went out immediately into the night- There seems an echo of how Esau "for one morsel of meat sold his birthright" (Heb. 12:16). The immediate and the visible is so powerfully attractive, so powerful that it can lead men to throw away their spiritual birthright and betray God's peerless Son. "Went out" is a term later used by John to describe all those who went out from the community of John's converts- back into the darkness of Judaism, just as Judas did (1 Jn. 2:19). Judas is not, therefore, any special case. He is representative of an entire class of people, indeed, all those who turn away from the Lord's love.

13:31- see on Jn. 12:28.

When he was gone, Jesus said: Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him- With Judas gone, the Lord sensed that all those gathered around Him were to be ultimately and eternally saved by the sacrifice He was about to make. That was the final glory to God which He sought. In this we see the importance of all preaching and pastoral work; this shall climax in the glorification of the Father in the Son.

But the Lord had in view the way that He was about to die. This would be to the glory of God, just as the death and resurrection of Lazarus had been to the glory of God in His Son. The Lord knew that the exit of Judas to the Jewish 'satan' was now going to set in process the final train of events which would lead to His crucifixion.

13:32 *And God shall glorify him in Himself, and will glorify him immediately*- The second stage of the glorification was presumably in the events of the resurrection. However the idea may simply be as in GNB: "Now the Son of Man's glory is revealed; now God's glory is revealed through him. And if God's glory is revealed through him, then God will reveal the glory of the Son of Man in himself, and he will do so at once". The idea is that the glory of the Son is that of the Father and *vice versa*, God Himself would glorify the Son just as the Son had Himself glorified the Father; even though both Father and Son have their own glory.

"In Himself" could be translated "by Himself"; and the "immediately" may mean that the time was soon coming when this mutual glorification was going to happen, in a spiritual intercourse between Father and Son which was the most sublime moment of all time and space. No wonder the translation is difficult, for the ideas are the profoundest to ever be expressed in language. The mutual glorification of Father and Son speaks of the Lord's death and resurrection; the mutual quality and nature of it is hard to plumb and express, hence the difficulty in both translation and interpretation at this point.

The Lord Jesus had that “glory” in what John calls “the beginning”, and he says that he and the other disciples witnessed that glory (Jn. 1:14). “The beginning” in John’s Gospel often has reference to the beginning of the Lord’s ministry. There is essentially only one glory- the glory of the Son is a reflection or manifestation of the glory of the Father. They may be seen as different glories only in the sense that the same glory is reflected from the Lord Jesus in His unique way; as a son reflects or articulates his father’s personality, it’s not a mirror personality, but it’s the same essence. One star differs from another in glory, but they all reflect the same essential light of glory. The Lord Jesus sought only the glory of the Father (Jn. 7:18). He spoke of God’s glory as being the Son’s glory (Jn. 11:4). Thus Isaiah’s vision of God’s glory is interpreted by John as a prophecy of the Son’s glory (Jn. 12:41). The glory of God is His “own self”, His own personality and essence. This was with God of course from the ultimate beginning of all, and it was this glory which was manifested in both

the death and glorification of the Lord Jesus (Jn. 17:5). The Old Testament title "God of glory" is applied to the Lord Jesus, "the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8; James 2:1). It is *God's* glory which radiates from the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Jesus is the brightness of God's glory, because He is the express image of God's personality (Heb. 1:3). He received glory from God's glory (2 Pet. 1:17). God is the "Father of glory", the prime source of the one true glory, that is reflected both in the Lord Jesus and in ourselves (Eph. 1:17). The intimate relation of the Father's glory with that of the Son is brought out in Jn. 13:31,32: "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him; and God shall glorify him in himself, and straightway shall he glorify him". What all this exposition means in practice is this. There is only "one glory" of God. That glory refers to the essential "self", the personality, characteristics, being etc. The Lord Jesus manifested that glory in His mortal life (Jn. 2:11). But He manifests it now that He has been "glorified", and will manifest it in the future day of His glory. And the Lord was as in all things a pattern to us. We are bidden follow in His path to glory. We now in our personalities reflect and manifest the one glory of the Father, and our blessed Hope is glory in the future, to be glorified, to be persons (note that- *to be persons*!) who reflect and 'are' that glory in a more intimate and complete sense than we are now, marred as we are by our human dysfunction, sin, and weakness of will against temptation. We now reflect that glory as in a dirty bronze mirror. The outline of God's glory in the face of Jesus is only dimly reflected in us. But we are being changed, from glory to glory, the focus getting clearer all the time, until that great day when we meet Him and see Him face to face, with all that shall imply and result in. But my point in this context is that there is only one glory. The essence of who we are now in our spiritual man, how we reflect it, in our own unique way, is how we shall always be.

13:33- see on Jn. 7:33; Mt. 18:6.

Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You shall seek me, but as I said to the Jews, where I go, you cannot come. So now I say to you- "As I said to the Jews" [as well as to you] suggests they were far more influenced by the Jews than they should have been. The Lord has explained the deep spiritual intercourse and mutual glorification between Father and Son which was to be achieved on the cross. And there, into that profound mutual unity with the Father, they could not go. It was a communion unenterable by the disciples at that time.

13:34 *A new commandment I give to you: Love one another. Even as I have loved you, you also love one another*- "As I *have* loved you" is another example of how the Lord spoke of His impending sacrifice as if He had already achieved it in His life. Having loved His own, He loved them unto the end in His death (13:1). 15:12-13 says the same: "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends". Only the cross can be a strong enough power to inspire a love between us quite different to anything known in previous times; a love so powerful that it in itself could convert men and women. The newness of the commandment was to love as the Lord loved us. In this sense the new commandment can be later called an old commandment, which Christians had from the beginning (1 Jn. 2:7,8; 2 Jn. 5). "The beginning" surely means the beginning of Christianity in the upper room. All revelation before it was 'old'; to love as Jesus loved was 'new' and by that all is defined. His love, love achieved in His death, was the beginning, the new start for God's people. This is how utterly new and

defining is the love seen in the cross, visually demonstrated by the footwashing, with the Lord clothed as He was on the cross, where He was the ultimate servant of all.

The Greeks had various words for love, *agape* (a rather general word, used in the LXX); *eros* (referring to the physical aspect) and *phileo*, referring (for example) to the love of parents for children. These terms had loose definitions and are almost interchangeable in their OT (LXX) and NT usage. But then the Lord introduced a whole new paradigm: "A new commandment I give unto you, That you love (*agape*) one another; as I have loved you" (Jn. 13:34). To love as the Lord loved was something fundamentally new, and He chose one of the available terms and made it into something else. He chose a rather colourless word in the Greek language: *agape*, and made it refer specifically to the love of God and Christ towards us, and also to the love which their followers should show to each other. 'This is *agape'*, He says: 'This is My redefinition of that word, which must enter your new vocabulary'. It is true that *agape* and *phileo* are apparently interchangeable in some places; but the Lord's redefinition of love, His placing of new meaning into old words, still stands valid. Not only does the Lord give 'love' a new flavour as a word. He above all showed forth that quality of love. He turned man's conception of love on it's head. Thus He plugged in to the Pharisee's debate about who could be identified as their neighbour- by showing, in His Samaritan parable, that we must make ourselves neighbours to others.

13:35- see on Acts 4:13.

By this shall all men know you are my disciples- if you have love for one another- The Lord has just redefined "love" as the love He was showing by dying for them, epitomized in the foot washing incident. If His followers could do this for each other, then the witness would be made to "all men". Christian love must be distinctively different from any other profession of 'love' made by others. That is a great challenge; and it is only capable of fulfilment by being motivated by the Lord's love. It will be a witness powerful enough to convert the world. Indeed, this is John's version of the great commission- see on Lk. 22:32. The Lord's death was to result in a unity between us that would lead the world to understand Him and the love the Father has for Him (Jn. 17:21,23); and yet through the loving unity of believers, the world knows *them*, that they are His disciples (Jn. 13:35). We are an exhibition to this world of the relationship between the Father and Son. Hence our behaviour is so crucial. For if we are divided and unloving, this is the image of the Father and Son which we are presenting. It is also therefore sadly true that if all men do not see love for one another, then we are in fact not the Lord's disciples. This makes so many forms of cranky denominationalism self-condemned as non-Christian.

13:36- see on Jn. 21:18,19.

Simon Peter said to him: Lord, where do you go? Jesus answered: Where I go, you cannot follow now, but you shall follow afterwards- As noted on :32 and :33, the Lord was going to the cross, but to an unenterable mutual intercourse between Father and Son which would be to the profoundest glory of them both. This was unenterable by the spiritually immature disciples at that stage. The Lord was indeed telling Peter that he was not yet able to die for Him, but He would do so ultimately. But the essence of "Where I go" was to this intimate unity with the Father which was unenterable by the disciples at that stage. But the promise of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, would mean that the Lord's prayer of chapter 17 could and would come true- that the depths of His unity and mutual glorification with the Father would become true for them too.

The question is “Where are you going?", in the context of the Lord going to the cross. Yet later, the Lord pointed out that “Not one of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’” (Jn. 13:36; 16:5). Clearly enough the Lord’s point was that Peter had enquired about the cross, but not really enquired. Peter took 'Where the Lord is going' as referring to a literal place, or His death. But as noted on :32 and :33, where the Lord was going, as He understood it, was the most profound unity between Fahter and Son. And is it that same with us? That we wish to know of the cross, but we are not *really* enquiring as to it, as the personal and spiritual implications are too great for us? It wasn’t that Peter was unaware of the cross and the Lord’s teaching about it; it was rather that he [and we] failed to let the realities sink home and failed to appreciate the deep spiritual implications of it all. The Lord had clearly taught Peter that He must lay down His life for the sheep (Jn. 10:11)- but Peter wished to sacrifice his own life to save Jesus’ having to do this (Jn. 13:36-38). So great was Peter’s barrier to the idea of the Lord Jesus having to die. And we too run into this same barrier with the cross of Christ; it’s why, e.g., we find it so hard to make an extended study of the crucifixion, why people walk out of movies about the Passion of Christ half way through, why we find it hard to concentrate upon the simple facts of the death of Christ at their memorial meetings…

13:37 *Peter said to him: Lord, why cannot I follow you even now? I will lay down my life for you!*- Peter understood where the Lord was going as meaning 'to His death'. But the Lord had in view the intense spiritual intercourse with the Father and mutual glorification which would arise from that death (see on :32 and :33). His death was far more than death *per se,* it was a profound glorification of the Father. Peter's loyalty and desire to physically die *f*or the Lord is commendable, but the record shows that he was rather missing the point and spiritual perspective of the Lord's death. When he says “Though I should / must die with you” (Mt. 26:35), he uses the word elsewhere translated “must” in connection with Lord’s foreknowledge that He must suffer the death of the cross. Peter knew that he must share the cross- but the flesh was weak. When it became apparent that the Lord was going to actually die, he asked: “Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake” (Jn. 13:37). He saw the connection between following and laying down life in death. He had heard the Lord saying that He would lay down His life for them (Jn. 10:15,17). And Peter thought he could do just the same for his Lord- but not, it didn’t occur to him, for his brethren. He didn’t then appreciate the weight or extent of the cross of Christ. The Lord replied that he was not yet able to do that, he would deny Him rather than follow Him, but one day he would be strong enough, and then he would follow Him to the end (Jn. 13:36,37). Peter thought he was strong enough then; for he followed (s.w.) Christ afar off, to the High Priest’s house (Mt. 26:58). But in ineffable self-hatred he came to see that the Lord’s prediction was right.

Just before His death, the Saviour spoke of going to the Father, and coming again in resurrection (Jn. 13:36,37 cp. 14:28; 16:16,17; 17:11). He somehow saw the cross as a being with God, a going to Him there (‘going to the Father’ in these Johanine passages is hard to apply to His ascent to Heaven after the resurrection). When in this context He speaks of *us* coming to the Father, He refers to our taking up of His cross, and in this coming to the essence of God (Jn. 14:6 cp. 4, 13:36). See on Jn. 19:19.

13:38 *Jesus answered: Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you: The cock shall not crow, till you have denied me three times*- As noted on:37, Peter had rather missed the point anyway. The Lord was 'going' not to simply die *per se*, but into the profoundest spiritual glorification process with the Father which Peter was too immature to enter. But the Lord goes along with Peter's literalism, and gently points out to him that he was not even up to dying with Him, let alone entering the spiritual things which were implied in the Lord's death and where He was 'going'. The issues relating to the Lord's words to Peter here are discussed on Mt. 26:34,35.

JOHN CHAPTER 14

14:1- see on 17:3.

Do not let your heart be disturbed- The chapter division is unfortunate. The "you" in the final verses of John 13 referred to Peter and his upcoming spiritual failure. The "your heart... you" now addressed also referred to Peter. Although of course there is wider reference to all of us. For Peter is every man. Peter is being comforted that despite his failure, the Lord was going to the cross to prepare a place for Peter in eternity, in God's eternal house. And his heart should not be troubled at the inevitability of his sin and failure. The Lord was now going to Gethsemane to be "troubled" for him...

John has used this very phrase for a troubled or "disturbed" heart in describing the stress felt by the Lord as He faced the eternal issues of human salvation which were before Him (11:33; 12:27; 13:21). That is enough emphasis for us to safely conclude that the Lord meant- and means- that He is taking our stress and "trouble" about salvation onto Himself, and we need not worry about. For all the issues concerning whether we shall be saved were carried by Him. And it is surely alluded to when He urges them after His resurrection not to be "troubled" (Lk. 24:38). "Let not your heart be troubled" is an allusion to 1 Sam. 17:32, where Israel were not to fear Goliath because of the salvation which would be achieved through David.

Believe in God, believe also in me- For first century Jews, belief in God was taken as natural and normal. If they believe that He is from the Father and one with the Father in a functional sense, then they should believe also in Him. And the belief in view is faith in salvation (see on :1).

The Lord's goodbye address in Jn. 14-16 has many connections with those of Moses and Joshua, in which they expressed fear that after their death there would be a mass falling away within Israel, and their guise of spirituality would give way due to their lack of a real faith. This further indicates the weakness of the disciples. Our Lord's speech was shot through with doubt of the twelve and recognition of the weakness of the disciples, which needs tabulating to show its full force:

14	:2	"If it were not so" - implying they doubted
		"If I go... I will come again" - using logic to answer their implied doubt.

	:5	"We know not whither Thou goest"
	:7	"If ye had known me"
	:9	"Have I been so long with you, and yet hast thou not known me?"
	:10,11	"Believest thou?... believe me"
	:14	"If ye shall ask..."
	:15	"If ye love me... if ye loved me, ye would rejoice...if a man love me" (v.28,23)
15	:4	"Abide in me... no more can ye, except ye abide in me... without me ye can do nothing...if ye abide in me"
	:9,14,15	"Continue ye... ye are my friends, if ye...I have called you friends" - implying 'But you've got to live up to it'.
	:17	"These things I command you" - emphatic, desperate warning
	:20	"Remember the word"
16	:1	"That ye should not be offended"
	:5	"None of you asketh me, Whither goest Thou?" - implying Jesus was disappointed that they

	hadn't. "Sorrow hath filled your heart" (v.6) seems a similar rebuke.
:24	"Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask..."
:31	"Do ye now believe? (said almost sarcastically)... ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone" - cp. Joshua and Moses questioning Israel whether their commitment was really what they claimed, and warning that after their death they would soon fall away.

"Let not your heart be troubled… neither let it be afraid" (:1,27) repeats Moses' final encouragement to Israel to "fear not, neither be dismayed" (Dt. 31:8; 1:21,29; 7:18). Inheritance of the Kingdom was assured- if they believed.

I think it is worth all of us pausing to ask the most basic question: Do we *really* believe that God exists? "Those who say that they believe in God and yet neither love nor fear him, do not in fact believe in him but in those who have taught them that God exists. Those who believe that they believe in God, but without any passion in their heart, any anguish of mind, without uncertainty, without doubt, without an element of despair even in their consolation, believe only in the God-idea, not in God". The Jews must have been shocked when the Lord told them to "believe in God" (Jn. 14:1 RVmg.). For there were no atheists amongst them. What the Lord Jesus was saying was that their faith was in the God-idea, not in the real God. For if they believed the Father, they would accept His Son. We must ask whether we feel any real passion for Him, any true emotion, any sense of spiritual crisis, of radical motivation… See on Acts 16:34.

There are many other references in the Upper Room discourse to Moses- without doubt, Moses was very much in the Lord's mind as He faced His end. Consider at your leisure how Jn. 14:1 = Ex. 14:31; Jn. 14:11 = Ex. 14:8. When the Lord speaks in the Upper Room of manifesting the Father and Himself unto the disciples (Jn. 14:21,22), He is alluding to the way that Moses asked God to "manifest Yourself unto me" (Ex. 33:18 LXX). The Lord's allusion makes Himself out to be God's representative, and all those who believe in Him to be as Moses, receiving the vision of God's glory. Note that it was that very experience above all others which marks off Moses in Rabbinic writings as supreme and beyond all human equal. And yet the

Lord is teaching that that very experience of Moses is to be shared *to an even higher degree* by all His followers. It would've taken real faith and spiritual ambition for those immature men who listened to the Lord that evening to really believe it… And the same difficult call comes to us too.

The command not to be troubled is also an allusion to "Then I said unto you, Dread not, neither be afraid of them" (Dt. 1:41). Yet the contrast is with Moses, who fain would have gone ahead into the promised land to prepare the place, but was unable.

14:2- see on Lk. 14:12.

In my Father's house are many dwelling places- This is a form of the verb 'to abide' which features so frequently in John's record. The Father and Son seek to abide in the believer through the Spirit, deep in the heart of the believer (:17; 1 Jn. 3:24; 4:13). In this sense, each believer becomes like one of the rooms or cubicles around the temple, each used by a different priest. Insofar as the Spirit abides in us now, we are the temple of God, we are the new priesthood, and are therefore called to active service for others to His glory. So the thought is both that we go to a place to abide there, and also that God and His Son abide in us through the Spirit. The document known as "The Temple Scroll", a Jewish apocalyptic writing from Qumran, was well known at the time. It claims that there would be so many rooms in the future temple that there would be one for each Israelite. Against this background, the Lord's words about many rooms / abiding places in the Father's house would have been understood as alluding to the rooms around the temple courts- and not Heaven. Indeed the Lord speaks of the temple as His Father's house in Jn. 2:16, and we note the use of the word "place" for the temple in Jn. 11:48 cp. 4:20. The Lord Himself says that His discourse here is in figurative language (Jn. 16:25), so it is far too literalistic to insist that the "Father's house" here is simply Heaven. The house of God in the OT is always an earthly sanctuary and not Heaven (Ex. 23:19; Jud. 18:31; 1 Chron. 6:48; 2 Chron. 4:11; Ps. 42:4; 118:26).

If it were not so, I would have told you- The offer of salvation is so repeatedly stated by the Father and Son throughout the Bible that we are left with a terrible choice: Either it is true, or God is the worst deceiver. And if that were the case, the Lord as the obviously good man would have told us. This awful choice points up the amazing truth- that God really wishes us to be saved and assures any and every believer of the certainty of salvation.

I go to prepare a place for you- The abiding Spirit was only given as a result of the Lord's death and glorification (7:38,39), and He will go on throughout the Comforter discourse to make this point. He was going to the cross, and to the intense mutual glorification of Father and Son there of which He has just spoken in chapter 13.He is speaking here in response to Peter's question as to where the Lord Jesus was now going to disappear to, i.e. in death. "I go to prepare a place for you" alludes to the idea of Moses and the Angel bringing Israel "into the place which I have prepared" (Ex. 23:30). Indeed the LXX of Ex. 15:17 is so similar; Israel were to be brought to "the place of Your dwelling". The Angel of the presence, called "His Holy Spirit" in Isaiah, "goes before you on the way to seek out a place for you" (Dt. 1:33). The Lord speaks of the "Comforter" in the same terms as that Angel. We will be king-priest of the future age (Rev. 5:10), on active duty, doing God's service in a unique way. That is the picture of having our own individual priestly room in the temple. Those rooms included the "household stuff" of Tobiah in Nehemiah's time, so we can imagine that the priests lived in those rooms whilst on duty.

And it is also surely an allusion to the Palestinian tradition that the wife came to live with the new husband after a year and a day, whilst He 'prepared the place' for her. The cross was His purchase of us as His bride. The bridegroom was “taken away” from the wedding guests (Mk. 2:20)- the same word used in the LXX of Is. 53:8 for the ‘taking away’ of the Lord Jesus in His crucifixion death. But the groom is ‘taken away’ from the guests- because he is going off to marry his bride. The cross, in all its tears, blood and pain, was the Lord’s wedding to us.

14:3- see on Lk. 17:34; 1 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 4:15.

And if I go and prepare a place for you- The Lord's death and glorification on the cross [in God's eyes], being lifted up in glory from God's viewpoint, was in order to release the Spirit. This was symbolized by the water which came from the Lord's side, and His breathing His last breath / spirit toward the weak and fearful disciples. He had asked the disciples to "prepare" the Passover meal for them (s.w. Lk. 22:12). And now He demonstrates the mutuality between Him and His followers by saying that He was now going to prepare a place for *them*, an abiding place, on account of actually being the Paschal lamb.

I will come again- The coming again refers therefore to His resurrection, and the spiritual intimacy with His followers which the gift of the Spirit would enable. There is of course some reference to the second coming, but the Lord is to go on now to explain that His physical coming and presence were to be experienced in spiritual essence by His presence amongst them through the Spirit. The way He was going was to the cross- not to Heaven. There our place was prepared. He “came again” in resurrection.

The fact we sin and fail inevitably militates against a robust faith that “we will be there”. The Lord predicted how Peter would deny him; but went straight on to assure the shocked and worried disciples: “Let not your heart be troubled [because some of you will fail me]: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you… if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (Jn. 13:36-14:3). These wonderful words of assurance were in the very context of predicting the disciples’ failure. It’s as if the Lord is saying: ‘Don’t let the fact that you will fail me shake your faith that I will never fail *you*, and I will save you in the end, despite your weakness and collapses of faith’.

And will receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also- This speaks of the spiritual intimacy which would be achieved through the gift of the Spirit released by the Lord's death. His death was enabling or preparing the abiding place by the Spirit in every believers' heart. "Where I am" is a distinct present tense. His being so united with the Father, able to lift up His eyes to Heaven and pray with no senses of barrier, was to be shared with the believers on account of the gift of the Spirit released through His death. This idea of His relationship and unity with the Father being shared with us is the great theme of His prayer of chapter 17. Where He was in His relationship with the Father would be ours. He would 'receive us unto Himself'- a phrase so intimate that it implies the closest form of marital union. It is used of taking a woman unto oneself in marriage (Mt. 1:20,24). "Unto myself" is the very phrase He used in 12:32 of how the cross would draw all the men of the new creation "unto me". This drawing unto and into Himself is all the work of the Spirit, an outflow of His work on the cross. The idea is not at all of going to be with Him in Heaven, but of being personally connected with Him; being received unto Himself is to be drawn unto Him on the cross. Again there is a connection with the prologue, where Israel generally did not "receive" Him, but those who did were given the Spirit of adoption,

His grace / gift, His fullness (1:11,12,16 s.w.). The Jewish world refused to receive the gift of the Spirit (:17 s.w.). The same word is used of the receipt of the Spirit through His death (7:39; 20:22 "receive the Holy Spirit"; 1 Jn. 2:27 "the anointing which you have received"). There is a mutuality in all this; we receive Him, and He receives us (:20 s.w.). The receipt of the Spirit enables us to be received unto and into Himself, to be with Him where He was with the Father as He spoke those words. To deny the Spirit's operation is to miss out on the relationship with the Lord Jesus which is the essence of Christianity.

14:4 *And where I go, you know the way*- He had often told them of His forthcoming death, but rarely if ever about His ascension to Heaven. Where He was going clearly refers to the cross. The Lord seems to have imputed their future maturity to them at a time when they still didn't have it. 'You know where I go', He told them (:4,5)- when, as they themselves responded, they didn't. He said that they knew the Spirit of Truth, whereas the Jewish world didn't (14:17)- because "in that day you shall know…" (14:20). And this approach will help us with our immature and frustrating brethren; we need to impute to them that spiritual maturity to which we must believe they will rise.

14:5 *Thomas said to him: Lord, we do not know where you go. How do we discern the way?*- See on :4. Here we have our typical problem- we know the way of the cross, but in practice we don't know- or rather, we don't want to know. The disciples were confused as to where the Lord Jesus was going and to where He was leading them. His response was that He was and is "the way". C.H. Dodd in *The Interpretation Of John's Gospel* p. 412 suggests the meaning of Jn. 14:4,5 as: "You know the way [in that I am the way], but you do not know where it leads", and Thomas therefore objects: "If we do not know the destination, how can we know the way?". The Lord's response is that He is the way. That's it. It's not so much the destination as the way there. The excellency of knowing Christ demands of us to walk in His way, to know Him as the life right now, to live His life, to be in His way. The way is the goal; 'You don't need any further horizons than that, than me, right now'. This is totally unappreciated by the prosperity Gospel.

14:6- see on Jn. 13:37.

Jesus said to him: I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me- The way to the cross had been lived out by the Lord throughout His life. And that too is "the truth". "The way" was to the cross, and there we find and see the only true kind of life. That "way" of crucifixion life leads us to the Father, just as the Lord understood His death on the cross as a going to the Father. Because the cross so supremely manifested the Father, there we find Him, if we will live the life of Christ crucified. Yet if we keep His commandments, the Father and Son come to us (14:23), and we come to them. The cross enables a mutuality of relationship between us all. Note too that "the way" is now another term for "the cross". They were asking where He was going; was He going to die on a cross? And He replies that "I am the way"- that they ought to have realized that His whole way of life was a cross carrying, and so of course, He would be literally going to die on the cross; He would follow His "way" to the end.

"I am *the* way" may allude to the one great way of Proverbs. The whole way of life which leads to the Kingdom, the things we do, our deepest thoughts, our daily decisions; these are all "the way" which leads to the Kingdom; and yet Christ is "the

way". This clearly means that all these things, the very essence of our being, the fibre of our thought processes, the basis of all our works; must be the Lord Jesus Christ. The fact God's ways and principles are unchanging encourage our self-examination; for there is always the rock of God and His way against which to compare our ways. The Lord Jesus is the same yesterday and today and for ever.

14:7- see on Jn. 17:7.

If you had truly known me, you would have truly known my Father also. From this time forward you will truly know Him and will have seen Him- I noted on :1 that these words all have special relevance to Peter. And he was about to state three times that he doesn't "know" the Lord Jesus. But the Lord tells the Father in 17:7,8 that the disciples have known Him and the Father, unlike the Jewish world who had not known Him (16:3). Here we see a wonderful principle revealed: The Lord speaks so positively to the Father about us, imputing righteousness and levels of commitment to us which we do not currently have. They would truly know and see the Father through the work of the cross and the gift of the Spirit which would open their eyes to the Son and thereby to His Father.

14:8- see on Dt. 5:4,5.

Philip said to him: Lord, show us the Father, and it suffices us- The Lord replies that He is the manifestation of the Father. This is the language of Ex. 33:18 LXX, where Moses likewise asks God "show Yourself to me". The answer was in the theophany on Sinai, with the Name of Yahweh declared, as full of grace and truth. This, according to Philip's allusion to it, is what we see in Jesus. And this is why the prologue in Jn. 1 speaks of the Lord Jesus in terms of the theophany of Exodus, that in His personality the full glory of the Father dwelt. Philip was the one who commented that "two hundred pennyworth of bread is not *sufficient*" for the crowd to eat and be filled. Yet he now uses the same, relatively uncommon, Greek word some time later, when he says that if he could see the Father, it would 'suffice' him (Jn. 6:7; 14:8). Perhaps John intended to bring out the growth in Philip; he now perceived that the bread created by the Lord for the crowd was indeed representative of the bread of life, the Lord Jesus who was the manifestation of the Father. The Lord had taught in Jn. 6:35 that He was the bread, and He bade His followers 'see' Him; and Philip had absorbed the point, even though, as the Lord makes clear, Philip still did not 'see' Him as he ought.

The relationship of the Lord Jesus with His Father was evidently intended by Him to be a very real, achievable pattern for all those in Him. The prayer of chapter 17 makes this clear, for the Lord there prays that we would share His relationship with the Father, or as He has just said, we would be with Him where He then was in relationship with the Father. He wasn't an aberration, an uncopyable, inimitable freak. John's Gospel brings this out very clearly. The Father knows the Son, the Son knows the Father, the Son knows men, men know the Son, and so men know both the Father and Son (10:14,15; 14:7,8). The Son is in the Father as the Father is in the Son; men are in the Son and the Son is in men; and so men are in the Father and Son (Jn. 14:10,11; 17:21,23,26). As the Son did the Father's works and was thereby "one" with Him, so it is for the believers who do the Father's works (Jn. 10:30,37,38; 14:8-15). Whilst there obviously was a unique bonding between Father and Son on account of the virgin birth, the Lord Jesus certainly chooses to speak as if His Spirit enables the relationship between Him and His Father to be reproduced in our experience.

14:9 *Jesus said to him: Philip, have I been with you such a long time, and still you do not truly know me? He that has seen me has seen the Father. How do you ask: Show us the Father?*- Although the Lord speaks quite toughly to them at this point, as noted on :7, He is totally positive about them in talking with the Father about them (17:7,8). They did not truly know Him nor the Father, and yet He uses just that same Greek word in telling the Father that His men did "know" Him and His word (Jn. 17:7,8,25). He had faith and hope in their future maturity- they didn't then "know", but they did in the future (Jn. 12:16; 13:7). The Lord had hope that "In that day you shall know" (Jn. 14:20). For there was no absolute guarantee that the eleven would come to "know" Him and His word, seeing they had freewill- Jesus had faith they would, and He expressed that faith and Hope to the Father so positively. For to love someone is to impute things to them which we only hope for. That is the simple basis of the 'imputed righteousness' of which Paul writes in Romans.

14:10 *Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak to you, I speak not from myself; but the Father abiding in me does His works*- John's Gospel especially seems to speak of the "words" and "works" of the Lord Jesus almost interchangeably (Jn. 14:10-14); in illustration of the way in which the word of Jesus, which was the word of God, was constantly and consistently made flesh in Him, as the prologue stated (1:14); issuing in the works / actions of this man who was "the word made flesh". See on Jn. 8:28. The Lord is encouraging us to see beyond the miracles or "works"; all of His words, works, miracles, character, spirit, personality were summarized in Him as a person. There was perfect congruence between Him as a person and all that He said, did and showed Himself to be. He was as He has just stated "the truth", the word made flesh. The appeal to let His words abide in us does not therefore only imply that we are to memorize His recorded words and endlessly recycle them in our minds. Although there may well be an allusion to the idea of memorizing the Gospel records. It is more a question of allowing Him to dwell or abide within us, with all His spirit, words, personality and essence of His being. For this would be the Hebraic understanding of a man's "word".

14:11- see on 14:1.

Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake- He wanted them to perceive the indwelling of the Father in Himself, and His mutual abiding in the Father, because this was the very thing which He was promising them- to share His relationship with the Father, to come to be where He now was with the Father (:3). The prayer of John 17 and the promises of the effect of the Comforter all speak of the same possibility.

As noted on 10:38, the Lord was willing to accept 'belief' if it was simply at the level of accepting that His miracles ["works"] were from God; in the hope that He could take such faith further. Yet here He seems to be saying that belief in Him as a person, was the same as believing in Him for the sake of His miracles. He as a personality, as a character, was the most powerful witness, at least equal to that witness provided by the miracles. To encounter Him without miracles ought to be persuasive enough, and we see this from the conversion of the Samaritan woman, who believed He was in the Father without seeing miracles.

14:12- see on Mk. 11:24; Jn. 17:20.

Truly, truly, I say to you: He that believes in me, the works that I do, shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go to the Father- As noted

on :10 and :11, "the works" of the Lord refer not only to His miracles but to all that He was. His going to the Father on the cross would release the gift of the Spirit (7:39). This was and is fundamentally a gift of internal strengthening in the heart, although it had issue in miraculous works for the disciples in the first century context.

It may be the Lord had in mind that the disciples through having the miraculous gifts of the Spirit would do greater works than He had done. But this raises the question of what is meant by "greater". It could mean "more", numerically. But the Greek word specifically carries the idea of being older, more mature- e.g. "Are you greater than our father Abraham?" (Jn. 8:53) in the context means 'Are you older than Abraham?'. So He could be saying that the disciples would do greater works" in the sense that collectively between us we would reveal to an even greater or mature extent the works of God. Because there must be a connection in His thought with Jn. 5:20, where alone elsewhere we meet the phrase "greater works": "For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and greater works than these will he shew him, that ye may marvel". The greater works that the Father showed the Son were the works which the believers in Christ were to perform subsequent to the Lord's resurrection. The "works" are the works of God Himself. The community of believers in Christ are doing His works, acting as God would do if He were a human being living on planet earth, and in this sense we are doing greater works than what Jesus personally did; for He was 'only' one person, and we are many. And Jesus was aware of this. He explained repeatedly that the works He did were the works which God did (Jn. 5:36; 10:25,32,37,38; 14:10,11). As God showed Him the works He was to do, so He showed those works to the world in which He lived (Jn. 10:32). Paul therefore states that there are good works which are prepared in Heaven for us to fulfil: "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). In a sense, all the works were finished from the foundation of the world, it's for us to go out there today and perform them (Heb. 4:3). Practically this means that as we contemplate "good works", we can be assured that somehow God will provide all that's needed for them to be performed. Our little faith so often stops us from performing them because we doubt whether we have the resources, the time, the money, the ability... whereas instead the need should be the call, and we should approach them in confidence that this is indeed God's will for us to do His works here on earth. For He has prepared both them and us to fulfil them.

The works of the Father and Son are defined in 6:29 as believing on the Son whom the Father sent. This is what it means to do the works of God. We could therefore read these promises as John's version of the great commission- to take the Gospel into all the world, and to trust that we shall be empowered by the Spirit to do this.

Another take on all this is that the potential enabled by the Spirit was never fully lived up to by the disciples, just as it is not with us. The Lord’s promise that whatever the disciples asked, they would be given seems never to have been fully realized in them (Jn. 15:16). Likewise the ‘prophecy’ here that they would do greater works than done by the Lord, once they received the Comforter, and possibly the promise that they would be taught “all the truth” about “things to come” (Jn. 16:13), were all likewise promises / prophecies whose potential it seems the disciples never fully rose up to.

14:13 *And whatever you shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son*- This is not a blank cheque promise. I suggested on :12 that the works of God were to bring others to faith in His Son, for that is how they are defined in 6:29. It is in that context that whatever we ask for will be ultimately provided. The

connection with the great commission in the Synoptics is in the promise that "all power" would be given to enable this work to be done (Mt. 28:18). The laboured emphasis upon "in my name" here and in :14 would then connect with the command to "preach in his name" with the promise of the Spirit to empower them in that work (Lk. 24:47,49). Whilst we do not now have the miraculous gifts, the essence of this remains powerfully true. All shall be provided, the Spirit works in non-miraculous ways, if we ask for empowerment to glorify the Father in the Son through bringing others to Him. My own ministry is proof enough of that.

14:14 *If you shall ask anything in my name, that will I do*- This repeats word for word the assurance of :13; but as noted there, it is in the context of doing the "works" of the Father, which are bringing others to faith in His Son (6:29).

14:15- see on Jn. 17:6.

If you love me, you will keep my commandments- As noted earlier in this chapter, the Lord is ever alluding to the last speech of Moses in Deuteronomy; here the appeal to "keep my commandments" sets the Lord as greater than Moses, mediating a new law to a new Israel; for "keep the commandments" reflects a major identical theme in Dt. 5:10; 7:9; 11:1,22; 13:3,4; 19:9; 30;16. The Lord's comment to the disciples that if they loved him, then they would 'keep his word' (Jn. 14:15,21,23) implies their love was at best imperfect. Their keeping of His word and loving Him was certainly under question in Jn. 15:10. And yet He confidently represents them to the Father as those who had kept His word (Jn. 17:6).

But the Lord's commandments are "not grievous" (1 Jn. 5:3); it is not that we have been given a whole set of detailed regulations similar to the 613 given by Moses. It is not hard to be obedient to His commandments, 1 Jn. 5:3 implies. The Lord states clearly that He has left us one commandment- to love one another as He loved us (13:34; 15:12; 1 Jn. 4:21; 5:2). The plural "commandments" may be a reflection of the Hebraism whereby the plural is used to emphasize the greatness and cardinal value of one singular thing, the plural of majesty. This is perhaps confirmed by 15:17: "These things[plural] I command you: That you love one another". Love of each other was the great 'thing'. To love should not be grievous; if we are walking in the light of His endless love. Therefore "This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another" (1 Jn. 3:23). The commandment to love as He loved us is only capable of understanding and fulfilment if we have believed into the Name of the Lord Jesus, and experienced that love, having God's love shed abroad in our hearts by the Spirit we receive after believing into Him (Rom. 5:5).

God is His word, as the prologue states (Jn. 1:1); to love God is to love His word. If we love His Son, we will keep His words (Jn. 14:15,21; 15:10). This is evidently alluding to the many Old Testament passages which say that Israel's love for God would be shown through their keeping of His commands (Ex. 20:6; Dt. 5:10; 7:9; 11:1,13,22; 30:16; Josh. 22:5). Israel were also told that God's commands were *all* related to showing love (Dt. 11:13; 19:9). So there is a logical circuit here: We love God by keeping His commands, therefore His commands are fundamentally about love. Thus love is the fulfilling of the law of God; both under the Old and New covenants (Rom. 13:10). It is all too easy to see our relationship with God and His Son as a question of obedience to their words, as if this is somehow a test of our spirituality. This is to humanize God too far, to see God as if He were a fallible man; for if we were God, we would institute some kind of written test for our creatures: 'Do this, and if you don't, then I know you don't love me'. The God of glory is beyond this

kind of thing. He is His word. If we love Him, we will be eager to know His words, we will dwell upon them, we will live them out in our daily experience as far as we can. In our seeking to know an infinite God, we will of course fail to see or appreciate the spirit of all His words. But He appreciates this. Yet in a sense our attitude to His word is an indication of our state of 'in-loveness' with God. Reading His word will not be a chore, a mountain to be grimly climbed and achieved each day; it will be a vital and natural part of our daily life, as natural and spontaneous as our desire to eat; and even *more so* (cp. Job 23:12).

14:16 *And I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another comforter, that he may be with you for ever*- Another Comforter / intercessor implies that the Lord Jesus was the first Paraclete [as confirmed in 1 Jn. 2:1]. Yet Moses was the foremost intercessor for Israel, and is actually called 'the Paraclete' in the Midrash on Ex. 12:29. But the idea is that the Lord was only physically with them for so long; the Comforter would mean that His presence was with them "for ever". Any attempt to confine the work of the Comforter to the first century is therefore ill founded. For the contrast is with how the Lord physically was with them for only a period; but the Comforter, His abiding presence, would remain with them "for ever".

14:17 *The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive. For it neither sees him nor knows him. You truly know him, for he abides with you and shall be in you*- This is clarified when we appreciate the allusion to the prologue. The Jewish world did not receive the Lord Jesus, and therefore did not receive His Spirit; but those who did received power to become God's children, and the grace / gift of all His fullness (1:11,12,16). "You truly know him" was not then true; as noted on :9 and :10, the Lord is imputing knowledge to them which they did not have at that very moment. We too need to see the spiritual potential in people, rather than relating to them how they are at this given moment.

Likewise the Spirit of truth, so named because it would guide them into all truth (16:13), "abides with you" right then. Although the Spirit was only poured out at the Lord's glorification on the cross (7:38,39), this was so certain that the Lord perceived that potentially, the Spirit was within them already. This is the scenario in Corinthians, where they had been given the Spirit potentially, but were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1); and it is the case with many believers today who have not perceived the potential of the Spirit within them.

The promised Spirit "shall be in you"; it speaks fundamentally of an internal power, guiding into truth (16:13), which is a matter of the mind rather than miraculous external gifts. The Lord has just defined Himself personally as "the truth", so the promise is not so much of intellectual purity of understanding as relationship with Him; for "truth" is a Hebraism for relationship. It is only the Western mindset which would see in "truth" here a reference to academic, intellectual purity of understanding.

14:18- see on Mt. 18:6.

I will not leave you desolate as orphans. I will come to you- The Lord has just addressed them as "little children" (13:33), and senses their panic that He is leaving them. He assures them that He will come to them, just as He has stated in :3; that coming to them would be to receive them for ever to Himself through the ministry of His abiding Spirit. The allusion is to the way the Rabbis spoke of their disciples being left orphans after the Rabbi died. But the Lord's death would not be like that, but the opposite. His death would lead to His abiding personal presence and continual teaching of His disciples deep within their hearts. It is this allusion which explains the

emphasis upon the Comforter providing continued teaching to the disciples. The discourse about the Comforter is inserted it seems in place of the Olivet prophecy, which in the Synoptics forms the Lord's promise of literally coming back. John's Gospel was written after them, and he is perhaps addressing the concern that the Lord had not returned, and might delay His return, by reminding them that the Comforter enabled the Lord's presence to be with us just as really as when He was literally present. There is an understandable desire in every true believer for the Lord's literal return; but we must be careful that our enthusiasm for it does not become so obsessive that we fail to sense His very real coming to us now in the Spirit. It is unfortunately significant that some of those most obsessive about the signs of the times fulfilling Bible prophecy and pointing to the Lord's imminent return are in fact those who also deny the operation of the Spirit today.

14:19 *Yet a little while, and the world sees me no more; but you will see me. Because I live, you shall live also*- The Lord carefully uses a present tense: "I live", not "I will live". His life was going to become their life because He would give them His spirit of life. The Lord would no longer be visible to the Jewish world; but He would be 'seen' by the disciples because the gift of the Comforter would be such that His presence was as real as if He were physically present.

14:20- see on Jn. 17:7.

In that day, you shall truly know that I am in my Father, and you in me and I in you- The "truth" in to which they would be guided by the Comforter, "the spirit of truth", would not be intellectual purity of understanding, but the knowledge or seeing of the Father and Son. And they would also "know" that "I [am] in you". This promise is often alluded to by John when later writing to the converts made from hearing or reading his Gospel record. For he writes about "hereby we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us" (1 Jn. 3:24; 4:13; also alluded to in 1 Jn. 2:3,5; 3:19; 4:6). So the knowledge that the Son dwells in us is from the experience of the Spirit. "That day" therefore refers to the day when the Spirit would be given, and they would 'see' the Lord ever before them and have His personal presence within them (:19).

14:21- see on Jn. 14:1.

He that has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me; and he that loves me, shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him- I suggested on :15 that the plural "commandments" refers to the singular commandment to love which is paramount to Christianity. And the connection between commandment and love is continued here. To love one another as He loved us, keeping the commandment[s], is to love the Lord. And John later makes this explicit, in explaining that love of the Lord and love of each other are related and inseparable. The commandment[s] must be both 'had' and kept. To love those in Christ was a commandment which the Jewish world did not 'have' in that they did not accept it, and not only killed God's Son but persecuted and hated all who believed in Him. John's letters refer to those who hate their brother, and the reference is primarily to the Jewish persecution of their Christian brothers. Obedience to the command to love one another is effectively a loving of the Son, which is a loving of the Father; and in response the Son will love us in manifesting Himself to us. This self-manifestation of the Lord to those who love Him and His brethren is again through the ministry of the Spirit. It is paralleled in :23 with coming to the believer and abiding ["make our abode"] with him. "Manifest myself" is the word used of the

manifestation of the risen Christ in Acts 10:40, and of the appearing of resurrected people of Mt. 27:53. John uses a related verb about the 'showing' of the Lord to the disciples after His resurrection (21:1,14). The evidence of the resurrection is not therefore in the literal visible appearance of the risen Lord to believers, but in His appearance or manifestation to them by the Spirit. In this sense His life is manifested or shown to us (1 Jn. 1:2 s.w.). This is why His resurrection, His life, His living again, can never be proven in Euclidean terms; it is a matter of experience. No amount of apologetics can prove the Lord rose from the dead, that a living body emerged from a cave on the outskirts of Jerusalem; and yet this is the cornerstone of the whole Christian faith. It is proven by His resurrection manifestation to those who accept His claims and live in His love, and whose lives are His life, His living. This may appear a circular argument, and so it is, in secular, human terms. But the transformation of life elicited by it, in radical love for each other, is to be the exhibit which cannot be argued against.

14:22- see on Jn. 7:4.

Judas (not Iscariot) said to him: Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?- They were far from understanding. His manifestation to the believers was because they had accepted Him and His claims, and were obeying His commandment to love each other. The Jewish world had not received Him, and so the internal manifestation of the Spirit could not be experienced by them. In simple terms, they did not love Him (:23).

14:23 *Jesus answered and said to him: If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him; and we will come to him and make our home with him*- The Jewish world did not accept the light of the Lord Jesus, as the prologue emphasizes. The manifestation of the Lord would be through His Spirit in the hearts of those who loved Him, and also loved their brethren, i.e. 'kept His word', His singular commandment of loving each other (13:34; 15:12; 1 Jn. 4:21; 5:2). See on :15. John's letters put this in so many words by saying that if we love the Father and Son, then we will love other believers. Here the Lord says that if we love Him, then we will "keep my word", which is the singular commandment to love one another. In that life of love, the Father and Son will 'come' to us by the Spirit, as explained on :3, and abide with us on a permanent level ["make our home"]. Not just in moments of emotional connection with them, but on a permanent basis.

14:24 *He that does not love me, does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me*- The words which are to be kept, as noted on :15, refer to the singular commandment to love each other (13:34; 15:12; 1 Jn. 4:21; 5:2). If we do not love the Lord, we will not love our brethren. And that word, of radical love, is the word of the Father. He is love, in that sense. This interpretation is confirmed by John's later interpretation of these words in 1 Jn. 4:16: "And we know and have believed the love which God has toward us. God is love, and he that abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him". See on :31, where again, keeping God's commandment meant simply loving Him, unto death on the cross for His people.

14:25- see on Jn. 1:38.

These things have I spoken to you, while still with you- The Lord predicted His personal presence amongst them through the Spirit before He left them. He didn't leave them to just experience His presence through the Spirit. That experience would

remind them that this was precisely what He had predicted. And yet He realized that at that time, they did not understand. But the coming of the Spirit would make clear what He meant. These words spoken about the Comforter, spoken at that moment whilst still with them, were the words which would be recalled to their mind by the Comforter (:26).

AV "Being yet present with you"- the same Greek word as 'abide'. The Lord was 'abiding' with them; but He promises to give them the Spirit so that He might "abide" or "be present" with them for ever. The gift of the Spirit therefore enables His abiding presence, as real as if He were physically with us. 'Abiding' is a major theme in John's writing. He sees it as what Christian discipleship is all about- abiding in Him, in the sphere of thinking around Him, His Sprit abiding in us, eternal life abiding in us, walking as He walked if we abide in Him, absorbing Him as a person into our person, eating the flesh of the Son of Man and drinking his blood if we abide in Him... this is what it is to be a Christian, a Christ person.

14:26 *But the comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and cause you to remember all that I said to you*- The Spirit was "in my name" in that it would be as if the Lord was literally with them. The Lord was aware that His teaching about the Comforter could not then be understood by them; and so He assures them that the Comforter would make them remember these words about the Comforter and then all would be plain to them; see on :25. It could be that the Comforter had a specific role in recalling literally all the Lord had spoken to them, so that the Gospel records could be written under inspiration. But the connection with :25 suggests to me that the Lord had in view His specific teaching about the Comforter.

Eph. 4:21 AV says that we are "taught by Him". The Lord "began to do and teach" things (Acts 1:1), and continues. Multiple times this word is used of the Lord's teaching people in His ministry. And that now continues. He teaches us. And He specifically says He will give us the Comforter, His teaching Spirit, to effect this. The Comforter will teach us "all things", and the "all things" are the things about Jesus (Jn. 14:26). 1 Jn. 2:27 alludes to this, saying that the anointing we have received "teaches you all things" and abides within us, in our hearts, so that we don't need any man to teach us. And any human teacher we do listen to must be judged against this teaching from the Comforter. This is why any man who does God's will through the Spirit will intuitively know if a human teaching ["doctrine", same word as 'teaching'] is of God or not (Jn. 7:17). Whoever leaves the teaching of Christ doesn't have God (2 Jn. 9). These Johannine passages use the same word for "teach" which we have in Eph. 4:21. . Paul himself says the same when he claims that he was taught the Gospel by none other than Jesus Christ and not by man (Gal. 1:12). Heb. 8:11 may have the same idea- under the new covenant, which includes the gift of the Spirit, men shall not teach their brother to "know the Lord" because all shall know Him through His direct teaching. We see here the active nature of the Lord's work now, teaching as well as mediating, forgiving and seeking to guide our life path towards eternity with Him. He teaches us, and Paul says that thus we "learned Christ" (Eph. 4:20). He teaches us about Himself. And there's nothing better than reading the Gospel records with the Lord Himself explaining Himself to us, as an individual tutor. We are taught "Christ" (:20), or "according to the truth which is in ['which consists in'] Jesus". Those lessons, that learning, is of the final truth- which is "Christ" Himself, "Jesus". Knowing Him, being in relationship with Him, is "the truth", as John's writings make clear. Understanding these things makes us review the passages which speak of our having

received a teaching / doctrine [s.w.], and needing to remain faithful to it. At first blush we may assume this teaching is from the person who taught us the Gospel. But perhaps the idea is rather than this teaching was given us by the Lord Jesus: "That form of teaching that was delivered to you... the teaching that you learned [from Jesus directly?]... holding fast the faithful word he has been taught [by Jesus?]... abide in the teaching of Christ" (Rom. 6:17; 16:17; Tit. 1:9; 2 Jn. 9). Once we are secure in this relationship, we will not be blown about by every wind of human teaching / doctrine. We will be able to easily discern teachings.

14:27 *Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives, do I give it to you. Let not your heart be disturbed, neither let it be fearful*- "'Peace' ['*shalom*'- the usual Semitic greeting] is my farewell to you" is an example of how He seems to have almost purposefully delighted in using language in a startlingly different way. There are times when the Lord Jesus seems to have almost coined words. The gift of the Spirit would be the source of peace with God, which is how "peace" is commonly used in the Bible. Therefore they need have no fear before God, troubled thoughts about the outcome of judgment day; see on :1. The peace given would affect their heart; the gift of the Spirit in view was primarily internal, in the heart. "My peace" refers to the peace which the Lord had with the Father, with no barriers. This is another way of saying what He does so often in this section- that the Spirit was enabling them to have the same relationship with the Father which He had. His *shalom* [peace] was not as the [Jewish] world could give it; each time He called out *shalom* across the street or to the guys at work each morning, He meant it. And He perceived that it would take His death on the cross to really achieve what He was giving to them in His words.

The Lord's commission to His preachers comes along with a promise that He would "be with [them] always". This is perhaps Matthew's equivalent to John's promise of the Comforter, who would abide with the Lord's people for ever. The promise of Holy Spirit support in the work of fulfilling the great commission is not necessarily fulfilled in the ability to do miracles etc. It was in the first century, but not today. Yet the promise that "I am with you always, even [as you fulfil my commission to preach] unto the ends of the world", is surely fulfilled in the promised Comforter, who is to 'abide with us for ever'. What does this mean? The Comforter clearly refers to the personal presence of Jesus, even though He is not visibly with us:

The Comforter	The Lord Jesus
Will come into the world	Jn. 5: 43; 16:28; 18:37
Comes forth from the Father	Ditto
Given by the Father	Jn. 3:16
Sent by the Father	Jn. 3:17
The spirit of truth	The truth Jn. 14:6
The Holy Spirit	The Holy One of God Jn. 6:69
The disciples would know / recognize the Comforter	As they knew / recognized Jesus Jn. 14:7,9
Would remain within the disciples	Jn. 14:20,23; 15:4,5; 17:23,26
Declares things to come	Jn. 4:25,26
Bears witness, against the world	Jn. 8:14; 7:7

Not accepted by the world	Jn. 5:43; 12:48
Unseen by the world	Jn. 16:16

Because of this, the Lord made a clever word play by saying that "'Peace' [*shalom*] is my farewell to you" (Jn. 14:27)- when 'Peace' was what you said when you met someone, to say 'Hello'. His farewell in the flesh was His 'hello', in that His personal presence would be with them. This Comforter, this personal presence of Jesus, is given *especially in the context of fulfilling the great commission to take Him to the whole world*. He will be with us, there will be a special sense of His abiding presence amongst us, because we are witnessing "in Him", and our witness is a shared witness with Him. Any who have done any witnessing work, not necessarily missionary work, but any witnessing to Him, will have felt and known His especial presence, as He promised. And we live in a time similar to that when John's Gospel was written- a time when the church were disappointed the Lord had not returned as quickly as they thought He would, when the eyewitnesses of Jesus in the flesh were not with them any longer. John's point is that through the Comforter, it's as good as if Jesus *is* here with us; and he brings out in his gospel how things like the judgment, eternal life, the coming of Jesus etc. all essentially occur within the life of the believer right now.

14:28 *You heard how I said to you: I go away and I come to you. If you loved me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father. For the Father is greater than I*- As explained on :3, the going away was to the cross and the coming to them through His abiding presence in the Comforter. "If you loved me" may seem rather severe, seeing they were willing to die for Him. But their sorrow rather than rejoicing at His departure was actually because in real spiritual terms they did not love Him; they wanted Him to remain for their own sakes. If they loved the essence of what He and the Father stood for, they would have rejoiced at His departure, for it meant the giving of the Comforter which would glorify the Father and Son so much more than if He did not depart. "The Father is greater than I" may mean that the Father's glory was far greater an issue than the Lord's death or presence with them- the issues they were immediately concerned about. To love the Son was to love the glorification of the Father, who was greater than Him. They should therefore have rejoiced at the teaching that He was going away in order to come to them in the power of the Comforter. The same word has just been used of how "greater works" were to be done when the Comforter was given (:12), on account of the Lord's going to the Father on the cross. The "works", the miracles, would glorify the Father and Son (2:11; 11:4,40). The cross itself would glorify the Father and Son (12:41).

14:29- see on Jn. 12:16.

And now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe- The purpose of prophecy isn't to specifically predict the future, but so that we shall be able to recognize the signs when they appear. The disciples did not expect Jesus to enter into Jerusalem "sitting on an ass's colt" in fulfilment of Zech. 9:9. But when He did, then soon afterwards, all became clear to them- that He had fulfilled this prophecy (Jn. 12:16). Likewise with prophecies such as "the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" in Ps. 69:9, and even the Lord's own prophecies of His resurrection. When it happened, "his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture (Ps. 69:9), and the word which Jesus had said" (Jn. 2:17-22). Such later clarification of the Lord's words and actions was all part of the ministry of the Comforter to the disciples (:26).

14:30 *I will no longer say much to you. For the prince of the world comes; but he has no claim on me*- There was a Rabbinic tradition that the whole world was under the power of the Angel of death which controlled Egypt at the first Passover, but had no dominion over Israel. They referred to this Angel as the *Sar ha-olam*, and at the time of Jesus the phrase "Prince of this world" would have been understood as referring to this Angel. This is how the Lord's use of the phrase would have been understood. He described the "prince of this world"- the Angel of death and darkness- as coming to him and finding nothing in Him. This would be alluding to the Angel of death at the first Passover (and Jesus was speaking at Passover time) coming to each house and finding nothing worthy of death there because of the blood of the lamb on the lintel. Jesus may have been using the 'language of the day' as He did regarding Beelzebub and demons, but the consistent fitting of the type implies Jesus believed the Rabbinic idea was at least partially correct, in that the whole world apart from Israel was under the control of a specific Angel. However, spiritually Israel were not under the protection of the blood of the lamb because they rejected Christ. The "prince of this world" Angel would therefore destroy them too. I have suggested on 12:31 that this prince refers to leader of the Jewish system, Caiaphas. This man, the very epitome of apparent spirituality, who had dominion over Israel, was being compared to the Angel of evil which the Jews believed had dominion over the Jews' enemies but not over the Jews. The Lord is turning it all around, to show that actually the Jews were like the Egyptians, and were under the domination of a leader who would not preserve them from the destruction now coming to them.

The Jews believed that the *Sar ha-olam* had no claim upon the Jews who were the true Israel, covered by the blood of the Passover lamb. The Lord is saying that *He* is that true Israel upon whom Caiaphas and his evil system had no power. This is the force of "he has no claim on me". The Angel whom the Jews thought would not touch them because of the other Angels hovering over them (the real idea of the word 'passover') to protect them from the destroying Angel, was going to destroy them; the protecting Angel which hovered over them and led them through the wilderness was "turned to be their enemy"- i. e. to be the destroying Angel (Is. 63:10), the *Sar ha-olam*. And that destroying Angel was operating on earth through his human representative, Caiaphas, the prince of the Jewish world.

14:31 *And he comes so that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, thus I shall now do. Arise, let us leave here*- The prince of the Jewish world would come to take the Lord away to death, epitomized in his agent Judas, who 'came' to the Lord with the forces of the Jewish world to arrest Him (18:3). It was through reflection on all this that the Jewish world would "know" the Lord's sincerity, His love for the Father. That was however only potentially true, for even His death, with all the internal contradictions and evil within the Jewish system which were thereby exposed, did not bring all the Jewish world to know Him. "That the world may know" is an allusion to David's words just before the victory over Goliath.

The Lord's obedience to the Father's commandment was His love of the Father. Again we see a connection between love, and keeping commandment. I have suggested on :15 and :24 that the keeping of the Lord's commandment means loving our brethren unto the death of the cross, as He loved us. Here we see the same idea- the Son obeyed the Father's commandment by loving Him, unto death on the cross.

JOHN CHAPTER 15

15:1- see on Lk. 13:8.

I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman- The Lord Jesus in John's Gospel describes Himself in terms of the "I am…" formula. Each time, He was referring back to the burning bush revelation of Yahweh as the "I am"; and by implication, the Lord's audience are thereby placed in the position of Moses, intended to rise up in response as he did. This parable is in the direct context of the promise of the Spirit. This is expressed here as the Father's constant activity as our husbandman, seeking to elicit spiritual fruit from us. And likewise our partaking in the vine means that we receive the sap, representing the Spirit, without which we are "none of His" are dead, unable to bring forth fruit.

The parable of the vine is within the context of the Lord's teaching about the gift of His Spirit, and the need to let that abide in them. So we can deduce that the central thrust of the parable is the need to be in the vine, so that the sap [representing the Spirit] may be in us. Without abiding in the source of that sap, we are nothing.

We notice the juxtaposition of ideas- the "I am" of the Yahweh Name is placed next to the description of the Father as "the husbandman", literally, 'the worker of the land', one of the lowest jobs, nearly always performed by a slave or servant. We see the humility of God; none of the false gods of the Gentiles had this feature of humility. But perhaps we are intended to put this parable together with that of the wicked husbandmen. The owner of the vineyard [God] sent His servants and then His Son, but the husbandmen [s.w. six times in Mt. 21] rejected them. He then destroyed the vineyard. And perhaps we are supposed to take that parable further- and conclude that the owner does the work of the husbandmen, so short is He of good workers, because the other husbandmen are not much better than the Jewish ones. He does the menial work Himself, because He is so passionately connected to His vineyard project. Even though the absentee landlord is initially set up to evoke images of someone distant and disinterested- which is how many see God. But putting these parables together, we see that this is but an initial impression. Closer investigation shows that He actually has a passionate interest in His special project of the vineyard, and fruit within it.

"The true vine" suggests that the community in view is the true one compared to a false one; and the false vine was the community of Israel: "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt and planted it in this land" (Ps. 80:8). That vine had not brought forth good fruit and so had been cut down (Mt. 3:8). But the parable makes clear that the new vine, Jesus, still has the possibility of being fruitless and suffering judgment. Membership in a community had been replaced by membership or, better, relationship, with and in a person- the Lord Jesus. That same move is part of every conversion- from 'religious membership' to personal relationship.

In this parable, the mediation of the Spirit is envisaged as being provided collectively, to the whole vine. If we opt out of realistic mixing with each other, we are effectively resigning from Christ. For He *is* His brothers and sisters. He didn't say 'I am the trunk and you are the branches', He said 'I *am* the vine, and you are the branches'. We *are* Him, His body. Our attitude to our brothers and sisters is our attitude to Him. We cannot claim to love God if we don't love our brother. It's as simple as this.

The Father is the husbandman, and is noted for His long patience in waiting "for the precious fruit" (James 5:7). Every bit of spiritual development is so precious to

Him. To hinder it by our attitude to others, or enforcing situations which are going to limit the development of spirituality in others, is deeply displeasing to God and frustrating of His purpose and work for people.

The same word is used by the Lord in the synoptics concerning the parable of the husbandmen in Mt. 21; Mk. 12 and Lk. 20. This is surely John's take on that parable. The Jewish husbandmen had failed to develop fruit for the Father, and had been replaced by other husbandmen. But ultimately, the owner of the vineyard also becomes the husbandman. He is manifested through our efforts to be husbandmen. If we consciously seek to develop spiritual fruit in others then we will experience God's especial blessing and empowerment of our efforts.

15:2- see on 2 Cor. 4:4.

Every branch in me that carries no fruit, he prunes away- This is powerful warning that it is possible to appear as "in Christ" by status, perhaps by baptism, and yet bear no fruit. Perhaps the difference is between simply being "in Christ", and "abiding in" Him, which alone will bring fruit. And it is bearing the fruit of the Spirit which is therefore critically important. Only at the day of judgment is the branch finally pruned to the point of being cut off and burnt. Until then, fruitless branches are allowed to remain- in hope that the vinedresser may coax them into life. The Lord's approach is a stark contrast to those who want to cut off fruitless branches from the church in this life. To lament a lack of 'fruit worthy of repentance' and therefore cut someone off is in fact *not* what we read here. Such fruitless branches get special attention. And only after the dormant period of Winter [cp. death] are they then cut off and destroyed. And of course it is God, through the Lord Jesus (the vinedresser of Lk. 13), who does the pruning away, and not us. Our focus is to be upon our personal fruitfulness. In viticulture, the pruning of apparently dead branches is to avoid the tendency of vines to grow longer, larger and more leafy branches- at the expense of fruitfulness. We can easily perceive that God's activity in our lives is geared towards our fruitfulness, and to prevent us from merely external appearances.

"Prune" is literally 'to lift up'. First century vineyards allowed the branches of the vine to run along the ground, or to be lifted up on trellises, or cross-bars. So the same word for "prune" is translated "take up" or "carry" in "take up his cross..." (Mt. 16:24; 27:32). The idea is not as in AV to 'take away' in destruction. That comes later, when at the day of judgment, the fruitless branch is cut off and thrown into the fire. The connections with crucifixion may suggest that the Father works in order to bring the fruitless believer into closer identity with the cross of Jesus.

And every branch that carries fruit, he cleanses it, that it may bear more fruit- The removed branch which was not cleansed refers initially to Judas, who had now left them, as he was the one of them who was not clean / cleansed (13:10). Bearing the fruit of the Spirit is absolutely essential; Paul puts it another way when he writes that if we have not the Spirit of Christ, we are "none of His". The Lord Jesus here speaks of how we as shoots on the vine tree are either ‘cut off’ in rejection, or ‘trimmed / purged’ to be more fruitful. There is a paranomasia here in the Greek text [i.e. a play on similar sounding verbs]- *airein* and *kathairein*. The point being that the purging process works through condemning oneself now; by going through the realization of our condemnation now, we are thereby purged so that we avoid condemnation at the day of judgment.

"Cleanses" is the word used in Jn. 13:10,11 to describe how the 11 disciples were 'cleansed', but Judas was not. Always in these upper room discourses, Judas is ever

being alluded to. He was the branch which was not cleansed because he had no fruit, and was finally broken off. He was the one who did not abide in Christ, but walked out into the darkness. In one sense, abiding in Christ means to stick with Him and not walk out on Him. Which is all easier said than done.

In viticulture, the branches that are fruitful are pruned in order that after the Winter dormancy period [cp. death], they will be more fruitful next season. I suggested above that the unfruitful branches are lifted up, or trellised; and now He refers to the trimming of the fruitful branches. But the most severe trimming or pruning is done *after* the harvest, after which the vine becomes dormant, and then as it were resurrects into new life in the Spring. So the Lord may be saying that the fruitless will be harvested and pruned at their death, and then in the resurrection, their fruitfulness will be again considered. If then there is no sign of fruit, they are cut off the vine and burnt / destroyed. Another take on this is that the Lord is speaking to the disciples just before His own death. He is urging them to "abide" in Him through that time of dormancy, and emerge into an eternal Spring of fruitfulness at His resurrection.

The fruit to be produced is the fruit of the Spirit- which is all internal attributes, elicited by the sap / Spirit: "The fruit of the Spirit (that which the Spirit produces) is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22,23). Nine qualities gathered as one cluster, just as on a grapevine.

As also to be noted on the parable of the vineyard in Isaiah 5, God does all He can to ensure that we have an optimal environment for bearing spiritual fruit. So often we complain that if only we were in this or that situation, then we would bear more fruit. But He knows best. The cleansing, spoken of in this Upper Room context, must be understood in the context of the Lord's washing of the disciples' feet, whereby they were cleansed, but not all (13:10); for Judas was not cleansed internally. His comment that feet needed regularly washing may refer to some regular cleansing by the Lord, of which He again speaks here. 'Cleansing' may refer to internal cleansing of the heart; the pure / cleansed in heart (Mt. 5:8), those cleansed "within" (Mt. 23:6), and the internal work of cleansing the heart and conscience is that of the Spirit, operating within the heart of believers.

15:3 *Already you are clean because of the word which I have spoken to you*- How does the Lord's word cleanse? It is inadequate to suppose that by reading the whole Bible, we are somehow internally cleansed. The same word is used in 13:10 of how they had been cleansed, but not all- for Judas was excepted. Yet he had heard the word, as spoken words- but was not cleansed. As ever in John, the prologue helps us toward understanding. "The word was made flesh", and was "in the beginning" of His ministry, and "was God". The reference is not to all the recorded statements of the Lord Jesus, as if we are to read and recite all the red letter words in a New Testament and thereby be cleansed by the exercise. I have suggested elsewhere that the Gospel records were indeed intended to be memorized. But "the word" is the Lord Jesus as a person, in the flesh, as the personality which was the sum total of all His words, miracles, work, personality and character. The word of John 1 was the light of men, in which they should live. *Logos*, "word", like *rhema*, is used to translate the Hebrew *dabar*. These terms, however, are used to refer not just to words, but to actions and persons. *Dabar* is used to refer to far more than spoken words; but to things and causes. When the Lord speaks of "My word", He means not simply His recorded statements, but He Himself, the summary of all His being and personhood. "The acts [*dabar*] of David" (1 Chron. 29:29) means not simply his words, but his acts and whole life story. "The things [*dabar*] which your eyes have seen" (Dt. 4:9) referred

not to words heard, but to experience; and this is a common usage, speaking of event as a "word". In Hebraic thought, a 'word' is a thing done and not merely words as in lexical items. "The Lord was angry with me for your sakes [*dabar*]" (Dt. 4:21) doesn't refer to words so much as to the sake or cause of a person. The Lord's "word" must be understood in this Hebraic sense, far wider than simply His recorded speech as it stands in the Gospels. This is why He speaks of "*My* word[s]"; the word / *logos / dabar* which was Him. His reference is not to the words of God in the Bible, but to the word which was Him. Dt. 26:17 records that Israel had chosen Yahweh to be their King; but the Targum on this says that they had appointed the word / *logos* of God to be their king. The *logos* of a person is them, with all their actions and events; and thus the word of the Lord Jesus refers to He Himself, just as "the word was God" in the prologue.

We therefore at this point note the singular, "word", not "words" as we would expect if His utterances were in view. References in the plural to His "words" may well be an example of the Hebrew plural of majesty- the one great word / *logos*, which in John's writing can be none other than the Lord personally. We are cleansed by Him, by His blood, His work, and His sacrifice of a uniquely perfect life. The association of cleansing with His sacrifice is a common New Testament theme.

"Now you are clean...", in the context of viticulture, may be an allusion to how after three years, the fruit of vines was "holy" (Lev. 19:23,24). And the Lord was speaking after the third year of ministry with them.

15:4 *Abide in me and I in you-* The idea of 'abiding' is so common. The preceding verse has spoken of how they are 'clean'; and yet the Lord has made the point in Jn. 13 that they were all clean, apart from Judas, who went out into the night. To abide is therefore to not go out into the night. Sinlessness is not therefore in view. Rather the sense of overall location and self-perception is to be "in Christ". Abiding in the Lord Jesus is also definable as allowing Him to "abide in you" through His Spirit.

As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, so neither can you, except you abide in me- The Lord's common Upper Room theme of 'abiding' in Him uses the same word as Moses used when exhorting his people to 'cleave unto' God (Dt. 10:20; 11:22 LXX). This abiding involved loving God and keeping His commandments- all ideas which occur together in Dt. 13:4; 30:20. The branch can only bear fruit if it receives the sap which is in the whole tree. This sap represents the Spirit, which is why this parable is found wedged in between the promises of the indwelling of the Comforter. Abiding in the Lord means Him abiding in us, which He does through the gift of the Spirit in our hearts (1 Jn. 3:24 etc.). The disciples were going to be tempted to turn away from the Lord; but He urges them to abide, because there can be no fruit of the Spirit on us unless the Spirit abides in us and brings forth those fruits. This is also a vital perspective on the claim that non-Christians produce spiritual fruit. The fruit brought forth by the Spirit, spiritual fruit, is indeed just that; and unless we are abiding in the vine, in the Lord Jesus, and He in us, then we simply cannot bring forth the fruit of the Spirit. It is no good being near the vine, associated with it... we have to have the spirit of Christ, in order to bear fruit. To abide in the vine is therefore to remain under the influence of His Spirit. "The fruit of the Spirit" is brought forth by the Spirit. We can therefore never overstate the case for a Spirit-based approach to practical Christian living. This is the emphasis of the Bible, and any approach which devalues the ministry of the Spirit is simply missing the point of the essence of Christianity. The vine cannot bear fruit "of itself"- a sober warning against all ideas that we can force ourselves to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit. We

may think we have brought forth love or peace, but this is not the fruit of the Spirit unless it has been brought forth of the Spirit and not of ourselves. And yet there is an interplay between the work of the Spirit on the one hand, and human volition on the other. For the fruit is all the same called "your fruit" (:16).

The man under the Old Covenant who made his offering of, e.g. an ox, at a place other than at "the door of the tabernacle of the congregation" was viewed as having shed blood and therefore was to be cut off from the congregation (Lev. 17:3,4). The Law foresaw that there would be this tendency, to worship God away from the rest of the congregation. Those who did so were condemned in the strongest terms: their sacrifice of an animal was seen as the murder of their brother, whereas they would have seen it as an expression of their righteousness. "He that kills an ox is as if he slew a man" (Is. 66:3) refers back to this, making it parallel with idolatry and proudly refusing to let God's word dwell in the heart.

15:5 *I am the vine, you are the branches. He that abides in me and I in him, the same carries much fruit. For severed from me you can do nothing*- He is the whole tree; He doe not say that He is the trunk, and we the branches. To leave the tree is to leave Him; and He is His body, the entire community of believers. And severed from me, He said, you can do nothing, in spiritual terms. Much as some think they can. And in the end, like a slow cancer, the brother or sister who was offended by whatever, will eventually die in that they leave the vine of Christ. It is from the body of Jesus that there comes nurture and nourishment, supplied by every member of the body (Eph. 4:16). And we, all of us, are the body of Christ. To cut ourselves off from it, formally or informally, openly or deep within our hurt hearts, is to deprive ourselves of the nourishment which He is willing to give through our brethren. And likewise to try to exclude others from it is serious indeed; for so many who are disfellowshipped or excluded then fall away from true spirituality. It follows from this figure that not *all* our brethren are no good. There's a lot of goodness out there- those who give up lands, houses, parents etc. for the Lord's sake *will* find within His ecclesia a hundredfold of these things. But we will only share in these things if we are willing to look at the positive side in our brethren. For in many things we also offend others. Yet we know well enough we basically are sincere and willing to give to others. And as we expect others to relate to that good side in us, so we should to others. Nobody in the brotherhood is totally, purely evil- at least, seeing we cannot judge in that sense, we should not think that of any. We have to assume that each of our brethren is secured in Christ, and will be in the Kingdom. They have the Christ-man formed in them, however immaturely.

"Severed from me" is as AV "without Me", the same phrase as in Jn. 1:3, "without him", the Word made flesh, the Lord Jesus, "nothing was made / created". The connection is to demonstrate that spiritual fruit is in fact the creation of the Lord Jesus; for He is the vinedresser, on God's behalf. We cannot take a day off work in order to develop our love or our patience, there is no button on our head that we must press in order to change. The new creation, the fruit on the branches, is of His creation- although it requires our openness to His work.

15:6- see on Mt. 13:6; Rev. 14:10.

If a man does not abide in me, he is thrown out as a branch and withers, and these are gathered and thrown into the fire, and they are burned- The language of branches being severed from the vine is used in Romans 11 about how *God* can do this in judgment. But it is He who can do this, and not us. We are the branches, not the husbandman. Those who choose not to abide in the Lord shall wither. In the

primary context, the Lord had Israel in view, the fig tree which "withered" and would then have to be burnt (s.w. Mt. 21:19). The Lord had this figure in view when He spoke soon afterwards, on the way to the cross, of Israel as a withered tree about to be burnt up in AD70 (Lk. 22:31).

But Israel then, as many today, are living out their own condemnation; they will be "thrown out" or [s.w.] "cast away" at the final judgment (Mt. 13:48; Lk. 14:35) in response to their conscious decision not to remain in the Lord, in the vine; and refusing the sap of the Spirit. It is they rather than the Lord who have chosen their fate.

The last day is the time of breaking off and burning; but Romans 11 says that the Jewish branches have already been broken off, and the Gentiles grafted in. However, Romans 11 speaks of an olive tree, not a fig tree. And a different word for "branch" is used. I suggest that the two teachings are not to be confused. Unless we conclude that Jewish branches were "broken off" ahead of time because they totally refused to be part of the true vine; but fruitless branches who are "in Christ" but fruitless, He works with; and they will only finally be cut off at the last day.

15:7 My words- see on Job 22:27,28.

If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you shall ask whatever you will and it shall be done to you- I have suggested elsewhere that the Lord's "words" refer not so much to His recorded statements, those printed in red letters in some Bibles; but rather to the whole essence of His being and personality. For He was "the word made flesh", as the prologue states (1:14). The reference is not to the entire Bible, but specifically to the words of the Lord Jesus. If He abides in us, we will ask what *we* will, and it will be done. Yet only if we ask according to *God's* will can we receive our requests (Jn. 15:7 cp. 1 Jn. 5:14). The implication is that if the word that is Him dwells in us, our will becomes that of the Father, and therefore our requests, our innermost desires, are according to His will, and are therefore granted. It is by the Spirit that He abides in us (1 Jn. 3:24). His Spirit, His word, His way of thinking, is His will, which is the Father's will. If we have Him within, then our will shall be the Father's, and we will intuitively ask for only what we know is His will. We will not as it were be guessing, asking for lists of things in the hope that we shall hit on some points where our will and His coincide.

In our age, the Bible is indeed a valuable source for growing in knowledge of His will. The word of the Gospel becomes “united by faith with them that hear it” (Heb. 4:2 RVmg.). Through the medium of our response to God’s word, our will becomes united with His. Therefore the word was what directed and motivated David's regular daily prayers (Ps. 119:164); they weren't standard repetitions of the same praises or requests, but a reflection of his Biblical meditation. He asks God to hear his prayers because He keeps God’s word (Ps. 119:145,173). He asks God to hear *his* voice in prayer, using the very same words with which he reflects upon how he heard *God's* voice as it is in His written word. He even goes so far as to draw a parallel between God and his own “reins” or inner self- both of them “instruct me” (Ps. 16:7). His inner self was so absorbed into the reality of God. He asks God to hear *his* voice in prayer, using the very same words with which he reflects upon how he heard *God's* voice as it is in His written word. In successful prayer, therefore, our will merges with that of the Father. His will becomes our will; and *vice versa*. By this I mean that *our* will can become *His* will in that He will hear us and even change His declared will [Moses several times achieved this during the course of his prayer life]; prayer really does change things. Our will becomes God’s just as His becomes ours.

There is an awesome mutuality between a man and his God as he kneels at night alone, praying and asking for the very things which are now God's will.

15:8- see on Jn. 12:23-26.

Herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; and so shall you be my disciples- They were fearful that the Lord was going away, and they were being left "orphans", pupils without a Rabbi. But the promise of the Spirit means that He will be present with us just as much, and even moreso, than when He was physically present as their teacher. He envisaged them, and all believers, continuing to be disciples, and Him through the Spirit being their continued teacher. The "fruit" in view is what Paul later terms "the fruit of the Spirit", the fruit brought forth by the Spirit, through our allowing the Lord to operate in us. It is the Father's will that we should bear much fruit, because it glorifies Him; and this is the end result of all the Lord's teaching, and of our being His disciples. We may think that if only our life situation were different, then we would be the more spiritually fruitful. But the Lord is clear that it is the Father's will, and His will, that we should be fruitful. As taught in the parable of the vineyard of Isaiah 5, all has in fact been done to provide us with an optimal environment in which to bring forth fruit.

The Father is glorified in our fruit bearing; but it is a major theme of John that it is the cross of Christ which brings glory to Him. The connection is in the fact that a true response to the principles of the cross brings forth true spiritual fruit. The glory of God is His Name and the characteristics associated with it; and we will bear these if we respond to the spirit of the cross. In this sense the Lord Jesus could say that through His death, He would be glorified in us (Jn. 17:10). By beholding and perceiving His glory on the cross, we glorify Him (Jn. 17:24,10).

We may be correct to connect the Lord's theme of fruit on the vine with His comment at the last supper, that He would only drink the fruit of the vine with us at His return (Mt. 26:29). The harvest of the vine will therefore be at the Lord's return, even though we bring forth some fruit now; that is the time when Israel as the vine shall fill the face of the earth with fruit. Now, we are being pruned and cleansed towards that final harvest. And the Lord Jesus, presented in the parable of LK. 13 as the vinedresser of His people, will eternally enjoy the results of His labour.

15:9 *Even as the Father has loved me, I also have loved you. Abide in my love*- Abiding is achieved through the Spirit abiding within us (1 Jn. 3:24); it is through the gift of the Spirit accepted within our hearts that His love is shed abroad within our hearts (Rom. 5:5). We abide in Him, in His love, and His love abides in us. And we therefore shall live in love to others. If we do not love our brother, we do not abide in Him nor He in us (1 Jn. 3:14). These allusions in John's letters seem to be saying that abiding in His love means loving each other, those others who are also in Him. This idea is continued in the next verse, speaking of how abiding in the Lord's love means keeping His commandment, of loving our brethren.

"My love", the love of Christ, is consistently associated with His death. To abide in His love is to abide in a deep impression of the cross, to live always in the shadow of His death there for me, with all the certainty of salvation which this brings. "Abiding" is a major theme of John. It is his code for 'being a Christian'. The imagery of abiding in the vine, in contrast to Judas who went out into the darkness, suggests that believers are not "in" with the Lord Jesus for a few minutes and then "out" during sin, and then back "in" after repentance. The idea of "abiding" reflects how the Lord sees the overall spirit of a man's life; rather like the records of the kings of Judah give

God's overall judgment of them as obedient or disobedient, and then we read their biographies- which feature many ups and downs of faith in the shorter term. For a branch doesn't drop on and off a vine, it remains part of it. Paul expresses the same idea in speaking of how we are brethren "in Christ", parts of His body. The Old Testament has the equivalent in the idea of being "in" or "out" of covenant relationship with Yahweh, also expressed in terms of being married to Him, or being within the Divine family. Membership in a family doesn't speak of being red hot enthusiastic about each other all the time; rather does the metaphor speak of abiding relationship and permanent identity. "Abiding" is therefore speaking of relationship. All this is one of the things symbolized in the bread and wine of the communion service; we thereby act out our abiding in Jesus and His abiding in us: "He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him" (Jn. 6:56). We are helped in achieving this experience of 'abiding' through the gift of the Spirit. The Lord spoke of how He was 'abiding' with them [AV "being yet present with you", Jn. 14:25], but His 'abiding' in the sense of His presence would be just as real for all believers through the Spirit. "Hereby we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us" (1 Jn. 3:24; 4:13). Paul expresses this in terms of "Christ dwelling in" human hearts (Rom. 8:9,10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27). But we are to dwell in Him, to abide in Him as He abides in us.

15:10- see on Jn. 17:6.

If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love- I suggest that the plural "commandments" is a Hebraism, a plural of majesty, referring to the one great commandment. And that is defined clearly in :12- the singular commandment is to love one another as He loved us, to death on the cross. The idea is not that the Lord's love is conditional, waiting only for those who obey a long list of commandments. This effectively means: 'If you love one another, then you shall abide in My love'. Which is just what He has said in :9 (see note there). 1 Jn. 2:10 says as much: "He that loves his brother abides...". "If we love one another, God abides in us" (1 Jn. 4:12). "His commandments" and "the [singular] commandment" are paralleled in 2 Jn. 6. The Father's commandment likewise is the same. For the Lord taught that all the Father's commandments are summarized in the idea of loving God and thereby our neighbour; see on Mk. 12:31. Any other reading of this verse is likely to veer towards treating the Lord's commandments as another list of statutes, similar in principle to the 613 given by Moses; as if He grants His love conditional upon our legal obedience to some extended moral code of behaviour. If this were the case, given our disobedience and weakness, we shall never know His love. And His love is not conditional upon legalistic obedience in this sense.

15:11- see on 1 Jn. 1:4.

These things have I spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full- The filling up of joy means that something will be done to us within our hearts; for that is where "joy" is experienced. 'Filling up' is the language of the ongoing filling of the Spirit, which is the context of this whole section in chapters 14-16. The Lord's spirit, His way of being and thinking, His mind, included "joy". Although as He spoke these words facing His death, His "joy" was hardly of a frivolous type, as the world thinks of "joy". As with "love", the Lord in His farewell discourses radically redefines love, joy and peace. He wished to give His spirit to us, so that His spirit might become ours; and thereby His joy would be within us. His

"joy" is expressed in the Gospels as joy over a lost sheep being found (Lk. 15:7), the joy of finding people for the Kingdom (Mt. 13:44), the joy of seeing others enter His Kingdom (Mt. 25:21). What He rejoices in, we shall. His joy shall be in us in that we share His spirit, His attitude and mindset (17:13). John himself experienced this when he wrote of having joy that his converts were abiding in Christ; and he could think of "no greater joy" (3 Jn. 4).

The language here in Jn. 15:11,14 speaks of the disciples as friends, who can now have fullness of joy. It clearly alludes to the earlier account of John the Baptist, "the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice; therefore this joy of mine is now full" (Jn. 3:29). Here we have further evidence that the disciples' coming to Jesus was thanks to John's work; many of them would have been John's followers. So the Lord is rejoicing that John's ministry had not been in vain.

15:12 *This is my commandment: That you love one another, even as I have loved you*- As noted on :10, this singular commandment is spoken of in the Hebraic plural of majesty as His "commandments", plural. This in one 'word' is the essence of His message, His *logos* to men. We are to love each in on ongoing way, as Christ loved us in His death in that once-off act (Jn. 15:12,17). The combination of the present and aorist tenses of *agapan* ['to love'] in these verses proves the point. Thus our obedience *to* Christ in loving each other is exemplified by the obedience *of* Christ (:10). Quite simply, something done 2000 years ago really does affect us *now*. There is a powerful link across the centuries, from the darkness of the cross to the lives we live today in this century. "By his knowledge", by knowing Christ as He was there, we are made righteous (Is. 53:11). As Israel stood before Moses, they promised: "All the words which the Lord has spoken will we do". When Moses then sprinkled the blood of the covenant upon them- and this incident is quoted in Hebrews as prophetic of the Lord's blood- they said the same but more strongly: "All the words which the Lord hath spoken will we do *and be obedient*" (Ex. 24:3,7). It was as if their connection with the blood inspired obedience. Likewise the communication of God's requirements was made from over the blood sprinkled mercy seat (Ex. 25:22)- another foretaste of the blood of Christ. Quite simply, we can't face the cross of Christ and not feel impelled towards obedience to that which God asks of us, which is to love as the Lord loved us. For the next verse will define love as the love of the cross.

15:13 *Greater love has no one than this: That a man lay down his life for his friends*- This is a truth accepted in every human society, and many men have laid down their lives for their friends. What is unique about the Lord's love-unto-death was that He died for us whilst we were yet enemies, and not His friends (Rom. 5:8); He took the initiative in loving us through the death of the cross (1 Jn. 4:10,19). We only love, because He first loved us. As noted on 10:11, the Lord did not have His life taken from Him, He gave it of Himself, to the point of controlling the very period and moment at which He died, consciously outbreathing His last spirit toward us. And so the Lord's "greater love" was in that He died for us whilst we were not actually His friends but enemies (Rom. 5:10 "when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son"). He *called us* friends; that is the huge force behind those words in :15. He took the initiative, calling us friends when we were enemies; and died for us. We show ourselves to be His friends by accepting His love, and living in that love toward others (:14).

15:14 *You are my friends, if you do the things which I command you*- For "friends", we could read 'The ones whom I love', for that is how the Lord has just

defined love, as laying down life for friends (:13). The things commanded are quite simply to love our brethren as the Lord loved us (:12); that singular commandment is spoken of in the plural in :10 as a Hebraic plural of majesty, the one great commandment, the one great thing commanded. The Lord is not saying: 'I shall love you, if you first love Me, and demonstrate that by keeping a list of a few hundred commandments I have given you'. That would be to totally miss the point. We love, because He *first* loved us (1 Jn. 4:19); it was not that we loved God, but that He loved us in giving His Son (1 Jn. 4:10). The Lord has died for us, showing us that "no greater love" (:13). We abide in that love if His spirit abides in us, and we likewise live in love, doing the great thing He commanded both by word and example- to love as He did.

15:15- see on Jn. 16:12.

No longer do I call you servants. For the servant does not know what his lord does; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from my Father, I have made known to you- The servant simply does what he is told, without any particular insight into what the master does in the rest of his life, what his private life and thought is like. There are many allusions to the Rabbi-disciple relationship in the Lord's final words to the disciples, and here the allusion is to how disciples were servants of the rabbi. They were to be obedient to him, and to just obey his teaching- without 'knowing that he does'. That is the path of religion. But the Lord offers relationship, His word of teaching became flesh in Him, sharing with His servants what He really thinks, what His longer term agenda is, and who He really is. This is the path of spirituality and personal relationship. Professional distance between master and servant has been collapsed, although we are still His servants. But we are servants who are also His friends. And that friendship was not going to be on the basis of occasional contact; He was going away but would come again to His friends by living within them 24/7 through the gift of His Spirit- a friendship with an intimacy like no other.

As noted on :13, the uniquely "greater love" shown by the Lord was that He died for us when we were still enemies (Rom. 5:10); but He *called us* His friends. His intense hopefulness in our response accompanies all our efforts to invite others to accept His love and consciously befriend Him who so befriended them. The "no longer" suggests that in His death on the cross, they will see the final revelation of God, the quintessential declaration of all that He had heard from the Father, made known to them. There is no hint here that He now is going to declare the future to them. Now they were going to understand what their Lord and friend had done; for the Comforter was to open their understanding to the things of the cross, to the meaning of it all. This explains how things were going to change in their understanding, from being servants just obedient for the sake of it to a Master they respect and obey but do not really understand, to friends who now have been shown the innermost essence of their Master. As noted on 16:13, the Comforter was to make known to them the things which were coming, the things of His death on the cross. He would show them plainly of the Father, in His death on the cross and the Comforter unpacking that death to them (16:25). Or as Paul puts it, the gift of the Spirit opens our eyes to understand the depth and height of our Lord's love for us (Eph. 1:18; 3:18,19). And His love was declared in essence in the death of the cross.

Friendship is exactly the language God uses about Abraham- because He was His "friend", He showed Abraham what He was going to do (Gen. 18:17-19). But the

things to be done here refer to the cross (see on 16:13). To the Lord's first hearers, a slave was defined by his or her obedience to the master's commands. The Lord says that His followers are His friends, who do His commandments- but they're not slaves. He seems to be saying that they were indeed His slaves- but a new kind of slave, a slave who whilst being obedient to the Master, was also His personal friend. It's lovely how the Lord speaks of such well known ideas like slavery, and shows how in the humdrum of ordinary life, He gives an altogether higher value to them. See on Jn. 10:28.

He has just reminded them that they call Him Lord, and rightly so, and therefore His washing of their feet was what they must do (Jn. 13:13). Earlier, He had rebuked them for calling Him "Lord" but not *doing* what He said (Lk. 6:46- this is in a speech directed at the disciples- Lk. 6:20,27.40). And yet He told others that His disciples *did* His word (Lk. 8:21). He was so positive about them to others, even though they did not *do* the consequences of calling Him Lord [e.g. washing each others' feet- instead, they argued who was to be the greatest]. Perhaps when the Lord says that He will no longer relate to them as a Lord, with them as His servants, but rather simply as their friend, He is tacitly recognizing their failure, and preparing Himself to die for them as their friend rather than as their Master. And yet, as the Divine economy worked it all out, it was exactly through that death that they exalted Him as Lord and Master as they should have done previously.

15:16- see on Mk. 4:8; Jn. 14:12.

You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you to go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain. So that whatever you shall ask of the Father in my name, He may give it to you- This is alluded to in 1 Jn. 4:10,19- it is not that we loved God and He responded, but He loved us. It is not so much that we knew God, but that He knew us. It is not that we were out seeking for the Lord Jesus and found Him as a result of hard Biblical scholarship. He found us; indeed Paul cites the whole question of choosing, calling and predestination as the parade example of God's grace through the work of the Spirit. His choosing of us is the supreme example that it is not of works, nor intellectual ability, but of grace through the Spirit. "You did not choose me, but I chose you… out of the world" (:16,19) corresponds to the oft repeated theme of Moses that God has chosen Israel "out of all peoples" (Dt. 7:6 RVmg.), by grace (Dt. 4:37; 10:15; 14:2). For as Israel were the failed vine, so we in Christ are the new vine which will be fruitful.

It is not as if the Lord Jesus has said to us: 'Would you like me to die for you on the cross, to gain your salvation?'. Because then we could say 'No, don't do it for me', and we would be free of obligation. But He has taken the initiative. He has already died for us, He suffered for me, He won my redemption. And He has called me to know this and respond to it. I *can't* say, with eyes even only half open to the cross, 'No, I don't want what You did for me. Take it away, no, I don't want it'. He has done it. He has called me. I can't say I don't want it. And for you too. We have not chosen Him of our own decision; He has chosen us, and asked us to bring forth fruit (Jn. 15:16). Reflected upon, this is one of the most tremendous imperatives which we have to a dedicated life of response to the principles of His cross: justifying the weak, showing a spirit of grace amidst hatred, imbibing the word, being concerned for the salvation of others amidst our own agonies, enduring apparently endless tribulation (notice, and circle in your Bible, all the occurrences of the word "and" in Mk. 15 A.V.)... that principle that *nothing else matters* apart from our response to His love, so great, so free. The whole horror, pain and tragedy of the cross was surely to show us

that *He loved us far more than we have ever or will ever love Him*. And yet He asks us to accept His love, to respond to it, to love Him and in that love, show forth His character to others. With shame at the paucity and poverty of our own devotions, we can do little else but respond as fully and as best we can.

The twelve evidently saw Jesus of Nazareth as a Rabbi, their special, lovable, somewhat mystic teacher at whose feet they sat. But the disciples saw Jesus within the frames of Judaism. "What does this mean? He tells us..." (Jn. 16:17) is similar to a familiar Rabbinic formula. But of course Jesus was far more than a Rabbi, and He laboured to change their perceptions. For example, He stresses many times that *He* chose *them* to be His disciples (especially Jn. 15:16-19)- whereas in Judaism, it was always disciples who chose a Rabbi: "Jesus chose the disciples, but the students of the rabbis almost always chose a teacher". The words of the Lord Jesus were the words which He had 'heard' from the Father. But this doesn't mean that He was a mere fax machine, relaying literal words which the Father whispered in His ear to a listening world. When the disciples finally grasped something of the real measure of Jesus, they gasped: "You do not even need that a person ask you questions!" (Jn. 16:30). They had previously treated Jesus as a Rabbi, of whom questions were asked by his disciples and then cleverly answered by him. They finally perceived that here was more than a Jewish Rabbi. They came to that conclusion, they imply, not by asking Him questions comprised of words and hearing the cleverly ordered words that comprised His answers. The words He spoke and manifested were of an altogether higher quality and nature. Here was none other than the Son of God, the Word made flesh.

The language here is very much that of ordaining to priestly service, just as in chapter 17 the Lord will talk about sanctifying His followers, as if they are Levites, and sending them out to do Divine service in the work of the great commission, calling others to His grace. We find this same theme of a new Israel being created in the usage of “ordained [Gk. *etheka*] you”. C.K. Barrett shows that *etheka* reflects the Hebrew *samak*, and that the Lord’s phrase alludes to the ordination of a disciple as a Rabbi. Those guys must’ve looked at each other in shock. They who were barely literate, and knew how very human they were, whose small minds were creaking under the burden of trying to understand this Man they so loved… were being ordained as Rabbis, by a man who’d just washed their feet, which was what disciples usually did for their Rabbis. But yes, the Lord challenged them and us to have a far higher estimate of His opinion of us…

“I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should *go forth* and bring forth fruit... that whatsoever you shall ask of the *Father* in *my name*, he may give it you" is full of connection with the world-wide preaching commission; and in this context, *whatever* we ask to this end will be given. All will be provided for our mission; if it is indeed solely for His mission that we are making request. Lack of resources has never therefore ultimately and truthfully hindered any sincere attempt to obey the great commission. I can personally testify to that and so can many.

The fruit brought forth is therefore partly application to our converts. The 'remaining' [s.w. 'abiding'] of the fruit would then refer to the converts abiding in the Lord and He in them through the Spirit, which would then be alluded to by John when he writes that he has no greater joy than to know that his converts abide in the Lord (3 Jn. 4). This is the branch and fruit abiding in the vine.

In a more general sense, the fruit remains, in that all spiritual fruit abides eternally. This is another way of saying that we now live the eternal life, the kind of life which we shall eternally live. Righteousness, e.g. support of the poor, "abides for

ever" (s.w. 2 Cor. 9:9). A man's works for the Lord "abide" even after judgment day (1 Cor. 3:14 "If any man's work abide which he has built thereon..."). Truly only what is done for Christ will last.

15:17- see on Eph. 1:5.

These things I command you, so that you may love one another- This doesn't mean 'I command you to love one another, so that you may love one another'. The idea rather is that all the "things" the Lord had taught, in the word or commandment which was Him as well as in His actual words, were summarized in the need to love one another. This was and is the essence of Him, His word made flesh. See on :17.

15:18 *If the world hates you, you know that it has hated me before it hated you*- The "if..." is perhaps a reflection of the Lord's hope that the Jewish world would be persuaded by the witness of the disciples' love and unity- although elsewhere He clearly envisaged their being cast out of the synagogues and experiencing evil at the hands of the Jewish world. And yet in that word "if..." we see reflected His positivism and hopefulness for others, which is to be part of our spirit too, if we have received His spirit. The hatred of the world has been explained by the Lord as a result of their resistance to the message preached (7:7). I suggested on :16 that the Lord is here repeating the essence of the great commission, to go into the world and bring forth fruit for Him. The comment about love in :17 would then be suggesting that our love for each other will back up that witness, as the Lord envisaged in chapter 17. And now He comforts His future preachers that they are to expect opposition to their witness, but in that experience they will know Him and share His spirit, for that was His experience too.

15:19 *If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you*- This is basic psychology; those who come "out of" a system are hated by that system. But the hatred is specifically because the disciples would preach to the world and seek to convict them of sin (7:7). The talk about love and hatred here is alluded to by John when he urges his converts not to hate each other, especially in 1 Jn. 4. By hating our brother, we are as the world. For that is what the world does. And John presents a chasmic divide between the believer and the world. To hate our brother is to place ourselves on the side of the world. John was writing for Jews and to Jewish converts; the pull of the Jewish world, the synagogue, was every strong. And he is reminding them that the Lord saw a huge divide between His followers and that world, a world which was fast heading to its destruction in AD70.

15:20 *Remember the word that I said to you: A servant is not greater than his lord. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will keep yours also*- The Lord has just taught that He treats His followers not as servants but friends; and yet here He addresses them again as servants. But I suggested on :15 that His idea was that they are His servants whom He treats as intimate friends, revealing absolutely bare all that He is and stands for, and dying for them. From how the Lord speaks here, serious opposition to the preaching of His word is absolutely to be expected. A merely social Gospel, a doing good works in the hope somebody might somehow notice and come to the Lord, will not have this effect. Our preaching of Him means that there will be the parallel made here between "my word" and 'your word'. His word was the essence of Him, the light which challenged the darkness of men; and we shall meet the same response as He did. But it is that plain presentation of Him which will lead people to Him, rather than the supposed social Gospel of good works alone. For that is not a uniquely Christian statement, in that many folks do

good works. 'Keeping My word' meant receiving life eternal (8:51,52), and the Father and Son making their dwelling in the heart of the hearer (14:23); this is the profound message we have for men.

15:21 *But all these things will they do to you for my name's sake, because they do not truly know Him that sent m*e- John later speaks about those who fulfill the great commission as going forth for His name's sake (3 Jn. 7). Throughout this section, the Lord is speaking about the need to follow the great commission and preach forgiveness and repentance in His name (Lk. 24:47). If His Spirit, His word and essence, abode in them, then they would experience the same opposition which He did. Their 'not knowing' the Father who sent the Son would be the basis of their hatred of the preachers. On the other hand, to know the Father is to have relationship with Him, and love His children. John's letters develop this same theme; to not love is to not have a relationship with the Father.

15:22 *If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin*- We see here that hearing the word is the basis for responsibility to judgment. The 'coming' of the Lord was not a reference to some descent from Heaven to Palestine on planet earth; His coming to the Jewish world was in His words spoken to them. And as He was sent into the world, so He was sending His disciples. The fact they were without excuse issued in a hatred for the preachers who had spoken to them- for that is the context here in :23 and :21. All the synoptics use the word translated "excuse" about the Jewish leadership making a "pretence" of spirituality (Mt. 23:14; Mk. 12:40; Lk. 20:47). And this is John's version of that. He states specifically what the synoptic writers do not- that the "pretence" of external religion was in fact to cloke [AV] or hide their sin. The synoptics state that for a "pretence" the Jews made long prayers, but they do not specifically state what was being cloked or covered over. And here, the Lord states it was "sin". So often, religious behaviour is used in order to cover our sin from our own eyes. We must remember that we are all prone to the psychology of religious behaviour. The Lord 'spoke to them' about this; and they no longer had that cloke, for He had removed it and demonstrated that He saw through it. Their works were evil (7:7) and He had urged them to address their internal issues instead of covering their evil thoughts with external acts of obedience. And their response was to hate Him.

15:23 *He that hates me hates my Father also*- The attitude of people to the Son is their attitude to God. The Jews of course considered that they loved God, but hated His Son. And the Lord is saying that this cannot be the case. And again John builds on this in a pastoral sense in 1 Jn. 4, arguing that if we hate our brother, then we hate the Father and Son. It was an awful thing to accuse an Orthodox Jew of hating God; their whole life was so apparently God-centered. But our attitudes to His Son and all His children are our attitudes to Him.

15:24 *If I had not done among them the works which no other man did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father*- This parallels the statement in :22 that it was because the Lord had "spoken" to them that they "had sin". His spoken words were paralleled with the works He did amongst them. As John especially makes clear, all those miracles were "signs", were a word to men. This confirms our earlier suggestion that the references to "my word[s]" in John are talking about the essence of the Lord's self-declaration and declaration of the Father, rather than literally referring to His recorded lexical items, the sentences printed in red letters in some Bibles. The "works" were so that they could see the Son, and thereby the Father. The miracles were not therefore random acts of kindness to

meet human compassion; for the Lord walked past many cases of human need without responding. They were specifically designed to enable men to see / understand / know / believe in the Son and Father. We also learn from this that the Jews through the miracles did in fact perceive who the Lord was, hence the hatred for Him which arose from a bad conscience. Throughout the Joseph record there is the unwritten sense that the brothers had a niggling conscience that Joseph might be alive. This typifies the underlying Jewish conscience towards the Lord Jesus. They knew Christ as Messiah, but blinded themselves to the fact (Jn. 6:36; 9:41; 15:24 cp. 14:7).

15:25- see on 1 Cor. 11:20.

All this happens so that the word may be fulfilled that is written in their law: They hated me without a cause- "Their law" rather than 'God's law' is another reflection of how they had hijacked God's word and ways and turned it into their own religion; the feasts of the Lord and house of the Lord had become the feasts of the Jews, and the temple of the Jews. “They hated me without a cause" (Ps. 35:19; 69:4) surely refers to their crucifixion of Him “without a cause" as reflected in the collapse of the legal case against Him. Their own law ["their law"] admitted there was no cause for death. He died purely because of their hatred. He again seems to use the past tense to describe His yet future death. There men would see the Father and Son, which has to be connected with John’s recurring theme that in the cross men saw what Moses so wanted to see- Yahweh Himself manifested.

The Messianic Psalms quoted about hatred of the Lord without a cause imply that this hatred was especially seen in His death. And yet the Lord has said that our sharing in His Spirit will mean that we too shall be hated if we witness "in Him", in His Name. This means that in our experience of opposition and hatred, we are sharing in His crucifixion experiences. He there becomes each of us. He was indeed our representative, and we are His too. Our experiences therefore provide a bridge between Him there, many centuries ago, and us today. We thereby in an experiential sense come to "know Him", and Him in His time of crucifixion. And if we thus suffer with Him, we shall also live with Him, eternally.

15:26 *And when the Comforter comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth which proceeds from the Father, he shall testify of me*- The opening of this verse, "And..." or "But...", suggests a direct connection with what has preceded. There we have been told one of John's versions of the great commission. The Lord envisaged that believers in Him would go forth into the world and bring forth fruit, but would encounter the same hatred from the Jewish world which He had experienced. His anticipation of persecution for His witnesses (:20) is the background for this renewed promise of the Comforter. It is this context of persecution which provides the appropriacy of the language of *parakletos*. The Spirit would testify of the Lord Jesus; yet the disciples personally were to do so. They would have the Lord's Spirit within them, and so their witness would be in the power of the Spirit.

The *parakletos* / Comforter is literally 'one called alongside', and this title is appropriate to the idea that the Lord is physically leaving them, but His presence will abide with them through the Spirit. It is as if the Lord is physically with us, as if He has come alongside us. The legal aspects of the word, referring to an advocate, may have been appropriate to the context of persecution. The association of the Comforter with "testimony" continues the legal association.

There is a definite link between the power of witness and the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that bears witness; and yet we are the witnesses. The miraculous gifts of the

Holy Spirit are not in view, although in the first century context, they were a visible manifestation of possession of the Comforter. The Spirit bears witness in us in that the spirit of Christ, the joy, peace, love which we show as individuals and thereby as a community, gives as much credibility to our witness as did the performance of miracles in the 1st century. And so Paul told the Thessalonians: "Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much assurance". The "assurance", the power of confirmation, was in the credibility which the Spirit of Christ in their examples gave to their preaching of the word. And likewise in 1 Cor. 2:3-5: "My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God".

"He shall testify of me" reflects a masculine term in the Greek. But the object referred to is the Holy Spirit, which is neuter. This apparent mismatch of gender in Greek grammar is intentional; for the Lord is saying that the Spirit will enable them to have His personal presence in their hearts, to the point that the neuter "Spirit" is effectively Him, a male; so really can He be in us by the Spirit. The testimony of the Spirit would be their testimony (:27). It is our spiritual character, the evidence of the Spirit within us, which is the real and compelling witness to this world.

15:27 *And you also shall testify, because you have been with me from the beginning*- This was exemplified in Acts 4:13, where it was apparent from the nature of the disciples' preaching that they "had been with Jesus". To be with the Lord, to have experience of Him, meant that one would witness to Him; such is the true experience of Him that it is axiomatic that it issues in witness. All who have truly known the Lord will witness to Him. And if we don't... do we know Him, have we "been with" Him...?

Jn. 14:26 and 16:12 likewise associate the work of the Comforter with the testimony of the disciples, who had been with the Lord from the beginning of His ministry. There was a special sense in which the Comforter was relevant only to the disciples, the first eye witnesses from the beginning of the ministry. But the connections with other teaching about the gift of the Spirit lead us to conclude that as with all New Testament teaching about the Spirit, the essence is for all time, although the miraculous manifestation was only for the first century. These passages (here and in 14:26; 16:12) make it clear that the disciples were to witness as Christ to this world exactly because they had been with the Lord from the beginning. John's gospel is his obedience to that. And so he explains that he is recounting how things were from the beginning off the Lord's ministry. And Luke does the same, writing that he too was a witness from the beginning and is therefore testifying to what he had seen (Lk. 1:2).

The whole purpose of the Lord's life was that He should "bear witness" unto the Truth of the Father (Jn. 18:37). But John also records the Lord's expectations that all in Him should likewise "bear witness" (Jn. 15:27). And as John recounted the Gospel [of which the Gospel of John is a transcript], He stresses that by doing so he is 'bearing witness', living out the work of the Lord who lived as the faithful and true witness to men (Jn. 3:11; 19:35; 21:24 cp. 18:37).

The Comforter: An Angel?

The point has been made by several expositors that as Israel were led by a special Angel through the wilderness, whom Isaiah 63 associates with God's Holy Spirit, so the new Israel were led by a Holy Spirit Angel, the Comforter, who was sent to the church by Jesus after His assuming of all power over the Angels on His ascension.

The gift of the Holy Spirit was to be "within" the disciples; but it could be feasible that this was superintended by an Angel. The following thoughts are presented more for reflection; I am undecided about the matter. It could be that the Lord is alluding to Jewish ideas about a *paraklete* Angel and deconstructing them; urging His people to forget Jewish angelology and have His direct personal presence in their hearts through the Spirit. But for the record, here is a summary of the reasons for thinking that the Comforter may have some reference to an Angel:

- Is. 63:7-11 describes the Angel that guided Israel through the wilderness as the "Holy Spirit"- which is the Comforter.
- The Comforter was sent in God and Christ's Name (Jn. 14:26)- the Angel was sent in God's Name (Ex. 23:21)
- The Comforter would teach (Jn. 14:26), guide (16:13), be a judge (16:8) and prophesy (16:13); the Angel guided Israel through the wilderness, taught them God's ways, judged Egypt and the Canaanites, gave prophecies, and represented God to Israel as the Comforter represented Jesus to His people. As the church began a new Exodus and was constituted God's Kingdom in prospect as Israel were at Sinai, it was fitting that it should also have an Angel leading them, representing God to them.
- The Comforter would "shew you things to come" (Jn. 16:13)- fulfilled by the Angel giving the Revelation to John.
- The Angel testified to the churches (Rev. 22:16)- "the Comforter... shall testify of Me" (Jn. 15:26).
- The references in Acts to the Holy Spirit as a person would then be easier to understand - e.g. "The Holy Spirit said, Separate Me Barnabas. . " (Acts 13:2). Similarly the frequent occurrences of the ideas of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit together fall into place if the Holy Spirit has some degree of reference to a personal being in the form of an Angel. The error of the doctrine of the trinity is not in identifying the three common forms of God manifestation (i. e. through God Himself, Jesus and the Holy Spirit Angel), but in the inter-relationships between them which it proposes. This idea is worth applying to our understanding of the baptismal formula.
- The work of the Comforter Angel may have been confined to the first century, in the same way as the Angel was particularly evident to the ecclesia in the wilderness during the initial Exodus period. Thus the words 'Angel' and 'Spirit' are obviously interchangeable in the book of Acts (e. g. 8:26,29; 10:3,19,20).
- The Angel in Revelation "like the son of man" (i. e. representing Him but not Him personally) would then be this same Comforter Angel representing Jesus (Rev. 1:11 cp. 22:13,8,16). He carried the titles of Jesus, who carried the titles of God- e. g. "Alpha and Omega".
- The Comforter is called “the spirit of truth” (Jn. 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). In the Qumran Dead Sea Scrolls literature, this phrase describes an Angelic Spirit who is the leader of the “good forces” and ‘in whom’ the righteous walk [*Testament of Judah* 20, 1-5]. The Aramaic translation of Job, and the targums on it, uses the term *prqlyt* to describe the Angelic spokesman [the *malak melis*] who makes a testimony in Heaven in Job’s defence (Job 16:19; 19:25-27; 33:23).
- Otto Betz, *Der Paraklet* (AGJU, 1963), brings out many connections between the Comforter and the Angel ‘Michael the Spirit of truth’ in contemporary Jewish writings.
- When we read of the “spirit of the Lord” snatching away Philip, it seems logical to interpret this as the same Angel already mentioned earlier in the chapter (Acts 8:26,29,39). But this Angel is defined as the Lord’s Angel- and the Lord in Acts is

nearly always the Lord Jesus. Clearly we are led to understand the Lord Jesus as being associated with a specific Angel.
- "Ye have an unction from the Holy One (the Comforter/ Holy Spirit), and ye know all things" (1 Jn. 2:20) is clearly alluding to the promise of the Comforter in Jn. 14:26; but "Holy One" is Angelic language, as if the Holy One was also an Angel.

- The tongues sitting like flames of fire on the apostles at Pentecost was an Angelic manifestation; the Angels can be made "a flame of fire".

- Jude 5 reminds the new Israel of the first century that Israel of old had been condemned due to their provoking of the wilderness Angel- a warning that takes on special power once it is recognized that the very same Angel was leading the early church.
- Stephen's speech in Acts 7 contains many references to the Angel of Israel. He uses examples from Israel's history in which they rejected those who were types of Jesus- e. g. v. 9,10,22,25. It follows then that v. 35 must refer to this same aspect of Moses as a type of Christ being rejected. "This is Moses whom they renounced. . even him God sent to be a ruler and a redeemer with the hand of that Angel which appeared to him in the bush" (Diaglott). Israel resisted the work of the Angel supporting Moses, and so years later they were also rejecting the support of the same guardian Angel for the teachings of Jesus and His disciples, the greater than Moses. So v. 51 stresses "ye do always resist the Holy Spirit (the title of the Comforter Angel in Is. 63): as your fathers did, so do ye". Their fathers resisted the Angel of the presence which went with them; and so the Jews of the first century were doing just the same.

JOHN CHAPTER 16

16:1 *These things have I spoken to you, so that you should not be made to stumble*- The context goes on to speak of excommunication from the synagogue. The Lord perceived that religious excommunication created a strong possibility of stumbling; and so it is to this day. He says this in the context of His promise of the Comforter, His presence amongst and within the believers. His argument is that if that is felt and experienced by believers, then being disfellowshipped from some human group will not at all affect them. The wonder of His abiding presence will be far greater than the trauma of being excluded from some human group or society. And that truth remains wonderfully true today, the ultimate comfort through all church politics and exclusions performed by those who thereby proclaim that they do not have the Spirit.

The discourse in the upper room was intended by the Lord "to prevent your faith from being shaken" or, literally, 'scandalized' (Jn. 16:1). And yet He uses the same word to predict how "This night you will all be scandalized because of me" (Mt. 26:31). He knew they would stumble, or be 'scandalized'. Yet He hoped against hoped that they would not be; so positive was His hope of them. And exactly because He was like this, the pain of their desertion and stumbling would have been so much the greater. And the Lord who is the same today as yesterday goes through just the same with us, hour by hour.

16:2 *They shall put you out of the synagogues. Yes, the time is coming, when whoever kills you shall think that he offers service to God*- See on :1. The coming time or hour in John's Gospel refers usually to the Lord's death (2:4; 7:30; 8:20,21; 12:23,27). In

the crises of persecution we face, we are sharing in His death, that His life might be ours too.

Realizing the need of each believer for the brotherhood will lead us to be more than careful before ever evicting anyone from our association. Indeed, forced expulsion from any social group is highly damaging to the victim. The Lord appreciated this when He said that when His followers were cast out of the synagogues, then they would be likely to stumble (Jn. 16:1,2). They were excommunicated exactly because of their faith in Him; and yet He foresaw that in the aftermath of that rejection, emotionally, sociologically, economically, they would be likely to stumble. Eviction of anyone from our fellowship ought therefore never to be done lightly, if ever. For by doing so, we are likely to make them stumble from the path to eternity; and nobody would want such a millstone around their neck at judgment day. We may in this life appear to be 'keeping the truth pure', 'doing the right thing'- but the Lord will judge the effect we had upon another's path to Him. Initially, as we see from e.g. John's Gospel, the core issue in Christianity revolved around simply believing in Jesus. But soon, as we see from John's letters, it became important to counter wrong beliefs *about* Jesus. As controversy over interpretation developed, it was almost inevitable that the arguments led to exaggerations on both sides. We see it happen in political arguments today- the supporters of candidate X respond to criticisms of him by painting him as more exalted, wonderful and even Divine than he really ever could be. And as they do so, the critics become even more virulently against them. This is the nature of controversy. And as the Jews began expelling Christians from their synagogues (Jn. 9:22; 12:42; 16:2) and inventing many slanderous stories about Jesus, it was inevitable that those without a solid Biblical grounding in their faith would *react* rather than *Biblically respond* to this- by making Jesus out to be far more 'Divine' than He was.

The apostate among God's people, both in Old and New Testaments, sunk to the most unbelievable levels, but sincerely felt that they were doing God's will. These things included killing righteous prophets (Jn. 16:2), turning the breaking of bread service into a drunken orgy (1 Cor. 11:21), and turning prostitution within the ecclesia into a spiritual act (Rev. 2:20). For believers to come to the conclusion that such things were the will of God surely they were not just misinterpreting Scripture. There was an extra-human power of delusion at work. We have seen in the above verses that God is responsible for this kind of thing. Note that the Bible knows nothing of a super-human devil who does all this.

The early believers were initially members of the synagogues, and Paul always visited the synagogue services in his travels. Peter and John went up to pray in the temple at the ninth hour along with everyone else (Acts 3:1). Early ecclesial meetings were based upon the synagogue system (James 2:2). The Lord didn't tell them to leave because they might catch some 'guilt by association'. He knew that if they forthrightly preached the Truth, they would be excommunicated: "the time will come when they will expel you from their synagogues", He had foretold; as if He expected them to stay there until they were chased away. Those who reject the Lord Jesus will treat us likewise (Jn. 15:18-21). However, it must be said that the Lord was perhaps making some concession to the weakness of His new people by allowing them to remain members of the synagogue system, and keep parts of the Law. As the New Testament period progressed, the Holy Spirit through Paul increasingly urged upon the believers the need to cast out the bondwoman of Judaism, to trust completely in grace not law. Consider, too, Paul's command in 1 Cor. 11:14 that brethren do *not*

wear head coverings in ecclesial meetings. Assuming this to have been a universal principle which he intended to be followed in all ecclesias [and the reasons he gives are based upon universal principles], this was really signalling an exit from the synagogues, where men *had* to attend with covered head. Now they could no longer go on attending the synagogues to fulfil their Christian worship; they had to realize the extent of the implications of the Lordship and Headship of Christ, as the image and glory of God. Yet sadly, the brethren increasingly returned to the synagogues rather than separated from them.

16:3 *And these things will they do, because they have not known the Father nor me*- The idea is 'because they have refused to know'. They had been given the chance, as explained at the end of chapter 15, but had rejected it. And their bad conscience overflowed in personal anger. Not knowing the Father and Son was the reason why they killed the Lord (Acts 13:27,28). Because they killed Him, we must expect persecution at their hands, if we are in His Name and share His spirit. John stresses that because they knew not the Father nor Son, they crucified Jesus (15:21). And yet on another level they *did* know the Son and Father, especially when they saw His death (8:28). Even the Centurion was convinced that "truly, this was the Son of God". And even before that, "Jesus cried out in the temple, teaching and saying: You both know me, and know from where I am, and that I have not come of myself" (7:28). They knew, but chose not to know. And this was the psychological cause of their extreme anger.

16:4 *But these things have I spoken to you, so that when the time comes, you may remember what I told you. And these things I did not say to you from the beginning, because I was with you*- The "things" presumably concern the persecution which they were to experience, and the supportive presence of the Comforter as their defence. The Lord did not begin His teaching of the twelve by telling them of their likely sufferings; and His personal presence with them involved their 'keeping', both spiritually and in terms of physical safety (17:12; 18:9). Now He was departing, He would still be with them, in that the presence of the Comforter, His spirit in their hearts, would be as real as if He were personally with them. "The time / hour comes" is used in John normally concerning the hour of the Lord's cross. But now the Lord uses the term about the time of *their* sufferings, extending the idea that His Spirit, experience and destiny is to be theirs; or as the synoptics record it, they would pick up His cross, sharing in His sufferings.

16:5 *But now I go to Him that sent me; and none of you asks me, Where do you go?*- Peter had asked that very question (see on 13:36-38). But he had asked it only from concern about himself and the disciples; not from interest in where the Lord was actually going. Real interest in the Lord Jesus can so often only be a form of self-interest and even self-preservation.

16:6 *But because I have spoken these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart*- We sense the Lord's disappointment that they did not grasp that His departure meant the glorification of the Name, and the receipt by them of the Comforter. All they could think of was His physical presence not being with them, and they were filled with sorrow rather than with the Spirit. And yet the whole of the Lord's last discourse to the twelve reflects His positive view of them- at the very time when their commitment to Him was in some ways at its lowest ebb. For they all forsook Him in His hour of need. He comments that they are filled with sorrow because of their misunderstanding about His departure from them. But He goes on to liken this sorrow

to the sorrow of a woman in labour, who forgets that sorrow as soon as her child is born (Jn. 16:6, 20-22). In the analogy, the travailing woman is the disciples, and the new born child is the resurrected Jesus. For “then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord”. Their ‘sorrow’ was thereby interpreted by the Lord as their longing and striving towards His resurrection. But this is a very positive way of interpreting their sorrow. Their sorrow was based on their misunderstanding (Jn. 16:6). Yet the Lord saw that deep underneath that sorrow, even though they didn’t perceive it themselves, they were actually yearning for His resurrection. This helps explain the slight mismatch in the metaphor; for "sorrow" is not an emotion really associated with a woman facing labour pains; rather, anxiety, stress and fear. But the Lord as it were makes the analogy fit, because He wants to positively represent their sorrow and hope that something positive comes out of it.

This was all partly due to His penetration of their psychology, but it also reflects the simple fact that He certainly counted them as more spiritual than they actually were. He tells them to “ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full”, having just defined their future joy as the joy of seeing Him risen from the dead (Jn. 16:24,22). But did they ask to see His resurrection? Not as far as we know; for He upbraids them with their slowness to believe His predictions of resurrection. But despite all that, He said that they *would* have that joy which would come from asking to see Him risen from the dead. They didn’t ask for this, but they would still have the joy. Why? Because He perceived them to have ‘asked’ for what they didn’t actually ask for in so many words. He read their basic inner yearning for Him as a prayer for His resurrection, even though they were far from understanding that He would ever rise again once dead. It’s rather like God saying that the righteous remnant in Jerusalem had shaken their head at the Assyrian invaders and laughed at them in faith- when this was certainly not the case on the surface (Is. 37:22). And this Lord is our Lord today, interpreting our innermost, unarticulated desires as prayers to the Father (Rom. 8:26,27).

16:7 *Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away. For if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you. I will send him to you*- "It is expedient" is the very phrase used by Caiaphas in saying that it was expedient that the Lord die (11:50). The parallel is clearly between His 'going away' and His death, confirming the suggestion that His talk of 'going to the Father' refers specifically to His crucifixion and not only to the ascension to Heaven. The Lord sees a major purpose of His death as being the giving of the Comforter, His spirit. When he breathed His last, and blood and water flowed out from Him, He was giving His spirit toward us, the confused and misunderstanding disciples. This is the connection between His death and the gift of His spirit to us. Our understanding and acceptance of this gift of the Spirit is therefore crucial; it is in fact what He died for, it is the gift of His life given to and into us.

"I will send him to you" uses the same word frequently used of how the Father sent the Son, and the Son sends us. But here, the Son will send the Comforter to us. He explained in 8:29 that "He that sent me is with me; the Father has not left me alone". The sending of the Son involved His being given the Father's presence. And in His sending of us into the world, in fulfilment of the great commission, He sends us as the Father sent Him, but He also sends us with His presence. The language of 8:29, "not left alone... with me" is exactly that which the Lord uses about His presence with us through the Comforter. That presence however is specifically associated with our mission, the purpose for which we have been sent. The great commission in Mt. 28:20 comforts us that "I am with you always"; and here in John's version of that

commission we find that the Lord's presence refers to the gift of the Spirit, empowering our mission, guiding us to correct understanding, spiritually keeping us from falling, and mediating to us the sense of His personal presence. The theme continues into the Lord's prayer of chapter 17, where He speaks of how He has sanctified us, as Levites, and sent us forth on this great commission. Therefore the work of the Gospel, the fulfilment of the great commission, is to be utterly central to our Christian lives. The way it is solemnly placed at the end of the synoptics is proof enough of this.

16:8 *And he, when he comes, will convict the world in respect of sin and of righteousness and of judgment*- Just as the Lord convicted the world of sin (7:7; 15:22), so we will do so if the Comforter dwells in us, the presence within us of the Lord Jesus through the Spirit. We shall continue His work through our witness in the power of the Spirit / Comforter (15:26,27). The legal dimension to the word *parakletos* is here referred to. Our advocate will also be the prosecutor of the world. It is on our witness that the world is convicted of sin, because they heard the Gospel from us, through our obedience to the great commission, but rejected it [as made clear in 15:22].

16:9 *Of sin, because they do not believe in me*- The Jewish world was convicted of sin through the Comforter-filled disciples witnessing to the Jews about their sin in rejecting the Lord. The implication of this statement is that when we preach Christ to people, they actually realize the truth of what we say, at least on a subconscious level [no matter how well they disguise it]. Otherwise, why would they be convicted of the sin of unbelief? The principle has been outlined in 15:22, that hearing the spoken word of the Lord Jesus is to be left with no excuse for sin. This is a huge encouragement in our preaching to an apparently disinterested world. Their disinterest is a guise, however unconscious, to attempt to cover their deep dis-ease at their rejection of the call they are receiving. And more often than we may think, our message cuts through that guise, that cloke (15:22), and touches hearts.

16:10 *Of righteousness, because I go to the Father and you see me no more*- To convict the Jewish world of righteousness is a strange idea, making little sense until we see the allusion to Is. 64:5 LXX, which describes Israel's righteousness as abomination. They would be convicted concerning their righteousness- that it was empty. It would be clear from the witness of the Comforter, the spirit of Christ within the preachers, that they were counted righteous by grace; and all the legalistic rightness of Judaism, and indeed the world in any time or place, is but filthy rags.

16:11 *Of judgment, because the prince of this world has been judged*- Just as "righteousness" in :10 refers to the false righteousness of the Jewish world, so here. The Lord has many times been wrongly judged by the Jewish world (7:24), coming to a climax in the way that Caiaphas, the prince of the Jewish world, judged the Lord as worthy of death. The witness of the Comforter, the Spirit-filled witness of the disciples, would demonstrate this to the Jewish world.

"The prince of this world" (sin, the devil?) was judged by the victory of the cross (Jn. 16:11). There, in that naked, abused body and infinitely tormented yet righteous mind, there was displayed the judgments, the character, the very essence of God; and the utter condemnation of the flesh, the devil, the prince of this world. Those judgments were displayed in front of a world which stood before it self-condemned. The Lord was judged by Caiaphas and other princes of this world, but He in fact stood before them as the judge and condemned them. And yet it is *our* witness, empowered

by the Comforter, which is to convict the world of judgment. We take the spirit of the Lord's cross before the world, and it convicts them.

16:12 *I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now-*
The message or word of Jesus was far more than the words that He spoke from His lips. In one sense, He revealed to the disciples everything that He had heard from the Father (Jn. 15:15); and yet in another, more literal sense, He lamented that there was much more He could tell them in words, but they weren't able to bear it (Jn. 16:12). His person and character, which they would spend the rest of their lives reflecting upon, was the 'word' of God in flesh to its supremacy; but this doesn't necessarily mean that they heard all the literal words of God drop from the lips of Jesus. I have shown elsewhere that both the Father and Son use language, or words, very differently to how we normally do. The manifestation of God in Christ was not only a matter of the Christ speaking the right words about God. For as He said, His men couldn't have handled that in its entirety. The fullness of manifestation of the word was in His life, His character, and above all in His death, which the prologue in 1:14 may be specifically referring to in speaking of how John himself beheld the glory of the word being made flesh.

16:13 -see on 1 Jn. 4:1; Jn. 14:12.
However, when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he shall guide you into all the truth. For he shall not speak from himself; but whatever he shall hear, these shall he speak-
"The Spirit of truth" is in reality "the spirit of Christ", making His presence near and real just as if He were literally with us. So "the truth" is again a reference to the Lord Jesus personally, the truth of Him who is "the truth", rather than a reference to the academic 'truth' of a particular set of theology. "All truth" would be going far too far if it refers to intellectual truth, for nobody could ever claim to have "all truth" in that sense. It makes little sense to talk of being "in" truth in the sense of theological truth. The language is far more appropriate to a person, the Lord Jesus.
"Guide" is the language of a Rabbi teaching or guiding his disciples by teaching (s.w. Mt. 15:14; 23:16; Lk. 6:39; Acts 8:31; Rom. 2:19). The disciples were concerned that their Rabbi was leaving them and they would be without a teacher (see on 14:18). The Lord is assuring them that His teaching presence would continue amongst them through the presence of the Spirit, the Comforter.
"He shall not speak from himself" recalls the Lord's claims that "I speak [not] from myself", but from what He heard from the Father (7:17; 8:28; 12:49). The Comforter is personified and spoken of in exactly the terms of the Lord Jesus because He wished to emphasize the idea that the presence of the Spirit would be as if He personally was with them, teaching them as He had done as their Rabbi on earth.
And he shall declare to you the things that are to come- There could be a reference here to the giving of the book of Revelation, but the hour to come in John's Gospel, the even "to come", is clearly the Lord's death. The meaning of that would be declared to them by the Spirit. They did not then understand what the Lord was doing, but they would do so afterwards- when the Spirit revealed it to them.

16:14 *He shall glorify me; for he shall take what is mine and shall declare it to you-*
The Spirit would be the medium of communication between the Lord and His followers. The context here is of teaching, of the disciples continuing to be taught by the Lord from Heaven through His Spirit (see on :13). "What is mine" would therefore refer to the understandings given to the Lord by the Father, which were now

going to be in turn transmitted to His followers by means of the Spirit. And that process would be to the glorification of the Lord Jesus. For they would understand Him and His achievements so much deeper. This is the same word used in 16:25 of how the Lord would declare or shew to them plainly of the Father. He was to do this in His death for them, but that death would be unpacked by the Lord's work within them through the Spirit.

16:15 *All things, whatever the Father has, are mine. Therefore I said: that he shall take of mine and declare it to you*- These "all things" which the Father has refer to the things which would be declared to them (:14), and those things centre in the Lord Jesus. All those things in that sense were 'Me', the Lord Jesus. For the prologue states that the *logos* of Jesus is God, in the sense that the entire purpose and plan of God is centred in His Son. The focus of the Father upon His Son is significant beyond appreciation. The Son was "all things" to the Father; and the things of the Son, and thereby the "all things" of the Father, were to be declared to the believers by the Spirit.

16:16 *A little while, and you will see me no more; and then a little while, and you shall see me, because I go to the Father*- The first "little while" refers to the time remaining until His death (7:33; 13:33). The second "little while" is until the point when they would 'see' Him because He goes to the Father. The 'seeing' in view is the vision of the presence of Jesus which arises from the gift of the Spirit which would be given as a result of the Lord's death. His going to the Father could refer to ascension; but that was not when the Spirit gift was given and they 'saw' Him. It was not through his ascension that the gift was enabled, but rather through His death. And it is to His death that "'I go to the Father" refers elsewhere in John. The second "little while" I suggest refers to the period from His death until the receipt of the Comforter and the full seeing of Him then. He is of course presenting a purposeful paradox; that His going away was in fact when they would 'see' Him. This 'seeing' was the understanding of Him and experience of His presence which would be possible through the Comforter. Elsewhere in John, beholding or seeing the Son doesn't refer to physically seeing Him, but rather to understanding and believing in Him (Jn. 1:14,29,36,50; 6:40; 12:21; 14:9,19; 17:24 etc.). The Lord surely meant: 'Soon, you will no longer see / understand / believe me… but, in the end, you *will* understand / believe in me'. And John, the author or speaker of this Gospel record, was one of those being referred to. So he, and all the disciples, would've been appealing to people to see / understand / believe in Jesus, whilst openly telling them that they themselves had once lost that understanding / belief which they once had, even though they regained it later.

"If I go… I will come again... A little while, and you shall not see me: and again, a little while, and you shall see me, because I go to my father" (Jn. 14:3; 16:16). This may refer to Moses going up and down the mountain, disappearing from Israel's sight, and then returning with the covenant- to find Israel worshipping the golden calf. Perhaps this refers to the Lord's disappointment that they did not perceive the wonder of His resurrection.

The New Testament speaks in challenging terms of how real is to be our relationship with the Lord Jesus. The Lord's enigmatic words of Jn. 16:16 indicate just *how* close the Comforter was to make Him come to His people once He was in Heaven: "Yet a little while, and ye shall not see me [*theoreo*, to physically see]: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me [*horai*, to know or understand, to spiritually 'see'], because

I go to the Father". It could be argued, *contra* my position just stated, that the "little while" in each clause is one and the same. In "a little while" they would not see Him physically, but exactly because He would be with the Father, He would send the Comforter, and enable His people to 'see' Him in the sense that John usually speaks of in his Gospel. This 'seeing' of Jesus, this perception of Him, is effectively a 'seeing' of the Father.

16:17- see on Jn. 15:16-19.

Some of his disciples questioned each other: What is this that he said to us? A little while and you will see me no more; and then a little while and you shall see me, because I go to the Father?- Their questions were presumably said out of the Lord's earshot, for He perceived rather than heard their questions (:19). His sensitivity of Spirit was such that He could perceive the hearts of men, without necessarily receiving some bolt of direct revelation as to what they were thinking. And His sensitive spirit is given to us. See on :16 for comment about the "little while".

There are two different words for "see" used here, and at first blush they seem rather strange. But that was purposeful, as the Lord wished their minds to work upon this immense idea of His absence meaning His presence through the Spirit. The first means 'to discern' and the second more literally 'to see'. In a little while He would die and they would not discern / see Him, they would not understand; but then they would 'see' Him when He went to the Father. The presence of the Son through the Comforter would be as real as if they were literally seeing Him; and this huge challenge comes down to us today.

The "little while" refers equally to the few hours to His death, the few days until they saw Him resurrected, and likewise a few days until His return when they and all His people would see Him. A few hours, a few days or a few millennia of years are all the same just a short moment, these periods are all called a "little while"; to teach us that there is no real difference between them in the context of eternity.

16:18 *They said: What is this that he said? A little while? We cannot decipher what he said*- They struggled over which period He had in view, and whether there were two 'little while' periods or whether they are referring to the same period. See on :16. The Lord was speaking in such a way that they would mull over His words. For the truth He presents here is so utterly profound and demanding that it cannot be accepted or perceived by just reading or hearing a few words and grasping the idea. The gift of the Spirit would mean that He would be amongst them just as really, and even moreso, as He had been in His physical presence.

16:19 *Jesus perceived that they wanted to ask him, and he said to them: Do you inquire among yourselves what I said? A little while and you will see me no more, and then a little while and you shall see me?*- See on :17 regarding the Lord's perception. The Lord may be rebuking them for asking *among themselves* for the answer to the paradox, rather than asking *Him*. Very rarely in the Gospel records does the Lord respond directly to the questions He was asked. He replies at a tangent, sometimes directing the questioner away from the question to more significant issues, or answering the question in terms of higher principle rather than focusing just on the specific case in question. And His response here is the same.

16:20 *Truly, truly, I say to you: You shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice. You shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy!*- As noted on :19, the Lord's response to the question about what "a little while" meant is typical of how He tends not to directly answer questions. He wanted them to reflect about what He meant; He wanted them, like us, to personally come to realize the momentous

truth that through the Spirit, He will be as present with us as He physically was with the disciples during His ministry, teaching us as He taught them, under the trees and in the courtyards of Galilee. Instead He re-focuses their minds on the trauma immediately ahead. The Gospels do not record the disciples weeping and lamenting the Lord's death whilst the Jewish world rejoiced, but that is what happened during the days the Lord lay dead. Their sorrow is read here positively by the Lord as sorrow for the loss of a loved one. But in reality, their sorrow was also because of dashed hopes, as the disciples on the way to Emmaus clearly reveal. Their sorrow was also partly because of disappointment. But the Lord wishes to interpret their sorrow positively, and therefore turns it into the idea that their sorrow was that experienced by a woman just before giving birth. But as noted on :21, that is to force a simile, for "sorrow" is not really the dominant emotion or feeling of a woman in advanced labour. The way the Lord forces the simile is a reflection of how He was simply so positive about the weakness of the disciples' understanding. And we must have His positive spirit in all our dealings with our fellow disciples, never cutting them off because they lack understanding, faith or sufficient attention to the Lord's words; but ever hoping that they shall develop, and accepting what understanding they do have in a positive way; seeing the glass half full rather than half empty.

16:21 *A woman when she is in labour has sorrow, because her hour comes; but when she has delivered the child, she does not remember her anguish, because of her joy that a child is born into the world*- The coming hour is spoken of in John as the hour of the Lord's death. Although the Lord is addressing the disciples, as so often in His teaching, He is speaking to Himself too. For He was the one about to go through physical pain, to the end the child of the church should be born into the Jewish world- a world which would not accept it, as the drama of Revelation 12 makes clear, in its immediate first century application. Judaism used this very metaphor to speak of Israel's sufferings immediately prior to the coming of the Messianic Kingdom. The Lord is alluding to this, saying that His Kingdom is to come in the form of the birth of the church, but only as a baby, which must grow into the full maturity of His Kingdom on earth to be established at the second coming. His joy in us now means that He does not "remember" the anguish of the cross. The pain of the cross was therefore His bearing of the pain of Israel. The Lord is going along with the Jewish understanding of the metaphor, in that He is alluding to Is. 26:16-21 where we meet the ideas of a "little while", the last day, the hope of resurrection and the metaphor of a woman in labour. And John was writing immediately prior to the pains of AD70 and Christian persecution/. The Lord had taken those pains into Himself in His crucifixion sufferings, and could absolutely relate to them.

The day of the Lord will result in the wicked being "in pain as of a woman that travaileth" (Is. 13:8). Yet the faithful just before His coming would also be like a woman in travail (1 Thess. 5:3), with the subsequent joy on delivery matching the elation of the disciples in realizing the Lord had risen and would be eternally present with them through the Comforter (Jn. 16:21). So, it's travail- or travail, especially in the last days. If we choose the way of the flesh, it will be travail for nothing, bringing forth in vain (this is seen as a characteristic of all worldly life in Is. 65:23). We either cut off the flesh now (in spiritual circumcision), or God will cut us off at the last day. This point was made when the rite of circumcision was first given: "The uncircumcised [un-cut off] man...shall be cut off" (Gen. 17:14). See on Mt. 3:11.

16:22 *You now have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no one will take away from you*- It is tempting to connect this joy with the joy of the disciples when they met the risen Lord and literally saw Him

again (20:20). But the joy in the heart which would never be taken from them is really a stronger reference to the coming of the Comforter to abide with them for ever; this was when and how they 'saw' the Lord in the sense John's Gospel uses the term, to mean understand / believe. The Lord's literal resurrection and the joy they had on literally seeing Him is presented as the joy that shall be with all who have received His abiding presence in the Comforter. That joy cannot be taken from them; but the joy of literally seeing Him would soon fade when He ascended, if the joy in view is simply that of literally seeing the risen Lord. The joy at seeing Him which does not fade is only possible if His presence abides permanently, and that is the work of the Comforter, making Him present to us as really as if He were physically with us. "Your heart shall rejoice" is a direct quotation from Is. 66:14 LXX about the permanent joy of the Kingdom age. This is not to say that the Kingdom has now come. The idea is that through the work of the Comforter we experience the life eternal, the permanent joy of the Kingdom age is known in our experience of His abiding presence now.

"I will see you again" reads strangely; we would rather expect "You will see me again, so don't be sad". He sees us again, in that He comes to us. And He knows / sees us, as well as us seeing / knowing Him. Gal. 4:9 may have this idea in view, teaching that it is not so much a question of us knowing God, but of Him knowing us. Likewise, we did not choose Him, but He chose us (15:19).

16:23 *And in that day, you shall ask me no questions*- As noted on :22, the experience of abiding joy and seeing the Lord is all Kingdom language, in that the Comforter enables us to live the eternal life, the Kingdom life, right now. This explains why "that day" is a phrase commonly used to refer to the last day (2 Tim. 1:12,18 etc.). "That day" in essence comes to all who receive the Comforter, and thereby have the Lord's permanent presence. In 1 Jn. 2:18 John speaks as if the believers are right now in the last day / hour; not only in that they are expecting the second coming at any minute, but in that the last day is in essence being experienced by them.

"Ask me no questions" can be translated "ask me nothing". The idea is that His relationship with the Father will be ours; we will relate directly to the Father as He did and does, because we are "in my name", possessing the Comforter which is sent in His name. If we insist on the sense of 'ask me no questions', the idea could be that because we know the Father and Son through having relation with them, we will not be full of questions (1 Jn. 2:20). Our base experience of relationship with them will mean that 'hard questions' are of no particular angst to us. We know the things of our salvation (15:14,15), and that is enough. Any other questions are of far secondary importance. All struggles about apologetics, questions about the conflict between current science and the Bible, all become utterly subsumed beneath the reality of knowing the Father and Son in the sense of having ongoing relationship with them. The questions in the immediate context concerned the Lord's going away and coming again. The Comforter would explain those questions; and we note that the meaning of the Lord's death, resurrection and gift of the Holy Spirit were not understood by the disciples until after His resurrection and their receipt of the Holy Spirit Comforter. The Comforter works likewise with us, unpacking the meaning of these things- for the Lord was far from the only man to die through crucifixion. The personal import of *His* death and resurrection and gift of His Spirit has to be personally experienced; theology can only go so far. And that is the work of the Comforter.

We recall that towards the end of His ministry, the Jews ceased asking the Lord questions (Mt. 22:46). This was because things had come to such a pitch that the Lord

had answered everything and presented Himself without doubt as their Saviour and God's Son. The choices left were to believe in Him, or turn against Him blinded by a bad conscience. The Lord seems to be alluding to that position, saying that the disciples were also going to be in a position where they totally believed in Him and needed answers to no more questions, for the answer was already clear.

Truly, truly, I say to you: If you shall ask anything of the Father, He will give it you in my name- The intimacy of relationship between Father and Son is to be experienced by us on account of the Comforter. We will sense His will and pray accordingly, and receive. "In my name" is another way of saying that because we are in Christ and He in us, we shall directly dialogue with the Father just as He did and does. He will no longer be a mediator, in that sense. The language of His intercession which we encounter later in the New Testament is all concerning His attainment of salvation for us (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25), and the contexts do not refer to some kind of mechanical transaction being performed between Son and Father every time we pray for some request. We who were enemies have now been reconciled to God in Christ, as Romans 5 teaches. The Lord's work of mediating between God and man is therefore for those who have yet to be reconciled; for us it is done, we already live as reconciled to God.

Moses reached something of that intimacy; he cried to Yahweh to take away the frogs, "and Yahweh did according to the word of Moses" (Ex. 8:12,13); the requests of prayer become almost a command to God; by His grace, we will ask what we will and He will do it for us (Jn. 16:23). W.E. Vine makes the point that the Greek here implies a superior asking an inferior to do something. Not only is this an essay in the humility of God's self-revelation, but it surely shows how if we seriously believe in the power of prayer, what we request really will be given. "Thou shalt also decree a thing (in prayer) and it shall be established unto thee" (Job 22:28). Rev. 9:13 portrays prayer as a command to the Angels. The prayer of command is to be found in the well known words of Ps. 122. “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem”, David exhorts. And the response [made so much clearer when the Psalm is sung]: “Peace be within thy walls… I will now say, Peace be within thee” (Ps. 122:6-8). The way peace is ‘commanded’ to be in Jerusalem by those who pray is because they so believe that the answer will surely come.

The wonder of the resurrection would totally affect our attitude to asking for things, the Lord taught in Jn. 16:23,26. “In that day [of marvelling in the resurrected Lord], ye shall ask me nothing… if ye shall ask anything of the Father, he will give it you [RV]… in that day you shall ask in my name…”. What are we to make of all this talk of asking and not asking, in the ‘day’ of the resurrected Lord Jesus? My synthesis of it all is this: Due to the sheer wonder of the resurrection of the Lord, we will not feel the need to ask for anything for ourselves. The gift of freedom from sin is enough. Because if God gave us His Son and raised Him from the dead, we will serve for nothing, for no extra ‘perks’ in this life; and yet, wonder of wonders, *if* we shall ask, in His Name, we will receive. But we must ask whether the implications and wonder of the fact of the Lord’s resurrection have had such an effect upon us…?

16:24 *So far you have asked nothing in my name. Ask and you shall receive, that your joy may be made full*- By receiving the spirit of the Lord Jesus, His mindset becomes ours. His joy becomes our joy (15:11). The Lord's joy was in our salvation (Mt. 25:21,23), that spiritual being were born into the world of the new creation (16:21) and human repentance (Lk. 15:7). This explains the Lord's exhortation to ask in His name so that their joy might be fulfilled. This doesn't simply refer to the joy of

receiving a request which has earlier been requested in prayer. The fullness of joy received means having the Lord's joy within us; having His Spirit / mind / value set. This means that the thing asked for was the Comforter, the mind of Christ, His Spirit, which included His joy; the mindset which rejoices in the things He rejoices in. And they are the things of human salvation and the glorification of the Father's Name. See on 17:13.

16:25 *These things have I spoken to you in figurative language*- This explains why the Lord did not directly answer their question concerning what He meant by "a little while"; see on :18,19.

The hour comes, when I shall no longer speak to you in figurative language, but shall show you plainly about the Father- God was especially in Christ at His death. Perhaps it was partly with reference to the cross that the Lord said: “I shall shew you plainly of the Father" (Jn. 16:25). See on Jn. 19:19.

John’s references to the hour coming nearly always refer to the crucifixion. The plain showing forth of the Father was in the naked body of His crucified Son; there, all the theory which Jesus had taught was exemplified in stark, plain terms. The Father was ultimately revealed. Is. 64:1-4 had foretold: “Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence... For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him". This latter verse is quoted in 1 Cor. 2 about how the “foolishness" of the cross is not accepted by the wise of this world. Only the humble and spiritually perceptive eye of faith realized that there in the naked shame of Golgotha, God Himself had rent the heavens and come down, as all the faithful had somehow, in some sense foreseen and yearned for. There, in the battered body of Jesus, was God revealed to men.

As noted on Jn. 2:4; 4:21-23 and 5:25-29, the hour that was to come is a reference to the cross. There, we see and hear the preaching / word of [‘which is’, Gk.] the cross. There on the cross, there was no allegory. There we were shown plainly the Father. He went on: “Behold, the hour [s.w. “time"] cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me" (16:32). The disciples scattered at the crucifixion, probably they came to see it and then scattered in fear after the first hour or so. But He was not left alone; for the Father was with Him there. Just as John began his Gospel by saying that “the word was with God", with specific reference to the cross. Philip had just asked to be shown the Father, just as Moses had asked (14:9,10). And the Lord is saying that in the cross, they will see plainly of the Father. And perhaps therefore we are to understand 17:24 as meaning that Jesus prayed that the disciples would physically see and spiritually understand His cross: “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world". “I am", “my glory", given by the Father, and the lamb slain from “the foundation of the world"... this is all language of the cross.

And yet the showing plainly of the Father is spoken here in the context of assuring the disciples that although He, their Rabbi, was to be taken from them, His teaching of them would continue and intensify through the ministry of the Comforter in their hearts. The showing plainly is to be connected with the promise that the

Comforter would guide them into all truth (:13), and then they would have no more questions (:23).

The Lord recognized the influence of the synagogue upon them when He said that He spoke to them in parables, and would later speak to them plainly (Jn. 16:25)- when He had earlier spoken to the Jewish world in parables rather than plainly, because they did not understand (Mk. 4:34). And yet the disciples got there in the end. He spoke to them in the end "plain words" (*parresia*), and this word is the watchword of the disciples' own witness to the world (Acts 2:29; 4:13,29,31; 28:31). They spoke "plainly" *(parresia*) to the world, without parables, because they reflected to the world the nature of their understanding of their Lord. However, during His ministry, it would appear that the Lord treated them as if they were still in the Jewish world. When they asked Him why He spoke to *the people* in parables, He replies by explaining why He spoke *to them* in parables; and He drives the point home that it is to those "outside" that He speaks in parables (Mk. 4:11).

16:26- see on Mt. 6:13; 1 Pet. 2:5.

In that day you shall ask in my name; and I do not say to you that I will pray to the Father for you- The Lord has just explained that "in that day" when they possess the Spirit, they will not need to go to the Father through the Lord. They will have the same relationship with the Father which the Son had and has; see on :23. They would ask the Father on account of being "in Christ", in His Name, baptized into it and abiding in it with the presence of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts. The Lord will not in some mechanical sense pray to the Father with our words but expressed in different language, with a nudge, as it were, for Him to respond positively because we are the Lord's. We shall be in direct relationship with the Father.

This unity of Spirit between us, the Son and the Father explains an apparent contradiction in the Lord's discourse in the upper room: "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will *I* do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask *me* anything (being) in my name, that will I do (Jn. 14:13,14 RV)... If ye shall ask anything of *the Father*, he will give it you in my name... and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father himself loveth you" (Jn. 16:23,26 RV). Who do we pray to? The Father, or the Son? Who 'does' the answer to our prayers? God, or Christ? The context of the Lord's words was that "the Father is with me... I am in the Father, and the Father is in me... the Father abiding in me doeth the works", even as the believers are in the Son and in the Father, as they are in us. This means that the question of who to pray to is on one level irrelevant. Our spirit bears witness with their Spirit, and there is only one spirit. This unity of the believer with the Father is only made possible through the Son, and so our formal prayers should be addressed to God not with "in Christ's Name" tagged on to the end of them [for that smacks of ritualism], but on account of our being in Christ, we can have a direct relationship with the Father. But the essence of prayer is not formal request. To pray "in my name" could mean 'in union with me'; yet Christ was at one with the Father. "He that searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:27) without us verbalizing our spirit in formal prayer. In the same way as the priests helped / assisted the Old Testament worshippers rather than actually offered their prayers or sacrifices, so with the Lord Jesus. Paul spoke of how he would be helped "through your prayers and the help of the spirit of Jesus" (Phil. 1:19 RSV). Their prayers ascended directly to God, but the response was helped by the spirit of the Lord Jesus which was to be given them in the Comforter; and because He is so sublimely at one with the Father, this means that the help will surely come. The rapport between our spirit and His Spirit is again reflected by the way Rom. 8:6,27 use the same phrase, "the mind of the

spirit", to describe firstly the mind of *our* spirit, and then, the mind of the spirit of the Lord Jesus.
We will no longer need Christ to ask the Father for us, we will be able to have a direct relationship with the Father in prayer. We will not need to be like the disciples, who in their immaturity asked Jesus to pass on their requests to God (Jn. 11:22). He sees our spirit anyway, He knows our need anyway; this knowledge doesn't depend on the Lord's mediation. The advocate, the Comforter, identifies with the one he helps, stands next to him, knowing his case fully. But as Christ is our advocate, so we should be to our brethren ("comfort" in 2 Cor. 2:7 is s.w. 1 Jn. 2:1). This doesn't necessarily mean that we interpret our brother's words to God, but rather than we pray for our brother, in our own words; we are with our brother, supporting him, knowing his weakness. So on one hand we have a direct relationship with the Father. On the other, the Lord Jesus is our vital, saving advocate with Him. I don't think these two aspects can be reconciled by re-translation or expositional juggling. The fact is, through what the Lord achieved, we theoretically don't need His mediation any longer. He was our High Priest to bring us to God on the cross. He no longer needs to enter into the Holiest Place (cp. heaven) to gain our atonement, for this He did once for all (Heb. 9:26). We should be able to pray with the earnest intensity of Elijah or Moses, who prayed without an intercessor, and were heard. But where we lack that intensity, the Lord Jesus holds up our feeble 'groanings' before the Father. Likewise He is our 'advocate', although theoretically a righteous man doesn't need an advocate. John almost writes as if 'Of course, you won't sin, but if very occasionally you do, Jesus can act as a powerful advocate for you'. And yet in reality, He is acting in the advocate role for much of our sin-stricken lives.

16:27 *For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved me, and have believed that I came from the Father*- The Comforter, the gift of the Spirit in their hearts, would enable them to have the same relationship with the Father which the Son enjoyed in His mortal life. This is the repeated request in the prayer of chapter 17. The Lord does not therefore need to persuade the Father to be loving and generous in response to us; He Himself and of Himself *loves us*. Our love of the Son is read by the Father as love of Him, because we believe that the Jesus we love is His Son, 'come from the Father'. John later extends this logic, distilling it to mean that if we love the begetter we love also the begotten- and applies this to how therefore we cannot claim to love God but not love His spiritually begotten children (1 Jn. 4:1,2). "The Father Himself loves you" is a phrase we need to bear in our hearts always. We do not need the Lord to as it were get us on His right side; He Himself directly loves us, and all our brethren too.

The Lord's statement that "You… have believed that I came out from God" elicited agreement from the disciples: "[Yes], we believe that you came forth from God". But to that He responds in :32: "Do you now believe? Behold, the hour comes, yes, is now come, when you shall be scattered, every man to his own home, and shall leave me alone". Although they didn't really fully believe, He said that they did. He wasn't so in love with them that He was blind to their failures. But He was all the same so positive about their practically non-existent faith. And what's more, He goes on to tell the Father His positive perspective on their faith: "They…have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me" (Jn. 17:8). But the Lord had only just been telling the disciples that they *didn't* really believe that He had come out from God…! Yet He counted them as if they did, and reflected this to the Father in prayer. And this is surely how the Lord feels and speaks about us to the Father today.

16:28 *I came from the Father and came into the world. Now I leave the world and go to the Father-*
The disciples have just been commended for having "believed that I came from the Father" (:27). Their faith was in the fact that Jesus was the begotten Son of God, that Mary had been made pregnant with Jesus by the Holy Spirit. This is what it meant to believe that the Lord Jesus "came from the Father". The disciples didn't believe the Lord Jesus was some pre-existent Divine being. This was not at all what their belief in His 'coming from the Father' meant. And so His 'coming into the world' refers to His entry into the Jewish world, as the begotten, Messianic Son of God- rather than referring to any entry into earth's atmosphere from 'heaven'. Literal descent from Heaven "into the world' isn't in view. Likewise His 'leaving the world' was not referring to any literal ascent from planet earth to Heaven. If this were the case, then surely the language would have been of "earth" rather than the more social term "the world".

16:29 *His disciples said: Now you speak plainly and not in figurative language!-*
The irony of course was that the Lord was still speaking in somewhat figurative language (see on :28). And the disciples didn't really understand; for after His resurrection, the Lord was to rebuke them for their lack of understanding. And yet [under Divine inspiration], the record here is a transcript of how John usually preached the Gospel. He is as it were poking fun at himself and his brethren, in that they were so sure that "Ah! Now we get your sense!", when actually they were very far from it. By implication, John appeals to his audience to not be as slow to understand as he had been. And it is a similar confession of our own weakness which will make our witness the more attractive and persuasive.

16:30- see on Jn. 15:16-19.

Now we are sure that you know all things, and do not need anyone to question you. By this we believe you came from God- They do not say to the effect that 'Ah, now we understand everything!'. They realized they did not, but were now satisfied that the Lord did understand and know all things. And here we have comfort to us in our questioning of Him; the comfort is not that we know the answers, but that there are answers, and He holds them. "By this we believe you came from God" may be reported as another example of a confessional formula; the hint is to readers and listeners to make the same confession in their hearts.

The words of the Lord Jesus were the words which He had 'heard' from the Father. But this doesn't mean that He was a mere fax machine, relaying literal words which the Father whispered in His ear to a listening world. When the disciples finally grasped something of the real measure of Jesus, they gasped: "You do not even need that a person ask you questions!" (Jn. 16:30). They had previously treated Jesus as a Rabbi, of whom questions were asked by his disciples and then cleverly answered by him. They finally perceived that here was more than a Jewish Rabbi. They came to that conclusion, they imply, not by asking Him questions comprised of words and hearing the cleverly ordered words that comprised His answers. The words He spoke and manifested were of an altogether higher quality and nature than mere lexical items strung together. Here was none other than the Son of God, the Word made flesh in person.

16:31- see on Jn. 17:6.

Jesus answered them: Do you now believe?- This recalls how Joshua and Moses in their goodbye speeches questioned Israel as to whether their commitment was

really what they claimed, and warning that after their death they would soon fall away. See on Mt. 28:10.

However, a fair translation, supported by NIV and Leon Morris (*John* p. 631) is: "You now believe!". In this case, He rejoiced at their faith despite knowing that they would be weak in faith (:32); in the same way as John's Gospel positively records all confession of faith in the Lord, despite noting how weak that faith was subsequently shown to be.

16:32- see on Jn. 10:5.

Behold, the hour comes, yes, has come, when you shall be scattered, every man to his own home, and you shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me- The Lord's 'hour' which was to come was His death (Jn. 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23,27; 13:1; 17:1; 19:27). The disciples scattered at the crucifixion, probably they came to see it and then scattered in fear after the first hour or so. But He was not left alone; for the Father was with Him there. Just as John began his Gospel by saying that "the word was with God", with specific reference to the cross. See on Jn. 19:19 concerning the special presence of the Father with the Son on the cross.

Each of them ran off to their own little family, to safeguard their own petty little human possessions, and left Him alone; alone, when He most needed some human comfort and compassion, a wave from a friend in the crowd, a few silently mouthed words, a catching of the eye, perhaps even the courtesy of a brief hand-shake or clap on the shoulders before the 11 ran off into the night, the word 'thank-you' called out as He stumbled along the Via Dolorosa. But nothing. They cleared off, they got out, every man to his own. And the pain of betrayal with a kiss by a man He was gracious enough to think of as His equal, with whom He had shared sweet fellowship (Ps. 55:13,14). And to hear Peter's cursing, perhaps cursing of Him; his denial that he'd ever known the guy from Nazareth. And yet in the face of *all this*, the Lord went on: He laid down His life *for us*, we who betrayed Him, scattered from Him, hated Him, did Him to death in the most degrading and painful way our race knew how. In the face of rejection to the uttermost, He served us to the end, even to death, and even to the death of the cross.

The response of the disciples to the Lord's arrest was to flee; and at the time of His resurrection, which in faith they ought to have joyfully expected, they quite literally 'went fishing'. The powerful point is made that the church was built upon the foundations of men weak in faith, who were openly discredited and who themselves, in the Gospel records, preached their own weakness. And yet they are the foundation stones of the new Jerusalem pictured in Revelation. This stands for all time as an encouragement to all in their weakness.

"The Father is with me" is recorded here in this context of weakness; for the Lord later cried from the cross that the Father had forsaken Him (Mt. 27:46). Perhaps this obvious tension is introduced here to show that human crisis of faith is not necessarily sinful, for the Lord experienced it.

16:33 *These things have I spoken to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good courage; I have overcome the world*- This promise of personal "peace" comes straight after the prediction of their collapse of faith and shameful abandonment of the Lord. "Peace" in the Bible usually refers to peace with God. He is saying that despite their failure, He had foreseen it and His death would deal with it, and the gift of the Spirit would involve the gift of peace in their hearts, despite their sin and weakness. They could therefore find peace with God despite their failure; and despite their tribulation in the Jewish world, particularly that

which would come in the last days and AD70(Mk. 13:9), their peace with the Father and Son would make them courageous and strong in the face of all rejection by the Jewish world, in which they would have tribulation.

The Lord had "overcome" the Jewish world, and every form of this world; and He frequently uses the word in His letters to the churches in Rev. 2,3, encouraging us likewise to overcome. His spirit is to be ours. John too rather likes this word "overcome", using it of how his converts had "overcome the wicked one" and the [Jewish] false teachers (1 Jn. 2:13,14; 4:4). "The wicked one" is therefore, in the first context, the Jewish world which the Lord overcame. This is why the terms "satan" and "devil" and other such titles are used about the Jewish world so often; see my chapter 'The Jewish Satan' in *The Real Devil* , chapter 2.

JOHN CHAPTER 17

17:1 *These things spoke Jesus*- The idea is that after having given the discourse just recorded in the previous chapters, the Lord prayed this prayer. In discussing the Lord's teaching about the Comforter in chapters 14-16, we have noted that He speaks of this gift as He Himself, coming in the first instance to the disciples who had been with Him "from the beginning" and who were to convict the Jewish world of sin by their witness, in the strength of the Comforter; and yet we have also seen that the promised Comforter is essentially an internal strengthening given to all believers. These three themes are all summed up in the Lord's prayer of John 17. The prayer falls easily into the same three categories; prayer for Himself (:1-5), for the disciples (:6-19) and for all believers (:20-26).

And lifting up his eyes to Heaven, he said- The significance of this is that the Lord has spoken of how the Comforter would enable believers in Him to have the same kind of relationship with the Father which He had enjoyed in His mortal life. And His prayer goes on to emphasize this. The fact He could pray to God in Heaven with no sense of barrier is a profound visual indicator of the totally open nature of that relationship; and His intention is that we share the same relationship with the Father as He did.

Indeed we must ask why the record of this prayer, the Lord's longest recorded prayer, this unique insight into His relationship with the Father, is placed at this point. Why do we not have transcripts of other, earlier prayers to the Father earlier in the account? I suggest it is because it follows on from the Lord's promise that through the presence of the Spirit, believers would share His relationship with the Father. And in this prayer, we see something of what that relationship involved.

Father, the hour comes. Glorify Your son, that the son may glorify you- The coming of the predetermined hour for His death did not make the Lord fatalistic, merely submitting to the Father's will. Not the hour had come, He prayed to the Father. Our sense of God's utter sovereignty should lead to prayer and action, as it did with the Lord; rather than mere resignation to His will. The Lord was lifted up on the cross, and 'lifted up' is the Hebrew idea for glorification. The Lord saw the whole process of death, resurrection and ascension as glorification; He did not break the process down into chronological segments, for He looked at it from outside time as we know it. It was by or for the glory of the Father that the Lord was raised from the dead (Rom. 6:4), so the glorification process includes both death and resurrection. The purpose of His glorification was for the Father's glory, and Paul alludes to this in teaching that the whole process of the Lord's humiliation and glorification was "to the

glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:11). The language and concepts simply cannot be fitted in to the Trinitarian paradigm.

The Father is glorified in our response to the Lord's life and death. The request "Glorify Your Son" is therefore effectively a prayer for us to respond to the cross; for by glorifying the Son thereby, we glorify the Father. But clearly the Lord sensed that our response to His death, the effect of His death, could be as it were enhanced by God's blessing. And this is why we can legitimately pray at the breaking of bread for the Father's help to respond more deeply to His Son's death. For this will glorify the Son, and thereby glorify the Father.

The echoes of Deuteronomy in the Lord's goodbye speeches shouldn't be missed; for Moses at this time truly was a superb type of the Lord Jesus. Deuteronomy concludes with two songs of Moses, one addressed to the Father (Dt. 32), and the other to his people (Dt. 33). It is apparent that the Lord's final prayer in Jn. 17 is divisible into the same divisions- prayer to the Father, and concern for His people. It has been observed that the prayer of Jn. 17 is also almost like a hymn- divided into seven strophes of eight lines each. It would appear to be John's equivalent to the record in Mk. 14:26 of a hymn being sung at the end of the Last Supper.

The prayer is in some ways an expanded restatement of the model prayer. In it, the Lord asks for the Father's Name to be hallowed or glorified (Jn. 17:1,11,12); for His work or will to be done or finished (Jn. 17:4); for deliverance from the evil one (Jn. 17:15). The prayer of Jn. 17 can be divided into three units of about the same length (Jn. 17:1-8; 9-19; 20-26). Each has the theme of glory, of directly addressing the Father, and of the needs of God's people- all clearly taken from the model prayer.

17:2 *Even as You gave him authority over all flesh, so that he should give eternal life to all whom You have given him*- This continues the appeal made in :1; for the work of the cross to be blessed, so that as many as possible might receive eternal life because of His upcoming death.

The connection between the universal authority of the Lord and the need to preach it is made in Jn. 17:2,3 AV: "Thou hast given him power over all flesh, *that* he should give eternal life to [men]... and this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent". The great commission says that because He has power over all flesh, therefore we must preach Him to all flesh (Mt. 28:18,19). Jn. 17:2 says that because He has this power, He can give men eternal life through the knowledge of Him. But that giving of eternal life is through the process of our obedience to the great commission to go out and offer it to all flesh. The extent of our obedience to the preaching commission is the extent to which eternal life is given to men. Their eternal destiny is placed in our hands. The authority to save all men and women has been given to the Lord, but the extent to which this becomes reality depends upon our preaching it. And yet the gift of eternal life cannot be limited to the gift of immortality at the Lord's return; for throughout John, the gift of the life eternal is a present experience. The Lord gives us His life, through the gift of His Spirit into our spirit and living. It is this which we offer to "all flesh", and it shall surely have its issue in the gift of immortality at His return.

17:3- see on Jn. 10:15; 1 Jn. 1:3.

And this is everlasting life, that they should know You, the only true God, and him whom You sent, Jesus Christ- As noted on :2, the gift of eternal life refers not only to immortality at His return. The meaning of this idea in John is that we can live that

eternal life now. And so He defines what it is to life eternal life now- it is a knowing of the Father and Son, using 'knowledge' in the Hebraic sense of relationship with. The idea is not that if we have true academic, theological knowledge about the Father and Son, we shall get eternal life at the last day as a kind of reward for being so smart. That was the Rabbinic understanding; but the Lord turns it on its head, by saying that the knowledge of Father and Son, the life lived in relationship with them, is a gift, given right now, to those who believe (:2). 1 Jn. 5:20 alludes here and applies this experience to the believing life right now, knowing and being "in" the true God: "the Son of God came, and has given us an understanding so that we truly know him that is true; and we are in him that is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life".

The Lord usually speaks of Himself in the third person- e.g. “the son”; but here in Jn. 17:3 He refers to Himself in prayer to the Father as “Jesus Christ”, as if He was consciously aware of how we would later see Him, and aware that His words were being recorded for us.

He will say to many in the last day that He has never known them, for they never knew Him- for all their pure doctrine and good works. Life eternal is about knowing God and Jesus (Jn. 17:3)- and the Greek word here doesn't mean to merely know in an academic sense, but to know intimately and personally in relationship. Only if we *really* see / perceive the Son will we be saved; "you have seen me and yet believe not" the Lord told the Jews, warning them that only those who see the Son *and* believe in Him will have eternal life (Jn. 6:36, 40). If we really know the Son then we will likewise know His love and sacrifice is enough to truly grant us the life eternal. If we truly see the Son and believe in Him, then we will know that we (will have) eternal life- because His grace, His love, His desire to save will be so clearly evident to us through the study and knowledge of His personality. If we know Him, we will be sure of our salvation; for we are living now the kind of life which we shall eternally live, the eternal life given right now to believers through the Spirit. We will be humbly confident that in the very, final end- we will be there. There is therefore the factual, doctrinal 'knowledge' or 'seeing' which by grace has been granted us. But beyond that there is the true seeing and believing into the Man Jesus, with the definite Hope which that brings. If we *truly* know Him we will count literally all else as loss (Phil. 3:8). We should not be in the faith, labouring towards the Kingdom, just so that we personally can have eternal life at the end of it. "Eternal life" in John's Gospel refers to knowing and understanding God now, rather than simply to infinity (Jn. 17:3; 1 Jn. 5:20).

The "... know you" is in the continuous tense. It speaks of relationship. It is simply not so that if we attain a set level of knowledge of God and His Son, then we shall be rewarded with immortality at the last day. The 'knowledge' in view is ongoing, incremental, and therefore refers to a relationship. This point has been sadly missed by those who insist on teaching converts theology about God and Jesus, baptize them once they have attained a level of facility with it which the teacher sets, and then tells them to hold on to those understandings and hope to get immortality for it at the last day. This verse has tragically been misread to support such a view. But it teaches something quite different- to be knowing, in a continuous tense, is a gift from God; and is the definition of the gift of life eternal. That eternal knowing will of course continue eternally, throughout the Kingdom. As God is infinite, it will take eternity to get to know Him. Life eternal both then as now will be all about getting to know God and Jesus. David saw the Kingdom as a time of *enquiring* after God in His

temple (Ps. 27:4). According to Jn. 17:3 and its various Old Testament foundations, to know God is to live for ever. Eternal life is all about knowing His Name. Hos. 6:2,3 LXX puts it like this: "We shall rise [from the dead] and live in His presence, and have knowledge; we shall press forward to know the Lord". If we start knowing God now, and press ever forward to know His Name yet more... we have started the essence of the life which we will eternally live. And of course 'knowing the Lord' involves a personal union with Christ, experience and relationship with Him, of which intellectual knowledge is only a part. For in John's Gospel, seeing, knowing and believing are related; "he that has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn. 14:7-9) is paralleled with "If you believe in God, believe in me" (Jn. 14:1). We start the process of knowing the Father's Name in this life; and in this sense we embark upon what will be for us [by His grace] the experience of the eternal life.

The new covenant promised that all God's people would know Him (Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:11). By baptism into the Lord, that new covenant is made with all believers. The knowledge promised is therefore a gift, part of the covenant promise, the equivalent of the word to Abraham that "I will be their God", in personal relationship / knowledge with each member of the seed. This promise of knowing God begins to be fulfilled when each believer is given that knowledge / relationship. It is not the case that on the basis of acquired theological knowledge, a believer receives some blessing. Rather is the knowledge of God a gift from Him to us, in the sense of relationship with Him, in which it is more significant to be known by Him rather than to know Him academically.

17:4 *I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You gave me to do*- This could be read as a conclusion by the Lord that He had in fact achieved God's intention with His disciples. As He says in :6, He had manifested God's Name to the men whom He had been given to work with. There were some amongst them who had glorified God; they had brought forth the fruit which in Jn. 15 He says means that God has been glorified. But the Lord sees His death and resurrection as His glorification of the Father (:1). And yet He knew that in essence, He had accomplished or finished that work during His mortal life. His final cry "It is finished / accomplished" was of course significant, but the essence of His sacrifice had been made in His personality and life amongst men before that. In Jn. 4:34 He spoke of His accomplishing the Father's work as still ongoing; and an example of it was [in that context] the saving of the Samaritan woman. His work was the Father's work, which was bringing men to faith and the experience now of eternal life. His life was the pattern for that eternal life, and now His life was at and end, He could say that He had completed that work.

17:5- see on Jn. 1:14.

And now Father, glorify me with Your own self with the glory which I had with You before the world was-

The idea of 'apocalypse' alludes to the Jewish idea of predestined things 'existing' in Heaven with God; for 'apocalypse' means literally an unveiling, a revealing of what is [in Heaven]. In this sense the believer at the resurrection will receive what was already laid up in store for him or her in Heaven (2 Cor. 5:1; Col. 1:5; Mt. 25:34). Because of this, Hebrew can use past tenses to speak of that which is future (e.g. Is. 5:13; 9:2,6,12; 10:28; 28:16; 34:2; Gen. 15:18 cp. Acts 7:5). Things can thus "be" before they are created: "They are and were created" (Rev. 4:11). And thus when the Lord Jesus speaks of the glory which He had with God from the beginning, there is no

suggestion there that He therefore existed in glory from the beginning. He didn't ask for that glory to be restored to Him, as trinitarianism demands; instead He asked that the glory which He already had in the Divine purpose, be given to Him. Significantly, there is a Greek word which specifically refers to personal, literal pre-existence: *pro-uparchon*- and it's never used about the Lord Jesus.

To understand this verse, we must enquire what the Bible means when it speaks about "glory". The glory of God was revealed to Moses at Sinai- and what he heard was the declaration of God's Name or character, that Yahweh is a God full of grace, mercy, truth, justice, judgment etc. (Ex. 33:19; 34:6,7). Jesus alludes to what happened at Sinai by saying that He has "glorified you… manifested your name" (Jn. 17:4,6) before the foundation of the Jewish world, which was at Sinai. Whenever those characteristics of God are recognized, manifested or openly shown, God is glorified. In this sense, God is the "God of glory" (Ps. 29:3 etc.). He is totally associated with His Name and characteristics- it's not that He just shows those particular attributes to men, but He Himself personally is someone quite different. He *is* His glory. And this is why Jn. 17:5 parallels His glory with God's very own "self".

That glory of God was of course always with God, right at the beginning. He hasn't changed His essential characteristics over time. The God of the Old Testament is the same God as in the New Testament. As John begins his Gospel by saying in the prologue, the essential "Word", *logos* of God, His essential plans, intentions, personality, was in the beginning with Him. It was "made flesh" in the person of Jesus (Jn. 1:14), in that the Lord Jesus in His life and especially in His death on the cross revealed all those attributes and plans of God in a concrete, visible form- to perfection.

The request of Jesus to be glorified is therefore asking for the Name / attributes / characteristics / glory / word of God to be openly revealed in Him. Surely He had in mind His resurrection, and the glorifying of God which would take place as a result of this being preached and believed in world-wide.

But in what sense was this the glory which Jesus had with God before the world was? The "glory" of God was revealed to Moses at Sinai in Ex. 34 as the declaration of His character, at the beginning of the Jewish world. In this sense, the Lord Jesus could speak of having in His mortal life "that glory which was with [the Father]" when the [Jewish] world came into existence at Sinai (Jn. 17:5 Ethiopic and Western Text). It was that same glory which, like Moses, He reflected to men. But according to 2 Cor. 3:18, the very experience of gazing upon the glory of His character will change us into a reflection of it. There is something transforming about the very personality of Jesus. And perhaps this is why we have such a psychological barrier to thinking about Him deeply. We know that it has the power to transform and intrude into our innermost darkness.

There is essentially only one glory- the glory of the Son is a reflection or manifestation of the glory of the Father. They may be seen as different glories only in the sense that the same glory is reflected from the Lord Jesus in His unique way; as a son reflects or articulates his father's personality, it's not a mirror personality, but it's the same essence. One star differs from another in glory, but they all reflect the same essential light of glory. The Lord Jesus sought only the glory of the Father (Jn. 7:18). He spoke of God's glory as being the Son's glory (Jn. 11:4). Thus Isaiah's vision of God's glory is interpreted by John as a prophecy of the Son's glory (Jn. 12:41).

The glory of God is His “own self”, His own personality and essence. This was with God of course from the ultimate beginning of all, and it was this glory which was manifested in both the death and glorification of the Lord Jesus (Jn. 17:5). The Old Testament title “God of glory” is applied to the Lord Jesus, “the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8; James 2:1). It is *God’s* glory which radiates from the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Jesus is the brightness of God’s glory, because He is the express image of God’s personality (Heb. 1:3). He received glory from God’s glory (2 Pet. 1:17). God is the “Father of glory”, the prime source of the one true glory, that is reflected both in the Lord Jesus and in ourselves (Eph. 1:17). The intimate relation of the Father's glory with that of the Son is brought out in Jn. 13:31,32: "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him; and God shall glorify him in himself, and straightway shall he glorify him".

What all this exposition means in practice is this. There is only “one glory” of God. That glory refers to the essential “self”, the personality, characteristics, being etc. The Lord Jesus manifested that glory in His mortal life (Jn. 2:11). But He manifests it now that He has been “glorified”, and will manifest it in the future day of His glory. And the Lord was as in all things a pattern to us. We are bidden follow in His path to glory. We now in our personalities reflect and manifest the one glory of the Father, and our blessed Hope is glory in the future, to be glorified, to be persons who reflect and ‘are’ that glory in a more intimate and complete sense than we are now, marred as we are by our human dysfunction, sin, and weakness of will against temptation. We now reflect that glory as in a dirty bronze mirror (2 Cor. 3:18). The outline of God’s glory in the face of Jesus is only dimly reflected in us. But we are being changed, from glory to glory, the focus getting clearer all the time, until that great day when we meet Him and see Him face to face, with all that shall imply and result in. But my point in this context is that there is only one glory. That glory was with God from the beginning. The Lord Jesus was in the mind and plan of God from the beginning. It was God’s original plan to resurrect and glorify and justify His Son. And in Jn. 17:5, the Lord is asking that this will happen.

The glory which the Lord Jesus had “before the world was” is connected with the way that He was “foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Pet. 1:20), the way God promised us eternal life (through His Son) before the world was (Tit. 1:2). 2 Tim. 1:9 speaks of us as being called to salvation in Christ “before the world began”, He “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). In the same way as we didn’t personally exist before the world began, neither did Christ. Indeed 1 Cor. 2:7 speaks of *us* having some form of glory with God “before the world began”. It’s the idea of this “one glory” again- God’s glory existed, and it was His plan to share it with His Son and with us; and He speaks of those things which are not as though they are, so certain are they of fulfilment (Rom. 4:17). In Jn. 17:5, the Lord Jesus is ‘pleading the promise’ of these things. We have noted that the Lord speaks of His whole process of death, resurrection and ascension as one item- going to the Father, glorification. He doesn't break it down into chronological segments, and likewise His talk of glory before is spoken from the Divine perspective, outside the limitations which our kind of time places upon our language.

We need to remember that the Lord was speaking, and John was writing, against a Jewish background. The language of 'pre-existence' was common in Jewish thinking and writing. To be 'with God' didn't mean, in Jewish terms, to be up there in heaven with God literally. Mary had favour *para* God (Lk. 1:30) in the same way as Jesus had glory *para* God, but this doesn't mean she pre-existed or was in Heaven with God

with her "favour". The Torah supposedly pre-existed, everything on earth was a pattern of the pre-existing ideas of those things which were held in the plan and mind of God in Heaven. John 17:5 has reference to these things: "And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed". The Talmud and Genesis Rabbah speak of the "Throne of Glory" pre-existing before the world existed. And the Lord Jesus seems to be alluding to that. The Jewish mind wouldn't have understood the Lord Jesus to be making any claim here to have bodily, physically existed before birth. Peter reflected Jewish thinking when he wrote (albeit under inspiration) that Jesus was "foreknown" before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:20 ESV). Think through the implications of being "foreknown"- the Greek word used is the root of the English word 'prognosis'. If God 'foreknew' His Son, the Son was not literally existent next to Him at the time of being 'foreknown'. Otherwise the language of 'foreknowing' becomes meaningless. He goes on to say that the faithful were 'God's' (:6), who were given to the Lord. This is another example of speaking of things which were not as though they were.

17:6 *I manifested Your Name*- The intention was that the Lord Jesus would manifest God to Israel ("that He should be made manifest to Israel", Jn. 1:31). He manifested the Father's glory through His words and miracles (Jn. 2:11 "manifested forth His glory"). But Israel didn't perceive this; His own brothers goaded Him to "manifest" Himself to the [Jewish] world (Jn. 7:4 s.w.). He was manifested to a small group of working men and a few questionable women. And that was success. The Lord in Jn. 17 is very confident that His mission has been succesful. This is why we sense the genuine distress in Him in Jn. 6 when He fears that even the disciples would go away from Him. We note that His manifestation of the Name, which was ultimately seen in His death on the cross (:26; "Herein was the love of God manifested to us, in that God has sent His only Son into the world", 1 Jn. 4:9 cp. Jn. 3:16), elicited men manifesting their deeds in confession before God (those who come to His light have their deeds "made manifest", Jn. 3:21; the works of God were made manifest within the healed blind man, Jn. 9:3). Hence the focus upon the cross at the breaking of bread naturally elicits self examination.

To the men whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were and You gave them to me, and they have kept Your word- As noted on :4, it was in this sense that the Lord felt that He had glorified God, in that He felt He had got the disciples to the point where they had glorified God. And yet He felt that despite knowing that in a few hours, or even less, they were going to abandon Him. Peter was to deny Him. But He looked beyond those surface level failings; just as He characterizes discipleship as "abiding" in Him, rather than perfection of following. He knew their overall heart position. And this is huge comfort to us in our failings. The manifestation of the Name has echoes of the Angel manifesting the Name to Moses; here, the Lord is as the Angel, and the disciples are likened to Moses, which was a huge challenge to a mindset which considered Moses as the untouchable pinnacle of spirituality. But His manifestation of the Name was far greater than had happened then. We note that "Name" effectively means 'the whole person', all they stand for, characteristics, history and essence of being. The manifestation of the Name in the person of the Lord was throughout His life, but it would come to an intense climax in His manifestation of it on the cross (:26). It was not made to the Jewish world, but to those who had come out of that world, rather like Moses going out of the congregation of Israel in order to behold the manifestation of the Name to him.

As noted on :5, the Lord is here speaking to the Father, and as such has His perspective on time and existence. He speaks of the men whom the Father had given

Him, as if they had always existed. They were given to Him, having been foreknown and kept in God's eternal purpose from before time, just as "the work" was given Him (:4). That "work" was therefore the salvation of those given Him, those foreknown and predestined to that call. The men having been given out of the Jewish world recalls the Levites being "given" to Aaron / the priesthood out of Israel (Num. 3:9; 8:19; 18:6); at the time of the golden calf they "observed your word, and kept your covenant" (Dt. 33:9, cp. "they have kept your word"), as did the disciples. The relationship between Moses and the Levites was therefore that between the Lord and the disciples- a sense of thankfulness that at least a minority were faithful.

The idea of the manifestation of the Name recalls the prologue's statement in Jn. 1:14 that when the word of God was made flesh in the Son of God, we saw the glory of God. If "The word" which was made flesh is in fact a reference to the Name of God, then this becomes understandable. And so the *logos* of God, the Name of God, being with Him in the beginning and being Him in a sense, was revealed fully in the human person ("flesh") of the Lord Jesus. The Lord said this in so many words: "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me" (Jn. 17:6). John surely has this in mind when he comments that the word / Name became flesh, and we saw that glory, but others in "the world" didn't perceive it (Jn. 1:14).

"They have kept your word" is the Lord speaking positively to the Father about His followers, just as He does concerning us today. The Lord's High Priestly prayer of intercession in John 17 [so called because of the way He speaks of 'sanctifying Himself'] reveals how positively He felt about the disciples- even though He knew and foretold that they were about to betray Him, deny Him and leave Him alone in His hour of greatest human need. His grace towards them here is quite profound. He describes them to His Father as those who "have kept your word"- referring to His own parable of the good ground, those who keep the word and bring forth fruit with patience (Lk. 8:15). Again, He tells His Father about them: "They have believed that You did send me" (Jn. 17:8). But He had just upbraided them for their *un*belief in Him (Jn. 16:31), and would do so again in a few days time (Mk. 16:14). Yet He presents His weak followers to the Father as so much better than they really were; and this is the same Lord who mediates for us today. This was not wishful thinking and excessive positivism on the Lord's part. He saw them as "abiding" in Him, meaning that He saw through their temporal lapses to their overall heart position. Likewise, the Lord assures the Father that they were not "of the [Jewish] world" (Jn. 17:14,16), even though as we have shown in these studies, they were deeply influenced by the Jewish world around them. Perhaps the Lord looked ahead to the day when they would be spiritually stronger, and yet He presents the immature disciples to the Father from the perspective of how He hoped they would one day be. Thus He says that He has already "sent them into the world" (Jn. 17:18)- but this was only done by Him in its fullness *after* His resurrection. He speaks of how He was glorified in them before the [Jewish] world (Jn. 17:10)- when He knew Peter was about to deny Him and shame His whole cause and mission. But surely the Lord looked ahead to the hope He had in Peter and all of them, that they would go out into the world and glorify Him. Indeed, the whole prayer of Jn. 17 reveals how the Lord presented them to the Father as men who in many ways they simply were not. When they say "We believe… that you came forth from God", He comments: "Do you now believe?" and predicts their scattering. Yet in prayer to the Father, He says that they did believe "Surely… that I came out from thee" (Jn. 17:8,25). Their faith was anything but "sure". Likewise, we have shown above that they failed to really perceive His death, and thus failed to perceive the essence of *Him*. In the face of this tragedy, this frustration and pain, the

Lord could calmly tell the Father: “I am glorified *in them*” (Jn. 17:10)- in they who understood so little, indeed who refused to understand. Even worse, the Lord had just been telling them that they didn’t really love Him fully (Jn. 14:15,23,28). And yet He speaks to the Father of them as if they are *so* committed to Him.

The Lord’s comment to the disciples that if they loved him, then they would ‘keep his word’ (Jn. 14:15,21,23) implies their love was at best imperfect. Their keeping of His word and loving Him was certainly under question in Jn. 15:10. And yet He confidently represents them to the Father as those who had kept His word (Jn. 17:6). Perhaps by this He simply means that they loved Him and thereby the Father, rather than claiming any particular level of obedience for them.

17:7 *Now they know that all things, whatever You have given me, are from You*- As noted on :6, there was much they did not know / understand / believe, which is the sense of 'knowing' in John. The Lord imputed more understanding and faith to them than they really had. The Last Supper discourse showed clearly enough that they didn't understand or "know" (Jn. 14:7,9; 16:5,18). Yet here, He uses the perfect tense of the verb 'to know' when He says "Now they have come to know..." . It's almost as if He increasingly imputed things to them which were not yet so, as increasingly He faced up to the reality and implications of His death for them. The disciples didn’t “know” the things the Lord spoke to them about His origin and purpose- they only “knew” them after the resurrection (Lk. 18:34; Jn. 10:6; 12:16; 13:7). Jn. 14:7,9 is plain: “If you had known me… yet have you not known me”, He tells the disciples. And yet He uses just that same Greek word in telling the Father that His men did “know” Him and His word (Jn. 17:7,8,25). He had faith and hope in their future maturity- they didn’t then “know”, but they did in the future (Jn. 12:16; 13:7). The Lord had hope that “In that day you shall know” (Jn. 14:20). For there was no absolute guarantee that the eleven would come to “know” Him and His word, seeing they had freewill- Jesus had faith they would, and He expressed that faith and Hope to the Father so positively.

The things given the Son were the disciples (:6). Perhaps the sense is that they now realized and believed that they had been given to the Son by the Father, and were therefore 'with' the Father.

17:8- see on Jn. 16:27; 17:6.

For the words which You gave me I have given to them, and they received them, and knew as a truth that I came forth from You; and they believed that You did send me- The connection with the prologue is in the way that the Jewish world did not receive the Lord as a person, but the disciples did. "He" as a person is hereby paralleled with His words.

The Lord told the Father that He had given the disciples His words, “and they have received them” (Jn. 17:8). This is evident allusion to the editorial comment in Dt. 33:3 about how all Israel received God’s words through Moses. Likewise “I manifested thy name… they have kept thy word” (Jn. 17:6,26) = “I will proclaim the name of the Lord… they have observed thy word” (Dt. 32:3; 33:9). One marvels at the way the Lord’s mind linked together so much Scripture in the artless, seamless way in which He did.

Their 'recieving' of the Lord's words should not be read as meaning that they reviewed all His recorded speech, as it were the 'red letter' sections of the New Testament, and accepted them as true or reasonable. The prologue defines the disciples as those who received "Him" (1:12; 13:20). There is a common parallel

between Him personally and His words (5:43; 12:48). His words are put for Him as a person, as noted elsewhere. They received not just His spoken words but all His "fullness", the "testimony" of His person, His spirit (1:16; 3:33; 14:17). They received 'Him' in the sense of allowing Him into their hearts and lives, allowing Him to fill them and abide in them. This is not quite the same as intellectual acceptance of words spoken as true and reasonable. Hence the same word is used about the receiving of the gift of the Spirit in the innermost being (7:39; 20:22; Acts 1:8; 1 Jn. 2:27).

17:9- see on 1 Tim. 2:2.

I pray for them. I pray not for the world, but for those whom You have given me; for they are Yours- The disciples were given to the Lord out of the Jewish world, as the Levites were. As the Levites were God's (Num. 3:12,13,45 "the Levites shall be mine"; 8:14), so are the believers. The Levites represent us (Dt. 33:9); the relationship between Moses and the Levites represents that between the Lord and us. Moses' thankfulness that they remained faithful during the golden calf crisis, that sense of being able to rely on them, will be reflected in the Lord's feelings toward the faithful. His statement that He payed not for the Jewish world recalls the command to Jeremiah not to pray for the Jewish world of his day, for they had spurned multiple chances and now had to face judgment.

The Lord Jesus worked through individuals. His strategy was not so much to win the multitudes for His cause as to firmly found the faith of a few women and 12 men who would then take His message to the world. The men He chose were like us- impulsive, temperamental, easily offended, burdened with all the prejudices of their environment. Their mannerisms were probably awkward and their abilities limited. But He prayed for them, as we should for those converts the Lord grants us, “not for the world” [perhaps, not *so much for the world as for*] those few whom the Father had given Him out of the world. Everything depended upon them, for “through their word” the world was to believe (Jn. 17:6,9,20). With all the powers of the universe at His command, the Lord could have chosen a programme of mass recruitment. But He didn’t. They were to follow Him, so that later they would become fishers of men on a larger scale than He chose then to work on (Mk. 1:17). They would later bear witness because they had been with Him from the beginning (Jn. 15:27). In the few years they were with Him, those men learnt of Him

17:10- see on Jn. 17:6.

All things that are mine are Yours, and Yours are mine, and I am glorified in them- His comment that “I am glorified in them” was evidently said in hope and faith that they would glorify Him- for before His death He “was not yet glorified” (Jn. 7:39). Indeed, Jn. 12:16 suggests that the disciples only “glorified” Him after the resurrection, once they remembered and understood His words and actions properly. It was through “bearing much fruit” that the disciples would glorify Him (Jn. 15:8)- and they evidently hadn’t started doing that. Indeed, from when Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane, the Father was indeed glorified in Him- but not through the disciples, who ran away in denial of their Lord (Jn. 12:28; 13:31). And yet the Lord Jesus confidently asserts to His Father, to God Almighty, that He was glorified in the disciples (Jn. 17:10). As noted on :6, we see here how positive He was in prayer to the Father about His followers. "I am glorified in them" sounds like a proud father reflecting on his dutiful children. And He is the same kind of intercessor for us today, seeing us according to how far we "abide" in Him, rather than by our ups and downs of spiritual failure and success.

17:11 *I am no more in the world; but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them whom You have given me in Your Name, that they may be one, even as we are one*- As noted on 14:2,3, the going to the Father meant going to the cross. His presence with the Father meant that the Father would "keep" them just as the Lord had "kept" them whilst physically present with them (:12). This 'keeping' was and is achieved through the gift of the Spirit, keeping hearts and minds faithful. Those begotten by the Spirit are thereby "kept" from the wicked one and sin generally (1 Jn. 5:18; 2 Thess. 3:3), "preserved [s.w. "kept"] in Christ" and from falling (Jude 1,24), kept by the Holy Spirit which dwells within us (2 Tim. 1:14). This 'keeping' is part of a mutual relationship, for often we read of the need to 'keep' the Lord's words.

We are kept in the Name in the sense that the characteristics of the Yahweh Name are imputed to us. The disciples were weak. But they were counted as in the Name. And the Lord asks the Father to continue doing that. Clearly the connection is with the manifestation of the Name to Moses, a theme which runs throughout John 17. Part of that Name was that Yahweh 'keeps mercy for thousands' (Ex. 34:7; Dan. 9:4 "the great and dreadful God, who keeps covenant and loving kindness with those who love Him and keep His commandments"). As Aaron "put My Name upon the children of Israel" (Num. 6:27), so the Lord keeps us in the Father's Name. The Lord has reasoned with the Father that He has kept [imperfect, 'been keeping'] them in the Name. But now He is to die. He cannot go on interceding for them whilst dead. And so He asks the Father to Himself keep them in His Name- because the Lord knows that they are going to have a collapse of faith. He is asking the Father to as it accept His intercession for them ahead of time, and not to reject them in their forthcoming crisis of faith.

There are many points of contact between the Lord as the seed of the woman in the garden of Gethsemane and Eve in the garden of Eden- e.g. "Those whom you gave me" recalls Adam's "the woman which Thou gavest Me" (caused me to be sinful in Your sight- as we did to Jesus on the cross in the same garden). Not least there is the contrast between the struggles against temptation which took place in the same garden.

1 Jn. 3:23 associates believing on the Name with loving each other; and in Jn. 17:11 Christ prays that God will keep us all as one *through His own Name*. So often God's Name is associated with unity. God's Name is connected with His being "the Holy *One*" (Is. 29:23; 47:4; 54:5; 57:15; 60:9; Ez. 39:7). God being the Holy *One* is a further statement of His unity. Of course, we are speaking of ideal things. False doctrine and practice, the uncertainty of knowing exactly who carries God's Name, these and many other limitations of our humanity make it hard to achieve the unity which this theory speaks of. But the unity we do achieve is a foretaste of the Kingdom; unless we *love* this idea of unity, we will find ourselves out of place in the Kingdom. "In *that day* there shall be one Lord, and His Name one" (Zech. 14:9). It may well be that Eph. 4:4-6 is alluding back to this verse; this passage inspires us to keep the unity of the Spirit, because here and now "there is one body, and one Spirit... *one Lord* ...one baptism, one God"; in other words, Paul is saying that the unity of the Kingdom, as spoken of in Zech. 14:9, must be found in the ecclesia of today. See on Jn. 5:23; Mk. 13:32. There are several connections between there being one Name of God- one set of principles with which He identifies Himself- and unity between believers. David bad his people exalt God's Name "together", in unity (Ps. 34:3). The fact that there will be one Lord and His Name one in the future will inspire unity

amongst the whole world. By being kept "in the name", we are made one (Jn. 17:11)- by sharing in and developing that unique set of characteristics that comprise God's Name / personality, unity between us is enabled by the love, forgiveness, justice etc. which we will show.

The account of the tabernacle labours the point that the whole house of God, this huge but delicate structure, was held together by "clasps of brass to couple the tent together, that it might be one" (Ex. 36:18 and often). "That it might be one" is alluded to by the Lord when He prayed for His people, "that they might be one" (Jn. 17:11,21-23). The record of the tabernacle stresses how the system was based around a mass of boards, tenons, curtain couplings etc. God's dwelling place, His house, hangs together by millions of inter-personal connections. "Out of church Christians", in the sense of those who think they can go it alone in splended isolation, are totally missing the point. We are encouraged to see the allusion by realizing that "Holy Father… righteous Father" (Jn. 17:11,25) was a form of address which the Lord had in a sense lifted from Moses when he addresses God as "righteous and holy" (Dt. 32:4 LXX).

17:12 *While I was with them, I kept them in Your Name which You have given me, and I guarded them; and not one of them perished except the son of perdition, so that the scripture might be fulfilled*- As noted on :11, the 'keeping' here refers to spiritual keeping in the Way and in all the things bound up in the Father's Name. The Lord had done this whilst physically with them, and now He was leaving them, He asks the Father to continue that keeping. His going to the Father meant the giving of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to the believers; and this was and is the means by which we are kept or guarded in the things of the Name. The only one the Lord had not 'kept' or spiritually preserved was Judas. This of itself shows that the keeping in view is spiritual preservation, a matter of the heart; and this is therefore the arena of operation of the Father's keeping, guarding work, performed by the Spirit given into the hearts of believers.

Again we see how the Lord speaks so positively of His weak followers at that time. For all their weakness, He had "kept" them; although 1 Jn. 5:21 uses the word in urging "keep yourselves from idols". The side of human volition is always present. But we are to "keep" ourselves "by the Holy Spirit which dwells in us" (2 Tim. 1:14 s.w.). This is how the Lord does His part. But we are to be open to it. We are "kept by the power [spirit] of God *through faith* unto salvation" (1 Pet. 1:5).

The Hebraism 'the son of...' referred to a person having the characteristics of what they were 'the son of'. Judas acted like a condemned person, and so he was one. The fulfilment of Scripture may not simply refer to specific predictions about Judas the betrayer, such as Ps. 109:8. The upcoming fulfilment of the Old Testament scriptures was to be in the Lord's death, and the idea may therefore be that Judas chose to be as he did, but this was used in God's wider plan in order to fulfil the Scriptures in the Lord's death.

17:13 *Now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy made full in themselves*- The Lord was aware that His private prayer was being spoken publically, out loud, and the disciples were listening and a transcript of it would be read by all generations afterwards. He spoke the prayer so publically because He wanted them to see what His relationship with the Father was like, and to have that same relationship with the Father. He wanted them to have 'His joy' in relationship with the Father experienced within them / us. The Lord's joy was in our salvation (Mt. 25:21,23), that spiritual being were born into the world of the new

cration (16:21) and human repentance (Lk. 15:7). By receiving the spirit of the Lord Jesus, His mindset becomes ours. His joy becomes our joy (15:11). This explains the Lord's exhortation to ask in His name so that their joy might be fulfilled (16:24). This doesn't simply refer to the joy of receiving a request which has earlier been requested in prayer. The fullness of joy received means having the Lord's joy within us; having His Spirit / mind / value set. This means that the thing asked for was the Comforter, the mind of Christ, His Spirit, which included His joy; the mindset which rejoices in the things He rejoices in. And they are the things of human salvation and the glorification of the Father's Name.

The Lord had foreseen most aspects of His death: the handing over, the picking up of the cross, the carrying it, the being lifted up. In Lk. 15:5 the Lord spoke about how He as the good shepherd would carry the lost sheep on His shoulders, *rejoicing*. It is tempting to connect this with the way Christ spoke of His *joy* just hours before He was arrested. I am not suggesting there was *any* joy at all for the Lord in His carrying of the cross- not in the way we understand joy. But perhaps to Him, in His vocabulary, "my joy" meant something else; as for Him, 'eating' meant not eating food but doing the Father's will (Jn. 4:34). Whatever "rejoicing", "my joy" meant for the Lord, He had that sense as He carried the cross on His shoulder.

17:14 *I have given them Your word, and the world hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world*- The Lord's gift of "Your word" surely doesn't mean that He presented them with a copy of the Bible, as it were. "I... give" are words found on the Lord's lips in John concerning His gift of the Spirit (4:14), of Himself on the cross as the bread of life (6:51), His glory (:22) and of His "example" in Himself and the person He was (13:26). The gift He gave in the immediate context was of the Comforter (14:16,27). God's word was "made flesh" according to the prologue, in the person of Jesus (1:14). Again, as noted earlier in John, "word" refers not simply to the literal Bible, but the expression of all a person is. God's "word" to men was in His Son, and the Lord had given Himself to the believers.

The disciples don't record much of the opposition they personally received. But here the Lord tells the Father that the Jewish world "hated" the disciples; in fulfilment of His comment that the Jewish world would "hate" any who testified of its wickedness (7:7). John develops this idea in a pastoral context in saying that it is the world who hates the Lord's people, and any who hates his brother in Christ is therefore of the world (1 Jn. 2:9,11; 3:15; 4:20). This all implies that the community of believers to whom John wrote had hatred against their brethren, and this marked them out as being of the Jewish world and not in fact believers at all. And the same powerful logic must be applied to all hatred within the church.

17:15 *I do not pray that You should take them out from the world, but that You should keep them from the evil*- The association of "evil" with "the world" is clear. And in John, "the world" usually refers to the Jewish world. Clearly it was Judaism which was the source of "evil" for the early Christians, explaining why it is referred to as the great "satan" / adversary in the later New Testament. It's observable that the Lord Jesus Himself prayed most parts of His model prayer in His own life situations. "Your will be done... Deliver us from evil" (Mt. 6:13; Lk. 11:4) were repeated by Him in Gethsemane, when He asked for God's will to be done and not His, and yet He prayed that *the disciples* would be delivered from evil. It is as if He prays the "Lord's prayer" for them; "keep them from the evil", although they should have been praying this for

themselves. And there are times when we likewise almost have to pray prayers for others which they ought to be praying themselves.

The Lord reasoned that by remaining in the world, as He had been in the world, they could be the light of the world. He therefore speaks of the day when they shall be cast out of the synagogues (16:2), which was spoken of by some Rabbis as being cast out of the Jewish world. He wanted them to remain as long as they could, and here He prays that the Father will enable this to happen- that they should not be taken out of the Jewish world. We see here His complete lack of any 'guilt by association' mentality.

17:16 *They are not of the world even as I am not of the world*- He Himself made the point that if His Kingdom- i.e. the people under His Kingship- were of this world, then they would fight for Him (18:36). And that is exactly what they tried to do in Gethsemane! They acted then as if they were indeed “of this world” by trying to fight for Jesus physically. And yet the Lord saw through to their inner spirit, and presented this to the Father as their being actually not of this world. The Lord's Heavenly origins, being "not of the world", are here imputed to His followers. His language of being from above and not from beneath therefore says nothing about any supposed personal pre-existence, or descent from Heaven to earth in some primitively literal sense. For all such language He applies here to His followers too.

To be "of the world" is later defined in 1 Jn. 2:16: "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vain glory of life, is not of the Father but is of the world". The Jewish world in which John's Jewish converts lived, for all its apparent righteousness and sanctimony, was structured around the liusts of the flesh and pride.

17:17 *Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth*- The reference is to how the Levites were sanctified (1 Chron. 23:13 Heb.). The Levites were initially consecrated in God's eyes by their zeal to rid Israel of apostacy; this is what constituted them Yahweh's "holy (sanctified) one" (Dt. 33:8,9). They sanctified themselves to God, and He sanctified them. Through His allusions to this, the Lord was telling the disciples not to be frightened to stand alone from the Israelite community they knew; for it was deeply apostate. So often, the Lord is speaking of the development of a new Israel, with new Rabbis and Levites taken from the ranks of very ordinary and dysfunctional people who had believed in Him.

The teaching here is complemented and explained by :19: "And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they may also be sanctified in truth". They were sanctified in Him; because the Lord was supremely sanctified, holy in character, He was fitted for Divine service *par excellence*. And all that was true of Him was to be true of those in Him, as Paul later develops. They were sanctified because they were in Him, the supremely sanctified One. So "Sanctify them in the truth" is parallel with being sanctified on account of being in Him. "The truth" is therefore a reference to Himself personally, as in 14:6. And that is confirmed by the statement: "Your word is truth". The prologue is clear that the Divine word was the Lord Jesus personally, made flesh in Him. The "word" of God in His Son refers to all we have seen and known of Him in Christ. That is the ultimate "truth" by whcih we are to live. It is nothing but shoddy Biblical workmanship which superimposes the words "Your word is truth" over pictures of open Bibles. The Bible is indeed God's word and is true. But that is simply not in view here. God's word in John is clearly the Lord Jesus personally, who is "the truth". If the Lord intended us here to understand God's word as the Scriptures which comprise the Bible, He surely would have used some other term apart from *logos*.

And how can we be sanctified by a book, even an inspired one? It is simply not so that Bible reading of itself makes us sanctified. Verse 19 is quite clear that we are sanctified through being "in Christ", on account of *His* sanctification.

17:18 *As You sent me into the world, even so I send them into the world*- The Son was "sanctified and sent into the world" (Jn. 10:36). And yet we too are sanctified (Jn. 17:17,19), and likewise sent into the world (Mk. 16:15). The basis of our sanctification is our being in Christ (see on :17,19). The priestly service which is in view in the term 'sanctified' is therefore that of taking the Gospel to the world. As the Lord was sent into the world, so He sends us into the world [Jn. 14:12; 17:18; 20:21 - this is again John's equivalent of the great commission]. God sent forth Christ to save the world, and likewise we are sent forth in witness (Gal. 4:4 cp. Mt. 9:38; 22:3; Acts 13:4). As He was sent into the world, so He sent us (Jn. 17:18).

We note again that the language of sending into the world is applied to us as well as to the Lord. It simply does not mean that He pre-existed and was somehow sent from Heaven down to earth in some metaphysical sense. For that is not how *we* are sent into the world.

"The world" in John often refers to the Jewish world. John is presenting the great commission in terms of going into the Jewish world as the Lord was sent into it. Whilst the great commission is universal in scope, we should not miss this initial intention- to go out and bring the Jewish world to faith in the One first sent to them with the Gospel.

17:19 *And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they may also be sanctified in truth*- The Lord's death was the final act of sanctification in His holy life. If we venture to enquire how exactly He achieved what He did, what His motivations were... we are entering holy ground. But here He states that He did it "for their sakes", so that we might be sanctified in Him, "the truth" (see on :17,18). His vision, however, was that we would not simply be 'saved' but 'sanctified', which as explained on :17 is a clear allusion to priestly service. He sanctified Himself so that in Him, we would be sanctified- to do priestly service. And the service particularly in view, as noted on :18, was to be sent into the world to save others. We are therefore expected to be proactive in our response to Him. Quite simply, if we behold and believe the things of the cross, we will respond.

Clearly the allusion is to the sanctification of the High Priest, that the other priests might be sanctified for service. The Lord's prayerful desire was that we should not be passive to His death, but rather take it as a means for us to be sanctified for active service. This is why there are so many allusions to the priesthood here. As the Levites "are mine", so the disciples are called 'God's'. As they were "given" to Aaron, so the sanctified disciples, sanctified through the cross, are to be "given" to the Lord to do His priestly work amongst men. As Aaron "put My Name upon the children of Israel" (Num. 6:27), so the Lord keeps us in the Father's Name.

17:20 *Neither for these only do I pray, but for those also that believe in me through their word*- The word preached was in order that others like us "believe in me". The content of the word preached is therefore the Lord Jesus and belief into Him. He personally, and not solely the results of the salvation He achieved ["the Kingdom of God"], is to be the focus of the word preached. As noted on :18 and :19, the Lord has in view that the sanctification of the believers will be so that they can do priestly service- which is to take the Gospel to the world.

In the same way as John matches the more literal accounts of the birth of Jesus with a more spiritual interpretation in Jn. 1, so he likewise refers to the great commission, expressing it in more spiritual terms throughout his gospel. I bring together here some comments that have been made elsewhere in this commentary, to show the number of allusions:

- Jn. 10:32: "If I be lifted up from [RVmg. 'out of'] the earth, will draw all men unto me". Straight after the Lord's death and resurrection the great commission was given, to bring all men unto Him and His cross.
- God sanctified / consecrated the Lord Jesus and sent Him into the world (Jn. 10:36). But this sanctification was through His death on the cross (Jn. 17:19). The Lord was sanctified on the cross and sent into the world in the sense that we His people would be impelled by His cross to take Him into all the world. *We* would be sent into all the world in His Name.
- *As* the Lord was sent into the world, so He sends us into the world (Jn. 14:12; 17:18; 20:21)- the very language of the great commission. Jesus 'came down' to this world in the sense that He was the word of the Father made flesh, and 'all men' saw the light of grace that was radiated from His very being. And that same word must be flesh in us, as it was in the Lord.
- In Jn. 12:23-26, the Lord foretold aspects of His coming sacrifice: "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit [spoken in the context of potential Gentile converts]. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it... if any man serve me, let him follow me". Here the Lord goes on to assume that His death, His falling into the ground, would be matched by His followers also hating their lives, that they might rise again. And He connects His death with glorification. Soon afterwards, the Lord spoke of how his followers would likewise "bear much fruit", and thus *glorify* God. And in this context He continues with words which can be read as John's record of the great preaching commission: "I have chosen you... that ye should *go* [cp. "Go ye into all the world..."] and bring forth fruit" (Jn. 15:8,16). Clearly the Lord connected His bringing forth of "much fruit" through His death with the same "much fruit" being brought forth by the disciples' witness. It follows from this that the fruit which He potentially achieved on the cross is brought to reality by our preaching. And perhaps it is also possible to see a parallel between our preaching and His laying down of His life on the cross, as if the work of witness is in effect a laying down of life by the preacher, in order to bring forth fruit.
- The whole world is to know the Gospel because of the unity of the believers (Jn. 17:18,21,23); and it follows that a situation will arise in which the extraordinary nature of true Christian solidarity over linguistic, ethnic, social and geographical lines will make a similar arresting, compelling witness as it did in the first century. The Lord had prophesied that His followers over time "shall become one flock" (Jn. 10:16 RV); they would be "perfected into one, that the world may know" (Jn. 17:23 RV). As the Gospel spreads world-wide in the last days, the unity of the believers will become all the more comprehensive, and this will of itself provoke yet more conversions. And once the fullness of unity is achieved, our communal way of life will have hastened the coming of the Lord (2 Pet. 3).
- Matthew and Mark record how the apostles were *sent* to preach the Gospel and baptize, for the *forgiveness* of sins (cp. Acts 2:38). Luke records the Lord stating that the apostles knew that *forgiveness of sins* was to be preached from Jerusalem, and therefore they should be witnesses to this. I would suggest that John's Gospel does in

fact record the great commission, but in different and more spiritual words: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you...If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven” (Jn. 20:21,23 NIV). These words have always been problematic for me, especially that last phrase. Can God’s forgiveness really be limited by the forgiveness shown by fallible men? Yet if these words are taken as a record of the great commission to go and preach, and the ellipsis is filled in, things become clearer: ‘I am sending you to preach the Gospel and baptism of forgiveness; if you do this and men respond, then the Gospel you preach really does have the power to bring about forgiveness. But if you don’t fulfil the commission I give you to preach forgiveness, then the sins of your potential hearers will remain unforgiven’. Again, the forgiveness and salvation of others is made to depend upon our preaching of forgiveness. “Whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained” becomes the equivalent of “he that believeth not shall be damned”. Note that the Greek for ‘retain’ strictly means ‘to hold / bind’, and that for ‘remit’ means ‘to loose’. This has evident connection with Mt. 16:19, where the keys of the Gospel of the Kingdom (which we all possess) have the power to bind and loose, i.e. to grant or not grant forgiveness. Jn. 15:8,16 also has some reference to the great commission: “…so shall ye be my disciples…that *ye should go* [into all the world] and bear fruit, and that your fruit [converts?] should abide”. The eternal life of the converts is a fruit brought forth by the preacher’s obedience to his Lord’s commission. Likewise through the preaching of John, he turned men’s hearts- the idea of repentance, being brought about by the preacher (Mal. 4:6).
- “These are written [“in this book” of John’s Gospel] that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ…and that believing ye may have life in his name” (Jn. 20:31 RV)- belief, life, “in his name”, these are all references to the great commission. It’s as if John is saying that he fulfilled it by the writing and preaching of his Gospel record. John's equivalent to an appeal for baptism may be his concluding appeal to believe that Jesus is the Christ, and as a result of that belief, to receive life "in his name" - into which we are baptized.

John's record of the great commission is not merely found at the end of his gospel. When John records how the disciples were to proclaim "the word" to the world (Jn. 17:20), he is surely intending connection to be made with how "the word" had likewise been made flesh in the Lord Jesus (Jn. 1:14); and how it was that same " word" which Jesus had given to His men, just as His Father had manifested that word through Himself. Our witness is to be in our making flesh of the word in real life, just as it was in the Lord.

17:21- see on Jn. 13:35.

That they may all be one, even as You, Father, are in me and I in You, that they may also be one in us; that the world may believe You did send me- As noted on 14:2,3 and throughout the Comforter discourse, the Lord intended that the relationship He had with the Father ("where I am") would be experienced by all those who received His Spirit. The unity in view here is expressed in a slightly ambiguous way because it is two-fold. Unity between the believer and the Son and Father; and thereby unity between each other, between preacher and convert, and convert and convert. This would be achieved through being together "in us", as the Son and Father mutually indwellt each other. The source of this indwelling was the Spirit; 1 Jn. 4:13 alludes here: "Hereby we know that we abide in him and He in us, because He has given us of his Spirit". Those who resist the idea of the indwelling Spirit are

invariably not at one with their brethren, and thereby not at one with the Father and Son. For it is through the mutual indwelling of the Spirit that He is in us and we in Him; and thereby we are all one with each other.

The laying down of the Shepherd's life was so that the flock might be one, in one fold (Jn. 10:15,16). The offering of the blood of Christ was *so that* He might "make in himself... one new man" (Eph. 2:15). Thus the theme of unity dominated the Lord's mind as He prepared for His death. "For their sakes I sanctify myself [in the death of the cross]... that they all may be one" (Jn. 17:19,21). The glory of God would be the source of this unity in Christ (Jn. 17:22); and that Name and glory were declared supremely on the cross (Jn. 12:28; 17:26). The grace, mercy, judgment of sin, the goodness and severity of God (Ex. 34:5-7)... all these things, as demonstrated by the cross, bind men together. And thus in practice, both a too strict and also too loose attitude to doctrine and practice, an unbalanced understanding of the glory of God, will never bring unity.

This unique unity, the "unity of the Spirit", brought about by the indwelling of the Spirit (see on Eph. 4:3), will be so compelling that the world, initially the Jewish world, would believe that the Father sent the Son. It would be apparent that this unity had been created by Jesus of Nazareth, who therefore was no ordinary man, but the One supremely sent by the Father. In this thought we see continued the many allusions in this section to the great commission. The sanctification of the Son, the indwelling of the Spirit, unity between us and with the Father... all this was to be harnessed in the work of winning others for His cause.

We naturally ask why, therefore, the world, both our world and the Jewish world of John's time, have not all believed. It could be that they do not believe simply because as with the witness of the Lord, they for the most part choose to disbelieve it and reject it, lest their lives be too disturbed. But it could be that the dysfunction of the church, which is characterized by its disunity rather than unity, has meant that the potential conversion of the world to Christ has not happened.

17:22 *And the glory which You have given me, I have given to them, that they may be one, even as we are one*- The glory given to Moses was nothing compared to that given to the Lord. By beholding that glory in the face of the Lord Jesus, it shines off from our faces too (2 Cor. 3:18). The glory is potentially given, but it is only by beholding it in the face of the Lord that it becomes real for us. The faces of the disciples at that time, as they watched the Lord praying, were anything but glorious. They fled from Him, and went fishing instead of being enthused by His resurrection. But so much was made potentially available to them. The glory that would soon shine from the Lord's face when He was arrested was theirs, already.

"The glory" has associations with the Name declared at Sinai, and now even moreso in the person of God's Son. Connect :6,8,22: "I have manifested Thy Name unto the men which Thou gavest Me... I have given unto them the words Thou gavest Me... the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them". Indeed, so much was "given" to the believers by the Lord. He gave them the essence of Himself, His Spirit; the prologue says they were given "power to becomes the Sons of God" (1:12). The idea of the gift of glory is associated with the gift of the Spirit in Eph. 3:14-18 where the same words are used and again connected with unity between those who possess the Spirit: "I bow my knees to the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that He would *grant* ["give"] you, according to the riches of His *glory*, that you may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man. That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, to the end that you would be rooted and

grounded in love, that you might be able to comprehend with all the saints". The gift of glory therefore sums up everything- the very essence of the Father and Son, their word, their Spirit, the Name. The receipt of those things will issue in unity between us. In this sense the gift of "glory" is what enables our unity both with the Father and Son as well as with each other.

Repeatedly, unity between believers is presented as reflecting the unity between the Father and Son which they experienced during the Lord's life. But the unity between God and the Lord Jesus wasn't a case of uniformity. We see in Gethsemane how the Father's will was not that of the Son ["not My will, but Yours..."]. Unity is not therefore a case of total collapsing of personal boundaries, nor is it unanimity of will. This dispels many unrealistic myths about what unity is. Those mythical, idealistic views of "unity" never come to observed reality anyway. But to put it crudely, Jesus is not God. Their unity is more profound than that; and likewise, unity between believers is deeper than simply adopting identical positions on issues.

17:23 *I in them and You in me, that they may be perfected into one, that the world may know You did send me and that You have loved them just as You loved me*- The unity envisaged was a process; the indwelling of the Father in the Son, and they in us, is by the Spirit (1 Jn. 4:13). But as noted earlier, we are progressively filled with the Spirit, it is not a one-time gift. And there is therefore this process of perfecting into one. It could be that once the believing community are truly filled with the Spirit and one with each other, that they will finally convince the [Jewish] world of the Father's love. John alludes here in later writing that love between believers is the sign of this perfecting process developing: "If we love one another, God dwells in us ["I in them and you in me"], and His love is perfected in us" (1 Jn. 4:12). It is not God's love of itself must be perfected or matured; as we mature in love to each other, and thereby unity, His love is declared in an ongoing sense. The idea of our love being perfected and thereby the outcome of God's love being perfected is quite a theme (1 Jn. 2:5; 4:12,17,18).

We have suggested elsewhere that the great commission is repeated in John's Gospel but in more spiritual language. The whole world is to know the Gospel because of the unity of the believers (Jn. 17:18,21,23); and it follows that a situation will arise in which the extraordinary nature of true Christian solidarity over linguistic, ethnic, social and geographical lines will make a similar arresting, compelling witness as it did in the first century. The Lord had prophesied that His followers over time "shall become one flock" (Jn. 10:16 RV); they would be "perfected into one, that the world may know" (Jn. 17:23 RV). He surely hoped this would have become true in the first century. As the Gospel spreads world-wide in the last days, the unity of the believers will become all the more comprehensive, and this will of itself provoke yet more conversions. It could have been like this in the first century- for Eph. 3:9 speaks of how the unity of Jew and Gentile would "make all men see" the Gospel. This is the urgency of Paul's appeal for unity in Ephesians- he knew that their unity was the intended witness to the world which the Lord had spoken of as the means of the fulfilment of the great commission in Jn. 17:21-23. But sadly, Jew and Gentile went their separate ways in the early church, and the possibility of world-converting witness evaporated.

This almost uncanny sense of unity is referred to in Eph. 4:3 as "*the* unity"; although, as Paul shows, the *keeping* and experience of that unity is dependent upon our patience with each other and maintenance of "the one faith" (i.e. the unifying faith

that gives rise to the one body). This unity is potentially powerful enough to convert the world. Through it, "the world may know", “the world may believe" (Jn. 17:21,23). And yet, in Johanine thought, "the world may know" was a result of the Lord's death (Jn. 14:31), and yet also of the love that would be between His people (Jn. 13:35). The Lord's death would potentially inspire such a love between His people that their resultant unity would let the world know the love of the Father and Son. Paul alludes to all this when he says that because of the new unity and fellowship between Jew and Gentile, "all men (would) see”, and even to the great princes and powers of this world would be made known by the united church "the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:9-11). The miraculous Spirit gifts were given, Paul argues, to bring the Jewish and Gentile believers together, “for the perfecting (uniting) of the saints", into "a perfect man", a united body. And thus, once Jewish and Gentile differences were resolved within the ecclesia by the end of the first century, the gifts were withdrawn.

The Lord had prophesied that His followers over time “shall become one flock” (Jn. 10:16 RV); they would be “perfected into one, that the world may know” (Jn. 17:23 RV). He surely hoped this would have become true in the first century. And it could have been like this in the first century- for Eph. 3:9 speaks of how the unity of Jew and Gentile would “make all men see” the Gospel. This is the urgency of Paul’s appeal for unity in Ephesians- he knew that their unity was the intended witness to the world which the Lord had spoken of as the means of the fulfilment of the great comission in Jn. 17:21-23. But sadly, Jew and Gentile went their separate ways in the early church, unity in the church broke up, and the possibility of world-converting witness evaporated. Seeing the great commission is to be powerfully obeyed in our last days, we simply *must* learn the lesson.

17:24- see on Jn. 7:34.

Father, I desire that they also whom You have given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which You have given me. For You loved me from before the foundation of the world- The glory given before the foundation of the world (:5) is paralleled here with God's love for His Son at that same time. These terms such as "glory" and "love" are all parallel, and do not require too much specific definition. To behold or perceive the Lord's glory, which was the Father's glory, was to "be where I am", which was the whole intention of His death. For He died so that His Spirit would be given to us, that where "I am" in His relationship with the Father, there we might be also (14:2,3). To be where He was meant to behold or perceive the glory; to perceive in Him, a 33 year old Palestinian Jew, of a certain blood type and plasma, son of a hairdresser from a Nazareth back street, covered in blood and spittle on a Roman cross, on a day in April, on a hill just outside Jerusalem, tormented by flies... the sublimest glory of God.

It could be that His request is therefore specifically that His disciples should be with Him at the cross- "I will that where I am, there they may also be" (Jn. 17:24 RV- hence John's emphasis that he really did behold Him there). He so wishes for us to at least try to stand with Him there and enter into it all. See on Lk. 22:15. But more than physical presence, He desired that they would perceive the crucifixion as the manifestation of glory, after the pattern of the theophany of Exodus 34.

Love before the foundation of the world is a reference to the description of Moses as having been prepared in God’s plan from the beginning: “He prepared me [Moses] before the foundation of the world, that I should be the mediator of His covenant” (*Assumption of Moses* 1.14). Once we appreciate this and other such allusions to

popular Jewish belief about Moses, then the passages which appear to speak of personal pre-existence are easier to understand. The Jews didn't believe that Moses personally pre-existed, but rather that he was there in the plan / purpose of God, and with the major role in that purpose, from before creation. The Lord was applying those beliefs and that language to Himself, showing that He was greater than Moses. But by doing so, He wasn't implying that He personally pre-existed.

"That they may behold my glory" connects with the statement in the prologue that they *did* behold His glory, as if to say that the Lord's request here was indeed granted. His glory was especially manifested in His death. "Where I am" and His future glorificaton are linked into one and the same event, even though the glorification was not then apparent. This use of language is to be connected with the way John's Gospel speaks several times of the hour coming, and yet having already come (Jn. 4:23; 5:25; 16:32). I have suggested that all these references have application to the Lord's death.

He tells the Father in prayer: "I will [NEV "desire"] that they… be with me" and yet elsewhere in the same prayer He says "I *pray* that…" (Jn. 17:9,15,20). Our will is essentially our prayer, just as His will was His prayer. If our will is purely God's will, we will receive answers to every prayer. And yet our will is not yet coincidental with His; even the will of the Son was not perfectly attuned to that of the Father (Lk. 22:42; Jn. 5:30; 6:38), hence the unanswered prayer for immediate deliverance from the cross. Yet as we grow spiritually, the will of God will be more evident to us, and we will only ask for those things which are according to His will. And thus our experience of answered prayer will be better and better, which in turn will provide us with even more motivation for faith in prayer. The Lord Jesus is the great example in all this. The implications of our will becoming God's will, of the sacrifice of our natural will, are enormous. Our will is the thing we cling to the most, and only give up at the very last. Our will alone is what we truly have, our dearest thing- and we are called to sacrifice it. I see in the OT significance of the blood poured out far more than merely our physical life force- rather does it further symbolize our essential will.

17:25 *O righteous Father, the world did not know You; but I knew You, and these knew that You sent me*- The Jewish world rejected the light of the person of Jesus, as stated in the prologue. By rejecting Him they rejected knowledge of / relationship with the Father. The Lord balances the idea of 'knowing God' with 'knowing that You sent Me'. He is aware that the disciples still have not fully known Him nor the Father (14:8-10). But He sees in their recognition that He was sent from God the potential for further development, into knowing the Father. His words here are therefore an indirect request, rather than a mere statement of fact. He wishes that through the Spirit, they would progress from knowing that He was sent from God, to fully knowing the Father. We recall how Nicodemus is presented as initially recognizing that the Lord was "from God", but coming to fuller faith through the experience of the cross.

17:26 *And I declared to them Your Name, and will declare it, so that the love with which You loved me may be in them, and I in them*- The second declaration of the Name was in the cross. On 19:19-22 I note that the Name was particularly declared upon the cross, and that the title over the cross in Hebrew was comprised of four words, the first letter of each spelling the YHWH Name. All the words of God, the essence of His Name, were summed up in that death. "I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me... I have declared unto them thy name" (:8, 26). "I have proclaimed the name of the Lord" (Dt. 32:3 LXX) was surely in the Lord's mind; Moses did that just before his death. Particularly on the cross we see the very essence

of love, which is at the core of the Name. Having loved His own, He loved us there unto the end, to the end of the very concept of love and beyond (Jn. 13:1). He knew that in His death, He would shew "greater love" than any man had or could show. There He declared the Name and character of God, so that the love of God would be within us. "Hereby perceive we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:16 Gk.). The death of the cross was therefore the very definition of love; love is a crucifixion-love, a conscious doing of that which is against the grain of our nature. We *must therefore* respond by showing that love to our brethren. It is not an option. To be unloving is to deny the very essence of the cross of Christ.

The idea of indwelling love again alludes to the indwelling of the Spirit, which was given to us through the Lord's surrender to us of His spirit on the cross. It is through the Lord's indwelling of us in this way that we love one another as He loved us. This is why John's letters have so much to say about love, and about how hatred of our brethren is a sign that we are not spiritual, are not indwellt by the spirit of the Son.

JOHN CHAPTER 18

18:1 *When Jesus had spoken these words, he went with his disciples over the brook Kidron, where there was a garden into which he and his disciples entered*- We have the impression that having offered Himself to the Father in speaking those words of prayer in chapter 17, the Lord now purposefully went forth "unto the Father". It was as if He had planned it all; He knew that Judas would guess that he would likely spend the night in that garden, and would be on the lookout for Him there to have Him arrested discreetly. And so He went to that very place. His life was not taken from Him, He gave it of Himself (10:18); the whole situation and timing of His death was brought about by His supreme perception of human psychology, and He thereby arranged the whole scene, getting the stage perfectly ready for the actors to walk on and act exactly as He had set them up to.

18:2 *Now Judas, the one who betrayed him, also knew the place. For Jesus often met there with his disciples*- As noted on :1, the Lord went there because He knew Judas would guess that He would go there to spend the night. And the Lord was right; Judas was hanging out there with a band of soldiers, guessing the Lord would go there. We note in passing that the Lord was unlike any other great teacher; He literally spent nights sleeping rough. Surely there were some who invited Him to stay at their place, and it would not have been impossible for them to have slept where they kept the last support or to have walked out to Bethany. But the Lord went to Gethsemane because He knew that Judas would guess He might go there.

18:3 *Judas along with a detachment of temple guards whom he had been given, and the servants of the chief priests, and the Pharisees, arrived there with lanterns and torches and weapons*- As noted on :1,2, Judas went there because he guessed that the Lord would spent the night sleeping rough there, rather than walk out to Bethany or stay with other sympathizers in Jerusalem. The Lord knew he would think like that, and went along with the plan which He Himself had set up. He was not overtaken by events and murdered; rather did He give His life just when and how He wished, setting up the entire situation which would enable Him to die as the Passover lambs were being slain, on that particular Passover, by crucifixion, at Romans hands but at the behest of the Jews, with the masses turned against Him as well as their leaders. As

noted on the triumphal entry, this was why He set the crowds up to be bitterly disillusioned in Him by His inversion of all their values and expectations. Judas had prepared the men, on the off chance he would be right and the Lord would indeed go and sleep rough in Gethsemane that night. He must have been so glad his bet paid off, and the men with him would not have wasted their efforts; for a *speira* "detachment", was about 200 men, and some of the chief priests themselves were present (Lk. 22:52). But he was fulfilling the exact plan of the Lord. Hence RV "Judas *therefore...*". It was all set up by the Lord. They came with lanterns and torches, despite the full moon of Passover, because they assumed He might hide somewhere in the Kidron ravine once He saw them coming. But the Lord went out and gave Himself over to them.

18:4 *Jesus knowing all the things that must come upon him, went forward and said to them: Whom do you seek?*- As noted on :1-3, the Lord had set up the entire situation, and it was going exactly according to His plan. So it was knowing how His plan was going to work out that He went forward to surrender to them; we should not at all read this as any kind of fatalism and grim submission to inevitable events which were overtaking Him. Just as the ending of our lives, through illness or old age, is not to be met in this way, but rather as a conscious giving of life to the Father.

"Whom do you seek?" is again another question which jumps out of the record to challenge all hearers and readers; as if to say 'And whom do *you* seek?'. He knew they knew, and that they knew that He knew... So why ask the question? It was surely to elicit in them the words and understanding that 'We seek Jesus'. For these are the words the Gospel writers place on the lips of those who wished to believe in Him (Mt. 28:5; Jn. 1:38; 20:15). The Lord's desire to witness to all men, to attempt to save even His persecutors, stands as all time a challenge to us to emulate in evangelism and by all means seeking to share the Gospel with all. Paul in his trials caught the spirit of all this, in attempting to even convert his judges.

18:5- see on Mt. 26:75; Jn. 18:17.

They answered him: Jesus of Nazareth- As noted on :4, the Lord had elicited from them the statement 'We seek Jesus', which is associated with belief in Him. He was by all means seeking to convert them even at that dark hour.

Jesus said to them: I am he (Judas, the one who betrayed him, was standing with them)- The Lord was a well known public figure in Jerusalem. The way Judas kissed the Lord to identify Him to them may however indicate that some of these Roman soldiers were not aware of Him. "I am he" was clearly a reference to the Yahweh Name. He had put the position in their mouths: 'We seek Jesus'. And in answer to that search, He presented Himself as the fullness of God manifest in flesh.

18:6 *When he said to them: I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground*- His declaration of the Yahweh Name (see on :6) was accompanied by some kind of theophany, so that they fell to the ground, just as Saul did before the encounter with the glorified Jesus. To now arrest 'the man with the face of God' was going to be difficult for them; it would involve a wilful denial of the obvious.

18:7 *Again he asked them: Whom do you seek? And they said: Jesus of Nazareth*- As noted previously, the Lord was seeking to convert them, eliciting from them the statement that 'We seek Jesus', which is elsewhere found on the lips of believers in Him (Mt. 28:5; Jn. 1:38; 20:15). But now they had seen His face flash with the glory of God, and had fallen to the ground before Him, He urged them not to do the apparently psychologically inevitable, but to stop in their tracks and continue seeking Him in truth. This desire to convert them, to help them even at that late stage to pull

out of their nose dive to condemnation, reveals so much about the whole spirit of the Lord.

18:8 *Jesus answered: I told you that I am he. If therefore you seek me, let these go their way*- So often we read that the Lord told the Jews that He was God's Son, but they refused to believe. The same words are found in 10:25: "I told you and you believed not". And so it was now; the Lord had told them, shown them through the theophany that "I am", but they refused to believe. He had set up a situation whereby they were going to do to Him what they knew was wrong, and they knew He realized that. And so He asks them for a small favour- to let the disciples go free. Again, His understanding of human psychology was magnificent. He so knew and knows us, and we can therefore in all ways be assured that His judgment will be just, and will take into total account every psychological nuance and factor when judging us.

18:9 *That the word might be fulfilled which he spoke: Of those whom you have given me I lost not one*- This suggests that the Lord's 'keeping' of the disciples in His lifetime was physical as well as spiritual (17:12), and this explains why when speaking about their forthcoming tribulation at the hands of the world, He assures them that His physical departure will not mean that He will not continue to "keep" them; see on 16:4. For He would do so through the ministry of the Comforter, the advocate, the legal counsel for the defence.

18:10 *Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. Now the servant's name was Malchus*- The Lord knew that Peter had a sword / knife hidden in his garment when in Gethsemane. But He did nothing; He didn't use His knowledge of Peter's weakness to criticise him. He knew that the best way was to just let it be, and then the miracle of healing Malchus must have more than convinced Peter that the Lord's men should not use the sword. For their Master had healed, not murdered, one of the men sent to arrest Him. The Lord perhaps knew what Peter would do, for it was not hard to guess, knowing his temperament. The healing of Malchus' ear was therefore planned; for usually the Lord did not address human need but only did His "works" as a witness to His Heavenly origins; John's Gospel records this several times. The miracle was therefore yet another desperate appeal to those arresting Him to not go ahead with their plan. They did so having witnessed directly the Lord's Divine authentication. They were totally culpable, although they would have later given the excuse that they had followed a multitude to do evil; for to break ranks at that stage was indeed difficult.

18:11 *Jesus said to Peter: Put the sword into its sheath. The cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?*- In prayer earlier, the Lord had totally accepted the cup, despite asking for it to be removed (Mt. 26:39). So Peter's resistance to the idea of the Lord drinking the cup was in fact shared by the Lord, but He consented. We see here yet another of John's cameos of the Lord's utter humanity and connection with men. Peter had intended to kill Malchus, and only by dodging the blow aimed at his head did he survive, although the sword blow removed his ear. For all time we see that violent resistance to evil is not the Christian way.

18:12 *So the detachment of temple guards and their chief captain and the magistrates' attendants of the Jews seized Jesus and bound him*- The word for "detachment" could mean there were a few hundred armed men present; so Peter's attempt to murder Malchus was futile. But he may well have know Malchus, for John knew the high priest, whose personal servant Malchus was. It is not impossible that Peter aimed for him in particular to settle some old perceived score.

18:13 *And led him to Annas first. For he was father in law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year*- All through the record, we see the Jews' disobedience to the law. A high priest was to be for life, and there were not to be joint high priests nor agreement they could have power just for a specific period. Likewise weapons were not to be carried at the time of the feasts, but these men were armed.

18:14 *It was Caiaphas that had counselled the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people*- The record in John places particular blame upon Caiaphas, who is called "the prince of this [Jewish] world", who had particular responsibility for the Lord's death. This statement placed here implies again that it was Caiaphas who was behind it all.

18:15 *Simon Peter followed Jesus*- The Lord had specifically told Peter that he could not follow Him (13:36). If Peter had given due weight to the Lord's words and not overrated his own strength, he would not have followed, and led himself into temptation too great for him. This basic tendency to assume we shall not give in to temptation is very much part of us as humans, and in the Biblical record we have so much encouragement to face up to the fact and humble ourselves in recognizing it.

And so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest; and he entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest- John, the disciple beloved by his Lord, brings out the apparent paradox- that he was 'on friendly terms with the High Priest', the great 'satan' of the early Christians, Caiaphas being presented as "the prince of this world" with especial responsibility for the Lord's death; and yet also 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'. When John knew full well that the Lord Jesus had taught that a man cannot be friends of both Him and of the persecuting world. Again we see the Gospel preachers / writers bringing out their own weakness as a platform upon which to appeal to other weak people to likewise believe as they had done. Quite how it was that John knew Caiaphas isn't clear; it could be that his family fishing business provided salt for the temple and therefore he knew Caipahas from business dealings. If indeed Salome was John's mother and also the sister or relative of Mary the Lord's mother, then he may well have had priestly connections in the family.

18:16 *But Peter was standing outside the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the maid who kept watch at the door*- If John was known to the high priest and his servants, he would have been known as a disciple of Jesus. His identification with Peter as his friend was therefore a quite obvious invitation for everyone to assume that Peter was also a disciple of the Lord. And just a few hours ago, he had attempted to murder Malchus, who would have been known to all in the yard. Any denial from Peter about his association with the Lord, let alone claiming he had never heard of Him, was doomed to failure. If only he had not followed, accepting the Lord's warning of 13:36 that he could not follow Him yet, he would have gotten into the wretched situation he did. And we can retro analyze our own failings in just the same way.

18:17 *The maid keeping watch at the door said to Peter: Are you also one of this man's disciples? He said: I am not!*- Again the challenge comes out of the record to all hearers and readers: 'Are you one of this man's disciples?'. Although the Lord was not standing amongst them, all the talk was about "this man". Again we see His utter humanity. That the girl would speak like this is utterly credible and again reminds us that the Biblical record is true. These words were actually said, these things really happened.

The failure of Peter is effectively emphasized by the very structure of the Gospel accounts. John frames the interrogation of the Lord as happening alongside the

interrogation of Peter. The Lord peerlessly and bravely witnesses to the Truth, and is condemned to death for it; whilst Peter flunks the issue time and again to save his own skin. Whilst the Lord unflinchingly declares His identity before the High Priest, Peter is presented as doing anything to deny his identity as a disciple. Peter's denials are presented by the records as if in slow motion, for the reader to gaze upon in detail. Peter's denial "I am not" is placed by John in purposeful juxtaposition to the Lord's brave self-identification in Gethsemane: *ego eimi*, "I am" (Jn. 18:5,17). And yet this 'setting up' of the leader of the early church as a failure was done *by* the early church writers, ultimately inspired as they were! The Gospel writers were *glorying* in their weakness and their Lord's supremacy. They were standing up for their unity with Him by grace, but openly and pointedly proclaiming the vast mismatch between them and Him.

18:18- see on Mt. 26:75; Lk. 22:32.

Now the servants and the officers were standing there, having made a fire of coals. For it was cold, and they were warming themselves; and Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself- The extra information about the fire being of charcoal coals was in order to highlight the similarity with the Lord's later appearance to Peter, again by a charcoal fire, where the three denials are as it were undone by three asservations of loyalty. "The servants and the officers" refers to the very same group who had just arrested the Lord in the garden. In the full Passover moon, they would surely have discerned Peter, and known that it was he who had tried to murder Malchus their colleague. These background factors made Peter's attempts to deny the Lord all the more hopeless, just as hopeless as trying to defend the Lord against a few hundred armed men by trying to kill one of them. Peter is thereby presented as not simply hotheaded, but rather simple, not thinking through the obvious outcome of situations. And yet he, the one with simple loyalty and the sins of a simple man, was the one chosen to establish the Lord's church. The record thereby appeals to the simple, that the Lord's way and even responsibility in His church is for them too.

18:19 *The high priest asked Jesus about his disciples and his teaching*- The Lord knew that Peter was out there in the yard and would deny Him three times. And yet when asked about His disciples, He speaks so positively about them (see on :21). The legal ground for condemnation was the Lord's claims in relation to God and the destruction of the temple. These were all issues directly connected with Him personally rather than His disciples, who were in any case not present to answer for themselves. So it could be that the questioning about them was a way of humiliation before coming to the actual allegations. He had converted a rag tag band of fishermen and simple folk like Peter, who had now fled from the garden. He had made no disciples, apparently. And the masses had turned against Him because of His purposeful disappointment of their Messianic expectations in His parody of a triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

The cross is realistically intended to be lived out in daily experience. The record of the crucifixion and trials of the Lord are framed in language which would have been relevant to the first hearers of the Gospel as they too faced persecution and suffering for their faith. John's account of the interrogation of the Lord by the Jewish leaders, accusing Him of being a false prophet, was surely written in the way it was to provide encouragement to John's converts [the "Johannine community" as theologians refer to it] to see how their court appearances before the Jews were in fact a living out of their Lord's cross. They too were to 'speak openly to the world' and 'bear witness to

the truth before the world', living out the cross in the way in which they responded to the great commission.

18:20 *Jesus answered him: I have spoken openly to the world. I often taught in the synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together, and have never spoken in secret*- Again we see how "the world" in John refers specifically to the Jewish world, "all the Jews". From what the Lord says here, He did not teach one thing in public and another more secretly to the disciples. He did not give them special knowledge which the masses were forbidden. As taught so often in John, the Lord was the open manifestation of truth to all; He was the light, shining in darkness. There was nothing "secret" about what He stood for. He likewises asks us to be a city set on a hill, which cannot be kept secret (Mt. 5:14), being the light of the world as He was. Our witness to Him should likewise be open and direct; so much of the 'social Gospel' approach is indirect and amounts to doing the same good works done by unbelievers, without the direct and up front manifestation of the light which was characteristic of the Lord's witness.

18:21 *Why do you ask me? Ask those that have heard me what I spoke to them. Behold, these know the things which I said*- The Lord was rather critical of the disciples when speaking directly with them, especially concerning their lack of understanding and recall of His previous teachings. But in prayer to the Father in chapter 17 and now in talking about them to others, He is extremely positive about them; just as He is about us with all our weaknesses of understanding and behaviour. He states here that those who heard Him, His disciples (:19), could tell anyone what He had taught. He is setting up a parallel between His teaching and that of the disciples, knowing that soon they were to continue His teaching work in the world.

Peter would have reflected how his denial had been in spite of the fact that the Lord had prayed he wouldn't do it- even though He foresaw that Peter would. Just a short time before the denials He had commented, probably in earshot of Peter and John, "ask those that have heard me, what I spake unto them". Perhaps He nodded towards them both as He said it, to encourage them to speak up rather than slip further into the temptation of keeping quiet. He had used the same phrase earlier, just hours before: "These things have I spoken unto *you*" (Jn. 16:33).

18:22 *And when he had said this, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying: Do you answer the high priest so?*- "Struck" is the word used in the LXX of the Messianic Is. 50:6 "I gave my cheeks to blows". Perhaps, in the spirit of giving His life and not having it taken from Him, the Lord offered his cheek; although see on :23. This was totally unprovoked; perhaps the officer was over eager to ingratiate himself to the high priest. Or perhaps he was Malchus, or some other beneficiary of the Lord's healing work who wanted to demonstrate that he was not a secret Jesus sympathizer.

18:23 *Jesus answered him: If I have spoken evil, testify of the evil, but if well, why do you hit me?*- The Lord did not literally 'turn the other cheek', as we might have expected if He intended us to take His words of Mt. 5:39 literally. His words were aimed at helping that officer come to believe in Him; to ask himself whether the Lord had ever at any time spoken evil. He wanted the man to realize that his behaviour in hitting Him was dictated by a desire to please others; the Lord was inviting the man thereby towards freedom in Him.

18:24 *Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest*- The 'hearing' was very early in the morning; the appearance before Annas was a kind of pre-trial hearing, which was not required by any law. Presumably it was done in an attempt to give the impression of having done everything in a hyper correct legal sense. We see a

theme in the record of the Jews being so careful to give an appearance of legal obedience whilst they were breaking the most major principles of both Divine and Roman law.

18:25 *Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said to him: Are you also one of his disciples? He denied and said: I am not!*- As noted on :17, His "I am not!" compares unfavourably with the Lord's statement "I am", and shamelessly open declaration of Himself as He always had. The "also" could imply that the conversation had turned around others who were the Lord's disciples. John was known to the high priest, and presumably to his entourage, in that he had got the girl to allow Peter in to the compound. The talk would naturally have turned to how John was one of his disciples- and then quite naturally, to his friend Peter. As noted on :18, Peter displays quite some simplemindedness in not seeing that denial was pointless and deeply unconvincing.

18:26 *One of the servants of the high priest, being a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said: Did I not see you in the garden with him?*- Caiaphas and his entourage were riddled with nepotism; there were not even 10,000 people living in Jerusalem, according to Joachim Jeremias, and many who worked in a certain sphere would have been surrounded with friends and relatives as co-workers. And again, Peter ought surely to have realized that he was now inside a locked compound with a crowd of people who were friends and relatives of the very crowd whom he had just confronted in the garden. His situation was hopeless, and as noted on :18, his basic intelligence cannot be highly rated in allowing himself into that situation. But from that simple man came the baptism of thousands and the establishment of the Lord's church.

18:27 *Peter denied again; and immediately the cock crew*- John's account of Peter's denial of the Lord is to me very beautifully crafted by him to reflect his own weakness, lest the focus be left purely upon the failure of Peter. He [alone of the evangelists] records how he knew a girl who kept the door to the High Priest's palace, and how he was even known to the High Priest. He speaks to the girl, and she lets Peter in. Then, she recognizes Peter as one of the disciples, that he had been with Jesus, and he makes his shameful denial. But John's point is clearly this: he, John, was known to the same girl, and to Caiaphas- but they never accused *him* of having been with Jesus. Because they sadly didn't make the connection between John and Jesus. Yet when they saw Peter- they knew him as an up front disciple of Jesus. And when Peter ran out in fear and shame, John remained in the High Priest's palace- unrecognized and unknown as a disciple of Jesus. The door girl must have realized that John and Peter were connected- because John had asked her to let Peter in. But she never made the accusation that John also had been one of Jesus' followers. In all this, John reveals his own shame at his lack of open association with the Lord. Significantly, Acts 4:13 records how the Jews later looked at Peter and John "and they took knowledge of them [i.e. recognized them, as the girl had recognized Peter], that they [both!] had been with Jesus". This is the very language of those who accused Peter of having 'been with Jesus'. John learnt his lesson, and came out more publically, at Peter's side, inspired by his equally repentant friend. It's an altogether lovely picture, of two men who both failed, one publically and the other privately, together side by side in their witness, coming out for the Lord.

18:28 *They lead Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium; but it was early, and so they did not enter into the Praetorium, that they might not be defiled and might eat the Passover*- Again we see the extreme hypocrisy of men so caught up with legalistic obedience, whilst committing the worst crime of all time. "Early" is the term used

technically of the fourth watch, 3-6 a.m. The appearance before Annas was clearly staged, a show trial if ever there was one. "In capital cases, sentence of condemnation could not be legally pronounced on the day of trial"; and many other such legal requirements were broken. The fear of defilement was through contact with the Gentile soldiers who were abusing the Lord. "That they... might eat the Passover" is surely proof enough that the last supper was a Passover-like meal, but not "the Passover" of the 14th Nissan. The Lord is portrayed as developing a new Israel, with a new priesthood and different central symbols; He was able to change and reinterpret the Passover with ease.

18:29 *Pilate went out to them, and said: What accusation do you bring against this man?*- He went out to them as they would not go in to him lest they defile themselves. The inspired record hangs together with great credibility down to the finest details. Pilate faced the same problem as Paul's judges faced. It was simply not clear what this man's crime was.

18:30 *They answered and said to him: If this man were not an evildoer, we should not have delivered him up to you*- The Jews were careful not to be too specific, because they knew that they had no concrete case against the Lord. Peter lived the rest of his life under the deep impression of the events of this time, which occured whilst he was denying his Lord. He uses the same word in 1 Pet. 2:12: "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation". "Visitation" is literally 'the day of looking at', using the same word as used about how the Lord turned and looked at Peter after his third denial. Peter's idea is that just as the Lord was falsely accused of being "an evildoer", so would all those in Him. His sufferings are therefore not to be viewed from a distance, but taken into our lives; our experiences result in our being connected with Him in His time of crisis. The Greek word for "evildoer" used here only occurs four other times in the New Testament, and all of them are in 1 Peter. Consciously or unconsciously, the things of the Lord's passion were in Peter's heart, as they should be in ours.

18:31 *Pilate replied to them: Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law. The Jews said to him: It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death*- Pilate is repeatedly presented here as on the back foot, and nervous about dealing with the Lord. He is portrayed in history as utterly conscienceless. And so he probably was- but the person of the Lord Jesus is such that it provokes the conscience of every person, even those who appear to have no religious interest nor conscience. The fact is, every human being has a conscience, because it is intrinsic to our being human. And as noted on 15:22, our preaching of the Lord Jesus penetrates directly to that conscience. Pilate is a great example of this. The Jews had already judged the Lord as worthy of death, but their ability to execute people had been taken away from them, meaning that they had to pass over such cases to the Romans to decide, and to execute if they considered legitimate.

18:32 *That the word of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spoke, signifying by what manner of death he should die*- The Lord designed to die by crucifixion and yet also at the hands of the Jews. He therefore arranged things so that the plan to kill Him, and the responsibility for it, was squarely with the Jews; and yet it was to be the Gentiles who put Him to death, and through crucifixion. He therefore set Himself up to be so hated by the Jews on account of their rejection of Him that they would desire to kill Him; and to effect that, they would have to hand Him over to the Romans, who would then kill Him by crucifixion. This was all the Lord's design, part of His wilful giving of His life and not having it taken from Him (10:18), not being overtaken by

events, nor in that sense murdered. He was master of the entire situation from start to finish, arranging it all so that the players all exercised their own freewill, and did what they did despite His personal efforts to lead them to repentance.

18:33 *Pilate therefore went into the Praetorium and called Jesus, and said to him: Are you the King of the Jews?*- The Jews were seeking the death penalty on the basis that the Lord was setting Himself up as a king in opposition to Caesar. And yet according to their law, this was not a capital offence, in fact it was no crime at all. Their whole legal and logical case against the Lord had no consistency nor integrity at all.

The records are in fact written in such a way as to encourage us to re-live the crucifixion process as it were in slow motion. The record of the trials likewise is written in a way which encourages us to imagine it and live it out in our imaginations in slow motion. Donald Senior has pointed out how John's account of the trial scenes alternate between what is happening "inside" and "outside":

(1) "Outside" - The Jewish leaders hand Jesus over to Pilate, Jn. 18:28-32
(2) "Inside" - Pilate interrogates Jesus, 18:33-38
(3) "Outside" - Pilate declares Jesus innocent, 18:38-40
(4) "Inside" - The Roman soldiers scourge and mock Jesus, 19:1-3
(5) "Outside" - Pliate again declares Jesus not guilty, 19:4-8
(6) "Inside" - Pilate interrogates Jesus, 19:9-12
(7) "Outside" - Pilate delivers Jesus to crucifixion, 19:13-16.

18:34 *Jesus answered: Do you say this of yourself, or did others tell it to you concerning me?*- The Lord was interested in the conversion of even Pilate, just as Paul was for his judges. The Lord of course knew the answer to His question- Pilate was saying this because others had told him. And yet He wishes Pilate to genuinely ask himself the question in his own heart: 'Who really is this Jesus? Is He a King?'.

18:35 *Pilate answered: Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered you to me. What have you done?*- Pilate avoids the question just as the Lord avoids Pilate's question. This is not a typical interaction between a judge and the accused. The Lord is taking the initiative and seeking by all means to persuade Pilate, who instead of pushing for an answer to his question about "Are you the King of the Jews?" moves on to another question. Perhaps he did not push for an answer because he knew in his own conscience that before him stood a true, Divine King. And he did not wish to dwell on the question 'Who are You?' because in his conscience he knew. Pilate distances himself from personal guilt in the matter by saying that it was the Jews who had delivered the Lord to him, and he was not a Jew and so had had no part in it. This protestation of innocence by an otherwise conscienceless man, even when he sat in the position of power, all indicates how the Lord was touching even his conscience.

18:36 *Jesus answered: My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight that I should not be delivered to the Jews, but my kingdom is not from here*- I suggested on :35 that Pilate was persuaded in his conscience that the Lord was indeed a Heavenly King, and he did not push for answer to his question about the Lord's kingship because in his heart, he knew the answer and wanted to move on. As a judge he had every right and necessity to not let the accused avoid a question. But he allows the Lord to not answer on that point. Perceiving this, the Lord now returns to this theme of His kingship, using His next opportunty to speak to return to it, even though what He says about it is not an answer to the question just addressed to Him ["What have you done?"]. The fact He claimed to have a Kingdom was a sign that He considered Himself a King. But it was not a Kingdom

in the secular sense, and was not characterized by fighting for Him. But His servants just *had* tried to fight, to this very end! Thus He imputed righteousness to His men and was very positive about them to others.

18:37- see on Jn. 15:27.

Pilate replied to him: Are you a king then? Jesus answered: You say that I am a king. To this end have I been born, and to this end I came into the world, that I should testify to the truth. Everyone that is of the truth hears my voice- Pilate as a Roman procurator cannot let this claim to kingship go without comment. For Caesar was to be accepted as the only king in any form. Again we see the Lord as psychological master of the whole situation. Pilate had not stated that the Lord was a King; but He perceived that this was in fact what Pilate had come to believe. See on :31,33,36.

The Lord told Pilate in the context of His upcoming death that He had come into this world to bear witness to the truth- and this was the basis upon which His Kingdom stood. And the cross was the supreme witness and exhibition of the truth. The Lord personally was the truth, the light; His person was a testimony to truth. His Kingdom, the community who accepted Him as their King, were those heard His voice, who accepted the word which was Him as a person. In 12:27, the cross is again “this cause" for which He came. His death was therefore a witness, a testimony, to the finest and ultimate Truth of God.

18:38 *Pilate said to him: What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them: I find no crime in him!*- The famous question "What is truth?" is another example of how phrases are used in the gospel records which as it were jump off the page and confront all hearers or readers. We all must ask this question, and visually, we can perceive that the Lord standing in front of such a questioner was Himself the answer. For He is presented in John as "the truth". The implication could be that Pilate perceived this, for his rhetorical question is immediately followed by his conviction that there was "no crime in him". The conscienceless Pilate would have had no problem in agreeing to execute a troublemaker; for he is recorded as ordering the murder or random people for no good reason at all. But here he sees no crime in the Lord and is careful not to behave like this. Clearly, his conscience had been touched.

18:39 *But you have a custom, that I should release to you one prisoner at the Passover. Will you have me release to you the King of the Jews?*- Matthew and Mark make it clear that Pilate was surprised they did not want the Lord released, and he remonstrated with them as to how they could wish the Lord crucified when He had done nothing wrong (Mk. 15:14). It seems that Pilate misjudged the mood of the masses; he assumed they were all pro-Jesus. He was not aware that the Lord's parody of the triumphal entry had dashed their Messianic hopes, and they were now very angry with Him. Pilate had assumed that this whole thing was just a matter of envy on the part of the priests (Mk. 15:10). Pilate's offer to release the Lord was an attempt to drive a wedge between the masses and the Jewish leadership; but he failed to realize that the leadership had persuaded the masses and they were themselves disillusioned with the Lord.

18:40 *Therefore they cried out: Not this man but Barabbas! (Now Barabbas was a bandit)*- Both Barabbas and the thieves are described with the same Greek word, translated "robber" (Jn. 18:40; Mk. 15:27). The Lord uses the same word when He points out that His persecutors were treating him as a "robber" (Mt. 26:55; Mk. 14:48; Lk. 22:52); He seems to be aware that what the experience He is going through is

setting up Barabbas as a kind of inverse type of Himself, the true 'Son of the Father' (= 'Barabbas'). Those low, desperate men, the dregs of society, were types of us.

The crucified Christ is portrayed as King of criminals, King of the basest sort, enthroned between them, taking the place of their leader Barabbas, who ought to have been where the Lord was. Barabbas especially becomes a symbol of us all. According to Jewish tradition at the time (*Pesach* 8.6) “They may slaughter the Passover lamb… for one whom they [the authorities] have promised to release from prison". The Passover amnesty freed a man justly condemned to death- on account of the death of the lamb. We can imagine the relief and joy and almost unbelief of Barabbas, as he watched or reflected upon the crucifixion of Jesus- that he who rightfully should have been there on the cross, was delivered from such a death because of the cross of Christ. The image of condemned prisoners being released due to the death of Messiah is an undoubted Old Testament figure for our redemption from slavery; those locked in the dark dungeon see great light, etc.

JOHN CHAPTER 19

19:1 *So Pilate had Jesus scourged*- Having been flogged until the skin was left hanging in bloody shreds (Josephus), His clothes would have stuck to the skin. Taking the clothes off would have ripped some shreds away. The process of dressing and undressing would have done the same. And then the cross was laid on that bare back. It seems from the synoptics that Pilate did this in the hope this would placate the Jews and he would not need to crucify Him. Again we see the power of encounter with the Lord to touch the hardest conscience.

19:2 *And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple garment*- The thorns would have penetrated the scalp into the network of blood vessels there, producing a flow of blood onto the mock-kingly garment. We see here human nature at its most raw and primitive. That is one feature of the crucifixion accounts. They were also motivated by a desire to test His claims to royalty. He had made it clear that His Kingdom was not of this world; His teaching about the Kingdom, largely in the parables, was about life lived now under domination of the Father's principles. And yet they willingly overlooked that and focused on mocking Him as a king. We note that Babylon too is arrayed in purple (Rev. 17:4), making her a veritable anti Christ, a fake imitation of Him.

19:3 *And they came to him, and said: Hail, King of the Jews! And they struck him with their hands*- Note the continuous tenses. The Lord's experiences of suffering are depicted as going on and on, as if in endless waves. When we get that sense in our far smaller sufferings, we are fellowshipping Him there and then. The striking was "upon the cheek", according to some texts. The otherwise strange paradox of Mic. 5:1 was fulfilling: "They shall strike the judge of Israel upon the cheek". He stood there as their judge; throughout all His sufferings and final death, He was in fact supremely in control, as their judge. For of this period He had stated: "Now is the judgment of this world", and He was the judge. See on :13.

19:4 *Pilate went out again to the Jews, and said: Look, I bring him out to you, so you may know that I find no crime in him*- Again we see the hard conscience of Pilate touched by the encounter with the Lord, putting this otherwise callous man on the back foot. Again we note that Pilate "went out... to the Jews", lest they be defiled by as it were coming in to a Gentile house; recall Peter's reticence at entering the home of Gentile Cornelius.

19:5 *Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple garment. And Pilate said to them: Behold the man!*- This was indeed sarcasm; the Lord stood there as a pathetic and bedraggled figure. But Pilate said it not so much out of spite toward Him, but as a desperate attempt to again persuade the Jews that he had humiliated this man sufficiently, and there was no point in crucifying Him. Yet again we see the desperation provoked in that hard man's conscience.

The mocking "behold the man..." would have been seen by the Lord as a reference to Zech. 6:12, where He is foreseen as a Priest crowned with silver and gold, introduced to Israel with the same phrase: "Behold the man...". The Lord would have taken encouragement that in the Father's eyes, He was crowned there and then in glory, as He magnified His priestly office. But it would have seemed so, so different in the eyes of those mocking men. As Son of God, He was an intellectual genius without compare, and He applied His genius to the Father's word. He would have been conscious of all these links, and so much more. This way of His didn't seem to leave Him in His time of dying. And His awareness would doubtless have been a tremendous encouragement to Him. God likewise can control our trials so that we take strength from them in accordance with our appreciation of His word.

19:6 *When the chief priests and the servants saw him, they cried out: Crucify him! Crucify him! Pilate said to them: Take him yourselves and crucify him. For I find no crime in him*- Pilate's repeated statement that he found no crime in the Lord was unwise from a secular point of view; for he was publically going on record as saying he was authorizing the crucifixion of an innocent man. The only reason for saying this was because he was making a genuine protest of conscience. The Jews likewise had a conscience. The more Pilate drew their attention to His innocence, the louder and more insistently they cried for His crucifixion. This of itself indicates the unease of their own consciences. All concerned are presented as culpable, rather than just doing a job. We see here how submission to the crowd mentality, following a multitude to do evil, is still absolutely culpable before God. And in our similar situations we must be ever aware of this. For we like sheep go astray, led into sin by reason of our part in the herd... but we still go astray, and for those sins committed like sheep, the Lord had to die as He did.

19:7 *The Jews answered him: We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God*- The Mosaic death penalty for false prophets / teachers did not exactly correspond with the charge laid against the Lord, of being God's Son. We note that their issue was not that He claimed to be God. If they felt they had any real evidence for that claim, they would have surely used it now. But even they realized, as Trinitarians ought to, that the Lord was not claiming that. He had clarified their claim to that effect in chapter 10, stating that no, He was only claiming to be the Son of God. And such terms could be used about men without being in the least blasphemous.

19:8 *When Pilate heard this he was even more afraid*- If this were any other case, Pilate would likely have shrugged or even laughed. Just another nutty person with delusions of grandeur. But the great fear that came upon him is indication that he subconsciously joined the dots and realized that this claim was indeed true. Yet again, we are encouraged that encounter with the Lord touches the consciences of the hearers. And we can therefore preach Him knowing that for all the apparent show of disinterest, we are touching people. And that is why people's body language changes distinctly when they are handed a tract about Him; if it were advertising something to buy, or a show at the local park, their body language is quite different.

19:9 *And he went back into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus: Where are you from? But Jesus gave him no answer*- Pilate took the Lord back inside, away from earshot of the Jews, to ask Him more about this "Son of God" claim; for it had touched his conscience. This question is strange. It leads nowhere really, if asked from a purely secular perspective. I suggest that the conscience of a man as hardened as Pilate was being touched, and he sensed that the Lord was indeed from God, or had Divine origins. Hence his question. The Lord's silence was because His whole personality was an answer to the question, for He had shown in His life and showed in His whole personality that He was God's Son.

Because the Lord was so excluded from society (see on Jn. 8:42), He would have been so focused upon His Heavenly Father. And that would have been felt and perceived. Reflect how the Centurion muttered: “Truly this was the Son of God”. The Lord’s creation of a new family was radical then; and it’s just as radical today. In passing, the Lord must have been so tempted to say that Joseph was his father. It would’ve made things *so* much easier for Him. Just as we are tempted to effectively deny our Heavenly Father, and act like we’re just the same as this world. According to the rabbinic writing *Qiddusin* 4:2, a fatherless person must remain silent when asked “Where are you from”. And this is exactly what Jesus did when asked this very question here in Jn. 19:9. This refusal to call Joseph His father cost Him His life. He refused to call Himself the son of Joseph. Indeed, E.P. Sanders makes the point that the fatherlessness of Jesus not only meant that He would not have been counted as a child of God or son of Abraham; because of these exclusions, He would have been put in the category of “a sinner”. If Joseph did indeed abandon Mary, she would have been classified as “a whore”, and Jesus would have been the “son of adultery”, putting Him in the same “sinner category”. In this we see a wonderful outworking of how God having a son resulted in that Son being counted as a sinner, even though He was not one. He was treated as “a sinner”, and thereby He came to know how we feel, who truly are sinners.

19:10 *Pilate said to him: Why do you not speak to me? Do you not know that I have the power to release you and have the power to crucify you?*- Even on a secular level, the situation was such that actually Pilate did not have that power. He either capitulated totally to the Lord's cause, or allowed his supposed "power" to be overriden by the circumstance and manipulation from the Jews. And the Lord had precisely set up the whole situation, so that Pilate would have to crucify Him- although built into the whole game plan there was the genuine appeal to Pilate and the possibility that he would repent and become a Christian. We marvel at how it all worked out, remembering that this Lord is our Lord, and works in a similar way in our lives- directing and manipulating circumstance, whilst leaving the players concerned completely free to repent and come to Him. Those parts of our life path which we don't understand are simply the bits where His arrangement of things is so complex that it is beyond our comprehension. But the end result in view is our salvation.

19:11 *Jesus answered him: You would have no power against me unless it was given to you from above. So the man that delivered me to you has the greater sin*- As noted on :9, the Lord made no comment about who He was, for it was obvious. But He does respond to this issue of power. The one who delivered the Lord to Pilate was Caiaphas, and he here is credited with the greatest culpability for the crucifixion. This would explain why he is earlier spoken of as "the prince of this [Jewish] world", singled out for particular judgment. Although Judas betrayed / delivered / handed over

the Lord to the Jews, it was Caiaphas who handed Him over to Pilate. The similarity of the language is to demonstrate that Caiaphas also handed over / betrayed the Lord, and was even more culpable than Judas. In this sense, the devil / satan, the great adversary to the Lord, Caipahas and the system he represented, had used Judas as a tool. By making the point that Caiaphas had greater sin than Pilate, the Lord was as it were comforting Pilate; demonstrating that it was He and not Pilate who was in complete control of events.

The Lord was intensely intellectually conscious throughout His sufferings. His mind was evidently full of the word, He would have seen the symbolism of everything far more than we can, from the thorns in His mock crown, to the hyssop being associated with Him at the very end (the hyssop was the fulfilment of types in Ex. 12:8,22; Lev. 14:4,6,49-52; Num. 19:6,18). Often it is possible to see in His words allusions to even seven or eight OT passages, all in context, all relevant. Reflect how His response to Pilate “you would have no power against me" was a reference to the prophecy of Daniel 8, about Rome becoming mighty “but not by his own power". Or how His crucifixion “near to the city" (Jn. 19:20) connected with Jerusalem thereby being guilty of His blood (Dt. 21:3).

It is inevitable that to someone of His intellectual ability as the Son of God, to a man with His sense of justice and with His knowledge of the Jews and their Law, everything within Him would have cried out at the protracted injustices of His trials. He had the strong sense within Him at this time that He was hated without cause, that the Jews were "my enemies *wrongfully*" (Ps. 69:4). "Are you come out as against a thief...? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and you laid no hold on me" (Mt. 26:55). "Why do you ask me? Ask them which heard me... If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why do you smite me?" (Jn. 18:21-23). All these indicate a keen sense of injustice. It must have welled up within Him when He saw the servant come with the bowl of water for Pilate to solemnly wash his hands in. Yet His response was one of almost concern for Pilate, lest he think that the guilt was *solely* on him (Jn. 19:11; cp. His concern for Judas’ repentance, Jn. 13:27). The Lord did not just passively resign Himself to it with the sense that all would have to be as all would have to be. He struggled with the injustice of it all. Some form of anger even arose, it would seem. This fact must have pushed Him towards that dread precipice of sin. His possession of human nature and the possibility of failure meant that there were times when He was much nearer sin than others. But He didn't just keep away from the precipice, as He didn't spare Himself from being tired and tested by the crowds and thereby drawn closer to the possibility of spiritual failure. He came into this world to show forth the Father's glory, and to do His will was His meat and drink. This hangs like a tapestry to the whole crucifixion event.

19:12 *Upon this, Pilate sought to release him*- The Lord had told him that he did indeed have "sin" over this matter, although Caiaphas had greater sin. And there was something in Pilate that didn't want to sin or be held guilty by the power "from above" (:11) which was clearly involved in all this.

But the Jews cried out, saying: If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone that makes himself a king speaks against Caesar!- On one hand, there was Pilate's desire not to sin or be held guilty before God. On the other, there was the manipulation of the crowd, the desire to retain office, and not offend our secular superiors. And that voice, as with so many, was more powerful than the voice of the *logos* of encounter with Jesus.

19:13 *When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out, and sat down on the*

judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha- The judgment seat of Christ is not a means by which the Father and Son gather information about us, consider it and then give a verdict. It will be for *our* benefit. Our behaviour is constantly analyzed by them and 'judged'. The idea of sitting upon a judgment seat or giving judgment doesn't necessarily involve the idea of weighing up evidence. To 'judge' can mean simply to pronounce the final verdict, which the judge has long since known; not to weigh up evidence (consider Mt. 7:2; Jn. 3:18; 5:22; 7:24,51; 8:15,16,26; 16:11; 18:31; Acts 7:7; 23:3; 24:6 Gk.; Rom. 2:12; 3:7; 1 Cor. 11:31; 2 Thess. 2:12; Heb. 10:30; 13:4; 1 Pet. 4:6; James 5:10,22). Herod sat on the judgment seat in order to make "an oration" to the people, supposedly on God's behalf (Acts 12:21 RVmg.). It wasn't to weigh up any evidence- it was to make a statement. And thus it will be in the final judgment. Also, "judge" is often used in the sense of 'to condemn'- not to just consider evidence (e.g. Mt. 7:2; Rom. 3:7; 2 Thess. 2:17).

It is grammatically possible to read Jn. 19:13 as meaning that Pilate sat Him (Jesus) down on the judgment seat, on the pavement, replete with allusion to the sapphire pavement of Ex. 24. The Gospel of Peter 3:7 actually says this happened: “And they clothed him with purple and sat him on a chair of judgment, saying, Judge justly, King of Israel". See on 1 Pet. 2:23. This would fit in with how it was as "the judge of Israel" at this time that the Lord was smitten on the cheek; see on :3. Now was "the judgment of this world", and the Lord was judge.

The whole account of the crucifixion in John shows how the Lord gave His life up of Himself; the Jews and Romans had no power to take it from Him, and throughout John’s accounts of the trials and crucifixion, it is apparent that it is the Lord and not His opponents who is in total control of the situation. Even though ‘the [Jewish] Devil’ is seen as a factor in Judas’ betrayal of Jesus (Jn. 13:27,30), it is clear that Jesus was delivered up [s.w. ‘betrayed’] by the “determinate counsel [will] and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23). It wasn’t as if God fought a losing battle with a personal Satan in order to protect His Son from death. The way that the Lord Jesus is ‘sat down upon’ the Judgment Bench, as if He is the authentic judge (Jn. 19:13), is an example of how the Lord Jesus is presented in John as being totally in control; His ‘lifting up’ on the cross is portrayed as a ‘lifting up’ in glory, enthroned as a King and Lord upon the cross. Likewise 'Gabbatha' means an elevated or lifted up place; the Lord there was lifted up too, that He might draw all believing eyes toward Him. Other examples of John bringing out this theme of the Lord being in control are to be found in the way He confronts His captors (Jn. 18:4), questions His questioners (Jn. 18:20,21,23; 19:11), gets freedom for His followers (Jn. 18:8), and makes those come out to arrest Him fall to the ground.

The mention that Jesus stood before Pilate “in a place that is called the Pavement" (Jn. 19:13) reminds us of Ex. 24:10, where Yahweh was enthroned in glory on another ‘pavement’ when the old covenant was made with Israel. The New Covenant was inaugurated with something similar. “In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9) would have been easily perceived as an allusion to the way that Yahweh Himself as it were dwelt between the cherubim on the mercy seat (2 Kings 19:15; Ps. 80:1). And yet the Lord Jesus in His death was the “[place of] propitiation" (Heb. 2:17), the blood-sprinkled mercy seat. “There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat... of all things which I will give thee in commandment" (Ex. 25:20-22). In the cross, God met with man and communed with us, commanding us the life we ought to lead through all the unspoken, unarticulated imperatives which there are within the blood of His Son.

There in the person of Jesus nailed to the tree do we find the focus of God's glory and self-revelation, and to this place we may come to seek redemption. See on Jn. 19:19.

19:14 *Now it was the preparation of the Passover*- And indeed the Passover lamb was being prepared by these awful sufferings. The Lord's last supper was therefore a Passover-style meal, but not the Passover of 14 Nissan.

It was about the sixth hour, and he said to the Jews: Behold, your King!- Pilate really ought to have figured by now that if he wanted to keep his job and placate the Jews, he had to crucify the Lord. But still his desperate conscience tried to get the Lord released. He was indeed being sarcastic by presenting the bedraggled figure of Jesus as King of the Jews. He was desperately reasoning that they could hardly accept such a figure as their king. Their response of :15 is evidence that they considered Pilate's words as an attempt to get them to rethink their obsession with crucifying the Lord.

19:15 *They cried out: Away with him! Away with him!*- The Greek means literally 'to lift up'; again the Lord would have taken encouragement from the fact that effectively His crucifixion was a lifting up in glory, from God's perspective. And He had used the same word in saying that His life was not to be taken "away" from Him, but He would give it of Himself (10:18). He was total master of the situation. And there are times when others may apparently have power over us, where we appear to be victims of a total collapse situation all around us, or circumstances are going to take us away, maybe from life itself. But if we are consciously giving our lives to the Lord, then we are not being swamped or taken away by circumstance, but like the Lord, remain masters of our life's path.

Crucify him! Pilate said to them: Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered: We have no king but Caesar!- This recalls how Israel rejected God's Kingship for that of a human king. This public statement of loyalty to Caesar was exactly what the orthodox Jews objected to making. But they made it now because of their utter obsession with destroying Him. Such obsessions, born out of a bad conscience, result in all principles being thrown to the wind.

19:16 *Therefore he delivered him to them to be crucified*- Pilate's guilt here is plainly stated, especially as he himself realized he had the power to release the Lord. He delivered Him "to their will" (Lk. 23:25), tacitly accepting that their will was stronger than his; although all this happened according to the will of the Father and Son. The Gospels carefully omit any record of Pilate pronouncing a judgment of condemnation upon the Lord, as was required and usual. He did not do so because of the deep weight of conscience within him.

This handing over of the Lord to crucifixion was ultimately done by God, the "power" behind and through Pilate. There is an unmistakable Biblical link between the term "Son of God", the idea of God giving, and the death of the Lord Jesus. Whatever else this means, it clearly shows the pain to God in the death of His Son. Paul only uses "Son of God" 17 times- and every one is in connection with the death of the Lord. And often the usages occur together with the idea of God's *giving* of His Son to die- "He who did not spare His own son but gave him up for us all" (Rom. 8:32). This sheds light on the otherwise strange use of another idea by Paul- that Jesus was 'handed over' to death (Rom. 4:25; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2,25). It was the Father who ultimately 'handed over' His Son to death. The idea of God's Son being *sent* to redeem us from sin is perhaps John's equivalent (1 Jn. 1:7; 4:10; Jn. 3:16). Jesus was the Son whom the Father sent "last of all" to receive fruit (Mk. 12:6)- and it is reflection upon God's giving of His Son on the cross which surely should produce fruit in us. For we can no longer live passively before such outgiving love and self-sacrificial pain. And

we are invited to perhaps review our understanding of two passages in this light: "When the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son... to redeem" (Gal. 4:4) and "God sending His son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for [a sin offering] condemned sin, in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). These verses would therefore speak specifically of what happened in the death of Christ on the cross, rather than of His birth. For it was in the cross rather than the virgin birth that we were redeemed and a sin offering made. It was on the cross that Jesus was above all in the exact likeness of sinful flesh, dying the death of a sinful criminal. The "likeness" of sinful flesh is explained by Phil. 2:7, which uses the same word to describe how on the cross Jesus was made "in the likeness of men". We can now better understand why the Centurion was convicted by the sight of Christ's death to proclaim: "Truly this was the Son of God" (Mk. 15:39).

19:17 *So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called the place of a skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha*- They "took" or Gk. 'received' Him; but the prologue states that they received Him not (1:11).

Tradition has it that the victim had to hold their hands out to receive the stake, which they then had to carry. The Lord's prophecy of Peter's crucifixion thus describes it as Peter stretching out his hands and being led to his death (Jn. 21:18). Yet the Lord emphasized in His teaching that we must *take up* the cross, as He did (Mk. 8:34; 10:21). This might just suggest that in line with the Lord's willing death, giving up of His life rather than it being taken from Him, He bent down and picked up the stake before the soldiers had the chance to offer it to Him. I imagine doing this in a deft manner. The deftness of the way He broke that bread apart and held the cup comes out in Mt. 26:26. He knew what that breaking of bread was going to mean. His willingness would have been such a contrast to the unwilling hesitation of the thieves and other victims. The soldiers must have been blind indeed to still mock Him, despite all these indications that He was more than mere man. That piece of wood that was laid upon Him by the Father, however the Lord physically took it up, represented our sins, which were laid upon Him (Is. 53:6); your laziness to do your readings early this morning, my snap at the woman in the bus, his hatred of his mother in law... that piece of wood was the symbol of our sins, every one of them. This is what we brought upon Him. It was our laziness, our enmity, our foolishness, *our weak will*... that necessitated the death of Jesus in this terrible way. He went through with it all to make an end of sins" (Dan. 9:26). Will we do our little bit in responding? The marks of His sufferings will be in Him eternally, and thereby we will be eternally reminded of the things we now only dimly appreciate (Rev. 5:6; Zech. 13:6). The walk from the courthouse to Golgotha was probably about 800m (half a mile). One of the soldiers would have carried the sign displaying the Lord's Name and crime. The thieves were probably counting the paces (maybe the crowd was chanting them?). You know how it is when doing a heavy task, 'Just three more boxes to lug upstairs... just two more... last one'. But the Lord was above this. Of that I'm sure. Doing any physically strenuous task that takes you to the end of your strength, there is that concentration on nothing else but the job in hand. Hauling a heavy box or load, especially in situations of compulsion or urgency, it becomes irrelevant if you bump into someone or crush a child's toy beneath your heavy feet. But the Lord rose above.

John's statement that "He went out, bearing the cross for Himself" as He walked to Golgotha is a real emphasis, seeing that it was *as* He came out that it was necessary for them to make Simon carry the cross. John takes a snapshot of that moment, and directs our concentration to the Lord at that moment, determined to carry it to the end,

even though in fact He didn't. It is this picture of following the Lord carrying *His* cross which the Lord had earlier asked us to make the model of our lives. We are left to assume that the two criminals followed Him in the procession. They were types of us, the humble and the proud, the selfless and the selfish, the two categories among those who have been asked to carry the cross and follow the Lord in His 'last walk'.

The word John uses for 'bearing' is translated (and used in the sense of) 'take up' in 10:31. It was as if John saw as significant the Lord's willingness to take up the cross Himself, without waiting for it to be forced upon Him as it probably was on the other two. And there is a clear lesson for us, who fain would carry something of that cross. And yet the similarity of meaning within this word for 'taking up' and 'bearing / carrying' is further instructive. The Lord picked it up and was willing to carry it, but didn't make it to the end of the 'last walk', through understandable human weakness. Amidst the evident challenge of the cross, there is interwoven comfort indeed (as there is in the Lord's eager and positive acceptance of the thief, Joseph and Nicodemus, and the wondrous slowness of the Father's punishment of those ever-so-evil men who did the Lord to death).

'Golgotha' meaning 'The place of the skull' or even ‘The skull of Gol[iath]’ may well be the place near Jerusalem where David buried Goliath's skull (1 Sam. 17:54). "Ephes-Dammim", where David killed Goliath, meaning 'border of blood' suggests 'Aceldama', the "field of blood". Goliath coming out to make his challenges at morning and evening (1 Sam. 17:16) coincided with the daily sacrifices which should have been offered at those times, with their reminder of sin and the need for dedication to God. The thoughtful Israelite must surely have seen in Goliath a personification of sin which the daily sacrifices could do nothing to overcome.

“The crossbar was carried... weighing 34 to 57 kg., was placed across the nape of the victim's neck and balanced along both shoulders. Usually the outstretched arms then were tied to the crossbar”. This means that the Lord would have had His shoulders bowed forward as He walked to Golgotha, with both His hands lifted up against His chest. He evidently foresaw this in some detail when He described His mission to man as a shepherd carrying His lost sheep on both shoulders. Let's forever forget the picture of a happy, quiet lamb snugly bobbling along on the shepherd's shoulders. We are surely meant to fill in the details in the parables. The sheep, his underside covered in faeces and mud, would have been terrified; in confusion he would have struggled with the saviour shepherd. To be carried on His shoulders would have been a strange experience; he would have struggled and been awkward, as the shepherd stumbled along, gripping both paws against His chest with His uplifted hands. This was exactly the Lord's physical image as He stumbled to the place of crucifixion. He evidently saw the cross as a symbol of us, His struggling and awkward lost sheep. And every step of the way along the Via Dolorosa, Yahweh's enemies reproached every stumbling footstep of His anointed (Ps. 89:51). It was all this that made Him a true King and our unquestioned leader- for on His shoulders is to rest the authority of the Kingdom (Is. 9:5), because He bore His cross upon the same shoulders.

19:18 *There they crucified him, and with him two others, on either side one and Jesus between them*- He is presented as King of criminals of the basest kind; see on 18:40.

John’s Gospel has many references to Moses, as catalogued elsewhere. When John records the death of the Lord with two men either side of Him, he seems to do so with his mind on the record of Moses praying with Aaron and Hur on each side of

him (Ex. 17:12). John's account in English reads: "They crucified him, and with him two others, on either side one" (Jn. 19:18). Karl Delitzsch translated the Greek New Testament into Hebrew, and the Hebrew phrase he chose to use here is identical with that in Ex. 17:12. Perhaps this explains why John alone of the Gospel writers doesn't mention that the two men on either side of the Lord were in fact criminals- he calls them "two others" (Jn. 19:18) and "… the legs of the first and of the other" (Jn. 19:32). Thus John may've chosen to highlight simply how there were two men on either side of the Lord, in order to bring out the connection with the Moses scene.

It makes a good exercise to read through one of the records, especially John 19, and make a list of the adjectives used. There are virtually none. Read a page of any human novelist or historian: the pages are cluttered with them. Hebrew is deficient in adjectives, and because of this it often uses 'Son of...' plus an abstract noun, instead of an adjective. Thus we read of a "son of peace" (Lk. 10:5,6), or "a man of tongue" (Ps. 140:11 RVmg; AV "an evil speaker"). The Hebrew language so often reflects the character of God. And His artless self-expression is no clearer seen in the way He inspired the records of the death of His Son. The record of the death of God's Son is something altogether beyond the use of devices as primitive as adjectives. The way in which the actual act of impaling is recorded as just a subordinate clause is perhaps the clearest illustration of this. The way Mary thinks the risen Lord is a gardener is another such. Or the weeping of the women, and Joseph, and Nicodemus (presumably this happened) when the body was taken from the cross, as the nails were taken out: this isn't recorded. Likewise, only Matthew records the suicide of Judas; the Father chose not to emphasize in the records that the man who did the worst a man has ever done or could ever do- to betray the peerless Son of God- actually went and took his own life (and even made a mess of doing that). If it were my son, I would have wanted to emphasize this. But the Almighty doesn't. In similar vein, it is almost incredible that there was no immediate judgment on the men who did the Son of God to death. The judgments of AD70 only came on the next generation. Those middle aged men who stood and derided the Saviour in His time of finest trial: they died, as far as we know, in their beds. And the Roman / Italian empire went on for a long time afterwards, even if God did in fact impute guilt to them for what their soldiers did. Another hallmark of God's Hand in the record is that what to us are the most obvious OT prophecies are not quoted; e.g. Is. 53:7: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth". A human author would have made great capital from such detailed fulfilments. But not so the Almighty. Hebrew, along with all the Semitic languages, has no superlatives. God doesn't need them. And the record of the cross is a classic example. The record of the resurrection reflects a similar culture. The actual resurrection isn't ever described [in marked contrast to how it is in the uninspired 'gospels']. Instead we read of the impact of His resurrection upon His disciples.

The crucifixion of Christ was at 9 a.m. The text suggests there may have been a gap of minutes between them arriving at the place and the actual nailing. He would have willingly laid Himself down on the stake, whereas most victims had to be thrown down on the ground by the soldiers. He gave His life, it wasn't taken from Him. Likewise He *gave* His back to the smiters when they flogged Him; He gave His face to them when they spoke about pulling out His beard (Is. 50:6). Men usually clenched their fists to stop the nails being driven in, and apparently fingers were often broken by the soldiers to ease their task. Not a bone of the Lord was broken. We can imagine

Him willingly opening His palms to the nails; as we, so far away from it all, should have something of a willing acceptance of what being in Him demands of us. It may be that He undressed Himself when they finally reached the place of crucifixion. In similar vein, early paintings of the flogging show the Lord standing there *not* tied to the flogging post, as victims usually were. As He lay there horizontal, His eyes would have been heavenwards, for the last time in His mortality. Perhaps He went through the business of thinking 'this is the last time I'll do this... or that...'. How often He had lifted up His eyes to Heaven and prayed (Jn. 11:41; 17:1). And now, this was the last time, except for the final raising of the head at His death. "While four soldiers held the prisoner, [a Centurion] placed the sharp five inch spike in the dead centre of the palm… four to five strokes would hammer the spike deep into the rough plank and a fifth turned it up so that the hand would not slip free" (C.M. Ward, *Treasury Of Praise*). If it is indeed so that a Centurion usually did the nailing, it is a wondrous testimony that it was the Centurion who could say later that "truly this was the Son of God". The very man who actually nailed the Son of God was not struck dead on the spot, as a human 'deity' would have done. God's patient grace was extended, with the result that this man too came to faith.

The sheer and utter reality of the crucifixion needs to be meditated upon just as much as the actual reality of the fact that Jesus actually existed. A Psalm foretold that Jesus at His death would be the song of the drunkards. Many Nazi exterminators took to drink. And it would seem almost inevitable that the soldiers who crucified Jesus went out drinking afterwards. Ernest Hemingway wrote a chilling fictional story of how those men went into a tavern late on that Friday evening. After drunkenly debating whether "Today is Friday", they decide that it really is Friday, and then tell how they nailed Him and lifted Him up. "When the weight starts to pull on 'em, that's when it gets em... Ain't I seen em ? I seen plenty of 'em . I tell you, he was pretty good today". And that last phrase runs like a refrain through their drunken evening. Whether or not this is an accurate reconstruction isn't my point- we have a serious duty to seek to imagine what it might have been like. Both Nazi and Soviet executioners admit how vital it was to never look the man you were murdering in the face. It was why they put on a roughness which covered their real personalities. And the Lord's executioners would have done the same. To look into His face, especially His eyes, dark with love and grief for His people, would have driven those men to either suicide or conversion. I imagine them stealing a look at His face, the face of this man who didn't struggle with them but willingly laid Himself down on the wood. The cross struck an educated Greek as barbaric folly, a Roman citizen as sheer disgrace, and a Jew as God's curse. Yet Jesus turned the sign of disgrace into a sign of victory. Through it, He announced a radical revaluation of all values. He made it a symbol for a brave life, without fear even in the face of fatal risks; through struggle, suffering, death, in firm trust and hope in the goal of true freedom, life, humanity, eternal life. The offence, the sheer scandal, was turned into an amazing experience of salvation, the way of the cross into a possible way of life. The risen Christ was and is just as much a living reality. Suetonius records that Claudius expelled Jewish Christians from Rome because they were agitated by one Chrestus; i.e. Jesus the Christ. Yet the historian speaks as if He was actually alive and actively present in person . In essence, He was. All the volumes of confused theology, the senseless theories about the Trinity. would all have been avoided if only men had had the faith to believe that the man Jesus who really died and rose, both never sinned and was also indeed the Son of God. And that His

achievement of perfection in human flesh was real. Yes it takes faith- and all the wrong theology was only an excuse for a lack of such faith.

Several crucifixion victims have been unearthed. One was nailed with nails 18c.m. long (7 inches). A piece of acacia word seems to have been inserted between the nail head and the flesh. *Did the Lord cry out in initial pain and shock?* Probably, as far as I can reconstruct it; for He would have had all the physical reflex reactions of any man. But yet I also sense that He didn't flinch as other men did. He came to offer His life, willingly; not grudgingly, resistantly give it up. He went through the panic of approaching the pain threshold. The nailing of the hands and feet just where the nerves were would have sent bolts of pain through the Lord's arms every time He moved or spoke. The pain would have been such that even with the eyelids closed, a penetrating red glare would have throbbed in the Lord's vision. Hence the value and intensity of those words He did speak. The pulling up on the nails in the hands as the cross was lifted up would have been excruciating. The hands were nailed through the 'Destot gap', between the first and second row of wrist bones, touching an extra sensitive nerve which controls the movement of the thumb and signals receipt of pain. They would not have been nailed through the palms or the body would not have been supportable . It has been reconstructed that in order to breathe, the crucified would have had to pull up on his hands, lift the head for a breath, and then let the head subside. The sheer physical agony of it all cannot be minimized. Zenon Ziolkowski (*Spor O Calun*) discusses contemporary descriptions of the faces of the crucified, including Jehohanan the Zealot, whose crucifixion Josephus mentions. Their faces were renowned for being terribly distorted by pain. The Lord's face was marred more than that of any other, so much so that those who saw Him looked away (Is. 52:14). That prophecy may suggest that for the Lord, the crucifixion process hurt even more. We suggest later that He purposefully refused to take relief from pushing down on the 'seat', and thus died more painfully and quicker. Several of the unearthed victims were crucified on olive trees. So it was perhaps an olive tree which the Lord had to carry. He would have thought of this as He prayed among the olive trees of Gethsemane (perhaps they took it from that garden?). I would not have gone through with this. I would have chosen a lesser death and the achieving of a lesser salvation. I would have had more pity on myself. But the Lord of all did it *for me*, He became obedient *even* to death on a cross (Phil. 2:8), as if He could have been obedient to a lesser death, but He chose this ultimately high level. I can only marvel at the Father's gentleness with us, that despite the ineffable trauma of death, the way He takes us is so much more gentle than how He allowed His only begotten to go.

Despite much prior meditation, there perhaps dawned on the Lord some 'physical' realizations as to the nature of His crucified position: the utter impossibility of making the slightest change of position, especially when tormented by flies, the fact that the hands and feet had been pierced in the most sensitive areas; the fact that the arms were arranged in such a way so that the weight of the body hung only on the muscles, not on the bones and tendons. The smell of blood would have brought forth yelping dogs, circling birds of prey, flying insects…an incessant barrage of annoyances, things to distract the Lord's mind. As we too also face. He would have realized that the whole process was designed to produce tension in every part of the body. All His body, every part of it, in every aspect, had to suffer (and He would have realized the significance of this, and seen *all* of us as suffering with Him). The muscles were all hopelessly overworked, cramps due to the malcirculation of blood would have created an overwhelming desire to move. All victims would have writhed and wriggled within

the few millimetres leeway which they had, to avoid a splinter pushing into the back lacerated from flogging... But my sense is that the Lord somehow didn't do this. He didn't push down on the footrests for relief, He didn't take the pain killer, He didn't ask for a drink until the end, when presumably the others accepted. Every muscle in the body would have become locked after two hours or so. Every part of His body suffered, symbolic of how through His sufferings He was able to identify with every member of His spiritual body- for "we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones" (Eph. 5:30). He had perhaps foreseen something of all this when He likened the killing of His body to the taking down of a tent / tabernacle- every bone and sinew, like every pole and canvass, had to be uprooted, 'taken down' (Jn. 2:19,21).

The moment of lifting the stake up vertical, probably amidst a renewed surge of abuse or cheering from the crowd, had been long foreseen and imagined by the Lord. "If, if I be *lifted up*..." (Jn. 12:32). He foresaw the physical (and spiritual) details of the crucifixion process in such detail. Recall how He foresaw that moment of handing over to death. And yet still He asked for the cup to pass, still He panicked and felt forsaken. If the theory of the cross was so hard to actually live out in practice for the Lord, then how hard it must be for us. The Lord's descriptions of Himself as being 'lifted up' use a phrase which carried in Hebrew the idea of exaltation and glory. As He was lifted up physically, the ground swaying before His eyes, His mind fixed upon the Father and the forgiveness which He was making possible through His sacrifice, covered in blood and spittle, struggling for breath... He was 'lifted up' in glory and exaltation, to those who have open eyes to see and hearts to imagine and brains to comprehend.

Imagine yourself being crucified. Go through the stages in the process. The Lord invited us to do this when He asked us to figuratively crucify ourselves daily. Consider all the language of the sacrifices which pointed forward to the final, supreme act of the Lord: poured out, pierced, parted in pieces, beaten out; the rock smitten... and this is the process which we are going through, although the Father deals with us infinitely more gently than with His only Son.

19:19 *Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And there was written: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews*- Did Pilate write it in his own handwriting? Did they use the same ladder to place the inscription which Joseph later used to retrieve the body? Why do the records suggest that the inscription was placed after the stake had been erected? Was there initial resistance from the Jews? Was He impaled with the placard around His neck, and then the ladder was put up, and a soldier lifted it off and nailed it above His head? "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would have used words whose first letters created the sacred Name: YHWH. Perhaps this was why there was such opposition to it. "King of the Jews" would have been understood as a Messianic title. Either Pilate was sarcastic, or really believed it, or just wanted to provoke the Jews. In any case, somehow the Yahweh Name was linked with the Messiah: King of the Jews. The Name was declared in the Lord's death, as He had foretold (Jn. 17:26). Forgiveness of sins is through baptism into the Name (Acts 2:38), as even in OT times forgiveness was for the sake of the Name (Ps. 79:9). And yet through the cross and blood of Christ is forgiveness made possible. His blood and death therefore was the supreme declaration of God's Name; through His cross the grace and forgiveness, love, salvation and judgment implicit in the Name was all enabled and revealed in practice. Ps. 22:22 prophesied that "I will declare thy name

unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation [*ekklesia*, LXX]". It was to us His brethren that the Name was declared; in the eyes of an unbelieving world, this was just another crucified man, a failure, a wannabe who never made it. But to us, it is the declaration of the Name. It was and is done in the midst of the ecclesia, as if the whole church from that day to this beholds it all at first hand. And our response is to in turn "Declare his righteousness" (Ps. 22:31), in response to seeing the Name declared, we declare to Him…in lives of love for the brethren. For the Name was declared, that the love that was between the Father and Son might be in us.

It is possible to argue that "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would require the use of words, the first letters of which created the word YHWH:

y Jesus- Yeshua
h The Nazarene- Ha'Natzri [cp. "the sect of 'The Nazarene(s)', Acts 24:5]
v and King- u'Melek
h of the Jews- Ha'Yehudim
giving the Yahweh Name:
hvhy

This is why the Jews minded it so strongly when the title was put up. Pilate's retort "What I have written I have written" may well have been an oblique reference to 'I am that I am'. It was his attempt to have the last laugh with the Jews who had manipulated him into crucifying a man against whom there was no real charge. It was as if the Lord suffered as He did with a placard above Him which effectively said: 'This is Yahweh'. The Name was declared there, as the Lord had foreseen (Jn. 17:26). The declaration of Yahweh's Name to Moses in Ex. 34:6 thus becomes a foretaste of the Lord's crucifixion. Some LXX versions render Ex. 34:6 as 'Yahweh, Yahweh, *a man* full of mercy....'. In the crucifixion of the man Christ Jesus the essence of Yahweh was declared. And we, John says with reference to the cross, saw that glory,as it were cowering in the rock like Moses, *full* of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14 cp. Ex. 34:6 RV).

There are other reasons for thinking that there was the supreme manifestation of Yahweh in the cross of His Son:

· It has been observed that the blood of the Passover Lamb on the lintels of the doors at the Exodus, three sides of a square, would have recalled the two repeated letters of 'Yahweh' (see above panel), as if His Name was manifested in the blood of the slain lamb.

· Yahweh laid on the Lord the iniquity of us all, as if He was present there when the soldiers laid the cross upon the Lord's shoulders (Is. 53:6).

· Yahweh had prophesied of what He would achieve through the crucified Christ: "I am, I am: He that blots out thy trangressions" (Is. 43:25 LXX). He declares His Name as being supremely demonstrated in His forgiveness of our sins through and in the Lord's cross.

· Jehovah-Jireh can mean "Yahweh will show Yah" (Gen. 22:14), in eloquent prophecy of the crucifixion. There Yahweh was to be manifested supremely.

· Paul speaks of how the cross of Christ should humble us, so that no flesh should glory in God's presence (1 Cor. 1:29); as if God's presence is found in the cross, before which we cannot have any form of pride.

· The LXX uses the word translated "propitiation" in the NT with reference to how God forgave / propitiated for Israel's sins for His Name's sake (Ex. 32:14; Ps. 79:9). That propitiation was only for the sake of the Lord's future death, which would be the propitiation God ultimately accepted. Having no past or future with Him, Yahweh

could act as if His Son's death had already occurred. But that death and forgiveness for "His name's sake" were one and the same thing. The Son's death was the expression of the Father's Name.

· There was a Jewish tradition that the only time when the Yahweh Name could be pronounced was by the High Priest, when he sprinkled the blood of Israel's atonement on the altar. The Name was expressed in that blood.

· Zech. 11:13 speaks of Yahweh being priced at thirty shekels of silver by Israel. But these words are appropriated to the Lord in His time of betrayal. What men did to Him, they did to the Father.

-The Red Heifer was to be slain before the face of the priest, "as he watches" (Num. 19:3-5 NIV), pointing forward to the Lord's slaughter in the personal presence of the Father.

- The blood of the sin offering was to be sprinkled "before the LORD, before the veil" (Lev. 4:6,17). Yet the veil was a symbol of the flesh of the Lord Jesus at the time of His dying. At the time of the sprinkling of blood when the sin offering was made, the veil [the flesh of the Lord Jesus] was identifiable with Yahweh Himself. The blood of the offerings was poured out "before Yahweh" (Lev. 4:15 etc.), pointing forward to how God Himself, from so physically far away, "came down" so that the blood shedding of His Son was done as it were in His presence. And who is to say that the theophany that afternoon, of earthquake and thick darkness, was not the personal presence of Yahweh, hovering above crucifixion hill? Over the mercy seat (a symbol of the Lord Jesus in Hebrews), between the cherubim where the blood was sprinkled, "there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee" (Ex. 25:22). There we see the essence of God, and there in the cross we hear the essential word and message of God made flesh.

· The smitten rock was an evident type of the Lord's smiting on the cross. And yet in Deuteronomy especially it is made clear that Israel were to understand Yahweh as their rock. And yet "that rock was Christ". God Himself said that he would stand upon the rock as it was smitten- presumably fulfilled by the Angel standing or hovering above / upon the rock, while Moses smote it. And yet again it is Yahweh who is described as smiting the rock in Ps. 78 and Is. 48:21. He was with Christ, directly identified with Him, at the very same time as He 'smote' Him.

See on Mt. 26:65; Jn. 1:14; 3:14; 8:56; 13:37; 16:25,32; 19:13; Acts 20:28; 2 Cor. 5:20.

19:20- see on Jn. 19:11.

This title many of the Jews read, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near to the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin and in Greek- As noted on :19, the Jews objected to the Hebrew title because the first letters of the four words used spelled the memorial Name, YHWH. The point is made here that crucifixion was public. If we are to die with the Lord, and share His cross, then our commitment to Him likewise must be public. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. The tendency in our age is to be secret Christians, showing sympathy for His cause from behind our screens. But the essence of Christianity is to make a public declaration as the Lord did; and John's Gospel has a theme of secret believers either turning back to their surrounding world, or coming out openly for the Lord.

19:21 *The chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate: Do not write, The King of the Jews; but that: He claimed, I am King of the Jews*- Pilate seems to have sincerely believed that the Lord was indeed Israel's king and Son of God; throughout 19:1-15 I have pointed out his struggle with his own conscience. This insistence of writing the

title as he did was perhaps a rather pathetic attempt to make at least some statement of support for the Lord.

19:22 *Pilate answered: What I have written I have written*- As noted on :19, perhaps an allusion to the YHWH Name, 'I will be that I will be', which was spelled out by the first letters of the four Hebrew words used for the title.

19:23 *The soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also the coat. Now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout*- This was all prefigured in how Joseph lost his garment before he went into the pit and before he went to prison (Gen. 39:13). Presumably there were many soldiers around. The temple guard which was seconded to the Jews (Mt. 27:65) was doubtless there in full force, lest there be any attempt to save Jesus by the crowd or the disciples. And yet Jn. 19:23 suggests there were only four soldiers, each of whom received a part of His clothing. This must mean that there were four actually involved in the crucifixion: one for each hand and foot. He had signs of nails (plural) in His hands. We are left to meditate as to whether He was nailed hand over hand as tradition has it (which would have meant two very long nails were used); or both hands separately.

It is likely that the Lord was crucified naked, thereby sharing the shame of Adam's nakedness. The *shame* of the cross is stressed (Heb. 11:26; 12:2; Ps. 31:17; Ps. 69:6,7,12,19,20). And we are to share those sufferings. There *must*, therefore, be an open standing up for what we believe in the eyes of a hostile world. Preaching, in this sense, is for all of us. And if we dodge this, we put the Son of God to a naked shame; we re-crucify Him naked, we shame Him again (Heb. 6:6). He was crucified naked, and the sun went in for three hours. He must have been cold, very cold (Jn. 18:18). Artemidorus Daldianus (*Oneirokritika* 2.53) confirms that the Romans usually crucified victims naked. Melito of Sardis, writing in the 2nd century, writes of “his body naked and not even deemed worthy of a clothing that it might not be seen. Therefore the heavenly lights turned away and the day darkened in order that he might be hidden who was denuded upon the cross" (*On the Pasch* 97). The earliest portrayals of the crucified Jesus, on carved gems, feature Him naked.

There is reason to think that the Jews put the Lord to the maximum possible shame and pain; therefore they may well have crucified Him naked. T. Mommsen *The Digest Of Justinian* 48.20.6 reports that “the garments that the condemned person is wearing may not be demanded by the torturers"- the fact that they gambled for His clothes shows that the Lord was yet again treated illegally (quite a feature of the records) and to the maximum level of abuse. We not only get this impression from the Biblical record, but from a passage in the Wisdom of Solomon (2:12-20) which would have been well known to them, and which has a surprising number of similarities to the Lord’s life amongst the Jews:

“Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man, since he annoys us and opposes our way of life, reproaches us for our breaches of the law an accuses us of playing false...he claims to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a son of the Lord. Before us he stands, a reproof to our way of thinking, the very sight of him weighs our spirits down; His way of life is not like other men’s...in His opinion we are counterfeit... and boasts of having God as His father. let us see if what he says is true, let us observe what kind of end he himself will have. If the virtuous man is God’s son, God will take his part and rescue him from the clutches of his enemies. *Let us test him with cruelty and with torture, and thus explore this gentleness of His and put His endurance to the proof. Let us condemn him to a shameful death* since he will be looked after- we have his word for it".

Susan Garrett lists several Greek words and phrases found in the Gospel of Mark which are identical to those in this section of the Wisdom of Solomon. It would seem that Mark was aware of this passage in the Wisdom of Solomon, and sought to show how throughout the Lord's ministry, and especially in His death, the Jews were seeking to apply it to Him in the way they treated Him. See Susan Garrett, *The Temptations Of Jesus In Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) p. 68.

The idea of the Lord being subjected to the maximum pain and mocking must, sadly, be applied to Seneca's description of how some victims of crucifixion were nailed through their genitals (*Dialogi* 6.20.3). In this sense the paradox of Is. 53 would have come true- through losing His ability to bring forth children, the Lord brought forth a huge multitude of spiritual children world-wide. It's an honour to be one of them.

There seems to have been something unusual about the Lord's outer garment. The same Greek word *chiton* used in Jn. 19:23,24 is that used in the LXX of Gen. 37:3 to describe Joseph's coat of many pieces. Josephus (*Antiquities* 3.7.4,161) uses the word for the tunic of the High Priest, which was likewise not to be rent (Lev. 21:10). The Lord in His time of dying is thus set up as High Priest, gaining forgiveness for His people, to 'come out' of the grave as on the day of Atonement, pronouncing the forgiveness gained, and bidding His people spread that good news world-wide.

19:24 *They said to each other, Let us not tear it but cast lots for it, to determine whose it shall be; that the scripture might be fulfilled, which said: They divided my garments among them, and for my robe they cast lots*- The robe was not to be torn, *schizein*. There was to be no schism in it. Ahijah tore his garment into twelve pieces to symbolize the division of Israel (1 Kings 11:30,31). The Lord's coat being unrent may therefore be another reflection of how His death brought about unity amongst His people (Jn. 11:52; 17:21,22). Before Him, there, we simply cannot be divided amongst ourselves. Likewise the net through which the Lord gathers His people was unbroken (Jn. 21:11). Note how all these references are in John- as if he perceived this theme of unity through the cross. Note the focus of the soldiers upon the dividing up of the clothes, whilst the Son of God played out the ultimate spiritual drama for human salvation just a metre or so away from them. And our pettiness is worked out all too often in sight of the same cross. As those miserable men argued over the clothes at the foot of the cross, so when Israel stood before the glory of Yahweh at Sinai, they still suffered "disputes" amongst themselves (Ex. 24:22 NIV cp. Heb. 12:29). So pressing and important do human pettinesses appear, despite the awesomeness of that bigger picture to which we stand related.

The prophecy quoted is Ps. 22:18, where the Psalmist speaks as if he is observing the parting of his garments before his own eyes. This had an incredibly accurate fulfilment in how the Lord from His impaled position was able to view this happening before Him.

19:25 *These things the soldiers did. There was standing by the cross of Jesus his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene*- The Torah required "two or three witnesses" (Dt. 19:15); yet Roman law disallowed women as witnesses. Significantly, the Torah didn't, although later Jewish law did. The records of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus are carefully framed to show that there were always two or three witnesses present- and they are all *women*:

	Cross	Burial	Resurrection

Matthew	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and Joseph, Mother of the sons of Zebedee	Mary Magdalene, "the other Mary"	Mary Magdalene, "the other Mary"
Mark	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and Joses, Salome	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of Joses	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, Salome
Luke			Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary mother of James

The emphasis is surely deliberate- women, the ones who were *not* witnesses according to the world, were the very witnesses chosen by God to testify the key truths concerning His Son. And His same approach is seen today in His choices of and amongst us.

It is entirely possible that the sister of Jesus' mother mentioned in the account of the crucifixion ("His mother's sister") is to be identified with the woman named Salome mentioned in Mark 15:40 and also with the woman identified as "the mother of the sons of Zebedee" mentioned in Mt 27:56. If so, and if John the Apostle is to be identified as the beloved disciple, then the reason for the omission of the second woman's name becomes clear; she would have been John's own mother, and he consistently omitted direct reference to himself or his brother James or any other members of his family in the fourth Gospel. Therefore "behold your mother" meant he was to reject *his* mother and take Mary as his mother, to alleviate the extent of her loss. Finally Mary came to see Jesus as Jesus, as the Son of God, and not just as her son. This was her conversion- to see Him for who He was, uncluttered by her own perceptions of Him, by the baggage of everything else. And so it can be with us in re-conversion. We each must face the reality of who Jesus really is, quite apart from all the baggage of how we were brought up to think of Him: the Sunday School Jesus, the Jesus of the apostate church, the Jesus we have come to imagine from our own human perceptions…must give way when we are finally confronted with who He really is. This line of thought is born out by a consideration of Mk. 15:40,41: "There were also women beholding from afar: among whom were both Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the little and of Joses, and Salome; who, when he was in Galilee, followed him and ministered unto him: and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem". Jesus had two brothers named James and Joses (Mt. 13:55). If the principle of interpreting Scripture by Scripture means anything, then we can fairly safely assume that the Mary referred to here is Mary the mother of Jesus. It was perhaps due to the influence and experience of the cross that His brother James called himself "the little", just as Saul changed his name to Paul, 'the little one', from likewise reflecting on the height of the Lord's victory. So within the crowd of women, there were two women somehow separate from the rest- "among whom were both Mary Magdalene, and Mary". Mary Magdalene was the bashful ex-hooker who was almost inevitably in love with Jesus. The other Mary was His mother. Understandably

they forged a special bond with each other. Only Mary Magdalene had fully perceived the Lord's upcoming death, hence her annointing of His body beforehand. And only His Mother had a perception approaching that of the Magdalene. It's not surprising that the two of them were somehow separate from the other women. These women are described as following Him when He was in Galilee; and the mother of Jesus is specifically recorded as having done this, turning up at the Cana wedding uninvited, and then coming to the house where Jesus was preaching. The description of the women as 'coming up' (the idiom implies 'to keep a feast') with Him unto Jerusalem takes the mind back to Mary bringing Jesus up to Jerusalem at age 12. But my point is, that Mary is called now "the mother of James…and of Joses". The same woman appears in Mk. 16:1: "Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James…had bought sweet spices that they might come and anoint him". Earlier in the Gospels, Mary is always "the mother of Jesus". Now she is described as the mother of her other children. It seems to me that this is the equivalent of John recording how Mary was told by Jesus at the cross that she was no longer the mother of Jesus, He was no longer her son. The other writers reflect this by calling her at that time "Mary the mother of James" rather than the mother of Jesus. The way that Jesus appears first to Mary Magdalene rather than to His mother (Mk. 16:9) is surely God's confirmation of this break between Jesus and His earthly mother.

The whole structure of the records of the crucifixion are to emphasize how the cross is essentially about human response to it; nothing else elicits from humanity a response like the cross does. Mark's account, for example, has 5 component parts. The third part, the centrepiece as it were, is the account of the actual death of the Lord; but it is surrounded by cameos of human response to it (consider Mk. 15:22-27; 28-32; the actual death of Jesus, 15:33-37; then 15:38-41; 15:42-47). John's record shows a similar pattern, based around 7 component parts: 19:16-18; 19-22; 23,24; then the centrepiece of 25-27; followed by 19:28-30; 31-37; 38-42. But for John the centrepiece is Jesus addressing His mother, and giving her over to John's charge. This for John was the quintessence of it all; that a man should leave His mother, that Mary loved Jesus to the end… and that he, John, was honoured to have been there and seen it all. John began his gospel by saying that the word was manifest and flesh and he saw it- and I take this as a reference to the Lord's death. Through this, a new family of men and women would be created (Jn. 1:12). See on Lk. 23:48.

19:26 *When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing by, he said to his mother: Woman, behold your son!*- Unearthed victims of crucifixion seem to have been impaled on stakes about 10 feet high. The cross would not have been as high as 'Christian' art usually represents it. The feet of the Lord would only have been about 4 feet above ground. His mother and aunty stood by the cross- the tragedy of His mother being there needs no comment. She would have seen the blood coming from the feet. Her head would have been parallel with His knees. His face marred more than the sons of men (Is. 52:14), sore from where His beard had been pulled off (Is. 50:6), teeth missing and loose, making His speech sound strange, fresh and dried blood mixing... and His mother there to behold and hear it all. She must have thought back, and surely He did too; for He was only a man. Mother around the house as a child, mending clothes, getting food, explaining things, telling Him about Simeon's prophecy, of how a sword would break her heart as well as His. This isn't just emotional speculation. Ps. 22:9,10 emphasizes the Lord's thoughts for His mother and His babyhood with her: "Thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou keptest me in safety (AVmg.- a reference to Herod's persecution) when I was on my mother's

breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly". The temptation would have been to go on and on. Was I too hard on her in Cana? How I must have stung her when I said "Behold *my mother* and my brethren" are these half hearted, superficially interested people (Mt. 12:49). She was the best best best mother I could have ever had. Like any man would think. And He was a man. Not a mere man, but a man. I wonder if He said those words of breakage, of severance, between Him and her, because these feelings welling up within Him were affecting His concentration on the Father.

"*But* there stood by the cross..." makes the connection between Mary and the clothes. It seems that initially, she wasn't there; He looked for comforters and found none (Ps. 69:20- or does this imply that the oft mentioned spiritual difference between the Lord and His mother meant that He didn't find comfort in her? Or she only came to the cross later?). His lovers, friends and kinsmen stood far off from Him (Ps. 38:11), perhaps in a literal sense, perhaps far away from understanding Him. If Mary wasn't initially at the cross, John's connection between the dividing of the clothes and her being there would suggest that she had made the clothes. In any case, the four women at the cross are surely set up against the four soldiers there- who gambled over the clothes. Perhaps the other women had also had some input into the Lord's clothing.

If indeed Mary and the few with her came from standing far off to stand by the cross, they were sharing the spirit of Joseph and Nicodemus: 'In the light of the cross, nothing, nothing, absolutely *nothing* really matters now. The shame, embarrassment nothing. We will stand for Him and His cause, come what may'.

I can only ponder the use of the imperfect in Jn. 19:25: 'There were standing' *may* imply that Mary and the women came and went; sometimes they were there by the cross, sometimes afar off. Did they retreat from grief, or from a sense of their inadequacy, or from being driven off by the hostile crowd or soldiers, only to make their way stubbornly back? Tacitus records that no spectators of a crucifixion were allowed to show any sign of grief; this was taken as a sign of compliance with the sin of the victim. He records how some were even crucified for showing grief at a crucifixion. This was especially so in the context of leaders of revolutionary movements, which was the reason why Jesus was crucified. This would explain why the women stood afar off, and sometimes in moments of self-control came closer. Thus the Lord looked for comforters and found none, according to the spirit of prophecy in the Psalms. And yet His mother was also at the foot of the cross sometimes. For her to be there, so close to Him as she undoubtedly wished to be, and yet not to show emotion, appearing to the world to be another indifferent spectator; the torture of mind must be meditated upon. Any of these scenarios provides a link with the experience of all who would walk out against the wind of this world, and identify ourselves with the apparently hopeless cause of the crucified Christ. The RV of Jn. 19:25 brings out the tension between the soldiers standing there, and the fact that: "But there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother…". The "but…" signals, perhaps, the tension of the situation- for it was illegal to stand in sympathy by the cross of the victim. And there the soldiers were, specially in place to stop it happening, standing nearby…

John taking Mary to his own home *may* not mean that he took her away to his house in Jerusalem. In any case, John's physical home was in Galilee, not Jerusalem. "His

own (home)" is used elsewhere to mean 'family' rather than a physical house. This would have involved Mary rejecting her other sons, and entering into John's family. Spiritual ties were to be closer than all other. This must be a powerful lesson, for it was taught in the Lord's final moments. Whether we understand that John took Mary away to his own home (and later returned, Jn. 19:35), or that they both remained there to the end with the understanding that Mary was not now in the family of Jesus, the point is that the Lord separated Himself from His mother. The fact He did this last was a sign of how close He felt to her. She was the last aspect of His humanity which He had clung to. And at the bitter bitter end, He knew that He must let go even, even, even of her. Jn. 19:28 speaks likewise as if the Lord's relationship with His mother was the last part of His humanity which He had to complete / fulfil / finish. For it was "after this", i.e. His words to His mother, that He knew that "all was now finished".

And yet another construction is possible. It would seem that John *did* have a house in Jerusalem. Mary was John's aunty, and so she was already in his 'house' in the sense of family. This might suggest that the Lord didn't mean John was to accept Mary into the family, as they were already related. It is reasonable to conjecture that perhaps He sent her away to John's house, for *her* benefit. He didn't want her to have to see the end. For me, if I had been in His situation, I would have preferred to die with her there. At least there was the one and only human being who knew for sure, and He knew she knew for sure, that He was the Son of God. She was the one, on earth, that He could be certain of. She had pondered all these things for 34 years. And He knew it. But if He sent her away for *her* benefit, we have yet another example of the Lord rejecting a legitimate comfort; as He rejected the pain killer, the footrests, the opportunity to drink before He asked for it ...indeed, the cross itself was something which He chose when other forms of obedience to the Father's will may have been equally possible.

The thoughts presented here concerning Mary offer several possibilities, not each of which can be what really happened; not least concerning the question of for how long she stood by the cross. But this, to my mind, doesn't matter. Each man, yes, each and every one of us, must go through the process of the cross in his own mind, and thereby be inspired. These are only thoughts to help on the way. The whole record is designed, it seems, to provoke reverent meditation. One can only, for example, meditate in a vague way on what Mary's feelings will be when she rises from the sleep of death to see her son. As we will recognize Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom, so surely she will have that sense that "this is my boy". Reflecting upon the Lord's relationship with His mother as He died leads us a little deeper into His tension and ineffable sadness which the cross crystallized. His soul was sorrowful unto death in Gethsemane, as if the stress alone nearly killed Him (Mk. 14:34). "My soul is full of troubles, and my life (therefore) draweth nigh unto the grave" (Ps. 88:3). Is. 53:10-12 speaks of the fact that Christ's *soul* suffered as being the basis of our redemption; the mind contained within that spat upon head, as it hung on that tortured body; this was where our salvation was won. Death is the ultimately intense experience, and living a life dedicated to death would have had an intensifying effect upon the Lord's character and personality. Thus He jumped at His mother's request for wine as being a suggestion He should die there and then (Jn. 2:4). So many men reached their most intense at the end of their lives: Moses spoke Deuteronomy, Paul and Peter wrote their finest letters then. And the Lord was matchlessly superb at His end. He reached a peak of spirituality at the end, to the point where He showed us, covered in blood and

spittle and human rejection as He was, what the very essence of God really was. He declared the Name of Yahweh in the final moments of His death.

A mother always feels a mother to her child. That's basic human fact. The way the Lord as it were ended that mother-child relationship with Mary thereby carries all the more pain with it. The way the Gospel records refer to Mary as the mother of others amongst her children, e.g. "Mary of James" (Lk. 24:10) shows the Gospel writers paid tribute and respect to this break that had been made. Perhaps this explains why the brothers of Jesus, James and Jude, chose not to identify themselves as the brothers of Jesus- Jude calls himself the brother of James (Jude 1), and James identifies himself as a servant of Jesus (James 1:1). In this way they both reflected the way that human relationship to Jesus now meant nothing at all.

It's been observed by many that what a man needs most as he dies… is not to face death alone. To have someone with him. The way the Lord sent Mary and John away from Him at the very end is profound in its reflection of His total selflessness, His deep thought for others rather than Himself. It also reflects how He more than any other man faced the ultimate human realities and issues which death exposes. He wilfully faced them alone, the supreme example of human bravery in the face of death. And He faced them fully, with no human cushion or literal or psychological anesthesia to dilute the awful, crushing reality of it. Remember how He refused the painkiller. And through baptism and life in Him, we are asked to die with Him, to share something of His death, the type and nature of death which He had... in our daily lives. Little wonder we each seem to sense some essential, existential, quintessential… loneliness in our souls. Thus it must be for those who share in His death. I'm grateful to Cindy for a quote from a wise doctor, Kurt Eissler: "What you can really do for a person who is dying, is to die with him". How inadvertently profound that thought becomes when applied to the death of our Lord, and to us as we imagine ourselves standing by and watching Him there. "What you can really do for a person who is dying, is to die with him".

We are asked to fellowship the sufferings of the Son of God, to truly begin to enter into them. The least we can do is to meditate upon their different facets, and begin to realize that if the cross really does come before the crown, then we can expect a life which reflects, in principle at least, the same basic agonies. The relationship between the Lord and Mary brings home two crystal clear points: Firstly, the sheer human pain and pathos of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ and those near Him; and secondly, the way in which He had to sacrifice His closest human relationship for the sake of His devotion to God.

There is something ineffably, ineffably sad about the fact that the mother of Jesus was standing only a meter or so away from Him at the foot of the cross. Absolutely typical of the Biblical record, this fact is recorded by John almost in passing. This is in harmony with the way the whole crucifixion is described. Thus Jn. 19:17,18 seems to focus on the fact that Jesus bore His cross to a place called Golgotha; the fact that there they crucified Him is mentioned in an incidental sort of way. Mark likewise: "And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments..." (Mk. 15:24). In similar vein the agony of flogging is almost bypassed in Mt. 27:26: "and when he had scourged Jesus...".

Simeon had early prophesied Mary's feelings when he spoke of how her son would be "spoken against" and killed: "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul *also*" (Lk. 2:35). This means that the piercing of Christ's soul was felt by His mother at the same time. And so we picture that woman in her 50s at the cross, with a lifetime behind her of meditating upon God's words, meditating upon the strange road her life had taken, a road travelled by no other woman, keeping *all* these things in her heart (Lk. 2:19,51; implying she didn't open up to anyone), a lifetime characterized by a deep fascination with her firstborn son, but also characterized by a frustrating lack of understanding of Him, and no doubt an increasing sense of distance from His real soul. Recall how when Mary asked Jesus for wine at the feast, He saw in her mention of wine a symbol of His blood. She asked for wine, on a human level; and He responded: 'Woman, what have I to do with you, can't you see that the time for me to give my blood isn't yet?'. They were just on quite different levels. It seems almost certain that Christ was crucified naked. If we crucify him afresh (Heb. 6:6), we put him to an "open" or naked (Gk.) shame. The association between shame and the crucifixion is stressed in Ps. 22 and Is. 53; and shame is elsewhere connected with nakedness.

We know that the Jews felt that Christ was the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier; this is recorded to this day in the Mishnah. They had earlier taunted Him about this (Jn. 8:19). Translating into dynamic, modern English, it is not difficult to imagine the abuse they shouted at Him as He hung on the cross. Their mocking of His claim that God was His Father was doubtless related to this. And there can be no doubt that their scorn in this direction would have fallen upon Mary too. The sword that pierced Christ's soul on the cross was the sword of the abuse which was shouted at Him then (Ps. 42:10); and the piercing of Christ's soul, Simeon had said, was the piercing of Mary's soul too. In other words, they were both really cut, pierced, by this mocking of the virgin birth. Neither of them were hard and indifferent to it. And the fact they both stood together at the cross and faced it together must have drawn them closer, and made their parting all the harder. She alone knew beyond doubt that God was Christ's father, even though the Lord had needed to rebuke her for being so carried away with the humdrum of life that she once referred to Joseph as His father (Lk. 2:33). For everyone else, there must always have been that tendency to doubt. Ps. 22:9,10 were among Christ's thoughts as He hung there: "Thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly". If dying men do indeed think back to their childhood, His thoughts would have been with His mother.
She had sought Him *sorrowing* when He was 12, all her life she had been plagued by this problem of knowing He was righteous, the Son of God, her Saviour, and yet she didn't fully understand Him. How deeply would the pain of all this hung over her as she watched Him in His time of dying. Doubtless she had (on the law of averages) lost other children, but this one was something special. She was a woman a real mother, and her special love for Jesus would have been noticed by the others. This probably had something to do with the fact that all her other children had rejected Christ as a "stranger", i.e. a Gentile; perhaps they too believed that this Jesus was the result of mum's early fling with a passing Roman soldier (Ps. 69:8). Inevitably people would have commented to Mary: "He's a lovely boy, isn't he". And although one doesn't sense she was arrogant in any way, her motherly pride would have risen. For He was a lovely boy, ever growing in favour with men, rather than falling out of favour with some over the petty things of village life. Remember how we sense her

motherly pride surfacing at the wedding in Cana. At the cross she would have recalled all this, recalled Him as a clinging 5 year old, being comforted by her in childhood illnesses, recalled making and mending His clothes- perhaps even the cloak the drunk soldiers were gambling over. And as she beheld Him there, covered in blood and spittle, annoyed by the endless flies, alone in the darkness, evidently thirsty, with her helpless to help beneath- surely her mind would have gone back 34 years to the words of the Angel: "He shall be great". "He shall be great". And then the mental panic to understand, the crying out within the soul, the pain of incomprehension of death.

There is a great sense of pathos in those words of Jesus: "Woman behold thy son". It sounded first of all as if Jesus was saying 'Well mum, look at me here'. But then she would have realized that this was not what He was saying. We can almost see Him nodding towards John. He was rejecting her as His mother in human terms, He was ceasing to be her son, He was trying to replace His sonship with that of an adopted son. The way He called her "Woman" rather than mother surely reflects the distance which there was between them, as He faced up to the fact that soon He would leave human nature, soon His human sonship would be ended. In passing, note how He addresses God at the end not as “Father" but “My God"- as if His sharing in our distance from God led Him to feel the same. Hence His awful loneliness and sense of having been forsaken or distanced from all those near to Him. "Behold thy mother ...behold thy son" suggests Jesus was asking them to look at each other. Doubtless they were looking down at the ground at the time. We get the picture of them looking up and catching each others eye, then a brief silence, coming to understand what Jesus meant, and then from that hour, i.e. very soon afterwards, John *taking* Mary away. We are invited to imagine so much. The long, long discussions between them about Jesus, punctuated by long silences, as they kept that Passover, and as they lived together through the next years. Above all we see the pathos of them walking away, backs to Jesus, with Him perhaps watching them.

All this would have contributed to His sense of being forsaken. The disciples forsook Him (Mt. 26:56), His mother had now left Him, and so the words of Ps. 27:9,10 started to come true: “Leave me not, neither forsake me, O God... when my father and my mother forsake me". All His scaffolding was being removed. He had leaned on His disciples (Lk. 22:28), He had naturally leaned on His mother. Now they had forsaken Him. And now His mother had forsaken Him. And so He pleaded with His true Father not to leave Him. And hence the agony, the deep agony of Mt. 27:46: "My God, my God, Why hast *thou* (this is where the emphasis should be) forsaken me?". The disciples' desertion is a major theme, especially in Mark 15 (written by Peter, the most guilty?). The young man followed, but then ran away; Peter followed, but then denied (Mk. 14:51,54); all the disciples fled (:50); Joseph and Nicodemus denied Him (:64). By instinct, we humans want someone by our side in the hospital the night before the operation, in the nursing home as death looms near, or in any great moment of crisis. The Lord needed, desperately, His men with Him. Hence the hurt, undisguised, of “could you not watch with me one hour?".

Col. 2:11-15 describe the crucifixion sufferings of Jesus as His 'circumcision'. The cross did something intimate and personal to Him. Through the process of His death, He 'put right off the body of his flesh' (RVmg.). He shed His humanity. The saying goodbye to His mother, the statement that she was no longer His mother but just a woman to Him, was, it would seem, the very last divesting of 'the body of his flesh'. It

seems to me that such was His love of her, so strong was His human connection to her who gave Him His human connection, that the relationship with her was the hardest and in fact the final aspect of humanity which He 'put off' through the experience of crucifixion. And this is why, once He had done so, He died.

There cannot be any of us who are not touched by all this. We are asked to fellowship the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. What can we expect but a sense of pathos in our lives, broken and sacrificed relationships, the loss of the dearest of human love. There seems to be a growing group of believers in their 20s -50s, some happily married, well blessed with the things of this life, who seem to preach a gospel of happy-clappy belief, of tapping each other under the chin and speaking of how much joy and happiness their religion gives them. And those who don't experience this are made to feel spiritually inferior. Yet that 'other' group are, world-wide, growing into the majority of the body of Christ. A real meditation upon the cross of our Lord and the frequent exhortations by Him to share in it places all this in perspective. We must suffer with Him if we are to be glorified with Him in His Kingdom. The joy and peace of Christ which is now available is the joy and peace which He had in His life, a deep deep joy and peace from knowing that we are on the road to salvation. Know yourselves, brethren and sisters. Search your lives. If we are truly, truly trying to share the cross of Christ, if we are beginning to know the meaning of self-sacrifice, of love unto the end, we will know the spirit of Christ on that cross, "the lonely cry, the anguish keen". We will be able to share His mind, to know the fellowship of His spirit, of touching spirits with Him. And in that is joy and peace beyond our ability to describe.

19:27 *Then he said to the disciple: Behold, your mother! And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home*- I take the comment that John therefore took her to his own [home] as meaning His own house, back in Jerusalem (Jn. 19:27). The same construction is used in Jn. 16:32 cp. Acts 21:6 as meaning house rather than family. "Took to" is a verb of motion as in Jn. 6:21. His feelings for her were so strong, so passionate, that He saw it could distract Him. He wanted to stay on earth with her, and not go to His Heavenly Father. This accounts for His again using the rather distant term "Woman", and telling her that now, He wasn't her Son, John was now, and she wasn't His mother, she must be John's mother. And many a man has chosen to leave mother for the sake of the Father's work, as Hannah sacrificed her dear Samuel, to be eternally bonded in the gracious Kingdom to come. And even if one has not done this in this form, there is scarcely a believer who has not had to make some heart wrenching break with family and loved ones for the Lord's sake. Only His sake alone could inspire men and women in this way.

19:28 *After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now finished, so that the scripture might be accomplished, said: I thirst*- This wasn't just ingenious thinking on the spur of the moment. Victims lived for around two days on the crosses, but this was only due to a regular supply of liquid being handed up to them. One wonders if the person who organized the drink was one of the relatives of the thieves, or perhaps His own relatives. Surely His mother and aunty and Mary had come prepared to do all they could for Him in this final agony. They knew what the relatives of the crucified had to do. The thieves had probably received liquid already during the ordeal. But our sense must be that the Lord didn't. Perhaps His mother even suggested it, with an inward glance back to the sweet days of early childhood: "Do you want a drink? I can get you one". But as He refused the painkiller, as He refused to push down on the footrests, so

He refused to quench His thirst.

Note that the sponge was placed on a hyssop plant, which is only 50cm. long at the most. This is internal evidence that the cross was quite low, and the Lord's feet only a few feet above the ground. The Lord Jesus began to quote Psalm 22 in His final moments on the cross, and He earnestly desired to complete the quotation. He asked for something to wet His throat so He could complete the last few verses. This indicates not only His earnest desire to say out loud "It is finished" with all that meant, but also the level of His thirst. Every word He spoke out loud was an expenditure of effort and saliva. He was intensely aware of this. He realized that unless He had more moisture, He just would not be able to speak out loud any more. And yet He so desperately wanted His last words to be heard and meditated upon. His sweat in the Garden had been dropping like blood drops; the nervous tension of bearing our sins sapped moisture from Him. There would have been a loss of lymph and body fluid to the point that Christ felt as if He had been "poured out like water" (Ps. 22:14); He “poured out his soul unto death" (Is. 53:12), as if His sense of dehydration was an act He consciously performed; He felt that the loss of moisture was because He was pouring it out Himself. This loss of moisture was therefore due to the mental processes within the Lord Jesus, it was a result of His act of the will in so mentally and emotionally giving Himself for us, rather than just the physical result of crucifixion.

The Psalms, especially 22, indicate the extent of His dehydration- largely due to the amount of prayer out loud which He did on the cross ("The words of my *roaring*"). Heb. 5:7 speaks of His strong crying and tears (again an expenditure of moisture) while on the cross; and Rom. 8:26 alludes to this, saying that our Lord has the same intensity in His present mediation for us. The physical extent of His thirst is expressed by that of Samson, when in an incident typical of Christ's conquest of sin on the cross, he nearly died of thirst in the midst of a spectacular victory (Jud. 15:18). A perusal of that incident will enable us to enter into the thirst of our Lord a little more.

The Messianic Psalms also speak of the great spiritual thirst of the Lord Jesus in His sufferings. The intensity of His physical thirst therefore reflected His spiritual thirst, His desire to be with the Father, His desire to finish His work and achieve our salvation. We are better able to imagine His physical thirst than His spiritual thirst. Yet we are surely intended to see in that physical thirst a cameo of His desire for spiritual victory, His thirsting after God's righteousness.

"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been me meat...while they continually say unto me (on the cross), Where is thy God?" (Ps. 42:1-3). Christ's thirst was to come and appear before God. Appearing before God is Priestly language. Now He appears in God's presence in order to make mediation for us (Heb. 9:24), and He will appear again as the High Priest appeared on the day of Atonement, bringing our salvation. This means that Christ thirsted not so much for His own personal salvation, but for ours; He looked forward to the joys for evermore at God's right hand (Ps. 16:11)- i.e. the offering up of our prayers. How this should motivate us to pray and confess our sins! This is what our Lord was looking forward to on the cross. This is what He thirsted for.

"O God... my God (cp. "My God, my God")... my soul thirsteth after thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is" (Ps. 63:1)- cp. Christ as a root growing in a spiritually dry land on the cross (Is. 53:1)
"I stretch forth my hands unto thee (on the cross): my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land" (Ps. 143:6).

The thirsty land surrounding Christ on the cross represented spiritually barren Israel (Is. 53:1; Ps. 42:1-3); but the Lord Jesus so took His people upon Him, into His very soul, that His soul became a thirsty land (Ps. 143:6); He felt as spiritually barren as they were, so close was His representation of us, so close was He to sinful man, so fully did He enter into the feelings of the sinner. In the same way as Christ really did feel forsaken as Israel were because of their sins, so He suffered thirst, both literally and spiritually, which was a punishment for Israel's sins:

"Thou shalt serve thine enemies... in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things" (Dt. 28:48). This is an exact picture of Christ on the cross. And Paul likewise alluded to this language when describing his own sufferings for the sake of taking the Gospel to Israel (2 Cor. 11:27), as if he too felt that he was a sin-bearer for Israel as Christ had been. This is to be understood in the same way as his appropriating to Himself the prophecies concerning Christ as the light of the Gentiles. This is so relevant to the cross.
"They shall not (any more) hunger or thirst" (Is. 49:10) occurs in the context of comforting Israel that they will no longer be punished for their sins.
"Ye are they that forsake the Lord... therefore... ye shall be hungry... ye shall be thirsty... ye shall be ashamed" (Is. 65:11,13). This too is exactly relevant to the cross.
"Let (Israel) put away her whoredoms... lest I... set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst" (Hos. 2:3).
"I will send a famine in the land, not a... thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord... in that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst" (Am. 8:11,13).

This literal and spiritual thirst which was a punishment for Israel's sins came upon the Lord Jesus. He genuinely felt a thirst for God, He really felt forsaken, *as if* He had sinned, He truly came to know the feelings of the rejected sinner. And because of this He really is able to empathize (not just sympathize) with us in our weakness, to enter right into the feelings of those who have gone right away from God, as well as those who temporarily slip up in the way (Heb. 5:2).

19:29 *Nearby was a vessel full of vinegar. So they put a sponge full of the vinegar upon a hyssop stick, and held it to his mouth*- As noted on :28, the hyssop stick would not have been more than 50 cm. long at the most; so the Lord was not that high above the ground, contrary to the impression given by Catholic architecture, with crucifixes lifted far above the ground.

19:30 *When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said: It is finished! And he bowed his head and gave up his spirit*- The suggestion is that His humanity was such that He needed at least some moisture in order to utter His final words. That perhaps is all there is to His request for a drink.

All crucified men bow their heads on death. The record of this therefore suggests that He lifted up His head to the Father, and then nodding His head towards His people, gave His Spirit towards them- those who had walked out across the no mans land between the crowd and the soldiers, those who stood there declaring in front of all their allegiance to this crucified King. Yet the spirit of Christ is essentially the mind and disposition of Christ rather than an ability to perform miracles etc. The power to be like Him is passed to us through an inbreathing of His example on the cross. In this sense, the Lord's lifting up in glory on the cross enabled Him to impart His Spirit to us (Jn. 7:37-39). Notice that Christ gave up His last breath of His own volition- the withdrawal of a man's Spirit by God, as with the withdrawal of the Spirit gifts, is to be seen as God's judgment of man. Gen. 6:3 LXX and RVmg. implies this. This cry *was* the giving up of the Spirit. He gave His life, it wasn't taken from Him. As He wasn't pushing down on the footrests, breathing was agonizingly difficult. I suggest He took one last great breath, with head uplifted, the nails tearing at that sensitive nerve in His hands as He did so, and then He felt His heart stop. In that last two seconds or so, He expired in the words "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit". Thus He *gave* His life- for us. The centurion, when he saw *how* He died (Mk., NIV), believed. The display of self-mastery, of giving, of love so great, *so* free, was what made that man believe (perhaps he was Cornelius?). It has been observed that the phrase "He gave forth His spirit" is unique; death isn't described like that in contemporary literature. "Nowhere in antiquity is death described as the giving forth of one's spirit" (I. de la Potterie, *The Hour of Jesus* (New York: Alba House, 1989) p. 131).

This was a final victory cry. The spirit of the New Testament is that the cross was a pinnacle of victory, not of temporal defeat. There is no way that Christ was just muttering the equivalent of 'Well, that's it then'. "It is finished" encompassed so much. That tiny word "it", not even present in the Greek or Aramaic which Jesus actually spoke, compasses so much; the whole purpose of God. So we ask the question: *What* was finished? The key to this question is in Jn. 17:4: "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do". "The work" is therefore parallel with Christ's glorification of God. "It is finished" therefore reflects Christ's appreciation that He had now totally glorified His Father. But we need to ponder what exactly it means to glorify God. The glory of God refers to the characteristics intrinsic in God's Name; thus when Moses asked to see God's glory, the attributes of the Name were declared to him. Christ understood that in His death He would manifest God's Name / character to the full, although of course He had also manifested it in His life: "I have declared unto them (the believers, not the world) thy name, and *will declare it*" in His forthcoming death (Jn. 17:26).

It is a major theme of John's Gospel that God was glorified in the death of the Lord:

"Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from Heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again" at the cross (Jn. 12:28)

"Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him (i.e. the achievement of God's glorification was internal to Jesus, within His mind, where characteristics are found). If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him" on the cross (Jn. 13:31,32)

"And now, O Father, glorify me with thine own self (i.e. your fundamental being and character) with the glory which I had with thee...I have manifested thy name" (Jn. 17:5,6).

"I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it" on the cross (Jn. 17:26).

Christ's perfect character is only appreciated by the believers, and therefore it is only to them that God's Name / glory / very own self is revealed by Christ's example. It was to us that God's glory was finally revealed in the death of Christ. To those who wanted to see it, there was almost a visible righteousness exuding from Christ in His time of dying. "Truly this man was the Son of God... Certainly this was a righteous man" (Mk. 15:40; Lk. 23:46) was the response of the Centurion who was "watching Jesus"; and collating the Gospels, it seems he said this twice. "It is *finished*" implies that Christ's manifestation of the Father was progressive. He was "made *perfect*" by His sufferings, only becoming the author of our salvation when He had finally been perfected by them (Heb. 2:9; 5:8,9). This surely teaches that Christ died once He had reached a certain point of completeness of manifestation of the Father. If we accept this, we should not think of Christ just hanging on the cross waiting to die. He was actively developing His manifestation of the Father's characteristics, until finally He sensed He had arrived at that totality of reflection of the Father. Likewise in our carrying of the cross we are not just passively holding on until the Lord's return or our death. We should be actively growing; for surely we only die once we have reached, or had the opportunity to reach, a certain point of spiritual completeness. This may well explain why some believers die young relatively soon after baptism; they reach their intended completeness, and are therefore taken away from the grief of this life. The perfection of Christ's manifestation of the Father was steadily progressing until at the point of death He completely manifested Him. Thus at Christ's most forlorn and humanly desperate point, utterly exhausted, with no beauty humanly that we should desire Him, utterly despised, rejected and at best misunderstood by every human being, the Lord Jesus at that point was supremely manifesting the Father; He was manifesting God's very own self at that point when He cried "It is finished" (Jn. 17:5). It is axiomatic from this that the Gospel of God will be generally rejected by men. The Lord foresaw that His cross would be the final consummation of God's plan in that He at times almost spoke as if He saw His death as His glorification. Thus He speaks of the cross as a going to the Father (Jn. 16:16,17,28). The description of Him as the snake *lifted up* in the wilderness is in the context of Christ ascending to Heaven (Jn. 3:12-14), as if the lifting up of the snake was a reference to both the crucifixion and ascension of the Lord.

At the point the Lord expired, He laid down His life. So close was the link between Father and Son at this point, so deeply was God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, that John could later comment: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because *He* laid down His life for us: and we ought (in response) to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:16). The love of Christ and the cross are paralleled in 2 Cor. 5:14. To behold Christ there at the end, to imagine the sound of those words "It is finished", to begin to sense Christ's spiritual supremacy at that point, should deeply deeply motivate us. Christ loved us with a love which was love "unto *the end*" (Jn. 13:1)- the same word translated "finished" in "It is finished". As Christ said that, His love for us was complete, it was love unto the end, love right up to and beyond the limits of the concept of love. And we are actually asked to imagine that love, the growth of it for us until it was finished, perfected in the laying down of His life- and respond to it.

The Lord thought as much: "I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it (in his forthcoming death, cp. Jn. 12:26): *that* the love wherewith thou hast loved me

may be in them, and I in them" (Jn. 17:26). “In this we know love, that he laid down his life for us" (1 Jn. 3:16). Herein was the definition of love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and gave His son for our sins (1 Jn. 4:10). By beholding the finished perfection of the Lord Jesus, the spirit of Christ will dwell in us, and the love of God will be deeply in our hearts. There is almost a mystical power in reflecting upon the example of the Lord Jesus on the cross; somehow by beholding His glory, His matchless display of God's righteousness at the end, we will start to reflect that glory in our very beings. "We all, with open (RV "unveiled") face beholding as in a glass the glory (moral attributes, the peerless character) of the Lord (Jesus), are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit (mind and influence) of the Lord (Jesus)" (2 Cor. 3:18). Time and again is it stressed that the Lord did all this “for us". Jn. 10:14,15 link His knowing of us His sheep, and His giving His life for us. It was because He knew us, our sins, or kind of failures, who we are and who we would be, and fail to be… that He did it. And knowing our brethren, building understanding and relationship with them, is how and why we will be motivated to the same laying down of life for them.

But the work finished by the Lord Jesus was not just the faultless display of God's characteristics. The Son's manifestation of the Father was to the end that we might be saved (a point fundamental to an appreciation of the Gospel). The work that Christ ended when He cried "It is finished" was the execution of the whole will of God; for the work that He finished was God's will: "I have meat to eat that ye know not of... my meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (Jn. 4:32,34). The will of God is that we might be sanctified, counted as righteous, and ultimately given salvation (1 Thess. 4:3; 2 Pet. 3:9; Heb. 10:10). "I came down from heaven... to do... the will of him that sent me... and this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which *seeth* the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life" (Jn. 6:38-40). God's will is that we should “see", i.e. understand, the righteousness of Christ, and believe that this will be imputed to us, and thereby we can be saved. To have an appreciation of the righteousness of Christ is therefore something absolutely essential for us to develop.

To achieve that fullness of righteousness and salvation for us meant more to the Lord Jesus than physical food; His great physical hunger in John 4 was bypassed by the fact that He was bringing about the salvation of a fallen woman. He had a baptism, i.e. a death and resurrection, to be baptized with, and He was "straitened until it be *accomplished*" (Lk. 12:50), the same word translated "finished" in Jn. 19:30. He agonized throughout His life, looking ahead to that moment of spiritual completion. The more we appreciate this, the more we will be able to enter into His sense of relief: "It is finished / accomplished". And this too should characterize our lives; ever straining ahead to that distant point when at last we will attain that point of spiritual completeness. The incident with the Samaritan woman in John 4 was recognized by Jesus as but a cameo of His whole life; our salvation through His perfect manifestation of the Father was the end in view, it was this which was all consuming for Him. He was not motivated solely by a desire *firstly* for His own salvation, as some of our atonement theologians have wrongly implied. His meat and drink was to do the Father's work and will, which was to save us through imputing Christ's righteousness to us. This is what motivated His obedience, His perfection; it was our salvation which was the last thing in His human consciousness as He cried "*It* is finished" . His attitude, both at the start of His ministry and in His approach to His

death, was "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God... by the which will we are sanctified (counted righteous) through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ" (Heb. 10:10).

"I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" ultimately finished when the Lord cried "It is finished" (Jn. 17:4; 19:30; it alludes to several Old Testament passages. Daniel 9:24 had prophesied that Messiah's sacrifice would "finish transgression... make an end of sins... make reconciliation for iniquity... bring in everlasting righteousness... and to anoint the Most Holy", as if a new sanctuary were being inaugurated. In prospect, the whole concept of sin was destroyed at the point of Christ's death, the devil (sin) was destroyed, the opportunity for us to have the everlasting righteousness of Christ imputed to us was opened up. "It is finished" may well have been uttered with an appreciation of this passage (for surely Dan. 9 was in the mind of our dying Lord). In this case, Christ died with the final triumphant thought that our sinfulness had now been overcome. Surely this should inspire us to a fuller and more confident, joyful faith in this.

Ex. 40:33 describes how Moses "reared up" the tabernacle, representing us (2 Cor. 6:16); "So Moses finished the work" God had given him to do. Dt. 31:24 likewise speaks of Moses finishing the work. The Hebrew for "reared up" is also used in the context of resurrection and glorification / exaltation. As our Lord sensed His final, ultimate achievement of the Father's glory in His own character, He could look ahead to our resurrection and glorification. He adopted God's timeless perspective, and died with the vision of our certain glorification in the Kingdom. This fits in with the way Psalms 22 and 69 (which evidently portray the thoughts of our dying Lord) conclude with visions of Christ's "seed" being glorified in the Kingdom. There are a number of passages which also speak of the temple (also representative of the ecclesia) being a *work* which was *finished* (e.g. 2 Chron. 5:1). In His moment of agonized triumph as He died, the Lord Jesus saw us as if we were perfect. Surely, surely this should inspire us to have the confidence that this is still how He sees us, both individually and collectively? The mystery of God will ultimately be "finished" in the Kingdom (Rev. 10:7); and yet on the cross Christ could see that effectively "It is finished" at that point, in that the way had now been made absolutely certain. So confident was the Lord in the power of His sacrifice, so great was His sense of purpose and achievement! And nothing has changed with Him until this day.

"It is finished" has some connection with the Lord loving His people "to the very end" (Jn. 13:1- *eis telos*). To the end or completion of what? Surely the Lord held in mind Moses' last speech before he died. Then, "Moses had finished writing all the words of this Law in a book, even to the very end (LXX *eis telos*)" (Dt. 31:24). It was Moses' law which was finished / completed when the Lord finally died. Again we marvel at the Lord's intellectual consciousness even in His death throes. The fact He had completed the Law was upmost in His mind. This alone should underline the importance of never going back to reliance upon that Law, be it in Sabbath keeping or general legalism of attitude.

Putting all this together, we see our Lord realizing that He had achieved the perfect reflection of the Father's glory, His character; He had finished the work the Father had given Him to do. He knew that the perfection of that manifestation which He had achieved would be imputed to us, and therefore He looked forward to us as if we were perfect, He foresaw our salvation, He saw us in the Kingdom. It is quite possible that in some sense the Lord Jesus had a vision of us in the Kingdom. It can be noted that

Christ's working of the work of God is associated with His miracles. Each of them was part of the work which the Father had given Him to finish (Jn. 5:36). The Lord's miracles were not motivated by a desire to do solve the need of this present evil world; they were "signs" which spoke of the Father's character; they were a progressive manifestation of the glory of the Father in order to deepen the faith of the disciples (Jn. 2:11). This is why each of them can be seen as deeply parabolic, teaching so much about the character / glory of the Father. Any temporal physical help which they provided was only an incidental by-product.

The progressive nature of the Lord's manifestation of God's glory through the miracles is suggested by Jn. 2:11: "This *beginning* of miracles did Jesus... and manifested forth his glory". Likewise Matthew's Gospel has at least four references to the fact that the Lord "finished" or "ended" revealing God's words (Mt. 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1), using the same word as in Jn. 19:30 "It is finished". His words were a manifestation of the Father's glory / character. Thus in Jn. 17 the Lord associates His manifestation of the Father's Name / glory with His (progressive) giving of the Father's words to the disciples. Thus at the very end He must have felt that now He had reached the end of that progressive revelation, now He was manifesting the fullness of God, a God who *is* love- as He hung naked, covered in blood and spittle, totally misunderstood, deserted by His superficial disciples. At that point He was fully, fully, completely, manifesting the Father.

In His final physical agony, the mind of our Lord was full of thoughts of our salvation. Such was the extent of His devotion to us. It has taken us hundreds of English words to just begin to enter into the intensity of spiritual thinking which was going on in the mind of our Lord. And yet He asks us to share His cross, to run our whole life with endurance even as He endured on the cross (Heb. 12:1,2), to personally enter into His sufferings; to be likewise filled with an overpowering concern for the salvation of others and the reflection of God's character in our own. It seems that Paul was able to enter into the mind of the Lord Jesus in this. "This also we wish, even your perfection" (2 Cor. 13:9), your finishing, your rearing up as a perfect tabernacle; this was Paul's attitude to spiritually weak Corinth. "I have *finished* my course" (2 Tim. 4:7) uses the same word as in Jn. 19:30 ("It is *finished*"). 2 Tim. 4 has a number of other allusions to Christ's final sufferings. As the Lord felt He had finished the work just before He actually had (Jn. 17:4), so did Paul in 2 Tim. 4; He felt He had entered into that sense of finishing which his Lord had on the cross. Our aim is to be perfected, to come to the full knowledge of Christ, "unto a perfect man (a finished man; the same word as in "It is *finished*"), unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12,13). As our Lord moved towards that point of ultimate spiritual completeness, so do we too. At last we will attain that perfection, at last we too will know the feeling of "It is finished" - as a result of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us.

19:31 *The Jews, because it was the preparation day, and so that the bodies should not remain on the cross upon the Sabbath (for the day of that Sabbath was a high day), asked of Pilate that their legs be broken so that they might be taken away*- Dt. 21:23 forbad bodies of those accursed by God from hanging overnight. Again, we see their masking of their awful consciences by legalistic obedience to God's laws and their own fences around those laws. This is what legalism is- a mask for a bad

conscience over more fundamental failures. When hard line legalists are exposed as caught up in major sin, we should not be surprised. It is in fact to be expected that their legalism is but a cover for a guilty conscience in other areas.

John is at pains to point out that the Passover was coming on, as if he wishes us to be aware that the last supper was not the Passover, and the breaking of bread service was not the same as the Passover, but based upon it. He is ever seeking to show his Jewish readers that a new Israel, with new symbolisms and meanings, has been created. That Sabbath is here called "a high day", literally, 'the day of that Sabbath was great' (as in 7:37). Perhaps here John is implying that the Lord's death made this the greatest Sabbath; and thereby removed the need for literal observance of it.

19:32- see on :18.

Therefore the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other that was crucified with him- The legs were broken so that the victim could no longer rest their weight on the *sedile*, the piece of wood protruding from the cross on which they could rest their weight in order to get temporary relief and yet prolong their sufferings. The strange reference to "the first and... the other" may invite us to consider that "the first" was the repentant thief.

19:33 *But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was dead already, they did not break his legs*- He was so evidently dead; it was absolutely plain to the world that the Lord had died. Any ideas of a swoon theory are stopped dead in their tracks by this. He was not even worth a hammer blow to the legs, because He was so evidently dead.

19:34 *However one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out of his side*- The great theme of John has been that the Lord died in order to give us His life, His Spirit. That life, that spirit, has been likened to water in the account of the Samaritan woman at the well in chapter 4, and also in 7:38,39, where we learn that the Spirit was to be given at the Lord's glorification. His death was central to that, indeed His lifting up on the cross could be read as a lifting up in glory from God's perspective. The life blood and water which flowed out from Him, having breathed His breath / spirit outward towards His misunderstanding and unspiritual disciples, all speaks of the gift of His life and spirit toward us. The gift of His life to us means that it lives within us, which is what is achieved by the gift of the Spirit to each believer. The connection is being made with the smitten rock out of which there flowed spring water for God's people (Ex. 17:6). The water in John chapters 4 and 7 represents the gift of the Spirit made possible by the Lord's death. His Spirit was Him; the Comforter passages have explained that the coming of the Spirit was effectively His coming to His people. This is why 1 Jn. 5:6 explains that the Lord Jesus personally came to the believers through the water and the blood. The fountain of water and blood, representing His Spirit and His life, represented Him personally coming to His people.

A connection of thought arises from the word "pierced". Simeon had prophesied that a sword would pierce Mary's heart as it also pierced that of Christ her son (Lk. 2:35). This is one reason for thinking that Mary may still have been at the cross when the Lord died. It could be that John took her to his home, arm round her shoulders as she wrestled with the desire to take one last motherly look back, and then returned himself to the cross; and then Mary crept back, almost hot on his heels, or perhaps choosing another route, and hiding somewhere in the crowd where neither her son nor John, her new son, would see her. To me, this has the ring of truth about it. Simeon's

prophecy, as that sweet baby in cheap cloths lay cradled in his arms, seems to imply that *as* the Lord's heart was pierced, so would his mother's be. Are we to conclude from this that there was a heart-piercing groan within her, as she saw the spear head enter and the blood flow out? Each time they called out 'Come down from the cross!', her heart must have been in her mouth. Would He? She had learnt the lesson of Cana, not to pressurize Him for convenient miracles; not to catch His eye as if to say 'Go on, do it, for my sake'. But nonetheless, because she was only human, she would have hoped against hope. But now, the finality of death forced itself upon her. And her heart was pierced in that moment. Yet Yahweh Himself had prophesied, years before: "They shall look upon *me* whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for *him*... and shall be in bitterness for *him*" (Zech. 12:10). The use of pronouns here seems to mean that God was in Christ on the cross, reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). When the Son was pierced, so was the Father. And so at the moment of that sword-thrust, we see the connection of both parents with their suffering Son. As He was pierced, so were the Father and mother. Here we see the wonder and yet the tragedy of the Divine family. We have a very rare insight into the relationship between the Father and Mary. The notion of personal pre-existence and total Deity of Christ destroys this beauty and mystery. Indeed, the whole relationship between the Lord and His mother and Father is surpassingly beautiful, once His nature is correctly understood. There is so much one could speculate and yet dares not hardly think or say (e.g. whether the Lord appeared to His mother after the resurrection; what their relationship will be in the Kingdom).

The description of blood and water flowing has raised the question as to whether the Lord had been fasting, or had emptied His bowels in Gethsemane, before the crucifixion. It has been suggested that for this to have happened the Lord would have been pierced from the right hand side above the fifth rib, piercing the right auricle of the heart (from which the blood came) and also the pericardium, from where the serum came which appeared like water. However there are critics of these suggestions, which leaves the possibility that the flow of blood and water was in fact a miracle- hence John's insistence that yes, he actually saw this happen. And he says that he records it so that we might believe. The implication is that meditation upon the cross is what inspires faith, as well as conviction of sin and repentance. The way the Lord's blood flowed out from His heart is highly evocative of powerful lessons. He gave out from the very core and foundation of His being. We may serve God in good deeds, in writing books, in labouring for Him, without any real demand being made on our innermost self. The challenge of the cross is to give from the very centre and fountain of our life, our very selves, our person, our most vital soul.

19:35 *And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe*- It is difficult to tell if a body is dead or not. But there was something about the Lord's corpse which somehow shone forth the message that He had given up His life. Do we not get the sense here of a man, even under inspiration, grasping for adequate words and finding there are none? This is an experience beyond the paradigm of verbal description. There are links between the concept of 'truth' and the cross. In Ps. 60:4 God's Truth is displayed on the banner (s.w. "pole", on which the snake was lifted up). John struggled with words, even under inspiration, to get over to us the tremendous truth and reality of what he witnessed at the cross. God is the ultimate Truth, and the cross was the ultimate declaration of His Truth. John's speaking and writing up of his Gospel was his testimony; and the Comforter passages have stressed that the Spirit bears witness

through our witness. In the account of the Lord's death, the Spirit is appealing to all who hear of it.

"That you may believe" predicates faith upon acceptance of the fact the Lord really died. It is by Him there that we believe in God (1 Pet. 1:21). Apologetics do not give faith, and in that sense they are largely a waste of time, and at best a poor crutch for faith. We are invited to look at the death of the Lord on the cross- and believe, believe all that is implied in it. This may be scoffed at as intellectually weak, what is called 'fideism'. But it is what the Bible teaches and it is simply true to observed experience. We either believe He died as He did, with all the Biblically recorded claims about the significance of that death- or we do not. If we do believe, and those who do not believe in it are struggling against their consciences, then all falls into place; we come to Biblical "faith".

19:36 *For these things happened so that the scripture might be fulfilled: A bone of him shall not be broken*- The prophecy of Ps. 34:20 about not a bone of the Lord being broken is here clearly applied to Him. But the context is clearly about all of us- any righteous man. The preceding verse speaks of how the Lord delivers the righteous man out of all his tribulations- and this verse is applied to other believers apart from the Lord Jesus in Acts 12:11 and 2 Tim. 3:11,12. The chilling fact is that we who are in the body of the Lord are indeed co-crucified with Him.

We are the Lord's body, of His flesh and bones (Eph. 5:30). Crucifixion was designed to torture the bones; and yet none was broken. We suffer in Him, but shall not be finally broken. As the Passover lambs were being killed, the Lord died; and it was critical that not a bone of the Passover lambs be broken (Ex. 12:46; Num. 9:12). John seems so keen to point out that the Lord died as the Passover lamb, and Paul perceives this when stating that He is "our Passover" (1 Cor. 5:7). For no bone of the Lord to be broken, the nails driven through His hands [the Greek can refer to the arms or wrists too] would not have been large, and would probably have been driven through the 'Destot gap', the set of nerves in between the large wrist bones. The pain would have been intense at that point. The rough hammering of the nails through that point would have paid no attention to detail; but those hammer blows were Divinely guided so that no bone broke. And this would have been even more amazingly guided for the nails driven through the feet not to break a bone. It was only by the Lord refusing to relieve the pain by pushing down on the *sedile* that He avoided breaking any bones.

19:37- see on Jn. 1:14.

And again another scripture says: They shall look on him whom they pierced- The Lord's death was effectively Israel's judgment. The Jewish world was judged then by Him. There, in that naked, abused body and infinitely tormented yet righteous mind, there was displayed the judgments, the character, the very essence of God; and the utter condemnation of the flesh, the devil, the prince of this world. Those judgments were displayed in front of a world which stood before it self-condemned. The prophecy of Zech. 12:10 concerning looking on the pierced Messiah is quoted in Rev. 1:7 concerning the judgment seat; and yet in Jn. 19:37 concerning the cross. See on Jn. 12:42. Looking on Him there is what they shall do in the condemnation of the last day. And standing before Him there, beholding Him, we know our judgment too; for He died for us who believe in Him, that whoever looks toward Him in faith shall be saved. It is as simple as that.

The death of the High Priest was paralleled with a man standing before the judgment for his crime in Josh. 20:6 RV. This surely prefigured how the Lord's death was and is

effectively our judgment. Further connection between the cross and the judgment is found in considering Zech. 12:10, which states that men would look upon the pierced (i.e. crucified) Saviour, and mourn in recognition of their own sinfulness. This verse is quoted as having fulfilment both at the crucifixion (Jn. 19:37) and also at the final judgment (Rev. 1:7). There is strong connection between these two events. And so it has been observed that the cross divided men into two categories: The repentant thief and the bitter one; the soldiers who mocked and the Centurion who believed; the Sanhedrin members who believed and those who mocked; the women who lamented but didn't obey His word, and those whose weeping isn't recorded, but who stood and watched and thought; the people who beat their breasts in repentance, and those who mocked as to whether Elijah would come to save the Lord.

19:38 *And after these things Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus (but secretly for fear of the Jews), asked of Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. Therefore he came and took his body away*- John's Gospel emphasizes how secret believers either turned back to the surrounding world, or were provoked by the cross to 'come out' in full faith. It is twice stressed that Joseph was on the Sanhedrin council. So was Nicodemus (Jn. 3:2). Yet the whole council unanimously voted for the crucifixion (Mk. 14:64). "The whole Sanhedrin" (Mk. 15:1 NIV) agreed the High Priests' plan of action. They *all* interrogated Him and “the whole multitude of them" led Jesus to Pilate (Lk. 22:66,70; 23:1). This is some emphasis. Joseph “was not in agreement" with them, we are told, but it seems this was a position held within his own conscience. It was only the actual cross which brought faith into the open. “You shall not be in agreement with the wicked as an unjust witness" (Ex. 23:1) probably tore out his heart. It may be that these men weren't present and that the Jews broke their own law, that the death sentence must be unanimously agreed. However, I have an intuitive sense (and nothing more) that these men voted for the Lord's death; and that they went along with the discussion in which “all" the council were involved, as to which incidents in His life they could remember for which they could condemn Him (Mk. 14:55) . They may not have consented to what was done in their hearts, but they still went along with it all on the surface. Acts 13:28,29 is at pains, almost, to associate Joseph, Nicodemus and the rest of the Sanhedrin: "*They* have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though *they* found no cause of death in him, yet desired *they* Pilate that He should be slain... *they* took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre". The text records that they desired Pilate for the death of Jesus; but the very same Greek words are used to describe how Joseph desired Pilate to let him have the body of Jesus (Mt. 27:58)- as if to show how Joseph openly undid his request for the crucifixion, by requesting the body. They were secret disciples, fearing the loss of standing among the Jews. It was only after the Lord's death that they came out in the open. It seems to me that they voted for the Son of God to die. But in His grace, the Father emphasizes in the record that Joseph was a good man, and a just; a disciple, although secretly. The grace of God shines through the whole record. Thus only Matthew speaks about the suicide of Judas; the other three records are silent. A human god would inevitably have stressed that the betrayer of His Son went out in shame and took his own life. But the God of all grace is higher than reflecting vindictiveness in His word.

If the Lord died at 3p.m. and sunset was at 6p.m., there were only three hours for Joseph to find Pilate, gain a hearing, make his request, for Pilate to verify that the body was dead, and then for Nicodemus to buy the spices and for the burial to be

done. Joseph and Nicodemus must have decided almost immediately what they were going to do. And the lesson for us: Beholding the cross makes us see what we ought to do, it becomes urgently apparent, and then we give our all, with the spirit of 'nothing else matters', to achieve it as far as we can. But we can enter into their thoughts: I wish I'd done more for Him while He was alive, and now, even now, because of the pressure of time, I just can't bury and honour this body as I'd like to. All these things are against me. The self hate and loathing and regret would have arisen within them, mixed with that love and devotion to the Lord of all grace. And there would have been an earnest desire for God to accept what little they could do, with time, the surrounding world, the Jewish culture, the unchangeable past, and their own present natures, all militating against the height of devotion they fain would show.

The body was sometimes granted to very close relatives. Joseph is now showing his open affinity with this crucified man. At that time, he didn't firmly believe in the resurrection. For sheer *love* of this crucified man, he was willing to sacrifice his standing in society, his economic position, risk his life, grovel before the hated Pilate to beg (Lk.), crave (Mk.) the body. This was something which only the close relatives of the crucified could presume to do. But he felt already that new relationship to the Lord, and whether or not He would ever be raised he wanted to show openly to the world his connection with Him, come what may. This was the effect of the Lord's death upon him.

19:39 *And there came also Nicodemus, he who came to him at the first by night; but now he brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds 45kg weight-* Nicodemus and Joseph not only did something which placed them outside the religious and social elite of Israel. They humbled themselves in front of that cross. Joseph grovelled before Pilate for the body, he walked out into that no man's land between the crowd and the cross. Nicodemus bought 300 pounds of spices, far greater than the amount used at the most lavish royal burials of the time. The cost of this would have been colossal; equivalent to tens of thousands of dollars. And he did this on the spur of the moment; he bought it in the three hours between the Lord's death (3p.m.) and sunset (6p.m.). He didn't count the cost, thinking that OK, he'd given up his place in the society and economy, and would now have to live frugally on what he had for the rest of his days. no. Like the widow, he gave what he had, his capital, which many would have more 'prudently' kept for the rainy days ahead. To realize such a huge sum he must have run around in those hours, selling all he had for ridiculous prices (something similar to scenes in *Schindler's List*). The holiday was coming on, and nobody was really in the mood for business. His wife, family, friends, colleagues... would have considered crazy, But all the time, beating in his brain, would have been the sense: 'Now, nothing, *nothing else* really matters at all'. It's been observed: "If the aloe and myrrh were in dried or powdered form, a whole row of sacks would be necessary to carry this weight, and Nicodemus must have had assistance to be able to transport the load. The transport would have been even more difficult if the substance was dissolved in wine, vinegar or oil". Remember the Feast was coming on. To marshal such labour would have been so difficult and attracted so much attention and consternation. The Roman *litra* or pound was about 12 ounces, so 100 pounds (Jn. 19:39) would have been about 75 imperial pounds. Such a weight would fill a considerable space in the tomb, forming a mound which would smother the corpse. Such was their love. It was common for kings to have such large amounts

of spices (e.g. Jer. 34:5). Those men were showing their belief that Jesus truly was Lord and King for them. To believe Jesus is Lord and King is not something which we can painlessly or cheaply believe. It demands our all. And there is no reason to think that Joseph 'got away with it'. The *Acts of Pilate* 12 reports that the Jews became so hostile when they heard that Joseph had asked for Jesus' body that they imprisoned him. It should be noted that Joseph didn't do what he did for hope of a future reward. The cross itself was enough to motivate him to give all purely for love of the Lord Jesus; not for any future hope. It could be that the reference to how he "waited for the Kingdom of God" when he begged for the body (Mk. 15:43) suggests that he had lost hope for the future Kingdom at that time, he had earlier waited for it, but now he simply lived life for love of Jesus. And this should be our attitude if we are for some reason denied the Kingdom ahead; that, simply, we love Jesus, and would give our lives for Him all the same, Kingdom or no Kingdom. We who are baptized into both the death *and burial* of the Lord have a like senseless grace and love lavished upon us too (Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:10-12). In passing, the question arises as to *why* Nicodemus bought such a huge amount of spices. Perhaps it is the nature of true devotion to behave in a humanly senseless way. Alternatively, the use of spices was to keep the body from decaying. It could be that he vaguely understood the promise of Ps. 16:10, that the Lord's body would not see corruption (cp. Jn. 11:39), and thought that by his own extreme efforts he could bring this about. Despite his misunderstanding of that passage, his lack of faith and comprehension of the resurrection, all the same his devotion was accepted. There is significant extra-Biblical information about Nicodemus. Josephus mentions him as a distinguished man in *Wars of the Jews* II, 20 and IV, 3,9. He is mentioned in the Talmud [*Gittin* 56a] as Nakdimon ben Gurion, one of the three richest nobles in Jerusalem. The Talmud also mentions a story about his daughter [*Ketuboth* 66a]. It relates that one day when Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai was riding out of Jerusalem, he spoke to a poor young beggar woman, and discovered that she was Nicodemus' daughter. He recalled that her father had lost his fortune, and had not practiced deeds of charity. This rather confirms our picture of Nicodemus. He did indeed lose his fortune, and his previous mean spiritedness was radically transformed by his experience of the outgiven life and love of Jesus. In the light of that, he gave away all. And the powerful impact of the cross of Christ can likewise banish all carefully calculated meanness from our hearts too, and concretely result in real generosity.

The life of radical grace is infectious. Mary's lavish anointing of the Lord may well have been what inspired Nicodemus to so lavishly prepare the Lord's body for burial. The vast quantities of spices he used was more than that used in the burials of some of the Caesars. He too must have bankrupted himself to anoint the Lord's body. That two people did this within a week of each other is too close a similarity to be co-incidental. Surely the nature of Mary's giving inspired that of Nicodemus. Paul likewise writes of how the generous commitments of the Corinthian ecclesias had "inspired very many" to generosity (2 Cor. 9:2). And we too, in our abundant responses to God's super-abundant grace, will inspire each other likewise.

19:40 *So they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as it is the custom of the Jews to bury*- As we will note in chapter 20, the way the linen cloths and napkin were found still wrapped neatly is significant. For the myrrh would have made the linen stick to the Lord's body like glue. He did not have to fight His way out of them, nor was He somehow extricated from them by sympathizers and the corpse removed. Rather His very emergence from those cloths was itself part of

the miracle of resurrection. The surrounding customs involved removing body parts; and the Romans burnt their dead. Only the Jews buried the entire body.

19:41 *Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb wherein no one had lain*- Twice it is stressed that the tomb was near to where the Lord died (:42). Perhaps the Lord would have known that He would be buried there, and would have perhaps viewed the tomb from His elevated position on the cross. The Father provided encouragement to the Lord throughout His traumas, as He does to us in ours in ways great and small. The tomb had had no previous contact with a dead body, and so was ritually clean. This may be of no final consequence, because the Lord had been ritually defiled in about every way possible, but John maybe mentions this to try to make his Jewish audience as comfortable as possible. We too are to state truth as it is, but also be all things to all our hearers, as Paul was.

19:42 *There, because of the Jews' preparation day, they laid Jesus (for the tomb was nearby)*- See on :41. Again John emphasizes that the Passover was coming on and therefore the last supper had not been a Passover meal. He is writing to and for Jews who were ever tempted to remain or return to Judaism. His point is that feasts like Passover had had their total fulfilment in the Lord's death. The way John, as a Jew writing to and for Jews, speaks of "the Jews' preparation day", along with other references to "the Jews", shows the chasmic gulf which he felt there to be between Christianity and Judaism.

JOHN CHAPTER 20

20:1 *Now on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb*- Mary came seeking the Lord early in the morning… and this inevitably takes our minds to some OT passages which speak of doing just this:

- "O God, thou *art* my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory" (Ps. 63:1,2). The resurrection of Jesus showed clearly both the power (2 Cor. 13:4) and glory (Rom. 6:4) of the Father. For Mary, life without her Lord was a dry and thirsty land. This was why she went to the grave early that morning. She was simply aching for Him. And she had well learnt the Lord's teaching, that her brother's resurrection had been associated with the glory of the Father (Jn. 11:40). She went early to the tomb to seek the Father's glory- so the allusion to Ps. 63 implies. She was the one person who had actually believed in advance the Lord's teaching about resurrection. And yet even she was confused- half her brain perceived it all and believed it, and was rewarded by being the first to see the risen Lord; and yet another part of her brain was simply overcome with grief, believing that the gardener had somehow removed the body some place else. And our own highest heights of spiritual perception are likewise shrouded by such humanity too.
- "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me" (Prov. 8:17) is written in the first instance of wisdom. And yet the Lord Jesus has "wisdom" as one of His titles (Mt. 12:42; 1 Cor. 1:24,30). Mary sat at the Lord's feet to hear His wisdom; to her, she showed in practice what it means to comprehend Jesus as "the wisdom of God". She anxiously heard His words. And thus she sought Him early…because she so wanted to hear His wisdom again. Of course, she loved Him. But that love was rooted in respect and almost an addiction to His wisdom. It was this that she loved about Him, and it was this which led her to the grave early. And it was

this which led her to the honour of being the first to see the risen Jesus.
- "Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of *our* soul *is* to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early" (Is. 26:8,9) makes the same connection between seeking the Lord early, and loving His words.

John's record seems to reflect how he saw parallels between himself and Mary in their witness to the resurrection. They both "came to the tomb" (Jn. 20:1,4), stood outside, "stooped" and looked into the tomb (Jn. 20:5,11), "beheld… saw" (Jn. 20:5,12). Yet Mary was the first to see the risen Lord. The testimony of a woman didn't count in the 1st century world, and yet God chose her to be the first witness. In doing so, He was teaching that the work of witness and the sheer power of what we are witnesses to can transform the most hesitant and inappropriate person into a preacher of the irrepressible good news, even with the whole world against them. It's as if John is saying in his account of the Gospel that Mary was in some ways his pattern; he and her were to be connected. He wasn't ashamed to thus identify himself with the witness of a woman. Ps. 68 is prophetic of the Lord's death and resurrection. Verse 18 is specifically quoted in the New Testament about His ascension. Verse 11 predicts that: "The Lord gave the word: the women that publish the tidings are a great host". This primarily concerns the publishing of the Lord's resurrection, although the imagery is based upon the singing of Miriam and the women of Israel after the Red Sea deliverance. Clearly enough, women were to play a major part in the witness to the Lord's resurrection. This was shown by the women being commanded to go tell their brethren that the Lord had risen indeed. And yet there is ample evidence that it was women who in practice were the more compelling preachers of the Gospel in the first century ecclesia. The simple fact is that God delegated to women the duty of witnessing to what was for Him the most momentous and meaningful act in all His creation- the raising of His Son from the dead. He was clearly making a point- that those whose witness this world may despise, are those He uses. And in this we can take endless personal encouragement, beset as we are by our own sense of inadequacy as preachers.
John's record presents the resurrection through the eyes of Mary Magdalene. She went alone to the tomb while it was yet dark. This doesn't contradict the other accounts, which pick up the story at sunrise, when all the women were together there.

20:2 *She ran to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them: They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him!*-Mary Magdalene was the first believer to call Jesus "the Lord"- despite His repeated teaching that this was His true position. They had called Him "Lord and Master" but not *the* Lord. Her example soon spread to her less perceptive brethren- for they likewise soon were speaking of Him as "the Lord" (Jn. 20:25; 21:7). Although the resurrection made Him Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36), yet to her, it was as if He was risen and glorified already. This is an indication to me that she did really believe He would rise, but her humanity, her grief, the intensity of the moment, led her to act and speak as if this wasn't the case. Consider all the descriptions of Jesus as "the Lord" even during His ministry; so certain was He that He would indeed be made Lord and Christ- and realize, how the fact Mary Magdalene too called Him "Lord" before seeing the proof of His resurrection indicates that she shared this perception.

20:3 *Peter with the other disciple therefore went out and went to the tomb*- Given the disrespect of women as witnesses, we see a humility here in them not only taking

her seriously, but running in response to her word (:4). They set an example for all church leaders, one which was all the more radical in their age.

20:4 *They ran there together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came first to the tomb*- Here we have another of the unusual usage of tenses which is characteristic of the Gospels. The imperfect here should be translated "they were running", inviting us to play Bible television with the narrative, seeing it unfolding before our eyes, seeing them running. John is displaying humility in recording that he outran Peter, running faster because he was perhaps younger or fitter; and yet going straight on to say that although he may have been faster in human terms, he was far slower than Peter in spiritual terms, for Peter was the first to enter the tomb and see the evidence for the Lord's resurrection (:5,6).

20:5 *Stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not enter*- Each of the Gospel writers reveals a sense of inadequacy about themselves or the disciples, this self-criticism, in different ways. The preaching of the twleve disciples is really an admission of their own weaknesses. For example, John mentions that when he and Peter arrived at the tomb, he [John] "did not go in", but Peter did, and therefore believed before he did. We see here John's gentle humility, and reflection in his own preaching of how he esteemed others better than himself, and of stronger faith. John says that "he saw and believed", but goes straight on to say that he at that time did not understand that Jesus must rise from the dead (:8,9). He surely means that he *later* believed, but not right then.

20:6 *Simon Peter arrived behind him and entered into the tomb, and he saw the linen cloths lying there*- Peter and John went to the tomb after having first of all disbelieved Mary Magdalene (Lk. 24:11). The state of the linen cloths was what provoked John's faith (:8); for it is John who notes the huge quantity of myrrh used to embalm the Lord's body, and "myrrh... glues linen to the body not less firmly than lead" (Leon Morris, *John* p. 736). The fact the cloths were neatly placed as they were was therefore a powerful evidence that the Lord had risen, and not been extricated from the cloths by any human effort.

20:7 *And the napkin that had been upon his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself*- As noted on :6, for napkin to be rolled up meant the body had miraculously come out of them; for the myrrh would have glued them to the body in such a way that a person reviving and fighting their way out of the wrappings would have torn them; and they were neatly rolled up, not torn.

It does us good to reflect soberly and deeply upon the events of the birth, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. To reconstruct in our own minds what really happened, that we might know Him the better. That on a day in April, on a Friday afternoon, on a hill outside Jerusalem, 1970 years ago…there really was a man lead out to crucifixion. And that three days later, in a dark tomb, a tightly wrapped body came to life, and in a microsecond was standing outside his burial garments. The only sound would have been of the graveclothes collapsing or subsiding as the support of the body inside them was removed. The napkin wrapped around His head (cp. Jn. 11:44) would suddenly have become a crumpled turban. The clothes would have been like a discarded chrysalis from which the butterfly has emerged. John saw the linen clothes "lying", but according to one authority the Greek word can apparently stand the translation "collapsed". That John saw the clothes "lying" is repeated twice, and the first time it is placed in an emphatic position in the Greek sentence- 'He saw, as they were lying [or 'collapsed'], the linen clothes'. John also records his deep impression that the head napkin was not with the other clothes, but by itself. Apparently it was normal practice to bind the body and the head in graveclothes, but

not the neck. It could be that John is saying that he was most struck by the way there was a slight gap between the collapsed body bindings and the head napkin- the gap where the neck of Jesus had been. This head napkin was "wrapped together", but here we can with fair confidence say that the Greek word means more 'twirled'. The word aptly describes the rounded shape which the empty napkin still preserved. And so John saw the stone slab, the collapsed graveclothes, and the shell of the head cloth, with a gap between the two where the Lord's neck had been. And John "saw [this] and believed". Now of course it is possible to reconstruct the whole scene otherwise. What I am saying is that in our personal following of the Lord we love, we each need to try to reconstruct for ourselves how it would have been. The artless style of the inspired records encourage us in this- one only has to compare them against the fantastic Apocryphal Gospels, with their descriptions of Jesus bursting from the tomb in power and glory, to see in the most obvious terms what is inspired and what isn't.

20:8 *Then the other disciple also entered, he who had arrived first to the tomb; and he saw and believed*- To see and believe is another challenge which comes out of the text to readers and hearers, to do just the same. To see with the eyes of faith, and believe. But John is credited with believing, when he did not yet understand the Biblical basis for the Lord's resurrection (:9), and his immediate return to his own home (:10) is presented as an action of unbelief when we compare this with 16:31,32, remembering that John rarely repeats phrases in his record unless he intends us to connect them: "Jesus answered them: Do you now believe? Behold, the hour comes, yes, has come, when you shall be scattered, every man to his own home". So John may be saying that his faith was weak, it was momentary. And that would explain the odd phrase used in the Greek; for "believed" has no object as Greek grammar would require. It is not implied *what* he believed in; although that nuance cannot really come through in English translation.

20:9 *For as yet they did not understand the scripture that he must rise from the dead*- As noted on :8 and :9, this confirms the impression that John's 'belief' was momentary. However, a more generous interpretation is possible. It could be that John means to demonstrate here that faith in the risen Lord does not necessarily depend upon knowing or understanding the Old Testament texts which require Messiah's resurrection. For that requirement and implication is indeed there, but is hardly apparent to a casual reader or hearer; bearing in mind that most were illiterate and had no easy access to the scrolls. In this case, John would be appealing to Gentiles and illiterate Jews, the mass of first century society- and encouraging them that faith in the risen Christ is possible without any background of Old Testament theology and familiarity.

20:10 *So the disciples went away again to their own home*- As noted on :8, this is an allusion to 16:31,32, which says the disciples would do this because they did not really believe. John is appealing for faith in the empty tomb but explaining how his initial faith was momentary, and not based upon a Biblical understanding of the necesssity of the Lord's resurrection. By implication he is appealing to his audience to have a faith stronger than his had initially been; and this is a very powerful way to appeal for faith from an audience.

20:11 *But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping. So, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb*- Mary "stood without", and yet the same word is used in a rather negative context elsewhere in the Gospels: Lk. 8:20 Mary and His brethren standing without; LK. 13:25 the rejected "stand without" with the door closed,

seeking for their Lord; Jn. 18:16 Peter stood at the door without. It's as if she was in the shoes of the rejected. And yet she is graciously accepted in a wonderful way by the risen Lord. And she is our representative. Her weeping likewise could be read negatively; for she ought to have gone to the tomb after three days with full faith and joy in expectation that the Lord had risen as He promised. Hence His question to her as to why she is weeping (:13,15). As noted earlier in this chapter, the Gospels are full of self-criticism of themselves as writers and their fellow disciples, stressing their weakness, and slow struggle towards the faith they now urged men and women to accept.

20:12 *And she saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain*- The scene is described in terms which recall the cherubim on either end of the "mercy seat", the blood stained cover of the ark of the covenant which Hebrews sees as so strongly representative of the Lord Jesus. As those cherubim were, it is emphasized, of the same material as the mercy seat (Ex. 25:18,19), so the now invisible Lord was of their nature; hence His association with them as noted on :13.

20:13 *And they said to her: Woman, why do you weep? She said to them: Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him*- This comment on her weeping could be taken as a rebuke; see on :11. The Lord will soon repeat verbatim these Angelic words to Mary: "Woman, why are you weeping?" (Jn. 20:13,15). Likewise, when He appears to the women in Mt. 28:9,10, He repeats the Angel's words of Mt. 28:5,7. This indicates the unity which He felt with the Angels especially after His resurrection; see on :12.

20:14 *When she had said this, she turned herself around and saw Jesus standing there; but did not know that it was Jesus*- She apparently perceived they were Angels (:12); but her focus on the Lord was so great that she was not impressed with that. All she wanted was Him. The later New Testament frequently tackles the Jewish obsession with Angels, to the point that the Christian Jews were losing their focus upon the Lord Jesus. And here in visual terms John addresses that issue, by presenting Mary as so focused upon the Lord that even meeting two white Angels was of no interest to her compared to her focus upon Him.

Jewish women were not supposed to talk to men in public. The fact that Mary addresses the man whom she thinks of as "the gardener" shows how her love for Jesus, her search for Him, led her to break out of gender roles. She perceived that through His death, there was now neither male nor female, but a new kind of family (Jn. 20:14,15).

It is emphasized that Mary Magdalene beheld the cross of Jesus (Mk. 15:40)- the same word is used about how she came *to see* the sepulchre (Mt. 28:1); and now she *saw* Jesus standing (Jn. 20:14). People beheld the spectacle of the crucifixion (Lk. 23:48) and repented, smiting their breasts in recognition of their sinfulness. She was representative of us all. John's Gospel is full of references to the crucifixion, and especially the idea of 'seeing' / perceiving its' real meaning. The prologue invites us too to be amongst those who "beheld his glory". "This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life" (Jn. 6:40) connects with the idea of looking unto the bronze snake (which represented Christ on the cross) and receiving life. "And he that seeth [on the cross] seeth him that sent me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness" (Jn. 12:45,46). Note again the linkage between seeing and

believing; which Jn. 3 applies to belief in the crucified Jesus, as Israel had to believe in the bronze snake on the pole. The light of the world was defined in Jn. 3 as the light of the cross. In seeing / perceiving Christ on the cross, we perceive the essence of God- for the Father was so intensely manifested in the Son. There, God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. The emphasis on Mary Magdalene being the one who beheld the cross, the one who perceived the things of the Lord's death and resurrection, is surely to set her up as our example. For we can look at the cross without perceiving the glory and wonder it all, neither perceiving the urgency of the imperative in the things which were so uniquely crystallized there. She, the one with former 'demons' and a sinful past, and a mere woman, in the eyes of her world, is set up as a pattern for all who shall see the Son in faith.

20:15 *Jesus said to her: Woman, why do you weep?*- This could be understood as a rebuke, seeing she ought to have known that after three days the Lord would rise again. See on :11. Note too that the Lord repeats the Angelic words to her, showing His connection with them now by nature; see on :12,13.

Whom do you seek?- This is another of those questions which fly out of the page to challenge every reader or hearer; whom do *we* seek? He was still the same Jesus. The Lord was recognized by the Emmaus disciples in the way that He broke the bread. How He broke a loaf of bread open with His hands *after* His resurrection reflected the same basic style and mannerism which He had employed *before* His death. Not only the body language but the Lord's choice of words and expressions was similar both before and after His passion. He uses the question "Who are you looking for?" at the beginning of His ministry (Jn. 1:38), just before His death (Jn. 18:4) and also now after His resurrection. And the words of the risen Lord as recorded in Revelation are shot through with allusion to the words He used in His mortal life, as also recorded by John. See on Jn. 21:5,20. "Whom do you seek?" are words He had used three times in His ministry (Jn. 1:38; 18:4,7). He used words which she ought to have recognized as a catch phrase of the Lord, and thereby have realized that it was the Lord speaking to her. She did, eventually, make the connection; she lived up to the spiritual potential which the Lord realized in her. She replies by exclaiming: Rabboni! When three years earlier the Lord had "*turned* [as He did again to Mary]... and saith... What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi...' (Jn. 1:38). And now Mary sees the similarity which the Lord has set up, and joyfully realizes the reality of His resurrection through it.

She, supposing him to be the gardener- That God's Son could be a normal working class person actually says a lot about the humility of God Himself. Jn. 5:17 has been translated: "My Father is a working man to this day, and I am a working man myself". No less an authority than C.H. Dodd commented: "That the Greek words could bear that meaning is undeniable". I find especially awsome the way Mary mistakes the risen Lord for a lowly gardener- He evidently dressed Himself in the clothes of a working man straight after His resurrection, a far cry from the haloed Christ of high church art.

Said to him: Sir, if you have taken him from here, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away- Mary addresses the gardener as "sir", but this is the same Geek word [*kurios*] as is translated "Lord' a few verses earlier, when she describes Jesus as "the Lord" (Jn. 20:2,15). It seems to me that she half knew that this person standing there was Jesus. She was half expecting it. "They have taken away the Lord" (:2) almost sounds as if she felt Him to be alive and already made Lord and Christ. But the sheer grief of the situation distracted her from seeing that it was really Him. In this kind of thing there is, to me at least, the greatest proof of inspiration. It is

all so real and therefore credible. She couldn't dare believe that her wildest hope of every grieving person was actually coming true. And in this we surely see some echoes of the slowness to believe that we have actually made it which it seems there will be after the judgment seat experience.

Her desire to remove the Lord's body may appear strange, seeing He had been buried in an expensive new tomb. She was surely not thinking straight anyway, for it would have been hard for a woman to carry the heavily embalmed corpse of a man on her own. Where did she intend taking it? I suggest she had no concrete idea. She wanted *Him* for herself; the point of the record is that her focus was so completely upon Him. And in that she is our example, and her disorientation and impractical ideas are exactly what we would expect of someone in that mental situation. The verisimiltude of the narrative comes over so strongly.

20:16 *Jesus said to her: Mary*- The Lord's intonation and voice was just the same before and after His resurrection and change of nature. This is a profound reflection of how He is the same today as yesterday and forever.

She turned- She had turned away from the Angels and had looked toward the Lord, but assuming Him to be a gardener, she has turned away again, and is speaking without looking at the one she is addressing. This again presents a realistic picture both of her disorientation, and also of her desire to focus on nothing and nobody apart from her Lord. In this she is set up as our example.

And said to him: Rabboni! Which is to say, teacher- This was her instant response; and so we can assume she uses the title for the Lord which she usually used, and which reflects how she related to Him. He had been for her above all her Rabbi, her teacher. And the Jews considered it wrong for a woman to be taught the Law; yet the Lord was for her above all her teacher. This strong perception of Him as teacher explains their terrible concern that He was leaving them, and they would be without a teacher; hence the comfort that the Holy Spirit would empower them not only with a sense of His personal presence, but also would teach them as He had done personally. See on 14:18.

20:17 *Jesus said to her: Don't keep touching me; for I am not right now going to ascend to the Father*- She thought that the Lord was about to ascend to the Father, understanding His previous references to 'going to the Father' as referring to an ascension through the sky to Heaven. But the Lord comforts her that she doesn't need to keep grabbing hold of Him to stop that ascension, for He was not planning on doing so immediately at that moment. This intense dislike of the idea of His ascension and desperate desire for His physical presence reflects how she totally hadn't understood His entire teaching about the Comforter in chapters 14-16. It was expedient for them that He went away to the Father, because then they would receive the gift of the Spirit, His abiding presence in their hearts which would be as if He were physically present with them, and even more profound. But the Lord is gentle, and doesn't apparently make that obvious point to her. Despite her serious inattention to His words and inadequacy of understanding on that point, He urges her to go and tell the simple good news of His resurrection to others. This is the essence of the good news, and a person can believe and preach it regardless of whether they correctly understand everything else in the Lord's teaching. Mary is the parade example of encouragement in this.

But go to my brothers and say to them: I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God- And she obeyed: she "went and announced…" (:18). This is the first time the Lord refers to the believers as His "brothers". He wishes to emphasize His connection with us despite the experience of resurrection and

immortalization; and perhaps He felt that a new family relationship had now been forged through the gift of the Spirit working in their hearts, "the spirit of adoption" (Rom. 8:15), now enabled by His death.

Putting this alongside the other gospel records, this is all in the context of the disciples being commanded to take the good news of the risen Lord to all men. Surely Mary is being set up as an example of obedience to that command. She overcame all her inhibitions, the sense of "Who? *Me*?", the embarrassment at being a woman teaching or informing men in the first century… and as such is the pattern for all of us, reluctant as we are to bear the good news. "Among the Hebrews women only had limited rights and above all could not act as witnesses". And yet, the Lord chose Mary to be the witness to His resurrection to His brethren. He turned societal expectations on their head by setting her up as the bearer of the good news to them. Why? Surely to shake all of us from the safety of our societal and human closets; that we, whoever we are, however much we feel inadequate and 'this is not for me', are to be the bearers of the Lord's witness to all men.

She was not to tell them 'Jesus is going to ascend…'. She was to use the first person. Why? Surely because in her witness she was to be to them the voice of Jesus. And so it is for us all; we are witnesses in Him, we are Jesus to the eyes both of our brethren and this world. It was so significant that a woman should be chosen to make this witness, for women were not a valid witness in Judaism (Mishnah, *Rosh Ha-Shanah* 1.8). Those who feel an intrinsic inadequacy are made adequate for this work of witness. And Mary's previous mental illness (Mk. 16:9) and immoral lifestyle likewise seriously dented her credibility on a secular level.

Perhaps Mary Magdalene alone perceived [from Ps. 110?] that the Lord must ascend after His resurrection- for surely this was why she kept clinging on to Him after He rose, fearful He would there and then disappear Heavenwards. And therefore the Lord comforted her, that there was no need to cling on to Him so, for He was not just then going to ascend to the Father (Jn. 20:17). But another reading of this incident is possible, once it is realized that the OT associates clinging to another's feet with making a request of them (2 Kings 4:27).

Perhaps the Lord called the disciples His "brothers" straight after His resurrection in order to emphasize that He, the resurrected Man and Son of God, was eager to renew His relationships with those He had known in the flesh. It's as if He didn't want them to think that somehow, everything had changed. Indeed, He stresses to them that their Father is His Father, and their God is His God. He appears to be alluding here to Ruth 1:16 LXX. Here, Ruth is urged to remain behind in Moab [cp. Mary urging Jesus?], but she says she will come with her mother in law, even though she is of a different people, and "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God". This allusion would therefore be saying: 'OK I am of a different people to you now, but that doesn't essentially affect our *relationship*; I so love you, I will always stick with you wherever, and my God is your God'.

20:18- see on Mk. 3:14.

Mary Magdalene went and told the disciples: I have seen the Lord! And she told them that he had said these things to her-

Mary went to tell others "what she had seen and heard" (Jn. 20:18), and John in one of his many later allusions back to his Gospel uses these very words about all the apostles- "that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you" (1 Jn. 1:1,3). He and the other brethren took Mary as their inspiration in the work of witness, as should we.

Mary is very convinced as to what she had witnessed; she goes and tells the others that she has actually seen the Lord in person, and that He spoke words to her which she was now telling them. By contrast, the other women spoke in more abstract terms of having seen "a vision of Angels" (Lk. 24:23), rather than saying how they actually met Angels; and likewise the disciples understood the Lord's appearance to them as them having "seen a spirit" (Lk. 24:37). But Mary is far more concrete; she was immediately convinced of the actual, personal, bodily resurrection of the Lord. To 'spiritualize' is so often really an excuse for lack of faith. And so many, from ivory tower theologians to JWs, have fallen into this error. Faith in the end is about concrete, actual things which defy all the 'laws' of our worldviews. And it was this faith which Mary showed. See on Mk. 16:9.

"I have seen the Lord" is consciously alluding to Jn. 14:19 and Jn. 16:16, where the Lord had prophesied that all the disciples would see Him. It's as if John saw her as the representative of them all. Further evidence of this is found in the way John records the Lord as saying that He calls His sheep by name, and they recognize His voice (Jn. 10:5)- and by then recording how Mary Magdalene was the one who recognized the Lord's voice when He called her name (Jn. 20:16), as if she represents all the Lord's sheep. A woman rising early and searching for the Man whom she loves, asking the watchmen whether they have seen him, then finding him, seizing him and not letting him go… this is all the fulfilment of Song 3:1-4, where the bride of Christ is pictured doing these very things. Mary Magdalene is therefore used by John as a symbol for all the believers, or at least for the Jewish Messianic community searching for Jesus. Compare too the Lord's reassurance of Mary Magdalene with language of Is. 43:1 to the whole community of believers: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name…".

20:19 *When it was evening, on that day, the first day of the week, and for fear of the Jews, the doors were locked where the disciples were; and Jesus came and stood in their midst, and said to them: Peace to you*- The AV better reflects the Greek: "Where the disciples were assembled", or literally, 'synagogued'. The same phrase is used of church gatherings (Acts 20:7). They were unwelcome in the synagogues and persons of interest to the Jews; and so they by default became their own synagogue. But without a Rabbi / teacher. The Lord's appearance in their midst as it were gave life to their synagogue / church. He fulfilled His promise that where two or three were gathered together for His sake, He would come into their midst. The standing "in their midst" is emphasized in :26. But it is John who will later use the same word in describing how after the Lord had been slain He was represented in Heaven as a freshly slain lamb possessing the Spirit standing "in the midst" of the Heavenly elders (Rev. 5:6). That was Heaven's reflection of that very humble situation on earth, where the illustrious elders of Heaven were reflected by the frightened, weak disciples in whose midst the Lord stood. But they were to become the elders of the new people of God, with representative Angels before the throne of God, in the court of Heaven. Our weak situations on earth have their far more glorious reflections in the Heavenly throne room.

The wishing of peace was no mere formality. It was another way of wishing them peace with God through the gift of the Spirit.

20:20- see on Lk. 24:41.

And when he had said this, he showed to them his hands and his side. The disciples therefore were glad, when they saw the Lord- There is no mention of His

feet, although crucifixion victims were usually nailed there too. Perhaps this was because in order not to break a bone of Him, the nails had not left major holes there. Their 'gladness' was in partial fulfilment of His word that their sorrow would be turned into joy when they 'saw' Him again, but I have suggested that the joy in view there more fully referred to the joy of His presence through the receipt of the Comforter in their hearts to replace His physical presence. It seems that they saw the Lord, but were not persuaded it was Him until they had seen the marks in side and hands. Mary was persuaded without being shown these. The record is continually emphasizing their weakness and slowness of faith. We also see the depth of their belief in disembodied spirits, a totally unBiblical belief. But such doctrinal failure was no reason for the Lord to break relationship with them, and neither should it be for us.

20:21- see on Jn. 17:20.

Jesus again said to them: Peace to you. As the Father has sent me, even so send I you- The gift of peace was no passing formality. To be given the Lord's attitude of mind, the peace He had with the Father, was part of the promised gift of the Spirit (14:27); and here we go on immediately to read of the Spirit being given (:22). That gift was therefore primarily something internal, mental, psychological, in the heart; for that is where peace exists, especially peace with God of the kind the Lord enjoyed.

Again we have a Johannine version of the great commission. As the Lord was sent into the world, so are we. This parallel means that His 'sending into the world' cannot be harnessed to support any mistaken notion of personal pre-existence or coming from Heaven to earth at birth; for as He was sent, so are we. The synoptics record the risen Lord sending the disciples to preach Him and His resurrection; just as He was sent forth to testify of Himself. They are promised the strength of the Spirit to make that witness; here they are given "peace" and the gift of the Spirit (:22). And yet the disciples were weak and fearful at this time, hence the repeated assurance of "Peace unto you!". We too receive the same commission against a backdrop of feeling so inadequate and lacking of resource to fulfil it.

20:22 *And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them: Receive the Holy Spirit*- The gift of the Spirit was not and is not a once-off phenomenon, given just once in the experience of the believer. The New Testament records the believers being filled with the Spirit on various occasions, and the exhortations to allow ourselves to be filled with the Spirit are proof enough that it is given in an ongoing sense. Paul says that the Corinthians had received the Spirit at baptism, but he urges them to now be spiritual, to receive it and be filled with it again. There is therefore no chronological issue with the fact that Luke places a giving of the Spirit by the risen Lord at a slightly different point in the narrative.

The breathing of the Lord recalls His breathing His last breath toward the disciples at His death; "breath" and "spirit" are the same idea. The Spirit given is therefore fundamentally the spirit of Lord Jesus, His breathing, His life. Any manifestations of it through miraculous gifts in the first century are incidental to the essential idea- which is that His breathing, His living, the spirit of His mind, is given into ours and becomes ours as it displaces all human thinking and 'spirit' within us.

20:23- see on Lk. 11:4.

If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained- Grammatically, the "any" refers to any type or class, rather than 'any individual'. This encourages us to understand this as John's version of the great commission to take the Gospel to all kinds of people; see on :21,22. "If you forgive

anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven" (Jn. 20:21,23 NIV). These words have always been problematic for me, especially that last phrase. Can God's forgiveness really be limited by the forgiveness shown by fallible men? Yet if these words are taken as a record of the great commission to go and preach, and the ellipsis is filled in, things become clearer: 'I am sending you to preach the Gospel and baptism of forgiveness; if you do this and men respond, then the Gospel you preach really does have the power to bring about forgiveness. But if you don't fulfil the commission I give you to preach forgiveness, then the sins of your potential hearers will remain unforgiven'. Again, the forgiveness and salvation of others is made to depend upon our preaching of forgiveness. "Whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained" becomes the equivalent of "he that believeth not shall be damned". The disciples did not go out into the world and tell some people that they were forgiven and others that they were not. There is no historical account of them doing that at all. Rather we see them going out into the world preaching the good news of forgiveness for any who wished.

Commentators have noted that the language of retaining here is similar to how the Rabbis spoke, and the basis upon which they either excommunicated or 'received into fellowship'. The Lord is saying that this power is not in their hands, but is in the hands of the preacher of the Gospel. And instead of stipulating who is in and out, they should take the Gospel of God's radical acceptance to the world. This is a powerful challenge to latter day Judaists within Christian churches who think in exactly these categories of receiving into fellowship or putting out of fellowship. That same mentality likewise misses the focus now placed by the Lord on taking the message of fellowship with Him out into the world, and leaving God to decide who finally is 'in' or 'out' on the basis of their acceptance or rejection of His offer.

The Greek for 'retain' strictly means 'to hold / bind', and that for 'remit' means 'to loose'. This has evident connection with Mt. 16:19, where the keys of the Gospel of the Kingdom (which we all possess) have the power to bind and loose, i.e. to grant or not grant forgiveness. Jn. 15:8,16 also has some reference to the great commission: "…so shall ye be my disciples… that *ye should go* [into all the world] and bear fruit, and that your fruit [converts?] should abide". The eternal life of the converts is a fruit brought forth by the preacher's obedience to his Lord's commission. Likewise through the preaching of John, he turned men's hearts- the idea of repentance, being brought about by the preacher (Mal. 4:6).

20:24 There's meaning in the fact that Thomas' other name, Didymus, is given (Jn. 20:24). 'Didymus' means literally 'the double', presumably implying he was a twin. But 'Didymus' is a form of the same Greek word we find in Mt. 28:17, describing the 'doubt', literally the doubleness, i.e. the double mindedness, which there was in the disciples. Again, the element of doubt and lack of faith is being emphasized.

20:24 *But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came*- His surname 'the twin' could hint at his suffering from the dual nature we all have when it comes to matters of faith; we can believe and yet disbelieve. Perhaps his absence from the group was related to his strongly expressed disbelief.

20:25 *The other disciples told him: We have seen the Lord! But he said to them: Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe*- When John records Thomas as saying "If I do not see… and put my finger… I will never believe", he is connecting back to the Lord's very similar words: "Unless you see signs and wonders, you will never believe" (Jn. 4:48). It's as if John is bringing out the weakness of faith in his friend Thomas, the struggle there was to believe, knowing it would elicit a chord in his hearers, thus building a bridge between

the hearers and the preacher. And John goes on to record that there is a greater blessing for those who believe, not having seen the Lord, than there is for preachers like himself, who had believed because they had seen and touched the Lord (Jn. 20:29). It's as if John shows the utmost humility before his audience, imputing to them greater faith than he had. And Peter does likewise, alluding here when he says that his readers love the Lord, although they [unlike he] had never seen Him (1 Pet. 1:8).

20:26 *Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them, and said: Peace to you*- For the significance of His 'standing among them' see on :19. They still weren't obedient to their risen Lord- they didn't go immediately into Galilee. They remained at least eight days in Jerusalem, until the Lord Jesus appeared to Thomas there. The fact they met a week later, taking 'an eight days' as a week by the Jewish inclusive method (Mt. 17:1 cp. Lk. 9:28), suggests they had already begun meeting regularly together. His special presence during their gatherings may speak of His presence at communal gatherings of His people, although the Comforter presence is ever present in the heart of every individual believer.

20:27 *Then he said to Thomas: Reach here your finger and see my hands, and reach here your hand and put it into my side; and be not faithless but believing*- His finger was the appropriate size to enter the nail wounds, and his hand the right side to enter the spear gash in the Lord's side. "Do not persist in your disbelief, but become a believer" (Gk.). And then He pronounces to Thomas: "You have [now] believed" (Jn. 20:29, Syriac text). It's as if John is challenging his hearers and readers in the same way, and setting up his buddy 'doubting Thomas' as their pattern. John makes the point that Thomas didn't initially believe the 'preaching' of the Gospel of the resurrection by the other disciples; just as John anticipated some would not accept his account of the same Gospel on first hearing. And again, "be not faithless but believing!" jumps out of the text to challenge each of us, as do so many questions and exclamations in John's Gospel.

20:28 *Thomas answered and said to him: My Lord and my God*- Although Thomas' exaltation "My Lord and my God!" may appear an off-the-cuff gasping out of praise, can I suggest there was far more to it than that. I suggest he was alluding to or quoting Ps. 35:23: "Stir up thyself, and awake to my judgment, my God and my Lord" . The Lord Jesus had indeed arisen and stirred up in resurrection, and Thomas realized that it was to his judgment. When we look closer at the Psalm, it seems to reveal something of the thoughts of the Lord Jesus. He had desired God to awake to *his* need. And now Thomas shares those same thoughts, through his relationship to Jesus. And this is a very Johannine theme; that the relationship between Father and Son is to be shared by the believers, on account of the way they relate to the risen Lord Jesus. Or perhaps Thomas had Ps. 91:2 in mind: "I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge, my fortress, my God; in him will I trust" . When Thomas addressed Jesus as "My Lord and my God" , he was likely alluding to the way the Emperors [Domitian especially, according to Seutonius] demanded to be called " *Dominus et Deus noster*" - Our Lord and our God. Thomas was saying something radical- he was applying to the Lord Jesus the titles which those living in the Roman empire were only to apply to Caesar. And our exaltation of the Lord Jesus should be just as radical in practice. Further, note that Yahweh Elohim is usually translated in the Septuagint '*Kyrios, ho theos mou*'- Lord, my God" . Am I going too far in thinking that Thomas saw in the risen Jesus the fulfillment of the Yahweh Elohim name? He would thus

have been fulfilling the Lord's prophecy in Jn. 8:28: "When you lift up the Son of man, then you will realize that I Am..." . Finally the disciples were grasping that "All men may honour the Son just as they honour the Father" (Jn. 5:23). Thomas' expression of praise was thus blasphemy to both Jews and Romans. A true perception of the exaltation of the Lord Jesus leads us to a unique position which cannot be accepted by any who are not truly of Him.

Again and again we have to emphasize that we read the Biblical documents at a great distance from the culture in which they were first written. It was quite understandable for a person to carry the name of their superior, without being that superior in person. And so it was and is with the Lord Jesus. To give just one of many possible confirmations of this: "[In 2 Esdras 5:43-46]... God's spokesman, the angel Uriel, is questioned by Ezra as though he were both Creator and Judge [which God alone is]. Ezra uses the same style of address to Uriel ("My lord, my master") as he uses in direct petition to God. This practice of treating the agent as though he were the principal is of the greatest importance for New Testament Christology [i.e. the study of who Christ is]". The acclamation of Thomas "My Lord and my God!" must be understood within the context of first century usage, where as Paul says, many people were called Lord and "god" (1 Cor. 8:4-6). If we're invited by our manager "Come and meet the president", we don't expect to meet the President of the USA. We expect to meet the president of the company. The word "president" can have more than one application, and it would be foolish to assume that in every case it referred to the President of the USA. And it's the same with the words "Lord" and "God" in their first century usage. Hence a Jewish non-trinitarian like Philo could call Moses "God and king of the whole nation" (*Life Of Moses* 1.158)- and nobody accused him of not being monotheistic! Significantly, there is in the New Testament the Greek word *latreuo* which specifically refers to the worship of God- and this is always [21 times] applied to God and not Jesus. The worship of Jesus that is recorded is always to God's glory, and is recorded with the same words [especially *proskuneo*] used about the worship of believers (Rev. 3:9, Daniel (Dan. 2:46 LXX), kings of Israel etc. (1 Chron. 29:20 LXX)).

20:29- see on Lk. 1:45.

Jesus said to him: Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are they that have not seen and have believed- We naturally tend to think of ourselves as the referrent here. And indeed we are. But the tenses here read strangely if future generations are in view; for then we would need something like 'not seen yet will then believe'. He implies there were others at that time who had not seen but had believed. The Lord knew there were some who had heard His promise of resurrection after three days, and believed it- although they had not seen Him. This means that the disciples were spiritually second class citizens at that point, even amongst the body of believers. Some had not seen and believed He had risen; they had seen, but doubted- despite the great blessing of having the Lord appear to them. This again highlights the point being made throughout all the Gospels; the disciples were weak, even amongst the other believers; and yet they came through in the end, and were used by the Lord to found His church. Peter alludes to this passage when encouraging his converts that they had not seen and yet had believed, using the same words (1 Pet. 1:8). He writes that fully aware that he was one privileged to have seen and yet whose faith was weak, and who literally 'went fishing' in disillusion even after having seen the risen Lord. The phrase 'blessed for having not seen but have believed' is found in the

Rabbinic writings concerning proselytes. John continues his theme of a new Israel being developed, suggesting that the new Israel was based around the "twelve" [cp. the twelve tribes of Israel], and proselytes would be joined to them.

20:30 *Many other signs Jesus did in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book*- The context is of :29 stating that some believed without seeing the risen Lord, whereas the disciples saw Him but doubted. Here that self-critical spirit continues, with John admitting that the Lord not only appeared to them but did many signs in their presence, witnessed by them- making their slowness to believe all the more reprehensible. John concludes by saying that he has written down these signs so that "you", his audience who had not seen but whom he hoped would believe, might be better than him and the disciples- believing in what they had not seen.

20:31- see on Jn. 17:20.

But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name- See on :30. John's Gospel was written for the specific purpose of bringing others to faith- like most of the New Testament, it is essentially a missionary document. The gospel preached by John is what is transcripted here. We must ask then whether any other theology is actually part of the Gospel message. Jn. 20:31 makes it clear that the purpose of John's Gospel was to bring unbelievers to faith in Christ: "This has been written in order that you may hold the faith that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that, holding this faith, you may possess life by His name". C.H. Dodd comments: "The tense of the verbs... the aorists... would necessarily have implied that the readers did not so far hold the Christian faith or possess eternal life". The gift of eternal life in John refers to the present receipt of the gift of the Spirit, the life and spirit of live lived by the Lord Jesus, the life we shall eternally live. This is why life is "in his name". There may be reference to baptism into His Name, but the "name" of a person refers to the summation of their character and being. Life is lived in "His name", living, thinking, feeling and acting as He did and does.

"That ye might believe" implies John intended his readership to be unbelievers rather than believers in the first instance. Jn. 19:35 implies that the community for whom John was writing had John as the basic source of their knowledge about Jesus, and was highly respected as their spiritual father. 'John' is therefore his inspired write-up of the Gospel he had taught his converts, and therefore it has various specific features highly relevant to them. Acts likewise seems to be written as a preaching document, recording the speeches of basic apologetics which were made to both Jews and Gentiles. The early preachers would have gone around telling the good news about Jesus Christ, and in so doing would have recited time and again His teaching and life story. John seems to suggest that he chose which miracles to record so that "ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name" (Jn. 20:31). The implication is that he wrote his Gospel with the intention of it being used as a preaching document.

The Gospel records are transcripts of the original preaching of the Gospel delivered by e.g. Matthew or John. Thus John wrote down his gospel "*that you may believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the *Son of God*, and that by believing you may have *life* in his *name*" (Jn. 20:31). His first letter was written, it seems, to the converts which his Gospel preaching had made: "I write these things to *you who believe* in the *name* of the *Son of God* so that you may know that you have eternal *life*" (1 Jn. 5:13). It has even been suggested that John was writing in order to win converts to Christianity

from a specific synagogue somewhere in the Diaspora. Another suggestion is that John is aiming at converting Samaritans or at least, a group of Gentiles perhaps associated with a synagogue. For John records how Samaritans came to Jesus, how "the world" includes them and not just Jews (Jn. 4:42); how physical descent from Abraham is irrelevant now (Jn. 8:33-41); how the true Israelite is anyone who has been born again (Jn. 1:47; 3:3-8), and John stresses that the true sheep of Jesus for whom he died are not just Jews (Jn. 10:16; 11:51,52). John records Jesus' explaining that He has already done the sowing, but the reaping of the Samaritans / Gentiles is up to us the reapers (Jn. 4:35-38). The lesson is that we must each preach the Gospel to others in a way that is relevant to them, not compromising the basic message, but articulating it in ways that connect with their needs and situation. The New Testament is simply full of encouragement and example in this.

But it could also be that John was writing to confirm the faith of those who had heard his preaching of the Gospel and been baptized. For they would have largely been illiterate and would need some way of being reminded of that in which they had believed. It is possible to translate: "That you may continue to believe".

JOHN CHAPTER 21

21:1 *After these things Jesus manifested himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias; and he manifested himself in this way*- Mt. 28:10 sounds as if the Lord Jesus intended not to reveal Himself to the disciples until they met in Galilee. The fact He did so earlier shows that He changed plans, perhaps out of concern for their very weak faith, or perhaps simply from an overpowering love of them and desire to be with them. Jn. 21:1 stresses that He revealed Himself to them in Galilee *again*, as if the necessity for this was somehow shameful; and Jn. 21:14 notes this was the third time that the disciples as a group saw the risen Lord. Perhaps the degree of their unbelief was unexpected even to the risen Lord.

Perhaps this incident fulfills the Lord's intention to meet them on a mountain in Galilee (Mt. 28:16); but the planned meeting never happened because instead of going to the prearranged meeting place on a mountain there, they went fishing. Their going fishing might imply that they just returned to their old business. Meeting the risen Christ still didn't have a permanent effect upon them. This follows straight on from the blessing just pronounced upon those even at that time who had not seen but had believed; the disciples saw multiple times but still 'went fishing'; see on 20:29.

We may enquire as to the function of John 21. It appears rather tacked on to the Gospel of John. My own view is that it is designed to highlight the disciples' weakness. They were given the great preaching commission, along with the power of the Spirit to effect it, in Jn. 20:21-23. They had twice seen the risen Lord; for this is now the third time they see Him. And they respond by going fishing, returning home rather than going out into the world. This in fact is quite typical human response to traumatic events- to seek to return to the old and familiar, to get back to the "old normal". That they should return home and go fishing is absolutely psychologically credible. But the experience of meeting the risen Lord and engaging with His power was intended to help them overcome that natural response. The disciples, like us, so easily slip back into the ordinary. Going back to work, fishing, thinking about who's going to cook breakfast, bad luck fishing... is all so very much the stuff of the ordinary. To the point that we are given the impression that they failed to even recognize the Lord at first meeting. We can relate to all this so easily. For it is the stuff of the ordinary which swamps our sense of encounter with the risen Lord, and

our obedience to His mission. Perhaps this is at the root of the Lord's question: "Do you love Me more than these?", asked as it was before the large pile of 153 fish. Do you love Me more than you love these fish, this lake, your boat, your nets?

21:2 *There was together Simon Peter and Thomas called Didymus and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee and the sons of Zebedee and another two of his disciples*- As noted on :1, the 'going fishing' incident was shameful. The Lord had already appeared to them twice, and they had arranged a meeting on a mountain in Galilee (Mt. 28:16). But now they just go fishing, as if in disinterest or continued disbelief. Perhaps this is why the group who did this are named and shamed, by themselves, as it were.

The Gospel writers each conclude their message with some reference to their own incredible slowness to believe the very Gospel which they were now preaching to others. Between them, the preaching of the twelve makes it clear that they saw the risen Lord in Jerusalem, at least twice, were commissioned as preachers of that good news… and yet returned to Galilee in disbelief and resumed their previous occupations. And of course they recall their Lord's rebuke of them for their slowness and blindness. Truly they were appealing to their hearers on the basis of their own humanity and weakness of faith. They weren't painting themselves as immaculate, never doubting believers. They were so strongly portraying their humanity, knowing that they were appealing to men and women who were equally human and frail of faith.

21:3 - see on Mk. 10:28.

Simon Peter said to them: I am going fishing. They said to him: We will go with you. They went out and entered into the boat, and that night they caught nothing-

John perhaps especially brings out their blindness at this time. He describes how they were fishing on the lake, having given up, it seems, their faith in Jesus, despite His appearances to them. Yet John describes that incident in language which evidently alludes to the account in Luke 5 of the Lord's first call to them by the same lake, whilst they were fishing. Consider the similarities:

- They have fished all night but caught nothing
- The Lord tells them to cast their nets
- They obey and catch many fish
- The effect on the nets is mentioned
- Peter reacts emotionally, and in both records is called 'Simon Peter'
- The presence of "the sons of Zebedee" is mentioned both times (Jn. 21:2; Lk. 5:10)
- Jesus is called 'Lord'
- The same Greek words are used for climbing aboard, landing, the nets etc.

The point being that John is saying: 'Durrr! We were so dumb, not to realize the similarities more quickly! *Of course it was Jesus!* But we were so, so pathetically slow to accept it. After the encounter by the lake in Lk. 5, Jesus made us fishers of men. But we refused to be, initially. So He had to re-commission us yet again after this second incident'. John uses the verb *helkein* to describe how they 'drew' the nets to land- the same word used elsewhere by him for people being 'drawn' to Jesus (Jn. 6:44; 12:32). He is recognizing that they had had to be re-taught the call to be fishers of men, because they had pushed off to Galilee in disbelief and disobedience to the great commission to go and catch men. Perhaps John records Peter being asked the same question "Lovest thou me?" three times, in order to show how terribly slow they all were to accept the teachings of the Lord which now they were asking others to accept.

Peter is presented as the leader of the group, and is mentioned first in the list (:2); as if to demonstrate that the one who led them fishing, in disbelief and disobedience to the command to meet in a mountain nearby (Mt. 28:16), was the very one who became the leader of the early church. Again and again, the weakness of the disciples is emphasized in their own preaching; for the Gospel records are transcripts of their preaching to others. The details of them walking to the shore and getting into the boat are recorded in detail because John wishes us to imagine the shameful incident.

21:4 *But when day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach. The disciples did not know that it was Jesus*- The record has twice described the Lord as 'standing' among them in His two appearances to them in the locked room in Jerusalem. His form should therefore have been familiar to them. If we enquire why exactly they were so slow to fully believe, despite all the evidence and appearances, there is no immediately apparent answer. It could be that they so deeply believed in ghosts and disembodied spirits that they struggled to believe in His bodily resurrection; in which case we see that false theology and worldviews can militate against a true faith in the Lord Jesus. Or it could be that as John has shown with His references to how the Lord's miracles failed to convert the Jews, literal miracle and 'seeing' are not of themselves abidingly persuasive. John was writing for those who had not seen but had believed; and he is perhaps developing the point that their lack of literally having witnessed the resurrection is no excuse for disbelief. For the disciples literally saw the Lord in several appearances, but failed to be motivated thereby to a lasting faith. They too had been given the Spirit (20:22), but still failed to believe; just as the Corinthians were given the Spirit but were not spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1). The Comforter was to make the Lord even more persuasively present in the hearts of believers than any physical presence; so perhaps John labours the point that physical meeting of Him was only inspirational to faith at the time, just as the miracles had been; lasting faith was from other sources.

21:5 *Jesus called to them: Boys, have you something to eat? They answered him: No*- Here we have a rather nice indicator of the Lord's conscious effort to show His 'humanity' even after His resurrection. The risen Lord of heaven and earth calls out to the disciples over the lake, calling them "lads". The Greek *paidion* is the plural familiar form of the noun *pais*, 'boy'. Raymond Brown comments that the term "has a colloquial touch… [as] we might say 'My boys' or 'lads' if calling to a knot of strangers of a lower social class". Why use this colloquial term straight after His resurrection, something akin to 'Hey guys!', when this was not His usual way of addressing them? Surely it was to underline to them that things hadn't changed in one sense, even if they had in others; He was still the same Jesus. Likewise the term for "something to eat" is unusual, and perhaps colloquial for 'Any nice grub'. It occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. See on Jn. 20:15.

The question was to recall His question to them, as to whether they had food to feed the multitude. The implication then was 'No, but You can provide any amount of food'. He was seeking to stir their memories and to recognize Him, as well as through the clear similarities with the earlier fishing incident noted on :3. He knew that provoking them to join the dots and see the picture was going to be far more powerful than a direct appearance to them. And that is so relevant for all today who have not had any appearance to them of the risen Lord, but all the same believe.

21:6 *And he said to them: Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you shall find. There they cast their net; and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fish*- The 'drawing in' of the nets here and in :11 implies the drawing in of the

Gentiles, from all nations. It is the same word as in Jn. 12:32: "When I am lifted up from the earth [in death], I shall *draw* all men unto myself". The nets were not torn [*schizein*] in that there must be no division amongst true preachers of the Gospel who all teach the same basic Gospel- contrast this with how John frequently mentions the *schizein* which occurred amongst those who would not fully accept the Lord's message (Jn. 7:43; 9:16; 10:19). And likewise we can learn that all human resources will be provided in order to fulfil the great commission, no matter how they are stretched apparently beyond their natural limit. The 153 fish caught in the net may refer to 153 being the total number of species of fish recognized by the Greek zoologists. The Lord's cross will draw all men- i.e. men from all nations- unto Himself through our preaching, through our undivided drawing in of the nets. This means that true believers will be found to have come from every nation; the Gospel must therefore go to them all and make converts. This has only been achieved in recent times, and is a sure sign of the Lord's soon return. It shows however that basic belief in the Gospel is what is required; for no one Protestant denomination has won converts from every single nation.

The drawing in of nets is used by the Lord elsewhere as a figure for His return and judgment- only when they are all drawn in can the bad fish be cast away. So the conclusion has to be faced: there must be fish caught in the net, i.e. men and women who have responded to the true Gospel, amongst "all men", every species of humanity, before the Lord's return. If we are convicted that we teach the true Gospel, then it follows that there must be true Christian communities amongst "all men" before the Lord returns; and thus His return will be hastened by our establishment of those groups. When the Gospel goes into all the world, then shall the end come.

The disciples were unable to draw in the catch, representing response from "all nations", on their own. They needed the help of their brethren. The Lord prayed in John 17 that our unity would convert the world, and perhaps this is being again said here in more visual terms.

21:7- see on Acts 11:17.

That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter: It is the Lord!- The presentation of John and Peter together by John always seems in the end to Peter's glory. Here again, John is the first to realize, but Peter the first to act.

So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he wrapped his coat about him (for he was naked) and threw himself into the sea- Peter's casting of himself into the sea uses the same word as just used for the casting of the nets in :6. Perhaps Peter perceived that the nets represented them, and they should be out preaching, gathering in men rather than fish; and with characteristic zeal and repentance, he cast himself into the sea as he had just cast the net into the sea. He thereby recognized that he was part of that net that should be catching men, in obedience to the great commission. Peter's wrapping of himself in his outer coat before swimming was at best clumsy. Again we get the impression of someone rather uncoordinated or not thinking through implications. And yet such was the man chosen to lead the early church.

Peter knew the Lord Jesus had risen, and he had met Him and been “glad” when he saw the Lord, and in some form had joyfully proclaimed the news to the others. The whole flavour of this record would make it seem that this was the first time Peter had met the risen Lord. But it clearly wasn’t. Surely the point is that like us, we can know theoretically that Christ rose; we can be sure of it. But the personal implications in terms of confession of sin and service to that risen Lord can be lost on us, to the point

that we *don't really accept* that Christ is risen, even if in theory we do know and confess it.

When Peter realized that it was Jesus standing on the shore, this was at least the third time he had met the risen Lord. But when John says "It is the Lord", Peter throws himself into the water to rush to Him as if it's the first time they have met after the denials. Surely it was a higher appreciation of what Christ's Lordship entailed that suddenly struck him at that moment, and he now rushed eagerly to Him, believing surely in His gracious forgiveness. No wonder in a month or so's time he was appealing for men to repent and accept forgiveness on the basis that really, Jesus is Lord. The Lordship of Christ convicted Peter (and all men) of both their sinfulness (as they see themselves in the peerless light of His moral majesty) and also of the reality of His forgiveness. "I am a sinful man, *O Lord*" (Lk. 5:8) is a case in point. A case could be made to argue that Peter's use of 'Master' tends to be at times when he is weak or doubting (Lk. 5:5; 8:45; Mk. 11:21); whilst he saw Jesus as a master who simply gives directives to His slaves, there was not such great inspiration to faith. But the utter and surpassing Lordship of Jesus had quite a different message. Peter's perception of Jesus as 'Lord' climaxed when he perceived that "It is the Lord!" whilst fishing on Galilee after the resurrection. His sense of the greatness of this more-than-man led him to do something counter instinctive and even absurd- he adds clothes before jumping into the water to swim to Him, in order to be attired as best he could be before Him. It would seem that He was imitating the body language of the Lord when He washed Peter's feet- he tied a towel around Him [s.w. as Peter wrapping his outer garment around him, Jn. 13:4,5 cp. 21:7].

21:8 *But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from the land, only about meters from shore), dragging the net full of fishes*- The distance given is about 90 meters. For Peter to swim this with his outer garment would have been quite exhausting for him, and he would have arrived before the Lord panting.

21:9- see on Lk. 22:32.

So when they reached the shore, they got out of the boat; and saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon and bread- Again by a charcoal fire (s.w. only 18:18), the three fold "do you love me?" probed Peter's three denials, and the threefold commission to "feed my sheep" confirmed his total re-instatement to grace. Fish and bread was exactly what the Lord had miraculously provided in 6:9. They were continually being directed back to incidents in the gospels in order to demonstrate to them that the Lord was the same then, after His resurrection, as He had been during His ministry.

Anyone who has reflected on any length of ecclesial experience will realize the truth of the fact that so many of our spiritual exercises in preaching and pastoral work are in fact for *our* benefit, although we may feel that they are only for the benefit of others. This is especially true of preaching: the disciples laboured so hard to catch all the fish according to the Lord's command, but when they reached land with all the fish, they found the Lord already had fish and prepared them for breakfast. All the labour for the fish was for their benefit: not because the Lord needed fish (cp. converts); He already had His.

Even after His resurrection, in His present immortal nature, the Lord thoughtfully cooked breakfast on the beach for His men (Jn. 21;9,12). And this is the Lord who will return to judge us. He knows how to cook fish and unleavened bread. The Lord Jesus was male, and yet in so many ways He combined feminine sensitivity with His

almost heroic, classic masculinity, as the King, warrior, brave captain who gave His life for His friends. You see it even after the resurrection- He cooked a meal for the guys as they were out fishing (Jn. 21:9). From our cultural distance it's not immediately obvious, but in first century Palestinian terms this was so obviously the work of a woman. The men fished, the woman sat on the beach preparing food for the hungry workers when they returned off night shift. But it was a man, a more than man, the exalted and risen Lord of the universe, who chose and delighted to do this very feminine, thoughtful and sensitive action of service. The incident isn't merely an insight into the Lord's humility even after His resurrection. It speaks of how He incorporates in His person both male and female characteristics, as the ideal and perfected humanity, the Man fully and ultimately in the image of God. And there are other examples in His life. He perhaps rejoiced to lead His disciples to the breaking of bread through setting up the sign of a man carrying a pitcher of water- which was evidently women's work. The way the Lord held John to His breast at the last supper is likewise a classic female image.

21:10 *Jesus said to them: Bring some of the fish which you have now taken*- This detail is significant. Breakfast was ready, with His fish and bread on the fire. But He asks them to contribute *their* fish, so that the breakfast finally enjoyed included both their fish and His; even though 'their' fish had actually been brought to them by the Lord. We think of His teaching of bringing His sheep together with other sheep not of this fold, making one fold. The fishing incident clearly spoke of the great commission, and of how He would work together with them, so that the final harvest was a joint result of their work and His provision. They alone caught nothing, but with His help, they caught 153 fish, the number of species of fish which were understood to exist.

21:11 *Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken*- Again we see the enthusiasm and yet clumsiness of Peter; the Lord had asked for "some of the fish", and Peter drags the entire net full of 153 fish to the Lord. Although 153 is the numerical value of "sons of God", 153 was the number of species of fish which were understood to exist in the sea. This wrong idea was used by the Lord. These men were fishermen, who thought they knew all about fish; and He uses their incorrect science to make His point. With His help, they could bring representatives of all nations into the Gospel net. He would send fish to them; and we need to sense this too rather than preaching in our own strength, praying daily for the Lord to send people to us. The unbroken net speaks of how in the power of the Spirit, we will be provided with the resources, fully stretched as they may be, in order to fulfil His bidding in the great commission.

21:12 *Jesus said to them: Come. Break your fast. And none of the disciples did inquire of him: Who are you? Knowing that it was the Lord*- This meal looked forward to the Messianic banquet, which will be as a result of our obedience to the great commission with the Lord's direction and blessing. The Lord had to tell the disciples after the resurrection to “Break your fast” (Jn. 21:12 RV). Despite the Lord having appeared to them as recorded in John 20, they were fasting for the dead. No wonder the Lord urged them to break that fast. But the point is made, by John himself, as to how terribly slow they were to believe in His resurrection. As this was the third time He had appeared to them (:14) and they had disobeyed His command to meet them on a mountain in Galilee, instead returning to their fishing, I would have been minded to rebuke them. But there is no word of rebuke from the Lord, but rather a command to fish, and a using of them in His service. There are times when disciplining a person or again rebuking them is futile; treating them as partners and

asking them to get involved in the Lord's work is the more effective way of developing their faith. And the Lord uses that method here.

He typically avoided making direct statements about who He was, notably before Pilate. His whole person and behaviour was Him, He was His word or proclamation made flesh in Himself. He had no need to proclaim His Divine Sonship in so many words; it was evident. And we see this beautifully effected here.

21:13 *Jesus took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise*- Again this was to recall how He had distributed bread and fish to them in the feeding of the 5000. The implication was that they were to distribute that bread and fish wider; and perhaps they literally did so, seeing they had 153 large fish in their net. Again the Lord is seeking to point out that who He was in His earthly ministry was who He continued to be after resurrection. The process of immortalization will not obliterate personality; who we are now is who we shall eternally be. This points up the eternal importance of development in this life of personality and character, the spirit, spiritual formation.

The invitation to come and eat at the Lord's table, prepared by Himself, clearly has some connection with the breaking of bread. The Lord was eager that Peter should be there; even though He only 'takes up the matters' of Peter's betrayal *afterwards*. The Lord is eager to assure Peter of His acceptance of him in fellowship at His table. And from that position, He goes on to probe Peter's love of Him. Just as the Lord ate with sinners in order to bring them to repentance. And this should be the pattern of our welcome of others to the same table.

21:14 *This was the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after he had risen from the dead*- The synoptics appear to record other appearances, so this must mean that this was the third time recorded in John that Jesus revealed Himself to them all together as a group at one and the same time. The same word for "manifested" is used when John later writes that "the life was manifested, and we have seen it and bear witness..." (1 Jn. 1:2). He has in view the resurrected Lord of life, whom they saw and handled. But the witness they were making to this 'manifestation' included a recognition in the resurrection accounts that they had been so slow to accept that 'manifestation' of life which they now urged others to accept. Again we see a humility in their witness, which would have made them very convincing and approachable as preachers and teachers.

21:15 *So when they had broken their fast, Jesus said to Simon: Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these? He said to him: Yes, Lord. You know that I love you. He said to him: Feed my lambs*- Love of the Lord Jesus is to be manifest in loving others, caring for them. John makes this point in his letters, and it is exemplified here. To love Jesus personally means to practically love His brethren, His sheep. This is to be the starting motivation for all pastoral work- personal love for Jesus. Any other motivation will not work. In a healthy spiritual path, our love for the Lord will grow. And so will our love for His sheep. This is why pastoral ministry can never be a bought position, let alone a career for which one is qualified by a college education. It arises naturally, out of personal love for the Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus had already met Peter at least twice since His resurrection, but hadn't raised the obvious issue of Peter's denials. And now He does it only *after* He has first eaten with Peter. We must bear in mind that to eat together, especially to take bread and give it to others, implied acceptance and religious fellowship (the scene here is reminiscent of the breaking of bread, the same words for 'bread', 'take' and 'give' are found in Mt. 26:26). The Lord firstly fellowshipped with Peter and only

then moved on to probe the issue of his disloyalty, after having first affirmed His abiding love for Peter. This is a pattern for us in dealing with others' failure. The human tendency is to demand all is resolved between us before we can move on together, but the Lord was wiser than that. He had tried to arrange circumstance to provoke Peter to himself engage with the issue- for the triple questioning, the triple invitation to work for Him, all took place by a fire of coals- just as Peter's triple denials had. We see clearly portrayed here the gentle, seeking spirit of the Lord.

"Do you love me?" was a question for Peter's benefit, not in order to give the Lord information which He didn't have. His great sensitivity to Peter led Him to foresee the obvious question in Peter's mind: 'Has He forgiven me?'. And the Lord is saying that Peter knows the answer insofar as Peter knows how much he loves Jesus, on the principle that whoever loves much has been forgiven much (Lk. 7:47).The allusion back to that incident in Luke 7 is confirmed by the way that the phrase 'to love more' occurs elsewhere only there, in Lk. 7:42: "Which of them will *love* him [Jesus] *most* [s.w. "more"]". Jesus had already forgiven Peter; the answer to Peter's concern about whether he had been forgiven was really 'Yes you have, if you believe it; and if you believe it, you will love me, and according to how much you love me, you will know how much forgiveness you have received'. In all this, we see the careful sensitivity of the Lord Jesus to His people, foreseeing and feeling our doubts and fears, our questions; and responding to them in a profound way.

"You know that I love you" was met by the Lord with the comment that Peter must feed His sheep. This wasn't so much a commandment / commission, as the Lord explaining that Peter's love for Him personally would be reflected in the degree to which Peter loved the Lord's sheep. John grasped this clearly, when he underlines throughout his letters that we cannot have love for God without loving our brethren. The Father and Son are to be identified with their people.

"Do you love me more than these?" is grammatically ambiguous. The reference could be to the nets and ships, or to Peter's other brethren. On both fronts, Peter needed provoking to self-examination. For he was proud of his profession and too eager to return to Galilee and get back to work; and he had boasted earlier that "Though all men deny you, yet I will not". There are purposeful ambiguities in some parts of God's word, not every sentence is intended to have a final 'right interpretation' which stands for all time; the ambiguities are to provoke our self-examination.

21:16 *He said to him, a second time: Simon, son of John, do you love me? He said to him: Yes, Lord. You know that I love you. He said to him: Tend my sheep*- In the first two engagements, the Lord asks Peter if he 'loves' [*agape*] Him, and Peter replies that yes, he 'loves' [*phileo*] Him. In the third engagement the Lord asks Peter if he really 'loves' [*phileo*] Him, and Peter replies that yes, he does *phileo* Jesus. To argue that *phileo* and *agape* are interchangeable is to miss the point here; indeed, this whole exchange would surely show that they are not. And if they are, then we wonder why the two words are used as if there is a difference. Only surface level reading would suggest they are interchangeable. For *agape* is the otherwise colourless Greek word which has been chosen in John to refer to the Lord's love for us, the new commandment being to love *as He loved us*. Peter hasn't yet grasped that, and can think only in terms of *phileo*, the love of human friendship. This would continue the theme which began in :1 of this chapter- of the weakness of the disciples' response. Peter just doesn't grasp *agape*. And so the Lord reluctantly takes up Peter's use of *phileo* and asks Peter if Peter really even has that *phileo* love for Him.

The three questions are clearly intended to undo the three denials. But it is part of trauma therapy to re-tell the narrative of the trauma. And in a way, the Lord is seeking to do that through His questions. We sense His absolute tenderness towards Peter. And this Lord is our Lord, the same today as He was yesterday.

Another perspective is that Peter did understand the Lord's special use of 'agape' at the last supper discourses, and appreciated that in the Lord's vocabulary, this spoke of the Lord's love unto death for Peter. And he recognizes [by using 'phileo'] that his love for the Lord is there and real, but not on the level with which the Lord has loved him. Just as we all feel.

21:17 *He said to him the third time: Simon, son of John, do you love me? Peter was grieved because he asked him a third time: Do you love me? And he said to him: Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you. Jesus said to him: Feed my sheep*- As noted on :16, Peter has responded to the question about whether he has *agape* for the Lord by saying that he has *phileo*. The Lord now in the third exchange as it were gives up trying to get Peter to respond to *agape* with *agape*, and probes whether he really has the *phileo*, the love of human friendship, which he professes. The Lord doesn't make any claim as to whether Peter does or doesn't have the *phileo* he professes; His response is that love for Him will be reflected in love for those in Him, His sheep. This is brought out in John's letters, where love for the Father and Son is only legitimate if we love their spiritual children, the Lord's sheep.

Peter was full of a simple, pure love for the Lord as he stood before Him. And he wanted to assure the Lord of that. But the Lord's response seems to be that love for Him is not the passion of a moment. It is shown by loving our brethren, His sheep, over a lifetime of service- as Peter went on to do.

Peter is asked to feed [give food to] the lambs (:15); then pastor / shepherd the mature sheep (:16); and now to feed [give food to] the mature sheep (:17). John took this as a command for him and to us all, for he alludes to it in his spiritual care for the young men [cp. lambs] and the more mature ["fathers"] in 1 Jn. 2:14 (Catholics are wrong to assume these words apply only to Peter). The point is that mature sheep still need feeding as they did when they were lambs, although they also need shepherding.

21:18 *Truly, truly, I say to you: When you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you shall be old, you shall stretch forth your hands, and another shall gird you, and carry you where you do not wish to go*- This follows straight on from the command to Peter to show his love for the Lord by how he treated the Lord's flock. The Lord seems to be saying that He knows that Peter does love Him, and that Peter will indeed give his life to caring for the Lord's sheep- and because of this, Peter will finally suffer and die, as the Lord did. This prediction of Peter's future suffering for the sake of his work for the Lord's flock is therefore the Lord's way of saying that yes, He does accept that Peter truly loves Him- because He knows how He will suffer for his love of the Lord's people.

Consider how the Lord's words to Peter here about girding himself would have offered him tremendous comfort in Acts 12:8, if he appreciated them; see note there. Jn. 21:18,19 could be taken as meaning that Peter was to die the death of crucifixion, which would be the final fulfilment of the charge to “follow me”. Jn. 21:19 contains the observation that as he would be led to that place of execution, it would be a death that “you do not wish”. The Lord foresaw that Peter’s unwillingness to accept the cross would surface even then. One of the most well attested extra Biblical traditions about Peter is found in the apocryphal ‘Acts of Peter’. It is that as he was being led to crucifixion, the Lord Jesus appeared to Peter, and Peter asked: ‘*Domine, quo vadis*?’-

'Lord / Master, to where are we going?' (repeating his words of Jn. 13:36), as if somehow even then, he found the final acceptance of the cross hard. As indeed, it would be.

In Jn. 13:36, the Lord had answered the question by telling Peter that then, he wasn't able to follow Him to death. But he would do so at a later date. And that time had come, although it took a lifetime to reach. This tradition has, to me, the ring of truth about it, from all that we know of Peter's problem with the cross. And it exactly mirrors our own difficulty in facing up to the stark realities of the life of self-sacrifice and ultimate self-crucifixion to which we are called, the question of *Quo Vadis*? Only then, at the very very end, did he realize that following Christ was a call to follow Him to His cross. And another extra Biblical tradition has a similar likelihood of truth: it is said that when finally Peter was brought to the place of crucifixion, he insisted on being crucified upside down, as he was unworthy to die the same death as his Lord. Another tradition says that because of this unusual angle of crucifixion, the nails fell out and Peter was offered the chance of release, which he refused, and asked to be crucified with his Lord, still upside down.

If all this is so, he finally learnt the lesson which we likewise struggle for a lifetime to learn: that following Christ means going to His cross with Him, and in the process learning and feeling through and through our unworthiness. And he learnt too that to die with Christ is never forced upon us by the Lord who bought us: in Peter's final, willing choice of death, as with our day by day denials of the flesh for Christ's sake, we make the choices purely from our own volition. We alone decide, in the terror, pain and difficulty of a genuine freewill, that thus it must be for us. And for us, *Quo Vadis*?

21:19 *Now this he spoke, signifying by what manner of death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he said to him: Follow me*- After Peter's 'conversion', the Lord told Peter in more detail how he would die. He would be carried, as the Lord was carried to the cross. But his death would "glorify God" (as the Lord's death also did: Jn. 7:39; 12:28; 13:32; 17:1). We see here how the Lord's death is replicated in the death of His people. Our death is a death with Him, and our resurrection shall be after the pattern of His. This is the vast promise made in being baptized in faith into Jesus' death and resurrection. Having said this, the Lord invited Peter: "Follow me" (Jn. 21:19). Live the life of cross carrying now, Peter. And they went on walking, with Peter walking behind Jesus. But he couldn't concentrate on the crucifixion life, and got distracted by his issues with John.

Significantly, both Luke and John conclude their Gospels with the risen Lord walking along with the disciples, and them 'following' Him (Jn. 21:20)- just as they had done during His ministry. His invitation to 'Follow me' (Jn. 21:19,22) is the very language He had used whilst He was still mortal (Jn. 1:37,43; 10:27; 12:26; Mk. 1:18; 2:14). The point being, that although He was now different, in another sense, He still related to them as He did when He was mortal, walking the lanes and streets of first century Palestine. Elsewhere I have pointed out that the fishing incident of Jn. 21 is purposefully framed as a repetition of that recorded in Lk. 5- again, to show the continuity between the Jesus of yesterday and the Jesus of today. It's as if in no way does He wish us to feel that His Divine Nature and glorified, exalted position somehow separates us from Him.

21:20 *Peter, turning about, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following- he who had leaned back on his breast at the supper and asked: Lord, who is he that betrays you?*- Like Lot's wife, he turned around, away from the Lord, and saw John also following, the one who had leaned on Jesus' breast at the last supper (is this detail

included here to suggest that this was a cause of jealousy for Peter?). And he quizzed the Lord as to His opinion of John. Peter got distracted from his own following, his own commitment to self-crucifixion, by the powerful fascination human beings have in the status of others and the quality of their following. The Lord replied that even if John lived until His return, without ever having to die and follow Him to the literal death which Peter would have to go through, well, so what: "What is that to you? You- follow me". This was the same message the Lord had taught Peter through the parable of the 1st hour labourer getting distracted by the reward of the 11th hour one. He had that tendency to look on the faults of others (Mt. 18:21), to compare himself with others (Mt. 19:21 cp. 27; 26:33).

And so, so many tragic times we do the same. We are distracted from the quintessence of our lives, the following, to death, of the Lord, by our jealousy of others and our desire to enter into their spirituality rather than personally following. Remember that it is so often recorded that multitudes followed the Lord wherever He went. But they missed the whole point of following Him- to die the death of the cross, and share His resurrection life. John's Gospel has a somewhat strange ending, on first sight. The synoptics end as we would almost expect- the Lord ascends, having given His last commission to preach, and the disciples joyfully go forth in the work. But John's Gospel appears to have been almost truncated. Christ walks away on His own, with Peter following Him, and John walking some way behind Peter. Peter asks what the Lord's opinion is of John, and is told to ignore that and keeping on following Him. John inserts a warning against possible misunderstanding of this reply- and the Gospel finishes. But when we appreciate that the language of 'follow me' is the call to live the life of the cross, to follow the Man from Nazareth to His ultimate end day by day, then this becomes a most impressive closing scene: the Lord Jesus walking away, with His followers following Him, in all their weakness. John's Gospel was originally the good news preached personally by John, and there is an impressive humility in the way in which he concludes with a scene in which he follows the Lord He has preached, but some way behind Peter. An awareness of our frailty and the regrettable distance with which we personally follow the Lord we preach is something which ought to be stamped on every witness to the Lord. To follow the Lord in cross bearing is indeed the end of the Gospel. And Peter understood this when he wrote that "hereunto were you called [i.e. this is the bottom line of life in Christ]: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). Fellowshipping His sufferings and final death is following Him. Little would Peter have realized that when he first heard the call "Follow me", and responded. And so with us. The meaning of following, the real implication of the cross, is something which can never be apparent at conversion.

21:21 *Peter therefore seeing him, said to Jesus: Lord, and what shall this man do?*- There is a fatal fascination with the question of why some weren't called. But who are we as the clay to argue with the potter's grace? John's Gospel closes by addressing this question. Peter was following Jesus, walking behind Him, in response to Jesus' command to follow Him. But John was also following Jesus, and Peter turned around, turned back from following Jesus [just as he lost his focus on Jesus when he was walking on the water towards Jesus]... to notice John was also following. The fate of others, the nature of their following or not of Jesus, is not [in this sense] directly our concern; our focus must be upon single-mindedly following Jesus as we by grace have been called to do.

21:22 *Jesus said to him: If I will that he remains till I come, what is that to you? You follow me*- If Peter had to die the death of the cross, he wondered what John

would have to suffer. The Lord's reply is that if John were not called to be a martyr, but lived without tasting death until the Lord's return- what was that to Peter? He ought to still "Follow me". The Lord may be speaking literally, or using hyperbole in order to make Peter realize that absolutely nothing in the path or destiny of another man should distract him from *his* path. And we can well take that lesson; for so many stumble in their following of the Lord, or staying on the path intended, because of obsessions with others.

21:23 *This saying therefore went forth among the brothers, that that disciple should not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he should not die, but: If I will that he remains till I come, what is that to you?*- We have a window here onto how easily there could arise misunderstandings in an illiterate community, going only on the reported speech of the Lord, passed around by memory and repetition. Hence the need for the Spirit to inspire definitive Gospel records as we have them, correcting such errors which would inevitably arisen. We also note John's title for the believers as "the brothers". A new family relationship had been born due to the Lord's resurrection and continued spiritual life amongst them.

21:24 *This is the disciple that testifies of these things and wrote these things; and we know that his witness is true*- The Gospel of John is the eyewitness account of John- he says that he testifies to all he has written. The "we" presumably refer to the elders of the Johannine community, the converts he had made, who as it were published his Gospel. If so, they would only have know that his witness was true because of the work of the Comforter, the presence of the Spirit of Jesus in their hearts enabling them to discern truth about Him. Alternatively, the "we" would refer to the other disciples, who alone had been with the Lord and John from the beginning of His ministry, and who could testify that John's account was true.

21:25 *And there are many other things which Jesus did, which if each one of them should be written down, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written*- The books written parallel the personal witness made of :24. The Lord had done so much in so many lives, that if each person were to write down their account, then "I suppose" the world could not contain the records. "I suppose" reads strangely as it stands; John is hardly one for using throw away terms such as "I guess...". The Greek literally means 'to make as oneself'. The idea may be that each one in whom the Lord Jesus had done things could write a witness as John had done in his Gospel record; and the world could not contain so many books of witness. But "the world" in John is nearly always the Jewish world; and so often, he alludes back to the prologue. His conclusion of the Gospel is surely a place where he would allude to the prologue. There we read that the Jewish world did not "receive" the testimony or *logos* of the Lord; and "contain" here can also mean "receive" [s.w. "All men cannot receive this saying", Mt. 19:11]. So the idea may be that the Jewish world would in no way receive all the testimonies made. This however would be a rather negative way to end. We have detected allusions to the great commission so often in John. Perhaps the idea is that the world, both the Jewish world and the *kosmos*, could and should be flooded with books of witness from those in whose lives the Lord had done things. For He "did" [s.w. "made"] disciples of men (4:1 s.w.), doing or making people whole (5:15 s.w.). Their 'books' would be like John's book of witness in his Gospel record; but all slightly different. This, then, would be the taking of the Lord Jesus into all the world, by personal witness of what He had done in human lives.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: ACTS

ACTS

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Duncan Heaster

ACTS CHAPTER 1

1:1 *The former account*- Gk. *protos logos*. When John begins his Gospel with the idea of the *arche logos*, he is perhaps saying the same thing. The *logos* was the word or account of God's purpose in Jesus. Luke's Gospel was written for the purpose of preaching to Theophilus, who had already been 'catechized', taught by rote, one of the

Gospels (probably Mark), but who wanted to have a more detailed and factual account (Lk. 1:3,4). Luke later describes his Gospel as his *logos*, his 'word' about all Jesus did (Acts 1:1 Gk.). The Lord seems to have foreseen this when He spoke of how "Wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, which this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (Mt. 26:13). There is evident connection with Christ's prophecy of how the Gospel would be preached in all the world (Mt. 24:14; Mk. 16:15). He seems to have seen the 'Gospel' that would be preached as a re-telling of His life and incidents in it, such as the woman's anointing of Him. It is significant that her anointing is mentioned in all four Gospel records. In Mk. 14:9 we read that wherever the gospel was to be preached, what she had done would be narrated in memory of her. So 'preaching the Gospel' is defined there as a narration of the events and sayings of the Lord Jesus in His ministry.

Regarding the initial intention of Luke-Acts, see on 21:19.

I made- This is the same Greek word used in the next clause, concerning all that Jesus began to make or "do". The work or doing of Jesus is continued through the written record of that work- that seems to be the idea.

O Theophilus- A case could be made that Luke's account in his Gospel and in the Acts actually emphasizes how wealthy and middle class people came to the Lord- e.g. Joanna wife of Chuza, Cornelius the Centurion; Dionysius; Sergius Paulus, governor of Cyprus. Perhaps a reason for this was that he dedicated his works to the "noble" [Gk. 'well born', 'wealthy'] Theophilus (Acts 1:1). Luke, it seems to me, was writing to Theophilus because he wanted to convert him. And so he gives other examples of wealthy people who had also converted. He was urging the middle class to allow the radical call of Christ to reach to them. Luke's address to "Most Excellent Theophilus" may be a reference to the Roman-imposed High Priest of Israel between AD 37 and AD 41, Theophilus ben Ananus.

Concerning all that Jesus began to do and to teach- Reading Luke and Acts through together, it becomes apparent that the author [Luke] saw the acts of the apostles as a continuation of those of the Lord Jesus. This is why he begins Acts by talking about his "former treatise" of all that Jesus had *begun* to do, implying that He had continued His doings through the doings of the apostles (cp. Heb. 2:3, Jesus "began" to speak the Gospel and we continue His work). See on Acts 2:6; 2:7; 8:40. Luke uses the same word translated 'preach' in both Luke and the Acts [although the other Gospels use it only once]. In Luke we find the word in 1:19; 2:10; 3:18; 4:18,43; 7:22; 8:1; 9:6; 16:16; 20:1; and in Acts, in 5:42; 8:4,12,25,35,40; 10:36; 11:20; 13:32; 14:7,15,21; 15:35; 16:10; 17:18. Luke clearly saw the early ecclesia as preaching the same message as Jesus and the apostles; they continued what was essentially a shared witness. This means that we too are to see in the Lord and the 12 as they walked around Galilee the basis for our witness; we are continuing their work, with just the same message and range of

responses to it. Lk. 24:47 concludes the Gospel with the command to go and preach remission of sins, continuing the work of the Lord Himself, who began His ministry with the proclamation of remission (Lk. 4:18 cp. 1:77). Acts stresses that the believers did just this; they preached remission of sins [s.w.] in Jesus' Name, whose representatives they were: Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18.

"To do and to teach" alludes to how at the close of Luke, the two disciples call the Lord "a prophet mighty in deed and word" (Lk. 24:19). Here therefore we have a rebuke of their earlier position, that the Lord had wonderfully done and said so much. But He was now dead and gone, and this was mere history. We can in fact have the same attitude. But the point is that He is continuing to do and teach, both directly and through His body on earth.

On one hand, the fool begins and doesn't finish (Lk. 14:30 "This man began to build, and was not able to finish"). On the other hand, we are saved by grace even when we don't finish. Likewise the Lord has "begun a good work in us" and will complete it- if we let Him, for He will keep on trying to finish it ("Being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will keep working at perfecting it, until the day of Jesus Christ" Phil. 1:6). The Galatians 'began in the Spirit' but left that path and tried to complete the work without the Spirit, "by the flesh", and failed (Gal. 3:3). The Lord 'began' doing and teaching in His ministry (Acts 1:1; 10:37 "that word began from Galilee") and continues. So many times the Lord's words are prefaced with the statement that He "began to say..." (Mt. 4:17; 11:7,20; Mk. 4:1; 6:2,34; 8:31; 10:32; 12:1; 13:5; Lk. 4:21; 7:24; 11:29; 12:1; 20:9; 24:27). This is all quite some theme. His words were intended to commence something in the hearers, although usually that intended process wasn't and isn't allowed to go forward to its intended end. When a man today hears the Lord's words, that process likewise begins; but men truncate it. Samson was intended to "begin" delivering Israel from the Philistines (Jud. 13:5), and so the Spirit of God "Began" [s.w.] to move him to do so (Jud. 13:25). But he didn't let that process progress as intended, becoming caught up on anger and sexual lust issues. We have the sense that God began a work in and through Samson that wasn't completed as potentially possible- perhaps with the implication, that it should have been but wasn't. Not until David's time would Israel be free from the Philistines (2 Sam. 8:1). Yet despite only partially fulfilling his potential, Samson did make a beginning. And he will be saved, despite all that was unfinished and all the unrealized potential.

1:2 *Until the day in which he was received up, after that he had given commandments through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen-* The day the Lord was taken up, He gave one commandment to the apostles, related to their possession of the Holy Spirit: to go into all the world with the Gospel. But why does Luke speak in the plural, "commandments"? It could be that here we have one of many examples of Hebrew idiom being used by the Jewish writers of the New Testament, even though they

wrote in Greek. There is in Hebrew an 'intensive plural', whereby something is put in the plural (e.g. "deaths" in Is. 53:9) to emphasize the greatness of the one thing (e.g., *the* death, of Messiah). Could it not be that here we have something similar? The one great commandment is to go into all the world with the Gospel. We are the light of this world. We, the candles, were lit so that we might give light to others. Our duty is not merely to inform others of our doctrinal position, but to gain, win or catch [as fishermen] our fellow men for Christ.

1:3 *To whom, after his suffering, he also showed by many convincing proofs*- Acts 1:3 says that the Lord showed Himself to be alive to the disciples "by many infallible proofs". The suggestion is that they simply didn't accept Him as He stood there before Him; they failed to grasp that He was for real. They gave Him food to eat to check Him out; and He again ate before them in Galilee on His initiative.

That he was alive, being seen by them for forty days, and speaking about the kingdom of God- The Greek is literally: 'Speaking about the things concerning the Kingdom of God'. And this is exactly how the content of the Apostolic preaching is described in Acts 8:12; 19:8; 28:31. Clearly what the Lord taught them became the basis of their teaching to others. They were a continuation of Him on earth, just as our witness should be likewise. It could even be that "the things concerning the Kingdom of God" became a technical term for a body of material which the Apostles taught, having heard it directly from the Lord during those 40 days.

1:4 *And, being assembled together with them, he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem*- Rendered by AVmg. and RVmg. "eating together". We can note the association between eating and proof of resurrection; and also the idea of fellowship together. In the first century, to eat together was to fellowship together. It would seem that the command to remain in Jerusalem was given whilst 'eating together', in instruction at the breaking of bread meeting. That meeting continues to be the place where we receive instruction from our Lord, if we approach it in that spirit.

But to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, you heard from me- Presumably referring to the promise of the Comforter made in the Upper Room.

1:5 *For John indeed baptized with water, but soon you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit*- The implication is that they had all been baptized by John the Baptist; his work of preparing the way for the Lord succeeded with that small group, even if it failed nationally. The contrast is between *with* water and *in* Spirit. I suggest therefore that the baptism in the Spirit refers to something internal and psychological, the gift of the Spirit in human hearts promised as "the comforter" in Jn. 14-16, which in some cases in the first century was manifest by visible external signs.

1:6 *Therefore, when they had come together, they asked him*- The imperfect means they kept on asking.

Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?- Once the Gospel is preached world-wide, then the end will come (Mt. 24:14). And so the Lord replied to the question: 'When are you coming back?' by telling the questioners to go and preach the Gospel (Acts 1:6,8), as if the preaching of the word and the timing of the second coming are related. Likewise in the Olivet prophecy, the Lord gave them some signs of His return but told them that firstly, i.e. most importantly, the Gospel must be preached to all the world (Mk. 13:10)- implying that it is spreading the Gospel world-wide, not looking for the fulfilment of signs, that will bring about His return. Surely this would associate the exact timing of the Lord's return- for which He and the Father are ever eager- with the time when we have satisfactorily spread the Gospel far enough. When the harvest is ripe, then it is harvested. The Lord has to delay His coming because of the slowness and immaturity of our development; in these ways we limit Him. And it isn't enough to think that if we merely preach world-wide, therefore the Lord's coming will automatically be hastened. It is the bringing forth of fruit to His Name that is important to Him.

The disciples' request to know exactly when the Kingdom would be restored ('When will Ez. 21:25-27 be fulfilled?') was met with a promise that while they would never know the exact date, that was immaterial as they would possess the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit soon (Acts 1:7,8)- implying that what they would do with them would be a primary fulfilment of the Kingdom prophecies which they were enquiring about.

We note that they asked this question just prior to the Lord's ascension (:9). But He had been teaching them about the Kingdom for 40 days; and surely this topic had arisen before and this question would have already been asked. Because it was the obvious question for them to ask: 'And what next, what now?'. And still they did not 'get it'. Again we see how the apostles continually reference their own weakness- in a book about their "Acts" of preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom. They were patient with those slow to understand because they themselves had been so slow. And we see the lesson for ourselves.

1:7 *And he said to them: It is not for you to know times or seasons*- There is clearly a difference between them. *Chronos*, "times", is at times used to mean 'delay'; and *chairos*, "seasons", is also translated "opportunity". There would appear to be reference here to the variable nature of the Divine program; there are delays, extensions, and preconditions which must be fulfilled, and therefore opportunities for hastening or realizing the day of the Lord's coming. But by the same token, there is apparently no calendar date set for it.

Which the Father has set within his own authority- Or, power. The Lord made two statements to the disciples which he surely intended to be connected: "All power is

given unto me in heaven and in earth... it is not for you (the inquisitive eleven standing on Olivet) to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Mt. 28:18; Acts 1:7,8). But *all* the Father's power has been given to His glorified Son, and this therefore includes knowledge of the "times and seasons" of the second coming. In the exalted Lord "are hid all the riches of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3); it is thereby inconceivable that the Father would still keep back some knowledge from the Son. The point of all this is that when the Lord Jesus said that "of that day and that hour knoweth (present tense) no man, no, not the angels... neither the Son" he was not laying down a general principle for all time. He was speaking of the situation at that time: 'You can't know now, indeed at the moment even I don't know; but these are the signs which will tell the believers when I'll come'. By implication he was saying 'You can't understand them, although I'm giving them to you, but in the future some will understand them, because these signs will accurately pinpoint my return'. This was exactly the spirit of what the Angel told Daniel when he too wished to know when Messiah would come in glory; he was basically told 'It's not for you to understand, but in the last days understanding of these things will be increased among God's people; they will know the time, but you can't'. There are so many connections between the Olivet prophecy and Daniel that perhaps it is legitimate to think that the Lord was alluding to the Angel's refusal to tell Daniel the time of Messiah's coming. That the Lord was primarily referring to the twelve when he spoke of them not knowing "when the time is" (Mk. 13:33) is confirmed if we appreciate that the Lord Jesus sometimes uses "the time" as a reference to the appointed time for his own death (Mt. 26:18; Mk. 14:35; Jn. 7:6,8). The disciples were fascinated with the time of his return, and the Lord was giving them the signs. But knowing his death was only days away, inevitably he had in mind "the time" of his passion. And he knew that as they didn't know the time of his return, so they didn't understand the time of his death. Having pointed out that they knew not "the time", in words surely reminiscent of his criticism of Jewry generally for not knowing "the time" of his coming and death (Mt. 16:3; Lk. 19:44), the Lord went on to tell the story of the man (himself) who left his household (the disciples) and told them to watch, with warnings as to what would happen if they didn't. Every one of those warnings, and some other language in the Olivet prophecy, came true of the disciples in the next few days, in the context of "the time" being the time of Christ's death.

1:8 *But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the remotest part of the earth*- When the watchman of Is. 21:11 calls out “What hour of the night [will it come]?” (RVmg.) the answer is “Turn ye” (RV). This is when it will come- when Israel turn again in repentance. This is alluded to in Acts 1:7,8 and Mk. 13:28-33, where the answer to the question ‘When will Jesus return?’ is basically: ‘Preach to Israel; lead them to repentance. That’s when the Lord Jesus will return’.

The Gospel was to be preached for a witness to all nations (Mt. 24:14); and yet "*you* are witnesses... *you* will be witnesses" (Lk. 24:27; Acts 1:8). The preacher of the Gospel *is* the Gospel; the man is the message, just as the very same word / message was made flesh in the Lord. Israel of old were taught this. They were to keep and do the commandments of God, and *this* would be the witness of their wisdom and understanding to the nations around them- who would thereby be brought to Israel's God (Dt. 4:6-8). The imparting of wisdom and understanding therefore didn't come so much through specific doctrinal exposition, as through living out those principles in daily life. But *marturion*, "witness", can simply be a legal term referring to testimony or witness in a prosecution. Perhaps the sense is that judgment will come upon all the world once the Gospel has been witnessed to them; it is their receipt of that information which gives them the knowledge which makes them responsible to Divine judgment. For once this witness has been made, then the end comes.

The possession of the Holy Spirit in the first century was possessing "the powers of the world to come" (Heb. 6:5), showing that at that time there was a foretaste of the coming Kingdom. Thus in answer to the question about whether He would then fully restore the Kingdom of God, our Lord basically said: 'When, exactly, you can't know. But you will receive Holy Spirit power coming upon you (Acts 1:8 AVmg.) and will spread the Gospel world-wide from Jerusalem; which is tantamount to saying that in a limited sense the Kingdom is coming right now, although when it will finally be fully established is not for you to know'. Further support for this is found in our suggestion elsewhere that Kingdom prophecies like Is.2 were fulfilled to some degree in the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem in the first century.

The record of the Acts is a continuation of all that Jesus *began* to do and teach as recorded in the Gospels (Acts 1:1). The preachers were witnesses *of Jesus* (Acts 1:8). The logical objection to their preaching of a risen Jesus of Nazareth was: 'But He's dead! We saw His body! Where is He? Show Him to us!'. And their response, as ours, was to say: 'I am the witness, so is my brother here, and my sister there. We are the witnesses that He is alive. If you see us, you see Him risen and living through us'. In this spirit, we beseech men in Christ's stead. Just as the Lord strangely said that His own witness to Himself was a valid part of His overall witness, so our lives are our own witness to the credibility of what we are saying.

When we read of how we are to be "witnesses" to all the world, a look under the surface of the text shows that the Greek word 'martyr' is being used (Acts 1:8). We're all martyrs. Augustine said that "The cause, not the suffering, makes a genuine martyr". That needs some reflection and time spent processing that profound observation. In his play *Murder in the Cathedral*, T. S. Eliot defines a martyr as one "who has become an instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, not lost it but found it, for he has found freedom in submission to God. The martyr no longer desires anything for

himself, not even the glory of martyrdom". We can all enter into the definition of witness / martyrdom in this sense, insofar as we are 'in' the suffering Christ, even if in practice we may never be called to take a single blow to our body as the result of our witnessing.

Samaria is perhaps mentioned specifically because of the earlier command not to preach there during the Lord's ministry (Mt. 10:5).

"To the remotest part of the earth" need not be a reference to the great commission. It could be that this prediction had a specific, one-time fulfilment at Pentecost, where the Gospel was witnessed to Jews from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to Jews from the very ends of the earth / land promised to Abraham. If we understand the "earth" in a literal, global sense, then the Apostles didn't achieve this. They were told that the coming gift of the Holy Spirit would enable them to make this witness, and the most comfortable fit for the fulfilment of this is to simply read on in Acts and learn how the gift of speaking in the languages of the Jewish diaspora was given to them. They indeed achieved the intended witness on the day of Pentecost to Jews from the very areas predicted here in 1:8.

1:9 *And when he had said these things, as they were watching, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight*– surely it was a cloud of Angels not water droplets. But so it looked to them standing on earth, and the record is written from that perspective. We find this so often in the Bible- the language of creation in Genesis 1 is an example, as are the references to 'demons'.

1:10 *And while they were looking earnestly into heaven as he went, two men stood by them in white clothing*- Of the 14 usages of the Greek word here used for "looking earnestly" in the NT, 12 are by Luke. This is what we would expect with Divine inspiration- the personality and word choice of an individual still comes through noticeably in the written word, the writers were not zombified; and yet the overall product also uses words chosen by the Spirit, and is the Spirit's work and infallible.

1:11 *Who also said: You men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven?* - Why address them in this way? Surely we conclude that pnly the disciples were present. What was significant about them all being Galileans? We note that the Jewish audience of Acts 2:7 remarked likewise- "Look, are not all those who speak Galileans?", and Peter's Galilean accent could not be disguised in the courtyard. The records emphasize that the Lord was also considered a Galilean (Mt. 26:69; Lk. 23:6). Yet Galilee was despised. Perhaps the Angels were encouraging those men not to worry about their own inadequacy, lack of culture or erudition. Instead of just gaping at their vanishing Master, with thoughts of ethnic inadequacy arising in them, they were being encouraged to go out and make the witness which the Lord had asked of them. And the Angels were

comforting them that their humble origins were full well known to God, and would not hinder them in their work for Him.

*This same Jesus, who was received up from you into heaven- "*This same..." is clearly alluded to in Paul's later assertion that Jesus Christ is "the same" yesterday, today and forever. Who He was in His mortal life is the same Jesus with whom we have to do now, and whom we shall meet at the day of judgment. He will not turn another face. The Jesus who bid us come to Him because He was meek and lowly of heart... is the same Jesus who shall return and judge us. We note the bald reference to "Jesus", without any title, not even "Jesus Christ". This is unusual. The Lord is nearly always described as something more than plain "Jesus". Especially as "Jesus" was one of the most common male names in Palestine at the time, as common as 'Jose' in Mexico or 'Mohammed' in the Middle East. It's as if the Angels wished to emphasis that indeed it will be "this same Jesus" whom they had known in His humanity who would return. We see the Lord labouring the same point by addressing the disciples as "boys" or 'guys' after His resurrection; and calling God "My father.... your father... my God and your God". He stressed, thereby, the continuity between who He had been as a man and who He eternally is now He has Divine nature. "This same Jesus" is literally "This Jesus". It is the same Greek term as was written on the cross: "This is Jesus..." (Mt. 27:37). The Jesus who died on the cross was the One who ascended and who shall return- with the same love and desire to save. This is why the returned Lord is still described as a lamb, not solely as a lion. He returns with the 'wrath of the lamb', not the wrath of the lion. Perhaps Paul had some appreciation of this when we read that "the Christ [had to] suffer and rise from the dead, saying: This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ" (Acts 17:3). Paul spoke of "this Jesus" as if he were referring to a person actually present amongst them. Paul's preaching was totally Christ centered. "This Jesus" who was presented by Paul at that point as alive, let's say in around AD50... was the same Jesus who had suffered and resurrected in AD33.

Shall return in like manner as you saw him going into heaven- The *same* Jesus who went into Heaven will *so* come again *in like manner*. The record three times says the same thing. The “like manner” in which the Lord will return doesn’t necessarily refer to the way He gradually ascended up in to the sky, in full view of the gazing disciples. He was to return in the “like manner” to what they had seen. Yet neither those disciples nor the majority of the Lord’s people will literally see Him descending through the clouds at His return- for they will be dead. But we will ‘see’ Him at His return “in like manner” as He was when on earth. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. The Jesus who loved little children and wept over Jerusalem's self-righteous religious leaders, so desirous of their salvation, is the One who today mediates our prayers and tomorrow will confront us at judgment day.

1:12 *Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near to Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey*- In obedience to the command to remain in Jerusalem until they were given the Spirit (:4). I suggested on Lk. 24:50 that the Lord's ascension was from Bethany, and that perhaps they had gone out to the nearby mountain to see if they could still see Him.

1:13 *And when they arrived, they went into the upper room where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James*- The definite article suggests this was a well-known, specific meeting place. We note how Peter is always placed first in the lists of disciples. He, the most unstable and apparently least qualified for leadership, was the one chosen by the Lord as the leader of the pack. And He works with the same style today.

1:14- see on Acts 2:42.
These all with one accord- There are a number of words and phrases which keep cropping up in Acts, especially in the early chapters, which are kind of hallmarks of that early ecclesia. "With one accord" is one such. We begin in Acts 1:14: "These all continued with *one accord* in prayer". Then 2:1: "When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all *with one accord* in *one* place". Now over to v.46: "Continuing daily *with one accord*... breaking bread... with... *singleness of heart*". And on to 4:24: "They lifted up their voice to God *with one accord*". Now to 5:12: "They were all *with one accord* in Solomon's porch". There is another example in 15:25 too. So it's quite obvious, then, that the fact the early ecclesia was "with one accord" in those early, heady days is stamped as a hallmark over this record. But this phrase "with one accord" is also used in Acts about the united hatred of the world against those early brethren and sisters. The Jews ran upon Stephen "with one accord" (7:52), those of Tyre and Sidon were "with one accord" (12:20), "The Jews made insurrection against Paul with one accord" in Corinth (18:12), and at Ephesus the mob "rushed with one accord" against Paul (19:29). The same Greek word is used in all these cases (and it scarcely occurs outside Acts). It's quite obvious that we are intended to visualise that early ecclesia as being "with one accord". But we are also supposed to imagine the world around them "with one accord" being against them. The difference between them and the world was vast. The world was actively united against them, and thereby they came to be strongly united with each other.

Continued earnestly in prayer with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers- Mary is portrayed as somehow separate from the other ministering women. It would have been psychologically impossible, or at best very hard, for the mother of the Lord to hang around with them. The group dynamics would have been impossible. Likewise in Acts 1:14 we have "the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus", as if she is separate from them. She followed Him to Cana, uninvited, and also to

Capernaum. Next she is at the cross risking her life, but she isn't among the women who went to the grave. Why not? It was surely natural that she would go there, and that the other women would go with her to comfort her. But she was a loner; either she went alone, as I think I would have tried to, or she just couldn't face contact with the others and simply hid away. And could it be that Jesus, in recognition of her unique perception of Him, appeared to her first privately, in a rightfully unrecorded meeting? But by Acts 1:14, she was in the upper room, as if His death led her to be more reconciled to her brethren, to seek to get along with them... although by nature, in her heart and soul, she was a loner, maybe almost reclusive. A struggler to understand. A meditator, a reflector, who just wanted to be alone, one of those who take their energy from themselves rather than from other people.

1:15 *And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the brothers (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons) and said*- Is that all the Lord's miracles and ministry in Jerusalem had converted? It was from that apparently slender response that Christianity was born. So paucity of response to our message should be no discouragement. The AV is more literally accurate here: "the number of names together were...". This phrase recalls the description of the numbering of Israel in the OT, especially in Numbers 1, where the phrase "the number of names" occurs many times. Here was a new Israel formed, and being numbered so that they could go forward and inherit the Kingdom. See on 3:7.

1:16 *Brothers*- The believers are addressed as "brothers" here and in Acts 15:13; and yet the same phrase is then used about an unbaptized crowd of people who were listening to the Gospel being preached (Acts 2:29; 3:17; 13:26,38). It is also used in addressing those who in no way believed the Gospel (Acts 7:2; 22:1; 23:1,5). We note that Paul was called "brother" by Ananias even before he was baptized (Acts 9:17; 22:13); and Paul's reasoning in 1 Cor. 8:7-13 seems to suggest that he saw "every man" as his "brother", and sought not to put a stumbling block in the way of any and every member of the general public, whom he also calls "brother". This was surely because the early brethren had learnt the lesson taught to Peter; that they were to see all men as potentially cleansed in Christ, seeing that Christ died for all, and individuals are to be invited by us to accept that cleansing- in Peter's case, through extending table fellowship to them. The simple picture is that the early church was not so hung up as we may be today regarding whom they addressed as brother.

It was necessary that the Scripture should be fulfilled- Peter is quoting here from the Lord's recent words in Lk. 24:44, that the Scriptures must [s.w. 'necessary'] be fulfilled about Him.

Which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David- A classic statement concerning the process of Divine inspiration of the Bible.

Concerning Judas, who was guide to those that took Jesus- The way Judas led the armed men to take or seize Jesus in Gethsemane was etched in Peter's memory; the shock of realizing Judas' betrayal would have been enormous.

1:17 *For he was numbered among us and received his part in this ministry*- Alluding to Is. 14:10 LXX, where the King of Babylon is described as a star which fell from the sky and is met by the kings of the earth, who comment that he was now "numbered with us". The disciples saw Judas as the "guide" or leader of those who killed Jesus (:16), and saw him as having left leadership amongst the Lord's people for a place of leadership amongst the people of His enemies. This helps us better understand how Judas is described as 'satan', the adversary, and how he is presented as personified evil.

1:18 *Now this man obtained a field with the reward of his iniquity, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out*- See on Mt. 27:7. The way Judas "burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out" (Acts 1:18) may not be only a description of a bungled suicide. "Bowels" is elsewhere *always* used figuratively. One wonders whether it doesn't also describe how he fell down headlong, as Saul did when he knew his condemnation, and burst asunder within him, and poured out his heart in desperation, in the very pathetic little field he had bought for the price of the Son of God. In an utterly terrible figure, Ezekiel describes the condemnation of Israel as them being a woman trying to pluck off her own breasts (Ez. 23:34). This was and will be the extent of self-hatred and desperation. She will be alienated from her lovers of this world, and God's mind will be alienated from her (Ez. 23:17,18,22). The utter aloneness of the condemned is impossible to plumb.

1:19 *And it became known to all the dwellers at Jerusalem, so much so that in their language that field was called Akeldama, that is, The field of blood*- "What will you give me...?" suggests that Judas' motive was partly financial. And all he could buy with it was a muddy clay field which became worthless, which nobody else wanted to own anyway. The suicide of Judas and the way he had bought or been given a field for his evil work became known to all. It was impossible for the Jews to disguise the fact that what they had done was known by all, and all their plotting had not been blessed but had come to an unpleasant and embarrassing end. They really had no option but to repent and accept the risen Lord; but their pride was too great. "Akeldama" has been linked to the name of the field where the young men of David and Saul died in their own blood when they tried to take the Kingdom immediately in the wrong way (2 Sam. 2:16). We note that the Aramaic "Akeldama" was the "proper tongue" of the Jerusalem dwellers. They would have claimed to be true Hebrews; but in truth they were part Gentile in God's eyes, hence their true language is called Aramaic. It was the "dwellers at Jerusalem" who later repented and were converted by Peter in chapter 2; their consciences began to be touched by hearing of the tragedy of Judas, and how deeply unblessed was all connected with him.

1:20 *For it is written in the book of Psalms: Let his habitation be made desolate and let no one dwell therein, and his office let another take* - The condemnation of Jewry for crucifying Christ in Ps. 69:25 ("let *their* habitation be desolate") is quoted in the singular about Judas in Acts 1:20. What was true of Judas was also true of Israel in general; in the same way as the pronouns used about Judas merge from singular into plural in Ps. 55:13-15 ("a man mine equal... let death seize upon them"), as also in Ps. 109:3 cp. v.8.

Psalm 109 is a prophecy of Christ's betrayal and death (:8 = Acts 1:20). The satans ("adversaries") of the Lord Jesus which the Psalm speaks of (:4,20,29) were the Jews, and the specific 'Satan' of v. 6 was Judas. Psalm 55:13–15 foretells Judas' betrayal of Jesus. It speaks of Judas in the singular, but also talk of his work as being done by a group of people – the Jews, in practice: "It was you, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together... let death seize them (plural), and let *them* go down quickly into hell" (cp. Judas' end). Likewise the other prophecy of Judas' betrayal also connects him with the Jewish system: "My own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread (cp. Jesus passing the sop to Judas), has lifted up his heel against me. But You, O Lord, be merciful unto me, and raise me up, that I may requite them" (Ps. 41:9,10). Thus Judas is being associated with the Jews who wanted to kill Jesus, and therefore he, too, is called a Devil. Both Judas and the Jews were classic 'devils' due to their surrender to the flesh. This is further confirmed by a look as Psalm 69. Verse 22 is quoted in Romans 11:9,10 concerning the Jews: "Let their table become a snare before them... let their eyes be darkened". The passage continues in Psalm 69:25: "Let *their* habitation be desolate; let none dwell in *their* tents". This is quoted in Acts 1:16,20 as referring specifically to Judas, but the pronouns are changed accordingly: "This scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas... Let *his* [singular] habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and *his* bishopric let another take".

Ps. 109:8 is quoted in Acts 1:20 concerning Judas, suggesting that the preceding v.6 reveals Christ's thoughts about him: "Set Thou a wicked man over him: and let satan stand at his right hand", implying that Jesus prayed for the Jewish satan to help or co-operate with Judas (which is how the idiom of standing at the right hand is used in Ps. 109:31). This is tantamount to not praying that Judas would overcome the advances of the Jews which the Lord would have been aware they were making. But he could encourage Peter that he had prayed for him to resist these advances (Lk. 22:32). The whole of Ps. 109 is a prayer requesting the punishment of Judas, asking God to confirm him in his supreme apostasy: "Let his prayer become sin" (Ps. 109:7). The last section of the Psalm (109:22-29) describes Christ's sufferings on the cross in language that has many connections with Ps.22 and 69; and as with them there is a sudden breakthrough at the end into looking forward to praising God "among the multitude" (Ps. 109:30), as there is in Ps. 22:22. This may mean that it was on the cross that the enormity of Judas'

sin was fully realized by Christ, although he had previously recognized it to some degree before the cross (Jn. 19:11; Mt. 26:24).

1:21 *Therefore, of the men that have been with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and went out among us*- Only two men fitted the requirement. But we hear nothing of either of them in the Gospel records. That demonstrates that when we read of "the twelve" experiencing various things, being in the boat with Jesus, the breaking of bread, the feeding miracles etc., there were at least these two men also present- and probably many others at various points of the ministry, although only these two individuals were consistently present all the time.

1:22 *Beginning from the baptism of John, to the day that he was received up from us, of these must one become a witness with us of his resurrection*- This means that Joseph and Matthias were also present at the last supper; this is one of many reasons for rejecting the idea that the supper was a closed table strictly for the twelve. Without wishing to be unduly critical of the disciples at this point, it is surely so that a witness of the resurrection was all the same a witness, whether or not they were confirmed as such. One is a witness of what they have seen, regardless of whether they are officially appointed as such. This is one of several reasons for having some unease at the path taken here and the drawing of lots, to the point that I feel we cannot reliably also draw lots to decide whom to appoint.

1:23 *And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justus; and Matthias*- The problem with democracy and choices by lot is the selection of the candidates. “Put forward” is the word for “appointed”. They decided on the candidates. Perhaps they were the only two who fitted the criteria of :22; but it seems it was the disciples themselves who chose those parameters for choice. The whole incident seemed unnecessary; we never hear of these brethren again in the record. We do note however that Peter is described as “standing up with the eleven” (2:14), suggesting they stood as a group of twelve and therefore the replacement disciple stood with them at that point.

1:24 *And they prayed, and said: Lord, you who knows the hearts of all men, show us which of these two is the one whom you have chosen*- It could be argued that giving God a binary choice like this was as it were forcing His hand, and therefore the result was invalid. And we don't hear any more about Matthias, with the term 'disciple' and 'apostle' being used about a far wider community than the original 'twelve', as if the significance of having been in the 'twelve' was somehow lessened as the ministry of the Spirit developed.

1:25 *To take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas fell away, that he might go to his own place*- The contrast is with his "place" in the ministry mentioned at the beginning of the verse. The rejected have their own individual condemnation,

because so much of the plain of it will be because of their own personal reflection on "the place" they might have had, compared to "the place" of condemnation and rejection. But the allusion is clearly to the description of Balaam in Num. 24:25 "And Balaam returned to his own place". The motivation of Balaam for his apostacy was clearly money; and we are thereby steered towards understanding money as being a significant factor in Judas' motivation. Again and again, we marvel that men can do what they do for the sake of the hope of wealth in this brief life. "What will you give me...", the way he began betraying the Lord after the incident involving wealth at the anointing at Bethany, the note that he was a thief and stole what was in the common purse and the way he cast down the coins into the treasury all support that understanding of Judas.

1:26 *And they cast lots for them; and the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles*- As noted on :21,22 and :23, the whole process here seems somewhat lacking in solid Biblical and procedural support, and would in my judgment be unsafe to use as justification for using lots.

ACTS CHAPTER 2

2:1 *And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place*- Literally, "was being fulfilled" (RVmg.). The Mosaic feast of Pentecost was a prophecy looking forward to what was now happening in the Christian dispensation. In commentary on 11:17, I discuss the possibility that the disciples were themselves baptized at this time and received the Spirit as a result of that. The mention of "one place" deepens the impression of their unity.

The events of the Lord's death fulfilled the Passover. It was at Pentecost that Moses came down Sinai with the law. Now, the Lord is coming down with the new covenant, the gift of the Spirit, which Jer. 31 and elsewhere understands as a heart to know Him. The descent of fire on the heads of the disciples may allude to what happened at Sinai, when God came down in fire (Ex. 19:17-20). Perhaps the dwelling of fire upon their heads was to represent how the Spirit came upon their minds. And that is the essence of the gift, which they then offered to the audience. And as Peter later recalls, they were given "the like gift which He have unto us". The essence of that gift was a rewiring of the human heart, the mind, the head, and not the ability to speak in languages of itself.

2:2 *And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting*- This seems to be intentionally contrasted with the fact they were sitting in the "upper room" of that house. Perhaps the idea is that the activity of God with the apostles was to be seen throughout the entire house / body of believers. Or maybe the allusion is to the glory of God filling the entire house of Solomon's temple. The body of Christ was now the temple, and God had accepted it by filling it with His Spirit.

The Greek for "rushing" carries the idea of carrying or driving along; the same word is used of a ship being driven by the wind. Whilst human freewill is never obviated by the Spirit's work, on the other hand, without God's carrying of us... we will never get there. This is therefore a feature of the wind / spirit of God in human life. The same word for "wind" is found in Jn. 3:8, where again we have the idea of

the "sound of... wind" in the context of the birth of the Spirit: "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear its sound, but do not know from where it comes and where it goes. So is every one that is born of the Spirit". And so the stage is set for us to understand the gift of the Spirit as being essentially an internal matter, within the human heart / mind. We will now go on to learn that this Spirit hovered over the heads or minds of the believers. The external manifestation of this in the gift of languages at this time is incidental to the essence of the gift of the Spirit.

2:3 *And there appeared to them tongues like fire, separating and resting upon each one of them personally*- The tongues were not fire, but "like fire" because of the reddish colour of the human tongue. This was a visual reflection of how the gift of speaking in human languages was being given to each of those present. It is probably unwise to assume that this fulfils the prediction that the Lord would baptize with Spirit and fire- because the tongues were not of literal fire. See on Acts 2:45.

There is another take on John's prediction that those who came to him would be baptized by the Lord Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Mt. 3:11). The immediate context has the Lord speaking of "fire" in the context of the rejected chaff and wood being burnt with "fire" (Mt. 3:10,12). The Lord could be saying that those water baptized into Him would also be immersed into His Spirit, like going to live in another country in an immersion course- an immersion into another culture, language, history and way of being. But others would be baptized in the fire of condemnation. The difficulty is to connect this with the apparent fulfilment of it when the disciples experienced tongues of fire coming upon them before they received the Spirit and spoke in tongues / languages in Acts 2. Whenever fire comes upon a person from Heaven it is usually in condemnation, and fire is a common symbol of condemnation and judgment- rather than of 'being on fire for the Lord'. The secular usage of the term 'baptism of fire' has perhaps also misled English speaking readers. So I suggest that the appearance of tongues of fire upon the disciples was a reminder to them of the possibility of their condemnation- before they were empowered by the Spirit to do an amazing public work for the Lord. Just as the Lord upbraided them for their unbelief, and then empowered them to go and preach that unbelievers would be condemned.

2:4 *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other languages, as the Spirit gave them to speak*- The imperfect means that the Spirit kept on giving them. Throughout the ministry of each one present, they were given multiple times the ability to speak forth the Gospel in languages different to their native tongue. Eph. 5:18 appeals to us all to be "filled with the Spirit". The essence of Pentecost is ongoing for us all, although the external confirmation through the gift of languages was only for that time.

2:5 *Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem devout men, Jews from every nation under heaven*- See on :9. The Greek means to live permanently. These were diaspora Jews who had retired to Jerusalem and would have been living there throughout the Lord's ministry and had probably encountered John the Baptist and perhaps some had been baptized by them. The "multitude" (singular in the Greek) of them who were gathered together (:6) therefore refers to this group of retirees, rather than to the general public. We can understand why Peter specifically accuses this group of having responsibility for the crucifixion of the Lord- because they as the 'elders' in age and authority had allowed it. The later appeal was to them and to their children [Jews still living in their family homes in the diaspora], and to all who were afar off- either the Gentiles, or all Jews in the diaspora, not just the children of the Jerusalem retirees.

If these Jews were permanent residents of Jerusalem, this means they had accepted the common Jewish idea that if one lived and died on Jerusalem, then their salvation was assured. These very people were baptized and then had to flew from Jerusalem and die in exile far away, many in modern Turkey. For Peter who converted them, then wrote his letters to them there. We see how what was their pet trust, namely that living and dying in Jerusalem would save them, was removed from them. They were taken from religion to personal spirituality and relationship with the Lord. They learnt that salvation is in Jesus and not in any particular place. We too experience this removal of the things of human strength that we trust in the most. Be it parents, partner, family, church, health... That we may trust solely in the the Lord Jesus.

2:6 *And at this sound the crowds came together*-

"At this sound" uses the same word as in Mt. 2:18 of the voice of lamentation being heard widely. AV 'noised abroad" could refer to miraculous amplification of their voices so that the entire city heard.

"The multitude". The Acts record repeatedly describes the converts as “the multitude of the disciples” (2:6; 4:32; 5:14,16; 6:2,5; 12:1,4; 15:12,30; 17:4; 19:9; 21:22), using the same word to describe the “multitude of the disciples” who followed the Lord during His ministry (Lk. 5:6; 19:37). There is no doubt that Luke intends us to see all converts as essentially continuing the witness of those men who walked around Palestine with the Lord between AD30 and AD33, stumbling and struggling through all their misunderstandings and pettiness, the ease with which they were distracted from the essential… to be workers together with Him. See on Acts 1:1.

And they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language- Gk. *dialektos*, meaning that the language was heard with perfect local pronunciation; and another evidence that the gift of speaking in languages ["tongues"] was intelligible human language and not the mumbo jumbo of Pentecostalism.

2:7 *And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying: Look, are not all those who speak Galileans?*- Luke describes the “amazement” at the preaching and person of Jesus (Lk. 2:47,48; 4:36; 5:26; 8:56; 24:22), and then uses the same word to describe the “amazement” at the apostles (Acts 2:7,12; 8:13; 9:21; 10:45; 12:16). See on Acts 1:1. Galileans were noted for their heavy accent and grammatical mistakes. Yet exactly those people, the least qualified as linguists, were chosen to perform the greatest linguistic miracle of all time.

2:8 *And how is it each of us heard*- The miracle was therefore in their hearing as well as in, or perhaps apart from, the words coming from the mouths of the speakers-in-tongues.

In his own native language- Gk. *dialektos*, see on :6.

2:9 *Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, in Judea and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia*- The list of nations here seems to be designed to go around the compass from Jerusalem, giving the impression that people from the whole world had heard the Gospel. They were from "every nation under heaven" (:5). Paul surely alludes to this when he writes later that "the Gospel was preached to every creature which is under heaven" (Col. 1:23). I suggest he is referring here to Peter's work on Pentecost; and in commentary elsewhere, especially on chapter 20, I will suggest that Paul struggled not to be jealous of Peter's success at Pentecost. So how he writes in Col. 1:23 is giving full credit to Peter in a commendable way. The Old Testament predictions that the message of Messiah would go into all the world was thereby fulfilled, in a sense. But it didn't involve any missionary activity in the sense of travelling throughout the world. People from

various nations were living permanently in Jerusalem, and the Gospel being preached to them was counted as the Gospel having been preached to every creature under heaven. In our day, we too have a commission to take the Gospel to every nation; but given then phenomena of international migration, we can witness to the Lord Jesus in cities like London, New York, Paris, Sydney... and thereby be counted as having taken the Gospel into the whole world. And in the same spirit, the Lord surely counts internet witness the same.

The list here in :9-11 includes Crete, Rome and Damascus. There were Christians here it seems before Paul came to them. So those who were converted and baptized in a day had deep roots for their simple faith, and took the basic Gospel with them to their homelands. And that basic message was again believed and people were baptized in response to it. So we see the power of the most simple statements of the Gospel.

2:10 *In Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt and the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and sojourners from Rome, both Jews and proselytes*- The fact proselytes were baptized is evidence that there were Gentiles baptized before Cornelius. The early believers were however terribly slow to grasp the simple truth that the Gospel should go to all nations. But the Lord kept nudging them towards realizing this, and the baptism of proselytes is an example. We experience the same kinds of nudges towards grasping those things which ought to be obvious to us if we respect the Lord's word.

2:11 *Cretans and Arabians, we hear them speaking in our language*- The miracle was also in the hearing / perception of the listeners, as well as in the nature of the language proceeding from the mouths of the language speakers.

The mighty works of God- Only used elsewhere in Lk. 1:49 concerning the mighty things done by God in His Son.

2:12 *And they were all amazed and were perplexed, saying to each other: What does this mean?*- "Perplexed" is Gk. 'doubted'. Contrary to modern Pentecostal claims, the gift of tongues did not of itself inspire faith in the hearers; these still doubted, and others passed it off as alcohol freeing a person up to use talents [languages, in this case] which were normally dormant.

2:13 *But others mocking said: They are filled with new wine!*- Seeing the miracle was in their hearing as well as in the mouths of the apostles, this was no possible reason. But this is the length to which some will go to deny the Lord's action in human life. *A* reason, *any* reason, has to be given to explain it away.

2:14 *But Peter, standing with the eleven*- Peter stood up along with the eleven others; thus the record accepts that Mathias had been accepted and that the entity known as 'the twelve' had been reconstituted. We read of "the twelve" in Acts 6:2. However we do not read further in Acts after 6:2 of "the twelve" so it would appear they played no official role in the later development of the church.

Lifted up his voice and addressed them: You men of Judea and all that dwell in Jerusalem, let this be understood by you, and listen to my words- It would have become public news in Jerusalem that the man who nearly killed Malchus had slipped in to the High Priest's yard, and just got out in time before they lynched him. And the fool he had made of himself would for sure have been exaggerated and gossiped all round. Jerusalem would have had the small town gossip syndrome, especially at Passover time. Every one of his oaths with which he had disowned his Lord would have been jokingly spread around in the three days while Jesus lay dead. But then Peter's preaching of the Gospel after the resurrection reached a pinnacle which probably no other disciple has reached, not even Paul. No one individual made such huge numbers of converts, purely on the basis of his words of preaching. Nobody else

was *so* persuasive, could cut hardened men to the heart as he did, and motivate them to be baptized immediately. He brought men far more highly educated and cultured than himself to openly say from the heart: “What shall we do?”, in the sense: ‘Having done what we’ve done, whatever will become of us?’. And of course Peter had been in just that desperate position a month ago. He was just the man to persuade them. And yet on the other hand, there was no man more unlikely. The rules of social and spiritual appropriacy demanded that someone who had so publicly denied his Lord keep on the back burner for quite some time. And Peter of all men would have wished it this way. See on Acts 10:35,36.

2:15 *These*- See on 2:18 *My handmaids*.

Are not drunk as you suppose, seeing it is only the third hour of the day- See on 2 Pet. 2:13. Peter’s speech of Acts 2 was made in response to a mocker’s comment that the speaking in tongues was a result of alcohol abuse (Acts 2:13,14). We would likely have told those men not to be so blasphemous, or just walked away from them. But Peter responds to them with a speech so powerful that men turned around and repented and were baptized on the spot. Or it could be that the comment that they sounded drunk was made in jest, and Peter responds likewise tongue in cheek- for surely he must have known that men can be found drunk at 9 a.m. Is. 5:11 laments how some in Israel were drunk in the morning, so the possibility was not so obviously absurd as Peter might appear, at first blush, to be suggesting. This would then become an example of answering a food according to his folly.

2:16 *But this is the fulfilment of that which has been spoken through the prophet Joel*- Many attempts to understand prophecy, not least the book of Revelation, have fallen into problems because of an insistent desire to see everything fulfilling in a linear chronological progression, whereas God's prophecies (Isaiah is the classic example) 'jump around' all over the place as far as chronological fulfilment is concerned. And this principle is not only seen in Bible prophecy. The historical records in the Old Testament tend to be thematically presented rather than chronologically (Joshua is a good example of this); and the Gospel records likewise. It especially needs to be recognized that in line with so much OT prophecy, neither the Olivet prophecy nor its extension in the Apocalypse can be read as strictly chronological. Thus Lk. 21:8-11 gives a catalogue of signs, and then v. 12 jumps back to the situation before them: "but before all these things..." (21:27,28; Mk. 13:10 are other examples). These principles are all brought together in the way Peter interprets Joel 2. The comments in brackets reflect the interpretation which Peter offers later in his address. He gives each part of it a fulfilment not in chronological sequence with what has gone before: "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel [i.e. you are seeing a fulfilment of this prophecy before your eyes]: I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy [fulfilled by the apostles after Christ's ascension]... and I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath [the miracles of the Lord Jesus during His ministry]... the sun shall be turned into darkness [the crucifixion], and the moon into blood [also referring to an unrecorded event at the crucifixion?], before that great and notable day of the Lord come [the second coming; or the resurrection?]: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved [fulfilled by the crowd accepting baptism on the day of Pentecost]" (Acts 2:16-21).

Typical of the NT writers, Peter doesn't quote from the Masoretic [Hebrew] text, but from the Septuagint, and in Joel 2 there are significant differences. And yet Peter adds and changes things even from the LXX. The inspired writers don't quote exactly, and often mix interpretation with quotation.

2:17 *And it shall be in the last days, says God*- The phrase doesn't have to necessarily refer to the last days before the Lord's second coming. It could equally refer to the last days of some other period- in this case, the Mosaic system. But the phrase is of course ambiguous- exactly because the Lord's second coming could have occurred then, but the various required preconditions were not met. The LXX also has as the Masoretic Text: "Afterward". "The last days" would appear to be Peter's inspired interpretation.

I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams- A prophecy apparently about "all" here has a specific fulfilment in a limited group. Other Biblical references to "all" must likewise be understood; from God's perspective, the believers are "all things" to Him.

2:18 *Yes, and in those days will I pour out My Spirit on My servants and on My handmaids, and they shall prophesy*- In order to see a fulfilment of this at that time of Pentecost, surely there were female believers who also began speaking in foreign languages- although that is not recorded. Often the NT quotes the OT selectively, omitting words and phrases which were not relevant to the fulfilment. The fact the "handmaids" and "daughters" (:17) are mentioned would surely mean that there were women also given the gifts at this time. The fact this is not specifically recorded is yet another example of how the records are so abbreviated. The fact women aren't recorded as publicly preaching at this time is no reason to think they did not. Likewise the fulfilment of the Joel prophecy meant that there were both old and young men preaching (:17). The "all" who were "together in one place" (2:1) were those who received the gifts, all within the house; not just the apostles. However, 2:7 records the impression that "all" who were speaking in foreign languages were from Galilee. The women / sisters in view were therefore presumably also from Galilee. Peter "and the eleven" stated that "these are not drunk" (:15)- rather than 'We are not drunk'. The use of "these" suggests that there were others apart from 'the twelve' who were preaching with the Spirit gifts. It was a shameful thing for a Jewish man to talk publicly to a woman, let alone for her to read the Torah, and for a woman to publicly preach God's word would have been nothing short of scandalous. In this we have a challenge to our own sense of inadequacy in witness; women, Galileans, the illiterate and poorly educated... were those used by God to make history's greatest and most effective public witness to Christ.

2:19 *And I will show wonders in the heaven above, and signs on the earth beneath: blood and fire and vapour of smoke*- Blood, fire and smoke columns suggest Mosaic sacrifices, in which the blood had to be poured out and then the carcass burnt. God's judgments are described as Him having a sacrifice (Jer. 46:10), and here the AD70 judgment of Jerusalem is surely in view. This is the language of Mt. 24:5-7 about the same event.

Thomson (*Land and the Book*, vol. 2, p. 311) suggests the allusion in this passage is to the whirlwind sandstorms, which are appropriate figures of Divine judgment: “We have two kinds of sirocco, one accompanied with vehement wind, which fills the air with dust and fine sand. I have often seen the whole heavens veiled in gloom with this sort of sandcloud, through which the sun, shorn of his beams, looked like a globe of dull smouldering fire. It may have been this phenomenon which suggested that strong prophetic figure of Joel, quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost. Wonders in the heaven and in the earth; blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood. The pillars of smoke are probably those columns of sand and dust raised high in the air by local whirlwinds, which often

accompany the sirocco. On the great desert of the Hauran I have seen a score of them marching with great rapidity over the plain, and they closely resemble ‹pillars of smoke.‘”

2:20 *The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, that great and notable day*- Language clearly relevant to the day of the second coming. The conclusion is quite clear- that day could have come in the first century, but it didn't. What was potentially possible didn't happen because Israel didn't repent. And so it has been delayed until our 'last days'.

2:21 *And it shall be that whoever*- It seems that the early brethren chose to understand the Lord’s universal commission as meaning going out to preach to Jews of all nations, and they saw the response of Acts 2 as proof of this. And yet “all nations” is used about the Gentiles in all its other occurrences in Matthew (4:15; 6:32; 10:5,18; 12:18,21; 20:19,25). Such intellectual failure had a moral basis- they subconsciously couldn’t hack the idea of converting Gentiles into the Hope of Israel. They allowed themselves to assume they understood what the Lord meant, to assume they had their interpretation confirmed by the events of Acts 2… instead of baring themselves to the immense and personal import of the Lord’s commission to take Him to literally all. We too can read Scripture and assume we understand it, and thereby skip over massive implications for us.

Shall call on the name of the Lord- Joel 2:32 seems to prophesy of multitudes calling upon the name of the Lord in the ‘last days’. The preliminary fulfilment of this in Acts 2:21 must surely be repeated in the ultimate ‘last days’. And it may be that it is multitudes of Diaspora Jews who respond, as it was in Acts 2… The description of "the remnant" being saved out of Jerusalem and mount Zion, the temple mount, may mean that they go into the temple area in the last days to seek safety as the Jews did in AD70, and this is where they are at the moment of the Lord's intervention. Joel 2:32 must have had its primary fulfilment in the redemption of this remnant, and it therefore has an application to the salvation of the latter-day Jewish remnant out of Arab-occupied Jerusalem: "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord (i.e. truly pray for deliverance in faith, perhaps through calling upon themselves the Lord's name through baptism into Christ) shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem (cp. 2 Kings 19:30,31 for the mention of those two terms) shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said (through Isaiah and his prophets), and in the remnant...". This passage is quoted in a different context in Acts 2:21 and Rom. 10:13, but this does not preclude its application to the faithful remnant in Jerusalem in the last days. This New Testament usage is regarding how a convert should eagerly call upon himself the Lord's salvation/deliverance from sin in Christ. This should therefore be done with the same sense of urgency and desperate intensity as the persecuted remnant of the last days will do, like their counterparts within Jerusalem in Hezekiah's time.

Shall be saved- The quotation from Joel has spoken of an outpouring of Spirit gifts, followed by a time of trouble in the land, and then the coming of the great day of the Lord. The immediate context of this offer of salvation was therefore regarding saving from the destruction which was to come upon Israel and Jerusalem specifically. Peter later appealed for people to believe in the Lord Jesus in order to save themselves from [the judgment to come upon] that wicked generation (:40).

When Peter was sinking, he was living out the picture we have of condemnation at the last day. When we read that he began to “sink” into the sea of Galilee, this is exactly the image we find in Mt. 18:6, where the Lord says, in response to the question ‘Who will be the greatest?’, that he who offends one of the little ones will be

drowned [s.w. “sink”] in the midst of the sea, His audience would have immediately associated this with the midst of the sea of Galilee, just where the storm had occurred. Peter seems to have realized that this warning was pertinent to him, for it is he who then interrupts the Lord to ask how often he should forgive his brother (Mt. 18:21). Peter sinking into Galilee, giving up swimming but desperately throwing up his hand to the Lord [you don’t swim with a hand outstretched], is the position of each person who truly comes to Christ. This is the extent of our desperation; baptism, conversion to Him, is most definitely not a painless living out of parental expectations. Note how they were “tossed” or ‘tormented’ (Gk.) by the raging waves (Mt. 14:24)- the very same word is used about how the rejected will be “tormented” in condemnation (Rev. 14:10; 20:10). Peter’s salvation by the hand of the Lord was representative of us all. As he drowned there in the lake, he was effectively living out the condemnation of the last day. But he appealed urgently to the Lord: “Save me!”. Later, Peter was to use the same words in his preaching, when he appealed to his nation to “save [themselves]” by calling on the name of the Lord, just as he had done on the lake (Acts 2:40). He saw that those people were in just the position which he had been in on the lake.

2:22 *You men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth was a man attested to you by God, by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in the midst of you*- The crowd being addressed were Jews who were permanently living at Jerusalem; the crowd had all met the Lord Jesus and seen His miracles.

Even as you yourselves know- These Jerusalem residents had known in their conscience that Jesus was indeed "attested by God" as Messiah. Like Paul at this time, they were kicking against the goads.

2:23 *Him, being delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God*- Perhaps Peter is addressing the sense some of the Jews had that the Lord's death was according to God's will, and therefore they were the less guilty.

You by the hand of men outside the Law, did crucify and slay- Although it was Roman hands who crucified the Lord, Peter reminds the Jews that God judged it to have been effectively their hands. Their sin was not mitigated against by the fact that others had done it, when they planned it.

2:24 *Whom God raised up, having loosened the pangs of death; because it was not possible that he should be held by it*- Quoting Ps. 18:5 LXX. There are some passages which imply the Lord Jesus was somehow conscious during His three days in the grave. Evidently this was not the case. And yet the resurrection loosed the birth-pangs of death. Those three days are likened to labour, in the Lord's case bringing forth life through death. Yet He was dead and unconscious. But to the Father, He saw things simply differently. Sometimes God speaks from His timeless perspective, at other times His words are accommodated to us. Likewise from the Father's perspective, the spirit of Christ went and preached to the people of Noah's day at the time of His death. Yet this didn't happen in real time in such a way.

2:25 *For David said concerning him*- David is one of the major OT types of the Lord Jesus. The words of David in Ps. 16 are quoted in Acts 2:25,29 concerning Jesus: “I have set the Lord always before me... he is at my right hand... thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see corruption”. These are words describing David’s feelings about his own death and resurrection; and yet so identified was he with the Messiah, that they are quoted as being directly true of Jesus. But Acts 2:29 also quotes these words with a slightly different spin- in that David saw the Lord *Jesus* always before him, and it was this sense that stabilized him. This could only have been true in that David understood all his feelings and present and future experiences [e.g. resurrection, not being suffered to corrupt eternally] as

being typical of the Lord Jesus. He so understood himself as a type of the One to come that he saw this person as ever with him. This is the extent of the typology. 1 Chron. 17:17 in Young's Literal has David saying: "Thou hast seen me as a type of the man on high" [i.e. Messiah]. David describes himself at ease with clearly Messianic titles such as 'the Christ', 'the man raised on high', and then goes on to speak of the Messiah who *is to come* on the "morning without clouds", admitting that "verily *my* house is not so with God" (2 Sam. 23:1-5). This is only really understandable if we accept that David consciously saw himself as a type of the future Messiah. The main reason why there is so much deep personal detail about David is because we are intended to come to know him as a person, to enter into his mind- so that we can have a clearer picture of the mind and personality of the Lord Jesus. This is why the thoughts of David, e.g. in Ps. 16:8-11, are quoted as being the very thoughts of Christ (Acts 2:27). So Christ-centred was David's mind that he "*fore*saw (not "saw" - disproof of the pre-existence) the Lord (Jesus) always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved" (Acts 2:25). David was obsessed, mentally dominated, by his imagination of Christ, so much so that his imagination of his future descendant gave him practical strength in the trials of daily life. Small wonder we are bidden know and enter into David's mind. Likewise the book of Genesis covers about 2000 years of history, but almost a quarter of the narrative concerns Joseph; surely because we are intended to enter into Joseph, and thereby into the mind of Christ.

I saw the Lord always before my face- With David we should be able to say that we see the Lord [the Lord Jesus] ever before our face, so that we will not be moved by anything. However, we could also interpret the quotation as David solely talking about the future feelings of Jesus; the "Lord" in view would therefore be the Lord God.

For he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved- The Lord Jesus felt God was at his right hand; but He is now on the Father's right hand. We see here a mutuality between Father and Son.

2:26 *Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced, moreover my flesh also shall dwell in hope* - Literally, to dwell in a tent. The idea is that death is merely setting up a tent to pass the night in, until the day of resurrection dawns. David said that just because "our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding", therefore he wanted to be as generous as possible in providing for the work of God's house (1 Chron. 29:14-16). So sure is the hope of resurrection that the Lord interpreted God being the God of Abraham as meaning that to Him, Abraham was living. Death is no barrier to God's continuing identity with His people. His faith in the resurrection is so sure that He speaks of death as if it is not. And in our weakness, we seek to look beyond the apparent finality of death likewise. Because David firmly believed in a resurrection, "my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced; moreover also my flesh shall tabernacle in hope" (Acts 2:26 RV). His whole life 'tabernacled in hope' because of what he understood about resurrection. This was and is the power of basics. Yet we can become almost over-familiar with these wonderful ideas such as resurrection.

2:27 *Because You will not leave my soul in the grave, neither will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption*- The women's devotion to the Lord, coupled with Joseph and Nicodemus going to such extraordinary lengths to have the Lord speedily buried in a new tomb, with more spices than were used for the burial of the Caesars, ensured that the Lord's body did not corrupt after three days. We note that Martha assumed that after three days, a corpse had usually started to smell because corruption was so

advanced. However, the lack of corruption of the Lord's corpse was not 'allowed' by God, even if He worked through the freewill devotions of the Lord's loving followers. Given the Jewish belief and experience that after three days a corpse has seriously decayed, perhaps the reason the Lord remained dead for three days in order to demonstrate that His resurrection was indeed a miracle and not some quick resuscitation.

2:28 *You made known to me the ways of life, you shall make me full of gladness with Your countenance*- "The Kingdom of God" was a title used of Jesus. He 'was' the Kingdom because He lived the Kingdom life. Who He would be, was who He was in His life. At the prospect of being made "full of joy" at the resurrection, "therefore did my heart rejoice" (Acts 2:26,28). His joy during His mortal life was related to the joy He now experiences in His immortal life. And this is just one of the many continuities between the moral and the immortal Jesus.

Acts 2:28 quotes Psalm 16 concerning Christ's resurrection and ascension: "Thou shalt make me full of joy with Thy countenance". So Christ's fullness of joy was to see God's face, and He has left us His joy (John 15). This was "the joy set before Him", and it is ours too. This is our fullness of joy, to see God's face, spiritually in this life, and physically in the future. After asking us to let His Words abide in us, Jesus said He had told us that so that our joy might be full (Jn. 15:7,11). So the effect of the Word and of true repentance and turning to God is the same as seeing God's face- it should bring that same fullness of joy. Other passages make the same connection between the Word and God's face shining upon us- e.g. Ps. 119:135 "Make Thy face to shine upon Thy servant, and teach me Thy statutes".

2:29 *Brothers, I may say to you freely about the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day*- The Greek for "freely" means boldly, confidently, openly. This was a characteristic of Peter's public speaking (Acts 4:13,31), and it is used frequently in the New Testament of our boldness. We must ask ourselves whether we experience this; such a characteristic arises from trust that truly, we have been forgiven and will by grace live eternally. The Lord recognized the influence of the synagogue upon them when He said that He spoke to them in parables, and would later speak to them plainly (Jn. 16:25)- when He had earlier spoken to the Jewish world in parables rather than plainly, because they did not understand (Mk. 4:34). And yet they got there in the end. He spoke to them in the end "plain words" (*parresia*), and this word is the watchword of the disciples' own witness to the world (Acts 2:29; 4:13,29,31; 28:31). They spoke "plainly" *(parresia*) to the world, without parables, because they reflected to the world the nature of their understanding of their Lord. However, during His ministry, it would appear that the Lord treated them as if they were still in the Jewish world. When they asked Him why He spoke to *the people* in parables, He replies by explaining why He spoke *to them* in parables; and He drives the point home that it is to those "outside" that He speaks in parables (Mk. 4:11).

2:30 *Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body he would set one upon his throne*- Some manuscripts add *according to the flesh*. This expression, *kata sarx*, is a very clear statement of the humanity of the Lord Jesus and His lack of personal pre-existence- seeing He was the fruit of David's body or, as the Greek literally says, his hip or creative power. Acts 2:30-33 says that our Lord's exaltation in Heaven fulfils, albeit primarily, the promise to David of Christ reigning on his throne. This is confirmed by 2 Sam.7:12 saying that God would "set up" David's seed to have an eternal Kingdom;

and "set up" in the Septuagint is the same word as "resurrect", as if in some way the promise would be realized after Christ's resurrection.

2:31 *He foreseeing this, spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was he left in the grave, nor did his flesh see corruption*- This may mean that David foresaw and consciously spoke about the death and resurrection of his great descendant, Messiah. But inspired writers can also state things whereby they speak of and 'foresee' things which they themselves do not fully understand (1 Pet. 1:12). Therefore we need not read these words as having to mean that David personally understood all the things about the Christ of which he spoke / wrote.

2:32 *This Jesus did God raise up, of which we are all witnesses*- The "we" presumably refers to the group of 120 of Acts 1; the "we", including men and women, who were witnessing with the gift of languages.

2:33 *Therefore, being exalted by the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear*- John repeatedly records Christ's description of the cross as Him being "lifted up" (Jn. 3:14; 8:18; 12:32,34). But Peter uses the very same word to describe Christ's exaltation in resurrection and ascension (Acts 2:33; 5:31). Looking back, Peter saw the cross as a lifting up in glory, as the basis for the Lord's exaltation afterwards. At the time, it seemed the most humiliating thing to behold. It was anything but exaltation, and Peter would have given his life in the garden to get the Lord out of it. But now he saw its glory.

The Greek for "poured out" is often used about the shedding of the Lord's blood. It was on account of His sacrifice that the Holy Spirit was shed. That seems to be the connection. The miraculous dimension of the gifts, in this case the understanding of languages, was a specific thing at a specific time. But the power of spiritual regeneration, the spirit / power of holiness, continues to be poured out in the lives of believers. Paul speaks as if the outpouring was valid for all, not just those at the day of Pentecost: "The washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which He poured out upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Tit. 3:5,6).

An appreciation of the Lord's exaltation will in itself provoke in us repentance and service (Acts 2:33-36). A vision of the exalted Lord Jesus was what gave Stephen such special inspiration in his final minutes (Acts 7:56).

2:34 *For David did not ascend into Heaven*- But it was Jesus who did; He, as David's 'lord', is sitting at God's right hand, and so it has to be Him and not David who is now in Heaven. This statement clearly disproves the idea of the faithful going to Heaven at death. Peter is tackling Judaism's tendency to think that whoever Messiah is or was or shall be, he is in any case inferior to the likes of Moses and David. Peter reasons that the fact David spoke of his 'lord', i.e. Jesus, being at the right hand of Yahweh therefore meant that Jesus was in Heaven. For that is where God's throne is.

But he himself said: The Lord said to my Lord, sit on My right hand- Peter uses Scriptures like Ps. 110 and 118 in exactly the same way as he heard the Lord use them (Acts 2:34 = Mt. 22:44; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7 = Mt. 21:42). A list could be compiled for Peter's allusions to the Lord as I have for Paul's. It may be that Peter's difficult reference to the spirits in prison (1 Pet. 3:19) is a reference to Is. 61 in the same way as Christ used it in Lk. 4:18. This point is meaningless without an appreciation of the extent to which Christ's words featured in the writing and thought of Peter.

2:35 *Until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet*- The context is Peter's appeal for those who crucified the Lord to repent. They were His "enemies"; but once they became a footstool for His feet, then He would return. Therefore Peter appealed for their repentance, apparently understanding being 'a footstool for His feet' as

meaning they would put themselves at His feet in obeisance. The Lord's footstool is the place where His worshippers come (Ps. 99:5; 132:7; Is. 66:1-3). The Father was willing to "make" His Son's enemies, those responsible for His death, into His worshippers. But they had to do their part, in repentance and acceptance of the activity of His Holy Spirit. Heb. 10:13 adds the detail that the Lord Jesus is eagerly looking for [AV "expecting"] His former enemies to become His footstool- and then He will return. This is why witness to Jewish people is so deeply significant in God's program.

2:36 *Therefore, let all the house of Israel know for certain, that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified*- Peter's growth of understanding of Jesus as 'Christ' grew. He declared Him as this during His ministry (Jn. 6:69), and also as 'Lord', but he preached Him as having been *made* Lord and Christ after the resurrection (Acts 2:36). He saw the Lord's status as having changed so much, even though he used the same words to describe it, and therefore he responded the more fully to Him. He so often refers to the Name of Christ, which had now been given Him (Acts 4:12 RV)- as if this new Name and the redemption in it was the motive power for his witness. Jesus had been born a Saviour, Christ the Lord (Lk. 2:11). But Peter uses each of these titles as if they had been given to the Lord anew, after His resurrection. And indeed they had been. They were no longer just appropriate lexical items for Peter to use; they were the epitome of all that the Lord was and had been and ever would be, all that He stood for and had enabled. And he preached them to men as the basis upon which salvation and forgiveness was now possible. See on Acts 5:31.

2:37- see on Acts 2:12.

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart- The NT emphasizes the power of the cross, and the horrendous fact that we are really asked to share in His sufferings (e.g. Acts 9:16; 2 Cor. 1:5; Phil. 1:29; 3:10; 2 Tim. 2:3; 1 Pet. 4:1,13; Rev. 2:10). The Acts record seems to bring out how the Lord's people shared in the Lord's mortal experiences (e.g. Acts 4:7 = Mt. 21:23,24). The early converts were "pricked" (Acts 2:37), using the same word as in Jn. 19:34 for the piercing of the Lord's side. Paul speaks of how in his refusing of payment from Corinth, "I made myself servant unto all", just as the Lord was on the cross. In accommodating himself to his audience, "to the weak became I as weak", just as the Lord was crucified through weakness. In our preaching and in our ecclesial lives, we articulate elements of the Lord's cross in our attitude to others.

The figure of being pricked in the heart or mind implies this was done externally to the person pricked. The Lord pricked them in their minds. Paul was surely present and was pricked by the Lord but refused to respond initially. The heart pricked people are then told to repent, to re think, and promised the gift of the Spirit if they do. That gift was essentially a confirmation of them in their mental attitudes. If we wish to re think, to repent, we will be psychologically spiritually strengthened. For faces with a call to repent, every man balks as to whether he can keep it up. And the gift of the Spirit meets man at his acutest need.

And said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: Brothers, what shall we do?- Luke is fond of using this Greek phrase in recording the response provoked by encounters with the Lord Jesus and the message about Him (Lk. 3:10,12,14; 6:11; 10:25; 12:17; 16:3,4; 18:18; 19:48; 23:34; Acts 4:16; 9:6; 10:6; 16:30; 22:10). This is therefore a most significant phrase for Luke. His preaching of the Gospel (for Luke-Acts are missionary documents) was to provoke this question in us too- what shall we do? Their question forms the context for Peter's answer in :38. They had a bad conscience,

they just didn't know what to do with their sins, they felt condemned. The promise of the Spirit which follows meets that need- and it is of forgiveness and salvation. Miraculous gifts weren't the answer to their need. Forgiveness, salvation and the presence of the Lord Jesus were what they needed. And it was that need which was and is met in the promise of the Spirit. It's why Joel 2 is quoted- in the terrible "last days" for God's people, whoever would call on the name of the Lord would be saved. And this again is the context of other teaching about the promised gift of the Spirit: "the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:14). It is not miraculous gifts that were promised to Abraham, but the blessing of forgiveness (Acts 3:24-26) and salvation.

2:38 *And Peter said to them: Every one of you should*- This might seem somewhat redundant, but remember that Peter was faced by a crowd of at least 3000 people. He sensed the tendency towards group action, being baptized because that was what the crowd was doing. And so he seeks to remind them that repentance is a very individual response to our own sins and God's salvation in Christ. And the same caveat needs to be sounded in communities which [quite rightly] raise their children in the Christian faith, surrounding them with those of similar background.

Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ to the remission of your sins- This language is intentionally reminiscent of how Luke earlier described the work of John the Baptist four years ago, which would have been well known to these Jerusalem Jews: he preached "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Lk. 3:3). Perhaps they had been baptized by John- for "all Jerusalem" were baptized by John. But that was not Christian baptism, which was only instituted after the Lord's death and resurrection; and there was no subsequent gift of Holy Spirit made accessible by that baptism. So maybe the emphasis was upon "in the name of Jesus Christ". Those baptized by John were baptized into Jesus in Acts 19:1-5.

Repentance is a very complex and personal issue. There is no evidence that each of those people gave a theological statement of their understanding.

The appeal to "be baptized" is asking us to let something be done to us; and the ultimate doer of baptism is the Father and Son. Israel's crossing of the Red Sea was a prototype of Christian baptism; the people were baptized into Moses, as we are baptized into Christ (1 Cor. 10:2). "They were baptized" again suggests they were baptized by someone- God. If the idea was that they had of their own volition put themselves under water, the Greek [and English] would be different- something like 'They baptized themselves into Moses'.

And you shall receive the gift- Rom. 5:16 and 6:23 describe salvation as "*the* gift"- inviting comparison with "*the* gift" of the Spirit in Acts 2:38. The only other time in the NT that we read of 'receiving' 'the gift' is in Rom. 5:17, where believers receive the gift of imputed righteousness and grace, i.e. salvation. And Acts 2:39 seems to be quoting Joel 2:32 concerning salvation as if this is what the gift of the Spirit was. Peter's reference to the promised gift being to those "afar off" alludes to Is. 57:19: "Peace (with God through forgiveness) to him that is far off". Eph. 2:8 also describes the gift as being salvation, saying that "by one Spirit (this gift) we all have access to the Father" (2:18). This is further validated by the fact that Eph. 2:13-17 is also alluding to Is. 57:19: "Ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace... (who) came and preached peace to you which were far off". Ps. 51:12,13 draws a parallel between possessing God's holy Spirit, and benefiting from His salvation.

Of the Holy Spirit- It is hard to interpret the genitive, "of". We can understand that the gift is the gift of the Spirit. The Spirit is the gift. Ot as suggested above, we

can see salvation and forgiveness as the gift from the Spirit. The repeated use of definite articles suggests that a clearly defined gift was in view. The promise of the Holy Spirit as a gift is surely referring to the promises of the Comforter in John 14-16. These promises contained the prospect of internal activity in the heart of believers, to the extent that they would as it were have the Lord Jesus literally present with them. Whilst the manifestation of the Spirit's presence was initially through visible phenomenon such as speaking in foreign languages, the essence of the gift is of internal strengthening to righteousness. And it is clearly alluded to in the later New Testament. "that you may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man. That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, to the end that you would be rooted and grounded in love, that you might be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height, and to truly know and understand the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him that is able to do immeasurably above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations for ever and ever" (Eph. 3:16-21; see too Eph. 1:17-19). "Now he that establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the down payment of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Cor. 1:21,22). "In whom you also believed, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, and were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13; 4:30). "...So that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:14). The idea of Spirit that was promised naturally connects with the promise of the Comforter, and with Peter's statement that baptism will receive the promised gift of the Spirit. These passages are all about the internal work of the Spirit- not miraculous gifts. The Comforter passages have a similar aspect to them: "The Father... shall give you another comforter, that he may be with you for ever [this sounds like something permanent, not only for two generations]- the Spirit of truth... he abides with you and *shall be in you*... I will come to you (Jn. 14:16-18)... But the comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and cause you to remember ['to put in the mind', Gk.] all that I said to you. Peace I leave with you (Jn. 14:26,27)... the Comforter, the spirit of truth (Jn. 15:26)... the Comforter... will convict (Jn. 16:7,8)... When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he shall guide you into all the truth... he shall declare to you the things that are to come. He shall glorify me; for he shall take what is mine and shall declare it to you" (Jn. 16:13,14). The Comforter, the Holy Spirit or "spirit of truth" is therefore associated with internal psychological processes in the mind of the believer. John's letters allude to the promise of the comforter, and speak as if it is being experienced by John's readership, both then and now. This of itself means that the Comforter was not just referring to miraculous gifts given to the apostles; it has a far wider reference. The following are John's later commentary on the Comforter passages: "You have an anointing from the Holy One and you know all these things... the anointing which you received of him abides in you [cp. Jn. 14:17 "the Spirit of truth... he abides with you and *shall be in you*"]... even as it taught you, so you are to abide in him (1 Jn. 2:2,27)... hereby we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He gave us (1 Jn. 3:24)... it is the Spirit that testifies, because the Spirit is the truth... He that believes in the Son of God has the witness within himself (1 Jn. 5:6,10)... the Son of God came, and has given us an understanding so that we truly know him that is true" (1 Jn. 5:20). All this activity of teaching us, giving us understanding, helping us abide in Christ- this is the work of the Comforter Spirit. All this desperately needed spiritual activity is the gift promised to those who are baptized.

2:39 *For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to him*- Peter's maiden speech on the day of Pentecost was a conscious undoing of his denials, and consciously motivated by the experience of forgiveness which he knew he had received. Having been converted, he was now strengthening his Jewish brethren. He went and stood literally a stone's throw from the High Priest's house, and stood up and declared to the world his belief that Jesus was and is Christ. Peter also preached in Solomon's Porch, the very place where the Lord had declared Himself to Israel as their Saviour (Jn. 10:33; Acts 5:12). Peter at the time of his denials had been "afar off" from the Lord Jesus (Mt. 26:58; Mk. 14:54; Lk. 22:54- all the synoptics emphasize this point). Peter's denials would've been the talk of the town in Jerusalem. So when in Acts 2:39 he says that there is a promised blessing for "all" that are far off... I think he's alluding back to himself, setting himself up as a pattern for all other sinners to find salvation. That's perhaps why he talks of "all" [those others] who are [also] "far off" [as he had been]. He could've just spoken of "they" or "those" who are far off. But the use of "all" may suggest he is hinting that the audience follow his pattern. This, in Peter's context, makes the more sense if we see *one* of the aspects of the promised Spirit blessing as that of forgiveness and salvation- as in Acts 3:25,26, the blessing was to be turned away from sins. See on Acts 3:26; 1 Pet. 2:25; Lk. 5:8.

As shown on :38 *The gift*, "afar off" alludes to Is. 57:19: "Peace (with God through forgiveness) to him that is far off". This is speaking of Gentiles; Peter was inspired to preach that the ministry of the Spirit was for the Jerusalem Jews, their children [who lived in the Gentile world, in the locations from which they had come to spend their retirement in Jerusalem, i.e. the Jewish diaspora]- and to the Gentiles. But it's clear from the Cornelius incident that Peter still failed to grasp the import of the words he was preaching- just like us.

Those "afar off" were the Gentiles (Eph. 2:13,17; Acts 22:21), but Peter later showed a marked reluctance to preach to them, as we see in his struggle to accept the command to eat the unclean animals of the vision in Acts 10. We have here a classic case of a man understanding truth on one level at one time, but not accepting it in practice and struggling against it. Truly the characters we meet in the Bible are all so psychologically credible.

"And to your children" need not mean the promise was only to them and the next generation. The audience were those who had supported the Lord's crucifixion, and they were repentant for this. It was they who had screamed for the Lord's blood to be laid on them *and their children*. They were the more distressed as they reflected that they had brought the Lord's blood upon their children. And now they were assured that the gift of grace and forgiveness was extended to their children, whom they had effectively cursed. No wonder they accepted this good news with joy, and were baptized with joy (:41 AV). There is a clear allusion to Is. 44:3, "I will pour my Spirit on thy seed, and my blessing on thine offspring".

The promise is that of the Spirit. The Lord had told them that the Spirit was promised and they should wait in Jerusalem until it came (Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:4). It was promised in the Comforter passages, which concern His internal presence as real as if He were still physically, visibly with them. The fulfillment of the promise was not just to those then present, for Paul alludes here in writing of how we have been sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13). The phrase "the promise" in the NT very often refers to the promise to Abraham, and to forgiveness and salvation. This is the

promised gift, but it is in our heart in that the assurance of forgiveness and salvation is connected with the presence of the Lord Jesus in our hearts. To be unsure of our status with God is therefore to lack the Spirit. He is faithful that promised (Heb. 10:23). Those who accepted this promise were joyful, they joyfully received the word and continued praising God (:46,47), breaking bread daily to remember the basis for this great salvation, giving their own possessions away in response to what had been done for them. But the letter to these Hebrews had to remind them to hold form that initial joy and confidence in grace, firm unto the end. James and Peter's letters likewise address the same converts to the same end.

2:40 *And with many other words he testified and encouraged them, saying: Save yourselves from this crooked generation*- "Lord, save me", Peter had cried when drowning. The words are significant because they are the words used by Peter in urging others to call upon the same Lord to be saved. He was such a compelling preacher- persuading 3000 people to be baptized instantly- exactly because he had called out these very words himself. It is only by knowing our own desperation that we will be compelling preachers. No amount of artistry, presentation or wordsmithing can produce anywhere near the same effect. He encouraged the crowds to likewise call upon the name of the Lord and be saved (Acts 2:39). He saw himself then and there, in all his weakness and yet sincere desperation, as the epitome of us all. But the parallels don't stop there. Peter had asked the Lord bid him 'Come unto me' (Mt. 14:28). Yet this is the very language of the Lord to all: 'Come unto me...'. Yet Peter went further; in the same way as the Lord stretched forth His hand and saved Peter, so He stretches forth His hand, Peter observed, to save all who would come to Him (Mt. 14:31 = Acts 4:30). But Peter is framed as Jesus, in that he too stretched out his hand to save others as Jesus had done to him (Mt. 14:35 = Acts 5:15,16; Mt. 14:31 = Acts 3:7), bidding them come through the water of baptism as Jesus had done to him. As Jesus was worshipped after saving Peter, so men tried to worship Peter (Mt. 14:33 = Acts 3:11). So Peter went through what we all do- having been saved by Jesus, having come to Him and having been rescued by the outstretched arm, he responds to this by doing the same for others. When the Lord "caught" hold of Peter as he sunk in the waves (Mt. 14:31), a Greek word is used which occurs only once elsewhere: "He did not take hold [s.w. to catch] of Angels, but of the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:16). The Hebrew writer was surely alluding to the Lord's 'catching' of desperate Peter and pulling him to salvation- and saw in Peter a symbol of all those who will be saved by Christ.

"This crooked generation" is the term used of how John the Baptist's mission was to make that "crooked" generation "straight" (Lk. 3:5). His mission failed, although it could have potentially succeeded. And so that generation were judged. God sees the world as actively evil: "this present evil world" (Gal. 1:4), under His condemnation (1 Cor. 11:32); he that is not with the Lord Jesus is seen as actively against Him, not just passively indifferent (Lk. 11:23). It is absolutely fundamental that our separation from this world is related to our salvation. The act of baptism is a saving of ourselves not only from our sins, but also from "this untoward generation" in which we once lived (Acts 2:40). But let us note that the essential demarcation 2000 years ago was between the believer and the world, not believer and believer.

John the Baptist's ministry was so that the 'crooked' nation of Israel should be 'made straight' and ready to accept Jesus as Messiah (Lk. 3:5). God's enabling power was present so that this might have happened; but the same word is used in Acts 2:40 and Phil. 2:15 to describe Israel as still being a 'crooked' nation. John's preaching, like ours, was potentially able to bring about the conversion of an entire nation. So instead

of being discouraged by the lack of response to our witness, let's remember the enormous potential power which there is behind it. Every word, witness of any kind, tract left lying on a seat... has such huge potential conversion power lodged within it, a power from God Himself.

John's mission was to prepare Israel for Christ, to figuratively '*bring low'* the hills and mountains, the proud Jews of first century Israel, and raise the valleys, i.e. inspire the humble with the real possibility of salvation in Christ (Lk. 3:5). Paul uses the same Greek word for "bring low" no fewer than three times, concerning how the Gospel has humbled him (Acts 20:19; 2 Cor. 11:7; Phil. 4:12). It's as if he's saying: 'John's preaching did finally have its' effect upon me; it did finally make me humble enough for the Lord Jesus'. And as John made straight paths for men's feet that they might come unto Christ (Mt. 3:3), so did Paul (Heb. 12:13).

2:41 *They that received his word were baptized-*

AV "gladly received". There was joy because they had been beating themselves up about their perilous position, having brought the Lord's blood upon them and their children. And now they were assured that this was totally removed, through the gracious Spirit gift of forgiveness and sanctification.

Peter appealed to Israel: "Hear these words...", and then went on to quote a prophecy of how the Lord Jesus would be raised up [i.e. after His resurrection], "and him shall ye hear" Acts 2:22; 3:22,24). The record adds that the crowd received Peter's word and were baptized (Acts 2:41), whereas elsewhere in Acts men and women receive the word of the Lord Jesus. It is simply so, that when we witness, the words we speak are in effect the words of Jesus. Our words are His. This is how close we are to Him. And this is why our deportment and manner of life, which is the essential witness, must be in Him. For He is articulated to the world through us.

And there were added in that day- Converts are described as being added to the church, and yet also added to Christ; the play on ideas seems deliberate (Acts 2:41,47 cp. 5:13,14; 11:24).

About three thousand people- Luke gives progress reports on the early Christian mission in quantitative terms, as if analysing the success of the work and possibly suggesting how it could be done even better (Acts 2:41,47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1,7; 9:31; 13:43; 14:1; 17:4,12; 18:10; 19:26; 21:20). The examples in Acts of preaching the Gospel and baptizing those who believed it are united in suggesting a very short period of time, and immediate baptism- the same hour of the night, in the case of the Philippian jailer, or the very same day, in the case of thousands on the day of Pentecost. The list is impressive: Acts 2:38-41; 8:12,13,36-38; 9:18; 10:47; 16:15,33; 18:8; 19:5.

2:42 *And they continued earnestly-* The same word is used of how *we* must "continue" in prayer (Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2), i.e. follow the example of the early ecclesia in prayerfulness. The disciples had "continued" in prayer after the Lord's ascension (Acts 1:14), and now their converts continued in prayer too. Note in passing that we continue in the pattern of those who convert us. Thus to start with, Simon "continued with Philip" (Acts 8:13). This means that who *we* are affects the spiritual quality of others. The same word is used several times in Acts (1:14; 2:42,46; 6:4; 8:13). The great concern of all missionary enterprises is that the converts will "continue", and Luke is therefore at pains to record that the converts did indeed "continue", initially at least.

In the apostles' teaching and fellowship in the breaking of bread and the prayers- Acts 2:42 speaks of the experience of *koinonia* in the breaking of bread, praying together, and the apostles' teaching about Christ. But these are not the only aspects of

koinonia; and these things are all centred around the person of Jesus. In summary, *koinonia* means to share *in* and not simply *with*. At your leisure consider the usage of the word in this connection in Lk. 5:1; Heb. 2:14; 2 Pet. 1:4; Rom. 11:17; 2 Cor. 6:14; Rev. 18:4; Mt. 23:30. We are "in fellowship" with each other in the sense that we share in the same reality. So all who wish to share in that reality [Christ, in the Christian context] are "in fellowship" with each other. Paul often speaks of *koinonia* in giving- the sense being of giving to or participating in a project or entity outside of yourself. 1 Cor. 10:16-20 speaks of how sharing in a feast implies your sharing in the Lord you are celebrating- the emphasis is vertical rather than horizontal. The concern is whose feast you are attending or engaging in- which entity you are fellowshipping, Christ or an idol. With whom you do this, laterally, isn't in view here.

Phil. 2 exhorts believers to be of "one mind", but that one mind is later defined in the chapter as being the mind of Christ on the cross. Again, the basis of unity between believers is their common share in Christ, especially in His death- there is never any implication that a theological statement of position is to be the basis of their unity. If this were the case, then we would expect to see this specifically stated. Instead, as in 1 Cor. 10, the unity between believers is on account of their individual participation in the mind and work of Christ.

Acts 2:42 in the AV has strongly influenced the thinking of many who uphold a closed table, due to reading back into a Bible verse the impression given by the AV and assuming it therefore supports a traditional approach to fellowship: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers". The impression is given by the AV that the duty of baptized believers is to continue believing the "doctrine" as in the theological positions of the apostles, and to only fellowship and break bread with those who believe the same. But on that basis it ought to be impossible to also pray together with those of different doctrinal persuasions- and that is not usually insisted upon by closed table theorists. However, the Greek text of Acts 2:42 is poorly translated by the AV. The *didache*, or "doctrine", refers not to theological propositions but to the act of teaching by the apostles. The mass of 3000 newly baptized converts were taught further by the apostles, in line with how the great commission of Mt. 28:19,20 had commanded the apostles to go and teach the good news of Christ's resurrection, baptize people into it, and then teach them further. We have in this section of Acts 2 the classic obedience to that commission. Indeed, the mention of people present from "all nations" encourages us to understand Acts 2 as Luke's account of how the great commission was initially obeyed; and his version of it in Lk. 24:47 says that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name, beginning at Jerusalem". There are pointed references in Acts 2 and 3 to repentance, remission of sins, baptism into the name, and all this beginning at Jerusalem with the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower the preachers (cp. Mk. 16:17). Clearly Luke is presenting the fulfilment of the great commission. The reference to the new converts hearing the teaching [AV "doctrine"] of the apostles after baptism is the direct fulfilment of the command of Mt. 28:20 for the apostles to further teach converts after baptism. Hence the CEV translates Acts 2:42: "They spent their time learning from the apostles, and they were like family to each other. They also broke bread and prayed together".

2:43 *And fear came upon everyone; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles*- The "fear" was perhaps because people now realized that indeed, Israel had crucified their King. And society as a whole, each of them, had some responsibility in this. They perceived how they were faced with the ultimate issues of eternity. Only total capitulation to God's way in His Son could lead them to

serve God *without* fear, as envisaged by Zacharias, Simeon and others when they first encountered the Divine plan in His Son.

2:44 *And all that believed were together and had all things common*- 3:1 goes on to explain the summary of Acts 2:42. The new converts continued listening to the teaching [AV "doctrine"] of the apostles and continued in fellowshipping with them- not in the technical sense of being "in fellowship" as opposed to being "out of fellowship"; for this would require us to read into the text our usage of those terms. They continued "hanging out" with the apostles, continued in their presence and company, as eager students with their teachers. The Greek for "fellowship" is *koinonia*, and the root word *koine* occurs in Acts 2:44- they had all things "in common". This is how they fellowshipped or common-ed together; they pooled their possessions and had them in common, or, as the AV will have it, in "fellowship". In fact, the idea of *koinonia* or "fellowship" in the New Testament is most commonly used about the sharing of material resources rather than theological agreement (Rom. 12:13 "contribute", Gal. 6:6 "share all good things", Phil. 4:15 and throughout 2 Corinthians in the context of appealing for assistance or fellowship for the poor saints at Jerusalem). Acts 2:46 then speaks of how they attended the temple together, and broke bread in homes. This is the further explanation of how the new converts are described in Acts 2:42 as continuing in the apostles' teaching [they went to the temple to hear it, as this was likely the only venue large enough to hold the crowd], and they continued in breaking of bread- by doing it in homes. For there was no church building available to do this as a group of 3000. And the nature of the "breaking of bread" is further defined in Acts 2:46- it involved a joyful eating together. The breaking of bread was therefore in the form of a collective meal, continuing the connection established by Jesus between His open table collective meals, and the "breaking of bread" in memory of Him. Acts 2:42 speaks of the new converts continuing together in "*the* prayers" (ESV and Gk.). Acts 3:1 goes on to define what this meant in practice- Peter and John went into the temple at the time of prayer. What they had in common was praying together in the Jewish temple prayers. But those prayers were attended by many Jews who didn't believe in Jesus. What that goes to show is that you can perform a religious act of fellowship with unbelievers, but enjoy true Christian fellowship with God's true people who are amongst them. From the very start, Christianity started with an "open" attitude to fellowship with the unbelieving Jews. If there really is some guilt by association principle to be operated in Christianity, surely we'd expect to see it outlined right at the start.

We can now summarize the above in tabular form:

Acts 2:42	How it worked out in practice
And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine [teaching]	Having heard the basic Gospel and having been baptized, they continued hearing the apostles' teaching, as the apostles obeyed the great commission- to preach the basic Gospel, baptize, and then teach further (Mt. 28:19,20). Acts 2:46 therefore speaks of how they attended the temple together in order to learn more from the apostles' teaching
And fellowship (*koinonia*)	Acts 2:44- they had all things "in common", Gk. *koine*.

The breaking of bread	Acts 2:46- this involved a joyful eating together in house groups
"*The* prayers" (ESV and Gk.).	Acts 3:1 defines what this meant in practice- Peter and John went into the temple at the time of prayer.

The unity between believers at the breaking of bread is brought out in Acts 2:42, where we read of the new converts continuing in:
the teaching of the apostles,
the fellowship
the breaking of bread
the prayers.
It could be that this is a description of the early order of service at the memorial meetings. They began with an exhortation by the apostles, then there was "the fellowship", called the *agape* in Jude 12, a meal together, and then the breaking of bread itself [following Jewish Passover tradition], concluded by "the prayers", which may have included the singing of Psalms. The performance of this feast was a sign of conversion and membership in the body of Christ. This is how important it is.

Some of the Roman leaders initially pushed the idea of Plato, that all land should be state owned and be given up by individuals to the state. Yet Acts 2:44; 4:32 use language which is directly taken from Plato's *Republic*: "All things common… no one called anything his own". The early church was seeking to set up an idealized alternative to the Roman empire!

2:45 *And they sold their possessions and goods, and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had need*- The Holy Spirit appeared to the apostles as "cloven / parted tongues" (Acts 2:3), giving to each man what each needed (Eph. 4:8-13). In response to this, we read that the apostles sold their possessions and "distributed [s.w. "cloven"] to all men, as every man had need" (Acts 2:45). Likewise Paul speaks of how God gave the Spirit gifts to every member of Christ's body, so that there was no part which "lacked" (1 Cor. 12:24). And he uses the same idea when telling the Corinthians to give their excess funds to provide grace / gifts for their brethren who "lacked" (2 Cor. 8:15). The simple picture, which even in different circumstances abides for us today, is that God's thoughtful and specific generosity to us, His giving us of unique gifts as we 'have need', should lead us to materially assisting those likewise who 'have need'.

Material giving to the Lord's cause was associated with the breaking of bread in the early church (Acts 2:42-46; 1 Cor. 16:1,2), after the pattern of how every male was not to appear empty before Yahweh (Heb. 'to appear for no cause') at the Jewish feasts (Dt. 16:16). We cannot celebrate His grace / giving to us without response. Because Israel had been redeemed from Egypt, they were to be generous to their brethren, and generally open handed (Lev. 25:37,38). This is why the Acts record juxtaposes God's grace / giving, and the giving of the early believers in response (Acts 4:33 cp. 32,34-37). The bread and wine of the drink offerings were to accompany sacrifice; they were not the sacrifice itself. And likewise the spirit of sacrifice must be seen in us as those emblems are taken. The Laodiceans' materialism resulted in them not realizing their desperate spiritual need for the cross (Rev. 3:17,18); Lemuel knew that riches would make him ask "Who is Yahweh?"; he wouldn't even want to know the Name / character of the Lord God (Prov. 30:9). The Jews' experience of redemption from Haman *quite naturally* resulted in them giving

gifts both to each other and to the poor around them (Es. 9:22). "You shall lend unto many nations" has often been misread as a prediction of Jewish involvement in financial institutions and banking (Dt. 28:12). But the context is simply that "The Lord shall open unto you *His* good treasure, the heaven to give the rain of your land... and *you* shall lend unto many nations". If God opens His treasure to us, we should open our treasures to others, even lending with a spirit of generosity, motivated by our experience of His generosity to *us*. Because Yahweh had redeemed Israel, they were not to be petty materialists, cheating others out of a few grams or centimetres in trading. The wealth and largeness of God's work for them should lead them to shun such petty desire for self-betterment.

Distribution as each "had need" may mean that people weren't given just because they asked, but according to their need, as judged by the elders.

2:46 *And day by day, continuing earnestly with one accord in the temple-* The way Jesus forewarned the disciples that the time would come when they would be cast out of the synagogues (Jn. 16:2) surely implies He assumed they would maintain synagogue attendance until they were cast out, rather than removing themselves in obedience to Christ. By remaining as far as they could, they were the salt of their world; and we see in Paul's ministry how his synagogue attendance gave him many opportunities to witness to the Gospel. The Lord warned His disciples that they would be scourged in the synagogues (Mt. 10:17). But synagogues could only scourge those who were members. The Lord foresaw that His preachers would remain within the synagogue system rather than leave it totally. The fact Paul was scourged in synagogues (2 Cor. 11:25) shows that in being a Jew to the Jews, he opted to remain within the synagogue system. This fact shows that the Lord Jesus didn't intend His people to formally break with the synagogue system, even though it was apostate in doctrine and practice. This indicates that there was absolutely no sense within Him of 'guilt by association' nor a demand for His people to leave apostate systems- they were to remain there until they were cast out of the synagogues.

Even from within the New Testament we can soon perceive that first century Judaism was full of both theological and practical errors- the immortal soul, heaven going, ascending to "Abraham's bosom" after death, hell fire, a personal Satan, literal demons, a Kingdom of God based around the violent resistance of evil and military conquest of the Romans in the first century; and above all a serious misunderstanding of Jesus and the whole concept and nature of Israel's Messiah.

And breaking bread at home- Luke's writings (in his Gospel and in the Acts) give especial attention to meals and table talk. Societies tended to distinguish themselves by their meal practices. Who was allowed at the table, who was excluded- these things were fundamental to the self-understanding of persons within society. So when the Lord Jesus ate with the lowest sinners, and Peter as a Jew ate with Gentiles... this was radical, counter-cultural behaviour. No wonder the breaking of bread together was such a witness, and the surrounding world watched it with incredulity (Acts 2:42,46; 4:32-35). Note too how Luke mentions that Paul ate food in the homes of Gentiles like Lydia and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:15,34).

Acts 2:42,46,47 speak as if it involved eating a communal meal together. If we can accept that the original "breaking of bread" was indeed a meal, it would seem almost axiomatic that access to the "bread and wine" as in the "emblems" would have been open. For would the early brethren really have said: "You're welcome to eat everything on the table except the unleavened bread"? Or would they really have invited those present to pray and worship with them before and after the meal, but not

while they were praying for and taking the bread and wine? There is no hint even that this was the case.

The record of the body of Christ in the New Testament begins with descriptions of the Lord preaching in houses. The word 'house' occurs a huge number of times in the Gospels, especially in Luke's record. He seems to have been very sensitive to the way the Lord entered into homes and did things there. We can be sure that these homes became house churches after His resurrection. The establishment of the church began with the believers gathering in the temple, but breaking bread "from house to house" (Acts 2:46 Gk.). Fellowship in Christ is about this family sense of community. In practice, the early body of Christ was a fellowship of house churches. They preached and worshipped both in the temple and "in every house", i.e. every house church (Acts 5:42).

Acts 2:46 (NKJV) records how the early brethren broke bread with "simplicity of heart"; and we likewise, in our memorial meetings and in our lives, must unswervingly focus upon Him and the colossal import of His cross.

Almost every major New Testament description of the Lord's coming and what He will bring with Him is also given an application to our experience in this life: the Kingdom of God, eternal life, salvation, justification, sanctification, perfection, glorification… and of course, judgment. All these things shall come; but the essence of them is being worked out in the life of the believer now. All this is brought to our attention whenever we attend the breaking of bread. That "table" at which we sit is a picture of the future banquet and table in the coming Kingdom. The "gladness" which accompanied the breaking of bread (Acts 2:46) is the same word used about the "rejoicing" at the future marriage supper of the lamb (Rev. 19:7) and the Lord's return (1 Pet. 4:13; Jude 24).

Throughout Scripture, the opposition between the kingdoms of this world and the Kingdom of God is highlighted. After the establishment of the first ecclesia in Jerusalem, the Acts record seems to emphasize the pointed conflict between the ecclesia and the world. Being "of one accord" was a hallmark of the early brethren (Acts 1:14; 2:1,46; 4:24; 5:12; 15:25); but the world was in "one accord" in their opposition to that united ecclesia (Acts 7:57; 12:20; 18:12; 19:29).

They took their food with gladness and singleness of heart- Metalabein literally means to "receive one's share in". In this context we read that "day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved". The repetition of "day by day" suggests a connection between the daily conversion of unbelievers and the daily breaking of bread meetings. And in extensive missionary experience I have observed that those who witness a breaking of bread meeting tend to find themselves drawn into the things of the Lord Jesus.

2:47 *Praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to them daily those who were being saved*- Those who heard the message wanted baptism immediately; they had been convicted by the preacher of a Christ-centred message, not just intellectually teased (Acts 8:36; 9:18). Lydia, the Philippian jailer, Paul, the Ethiopian eunuch, the crowds at Pentecost… were all baptized immediately. The Lord added *daily* to the church (2:27; 16:5)- they didn't tell candidates for baptism to wait even until the next Sunday, let alone for a few months 'to think it over'. They understood the first principle: baptism is essential for salvation. Believe or perish. They saw the absoluteness of the issues involved in the choice to accept or reject the Son of God. "Beware, therefore…" was their warning to their hearers (Acts 13:40). They made no apologies, they didn't wrap up the message. They taught the need for repentance more than seeking to prove that they were right and others wrong

(although there is a place for this in our witness in the right contexts). They made it clear that they were out to convert others, not engage in philosophical debate or the preaching of doubtful interpretations.

ACTS CHAPTER 3

3:1 *Now Peter and John were going into the temple*- See on 2:46.

At the hour of prayer, at the ninth hour- The time of the evening sacrifice. Their presence for this indicates they were fairly serious in their connection with Judaism still.

3:2 *And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate, to ask alms of those entering the temple*- He had been daily laid there for around forty years (Acts 4:22). The Lord Jesus surely passed Him by, for He told the Jews that He had taught them daily in the temple; but He didn't heal him. Perhaps his faith hadn't grown to the required level; or maybe the Lord consciously left this work for His followers to do. For Acts is the account of all that the Lord *began* to do. The man apparently recognized Peter and John; because when he saw them, he asked them for assistance. They were known as Jesus-followers.

3:3 *Seeing Peter and John about to enter the temple, he asked for alms*- If he was daily laid at the temple gate, he presumably would have seen the Lord and His disciples many times as they entered the temple- which had been a frequent occurrence. There is no evidence that the man believed. And we note the Lord must have walked by him many times without healing him. His focus was not on simply meeting human need of the moment.

3:4 *And Peter, looking straight at him (as did John) said: Look at us*- See on Acts 14:9. The lame man responded, and the people were amazed at the subsequent miracle. But Peter then tells them: "You men of Israel, why do you marvel at this man? or *why do you fasten your eyes on us* [i.e., why do you 'look on us'], as though by our own power or godliness we had made him to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his Servant Jesus" (Acts 3:12,13). I wonder if Peter was here publicly acknowledging an inappropriate turn of phrase, when he had asked the lame man to 'Look on *us*'- and immediately, he humbly and publicly corrected himself, redirecting all glory and all eyes to the Father and Son.

The man fastened his eyes on them just as Luke has noticed men fastening their eyes on the Lord (s.w. Lk. 4:20; Acts 1:10). We too are led to situations where the experience of the Lord in the Gospels becomes ours. Because those in Him are Him to their world. Peter and John were looking directly at the man, and they ask him to look directly at them. They wanted eye to eye contact- because they wanted him to see in them the face and the eyes of the Lord Jesus.

3:5 *And he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them*- His motivation was material. He is an example of how the Lord through His Spirit at times just comes into a person's life, taking all the initiative, rather than responding to their apparent seeking for Him.

3:6 *But Peter said: Silver and gold have I none, but what I have, that I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!*- Peter later alludes to this in a way that means he saw that man as typical of all his converts: "Knowing you were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life" (1 Pet.

1:18). Life before conversion for us all was as vain as the man sitting there lamely begging for silver and gold, in a temple structure unable to save him. See on 3:7.

Peter told the lame man: “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk"; but the healing was because of *Peter's* faith in Christ's Name (Acts 3:6,16). The Jerusalem Bible makes this apparent: "It is the name of Jesus which, through our faith in it, has brought back the strength of this man". The RV has: "By faith in his name hath his name made this man strong"- as if the power of the name of Jesus is waiting to be activated by human faith.

Nazareth was despised (Jn. 1:46), but the title on the cross includes it (Jn. 19:46) and here too we see how "Nazareth" is stressed, as well as crucifixion. These were things which were the biggest shame in first century Palestinian ears. But this is the great paradox- that the one from such an obscure, bad background with such despised characteristics, was now exalted.

3:7 *And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankle-bones received strength*- The word is used of the strengthening of the early converts, also by the Spirit (Acts 16:5 "So the churches were strengthened in the faith"). Again the idea is that the man was representative of the wider ecclesia; see on 3:6. He was not saved by silver and gold, just as Peter says that none of us are (1 Pet. 1:18).

Luke has a favourite Greek word, often translated “forthwith… immediately” (Acts 3:7; 5:10; 9:18; 12:23; 13:11; 16:26,33). This is quite some emphasis; and Luke uses the very same word a lot in his Gospel, as if to show that the speed and power and achievement of the Lord’s ministry is continued in that of His ministers now (Lk. 1:64; 4:39; 5:25; 8:44,47,55; 13:13; 18:43; 19:11; 22:60). The word is scarcely used outside Luke’s writing, although using different words, Mark also notes the speed and immediacy of the Lord's ministry. And Luke uses many other words to stress the speed and urgency and fast moving nature of the Lord’s work. They are worth highlighting in your Bible; for our ministry is a continuation of that of our early brethren (Acts 9:18-20,34; 10:33; 11:11; 12:10; 16:10; 17:10,14; 21:30,32; 22:29; 23:30).

Peter understood what it was to be in Christ. All that he did, all that he preached and taught by word and example, was a witness to the one in whom he lived and had his being. As he reached forth his right hand to lift up the cripple, he was manifesting how the right hand of God had lifted up (in resurrection) and exalted His Son and all those in Him (Acts 3:7). Likewise, he took Tabitha *by the hand* and then *lifted her up* and “presented her alive” (Acts 9:41), just as the Father had done to His Son. When Peter “stood up” after his conversion (Acts 1:15; 2:14), he was sharing the resurrection experience of his Lord. And now he reflected this in his preaching to others. As God stretched forth His hand to heal through Christ (Acts 4:30), so Peter did (Acts 9:41). And he includes us all in the scope of this wondrous operation: for as God’s hand exalted Christ, so it will exalt each of us who humble ourselves beneath it (1 Pet. 5:6).

3:8 *And leaping up, he stood and began to walk; and he entered with them into the temple, walking and leaping and praising God*- This reads like Dr. Luke's medical observation of the progressive steps of the recovery - leaped up, stood, walked, leaped. But it's also as if we are invited to play Bible television, focused up close on the man. The language is clearly appropriate for the eyewitness account which it is. The result of healing lame people in Acts 3:8; 14:10 was that they *leaped* (this is emphasized) and walked, praising God. This seems to be couched in the language of

Is. 35:5,6 concerning lame people leaping and praising God; a prophecy we normally apply to the future Kingdom.

"He entered with them into the temple" even though he was likely in a state of ritual uncleanness due to his previous disability. He leaped into the holy place; the joy of conversion naturally overriding all legalistic considerations.

3:9 *And all the people saw him walking and praising God*- This is twice emphasized (:8). Luke has used the very same phrase four times in his Gospel, regarding praise of the Lord Jesus (Lk. 2:13,20; 19:37; 24:53). Luke's Gospel was volume 1 compared to his volume 2, the Acts of the Apostles. But he develops the theme that the acts of the apostles are effectively the acts of the risen Lord Jesus (see on Acts 1:1). And so this kind of device is typical of Luke- things he ascribes to the Lord Jesus in his Gospel he applies to the work of the believers in Him in Acts. The man's response, "praising God", was exactly the response of people to the historical Jesus. It was as if through Peter's work, the Lord Jesus was manifested. See on 3:10 *Wonder* and 3:11 *The portico called Solomon's*.

3:10 *And they recognised him, that it was he that sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him*- Some commentators claim that next to this gate was a notice forbidding Gentiles and the unclean to go further. His location for forty years at the entrance to the temple (4:22) perhaps reflects Israel's being kept out of the promised land for the same period. He represented what could have happened to all Israel. The word for "wonder" is only used to describe the wonder at the miracles of the Lord Jesus; and it is used only by Luke (Lk. 4:36; 5:9). Again, Peter the healer is being presented as the manifestation of the Lord Jesus. The word for "amazed" is likewise used (Lk. 5:26). See on 3:9 *Praising God.*

3:11 *While he clung to Peter and John*- So often in this narrative, we see the essence of events of the Gospels now being repeated in the experience of the Lord's followers. In this case, the similarity is with how the healed man of Lk. 8:38 dreaded the idea of being parted from his healer, the Lord Jesus.

In the same way as the Lord stretched forth His hand and saved Peter, so He stretches forth His hand, Peter observed, to save all who would come to Him (Mt. 14:31 = Acts 4:30). But Peter is framed as Jesus, in that he too stretched out his hand to save others as Jesus had done to him (Mt. 14:35 = Acts 5:15,16; Mt. 14:31 = Acts 3:7), bidding them come through the water of baptism as Jesus had done to him. As Jesus in the boat was worshipped after saving Peter, so men tried to worship Peter (Mt. 14:33 = Acts 3:11). So Peter went through what we all do- having been saved by Jesus, having come to Him and having been rescued by the outstretched arm, he responds to this by doing the same for others. When the Lord "caught" hold of Peter as he sunk in the waves (Mt. 14:31), a Greek word is used which occurs only once elsewhere: "He did not take hold [s.w. to catch] of Angels, but of the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:16). The Hebrew writer was surely alluding to the Lord's 'catching' of desperate Peter and pulling him to salvation- and saw in Peter a symbol of all those who will be saved by Christ.

All the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's, astounded- There was a crowd mentality here; everyone got involved in a stampede towards Peter. Their mentality and direction was dictated by a group psychology rather than individual faith. The word only occurs later in the New Testament in Peter's letter, where he writes of how Gentiles "think it strange that you do not *run with them* in the same flood of dissipation" (1 Pet. 4:4). The similarity was that Peter reflected how a

crowd can stampede towards the symbols of Jesus, and yet stampede in the way of sin. But it's individual faith that the Lord searches for.

"The portico called Solomon's", Gk. 'which *is* called Solomon's'. This suggests that the Gospel of Luke was written whilst the temple was still standing; otherwise a past tense would have been used. This is one of many reasons for thinking that the Gospels were written early rather than later, certainly pre-AD70. The Gospel records and Acts are the transcripts of histories which were orally distributed to begin with, and then written down under Divine inspiration soon after they began circulating- and not many decades after the events, as the critics wrongly claim. The scene here is reminiscent of that in the Gospels, when a crowd of people gathered around the Lord Jesus in the same porch (Jn. 10:23). And again, we see Peter and John presented as the manifestations of Jesus on earth, just as we are; repeating in essence the situations encountered by the historical Jesus. See on 3:9 *Praising God*.

3:12- see on Acts 2:12.

And when Peter saw it, he addressed the people: You men of Israel, why do you marvel at this man? Or why fasten you your eyes on us, as though by our own power or reverence towards God we had made him walk?- AV "He answered and said". Although there was no previous statment nor question. As in Acts 5:8, where Peter *answered* Sapphira, although she had said nothing. This feature of the text gives us the impression of God's Spirit responding to man's unexpressed positions and responses.

"Marvel" implies some doubt. The men who marvelled and doubted whether Peter was anything more than a magic man were within a few hours believing and being baptized (Acts 3:12; 4:4). We noted on :11 that there was a group psychology operating here, but there is never any attempt to judge the sincerity of motivation in those apparently coming to Jesus. There is a speed and power and compulsion that pounds away in the narrative. The preaching of a God hurt by sin, passionately consumed in the death of His Son, feeling every sin, rejoicing over every repentance and baptism… this was something radically different in the 1st century world, just as it is in ours. And such a God imparted a sense of urgency to those who preached Him and His feelings and ways and being, a need for urgent response, a need to relate to Him, which was simply unknown in other religions. The urgency of man's position must be more up front in our witness. Christianity went wrong in the 2nd century AD because the church abstracted God and His being into nothingness, to the point that the urgent import of the true doctrines was lost in practice. May this not be the case amongst us.

Peter is urgent to explain that 'this isn't me- it's Jesus'. See on 3:10 *Wonder* and 3:9 *Praising God*. Peter knew that he was standing very close to where he had denied the Lord. And he knew that his audience knew. He felt he was not holy nor 'reverent' to God as he should be. Peter repeatedly uses this word, translated "holiness" or "Godliness", in appealing for his converts to develop this very attribute (2 Pet. 1:3,6,7; 3:11). And yet he states here that he is not sufficiently 'holy' or 'Godly'. It is this humility and recognition of failure which gave Peter's preaching and pastoral appeals the power they had.

3:13 *The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus*- Yet Peter and John did the Lord's work with this man of their own volition. The healing of the man was the glorification of the Lord. His glorification was thereby dependent for its extent upon the efforts of His people in practice. And that principle is true today. Peter understood it well; hence he urges the people not to glorify him, but the Lord Jesus. He holds himself up as an example to

his converts in that he alludes to this incident in 1 Pet. 2:12; 4:11,14, where he says that the good works of his converts can glorify God (s.w.).

Whom you delivered up- The word used for the betrayal of Judas. What he did was in essence what all Israel did; he was the epitome of Israel, influenced by the Jewish satan.

And rejected before the presence of Pilate- "Rejected" is the same word translated "denied" and is used repeatedly about the denials of Peter, in the presence of the Lord's trial and at the same time as the Jews rejected or denied their Messiah (Mt. 26:70,72). Peter was preaching this message a stone's throw from where he had denied / rejected his Lord. And he knew that they knew what had happened. Peter was therefore appealing to the Jews on the basis that he himself has very publicly done what they had done.

When he had determined to release him- Literally, "when he had given sentence to release him". Pilate had pronounced the Lord innocent (Jn. 19:4). The conflicted conscience of Pilate is a major theme, because it shows the power of the Lord Jesus to touch the hardest human conscience. *Krino* means to judge; he had judged to set Jesus free. This is exactly the situation which Paul found himself in later- he was judged by the Romans and judged that he should be set free, but he chose not to use that in order [as he perceived it anyway at the time] to spread the Gospel to the world [by appealing to a hearing in Rome]. Perhaps these words and form of expression of Peter became programmatic for Paul and led him to the decision he made, consciously seeking to follow his Lord's steps to the cross. I will develop the point later that Paul was very deeply influenced by Peter's words and ministry.

3:14 *But you denied*- The point is twice made (:13), just as it is twice recorded that Peter denied the Lord (Mt. 26:70,72) at the same time as they did. See on Acts 3:13 *Rejected...*

The holy and righteous one, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you- These words are elsewhere used about John the Baptist (Mk. 6:20), the Lord's forerunner; and also about the believers, who are to be likewise (Rev. 22:11), rather than simply admiring His holiness from a distance. He and all about Him is to be programmatic for us.

3:15 *And killed the prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses*- The blame is clearly placed by God on the Jews and not the Romans. Conspiracy to murder was counted by Him as the murder itself. Gk. 'the author' of life. The contrast is with Israel's desire for a murderer, a taker of life (:14).

3:16 *And by faith in his name*- Alluded to by Peter in 1 Pet. 1:21: “You who by Him do believe in God”. The Lord Jesus is “the author and finisher of our faith". Faith comes from the Lord Jesus, from encounter with Him, rather than apologetics.

Gk. *the* faith, maybe hinting that it was 'the faith' of the Gospel which inculcated faith in the apostles. But whose faith was Peter referring to? The beggar appears to have just been opportunistically begging for money from Peter (Acts 3:3). It was surely by *Peter's* faith that the man was healed, and not by his own faith. For Peter didn't invite the beggar to have faith in anything. And Peter explains to the Jews that he had made the man to walk not through his own power (Acts 3:12). So here again we have an example of a third party being healed as a result of another man's faith (see on Mk. 2:5).

Trust or faith in God comes from not trusting upon human understanding, but upon the understanding [s.w. meaning, knowledge, wisdom] that is God’s (Prov. 3:5). In this lies the importance of truth in Biblical interpretation. So understanding, correctly

perceiving meaning, true wisdom… are related to having a real faith. The Proverbs go on to plead for correct understanding, because this will be the source of a Godly life of faith in practice. There is therefore a connection between “faith" in the sense of belief, and the fact the essential doctrines of Christianity are called "*the* faith"; the noun "the Faith" and the verb 'to believe / have faith' are related. This is because a true understanding of the one Faith will inevitably lead to true faith, and therefore works; for faith and works are inseparable. This relationship is brought out in Acts 3:16: "His name, through faith in his name, hath made this man strong... yea, the faith which is in Him (Christ) hath given him (the healed man) this perfect soundness".

His name has made this man strong, whom you see and know- The same word used about the strengthening of the churches and all believers (Acts 16:5; 1 Pet. 5:9). The man is being presented as representative of all converts.

Yes, the faith which is through him, has given him this perfect soundness- The man appears to have been given ideal health throughout his body. Otherwise, he would have been unable to leap, after being forty years in that condition (4:22). Again, the man is set up as symbolic of the total change possible in the believer.

In the presence of you all- Just as Peter and John testified because they were witnesses of the Lord's resurrection, so the audience had also seen a 'standing upright' of a man well known to them; and they also ought to believe and testify. Peter is seeking to share his experience with his audience, building a bridge between him and them, inviting them to share his path- rather than baldly presenting theological truths to them and leaving them to respond as they wished.

3:17 *And now*- These are not just redundant words. The sense may be that although they crucified the Lord knowing full well what they were doing, *now*, by God's grace, that could be counted as having been done in relative ignorance. This is the amazing extent of imputed righteousness.

Brothers- Peter again is bridge building, having made the point that they had denied their Messiah just at the same time and place as he had done (see on Acts 3:14).

I know that in ignorance you did it, as did also your rulers-

There are various interpretations of this "ignorance". We note that Peter appeals for repentance on the basis of this sin of ignorance. A sin of ignorance was still a sin and required atonement, as Leviticus makes clear. Perhaps Peter is saying that despite part of their sin being consciously committed, they had failed to appreciate the enormity of what they had done in slaying their King, God's own Son. And it was this element of 'sin of ignorance' which he appeals for them to put right by repentance. No sacrifice was possible- but they were to identify themselves with the Lord's sacrifice for all kinds of sin, through baptism, sharing His Spirit, and living in Him.

It had been generous spirited of the Lord to pray on the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”. He may have meant they were relatively ignorant, or it may be that He felt they were so blinded now that the recognition of Him they once had had was now not operating. And Peter, who probably heard with amazement those words from the cross as he beheld the Lord’s sufferings, found the same generous spirit to men whom naturally he would have despised: “In ignorance you did it” (Acts 3:17 cp. Lk. 23:34).

The generosity of the Father and Son to humanity is awesome- so eager are they for our repentance. God so pleads for Israel to return to Him in Hosea and Isaiah that He almost takes the blame onto Himself, cooing over His people as having been tossed and afflicted- when it was His own judgment of them that caused it. And I think this explains the difficulty of Acts 3:17-19, where Peter appeals to the Jews to

repent, because they had murdered the Lord Jesus "in ignorance". The Lord's own parables explained that they did what they did with open eyes- "this is the heir, come let us kill him!". Yet in God's passionate desire for their repentance, He appears to view their awful sin in the most gracious possible light.

Paul uses the same word to reason that the Gentiles too had sinned in ignorance, but now must repent because of the Lord's resurrection (Acts 17:30). This is another example of Paul consciously modelling himself and his preaching on Peter. Considering that Peter was an illiterate fisherman, mocked by the Jerusalem intelligentsia as speaking without grammar... and Paul was the intellectual Jewish rabbi trained in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel... this indicates so much humility in Paul. Although I will later develop the possibility that Paul actually pretended to Peter to such an unhealthy extent that he failed to focus as he might on his ministry to the Gentiles, and sought rather to emulate Peter's to the Jews.

3:18 *But the things which God foretold*- It's as if Peter is trying to encourage them not to see their sin as too great to allow them to now come to the Lord Jesus. This is one reason why he appears to overstate their relative "ignorance" in :17. And here too, he seems to be presenting them with another window on their sin- that it was foretold by the prophets and had been necessary in God's plan of salvation, just as in the case of the sin of Joseph's brothers. We too encounter folks who truly feel that their sin presents too big a barrier between God and themselves. It's a fine balance, between preaching to convict people of sin [rather than socializing them into a social club], and on the other hand, encouraging them that that sin is not an insurmountable barrier.

By the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He thus fulfilled- It was their spoken words which were inspired; but there is no specific guarantee that the written form and transmission of them was likewise inspired. Their mouths, and not the pens of every scribe who wrote the words, were inspired by God- even though it would be fair to say that the preservation and transmission of their written words was the work of 'providence', and the Spirit of God in some way also at work. Because the Bible is the only Divinely inspired book there is, this can lead us to seeing the book as some kind of icon; it is the only 'thing' we have in our experience which is directly from God. Realizing, however, that the original autographs alone were inspired can help us see the Bible we read for what it is- the living, albeit translated and passed down, word of God Himself.

3:19 *Therefore repent and be converted*- Not 'repent and convert'. The conversion, grammatically, is performed by another party. The repentance is what enables the process of conversion to be performed upon the repentant person who now wishes to change. Repentance is therefore a mental re-thinking, not a rearrangement of human life to be without sin and failure. The parallel is with Peter's earlier preaching in Acts 2:38: "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ to the remission of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit". "Be converted" implies an action upon the heart of the repentant hearer of the Gospel; the parallel in 2:38 is to receive the gift of the Spirit, a holy spirit or mind being developed in the believer. I gave reasons on 2:38 to understand this gift to essentially refer to the internal work of the Lord on repentant hearts- or as Peter here puts it, being converted. The same word translated "converted" is found in the description of John the Baptist's work in Lk. 1:17 as being to turn or convert the hearts of people. This same work is now being done by the risen Lord, through His Spirit. Acts 11:21 speaks of this work of conversion as being done by the Lord's hand, and the Old Testament parallels God's hand with His Spirit; it is His instrumentality, and not

man's: "And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and were turned [s.w. 'converted'] to the Lord". Likewise Acts 28:27 parallels conversion with the act of the Lord healing hearts: "Be converted, and I should heal them". Conversion is the healing action of the Lord on human hearts who are open to it, rather than a steel-willed cracking of expositional and theological riddles in the Bible text and vainly attempting to brutally conform one's own life to that text. Conversion is also a matter of the heart in 2 Cor. 3:16, parallel with the Lord removing a vail which He has placed over the Jewish mind.

And again, it was Peter, the preacher himself, who had sinned against his Lord and had been "converted" on his repentance, with the result that he was not strengthening the Lord's sheep (Lk. 22:32 "When you are converted...", s.w.). Truly, Peter's address is shot through with reference to his own failure, repentance and restoration by grace. He reminds his sheep of how they are now "returned" (s.w. 'converted') to the Lord Jesus (1 Pet. 2:25), just as he had been. My point is that the 'conversion' was by another hand than his own steel will.

In the context of Israel's latter day repentance, we read some admittedly strange words: "(The Jews) have... not believed, that through your (Gentile believers) mercy, they also may obtain mercy" (Rom. 11:31). Could this not mean that Israel's reconciliation to God is partly dependent on our "mercy" in preaching the Gospel to them? And now consider Peter's words to Israel: "Repent... and be converted, that (firstly) your sins may be blotted out... and (secondly) he shall send Jesus Christ" at the second coming (Acts 3:19,20). Does this not suggest that Christ's eager desire for the second coming is limited by our preaching to Israel?

So that your sins may be blotted out- Applying the language of David's forgiveness for the murder of Uriah to all Israel (Ps. 51:1). David's forgiveness by grace is often set up as programmatic for the way all believers, and all Israel, can be treated (see Rom. 4:1-4).

So that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord- The second coming is clearly dependent upon Israel's repentance for crucifying the Lord. The seasons / times refer to those of Acts 1:7, the second coming. This is why the Lord said that there was no such defined 'time' for it, but rather they were to get on with converting Israel. There are preconditions, involving Israel's repentance in response to our preaching to them; but not a calendar date. "Times of refreshing" is the age of the Messianic Kingdom on earth, probably alluding to Is. 28:12: "This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing...".

"From the presence of the Lord" is literally from His face. Luke is connecting with what he recorded in Lk. 1:76; John the Baptist's ministry was to herald the presence / face of the Lord being revealed. But his ministry failed on a national level; the essence of John's appeal is however to be continued by Christian witness to the Jews in all ages, and when it finally succeeds, the Kingdom age shall come from the presence of the Lord. See on 3:21 *The time of the restoration.*

3:20 *And that He may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you, Jesus*- "That He may" shows that there is no calendar date set for the Lord's return; rather is the most significant condition for it that Israel repent. And this ought to be the focus of much of our ministry.

3:21 *Whom the heaven must receive until the time of the restoration of all things*- The reference is again to John the Baptist's ministry, which was intended to restore all things (Mt. 17:11 s.w.). By witnessing to Israel to repent we are continuing the

essence of John's ministry and when complete, the restored Kingdom of God shall come on earth. See on 3:19 *From the presence of the Lord*. The Bible often alludes to popular literature and understandings of the time, in order to deconstruct it. Plato was popular in the first century, and his writings spoke of a final "time of the restoration"; it's as if this social dream was being alluded to, and reinterpreted as being the Kingdom of God on earth. The following reference to how the prophets have been since the beginning of the age may well be a deconstruction of the then fashionable way of quoting the ancient Plato as wisdom, as if he were effectively a prophet. For the Christian, it was the writings of the prophets and not Plato which were to be authoritative; and rather than Plato's 'restoration of all things', there was the hope of God's eternal Kingdom on earth.

It was quite possible that the full Messianic Kingdom could have been established in the first century, depending upon how the Jews responded to Christ's Gospel. All things were ready for the feast, representing the Kingdom, and the Jewish guests invited- but their rejection of the offer resulted in a 2,000 year delay while the invitations were pressed home on equally laid back Gentiles (Mt. 22:4). Similarly, Peter understood that the Lord must remain in Heaven "until the times of restitution of all things (cp. Mt. 22:4), which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began"; but he felt, under inspiration, that "all the prophets... as many as have spoken (note the emphasis; cp. "all His holy prophets"), have likewise foretold of these days" (Acts 3:21,24), i.e. the days of the first century.

Of which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, that have been since the world began- Luke uses the same sentence in Lk. 1:70. We have here an example of the language of pre-existence- and yet the prophets did not literally exist at the world's beginning. And neither did the Lord Jesus.

3:22 *Moses indeed said: A prophet like me shall the Lord God*- Peter had been reminded of the prophecy of Dt. 18:15 when he was told to "hear Him" at the transfiguration. But Peter had there fallen down paralyzed with fear; he didn't really hear the son of God then. Yet here in Acts 3:22, Peter quotes Dt. 18:15 and asks his hearers to obey the passage by hearing Jesus, through his preaching of Him. He was asking his audience to do what he himself hadn't done.

Raise up for you- This 'raising up' is understood by Peter as referring to the Lord's resurrection (:26 "God, having raised up His servant..."). That hardly seems to be the context of the original Old Testament quotation. But the New Testament often quotes the Old without attention to context; just as Jewish midrash [interpretation] quotes Bible verses out of their context in order to explain other verses. Context is not always the key to Biblical interpretation; the Spirit which inspired the OT also inspired the NT, and therefore OT words and phrases are at times taken hold of in the NT and given a new meaning which is not at all in harmony with the context surrounding the original OT text. However, whether *we* are justified in doing this is doubtful- for one could then make any text mean whatever we wish by taking it out of context. We are the readers and interpreters of the text and not the inspired authors. This is not to say that sometimes, indeed often, the surrounding context of the original text is irrelevant. Harry Whittaker excelled at demonstrating how a verse from a Psalm was applied to the Lord Jesus in the NT, and then returning to the original Psalm and showing how so much else there was also relevant to the Lord's experiences. But I'm saying that this is not always how the Spirit interprets the OT.

From among your brothers [like unto me]- A clear statement of the Lord's utter humanity, perhaps alluding to how the sacrificial Paschal lamb was to be taken out "from among" the flock.

You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you- An example of where prophecy is not merely prediction, but also a command. Insofar as obedience is a function of human freewill, prophecies like this are therefore open to some element of failure or having their fulfilment reframed by the extent of human obedience. Ezekiel's prophecies of a glorious temple to be built by the returning exiles would be a classic example. The words of the great commission allude to this well-known Messianic prophecy- the preachers were to go "teaching them to observe all things whatever I commanded you" (Mt. 28:20). The Lord thereby invited Israel to see Him as the prophet like unto Moses who was to be obeyed.

3:23 *And it shall be, that every soul that shall not listen to that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people*- Those who would not accept Jesus as Messiah were to be “destroyed from among the people”, using a very similar phrase to the LXX of Gen. 17:14, where the uncircumcised man was to be “cut off from his people”. Col. 2:11 speaks of circumcision as another type of baptism, in that only the circumcised were in covenant with God: "The uncircumcised... that soul shall be cut off from his people" (Gen. 17:14). We either “cut off" the flesh, or God will cut us off. The circumcision / baptism allusion was really saying 'Accept Christ or perish'. The language of destruction "from among the people" connects with how the Lord Jesus was also "from among the people" (:22). Exactly because of His humanity, He is our appropriate judge; or as John records it, He has authority to execute judgment exactly because He is the Son of Man (Jn. 5:27).

3:24 *Yes, and all the prophets*- According to Acts 3:21,24, *all* the prophets speak of Israel's latter day repentance and the subsequent return of Messiah.

From Samuel- Samuel was not the first person to act as a prophet, a forth-teller of God's word. Why single him out as the starting point for the ministry of the prophets? Perhaps in reflection of the Jewish saying that Samuel was chief of the prophets. The connection with Moses (:22) may intend us to understand 'The law and the prophets'. Or perhaps because his mother was the first to specifically predict the Messiah in so many words (1 Sam. 2:10,35). But see on 3:25 *You are the sons of the prophets*.

And those that followed after, as many as have spoken, they also told of these days- The reference could be to the "times of the restoration" of :21, which Peter believed to be breaking in upon them with the conversion of some Jews. He was disappointed in his expectation; for the conversions didn't continue, and many of the Jewish Christians fell away. And so the preconditions required for the full restitution of all things weren't met, and it was delayed until our days.

3:25 *You are the sons of the prophets*- This phrase refers to the schools of the prophets (1 Kings 20:35; 2 Kings 2:3; 4:1; 5:22; 6:1; Is. 8:18). Samuel was seen in Judaism as the *rabban* or founder of the schools of the prophets. This would explain the choice of Samuel as the 'first' of the prophets in the preceding verse. The schools of the prophets were seen as for the elite within Judaism. But Peter is saying that now all who believe the prophetic words about Jesus as Lord and Messiah are no less the schools of the prophets; this was what the fledgling churches were to be likened to. Isaiah had spoken of his school of the prophets as he and his sons (Is. 8:18), but this is quoted in Heb. 2:13 about all in Christ.

And of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham: And in your descendant shall all the families of the earth be blessed- 'Sons of the covenant', *b'nai b'rith*, was and still is a reference to the elite within Israel, just like "sons of the prophets" referring to the schools of the prophets. So again, the distinction is being collapsed between the masses and the religious specialists. All believers are spoken of later in the New Testament as priests, even the High Priest,

and now as the very elitest of the prophets and "sons of the covenant". No longer could believers consider themselves one in a mass of attendees, one in an audience; but instead, each of us is of intense significance in God's prophetic program. But according to Gal. 3:27-29, even a Jew could only become a son of the covenant by baptism into Christ. But Peter speaks as if his audience were just this. He is assuming they will agree to believe and be baptized into Christ.

3:26 *To you first*- Along with the reference to all tribes / families of the earth being blessed as Abraham's seed (:25), the idea is clearly that Gentiles too can participate in this great Jewish salvation which is in the Jewish Messiah. But as is made clear in the Cornelius incident in Acts 10, Peter was far from understanding this at the time. The fact he made this hint here about Gentile salvation, if not a clear statement about it, is proof that he was speaking a Divinely inspired message and not just his own personal understanding. Perhaps this is why it is Peter who later makes the point that the inspired prophets spoke things which they did not themselves fully understand (1 Pet. 1:12); he had himself experienced such a thing with regard to the Gentiles.

God, having raised up His servant, sent him- Peter taught that "God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him" to preach to the Jews (Acts 3:26). Yet the Lord Jesus personally resurrected and ascended to Heaven, having 'sent' His followers into the world. Yet because all in Him are so fully His personal witnesses, representative of Him as He is representative of them, in this way it's true to say that the Lord Jesus personally was "sent" into the world with the Gospel message after His resurrection. And by all means connect this with Peter's difficult words in 1 Pet. 3:19- that by the spirit of Christ, Christ 'went' after His resurrection to preach to those imprisoned. By our sharing His Spirit, we are Him 'going' and preaching. In this sense the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (Rev. 19:10). And because Peter was alluding to the 'sending' of the great commission, he goes on to say that the spiritually imprisoned to whom we preach are saved by the baptism we minister in fulfilment of the great commission, in the same way as the ark saved people in Noah's day.

After His resurrection, the Lord Jesus was *sent* to preach blessing and forgiveness to Israel. But after His resurrection, He sent His men to preach this message. His witness became expressed through, and therefore limited by, His preachers. When they wilfully misunderstood His commission as meaning preaching to Jews from all nations, rather than taking the message to the whole planet literally, His work was in that sense hindered and His intention delayed. Remember that the Rabbis taught that salvation was impossible for Gentiles: "For the heathen nations there will be no redemption", so reads the Targum on Ex. 21:30. Like us, the early Jewish converts were influenced by their backgrounds and their limited world views. Until the Lord brought experiences to bear which, when responded to, taught them what is now the obvious meaning of His words- that we each have a duty to take the good news of Him to the whole planet.

To bless you- There is strong connection between forgiveness and blessing. Peter was speaking to the unspoken fears of his guilty audience. Forgiveness was possible in Christ.

In turning every one of you away from your sins- The promised blessing was not simply of forgiveness. It was of 'turning away' from sin. This is the equivalent of what Peter preached in Acts 2; he appealed for repentance and baptism, so that the gift of the Holy Spirit [or mind] could be experienced. Here, he appeals for repentance and belief [implying baptism], so that they would know the blessing of being turned away from sin. For what we really need is not simply forgiveness, but the power not to

repeat the sin; a new psychology, a new mind, a force higher than ourselves to turn us away from sin. And this is exactly what is promised here. Rom. 11:26 likewise speaks of how the Lord Jesus would "turn away [s.w.] ungodliness from Jacob" when Israel enter the new covenant; but that new covenant is now made with all who are baptized into Jesus. Rom. 11:26 is quoting from Is. 59:20, but the next verse goes on to say that this shall be effected by Yahweh giving the covenant promise of His Spirit upon His people and their children (Is. 59:21). The gift of the Spirit is therefore a turning of us away from sin. I noted under 2:39 that the promise of the Spirit "to you and your children" is also alluding to this same passage. Israel in their hearts turned back to Egypt (Acts 7:26 s.w.); the arena of this 'turning' is within the human mind. And it is exactly there where we need the Lord's operation; and it is this which is included in the gift of the holy spirit or mind which is enabled by commitment to Christ.

When Peter speaks of how the Lord Jesus will ‘turn away’ sinners from their sins, he is using the very word of how the Lord Jesus told him to “put up again” his sword (Mt. 26:52), thereby turning Peter away from his sin. Peter’s appeal for repentance and conversion was evidently allusive to his own experience of conversion (Lk. 22:32 cp. Acts 3:19; 9:35). In this he was following the pattern of David, who sung his ‘Maschil’ (teaching) psalms after his forgiveness in order to convert sinners unto Yahweh (Ps. 51:13). Like Peter, David did so with his sin ever before him, with a broken and contrite heart (Ps. 51:3,17). He invited them to seek forgiveness for their denial of their Lord, just as he had done. He dearly wished them to follow his pattern, and know the grace he now did. See on Acts 2:39.

We must remember that baptism means that we are *now* the seed of Abraham, and the blessings of forgiveness, of all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, and God's turning us away from our sins are right now being fulfilled in us (Acts 3:27-29). Israel were multiplied as the sand on the sea shore (2 Sam. 17:11; 1 Kings 4:20), they possessed the gates of their enemies (Dt. 17:2; 18:6)- all in antitype of how Abraham's future seed would also receive the promised blessings in their mortal experience, as well as in the eternal blessedness of the future Kingdom.

ACTS CHAPTER 4

4:1 *And as they spoke to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees*- The basis of their work was that they were the equivalent of the Levites who kept guard at the gates of the temple, in order to prevent the unclean from entering. They were defining the Jewish Christians and their message of healing as that which was unclean.

Came upon them- This is a common word in Luke-Acts. The Jews had likewise 'come upon' the Lord also in the same temple (Lk. 20:1). Luke is developing his point that the Lord's experiences and sufferings are repeated in those of believers in Him, especially in their work of representing Him in their witness. That principle applies to this day, and is a bridge between Him there so many centuries ago, and us here today.

4:2 *Being greatly annoyed because they taught the people*- See on 5:21 *Taught*. Not only are there links between Acts and Luke, as if the preaching of the apostles continues the personal work of the Lord in whom they lived and moved, but often Acts records the preaching work in language lifted from the other Gospel records too (e.g. Acts 4:2; 5:12-16 = Mt. 4:23).

And proclaimed in Jesus the resurrection from the dead- By being "in Jesus", by baptism into Him, His resurrection becomes ours. And this was their message. The

Sadducees who made the arrest denied resurrection, and it was endlessly irritating for them to see the growth of the Christian movement centred around faith in the resurrection both of Christ and ultimately of all believers in Him. The Gospels present the Pharisees as the great opponents of the Lord's work, but some of them converted to His cause. His criticism of them had related to matters of personal conduct, and some clearly accepted this and repented. But the Sadducees were under direct attack regarding a doctrinal matter, and it seems harder to repent of a theological wrong turning than of personal behaviour issues.

4:3 *And they arrested them*- Literally, 'they laid hands on them', as in 5:18. Exactly the same phrase is used about the arrest of the Lord (Mt. 26:50). Again, the experiences of the Lord's preachers are framed in terms of His experiences, especially at the time of His death. His cross therefore ceases to be something to be gazed at from a distance, but rather is the fullest and most complete reflection of our experiences; in that light, we can begin to attach meaning to event, which is the existential struggle of every human soul. Man's search for meaning comes to no higher moment than in seeing in our experiences those of God's beloved Son.

And jailed them until the next day; for it was now evening- 'Arrested them and jailed them' is repeated in Acts 5:18. Clearly their experiences now were intended to be learnt from and were consciously repeated again, just as a good teacher repeats lessons for students. This is why there is a sense of deja vu in our lives; it is the same Lord active in teaching us.

4:4- see on Acts 2:12.

But many of those that heard the word believed- Acceptable decisions to believe can therefore be made having only heard the word preached orally. The very same Greek sentence is to be found in Jn. 5:24: "He that hears My word and believes... has everlasting life". Yet again, the preachers of the Lord Jesus are presented as Jesus personally, preaching as He preached and thus continuing His witness in the world.

And the number of the men came to be about five thousand- In addition to the 3000 earlier baptized at Pentecost.

4:5 *And it came to pass that the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem*- This is how the Sanhedrin were referred to; they are specifically called the Sanhedrin in :15. Again we see the experience of the apostles being portrayed in terms of that of the Lord Jesus in His final sufferings. Such gatherings together to consider miracle workers were occasionally held, in the spirit of Dt. 13:1-5. The doctrine of the miracle worker was considered. Luke records three other times when the Sanhedrin met to consider the Christian preachers: Peter and the apostles (Acts 5:27), Stephen (Acts 6:12), and Paul (Acts 22:30). Each time they are presented as re-living what they did to the Lord Jesus. God was really knocking on the door of their conscience. This was presumably their first Sanhedrin gathering after the condemnation of the Lord; the places of Joseph and Nicodemus would have been conspicuously empty, and perhaps others too.

There is evidence that after around AD30, the Sanhedrin stopped meeting in the temple and met in the city of Jerusalem. We note the accuracy of the record. Any uninspired writer would have either omitted such detail, or made some historical or locational blunders. But there are none in Acts and the critics only reveal their intellectual desperation in the false claims they make to the contrary. The gathering together of these people in Jerusalem sounds as if the Psalm 2 prophecy of the Lord's enemies being gathered together against Him was now again coming true- for His preachers were Him.

4:6 *And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas*- Caiaphas was the son-in-law of Annas. Caiaphas was the high priest, but Annas had been the high priest ten years beforehand and was the power behind Caiaphas. The inspired record recognizes that by calling him the high priest. Another alternative is that the Jews at the time considered that anyone who had been the high priest would always be called "high priest" as a title.

And John- Perhaps Johanan ben Zaccai; or the 'Jonathan' son of Annas who was briefly High Priest AD36/37. This latter would strengthen the impression given that this was a group of family friends and buddies.

And Alexander- Alexander Lysimachus, who according to Josephus "was one of the richest Jews of his time, who made great presents to the temple, and was highly esteemed by King Agrippa... He was brother to the famous Philo Judaeus, and father of Alexander Tiberius, who married Bernice, the daughter of Agrippa the elder, and was governor of Judea after Cuspius Fadus".

And as many as were of the family of the high priest- Note the lack of mention of Gamaliel by name. Luke is seeking to present the decision makers as a group of family and friends, "as many as were of the family of the high priest".

4:7 *And when they had set them in their midst, they enquired*- The apostles surely recalled watching how the Jews had placed a sinful woman in their midst, and then she had been vindicated by the Lord's judgment and wisdom (Jn. 8:3,9 s.w.).

By what power, or in what name, have you done this?- It was inconceivable for them, as it is for many legalistic religious thinkers today, to think that individuals could have an experience with the Lord and on their own initiative serve Him, empowered by Him in their ministry. The religious types expect any religious work to be done in the name or authority of some organization.

4:8 *Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: You rulers of the people and elders*- The mention of the Holy Spirit is surely to demonstrate how exactly were the Lord's words being fulfilled: "But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and in their synagogues they will scourge you. Yes and before governors and kings you shall be brought for my sake, for a testimony to them, and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not be anxious how or what you shall speak, for it shall be given to you at that time what to speak. For it is not you that speaks, but the Spirit of your Father that speaks in you" (Mt. 10:17-20).

4:9 *If we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed*- See on 4:5 *Their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together*. The same word for “good deed” is only in 1 Tim. 6:2; all believers are benefitted by the good deed done for us in Christ. Our good deeds are a response to the ultimate good done to us.

4:10- see on Acts 10:35,36.

Be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel- This could mean far more than 'be informed'. It could be an appeal for the Sanhedrin to 'know' Christ. The ambition in preaching shown here is inspirational. Peter's hope was that the Sanhedrin who had recently condemned the Lord to death, and indeed all Israel, would know Christ. We see the same spirit in the Lord's desire to make a witness to the priests (Mt. 8:4); and in Paul's attempt at his similar judgment to persuade Agrippa to become a Christian (Acts 26:28). Indeed, this may be one of several examples of where Paul was inspired by Peter to the extent that he even consciously pretended to him, and this even went too far, in that he neglected his own ministry to the Gentiles in order to emulate Peter's to the Jews. Peter took seriously his previously stated belief that when Israel accepted Jesus as Christ, He would return, the Kingdom times of refreshing

would come with the sending of the Lord Jesus. And so he realistically dreamt of converting all Israel. We could all do with this spirit of ambition in witness, rather than lamely informing people of our positions, certain nobody will be interested.

That in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, in him does this man stand here before you healed- He stood before them as if in the witness box.

4:11 *He is the stone that was rejected by you the builders*- Gk. 'set at nought'. The same word used by Luke of how the Lord was 'set at nought' by Herod (Lk. 23:11). But Peter says that the Jewish leaders had done this, just as He says that it was their hands, and not so much those of the Roman soldiers, who crucified the Lord. Repeatedly, the Lord's death was blamed on the Jews. Our arrangement of things is counted as having done it.

Which has become the cornerstone- There could be no evidence of this apart from if a temple was now standing upon that stone. And there was such a temple- comprised of a few thousand believers. The existence of the church, the body of Christ, was the witness to Christ which was before the eyes of the Jews in the first century. We, as the body of Christ, likewise are witnesses to the resurrected body of Christ.

4:12- see on Acts 2:36.

And in no other is there salvation; for- Gk. *the* salvation, the Messianic salvation and Kingdom of the Old Testament. This is another form of the word translated "made whole" in :9. His 'salvation' was representative of the salvation of all men.

Neither is there any other name- According to Acts 4:12, there is no salvation "in any other name"; this is the name "wherein we must be saved" (RV). And the early chapters of Acts stress this theme of being "*in* Christ" (Acts 4:2,7,9,10,12 RV); yet all these things that are possible for those "in Him" require us to be baptized *into Him*. See on 2 Cor. 5:20.

The message they preached had an exclusive nature to it- it was radical preaching: ‘this is the truth, and nothing, nothing else on this earth’. Throughout the Roman empire, there was the concept of *religio*- the gods were thought to bless the empire if the empire worshipped them, and therefore everyone was expected to participate in the state religion. However, in addition, they were quite free to practice their own religions *as well*. But here, Christianity was intolerant. They preached that there was *no other name* apart from Jesus through which we might be saved- a direct and conscious attack upon the ‘religio’ concept. Christ had to be accepted as Lord in baptism, in contradistinction to ‘Caesar is Lord’. A Christian could only serve one of two possible masters. He had to love one and hate the other. The whole idea of “the Kingdom of God” was revolutionary- there was to be no other Kingdom spoken of apart from Caesar’s. But our brethren preached the Gospel of the Kingdom *of God*. And those who openly accepted these principles were inevitably persecuted- expelled from the trade guilds, not worked with, socially shunned, their children discriminated against.

That is given among men under heaven- This is a persistent but unfortunate translation across many English versions. *En anthropos* is the same phrase in Lk. 12:8: "Everyone who shall confess me *before men*". The giving of the Name among or before men was in the form of the confession or witness made by the preachers who preached in His Name. Luke has earlier used the term about how the Gospel speaks of God's good will "before men" (Lk. 2:14); but that good news must be placed "before men" by the preachers in order for it to be realized in practice.

Wherein we must be saved- An appeal for baptism "into" Christ for salvation. 'Our' salvation was therefore prefigured in the making whole or saving [s.w.] of the crippled man (:9 s.w.).

4:13 *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and had perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they realised that they had been with Jesus*- The Jews looked at Peter and John "and they took knowledge of them [i.e. recognized them, as the girl had recognized Peter], that they [both!] had been with Jesus". This is the very language of those who accused Peter of having 'been with Jesus'. John learnt his lesson, and came out more publicly, at Peter's side, inspired by his equally repentant friend. It's an altogether lovely picture, of two men who both failed, one publicly and the other privately, together side by side in their witness, coming out for the Lord. They saw their "boldness", and realised they had been with Jesus; for the very same Greek word is used in description of the Lord's "boldness" in witness (Mk. 8:32; Jn. 7:26; 11:14; 16:25,29; 18:20), and on the cross (Col. 2:15). Peter was an uneducated fisherman. Who was he to appeal to Jerusalem's intelligentsia? He was mocked as speaking *a-grammatos*, without correct grammar and basic education even in his own language (Acts 4:13; AV "unlearned"). The way his two letters are so different in written style can only be because he wrote through a scribe (2 Peter is actually in quite sophisticated Greek). So most likely he couldn't write and could hardly read. So humanly speaking, he was hardly the man for the job of being the front man for the preaching of the new ecclesia. But not only did his Lord think differently, but his own depth of experience of God's grace and appreciation of the height of the Lord's exaltation became a motivating power to witness which could not be held in. We all know that the way God prefers to work in the conversion of men is through the personal witness of other believers. We may use adverts, leaflets, lectures etc. in areas where the Gospel has not yet taken root, with quite some success. But once a community of believers has been established, the Lord seems to stop working through these means and witness instead through the personal testimony of His people. We all know this, and yet for the most part would rather distribute 10,000 tracts than swing one conversation around to the Truth, or deliberately raise issues of the Gospel with an unbelieving family member. If we recognize this almost natural reticence which most of us have, it becomes imperative to find what will motivate us to witness as we ought, *a-grammatos* or not. The fact they spoke *a-grammatos* (Gk.), without proper grammar, the fact they weren't humanly speaking the right men for the job... all this meant nothing to them. The height of the Lord's exaltation and the salvation this enabled just had to be shared with others.

Peter's confidence in preaching to the wise of this world in his *a-grammatos* way is continued in the way his letters stress that the only true knowledge is that of Christ (2 Pet. 1:5,6; 3:18). He was writing in response to the Gnostic heresy that *gnosis*, knowledge, enlivens the eternal spark within man until a man's knowledge becomes his 'immortal soul'. Peter didn't leave this for the more erudite to combat. Like an illiterate peasant farmer unashamedly challenging atheistic evolution, Peter powerfully made his point.

The credibility of a person depended not so much on them but upon their status and place in society- thus the witness of women, slaves, children and poor people was discounted. We see it happening in the way that the preaching of Peter and John was dismissed by the elders because they were of low social status (Acts 4:13). And yet these were the *very* types of people which the Lord Jesus used as His star and key witnesses in the very beginnings of Christianity!

There was something about Peter and his fellow fishermen which made even the most unsympathetic make a mental note ("took knowledge" AV) that they had been with Jesus of Nazareth. This was the fulfilment of Jn. 13:35, which using the same root word, teaches that the (Jewish) world would "know" the twelve as the Lord's men *if they reflected His love*. So there must have been something in the love that somehow shone between those men as they stood there before that court, which in a manner impossible to describe, revealed them as Christ's. This same, difficult-to-describe sense will exude from every one who is the Lord's, in whatever context we are in.

"Been with Jesus" recalls "You also shall bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning" (Jn. 15:27). It was exemplified in Acts 4:13, where it was apparent from the nature of the disciples' preaching that they "had been with Jesus". To be with the Lord, to have experience of Him, meant that one would witness to Him; such is the true experience of Him that it is axiomatic that it issues in witness. All who have truly known the Lord will witness to Him. And if we don't... do we know Him, have we "been with" Him...?

4:14 *And seeing the man that was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it*- The word is only elsewhere used, again by Luke, when recording the Lord's Olivet prophecy about the last days: "I will give you the words and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to withstand or to *contradict*" (Lk. 21:15). The second coming could have been in the first century; but the various preconditions weren't met, and so it was delayed until our last days. But the record here is framed to indicate that in the arraignment of the apostles before the Jews, there was a fulfilment of the Olivet prophecy.

4:15 *But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they took advice with one another, saying*- How did Luke know the contents of this secret conversation? It could have been by a flash of direct Divine inspiration; and yet God always seems to prefer to work through some human mechanism. Perhaps some members of the Sanhedrin did indeed convert to Christ as Peter had hoped; and shared the account of what had happened with Luke who included it in his record, albeit under inspiration.

4:16 *What shall we do to these men?*- It is Luke (and not the other evangelists) who earlier records how the Jewish leadership held such councils and said the same words about the Lord Jesus (Lk. 6:11; 19:48). Again and again, he is making the point- that in our preaching of the Gospel, we find the situations and experiences of our Lord repeating in our lives. We are thereby in Him, and He in and with us.

For indeed a notable miracle has been done through them- True, legitimate Holy Spirit miracles cannot be denied even by the cynical critics of Christianity. The claims to perform them today sadly and pathetically fail this test; for the claimed miracles can easily be denied and are not admitted as "notable" even by those looking at them with open minds. But this legitimate miracle could not be denied even by the critics, and they even admitted so themselves.

It is obvious to all- The Greek *phaneroo* is usually used in the sense of 'manifestation'. Paul uses the same words in saying that through his witness in prison, the Gospel had been made manifest to all (Phil. 1:13). This is one of many examples of where rabbi Paul saw himself as following the steps and leading of illiterate fisherman Peter.

All that dwell in Jerusalem- A specific reference to how 3000 of the 'dwellers in Jerusalem' had been baptized by Peter on Pentecost.

And we cannot deny it- See on *A notable miracle*. Miracles of themselves can be seen and recognized but will not inevitably persuade people to believe.

4:17 *But that it spread no further among the people, let us warn them, that from this time forward*- The Greek means to threaten. It's the same word used of how Saul / Paul threatened the Christians (Acts 9:1); seeing he was in Jerusalem at the time, it would seem likely that he played a part in these threats. Presumably the threats were quite scary. The disciples asked the Lord Jesus to "behold" those threats and to give them boldness to not be swayed by them (Acts 4:29).

They are not to speak to anyone in this name- The Jews later forbad Paul to speak to the Gentiles (1 Thess. 2:16). Yet it was Paul, it seems, who had been involved in forbidding these early disciples from speaking the Gospel. What he had done was done to him; not as punishment, but in order to help him grow spiritually himself, and also in relationship with his brethren. Those he had persecuted, and their families, would also notice that he had in fact suffered so much of what he had done to them, and this would in turn have eased their relationship with Paul and acceptance of him as a brother.

4:18 *And they called them, and ordered them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus*- This was only really of power and relevance if in fact Peter and John were still considered to be synagogue members. Likewise with Paul's beating with rods, which was a synagogue punishment (2 Cor. 11:25). Clearly the early believers remained within the apostate system of Judaism until they were thrown out of it; they were not required by the Lord to stop attendance in an apostate system as a condition of fellowship with Him. Forbidding them to teach sounds very much like forbidding them to stand up in the synagogue and give their opinion on Scripture- a right which was open to all synagogue members, and one which Paul so often used in order to introduce the Gospel to the Jews.

4:19 *But Peter and John answered and said to them: Whether it is right in the sight of God*- Luke has used this phrase earlier when saying that Zacharias and Elisabeth were 'right before God'. We too can focus upon Biblical characters and make them programmatic for our life decisions, wishing to emulate them in the decisions we face. The seven previous New Testament references to the presence / sight of God are all in Luke.

To listen to you rather than to God, you must judge- This is quite rightly the flagship proof text for the Christian refusal to obey Governments in ways which break God's commandments. "To listen" suggests that Peter saw God's word as living and speaking to him in an ongoing sense, just as much as those Jewish leaders were speaking to him. He had made the judgment to listen to God and not men, and he invites them to make a similar judgment.

In saying this, Peter is showing that he had learnt the lesson of the transfiguration, "hear Him". So he told the Jewish authorities that he had to hear God's word rather than theirs.

4:20 *For we cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard*- The basis of the Lord's exaltation was the resurrection. When asked why he preached when it was forbidden, Peter didn't shrug and say 'Well Jesus told me too so I have to'. His response was: "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard". It would have been like saying that, say, sneezing or blinking was a sin. These things are involuntary reactions; and likewise, preaching is the involuntary reaction to a real belief in the Lord's death and resurrection. His preaching was a 'hearkening unto God', not so much to the specific commission to preach but rather to the imperative to witness which the Father had placed in the resurrection of His Son. When arrested for

preaching a second time, Peter says the same. I'd paraphrase the interview in Acts 5:29-31 like this: Q. 'Why do you keep preaching when it's forbidden?'. A. 'Jesus has been raised, and been exalted to be a Prince and Saviour, "for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins". We have to obey the wonderful imperative which God has placed in these things: to preach this wondrous message to those for whom so much has been made possible'. It's not that Peter was the most natural one to stand up and make the witness; he spoke *a-grammatos*, but it was somehow evident from his body language that he had "been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). In rebuking the false teachers, he likens himself to the dumb ass that spoke in rebuke of Balaam- i.e. he felt compelled to make the witness to God's word which he did, although naturally, without the imperatives we have discussed, he would be simply a dumb ass. He told the Sanhedrin that to make true Christians agree not to preach was simply an inappropriate suggestion, because "we *cannot but* speak" out- it was something which went part and parcel with the experience of the risen Lord Jesus. Peter was not just an illiterate fisherman; so many of his words and phrasing indicate a thorough familiarity with the Greek Old Testament. Here, he seems to have Num. 24:13 at the back of his mind; Balaam says that although Balak is forbidding him to speak, he cannot but speak what God has inspired him with, even if it is intensely unpopular with those around him. Of course, the Christian preacher is not inspired as Balaam was, but the principle is the same: it is impossible to keep quiet, because of the very nature of what we believe and who we are. John had the spirit of Peter when he wrote (in one of his many allusions to Peter's words) that what they had heard and seen, that they declared / witnessed (1 Jn. 1:1,3), as if hearing and seeing / experiencing Christ inevitably lead to witness. Peter also seems to allude to Am. 3:8: "The Lord Yahweh has spoken- who can but speak it forth?". The speaking of Yahweh was in the death and resurrection of His Son, and our hearing of these words puts us all in the same position as the Old Testament prophets. This is something which once heard simply has to be spoken forth. If we have really grasped the Gospel, there is no way we can hide it. We are immediately made a city set on a hill which cannot be hid.

"We saw and heard" is a phrase which occurs often in the Gospels. It was not simply a case of repeating words heard. Those words were backed up by experience, what they had seen and known in the Lord Jesus. He was the word of hearing made flesh, made actual and visible. So often, the content of preaching tends to be unbalanced- more on experience ['seeing'] than the word heard, or vice versa.

4:21 *And they, when they had threatened them further, let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people*- The same words used of how no cause of death was found in the Lord at His trial (Acts 13:28). Again, the experiences of the apostles, like our own, were arranged to enable them to enter into the experiences of the Lord. The phrase is only again used about how no cause of death was found in Paul (Acts 23:29). This is one of many examples of where the ministries of Peter and Paul are framed as being so similar. They were to take encouragement from each other, thereby realizing that the same Heavenly Lord was working through both of them in their parallel ministries to Jews and Gentiles. Paul perceived this in Gal. 2:8: "For he that worked through Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, worked through me also to the Gentiles". Our lives are also structured in parallel with others, both in the Biblical record and contemporary to our times. This provides the basis for fellowship now; and also makes the Biblical record of past believers a living word to us, preparing us for eternal fellowship with them in God's Kingdom.

For all men glorified God for what was done- Luke uses this term of how the shepherds glorified God after seeing the baby Jesus (Lk. 2:20). But "saw and heard"

in the previous verse :20 is also used by Luke of how the shepherds "saw and heard". Again Luke is demonstrating that the incidents of the Gospel records repeat in essence in the experiences of those who follow the Lord in later years.

4:22 *For the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing was done*- A strange way to put it, if simply referring to 'the healing'. The healing was a *semeion*, a sign, of healing. The man was representative of all Israel; hence the mention of his age. For effectively, Israel were 40 years in the wilderness, unable to enter the promised land without Joshua-Jesus. Just as the man was left lame at the entrance to the temple for the same period.

4:23 *And being let go, they came to their friends, and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them*- The ecclesia was a growing family; the apostles returned ‘to their own’ when they came out of court (Acts 4:23 Gk.). Each baptism was and is a birth into *our* family. Visiting brethren were *gladly* received, as one would receive a relative; it was the logical thing to seek out the believers in a town and stay with them (21:7,17; 27:3; 28:14; 3 Jn. 5).

4:24 *And they, when they heard it, lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said*- All the believers, hearing what the disciples had been told by the priests and elders, immediately each made the connection with Psalm 2, and all came out with it at once. This is an example of the spontaneous fellowship of the Spirit, based around both God's word and also common experience. Such fellowship experience is not based on documents or agreements.

O Lord, you that made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that are in them- Quoting from Ps. 146:6. The Psalm goes on to exult that "Yahweh frees the prisoners" (Ps. 146:7), which is what had just happened in that the apostles had been set free (:21 'Let... go"). Paul uses the same reference to Yahweh as creator of heaven, earth and sea and all that is in them (Acts 14:15)- another example of Peter's influence upon Paul. I have suggested elsewhere that Paul imitated Peter partly from respect, partly from perceiving that his ministry was parallel to Peter's; and partly from a desire to pretend to Peter's ministry to the Jews.

The prayer of Acts 4:24-31 speaks of the God who made heaven and earth and the sea and everything in it- a classic Jewish liturgy used in the temple prayers. The point being, such prayers didn’t have to be made in the temple through the Jewish priests. Further, there is extra-Biblical evidence (from Tertullian, Origen and Cyprian) that the third, sixth and ninth hours were the times for prayer amongst the early Christians- but these were the very hours of prayer in the temple! One major obstacle for Jewish minds would have been their perception that prayer and worship were to be carried out in the Jerusalem temple. This would have been a particular barrier for the many Jews in Jerusalem who converted to Christ. Whilst initially it appears the believers did attend the temple services, it is also significant that Acts repeatedly brings out the parallels between prayers and worship performed in the *temple*, and those performed in the ordinary homes of believers. Some passages about worship in the temple appear to be in parallel with others about such worship in homes. Luke seems to emphasize how important was the home as a place for prayer. Cornelius is presented as praying at home at the ninth hour, which was the hour of temple prayer (Acts 10:3,30). This would have been so hard to accept to the Jewish mind- that your own humble home [hence Luke stresses meetings and prayers *in homes* so much] was the house of God. It had been so drummed into the Jewish mind that the temple was “the house of prayer” (Is. 56:7; 60:7 LXX)- but now they were faced with the wonderful reality that their own home was that house of prayer. Only those brave

enough to really reach out for a personal relationship with the God of Heaven would have risen up to this challenging idea. And yet the very height and thrill of the challenge inspired so many to do so.

4:25 *Who by the Holy Spirit*- A classic statement of the Divine inspiration of David's Psalms.

And by the mouth of our father David your servant, did say- Ps. 2:1,2, a prophecy about opposition to Jesus personally, is here appropriated to those who preach Him, because they are in Him.

Why did the Gentiles rage and the peoples imagine vain things?- It is a theme of the Apostolic preaching in early Acts that the Jews are paralleled with the Gentiles in their responsibility for the Lord's death. This was doubtless to counter the thought that the blame could be put upon the Romans. In order to bring about repentance and conversion, the Jews had to allow themselves to be fully convicted of their individual and national guilt. So often we as small people assume that the guilt for wrong behaviour is somehow on a group level. But we as individuals empower the group decisions, and this was never clearer than in the Lord's death. The Lord makes a similar allusion to Psalm 2 when He assures Paul that He will deliver Paul "from the people [of Israel] and the Gentiles" (Acts 26:17). This again is encouraging Paul to understand that his mission to the Gentiles was parallel to Peter's to the Jews, and the same deliverance would be given him, and Psalm 2 would be true for Paul as it had been for Peter here in Acts 4, and as it was ultimately for the Lord Himself. Yet it seems Paul didn't totally take the point, because he veered towards pretending to Peter's ministry to the Jews, rather than taking encouragement from it in his own ministry.

4:26- see on Acts 9:15.

The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ- The disciples understood this to refer to the Lord Jesus (:27) and yet they quote it about their experience before the assembled elders, who were also "gathered together" (:6, s.w.). Thus the early brethren appropriated prophecies of Jesus personally to themselves as they witnessed to Him (also in Acts 13:5,40). The same Greek words are also used in Luke and Acts about the work of Jesus and those of the apostles later; and also, the same original words are used concerning the deeds of the apostles in the ministry of Jesus, and their deeds in Acts. Thus an impression is given that the ecclesia's witness after the resurrection was and is a continuation of the witness of the 12 men who walked around Galilee with Jesus. He didn't come to start a formalised religion; as groups of believers grew, the Holy Spirit guided them to have systems of leadership and organization, but the essence is that we too are personally following the Lamb of God as He walked around Galilee, hearing His words, seeing His ways, and following afar off to Golgotha carrying His cross.

In arguing that both Jew and Gentile were gathered together against the Lord (God) and His Christ on the cross, Peter thus makes a connection between the Father and Son on the cross. Those who reproached Jesus there reproached the Father (Ps. 69:9).

The cross of Christ is the gathering point for His people (see on Jn. 12:32; 17:21). But it is also associated with the gathering together of all God's enemies (Acts 4:26). Even Herod and Pilate were made friends at that time (Luke 23:12). The cross divides men into two united camps; they are gathered together by it, either in the Lord's cause, or against Him. The crucifixion was the judgment seat for this world (Jn. 12:31). Likewise the day of judgment will be a gathering together, either against the Lord

(Rev. 16:16; 19:19), unto condemnation (Jn. 15:6); or into the barn of His salvation (Mt. 13:30). And likewise, in anticipation of the judgment, the breaking of bread is a "gathering together" either to condemnation or salvation (1 Cor. 11).

4:27 *For truly in this city*- Mentioned because Psalm 2 suggests that the gathering together against the Lord would occur in Jerusalem.

There were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles- Herod claimed to be Jewish, so perhaps Peter sees in this the fulfilment of Jew and Gentile gathering together to destroy the Lord. We recall that Pilate was unwilling to crucify Him; but all the same, he did it, and Peter very much considers that to be Pilate's guilt. So arguing that we sinned but against our will, making excuses kilometres long, doesn't finally justify us.

And the people of Israel- Peter's appeals were for individuals to repent. But he emphasizes the collective guilt of all Israel. He was seeking to convict individuals of the serious sin of empowering a collective decision, helping them to see that a member of the crowd still shares the guilt of the collective crowd. And on this basis, individuals were indeed convicted of their sin and baptized into the One they had effectively crucified.

4:28 *To do whatever Your hand and Your counsel foreordained to happen*- The fact the Lord's death had been in some sense predetermined by God and was according to His will did not in any sense mitigate against personal guilt; see on :27 *The people of Israel*.

4:29 *And now Lord, look upon their threats, and*- They were surely inspired by the praying of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 19:16 using the same words. And these examples ought to specifically fire our prayer life, too. We can discern how their thinking developed; in :25 they perceived the relevance of Psalm 2 to the Lord's trials and to their own. But they then recalled the historical application of Psalm 2 to Hezekiah surrounded by the raging Assyrians within Jerusalem. Meditating upon him, they remembered his prayer- and that too became an inspiration and pattern for their prayer. This is how familiarity with the Bible text works in practice; this is what the mind of the Spirit is about.

Grant- They believed that psychological attitudes such as boldness could be given. It was and is a gift of the spirit / mind.

To your servants- They spoke of themselves as God’s servants in the same breath as they speak of Jesus as being His Servant (Acts 4:29,30). They realized that all that was true of the Servant was true of them too.

To speak Your word with all boldness- This prayer for a spirit / attitude of mind, involving faith, disregard of consequences and confidence, was given- for in :31 we read that "when they had prayed, the place was shaken wherein they were gathered together, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit; and they spoke the word of God with boldness". That holy spirit which was given them was surely more a spirit / attitude of mind. And such psychological strengthening of the human spirit is available and experienced today. The shaking of the place, presumably by an earthquake, was to reflect the movement or out surge of power / spirit which was going on. It was a reflection in visible terms of the internal empowering going on within their minds, in response to their sincere prayer.

4:30- see on Acts 3:7.

While You stretch out Your hand to heal- As the apostles preached (:29), in parallel the Lord would stretch out His hand in doing miracles. The miraculous gifts

were to support the preaching of the word by the apostles- a specific thing at a specific time. The stretched out hand of God was a Hebraism speaking of God's covenant with men. The same phrase occurs in the LXX of Num. 14:30 and Neh. 9:15 "the land for which I stretched out My hand to establish you upon it" (see too Ps. 55:20). As the apostles presented God's outstretched hand through teaching the Gospel, so He Himself would stretch out His hand in appealing to Israel through doing miracles. Yet the majority of the 150 or so times in the LXX we read this phrase about God's hand stretched out, it is His hand stretched out to judge sin. Hence the significance of asking God to stretch out His hand *to heal*, when Israel deserved His hand stretched out yet again in judgment. The miracles were therefore to be seen as a special sign of God's grace to Israel at this time.

The stretching out of the Lord's hand to save is clearly allusive to what He had done to Peter as he sunk into the waves on Galilee that night. But now, Peter is framed as Jesus, in that he too stretched out his hand to save others as Jesus had done to him (Mt. 14:35 = Acts 5:15,16; Mt. 14:31 = Acts 3:7), bidding them come through the water of baptism as Jesus had done to him. As Jesus was worshipped after saving Peter, so men tried to worship Peter (Mt. 14:33 = Acts 3:11). So Peter went through what we all do- having been saved by Jesus, having come to Him and having been rescued by the outstretched arm, he responds to this by doing the same for others.

Peter felt that all the work he did by his own hand was effectively the Lord "stretching forth His hand to heal" (Acts 4:30). He realized that *his* hand was now the hand of Jesus, the same hand which had stretched forth [s.w. Acts 4:30] to save *him* on the lake that night. Our experience of salvation simply has to be re-enacted by us towards others. There is great emphasis in the Gospels upon the hands of Jesus- so often stretched out to heal, save and bless; the hands out of which no sheep can be taken, the hands into which all power has been given by the Father, the hands which were nailed through by men in their ignorance and rejection of God's salvation. And those hands are our hands. Think through this again- the Lord "stretched forth his hand" to save Peter (Mt. 14:31); and this is the very phrase used by Peter in Acts 4:30, speaking of how the Lord's hand is "stretched forth to heal". Peter saw himself on the lake as typical of all whom the Lord saves. Yet, it was *Peter*, not the Lord Himself, who stretched forth his hand to do the Lord's healing work on the lame man (Acts 3:7). Again, Peter is thinking back to the incident on the lake and perceiving that he is now Christ manifest as he had intended to be then. Thus it was the principle of God manifestation which inspired Peter to reach out of his comfort zone so dramatically; and properly appreciated, it can motivate us likewise.

That signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy servant Jesus- This is strictly speaking a just about legitimate translation of *pais*, but the word basically means 'a boy'. "Servant" would really be the translation of *doulos*, and this is the word used about the Lord in the 'servant' passage about Him in Phil. 2:7. The AV is not far off with "holy child". Their image of Jesus had something in it which reflected that child-likeness about Him which still stuck in their memories. Jn. 5:19 gives a window into the Lord's self-perception here. He says that whatever He sees the Father / abba / daddy do, He does "in like manner". It is the language of a young child mimicking their father. And He speaks of Himself as an adult behaving just like this. There was a child-likeness about Him in this sense. And the disciples seem to have noticed this and perhaps reflect it in this otherwise rather strange title for the Lord.

4:31 *And when they had prayed, the place was shaken wherein they were gathered together*- Presumably by an earthquake. But they were unharmed. The same

scenario is found when Paul was in trouble with the authorities in Philippi. In response to his midnight prayers, the place was shaken by an earthquake (Acts 16:26 s.w.). Paul was hereby confirmed in seeking to emulate Peter's ministry; for now something beyond his conscious imitation occurred, i.e. an earthquake after prayer, which reinforced his understanding of his ministry as being based upon Peter's. His willing taking humble Peter for his example was an essay in humility. See on 4:29 *To speak Your word with all boldness*.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit- The situation is intended to recall that in Acts 2. Here, they are gathered together in one place, presumably that same upper room. They prayed, and were filled with Holy Spirit. I suggested on 4:29 that this was more in the form of internal strengthening. But I think it was also in chapter 2, but there was visible manifestation for emphasis. In this case, the more physical manifestation of the Spirit was in the earthquake. We also observe that being filled with the Holy Spirit was an experience which had to be repeated; they had been filled with it in chapter 2, and were now filled with it again. It gave specific strength at specific times.

And they spoke the word of God with boldness- See on 4:29 *To speak Your word with all boldness*. When Paul is recorded as speaking the word with boldness (Acts 13:46) and praying that he would speak the world boldly as he ought to (Eph. 6:20), surely he was allowing himself to be inspired by Peter's example and consciously seeking to follow it. This huge respect for Peter by Paul is a powerful essay in humility. For they were from very differing social, cultural and educational backgrounds; in secular terms, Paul the Roman citizen was born far higher than Peter the Galilean fisherman.

4:32- see on Acts 2:44.

And the full number of those who believed were of one heart- Sitting there in Babylonian captivity, God offered His people a new covenant (Ez. 11:19,20,25 cp. Heb. 10:16); they could have one mind or heart between each other, and a heart of flesh. But Israel would not, and it was only accepted by those who turned to Jesus Christ in accepting the new covenant in Him. Their being of “one heart” after baptism was a direct result of their acceptance of this same new covenant which Judah had rejected. In the hearing of offer of the new covenant, we are essentially in the position of those of the captivity, hearing Ezekiel’s words, and deciding whether or not to remain in cushy Babylon, or make a painful and humanly uncertain aliyah to Zion.

And soul- The phrase only occurs again in Phil. 1:27, where Paul writes that having "one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel" is an outcome of a way of life appropriate to "the gospel of Christ". Such unity, encompassing now around 5000 people, was a psychological phenomenon. It was only possible on account of joint belief in the Gospel. It is a lack of focus upon that basic Gospel and working together for it which allows all manner of issues to creep in which then cause disunity.

And not one of them said that anything of the things which he possessed was his own- As a result of this, many sold what superfluous things they had. But those who didn't, we later learn, had their possessions and lands stolen during the persecution of the Hebrew believers that soon followed (Acts 11:19 cp. Heb. 10:32-34). God took back what He had lent them, even before their death. Their realization that they owned nothing was not just a temporary height of enthusiasm; they appreciated a principle which was true before, then and now. That principle applies today just as much as it did then.

In the early church, “not one of them *said* that any of the things which he possessed

was his own". I wonder- and maybe I'm clutching at straws and justifying us all- if the emphasis is upon the word "said". Their *attitude* was that they didn't personally possess anything. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, we are to buy and sell and deal in this world, as if we didn't really buy anything or gain a thing, as if it's all somehow performed by us as in a disconnected dream. See on Lk. 14:33. This attitude that nothing is personally ours is a great freedom- from worry about what we have, about security, changes of values, and from coveting what we might be able to own.

4:33 *And with great power gave the apostles their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all*- This is paralleled with "great [s.w.] grace" being with them. *Charis*, "grace", means a gift, and is often used about the gifts of the Spirit. We may simply be learning that there were great gifts of Holy Spirit power to perform major miracles. But the parallel between "great power" and "great grace" may mean that the disciples appreciated very deeply God's grace given to them, and this gave a convicting power to their witness to it. John the Baptist had the grace of God "upon" him (Lk. 2:40 s.w.) but "John did no miracle". So this passage doesn't have to refer to miraculous support of their testimony. Our experience of grace will likewise give great power to our witness. This is why the most powerful preachers are often those who perceive the most deeply their experience of grace.

The early brethren had seen and known Jesus, despised, hated, dropping from exhaustion in the boat, slumping dehydrated at a well, covered in blood and spittle, mocked in naked shame. And now they knew that He had risen, that He had been exalted to God's right hand so as to make the salvation of men possible, and surely going to return. They spoke this out, because they knew Him. And yet through the Gospels and with the eye of faith, we know Him too. And this must be the basis for our witness.

4:34 *For neither were there among them any that lacked; for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold*- We note that this was not in response to any particular appeal for funds. The need was the call, and the experience of God's gift quite naturally elicited this response. The referent is to the great multitude of 5000 believers (:32); not just to the apostles, for the sellers put the money at the feet of the apostles. Whether 5000 people really did sell all their property in a relatively short period of time... is somewhat doubtful. Surely we are being presented with an idealized picture of the early church, just as inspiration at times presents a positive take on things, e.g. the early Kingdom of Solomon as recorded in 1 Kings.

"Sold them" is the same word translated "things which he possessed" in :32 is to be found in Lk. 12:33 "Sell that which you have and give alms". This verse was surely hammering in their conscience as they sold their goods. The implication is that they realized the capital quickly. But in the East, especially in the first century, no commercial transaction was done quickly. They would have sold for low prices; reflecting their radical devaluing of possessions. There was no specific command given to them to sell their goods, or at least, the Acts record doesn't record it. Rather was their motivation 'just' one word from the Lord Jesus in Luke's Gospel. This should be the power to us of 'just' one recorded word from the Lord, now staring at us from a page of thin paper or a screen, the radical demands of 'only' one verse...

"Brought the proceeds" is Gk. 'carried the value'. As they apparently sold things quickly, payment was likely not only in coinage but in material goods, which they brought to the apostles.

4:35 *And laid them at the apostles' feet*- The same words in Greek used about how God would *make* (s.w. "laid down") His Son's enemies a stool for His feet. Peter has just been preaching this in Acts 2:35, and I commented there that being at the footstool meant worship and repentance. Peter quotes the passage in an appeal for Israel to repent and come to the stool of the Lord's feet. So it could be that following hard on from this idea being preached, the new converts saw the apostles as the manifestation of the Lord, and brought the symbols of their humanity to His feet. Such giving up of materialism is indeed part of repentance and truly coming on our knees to the Lord.

And distribution was made- The apostles had before them a huge and unexpected pile of precious metals, coins, garments and other items of value. And now they had to distribute them. The word occurs in describing how the Lord gave the loaves to the apostles and they distributed them to the crowds (Jn. 6:11). He led them, as He does us, through one experience in His service in order to prepare them for another.

Time and again, it becomes apparent that the Lord especially designed incidents in His men's experience which they would learn from, and later be able to put to use when similar experiences occurred after He had ascended. This was essential to the training of the twelve disciples. Thus He made *them* distribute the food to the multitude (Jn. 6:11); yet now, after His ascension, we meet the same Greek word here in Acts 4:35, describing how they were to distribute welfare to the multitude of the Lord's followers.

To each- Welfare aid is best given directly to the needy person by the donor, rather than through their representatives.

According to anyone's need- Not according to what they were asked to give, but in response to need.

4:36 *And Joseph, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas (we say Son of exhortation)*- An example of the Biblical record going along with the incorrect perceptions of faithful men is to be found in the way the apostles nicknamed Joseph as 'Barnabas' "under the impression, apparently, that it meant 'son of consolation'. On etymological grounds that has proved hard to justify, and the name is now generally recognized to… mean 'son of Nabu'". Yet the record 'goes along' with their misunderstanding. In addition to this, there is a huge imputation of righteousness to human beings, reflected right through Scripture. God sought them, the essence of their hearts, and was prepared to overlook much ignorance and misunderstanding along the way. Consider how good king Josiah is described as always doing what was right before God, not turning aside to the right nor left- even though it was not until the 18th year of his reign that he even discovered parts of God's law, which he had been ignorant of until then, because the scroll containing them had been temporarily lost (2 Kings 22:2,11).

A Levite, a man of Cyprus by race- Levites weren't supposed to own property; so they owned land outside the territory of Israel. He realized that this was just getting around God's intention. But how quickly he managed to sell it is remarkable. Perhaps he sold the title deeds for a knockdown price to someone in Jerusalem. Note that although Barnabas was Jewish, he is identified as "a man of Cyprus by race". This explains why there were devout Jews, Hebrew speakers, living in Jerusalem- who spoke of how they heard the Gospel in their own languages in which they were born.

4:37 *Having a field, sold it; and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet*- Perhaps he was motivated by how all Judas could buy for his pieces of silver was a field. He too had a field, held illegally before God. And he wanted to get rid of it

quickly. He brought money [cash] for it to the apostles, whereas :34 speaks of others carrying the proceeds of what they sold [as if those proceeds weren't simply cash]. I would conclude from this that he sold the title deeds quickly, for a cheap price, to someone in Jerusalem. Otherwise we are to imagine him sailing to Cyprus, finding a buyer, and then returning- which at the speed business was done in the East, would've taken maybe a year. The field however may not have been in Cyprus.

We note from 1 Cor. 9:6 that Barnabas had "to work for a living". Perhaps if he had kept that land, or the proceeds from it, this wouldn't have been necessary. He was wealthy if he owned land on Cyprus. Barnabas was not one of the disciples nor even a candidate to replace Judas. Surely he was one of the religious Jews, from Cyprus, who had come to live in Jerusalem and had been converted by the sermon of Acts 2. He had retired early to his dream location, Jerusalem, living off his income from his field in Cyprus [probably rented out for a plantation]. And he gave all that up, thanks to the sermon from a working man [Peter] that so convicted him. This is the power of ideas, above all the word of the cross and forgiveness.

A gift to God means that you are now "minus". In his case, it meant he had to work for a living rather than enjoy a passive income from his property holdings overseas. We note that he, a wealthy man from the landed class, placed that money at the feet of the poor and perhaps landless apostles, amongst whom Peter and John could truly say that they had no "silver and gold" to give. It was clearly an act elicited only by direct conviction of God's gift to him. He was "son of encouragement", of the *parakletos*, the Comforter / Holy Spirit; he was the parade example of a man responding to the gift of the Spirit. Whilst many sold property and gave to the church, only Barnabas is mentioned by name as having done so- possibly because in his case, he really gave all he had, his source of wealth and guaranteed income. His total giving is contrasted with the partial giving of Ananias and Sapphira which we go on to read of in Acts 5.

ACTS CHAPTER 5

5:1 *But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession*- As others in the community did (the same words are used in Acts 4:34). Ananias and Sapphira wished to appear like them; for without doubt they would have been praised and commended by all for such selfless giving.

5:2 *And with his wife's knowledge*- The initiator of the act and doer of the deed was Ananias; he alone brought the money to the apostles, for his wife was not with him at that time. But Sapphira was likewise punished because the essence of the sin was pride, and she shared in this.

Kept back part of the proceeds, and brought only a part of it- Gk. 'to keep for oneself'. It is translated "petty thieving" in Tit. 2:10. But who was the theft from? All he had belonged to God. His sin was therefore in assuming that what he had was really his; and anything he gave to God was a gift, and the rest he could legitimately keep as his. But as Peter points out, the money remained 'his' in the sense that God had delegated those funds to him. His sin was therefore not so much in keeping a part for himself, but in giving the impression of greater devotion and sacrifice than was actually the case. This lie, or as the Greek means, 'deception', resulted in his death. It's a sober lesson- not in generosity, but in never giving the impression to our brethren of a greater level of sacrifice than in fact we have made. And we have all likely failed at this point at some time to some extent.

And laid it- This translates *tithemi*, which is the same word translated "conceived" in :4 "you have *conceived* this thing in your heart". I suggest the connection is in the way that Ananias and Sapphira imagined how they would lay down the money at the feet of the apostles, with others watching... the sober nodding in agreement, the kind words of approbation, the tears of gratitude from the poor, the body language of respect from the apostles... all these things were their motivation. They laid up in their heart that moment of laying down the money at the feet of the apostles. Their sin was not theft or fraud- but pride.

5:3 *And Peter said: Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart*- Peter could plead with men, both in and out of the Faith, with a credibility that lay in his ready acceptance of his failures, and his evident acceptance of his Lord's gracious forgiveness and teaching. Consider how he tells Ananias that Satan has filled his heart (Acts 5:3), alluding to what everyone full well knew: that Satan had desired to have him too, and in the denials he had pretty well capitulated (Lk. 22:31,32). Peter's disciplining of Ananias, so soon after his own deference to the pressures of Satan as opposed to those of the Lord, would have been done surely in subdued, saddened and introspective tones.

To lie to the Holy Spirit- Gk. 'to deceive'. See on 5:2 *Kept back.*

And to keep back part of the proceeds of the land?- To make the generosity look credible, the amount they kept was probably not that great. And yet people betray their Lord and throw away their eternal life for very small sums of money.

5:4 *While it remained, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your power?*- When they sold their property, the Holy Spirit's comment in Acts 5:4 was that the money was "their own" and "under their own power" [Gk. *exousia*]. They could have chosen to give all or part of that money to God. It was theirs and not God's, the implication was. This is a startling insight. What wealth we have has been genuinely entrusted to us by the Lord, and in that sense it is indeed 'ours', under our power. Yet we are to realize that of course as those under the sphere of God's rulership / Kingdom, we are under *His* 'exousia'. Absolutely *all* power of *exousia* in any part of Heaven or earth has now been given to the Lord Jesus (Mt. 28:18; Jn. 17:2; Col. 2:10). And yet He has given "authority" or *exousia* to us His servants, and will judge us on His return as to how we have used this (Mk. 13:34; Jn. 1:12). We need to make this connection- that although He has delegated to us wealth, and placed it under our power or *exousia*, if we are truly part of His Kingdom, we are to give back the *exousia* or power / authority over our wealth to Him.

How is it you have conceived this thing in your heart- Acts 5:3 provides an example of the connection between the Devil and our sins. Peter says to Ananias: "Why has Satan filled your heart?". Then in verse 4 Peter says "Why have you *conceived this thing in your heart?*". Conceiving something bad within our heart is the same as Satan filling our heart. If we ourselves conceive something, e.g. a sinful plan, then it begins *inside us*. Note that when Peter speaks of how Ananias has "conceived this thing in your heart" he's alluding to the LXX of Esther 7:5, where the wicked Haman is described as one "whose heart hath filled him" to abuse God's people (see RV). Note in passing that the LXX of Esther 7:4 speaks of Haman as *ho diabolos* [with the definite article] – a mere man is called "the Satan". It's been suggested that 'Satan filling the heart' was a common phrase used in the first century to excuse human sin; and Peter is deconstructing it by using the phrase and then defining more precisely what it refers to – conceiving sin in our heart, our own heart filling itself with sin. But about "conceived", see on 5:2 *Laid it.*

You have not lied to men, but to God- He had, of course, lied to men. We must read in an ellipsis here: 'You have not [so much] lied to men, but [also] to God'.

5:5 *And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down*- Both Ananias and Sapphira fell down at the apostles' feet (:10)- exactly the place where they had laid their money. Truly, they perished along with their money. Perhaps Peter reflected on this to the point that he told Simon Magus that his money would perish with him (Acts 8:20). What God wanted was them- not their appearance of giving money. With reflection I am personally convinced that Peter's words to Simon were indeed a result of reflection upon how Ananias and Sapphira had fallen down at his feet, upon their money [or at least, Ananias did].

And breathed his last; and great fear came upon all that heard it- This apparently spread in the three hours after Ananias died. So we can assume it refers to the Christian community. "Great fear" is a phrase elsewhere used several times in the New Testament for fear of condemnation. If my analysis of the reasons for Ananias' judgment is correct, then this is understandable- because we have all at some times and in some ways sought the approbation of our brethren, and given an appearance of spirituality and self-sacrifice which is beyond where we really stand. Ananias died for this. No wonder an appropriate fear spread amongst the believers, as it does in our hearts too when we think of the holiness of God and totality of His demands upon men. This of course lays the groundwork for a marvelling, grateful acceptance of God's patient grace towards us.

5:6 *And the young men arose and wrapped him up*- Perhaps a technical term referring to a group of young men who did the practical things in the church. Paul refers to a similar group when he writes of "the messengers of the churches" (2 Cor. 8:23).

And they carried him out and buried him- A fairly rare word is used for "carried", occurring only 7 times in the New Testament, three of them here in this incident (:6,9,10). It cannot surely be insignificant that the word is used again in such close proximity to this incident, in describing the result of it- the sick were "carried out" and placed at Peter's feet (:15 s.w.), so close to him that the shadow cast by his body fell on them. Being carried to the feet of Peter might seem a risky undertaking, given what he had done. But here we behold both the goodness and severity of God. The harder side of God attracts; when His judgments are in the earth, then and thereby shall men come to Him. The judgment of Ananias and Sapphira at the hands of Peter did not drive people away; rather did it bring people closer to Peter and the Lord he represented. This is why "judgment to come" is part of the Gospel message; a vaguely defined message of a fuzzy love and candy for the kids will not of itself be attractive to people. There is another side to life, to God and to His Son; and every human being subconsciously knows that. And directly engaging with it, and finding that through all that, God is love... is what makes the Gospel so compelling, and what reached to the very soul of even Felix and almost persuaded Agrippa to be a Christian (Acts 24:25; 26:28).

5:7 *And it was about the space of three hours after when his wife, not knowing what had happened, came in*- But in the three hours after her husband died, the news spread around (:5). We wonder therefore where exactly Sapphira had been. As she approached Peter, nobody apparently told her 'By the way, your husband just got slain by Peter because he lied about the money'. Indeed, it would appear from :6 that Ananias was buried immediately, for Peter tells her "Behold, the feet of those that have buried your husband are at the door; and they shall carry you out" (:9). Perhaps

she went to Peter privately. But it's a good question for eager, imaginative Bible students: 'Where was Sapphira in the three hours after Ananias died?'.

5:8 *And Peter said to her*- Gk. 'Peter answered and said to her'. What he said to her was therefore a response. But there is no record of what she said. Perhaps she said nothing; but came in to the apostles giving the impression she had generously given to the Lord, seeking their approbation.

Tell me whether- We can only speculate as to the tone in Peter's voice. Was it the even tone of the prosecutor asking a question which he knew would decide the fate of the accused? Or was there in his tone some hint of pleading for her repentance, as if to say 'Did you *really* sell the land for that much?'. The question itself should have made Sapphira guess that something was up, and that they had been busted. In that split second, she had the choice between life and death; and it was her pride which made her choose death by lying.

You sold the land- You plural. Although Ananias sold it, it was counted as if she had too.

For so much. And she said: Yes, for so much- Pointing to the coins at his feet.

5:9 *But Peter said to her: How is it you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?*- I have suggested that pride was the key motive for the sin. But Peter's comment suggests another factor. Perhaps they doubted whether Peter truly had the Spirit, and so they had decided to test this. However, it could be that here we have a case of sin being described in terms of what it really is, even though how the sin is now described would be denied by the sinner. He wanted to show her what their pride and lying really amounted to- a putting of God's Spirit to the test. The language of testing God is replete with reference to Israel's failure in this. They tested God in the wilderness (Dt. 6:16; Ps. 78:18,41,56; 106:14); and this led to their exclusion from the promised land. In essence, Ananias and Sapphira had repeated Israel's sin. Despite all the evidence both to them and to Israel in the wilderness, that God's Spirit was indeed possessed by the leaders of His people- still they wanted to test whether it really was. But of course it all depends on motive- Gideon tested the Spirit, twice; Paul went against Spirit guidance in continuing his journey to Jerusalem. The same words are also used about how he tested going into Mysia, but the Spirit didn't allow him to (Acts 16:7). But what they did appears to have been a conscious, sceptical testing of whether the Lord was really amongst them or not.

Behold, the feet of those that have buried your husband are at the door; and they shall carry you out- This suggests that Peter suspected she would be impenitent. The young brothers were waiting in expectation of dealing with her corpse; or perhaps "the feet" suggests Peter had heard their footsteps returning from having buried Ananias. We also sense that she was alone with Peter, without the presence of others- as if to try to make the temptation to pride and maintenance of face and image somewhat less. She could have quietly confessed to Peter; but her pride was strong, unto death. We note how in the early church, there was the power of the Spirit to smite with sickness, and also to heal from it; and here we see there was even the power to slay with death.

5:10 *And she fell down immediately at his feet and breathed her last; and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her next to her husband*- "At his feet", where the money had been placed. See on 5:5 *Fell down*.

5:11 *And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all that heard these things*- See on 5:5. The phrase "great fear" is nearly always used in a negative context by Luke, and usually with a commandment not to fear following it. Luke records how

the message of the Lord Jesus was to empower God's people to serve Him "without fear" (Lk. 1:74); and John writes that such fear should be "cast out" in the experience of those who have the Spirit (1 Jn. 4:18). We conclude therefore that this is a hint at weakness in the church.

5:12 *And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders done among the people*- It could be that they literally used their hands to do miracles, in obedience to the comment on the great commission, that they would lay their hands on the sick (Mk. 16:18). But the phrase can equally mean 'by the instrumentality of...', as if to emphasize it was the Lord using them, rather than them doing anything of their own power.

And they were all gathering together in Solomon's porch- The point of mentioning this might be because the miracles were done there, at their public meetings. This public nature of these dramatic healing miracles is a far cry from the claims of healed headaches in backstreet church halls made by Pentecostalism. But why the specific mention of "Solomon's porch"? Perhaps because it was Stephen who would later point out that it was Solomon who built the temple, although that was not God's ideal intention; His desire was to dwell in the hearts of His people, not in buildings made with human hands. Solomon's porch was supposed to be the only original part of Solomon's temple which had survived. The porch was not large enough for the whole church, so the "they" who gathered there presumably refers to the apostles. However, Solomon's porch was open to Gentiles and the unclean too- and that was most likely the reason why they gathered there. The Lord was slowly working on Peter's conscience regarding including the Gentiles and the unclean; for Peter would have noticed how such folks were listening to his preaching there. The Lord likewise prods us through meetings and situations, and then makes His direct appeal to us, as happened with Peter in the matter of Cornelius.

5:13 *None of the rest dared join them, although the people held them in high esteem*- Who is this group of people? They are put in contrast with "the people", who respected the apostles and many of whom now believed (:14). Luke has spoken of such a group in describing how the women told the news of the Lord's resurrection "to the eleven and to all the rest" (Lk. 24:9 s.w.; also in Mk. 16:13 "They went and told it unto the rest, neither did they believe it"). Just recently in Acts, Luke has spoken of "the rest of the apostles" (Acts 2:37). I suggest this may be a technical term for the inner circle of believers who had followed the Lord before His death. Paul speaks of "the rest" as if they were a group which did not include Peter: "The rest of the apostles, the brethren of the Lord and Cephas" (1 Cor. 9:5). It could be that this group were scared by what had happened because they realized that they too had in some senses not been totally honest before the Spirit of God in whatever way; just as any sincere believer will read the account of Ananias and Sapphira and likewise have a sense of fear. This group are painted in distinction from the crowds generally, who respected Peter even more and increasingly believed, as we read in the next verse. This is an essay in the humanity and weakness of the Lord's followers at the time.

Another possibility is raised by considering the meaning of 'join them'. The implication could be that Ananias and Sapphira were part of a group who wished to attain to the inner circle of leading apostles. But with their death, the rest of those like Ananias and Sapphira no longer pretended to joining with the leading apostles.

5:14 *And many more believers*- The harder side of the Father and the Lord Jesus actually serves as an attraction to the serious believer. The lifted up Jesus draws men unto Him. When Ananias and Sapphira were slain by the Lord, fear came upon "as

many as heard these things". Many would have thought His attitude hard; this man and woman had sold their property and given some of it (a fair percentage, probably, to make it look realistic) to the Lord's cause. And then He slew them. But just afterwards, "believers were the more added to the Lord" (Acts 5:12,14). The Lord's harder side didn't turn men away from Him; rather did it bring them to Him. And so the demands and terror of the preaching of the cross did likewise. The balance between His utter grace, the way (e.g.) He marvelled at men's puny faith, and His harder side, is what makes His character so utterly magnetic and charismatic in the ultimate sense. Think of how He beheld the rich man and loved Him, and yet at the same time was purposefully demanding: He told Him to sell all He had and give it to beggars. Not to the work of the ministry, but to beggars, many of whom one would rightly be cynical of helping. It was a large demand, the Lord didn't make it to everyone, and He knew He was touching the man's weakest point. If the Lord had asked that the man's wealth be given to Him, he may have agreed. But to beggars... And yet the Lord made this heavy demand with a deep love for the man.

Were added to the Lord- The RVmg. speaks of them being added “to them”, i.e. the believers who comprised the body of Jesus. Baptism is not only entry into covenant relationship with the Father and His Son; it is also baptism into the body of Christ, i.e. the body of believers (1 Cor. 12:13). This is where self-baptism shouldn't be used too liberally. Thus the record in Acts describes baptisms as believers being "added" to the body of believers (Acts 2:41,47); but also as them being "added" (s.w.) to the Lord Jesus (5:14; 11:24). It is therefore appropriate that there are other members of the body of Christ present at baptisms; baptism is entry into relationship with the community of believers, as well as into a personal relationship with Christ.

Note that the Lord Jesus added converts to the church (Acts 2:47), but here, they are added to the Lord Jesus (NEV, AV). In this we see the direct connection between the Lord Jesus and His church; as Paul expresses it, the church is the body of the Lord Jesus.

Crowds of men and women- Gk. "Both men and women". Religion in the first century was largely the domain of men; the inclusiveness towards women would have made Christianity almost unique amongst contemporary religions.

5:15 *So much so*- This is picking up from the end of :12. Verses 13 and 14 are a parenthesis, and some versions place them in brackets. What had been done by Peter in the temple area, they believed could be done outside it. Again the Lord was developing the thought in their minds that actually there was nothing so special about that temple, not even Solomon's portico, the part of the structure believed to date back to Solomon's time. What was achieved in the temple area could be achieved on the streets...

That they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that, as Peter came by- See on 5:6 *Carried him out*. The scene recalls that of Mt. 14:35: “And when the men of that place recognised him, they sent word to all in that region and brought to him all who were sick”. In the same way as the Lord stretched forth His hand and saved Peter, so He stretches forth His hand, Peter observed, to save all who would come to Him (Mt. 14:31 = Acts 4:30). But Peter is framed as Jesus, in that he too stretched out his hand to save others as Jesus had done to him (Mt. 14:35 = Acts 5:15,16; Mt. 14:31 = Acts 3:7), bidding them come through the water of baptism as Jesus had done to him.

At the least his shadow- Perhaps in reference to how the mustard seed of the Gospel would become a tree under whose shadow unclean birds would come (Mk.

4:32 s.w.). The sick people were likely all ritually unclean, as were those who carried them. But it was exactly these types who were cured.

Might fall on some of them- Gk. 'overshadow'. As Peter had been overshadowed [s.w.] by the Lord's glory, so now he was called to reflect that same glory (Lk. 9:34). What we benefit from at the Lord's hands often becomes ours to share to others.

5:16 *And there also gathered crowds from the cities round about Jerusalem*- This is a phrase taken from the Old Testament, describing how these towns were the centres of idol worship (2 Kings 23:5) and therefore the specific target for Divine judgment (Jer. 1:5). Now, grace was being poured out upon them.

Bringing sick people and those that were vexed with unclean- This is word for word a sentence Luke used earlier about the Lord's healing ministry (Lk. 6:18). The point is being developed that the work of the believers in Christ is a continuation of His ministry as He walked around Palestine; and in essence, even if the form differs, that is what we are doing today. This is why the daily reading and reflection upon the Gospel records provides a key to attaching meaning to event and circumstance in our daily lives; for we are intended to be Him in this world.

And every one of them was healed- The scale of healing here is perhaps the greatest of any time in history. There seems nothing analogous in the Lord's ministry; He appears to have worked with 'an economy of miracle'. This healing outbreak was the fulfilment of the promise that when possessed of the Comforter, "greater works than these shall you do" (Jn. 14:12). "Greater" could mean more in number- and that was certainly the case here. "Every one" was healed- there were no failed healings, in marked contrast to the claims of Pentecostalism. This suggests that the healings were not dependent upon the faith of the individual, but were a pure outpouring of grace.

5:17 *But the high priest rose up*- Again, precisely the words used of how "the high priest rose up" and condemned the Lord to death (Mt. 26:62). The apostles did the miracles they did of their own freewill. They chose to identify with their Lord and continue His work. And now the same Lord responds by bringing about circumstances beyond their control which confirmed their identity with His death and sufferings. The same happens with us; we make freewill choices to identify with Him, and He on a larger scale arranges circumstance to confirm that identity, to make us know His sufferings and the power of new life in His resurrection.

And all they that were with him- Likewise the same word is used of how the whole multitude of the Sanhedrin 'rose up' and handed over the Lord to Roman punishment (Lk. 23:1). The 'rising up' may reflect a Hebraism meaning 'to rise up in giving sentence'. We note how the same word is used of how Gamaliel 'stood up' to give his opinion (:34).

Which is the sect of the Sadducees- We read that Gamaliel, a Pharisee, also "stood up" (s.w.) and urged a more lenient approach with the preachers (:34). Perhaps this was partly a reflection of the way the two groups loved to take opposing positions to each other.

And they were filled with jealousy- Jealousy of the receptive audience of others was what caused the Jews to so hate the Christian preachers. The same words are used of how the Jews were filled with jealousy when they saw the crowds responding to Paul (Acts 13:45), and this would seem to me to be an example of the Lord confirming Paul in seeing the similarities between his ministry and that of Peter. It was jealousy which led to the Lord's crucifixion (Mt. 27:18); and jealousy of others' success in preaching has likewise led many in the body of Christ to similar abuse of their own brethren.

5:18 *And arrested*- Literally, 'laid hands on'. See on 4:3 *They arrested them*.

The apostles and put them in prison- Gk. the public or "common" (AV) prison. That point is mentioned perhaps to draw out the similarities with the Lord's sufferings, in that the Jews handed Him over to the Roman authorities for punishment; and the Jews here did likewise, handing over the apostles to the Roman public prison.

5:19 *But an angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said*- Exactly the same happened to Peter again in Acts 12. This experience in Acts 5, like many of ours, was to prepare Peter for a future, greater experience when he was released from prison in Acts 12. Peter thought he was dreaming, and only realized he was in reality when he "came to himself" (Acts 12:9,11). Perhaps he had been dreaming, or exploring in his subconscious, this previous release from prison. Again we see the verisimilitude of the Biblical record; it is all so psychologically credible. And again, Peter's experiences were repeated in Paul's life when the prison doors were shaken open by the earthquake at Philippi. This triple opening of prison doors recorded in Acts is of course allusive to the passage in Is. 61:1 which speaks of the Lord Jesus through the Gospel opening the prison doors to a humanity bound by sin. Those early preachers like Peter and Paul were being made to personally realize the radical, liberating power of the Gospel they were preaching.

5:20 *You go and stand and speak in the temple to the people*- A reiteration of the great preaching commission.

All the words of this life- It was Peter who had earlier used this phrase in confessing that the Lord Jesus had the words of eternal life (Jn. 6:68). Now Peter is being told to go and speak them forth, at whatever risk to himself, if he really believes what he has said about the words of life. This connection with Peter's statement in Jn. 6:68 would explain the otherwise odd phrase "*this* life". It's as if the Lord is reading Peter's mind and saying: 'Yes, you said that My words are the words of eternal life- so go and preach the words of this life'. And of course it was the Sadducees who denied eternal life and resurrection. Another approach is to understand "this life" as referring to this present mortal life; the only other usage of the phrase is in 1 Cor. 15:19 "If in this life only...". In this case, the Angel was asking them to go and tell people the meaning of this life.

5:21 *And when they heard this*- Demonstrating their immediate response to a difficult request.

In the morning they entered into the temple and taught- Because of their role as *teachers*, it is understandable that the anger of the first century priesthood was always associated with Christ and the apostles *teaching* the people (Acts 4:2), in the belief that they were a new priesthood: Mt. 21:33; Lk. 19:47; 20:1; Acts 5:21. The existing priests felt that their role was being challenged. The main priestly duty was to teach God's word to the people. A whole string of texts make this point: Dt. 24:8; 2 Kings 17:27; 2 Chron. 15:3; Neh. 8:9; Mic. 3:11. Note too the common partnership between priests and prophets.

But the High Priest came and they that were with him, and called the council together and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought- He “came” into the place of meeting of the Sanhedrin? Because :25 implies that they did not personally witness the apostles preaching and were not present with them. The senate was “of the children of Israel”, the wayward sons of Jacob, and not the assembly of Yahweh.

5:22 *But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, saying*- The assistants to the Jewish leadership. It was probably the same men who arrested the Lord, bound and abused Him and who had been with Peter in the courtyard of the High Priest's house (Jn. 18:3,12,18,22). They

would have been waiting there for instructions from the High Priest, and they were likewise at his disposal now. They may have been the very men who had heard Peter's fearful denial of his Lord. And now, they were the ones who saw his fearless witness. The source of the change in this man would have exercised their minds, and was surely part of the reason why the Lord told Peter to go back to the temple and continue preaching, knowing that these were the men who would be sent to arrest him or bring him out from the prison. Whereas we would have wished these men every curse for how they treated the Lord, His way was different. He sought to work in their consciences in order to bring them to recognize Him.

5:23 *We found the prison shut in all safety, and the keepers standing at the doors, but when we had them opened, we found no one within*- If nobody at all was in the 'prison', the 'prison' may therefore refer to a small arrest room. Or perhaps the language is like this to make the whole situation is so similar to the Lord's resurrection. For it was men from the same group of soldiers and officers, who were under the control of the Jewish leadership, who had guarded the Lord's tomb. And His body had all the same disappeared. They were being led to realize that the Lord's followers were like Him; they were as His body. And the Lord works in the lives of our contemporaries to potentially make them perceive the same about us.

5:24 *Now when the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the upshot of all this would be*- Surely the same captain of the temple who had negotiated with Judas about betraying the Lord (Lk. 22:4), and who had come to Gethsemane to arrest Him (Lk. 22:52). And note how it is only Luke of all the Gospel writers who uses this term. Luke is making the connection- the apostles were fellowshipping their Lord's sufferings. Then, they had run away from Him and saved their skins. Now, they were experiencing what He did whilst they had hidden somewhere. And it would seem it was the same man or men involved. Surely the Lord was knocking at the door of conscience. His multi-layered, patient work on the hearts of men is wonderful to discern, and that same Lord is just as active today.

5:25 *And there came someone that told them: Behold, the men whom you put in the prison are in the temple standing and teaching the people*- In exact obedience to the command to go and stand and teach in the temple (:20). It was usual for rabbis to *sit* and teach; the Lord Himself *sat* and taught in the temple (Jn. 8:2 cp. Lk. 5:3). But the Lord asks them to *stand* and teach. Perhaps He wanted them to show that they were not pretending to the rabbis; and that their teaching was radically different, with no pretension to any authority on the part of the teacher.

5:26 *Then went the captain with the officers and brought them, but without violence*- Implying they asked the apostles to come with them, and they did without protest; following the spirit of their Lord, whose final sufferings are constantly alluded to in the record here.

For they feared the people, lest they should be stoned- Luke twice uses this phrase about their experience in trying to liquidate the Lord (Lk. 20:19; 22:2). Popular opinion had swayed back the other way again. And a while later, it was to sway against the Christians again, when “there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem” (Acts 8:1). This is the fickleness of human support.

5:27 *And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying*- Gk. 'stood' them, the same word used of how the apostles stood and taught; and they continued to stand and preach at their trial.

5:28 *We strictly ordered you not to teach*- The same words used of how the Lord strictly ordered Peter, James and John not to speak of the things they saw at the transfiguration until after He had resurrected (Lk. 9:21). Now that He had risen, that

'strict order' was from the Lord to teach... and so the 'strict order' from the High Priest sets him up as a kind of anti-Christ. And there was no way that the Lord's people could do anything else than speak forth their experiences of Him.

In this name- For them, authority was so important. Likewise the Lord had been asked by what authority He taught and cured. And it is likewise difficult for many today to see beyond mere religion and denominationalism, and realize that individuals who have experienced the Lord will therefore teach Him purely on their own private initiative.

And yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and- The reference in the next phrase to guilt for blood makes us think that they were alluding to the two references to how wicked Manasseh "filled Jerusalem with innocent blood" (2 Kings 21:16; 24:4). Condemning the righteous in Biblical terms and through out of context Scriptural allusion is therefore no new thing.

Intend to bring this man's blood upon us- Consider how the disciples responded to the High Priest rebuking them for preaching; he claimed that they intended to bring the blood of Jesus upon them. The obvious, logical debating point would have been to say: 'But *you* were the very ones who shouted out 'His blood be upon us!!' just a few weeks ago!'. But, Peter didn't say this. He didn't even allude to their obvious self-contradiction. Instead he positively went on to point out that a real forgiveness was possible because Jesus was now resurrected. And the point we can take from this is that true witness is not necessarily about pointing out to the other guy his self-contradictions, the logical weakness of his position… it's not about winning a debate, but rather about bringing people to meaningful repentance and transformation.

5:29 *But Peter and the apostles answered and said: We must obey God rather than men*- Something the Jews often said in excusing themselves from obeying various demands of the Roman empire. Peter is trying to reason with them in language they would understand and which had fallen from their own lips in other contexts. The specific obedience to God he had in mind was in preaching the Gospel. He uses the same word a few verses later in saying that the "Holy Spirit... God has given to those that *obey* Him" (:32). What he meant was that the Spirit had been given to those who obey His command to preach. Peter was alluding to the great commission, which promised the disciples the gifts of the Spirit in their preaching work which was their obedience to that commission.

5:30- see on Acts 4:20.

The God of our fathers- A common phrase in the Apostolic preaching (Acts 3:13,25; 7:2,45; 13:17; 26:6). They were not seeking to alienate their audience, but rather to bridge build with them, pointing out what they had in common and seeking to build further from that.

Raised up Jesus- His resurrection is an imperative to preach. When Peter is asked why he continues preaching when it is forbidden, he responds by saying that he is obeying God's command, in that Christ had been raised. There was no specific command from God to witness (although there was from Christ); from the structure of Peter's argument he is surely saying that the fact God raised Christ is *de facto* a command from God to witness to it which must be obeyed. The resurrection of Jesus is itself the command to preach.

Whom you slew, hanging him on a tree- But the Greek separates the slaying and the hanging on the tree. Earlier, Peter had thought that following Christ to the end could be achieved in a quick, dramatic burst of zeal- for surely his desire to "smite with the sword" in Gethsemane was almost suicidal, and yet by doing so he thought that he would fulfil his promise to lay down his life for Christ's sake. He learnt the

lesson, that crucifixion is a way of life rather than just dramatic death; for he said that the Jews had slain Christ *and* hung Him on a tree (Acts 5:30; 10:39). This seems strange- that they should have killed Him and then hung Him on the tree. Peter has in mind the practice of hanging an already dead criminal on a tree as a warning (Dt. 21:23). Paul appears to make the same mistake in Gal. 3:13, where he too says that the lifting up of Christ on the cross was typified by the lifting up of the already dead body of a criminal. Christ was not dead when He was lifted up- physically. But first Peter and then Paul came to understand that His death was actually in His way of life- so that He was as good as dead when lifted up. He was the dead bronze snake of the wilderness; the flesh had been put to death by a daily life of crucifixion.

Perhaps the distinction implies the 'slaying' was an ongoing process in His ministry, crowned by the final hanging on the tree. Paul speaks similarly in Galatians; as if the body was already dead when it was lifted up on the tree; for he quotes the Mosaic law regarding the body of a dead criminal being displayed on a tree as if it was descriptive of the Lord's death (Gal. 3:13 cp. Dt. 21:23). The veil symbolized the flesh of the Lord; and yet in it was woven scarlet, a symbol of His blood and sacrifice (Ex. 27:16), which permeated His mortal life. The lesson is that the cross is a daily way of life. The Lord taught this when He asked us to take up the cross daily: to live each day in the exercise of the same principles which He lived and died by. Let's not see spiritual life as a survival of a few crises, as and when they present themselves. It's a way of life, and the principles which lead us to the little victories (when we scald ourselves with hot water, when we dirty a newly washed shirt...) will give us the greater ones also, when (e.g.) we stand before a tribunal, or face death in whatever form.

5:31- see on Acts 2:33; 10:35,36.

Him did God exalt- The same word is used about the lifting up of the Lord on the cross (Jn. 3:14; 8:28; 12:32). God sees time differently to us; He knew the lifting up of His dear son was the basis of His future exaltation. And so the same word is used about His lifting up and His exaltation.

With His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour- This could mean 'to His right hand'; for it is there that He is Prince and Saviour. These are ongoing jobs- for the Lord is indeed an active Lord, ruling and saving His people. He is a "Prince", the same word translated "author" in Heb. 12:2- He is the author and perfecter of our faith. He initiates faith, by giving not only forgiveness but repentance to people; and works out the whole process of their transformation and salvation.

To give repentance to Israel and remission of sins- Man cannot truly know God and be passive to that knowledge; he must somehow respond to the God he sees so abundantly revealed to him. And so it is with an appreciation of the height and nature of the exaltation of the man Christ Jesus. This motivates to repentance and conversion, and therefore the man who has himself been converted by it will glory in it, and hold it up to others as the motive power of their salvation too. Acts 5:31 is a clear example. "We are witnesses of these things"- in the sense that Peter himself was a witness to the repentance and forgiveness brought about by God's resurrection and exaltation of His Son. Earlier Peter had preached Jesus of Nazareth as "made… both Lord and Christ", and when they heard *this*, when he reached this climax of his speech in declaring that Jesus was now made *kurios*, the Greek word that would be used to translate Yahweh, *then* they were pricked in their heart and repented and desired association with Him in baptism (Acts 2:36-38). Later he boldly declared: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men [i.e. no other name given to any man as this Name was given to

Jesus], whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Peter had once struggled with the teaching of the Lord that whoever humbled himself would be exalted (Lk. 14:11). Now he joyfully preached the height of the Lord's exaltation, knowing that by so doing he was testifying to the depth of His humility in His life. Now he valued and appreciated that humility (his allusions to the Lord's washing of feel in his letters is further proof of this).

Notice that repentance, and not just forgiveness, was 'given' to Israel. A change of mind was given; and this surely is the gift of a holy spirit or mind. See on Acts 2:33; 10:35,36. But the recipient of the gift still had to respond. In Elijah's time, God turned Israel's heart back to Him, but they still had to return to Him (1 Kings 18:37). Jeremiah was an example of making good use of the gift of repentance: "Surely after that I was turned, I repented" (Jer. 31:19).

The early believers spoke constantly in their preaching of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:21,23; 3:13-15; 5:30,31). The logical objection to their preaching a risen Jesus of Nazareth was: 'But He's dead! We saw His body! Where is He? Show Him to us!'. And their response, as ours, was to say: 'I am the witness, so is my brother here, and my sister there. We are the witnesses that He is alive. If you see us, you see Him risen and living through us'. In this spirit, we beseech men in Christ's stead. Paul in Galatians 2:20 echoes this idea: "I have been crucified with Christ: the life I now live is not *my* life, but the life which *Christ lives* in me". The spirit of the risen Christ lived out in our lives is the witness of His resurrection. We are Him to this world. The cross too was something which *shone* out of their lives and words. They sought to convict men of their desperation, the urgency of their position before God, the compelling nature of the cross, that they were serious sinners; that a man cannot behold the cross and be unresponsive, but rather must appropriate that work and gift to himself through baptism. The urgent appeal for repentance was quite a feature of their witness (2:38; 5:31; 7:51; 11:18; 17:30; 18:18; 20:21; 26:20; Heb. 6:1). May I suggest there needs to be a greater stress on repentance in our preaching, 20 centuries later.

Our Lord ascended to Heaven *so that* opportunity of repentance might be given to Israel (Acts 5:31), and *so that* He might give the Holy Spirit gifts to men (Eph. 4:8-13 cp. John 14-16 explaining how Jesus departed *in order* to receive the Comforter). It follows that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were given largely in order to convince Israel of the Gospel; and so too around the period of the second coming?

Note that it was repentance that was given on account of the Lord's resurrection and ascension. Not simply forgiveness. The gift of the Holy Spirit that was given on His exaltation was a mental, internal power; it was and is the power to repent. Those who do not repent are therefore stubbornly resisting God's powerful desire to see us change. See above on *With His right hand*.

5:32 *And we are witnesses of these things*- Reading carefully, Peter says that he is a witness not only of the resurrection, but of the fact that Jesus is now at God's right hand and from that position of power has enabled forgiveness. How could Peter be a witness to *that*? For he hadn't been up to Heaven to check. Quite simply, he knew the extent of his own forgiveness. And so he therefore knew that truly, Jesus had ascended and was there in a position of influence upon Almighty God, to enable forgiveness. His own cleansed conscience was the proof that his belief in the Lord's ascension was belief in something true. And yet we ask: does our belief that Christ ascended really have this effect upon us?

Luke concludes by recording how the Lord reminded His men that they were "witnesses" (24:48); and throughout Acts, they repeatedly describe themselves as

witnesses to Him (Acts 1:8,22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39,41; 13:31; 22:15,20; 26:16). This is quite some emphasis. This Christ-centeredness should also fill our self-perception; that we are witnesses to the Lord out of our own personal experience of Him. They were witnesses that Christ *is* on God's right hand, that He really *is* a Saviour and source of forgiveness (5:32); because they were self-evidently results of that forgiveness and that salvation. They couldn't be 'witnesses' to those things in any legal, concrete way; for apart from them and their very beings, there was no literal evidence. They hadn't been to Heaven and seen Him; they had no document that said they were forgiven. They were the witnesses in themselves. This even went to the extent of the Acts record saying that converts were both added to the ecclesia, and also added to Christ. He *was* His ecclesia; they were, and we are, His body in this world.

We are "witnesses [on account of our being] in him" (Acts 5:32 RVmg.). We are His epistle to men and women; His words of expression consist in our lives and characters (2 Cor. 3:3).

And so is the Holy Spirit, which God has given to those that obey Him- See on 5:29 *We must obey God rather than men*.

5:33 *But they, when they heard this, were cut to the heart and decided to kill them*- They had been reminded that the Lord Jesus was now giving repentance to Israel; He was working in the hearts of Jewish people to bring them to repentance. And they were resisting. No wonder they were cut to the very bone of their conscience. The same word is used of how they were again "cut to the heart" by Stephen's appeal to them (Acts 7:54). And they responded the same way- they desired to liquidate the messenger, to destroy the channel of the message. But the message remained. To be twice "cut in half", as the Greek means, would have left them psychologically shattered. They either repented, or became murderous in their hatred of the preachers.

5:34 *But a Pharisee in the council*- See on :17 *The Sadducees*.

Named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honour by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while- Paul had been his student. Yet Paul differed from him regarding the Christians, for he was for persecuting and destroying them rather than following his teacher's advice of leaving them alone (:38). This difference with the respected Gamaliel was surely one of the many goads in Paul's conscience that was intended to lead him to accept Jesus as Christ.

5:35 *And he said to them: You men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men*- See on 5:39 *You might be found to be fighting against God*. There is a repeated theme of local authorities being nervous about punishing the Christians (19:36; 22:26; Mt. 27:19). And this was in an age where conscience was not well developed, and there was little justice nor fear of prosecuting people on insufficient evidence. There was simply a sense that somehow God was in all this; and the insistent persecution of the Lord and His people was therefore carried out against all the pricks of conscience, with Saul of Tarsus being the parade example. There is often likewise an undefined sense in our contemporaries that we are somehow of God.

5:36 *For before these days Theudas*- The two examples chosen are of charismatic men who attracted followers. Gamaliel is saying that these men should be compared to Jesus of Nazareth, and their followers to His disciples who were now under trial. Gamaliel therefore perceived that the disciples were following a leader- it was that obvious. But the leader was nowhere to be seen. Gamaliel is therefore admitting the possibility that Jesus may have risen from the dead and therefore had attracted followers. The fact he did not close off that possibility completely, and even the

Sadducees who denied a resurrection agreed with him (:40,17), is all evidence enough of how the consciences of them all were being pricked. We would rather expect the Sadducees to have responded: 'Well yes, those men were visible men here on earth who attracted a following, but these disciples of Jesus are following a man who doesn't exist, seeing we killed Him and the dead do not rise'. But even they whose advertised position was that there could be no resurrection of anyone... went along with the reasoning and did not make the logical comeback on it. Such was the pressure upon the consciences of these men. No wonder Paul and some of them gave in to it, in accepting that indeed, Jesus had risen.

Rose up- The same word used of the resurrection of the Lord. Again, note that Gamaliel is not closing off the possibility that Jesus of Nazareth had risen; he is saying that others 'rose up' but in time, came to nothing; and so as far as he was concerned, the jury was still out as to whether Jesus had risen or not. The force of his logic was enough to make the Sadducees, who denied any resurrection, agree with him (:40). And his loyal student Paul was provided with yet another goad in his conscience concerning Christ- for his respected teacher was telling him that it was best to not rule out the possibility that Jesus had risen.

Claiming to be somebody- Luke uses the same words in describing the accusation that the Lord claimed to be the Christ (Lk. 23:2). The similarities are clearly being drawn between the Lord, and these two false leaders.

And a number of men, about four hundred, joined him- This clearly echoes Acts 4:4: "The number of the men [the same Greek words are used] was about five thousand".

He was killed- Same word used about the slaying of the Lord Jesus.

And all who followed him - The language used of those persuaded by the cause of Jesus.

Were dispersed and came to nothing- In contrast to the stress in Acts upon the unity of the Christians.

5:37 *After this man, there rose up*- See on :36 *Rose up*.

Judas of Galilee, in the days of the census- Jesus of Galilee also 'appeared' in the days of the census, as only Luke records. Gamaliel is drawing similarities between these men and Jesus- and leaving the verdict open for the time being, as to whether He had really 'arisen' and whether following Him was the right thing to do.

And drew away some of the people after him- Exactly as the Jews claimed Jesus had done. The Greek translated "drew away" is used again by Gamaliel in the next verse: "Keep away from [s.w. "drew away"] these men". He may be implying that their interest in these men and their invisible Master was in fact leading them to follow Him, to be drawn away after Him. This was an astute psychological observation; he perceived the process going on within his pupil Saul of Tarsus, and he was absolutely correct.

He also perished and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered abroad- This was exactly what happened to the rank and file followers (Acts 8:1,4; 11:19). But Acts 8:1 records that when Saul's persecution led to the 'scattering abroad' of the disciples, the apostles did *not* scatter. And it was the apostles who were under judgment and are the reference of Gamaliel at this point. Saul was desperately seeking to prove his teacher Gamaliel correct by consciously seeking to scatter the followers of Jesus; but he did not succeed in scattering the apostles. And Gamaliel had reasoned that if this did not happen, then this whole thing was likely of God. The way the apostles didn't scatter was therefore another goad in Saul's conscience.

5:38 *And now I say to you, Keep away from these men and leave them alone*- See on :37 *Drew away some of the people after him*.

For if this counsel or this work is of men- Gamaliel's reasoning made a deep impression on Paul; for years later he uses the same word in saying that he declared the "counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). Gamaliel had reasoned that this "counsel" was either of God or man; and clearly it was of God. And Paul recognizes this by alluding to his teacher's words. The unusual position of Gamaliel, therefore, was surely a goad in Saul's conscience. Saul would have carefully noted and thought about his words. Luke has used the same idea in describing the "counsel and deed" of the Jewish Sanhedrin in condemning the Lord to death (Lk. 23:51). Gamaliel is now addressing the Sanhedrin... and so he may be suggesting that the 'counsel and work' of the Sanhedrin is being compared against the 'counsel and work' of the apostles, and only time will tell who is of God and who of man. Again, we must note that Gamaliel is open to persuasion that the Sanhedrin may be wrong; he does not condemn the apostles, rather does he urge leaving them alone and leaving time to judge. This very significant position would have irked and concerned Paul deeply, and developed his conscience for Christ. On the basis upon which Gamaliel reasons, I personally would consider it likely that he converted to Christianity. Whilst this appears impossible to prove, it is [incidentally] the position held within the Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition, where he is revered as a saint. "According to Photius, he was baptized by Saint Peter and Saint John, together with his son Abibo (or Abibas, Abibus) and Nicodemus. The Clementine Literature suggested that he maintained secrecy about the conversion and continued to be a member of the Sanhedrin for the purpose of covertly assisting his fellow Christians".

It will fail- The same Greek word translated "overthrow" in :39. Gamaliel had surely heard the Lord's prediction of the overthrow [s.w.] of the temple and the Judaism of His day (Lk. 21:6). Again, Gamaliel is heightening the stakes- either Christianity will be overthrown, or the temple will indeed be overthrown as the Lord Jesus had predicted. This heightening of the stakes, and leaving the verdict open, was psychologically a path towards conversion to Christianity. And Paul was goaded down that path, as I suspect Gamaliel himself was.

5:39 *But if it is of God, you will not be able*- Gamaliel summarized the issue as being whether it was Judaism or Christianity which was of God or of men. I have mentioned already that Gamaliel is leaving the question open, rather than condemning the Christians; and that this was something which would have deeply exercised the conscience of his pupil Saul. The way Gamaliel's words deeply entered Paul's consciousness and conscience is reflected by the way in which he later alludes to those words. The choice between being of God or man is reflected in Rom. 2:29, where Paul reasons that a true Jew has commendation "not of men but of God". This is framed in exactly the terms Gamaliel uses here. This phrase "of God" is very widely used by John in his Gospel and letters, e.g. "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in wickedness" (1 Jn. 5:19). John of course was one of the apostles referred to by Gamaliel; and John too would have heard these words of Gamaliel, and was triumphing in the fact that things had worked out to show that indeed, Christianity was "of God".

To overthrow them- See on :38 *It will fail.*

You might be found to be fighting against God- Paul would have heard these words, and struggled with them, seeing they came from his respected teacher. He would have realized that indeed he was fighting with God- or as the Lord put it, kicking against the goads. The allusion is surely to Jacob, whose fighting with God in

the form of an Angel is therefore read here in a negative light. These "men of Israel", descendants of Jacob / Israel, were not to be followers of Jacob in his negative aspects.

5:40 *They took his advice*- It was unusual for Sadducees to take advice from a Pharisee in this way. See on :17 *The Sadducees*. The sense that these men might in fact be of God was very strong. Again, the Lord was working on their consciences in an attempt to save even them.

And when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go- The same word used about the beating of the Lord, probably at the same hands (Lk. 22:63). Paul uses the same word about how he 'beat' the Christians "in every synagogue", and that surely included in Jerusalem (Acts 22:19). His anger at the attitude of his teacher Gamaliel would have been given full vent in beating the Christians. Perhaps Paul even whipped Peter at this time. For Paul was Gamaliel's former pupil and was present in Jerusalem at this time. This would explain his deep respect for Peter and what appears to be a desire to follow Peter's ministry, in witnessing to the Jews, rather than in developing his own ministry to the Gentiles as the Lord intended. See my comments throughout Acts 20 for more on this. It also makes the more wonderful Peter's reference to Paul as his "beloved brother" (2 Pet. 3:15).

5:41 *They therefore departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the Name*- We get the picture of them walking out from those sour faces ['presence'], singing and rejoicing. The Sanhedrin had commanded that they be beaten- so when we read of them departing from the Sanhedrin, this was in order to be beaten. And they went to that beating rejoicing. If indeed Saul was one of those who did the beating [see above], and his involvement in the stoning of Stephen makes it likely he was, then this would have been a sight which stayed with him for life. And it would exactly explain why when Paul was beaten at Philippi, he went to prison and sang hymns in the cell. He had probably seen the apostles going to their beating with joy and rejoicing. And he was determined to emulate those fine brethren, especially considering that he himself had been the one who frequently administered such beatings / floggings to Christians (22:19).

There are about 70 references to there being joy of faith amongst the early brethren. It was undoubtedly a characteristic of the community, despite the moral and doctrinal failures amongst them, the turning back to the world, the physical hardship of life, and direct persecution from the authorities. There was a joy of faith in conversion and in beholding it (Acts 2:41,46; 3:8; 5:41; 8:8; 13:52; 15:3; 1 Thess. 1:6). Letters to new converts like the Philippians reflect this theme of joy, even though it was written from prison. Paul and Silas could sing in prison. The earlier brethren rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for Jesus' sake (Acts 5:41). Paul rejoiced daily in the fact the Corinthians had been baptized (1 Cor. 15:31). Many a photo taken at baptism reflects this same joy amongst us today. Sower and reaper rejoice together (Jn. 4:36). To hold on to the Truth was described as holding on to the rejoicing of the hope unto the end (Heb. 3:6).

5:42- see on Acts 2:46.

And every day, in the temple and at home- The Sanhedrin were clearly powerless to stop them. But the question arises as to why they felt so powerless? They had twice rebuked them and threatened them... And we wonder whether their lack of power in this case was related to the strange power of conscience which they all had working within them- that in fact, these Christian men were right and they were wrong. Seriously wrong.

They did not cease to teach and to preach Jesus as the Christ- Perhaps the emphasis is on the word "not". They did not cease as they were asked to in :41.

ACTS CHAPTER 6

6:1 *Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose*- Luke records how the converts were repeatedly “multiplied” (6:1,7; 9:31; 12:24), using the very word for the ‘multiplying’ of Abraham’s seed as the stars (7:17; Heb. 6:14; 11:12). Every baptism he saw as the triumphant fulfilment of the promises to Abraham, even though many of those who ‘multiplied’ later turned away. The same word is used again of the multiplying of the new Israel in 6:7, and Stephen surely alludes to this in saying that when Israel "multiplied" in Egypt (Acts 7:17 s.w.), then persecution arose. He is likening the Jewish leadership, with all their strict piety, to Pharaoh. And Saul noticed this point, and on repentance, makes the same point in Romans- that the hardening of the hearts of the Egyptians was as the hardening of Israel's hearts. Paul so often alludes to the reasoning of Stephen in his speech.

A murmuring amongst the Greek speaking Jews against the Hebrews, because their widows were- This word is used in later appeals for believers not to murmur (e.g. 1 Cor. 10:10). It is murmuring between believers, quiet comments and negative insinuations, which so often stops the powerful advance of the Lord's cause. There were dirty politics in the church. The Greek speaking Jews and the Hebrew speaking Jews within the ecclesia started arguing over welfare payments in Acts 6. It was the old tension- the liberals against the orthodox, with the orthodox unwilling to give much of the welfare collection to those they perceived as more liberal. This squabble was tackled by Stephen, and the record then goes on to describe his murder, almost implying that it was Judaist Christians within the synagogues who set him up for this. After all, there was big money involved- Jews were used to paying 10 or 20% of their wealth to the temple, and if this was now going to the ecclesia, with thousands baptized, there could well have arisen a power struggle over who controlled it. It could well be that the division between Paul and John Mark was over this matter; after they had baptized the first Gentile in Cyprus, Sergius Paulus, John Mark went back to the Jerusalem ecclesia (Acts 13:13). Acts 15:38 RV speaks of how he “withdrew from them from Pamphylia”, hinting at spiritual reasons for his withdrawal. It must also be remembered that Christianity was a new, unregistered religion in the Roman empire, increasingly subject to persecution and discrimination. Judaism was registered and tolerated. It was so much easier to remain under the synagogue umbrella, to deny the radical demands of the Lord Jesus, and to accept Him half-heartedly, in Name but not in reality.

Neglected in- Acts 6:1 makes the point that aid to the poor widows was cut off or impaired, because the other believers were arguing amongst themselves. It would appear that the Hebrew Christians went to the temple daily (Acts 2:46), whereas the Greek widows wouldn't have done (Acts 7:48,49). So the common theological disagreement about how far the Jewish Law should influence Christian life- resulted in old and needy ladies in the ecclesia suffering. This discrimination would suggest that there was strong dislike of even a whiff of Gentile influence, even amongst the leaders of the church. To accept Gentiles was going to be a very radical thing for them.

The daily distribution- Acts 6:1; 2:44; 4:34 imply there were large numbers of very poor people in the church. The Jerusalem ecclesia is an example of how rich and

poor were united together. There were clearly wealthy members- Simon of Cyrene owned a farm (Mk. 15:21). Barnabas sold lands (Acts 4:36). Ananias and Sapphira had land. And then there were the middle class. Mary owned a house in Jerusalem and had at least one servant (Acts 12:12-17). Levi was a tax collector wealthy enough to throw a large banquet, implying he had a large home (Mk. 2:13-17). James and John had a fishing business in Galilee that employed day labourers. And then there were the poor. The Lord Jesus and the apostles healed the beggars and diseased, who presumably became members of the church. James the Lord's brother was presumably a carpenter, poor like the Lord was. And yet he was the leader of the early church. Unlike many other religious movements, early Christianity drew its members from right across society; and one of the poorest was their leading light! This unity, as we have so often said, would have been their biggest single advertisement. And yet the Acts record artlessly says so little about social or economic class distinctions- precisely because they were not important. Any uninspired writer would have made great capital of this phenomenal feature of the early church.

6:2 *And the twelve summoned*- The appointment of a successor to Judas was therefore apparently acceptable. But it has to be noted that "the twelve" as a group play no further significant role in Luke's account of the early church.

The full number of the disciples to them- Literally, 'the multitude', a reference to how the coverts had multiplied (:1 s.w.).

And said, It is not fitting that we should- The same Greek word translated "pleased" in :5. The attitude of the twelve matched that of the crowd of converts.

Forsake the teaching of the word- The Greek says just "the word of God", but from :4 it is clear that we are required to read in an ellipsis. God's word is here put for the teaching of it. If God has spoken, and we accept the Bible as His word, then we are thereby obligated to speak it forth (cp. Am. 3:8). The twelve were very sensitive to the way in which administrative issues and addressing petty divisions can hinder the proclamation of God's word; and time and again, this has sadly happened in communities since. But they refused to be side-tracked.

And instead handle finances- Gk. 'serve at tables'. The reference could be to literally serving food. But the Greek for 'tables' is also translated 'bank' with allusion to the tables of bankers. Whichever translation we prefer, the point is that they considered that their teaching of the word was far more important than any practical issue relating to welfare. So often, missions become so focused upon the provision of welfare that the teaching of the word is side-lined; the discussion and energy is all about how and what kind of food to provide in a soup kitchen, rather than teaching the word to the folks who come along. The utter primacy of the teaching of God's word is here clearly established.

6:3 *Therefore, brothers, choose from among you seven men*- James 1:27 may allude here. James defines the essence of Christianity as 'visiting' the fatherless and widows. But the Greek word occurs also in Acts 6:3, translated 'to look / search out'. We are to actually search out others' needs, go to them, imagine what they might be in need of and supply it- rather than waiting to be confronted by those needs. It was of course exactly in this sense that God 'visited' us in the gift of His Son.

Of good repute- The qualifications here are alluded to later in the New Testament with regard to who should be appointed to serve in the churches. The early church was not therefore seen as a historical anomaly, a once off phenomenon, but rather a detailed role model for all future churches.

Full of the Spirit and of wisdom- Bezalel and his helpers who constructed the tabernacle are likewise described (Ex. 28:3; 31:3; 35:31,35). The allusion is intended

to teach that it was the community of Christian believers, the people, who were now the new tabernacle or temple (cp. 1 Kings 7:14) which the Lord was now constructing. Stephen went to his death for upholding this belief.

Whom we will appoint to this duty- There were no democratic elections. The multitude, the mass of believers, were to somehow come up with seven candidates, and the apostles 'appointed' them, presumably by their Spirit gifts confirming the choices.

6:4 *But we will continue earnestly in prayer*- These are the very words used about the believers generally continuing in prayer (Acts 1:14; 2:42,46). This is true leadership- the style of prayer of the leadership was copied by their converts. We must ask whether our elders are setting such patterns in prayer life.

The early elders of the Christian church decided that they were spending too much time on practical matters with the result that they weren't finding enough time for prayer (:4). And so they made a major re-arrangement to enable them to devote more time to prayer. Let this point sink in: so important was prayer in the early community that the seven deacons had to make arrangements for the practical running of the ecclesia so that they could give themselves more time for prayer; prayerfulness was more important than petty administration. Husbands and wives abstained from sex for short periods so as to more powerfully pray individually (1 Cor. 7:5).

And in the service of the word- A phrase used in contemporary literature to describe how the synagogue minister made pupils memorize Scripture texts. See on Acts 20:35.

6:5 *And the decision pleased the whole crowd; and they chose Stephen, a man*- "Decision" is Gk. *logos*, translated "word" at the end of :4. The idea may be that the word preached and taught guided the multitude in choosing the seven.

Full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus a proselyte of Antioch- The Greek can equally mean 'filled by faith'. Faith to some extent is a gift from God. The amount of faith in Stephen seems related to the extent of the miracles he did (:8); which would suggest his fullness of faith was on his own account, and also shows that the doing of miracles was related to faith in those doing them.

These names are all Greek. But it was common for Jews to have both Hebrew and Greek names, so we shouldn't too quickly conclude that the appointed brethren were all Greek speakers; that would have hardly been wise in the resolving a dispute between Greek and Hebrew speaking Jewish believers.

6:6 *They set them before the apostles, and when they had prayed, they laid their hands upon them*- See on :3 *We will appoint*. Laying on of hands speaks of the passing on of Spirit abilities or blessing from one who possesses them to another (8:17; 9:17; 13:3; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim. 1:6; Num. 27:18; Dt. 34:9). The apostles who had Spirit gifts to do work they judged they had no time to do therefore passed them on to the deacons. But they prayed first. The idea is not that they had some power which they gave to others. They prayed- and God gave the power to the deacons. For the Father and Son are the source of such spiritual gifts. There is therefore no power in the believers of themselves; hence prayer occurs together with the idea of laying on hands in most of the references listed above.

6:7 *And the word of God increased*- Again, God's word is put for the preaching of it (:4); such is the imperative within His word to preach it. The apostles had given a conscious focus upon preaching God's word and giving this work utter supremacy over welfare and administrative issues (see on :2). Now this was rewarded. "Increased" is an allusion to the parables of the mustard seed and the sower, where the

sown seed of the word 'increases' (Mt. 13:32; Mk. 4:8). This begs the question as to how that seed would grow further after this initial good response.

And the number of the disciples- These regular updates about numbers suggest that some kind of record was kept of the numbers baptized.

Multiplied greatly in Jerusalem- The large number of converts in Jerusalem laid the basis for the Jerusalem ecclesia, although they kept meeting in the temple initially. Nearly all these converts, being from Jerusalem, would have seen and heard the Lord preaching previously- and rejected Him. We must ever remember that those who hear our message and apparently reject it may very well respond later.

And a great many of the priests- This was a wonderful fruit to the Lord's endless efforts for these types. In the last six months, the Scribes and Pharisees repeatedly tried to trick the Lord. But He took the time to answer their questions, seeking to lead them to understanding and repentance- and His denunciations of them were probably softly and imploringly spoken, still seeking for the inevitability of future judgment to lead them to repentance. As the Son of God, walking freely in His Father's house, Jesus didn't have to pay the temple tax (Mt. 17:26,27). He could have insisted that He didn't need to pay it, He could have stood up for what was right and true. But doing this can often be selfish, a defence of self rather than a seeking for the Father's glory. And so He told Peter that "lest we should offend them", He would pay it. He was so hopeful for their salvation one day that He was worried about offending these wretched men, who weren't fit to breathe the same air that He did. We would have given up with them; but He worried about offending what potential faith they might have. Even at the end of His ministry, He still sought to convert them. He reasoned with them, using carefully prepared Old Testament allusions in the hope they would understand them, when we would almost certainly either have given up, or would just be gritting our teeth, trying to be patient with them because we didn't want to sin…but He was full of a genuine, unpretended desire for their salvation. And earlier in His ministry, He had told the cured leper to tell no other man but go and offer for his cleansing, in order to make a witness to the priests. All three synoptics record this, as if it made a special impression on everyone (Mt. 8:4; Mk. 1:44; Lk. 5:14). It could be that the Lord is using an idiom when He told the leper to tell nobody: 'Go and make a witness *first and foremost* to the priests as opposed to anybody else'. Such was His zeal for their salvation. And the fact that "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" shows how this apparently hope-against-hope desire of the Lord for the conversion of His enemies somehow came true.

The Lord's example is to be ours; He spoke of not making the Orthodox Jews stumble by not paying the tribute; yet He goes on to say that one must beware lest we make the little ones who believe, to stumble (Mt. 17:27; 18:6). Is it not that He saw in Orthodox Jewry the beginnings of faith…a faith which was to come to fruition when a great company of priests were later obedient to the faith in Him? None of us would have had that sensitivity, that hopefulness, that seeking spirit. It is truly a challenge to us.

Were obedient to the faith- This is ambiguous- it could mean obedience as response to faith, in which case it may refer to baptism; or it could mean obedience to the set of propositions which define the one faith. Because doctrine and practice are linked, the Gospel is something to which man must be obedient- it isn't merely a set of academic propositions. It results in "the obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). Probably the greatest temptation for all of us, in all stages of our spiritual career, is to be like Israel of old: to *know* the Faith, on an abstract, surface level, but not to really *believe* it in our hearts, and therefore not to act in the way God intends. Paul was

aware of this difference; he spoke of us as those who believe *and* know the Truth (1 Tim. 4:3).

6:8 *And Stephen, full of grace and power*- Or, "Full of faith" (AV). See on :5 *Full of faith*. “Grace”, *charis*, is so often associated with the gift of the Spirit. And this is the same “grace” in essence promised to all in Christ. Grace is a major New Testament theme, and it is deeply associated with the gift of the Spirit. This is a central part of the Christian experience which we cannot deny by simply assuming it refers solely to the miraculous manifestations of the Spirit experienced in the first century.

6:9 *Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen*- These were probably Jews [or their children] who had been taken to Rome as slaves and then been made free on the basis that they were Jews. They were therefore very sensitive to any possible problem with Rome and anything which meant that they were to cease identifying as Jews and identify instead as something else, in this case, the followers of the Lord Jesus and citizens of His invisible Kingdom. Opposition to the Gospel is often from those who perceive, even subconsciously, that they have something to lose, or that their historical positions will have to be rejected.

(Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen- Cilicia is where Paul was from. One wonders if he was involved in some way with these people.

6:10 *They were not able to withstand*- A clear fulfilment of the Lord's prediction in the Olivet prophecy: "I will give you the words and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to withstand or to contradict" (Lk. 21:15). The preceding context of Lk. 21:12 is relevant to what had just happened to the disciples: "They shall lay their hands on you and shall persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for my name's sake". The Olivet prophecy of 'the last days' could therefore have come true in the first century- it didn't, because the preconditions for the Lord's return were not fulfilled, particularly with respect to Israel's repentance.

The wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke- This is one of a series of connections between the sufferings of Stephen and those of the Lord Jesus:

The Lord Jesus	Stephen
Acts 2:22	Acts 6:8
Luke 4:22	Acts 6:10
Mark 12:13	Acts 6:11
Luke 20:20	Acts 6:12
Matthew 26:59	Acts 6:13
Matthew 26:61	Acts 6:14
Matthew 26:65	Acts 6:11
Mark 15:20	Acts 7:57,58
Mark 14:62	Acts 7:56

They couldn't resist the spirit by which Stephen spoke (Acts 6:10), yet he says they resisted the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51). This is the miserable position of all who refuse to the good news of the Kingdom. There was a similar situation at the time of the exile. God "poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel" (Ez. 39:28,29). The Spirit was poured out upon the dry bones, but they refused to come to life and stand up and return to Zion. They resisted the Holy Spirit. Salvation again 'came near' in the first century and again they refused. But they were resisting that which cannot be resisted.

6:11 *Then they secretly induced men to say*- The record of what they did is clearly alluding to how Jezebel set up men to falsely accuse Naboth of blasphemy (1 Kings 21:10,13). Later in the book of Revelation, Jezebel appears to be the basis for the description of the Jerusalem temple and its associated Judaism and apostate Jewish Christianity.

We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God- This is parallel with "blasphemous words against this holy place and the law" (:13). They had made 'God' equal the temple and the law. The external trappings of their religion, even the ultimately true religion, had become as a god to them. We can so easily do the same.

6:12 *And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes and came upon him and*- The first reference in Acts to the masses being poisoned against the Christians. Again we see how fickle people are.

Seized him, and brought him into the council- This again is the language of the Olivet prophecy about the situation in the 'last days' (same words used in Mk. 13:11; Lk. 21:12). The prediction there was that when they were "brought" to councils etc., they should not worry what they were to say, because the Spirit would teach them what to say. We can therefore view Stephen's speech in Acts 7 as not premeditated but directly inspired by the Spirit in response to his having been "brought" into the council.

6:13 *And set up false witnesses, who said: This man does not cease to speak*- Their case was based around the fact that the Christians had been asked to refrain / cease (Acts 5:28) but Stephen had ignored this. The continued case against the disciples was in defiance of Gamaliel's advice; and he was seen as one of Judaism's most revered ideologues, even during his lifetime. The council had initially agreed with his advice (5:40). This strange going against his advice after agreeing on it, to the point of one of Gamaliel's star pupils orchestrating the stoning to death of Stephen, was and is psychologically noteworthy. There was a power of irrational fear and anger at work, which was clearly rooted in a subconscious recognition that in fact, they were wrong and the Christians were correct. Saul was finally honest and owned up; but it would seem that many others of his peer group spent their rest of their miserable, bitter days kicking against the goads of their conscience. And so it can be today; the anger of religious people is never ameliorated in time, because it is rooted in a fundamental wrong turning in their thinking, and they lack the humility to admit it. And this accounts for the masses of bitter, self-righteous religious folks who go to their deathbeds upholding positions and truths over some curious quirk of thinking, or regarding separation from some supposed false teacher, all because they cannot allow a Damascus road to happen; all because their pride is too great to let them admit that they were wrong.

Blasphemous words against this holy place and the law- See on :11. Paul was doubtless deeply involved in setting up Stephen's condemnation. And it is no mere coincidence that he was accused in the same city of Jerusalem of profaning "this holy place" (Acts 21:28 s.w.). This is not mere poetic justice, what goes around coming around. Rather was this one of many Divinely arranged echoes of Stephen's sufferings in the life of Paul- for Paul's education and spiritual maturity. For after all, he and Stephen shall live eternally together.

6:14 *For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place*- The same word used in the accusation against the Lord that He intended to destroy the temple (Mt. 26:61). The Lord's trial was only recent history; it should have been apparent to those men that they were repeating exactly the same pattern of

events and accusations against Stephen as they had done against Jesus of Nazareth. And surely they must have feared, albeit unspokenly, that likewise their best efforts to silence the strange power behind these men would also come to nothing. The accusation in a sense was true, because the same word is used by the Lord in the Olivet prophecy, speaking of how the Jerusalem temple was to be 'destroyed' [AV "thrown down"]; and the commander of the armies of judgment was the Lord Jesus, according to other teachings.

And shall change the customs which Moses delivered to us- Paul was later accused of teaching Jews not to walk after the "customs" delivered to Moses (Acts 21:21 s.w.). Again, Paul was being led to fellowship with Stephen; just as we are brought to understand the feelings and positions of those whom we have hurt in previous years.

6:15 See on Acts 7:22.

And all that sat in the council, fastening their eyes on him- The same word is used of Stephen's eyes fastened upon his Lord in Heaven (Acts 7:55). When we too are the focus of others' hate, or even if that is how it feels or appears; we are to in turn focus upon the Lord above who sees and knows all.

Saw his face as if it had been the face of an angel- Within Judaism, seeing the face of an Angel was felt to be inappropriate for sinful man, and likely to lead to death. Hence Jud. 6:22: "Gideon saw that he was the angel of Yahweh, and Gideon said, Alas, Lord Yahweh! I have seen the angel of Yahweh face to face!". The implication may be that they felt most unworthy; and they had to drown that sense of guilt by an ever deeper obsession with legalism and casuistry. And their anger understandably grew the greater, even unto death, as they were in the presence of this manifestation of God's glory. The obvious image is of Moses, whose face shone with the glory of the Angel, before an Israel who condemned him. And so these men, the leaders of Israel, were as it were looking upon Moses and condemning him. For there is no reason to think that the glory just shone momentarily from the face of Stephen; rather is the implication that as those committee men sat there in their seats, they were beholding the glory shining from Stephen's face throughout. And hence he begins his defence by speaking of "the God of glory"- that same glory shining from him- and emphasizes Israel's rejection of Moses.

Saul, Paul and Stephen

As well as John the Baptist, it would seem that Stephen likewise had a deep impact upon Paul. Stephen's condemnation had been because he had reminded the Jews of the fact "Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool" and therefore the temple was not ultimately relevant (Acts 7:48,49). Yet only a few brief years later, Paul was using the very same words and logic on Mars Hill in Athens. It has been observed that Hebrews particularly has enough conscious points of contact with Stephen's words that it would seem that the author was very familiar with Stephen's words:

Acts [Stephen]	Hebrews
7:2,55	1:1-3; 2:10
7:2-5	11:8
7:2	11:1-31
7:9-36	3:16; 11:21,22
7:38	11:1-29 cf. 4:1-3
7:46	9:11,24 cp. Is. 66:1,2
7:39-43,52	3:7-12
6:14	ch. 1-6

Stephen's speech (and perhaps other, unrecorded words of Stephen) became

imprinted upon Paul's mind and consciousness. In writing to the brethren he had once persecuted, both consciously and unconsciously Paul was reflecting Stephen's words. A clear example is found in the way Stephen describes Israel as "thrusting" Moses away from them (Acts 7:39); and Paul is the only other person in the New Testament to use this same Greek word- to describe how although Israel thrust God away from them, yet God did not thrust [AV "cast away"] His people from Himself (Rom. 11:1,2). The even unconscious influence of Stephen upon Paul is reflected in the way he speaks of himself as "born… brought up… educated" (Acts 22:2,3)- using the very terms Stephen uses in Acts 7 about Moses. See on Acts 7:43.

ACTS CHAPTER 7

7:1 *And the high priest said: Are these things so?*- The "things" were the accusations of blasphemy against the temple and Mosaic law. Actually Stephen doesn't comment on those issues directly, although he does develop the theme that God has relationships with people in any place, and doesn't require a temple for that fellowship with man. Rather is Stephen's focus upon Israel's historical rejections of the Lord's prototypes; and it was this which led to the explosion of bad conscience anger which led to Stephen's death. But his murder was therefore not related to the "things" of which he was initially accused. It could be said that Stephen could have made a fair case that he in fact was innocent of what he was accused of. But he doesn't. Instead he purposefully appeals to their conscience regarding the Lord Jesus, and the bankruptcy of their conception of 'holy space'. And it was that witness which cost him his life, as it provoked the lynching which took place. He gave his life, therefore, in an attempt to save their eternal lives. And it worked, at least with Paul. But he achieved that by going on the spiritually offensive rather than being on the defensive to save his own skin. Thus in :42,43 he will quote Amos 5 concerning Israel's idolatry in the wilderness, and accuse the torah observant Jerusalem Jews of doing just the same. He clearly wanted their salvation, and knew that in the case of the hardened religiously self-righteous, shock tactics and direct, penetrating accusation were all that might work.

We note that Acts 4-7 contain three trials- with worsening outcomes [threats, then flogging, and now stoning to death]. This is then followed by Saul's persecutions- as if things got progressively worse for the church, and then Saul was converted.

7:2 *And he said: Brothers and fathers, listen*- Stephen did not consider the Jews to be somehow not his brethren. This open approach to fellowship with the Jews, despite their misunderstandings and misbelief and aggression, is surely a challenge to all who insist on rigid lines of fellowship demarcation.

The God of glory- See on 6:15. In his famous final speech, Stephen evidently had humming in his mind the theme of the glory of God. He begins by saying that "The God of glory appeared…". God heard that speech, and read his mind. And responded in an appropriate way- for to give Stephen final strength to face death, God made His glory appear to Stephen (Acts 7:55). And so it can be for us- although it all depends what we have humming in our hearts. The context of Stephen's speech is his defence against the accusation that he was blaspheming the temple. The Jews considered that God's glory was uniquely located within that building; even though there is no evidence that the shekinah glory was visible at that time. Stephen's response is that God's glory was apparent to Abraham in Gentile Mesopotamia, outside even the limits of the land promised to Abraham. There is the implication in the language of

'appearance' that Abraham had some kind of a vision of the cherubim glory of Yahweh, although Genesis is silent about that. Gen. 12:7 LXX says that "the Lord appeared to Abraham" but Stephen seems to understand this as a full manifestation of the "God of glory", a theophany which visibly displayed God's glory *outside* of the land of Israel and the temple. That's Stephen's point. This is all in answer to the accusation that Stephen along with "this Jesus" was planning to destroy the temple. They effectively equated God with His temple: "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God... This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law" (Acts 6:11,13). God was made equal to the external trappings of religion. And so many make this mistake. Stephen's response is to demonstrate that God works and fellowships outside of religion and 'sacred space'. The same religiosity is seen today in those who deny the possibility of being an 'out of church Christian', who fret about things like self baptism, taking communion alone etc.

Appeared to our father Abraham- Stephen was not merely witnessing against these men. He was appealing for their repentance, and does so by building bridges over what was common ground- in this case, having Abraham as their common father. See on 7:19 *Our race... our fathers* and 7:26 *Gentlemen...*

Before he dwelt in Haran- See on :4.

7:3 *And said to him, Leave your land and your kindred*- Pointedly omitting mention of "your father's house". Gen. 12:1 records that the Lord had told Abram to leave his country, kindred *and* his father's house, but goes on to say that "So Abram departed" from *Haran* "as the Lord had spoken unto him" (Gen. 12:4). The implication is that the command which he was given in Ur, was repeated to him in Haran, with the additional information that he must now also leave "your father's house". Stephen is making the point that Abraham's 'obedience' was counted to him by grace; righteousness was imputed to him, when he had a shaky start in his faithfulness. For he left because his father's family also left... not because he actually was obedient to the Divine call.

And go into- Gk. 'come here into'; as if God was already there in Canaan.

The land which I shall show you- According to Heb. 11:8, Abraham embarked on the journey not knowing or [Gk.] 'understanding' where he was going. Accurate knowledge of the literal details of the Kingdom whither we are headed is not therefore the issue here; rather is it simple faith in response to God's calling. This is what is required at the start of the journey; for Abraham is held up as the pattern for us all. Only later was Abraham 'shown' the land. The same word is used of how the devil of the Lord's own thoughts / temptations 'showed' Him the future Kingdom of God on earth (Mt. 4:8). Revelation of Divine truth is therefore progressive; after some time leading the disciples, the Lord then 'shewed' them the details of His sufferings (Mt. 16:21 s.w.), and after His resurrection 'shewed' Peter more details (Acts 10:28 s.w.) and 'shewed' latter day events to His followers (Rev. 1:1; 4:1 s.w.). Indeed there are seven references in the visions of Revelation to believers being 'shewn' things. Even the Father's 'shewing' of things to His Son was progressive (Jn. 5:20). We are not, therefore, to require of those just beginning their journey a comprehensive grasp of the things which have been 'shewn' to us who have been on the road of faith for some time already.

7:4 *Then he left the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran*- Stephen begins by pointing out that the father of Israel, Abraham, was himself weak in faith in response to the promises. He was asked to leave his family and homeland in Mesopotamia- but he didn't. His father took him and emigrated from Ur. And only

when his father died did Abram move on further. According to Jewish tradition, Abraham was 23 years in Haran. "From thence... *God* removed him into (Canaan)" (Acts 7:4 R.V.). But if God had *forced* him to be "removed", Abram's response to the promises would not be held up for us as the great example of faith which it is. The call of Abram is an essay in partial response being confirmed by God. *God* removed him through repeating the promises to Abram in Haran, and the providential fact that Terah died there. The fact that Abram "dwelt" in Haran, despite his call to leave, with his kindred and father's house shows a slow reaction to the command to leave those things and go to the unknown land, which by now Abram must have guessed was Canaan- or at least, he would have realized that Canaan was en route to it.

And from there, when his father was dead- Instead of doing as he was told and breaking with his father and immediate family, Abraham was only obedient by default. His father died, and he moved on. And there is historical evidence that there was war at the time and many left Haran in any case due to push factors; rather than Abraham being obedient to the simple words of God. The weakness of Abraham is emphasized, as is that of the patriarchs and others amongst the founding fathers. The idea is that it is simply not the case that God's people dwell in His land and worship at His temple, and are therefore acceptable with Him. God's people are weak, and in desperate need of His grace and forgiveness- which is only to be found in the Lord Jesus. Thus Stephen focuses upon the weaker side of Moses in :23, saying that he fled Egypt from fear; whereas Heb. 11:27 says he feld *not* fearing the wrath of the king. Faith and fear can co-exist in a believer; but Stephen focuses upon the fear in Moses. Stephen really wanted to make this point; for he was answering the accusation that he had blasphemed Moses. Instead of denying this to save his own skin, and painting Moses in stellar terms- he instead shows how he wants the Jews to come to repentance. And so he emphasizes the human, weaker side of Moses- in the hope they will be humbled and thereby enabled to look honestly at their own weaknesses, and repent.

God sent him into this land, wherein you now dwell- The Greek word is only used once again in the New Testament, and again by Stephen, in speaking of how God 'carried away' apostate Israel into captivity (Acts 7:43). The connection may imply that Abraham was not at his strongest when God carried him away into Canaan. Whatever, the point is surely clear enough that Abraham did not go of his own freewill obedience to Canaan, in response to God's clear command to him. Rather did God's grace as it were pick him up and take him there. This was an Old Testament example of God's Spirit working in the lives of His people to bring about their obedience; and it was that same gift of the Spirit which Peter offered to Israel at this time, speaking of how God would give them not only forgiveness but also even repentance itself- a mental attitude.

7:5 *And He gave him no inheritance in it, no, not enough to set his foot on it, and He promised that He would give it to him in possession and to his seed after him, when he had no child*- The Jews were therefore wrong in thinking that their dwelling in Palestine was some kind of fulfilment of the promises to Abraham. For God keeps His promises, and Abraham must therefore be resurrected to receive the inheritance in the Kingdom when it is established on earth at the Lord's return. He didn't get anything in this life, because he had to even buy a plot of land in which to bury Sarah.

7:6 *And God spoke in this way*- Because Stephen is changing the pronouns of the original quotation, and also summarizing the essence of what God was saying. Here we have an example of how extra words and verbal devices had to be used in the

absence of anything like square brackets. But Stephen is also mixing quotation with interpretation, as was and is the Jewish way of using Scripture.

That his seed should live in a strange land, and that they would bring them into bondage and- Remember that Stephen is seeking to demonstrate that God's presence is independent of sacred spaces such as the temple or land of Israel. Heb. 11:9 surely alludes here by saying that Abraham "went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land" (ESV). These are the same Greek words translated "strange land". For Abraham, the land of Israel was as a foreign land. And here Stephen speaks of Egypt as a strange / foreign land. The confusion is because in a sense, whilst the land is inherited by Abraham, the whole earth is a foreign land to God's people- including the geographical territory of Israel.

Treat them badly- The same word as in :19. But this is the term which is used about how the Jews abused the Christian preachers (Acts 12:1; 14:2; 18:10). What the Jews were doing to Stephen put them in the position of the Gentile Egyptians, persecuting the true Israel of God.

Four hundred years- The idea is that it would be unreasonable to suggest that God had no fellowship with anyone amongst His people for such a s long period as four hundred years. And yet they were away from the supposed sacred space of the land promised to Abraham.

7:7 *And the nation to which they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God*- This is added because Stephen appears to be summarizing the essence of God's word rather than making verbatim quotation.

And after that shall they come out and serve Me in this place- This is neither a quotation from the Hebrew [Masoretic] text nor from the standard version of the Septuagint. The text of Gen. 15:14 reads: "Afterward they will come out with great wealth". Apparently Stephen is alluding to Ex. 3:12: "When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain". Perhaps this is why the 'quotation' is introduced by the otherwise strange comment that "God spoke in this way" (:6). The essence of what Stephen understood God to say is quoted as if it is actual quotation. This kind of thing is common in Rabbinic exegesis. And yet why does Stephen change "this mountain", of Sinai, to "this place", a phrase commonly understood to refer to the temple? The point was that God could be served on a mountain, outside of Palestine, just as much as in the Jerusalem temple. For debate about the temple is the context of the whole speech.

7:8 *And He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham begat Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day, and Isaac begat Jacob, and Jacob the twelve patriarchs*- Covenant relationship with God doesn't depend upon sacred space, temples, holy land etc.

7:9 *And the patriarchs, moved with jealousy against Joseph*- Stephen is clearly presenting Joseph as a type of the Lord. And Luke has recently used the same word to describe how it was jealousy which led the Sanhedrin and Jewish leadership to oppose the Christians (Acts 5:17).

Sold him- Just as the Lord was 'sold' for 30 pieces of silver.

Into Egypt- This is one of a number of aspersions that the Judaism of Stephen's day was no better than Gentile Egypt, the persecutor of God's true Israel. Or it could be that we are to see the brothers as representing the Jews, and the selling or 'handing over' of Joseph into Egypt speaks of how they handed the Lord over to the Gentiles.

But God was with him- God being *meta* Joseph is an echo of 'Emmanuel', God with [*meta*] us (Mt. 1:23 cp. Jn. 3:2).

7:10 *And delivered him out of all his afflictions*- The same word used of how the brothers experienced "affliction" during the famine (:11), which brought them eventually to repentance concerning Joseph. God likewise works in our lives, so that we realize first-hand the results of our actions against others. Those who shun and disfellowship and misuse others so often end up having the same done to them; not because God operates some measure-for-measure system of judgment, but rather because He seeks our spiritual growth and sensitivity towards others. What the Jews did to Jesus they were to experience themselves, in essence, in order that they might identify with Him and realize what they had done to Him by feeling it themselves- and repent. But sadly, the Jews of the first century did not respond, even in the afflictions of the Jewish war. Yet Stephen clearly saw Joseph as representative of himself; for he says that Joseph had been given "wisdom", just as Stephen had been. Stephen's hope was that his afflictions at the hands of the Jews would lead to their repentance, and his closing words reflect that hope for them. He had clearly learned deeply from his Lord's example on the cross.

And gave him favour and wisdom- The same words used by Luke about the Lord (Lk. 2:52). Stephen is clearly presenting Joseph as a type of Christ, and also seeing in Joseph a representation of himself, who was likewise given grace and wisdom. Perhaps this was how Stephen's thought process developed; seeing similarities between himself and Joseph, to whom wisdom was also given, and who was also abused by his brethren; and then realizing that Joseph was a type of the Lord's sufferings. And thereby Stephen was led to the realization that the Lord in His sufferings and death was truly his representative.

The idea is "grace and wisdom", alluding to Gen. 39:21 LXX where Joseph was given grace before the jailor; but that experience of grace prepared him for the grace of being made governor over Egypt.

Before Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt- The Lord is described with the same word, as "Governor" (Mt. 2:6). Joseph's exaltation was therefore typical of the Lord's.

And all his house- A term used about God's house in Heb. 3:2,5, which the Lord Jesus is now "over". The multiple similarities in phrasing between Hebrews and Stephen's speech have led some to suggest Stephen as the author of Hebrews, especially as it appears to be addressed to the Jerusalem ecclesia, or is perhaps a transcript of a sermon given there.

7:11 *Now there came a famine over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction; and our fathers found no sustenance*- Note the focus on these two areas. The entire region was affected, according to Genesis; for peoples from all surrounding nations [not just Canaan] came to Egypt to buy corn. The intention may be to parallel Egypt and Canaan because of the theme Stephen is developing, that there is no holy land or place; and Israel is as Egypt. See on 7:6; 7:7 *After that shall they come out and serve Me in this place* and 7:9 *Into Egypt*.

7:12 *But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers the first time*- The laboured emphasis upon Joseph being recognized only the *second* time is to demonstrate that the Lord Jesus would be recognized by the children of Jacob / Israel the second time. We might be able to reason back from this type and conclude that the first time the brothers came to Egypt, they were intended to repent of their sin and recognize Joseph; but their lack of repentance meant that their eyes were as it were closed from perceiving him. The similarity with the Lord Jesus and Israel is of course acute.

7:13 *And at the second time*- The Messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth is hard to explicitly prove from the Old Testament, without recourse to typology. Even Isaiah 53 describes the sufferings of Hezekiah, who was typical of Jesus. Thus Stephen's defence of his belief in the Messiahship of Jesus rests largely on typology – e.g. the fact that Joseph/Jesus was rejected by his brethren at first (Acts 7:13).

Joseph was made known to his brothers- Quoting Gen. 45:1 LXX.

And Joseph's race became manifest to Pharaoh- Joseph had first been introduced to Pharaoh as a Hebrew (Gen. 41:12). But what the term "Hebrew" meant to Egyptians isn't clear; it could mean just 'one from beyond'. The "race" of Joseph presumably refers to the fact he was one of Jacob's sons; and the Jacob family had already become famous as far as Egypt. Yet Joseph had concealed his connection to that family. It may have partly been because of shame at their behaviour, and their disadvertisment for all the Godly principles which Joseph believed in. Or it may be that because God had performed a psychological miracle on Joseph in making him 'forget his father's house' (Gen. 41:51), he simply did not identify himself as from the Jacob family. Stephen may be making the point that when Joseph, like the Lord Jesus, was recognized by his brethren, he was at the same time recognized by the Gentile world likewise for who he really was. And the same will be true at the latter day repentance of Israel; Rom. 11:15 comes to mind: "For if the casting away of them is the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?".

Perhaps this continues Stephen's theme of demonstrating that the fathers of Israel were themselves weak in faith. Two of the greatest types of the Lord's mediatory work are Esther and Joseph. Esther was perhaps ashamed to reveal that she was a Jewess because of her people's behaviour, but given their desperate need she did reveal it in order to plead with the King for their salvation. And only when Joseph really had to use his influence to save his brethren did "Joseph's race become manifest unto Pharaoh" (Acts 7:13 RV). Does the Lord experience the same sort of embarrassment mixed with an urgent sense of our desperation, in His present mediation for us?

7:14 *And Joseph sent and called to himself Jacob his father and all his extended family*- Stephen has been developing Joseph as a type of the Lord Jesus. He sees significance, therefore, in Joseph-Jesus 'sending', *apostello*, as it were, by the means of apostles; and thus calling Jacob and his brothers to himself. Even in the last minutes of his life, Stephen saw himself as part of this desperate appeal of Joseph-Jesus to the children of Israel. We all have a great example in Stephen's desire to 'call to Jesus' even his persecutors.

Seventy five people- The Hebrew text at Gen. 46:26; Ex. 1:5 and Dt. 10:22 has '70'. But the LXX has 75. The difference is because some extra sons of Joseph's children Ephraim and Manasseh are recorded in the LXX; they are listed in 1 Chron. 7:14-21: Ashriel, Machir, Zelophehad, Peresh, sons of Manasseh; and Shuthelah, son of Ephraim. Joseph's sons were all half Egyptian; his wife was the daughter of a pagan Egyptian priest. Stephen may be reminding the Jews that their fierce claims to ethnic purity were a nonsense; because the very early fathers of the Jewish people were not ethnically pure, but mixed with Gentile blood from the start. Another possibility is that we have 66 people recorded in Gen. 46:8-26; but if we include the wives of Jacob's sons, we have 75. I calculate nine wives on the basis that Joseph's wife was already in Egypt; and the wives of Judah and Simeon were dead. So we may have here an encouragement to see the value of women, as equally counted amongst the 'founding fathers'. Or the 66 people may need to have the nine sons of Joseph

added to them; these are mentioned only in the LXX of Gen. 46:27 "And the sons of Joseph born in Egypt were nine souls".

7:15 *And Jacob went down into Egypt*- Stephen is developing the point that holy land or sacred space is not required for fellowship with God. Hence the Jewish obsession with the temple space was inappropriate.

And he died, he and our fathers- Acts 2:5 has recorded that there were large numbers of Jews from the diaspora who had come to live permanently at Jerusalem in order to die there; and many of them had been baptized. Stephen is making the point that the Jewish fathers themselves died outside the territory of the land promised to Abraham. Clearly those early Jewish Christians were still struggling with the idea that holy space was no longer to be seen so literally, but was now centred in the person and activity of the Lord Jesus.

7:16 *And they were carried back to Shechem, and laid*- The focus is very much upon their bodies, because the final fulfilment of the promises to Abraham involved a bodily resurrection of these men in order to eternally inherit the land promised to them.

In the tomb that Abraham bought for a price in silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem- The following possibilities have been suggested: "(1) Abraham bought a cave and field in which it stood (Genesis 23:17). (2) Abraham bought another sepulchre, but it is not stated that he bought the field in which it stood (Acts 7:15,16). (3) Years later, Jacob bought a parcel of ground (Joshua 24:32) or a parcel of a field (Genesis 33:19). This was, in all probability, the very field in which Abraham's second sepulchre stood, as this field once belonged to the same owners though they may have been miles apart". We note that despite the shameful behaviour of Jacob's sons to Hamor, God brought about some degree of reconciliation. This gives hope to all who feel stuck, perhaps by their own fault or that of their brethren and relatives, in situations where reconciliation appears impossible.

7:17 *But as the time of the fulfilment of the promise which God made to Abraham drew near, the people grew*- The Greek says simply "the time of the promise" drawing near- putting 'the promise' for 'the fulfilment of the promise', so sure are God's promises of fulfilment.

The promises to Abraham received their major primary fulfilment at the Exodus. Seeing that their ultimate fulfilment will be at the second coming, it follows that the deliverance of Israel from Egypt was typical of this. Or we can read this as meaning that the Abrahamic promises had their potential fulfilment at this time, involving a resurrection to eternal inheritance of the land- but Israel failed to meet the preconditions, and so their fulfilment was reinterpreted and rescheduled, just as was to happen as a result of their rejection of the Lord Jesus.

And multiplied in Egypt- See on 6:1 *Multiplying*.

7:18 *Until there arose another king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph*- Just as the Jews did not know the Lord in crucifying Him (Lk. 23:34 s.w.).

7:19 *The same dealt craftily with our race*- Again Stephen is seeking to bridge build with his audience by stressing what they had in common; see on :2 *Our father Abraham*.

And ill-treated our fathers- In fulfilment of the prediction mentioned in :6, where the same Greek word is translated "treat them badly". Luke uses the word of how the Christians were persecuted by the Jews (Acts 12:1; 14:2; 18:10). Again the Jews are being likened to the pagan Egyptians.

Casting out their babies so that they might not live- As the Jews cast out the 'baby' Christian converts from the synagogues. But the command of Pharaoh was that

the people themselves should cast their baby boys into the Nile; the abuse of the Hebrews was in that they were made to cast their own babies into the river; the Greek grammar here supports this. See on :21.

7:20 *At this time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair; and he was nourished three months in his father's house*- The word is only used in Heb. 11:23, also about Moses. It means just that- handsome, good. The idea that it means 'fair towards God' is speculation, and at best interpretation rather than translation. It seems a wilful twist of the Greek *asteios* , a word related to *astu*, a city, and meaning literally 'urbane'. Twisting *teos* ['God'] into *asteios* is just not permissible; and if we are to read 'fair to God' then quite simply the Greek would be different. It seems to be the equivalent of Ex. 2:2, where Jochebed noticed Moses was "a goodly child", the Hebrew *tob* meaning no more than 'good' or 'nice' and with no hint of 'to God'.

7:21 *And when he was cast out*- A related word to that used in :19 "casting out their babies so that they might not live"; see note there. The picture here presented is of Jochebed being technically obedient to the commandment to cast her baby into the river; by gently laying the child in an ark in the river. And it seems that no sooner had she done so, committing the baby to God's care, along walked Pharaoh's daughter and picked him up out of the water. Stephen describes the ‘putting out’ of Moses with the same word used in the LXX for what happened to Israel (Ez. 16:5; Ex. 2:3 LXX). Moses is set up as example and representative of his people Israel. Israel is likened in Ez. 16:5 to a child rejected at birth, but miraculously found and cared for, and brought up with every pampered blessing. Just as Moses was.

Pharaoh's daughter took him up- She called him 'Moses' because she had drawn him out of the water (Ex. 2:10). But the Hebrew *mashah*, 'drawn out', is used in the sense of deliverance. And this is from whence *Mosheh* ['Moses'; the same consonants are in both words]. Indeed, the idea of being drawn out of waters means just that (Ps. 18:16). So we are to imagine the baby about to drown, and the princess saving his life.

And nourished him as her own son- Moses would therefore have been next in line to the throne; and he gave up all that for the sake of trying to save a bunch of down and outs who didn't appreciate him anyway.

7:22 *And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians*- Moses and Daniel were in such a similar situation; Daniel appears to have slipped away into the shadows whenever he was promoted to greatness in Babylon, and surely he took inspiration from Moses. There are similarities intended to be discerned between our lives and those of others; and we are to respond. Paul says he was "*taught* according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers" (Acts 22:3) by Gamaliel, receiving the highest wisdom possible in the Jewish world; but he uses the same word as Stephen in Acts 7:22, describing how Moses was *"learned*" in all the wisdom of Egypt. Paul perceived his Jerusalem education as equivalent to that received by Moses in Egypt; he saw the very doyen of Judaism as no better than pagan Egypt. And Stephen [through his allusions] likewise had several times suggested that Judaism was no better than paganism. This speech had a huge effect on Paul, even though Stephen would not have noticed anything at the time.

*“*The wisdom” is Gk. *sophia*. The same word is used in the construction which is translated "dealt craftily" in :19; the wisdom of Egypt was to persecute the Hebrews.

And he was mighty in his words and works- The very phrase used by Luke about the Lord (Lk. 24:19). If Moses was indeed handsome (see on :20) and also mighty in words and works, he really would have been very eligible as the next Pharaoh, being the Pharaoh's adopted grandson. Moses really did despise so much worldly advantage for the sake of the far less glamorous calling of God. "Mighty in his words and

works" is very much the language which has been used to describe Stephen himself in 6:8-10. Stephen took comfort from the rejection of Moses, and saw himself in Moses' experiences. This is how we too can make Biblical history a living word to us. Indeed, the Biblical examples which Stephen selects include Joseph who were rejected by the children of Israel despite his "wisdom" (:10), and Moses who also had "wisdom" [of the Egyptians] but was rejected by Israel- and wisdom was the great characteristic of Stephen (6:10). The way God made Stephen's face to shine as if he were an Angel (6:15) is effectively showing how God confirms Stephen in feeling as Moses; for the Angel's glory shone off the face of Moses too (Ex. 34:29).

"I am not eloquent (mg. a man of words) ... I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (Ex. 4:10); this is how Moses felt he would be perceived, although actually he was formally quite fluent when in the court of Pharaoh (Acts 7:22). Paul would have remembered Stephen saying how Moses was formerly full of worldly *wisdom* and "mighty in words". Paul felt that he too had been through Moses' experience- once mighty in words as the rising star of the Jewish world, but now like Moses he had left all that behind in order to try to save a new Israel from Judaism and paganism.

7:23 *But when he was nearly forty years old*- It is worth trying to visualize the scene when Moses was “full forty years old” (AV). It would make a fine movie. The Greek phrase could refer to Moses’ birthday, and one is tempted to speculate that it had been arranged that when Moses was 40, he would become Pharaoh. Heb. 11:24 says that he refused and chose- the Greek tense implying a one off choice- to suffer affliction with God’s people. It is tempting to imagine Moses at the ceremony when he should have been declared as Pharaoh, the most powerful man in his world… standing up and saying, to a suddenly hushed audience, voice cracking with shame and stress and yet some sort of proud relief that he was doing the right thing: “I, whom you know in Egyptian as Meses, am Moshe, yes, Moshe the Jew; and I decline to be Pharaoh”. Imagine his foster mother’s pain and anger. And then in the end, the wonderful honour would have been given to another man, who became Pharaoh. Perhaps he or his son was the one to whom Moses was to come, 40 years later. After a nervous breakdown, stuttering, speaking with a thick accent, clearly having forgotten Egyptian… walking through the mansions of glory, along the corridors of power, to meet that man, to whom he had given the throne 40 years earlier.

It came into his heart- God clearly moved Moses to deliver Israel. We see here yet another example of how God can operate directly upon the hearts of men, giving ideas, motivation and even repentance.

To visit his brothers the children of Israel- 'Visit' is a Hebraism for identifying with, and also saving. It is through the Lord's representative sacrifice that God ultimately visited and saved His people. Ex. 4:31 is clear that *God* visited His people at this time; yet He was strongly manifested in Moses, so that what Moses did and desired to do was a manifestation of God. It is Luke who has recorded already how the work of the Lord Jesus was God's visiting of His people (Lk. 1:68,78; 7:16); and he later speaks of how God visited the Gentiles through the work of Peter (Acts 15:14). So often, the words of Stephen are alluded to later by Paul, who would have watched and listened with eagle intensity to Stephen's words here- and on his conversion, sought to live in the spirit and reasoning of the man he murdered. Paul uses Stephen's phrase here when he speaks of his decision to go 'visit his brothers' where he had previously preached and suffered (Acts 15:36). Such a decision was at great personal risk; for he had faced death and persecution in those cities. His brave desire to return was perhaps motivated by Moses' brave decision to visit his brothers,

at the cost of losing all things in his secular life and endangering his life. But the thought of following Moses in this was first stimulated by Stephen talking about it. And this is how our lives also work out; we may hear a brother talking about a Bible character like Moses, and it later inspires us in a radical, significant life decision.

"When Moses *was grown*, he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens... when he was *full forty years old* it came into his heart to visit his brethren... by faith Moses, *when he was come to years*, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter" (Ex. 2:11; Acts 7:23; Heb. 11:24). The implication seems to be that Moses reached a certain point of maturity, of readiness, and then he went to his brethren. " ...[Moses] *refused* to be called the son of Pharaoh... *choosing* rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the *reproach of Christ* greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Heb. 11:24-28). Moses could have been the next Pharaoh; according to Josephus, he was the commander of the Egyptian army. But he walked away from the possibility of being the riches man on earth, he "refused" it, because he valued "the reproach of Christ" and the recompense of the Kingdom to be *greater* riches. Yet what did he know about the sufferings of Christ? Presumably he had worked out from the promises of the seed in Eden and to the fathers that the future Saviour must be reproached and rejected; and he saw that his own life experience could have a close association with that of this unknown future Saviour who would surely come. And therefore, it seems, Moses counted the honour and wonder of this greater that the riches of Egypt. Both Paul and Moses rejected mammon for things which are abstract and intellectual (in the strict sense): the *excellency* of the understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ and His cross, and the Kingdom this would enable. Living when we do, with perhaps a greater knowledge of the Lord's victory and excellency, our motivation ought to be even stronger.

7:24 *And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed*- It was God who delivered Israel from their Egyptian oppressors (1 Sam. 10:18); but He did so through Moses. Yet Israel would only be oppressed by Gentiles if they were disobedient to the covenant (Dt. 28:29,33, and the word is often used about their punishments at Gentile hands during the period of the judges). But despite that, the God of all grace through Moses avenged His people who were justly suffering for their sins. Stephen is seeking to remove from Israel any sense of national pride at their Exodus from Egypt, and instead see it as a parade example of God's pure grace through the raising up of a Saviour in Moses, who looked ahead to Messiah. And yet the profound truth was that it was through the 'oppression' of that Messianic Suffering Servant on the cross that Israel's salvation would be enabled (Is. 53:7). And no wonder then that the brief summary of the Gospel in Acts 10:38 uses the word to summarize the work of the Lord Jesus as delivering the oppressed. Stephen, or the Lord speaking through Stephen, was appealing to the audience on all levels. There were many Rabbinic-trained minds there like Saul's, who thought constantly on the level of Scriptural allusion, type and antitype. And these words of Stephen, spoken in perhaps his last minutes of mortal life, succeeded in converting at least Saul.

Striking the Egyptian- The same word used of how the Jews 'smote' the Lord with death (Mt. 26:31). The point is being developed, as with the language of 'oppression', that it was through the Lord's smiting that He smote the oppressors of His people.

7:25 *And he supposed that his brothers understood*- "Supposed" translates *nomizo*, connected to the noun *nomos*, 'law'. The Law of Moses ought to have brought Israel to perceive the Lord Jesus as their Saviour; but for whatever reason, they failed to make that connection.

That God by his hand was giving them deliverance- Moses' hand. But God had told Moses at the bush: "I will stretch out *My hand*, and smite Egypt...." . Moses had yet to learn the meaning of God manifestation through men; Stephen is bringing out the weakness of the fathers, even Moses.

But they understood not- Another phrase of Stephen's that stuck in Paul's mind to the end of his days; for on arrival in Rome he lamented that the Jews "understood not" (Acts 28:26 s.w.). Stephen's speech is a superb example of powerful preaching that left ideas and words in the minds of his hearers that remained for decades afterwards. The Lord had many times lamented that Israel "understood not"; we can therefore infer that Israel could have accepted Moses' deliverance the first time. But they thrust him away from them, and there was a 40 year hiatus in the plan of Israel's redemption. This was reflected in Israel's rejection of the Lord Jesus and then the possibility arising around AD70 for them to accept Him again. It seems from the New Testament that the apostles clearly hoped for that; but again they refused the possibility, and another, longer hiatus has been interposed.

7:26 *And the following day he appeared to two of them* - God sent Moses to be their saviour, pointing forward to His sending of the Lord Jesus to redeem us. Moses came to Israel and "shewed (Greek *'optomai*') himself" to them (Acts 7:26). Yet *'optomai'* really means to gaze at, to watch a spectacle. He came to his people, and gazed at them as they fought among themselves, spiritually and emotionally destroyed by the oppression of Egypt. He invited them to likewise gaze upon him as their saviour. This surely prefigures our Lord's consideration of our sinful state. As he grew up in Nazareth he would have thought on this a lot. The same word for “appeared” is used of the Lord's appearances after His resurrection, specifically to the 'two' on the road to Emmaus. Luke has used the word in Acts 1:3 of how the Lord 'appeared' after His resurrection for 40 days. And it is the same word used of how the risen Lord appeared to Saul soon afterwards (Acts 9:17; 26:16; 1 Cor. 15:8). Surely Saul made the connection.

As they were fighting- 'Striving'. The same word is used of how the Jews strove amongst themselves over the issue of Jesus as Messiah (Jn. 6:52). The same striving was going on within the consciences of men like Saul and Gamaliel who were listening to Stephen.

And tried to reconcile them- Paul grasped the point, for in his later letters he writes much of how the Lord's work and the outcome of His death was fundamentally the ministry of reconciliation between persons. To glorify, create and perpetuate division between brethren is to miss the point of the Lord's work.

Saying, Gentlemen, you are brothers- Literally, 'men'. They were not to be mere men in their relationship with each other, they were to remember that they were brothers and act accordingly. See on :28. Several times Stephen has appealed to the fact that he and the Jews were brothers, with common ancestry; see on 7:2 *Our father Abraham*. But just as the point was lost on Israel at the time of Moses, so it was in Stephen's day; for they stoned him all the same.

Why do you injure each other?- The same word has just been used of how the Egyptian injured the Israelite (s.w. "suffer wrong"). By oppressing and injuring our brethren, we are acting as Egypt. This was a finely reasoned appeal to Stephen's brethren not to treat him likewise. And given the kind of minds listening to him, continually accustomed to such a way of reasoning from Biblical words and precedents, the appeal would have struck home. Especially with Saul.

7:27 *But he that did his neighbour wrong*- The same word as "injure" in :26; see note there.

Thrust him away- This incident was typical of Israel's attitude to Moses in the wilderness years (:39 s.w.). And again, the listening, angry Paul was deeply impressed by the logic. He got the point, that Moses was a type of the Lord Jesus; and he uses the same word in saying that Israel had thrust away the Gospel of Christ (Acts 13:46), although he also marvels at how although they had done this, God had not 'thrust away' His people Israel (Rom. 11:1,2). God has not treated them as they treated Him through their rejection of Moses and Jesus, who manifested Him.

Saying, Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?- Again there was the question of authority. This was a big issue with the Jews of the first century in their criticisms of both the Lord and His preachers. Stephen is demonstrating that it was this concern with authority which had led Israel to initially reject Moses. The Lord Jesus of course is described with the same words, as the ultimate ruler (Rev. 1:5) and judge. Luke clearly connects with these words by being the only evangelist to record the Lord's comment: "Who made me a judge or a divider over you?" (Lk. 12:14). The answer was, 'God'. The parallels were clearly being developed by Stephen between Moses and the Lord Jesus, and they would not have been lost upon his audience.

7:28 *Would you kill me*- Moses had made no threat at all. He had come to save his brethren, not kill them. Later, Israel liked to suppose that Moses and God Himself were some kind of psychopaths who had led them out of Egypt intentionally to murder them in the desert. Legion feared the Lord had come to torment rather than save him (Mt. 8:29). The disciples feared that the Lord didn't care that they perished in the storm (Mk. 4:38). Here we have a psychological phenomenon; the saviour is feared to be a destroyer by those he seeks to save. This has been observed from various angles in many studies and observations. The reason is that the group to be saved do not believe that the saviour can save them; and they justify that disbelief by thinking that actually, they are correct in disbelieving him- because actually, he is a deceiver and wishes to kill them. This is why strong opposites of reaction are produced by the challenge to faith which there is in the person of Jesus and in the Gospel. It is why messengers of that Gospel and of Jesus are so strongly slandered by those who disbelieve that Gospel. It is why nobody can stand on some passive middle ground when they encounter the Lord. Here too is the explanation for Saul's manic reaction against the Lord, and then such a strong reaction the other way. The very way we are wired means that we respond to salvation either in trust, or in strong reaction the other way. In our witnessing to men and women, we often meet the claim that folks are undecided or indifferent. However politely stated, that is in fact an excuse for unbelief.

As you killed the Egyptian yesterday?- The Hebrew assumed that Moses was going to treat him too as he would an Egyptian. The Hebrew had failed to realize the unique identity of himself as a Hebrew and not as a mere man. See on :26 *Gentlemen, you are brothers*.

7:29 *And Moses fled at this saying and went to live in the land of Midian*- Ex. 2:14 says that "Moses was afraid, and said, Surely this thing is known". But Heb. 11:27 gives a different perspective: "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the anger of the king. For he endured...". See on Heb. 11:27. It seems that Moses had at best a mixture of motives, or motives that changed over time; yet God sees through his human fear, and discerns an element of calm faith within Moses as he left Egypt. Moses is described as having "endurance" at the time he fled from Egypt (Heb. 11:27), even though in the short term his faith failed him at the time and he fled in fear (Ex. 2:14,15). Yet God counted him as having that basic ability to endure, even to endure through his own failure and weakness. *This* is what God looks at, rather than

our day-to-day acts of sin and righteousness. Stephen emphasizes the weakness of Moses to seek to lead his audience away from national pride and an idolizing of Moses; he wished them to see the prophet greater than Moses, Jesus the Messiah, as indeed greater than Moses. In Judaism, there was and still is a tendency to perceive Moses as the acme of spirituality, far greater than Messiah.

Where he begat two sons- Neither of whom did he circumcise; and their mother was a non-Israelite. Such a person would have been excluded from the synagogues by Moses' spiritual descendants. Again, Stephen is portraying the weaker side of Moses in order to lead his listeners to a position where they sought the greater than Moses.

7:30 *And when forty years were fulfilled*- The language of 'fulfilment' suggests that God planned the 40 years ahead of time. The suggestion seems to be that God gave them this period as a punishment- for not accepting Moses the first time. Stephen and the early apostles appear to have had the idea that likewise, a 40 year period was being given to Israel to repent after their rejection of the Lord. But even when that was fulfilled, they still refused to repent. The idea of years being fulfilled is using the words used in the LXX for the 70 years judgment upon Judah which was fulfilled (2 Chron. 36:21,22; Jer. 25:12). This confirms us in understanding this period as a judgment upon Israel; their sufferings in Egypt were prolonged by their refusal to accept Moses' deliverance.

An angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai- The point being once more that sacred space is not only in the temple nor only in the territory of the land of Israel. The wilderness where Moses kept sheep for 40 years was also the same area where he shepherded Israel for the next 40 years. 40 years is a long time; during it, Moses went from being a handsome young man, next in line for the throne, eloquent in words and works... to a man broken by 40 years of manual work in the cruel desert, stuttering, having forgotten Egyptian, needing a spokesman. And then, he was ready for God to use as the greatest leader of His people apart from the Lord. Monotonous experience over decades can be used by the Father to prepare us for another stage of life; whilst we cannot attach specific meaning to event at the time it happens, we can rest assured that there is meaning to event, even if it takes 40 years to realize it.

In a flame of fire- The appearance of the Spirit as flames of fire on the heads of the apostles thereby connected them to Moses; and the Jewish opposition to them made those learned religious men no better than the Egyptians.

In a bush- It is Luke who uses this word in recording how the Lord made the point that figs and grapes, the classic symbols of Israel under blessing, do not come from such thorny bushes (Lk. 6:44). But it was there, in that context and negative associations, that Yahweh revealed Himself as Israel's saviour through Moses. And He had done the same in the Lord Jesus whom Israel now likewise despised.

7:31 *And when Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight; and as he drew near to observe*- “Wondered” translates a Greek word which is often used in a negative sense concerning people lacking faith and insight when they should have had it. Another reference to Moses in weakness, preparing the way for presenting Jesus as Messiah as the greater than Moses.

There came the voice of the Lord- Actually of an Angel (:30). But the Angel was spoken of as if it were God, in that it was speaking God's voice. In this lies the basis for a correct understanding of the highly exalted nature of the Lord Jesus; not God Himself in a Trinitarian sense, but the supreme manifestation of Him.

7:32 *I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob*- The Angel spoke those words; and it would be fair to say that in reality, the patriarchs conceived of God in terms of His Angel. Jacob is quite clear about this in Gen. 48:15,16.

And Moses trembled and dared not look- This is in intentional contrast to the way in which he later spoke face to face with the Angel, as a man speaks with his friend (Ex. 33:11); and with how he had the ambition to ask to see God's own glory (Ex. 33:20). The point is that Moses grew spiritually in closeness to the Angel who manifested the Father. And it was such growth in relation to the Lord Jesus which Stephen was urging. See on :34 *Come*.

7:33 *And the Lord said to him, Take off the shoes from your feet*- Stephen says that this request came *after* God had introduced Himself as the God of Abraham etc. (:32). But the order is apparently different in Ex. 3:5,6: "Take your sandals off from your feet, for the place you are standing on is holy ground.
Moreover he said, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob". It could be that the "he said" is to be understood as 'He *had* said'. But another alternative is that Stephen was inspired to understand that God introduced Himself twice to Moses; and the first time Moses didn't comprehend it. This would fit with Stephen's point that Joseph was made known to his brethren the *second* time; and Moses likewise was accepted by Israel the second time he came to them. And now Stephen would be saying that Moses himself only grasped the manifestation of God in the Angel at the second time. All this of course was prodding the Jewish conscience about their rejection of their Messiah the first time; but at His second appearing, the 'second time'... they will accept Him.

For the place upon which you stand is holy ground- Literally, in the Greek, 'the holy land', the phrase beloved of Jews to describe Israel. Stephen was speaking in the context of arguing that the temple was no longer required for worship, house meetings were just as valid; and so he makes the point that a spot of scrubland in the Sinai desert was just as much the holy land as the territory of Palestine and the temple mount itself.

7:34 *I have surely seen the affliction of My people that is in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them; and now*- Their groaning was heard by God as a prayer; He sees situations as prayer. Otherwise, if prayer is simply words, then those who are better able to verbalize would have more powerful prayers. But ability to verbalize isn't the necessary thing in order for God to hear prayer.

Come, I will send you into Egypt- Gk. 'come here'. The Angel in the bush invited Moses to come closer to Him, whereas Moses "dared not look" (:32). It was his own intimacy to God which would be the basis of Israel's salvation; hence the paradox of "Come [here], I will send you [away] into Egypt". As noted on :32 *Moses trembled and dared not look,* Moses grew in relationship and intimacy with that Angel, just as he grew in ability to save Israel.

7:35 *This Moses*- Israel hated him, they thrust him from them (Acts 7:39); due to their provocation he failed to enter the land. He had done so much for them, yet they bitterly rejected him- "this Moses", as they called him (Ex. 32:1,23 cp. Acts 7:35). But when God wanted to destroy them and make of Moses a great nation, he pleaded for them with such intensity that he achieved what few prayerful men have: a change (not just a delay in outworking) in God's categorically stated intention.

Whom they refused, saying: Who made you a ruler and a judge?- The same word used of Israel's denial or refusing of the Lord Jesus (Acts 3:13,14). The loneliness of

Moses as a type of Christ in showing this kind of love must surely represent that of our Lord. They went to a height which was generally beyond the appreciation of the men among whom they lived. The Spirit seems to highlight the loneliness of Moses by saying that at the same time as Moses *refused* to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, Israel *refused* him (the same Greek word is used; Heb. 11:24; Acts 7:35). He was rejected by both the world and God's people: for 40 long years. As Israel envied Moses for spiritual reasons (Ps. 106:16; Acts 7:9), so they did Christ (Mt. 27:18), after the pattern of the brothers' spiritual envy of Joseph (Gen. 37:11). Spiritual envy leading to persecution is quite a common feature in Biblical history (Job, Jeremiah, Paul...). And it isn't absent from the Christian experience either.

Him God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer, by the hand of the angel that appeared to him in the bush- "Ruler and judge" becomes "ruler and deliverer". God fundamentally and essentially wishes to deliver / save rather than to judge. Although Israel rejected Moses as their ruler and deliverer, "the same did God send *to be* a ruler and a deliverer". They didn't want to be saved from Egypt through Moses, and yet God did save them from Egypt through Moses. Israel at that time were exactly like us; while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, we were redeemed in prospect from a world we didn't want to leave. We were saved- and are saved- almost in spite of ourselves. That we were predestined to such great salvation is one of redemption's finest mysteries.

7:36 *This man led them out*- The grammar here might suggest that the completed 'leading out' was after the 40 years journey, and the AV reflects that. Our path in spiritual life is likewise a leading of us out of Egypt; it is not all achieved at the moment of crossing the Red Sea / baptism. The lead up to the Red Sea crossing was just as much a part of the leading out process. This is why separation from the world and unto the things of the Kingdom is an essential part of our salvation process. And it's why that process will involve progressive disillusion and bad experience with the world.

"He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs... in the wilderness forty years" (AV); yet Ex.12:41; 33:1 say that the bringing out of Israel was at the Red Sea. These two 'bringings out' of Egypt (the flesh) are experienced by us, firstly at baptism, and secondly in actually entering the Kingdom at the second coming. Our bringing out from the Kingdom of darkness into the sphere of God's rulership only occurs in prospect at baptism and must be confirmed at the end of our wilderness wandering.

Having done wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years- This confirms that the 'leading out' was both from Egypt and at the end of the wilderness journeys. The wonders done at the exodus were in essence done throughout the 40 years. Thus the cloud in which they were baptized at the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1) continued with them for 40 years. Their baptism in this sense was ongoing, and this idea is repeated in the discourse on baptism in Romans 6.

7:37 *This is the Moses who said to the children of Israel*- Implying 'Moses would have believed in Jesus as Messiah if he were here today'.

A prophet like me shall God raise up to you from among your brothers - A clear statement of the Lord's humanity. As the Passover lamb had to be taken out from among the flock, so the Messiah was taken out from amongst His brothers. And Stephen has just stressed that Moses was a man ("This man...", :36). Messiah was to like him. Yet there was an initial possible fulfilment of this prophecy in Aaron, whom Moses was told would be his prophet (Ex. 7:1), and who was literally one of Moses' brothers. Aaron could have been the Messiah figure, but failed. Again we are

introduced to the idea of conditional prophecy; which was highly relevant to Israel at that time. If they accepted Jesus as Messiah, then prophecies would be fulfilled- but if they did not, then those prophecies would have another and more difficult [for Israel] outworking.

7:38 *This is he that was in the congregation in the wilderness*- The ecclesia, the church. We find Moses as a type of Christ also presented as representative of Israel, and therefore able to completely sympathise with them in their physical afflictions and spiritual weaknesses. Thus the Spirit says (in the context of presenting Moses as a type of Christ) that Moses was "*in* (not "with") the ecclesia in the wilderness", stressing the way in which he was in their midst rather than distanced from them. The Lord Jesus is portrayed in Acts as very much "in" the church, active and present just as much as Moses was. Paul's later reasoning in 1 Corinthians 10 about the church in the wilderness is yet another example of how the reasoning of Stephen remained with him over the years, and he developed the ideas.

With the angel- Acts 7:38 (especially the Diaglott translation) speaks as if the Angel was physically present with Moses on the journey, and was as much in the congregation as Moses was: "He (Moses) was in the church in the wilderness with the Angel which spake to him in the Mount Sina and with our fathers". In passing, this implies that it was the same Angel (Michael) who gave the promises to Abraham, who gave the Law, and who went with them through the wilderness. Truly He is the Angel connected with Israel! Stephen's point was that like the Angel in the wilderness, the Lord Jesus was no less 'in' the early church although mostly invisible.

That spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers- But their 'fathers' didn't want the Angel to speak with them directly, and wanted Moses alone to meet God on Sinai. This was the stock they were descended from; and it was no pedigree to be proud of. Stephen is implying that the descendants of those 'fathers' were likewise not willing to listen to the voice of God; or as Hebrews puts it, they turned away from Him who spoke from Heaven (Heb. 12:25- Hebrews might have been written by Stephen).

Who received living words to give to us- God's word is unlike any human word; it has the ability to speak to subsequent generations directly in their context. In this sense, the words given to Moses were also given to Stephen's generation, and spoke to them of Jesus. Just as the record of Jacob's wrestling with the Angel is God speaking to us today (Hos. 12:4). Moses trembled and Sinai shook and the people fled when they heard God's word. "God's voice was heard at Sinai: the same voice spoke in the Psalmist's words. But the appeal stands written in Scripture and therefore Paul can say that "Today" is a time with limits, but it was yet "today" when the Hebrews was written and Paul repeats the word of the Psalmist as God's voice to the Hebrews of his day. It is significant that Paul immediately adds that "the word of God is living and powerful". The words he quoted were no dead message but God's living voice… The exhortation "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord" was God speaking "unto you", says Paul to the Hebrews. Is it less so to sons of any generation?" [John Carter, *Delight In God's Law*, pp. 232,233]. Heb. 12:5 alludes to this idea of a living word by speaking of an Old Testament passage as 'reasoning' (R.V.) with us. The Lord Jesus spoke of how the spiritual man is to live by every word which proceeds (present tense) from the mouth of God (Mt. 4:4); as if He perceived God's words written in the book of Deuteronomy to be "proceeding" from God's very mouth in an ongoing sense. Moses speaks of how God says to each dying man "Return, you children of men" (Ps. 90:3)- as if Moses understood to speak the words of Gen. 3:19 to every man who dies. Likewise the Lord spoke as if the Jews of His day ought to be *hearing* Moses and the

prophets speaking to them in urgent warning (Lk. 16:31); yet despite studying their words syllable by syllable, the Jews didn't in fact perceive it was a living word speaking to them directly and urgently. Abel, through the account of him in Scripture, "is yet spoken of" (Heb. 11:4 AVmg.). Isaiah was prophesying directly to the hypocrites of the first century, according to the Lord in Mk. 7:6 RV. There is an active quality to the words we read on the pages of our Bibles. The passage in the scrolls that said "I am the God of Abraham" was "spoken unto *you* by God", Jesus told first century Israel (Mt. 22:31). Note in passing how demanding He was- expecting them to figure from that statement and usage of the present tense that God considered Abraham effectively still alive, although he was dead, and would therefore resurrect him. Although God spoke to Moses alone in the mount, Moses stresses that actually God "spake unto *you* in the mount out of the midst of the fire". The word of God to His scribes really is, to the same gripping, terrifying degree, His direct word to us (Dt. 4:36; 5:45; 10:4). This explains why David repeatedly refers to the miracle at the Red Sea as if this had affected him personally, to the extent that he could ecstatically rejoice because of it. When Dt. 11:4 speaks of how "the Lord has destroyed [the Egyptians] unto this day", it sounds as if we are to understand each victory and achievement of God as somehow ongoing right down to our own day and our own lives and experience. Thus Ps. 114:5,6 RV describes the Red Sea as even now fleeing before God's people. And thus because of the records of God's past activities, we should be motivated in our decisions now.

7:39 *Our fathers would not be obedient to him*- The early church was "obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7 s.w.). Again Stephen is demonstrating the weakness of 'our fathers', whom the Jews were so proud of.

But thrust him from them and turned back in their hearts to Egypt- Stephen stresses the way in which Moses was rejected by Israel as a type of Christ. At age 40, Moses was "thrust away" by one of the Hebrews; and on the wilderness journey the Jews "thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt" (Acts 7:27,35,39). This suggests that there was far more antagonism between Moses and Israel than we gather from the Old Testament record- after the pattern of Israel's treatment of Jesus. It would seem from Acts 7:39 that after the golden calf incident, the majority of Israel cold shouldered Moses; their hearts, their thinking, was back in Egypt, reminiscing about Egyptian food... Once the point sank in that they were not going to enter the land, these feelings must have turned into bitter resentment. They were probably unaware of how Moses had been willing to offer his eternal destiny for their salvation; they would not have entered into the intensity of Moses' prayers for their salvation. The record seems to place Moses and "the people" in juxtaposition around 100 times (e.g. Ex. 15:24; 17:2,3; 32:1 NIV; Num. 16:41 NIV; 20:2,3; 21:5). They accused Moses of being a cruel cult leader, bent on leading them out into the desert to kill them and steal their wealth from them (Num. 16:13,14)- when in fact Moses was delivering them from the house of bondage, and was willing to lay down his own salvation for theirs. The way Moses submerged his own pain is superb; both of their rejection of him and of God's rejection of him from entering the Kingdom.

"Turned back" suggests an anti 'conversion', which is how the word is elsewhere translated. We meet the word again in :42, where in response to this turning back, God in response likewise turned back from Israel. There is a mutuality in response between God and man, and yet overarching that there is also His grace and continued enthusiasm to save even those who turn away from His offer.

7:40 *Saying unto Aaron*- Their desire for the golden calf was part of their mental return to Egypt; it was surely an Egyptian idol deity.

Make us gods- They made a singular calf, but understood it as a plurality; a many-in-one god. This is classic paganism, and is reflected in the false doctrine of the Trinity to this day.

That shall go before us- The constant, visible presence of the cloud and fire leading them failed to register. Visible miracles seem to have little effect in bringing people to spirituality. They wanted to be led back to Egypt and needed a leader through the trackless waste to get back there. Yet they had leadership going before them through the desert towards the promised land. Clearly, people choose a form of leadership which they perceive will lead them to where they themselves want to go. If the Bible and the living word of the Lord Jesus are our chosen guides, then we are to follow wherever they lead, rather than choosing leadership which takes us where we ourselves would wish to go in the short term. So many struggles over church leadership today come simply back to this.

As for this Moses, who led us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him- Their concern was that the trackless desert required a guide. They wilfully chose to ignore the fire and cloud leading them, and chose instead to focus on the man who was their leader. This happens today; people excuse not following God's word and Spirit direction because of their issues with the human leadership. Luke may be making a connection with the way he uses the same word for 'led out' in speaking of how after His resurrection, the Lord led His people as far as Bethany and then ascended to Heaven, becoming their invisible leader (Lk. 24:50).

7:41 *And they made a calf in those days*- The days Moses was in the mount.

And brought a sacrifice to the idol and rejoiced in the works of their hands- A phrase used about idols several times; :43 stresses that they "made" the idols. Trust in our own works is therefore a form of idolatry; Stephen is saying that although the Jews were strictly against idols, their justification by works was a form of idolatry, just as it can be today. The doing of works becomes an addiction and a form of justification rather than simple faith in Christ. They "rejoiced" in what they had made, whereas earlier at the Exodus they had rejoiced in God's grace of salvation towards them.

7:42 *But God turned and gave them up to serve the host of heaven*- On their journey to Canaan, the Israelites worshipped idols. Because of this, "God turned, and gave them up (over) to worship the host of heaven... I gave them up to the hardness of their hearts" (Acts 7:42; Ps. 81:12 AVmg.). God reached a stage where He actually encouraged Israel to worship idols; He confirmed them in their rejection of Him. And throughout their history, He encouraged them in their idolatry (Ez. 20:39; Am. 4:4). God will confirm us today in whichever way we chose to go. See on :39 *Turned back*.

“Gave them up to serve” implies that God held them back from worshipping the idols they had carried with them. But then He withdrew this psychological restraint. This is evidence enough that God is able to work in the hearts of men in order to hold them back from sinning, as He did even with gentile Abimelech. This is one of the many functions of His Holy Spirit; their behaviour is specifically described in :51 as resisting the Holy Spirit.

As it is written in the book of the prophets: Did you offer to me slain beasts and sacrifices for forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?- Stephen pointed out, by the inflection which he gave to his OT quotations, that Israel's service of God was meaningless because at the same time they worshipped their idols: "*Have you offered* to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness?". This was a rhetorical question. They offered the sacrifices, but actually they didn't. And

what is the difference between "slain beasts" and “sacrifices"? Aren't sacrifices only slain beasts? The point is that the animals they gave were only slain beasts; nothing more, not real offerings, not real, acceptable sacrifice. "They sacrifice flesh for the sacrifices of mine offerings, and eat it; but the Lord accepteth it not" (Hos. 8:13). And likewise we can dress up our devotions with the appearance of real sacrifice when there is nothing there at all.

7:43 *You took up the tabernacle of Moloch*- Ezekiel 20 describes how Israel took the idols of Egypt with them through the Red Sea; indeed, they lugged a whole pagan tabernacle system with them through the wilderness, in addition to the true tabernacle (:43,44). This of course is a warning to us who were as it were baptized also at the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1). Are we carrying two tabernacle systems with us [or more] on our wilderness journey?

And the star of the god Remphan, figures which you made to worship- See on :41 *The works of their hands*. These were in contrast to the "figure" of the tabernacle (:44). It was an anti-tabernacle which they carried, just as all false religion is a fake imitation of the true and just as the anti-Christ is not a person so much against Christ (although he is that), but a fake imitation of Him.

And I will carry you away- As they had carried their idols. There is a mutuality between God and man in how God responds to human sin.

Beyond Babylon- Paul’s relationship with Stephen becomes even more acute when we reflect upon how Stephen says that Israel were taken into judgment to *Babylon*. He is quoting here from Amos 5:26, which in both the LXX and Masoretic text says that Israel were to go “to Damascus”. Why does Stephen purposefully change “Damascus” to “Babylon”? Was it not because he knew there were many Christians in Damascus, and he didn’t want to speak of ‘going to Damascus’ as a figure for condemnation? And yet *straight afterwards* we are reading that Saul ‘went to *Damascus*’ to persecute and kill the Christians there. It’s as if Saul was so infuriated by Stephen’s subtle change that he wanted to prove him wrong; he would ‘go to Damascus’ and not be condemned, rather he would condemn the Christians there, and make it *their* place of judgment. This suggestion may seem farfetched. But we have to remember the Pharisaic way of reasoning and thinking. Every phrase of Scripture was so valuable to them, and major life decisions would be made over one nuance of the text or interpretation of it. No wonder that in later life, Paul alludes to his dear friend Stephen so much. What a joy it will be to see them meet up in the Kingdom.

7:44 *Our fathers had the tabernacle of the testimony in the wilderness, even as He who spoke to Moses*- The contrast is with the tabernacle of Moloch which they also carried with them. The "testimony" implies an evidence, a witness. There was no such witness in the false tabernacle. This is the word commonly used for the testimony or witness of the early preachers (Acts 4:33 and often in Paul's letters). This testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus was ignored by the Jews of Stephen's day just as Israel in the wilderness preferred the witness of Moloch's tabernacle which was in fact not a witness at all, for it was a silent assembly of materials and nothing more. The hint was that this was all the Jerusalem temple now amounted to, for the Lord had left that house desolate; the glory had departed from it. To draw a parallel between the Jerusalem temple and the tabernacle of Moloch was a radical thing to do. No wonder Saul and his colleagues were cut to the heart and beside themselves with anger.

Appointed- The tabernacle of Moloch was not "appointed" by God. Saul was paying attention to every word; for the Lord then appeared to him and "appointed"

him to do the work of *His* tabernacle (Acts 22:10 s.w.). And by doing so the Lord was inviting Paul [and all of us] to see Moses not as an icon to be worshipped from a respectful distance, but as a realistic pattern for our own path.

That he should make it according to the figure that he had seen- See on :43 *Figures which you made*.

7:45 *Which also our fathers, in their turn, brought into the land with Joshua*- Joshua is the same Hebrew word as 'Jesus'. Joshua-Jesus and the "fathers" brought in the tabernacle into the place previously possessed by Gentiles. I suggest that the tabernacle now referred to people, God's dwelling place. The Lord used the same word, so Luke alone records, of how those previously excluded from the temple were to be 'brought in' by Him and His servants (Lk. 14:21). The 'fathers' therefore equate with the servants of Jesus; the tabernacle is the new system of worship. Paul was later accused of bringing in Gentiles to the temple (Acts 21:28,29 s.w.). As the "fathers" along with Joshua-Jesus brought the tabernacle into the holy space of the land of Israel, so the early Jewish Christians along with the active Lord Jesus were to bring Gentile converts into the new holy space- not a literal space, but the temple of God's invisible church and spiritual temple. It was all just too much for the listening Judaists. That those fishermen believers-in-Jesus could be equivalent to the "fathers", that the crucified Jesus was as the historical Joshua, that the Gentiles were as the ark, that holy space no longer counted... it was all too much. The intensity and depth of Stephen's allusions were increasing as he progressed in his apparently innocent recounting of Israel's history. And when men are spiritually and intellectually cornered, they descend to personal attacks, in this case to the extent of throwing Roman law to the winds and picking up stones to stone Stephen to death with.

When they received possession of the nations that God thrust out before the presence of our fathers- Stephen has just drawn a parallel between the early Jewish Christian preachers, many of them illiterate manual workers, and the "fathers" at the time of Joshua-Jesus. And now he says that the Gentiles were cast out before them; the implication was that the Judaist elders were no better than the Gentile inhabitants of Canaan, who were now being cast out of the holy space. The Lord had literally cast out such persons from the holy space of the temple. Saul's conscience was badly goaded at this point; but the point was not lost on him. For in the years of his repentance, he wrote of how just as Gentile Hagar was "cast out", so Judaism had been cast out from God's true family (Gal. 4:30).

To the days of David- At first blush, a strange detail to add; that the process of casting out the Gentile tribes from the land was only completed by David, many generations later. The "fathers" hadn't done the job; they were not the peerless elders Judaism liked to imagine. And it was David, a clear type of Messiah, whose "son" was to be Messiah, who actually completed the job. The Lord Jesus was likewise doing the same- completing the job of casting the Judaists out of God's holy space because He had redefined that holy space.

7:46 *Who found favour in the sight of God*- The grace he found was in that he was given the honour of being the 'father' of Messiah; the Messianic promises of 2 Sam. 7:12-14 were given to David. Luke forces the point home by using the very same words as to how Mary "found favour in the sight of God" (Lk. 1:30), and was chosen to be the woman through whom the Messianic promise to David came true.

And asked to find a habitation for the God of Jacob- David's desire to "find" a temple for God was matched by how he "found" (s.w.) grace with God. As we learn in 2 Sam. 7, God turned around that desire to 'find' something for Him by saying that He would 'find' something for David, namely the Son of God, the Jewish Messiah,

being directly a "son of David". Stephen is setting up the position that all the argument about the temple as holy place was deeply and Biblically misplaced; because God wanted to give Israel His Son, rather than have a temple. And the Judaists were back in the initially mistaken mindset of David, focusing on the physical temple rather than the spiritual house centred in God's Son, the true temple. Stephen clearly read negatively Solomon's insistence on building a physical temple.

7:47 *But it was Solomon who built Him a house*- Stephen was accused by the Jews of blaspheming the temple. In reply, he gives a potted history of Israel, emphasizing how the faithful were constantly on the move rather than being settled in one physical place. He was subtly digging at the Jewish insistence that the temple was where God lived. In this context, he refers to Solomon's building of the temple in a negative light. He says that David tried to find a *tabernacle* for God, "*But* Solomon built him an *house*. *Howbeit* the most High dwelleth *not* in temples made with hands; as says the prophet, Heaven is my throne... what house will you build me?". This cannot mean 'God no longer dwells in the temple as He used to before Christ's death', because the reason given is that the prophet Isaiah says that God cannot live in houses. This reason was true in Isaiah's time, before the time of Christ. It would seem that Stephen is politely saying: 'Solomon made this mistake of thinking that God can be limited to a physical building. You're making just the same mistake'. And he goes on to make a comment which could well allude to this: "You do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers (including Solomon) did, so do you" (Acts 7:51). Further evidence that Stephen saw Solomon's building of the temple in a negative light is provided by the link between Acts 7:41 and 48: "They made a calf... and rejoiced in *the works of their own hands*... howbeit the Most High dwells not in temples *made with hands*". The word "made" is stressed in the record of Solomon's building the temple (2 Chron. 3:8,10,14-16; 4:1,2,6-9,14,18,19,21). The work of the temple was very much produced by men's *hands* (2 Chron. 2:7,8). Things made with hands refers to idols in several Old Testament passages (e.g. Is. 2:8; 17:8; 31:7). Significantly, Solomon's temple is described as being made with hands in 1 Chron. 29:5. And it may be significant that the words of Is. 66:1,2 concerning God not living in temples are quoted by Paul with reference to pagan temples in Acts 17:24, and concerning the temple in Jerusalem by Stephen. The building of the temple became an idol to Solomon. Human motives get terribly mixed.

7:48 *However*- Stephen read Solomon's building of the temple negatively; see on :47. It was even an example of resisting the Holy Spirit (:51).

The most high dwells not in houses made with hands- Note that it was God's clearly expressed wish that He should *not* live in a physical house (2 Sam. 7:12-16; Acts 7:48; 17:24). Yet He accommodated Himself to human weakness in wanting a physical house in which to worship Him; He came and lived (in a sense) in just such a house. In the same way, He did not wish Israel to have a system of human kingship; but when they insisted upon it, He worked with them through it. Just as He does with our wrong decisions.

As said the prophet- Again the quotation from Is. 66:1,2 is not exact but a summary of God's intended sense, quotation mixed with interpretation, as was the habit of Jewish rabbinic interpreters. But the context of Isaiah 66 is of God's final message to Judah, telling them that now God is not interested in their rebuilding of Solomon's temple, because as the sun began to go down on the prophets, He was now going to focus upon relationship with individuals rather than a formal temple presence.

7:49 *The Heaven is My throne*- See on :48 *As said the prophet*.

And the earth a footstool for my feet- As noted on Acts 2:35, God's footstool is the place where He is to be worshipped. His worshippers on earth are therefore in view here, and not the literal planet earth in a geographical sense. God wanted hearts as His footstool, not anything physical.

What manner of house will you build Me? says the Lord; or what is the place of My rest?- This is a rhetorical question. The sense is not 'You cannot build Me a house'; rather is it a question- what kind of house do you think I want? And the answer was: A dwelling place in hearts who believe in God's Son. Likewise "what is the place of My rest?" is rhetorical. The *topos* or holy space is not the Jerusalem temple nor the land of Israel; it is in the hearts of believers in God's Son. Hebrews 4, whether written by Paul or Stephen, surely alludes to this point by using the same word for "rest" in describing how Christians are entering the "rest" but Judaism is as Israel fallen in the wilderness, who did not enter into the rest promised.

7:50 *Did not My hand make all these things?*- God lives in what He "makes", and not in temples made by human hands (:48). Through the agency of the Spirt, God was and is preparing human hearts to be His 'making'. Paul repeats this reasoning in Acts 17:24 and 2 Cor. 5:1; Stephen's very last words before his death struck home and reaped a great harvest in the heart of that angry man called Saul who was listening. And whoever wrote Hebrews, be it Paul or Stephen, says precisely the same (Heb. 9:11,24). The similarities between Hebrews and Stephen's speech are many, and they are not just verbal similarities. It's as if Stephen's thoughts have been developed further. I would therefore suggest that Hebrews is not Stephen's letter; it appears to be a further development of his last words. The appropriate author, although we cannot be dogmatic, would seem to me to be Saul / Paul. The verbal similarities have led some to assume it must be Stephen; but it makes more sense to me to realize that this was written by someone who had memorized and developed Stephen's speech throughout his life. And Paul is to me the compelling candidate.

7:51 *You stiffnecked*- The reference is to how God wished to destroy a "stiffnecked" Israel and make of Moses another people of God (Ex. 32:9; 33:3,5; 34:9). The message contained in that one word "stiffnecked" was lengthy and powerful. The only other time we read of being stiffnecked and uncircumcised in the same verse is in Dt. 10:16; and again there is the point made that circumcision is of the heart more than the flesh: "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked". This was an appeal to Israel. Stephen's allusion shows that he was not merely imprecating against the Judaists who surrounded him. He was appealing to them to change, so that they might enter the land of God's Kingdom. His hopefulness, up to his last words in this world, is amazing. His passion to save at least some of those hard hearts paid off, with the conversion of the worst of them, Saul, to become one of the Lord's greatest servants. See on "hearts and ears" below. "Stiffnecked" is formed from the word *sklero*, "hard". The Lord uses just that word in telling Saul that it is "hard" for him to kick against the goads. A stubborn ox is literally stiffnecked. The Lord saw that this whole reasoning about being stiffnecked and uncircumcised had struck home in Saul's heart. And so He continues the allusion in further appealing to him. He does the same likewise with us in life and the encounters with verses in His written word which He leads us to.

And uncircumcised- To call the circumcised Jews uncircumcised, when circumcision was for them the sign of Divine covenant, was just too much. Stephen is now making explicit what he has been saying earlier by way of allusion and implication- they were no more than Gentiles. And again, the listening, fuming Saul was deeply touched; for later he writes of how circumcision is a matter of the heart

and not of the flesh; indeed, this is quite a theme with Paul (Rom. 2:28,29; Eph. 2:11; Phil. 3:3; Col. 2:11). Each time he thought and wrote about it, he would've remembered how the dying Stephen had made this point, and how furious he had been to hear it. We see in Paul's references to circumcision how he had not only taken note of Stephen's words, but had taken the reasoning further. Seeing Hebrews is so full of reference to Stephen's words *and developments of his reasoning*, it seems to me that Paul is the likely author; and the letter is addressed to Hebrews, perhaps to the Jerusalem ecclesia, who would have known Stephen.

In heart and ears- They "stopped their ears" (:57). They refused the appeal Stephen was making to circumcise their hearts and ears, even at that late stage. Circumcision was to be not only of the heart, but of the ears. Circumcision of ears may seem a strange idea, at first blush. Stephen is saying that the sign of covenant relationship with God is how we hear; as his Lord had taught, "Take heed how you hear" (Lk. 8:18; again, it is Luke who records this). The circumcised ear will hear God's word; and the relevance of this otherwise throw away word "ears" is in that Stephen has been appealing to the Jews from the basis of Israel's well known history. He was asking them to hear that familiar Scripture with circumcised ears; and they refused. At least, right then at that moment they did.

You do always- This could just mean 'earnestly, strongly'. But the idea of regular resistance to the Holy Spirit could refer to their refusal to hear the real Spirit of God's word as they regularly read it and encountered the incidents from Israel's history in their Bible study. For the Holy Spirit was the agency behind the writing of the Bible. See above on "hearts and ears".

Resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you- See on :42 *Gave them up to serve.* The allusion is to Is. 63:10 LXX: "But they disobeyed, and provoked his Holy Spirit: so he turned to be an enemy, he himself contended against them". This resistance of the Spirit as we read the word of the Spirit, refusing to see the points the Lord is making to us, can be our failure too. The Jews were so proud of being descendants of the "fathers". But as demonstrated throughout this commentary, Stephen has been pointing out the weakness of the Jewish fathers, and he appeals to them to now have a different Father- God.

7:52 *Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?*- Stephen here and in :51 speaks of "your fathers" whereas earlier in his address he spoke repeatedly of "*our* fathers" (Acts 7:2,11,12,15,19,38,39,44,45). But having tried to build that bridge between himself and his audience, by speaking of their common ancestry, he now makes the appeal for radical change- to disown what those fathers *did*. Saul, who was intently listening, was guilty of persecuting the Christians (Acts 22:4 s.w.). And the Lord continues Stephen's appeal to him by asking him on the Damascus road: "Why do you persecute Me?" (Acts 9:4,5 s.w.). Note that every prophet was persecuted- even if we don't read about (e.g. Jonah- although maybe it was Jewish persecution which disinclined him to preach to Gentiles).

And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One- Peter had used the same word in Acts 3:28: "The things which God foretold [s.w.] by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He thus fulfilled". Stephen may be taking this further in suggesting that the reason they killed such prophets was because the message of a suffering, dead Messiah was so deeply unacceptable to the Jews. Stephen is demonstrating that the Jews' implacable hatred of Jesus of Nazareth was therefore seamlessly in line with the attitude of an Israel whom God had rejected. The message of Christ crucified cannot be received dispassionately; it forces a reaction, either of humbled acceptance, or anger, even passive anger, but all the same anger-

because the human conscience has been touched in a way nothing else can touch it. And that anger is directed at the one who brings the message, for he or she is the human face of Jesus to them. It is Luke alone who records how the Lord Jesus on the cross was "the just [one]" (Lk. 23:47 s.w.).

Of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers- Judas the singular betrayer was an embodiment of all the Jewish opposition. I suggest this is the key to understanding how the 'satan' or adversary of Jewish opposition entered into Judas. I develop this theme further in 'The Jewish Satan' in *The Real Devil*. The Jews doubtless rationalized the Lord's death by feeling that the Romans had done it. But the early preachers repeatedly lay the blame for it upon the Jews; hence Stephen says that they had each one murdered their Messiah; for he speaks of "murderers" in the plural. This demonstrates that 'going along' with a seriously wrong position can be counted by God as actually performing the crime.

7:53 *You who received the law as it was ordained by angels*- That Angels gave the Law is clear from Dt. 33:2 LXX; Ps. 68:17; Gal. 3:19 and Heb. 2:2. But why mention it? Perhaps because the listening Jews were seeing Stephen's face as if were an Angel (Acts 6:15). As Israel turned away from the law given by Angels, so they were turning away from the new covenant being presented to them by an Angel.

And did not keep it- That Jewish audience were convinced they were obedient to Torah. To be told they were not, because they didn't accept their own Messiah... was the last straw. For the argument here is that to reject Jesus as Messiah was to break the Mosaic law; for obedience to that law was intended to bring people to Messiah. Note that the Mosaic law was designed to bring people to Christ not so much through studying the various types of Christ it contains, but through practically seeking to obey it. That process would bring people to accept Jesus as the Christ; but the fact they didn't mean they had not properly kept it. Paul was influenced by these words of Stephen when he wrote that the circumcised do not keep the law [s.w., Gal. 6:13].

7:54 *Now when they heard these things, they were cut to the heart*- See on Acts 5:33 "Cut to the heart". The Greek is literally 'they were ripped through their hearts'. This is the power of the argument for Christ to touch human hearts. The same term is used for how the Sanhedrin were ripped in their hearts by Peter's defence (Acts 5:13).

And they ground their teeth at him- Such language must surely connect with the oft repeated description of the rejected gnashing their teeth at the judgment (Mt. 8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30); as if those Jews acted out their own rejection by their attitude to the word in this life. Judgment is ongoing now, in its essence. As Stephen's enemies "gnashed on him with their teeth", his Biblical mind would therefore have raced to Job 16:9, describing the behaviour of the wicked towards the faithful: "He tears me in his wrath, who hates me: he gnashes upon me with his teeth". The context goes on: "Now, behold, my witness is in heaven and my record is on high" (v. 19). Surely Stephen had thought ahead to this, for as his enemies gnashed their teeth against him, "he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). He looked up to Heaven and saw His witness, faithful and true, standing there as he expected.

7:55 *But he, being full of the Holy Spirit*- This is twice earlier stated of Stephen (Acts 6:3,5). Those passages suggest this was a permanent characteristic of Stephen (as Acts 11:24 "a good man and full of the Holy Spirit"). So whilst this phrase could mean that Stephen was given a special gift or revelation of the Holy Spirit in his time of final crisis and death, it could also mean that it was because of his Spirit filled life that he saw visibly what he had previously only seen by faith- his Lord Jesus standing

at God's right hand in Heaven. Likewise if we live a spiritual life, hour by hour, then that same Spirit is powerfully available to us in our times of crises. The idea may be that they "resisted the Holy Spirit" (:51) insofar as the Spirit was in Stephen- and they resisted his argument. They were 'killing the prophets' in killing Stephen.

Looked up earnestly into heaven- See on 6:15 *Fastening their eyes on him*. Paul uses the same term for "looked up earnestly into..." in 2 Cor. 3:13: "Moses, who put a veil upon his face so the children of Israel could not *gaze to see the outcome* of that [glory] which was fading away". The Jewish elders could not see the glory which Stephen saw; and Paul had been standing amongst them. Time and again, he alludes to the events of Stephen's death to demonstrate that Stephen's witness had been effective and his prayer had been heard- at least for him.

And saw the glory of God- This made Stephen equal to the revered prophets like Elijah, Moses and Ezekiel who had seen such visions of the cherubim and beheld the shekinah glory. What was so desperately and obviously absent from the Jerusalem temple was just this- the shekinah glory. It was what the Jews so earnestly wished they could see there. But God's presence and fellowship was simply not with them. But Stephen now saw it- and not in the holy space of the temple's holy place either. Perhaps this was to connect with how Stephen claims that the God of glory appeared to Abraham (:2)- something stated only by Stephen. Stephen was thereby connected with Abraham, modelling the seed of Abraham in faith in Jesus and Hope of the Kingdom. The glory of God was shining from Stephen's face at this point, for he had the face of an Angel at this time. Just as it shone from the Lord's face when He was arrested to be slain.

And Jesus- It is normal in the New Testament to describe the risen Jesus with some title, such as "*the Lord* Jesus". The simple "Jesus" directs attention to His humanity; and Stephen reflects this by referring to Him as "the son of man" (:56). The Lord's humanity was a great encouragement for Stephen in his most desperate human need, just as it is for us. This is a powerful practical outcome of understanding that the Lord was of our human nature and not "very God". I have observed that whenever the humanity of the Lord is spoken of, His highly exalted status is often juxtaposed with it. So many proof texts misused by Trinitarians are located right next to the clearest statements of the Lord's humanity. And so the reference to "the son of man" is not merely a statement of His humanity, but is an allusion to the Daniel 7 vision of the "son of man" coming in judgment in the clouds of Heaven (as Stephen saw Him in the "glory of God").

Standing on the right hand of God; and he said- In his time of dying, Stephen saw the Lord Jesus *standing* at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55). But about 13 times in the New Testament, the point is made that the Lord *sits* there, unlike the Mosaic priests who *stood* (Heb. 10:12). The Lord Jesus was passionately feeling for Stephen; and He just as emotionally and passionately feels for us in our struggles. This alone should lift us out of the mire of mediocrity. Prayer will have meaning and power. It won't just be the repetitious conscience-salver it can descend into. Many of those 13 NT references to the Lord being seated at the right hand of God are in Hebrews; and this again encourages us to see Hebrews as Paul's deeper reflections upon Stephen's speech. This would especially be the case if the Jews in the council actually saw something of what Stephen saw.

7:56- see on Acts 2:33-36.

Look, I see the heavens opened- The implication is that if they lifted their eyes, they too could see what Stephen was seeing. It was a desperate appeal for their

repentance in his final seconds. He so wanted them to see the Lord Jesus as he saw Him. Stephen's passion for the conversion of his enemies is simply matchless. They refused- rather like the earlier elders of Israel were invited to witness the theophany of God coming down on Sinai, but refused; asking Moses to go alone and hear and see it.

And the Son of man- See on :59,60 and :55 *Jesus*. Perhaps this was the fulfilment of the Lord's words to the Sanhedrin in Mk. 14:62: "you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power".

Standing on the right hand of God- The allusion could be to a witness or judge standing. As the human judge condemned Stephen- presumably by standing up to condemn him as usually happened in law courts (Acts 7:56 cp. Is. 3:13)- the Lord Jesus stands up in the court of Heaven as intercessor for Stephen. And this happens time and again in our lives, as and when and if we suffer the abuse of human condemnation and misjudgement. Although condemned by an earthly court, he confidently makes his appeal before the court of Heaven (Acts 7:56). Doubtless he was further inspired by the basic truth that whoever confesses the Lord Jesus before men, He will confess him before the angels in the court of Heaven (Lk. 12:8).

Hebrews- and I have suggested this letter is Paul's extended reflections upon Stephen's speech- invites us to see Christ as *sitting* there in Heaven [this is mentioned about 13 times in Hebrews], unlike the nervous High Priests of old on their annual entry into the Holiest *standing.* The fact Stephen saw the Lord *standing* at God's right hand suggests that He arose from His usual position, caught up, as it were, in the passion of mediation for His suffering servant. Robert Roberts began his life of Christ in *Nazareth Revisited* with the simple statement that "Christ is real". Indeed He is real in our lives, actively passionate for us, just as He was for Stephen. And we must ask with the German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his final writings at the time of death in a Nazi prison: "Who is Christ for us today?".

Another possibility is that the "Son of man" in "Heaven" recalls the language of Dan. 7 of 'the Son of Man coming in the clouds of Heaven', i.e. His second coming. The "son of man... coming in great glory" (Lk. 21:27) is what Stephen saw at this point. For he saw "the son of man" in "great glory". Stephen sees the Lord standing, not sitting, as if He is about to return. Because effectively for every believer, the moment of death is for us the time of the Lord's return. For death is unconsciousness, a sleep, and the next waking moment will be the Lord's return.

7:57 *But*- I suggest this means that they ignored Stephen's appeal to 'behold' the vision of the risen Lord which he was seeing. The power and reality of the Lord Jesus was subsumed beneath a wave of legalism and anger at injured positions and the desperate desire to deny that... they might just have been wrong. And so the real Christ has been obscured, it seems to me, to so many angry legalists, even Christian ones.

They cried out with a loud voice- Not, as we might expect grammatically, 'with loud voices' in the plural. They were united, and that unity is stated later in the verse- they "rushed upon him with one accord". Just as Pilate and Herod, and the warring Jewish factions, were united in the condemnation of the Lord Jesus. Their unity, and crying out with a loud voice as the Lord did on the cross, all makes them a kind of anti-Christ, a synagogue of satan. The very words are used of how Stephen "cried with a loud voice" (:60). They were no longer merely folks who held a different theological view; their conscious rejection of God's appeal in Christ made them an utterly false system which merited only complete destruction.

And stopped their ears- See on :51 *Heart and ears*. They were fulfilling Stephen's words, that they were "uncircumcised in ears" (:51). Putting their hands on their ears demonstated this.

And rushed upon him with one accord- The very same words used of how the Jews did the same to Paul and his brethren, more than once (Acts 19:29). This means that what Saul and his then brethren did to Stephen, was done to Paul. He came to realize how it felt. And the Lord leads us to the same realization, not to punish us, but to lead us to self-understanding and eternal unity with our brethren whom we have hurt. It is so that we may understand each other, and understand ourselves within the context of others and the effect we have had upon them. This explains why Stephen's speech is so often alluded to by Paul; and why he opens his own defence speeches with allusion to how Stephen opened his.

The allusion is to the punishment of someone convicted of idolatry (Dt. 13:9,10), whereby "the hand of all the people" was to be upon the offender. And yet in :42,43, Stephen has accused *them* of idolatry. This is a classic case of psychological transference- they knew they were guilty of idolatry, and so they transfered that guilt onto Stephen, and punished him for it. Just like a church elder feeling guilty of having an affair then heavily punishes a church member for having an affair. This is more than hypocrisy; it arises because of the human tendency to transfer personal guilt, rather than humbly admit it and let the Lord Jesus deal with it.

7:58 *And they threw him out of the city and stoned him*- The very words used by Luke about the Lord's experience at the hands of His own brethren in Nazareth (Lk. 4:29) and of how the Son is thrown out of the vineyard and killed in Lk. 20:15. Baptism identifies us with the Lord's death, and thereby His sufferings become replicated in all of us who are in Him. Stephen quotes his Lord's dying words as his own dying words, reflecting his grasp of what was going on- he was indeed sharing his Lord's sufferings with which he had willingly identified throughout his life in Him. So the 'throwing out of the city' was arranged by God to stimulate Stephen to see the similarities between him and his Lord, just as such events are brought into our lives, clearly beyond our control. But then we must use our own freewill to develop that identification, and Stephen does this by quoting the Lord's dying words as he himself died. Although the stoning of Stephen was clearly done in hot blood and with no regard to local law nor to Biblical law, the Jews still wanted to show obedience to the principle of stoning the condemned outside the camp. I have repeatedly drawn attention to the similarities between Acts 7 and Hebrews, which I suggest is Paul's reflection upon Stephen's words and example, and presented initially to the Jerusalem ecclesia. The appeal to go forth with the Lord Jesus "without the camp" (Heb. 13:13) surely continues this impression; we are to be followers of Stephen insofar as he was of the Lord Jesus. If indeed 'St. Stephen's gate' in Jerusalem is correctly located where Stephen was taken through to his death, he would have been dragged over the Kedron and through the garden of Gethsemane, thus encouraging his willing identification with his Lord's final sufferings. See on :60 *knelt down*.

All this happened at the behest of Saul. But he too was to be cast out of a city to be slain- and yet survived, or maybe was resurrected (Acts 14:29). This was to enable him to feel what he had done to Stephen. Not simply because 'what goes around comes around'; but to enable him to enter into Stephen's feelings, to prepare them for eternal fellowship in the Kingdom.

And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul- "At the feet" is a phrase elsewhere used in the context to imply that the people there are subservient to the person (Acts 4:35,37; 5:1). The implication is surely that

Paul was responsible for the stoning, or facilitated it in practice. Paul later was stoned unto death (Acts 14:5), and through this he learnt how his actions to Stephen had actually felt. This was far more than a poetic justice for the sake of it; it was to enable Paul to understand himself and the meaning of his own positions and actions. The Lord works likewise in our education. There is another allusion from Hebrews here- we are surrounded by a great crowd of "witnesses" and should therefore 'lay down' everything that impedes us from doing the Lord's work (Heb. 12:1). These are the same Greek words as used here about the witnesses who laid down their clothes. Paul had been one of those witnesses. The laying aside of garments recalls Aaron's death on Mount Hor, and there may be the hint that they were now resigning their priesthood and spiritually dying, outside the promised land.

7:59 *And they stoned Stephen*- Stephen's death sentence was against Pharisaic principles; and it was a studied rejection of the more gentle, tolerant attitude taught by Gamaliel, Paul's early mentor ("though I distribute all my belonging to feed the poor..." in 1 Cor. 13:3 is Paul virtually quoting Gamaliel- he clearly was aware of his stance). People like Paul who come from strict, authoritarian backgrounds can have a tendency to anger, and yet in Paul there seems also to have operated an inferiority complex, a longing for power, and a repressed inner guilt.

As he called upon the Lord- The impact upon Saul must have been psychologically colossal, for he then goes out to kill and persecute all who called on the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 9:14,21 s.w.). The Lord Jesus was working with Saul's conscience; for when He confronts Saul on the Damascus Road, He uses the same words to invite Saul also to 'call upon himself the name of the Lord Jesus' (Acts 22:16).

Saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit- I have suggested in my commentary on Hebrews that Hebrews was originally a transcript of a sermon at the breaking of bread meeting at the Jerusalem church, turned into written form. That audience would have known Stephen well. Hebrews is full of allusions to Stephen's speech, and my suggestion is that it was not Stephen writing to his own church before his death, but rather Paul expanding upon Stephen's speech. As the bitterly angry Saul, keenly listening to Stephen and grasping his every allusion, he would have felt the goads of Scripture sticking into his conscience. He remembered every word, and after his conversion, he took Stephen's thoughts further. Hebrews, I suggest, is his development of Stephen's words and ideas. The historical characters mentioned by Stephen are also mentioned by Paul in Hebrews 11. Paul draws his sermon in Hebrews towards a conclusion by speaking of how we as Christians have come into association with "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborns, who are enrolled in heaven; and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:22,23). It seems to me certain that Paul had Stephen in mind at this point, a clearly 'just man', who had asked the Lord Jesus in Heaven to receive his spirit, as one of "the spirits of just men made perfect", and whose name as a martyr was for sure "enrolled in Heaven".

Realizing, sensing how he was living out the sufferings of his Lord... all this really motivated Stephen; when he asked for forgiveness for his tormentors and asked for his spirit to be received (7:59,60), he was so evidently reflecting the words of the Lord in His time of final agony and spiritual and physical extension. It is Luke who brings out the similarity (Lk. 23:34,46). He died in prayer for his enemies, crying out with a loud voice, commending his spirit to Jesus as Jesus commended His to the Father... He saw the similarities between his sufferings and those of the Lord; and

therefore he went ahead and let the spirit of the Lord Jesus live in him. In addressing the Lord Jesus as "Son of Man" (:56), Stephen is the only person outside the Gospels to use the phrase. Perhaps it was because in the time of his sufferings, Stephen felt especially keenly the comfort of the Lord's humanity and the representative nature of His sacrifice. He personalized those words of the Lord which he already well knew, and made them his own. This is the intended end point for each of us- to know the spirit of Christ in His time of dying. It's just that we each have different paths to lead us there.

7:60 *And he knelt down*-Luke uses these very words of how the Lord knelt and prayed in Gethsemane, a stone's throw distant (Lk. 22:41). Clearly he is making the connection between the Lord and Stephen, who was stoned to death and thereby a stone's throw distant. Stephen is consciously trying to imitate the Lord Jesus in His time of dying, hence his request for the sins of his murderers to be forgiven. I have suggested that Stephen was dragged through Gethsemane on his way to the stoning- see on 7:58 *They threw him out of the city*. The Lord brought this to Stephen's mind, and he did his part in responding by imitating his Lord there in Gethsemane. Kneeling down, literally 'bending the knee', is the language of worship. Stephen died in worship of his Lord, whose death and last sufferings he had now come to know and identify with. By kneeling down instead of lying in a self-protective position, he was giving his body maximum exposure to the stones. Like his Lord on the cross, His devotion resulted in his physical sufferings being shorter than otherwise would have been the case. I have explained elsewhere that the Lord's refusal to press back on the *sedile* of the crucifixion pole hastened His death. Almost all Stephen's sufferings and words have some issue in Paul's experiences; some similarities were brought about by the Lord's hand in his life, others were a result of him consciously imitating Stephen. Luke uses precisely the same Greek words to record how Paul knelt down and prayed in Acts 20:36. Consciously or unconsciously, Paul was again imitating his hero and entering his experiences which Paul had brought upon him.

And cried with a loud voice- See on :57 *cried with a loud voice*.

Lord, do not charge them with this sin- The sins of the wicked are written down against them, to be discussed with them at the judgment. "Charge them not with this sin" certainly sounds as if Stephen expected that individual actions of human sin will be raised with them at the day of judgment. And yet the wonder of it all, is that our prayers now for our enemies can result in their not being charged with those sins. We are in that sense called to do the work of the advocate, to reflect the saving mediatorial work of the Lord Jesus in our prayer life right now. Our prayers for others really can have an effect upon what will be raised with them at the judgment- for that's what Stephen prayed for in his time of dying. And are we to think that his wonderful prayer went unanswered? He prayed with a loud voice so that they would all hear- for they were standing a stone's throw away from him, and there would've been much noise from their screaming and the thud of stones. He died in the hope that his obtaining of forgiveness for them would result in their repentance. And it worked wonderfully, at least in the case of Saul. As Saul wasn't throwing the stones nor gathering them, his attention would have naturally been fixed upon the person and words of Stephen. He was consciously modelling himself upon the Lord in *His* time of dying: "Father, forgive them..." (Lk. 23:43). Likewise "receive my spirit" (:59) is quoting another of the Lord's last sayings from the cross, in turn quoting from Ps. 31:5 LXX "Into your hand I commit my spirit". His kneeling to pray may likewise be consciously following the Lord's kneeling in Gethsemane in prayer before His death (Lk. 22:41). We note that his very last words were not concerned with his personal

salvation; but rather with that of others. Indeed, of men who appeared absolutely opposed or disinterested in the Lord Jesus. We see here not simply his paramount love of others, but a tacit reflection of his own personal confidence in salvation. "Receive my spirit" perhaps equates to Nehemiah's "Remember me for good for all I have done"; a confident handing over of our lives to the Lord Jesus, who loves us beyond death and our own unconsciousness. It is normal for men in death situations to beg for personal forgiveness and acceptance from God; but Stephen is so secure in his personal relationship with the Father and Son that his last words were for others, not himself. It is also noteworthy that 1 Kings 8 had offered forgiveness to Israel if they prayed towards the temple- and the destruction and spiritual bankruptcy of the temple is in view here. Stephen shows them for all time that the temple is not the magic source of forgiveness- but rather faith in the Lord Jesus.

And when he had said this, he fell asleep- This suggests that he died as an act of the will; he said his last words and died. In this we see another striking similarity with the Lord's death; He too made His last sayings, begging for Israel's forgiveness, and breathed His last. The impression we get is that like the Lord, Stephen's total desire was for Israel's repentance. And he died with that desire, falling asleep when he knew he had done what he could.

There should be no chapter break- Acts 8:1 about Saul should follow straight on from here.

ACTS CHAPTER 8

8:1 *And Saul approved of his execution*- Paul warned the Romans that those who "have pleasure" in (Gk. 'to feel gratified with') sinful people will be punished just as much as those who commit the sins (Rom. 1:32). But he uses the very word used here for his own 'consenting' or 'approving' the death of Stephen; standing there in consent, although not throwing a stone (Acts 8:1; 22:20). He realized that only by grace had that major sin of his been forgiven; and in that spirit of humility and self-perception of himself, as a serious sinner saved by grace alone, did he appeal to his brethren to consider their ways. 'Feeling gratified with' such sins as are in this list is what the entertainment industry is so full of. We can't watch, read and listen to this kind of thing by choice without in some sense being vicariously involved in it- and this seems to be exactly what Paul has in mind when he warns that those who feel gratified in those sins shall share in their judgment. This is a sober warning, relevant, powerful and cutting to our generation far more than any other. For given the internet and media, we can so easily feel gratified in others' sins.

And there arose on that day- Clear evidence that Stephen's speech was the psychological motivator for the anger now unleashed within Saul and his companions.

A great persecution against the church which was in Jerusalem, and except the apostles, they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria- Luke uses the word for 'Diaspora' to describe how the brethren were "scattered abroad" (Acts 8:1,4; 11:19); he saw this persecution as turning them into the new Israel. The entire membership of the Jerusalem ecclesia was scattered; the way we read of them numbering thousands by the time of Acts 21:20 suggests that to avoid persecution those who remained reconciled themselves with the temple, becoming a sect of Judaism, presumably with the tithe and temple tax going to the temple rather than to the ecclesia. These "thousands" of Acts 21 were probably largely converted since the persecution that arose after the death of Stephen. The original Jerusalem ecclesia had

gone and preached to the Gentiles (Acts 11:19,20), which wasn't what the later Jerusalem ecclesia supported. Indeed, Acts 11:22 goes straight on to record that the Jerusalem ecclesia sent representatives to find out what was going on. In order to escape further persecution, the Jerusalem ecclesia threw in their lot with the temple and orthodox Judaism. Finally Paul wrote to the Jerusalem ecclesia, as recorded in Hebrews. He sorrows that they fail to see the supremacy of Christ over Moses, and that despite initially enduring such persecution and loss of their goods (during the early persecutions), they had lost their real faith in Christ. The fact they weren't *then* being persecuted indicates they had reconciled with the temple. They needed to hold on, to keep the joy of faith they once had, rather than become hard hearted, judgmental, works-centred. But they didn't listen.

When the Romans began persecuting the early church, only the leaders were seized, while crowds of obvious Christians went unpunished. This was perhaps because paganism was utterly dependent on its elite, and most cults could easily be destroyed from the top. This explains a few Bible puzzles- why devout men could carry Stephen to burial and yet be unharmed; why the apostles could remain in Jerusalem [they were seen as unlearned and ignorant fishermen] whilst the others in the Jerusalem ecclesia had to flee (e.g. the great company of priests who became obedient to the faith). And yet Christianity spread yet further. Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.63-64) expresses surprise that the "tribe of Christians" [indicating their unity] had not disappeared after the death of their founder, "the [so-called] Christ". Unlike other religions, the faith of the followers was not in the leaders- if the organization and leaders were taken away, would our church continue? The early church did- and flourished. We must beware lest our system of elders and organizations doesn't take away our individual commitment to preach and personally care for people, and especially for the brotherhood. First century Christianity was a mass movement, rooted in a highly committed rank and file; and therefore it had the advantage of the best of all marketing techniques: person-to-person influence. This in the end is how we can preach far more effectively than through mass meetings or organized campaigns [not that I am saying not to hold these].

8:2 *And devout men buried Stephen*- A term only used of the "devout men" living in Jerusalem who were baptized by Peter and who formed the Jerusalem ecclesia (Acts 2:5; Lk. 2:25). These men had emigrated to live in Jerusalem in their retirement. To now have to flee was significant for them. Presumably some of them remained, and it was of these "devout men" that some bravely identified with Stephen in order to claim and bury his corpse.

And made great lamentation over him- Luke uses the word about the lamentation made over the Lord at His death (Lk. 23:27). As demonstrated throughout the commentary on the end of chapter 7, Stephen's death was modelled consciously upon the Lord's death. And the mourners surely recognized that, therefore mourning for Stephen as they did for the Lord.

8:3- see on Acts 26:10,11.

But Saul treated the church shamefully, entering into every house- "The church" is paralleled with "every house" [church]: "Saul laid waste the church, entering into every house". That's a very significant parallel. Those house churches in sum were the church of Christ in Jerusalem; the ecclesia met in house churches but gathered together in the temple, the only place big enough to hold them all. The same thing happened at Rome and Corinth, where there seem to have been various house churches which met together occasionally for larger gatherings.

Dragging out men and women and putting them into prison- Paul was himself dragged to his death by the crowd (Acts 14:19 s.w.). He was being made to realize what he had done to others; and this is how the Lord seeks to educate us, not simply bring about 'measure for measure' in our lives for the sake of it.

8:4 *Therefore those who were scattered*- Gk. 'the diaspora'. They were diaspora Jews who had come back from their dispersion to live in Jerusalem. But now they were again a diaspora, but of the Jerusalem church.

Went about preaching the word- Acts 11:19 informs us that these brethren went as far as Phenice and Cyprus preaching the word. Most of the Jerusalem church were comprised of the 'devout men' from throughout the Roman world who had come to end their days at Jerusalem, and now had been baptized into Christ by Peter. It's logical to assume that Saul's persecution prompted them to return home- and thus the Gospel spread.

8:5 *And Philip went down*- This is how any journey from Jerusalem was described. Travellers went 'up' to Jerusalem and thence 'went down'.

To the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ- Defined in :12 as the things about His Name and His Father's Kingdom. This term 'preached Christ' is clearly parallel to the statement that they 'evangelized the *logos*' (:4). The essential word / *logos* of God was seen to be the Lord Jesus personally. This indeed is how John began his preaching of the Gospel, as transcripted in the gospel of John.

8:6 *And the crowds, when they heard and saw the signs which he did, gave heed*- The same word is twice used about how previously they had 'given heed' to Simon (:10,11). Illiterate people inevitably follow human teachers, and the record here is therefore psychologically credible. They had once had Simon as their teacher, but now they gave their minds and attention to Philip. We note that Lydia likewise 'gave heed' to the Gospel message, but her heart was opened by the Lord so that she did this (16:14). That mental desire to open the mind to the message is therefore ultimately given by the Lord and is part of His calling of people. The people had given attention to Simon because he apparently did miracles, but when they saw far more credible miracles done by Philip, they believed him. This was one reason why the power to perform miracles was given in the first century- they were necessary to grab the attention of illiterate people who previously had paid attention to whoever did the most compelling miracles. This was, after all, the only criteria for credibility which the illiterate masses had. There was no written word which could be read to them, for the New Testament was not written. See on :23. The miracles were therefore a message; for they were heard as well as seen. The miraculous Spirit gifts and miracles were clearly a specific thing at a specific time- to back up the preaching of the Gospel in the first century.

With one accord to the things that were spoken by Philip- There was evidently a crowd mentality- every person in the crowd had the same mindset towards Philip's preaching at that moment. Now it seems to me that we would likely judge such momentary, mass response as mere passing emotion. But God is more positive- the record which He inspired counts it to them as real belief, just as the "crowd" who followed the Lord are credited with faith, even though soon afterwards they were doubting Him. That indicates to me not only the hopefulness of God for human response to His grace, but also His willingness to accept people.

8:7 *For from many of those that had unclean spirits, the unclean spirits came out, crying with a loud voice*- The Eastern (Aramaic) text reads: “Many who were mentally afflicted cried out”. This is because, according to George Lamsa, ““Unclean spirits” is an Aramaic term used to describe lunatics”. It should be noted that Lamsa

was a native Aramaic speaker with a fine understanding of Aramaic terms. He grew up in a remote part of Kurdistan which had maintained the Aramaic language almost unchanged since the time of Jesus. It's significant that Lamsa's extensive writings indicate that he failed to see in the teachings of Jesus and Paul any support for the popular conception of the Devil and demons– he insisted that the Semitic and Aramaic terms used by them have been misunderstood by Western readers and misused in order to lend support for their conceptions of a personal Devil and demons. We need to ask *who* cried with a loud voice. The 'spirits', or the sick person? The person, surely. But the record says the 'spirits' cried. We are intended therefore to read 'spirits' as referring to the sick persons; just as John's invitation to 'test the spirits' (1 Jn. 4:1) means 'test what these teachers are teaching', rather than asking us to grab hold of 'spirits' out of the ether and test them.

And many that were paralyzed or lame were healed- This balances the first part of the verse, which speaks of 'unclean spirits' departing. The idea seems to be that there was major healing, of both mental and physical illness. The healing of such persons is described in the very language used of the Lord's healings of the same categories (Mt. 15:30; 21:14). As Luke begins Acts by saying, He began such work, and His representatives continued it; as we do in essence to this day.

8:8 *And there was much joy in that city*- One gets the impression from the second century writings that the joy dropped out of Christianity; and yet the joy of the converts, and the urgent need to retain that first joy of conversion, is a major theme in the NT (e.g. Acts 8:8; 13:52; 15:3). This strange joy must have been a major factor in confirming the Gospel as authentic. The very phrase "great joy" is used about the result of the Lord's resurrection (Mt. 28:8; Lk. 24:52); the miracles being done were enabled by His glorification, and were in essence *His* action in the world, performed through His followers. Whilst we do not possess the miraculous gifts today, He is in principle operating in the same way today, through we who are in Him.

8:9 *But there was a certain man Simon by name, who previously used sorcery in that city*- Exactly the same phrase is used in introducing Ananias in Acts 5:1. And the context is identical- after dramatic developments in the Lord's work, there was human failure from an individual. And so things are to this day in His work.

And amazed the people of Samaria- The same word used of how Simon himself was "amazed" (:13). He was made to realize how others had been made to feel by his *false* claims; just as Paul was made to realize and share the feelings of those whom he had persecuted. This is all part of the Lord's education of those He seeks to save, and He works like that to this day.

Boasting that he himself was somebody great- Here we see the difference between the apostolic style of healing, and that of magicians. He claimed his powers were invested in himself, to the point that he gave the impression that "This man is the great power of God" (:10 AV). The apostles repeatedly claimed that what they were doing was not of themselves, but was the result of the risen Lord working through them. We too must be careful here; whatever truths we share with others, whatever we do for others, is all the Lord working through us; it is not of ourselves. Our aim is to be tools for His working and operation, rather than building up any personal respect or following for ourselves. And so much Christian leadership has miserably failed at this point.

8:10 *To him they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying*- See on 8:6 *Gave heed*.

This man has that power of God which is called Great- AV is better: "This man is the great power of God". See on :9.

8:11 *And they gave heed to him*- See on 8:6 *Gave heed*.

Because for a long time he had amazed them with his sorceries- Illiterate people are inevitably going to be impressed by the miraculous, and this was why the early preaching of the Gospel was backed up by visible miracles. But as Robert Roberts put it, there was "an economy of miracle". The Lord could have done far more than He did by way of miracles. But in this case in Samaria, all that was necessary was to budge the psychological stranglehold which Simon magus had over the people.

8:12 *But when they believed Philip as he was preaching*- It is helpful to read Luke and Acts following straight on. It is evident that Luke saw the apostles as continuing the work of preaching that Jesus personally performed. One of the most evident connections is the way in which Luke ten times uses the word *euaggelizo* to describe the Lord's witness; it occurs only one other time in the other Gospels. And yet Luke uses the word 15 times in Acts to describe the witness of the apostles. He clearly saw them as continuing the *evangelion* of Jesus. As Jesus preached the Gospel of the Kingdom as He walked around Israel in the late 20s of the first century (Lk. 4:43; 8:1; 9:11; 16:16), so His men continued the very same witness (Acts 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23,31).

The things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ- "The kingdom of God's sake" (Lk. 18:29) is paralleled with the sake of the Name of Christ by the account in Mt. 19:29. The things of the Name and the things of the Kingdom were therefore not two different things, rather were they different ways of referring to the same realities.

Both men and women were baptized- When the Samaritans believe the things Philip preached, they were immediately baptized. Baptism is seen as part and parcel of belief. The Lord's words that whoever believes-and-is-baptized shall be saved (Mk. 16:16) are surely being alluded to; for He too put baptism as part of initial belief in the news about Him. The impression is clearly given that baptism followed immediately upon belief and is part of believing. It therefore follows that once somebody confesses their faith in the Lord, they should immediately be baptized into Him. Any delay in this is due to an unspoken perception that *de facto* baptism is an entry rite into a human group, and all the club rules of that group must be learnt and adhered to first. But in the New Testament, baptism was the natural outcome of faith.

"Men and women" is noted because religion tended to be the preserve of men; the critics of early Christianity mocked the way that it was so attractive to women. Yet the call of Christ was no hobby level religion; it was a radical offer of salvation to humanity, women included.

8:13- see on Acts 2:42.

And Simon also himself believed, and being baptized, he continued with Philip; and seeing signs and great miracles done, he was amazed- It was probably clear that Simon's motivation was less than sincere, but they still baptized him. Simon appears to have been an onlooker at the baptisms of Acts 8:12, and "himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip" (Acts 8:13). Here we see again how belief and baptism were so closely connected. We see here another fulfilment of the great commission of Mt. 28:19,20- the basic Gospel was to be preached, people baptized, and then they were taught further. This seems the sense of how the convert Simon "continued with Philip", for to 'continue with' someone was an idiom for being a student of them (Mt. 15:32; Jn. 8:31; Acts 2:42; 14:22; 15:35; 18:11; 19:10; Phil. 1:25; Col. 1:23; 1 Tim. 4:16; 2 Tim. 3:14; 1 Jn. 2:19). In Simon's case, one gets the feeling that his motives for baptism were likely almost visibly suspect from the start; he saw the opportunity for financial gain. But that was no reason to not baptize

him. We can never know the motives of those who seek baptism. Over the course of a few thousand baptisms I have arrived at the simple conclusion that it's so often those who appear to be so well motivated, so brimming with knowledge and zeal, who don't stay the course. And it's those whose motivation would appear suspect- getting baptized because the boyfriend is baptized and from an established family of believers, or from the apparent motive of material benefit- who despite many traumas and difficulties in their lives, endure to the end. And it is endurance to the end which is of the essence. Simon's baptism should surely sink for all time the 'forbidding of water' to people because we doubt their motives. We barely know our own motives, so how can we pronounce with confidence upon the motives of other hearts, to the point of denying them baptism? For *Amazed* see on :9 *Amazed the people of Samaria*.

8:14 *Now when the apostles that were at Jerusalem*- According to 8:1 the majority of the Jerusalem church had scattered, and only the apostles remained there. It was therefore quite a sacrifice to send away Peter and John, who were surely amongst the leadership seeing they had been in the Lord's inner circle. But this was the importance they attached to missionary work and strengthening new converts.

Heard that Samaria had received the word of God, *they sent Peter and John to them*- This is the same phrase as used in the parable of the sower, about the ground which receives the word but then ceases to respond well (Lk. 8:13). They so believed that parable that they sacrificed Peter and John to go and try to strengthen those who had responded, lest they fall away. They knew full well from the parable that those who initially respond are prone to fall away, and they took proactive initiative in order to try to stop this happening. Our reading of Scripture must not be left on a mere level of correctly interpreting it; we are thereby empowered and required to go out and do things in response.

8:15 *Who came down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit*- I have argued on :14 *Received the word of God* that the motive for the visit was in order to strengthen the new believers against falling away. What those converts desperately needed was internal strength against temptation, so that their receiving the word would result in bringing forth fruit rather than them becoming one of the types of bad ground in the sower parable. And this was exactly why the apostles made the effort they did to go there and pray for them, placing their hands upon them, so that the Holy Spirit would be given them. There was likely a visible, external evidence of the receipt of the Spirit, but this is not actually mentioned here. The receipt of the Holy Spirit is described in :20 as "the gift of God". This is surely the same gift as referred to in Acts 2- the power of righteousness, of spiritual help and power. We note that the apostles had to make effort so that others could receive this gift, and they prayed for them to receive it. In this we see the power of third party prayer and efforts for others' spiritual strengthening. There is a power available to us all which in some cases is dependent upon the freewill efforts of our fellow brethren. This is the ultimate motivation to travel, worry about and pray for the spiritual strengthening of our brethren.

8:16 *For as yet it had not fallen upon them*- The idea of the Greek word translated 'fallen' is to seize; the language is surely more relevant to a mental seizure than anything physical. And this, I suggest, is the essence of the Holy Spirit gift- a mental, psychological invasion of the willingly opened mind of the believer.

These had only been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus- This continues the differentiation made in Jn. 3:3-5 between birth of water, and of the Spirit. Baptism alone will not save us; there must be spiritual regeneration afterwards. This was taken so seriously that Peter and John were sent to the new converts to help them towards

achieving this. We must note the danger of perceiving baptism as an end in itself, the final point reached after mastering a set of doctrine. It is only a beginning, and the essence is of the Spirit.

8:17 *Then they laid their hands on them*- We must remember that very many times, 'laying hands on' is a Hebraism for seizing someone. Admittedly, the Greek word used for such violent seizure is different to that used for laying hands on someone for healing or blessing. But the idea is the same, and it seems that there developed this specific technical term in the early church for 'laying hands on' in order to bless. We have just read that the Holy Spirit had not yet fallen upon, or seized [Gk.] these new converts; and so the apostles 'laid their hands upon' them so that the Holy Spirit would seize them. Whilst the words are not the same, the idea clearly is. The laying on of hands was therefore a visible reflection of the Spirit's seizure of the willing recipient. I noted on :16 that this language and imagery of 'seizure' is more appropriate to the Spirit as a mental, psychological force. This, I suggest, is what is in view, more than the ability to perform miracles. Such miraculous manifestations were indeed seen, but these were to demonstrate the power of the mental energy of transformation that had now been made available to the convert.

And they received the Holy Spirit- They received God's word (:14), but not the Holy Spirit. The primitive equation of word and spirit made by some, speaking of the so-called 'spirit-word', is therefore unrealistic. We read of the Holy Spirit being 'given' by the ascended Lord (Jn. 7:39), but it appears that this gift was still mediated through the prayers and efforts of other believers, and the willingness of the recipient to receive it. For it is apparent that unless Peter and John had prayed, travelled to Samaria and laid hands on these believers, they would not have received the Spirit. It would seem that it was outside the scope of Philip's calling to do this. But *lambano*, 'receive', can imply that the converts had to themselves make a conscious decision to receive it, in the same way as the Spirit will not come into our hearts unless we are open to it. The Lord's request to the apostles 'Receive the Holy Spirit' (Jn. 20:22) can be read as a request for their openness, rather than just stating the obvious, as if to say, 'Well I'm giving you the Holy Spirit, here you are, receive it'. Rather I suggest the sense is 'Please, receive it, go on, take what I am offering you'. 2 Cor. 11:4 criticizes the Corinthians for not receiving the spirit of Jesus but rather "another spirit", implying that receipt of the Spirit requires freewill decision making on the part of the recipient. So often, *lambano* means to consciously decide to take or receive something; it does not have to mean that the Spirit just comes upon the recipient in any case. Examples include Mt. 8:17; 10:38; 12:14; 21:35; 22:15; 26:52; Lk. 20:28.

8:18 *Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying*- The gift of the Spirit was surely the same as in Acts 2, which I have reasoned was a gift of internal spirituality. The same words for 'Spirit' and 'given' are to be found in other passages which clearly relate it to an internal power working within the human mind: "The love of God is shed abroad *in our hearts* by the *Holy Spirit* which is *given* unto us" (Rom. 5:5). "[He has] sealed us and *given* the earnest of the *Spirit* in our *hearts*" (2 Cor. 1:22). "He would *give* you, according to the riches of His glory, that you may be strengthened with power through His *Spirit* in the *inner man*" (Eph. 3:16). "God did not *give* us a *spirit* of fearfulness, but of... a disciplined *mind*" (2 Tim. 1:7). It's unclear whether or not that gift was accompanied by the reassurance of physical manifestations in this case. But the essence of it was just as it is today- the power of internal transformation, which is what every convert so desperately needs.

8:19 *Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit*- Simon didn't ask for the Holy Spirit himself, but rather the authority ["power"] to give it to others. He had been used to being perceived as the power of God (:10), and despite his new religious milieu as a Christian, he wanted that to continue. This kind of thing is observable amongst power hungry pastors today, who clearly do not see personal spirituality as significant, so drunk are they on power.

8:20 *But Peter said to him: May your silver perish with you*- The man was identified with his wealth, as so many are today. See on 5:5 *Fell down*. "Perish" translates a Greek word later to be often used by Peter, in the sense of the destruction of condemnation at judgment day (2 Pet. 2:1,2,3,7,16). When the Lord returns and judges this world, there will finally be left no silver, no wealth, and no people who identified with it. Although Peter was telling Simon that he would not at this point be saved but rather condemned along with his money, he urges him to repent and pray, knowing that the verdict of condemnation can be changed whilst we have life (:22). At his denials, Peter had himself experienced that status of being condemned; he had gone out from the Lord's presence and wept bitterly, just as the rejected will do at the last day. But he had repented. And so now he is sharing that experience with others. He would not, therefore, have said these words with any disinterested shrugging of the shoulders; he had personally been through this process of condemnation and salvation out of it. And he dearly wished Simon, his namesake, to do likewise.

Because you have thought to obtain the gift of God with money- The Greek can equally carry the sense, as in the AV, that he thought that God's gift could be purchased with money. In this case, Peter is seeing right through Simon's game plan. He wanted to have the power to pass on the gift, because he foresaw that he could then charge money for giving it to others.

8:21 *You have neither part nor share in this matter*- "Matter" is *logos*, usually translated "word", and used in the context about the word of the Lord which the Samaritans had responded to (8:4,14,25). "Part" is often used about a 'part' in an inheritance. Simon was not in line to share in the promised inheritance, which all true believers were experiencing and would experience. And neither was he any elder in this new community; for "share" or "lot" is a reference to the LXX of Num. 26:55 which speaks of the lot of the priests in service. Simon had no part in the work of the new priesthood / leadership, nor did he even have a part in the general inheritance of all believers. The Greek words for "part... share" are often used together in Deuteronomy (LXX) concerning how the Levites had no part nor share in the inheritance of Canaan (Dt. 12:12; 14:27,29; 18:1). They are also used together in Col. 1:12, of *partaking* in the *inheritance* of the saints. Simon had no inheritance in the word of the Kingdom. Another possibility is that a "part" refers to what is purchased, and "share" or "lot" is what is distributed freely; as if to say that Simon had no part in the word / *logos* / intention of the Gospel, whether by purchasing it or by being given it freely.

Because your heart is not right before God- Quoting Ps. 78:37 LXX about Israel in the wilderness, whose heart was in Egypt, whatever appearance they gave of journeying with God. This quotation, along with the previous allusions in this verse to Simon not having his inheritance in Canaan, rather suggests that Simon was Jewish. He had a Jewish name, after all, and was acting like Israel of old. The conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10 is surely framed as "the conversion of the Gentiles", and it was this baptism which provoked the debate about the inclusion of the Gentiles. We can assume therefore that the Lord considered Samaritans as Jews; and the Samaritans

practiced circumcision and considered themselves to be part of God's covenant people. My point is that these Old Testament allusions would not have been lost upon Simon, being a Jew.

"Before God" is literally 'in the face / presence of God'. Our innermost thoughts and subconscious motives, as in Simon's case, his fantasy of selling Holy Spirit to Christians, are directly before the face of God Almighty, which face we cannot currently come before in our own flesh.

8:22 *Therefore, repent*- Peter had used the same words earlier in addressing the crowd in Acts 3:19, appealing for them to "repent therefore and be converted"; in Acts 2:38 Peter had urged repentance in order to obtain forgiveness. Now he encourages the baptized Simon to repent and be forgiven. The call to repent and convert is as real both before and after baptism, for Simon had been baptized. Conversion, as Peter himself had learnt, is ongoing. This incident is proof enough that baptism alone will not save us; there is no such thing as 'once saved always saved'.

Of your wickedness- This is later defined as the thought of his heart. For the sake of thoughts, a man can be condemned. That is the message here, and the Lord made it equally clear. In this we see the supreme importance of being spiritually minded.

And pray to the Lord, that perhaps the thought of your heart shall be forgiven you- He had not just thought something, he had offered money in order to be able to pass on the Spirit gifts (:18,19). But the essence of his sin was a heart matter, what he was imagining, the likely future he envisaged, of him being given money in return for giving Spirit gifts. See on :20.

8:23 *For I see*-Perhaps Peter perceived the thought of Simon's heart by direct Spirit revelation; or maybe he himself perceived it. It's likely Peter's own perception was confirmed by the Spirit.

You are poisoned by bitterness- Simon's problem wasn't simply a love of money. He wanted the power of the Spirit gifts because of bitterness- the bitterness of envy (James 3:14). I suggest therefore that he was envious of the Christian preachers who had replaced him as the ones to whom people gave attention (see on :6 *Gave heed*). So his motivation was envy as well as greed. Bitterness is likened here to a snakebite- it spreads to influence every part of a person's thinking. We are surrounded by examples of this. Heb. 12:15 may carry the same idea, speaking of a root that bears bitterness in one person and thereby defiles many. Bitterness spreads like venom.

And held captive by iniquity- Literally, in the bonds of iniquity. The same word is used of how believers are likewise held in the bonds of peace and righteousness. People are 'bonded' in sin or in righteousness. We are confirmed one way or the other, and 'held' in those positions- although it's possible to break out of them.

8:24 *And Simon answered and said: Pray for me to the Lord*- Peter had to pray for Simon as Christ had prayed for him (Acts 8:24 cp. Lk. 22:32). As with his preaching, Peter’s pastoral work was shot through with an awareness of his own failure and taste of his Lord’s grace. The lack of energy in our collective care for each other is surely reflective of a lack of awareness of our sinfulness, a shallow grasp of grace, and a subsequent lack of appreciation of the need to lay down our lives for the brethren, as the Lord did for us. Jesus Himself encouraged Peter to see things this way, in that He arranged circumstances so that Peter had to pray for Simon as Christ had prayed for him (Acts 8:24 cp. Lk. 22:32).

There is no record as to whether Peter did pray for Simon. This is one of those things which is purposefully left hanging in the Biblical record, in order to exercise us. Can we pray for others to be forgiven? To what extent can our prayer be a factor

in their forgiveness? There is a degree to which this is indeed a factor (e.g. Mk. 2:5), but to what degree...?

That none of the things which you have spoken come upon me- Did Peter list various terrible judgments which the record doesn't state? Or are "the things" a reference to Peter's comment that Simon right then was "poisoned by bitterness and held captive by iniquity"? I suspect the latter. Because it is typical of those in that position that they will refuse to recognize that this is in fact how they are. They see this state as something which could happen to them, but they aren't there yet. All sin is addiction, to some extent; and this is the classic mindset of the addict or alcoholic.

8:25 *Therefore, when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord*- Perhaps this refers specifically to what they testified to Simon. But it would seem it has a wider reference. "Testified" is a legal term for a witness in court. Whenever someone hears the word of the Lord, they are as it were in the dock before Him; and their hearing of His word is the witness spoken by the preacher. The outcome of their case, in a sense, depends upon how they have responded to that testimony. The use of this language is a powerful example of how knowledge of the word brings responsibility.

They returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans- Presumably, in Samaritan villages surrounding Jerusalem. The parable of the good Samaritan suggests that there were Samaritans in the Jerusalem area. They had found such good response in the city of Samaria itself (:5) that they followed the Lord's leading, in realizing that all Samaritans were good ground for the Gospel. It's rather like preaching to Latvians in the UK after having a great response to the preaching of the word in Latvia. We are intended to use our initiative to follow where the Lord leads. Acts 10 presents the conversion of Cornelius as the first Gentile convert. The ethnicity of the Samaritans was a moot question; they were seen as half Jews. The Lord had spoken of the Samaritan leper He healed as a "stranger" or Gentile (Lk. 17:11,18; note it is Luke again who records this). The disciples should have grasped immediately from the great commission that they were to take the Gospel to the Gentiles; but they didn't. The Lord therefore led them gently to that conclusion, by giving them great response amongst the half-Jewish Samaritans. We too are led to the right conclusions and directions in our lives- if we correctly respond, stage by stage, to how the Lord patiently teaches us by the encounters and experiences He gives us in life.

8:26 *But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying: Arise and go toward the south*- A literal Angel? Or perhaps a messenger sent to Philip, to whom he faithfully responded. "Toward the south" is read by some manuscripts as "about noon" [also translated this way in Acts 22:6]- the worst time to travel into a desert. But the calling to witness is counter instinctive and against all human wisdom. It was also about noon, "at the sixth hour", that Peter received his call from an Angel to accept the Gentiles (Acts 10:9). Both are told to "arise and go" to the Gentile seeker. As the Ethiopian asked who could "forbid" water baptism, so Peter says he could notforbid water baptism to Cornelius (Acts 10:47,48). The parallels between Peter and Philip are discussed on :27.

To the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza- This appears to echo the parable of the good Samaritan, which had been programmatic for the decision to preach to and accept Samaritans as recorded in the previous verses. For *Gaza,* see on :27 *Treasure.*

The same is desert- There is a theme in the New Testament that major response to preaching is often unexpected. The disciples were told to cast the net on the other side, when they were convinced there would be no response. Philip was told to go

onto a road, probably in the heat of the day- when nobody was travelling. His willingness to go, to do at least something, resulted in an amazing response. This is exactly why predicting response to preaching is well-nigh impossible. It's why the geographical spread of the Gospel is so hard to explain when it is humanly analysed.

8:27 *And he arose and went*- In response to the command 'Arise and go' (:26). Luke so often uses this phrase. As Joseph and Mary arose and went immediately in response to a command, so did Philip. Immediacy of response was important to Luke; and he notes it in other terms in describing the immediacy of response to the Gospel and acceptance of baptism. Our flesh always seeks to delay our response, in the hope we may not have to fully make it in the end; whereas those whose hearts really perceive our call will respond immediately.

And a man- Gk. 'behold, a man'. We are invited to be with Philip, noticing the man from afar; and thereby sense his wonder at how faith had been rewarded. He had gone into the desert at midday in response to the Lord's strange request; and now, he saw why.

From Ethiopia- The disciples were being progressively opened up towards accepting that the Gospel must go to the Gentiles. They had been given great response amongst the Samaritans, who were at best half-Jews. And now a proselyte from Ethiopia was baptized. All this was leading up to the conversion of the totally Gentile Cornelius in Acts 10, which is presented as the opening of the door to the Gentiles. Of course, the disciples ought to have understood from the Lord's own teaching that the Gospel was now for all nations. But He worked with them in their slowness to understand that, accepting and gently working with their limited vision and cultural and historical resistances; just as we should with others, and exactly as the Lord does with us. Response from the leaders of Ethiopia was a feature of the Messianic Kingdom (Ps. 68:31; Is. 45:14; Zeph. 3:10). Although that Kingdom was not established in a literal sense upon the earth, it was being made clear to the disciples that the essence of it, with the lame walking and the blind seeing, was already with them. The same 'now but not yet' is seen in the Lord's work today just as clearly.

"Ethiopia" is often mentioned in the OT as being on the far edge of the world, and converts to Yahweh would come even from there (Ps. 68:31,32; Is. 45:14; Zeph. 3:9,10). We note from :26 that the road to this man came down from Jerusalem. Although he was not given a good reception by God's representatives in that city, it was from Jerusalem that the Gospel was to go out to the farthest parts of the known world. These considerations lead us to think that he was indeed a Gentile and not a Jew. The apparent opening of the doors to the Gentiles in Acts 10 with Cornelius was only making more public a situation that already existed sub rosa- the door was already open to the Gentiles and Philip had been taught this in Acts 8, as Peter was in Acts 10. The Gospel's path was made clear in Acts 1:8- from Jerusalem to Samaria and "to the ends of the earth". Acts 8 tells us of the Gospel going from Jerusalem to Samaria, and now, to an Ethiopian- seen to be at the "ends of the earth". Philip is whisked away to Azotus and from there preaches to the towns along the coastal plain up to Caesarea. This included Gaza and Ashdod, former Philistine towns still largely populated by Gentiles. Peter is led to preach in this same area in Acts 9, preaching in Lydda an Joppa before coming to Caesaria. Indeed his work there may have been visiting the existing believers there whom Philip had converted. So we see the Lord's hand teaching both Philip and Peter in separate ways, gently leading them to understand the calling to include the Gentiles. We see the Lord working likewise today, to teach the same things to parallel believers.

A eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians- The spiritually perceptive amongst the disciples would have reflected that Jeremiah's faithful friend Ebedmelech was an Ethiopian (Jer. 38:7-12); and his name meant 'Servant of the king'. Here was another servant of the king / queen of Ethiopia. If Ebedmelech could have a place amongst the Old Testament faithful, why not Ethiopians of Philip's day? Again we see how the Lord was gently but quickly leading His people towards acceptance of the Gentiles. Those who refused that leadership and continual psychological nudging were refusing the movement of the Spirit in their lives by resisting the obvious conclusion: Gentiles could be accepted in the family of God just as well as Jews.

Dt. 23:1 was clear that whoever had crushed testicles or was castrated "shall not enter the assembly of Yahweh". The Ethiopian was cut off from Yahweh's people, apparently. But that didn't stop him coming to the Lord. Some Rabbis understood Lev. 21:20; 22:24 to mean that a castrated man was permanently unclean. Josephus wrote: "Shun eunuchs and flee all dealings with them... expel them" (*Antiquities*, 4.290,291). As a eunuch, he could not be circumcised, and so was seen as outside the realm of covenant relationship with God- under the old covenant. He desperately wanted a new covenant, and this is what he found in the Lord Jesus. The Ethiopian likely heard all these arguments on his visit to Jerusalem. And therefore was the more intrigued to read of the Lord's condition and situation in Isaiah 53, and felt the more identity with He who had likewise been rejected by the Jerusalem religious leaders. Isaiah 56 had foretold that the eunuchs would be welcomed into the new temple on Zion; clearly the views of Judaism were askance with that. Hence the Ethiopian was baptized on the road that led *away* from Jerusalem.

The parts of Isaiah 53 that he focuses upon are those which speak of the Lord's humiliation on the cross, and the lack of justice. He quotes from the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew text, suggesting he had purchased the Greek version as he wasn't fluent in Hebrew. He doesn't quote the whole section, just some verses which struck him as relevant to himself. We too focus on various aspects of the Lord's sufferings as pertinent to our own experience. He saw the lamb being led to slaughter as a picture of a humbled animal, now willing to accept whatever was done to it, be it shearing or death. He had been humiliated- racially, as a man, as a person. And he was struck by how the Lord's humiliation was the basis of His exaltation- note :33 Gk. "His life was taken up [exalted] from the earth". This may well be a reference to His resurrection and ascension rather than to His death. No wonder the Ehtiopian so eagerly wanted immersion baptism, which speaks of this. This fits with Luke's great theme, shown by how he records Mary's words, that the high are brought down, and the humble lifted up (Lk. 1:52). But the Ethiopian was a high one in his own circles. But he was willing to be brought down along with the Lord Jesus, and thus be lifted up.

Who was over all her treasure- "Treasure" translates a non-Greek word, *gaza*. It occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It's a strange word choice, at first blush. Likewise when we encounter the same word as a proper noun in :26 to describe the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, we wonder why that description is given. For the Ethiopian was travelling from Jerusalem to Ethiopia, and defining the road as the part that lead to Gaza begs the question as to why that point along the journey is emphasized. The connection is clearly intentional. The man was burdened with the responsibility of managing great wealth, and he was now beginning his journey home, full of those thoughts one has on coming to the end of a vacation and realizing that it's now back to work. He was going back to his wealth, to his *gaza*, which he had been placed over. The idea of being placed over wealth is to be found in the Lord's parable

of Mt. 25:21,23, where the same words are used as here; we are placed over the Lord's wealth. I think the allusion is teaching us that all the cares of this world regarding our employment and the management of wealth, be it great or small, is utterly eclipsed by our conversion to the Lord and the responsibilities we now have in *His* service. For we are servants of the King, the King of the cosmos, and are put in charge over *His* amazing wealth, which we are to manage for *Him*.

Had come to Jerusalem to worship- He was a proselyte, but as a eunuch and effectively a Gentile, would have been unable to enter the temple for "worship". His worship would therefore have been in his heart and outside the temple. He was a prime candidate for the Gospel, just as all God loving but excluded persons are.

8:28 *And he was returning, and sitting in his chariot*- A similar word to 'converting'. He had only just begun his journey back to Ethiopia; he had not yet reached even Gaza. He would have been full of thought and sadness as to how his physical condition and ethnicity disallowed his full worship. And likely he had felt keenly the proud superiority of the Jewish religious leaders, which left him feeling humiliated. But this being brought down by the rejection of others was all part of his 'converting' to the Lord in spirit and truth. And the Lord above saw his feelings and felt for him, just as He does with all such folk to this day.

Was reading the prophet Isaiah- Perhaps he had bought a copy of the scroll. Such scrolls were hard to come by, especially for a Gentile eunuch, and were very expensive. Perhaps he had just bought it on his visit. And he knew Hebrew. His desire to draw close to God was very serious. And God notices likewise today all who truly love and seek to understand His word.

8:29 *And the Spirit said to Philip*- A reference to the Lord Jesus, "the Lord the Spirit" of 2 Cor. 3:18? Or the Spirit as an Angel? Or an internal prompting? I would opt for an Angel, perhaps the Comforter Angel, which effectively was the Holy Spirit in the early church. See on 8:39 *The Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip*.

Go near and join this chariot- The language of 'joining' is another prompt towards fellowshipping with Gentiles; the same term has been used for how believers 'joined themselves to' other believers (Acts 5:13; 9:26; 17:34). It became a lesson for Peter, who uses the term for how it was not seen as lawful for a Jew to 'keep company' or 'join himself to' Gentiles (Acts 10:28). Peter learnt from Philip's experience. For 'chariot' is put here for the entire entourage, who would have been Gentiles. Such a prominent man would not have travelled alone. His commanding the chariot to stop in :38 surely means he asked those driving the horses to stop. "Go near" translates the same word used by Peter in explaining that a Jew could not 'come unto' non-Jews (Acts 10:28). Philip was being led to the same experience as Peter by an Angel or "the Spirit" telling him to 'come unto' non-Jews. Philip's experience would have been an example to Peter. We see how the Lord works in a parallel way in different lives, and we are to take lessons and inspiration from this. It is this feature of His working which is the basis for true Christian fellowship; our meetings together are not therefore to be to chatter about the state of the nation and lament the weather, but rather to share our experiences of the Lord's hand, so that we might take encouragement from the fact that He is at work according to a similar pattern in other lives. For man is not alone, even amongst our fellows there are parallel lives from which we are to take warning and encouragement. Her breast cancer, your broken leg, their bereavement... we perceive as the workings of the same Lord towards similar ends.

8:30 *And Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said*- Sensing the Lord was leading him, Philip was eager to respond. Running is a

Hebraism for response to God's word (Hab. 2:2; Dan. 12:4). We too need to sense where we are being led and enthusiastically respond in order to be led further.

Do you understand what you read?- Our Bible reading can be so easily performed on a merely surface level, skimming over words without letting their real import be felt at all. Fred Barling truly observed: “Through long familiarity we have come to read [the Bible] with a phlegm and impassivity which are in sharp contrast to the amazement felt by those who came into actual contact with Jesus, and by those who first read these accounts”. Philip realized this when he quizzed the eunuch, with a play on words in the Greek: "Do you understand what you read?" . *ginoskeis ha anaginoskeis?* 'Do you really understand, experientially, what you are understanding by reading?'.

8:31 *And he said: How can I*- This suggests, in the Greek, that "I am not able". And God recognized this, by sending Philip to explain. It would seem from this that it isn't possible, or is very unusual, for a person to understand the Gospel purely through their own Bible reading. The implication is that an existing believer is required to explain it, to embody the theory in practice. This reflects how God (who can teach or save anyone as He wishes, how He wishes) prefers to work through the mechanism of the body of Christ, the church, in order to do this. It is His intention that the message of Christ be spread by those who model Christ. We can wrongly assume that Bible study alone is required to reveal the Gospel to a person. It can do, but marooned on a desert island with only a Bible we would be unlikely to find Christ- unless someone revealed Him to us.

"How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14). This clearly states that (as a general rule) it is impossible to believe in Christ without a preacher. The Ethiopian eunuch was the classic case of this. It is perfectly possible that Rom. 10:4 alludes to this, implying that this man's case was typical [and notice the connections between Acts 8:37 and Rom. 10:9]. Likewise the Lord Jesus spoke of "them also which shall believe on me through *their* (the preachers') word" (Jn. 17:20)- not through their unguided Bible reading. If all we had been given was a Bible, most of us would simply not be where we are today, spiritually. If I had started reading from Genesis, I don't think I'd have got much beyond Leviticus before giving up on the Bible. Yet there are some who have made it through, from Genesis to Revelation. And their testimony is even more emphatic: "Without doubt I needed someone to guide me, I was just crying out for all the pieces to be put into place" , in the words of one such recent convert.

Unless someone guides me- The LXX frequently uses this word for the Divine guidance of Israel in the desert. And here was the eunuch also in a desert, but wondering where the guidance would come from. He had God's word in the form of part of the Bible; but putting a Bible in a man's hand is not always enough. There is some other element required, and God in His wisdom has set things up like that so that our guidance is not a result of unaided intellectual effort, and requires fellowship with other believers at some level.

And he begged Philip- Another similarity with Peter's experiences, for we go on to read how Peter was 'begged' (s.w.) to go to Joppa and heal the half Gentile Dorcas (Acts 9:38).

To come up and sit with him- The wealthy, powerful man was 'sitting' in his chariot, at the centre of his entourage (:28 s.w.). We notice the new equality between the two men; Philip climbed up to him, and they sat together. This is the effect which the Gospel has upon people.

8:32 *Now the passage of the Scripture which he was reading was this: He was led*- This changes the quotation from Is. 53 to say that Christ was led (this isn't in the Hebrew text). The impression given of His passivity is another indication that He was giving His life of His own volition, it wasn't being taken from Him. There is great emphasis on the Lord being led (Mt. 26:57; 27:2,31; Mk. 15:16; Jn. 18:13,28; 19:16). The eunuch felt he too was being led; Luke uses the word to speak of the convert to Christ being led to the inn by the good Samaritan (Lk. 10:34), and it is used of Peter being first led to Christ (Jn. 1:42), of the sheep being led to the Lord's fold (Jn. 10:16), of sinners being led to repentance (Rom. 2:4) and the many sons being led to glory (Heb. 2:10). So the eunuch saw striking similarities between himself and all that was written of the Messianic figure in Isaiah. We could say that he saw in the Christ his representative. But he needed to make some conscious act of identification with him, which is why the appeal for baptism into Him was so natural and was exactly what he needed to hear.

As a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb- Having been so recently in Jerusalem for worship, these images were fresh in the eunuch's mind. Those animals were representative of some greater reality- and now he was figuring that that person whom they represented was also in turn representative of himself.

Before his shearer is dumb, so he did not open his mouth- One simple reason the Lord was silent before His accusers was because He was utterly scared in the face of death. His silence wasn't merely because of an iron willed biting of the tongue; it was also a result of the same humanity which sweated great drops in Gethsemane as He begged not to die. The sheep-Messiah was "dumb", literally, without a voice. Just as the eunuch was in Judaism. He too had been unable to "open his mouth" in the worship formalities because he was excluded from the temple on account of his physical condition and ethnicity.

The word "shearer" means literally 'one who cuts'. Perhaps the eunuch remembered his own castration before 'one who cuts', and thus eagerly wanted to know about this man with whom he could identify.

8:33 *In his humiliation*- The majority of references to humility in Scripture refer to humbling *oneself*; humility, hard as it is to define, is something consciously done, as an act of the will. Yet the Father confirms us in our efforts. The Lord *humbled Himself* to die on the cross (Phil. 2), and yet the cross *humbled Him* (Acts 8:33). I suggest the eunuch felt humbled by his visit to Jerusalem; but the word can also mean 'depressed'. He was depressed at the seeming impossibility of drawing close to God within the strictures of Judaism.

Justice was denied him- The eunuch's exclusion from the temple for reasons beyond his control seemed unjust. So he was both depressed and also frustrated at the injustice. And now he was reading of another depressed man who was also denied justice.

Who can declare his generation?- The eunuch was likewise without children and impotent. What attracted him to this Messiah figure was the similarity he was between this saviour figure and himself. He too was humiliated / depressed, just as this saviour was. This is the compelling attraction of the representative nature of the Lord's sacrifice, that He as a man with our nature and experience gave Himself as the sacrifice which we can identify with. No wonder, then, that the conversation with Philip moved to baptism, and the eunuch wanted to make that necessary identification with the Lord Jesus in that way.

For his life is taken away from the earth- Perhaps the depression / humiliation of the eunuch was to such a degree that he felt suicidal, or at least, he despaired at the

purpose of his life if he were to remain excluded from God. And now he was reading of another man whose life was taken away. In passing, the Lord makes the point that His life was not taken away from Him (Jn. 10:18- same words used), but rather He gave it of His own will. We see here how God is not a literalist when it comes to the use of words and ideas. The critic would cry 'Contradiction!'. But it's nothing of the sort. Instead we see here a truth stated- that His life was taken away. But the Lord saw deeper than that, and explained that His wilful giving of His life was to such an extent that in effect, the taking away of His life was not a taking away of life from Him. For He freely gave His life of His own volition.

8:34 *And the eunuch said to Philip: I beg you, of whom does the prophet speak?*- This urgency to understand whom the prophet spoke of was a reflection of the man's need to identify himself with that man. This is why baptism, as that act of identification, flowed on so naturally.

Of himself, or of somebody else?- The Greek translated "or" is very wide in meaning. The sense could equally be 'Of himself as much as about somebody else?', or 'Of himself and also somebody else?', or 'Of himself but also of somebody else?'. I have tried to demonstrate that all aspects of Messiah read by the eunuch were relevant to himself. So I would argue that the 'somebody else' he had in view was himself. His reasoning was not that the prophet was perhaps talking about himself but he was additionally a type of Messiah. That would be to read into these words the kind of thing *we* are accustomed to seeing in the Old Testament. The eunuch was a eunuch and was feeling strong connection with this figure he was reading about. So strong, that he asked whether he was correct in feeling that this prophecy was about the Messianic prophet figure and also about himself. We could wish for no clearer statement of the representative nature of the Lord's being and sacrifice.

8:35 *And Philip opened his mouth*- This surely must connect with the usage of the same phrase in :32 about the Lord Jesus, who in His time of death "did not open his mouth". It was as if Philip was manifesting the Lord Jesus; the eunuch had been reading of a figure like him who died, whereas now Philip represents that figure as alive. The desire for baptism at Philip's hands into that dead and resurrected figure was therefore quite natural.

And beginning from this Scripture- As He ‘began’ in the prophets and expounded “in all the scriptures the things *concerning himself*” (Lk. 24:27), so those in Him “*began* at this Scripture, and preached... *Jesus*”.

Preached Jesus to him- Our early brethren preached a person, even a personality cult- based around the man Christ Jesus. They preached a Christ-centred Gospel, to the extent that the preaching of the entire Gospel is sometimes summarised as “preaching Christ” (Acts 8:35; 5:42; 28:31). They preached a Man, a more than man, who has loved us more than we loved Him, and more than we ever can love Him. In this there is an imperative for response. It’s not the same as demanding obedience merely for the sake of a good time to come.

8:36 *And as they went along the road, they came upon some water; and the eunuch said: Look, water!*- The preaching of "Jesus" involved the message about baptism. There was more content in 'preaching Jesus' than literally just saying 'believe in Jesus'. Or it could be argued that the message he had read of the death and resurrection of the human Lord Jesus, whose experiences were representative of his own, naturally led to a desire to identify with Him. And perhaps the eunuch had seen Jews being baptized into Jesus during his stay in Jerusalem; and perhaps the brethren had refused to baptize him because he was a Gentile. The initiative in requesting baptism was clearly from the candidate; infant sprinkling is therefore no way

Christian baptism. The act of baptism is therefore a response to the message of the Lord's death and resurrection. For baptism by its nature is designed as an identification with those things, rather than a sign of assent to a theology we have heard and accepted. This is what the great commission envisaged- preaching the message of Christ's death and resurrection, baptizing people into that, and then subsequently teaching them "all things that I have commanded you".

What is stopping me from being baptized?- The Greek word is generally used in the context of forbidding people, Gentiles especially, from coming to Christ. Peter uses it in reasoning that baptismal water could not be forbidden for the Gentile Cornelius (Acts 10:47; 11:17). The Ethiopian may well have come up to the temple, searching for the God of Israel, and was now returning depressed at his rejection by Judaism. But now he finds acceptance in Christ. He is described as "a man from Ethiopia" (:27), and not a diaspora Jew. Luke has written of diaspora Jews in chapter 2, so it's rather surprising he doesn't mention the fact if the man indeed was one. However, the fact he was reading Hebrew could suggest he was a Jew, or at least, a very serious proselyte; and the conversion of Cornelius later, in Acts 10, is certainly set up as if it was the opening of the door to the Gentiles. But all the same, eunuchs weren't allowed into the temple; so even if this man was a Jew, he was an excluded one. The fact he was a senior minister in a gentile Government would also suggest he was not that devoted to Judaism externally, although in his heart he was, and had made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem and learnt to read Hebrew.

"What is to prevent me...?" is understandable once we appreciate the background of the man's experience at the hands of the Jerusalem Jews. They had found every reason to "prevent" him coming to God. But having understood the Lord Jesus, the Ethiopian is convinced that He operates no barriers. There is, surely, nothing to prevent him. And indeed there wasn't. Luke has previously noted that the disciples tried to "prevent" John the Baptist's disciples from witnessing, and were told not to prevent them (Lk. 9:49,50). And again they were warned not to prevent little children from coming to the Lord (Lk. 18:15-17). Those lawyers who prevent others coming to God were strongly condemned (Lk. 11:52; Mt. 23:13). The parallels with Peter (see on :27) continue when Peter is likewise led to understand that nobody could surely forbid water to those Gentiles who wanted to be baptized in Cornelius' home (Acts 10:47,48). We note that Luke ends his volume by noting that Paul preached the Gospel to the Gentiles with no man preventing / forbidding him (Acts 28:31). There are no bars on who can be baptized and we should rejoice in this.

8:37 *And Philip said: If you believe with all your heart*- Philip is putting the question back to the candidate. It was not for him to judge the state of the man's heart; only the eunuch knew his own heart. The decision regarding readiness for baptism was therefore left with the candidate and not the baptizer. There is no example in the apostolic preaching of candidates being turned down by the preachers. We notice that the question as to whether the eunuch believed "with all [his] heart" was answered by the eunuch with no reference to his heart; rather simply, "I believe". He knew he believed, but rarely is faith 100%. And the eunuch had the humility to recognize that, and Philip accepted that. Belief is frequently stated to be in the heart, and the passages in the later New Testament which state that may well be alluding back to the eunuch as a model convert to be emulated by us all. Belief, therefore, was not mere attendance at the temple nor simply external acceptance of religion. It was deeply personal, in the heart which only the believer knows. This may sound obvious to us, but it was a radical concept amongst the religions of the day and also within Judaism.

You may- The Greek *exesti* occurs 32 times and is 28 times translated "lawful" in the context of arguments about the Mosaic law. Surely the eunuch had encountered the objection so many times whilst in Jerusalem: It is not lawful for you to come into the temple, or even, perhaps, to be baptized. Now Philip is being led to understand that the spirit of the Law did indeed encompass a personal like the eunuch, despite his physical condition and ethnicity. For if Philip simply meant 'Sure, you can...', other words would more comfortably have been chosen.

And he answered and said: I believe- The impression is given by the record that he really couldn't put the Scriptures together at all; his first comment to Philip was that he couldn't understand the Scriptures because he had no teacher (Acts 8:31). The way Philip opens his mouth "and preached unto him Jesus" (Acts 8:35) suggests the man had no prior understanding of "Jesus". Philip's message obviously included baptism, because the Ethiopian on his initiative asked to be baptized when he noticed some water on their journey. Philip did not refuse him, but said that he could do so if he believed with all his heart (Acts 8:37). The fact Philip requested the man to ask *himself* that question would imply that Philip did not know the state of the man's heart. He didn't say "Yes, Mr. Ethiopian, I can read your heart and I see you believe, so, yes, you can". The Ethiopian's confession that "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37) is clearly presented as sufficient for the man to be baptized. One excuse for not following the example of baptisms found in Acts is to argue that no extensive interview or theological teaching was necessary because the apostles knew the hearts of men by the Holy Spirit gifts. That of course is an argument from silence. Nowhere is that explicitly stated in the context of baptism. But the example of the Ethiopian rather suggests that Philip did not know the man's heart, rather did he leave the man to decide the state of his own heart.

That Jesus Christ is the Son of God- It would be hard to argue that anything much more is required to make a baptism valid. Belief in Jesus as God's Son becomes the quintessential statement of faith in Jn. 9:35; 20:31 and 1 Jn. 5:5. If acceptance of a detailed package of theology was essential for the validity of baptism, then surely the New Testament would be specific in giving examples of this. But the evidence is quite the opposite.

8:38 *And he commanded the chariot to stop*- See on :29 *Go near and join this chariot*.

And they both went down into the water- This along with the description of them coming "up out of the water" (:39) is sure evidence that baptism was by immersion. And it has been well observed that nobody crosses a desert without water bottles. They surely had some water, which would have sufficed if baptism were by sprinkling.

Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him- It is stressed twice that both of them went into the water. We see here the unity between preacher and convert, which we also noted on :31 *Sit with him*.

8:39 *And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip*- This would suggest that "the Spirit of the Lord" was not an internal prompting but the Spirit working through an Angel. The 'snatchings away' recorded in the Bible often imply the involvement of an Angel. The Alexandrian MS renders: "The Holy Spirit fell upon the eunuch, but an angel of the Lord snatched away Philip". This would parallel the Angel's work with that of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was equally active in work in both their lives. "Caught away" would have recalled how Ezekiel was snatched away from Jerusalem to Gentile Babylon (Ez. 3:14); and the Apocryphal story of the transportation of Habakkuk, who was supposedly like Ezekiel

taken up by the hair of his head, and carried from Judea to Babylon. Again the suggestion is that Philip now went to preach to Gentiles.

And the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing- The temple centred Judaism of the time would have found it hard to get their head around how a person could go off and have a relationship with God with no access to holy space and without the further presence of their rabbi / teacher. It's likewise difficult for those who perceive the body of Christ to be limited by a particular church or attendance within a denomination. The idea that a person can be baptized and live in isolation with their Lord is hard for them to accept. There is fairly strongly documented evidence that there was a Christian movement in Ethiopia from the first century, so we can conclude that the eunuch preached there on his return.

8:40 *But Philip was found*- Elsewhere I have suggested that it's helpful to imagine the Biblical records as being filmed by some Divine cameraman who changes perspective and at times zooms in and zooms out, and changes angle. In this record we have seen Philip looking at the chariot, focusing upon the eunuch, running to the chariot entourage and joining himself to it, then climbing up into it and sitting with the eunuch. Now the word "found" suggests an almost aerial perspective, looking down upon Palestine and 'finding' Philip in Ashdod / Azotus.

At Azotus- Ashdod. It is given its Gentile name because the suggestion is that after the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch, Philip began preaching to Gentiles. He preached along the coastal strip from Ashdod to Caesarea, an area well known for the many Gentiles living there. Both he and Peter were led to the same conclusions by different routes. This impression is confirmed by the way that Cornelius was at Caesarea (Acts 10:1), and his conversion is presented as the opening of the doors to the Gentiles. Both Philip and Peter ended up open minded to Gentiles in Caesarea by different routes. We so often find this- believers are led to the same changed positions and the same truths by different paths but by the same Lord.

And passing through that area, he preached the gospel to all the towns, until he came to Caesarea - Luke describes the Lord and His followers as ‘passing through’ and teaching as He went (Lk. 2:15; 4:30; 5:15; 8:22; 9:6; 11:24; 17:11; 19:1,4); and employs the same word to describe the preaching of the apostles in Acts (8:4,40; 9:32,38; 10:38; 11:19,22; 12:10; 13:6,14; 14:24; 15:3,41; 16:6; 17:23; 18:23,27; 19:1,21; 20:2,25). See on Acts 1:1. His witness becomes that of all those in Him. We are Him to this world.

ACTS CHAPTER 9

9:1 *But Saul, yet breathing threats and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest*- Saul here is portrayed as a beast, perhaps the personal epitome of the beast system of Revelation which persecuted God's people during the first century. AV is incorrect in rendering "breathing *out*"; the Greek here means to inhale, not to exhale. The idea is that he breathed in a mental atmosphere of threats and murder. This is a helpful way of describing our mindset- we can breathe in our own words and wrong intentions, as Saul did here. The "yet" suggests that his fury at Stephen's arguments continued... but the depth of his hurt was really the depth to which his conscience had been prodded by the goads of the risen Christ.

The Damascus road experience surfaces time and again in Paul’s writing and self-consciousness (Rom. 10:2-4; 1 Cor. 9:1,16,17; 15:8-10; 2 Cor. 3:4-4:6; 5:16; Eph. 3:1-13; Phil. 3:4-11; Col. 1:23-29). It is no mere pointless repetition that results

in Luke recording Paul's conversion three times in Acts (Acts 9,22,26). Special attention is being paid to his conversion, because he is being set up as the model of all Christian conversion.

9:2- see on Acts 22:19.

And asked from him letters to Damascus, to the synagogues- The implication is that the Christians were to be found in the synagogues. This is yet further evidence that the Lord never required His followers to 'break fellowship' with the synagogue system, apostate as it was in doctrine and practice. He clearly had no concept of 'guilt by association'.

That if he found any that were of the Way - How the Christian community is described in 19:9; 22:4; 24:22. Yet "the way" is a title of the Lord Jesus personally. The community were so identified with Him personally that one of His personal titles became the name given to the community which manifested Him and was based around Him.

Whether men or women- This is emphasized three times (8:3; 9:2; 22:4).

He might bring them bound to Jerusalem- See on 9:14 *To bind*. It was specifically in Jerusalem that Saul had done so much evil to Christians (:13). Presumably the level of torture and death which Saul wanted to inflict couldn't so easily be done in Damascus, but he could get away with it in Jerusalem; hence he wanted to bring the Christians to Jerusalem. Paul later admitted he had murdered Christians during the period before the Damascus road incident: "And I persecuted this Way to the death [meaning, he murdered them], binding and delivering into prisons both men and women" (Acts 22:4). The way of getting the Christians into Roman prisons could only have been through false accusation. For the Jews didn't have their own prison system. Or perhaps we are to understand the Greek for "prisons" in 22:4 in its more literal sense of 'cages', in which Christians were sometimes burnt. The question, of course, is how Saul got away with doing this when the Lord's own trial and death had highlighted how the Jews themselves did not have the power to put people to death, and needed Roman agreement to do so. It could be that this changed after the death of the Lord Jesus; or it could be that a blind eye was turned, as the Christian converts were seen as anti-Roman in their beliefs and practices.

The binding and bringing of Christians from one city to another, along with other references to Saul's abuse of Christians (26:10,11), was predicted clearly in Mt. 23:33-36: "You serpents, you offspring of vipers, how shall you escape the judgment of Gehenna? Therefore, look, I send to you prophets and wise men and scribes. Some of them you shall kill and crucify, and some of them you shall scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city. That upon you may fall the guilt for all the righteous blood shed on the land... all these things shall come upon this generation". This reads as a prediction of Saul's personal behaviour. And yet the apparently inevitable judgment for doing these things did not come upon Saul. Here again we see how judgment can be stated, without any conditions or mitigating factors being explained at the time [just as Nineveh was to be destroyed after 40 days]- and yet the judgment can still be altered. And in Saul's case, the Lord worked hard to avoid having to bring it upon him. We wonder how many others He likewise worked with, but they didn't respond... The scope of His activity amongst men is wonderful.

9:3- see on Acts 26:10,11.

And as he journeyed, it came to pass, that he drew near to Damascus; and suddenly there shone round about him- The idea is of flashing, and suggests this was a vision of the Cherubim, similar to what Ezekiel saw (Ez. 1:4). See below.

A light out of Heaven- Paul's conversion-commissioning experience on the Damascus road has many similarities with the commissioning of Ezekiel. Ezekiel saw a similar vision of glory, heard "a voice of one that spoke", fell to the ground, resisted the commission, received Divine assurance, rose up by Divine invitation and was prepared for his commission by signs and wonders. The difference was that Paul says he saw the glory of the risen Christ. Ezekiel saw the glory of Yahweh, as the Lord Jesus wasn't in physical existence and hadn't resurrected at his time. But essentially, it was the same glory- for the glory of the Father is now fully invested in the Son (Rom. 9:23; Phil. 4:19). Ezekiel saw at the head of the vision of glory "the likeness of a man". He calls this figure the *Kavod*, the glory of God (Ez. 1:29). Although Jesus was not in physical existence at Ezekiel's time, I suggest that Ezekiel saw a vision of the Lord Jesus in glory. John 12 says that Isaiah likewise saw the glory of the Lord Jesus when he saw a similar vision of glory in Isaiah 6. James 2:1 speaks of "our Lord Jesus Christ, the glory". Christ is "the Lord of glory", reflecting the glory of God (Col. 1:27; Heb. 1:3). When Paul writes of our being transformed into "the image of Christ" (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49) he seems to have in mind Ez. 1:28 LXX: "The appearance of the image of the glory of the Lord". "The glory" in Ezekiel is personified- it refers to a person, and I submit that person was a prophetic image of Jesus Christ. But Paul's big point is that we *each* with unveiled face have beheld the Lord's glory (2 Cor. 3:16- 4:6); just as he did on the Damascus road, and just as Ezekiel did. It follows, therefore, that not only is Paul our example, but our beholding of the Lord's glory propels us on our personal commission in the Lord's service, whatever it may be.

Theologians debate whether the Damascus road experience was Paul's conversion, programmatic for each of us, as he says in 1 Tim. 1:16 and 2 Cor. 4:6; or whether it is a specific, unique calling to be a preacher of the Gospel, and therefore is couched in terms of the call of Ezekiel and other Old Testament prophets. In Galatians 1, Paul clearly understood what happened as being his specific call to a preaching ministry. I would say that Saul's conversion was also a call to a preaching ministry; and that our conversion is also a calling to a ministry no less significant than that of the Old Testament prophets.

9:4 *And he fell upon the earth and heard a voice saying to him: Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*- Clear evidence that the body of Christ is as it were the Lord Jesus personally. Whatever is done to us is done to Him. Nearly 10 times we read Paul saying that he had 'persecuted' Jesus; he was deeply aware of it. And he surely had his past in view when he urged: "Bless them which persecute you; curse [them] not" (Rom. 12:14). He likely remembered those whom he had maimed and murdered blessing him and not cursing him, and he realized that he was reaping the blessings of their grace.

9:5- see on Acts 23:1.

And he said: Who are you, Lord? And he said: I am Jesus whom you persecute- Paul was told by Jesus that all those whom he had persecuted were in fact Jesus personally (Acts 9:5). And this idea of the believer being so totally bound up with his or her Lord continues with Paul throughout his life. Thus he takes a prophecy concerning how Christ personally would be the light of the whole world (Is. 49:6), and applies it to himself in explanation of why he was devoted to being a light to the whole world *himself* (Acts 13:47- although 26:23 applies it to Jesus personally).

The term "Lord" is usually used in Acts about the Lord Jesus. The way Paul calls Him "Lord" is surely a reflection of how subconsciously he already knew Jesus was Lord. Conversion is largely about coming to be honest with ourselves and to accept the truth of what we already know. And this is the task of the preacher- to elicit honesty and humility in a person, so that they realize that the content of our message is in fact what they intuitively, subconsciously knew all along.

It is hard for you to kick against the pricks- This is omitted in some manuscripts. It's easy to assume that this means that Saul earlier in his life had been as an animal kicking against the goads, causing him much pain; and thus we can read this as a comment from the Lord about the tortured conscience of Saul. And this may be a valid reading. Paul had grown up in Jerusalem and would have probably been amongst 'all Jerusalem' who heard John the Baptist; he would've surely met the Lord Jesus during His times in Jerusalem. He so often alludes to John the Baptist, as I demonstrated at length in *Paul and Peter*. His anger against the followers of Jesus was therefore psychologically understandable if in fact he was angry with himself for resisting his conscience about Jesus personally. In fact, his persecution of Christians was a classic case of transference; he transferred his anger against himself onto the symbols of what was the root of his anger- Jesus.

But on :3 I discussed the question of whether the Damascus road experience was a conversion or [additionally] a receipt of a preaching commission. If we look at it from the aspect of being a commission to a preaching ministry, then we could understand these words not so much as the Lord comment upon Saul's past life, but rather a word of guidance to him about his future ministry. He was taking on the yoke of Christ, and was to plough a straight furrow for Him; any kicking against the goads would be painful for him. In other words, the Lord is encouraging Saul to accept the ministry and not try to wriggle out of the direction the Lord is going to lead him in. However, the comment that it is hard to kick against the goads is made directly in the context of asking Saul why he was persecuting the Lord Jesus. It would appear part of the appeal for him to repent of what he was intending to do in Damascus.

We note there is no demand from the Lord that Saul repent, nor a request to put anything right. Stephen had prayed for Saul's forgiveness and we wonder whether that prayer had been so totally answered that there was no need for this.

9:6 *But rise and enter into the city, and you shall be told what you must do*- The obvious question is why the Lord didn't tell Saul immediately of the need for repentance, baptism and a life of service. Perhaps He did, but it's not recorded. But maybe it was [and continues to be] His preferred method of working to use a human mechanism in explaining His will. He had Ananias in view already for this work. And he wanted Saul to meet with one of those he intended to abuse, and learn the Lord's requirements from him. If these were the only words of response which the Lord made, then Saul's obedience to the Lord's word would have been tested. On arrival at Straight Street, Damascus, he was presumably taken to a suitably hard-line Jewish Orthodox household. He must've wondered whether it was all for real; for no further instructions were given. Until Ananias bravely turned up on the door of a household he probably knew were bent on his destruction. The very same words for "[he shall] tell you what you must do" were used by the Angel in telling Cornelius that he must go to Peter and Peter would tell him what he must do (Acts 10:9). We see here the same Divine footprint; and again, we note the Lord's preference to work through human mechanisms in order to reveal His Truth to men. The Ethiopian eunuch correctly noted that he couldn't understand the Bible unless someone should guide him. Often the theoretical case has been presented of a man on a deserted island with

only a Bible. Would he figure out the Gospel for himself by his Bible reading? Maybe. It would have to be theoretically possible. But my sense both from Biblical history and observed experience is that God would parachute someone onto the island to explain the Bible to the marooned man.

9:7 *And the men that journeyed with him stood speechless*- They stood, whilst Saul fell to the ground because of the light. The awesomeness was only felt by Saul, otherwise the others would have fallen to the ground too.

Hearing the voice but seeing no one- After Saul arose, he too saw no man (:8 AV). The implication is that Saul did see the Lord Jesus during this vision. Paul says this explicitly in 1 Cor. 15:8.

9:8- see on Acts 13:11.

And Saul arose from the earth, and when his eyes were opened- We are to imagine the other men opening his eyelids, but not restoring his sight. Those men would have been hard-line orthodox Jews; and the message was clearly that Judaism could open eyes but not reveal the light of life and true spiritual vision.

He saw nothing, and they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus- AV "no man". See on :7 *Seeing no one*.

9:9 *And he was three days without sight, and did neither eat nor drink*- To help him identify with the Lord's three days in the grave. He was thus prepared to make the formal step of identity with His death and resurrection through baptism. This was how the Lord worked with the Ethiopian eunuch, and with people today too- they are led to identify with the experiences of the risen Lord, and then baptism as identity with His sufferings and victory becomes the logical next step. Note that it is experience rather than doctrinal instruction alone which prepares for this act of identity.

9:10 *Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him*- 'Named' could imply that he had received the name 'Ananias' as his Christian name, in line with the practice attested in the New Testament of Christians taking another name on conversion. The name would literally be translatable as 'God's grace / gift', equivalent of the Hebrew 'Hannah'. He was addressed by his name, "Ananias", and he responds [in the Greek]" "Behold, I". As if to say 'Yes, that's me- the one who is by God's grace'. His understanding of grace was now going to be tested- he was to go to the man who had come to abuse him, who was currently living in a household that were presumably agreeable to Saul's evil plans- and share God's grace with that man.

In a vision: Ananias. And he said: I am here, Lord- The active Lord Jesus likewise appeared to Saul in a vision at this time (:12). He is no less active today, working simultaneously in the lives of multiple people around the clock, worldwide.

9:11 *And the Lord said to him: Arise and go*- Just as Saul had been told to 'Arise and go' into Damascus (:6). This is no mere literary flourish, nor simply the stamp of the same human author. Just as similar experiences were shared by Peter and Cornelius, and similar language used about them both, so here too, Ananias and Saul are being worked with by the same Lord in the same way; and the similarities between them were in order to bind together the preacher and his convert (see also on :12). The same similar hand at work can be felt between believers today, and is one of the things which creates the bond of fellowship between them, knowing that the same Lord has left the same Divine footprint in working with both of them. This of course is only realisable if both believers share with each other their experience of the Lord-

and don't merely meet at church to chat about the weather and the state of the nation. Both Paul and Ananias had the choice as to whether to 'arise and go', and they both responded. Luke so often uses this phrase. Yet there was an element of choice before both those men. One side could have let the ball drop. But they both responded, with magnificent result.

To the street which is called Straight- See on 13:10 *The right ways*.

And enquire in the house of Judas for one named Saul, a man of Tarsus. For he prays- This is the same word used for how the men of Cornelius came enquiring for Cornelius, who had also been praying (10:19,21). Again we see the same Lord operating in the lives of Saul and Cornelius, according to a similar pattern. Those same similarities of pattern can be seen between our lives and those of other believers, and it is on this basis that we can be a comfort to each other (2 Cor. 1:3-8). Presumably the household were supportive of Saul's abuse campaign against Christians. So the name Judas was appropriate, obviously recalling Judas Iscariot, and again presenting Judas Iscariot as the epitome of the Jewish system who crucified the Lord.

9:12 *And he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and laying his hands on him, that he might receive his sight*- Saul is spoken of as "one named Saul" (:11), another attempt to present Saul and Ananias in parallel; see on 9:11 *Arise and go*.

9:13 *But Ananias answered: Lord, I have heard from many of this man, how much evil he did*- In typical human style, Ananias assumes he knows the situation down here on earth better than the Lord, whom he perceived [as we do in our weakness] to be somewhat distant and ignorant. But we locals do not in fact see the full picture at all... and this is where faith comes in.

To your saints at Jerusalem- 'Saint' means a holy one, but holiness also carries the sense of separation *unto* as well as separation *from*. The Hebrew idea is of consecration. The believers there were consecrated by the Lord Jesus unto specific service. And it is in this sense that we are all saints- we all have a specific service which we are commissioned to perform in the Lord's service.

9:14 *And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind*- And to take them bound to Jerusalem (:2). Paul later uses the same words to describe how he is going "bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem" (20:22), and to prison, suffering and maybe death there. He realized that he was living out the same experience he had inflicted upon others, and it was "the Spirit" which was bringing this about. God's providential hand, the Spirit, the Lord Jesus, the Angels [call it what you will] works likewise with us, so that we appreciate the impact of our actions upon others. And yet Saul actually never took anyone bound from Damascus to prison, suffering and death in Jerusalem. But he intended to. And so we can reflect that what we *intended* to do to others in essence happens to us; for the thought is counted as the action, and we are being led to understand the meaning and implications of our own thinking and intentions.

All that call upon your name- Saul was therefore asked to be baptized and also call upon himself the Lord's Name (22:16). His baptism was not merely an act of identity with the Lord Jesus, but with the body of Jesus whom he had been persecuting.

9:15 *But the Lord said to him: Go your way. For he is a chosen vessel to me*- The Lord spoke of Paul even before his conversion as "a chosen vessel unto me". The words "chosen" ['elect'] and "vessel" recur frequently in Paul's reasoning in Romans 9-11, where he argues that *we* are chosen vessels, elected / chosen by grace (Rom. 9:22,25). It's as if Paul is warning us not to see him as a special case, a piece of Divine artwork to be admired in passing; but as a very real example of how God is

just as powerfully at work with *us*. Truly Paul 'bore' Christ to the world just as John 'bore' (s.w.) Christ's Gospel (Acts 9:15 = Mt. 3:11). But surely Paul had the Lord's words here in mind in 2 Cor. 4:7: "But we have this treasure in earthly vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves". And the preceding verses are also full of allusion to the Damascus road, speaking of God shining into our hearts with the knowledge of Jesus.
"A chosen vessel" refers to how "The Holy One of Israel... has chosen you [Messiah]" (Is. 49:7 RSV). This is one of a number of instances of where Old Testament Messianic Scriptures are applied to Paul in the context of his preaching Christ.

To bear my name- Paul was to bear Christ's name to the world *in that he* would suffer great things for the sake of that Name (Acts 9:15,16). His sharing in the Lord's sufferings was the bearing of the Name before men. The Greek word for 'bear' in Acts 9:15 is the same used in Lk. 14:27 about bearing the cross. To bear His name to the world is to bear His cross. The record of the disciples' persecution for the sake of their witness is studded with references to their preaching being *in* the Name of Jesus (Acts 4:2,7,9,10,12 RV). Whoever heard them heard Jesus (Lk. 10:16). The prophecy of Psalm 2 concerning how "the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ" was appropriated by the preachers to themselves even though it is elsewhere applied to the crucifixion (Acts 4:26).

Before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel- Therefore the reference to Paul being the apostle to the Gentiles and Peter going to the Jews may not mean that they had such distinct roles. That may have described a local or temporary situation.

9:16 *For I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake*- There seems no record of the Lord as it were informing Saul of the details of his life ahead of time. The idea may rather be that throughout the course of his life, he would come to realize the sufferings of Christ through sharing the sufferings he had brought upon the Christian believers. Ananias had just spoken of the believers as those who bore the Lord's name (:14), and so the idea here may be that Saul was to experience the sufferings he had brought upon those who bore the Lord's name.

Right at his baptism, Paul realized that the Lord Jesus intended to make Paul fellowship the spirit of his experience on the cross (Acts 9:16). Later, Paul speaks of how he is "filling up what is lacking" in the aim Christ had set him: to fellowship the crucified Lord Jesus (Phil. 3:10). As the sufferings of Christ (i.e. his ability to relate to them) increasingly abounded in Paul (2 Cor. 1:5 Gk.), so did his comfort and certainty that he would be in the Kingdom; because he knew that if he suffered with Christ, he would share his glorious resurrection (2 Cor. 4:11,12). As we grow, therefore, our realization that we are progressively sharing the sufferings of Christ should increase; our understanding of the memorial meeting (which reminds us of this) will deepen, as we appreciate more what it means to take the cup of his pain. The need and simple beauty of the breaking of bread becomes more logical; taking those emblems becomes in a sense more difficult, yet more sobering and comforting. The point is that as we grow, the centre of our attention will increasingly be the Lord Jesus and his cross.

9:17 *And Ananias departed, and entered into the house; and laying his hands on him, said: Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road upon which you travelled, has sent me, that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy*

Spirit- As with Cornelius, Saul received the Holy Spirit before baptism. This is one of a number of similarities between the two men and a parade example of how the Lord works in a similar way with different people.

9:18 *And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales*- A classic example of how doctor Luke uses first century medical language.

And he received his sight; and he arose and was baptized- The Greek text adds 'immediately'. To receive sight immediately is a phrase only used elsewhere by Luke, in describing the healing of the blind man near Jericho: "Immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God" (Lk. 18:43). This man was seen by Luke as representative of Saul. But that blind man asked the Lord to heal him. We wonder whether doctor Luke perceived that subconsciously, this is what Saul had been asking for; or perhaps during the three days blindness, this was indeed Saul's prayer. Or perhaps his idea is that Saul's conversion and healing was an act of grace; what was done to the blind beggar because the man asked for it, was done to Saul without him asking for it. Whatever, the proud young Pharisee Saul was spiritually no more than a blind, possibly Gentile, beggar by the roadside. The blind man encountered the Lord on a road- just as Saul had done on the road to Damascus (Lk. 18:35). And if the blind man was indeed Bartimaeus (Mk. 10:46), 'the son of the unclean', we see an inversion of Saul's proud sense of his genealogy (Rom. 11:1; Phil. 3:5).

9:19 *And he took food and was strengthened, and was several days with the disciples that were at Damascus*- Saul was named after the historical King Saul, also being from the tribe of Benjamin. On Saul's last fateful night at Endor, having learnt of his unalterable condemnation, Saul likewise "took food and was strengthened" at the hands of the witch. Saul was being made to see the similarities- that he was as good as condemned, like Saul on his last night; but had been saved by Ananias, 'the grace of God'. The connection with the historical Saul accented the pure grace of God towards him.

9:20 *And immediately in the synagogues he proclaimed Jesus, that he is the Son of God*- No fewer than 15 times do we read of Paul "preaching Jesus". His message focused around a living person, more than over dry theology. Gal. 1:16 describes this as God being pleased to reveal His Son in Paul. Paul had the Son of God within he; he had the spirit / mind of Christ. And it was this which gave credibility and power to his preaching Jesus as the Son of God. And God eagerly manifested Himself and His Son through this.

9:21 *And all that heard him were amazed, and said: Is this not he that in Jerusalem made havoc of those that called on this name? And he had come here for this intent, that he might bring them bound before the chief priests*- The same word translated "made havoc" or "destroyed" is found in Paul's reporting of these words in Gal. 1:23: "They only heard say: He that once persecuted us now preaches the faith of which he once made havoc!". They said that he made havoc of believers; and also that he made havoc of "the faith". This reflects how closely identified were Christians with their "faith". They were living embodiments of their statements of faith. There was no such in those days as cultural Christianity, living out an inherited position. You were your faith. And so it should be today.

9:22 *But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews that dwelt at Damascus*- But he repeatedly uses the same word, particularly in his later letters, to describe how *Christ* strengthened him (Phil. 4:13; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 2;1; 4:17).

Proving that this is the real Christ- This is a strange way to put it; it's as if Paul himself was standing there showing in his person, Christ Himself. The Greek for 'proving' means 'to put together'; it may be that what was being put together was not

so much OT prophecies and Jesus, but rather Paul and Jesus. Preaching is a revealing to men of the Christ that is within us; this is what witnessing in Christ is really about, rather than pushing bills or placing press adverts or writing letters. Not that any of these things are to be decried, but the essence is that we from deep within ourselves reveal Christ to men. This is why those who witness to Him, as only those in Him can, testify to His especial presence in this work. The promise that "I am with you always" was in the context of being near the preacher as he or she witnesses.

9:23 *And when many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel together to kill him*- The very language used of the Jews' plans to kill the Lord. Paul was already starting to fellowship the sufferings of his Lord, just as we all must do. In this reality we find a bridge between Him there two millennia ago, and us today. He is now icon to be gazed upon, but rather a real individual whose sufferings and experiences are ours in essence. And this connection is what gives meaning and significance to the events in our human lives.

9:24 *But their plot became known to Saul*- The same word used of how the Jews later plotted against Paul (Acts 20:3,19; 23:30). Through this, he was going through his Lord's experiences at the hands of the Jews. We too are brought to fellowship aspects of the Lord's sufferings, day by day.

And they watched the gates day and night that they might kill him- 2 Cor. 11:33 says that Aretas the governor of Damascus did this. As with the Lord's death, the Jews persuaded Gentile rulers of the need to destroy God's people.

9:25 *But his disciples took him by night and lowered him down the wall in a basket*- He made converts very quickly- another indication that conversion can happen very soon after hearing the basic Gospel. This invites comparison with David escaping from king Saul's persecution in 1 Sam. 19:12. Saul had been named after king Saul, and like him, he had persecuted David-Jesus. Saul / Paul saw the similarity, and the Lord worked with him in this by putting him in a situation where he was replicating *David's* behaviour; and getting a taste of Saul's persecution. He was being helped to see his behaviour from outside of himself; and the Lord works with us likewise. Paul perhaps therefore recalls this incident as one of the most humbling he had ever experienced (2 Cor. 11:33). Further, we note that it was the disciples, whom he had intended to abuse and kill, who let him down over the wall. As they held the rope, he realized that his life was in the hands of those whom he had plotted to torture to death.

9:26 *And when he came to Jerusalem, he decided to attach himself to the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple*- The similarities with the Cornelius and Peter situation continue, in that Peter explained that it was not acceptable for a Jew to 'attach himself' to a Gentile (10:28). Saul the Jew was treated as a Gentile- and this, again, was used in the Lord's ecology and larger, wiser game plan in order to make Paul sympathetic to providing fellowship to Gentiles. For he had now learnt what it felt like to be excluded from fellowship with one's Jewish brethren.

9:27 *But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road and that he had spoken to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus*- The Greek suggests he physically took him by the arm or hand. The psychological likelihood of the record here is so very strong and imaginable. We are reading of events which truly happened.

9:28 *And he was with them*- The "them" with whom Paul was with refers to the apostles, the leadership (:27).

Going in and going out at Jerusalem- A Hebrew idiom for leadership.

9:29 *Preaching boldly in the name of the Lord; and he spoke and disputed against the Greek speaking Jews, and they that were seeking to kill him- Preaching... spoke... disputed-* These are all different preaching styles. Sometimes there was simple, joyful proclamation of the good news (*euaggelizein)*, sometimes patient comparison of the OT Scriptures (*suzetein,* Acts 9:29*, paratithestai*, 17:3*, sumbibazein,* 9:22); at other times there was the utter defeat of the listener by argument (*sunchunei*, 9:22). This is a far cry from the blanket attitude to 'the world' which our preachers so often show. There *is* a place for intellectual argument; belief is a matter of the mind as well as the heart.

He "preached boldly" as he had done in Damascus. Bold preaching was a characteristic of Paul, and this particular Greek word which means 'bold preaching' is used so often to describe his style (Acts 9:27,29; 13:46; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8; 26:26; 28:31; 2 Cor. 3:12; 7:4; Eph. 3:12; 1 Thess. 2:2). But this points up the deep significance of Paul's request that others join him in prayer that he may be bold in preaching (Eph. 6:19,20; Phil. 1:20 s.w.). He didn't find it easy, and his request for prayer that he might achieve imply that he wasn't a natural at this 'bold preaching'. We shouldn't assume that those who have the limelight in Gospel preaching are in fact confident extroverts, naturally brave and bold. Not all are; some only achieve that through prayerful struggle with their deep sense of inadequacy. And Paul was one of them.

"Disputed" is the very same word used for how this same group, Greek-speaking Jews, "disputed" with Stephen (Acts 6:1,9). Seeing it was Saul who had arranged the murder of Stephen, this cannot be coincidental. The Lord was again seeking to bring Saul to enter into the experience of another, whom he had effectively killed. But there is a slight difference- it was these Greek speakers who disputed with Stephen in Acts 6, whereas here it is Saul who apparently takes the initiative and disputes with them. Perhaps he consciously wanted to stand up for Stephen, or wilfully sought to enter into Stephen's experiences and life's struggles. This was and is repentance indeed- seeking to know the mind of the one you have hurt.

He was purposefully trying to convince those who wanted to kill him. Again, Saul was truly motivated by his own recent experience; those whom he had sought to kill were now his brethren, and he marvelled at the grace of men like Ananias, the epitome of 'God's grace' [as his name meant], and those brethren who let him down over the Damascus wall. And he wished to reflect that same grace that he had been shown. There are principles here for all time, meaning that this is no mere history for us. He tried to preach to and persuade those who wanted to kill him- rather than keeping away from them. He knew so well that those *he* had wanted to kill had taken great risks in order to preach to and persuade *him*. And he was trying to do likewise.

9:30 *And when the brothers knew it, they brought him down to Caesarea-* As the brothers likewise took Saul and saved his life by letting him down over the wall of Damascus so that he might flee elsewhere. As he was let *down* over the wall, so the brothers took him *down* to Caesarea. The impression is created of Paul's human salvation being in the hands of those he had only recently sought to abuse and kill. Straight away we go on to read about Cornelius in Caesarea (10:1); and one wonders whether he met Paul and was one of his first converts. We have noted throughout these notes the points of contact between Paul and Cornelius.

And sent him to Tarsus- Literally, they 'apostle' him. He went where they sent him, so he was under their control. Perhaps they thought that just as the Lord Jesus consciously went to preach in the home towns of the disciples, so a convert ought to preach in his hometown. And so they sent him on a mission to Tarsus, his hometown.

We know that his nephew was sympathetic to him, and one likes to think that he converted at least his sister and nephew.

9:31 *So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being built up*- This was because Saul was no longer persecuting the church; the implication therefore is that he had actively persecuted the Christians throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria. This means that the Samaritans baptized by Philip in Acts 8, and the groups in Galilee who remembered the Lord's time there... all were terrorized by Saul.

And walking in the fear of the Lord- They had been in fear of Saul's persecution (:26 s.w.). Now he wasn't persecuting them, instead they feared the Lord Jesus. They had been distracted from fearing Him by their fear of Saul.

And in the comfort of the Holy Spirit- A reference to the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, promised in John 14-16. One role of the Spirit is simply to comfort, and here we see clearly that it works on an internal, psychological level- i.e. in the human heart.

It multiplied- The connection is between the 'walking' of the church, focused now on the Lord rather than fear of Saul- and the growth of the church. Church growth is therefore made relative to the 'walk' of the church members.

9:32 *And it came to pass, as Peter went throughout all regions, he came also to the saints that dwelt at Lydda*- This suggests that Peter went on a pastoral circuit throughout all the areas where there were believers. This would have been in response to the Lord's command to him to tend His sheep and lambs.

9:33 *There he found...*- See on :35.

A certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years, for he was paralyzed- What is the significance of this period? Depending on when we date Saul's conversion, it could be that it was eight years ago that the man had first begun to hear the Gospel from John the Baptist. He had been sick all that time, as he resisted the message.

9:34 *And Peter said to him: Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed. And immediately he rose*- But of course it was Peter standing there healing him. He was Christ-manifest in his witness, just as we should be. Peter had observed as Jesus made a lame man *arise*, take up his bed, and follow Him (Lk. 5:25). But here in Acts 9:34, we find Peter doing just the same to Aeneas, even taking him by the hand as he had seen Jesus do to Jairus' daughter. What Peter had seen and learnt of the Lord Jesus, he was now called to do. Not for nothing did he tell Aeneas that "Jesus Christ heals you", thereby recognizing the connection between him and his Lord.

9:35 *All that dwelt at Lydda and in Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord*- Another example of where "all" refers to all those in God's purpose rather than literally 'all men'. This incident is recorded as an exemplification of what we have just read in :31- that through the work of the Holy Spirit, the church was multiplied at this time. The Greek translated "turned" is indeed translated 'to convert', but also 'to turn back'. Perhaps the "all" refers to all the believers in those areas, who had somewhat fallen away as a result of fearing Saul rather than the Lord; but after that miracle, of curing Aeneas who was maybe one of the saints at Lydda (:32,33 "there he found"), they all turned back to the Lord. Note how fresh conversion to the Lord as a result of Peter's miracles is described differently in :42: "It became known throughout all Joppa; and many *believed* in the Lord".

Mass conversions to the Lord's flock at Sharon sounds like the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 65:10 "Sharon shall be a fold of flocks". The essence of the Kingdom was coming true in the preaching of the Gospel, as it is today; and we await the

physical manifestation of all this in the literal return of Christ to establish God's Kingdom on earth.

9:36 *Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds*- She was therefore clearly well known to both Jews and Gentiles, hence she had the two names. Dealing with her was therefore an incident which prepared Peter for the challenge of chapter 10- to reject the Jewish idea that having Gentiles into your house was wrong. Note how the widows came into the house and spoke of the clothing which *Dorcas* [her Greek name] had made (:39). But Peter then goes to her corpse and addresses her by her Hebrew name, Tabitha (:40). So there were Jews and Gentiles in the same house; and the Holy Spirit worked through Peter to bind them all together in faith, joy and praise. This was clearly to prepare Peter for the challenge of going into the home of Cornelius. We note the obvious similarity with Cornelius, of whom the same was said as for Tabitha: "Full of good works and charitable deeds". See on :38. The Lord is very gentle, and leads us stage by stage towards deeper understandings. We should likewise be sensitive to the fact that the folk we mix with, in the world and also in the church, will not immediately 'get it' about things. As we have been gently led through Divinely controlled experienced from one understanding to another, so we must recognize that others are at different points in their journey. And we are to reflect them the same patience as the Lord has shown us.

9:37 *And it came to pass in those days, that she fell sick and died, and when they had washed her*- Why mention this detail? Was it to recall her baptism, which gave her the hope of bodily resurrection?

They laid her in an upper room- Luke brings out her identification with the church, the body of Christ, which was so associated with 'upper rooms' in its earliest days.

9:38 *And as Lydda was near to Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him: Come to us without delay*- This is so similar to what Peter was to experience with Cornelius; messengers sent to him, urging him to come without delay. These events were intended to prepare him for the Cornelius experience; see on :36.

9:39 *And Peter rose and went with them. And when he had arrived, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood by him, weeping and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas had made, while she was with them*- The widows would have likely been poor, and their clothes had been made by Dorcas. So they were showing their own clothes.

9:40 *But Peter sent them out, and kneeled down and prayed; and turning to the body, he said: Tabitha, rise. And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up*- When Peter resurrects Dorcas, he asked the weeping crowd to depart before he raised her- exactly repeating the Lord's procedure when He raised Jairus' daughter. Note how she is laid in a chamber, she is spoken to by Peter, she opens her eyes and sits up, and Peter presents her alive and asks for her to be given food. All this was evidently parallel to what Peter had been especially invited by Jesus to come and witness when He raised the girl during His ministry. The events Peter had been witnessed had been especially arranged so that when they repeated themselves in his future life, he was able to see the similarities and act as a true follower and mimicker of his Lord. The way he put everyone out of the room, turned to the body and said "Tabitha, arise", and she rose up, is exactly the way the Lord acted (Acts 9:40 cp. Lk. 8:54). Consciously or unconsciously, his very body language and words reflected those of the Lord.

9:41- see on Acts 3:7.

And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive- The very words used about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus (Acts 1:3). Acts continually presents the life, sufferings, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus as being reflected in the experiences of His body on earth, the church.

9:42 *And it became known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord*- An exemplification of the introductory statement to this section in :31, that the activity of the Holy Spirit at this time led to the numerical growth of the church.

9:43 *And it came to pass, that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon a tanner*- Peter had been urgently called to Joppa whilst visiting Lydda (:38). The Joppa visit was apparently unplanned. He raises Tabitha, many are converted as a result- and so he stays there for some time in order to follow up on the new ecclesia. This reflects his openness to the movement of the Spirit and willingness to go wherever led. No wonder 1 Cor. 9:5 mentions how Peter 'took around' his wife.

ACTS CHAPTER 10

10:1 *Now there was a certain man in Caesarea, Cornelius by name, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Regiment*- Comprised of Italians and true Romans. The man could not have been more Gentile. He was part of the Roman army of occupation, of none less than "the Italian regiment", a Roman of the Romans. For him to be described as "devout" and a God fearer was a deep paradox and challenge to Jews. Ceasarea had only a minority Jewish population; it was a new town built by Herod on the site of Strato's Tower, as the "model Greco-Roman city". Hence it was named 'Caesar City', Caesaria. Many Jews, even moderate ones, refused to accept Caesarea as part of Judah, dubbing it "the daughter of Edom". That a centurion in the army of occupation should be set up as the model Gentile convert, without apparently quitting his job, was a major challenge to Jewish Christians.

In this context, we note that the "Simon" with whom Peter stayed was a Jew who was a tanner, producing leather goods. The Roman military machine had a huge demand for leather- for tents, boots, bags, belts, helmet parts, sword and dagger sheaths, horse harnesses etc. “A legion required a minimum of 68,000 goatskins to make tents, and more than 3,000 cattle hides annually for boots alone”. “Each tent required some 70 hides, so to put a *cohors quingenaria ‘sub pellibus’* (auxiliary regiment ‘under leather tent’— approximately 500 soldiers) would require the lives of more than 4,200 goats, and a legion (approximately 5,000 soldiers) something in excess of 46,000”. So without question, Simon was working for the occupying army. And Peter stayed with him; and Simon provided Peter with food and lodging. We note that the record says that Peter was hungry, and Simon's household were preparing food for Peter. Peter was therefore sharing table fellowship with a man whom most Jews would have seen as a traitor and not a faithful Jew. But this Simon the tanner is presented as a faithful supporter of Peter's missionary work. Acts 9:43 notes that "he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon a tanner". This was no passing stay for one night. Peter arrived as a Christian missionary and was supported by Simon, following the Lord's command for missionaries to remain in the first home that welcomed them- which, in terms of the social norms of the day, meant accepting the message of the messenger. No decent Jew would have stayed at Simon's home. But Peter did, perhaps because he was the first person he approached, or perhaps because he had no choice. Maybe nobody else who owned a home accepted his message. Tanners were despised

by Jews; Lev. 11:39,40 pronounced unclean anyone who touched the carcasses of even a clean animal, so tanners were seen as unclean. The Rabbis allowed a woman to divorce her husband for any reason if he were a tanner. A tanner's yard could not be located within 50 cubits of any town- hence Simon lived by the seaside. A Jew should never even learn the trade of a tanner. We note in passing that Paul, Aquila and Priscilla were tentmakers, which would have likewise have often rendered them ritually unclean, or at best, reminded them that the tanner was the but one step between them and ritual uncleanness. Indeed some texts offer "they were leatherworkers" at Acts 18:3 [NEV "by trade they were tentmakers"].

10:2 *A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, who gave much charity to the Jewish people and prayed to God always*- The point has often been well made that doing all these things was not enough. Faith in Christ and baptism into Him was what was required; and yet his good deeds were not ignored by God. They were responded to by sending Peter to him to teach him the Gospel. Note too that devotion to God was still possible despite being an army officer. There is a significant silence regarding Cornelius leaving his job after baptism. There is a purposeful silence here in the record, to provoke our reflections. Because such matters are indeed a matter of very personal conscience.

10:3 *About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God, who came to him and said: Cornelius*- In 10:3,22,25 an Angel 'comes in' to Cornelius and gives him hope of salvation, and then Peter 'comes in' to Cornelius and explains that hope in more concrete terms. Peter was acting out what his guardian Angel had prepared for him to do, just as Israel had to follow the leading of the guiding Angel in the wilderness. We too must as it were follow our Angel.

10:4 *And he, fastening his eyes upon him and being afraid, said: What is it, Lord? And he said to him: Your prayers and your charity have gone up as a memorial before God*- The allusion is to the offering of incense and sacrifice. And Cornelius didn't have to be a Jew in the temple to do this. He could do it in his own home and life situation. Note the parallel between prayer and charitable giving. Prayer is not simply words; God reads human actions as prayer, too. And mere words alone are not of themselves prayer, otherwise whoever is the better wordsmith has the greater access to God. And that is not the case; some people are wired better as regards words and verbalizing. We note too that an unbaptized person was still listened to by God, and his good deeds still registered with Him. The scale of God's observation and sensitivity to humanity is so huge as to be beyond our comprehension. Cornelius had his generous gifts responded to in the same way as his prayers- in that Peter was sent to teach him the Gospel and baptize him. This suggests that our good deeds are seen as an expression of our essential self, and are treated as prayers. Yet those good deeds are not in themselves verbalized requests. It is also doubtful whether Cornelius was specifically praying for more knowledge and the opportunity of baptism. But this is how his prayers were interpreted by God, and this passive though unexpressed desire was interpreted and responded to. Prayer is likened to incense coming up before God. But so also is the almsgiving of Cornelius; his good deeds expressed a fine spirituality in his heart, and this was counted by God as prayer. Prayer is seen as an incense offering (Ps. 141:2); but the generosity of Mary (Jn. 12:3), the work of preaching (2 Cor. 2:16); living "a life of love" (Eph. 5:2 NIV); giving money to the needy (Phil. 4:18) are all seen as a fragrant incense offering. The act is the prayer. Mary's anointing was to be seen as a "memorial" (Mk. 14:9), but the only other times this

word is used are in connection with the prayers of Cornelius (Acts 10:4, cp. the OT idea of prayerful people being God's 'rememberancers'). Likewise, prophecy does not have to refer to specific, lexical statements; it can refer to the spirit and implication behind the recorded words.

10:5 *And now send men to Joppa*- The sense of the physical presence of the Angel was shown in Peter's case in the matter of Cornelius. Acts 10:5 says that the Angel told Cornelius to send men to Joppa to ask for Peter, whilst the same Angel ("The spirit", v. 19) tells Peter in v. 20 that *He* has sent the men. This awareness of the Angel is perhaps continued when Peter says in :33 "we are all here present before God"- i. e. before the Angel which both he and Cornelius were conscious had led them together. See on Gen. 18:10.

And fetch one Simon, who is surnamed Peter- This is the same word used to describe how believers 'called upon [themselves] the name of the Lord'; they surnamed themselves by His Name. The Lord had given Simon a new name, and the idea of having a 'Christian name' was popular amongst the early Christians. We have been given a new identity, unique to ourselves, by the Lord who has called us; and will have the new name written upon us eternally at judgment day. We can conclude that our unique and new identity / personality is being forged in us throughout this brief life, and will be permanently stamped into our eternal nature at the last day. In this lies the eternal significance of character development- for who we become now, is who we shall eternally be.

10:6 *He lodges with someone called Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea side*- Peter later explains that it was not possible for a Jew to enter the house of a Gentile (:28). So we can safely assume this Simon was a Jew, but not a very observant one, seeing he worked daily with the skins of unclean animals and blood. Being there must have provoked Peter to wonder about whether the Law really had to be kept so strictly; and living by the beach, he would have wondered whether the Lord's work actually extended overseas, beyond Israel. All these things were gently arranged by the same loving Lord who guides our spiritual path too. Peter was being led along the road towards leaving law-keeping, rather like Elijah having to depend for his life upon meat brought by unclean ravens. "If a tanner married without mentioning his trade, his wife was permitted to get a divorce. The law of levirate marriage might be set aside if the brother-in-law of the childless widow was a tanner. A tanner's yard must be at least fifty cubits from any town" (Farrar, *Life and Work of St. Paul*).

The AV adds: "He shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do". This phrase is much loved of Luke. Saul and the jailor said the same (Acts 9:6; 16:30), as did the crowds at Pentecost. The point is that encounter with the Lord Jesus means that we can never again be passive; we are to do something.

10:7 *And when the angel that spoke to him had departed, he called two of his household servants*- Luke uses this term about Angels speaking to Moses and Philip (7:38; 8:26). Gentile Cornelius was no less a significant player in God's unfolding purpose.

And a devout soldier of them that served him continually- "Devout" means just that; the word has a religious overtone of piety. To place the word together with "soldier" may seem an oxymoron; it could seem inappropriate, at first blush, to imagine that a Roman soldier could be "devout". Here we have an intentional challenge of stereotype. Those we might consider to be in a status which precludes spirituality may indeed be spiritually devout. "Devout" is the Spirit's comment through Luke upon this man. Clearly Cornelius' search for the Lord had not been a private matter; he had spread it to those closest to him in his family and workplace.

As the Gospel spreads to the secular and unchurched, such challenges to stereotype are frequent in our day.

10:8 *And having related all things to them, he sent them to Joppa*- His search for God was not conducted secretly, behind a computer screen or on a mobile device. He was quite open about it. Likewise notice how he called together his relatives and friends to hear Peter's message (:24).

We note the many parallels between Jonah and Peter. They were both at Joppa, Peter is 'son of Jonah' [bar Jonah, Mt. 16:17]. Both were hesitant to preach to the Gentiles; Jonah was persuaded by three days in the fish, Peter by three repeated visions. They were both told "arise and go" (Jonah 3:2; Acts 10:20). The Gentiles believed the message (Jonah 3:5; Acts 10:43). The men of Nineveh repented, quite unexpectedly, by Jewish standards of thought; Cornelius repented and was baptized, again, as noted on :1, quite against all Jewish expectation. The parallels are to show that resistance to taking the Gospel to those considered 'beneath us' is a common human trait. And God patiently struggles with it, ever seeking to broaden the parochial perspective of His people. Because to be parochial and judgmental is native to the natural man's mindset. The backdrop to the conversion of Cornelius and the Gentiles is the Jonah story; it is the scripture-scape behind the events recorded. The implication is therefore that those amongst God's people who refused to get on board with the idea of inclusivity would be left as Jonah is at the end of the book- sitting dejected, bitter and angry, shaking their fist at the God who is evidently love itself. For all their much avowed 'defence of the faith' and defence of [their own version of] God. Peter, we can infer, was initially resistant to the call to preach to the Gentiles, just as Jonah was. He was indeed son of Jonah. But it seems he repented sooner and was softer in God's hand than was Jonah. The vision Peter saw was nothing less than a nightmare for a Jew- to imagine God telling you to eat unclean animals, three times. Every halachah was broken, and apparently, God's own law was being changed by God Himself. Of course, all this had been implied in the Old Testament as well as the teachings of the Lord Jesus. But all the same, we must seek to enter into the degree to which it was all a nightmare shattering of paradigms for Peter. Just as an openness to others is for many traditions today. His response, especially when compared with Jonah's, is really humble and commendable.

10:9 *Now the next day, as they were on their journey, and drew near to the city, about the sixth hour*- Jesus removed prayer from being mere liturgy into being a part of real, personal life with God. The way Peter prays at 12 noon (Acts 10:9), and how Paul urges us to pray *all the time* (Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2) are therefore radical departures from the concept of praying at set times, three times / day.

Peter went upon the housetop to pray- He 'went up', and the same word is used of how the prayers of Cornelius 'went up' (:4). The parallels between Cornelius and Peter are extensive. They both prayed regularly, and during one of those regular prayer sessions, they received visions. The same Angel was at work with both of them. Thus a solidarity was developed between the preacher and the convert; and we see this so often in our own lives too. we of course fail to attach meaning to event, but we can rest assured that the events in our lives are all part of a wider plan and potential purpose, which may or may not work out or become clear to us in this life. Because we and / or others fail to respond as we might, sometimes things are as it were left hanging, in that event appears therefore not to have achieved its possible meaning or intention.

10:10 *And he became hungry and desired to eat, but while they made the food ready, he fell into a trance*- His hunger, like the Lord's hunger as He came to the fig tree, spoke of the Lord's desire to save and have fellowship with ['eat with'] the Gentiles. The Jews in Simon's home were preparing clean food for Peter [cp. preparing Jewish people to hear the Gospel], but then Peter's hunger was offered another method of satiation- in the eating of *unclean* food.

10:11 *And he saw the heaven open and a certain vessel descending*- The very same phrase occurs in Jn. 1:51, where the Lord predicted that the disciples would see "heaven open": "I say unto you [plural], Hereafter you [plural- all the disciples] shall see heaven open, and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the son of man". Whatever that enigmatic prediction meant, it surely was being given some application to the opening of 'heaven' to "all men", including Gentiles, thanks to Angelic work. And Peter saw Heaven open, and an Angel... and the equivalent of 'ascending and descending' was surely in the descent and ascent of the sheet containing unclean animals. The context of Jn. 1:51 is the Lord's observation that Nathanael was "an Israelite indeed" (Jn. 1:47). Maybe His intention was to teach the disciples that actually, 'heaven' was to be opened to non-Israelites too, and Jacob lying on Gentile ground that night with Angels ascending and descending upon him was some kind of foretaste of the body of Christ in future times. The opening of the 'heaven' of the Most Holy place at the Lord's death clearly gave the message that now the way into the holiest was open to all. Peter would also have recalled how the heavens were opened (same words used) at the Lord's baptism, and the dove / Holy Spirit 'descended'. Now he saw heaven opened, and was to see the Spirit descending upon Gentiles. They were, therefore, Jesus- the body of Christ, upon whom the Spirit first descended. Ezekiel likewise saw heaven opened and entered into a vision, whilst sitting with the captives in gentile Babylon (Ez. 1:1); thereby encouraging Peter that he was no less significant than the revered Old Testament prophets.

As it were a great sheet- The word strictly means a sail. Perhaps this was an echo from Peter's fisherman past, an image coming back in his dreams. And it was maybe an image recently impressed in his mind as living next to the beach, he would have seen boats at sea. Maybe this image was used to teach Peter that now the disciples should go overseas by boat to spread the Gospel to the Gentiles. If Sigmund Freud were amongst us, with his theories of dreams, he would likely have suggested that this aspect of the dream was an example of Peter's inner conscience and unexpressed awareness speaking to him- in this case, that the Gospel should indeed go to the Gentiles. And yet the dream was given by God, ultimately- perhaps using all these images, from whatever sources, in order to deliver the message to Peter.

Let down by four corners upon the earth- Another example of Luke's medical language, as this was the term used for the ends of bandages. But a four cornered sheet is more likely suggesting a table cloth. Peter is seeing the animals as it were on the table in front of him, and is invited to eat them. The unclean animals clearly represent previously unclean Gentiles. And a big theme of Luke is of inclusive table fellowship. Peter was to accept at table the Gentiles. The true Christian church was to accept the Gentiles at what had previously been an exclusively Jewish table. We must give due weight to the interpretation given to Peter- that God considers all to be clean and fit for fellowship at His table. It is an assumption to think that the idea was that baptized, Christian Gentiles could now be accepted at the table. Rather is the idea that the table is open to all who wish to be there; an approach taken by the Lord, who went out of His way to eat with hardened sinners *so that* they might repent, rather than to celebrate their repentance.

10:12 *Wherein were all manner of fourfooted animals, and creeping things of the earth and birds of the sky*- This translation is misleading. The idea is that every kind of four-footed animals were there, looking forward to how "all men" were to be encompassed in God's saving purpose. The implication is that there were both clean and unclean animals- there were "all manner" of animals, every kind. And they were mixing together, as it were, and Peter is asked to eat all of them. This has huge implications. God through the cross has achieved the world's redemption and cleansing, so that the world is to be seen as potentially clean. But, they must be offered in sacrifice; and this of course connects with how Paul speaks of preaching to Gentiles in terms of "the offering up of the Gentiles might be made acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:16).

10:13 *And there came a voice to him: Rise, Peter. Kill and eat*- This could as well be understood as the language of sacrifice; the animals were killed and then the offerer ate part of them, to demonstrate his identity with the animal. Likewise see on :35 *Is acceptable*. Peter's killing and eating was obviously symbolic of the acceptance of the Gentile converts; Paul's words in Rom. 15:16 surely allude to this incident and use the same sacrificial language, as if to say that he shared Peter's mission: "That I should be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be made acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit". Peter's work with the Gentile Cornelius was sanctified by the Holy Spirit in that the Spirit descended upon them before their baptisms. If "kill and eat" indeed refers to sacrifice, Peter's shock is even more understandable; he was being asked to not merely eat unclean food, but to actually offer it as a sacrifice to God. Judaism would have argued that the clean animals were made unclean by their association with the unclean. But here for all time the idea of 'guilt by association' is shown to be actually the radical inverse of what is now the situation. Peter was taught that he should call nobody unclean- because even the unclean had been potentially cleansed in Christ (:15). "Yet to me God has shown that I should not call anyone common or unclean" means literally 'I should not make anyone unclean'. He had done this by assuming that the clean animals were made unclean by asssociation with the unclean on the table sheet. They were all cleansed. "What God has cleansed" suggests that the cleansing was at one historical point- which was the cross. But it is over to us to as it were offer them up to God. That becomes the critical point in the vision. Not judging who is clean or unclean, for there is now totally no division between categories of persons; but bringing men to God in Christ, as the new priesthood. We must ask the question, 'Why didn't Peter just choose a clean animal and offer it?'. He saw all the animals of creation, clean and unclean, and he was told to offer them. But he objects that "No". He can't offer any of them. Why did he say that, if there were also clean animals there? Why not respond 'I'll offer the clean ones, but not the unclean ones'? I suggest the answer is that he considered the clean to have been made unclean, in line with the Mosaic laws about uncleanness spreading. And he was told that quite opposite to what he thought, actually every one of those animals was now clean.

What we are seeing here is therefore the conversion of Peter to what Christianity is actually all about. And so Acts 10 is set up as parallel to the conversion of Saul in Acts 9- there are visions, and Ananias and Peter both are taught that the Gospel net has caught those whom they naturally object to being allowed "in". The parallels are many, e.g. Saul's "Who are you, Lord?" is matched by Cornelius' "What is it, Lord?".

10:14 *Peter said: Not so, Lord. For I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean*- The figure of 'eating' is being used in this incident to speak of fellowship. This confirms the impression we have throughout the New Testament- that eating

together was seen as an act of fellowship. The open table manners of the Lord Jesus are therefore the more worthy of notice- eating with sinners and eating together in the feeding miracles with thousands of people, including some Gentiles. An example of relevant Old Testament quotation is shown when Christ asked Peter to kill and eat unclean animals. He replied by quoting from Ez. 4:14, where Ezekiel refuses to eat similar food when asked to by the Angel. Perhaps Peter saw himself as Ezekiel's antitype in his witnessing against Israel's rejection of the word of God in Christ (note how Ez. 4:16 is a prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction in AD70). 'In the same way as God made a concession to Ezekiel about this command to eat unclean food', Peter reasoned, 'so perhaps my Lord will do for me'. But the Lord was to teach him even greater things than Ezekiel.

10:15- see on Acts 10:35,36.

And a voice came to him again the second time: What God has cleansed- The unclean animals which Peter saw in the vision represented all the Gentile world (Acts 10:15,28). They had already all been potentially "cleansed" by the blood of Christ, but He was dead in vain, the cleansing achieved for nothing, unless the likes of Peter took the message to them. The more and the wider and the more powerfully we do this, the more we enable the cross of Christ to be victorious, to achieve its end, the more 'worthwhile' as it were was the Lord's sacrifice.

Do not call common- The fact we can be guilty of causing others to stumble means that we can limit God's gracious plan for them. By refusing to preach to the Gentiles, Peter was 'making common' what God had potentially cleansed (Acts 10:15 RV). We can spiritually *destroy* our brother, for whom Christ died (Rom. 14:15); we can undo the work of the cross for a brother who would otherwise be saved by it. We can make others sin (Ex. 23:33; 1 Sam. 2:24; 1 Kings 16:19).

Peter was told not to call or make common that which God had [potentially] cleansed; but the Greek is always elsewhere translated to defile or to make unclean. 'Don't make unclean what God's made clean' is the idea. By refusing table fellowship to people, we are proactively making them unclean- we are treating them as if the cleansing work of Christ has no possible connection to them. And so often, people end up acting and believing according to how others act toward them in such matters of spirituality. They simply walk away from the table from which they were excluded, and from all that is represented upon it… That is the observed reality in thousands of cases. David felt that being cast out of the community of Israel was effectively saying to him "Go, serve other gods" (1 Sam. 26:19). Nobody probably ever said those actual words to him, but this verse captures well how people so often read rejection from the people of God- they do indeed tend to go off and serve other gods. It is those who cast them out who will have to answer for having caused their stumbling.

10:16 *And this was done three times; and immediately the vessel was received up into heaven*- This surely connects with the triple instruction to Peter to feed the Lord's sheep. He was being taught that in practice, this would mean offering Gentiles to the Lord. And yet although Peter was the one chosen to lead the way in accepting the Gentiles, he was given a ministry to the Jews whereas Paul was given the Gentile mission to oversee (Gal. 2:9). Why was this? Perhaps Peter's inner struggle with accepting Gentiles was recognized, and he was given an easier way of service which was more within his comfort zone? Or perhaps Peter was initially the apostle to the Gentiles, but the Lord changed over the roles of Paul and Peter for some reason? Or perhaps Gal. 2:9 speaks of a specific missionary endeavour at one time, for which Peter focused on the Jews and Paul on the Gentiles?

We note that the unclean animals, representing Gentile converts, were “received” in heaven.

10:17 *While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men that had been sent by Cornelius, having made enquiry for Simon's house, stood before the gate*- On 10:9 *Peter went upon* I sought to demonstrate that the Lord's providential hand was creating a parallel between Peter and Cornelius, just as He does between brethren today. The language of these men of Cornelius 'standing before the gate' and earnestly knocking is precisely the same language as we find in the account of *Peter* knocking at the "door of the gate" after his release from prison: "He came to the house of Mary... there many were gathered together and were praying. And when he knocked at the door of the gate, a maid named Rhoda came to answer. And when she recognised Peter's voice, she did not open the gate, but in joy ran inside and told everyone that Peter stood before the gate" (Acts 12:12-14). As he stood there, Peter was being put into the shoes of those men who had stood before his gate and knocked. Providence does this in our lives many times, as the Spirit seeks to bind us together in one close-knit body. When the Jewish disciples initially wouldn't let Peter in... he must have seen the similarity with how things could have worked out, had he likewise left those Gentiles outside, holding to the Jewish tradition of not having Gentiles into your home.

10:18 *And called and asked whether Simon, who was surnamed Peter, were lodging there*- They carefully and obediently repeat the words of the Angel in :5.

10:19 *And while Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said to him: Look, three men seek you*- This seems typical of the Spirit's operation to this day. Those who think about their experience with the Lord are led to further revelation and paths of action. The same words are used of how whilst Joseph likewise "thought on these things" (s.w.), he had a vision directing him further (Mt. 1:20). "The Spirit" may well refer to the same Angel who was active with Cornelius. Acts 11:11 says that the men called for Peter "immediately" after the vision ended; but here in 10:19 we have the information that Peter thought on the vision after it ended, and only then did the men call for him. His 'thinking' on the vision was therefore brief, but as soon as he did, the answer came. *The Spirit*- An Angel, see on :5 *Send men*.

10:20 *So rise, and get downstairs*- Gk. 'go down'. This is the same word translated "descending" in :11. As God had 'come down' to Peter and to save the Gentiles, so Peter was in turn to 'come down'. Hence the word occurs again in :21, emphasizing Peter's obedience. We really can be part of God's program in saving others; as He comes down to the excluded, so we are to likewise.

Without doubting. For I have sent them- The phrase occurs only here (also in 11:12) and in James 1:6, where we are bidden to ask in faith "without doubting". This might imply that Peter was being encouraged to pray for the acceptance of the Gentiles and go forward in doing so "without doubting". As already outlined in these studies, there had been hints galore that such inclusion was what the Lord wanted. Even if the reference is not to prayer, the Lord recognized that Peter had doubts- and He urges Peter not to have them. His attitude was not that Peter should have accepted the plain statements of his Lord, that Gentiles worldwide were to be included in God's plan; nor that Peter should just accept the way he was being led. Instead the Lord tenderly appreciates Peter's doubts and prejudices, and urges him to overcome them. This should be our template in dealing with those who still 'don't get it' or 'won't get it' over various issues which are obvious to us.

"Doubting" translates *diakrino*. The same word is used about the Jewish brethren who then “contended” with Peter over his table fellowship behaviour (Acts 11:2-

diakrino again). The repetition of the word like this in the record seems to rebuke those who contend with others about their table fellowship policy; for Peter had been told *not* to contend / judge in this matter, and yet those legalistic brethren did that very thing. "You can't break bread with us because you break bread with those we don't approve of, even though you are our brother in Christ…" seems to smack of just the same disobedience. But as always, the proof of the pudding is in the eating; open table fellowship brings people to Christ, as it did Cornelius, whereas closed table fellowship drives people away. At least initially, this was recognized by the brethren in Acts 11 and they too changed their closed table policy.

10:21 *And Peter went down to the men and said: I am the one you seek. Why have you come?*- This is full of allusion to the Lord in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:56; Jn. 18:4-6). There is perhaps no exact sense in the allusions; but they reflect the fact that the experience of the Lord's death and resurrection so indelibly impressed Peter that he reflected it both consciously and unconsciously. Likewise with us- even our body language should reflect our experience of such great salvation in so great a Saviour.

10:22 *And they said: Cornelius a centurion, a righteous man and one that fears God, and who is praised by all the nation of the Jews, was instructed by a holy angel of God to summon you to his house and to hear words from you*- Yet Peter didn't know what he was to say. When he arrived, he asked them: "I ask with what intent did you send for me?" (:29). So he went with the visitors, confident God was leading him, but with no set piece speech prepared to read to them. We likewise are to follow the Spirit's leading in the Gospel's work.

10:23 *So he called them in and lodged them. And the next day he arose and went with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him*- Just as Peter's 'coming down' reflected the 'coming down' of the Lord in the world's salvation (see on :20), so this 'calling them in' reflects the calling in of "as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). Peter had spoken those words, thinking of the wide range of Jews being called to salvation. But now he would have realized that the Lord's call was to all men and women; and he was the one being asked to 'call them in' to the house of the Jews.

10:24 *And the next day they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius was waiting for them, having called together his relatives and his near friends*- See on :8. The same words are used in Luke's record of the parables of the lost; in a home, friends and neighbours are "called together" (Lk. 15:6,9). Cornelius was the lost who was being found, but he was also reflecting the joy of the Lord in Heaven by calling together his friends and neighbours into his home.

10:25 *And when it happened that Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet and did homage to him*- The Biblical examples of this kind of thing demonstrate the typical way that human beings tend to equate the message with the messenger. Cornelius so respected the message that he thought the messenger was wonderful and worthy of his respect. The reverse side of this equation is particularly destructive- the messenger is equated with the message. And therefore any disillusion with the messenger (or community of messengers) results in a corresponding collapse of faith in the message. Yet the message is the good news about God, the Lord Jesus and their Kingdom- not about the messenger. John the Baptist wisely described himself as merely a voice; and that is all we are. The truth and wonder of the message we pass on does not of itself mean that we are pure. Solomon made this mistake, assuming that his mere possession of wisdom made him somehow spiritually invincible, leading him to make concessions for himself which resulted in his final destruction.

10:26 *But Peter raised him up, saying: Stand up*- The occurrence together of the words "raised up" and "stand up" recalls incidents in the Gospels (Mk. 9:27; Lk. 6:8). Peter would have observed the Lord 'raising up' and then making 'stand up' the sick boy of Mk. 9:27; and he would have seen this as his pattern. We earlier observed how Peter's healing of Tabitha reflects the Lord's body movements and language. This sets us a challenge in our Christianity, our following and absorption of Him. It should be to the point that the actions and even body movements of the historical Jesus are so imprinted upon us that we are literally influenced by His Spirit.

I myself am also a man- These are the very same words on the lips of the Centurion in Mt. 8:9 and Lk. 7:8: "I am a man". One wonders whether this Centurion was in fact Cornelius or in some way connected with him. In this case, Peter would be quoting the words of Cornelius back to him, assuring him that he too was exactly who he was. We notice how the essence of this incident repeated in Paul's ministry, when in Acts 14:15 Paul has to assure the crowd that "We are men...". Again, Paul was being brought to understand Peter by going through similar experiences.

10:27 *And as he talked with him, he went in and found many gathered together*- There is a strange emphasis upon the idea that they were talking as Peter went in to Cornelius' home. It was that crossing of the threshold which was so significant; and the idea was that they did it whilst Peter was teaching the Gospel to the Gentile householder. The need to take Christ to others was what gave Peter strength to cross that significant boundary line. It was whilst doing that work of teaching that he found himself crossing the line, and thereby realized it was but a line in the sand. So many times, going out and teaching the Gospel, and then 'going with' the convert on their new journey, has been the means of radical change in the thinking of the preacher.

10:28 *And he said to them: You yourselves know how it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew*- If the 'law' in view was that of Moses, then Peter is sharing his struggle with the fact God had changed His law. Yet the idea of a Jew not sharing table fellowship with a Gentile nor entering his house was not Biblical; these were the 'laws' of the Jews rather than of God or Moses.

To join himself or come to- These are the very words used about Philip coming to and joining himself to the Ethiopian's chariot (Acts 8:29). The Lord worked in educating His followers using different means. Peter needed a vision; Philip was taken out into a desert away from peer pressure and simply told to connect with a Gentile. Yet both men ought to have figured that the Lord's work and teaching had ended the divide anyway. But they didn't, and He patiently worked with each of them in personally tailored ways in order to bring them to the same truths. He works likewise today. The level and intensity of His activity is simply colossal.

One of another nation; and yet to me God has shown that I should not call anyone common or unclean- Gk. 'not purged'. It could be argued that Peter has in view here those purged in Christ. For not all men are 'clean' or 'purged'. Therefore I am inclined to think that Peter means 'If someone, anyone, including a Gentile, is cleansed by baptism into Christ- who am I to say they are not cleansed / purged?'.

10:29 *Therefore also I came without objection, when I was sent for*- Peter says he went with them because he had seen the vision, and then the messengers from Cornelius knocked on his door. He felt that was providential and an answer to the mysterious vision he had seen. But he describes this in 11:12 as "the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting / judging". Perhaps the Spirit did not give him a specific word, to the effect 'Yes, go with them!'; but rather the Spirit arranged circumstances so that it was not hard for Peter to figure 'Well I guess I am meant to go with these strangers'. Likewise when Luke says that the Spirit stopped Paul preaching

in Bithynia (16:7), we are not to assume that he had a specific word from the Lord about it; probably circumstances worked out in such a way where he figured that 'This is not meant to be'. And the Spirit works no less actively in our own lives in these ways.

Therefore, I ask with what intent did you send for me- See on :22. "Intent" translates *logos*; we could translate: 'For what word / logos did you send for me?'. Luke has used this phrase before in recording how the people exclaimed at the teaching of the Lord: "What a word is this!" (Lk. 4:36).

10:30 *And Cornelius said: Four days ago, about this hour, I was keeping the ninth hour of prayer in my house, and a man stood before me*- The Angelic vision to Cornelius is presented as a direct response to his fasting and prayer. But what was he praying for? Perhaps specifically for acceptance amongst God's people and closer relationship with Israel's resurrected Messiah? Or was it that his prayers were interpreted as being for these things in essence, even if there was no specific, verbalized request for them made? For this is how many of our 'prayers' are answered; the essence is perceived and answered.

In bright apparel- The idea is of a good robe, rather than the glistening garments of Angels; "a gorgeous robe" (Lk. 23:11; James 2:2,3). This person may have been the Lord Jesus rather than an Angel.

10:31 *And said: Cornelius, your prayer is heard and your charitable acts are held in remembrance*- It's doubtful Cornelius was specifically praying for a person to guide him to baptism into Christ and an understanding of the Christian Gospel. But the essence of his spirit was discerned and counted for prayer. Note that "prayer" is singular- his various requests and devotions amounted to one essential prayer. This is a great comfort to all who feel that in prayer, they cannot somehow get the words out right, or nicely enough. It is the deepest spirit of a person which is discerned by the Father and Son, and counted as prayer. See commentary on the resurrection of Lazarus in John 11.

In the sight of God- The same term is used in :33, to describe how they were all present "here in the presence of God". The generosity of Cornelius was noted in the very presence of God; and yet Cornelius realized that that presence of God was also here on earth. The repetition of the ideas demonstrates how the presence of God was no longer to be thought of as simply in the Jerusalem temple; the good deeds of a Gentile were in God's presence, and that same Divine presence was to be found in the home of a Gentile.

10:32 *Therefore*- The plan to bring Peter to baptize Cornelius was all part of a Divine response to the prayers and good works of Cornelius. It was not simply the sovereign movement of God towards Gentiles. It was a response to that man's prayer and spirituality. Note that good works, in this case, regular giving to the poor, had high significance and partly elicited the Lord's response to the man. Although we likewise note that good works alone cannot save; it was encounter with the Gospel and faith in Christ which was so essential.

Send to Joppa and summon Simon, who is surnamed Peter. He lodges in the house of Simon a tanner, by the sea side- This is military language, as if Peter was already part of the military household of Cornelius. This is the whole theme of the record- that fellow believers are in a new family relationship.

10:33 *So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Therefore, now we are all here in the presence of God, to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord to say*- Cornelius had just said that he had seen an Angel standing "before me" (:30, s.w. "in the presence of"). He had been in the presence of

the Angel, and he felt that that had now happened again. He felt the literal presence of the Angel who had appeared to him. But "in the presence of God" is the same phrase as has been used to describe how the prayers and works of Cornelius had come into "the presence of God" (:4,31). It is as if God's presence had come to earth; the sheet had been let down from Heaven to earth.

10:34 *And Peter opened his mouth and said: Of a truth I perceive that God*- Peter was so powerful as a preacher, always alluding to his own weaknesses of behaviour and understanding. Consider this example here: "I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that fears him and works righteousness, is accepted with him [Peter alludes here to Old Testament passages such as Dt. 1:17; 10:17; Prov. 24:23 and Is. 64:5]. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel… that word, you know" (Acts 10:34-37). Peter is saying that he only *now* perceives the truth of those well-known Old Testament passages. He is admitting that the truth of his Lord's criticism of him, that he had been so slow of heart to believe what the prophets had spoken. And yet Peter masterfully goes on to show solidarity with his readers- he tells them that they too had already heard "the word" and yet now they like him needed to believe the word which they already knew. In doing this, Peter is bridge building, between his own humanity and that of his hearers. And the wonder of it all is that it seems this happened quite naturally. He didn't psychologically plan it all out. His own recognition of sinfulness quite naturally lead him into it.

Is no respecter of persons- Later, Peter reminds his Jewish readers that their prayers ascend to a Father "who without respect of persons judges according to *every* man's work" (i.e. Jew or Gentile, 1 Pet. 1:17). He was asking them to learn what he had so slowly and falteringly come to accept. In this was the power of his pastoral appeal- for the things he teaches are all what he had himself come to accept after much failure and struggle.

10:35 *But in every nation*- Peter's grasp of the extent of Christ's Lordship was reflected in the scope of his preaching. He had known it before, but understood it only to a limited extent. It seems that he preferred to understand the commission to preach "remission of sins *among* all nations" as meaning to the Jewish diaspora scattered amongst all nations (Lk. 24:47)- notwithstanding the copious hints in the Lord's teaching that His salvation was for literally all men. He preached forgiveness (s.w. remission) *to Israel* because he understood that this was what the Lord's death had enabled (Acts 5:31). It was Israel who needed forgiveness, because they had crucified God's Son- this seems to have been his thinking. Peter applies the word "all" (as in "to all nations") to his Jewish audiences (Acts 2:14,36; 3:13; 4:10). But he was taught in the Cornelius incident that because Christ is "Lord of *all*", therefore men from *every* (s.w. "all") nation can receive forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:35,36). He makes the link back to the preaching commission in Acts 10:43: *all* in *every* nation who believe can receive remission of sins (s.w. Lk. 24:47)- as he was commanded to preach in the great commission. He came to see that the desperate need for reconciliation with God was just as strong for those who had not directly slain His Son; for, Peter may have mused, all men would have held him "condemned by heaven" if they had been Jerusalem Jews. And he realized that Christ was truly Lord of all, all men, everywhere, and not just of a few hundred thousand Jews. And with us too. The wider and the higher our vision and conception of the ascended Christ, the wider and more insistently powerful will be our appeal to literally all men. Yet Peter had heard the Lord's words, when He had asked them to tell all nations, and when He had prophesied that His cross would draw all men unto Him. And his comment that "unto you *first* God, having raised up His Son, sent him to bless you" (Acts 3:26) suggests

he suspected a wider benefit from the resurrection than just Israel. But all this knowledge lay passive within him; as with his understanding of the cross, he just couldn't face up to the full implications of what he heard. But it was his recognition of the extent of Christ's Lordship that motivated him to make the change, to convert the knowledge into practice, to throw off the shackles of traditional understanding that had held him from understanding the clear truth of words he had heard quite clearly. An example would be the words recorded in Mk. 7:19 RV: All meats were made clean by Christ. But Peter had to be told: "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common" (Acts 10:15). He had to be taught to simply accept the word he loved, with all its implications. We too can skim over Bible phrases and verses, assuming our previous understanding of them is correct.

He that fears Him and works righteousness- A reference to Cornelius as a Gentile God-fearer who did good deeds.

Is acceptable to Him- Whoever truly works righteousness "*is* accepted" with God right now, as well as at the final judgment. Some faithful men experience condemnation for their sins now, with the result that they repent and therefore at the day of judgment will not receive that condemnation. The language of being 'acceptable' may be a continuation of the language of sacrifice which began with the invitation to "kill and eat" (see on :13). For the same Greek word for "acceptable" is found in Phil. 4:18: "A sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God".

10:36 *The word*- The definition here of the word of the Gospel includes the basic facts of the Gospel story as recorded by the Gospel writers. Issues of finer theology are not directly part of that Gospel. Here, "word" translates *logos*. It is spoken of as the "message" [AV "word"], *rhema*, in :37. It could be argued that *logos* and *rhema* are therefore dynamically interchangeable in practice. Or it could be that we are to understand that God sent a *logos*, a message with an intention beneath its words... and the words of that message, the more literal *rhema*, was preached.

Which he sent- The idea of a word being sent from God to earth clearly isn't literal. Likewise the language of the Lord Jesus, as the embodiment of that word being 'sent' doesn't imply any personal pre-existence or literal passage from Heaven to earth.

To the children of Israel- The Gospel was initially intended for Israel, but that message was that Israel's Messiah was "Lord of all", Jews and Gentiles.

Preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he being Lord of all!)- The text is saying that God is the preacher; He was and is preaching, through His Son. Our preaching is therefore an identification with Him. We are His representatives, and we have Him behind us in what we are doing.

10:37 *That message you yourselves know, which was published throughout all Judea*- Even Gentile soldiers on duty in Palestine knew the basic message of the Lord Jesus, so widespread was the message. If Peter could reason that the content of the Gospel was common knowledge in Palestine, we can hardly imagine the Gospel to be much more than the life and teaching of the historical Jesus. All theological matters could not then have been in view; and the definition and content of the Gospel surely didn't change after the time of Cornelius.

Beginning from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached- There is a strong NT emphasis on the Galilean origins of the Lord, His message and the whole Christian movement. Yet Galilee was despised. The point is being laboured that the origins of Christianity were in that which was despised by men. Every Jew would expect a Messianic movement to begin *from Jerusalem*. But Christianity is presented as having its genesis in despised, half-Gentile Galilee.

10:38 *About Jesus of Nazareth. How God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed by the Devil. For God was with him*- The Lord was empowered to do miracles to demonstrate to illiterate folk that "God was with Him"; but He was Immanuel, God with *us;* in that God was with Him, and He is with us. The Lord Jesus did not heal every sick person in Palestine. The healing of "*all* that were oppressed by the Devil" therefore suggests that we understand "the devil" here as referring not simply to the source of illness which needed healing. The healing was of "all" who were under the power of sin and who wanted freedom from that. So again we see a connection between the devil and sin.

10:39- see on Acts 5:30.

And we are witnesses of all things which he did- The Lord therefore was never much out of the view or hearing of the disciples. This implies a significant lack of privacy for Him, making more acute His need to go away in prayer alone. Truly He 'came down' and in that sense 'dwelt amongst men'; and men of such limited perception and vision, so constantly out of step with His thinking, language and direction.

Both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. Whom also they slew, hanging him on a tree- Peter points out the difference between the disciples and "the Jews" generally. He clearly felt that difference, and reflecting upon it would've made the more logical and natural his sense of solidarity with Gentile believers in Jesus.

10:40 *Him God raised up on the third day, and gave him to be revealed*- God didn't parade His resurrected Son personally before the eyes of the world. But He resurrected Him in order that He should be openly revealed (Gk.). This is the connection between the resurrection and the imperative to preach the resurrected Lord; the great commission is therefore directly in the context of spreading the news that the Lord has risen. So in this sense, the Lord risen and alive was paraded before men- but in the form of His body, the church. The same word is used about Christian preaching in Rom. 10:20: "I was made manifest ['revealed']". This open revelation was through the witness of the church.

10:41 *Not to all the people*- As noted on :40, God's plan was that the open revelation of His Son was through the believers, rather than through some public parading of the resurrected body of Christ.

But to witnesses that were chosen before by God, to us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead- Table fellowship with the risen Lord thereby empowered them to be witnesses that He is indeed alive. And the experience of breaking bread with Him now should lead to the same conviction- we know He is alive because we sat at table with Him, and thereby we are empowered to be witnesses of Him to the world. This explains the intended connection between the communion service and public witness; to turn it into a closed door private members club is to sadly miss the point.

10:42 *And he ordered us to preach to the people*- "Ordered" would be better translated 'commanded'. The reference is likely to the great commission. But Peter therefore misunderstood that as being a command to preach "to the people", i.e. the Jewish people. The great commission had commanded the disciples to preach; the fact Peter adds "to the people" suggests he is adding his interpretation to the Lord's actual words, until he assumes that that interpretation was part and parcel of the Lord's own words. Adam made the same mistake in Gen. 3:3, and all Bible readers and students are inclined to. Peter seems to be saying that the Lord had commanded him to preach to the people of Israel, but that he had been led to now preach to Gentile Cornelius.

But actually Peter had yet to join the dots, and realize that actually the requirement to share the Gospel with the Gentiles had been hinted at throughout the Old Testament and was to be found plainly in the actual teaching of the Lord Jesus. It wasn't a change of plan by the Lord at the time of Cornelius; rather was it Peter [and the other disciples] being so slow to understand the basic meaning of simple words, just as they had failed to accept the Lord's clear predictions of His own death and resurrection.

And to testify that this is he who is ordained by God- Note the legal language. It's as if we have been given a subpoena; we have to testify that we have met Him. And the world is our judge. It is our duty to persuade them, sceptical as they are, of the utter truth of our case, and that life and death eternal depend upon judging it rightly. But the metaphor has a double twist; we are on trial, but we are testifying that actually this risen Jesus is "the judge of the living and the dead".

To be the judge of the living and the dead- This could mean that when He returns, the Lord Jesus will raise the responsible dead and judge them, along with "the living" who are alive at the time of His return. Or it could be saying that He is right now the judge of all living, and also of all who have died, seeing He has their records and has already formulated His judgment of them. This latter option would make better sense of the present tense used- He *is* the judge, rather than 'He shall be one day the judge...'.

10:43- see on Acts 10:35,36.

To him all the prophets bear witness- It is quite a challenge to find this message explicitly taught in all the Old Testament prophets. "The prophets" may be a reference to the section of the Old Testament scriptures known as "the prophets", as if to say that the essence of the message from that section was forgiveness for Israel in Messiah's Name. Or "the prophets" may refer to the New Testament prophets, the forth-tellers of the word of the Gospel. This would make better sense of the present tense- all the prophets were right then giving witness to this message.

That everyone who believes in him- Jews and Gentiles.

Receives forgiveness of sins through his name- The same word used of how they "received" the Holy Spirit (:47). Repentance, forgiveness and inner transformation is what the Spirit gift is all about. The visible manifestations sometimes noted were to demonstrate to observers that really, those who had converted to Christ really were legitimate.

10:44 *While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit*- Whilst Peter spoke of receiving forgiveness (:43), the Holy Spirit came on them all. This suggests that the gift of the Spirit is repentance and forgiveness; any external sign of it, such as speaking in tongues, was a mere external attestation of that internal change.

Fell- The same word used of how Peter fell into a Spirit vision (:10); the outpouring was to underline that these Gentiles were just as much within the realm of God's operation as Peter. Hence he observed that the Spirit had fallen on them as on the Jewish believers (11:15).

On all them that heard the word- The language of the parable of the sower for positive response to the word. The gift of the Spirit was not an arbitrary 'zapping' but in response to the hearing of faith.

10:45 *And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed*- Peter had just quoted Old Testament scripture regarding how all the prophets taught that "everyone", literally 'anyone', who believes in Messiah receives forgiveness. And that 'anyone' embraced Gentiles. But when "even... Gentiles" were given the Holy Spirit as a sign of their acceptance by God... the Jewish believers were utterly amazed. Again, we see how the meaning of the most basic and simple words in

the Bible can be so hard to accept and therefore to understand- because we carry with us so much baggage of presupposition and assumed understanding.

Because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles- The pouring out of the Spirit elsewhere refers to an internal process of renewal (Tit. 3:5,6; Rom. 5:5; the same words are used for 'pouring out'). But in the context here, it was critical that Peter and the Jewish brethren were aware of this. And you can't usually know what's happening in the heart of another; therefore in this case, there was a visible manifestation of the Spirit's activity. The Greek for "poured out" is usually translated "shed" with reference to the shedding of the Lord's blood. One achievement of His death was the shedding of the Holy Spirit; His mind / Spirit, His breathing and thinking, became available to all who are in Him. For His death was His ultimate act of identification with us.

10:46 *For they heard them speak with tongues*- Probably in Hebrew, which would have been deeply impressive to the Jewish Christians present.

And magnify God. Then said Peter- The Greek means just that. We can make God greater, increase or magnify Him, in that He has delegated His work to us and it is over to us how far we extend it.

10:47 *Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these who have received the Holy Spirit just as we?*- The word means 'accepted'. Peter had been taught that God *accepted whoever* believed in Him, regardless of their race. But now Paul had to remind Peter that truly, God "*accepteth* no man's person" (Gal. 2:6). The same Greek word was a feature of the Cornelius incident: whoever believes *receives*, accepts, remission of sins (Acts 10:43), and they *received*, accepted, the Holy Spirit as well as the Jewish brethren (Acts 10:47). With his matchless humility, Peter accepted Paul's words. His perceptive mind picked up these references (and in so doing we have a working model of how to seek to correct our brethren, although the success of it will depend on their sensitivity to the word which we both quote and allude to). But so easily, a lifetime of spiritual learning could have been lost by the sophistry of legalistic brethren. It's a sober lesson.

The case of Cornelius (Acts 10:47) shows the urgency of baptism; Peter didn't report the case back to the elders, he went ahead immediately with it. Acts 10:36-43 usefully record "the word" of the Gospel which had been sent to Israel and which the Gentiles could now also believe: "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name". This "word" of the Gospel has several allusions to the great commission- "we are witnesses" is Lk. 24:48, and Peter clearly felt he was fulfilling the great commission when he says that he is preaching because after the resurrection, Christ "commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God". Peter's comment that "to Him all the prophets bear witness" was doubtless said with his mind on how after His resurrection, the Lord had expounded where He was to be found in the prophetic writings. The Gospel which the great commission required to be taught and baptized into is therefore summarized in "this word" which is summarized here by Peter. It was a brief message about the person of

Christ, His death and resurrection, His forthcoming return in judgment, and our need to repent and receive forgiveness by association with His Name.

“Can anyone withhold” is the same word used by the Lord to rebuke the disciples for 'forbidding' John's disciples and the little ones to come to Him (Mk. 9:38); and yet He uses the same word to describe how the lawyers hindered [s.w. 'forbad'] people to enter the Kingdom. There's a very clear parallel here between the disciples and their Jewish teachers who had so influenced their thinking. But they finally got there- for Peter insisted that Gentiles should not be forbidden [s.w. 'hinder'] baptism (Acts 10:47); and he uses the same word again when he says that now, he will not "withstand [s.w. 'hinder'] God in hindering people to come to Him (Acts 11:17). The awfulness of the disciples' attitude is brought out by the use of the word in 1 Thess. 2:16, where Paul says that the way the Jews 'forbad' or hindered the preaching of the Gospel was cause for the wrath of God to come upon them "to the uppermost". And the disciples initially followed their Jewish elders in this kind of behaviour. In passing, there is a sober warning here to those who would likewise 'forbid' baptism to those who sincerely seek it, and who will not allow ‘little ones’ to the Lord’s table.

10:48 *And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days*- Implying Peter himself didn't perform the baptisms, so that there would not arise any cult following of the baptizer.

ACTS CHAPTER 11

11:1 *Now the apostles and the brothers that were in Judea heard that the Gentiles also had*- Does this mean that the conversion of Cornelius was understood as representative of the conversion of the Gentiles? Or were there a number of Gentile converts apart from Cornelius- e.g. Tabitha, the Ethiopian eunuch, and it was to these that "the Gentiles" refers to here?

Received the word of God- See on 8:14 *Received the word of God*.

11:2- see on Acts 10:20; 15:5.

And when Peter had arrived in Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision- This term seems to refer not simply to circumcised Jews, because the majority of the church was Jewish. Rather would it seem to refer to those within the church who thought that circumcision was essential for salvation.

Criticized him, saying- The Greek *diakrino* can equally mean to enter judgment with. It's as if they set themselves up as Peter's judges before a church which had turned into a court of law. This so easily happens to this day.

11:3 *You went in to men uncircumcised and ate with them!*- It's easy to assume that the arguments about "regulations about food" (Heb. 13:9) in the first century hinged about what *types* of food should be eaten, i.e. whether the Mosaic dietary laws should be observed or not. But the angst about "food" was more passionately about *with whom* you ate. Peter explains in Acts 11:3 how utterly radical it was for a Jew to eat with a Gentile. Bearing this in mind, the way Jew and Gentile Christians ate together at the Lord's supper would've been a breath-taking witness of unity to the watching world. And yet ultimately, Jew and Gentile parted company and the church divided, laying itself wide open to imbalance and every manner of practical and doctrinal corruption as a result. The problem was that the Jews understood 'eating together' as a sign of agreement, and a sign that you accepted those at your table as morally pure. The Lord's 'table manners' were of course purposefully the opposite of this approach. Justin Martyr (*Dialogue With Trypho* 47.2-3) mentions how the Jewish

Christians would only eat with Gentile Christians on the basis that the Gentiles firstly adopted a Jewish way of life. And this is the nub of the problem- demanding that those at your table are like you, seeing eating together as a sign that the other has accepted your positions about everything. The similarities with parts of the modern church are uncanny.

To enter in to a house was itself a religious act; the word is used repeatedly about how Peter entered in to the home of Gentile Cornelius (Acts 10:24,25,27 use the word three times); and Peter was accused by the legalistic brethren of having not only eaten with a Gentile but also of "entering in" to his home (Acts 11:3). Likewise Lydia felt that Paul could only enter in [s.w.] to her home if he had judged her to be faithful to the Lord (Acts 16:15,40). But the assumption is made in 1 Cor. 14:23,24 that the doors of the ecclesia should be open to even unbelievers who wished to "enter in", with all that implied. James 2:2 uses the same word twice in describing how both rich and poor strangers were 'coming in' to "your assembly", and being given different treatment by the assembled believers. The point is, they "came in"- there was no barrier to them. The church and its table was open.

Peter ate with the uncircumcised- and got into trouble with the Judaist brethren exactly because the Law had forbidden the uncircumcised from eating the first Passover (Acts 11:3). The Jews had put a [very large!] hedge around this law by forbidding Jews from eating with Gentiles period. Yet Peter was taught that this was wrong- and he ate with Gentiles, it seems even before they were baptized. But the point is, he had been taught by the vision that all the old Mosaic category distinctions of clean / unclean, circumcised / uncircumcised, had now been ended. It seems this was as large a challenge to the church in the 1st century as it is in the 21st. It was by eating with Gentiles that Peter openly demonstrated that God had accepted Gentiles (Acts 10,11). In first century Judaism "meals... were principal expressions within Judaism of what constituted purity. One ate what was acceptable with those people deemed acceptable" (Bruce Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography* (London: Doubleday, 2000) p. 473). Note too how Luke mentions that Paul ate food in the homes of Gentiles like Lydia and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:15,34).

Eventually Peter wouldn't eat with the Gentile brethren (Gal. 2:12). But he had learnt to eat with Gentile brethren in Acts 11:3; he had justified doing so to his brethren and persuaded them of its rightness, and had been taught and showed, so patiently, by his Lord that he should not make such distinctions. But now, all that teaching was undone. There's a lesson here for many a slow-to-speak brother or sister- what you start by passively going along with in ecclesial life, against your better judgment, you may well end up by actively advocating. It can be fairly conclusively proven that Mark's Gospel is in fact Peter's.

11:4 *But Peter began to explain it all to them in order*- Peter didn't claim to be the rock upon which the church was built; he didn't demand respect for his position, but humbly recounted what had happened on a factual level. His humility here is impressive.

11:5 *I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, a certain vessel descending, as it were a great sheet let down from heaven by four corners; and it came down even to me*- "Even to me" is a wonderful reflection of Peter's humility. He was under the strong impression of his denials, and how he felt he was the last who ought to have been chosen to receive this invitation to openly accept the Gentile converts. But this is how the Lord works; He chooses the humblest, the most humbled, through which to develop His work and to be at the frontiers of new movements of His Spirit.

11:6 *Looking at it closely, I saw the fourfooted beasts of the earth and wild beasts and creeping things and birds of the sky*- The very same word used of how the servant girl looked carefully at Peter on the night of the betrayals (Lk. 22:56). Only Luke uses this word. He is making the connection, and revealing how perhaps even subconsciously, the experience of his failures was ever present in Peter's speaking and thinking. And exactly because of this, Peter was the one used by the Lord in this major extension of His work.

11:7 *And I heard a voice saying to me*- The only other person recorded as saying this phrase in the NT is Paul, recounting how the same Lord had appeared to him on the Damascus road (Acts 22:7; 26:14). Paul took the humble Peter as his role model, just as we should.

Rise, Peter, kill and eat- This is sacrificial language. Rom. 15:16 speaks of the preacher as offering up his converts upon the altar; this uses the same image of 'offering up' sacrifices to describe preaching. And this connects with how Paul speaks in Rom. 12:1 of offering ourselves as living sacrifices in dedication. The aim of the preacher, therefore, is to provoke a sacrificial life in his or her converts, after the pattern of the Master whom they learn of.

11:8 *But I said: Not so, Lord*- Perhaps Peter sought to remind everyone that at the last Supper, he had likewise told the Lord not to wash his feet; and earlier, he had likewise disagreed with the Lord about His intention to go up to death in Jerusalem. Peter is emphasizing how he had been out of step with his Lord. And on this basis, he became one of the greatest pastoral figures ever to be seen in the body of God's people.

For nothing common or unclean has ever entered into my mouth- Comparing this with what he is recorded as saying at this juncture in Acts 10:14, it seems he twice stated his objection to the Lord's request. Hence the voice came twice to him.

11:9 *But a voice answered the second time out of heaven*- Perhaps it came twice because Peter twice stated his objection to obedience- see earlier on this verse.

What God has cleansed, do not make common- The idea seems to be that God had potentially cleansed Gentile individuals, making the cleansing sacrifice of His Son relevant to them; but by not preaching to them or accepting them, they would be made unclean by the sin of omission of the members of the Lord's body who refused to accept them. We see here how much has been delegated to us; and the deep significance of sins of omission in the lives of others. It's simply not the case that if we do not accept or preach to someone, then God somehow will find another way. Rather has their salvation been placed in our hands, and if we mess up, then it won't happen.

11:10 *And this was done three times*- This could mean that each time, Peter twice resisted the command (see on :9). Which would mean a total of six refusals, really quite some resistance to the Lord's will. Peter's obedience was therefore as it were the seventh time around. He presents it this way in order to assure his audience that he absolutely can understand their resistance to the idea of accepting Gentiles.

And all were drawn up again into heaven- The word is only elsewhere used in the New Testament, again by Luke, in Lk. 14:5, speaking of how just as a donkey or ox would be 'pulled up' on the Sabbath, so the Lord was likewise willing to 'draw up' those in need of salvation. What's significant is that the donkey is an unclean animal and the ox is a clean animal. The Lord's subtle point in the example given was that the urgency of salvation eclipsed legal distinctions between clean and unclean. The 'drawing up' of the unclean into Heaven therefore spoke of God's saving acceptance of them; but this had to be operationalized here on earth by His representatives.

11:11 *And then three men stood before the house in which we were, having been sent from Caesarea to me*- Just as the Angel 'stood before' both Cornelius and Peter in his vision (10:30). Peter was to perceive that those Gentiles standing before him were effectively the Lord standing before him; to refuse them was to refuse his Lord. And that same principle must be applied to all cases where men and women stand before us, seeking our acceptance into the people of God.

11:12 *And the Spirit told me to go with them*- How the Spirit told Peter isn't clarified; it could have been through the circumstance of the vision he had just received; or a direct word from a Spirit-Angel; or an internal word of command. I'd go with the first option. "To go with them" renders a Greek word meaning 'to fellowship with'; and the point was, that the Spirit had told Peter to do this. Hence he explains that previously, it was not acceptable for a Jew to 'go with' Gentiles.

Making no distinction- The same word is used in Acts 15:9: "He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith". But this is also the same word used in 11:2 of how the Judaist Christians "debated with" Peter about his acceptance of Gentiles. Those Judaists made a distinction; but the Spirit did not. This is an age-old church situation- the Spirit leads some to accept a previously excluded group, and the conservatives will not accept them. Whilst it appears that the conservatives had no option but to accept the evidence of God's movement, the history of the early church, and the constant reference to the theme in Paul and Peter's letters, all indicate that in the end, the conservatives just couldn't accept this. And that Jew-Gentile, conservative-liberal tension was what led to the church dividing and becoming apostate. The same has been seen in my own denomination. It should be noted, however, that the command not to make a distinction is within the context of not refusing those whom God has accepted. This is not to say that we no longer can tell right from wrong, retreating to a position where everything is but a shade of grey. The same phrase 'making no distinction' is used as a criticism of some believers for failing to make a moral distinction when they should have done (1 Cor. 6:5; 11:29; Jude 22).

These six brothers also accompanied me- The picture is presented of Peter and the Jewish brethren travelling with the Gentiles, when such mingling with Gentiles was against Jewish practice. Yet he did so because the Spirit had bidden him do so.

And we entered the man's house- Strictly against Jewish practice (10:28).

11:13 *And he told us how he had seen the angel*- The definite article suggests a specific Angel; the same one who had been working with Peter. He is called a "man" in 10:30; Angels appear as men, and in this case, the Angel surely represented the man Christ Jesus.

Standing in his house and saying: Send to Joppa and fetch Simon, whose surname is Peter- The Jews were not supposed to enter into the houses of Gentiles (10:28). The fact the Angel entered into the house of Gentile Cornelius was therefore significant. If the Lord is fellowshipping with a person, then we also should be. This makes a nonsense of any fellowship position which recognizes a person as walking with the Lord, but refuses to fellowship them.

11:14 *Who shall speak to you words, whereby you shall be saved, you and all your household*- Belief is essential for salvation, and yet belief must have some intellectual basis; there must be some knowledge to be believed before faith can exist. Therefore it is utterly impossible to divorce understanding from ultimate acceptability. This is because the vital virtue of faith is rooted in understanding.

11:15 *And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit*- Acts 15:9 explains that the whole incident demonstrated that there was no distinction between Jewish and Gentile

believers, in that the hearts of the Gentiles had also been purified as a result of their faith. But Peter couldn't see into the heart of those Gentiles. There was therefore a visible manifestation of the Spirit given, in order to demonstrate to him that indeed, the Spirit was active inside the minds and hearts of these Gentiles. The giving of miraculous manifestations of the Spirit was therefore for a specific purpose at a specific time, which is how the miraculous gifts of the Spirit had always been used previously. The point is, belief in Christ is followed by Divine response, in that the Spirit is then made available to purify the heart / mind of the believer. This is one strong reason to be baptized. Those who are baptized often openly testify of this sense of God's presence within them; but unless they make use of it, it truly becomes a case of 'use it or lose it'.

Fell on them- See on 8:16.

Even as on us at the beginning- The beginning of the Christian movement is here pinpointed as being at Pentecost. Hence the Cornelius incident can rightly be called the Pentecost of the Gentiles.

11:16 *And I remembered the word of the Lord*- The word recorded in Acts 1:5; the remembering of the Lord's word was an example of the promised work of the Comforter (Jn. 14:26). When dealing with this tricky ecclesial situation which arose over the admission of the Gentiles, Peter had truth and right on his side. But in his account of what happened to the elders, he constantly makes allusion to his own failures. “I remembered the word of the Lord, how that he said…” is an unmistakeable reference to his remembering of the Lord’s word all too late after his denials. It’s as if he was saying: ‘And there I was again, not remembering the Lord’s word, not facing up to what it obviously implied, almost denying Him again by hesitating to accept these Gentiles’. He comments that the vision of the unclean animals came “even to me”, as if he was the least worthy to have been involved with this work.

How he said that John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit- The "you" referred to the disciples; the fact Gentiles had now been baptized with the Spirit meant that they were no less, spiritually, than the first disciples who journeyed with Jesus in Galilee. The 'baptism with the Holy Spirit' in the context would seem to refer to an internal purifying of the believer by the Spirit which was began around the time of their water baptism (Acts 15:9). They were to be given a holy 'spirit' or mind / thinking.

11:17 *If then God gave to these the same gift as He also gave to us*- I suggest the gift they all essentially received was that of the purification of their hearts by the Spirit (Acts 15:9). And this is the same promise of the Spirit which is available to us too. It is true that both the apostles and the Gentile converts spoke in tongues, but I suggest that this was the external manifestation of the more essential internal change which was being effected. This 'same gift as He also gave to us' parallels the *gift* of repentance unto life in :18. Repentance is itself a gift, although it must be responded to.

When we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ- This reading may not be correct. The AV is equally faithful to the Greek in omitting the idea of 'when...': "us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ". If the idea of 'when we believed...' is indeed correct, the suggestion would therefore be that the apostles only fully believed in the Lord Jesus at Pentecost. It could be argued that as Jesus was only made Lord and Christ at His ascension (Acts 2:36), and therefore the disciples could only believe in Him as Lord

and Christ after that point. Pentecost was the time chosen for them to make public their faith; I would not be surprised if they were all baptized in water at Pentecost, and then the Spirit came upon them in their hearts, and was publicly manifested in terms of the miraculous gifts. If this were indeed the case, the power of Peter's appeal to be baptized and receive the Spirit would've been so much more powerful- if indeed the preachers had themselves just been baptized and received the Spirit. Receipt of the Spirit is connected with water baptism throughout the New Testament; it comes at the point of belief. And the disciples received it at Pentecost. The implication would therefore be that this was when they were baptized. But admittedly the record is strangely silent about their baptism. Remember that Christian baptism, into the Lord's death and resurrection, could only have been performed after His resurrection. Indeed, His command to be baptized was only given after His resurrection. So at some point after His resurrection, the disciples would have been baptized. Pentecost seems a reasonable option; otherwise, they would have been baptized but apparently not received the gift of the Spirit until Pentecost. The objection that their baptism isn't recorded is fair enough; but that problem remains, whichever view one takes of the timing of their baptism.

Growing appreciation of the excellency of the Lord Jesus was also a feature of Peter's spiritual growth; he was the first to coin the phrase "the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 11:17); although *never* did he call the Lord simply "Jesus" (indeed it seems that none of the disciples addressed and rarely spoke about Jesus without giving Him a title). Trace through the path of Peter's growth on appreciation of the Lord's greatness: Mt. 16:22 (*arguing* with Him!); Acts 2:36; 10:36; 11:17. When Peter realized he was looking at the risen Christ standing on the shore, he exclaimed, with evident appreciation: "It is *the Lord*" - not 'Jesus' (Jn. 21:7). And even though he had to swim to meet Him, Peter cast his fisher's coat about him to cover his bare arms and legs. He realized the greatness which attached to the Man from Nazareth on account of His resurrection. After the pattern of Peter, some of the early brethren likewise reached this appreciation of the Lord's excellence *and the importance of it* as the climax of their probations; for many were slain simply because they insisted on calling Jesus of Nazareth "Lord", when Nero had insisted that *he* be called 'Lord' (cp. Acts 25:26). Those brethren (and sisters) died with the confession of Jesus as *Lord* on their lips- and more importantly, deep in their hearts.

Who was I, that I could oppose God- Peter challenged the legalistic brethren of his day with the question: “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized?” (Acts 10:47). The Greek word translated “forbid” presents a theme worth paying attention to. Peter uses the same word when he says later that if he had not baptized those Gentiles, then he would’ve been “withstanding” [s.w. “forbidding”] God Himself (Acts 11:17). This is serious. By forbidding people baptism we are forbidding God, because it is ultimately God through His Son who is the baptizer of people, thus inducting them into His people. This thought alone should make it very difficult for any of us to ever forbid baptism to someone who wants it. Great judgment is stored up for those who forbid others to preach the Gospel (1 Thess. 2:16). Diotrephes forbad brethren from fellowshipping with other brethren (3 Jn. 10)- and was roundly condemned for doing so. The disciples were rebuked for forbidding children to come to Jesus (Mt. 19:14)- this was ‘much displeasing’ to Jesus (Mk. 10:14, Gk. ‘much much-grieved’); for forbidding the disciples of John the Baptist, with their alternative understandings of some things (Mk. 9:38); no man who works in Christ’s Name should be forbidden, although the disciples evidently thought such a person should be forbidden (Mk. 9:39); the Jews are condemned for forbidding [s.w.

“hindered”] men to enter the Kingdom (Lk. 11:52; note that to make the way to entry hard and difficult, creating hoops which must be passed through, is effectively forbidding a man entry); the Eunuch’s question as to what forbad him to be baptized was answered by Philip eliciting a simple confession of faith from him, that Jesus was the Son of God (Acts 8:36).

The grace of God is manifested to the world through the preaching of the ecclesia; and in this sense, God has allowed His ability to manifest this Grace to be limited according to our effort in witness. Peter could have chosen not to baptize Gentiles; and if he had done so, he would have withstood God, like the Pharisees he would have frustrated the counsel of God (Acts 11:17). As in the Song of Solomon (1:8), the bride [the church] follows the sheep [believers] to find the shepherd [Jesus]. The sheep lead others to the shepherd. God has “manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me” (Tit. 1:3).

11:18 *And when they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying*- This initial joy and humble acceptance of Gentile conversion didn't last. Natural prejudices soon arose, as soon happened later in this chapter. Men can come to a peak of spirituality which isn't maintained. We think of David forgiving Shimei, but then on his deathbed, asking Solomon to murder Shimei for what he had said against David. Corinth enthusiastically undertook to support the welfare fund- but didn't then come up with the cash. As emphasized in Jn. 15, the Lord Jesus seeks fruit that will abide- and not the flash peaks of emotional devotion which never carry through into permanent reality.

Then to the Gentiles also has God granted repentance to life- This shows that He is active in developing our desire to repent; "the goodness of God leads you to repentance" (Rom. 2:4). The same words were used by the apostles when teaching that God had "granted repentance to Israel" (Acts 5:31). That statement was not untrue, but now they recognized that they had only seen and preached a partial picture; for the gift of repentance was now rightly perceived as being to the Gentiles too. "Granted" means that repentance is a gift, and it clearly parallels the 'gift' of the Spirit in :17, which I suggest refers to the gift of God working by His Spirit within the human spirit, i.e. the gift of the Holy Spirit. 2 Tim. 2:25 makes it clear that there still has to be some human volition in the matter of salvation; but all the same, repentance is a gift from God: "In meekness correcting those that contradict themselves, so that God may give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth". This is not to say that repentance is unnecessary because it is a gift from God. True repentance is critical in the salvation process. But true repentance in human strength is not easy. It cannot be like Saul, who had genuine emotions of self hate, sorrow and tears at his behaviour against David- but continued in it (1 Sam. 24:16-22; 26:21). God wants penitence, not penance. Repentance must be "toward God" and not man, and it must be totally free from fear of human consequences. And so, true repentance is a gift from God. By grace. By His working on the human heart.

God clearly works, potentially, on the hearts of people. In our moments of repentance, both at baptism and on the many subsequent occasions, it is hard to believe that in prospect God's enormous Spirit power has really prepared a way for us to be totally spiritual. Israel on Carmel with Elijah were in a similar position; thus Elijah prayed "Hear me, O Lord... that this people may know... that You have turned their heart back again" (1 Kings 18:37). He meant: 'They don't realize that you are so willing for them to repent, that in prospect you have touched their hearts and made them do it; answering my prayer dramatically may motivate them to make the

necessary freewill response in repenting, so that the spiritual help you have made available in prospect, can be theirs in reality'. Even the frankest comparison of ourselves with that motley crew of hardened apostates should inspire afresh the belief within us that God is willing that all His people should continually come to repentance.

The road to eternal life involves repentance. Recognition of personal sin is utterly fundamental to salvation.

11:19 *Now those who were scattered*- The use of *diaspeiro* suggests that the scattered Christians were now the Israelite *diaspora*; they were the true Israel of God. The Greek literally means 'to be sown widely'; and indeed the seed of the Gospel was spread through this enforced migration.

Because of the persecution that arose over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch- see on Acts 8:1.

Speaking the word to no one except Jews- They clearly assumed that the command to take the Gospel into all the world and to "every creature" referred to Jewish people worldwide. We too can read in an ellipsis into a section of God's word, so confident are we that our subconscious assumptions are the correct interpretation.

11:20 *But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they reached Antioch, spoke to the Gentiles also, preaching the Lord Jesus*- Why was it specifically here that the persecuted Jewish believers began to share the word with the Gentiles? The term used for "Gentiles" here can also mean 'Hellenists', i.e. Greek speaking Jews. Perhaps it was initially to them that they preached, but the ethnicity of these people in Antioch was unclear, and so it became impossible to divide full Gentiles from Greek speaking Jews- and thus the Gospel was spoken to the Gentiles. According to Plumptre, "It was a centre of vice, featuring the harlot-priestesses of Daphne and Apollo who on occasions engaged in public ceremonies "stripped of clothing". Heathenism in its most vulgar and debasing forms dominated the life of the people". One can assume therefore that there would have been Jews there who had intermarried with Gentiles; and yet in this immoral city, the Gospel took off. Antioch became as it were the Jerusalem of the Gentile church. But it's rather like a church being founded in some deeply immoral area of a modern city; again, the Lord's choice is strange at first blush. It would've been so hard for the Jewish conservative Christians to accept that there had been mass conversions of Gentiles in such a place.

Antioch was clearly set up as the model of an urban, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, immigrant and refugee / asylum seeker based church. The elders we know of — Barnabas [from Cyprus], Simeon "called Niger" [a Falasha Jew probably from North Africa], Lucius [from Cyrene in North Africa], Manaen [raised in Galilee with Herod Antipas], and Paul [from Tarsus]—were all from different cultures. None were locals from Antioch. At least one was known as a black man, and possibly Lucius was also. They possibly faced the same scpeticism as Africans face today when they do missionary work in Europe. Those elders would likely have all spoken different first languages. And they had been flooded with Christian Jewish refugees from Jerusalem after they had fled from there. They came to Antioch exactly because Judaism in that city was famed for being very liberal. Those refugees themselves had only come to dwell in Jerusalem "from every nation under heaven", according to the record of their conversion in Acts 2. And the population of Antioch [reckoned at 500,000] was itself multicultural and multiethnic. So it was all arranged by the Lord that they would become the first church to engage in missionary work to the Gentiles. Their experiences and environment were used by Him to help them make the break from the idea of a Jewish-only form of Christianity. The multiethnic ministry team produced a

multiethnic church in a multiethnic city- that was clearly the Lord's intention. And it worked. Despite all the prejudices they all felt, as Jews of varying degrees of orthodoxy. And it is no surprise that the Antioch church became the departure point for three great missionary journeys (Acts 13:1-3; 14:35,36; 18:22,23).

Peter too was gently led to the challenge of preaching to Cornelius, through his experiences in Acts 9- healing a half Jewish woman [Dorcas-Tabitha], living with Simon the non-observant tanner, by the Joppa seaside exactly where Jonah had resisted the call to preach to the Gentiles. The [uninspired] *AntiMarcionite Prologue to Luke* claims that Luke was a Gentile from Antioch- which would explain his interest in Antioch and knowledge of the situation there.

11:21 *And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed*- The Lord's hand, His activity, resulted in people believing. Again we see that His outreach and grace towards men means that we are not left unaided as we face the choice between faith and unbelief. The Lord's hand works on the hearts of men, to give them faith and repentance (:18). Just as faith is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8); and as the Lord opened Lydia's heart so that she believed (Acts 16:14).

Believed and turned to the Lord- These are two separate things. The equivalent is maybe "The Corinthians believed and were baptized" (Acts 18:8). The turning to the Lord would then refer to water baptism. Or the reference may be to the psychological activity of the Lord in turning hearts and minds to Himself. In response to their belief, they were turned to the Lord. The same word is used in 3:19: "Repent... and be *converted*". After belief and baptism, there comes the process of conversion. It is something done to us by the Lord, as much as us seeking to make concrete changes ourselves. It is the duty of the preacher to turn people to the Lord (s.w. 26:18), and yet we must ever be aware that this is also His desire; and His spirit is at work seeking to turn our audience to Himself. "The hand of the Lord" seeks to do this; and any who remain unconverted, not turned to Him, have therefore resisted His hand, His operation in their lives and hearts. Only by wilfully closing the eyes and heart can someone disallow the Lord from converting / turning their heart to Him (28:27 s.w.). We must remember this when struggling with the problem of those who do not believe. Their unbelief is multifactorial, but one element of the equation is that the Lord has worked to try to win them.

11:22 - see on Acts 8:1.

And the report concerning them came to the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem- The metaphor of the body is used for the local church, rather than the global body of Christ. It seems Paul's extended usage of the metaphor has the same reference.

And they sent Barnabas as far as Antioch- The Jerusalem ecclesia told Barnabus to go only as far as Antioch; he didn't tell them how wrong they were to boss him around. He went beyond Antioch to Tarsus, took Paul, and then went down to Antioch (:22,25). In the end, whilst we must respect those who deserve it, we are personal servants of the Lord who died for us, and we must follow Him according to our personal conscience. The lesson from this is that we should seek to be as positive as possible in the midst of this tension between right and left- especially in the way we write or speak about the problems. We should seek to move the Gospel forward, whatever unhappy disagreements there are between those already baptized.

11:23 *Who, when he had arrived and had seen the grace of God*- The idea is not simply that Barnabas saw how kind God had been in accepting the Gentiles. The gift [*charis*, s.w. "grace"] of God would have referred to the gift of the Spirit. With Cornelius, the receipt of the Spirit gifts by him was proof enough to the Jewish

brethren that his conversion was *bona fide*. And so it was the same in Antioch- when Barnabas saw the evidence of the *charis* of God, the work of the Spirit, then he was assured that the conversions were valid.

Was glad- There is a play on words here. *Chairo*, "glad", is similar to *charis*, "grace" or "gift". The joy of Barnabas was exactly because the Gentile converts had been given the gift of the Spirit, which was the proof of their legitimacy as converts. When those who have formally held a privileged position open the doors to others, it's a hard thing to be truly glad that you have lost your position of privilege. The joy of Barnabas and other Jewish brethren therefore indicates their utter humility and genuineness.

And he encouraged them all, that with purpose of heart they should cleave to the Lord- The Spirit gift of cleansing the heart must be responded to; 'use it or lose it' would be the appropriate slogan. Having seen evidence that they had received the gift of God, Barnabas urged them to do their part in maintaining that way of thinking / spirit.

11:24 *For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit*- He was the right person to exhort the new converts to retain the gift of the Spirit, because he had done so himself, and was full of it. We also see that being full of the Spirit involved some personal effort- his 'goodness' was related to his being full of the Spirit. The gift is given by grace- but must be retained by our wilful decision to abide with the Lord.

And many people were added to the Lord- Luke likes to use this word "added". In 2:41,47 we read of converts being added to the church; here, they are added to the Lord. He is His church. The word *prostithemi* means literally to lay beside; it is used in describing how David was buried, being laid beside his fathers (13:36). For a convert to be laid beside the Lord suggests baptism, with all its symbolism of death and burial together with the Lord.

11:25 *And he went to Tarsus to seek out Saul*- The implication is that Saul / Paul had retreated within himself, returning to obscurity in his home town. Barnabas knew that Saul had the potential to do far more than that, and went to try to find him. We too need to make such efforts to encourage others to live up to their callings. Perhaps Barnabas was motivated by the fact that the amazing spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles had arisen as a result of Saul's persecution of the Christians (:19). Perhaps Saul was consumed with "over much sorrow" for his sins, and Barnabas wanted him to understand how wonderfully God had worked through them. Or perhaps Paul had been disappointed by the rejection by the Jerusalem church, who clearly scorned the mission to the Gentiles he had been given by the Lord. He felt that without human approval, he couldn't do his mission. Despite being "sent to the Gentiles", he simply went home and possibly sulked in disillusion and introvertion. But he had earlier done missionary journeys to bring Gentiles to Judaism- that is one reading of his reference to his earlier 'preaching circumcision' (Gal. 5:11). That life experience still had to be used by the Lord, and Barnabas was perceptive enough to realize that he had to do the human part and encourage Paul to respond to the opportunity. It could be that Paul would not have fulfilled his ministry to the Gentiles had not Barnabas encouraged him. And we need to be like Barnabas in considering how we can help others realize their callings.

11:26 *And when he had found him*- Luke describes the work of Barnabas in terms of seeking (:25) and finding. It is Luke who records the parables of seeking and finding (Lk. 15:8). In those parables, it is the Lord Jesus who seeks and finds. But He works through His body on earth; in this case, Barnabas. Yet Barnabas used his own initiative in order to seek and find Saul. The allusion to the lost sheep parable

['seeking out' in :25, 'finding' and 'bringing' in :26] could imply that Paul's return home to Tarsus was a point of spiritual failure for him. And yet that prepared him for the great missionary work he was to begin in Antioch.

He brought him to Antioch- This suggests Saul's relative passivity, implying that it was the initiative of Barnabas which resulted in Saul coming to Antioch.

And it came to pass, that for a whole year they were gathered together with the church and taught many people- The "they" grammatically appears to refer to Saul and Barnabas, hence the GNB: "the two met with the people of the church and taught a large group". This establishment of the Gentile mission centre in Antioch was due to Barnabas taking the initiative and going to search out Saul and bring him to Antioch. "The church" and the "many people" appear to have been two separate groups- the two brethren engaged in both pastoral and outreach work. This would have been in response to the call of the great commission, to teach the simple Gospel, baptize people, and then teach them all the Lord had commanded.

And there in Antioch the disciples- All Christians are disciples, 'learners'; the twelve men who followed the Lamb of God around Galilee, with all their misunderstandings and lack of faith, were and are symbols of us all. The focus was upon Him, not each other. We are all learners of Christ, taught by He Himself (Eph. 4:20,21). And we are to make all men into disciples (Mt. 28:19 RV); to make them learners of Jesus too.

Were first called Christians- It has been suggested that this was initially a term of insult and mockery. They were Christ-centred, and so were mocked as being 'the Christ-folk'. However, the term is used as a self-designation of the community by Peter (1 Pet. 4:16 cp. Acts 26:28). Or it could be that we can read this as meaning that they first gave themselves this name of 'the Christ folk'. In this case, yet again we see that the early community was centred around Jesus as the Christ, around a living person, rather than around a set of theories and abstract interpretations. Another option is that it was Paul and Barnabas who first coined the term. The Codex Bezae reads: "And hearing that Saul was at Tarsus, he departed, seeking for him; and having found him, he besought him to come to Antioch; who, when they were come, assembled with the Church a whole year, and instructed a great number; and there they first called the disciples at Antioch Christians". "Called" translates a word which usually refers to a Divine call; so another option would be that there was direct Holy Spirit revelation that the believers should brand themselves with the term 'Christian'. This needs to be given due weight by those who name the name of Christ but refuse to be called Christians. "Christian" is from the Greek word "Christ" and the Latin ending -*ianus*. It is significant that an initially Jewish church should coin a term which has no Hebrew in it. They had becoming so mission minded that they perceived that the future of Christianity was going to largely [although not exclusively] be with Gentile converts.

11:27 *Now in these days there came down prophets from Jerusalem to Antioch*- One of them predicted a famine which would affect "all the world" (:28); yet the Antioch brethren gathered funds to send to Jerusalem to relieve "the believers that lived in Judea" (:29). Inevitably one wonders whether these prophets asked for material support in view of the predicted famine. And yet if they were predicting a world-wide famine, which would affect Antioch as much as Jerusalem, why was support only sent for the brethren in Judea / Jerusalem? Perhaps it was in order to demonstrate unity with different brethren of a different culture and ethnicity, and was therefore done in absolute selflessness, seeing that Antioch was presumably going to suffer as well.

11:28 *And one of them, named Agabus, stood up*- The Greek form of the Hebrew 'Hagab', meaning 'locust'. Locusts were understood as bringers of famine; so certain was the prophetic word, that the person bringing it was seen as the fulfilment of it.

And foretold- Gk. 'signified'. It could be that Agabus didn't simply predict a famine, but gave a symbolic vision which was interpreted as meaning that a famine would come. One manuscript adds: "When we came together", implying that Luke was then in Antioch. As discussed on Col. 4:14, it seems Luke was a Gentile from Antioch.

By the Spirit that there would be a great famine- We have here a powerful example of what it means to believe the prophetic word. These brethren were so convinced that the prophecy would come true that they decided there and then, ahead of the predicted famine, to gather welfare for those who would be affected by it. There appears to be an allusion to Joseph, who so believed the dreams he interpreted about the seven years of famine that he arranged the gathering of welfare in order to cope with it. The coming of 'great famine' was a sign of the end of the age in the Olivet Prophecy (Lk. 21:11). We see how the stage was set for the Lord's coming in the first century; it was Israel's lack of repentance, and a paucity of evangelical zeal amongst the believers, which meant that His return was delayed. Until we learn the lesson.

Over all the world. This took place in the days of Claudius- This only came true in a limited sense. Perhaps the massive wider reference was to flag attention to the way that this famine could fulfil the prophetic requirement of famine in many strange places (Mt. 24:7). I suggest that the extent of this famine wasn't effected, because the human conditions weren't right to allow the Lord to return.

11:29 *And the disciples, every man according to his ability*- Paul uses the same words in appealing to the Corinthians to likewise contribute for the brethren in Judea "every man according to" his opportunity (2 Cor. 9:7). He was thereby appealing to Corinth to follow the pattern of the Antioch ecclesia. Patterns of generosity are to be observed and imitated; for we take strength and patterns in giving from the example of others. There is also a reference to the parable of the talents- each were given according to their ability, and were to trade them. Here, the talents given is applied to whatever material resources we have.

"Every man" may suggest every convert contributed. We must remember that ethnic groups never gave charitable help to other ethnic groups. What was done here was radically counter cultural, and a triumph for the spirit of unity which there is in Christ. The allusion is clearly to the Lord's parable of how "every man... according to his ability" was given talents with which to trade. We have each been given something- and are to trade this by giving away what we have for others. And "every man" was to do this, not reasoning that he had only one talent and therefore wasn't called to do anything. It is the "one talent" category who are perhaps at greatest risk of failing to enter into the ministry intended for them. In the same context of the temple and Jerusalem, there is surely also an allusion to Dt. 16:16,17: "Three times in a year must all your males appear before Yahweh your God in the place which He shall choose... They must not appear before Yahweh empty: every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of Yahweh your God which He has given you". The equivalent under the New Covenant was giving to the poor Christian believers in Jerusalem. Again we notice the stress upon "*all* your makes... every man shall give".

The Mosaic Law countered the idea that only the rich can be generous. The purification after childbirth and the cleansing of the leper allowed a lower grade of offering to be made by the very poor- to underline that *no one* is exempted from

giving to the Lord, no matter how poor they are. Consider the emphasis: "Every man shall give *as he is able*... he shall offer *even such as he is able to get*... then the disciples (consciously motivated by these principles?) *every man according to his ability*, determined to send relief [one gets the picture of a convoy of brethren going to Jerusalem, carrying a little bit of meal from Sister Dorcas, a few coins from brother Titus...] ... let *every one of you* lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him" (Dt. 16:17; Lev. 14:30,31; Acts 11:29; 1 Cor. 16:2).

Decided to send relief to the believers that lived in Judea- First century people were relatively passive to disasters compared to Western people today. A famine was an act of God, of nature, and it had to be accepted; the idea of one ethnic group taking up a collection for another one in another place who were suffering from famine was a real paradigm breaker. And that's just what Paul engineered, in arranging for the Gentile converts to take up such a collection for the Jewish believers in Palestine who were suffering famine. Historians claim that Antioch was a wealthy city, and archaeological remains support that. It would be fair to assume that they not only funded the welfare for the Palestinian Christians, but also the following missionary journeys to the Gentiles which each began from Antioch.

11:30 *Which also they did*- This may appear redundant, until we realize that it is a common human tendency to 'decide' to be generous, but not actually do it. These brethren decided and also did it. And that is noted in the inspired record.

Sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul- This seems a wise pattern to follow in providing welfare relief.

ACTS CHAPTER 12

12:1 *About that time*- The time of chapter 11, when the brotherhood in Judea were threatened with famine, and the Gospel was spreading to the Gentiles. It seems the persecution of the Jerusalem leadership was used by the Lord to encourage the Gentiles to take responsibility- for the Jewish leadership of the early church was then straight away put under pressure. This is how intricately the Lord coordinates situations in our lives and collective experiences.

Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church- This Greek phrase is often used about the leadership laying hands on the Lord Jesus. The church were fellowshipping the sufferings of their Lord, just as we do in essence; hence the same language is used. This is also the phrase which is used in the Olivet prophecy, only in Luke's account of it, about how in the last days, hands would be laid on the believers (Lk. 21:12). Luke clearly saw this action of Herod as fulfilling that prophecy. All was set up for the Lord's coming in glory; the signs which depended upon God for fulfilment all came true. But Israel's lack of repentance and the lack of evangelical zeal to take the Gospel world-wide meant that the human preconditions weren't met, and so His coming has been delayed until our last days.

12:2 *And he killed James the brother of John with the sword*- Several commentators claim that the phrase 'to kill with the sword' means beheading. James was the first recorded martyr for the faith; and again (see on :1), Luke is recording this framed to show that the Olivet prophecy was coming true. The Lord had predicted that James would drink of His cup (Mt. 20:22,23), and so it happened. It's worth noting that there is no record of anyone being raised up to replace James and to thereby maintain the number of the 12. This gives the lie to Catholic claims of an apostolic succession.

12:3 *And when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. And those were the days of unleavened bread*- Luke uses the same word in recording how the Lord was 'seized', and "Peter followed afar off" (Lk. 22:54). Now, the implication is, after a period of following the Lord, it was Peter's turn to experience His sufferings more directly. There are many similarities with the Lord's sufferings- e.g. it was to "please the Jews" (:2). Hence the comment: "And those were the days of unleavened bread". It was Passover time- the very time of the Lord's sufferings. We too are led to fellowship with the Lord's sufferings, and our familiarity with the records of them will help us to perceive this more quickly.

12:4 *And when he had taken him*- A word repeatedly used about the Lord's being 'taken' by the Jewish opposition (Jn. 7:30,32,44; 8:20; 10:39; 11:57). Again, we see the development of the theme that the Lord's final sufferings were being replicated in Peter.

He put him in prison- Surely to test Peter's confident claim that he was ready to go to prison and death for his Lord (only recorded by Luke- Lk. 22:33). The Lord likewise has a way of testing our confident claims about our loyalty to Him. It's worth noting that Herod had earlier arrested John the Baptist and 'put him into prison' (the same words are used; Mt. 14:3), again in order to please another party- in that case, Herodias. That similarity would have led Peter to suspect that Herod would likewise behead him in prison as he had John. Our sufferings are so often in terms and tones similar to those of others, and this is because we are to take strength from them and to see that we are not alone.

And delivered him- A word so often used about the handing over of the Lord to death.

To four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover- The Greek for 'squad' refers to a group of four soldiers; four such squads meant 16 in all.

To bring him out to the people- The Greek word Luke uses about what was done to the Lord (Lk. 22:66).

12:5 *Therefore Peter was kept in the prison; but earnest prayer was offered to God*- The guarding of Peter in prison is placed in opposition to earnest prayer being offered; as if worldly forces were in struggle with spiritual ones, and the spiritual prevailed. "Earnest" is literally 'unceasing', and the word is only used elsewhere by Peter, in appealing for unceasing love within the church (1 Pet. 4:8). He would have recalled how unceasing prayer had been offered for him- and he urged the church to show such love to others.

For him by the church- Huper, translated "for", is what Dorothee Sölle called "the preposition of representation" (Dorothee Sölle, *Christ The Representative* (London: S.C.M., 1967) p. 69). Our prayer for others is effectively our representation of them before the throne of Heaven and the Divine court. And this of course is exactly what the Lord Jesus has done and continues to do for us; mediating *huper* us, as our representative. What He has done for us, we are not to merely lamely accept; we are to do the same in essence for others. And the clearest way we reflect it is through prayer *huper* others, feeling with them and for them, and bringing those feelings before the Father in prayer for them.

12:6 *And when Herod was about to bring him out, that same night*- This reflects how the Jewish day began at sunset. That night was the day in which Herod intended to 'bring him out' to death. In this kind of careful congruence we see evidence of inspiration and every verisimilitude. The language of 'bringing him out' naturally recalls the trial of the Lord Jesus before His death.

Peter was sleeping- A great essay in faith and the peace which comes from it. For it seemed obvious that that night would be his last, and death awaited him in the morning.

Between two soldiers- Recalling the Lord's death between two thieves.

Bound with two chains- The record gives much detail about Peter's binding and guarding by the soldiers. We learn there were four squads of four soldiers guarding him (:4), there is the apparently unnecessary repetition of the fact he was guarded (:5), and now we learn that he slept with a separate chain connecting him to a separate soldier. All that was humanly possible had been done, to ensure there was no escape. All this sets the scene for the amazing deliverance wrought by the Lord that night. Significantly, the Lord overruled it that Paul was later likewise bound with two chains (Acts 21:33); encouraging Paul to see his ministry as parallel to that of Peter. However, as I have elsewhere suggested, Paul seems to have pretended to Peter's ministry to the Jews, rather than accepting that his ministry was to be parallel to Peter's, but not identical with it. See on 12:7 *And an angel of the Lord stood by him*. It's also noteworthy that Peter later chose to describe the essence of condemnation as being in chains, in darkness, awaiting judgment (2 Pet. 2:4). He surely wrote that with recollection of how he had been left in exactly the same position that night in prison- and been saved out of it.

And guards before the door were guarding the prison- Another example of apparently excessive detail about the guarding. See on *Bound with two chains*. It also recalls the guards guarding the Lord's tomb. This is the second time in Acts that the "guards before the door" have been rendered powerless (Acts 5:23 uses the same Greek words).

12:7 *And an angel of the Lord stood by him*- Exactly as happened to Paul (Acts 27:23); see on 12:6 *Bound with two chains*. Luke uses the same language as in Lk. 2:9, where the Angel of the Lord stands by the shepherds and again, the light shines. It's unclear what exact point Luke is trying to make by demonstrating the similarity. Perhaps it was that the Lord was demonstrating to Peter that the events of His life were being replicated in Peter's; just as they are in the experiences of all who are in Christ.

And a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying: Rise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands- Yet another similarity with the Lord's crucifixion. The Greek verb translated 'strike' is usually used in the New Testament with the sense of striking with a fatal wound. This makes the next phrase so significant: "... and woke him", AV "raised him up". The similarities with the keepers / guards being stricken helpless at the resurrection and the glory of the Lord shining... all this was to help Peter to understand that the essence of the Lord's death and resurrection was being worked out in him. We note the subsequent disbelief of the male disciples as they fearfully prayed in a locked room, contrasted with the faith of a woman [Rhoda]; this was clearly looking back to the situation at the Lord's resurrection. His death and resurrection are being continually lived out in our experience too; baptism is a signal that we are prepared for that ongoing participation in His death and resurrection.

12:8 *And the angel said to him: Dress yourself and put on your sandals*- When the Angel told Peter this, he was alluding back to the Lord's words to Peter, that when he would be old, others would gird him and carry him to his death (Jn. 21:18). The Angel was therefore saying that the time of Peter's death had not yet come. The lesson is, that the amount of comfort and reassurance Peter took from the Angels' words

would have been proportionate to the degree to which he had meditated on his Lord's prophecy. And so with us. See on :10 for another example.

And he did so. And he said to him: Wrap your cloak around you and follow me- "Follow me" is a phrase used 18 times elsewhere, and always about following the Lord Jesus. Peter struggled with this- he was told to stop trying to persuade the Lord against death on the cross, and instead to follow Him; and at the end of John's Gospel, Peter again has to be reminded of the need to follow his Lord. So here we are surely to perceive the Lord Jesus speaking through the Angel at this point; the call to follow Him comes to us in the most unusual circumstances.

12:9 *And he went out and followed*- This might imply that the following and the going out were separate things. Peter's willingness to get dressed and leave the cell was a test of his faith. The commands to dress were likewise not simply the Angel's thoughtfulness because of the cold of the night which Peter would experience. Rather was it all a test and development of Peter's faith and obedience.

And he did not perceive that it was true which was done by the angel, but thought he was seeing a vision- This was precisely the position of the prayerful believers that same night (:15); and again, it was only after the opening of a door that they believed (:16). Peter was weak in believing that his prayers that night were being answered right before his eyes; and his awareness of his failure surely helped him to be patient with the failure of his own brethren that night. For at a prayer meeting, they received the answer to their prayers- and dismissed it as 'madness', as a mad woman seeing a vision. Which was precisely what Peter had done. So often, human weakness repeats between believers; and this is also under the hand of providence. It is intended, surely, to enable us to achieve patient forgiveness and fellowship with each other.

12:10 *And when they were past the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city*- There is huge variation in the amount of detail in the Biblical records. Many years of the lives of men like Peter aren't recorded; but here we have the finest details of a few moments of his life. This is to help us play Bible television with the material; so that we can attempt to reconstruct and relive this wonderful scene.

"The iron gate that leads into the city" was likely what was known as "the prison gate", and this gate is mentioned only one other time in the Bible. Neh. 12:39 records that it was at this gate that the celebrating Israelites met and sung praise to God when Jerusalem was finally revived under Nehemiah. As noted under 12:8 *Dress yourself and put on your sandals*, Peter would have taken encouragement from this, as he doubtless felt full of praise himself, according to whether or not he picked up the allusion to the Nehemiah record. So many things in our lives likewise are nudges and hints towards Biblical accounts- but if we fail to perceive them, then those things remain in the large mass of apparently irrelevant and unexplained furniture in our lives.

This opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and passed on through one street; and immediately the angel departed from him- Whilst walking with the Angel, Peter must have thought that nothing possibly could go wrong for him; but the Angel continued with him, it was just not visible. The 'leaving' was therefore just from his earthly perspective.

"Passed on" implies literally 'to follow'; the situation is replete with reference to the Angel opening the iron gates of Egypt at Passover time and leading Israel out. Further, the idea in :11 that "the Lord has sent his angel and delivered me out of the hand of Herod and from all that the Jews were expecting" alludes clearly to the Lord sending an Angel to deliver Israel from Pharaoh [= Herod] and the Egyptians [= the

Jews]. This all gives the impression that this was yet another level of conversion for Peter; again he was being 'converted', brought out of Egypt to light, just as we too have various levels of conversion, and the essence of baptism becomes an ongoing daily experience.

12:11 *And when Peter came to himself, he said: Now I know of a truth*- This Greek phrase, and the idea of 'knowing of a truth', is quite common in the Bible (Mt. 27:54; Mk. 15:39; Jn. 4:42; 6:14). The idea is that there are things we know, but experience brings us to know them of a truth. Job heard by the hearing of the ear, and then through his sufferings came to see it all for real as personal truth. This is why the knowledge of the Gospel learnt before baptism is merely knowledge; it is through the Lord's personal program for us in subsequent life, that that knowledge is known by us in truth. And we must be patient as others are led along that same path of converting mere ideas, theology, lines in a statement of faith, into personal truth. See on 12:12 *Considered*.

Now I know of a truth, that the Lord has sent his angel and delivered me out of the hand of Herod and from all that the Jews were expecting- Peter was delivered from prison as a result of the Angel being "sent forth"- from the court of Heaven, by the prayers of the other believers at their prayer meeting (Acts 12:11 RV). When those same believers commented: "It is his Angel" (:15) they were perhaps not mocking Rhoda; rather they were thanking God that Peter's guardian Angel had indeed been sent forth due to their prayers. See on :10 "Passed on".

12:12 *And when he had considered the thing*- The Greek doesn't mean this, but rather means 'to know'. We can pass through an experience, but now 'know' it until we have processed it with faith. See on 12:11 *Now I know of a truth*.

He came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark- Peter later refers to John Mark as his [spiritual] son (1 Pet. 5:13). We sense here therefore the deep family relationships forged by our experience in Christ.

There many were gathered together and were praying- Do we hold such all night prayer meetings? To pray all night requires quite some psychological stamina. However, note the difference between "gathered together" and "praying". They came together to be together in their thoughts about Peter, "and were praying" at that gathering, but not necessarily every minute of the night. The powerful lesson is that even these highly committed believers were of limited faith- for when the answer to their night of prayer knocked at the door, they laughed at anyone who thought such an answer was possible. We too must ask whether we pray in the real hope of answer; or whether our praying is more for our benefit.

12:13 *And when he knocked at the door of the gate, a maid named Rhoda came to answer*- Probably a Gentile name, perhaps reflecting her origin from Rhodes. We have a hint here of how Gentiles were already amongst the inner circle of the early church; and how they had more faith than their senior Jewish brethren. In any case, we find another similarity with the Lord's resurrection- that it was a woman who first believed in His deliverance from the iron gates of death, whilst the senior apostles didn't believe and mocked her as mad, just as they did Mary Magdalene. In :15 we will read that "*she confidently affirmed that it was so*". The only other time this Greek word occurs is again in Luke's writing, when describing how the girl in the courtyard confidently affirmed that Peter was Peter (Lk. 22:59). For me, this clinches the identity of that girl with Rhoda. Her perception is contrasted with the lack of perception of the church elders. Rhoda appears here "at the door of the gate"; and the very same Greek term is used in Mt. 26:71 of how the servant girl "in the porch" recognized Peter. She knew Peter's voice, and although she hadn't seen him [because

she didn't open the gate], on the strength of that recognition of his voice, she told the others that Peter had arrived. Yet at the time of Peter's denials, it was his distinctive voice with his Galilean accent which betrayed him. So again she recognizes his voice. And she "told everyone" that it was Peter- both times.

The connection is clear with Acts 10:17: "While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men that had been sent by Cornelius, having made enquiry for Simon's house, stood before the gate". The language of the men of Cornelius 'standing before the gate' and earnestly knocking is precisely the same language as we find in the account of *Peter* knocking at the "door of the gate" after his release from prison: "He came to the house of Mary... there many were gathered together and were praying. And when he knocked at the door of the gate, a maid named Rhoda came to answer. And when she recognised Peter's voice, she did not open the gate, but in joy ran inside and told everyone that Peter stood before the gate" (Acts 12:12-14). As he stood there, Peter was being put into the shoes of those men who had stood before his gate and knocked. Providence does this in our lives many times, as the Spirit seeks to bind us together in one close-knit body. When the Jewish disciples initially wouldn't let Peter in... he must have seen the similarity with how things could have worked out, had he likewise left those Gentiles outside, holding to the Jewish tradition of not having Gentiles into your home.

The theme of gates is apparent, each with a courtyard behind them. The gates of the prison swung open by the Lord's power. But soon Peter was standing outside another gate, that of the church. And those gates didn't open so quickly, despite a Gentile servant woman [Rhoda, 'the girl from Rhodes'] begging them to open. The contrast is intentional. The church within Mary's house were praying for Peter's release but were blind to the obvious- that he had been released and their prayers had been heard. Just like the disciples in Jerusalem, possibly also in Mary's house, refusing to believe the woman who testified that the Lord had risen. Likewise Gentiles had knocked at the door of Peter's house in Acts 10, and only with difficulty had he opened to them.

The Lord had told Peter that upon this rock, and Peter means 'rock', the church would be built- a clear reference to the mass conversions achieved by Peter at the start of Christianity. And, He had added, the gates of the grave would not overcome it- they would not succeed in keeping the "church" out, the gates of the grave would open before the church. Peter must have wondered what that meant. And the opening of huge iron gates must have reminded him of that. The opening of the gates in life encourages us that the great and final gate shall be opened, the city of death shall surrender to the church. That is the idea of the gates of the grave not prevailing against the church. But the church had to open its gates to Gentiles, and they were slow to do that. We note that standing before the gates is the place of the beggar (Lk. 16:20 Lazarus at the gate of the rich man; Acts 3:10 the beggar at the Beautiful gate, and often in classical literature). Cornelius stood begging, as it were, before Peter's gate- and he responded. Peter then stands himself before the gate of the church- and eventually, he in turn is allowed in.

12:14 *And when she recognised Peter's voice*- The similarities with Peter's betrayal of the Lord are clear. Again, he is standing at a gate; and again, a servant girl recognizes his voice without clearly seeing him. And she "told everyone" that it was Peter. The parallels are such that we wonder whether Rhoda was in fact the servant girl who recognized Peter by his voice in the High Priest's courtyard. In this case, we have yet another wonderful example of how the Lord works through human weakness

and betrayal of His Son; for through that whole shameful incident, that young woman was brought to faith in Christ, as she witnessed the amazing repentance of Peter. It was his weakness and the way he dealt with it which persuaded thousands on the day of Pentecost; and perhaps amongst them was a young Gentile servant girl called Rhoda.

There is clearly allusion to the parable of Jn. 10, where the Lord presents Himself as the good shepherd whose voice is recognized by the gatekeeper, who then opens the gate. Their acceptance of Peter was therefore reflecting their acceptance of the Lord Jesus. For Peter's smiting on the side, 'resurrection' and exit from the gates of death accompanied by Angels all looks ahead to the Lord's resurrection. Peter was representing the Lord Jesus.

She did not open the gate, but in joy ran inside- Another connection with how 'mad' Mary ran to the same disciples with joy that the Lord had been delivered. The similarities are such that we can conclude that this repetition of circumstance was in order to test the disciples; and again they failed, as we do so often.

And told everyone- The language of the great commission, about telling everyone the good news of the Lord's deliverance from the gates of death.

That Peter stood before the gate- The language of the risen Lord standing before the door, about to return, if His followers believed in Him enough (James 5:9).

12:15 *And they said to her: You are mad*- The believers gathered together to hold a prayer meeting for Peter's release. Their prayers were answered; he stood outside, knocking on the door. But they simply didn't believe it. They couldn't conceive their prayer was answered. They mocked poor Rhoda and told her to go back and watch the door and not disturb them any more while they prayed for Peter's release. And having mocked her, they got back on their knees and asked again for his release. We can pray, in faith apparently, but with no very deep faith that the answer in actual reality will happen or may already have been granted.

But she confidently affirmed that it was so- The only other time this Greek word occurs is again in Luke's writing, when describing how the girl in the courtyard confidently affirmed that Peter was Peter (Lk. 22:59). For me, this clinches the identity of that girl with Rhoda; see on :13 *Rhoda*.

And they said: It is his angel- The early church clearly believed in the [Biblical] concept of guardian Angels who represent us and can therefore be understood to appear as us before the court of Heaven.

12:16 *But Peter continued knocking*- Strikingly similar to the appeal to keep on knocking so that the door will be opened (Lk. 11:9,10). The figure of knocking is also used about the Lord Jesus knocking on the door of His church (Lk. 12:36; Rev. 3:20). And thus faithful Peter was to be understood as representative of the risen Lord Jesus, as we have pointed out earlier in this exposition.

And when they had opened, they saw him and were amazed- The strength of the Greek word reflects upon their lack of faith in the prayers they had just been offering. The word is translated "mad" in Mk. 3:21 and 2 Cor. 5:13. The obvious inversion of ideas is in the fact that they had just accused Rhoda of being mad (:15). It was they who were, as it were, mad. This so often happens. We are made to realize how it actually feels to be what we accuse others of. There is an African proverb, often told to warn children not to call each other bad names: "If you call another a cripple, you will become a cripple". This is not simply a case of what goes around coming around. Rather does God want us to enter into relationship with the person we thought badly of, to understand them, and to understand the real import of the words we use and think. And again, Luke is bringing out the similarities with the Lord's resurrection; for

the same group of male disciples were "amazed" (s.w.) by the testimony of the women who had met the risen Lord (Lk. 24:22).

12:17 *But he, motioning with the hand to hold their peace, declared to them how* - Paul is twice recorded as doing the same (Acts 13:16; 21:40). Was this a reflection of how he had unconsciously absorbed the example of fisherman Peter and so sought to emulate it? Or was he consciously pretending to Peter's ministry to the Jews- rather than focusing upon being himself and focusing on the very different ministry the Lord had given him?

The Lord had brought him out of the prison- When the Angel 'brought Peter forth out of the prison', this is recorded as "the Lord" (Jesus) doing so. He worked through [one specific?] Angel.

And he said: Tell these things- The women were told by the risen Lord to "tell My brothers…". Here in Acts 12:17 the same Greek words are used by Peter: "Tell these things… to the brothers". Peter felt that his deliverance from prison was like the Lord's resurrection, and perhaps consciously he used the Lord's words to Mary Magdalene. Peter then went "to another place" just as the Lord did on saying those words. He saw that his life was a living out of fellowship with the Lord's mortal experiences, every bit as much as our lives are too. Peter specifically said: "Tell these things to James and to the brothers"- just as the Lord had told the women to go and tell *Peter*, and the brothers. Peter perhaps saw James in the same position as he had been in. From our own experience of faithlessness and weakness, we are able to appear to others.

To James and to the brothers- There seem to be a number of unconscious allusions by Peter back to his own failures- and this is an example. It was an allusion to the women being told to go and shew the news of the resurrection to the brethren *and Peter*, who was then in spiritual crisis. Those words, that fact, was ingrained upon Peter to the point that he unconsciously builds it in to his own words. Here the same Greek words are used by Peter as by the Lord: "Go shew these things… to the brothers". Peter felt that his deliverance from prison was like the Lord's resurrection.

And he departed and went to another place- The way Peter beckons to the disciples to hold their peace, declares how the Lord had brought him out of the prison and death, tells them to go and shew these things to the brethren and then goes "unto another place" is a reflection of the Lord's behaviour after His resurrection (cp. Mt. 28:19). Consciously and unconsciously, confirmed by providence, Peter was living out the fact he was in Christ; he was showing the risen Lord to men and women by his words and actions.

12:18 *Now as soon as it was day, there was no small anxiety among the soldiers about what had become of Peter*- Again, a similarity with the Lord's resurrection.

12:19 *And when Herod had searched for him and not found him*- This sounds as if Herod personally searched, presumably going to the prison personally.

He examined the guards, and commanded that they should be put to death- This has echoes of the punishment of those entrusted with the murder of Daniel.

And he went down from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there- Herod had intended to kill Peter because he wanted to please the Jews (:3). But he invested so much in what originally was just a political move, that he became obsessed with it. And now it backfired, he took it so personally that he moved his residence out of Judaea to Caesarea. This is how our human minds degenerate; an insincere decision or policy adopted becomes a personal obsession, and then when we are shown to be fighting against the Lord's way, there is hurt pride which results in destruction.

12:20 *Now Herod was highly displeased with those at Tyre and Sidon*- "highly displeased" translates a Greek term which seems to mean 'to prepare war'. Hence they "asked for peace". The incident naturally recalls the Lord's parable of the mighty King who must be asked for peace, referring to how we must make peace with Him; and again we note that it is Luke who records this (Lk. 14:31). The connection may be to demonstrate that Herod was acting as God; and this is stated in so many words in :22. The way Blastus serves to reconcile Herod and these people would then look forward to the Lord's work between God and man.

They came with one accord to him and having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, they asked for peace- Throughout Scripture, the opposition between the kingdoms of this world and the Kingdom of God is highlighted. After the establishment of the first ecclesia in Jerusalem, the Acts record seems to emphasize the pointed conflict between the ecclesia and the world. Being "of one accord" was a hallmark of the early brethren (Acts 1:14; 2:1,46; 4:24; 5:12; 15:25); but the world were in "one accord" in their opposition to that united ecclesia (Acts 7:57; 12:20; 18:12; 19:29). The two women of Proverbs both have surface similarities; folly parodies wisdom. Thus the words of the adulteress drip honey and oil (Prov. 5:3), just as those of wisdom do (Prov. 16:24). Rabshakeh promised the Jews an Assyrian Kingdom where everyone sat under their own vine and fig tree- consciously parodying Micah's contemporary prophecies of God's future Kingdom (Is. 36:16 cp. Mic. 4:4). The Assyrian Kingdom was set up as a parody of Solomon's, which was the Kingdom of God (1 Kings 4:25; 2 Chron. 9:8). A glance through the descriptions of the beasts- the Kingdoms of this world- reveals that they are all set up in terms of the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom.

Because their country was fed from the king's country- Tyre and Sidon were city states belonging to Syria, with no agricultural land. They were therefore dependent upon food supplies from Herod's territory. Perhaps the famine of 11:28, or at least, the famines associated with the last days of AD70, led to tensions over food supplies.

12:21 *And upon aset day*- Perhaps a Jewish feast day, or a day of religious significance, upon which Herod wished to present himself as a Divine figure.

Herod dressed himself in Royal apparel- Literally, 'the clothing of the Kingdom'. He was wilfully playing God.

And sat on the throne and delivered an oration to them- In imitation of the Lord sitting on His judgment throne [*bema*] specifically refers to a judgment throne, and giving his verdict as if it were the Lord's.

12:22 *And the people shouted: The voice of a god and not of a man*- They clearly perceived that Herod wished himself to be perceived as Divine, and so they went along with his wish; for they desired peace with him. Roman emperors and leaders frequently presented themselves as Divine figures; and Revelation brings out the tension between accepting Jesus as Lord, and being part of the Roman empire with its cult of emperor worship. We may never go this far in brazen blasphemy, but we are all tempted to 'play God'. And we are also all in situations where at times, folks glorify *us* when the glory needs to go to God; and it is imperative that we remind others of our humanity. Paul and Peter were several times in such situations, and their eagerness to assure others of their humanity was perhaps partly in order to avoid the kind of condemnation which came upon Herod.

12:23 *And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give God the glory*- It would appear that he did not die immediately, because his death is described as through being "eaten by worms", presumably a reference to some kind of

cancer. Perhaps this method of death was chosen rather than instant death in order to give him a chance of repentance.

And he was eaten by worms and breathed his last- Not literally. Rather is this the language of the day being used to describe illnesses such as cancer which were not then understood. There should be no surprise, therefore, that the language of the day for mental illness is also used in the Bible. This explains the usage of 'demon possession' in the Gospels.

12:24 *But the word of God grew and multiplied*- The number of converts to the word multiplied- for the same word is repeatedly used in this sense (Acts 6:1,7; 5:14; 9:31; 19:20). Thus “the word of God” is put by metonymy for ‘the response to the word of God’, as if the word will inevitably bring forth response. We must believe, really and truly, that the word will not return void, but it will accomplish what it is intended to achieve. We are not scattering seed with the vague hope that something might sprout up; we are planting, fully expecting to see a harvest. It's also possible to speculate that the multiplication of God's word might refer to a growth in the availability of the written, inspired word of God in the form of the Gospel records, which were likely starting to appear in written form about this time.

The contrast is surely with how the people had claimed that Herod's voice was the word of God and not of man (:22). Here we see God's extreme sensitivity to attitudes to His word. The point is being made that the mimic of God's word soon fell silent, whereas God's true word grew. Our attitude to God's word in the Bible should reflect His understandable sensitivity to His word; just as we too are sensitive if others pay no attention to what we are saying or our efforts to communicate with them.

12:25 *And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had completed their service*- The AV says that Paul 'fulfilled his ministry'; and he can use the same two words in telling Archippus to ensure that he too fulfils *his* ministry (Col. 4:17). Surely Paul is setting himself up as a pattern, and inviting his brother to follow it. The specific "service" in view was the taking of donations from Antioch to Jerusalem (11:30). Having done this once, it became Paul's desire to do it again, when he attempted to gather donations from Asia for a Jerusalem Poor Fund. The record may be making the point that Paul was in Jerusalem at the time of Peter's deliverance from prison; this experience was intended to cultivate his faith, ready for the times when he would be imprisoned.

Taking with them John whose surname was Mark- The cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10). Some changed their Hebrew names into the Latin forms when they went on mission work into the Roman world: Silas became Silvanus, Saul became Paulus, Joseph Barsabbas became Justus (Acts 1:23); and hence we read of “John, whose other [Latin] name was Mark” (:12,25). We have here an example of becoming all things to all men in our witness to the world.

ACTS CHAPTER 13

13:1 *Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers*- The prophets 'spoke forth' God's word under inspiration, and the teachers relayed, distributed and interpreted this.

Symeon that was called Niger- Perhaps the same person as Simon of Cyrene who carried the cross (Mt. 27:32). Simon is listed here next to Lucius, who was also from Cyrene. The thief and the centurion were likewise converted, and the faith of Joseph, Nicodemus and probably others was brought out into the open by the cross. Like

Samson, the Lord won victories even in His death. The spiritual turn-around in Simon is a type of what is experienced by all whom the Lord compels to carry His cross. He was passing by, going somewhere else, full of his own plans, going about to establish his own righteousness... and then, out of the blue, he was called to what he much later realized was the greatest honour a man could be called to: to accompany the Son of God and carry His cross, right to the end. We are left to imagine him plonking it down, as if to say to Jesus 'Now you've got to do the rest', and then slipping off into the crowd. Cyrene was where there was a strongly orthodox Jewish community (cp. Acts 6:9). Simon was probably dark skinned, "called Niger", a countryman, a simple man, who had perhaps come up to Jerusalem in his zeal to keep Passover. What a comfort it was to the Lord to see a black man carrying His cross; for He had earlier said that all His true followers would carry the cross behind Him (Mt. 10:38; 16:24). The Hebrew writer seemed to see Simon as typical of us all when writing of how we must go out of the city with the Lord, "bearing his reproach" (Heb. 13:12,13, probably using 'reproach' as a parallel to 'the cross'). He would have seen in Simon a prototype of all His future, suffering, humiliated followers; "impressed" by the predestined calling, almost against our will, to carry His cross (Mt. 27:32 RV mg.). And was it accident that this prototype was almost certainly a black man, when perhaps ultimately it may appear that a large proportion of the faithful body of the Lord Jesus will have been black people? If indeed Simon was a black Jew (cp. modern Falashas) who had come up to keep the Passover, it would have been annoying beyond words for him to be made unclean by the blood of the Lord, which was inevitably on the stake after His first attempt at bearing it after His flogging. Not to mention the shame for a zealous Jew in having to carry the cross of this Jesus of Nazareth. Yet it would seem that he was later converted, and he in turn converted his wife and son (Mk. 15:21 cp. Rom. 16:13). Mark rarely records proper nouns, but he makes a special effort to mention that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. It would therefore seem that these men were well known in the early church.

And Lucius of Cyrene- Perhaps one of the men of Cyrene converted at Pentecost (Acts 2:10) who fled to Antioch from the persecution in Jerusalem.

And Manaen the foster-brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul- The mention of Herod's title was perhaps to demonstrate how the Gospel had spread amongst the elite, and also within the circles of those who had been so bitterly opposed to it. This is a tacit reference to the immense power of the message.

13:2 - see on Acts 18:18.

And as they ministered to the Lord- All spiritual endeavour leads to the Lord inviting us deeper into that endeavour; thus it was *as* Barnabus and Paul went about their ministering to the Lord that they were invited to go on a missionary journey (Acts 13:2). Likewise it was *as* the Levites were in process of collecting funds for repairing the temple, that they found the book of the law- perhaps because they needed more space in which to store the donations, and whilst making space they found the scroll (2 Chron. 34:14).

And fasted- Perhaps for guidance as to how to further progress the Lord's work. For the response to this fasting was to call Barnabas and Saul to go forth. Have you fasted for such guidance in your own ministry?

The Holy Spirit said: Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul- Paul uses the same word to describe how he had been 'set apart' for his missionary work from before creation (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:15). Now the time had come for that ancient plan to be realized. But Paul had the freewill not to respond to it. He was not bound to go forth in his missionary work just because it had been planned from the beginning. There are

for each of us good works prepared for us to execute in our lives (Eph. 4:10), but we do them by our own freewill. There are many such works, and many individuals, who do not respond. And in this must be the tragedy of God; that He has arranged the potential for us to perform or achieve much for Him, which is not performed because of our dysfunction or unbelief. We are never better than when we are fluently responding, open to God's intentions for us, and sensing His willing us forward in the service He intended for us.

For the work- Paul appropriates the words of Hab. 1:5 LXX to his work of preaching: "I *work a work* in your days, which ye will in no wise believe though *a man* declare it unto you". And so when we read of the *men* Barnabas and Saul being sent out on the *work* of the first missionary journey, we are to see an allusion back to Hab. 1:5 (Acts 13:2; 14:26). And yet that passage went on to say that the work would not be believed. Yet hoping against hope, they embarked on the missionary journey. Cyprus didn't respond, initially- as they had expected. But soon their positive spirit was rewarded, and converts were made, against all odds.

Unto which I have called them- In Acts 16:10, the same word is used of how Paul proved or concluded that he had been called to preach the Gospel to Gentiles. The implication could be that he somehow doubted his calling- he would far rather have been the apostle to the Jews. Later in this exposition I seek to demonstrate that Paul struggled with his calling as the apostle to the Gentiles, preferring rather to fill Peter's role. The parable of the talents suggests the Lord has specific hopes and callings for each of us, and man is never better than when he is working at those callings with the Lord's every support and blessing.

13:3 *Then, when they had fasted and prayed*- It was as they did those things that the Lord opened the way for Barnabas and Saul to depart on their missionary journey. Yet the process continued. This is the spirit in which we should live life in His service.

And laid their hands on them, they sent them away- The next verse says that they were "sent forth by the Holy Spirit" (:4), thus drawing a parallel between the "prophets and teachers" in Antioch and the Holy Spirit. Whilst we do not have the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, it is also so that we are to walk in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25), following the Lord's leading in His service. The laying hands upon the missionaries may therefore have been more than simply expressing unity with them, but could have been a granting of Holy Spirit to them, empowering them for the task ahead of them. In the Old Testament, hands were laid upon the sacrificial animals as a sign of identity, and we should not think that every 'laying on of hands' was in order to impart a blessing of Holy Spirit power; it was also simply an act of identity with the person.

13:4 *So they, being sent forth by the Holy Spirit*- See on :3.

Went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus- Judaism spoke of going up to Jerusalem and going down from it. But that concept is now transferred to Antioch, the centre of the early Christian mission at this time. This is another hint that Jerusalem was no longer the 'mecca' of God's people.

From Seleucia, Cyprus would have been visible from there on a clear day. So far as we know, the Holy Spirit had stated that there was a specific work for Barnabas, Saul and John Mark to do; but it's unclear to what extent they had to work out the plans and itinerary on their own initiative. Seeing that Cyprus was visible from Seleucia, it might have seemed the obvious first destination in an attempt to take the Gospel over the seas. And Barnabas was from there; perhaps they concluded that this was the logical overseas destination for the Gospel.

13:5- see on Acts 4:24-30.

And when they were at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God- Literally, the *logos* of God, which is the Lord Jesus. "The word of God" was a common Old Testament term for the prophetic word spoken through the prophets, but that had now come to a climax in the word about Jesus.

In the synagogues of the Jews- The movement of the Spirit was clearly for Saul to go "far hence unto the Gentiles", but he immediately begins his missionary work on arrival at the capital, Salamis, as he sadly continued it- with a stubborn obsession with preaching to the Jews, when this was Peter's work.

They had also John to assist them- Gk. 'to be their minister'. There was typically a minister or assistant attached to the synagogues, and so the impression may be that Saul and Barnabas were effectively taking over as the rabbis of the synagogues, and John Mark was their minister. Or perhaps the idea is that Saul preached as a Rabbi, and John Mark was his minister.

13:6 *And when they had gone through the whole island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet*- Perhaps to point out that the predictions of Luke 21 about the scenario in the last days was being fulfilled. He claimed to be "Bar Jesus", literally 'son of Jesus'; perhaps he actually purported to be the returned Jesus. Such a false Christ and false prophet surely met the terms of the Olivet Prophecy; again we see that the conditions were ripe for the Lord's return, but He didn't come because the human factors failed. Israel didn't repent, and the church became divided and lacking the Spirit. We must ask whether our last days will be different.

A Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus- Again we sense the focus, if not obsession, with engaging with Jews; see on :5.

13:7 *Who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of understanding*- See on 13:12 *The proconsul... believed*.

The same summoned Barnabas and Saul, and sought to hear the word of God- We can speculate that through Sergius Paulus trying to get the preachers into trouble with the proconsul, the Gospel was preached on a high level and with success. For Elymas was "with" Sergius Paulus, as if he had influence over him; and therefore under this influence, Sergius Paulus summoned the missionaries. But the plan of Elymas badly backfired; encouragement that no weapon formed against the work of the Gospel will ultimately succeed.

13:8 *But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) opposed them*- The scene is reminiscent of Satan, the Arabic adversary of the Jews, standing before the Angel with Joshua-Jesus the priest standing on the other (Zech. 3:1,2). The impression is given of the proconsul being preached to by Paul, whilst Elymas tried to persuade him otherwise. The similarity is appropriate because "Elymas" appears to be an Arabic word, from the Arabic *elim*, 'the wise', and he was likely an Arab. The scene also recalls the Egyptian magicians 'opposing' Moses before Pharaoh.

Seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith- The same Greek word is found in :10, where Elymas is accused of 'perverting' the "right ways of the Lord". The word seems to specifically mean to misinterpret; we have the impression that as Paul preached to the proconsul, Elymas stood there eagerly saying 'Ah, but what they really mean by that is *this*...'. These two verses state that both the listener [Sergius Paulus] and the message were 'perverted'. The listener is thus identified with the message; as in the parable of the sower, the Gospel takes lodgement within a person, and they become identified with it.

13:9 *But Saul, who is also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fastened his eyes on him*- It can be no accident that Saul appears to have changed his name to

‘Paul’, “the little one”, at the time of his first missionary journey. His preaching of the Gospel was thus related to his own realization of sinfulness, as reflected in his name change. And so it has ever been. Saul becomes Paul in so many lives. True self-abnegation, recognition of our moral bankruptcy, our desperation, and the extent of the grace we have received… these two paradoxical aspects, fused together within the very texture of human personality, are what will arrest the attention of others in this world and lead them to the Truth we can offer them.

Saul and Paul
Various expositors have noticed the links between Saul and Paul. "Is Saul also among the prophets?" was directly matched by 'Is Saul of Tarsus also among the Christians?'. The way Paul was let down through a window to escape persecution was surely to remind him of what King Saul had done to David (1 Sam. 19:12). They were both Benjamites, and perhaps his parents saw him as following in Saul's footsteps. And it seems Paul was aware of this. The implication is that by Acts 13:9 Paul consciously changed his name from Saul to Paul ('the little one'). It is difficult to avoid seeing the link with 1 Sam. 15:17: " When thou wast little (Heb. 'the littlest one') in thine own sight", God anointed Saul and made him the *rosh*, the chief, over Israel. Maybe Paul's parents intended him to be the *rosh* over Israel; and it seems he would have made it had he not been converted. I suggest that 1 Sam. 15:17 rung in Paul's mind. He saw how he had persecuted Christ, as Saul had David. He saw the self-will within him as it was in Saul. Yet he went on to see the tragedy, the utter tragedy, of that man. He saw how pride had destroyed a man who could have achieved so much for God. And he determined that he would learn the lesson from Saul's failure (as he determined to learn the lessons from those of John the Baptist and Peter). So he changed his name to Paul, the little one. What influence his sustained meditation on one Old Testament verse had upon him! It affected some basic decisions in his life; e.g. the decision to change his name. There was a time, according to the Hebrew text of 1 Sam. 15:17, when Saul felt he was 'the littlest one' (as demonstrated in 1 Sam. 9:21; 10:22). This was so, so pleasing to God. Saul at that moment, captured as it were in a snapshot, as the obvious, anointed King of Israel hid among the baggage, knowing in his heart he was no way suited to be the leader of God's Israel, was Paul's hero. And Paul alludes to it when he says he is less than the *least* of all saints, *least* of the apostles, chief of sinners (1 Cor. 15:9; Eph. 3:8; 1 Tim. 1:15- note the progressive realisation of his sinfulness over time). He earnestly resolved to be like Saul was at the beginning. When he describes himself as "anointed" (2 Cor. 1:21) he surely had his eye on 1 Sam. 15:17 again; when Saul was little in his own eyes, he was anointed. Paul tried to learn the lessons from Saul, and re-apply Saul's characteristics in a righteous context. Thus Saul was jealous (1 Sam. 18:8; 19:1), and Paul perhaps had his eye on this when he describes himself as jealous for the purity of the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:2). "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19) is surely a reference back to Saul's *dis*obedience (1 Sam. 15:22).

13:10 *And said, You son of the devil*- The Jewish religious leaders were “of your father the Devil” (Jn. 8:44). This would explain the Lord’s description of Judas as a Devil (Jn. 6:70) because the Jewish Devil had entered him and conceived, making him a ‘Devil’ also. In the space of a few verses, we read the Lord Jesus saying that “the Devil” is a “liar” – and then stating that His Jewish opponents were “liars” (Jn. 8:44,55). These are the only places where the Lord uses the word “liar” – clearly enough He identified those Jews with “the Devil”. If the Jews’ father was the Devil,

then ‘the Devil’ was a fitting description of them too. They were a “generation of (gendered by) vipers”, alluding back to the serpent in Eden, which epitomized “the Devil”; “that old serpent, called (i.e. being similar to) the Devil and Satan” (Rev. 12:9). In the same way as Judas became a Devil, the “false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-Jesus” is called a “son of the Devil” (Acts 13:6,10), which description makes him an embodiment of the Jewish opposition to the Gospel.

"You son of the Devil" is implying he was a tare sown among the wheat (Mt. 13:38).

You enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and all villainy, will you not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?- Just as the preaching of the Gospel was to make straight paths for the Messiah to come (Lk. 3:4), so we are to make *our* paths straight (Heb. 12:13)- as if somehow we are the Lord Jesus; His revelation to this world at the second coming will in a sense be our revelation. Hence the final visions of Revelation speak of the Lord's second coming in terms which are applicable to the community of those in Him [e.g. a city of people coming down from Heaven to earth]. John’s preaching was in order to make [s.w. ‘to bring forth fruit’] His [the Lord’s] paths straight- but the ways of the Lord are “right” [s.w. “straight”] anyway (Acts 13:10). So how could John’s preaching make the Lord’s ways straight / right, when they already are? God is so associated with His people that their straightness or crookedness reflects upon Him; for they are His witnesses in this world. His ways are their ways. This is the N.T. equivalent of the O.T. concept of keeping / walking in the way of the Lord (Gen. 18:19; 2 Kings 21:22). Perhaps this is the thought behind the exhortation of Heb. 12:13 to make straight paths for our own feet. We are to bring our ways into harmony with the Lord’s ways; for He is to be us, His ways our ways. Thus Is. 40:3, which is being quoted in Lk. 3:4, speaks of “Prepare ye the way *of the Lord*”, whereas Is. 62:10 speaks of “Prepare ye the way *of the people*”. Yet tragically, the way / path of Israel was not the way / path of the Lord (Ez. 18:25).

"The right ways" is literally, the straight streets. The same word is used of the street called "Straight" where Paul was baptized (Acts 9:11). That street was chosen in order to demonstrate to Paul how his new life was to be walked along a straight way or street, towards the Kingdom; remembering how John the Baptist's mission had been to make straight [s.w.] the Lord's paths or roads (Mt. 3:3).

13:11 *And now, the hand of the Lord is upon you and you shall be blind*- This foreshadowed how the rejected will be sent to a mist of darkness (2 Pet. 2:17). Thick darkness is associated with God's judgment (Is. 8:22; Joel 2:2; Zeph. 1:15)- and recall how the judgment of darkness upon Egypt was so severe that human movement required 'groping' (Ex. 10:21). Perhaps there will be a literal element to this in the experience of the rejected. Be that as it may, the utter *pointlessness* of life without God will be so bitterly apparent. And yet they would not face up to it in their day of opportunity.

Not seeing the sun for a time. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness, and he went about seeking someone to lead him by the hand- It is possible that this was so that he had to be led by the hand (Acts 13:11); it is all so reminiscent of Paul’s own experience in 9:8 that it would seem he was consciously seeking to replicate his own conversion in the life of another man. And this is, indeed, the very essence of preaching from a grateful heart. He saw the power that worked in Him as working in all of us (Eph. 3:7,20). Paul wishes that the Colossians would be “filled with the knowledge of his will” (Col. 1:9), just as at his conversion he had been chosen so “that you should know his will” (Acts 22:14). He wanted them to share the

radical nature of conversion which he had gone through; the sense of life turned around; of new direction.

13:12 *Then the proconsul, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord*- Paul's name change from Saul to Paul occurred whilst in Cyprus- where he met Sergius Paulus and preached the Gospel to him (Acts 13:7). It would seem that Paul took the name of this Gentile to represent how his work with the Gentiles had become so fundamentally a part of him. From there, Paul went to Antioch and preached there. Why did he do that? Bruce Chilton has pointed out that there is archaeological evidence in Antioch that Sergius Paulus of Cyprus was in fact from there and there are plaques and inscriptions recording how he had funded things in the town (Bruce Chilton, *Rabbi Paul: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Random House, 2005) p. 117). The guess is that this man became Paul's patron for a while, and sent him to preach the Gospel to his family in Antioch; hence, as the custom was, Saul of Tarsus took the name of his patron. And perhaps reflecting upon how this was all so providential in spreading the Gospel to the Gentiles, Saul kept that name. The providence of the situation becomes the more interesting when we reflect that as a Roman Governor, bound to perform pagan rituals and be loyal to Caesar, Sergius Paulus may never himself have accepted the faith. The way John Mark returned to Jerusalem at this point (Acts 13:13) may simply be because he considered that all this was too much- following what appeared to be a whim of chance and calling it God's hand. For Antioch [not Antioch on the Orontes] was in the backwoods of Asia Minor, and it would've seemed crazy to go into such a distant and insignificant area all because of a 'chance' meeting with a generous Roman Governor.

13:13- see on Acts 6:1.

Now Paul and his company set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John left them and returned to Jerusalem- John Mark was an example of one 'brought up in it' (almost) who made it real for himself in the very end. His mother Mary owned the home where the first ecclesia met in Jerusalem- he would have known all the leading lights, the doubts, the joys, the fears, the debates of the early church. Barnabas was his kindly uncle, who took him on the first missionary journey with Paul. Cyprus was OK, but once they landed at Perga, Paul insisted on leaving the coast road and going up the dangerous road to preach on the uplands; and Mark quit, scared perhaps to risk his life that far. And so he went back to his mum in Jerusalem, and the safety of the home ecclesia. And no doubt he was warmly welcomed home, as the Jerusalem ecclesia by then were beginning to consider Paul as apostate. But over the months, things changed. John Mark wanted to go again, and his uncle Barnabas encouraged him. But Paul would have none of it. That rejection must have sorely hurt Mark; and we hear nothing more of him for about 15 years. Then, when Paul was in prison, he starts to get mentioned. He is called there Paul's "fellow-prisoner" (Col. 4:10), as if he too had been imprisoned for his bold preaching. To Philemon, Paul writes that Mark is his "fellow-worker"; and in his last days, he begs Mark to come and see him (2 Tim. 4:9-11). Peter also, probably writing likewise from Rome ["Babylon"] mentions Mark as his "son" (1 Pet. 5:13), and tradition has it that Mark wrote down Peter's Gospel. So the young brother who possibly had been made flabby by the nice background, eventually made it real for himself in the end.

13:14 *But they, passing through from Perga, came to Antioch of Pisidia; and they went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day*- This again sounds as if this focus upon the Jews was customary for Paul. And yet the work to which he had been called by

the Holy Spirit was specifically to the Gentiles (:2). But in tension with that, Paul's obsession with Israel comes out repeatedly. Maybe this has something to do with how this verse opens with "But...".

And sat down- The cameraman is as it were zoomed up close upon them. Or perhaps the significance of their 'sitting down' was that they sat down as if they were members of Judaism, exercising their rights.

13:15 *And after the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent for them, saying*- The synagogues read the Law and prophets according to a reading planner, rather like *The Bible Companion.* Paul's opening words refer to Dt. 1:31 LXX, which was the lesson for the 44th Sabbath in the year, around July / August; the corresponding second lesson from "the prophets" for that Sabbath was from Is. 1:1-27, from which Paul also quotes when he alludes to Is. 1:2 LXX.

Brothers- They treat Paul as if he is one of them. The invitation to give such a major discourse could have been because Paul purposefully gave the impression that he was still an orthodox thinking Jewish rabbi- see on *And sat down* (:14). Much of the Jewish anger with Paul was because he later turned out to not be Judaist any longer, despite giving that impression in order to get an audience with them. If he had focused on his Divinely given mission to the Gentiles, he wouldn't have got into all these kinds of problems.

If you have any word of encouragement for the people, speak- 'Barnabas' meant 'Son of encouragement', so it would seem likely that the synagogue elders knew of his presence and were kindly alluding to it. One wonders if [contrary to what I have just suggested above] these elders were in fact Messianic believers in Jesus, or at least sympathetic to that Way. That would explain the rather odd description of them 'sending' *[apostello]* to Paul and Barnabas to give a word of encouragement to the congregation. Perhaps there was a veiled allusion to the Lord Jesus being the consolation [s.w. 'encouragement'] of Israel (Lk. 2:25).

13:16 *And Paul stood up and beckoning with the hand, said*- The same words used about Peter (Acts 12:17). Luke seems to be developing the parallels between Paul and Peter; but it is also possible that Paul is emulating Peter.

You men of Israel and you that fear God- Referring to the 'God fearers', the Gentile proselytes. Paul's sensitivity to this group may be reflected in his opening reference to "this people" rather than 'our people'; we can imagine Paul saying this whilst looking at the benches where the Gentile proselytes were sitting. Paul also directs his words to the Jews, by speaking of "our fathers"; thus modelling for us an inclusive approach in our witness and teaching.

Listen- The idea of the Greek is an appeal to understand, to 'get it'. The early brethren preached looking for a response. They were preaching toward decision, for conversion. The Lord taught us that He will make His followers fishers of men; and fishers catch something, they aren't fishermen if they just offer a bait indifferently. Paul taught that his hearers should repent and turn to God and do works meet for repentance (Acts 26:20). The address in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia has three parts, each marked by an appeal to the listeners. Clearly it has been planned in advance, and was an appeal for response (Acts 13:16,26,38). These preachers weren't shy in asking men and women to decide for or against the love of God in Jesus. They challenged men to do something about the message they had heard.

13:17 *The God of this people Israel chose our fathers*- Paul's entire speech is based upon Stephen's in Acts 7 [see commentary there]. It was that witness from

Stephen which had converted Saul / Paul; and he reflects that fact by likewise witnessing to others.

And exalted the people when they sojourned in the land of Egypt, and with a high arm He led them out of it- The prophets are clear that Israel worshipped idols in Egypt, and were not very responsive to God's salvation plans for them. The reference to exalting them therefore draws attention to God's grace towards Israel.

13:18 *For about the time of forty years*- See on :19 *About four hundred and fifty years.*

As a nursing father He carried them in the wilderness- Another reading is 'He suffered their manners in the wilderness' [as AV]. This would again be drawing attention to God's patient grace towards His people. But the allusion to Dt. 1:31 LXX encourages us to follow the 'As a nursing father' option. The idea of a father carrying and feeding his baby child is one which creates sympathy for the father; and Paul may have this in mind. For he was going on to appeal to Israel to consider that they had slain God's only begotten Son.

13:19 *And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan*- There were ten nations in the land (Gen. 15:19-21), but seven of them were destroyed (Dt. 7:1). This combination of ten and seven is repeated throughout the descriptions of the latter day beast dominating the land of Israel with seven heads and ten horns (Rev. 12:3; 13:1; 17:3,7). I suggest that this means that not all of the ten horns will conflict with Israel; perhaps only seven of the ten nation confederacy dominating latter day Israel will be destroyed.

He gave them their land for an inheritance, for about four hundred and fifty years- There are times when the Spirit uses very approximate numbers rather than exact ("about four hundred and fifty years", Acts 13:20 cp. 1 Kings 6:1, which gives four hundred and eighty years, although the LXX there says 440- hence "about 450 years"). Sometimes the Bible is not precise. Under inspiration, the Hebrew writer seems to have forgotten the exact quotation, or to have been deliberately vague, when he speaks of "one in a certain place testified" (Heb. 2:6). The reference to "seventy" in Judges 9:56 also doesn't seem exact. Seven and a half years (2 Sam. 2:11) becomes "seven years" (1 Kings 2:11); three months and ten days (2 Chron. 36:9) becomes "three months" (2 Kings 24:8). And 1 Kings 7:23 gives the circumference of the laver as “thirty cubits”, although it was ten cubits broad. Taking ‘pi’ to be 3.14, it is apparent that the circumference would have been 31.4 cubits; but the Spirit says, summing up, “thirty”. Surely this is to show that God is God, not man. His word is not contradictory, but in ensuring this, God does not sink down to the level of a man who wanted to produce an apparently faultless book, carefully ensuring that every figure exactly tallied. He has a spiritual culture much higher than this. And this is behind the many Bible paradoxes which we meet. The reading of the AV suggests judges were given for a period of about 450 years. Other readings are as in the NEV. Significantly, the period from the call of Abraham to the death of Joshua was likewise 450 years, suggesting that God works according to a plan and structures 'ages' according to a masterplan which climaxed in His Son (Heb. 1:1,2).

13:20 *And after these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet*- The judges all made the deliverances they did because they themselves made the effort to deliver Israel. But their freewill was worked through by God, who raised up or "gave them" these judges. Here again we see the perfect synthesis between Divine will and human freewill.

13:21 *And afterwards they asked for a king; and God gave to them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin*- God responds to human desire, even if the

desire is wrong. He gives us our heart's desire. And all the desire of Israel was upon Saul (1 Sam. 9:20). This is something more than a deep respect for human freewill on God's part. The fact is that we are confirmed in our desires; those who love the things of God's Kingdom above all else shall surely be there. If a place in the Kingdom is truly "all our hope and desire", it shall be granted. "All them that love His appearing" and in their hearts long and wait for Him- shall not be disappointed. This feature of God's dealings with men means that spiritual mindedness is of uppermost importance. What we really desire in our heart of hearts, our dominant desire, shall be granted. And God gave them a King whom He foreknew and told Israel would be bad for them. But He respected their desire.

For the space of forty years- The OT doesn't mention how long Saul reigned. Paul inserts this detail perhaps to demonstrate how God had given Israel various periods of testing and opportunity- for in :18 he mentions that they were 40 years in the wilderness. The period is realistic because Saul's son was 40 when he was placed on the throne when Saul died (2 Sam. 2:10).

13:22 *And when He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, to whom also He bare witness and said: I have found David the son of Jesse*- The 'removal' was when God 'raised up' David. But that point was some time before Saul's death. God makes a plan, decrees a course of action, but there is often a gap until it is fulfilled. He thus describes Himself as both planning and fulfilling His plans. That gap is perhaps to enable repentance even at an apparently late stage.

A man after My own heart, who shall do all My will- Perhaps David was only after God's own heart at the time Samuel anointed him? David was, in God's opinion, a man after His own heart, who fulfilled all His will. Yet this is the God whose ways are not, and cannot be, ours. Yet this is how humble He is, and how positive His view of a faithful servant. We also note that not all men do [or "fulfil"] God's will. He searches for and 'finds' men who will. God's will is revealed in His word- which is why attention to the Bible is so important. The Lord Jesus is often described as the one who did the Father's will (the same Greek words are used- Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 9:31).

13:23 *Of this man's seed*- The false doctrine of the physical 'pre-existence' of Christ before birth makes a nonsense of the repeated promises that he would be the *descendant* of Eve, Abraham and David. The early preachers emphasized that Jesus was "of David's posterity" [Gk. s*permatos*- Acts 2:29-31; 13:23; Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8]. If He were already existing up in heaven at the time of these promises, God would have been incorrect in promising these people a descendant who *would be* Messiah.

Has God according to His promise- The promise to David is not specifically cited here. What has just been quoted is God's comment upon David, that he would fulfil all His will, seeing he would have the mind of God. Perhaps Paul took this as meaning that as David was imperfect, therefore that comment was effectively a promise that a seed of David would fulfil the requirements of having the mind of God [which Paul says the Lord Jesus did, in Phil. 2] and fulfilling God's will- which the Lord did to an ultimate extent (the same Greek words are used about Him- Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 9:31). Ezekiel's prophecies about "David" ruling over God's people at the restoration clearly mean 'one of the seed of David', and Paul may be reasoning in the same way here.

Raised up to Israel a Saviour, Jesus- This 'raising up' of Jesus began at the end of John's ministry (:24) and therefore doesn't specifically refer to the Lord's resurrection, although there is clearly the hint of that too.

13:24 *After John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance*- Paul's mention of John in Acts 13:24,25 apparently adds nothing to his argument; it seems out of context. But it surely indicates the degree to which John was never far below the surface in Paul's thinking. Having been raised in Jerusalem, surely Paul as a young man would have heard John's preaching. It was the source of the goads against which he later kicked. Paul alluded to some parts of the Gospels much more than others, and an example of this is the way in which he alluded so extensively to the passages related to John the Baptist. I would suggest that the reason for this is that he saw John as somehow his hero, one for whom he had a deep respect. In doing so he was sharing the estimation of his Lord, who also saw John as one of the greatest believers. There are many 'unconscious' links between Paul's writings and the records of John, indicating how deeply the example and words of John were in Paul's mind (e.g. Mt. 3:7 = 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9; Jn. 3:31 = 1 Cor. 15:47). Or consider how John said that wicked Jewry would be "hewn down" (Mt. 3:10); Paul uses the very same word to describe how the Jewish branches had now been "cut off" (Rom. 11:22,24). Paul saw himself as being like the best man, who had betrothed the believers to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2,3)- just as John had described himself as the friend of the bridegroom (Jn. 3:28).

To all the people of Israel- This usage of "all" is hardly literal. If John's witness was counted as reaching "all Israel", we can understand the fulfilment of the great commission as likewise meaning that the Gospel must go to *people from* all nations, rather than to every individual.

As John preached repentance with a deep sense of his own unworthiness, so did Paul, with exactly that same sense (Acts 13:24,25 = 17:3; 20:21; 26:20).

13:25 *And as John was fulfilling his ministry, he said: Who do you suppose I am? I am not he! But look, there comes one after me*- It could be argued that John's ministry failed, in that people did not widely accept Jesus as Messiah but crucified Him. John's ministry was as children sitting in the marketplace appealing for Israel to mourn, but they would not. And yet John played the part he was called to play, and in this sense he fulfilled his ministry. Many ministries or lives may appear to have failed, but actually the believer played their part and fulfilled their ministry. The response of others, or success or failure of response to our message, doesn't of itself indicate whether we fulfilled our ministry or not.

The shoes of whose feet I am not worthy to untie- To untie another's sandals was an idiom for being his forerunner or herald. So John is not denying that he was the one who untied the Lord's sandals- but he is saying that he was not worthy to do the work he did. This is exactly the kind of humility to be associated with all witness work.

13:26 *Brothers, children of the stock of Abraham, and those among you that fear God, to us*- Here, and several times in this sermon, Paul seems to be repeating Peter's style of 3:17. He was deeply impressed by Peter; the question is whether he followed his example out of humble deference, or partly because he pretended to Peter's chosen role as the apostle to the Jews.

Is the word of this salvation sent- 'The *logos* of this Jesus'. That the Lord Jesus personally is in view here is confirmed by the next verse talking of how the Jews "knew Him not" and 'condemned Him' (:27). The personal pronoun is usually used after the person has been defined. The 'he' in verse 27 clearly refers to Jesus; and so the reference to Him is surely here in :26 in the phrase "the word of this salvation". Acts 10:36 speaks of the Lord Jesus as the word sent from God.

13:27 Consider the intensity of allusion to the records of Christ's death and resurrection in Acts 13:27-38:

Acts	Gospels
13:27	Lk. 24:27
13:28	Mt. 27:72; Mk. 15:13
13:29	Mt. 27:59
13:30	Mt. 28:6
13:38	Lk. 24:47

Thus Paul's early recorded preaching was basically a commentary on the Gospel records of Christ's death and resurrection (as was Peter's).

For they that dwell in Jerusalem and their rulers- This phrase is used in Acts about those responsible for the Lord's death who then repented (Acts 1:19; 2:5,14; 4:16). This group are therefore being held up as an example to the Jews in the synagogue where Paul was preaching.

Because they knew Him not, nor the voices of the prophets- Jesus personally is paralleled with the word of the prophets; for as explained under :26 *The word of this salvation,* Jesus is being presented as the word of the Jewish prophets made flesh. Paul was preaching just after the reading of the prophets- and he was seeking to persuade his audience that the words just read had become flesh in the person of Jesus. He speaks of their "voices" rather than merely their words. They had heard the words, but not felt and perceived that these were the actual voices of men who being dead yet speak. They didn't *feel* the wonder of inspiration in their attitude to Bible study- even though they would have devoutly upheld the position that the Bible texts were inspired. And here we have a lesson for ourselves. See Rom. 9:27; Jn. 5:39.

Which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him- Paul was preaching at a time when the voices of the prophets had just been read in the synagogue- he was appealing to his audience to be different from the respected Jerusalem Jews, who had heard the same readings read, and yet condemned God's Son to death. Paul was ever quick to press home the similarities between his present audience and previous precedents.

13:28 *And though they found no cause of death in Him*- Saul / Paul would have taken intense legal interest in the trial. He was fully aware that in fact they did claim that there was a cause for death; He was "guilty of death" for blasphemy (Mt. 26:66), and on this legal basis they asked Pilate to execute Him: "We have a law, and by our law He ought to die" (Jn. 19:7). Paul says the opposite- that they found no cause of death in Him. Paul is not making any mistake here- rather is he correctly reading the hearts of the Jews. They knew there was no cause of death in Jesus- although they said that there was. Paul is seeking to demonstrate that the voice of inner knowledge and conscience is so easily overridden by group think, by psychological obsession rooted in jealousy, by the power of conservatism, the terror of realizing we have been seriously wrong, the desperate clinging to pride... And he realized that the same subconscious psychological battle was going on in the minds of those listening to him. And he warns them through drawing attention to those who had likewise refused to accept Jesus as Messiah.

They asked Pilate to have him slain- The Greek means to earnestly beg. The only other three occurrences of this idea of 'begging Pilate' are all about Joseph begging Pilate for the Lord's body (Mt. 27:58; Mk. 15:43; Lk. 23:52). Yet Joseph was a Sanhedrin counsellor, one of those who had condemned the Lord to death- for although he didn't agree with it, the Sanhedrin decision was unanimous (Mk. 14:64). So Joseph was one of those who on face value begged Pilate to crucify the Lord; and

yet also begged Pilate for His body, something only done by closest family, and a sign of Joseph's public identification with Jesus and His cause. This continues the theme developed in commentary on the first half of this verse :28. A person can say or do something when in fact their inner convictions are otherwise. Both Joseph and the Jerusalem leadership knew in their hearts that Jesus was innocent and actually the Messiah. But they acted otherwise. Paul is speaking here to Jews assembled in synagogue. He knew there were many similarly struggling hearts before him in the audience, and his use of psychology and history in making his appeal is masterful.

13:29 *And when they had fulfilled all things that were written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb*- The "they" who did this amounts to Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, whom I have argued in commentary on :28 were in Paul's mind in his flow of thought at this point.

13:30 *But God raised him from the dead*- This is a bald statement of fact. Paul gives no evidence; and he is not recorded here as mentioning the obvious fact that he himself had met the risen Jesus on the Damascus road. This would be another example of where evidence is not required for faith; the simple facts of the Gospel are powerful of themselves to persuade the hearers.

13:31 *And he was seen for many days by those that came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people*- It is worth putting together two passages, both from Luke: “The women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after…” (Lk. 23:55); and Acts 13:30,31: “God raised him from the dead and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, and they are now his witnesses”. Surely Paul and Luke have in mind here the ministering women. They had followed from Galilee to Jerusalem, the risen Lord had appeared to a woman first of all, and now those women were witnessing to the people. Perhaps 1 Cor. 15:3-7 is relevant here, where we read that the Lord appeared after His resurrection to the twelve, and yet on another occasion to “all the apostles”- perhaps referring to the group that included the women. An empty tomb was no proof that Jesus of Nazareth had risen- unless there were witnesses there present at that empty tomb who could testify also that it was in that very tomb that Jesus had been laid. And only women, not men, were witnesses of this. The Greek world placed great emphasis upon sight- “Eyes are surer witnesses than ears”, Heraclitus said. They related to the past visually; for a group of people to be eyewitnesses was considered conclusive. Hence the enormous significance of the way in which the Gospels repeatedly make the women the subjects of verbs of seeing (Mt. 27:55; Mk. 15:40; Lk. 23:49,55). They were the eyewitnesses.

13:32 *We bring you good news*- The Gospel is stated to be in the promises made to the Jewish fathers, just as Paul states in Gal. 3:8. The good news, or Gospel, was strictly speaking in the fulfilment of the promises, through the resurrection of Christ. It is a knowledge of that reality, rather than of the wording of the ancient promises of it, which is the essence of the Gospel.

Of the promise made to the fathers- Paul saw a singular promise as having been made to all the Jewish fathers; and it had its fulfilment in the Lord's resurrection.

13:33 *That God has fulfilled the same*- There was a degree to which the promises to Abraham were fulfilled in the Lord's resurrection. This is not to say that they have no fuller realization in the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth in the future. But their fulfilment in the Lord's resurrection was surely in that the promised "blessing" to all peoples was actualized through that event; for the "blessing" is interpreted in Acts 3:25,26 and Galatians 3 as the spiritual blessing of forgiveness and grace. And here in

:34 we have an explicit connection made between the Lord's resurrection and "blessings".

To our children- AV "To us their children". If the other textual reading is correct, are we to suppose that Paul had children?

In that He resurrected Jesus. As also it is written in the second Psalm: You are My Son, this day have I begotten you- This text has multiple fulfilments in the New Testament; proof enough that prophetic fulfilments are not singular. Bible prophecy can have multiple fulfilments.

13:34 *And as for the fact that He raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken in this way: I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David*- See on 13:33 *God has fulfilled the same.* The blessings associated with David are surely the blessings of grace and forgiveness; for he speaks of himself in reflecting "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity" (Ps. 32:1), and this is applied to all who believe in Christ in Romans 4. The quotation is from Is. 55:3, which offers the returning exiles a new covenant of forgiveness and radical, gracious acceptance- described as "the sure blessings [LXX] of David". That new covenant was spurned by Judah, and yet can be accepted by us today. It could be that Paul and Isaiah are using "David" in the way it is used in the restoration prophecies of Ezekiel and in Jer. 30:9, where it refers to David's promised Son, the Messiah. Or it could be that the blessings of David refer to the promise made to him of Messiah, whose eternal Kingdom on earth would only be possible through the extension of grace and mercy to those who would inhabit it. The 'setting up' of David's seed in resurrection was part of the blessings of David, and so these blessings can be said to have come true on account of the Lord's resurrection.

Not seeing corruption was humanly achieved by the huge amount of spices used in the burial of the Lord Jesus. Some have complained that the weight of spices was more than even used to bury the Caesars. This extravagant freewill outpouring of love and respect for the crucified Lord was therefore the way the Father used to fulfil His prophetic word.

13:35 *Because He said also in another Psalm: You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption*- Paul's reasoning and usage of Psalm 16 is identical to that of Peter in his Pentecost address in Acts 2:29-31. There is good reason to think that Paul heard that speech live; and it was one of the goads in his conscience which the Lord asked him to stop going against. Paul's humility is seen in the way that he learned from fisherman Peter, and had clearly reflected upon Peter's line of argument.

13:36 *For David, after he had in his own generation served the will of God, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers, and saw corruption*- The AV suggests that David served his own generation, according to God's will. We wonder why Paul mentioned this. Perhaps the idea is as expressed in Hebrews- that the Lord Jesus serves not only one generation because of his mortality; rather, His resurrection to immortality makes Him the eternal "servant" of all generations. The Lord had had to remind the Jews that David was inferior to Messiah, because Judaism had a tendency to reason that Moses and David were in any case greater than the Messiah figure (Lk. 20:44). Paul does the same here, pointing out the inferiority of David to Messiah.

13:37 *But he whom God raised up saw no corruption*- As noted on :36, the superiority of Messiah over David had to be emphasized to a Jewish audience. The 'not seeing corruption' does not have to refer to the Lord's physical body being somehow preserved from corruption by embalming. He saw / experienced no corruption after His resurrection because He was immortalized. Psalm 16 expresses David's personal hope of resurrection out of the grave, where he envisaged "my flesh

shall rest in hope" (Ps. 16:9). But he understands this as being possible because of what he writes in Ps. 16:10: "For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, neither will You allow Your holy one to see corruption". "My soul" and the Messianic "holy one" are related, paralleled, but not identical. David would not remain in the grave because Yahweh's Holy One, Messiah, would not see corruption. David did "see corruption", as Paul and Peter state clearly. But David perceived that through identity with his great son, Messiah, he would be resurrected on account of Messiah's salvation from death. And we make that association through baptism into His death and resurrection. We too, as well as David, can therefore have remission of sins and resurrection proclaimed to us in the Gospel (:38).

13:38 *Therefore, be it known to you, brothers, that through this man is proclaimed to you the remission of sins*- The preaching of the man Paul was in effect the preaching of the man Christ Jesus. Because the Lord's resurrection enabled forgiveness of sins (1 Cor. 15:17), Peter therefore on this basis makes an appeal for repentance and appropriation of the Lord's work for men through baptism into His death and resurrection (Acts 2:31-38; 3:15,19 "therefore"). And Paul here likewise: "He, whom God raised again... through [on account of] this man [and His resurrection] is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 13:37,38). Because of the Name the Lord has been given, salvation has been enabled (Acts 4:12 cp. Phil. 2:9). "God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:26); "the God of our fathers raised up Jesus… exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give (i.e. inspire) repentance to Israel, and forgiveness" (Acts 5:30,31). The fact of the Lord's resurrection has obtained forgiveness of sins for all who will identify themselves with it through baptism into Him; and this is why it is thereby an imperative to preach it, if we believe in it. The disciples were told to go and preach of the resurrection of Christ, and *therefore* of the required responses this entails: repentance, acceptance of forgiveness and baptism (Lk. 24:46). Preaching is motivated by His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:14). Baptism saves us "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 3:21 cp. Rom. 4:25; Col. 2:13).

13:39 *And through him, everyone that believes is declared righteous in all things in which the law of Moses could not declare you righteous*- Better, "in Him". This is exactly what Paul expounds at such depth to the Romans; in Christ we are counted as Him, His righteousness is imputed to us, and this covers all our sins and disobediences to any Divine law, including that given through Moses. This justification, counting as righteous by grace through faith, was not on offer within the Mosaic structure. The force of "everyone..." is that it included Gentiles, which is what attracted them to this message (:42).

13:40 *Therefore beware, lest that which is spoken in the prophets comes upon you*- Prophecies of judgment can come true at any time if there is the required 'condition' of disbelief and disobedience. The prophecy didn't *have* to come true for them; but they should "beware" lest it did.

13:41 *Behold you despisers, wonder and perish. For I work a work in your days, a work which you shall in no way believe, even if someone declares it to you*- By rejecting justification by faith through grace, they were in effect despising God's grace, considering their own works were better, rather like the man in the parable who thought he didn't need the wedding garment provided because his own clothing was better. This prophecy stated that even when the Gospel was declared to some, they would not believe it. And yet Paul still declares it; knowing that God's purpose is open insofar as every person who hears the Gospel has genuine freewill.

The Hebrew text reads to the effect "Behold you Gentiles"; but this is quoted by Paul about the orthodox Jews. Paul is doing just what Stephen did in the speech of Acts 7 which so convicted Paul in his conscience; he demonstrates that the most nationalistic Hebrews were spiritually no better than the Gentiles whom they despised. The original context of the Habakkuk 1:5 quotation is the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians. Paul saw the parallels with the coming destruction of the temple by the Romans. But just as the threatened destruction of the temple could have been averted by Jewish repentance in the past, so it could have been in the first century. Hence :40 "Beware therefore lest...". Jewish repentance could have brought on the second coming; but they did not. Paul has asked them to repent in :38, and here he is implying that if they do not, then the Jewish system and temple cult were going to be permanently destroyed.

13:42 *And as they went out, they pleaded that these words might be spoken to them the next Sabbath*- The "words" included the stark warning of condemnation with which Paul concluded in :41. The harder side of God attracts; the reality of the issues before us, of eternal life and eternal death, attract attention in a way which a 'softer' approach cannot. And the Gentiles were attracted by the logic of the idea of righteousness imputed by grace through the faith of literally any human; see on :39.

13:43 *Now when the meeting of the synagogue was dismissed, many of the Jews and of the devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas; who, speaking to them, urged them*- The apostles weren't interested in just giving good advice, but rather good news. They were pressed in their spirit, that they *had* to appeal to men (Acts 13:43; 18:13; 26:28; 28:23; Gal. 1:10). They persuaded men, convinced and confounded the Jews, reasoned, testified and exhorted, disputed and converted (8:25; 18:13,19,28; 2:40). In short, they *so* spake that multitudes believed (14:1).

To continue in the grace of God- Paul and Barnabas realized that the idea of grace is attractive at first encounter, but to continue believing it is demanding, and has to be consciously continued in. For if by grace we are indeed counted righteous and shall surely be saved- this demands every fibre of our being in response. And the later New Testament letters are full of examples of how believers failed to continue under grace but turned to various forms of legalism. We have to continue in His kindness / gentleness (Rom. 11:22 s.w.). And that is harder than it might seem, because to abide in that constant sense of sin forgiven and certain salvation demands so much of us, in that we cannot be passive to it, nor treat these things as a mere part of our religious hobby. The *charis*, grace / gift of God, often refers to the gift of the Spirit given to believers after baptism. The Corinthians received it, but were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1); it could be received in vain if the believer denied the Spirit or refused to be led by it. So it could be that those who heard in the synagogue were baptized, and received the gift of God- and had to be encouraged to continue in it.

13:44 *And the next Sabbath almost the whole city was gathered together to hear the word of God*- This huge attendance was not because of miracles, carrots offered or the hope of personal benefit. It was because of the immense power of the ideas presented- justification, total righteousness, by grace through faith; for everyone, literally everyone. The Gentiles enthused about this to others, and it is by personal witness that people come along to meetings and are converted.

13:45 *But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy*- The success of other preachers can elicit the most powerful jealousy, as it does to this day. "The Jews" here refers surely to the Jewish leadership, as the term often does in Luke-Acts.

The experience of such jealousy places us in the direct fellowship of the Lord Jesus. For it was jealousy about "the crowds" which led to His persecution unto death.

And contradicted the things which were spoken by Paul and blasphemed- Gk. 'cursed'. The Jews of Antioch in Pisidia cursed Paul and his message, drove him out of the city, and then travelled 180 km. to Lystra to oppose his preaching there. This is the behaviour of bad conscience, rather than secular people just irritated with religious evangelism. Not only did the Jews crucify God's Son, but the book of Acts makes it clear that it was Jewish opposition which was the main adversary to Paul's spreading of the Gospel and establishment of the early church (Acts 13:50,51; 14:2,5,619; 17:5–9,13,14; 18:6,12–17; 21:27–36; 23:12–25). Paul speaks of the Jewish opposition as having "killed both the Lord Jesus and the [first century Christian] prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. Thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins" (1 Thess. 2:13–16). These are strong words, and must be given their full weight in our assessment of the degree to which the Jews were indeed a great 'Satan' to the cause of Christ in the first century.

13:46 *And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, and said: It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you. Seeing you thrust it from you*- See on Acts 7:27 *Thrust him away*. One phrase of Paul's in Acts 13:46 combines allusions to two verses in Matthew (Mt. 21:41; 22:8). Those verses are close to each other. As Paul thought about Mt. 21:41, he would have gone on to Mt. 22:8, and then brought them both together in his allusion- ultimately controlled by the Spirit, of course.

And judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the gentiles- Not only are we living out *our* judgment by how we preach; by presenting the Gospel to people we are effectively bringing the judgment to them. Paul commented how those who rejected his preaching judged / condemned themselves to be unworthy. The Jews by their attitude to the word "judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life"; and we too can anticipate the judgment seat by the same mistake. The preacher stands in the 'highways' (Mt. 22:9)- 'the place of two roads', the Greek means, i.e. the place where two roads divide. This is what our taking of the Gospel to people means. They are given their choice. We bring the crisis of the judgment seat right in front of them, and they make their choice.

13:47 *For so has the Lord commanded us: I have set you for a light of the Gentiles, that you should bring salvation to the uttermost part of the earth*- Isaiah's prophecies of Christ being a light to the Gentiles in the Kingdom were fulfilled in Paul (Is. 49:6 = Acts 13:47; and is Is. 49:4 also a prophecy of Paul's thoughts? "I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought... yet surely my judgment is with the Lord"). Paul noticed the prophecy that Christ was to be the light of the whole world and saw in this a commandment to him to go and preach Christ world-wide. He read "…for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider" (Is. 52:15) as a prophecy which required him to fulfil it, by taking Christ to those who had not heard (Rom. 15:21). All that is prophesied of Christ is an imperative to us as His body to action. Paul was to bring others to the light just as John had (Lk. 1:77,79 = Acts 13:47; 26:18,23). Paul takes a prophecy concerning how Christ personally would be the light of the whole world (Is. 49:6), and applies it to himself in explanation of why he was devoted to being a light to the whole world *himself* (Acts 13:47- although 26:23 applies it to Jesus personally). Paul even says that this prophecy of Christ as the light of the world was a *commandment* to him; all that is true of the Lord Jesus likewise becomes binding upon us, because we are *in* Him. Note that Paul says that God has commanded *us* to

witness; it wasn't that Paul was a special case, and God especially applied Isaiah's words concerning Christ as light of the Gentiles to Paul. They apply to *us*, to all who are in Christ. Because everything said about Christ is a commandment to all of us who are in Him. What would Jesus do, who would He be, if He lived in your street, did your job, was married to your partner, mixed with the guys *you* mix with? The answer to that is our mission. In this sense He has in this world no arms or legs or face than us.

Believers worked for the fulfilment of their prophecies. Thus Mary was blessed for believing, because therefore and thereby there would be a fulfilment of the things spoken to her (Lk. 1:45 RV). Without her faith, would those things have been fulfilled? She had to do her bit. And this is why she was called blessed. The Lord basically told the disciples to go into the world and preach in order that the prophesies of repentance being preached among all nations would come true (Lk. 24:48). Paul's preaching to the whole world was likewise driven by a desire to fulfil the prophecy that Christ would be a light to the Gentiles.

13:48 *And as the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God*- The Gentiles may refer specifically to those Gentiles who had been attending the synagogue (:43). To be taught that the Jewish Messiah was the light of all people, and justification was possible in Him and not through legal obedience, triggered real joy amongst them. Paul prayed for the word of the Lord to be glorified (2 Thess. 3:1 same phrase), and those prayers were heard here. We glorify God's word or *logos*, His essential purpose in Christ, by believing it.

And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed- This phrase was that used by Judaism regarding how all the faithful people of natural Israel were those "ordained to eternal life", comprising "everyone that is written to eternal life, in the book of life". But the phrase is as it were subverted here to refer to Gentiles who believed in the Lord Jesus. It is meant to be read as the opposition to the statement that the Jews had judged themselves unworthy of eternal life (:46). But whilst there is freewill as to whether we believe or abide in the Lord Jesus or reject Him as the Jews did, there is also an element of predestination, of having been "ordained" to believe. For "all men have not faith" (2 Thess. 3:2); faith "is the gift of God" and thereby a proof of how His grace saves us rather than our works (Eph. 2:8).

13:49 *And the word of the Lord was spread about throughout all the region*- The joyful response and wide publication of the Gospel is strongly emphasized in these verses. But we hear nothing more of the church in Pisidian Antioch; perhaps we are left to conclude that they were an exemplification of the parable of the sower, where there was zealous, joyful response initially which then quickly withered when persecution arose (Lk. 8:13). The reference to persecution in :50 suggests that Luke may be making a conscious allusion to his record of the sower parable. The converts here were in the category of the seed sown upon the rock. This would explain why they were given especial warning to "continue" in their faith (:43).

13:50 *But the Jews incited the religious women of high standing and the leading men of the city*- These women may have been Jews, or at least Jewish proselytes. Josephus claims (*The Jewish War* 2.20.2) that "In large towns and cities in which Jews abounded, the wives of the men in high position among the heathen were much inclined to the Jewish religion"; this would explain the connection between them and the leading males of the city.

And stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district- This persecution was apparently successful in withering the faith of the once joyful believers who had responded so quickly and enthusiastically to the

Gospel; see on :49. The collaboration here between the Jewish leaders and powerful Roman leaders was typical of how the 'satan' / adversary operated against the early Christians, just as it was such a joining of the forces of evil which led to the Lord's death. The expulsion from the district may refer to some formal ban on Paul ever re-entering, similar to what seems to have happened at Thessalonica (see on 1 Thess. 2:18).

13:51 *But they shook off the dust of their feet against them and came to Iconium*- The way Paul shook off the dust of his feet against those who rejected his preaching was surely an almost unconscious reflection of the attitude which the Lord had enjoined upon his men; but there is no evidence that Paul was given the same commission (Acts 13:51 cp. Mt. 10:14). Jews were supposed to shake off Gentile dust from their feet on returning to the promised land; again, Paul is treating these orthodox Jews as if they are Gentiles. The idiom of shaking out is used in Neh. 5:13 to mean a shaking out of covenant relationship with God; by refusing the new covenant, those Jews were effectively ending their relationship with God, despite their zeal to keep the old covenant.

13:52- see on Acts 8:8.

And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Spirit- The Ethiopic text reads "the apostles", as if Paul and Barnabas are in view. To be filled with implies external agency; the Lord filled them with joy, through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit therefore here refers to an internal psychological power, which in this case gave joy. The Spirit gift is given to each believer at baptism, but there are clearly specific moments when believers are filled with it further. The allusion here is clearly to the Lord's command to rejoice under persecution (Mt. 5:12); that is an attitude and action which has to be consciously adopted. But this is confirmed and encouraged by the action of the Spirit within us to give joy. The spirit is effectively our mind and attitude; the Spirit /mind of the Lord Jesus is therefore being replicated in our minds. As "Jesus was filled with joy by the Holy Spirit" (Lk. 10:21), so are we "fill[ed]with all joy and peace by means of... the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13). This is "the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 1:6); "For God's Kingdom is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of the righteousness, peace, and joy which the Holy Spirit gives" (Rom. 14:17).

ACTS CHAPTER 14

14:1 *Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue*- see on 17:1,2.

And spoke in such a way- Paul *so* spoke that men believed. Presentation *is* important. Yet, his speech was “rude… contemptible… not with wisdom of speech” (2 Cor. 10:10; 11:6; 1 Cor. 1:17 AVmg.). Yet it was because Paul *so* spoke that men believed. He spoke God’s Truth in his own words, with no pretensions, with no attention to a smooth presentation; and the more real, the more credible. Because he spoke things as they are, right between the eyes, without posing as anyone apart from the real, human guy Paul… therefore men believed. He came over as credible and convinced, and he inspired others to this end.

That a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed- This occurred within the synagogue, so presumably the "Greeks" were Gentile proselytes or Hellenic, Greek speaking Jews.

The record gives the impression that after just one synagogue address, many Jews and Gentiles who were present "believed", and belief and baptism are presented in Acts as part of the same process. This happened it seems after just one address. For there is no hint that there was any period of extended instruction here. This is the power and simplicity of the Gospel.

14:2 *But the unbelieving Jews*- Yet these Jews would have been far from atheists. But their unbelief in Jesus as Lord leaves them classified as unbelievers. Here we see proof enough that all religions, even Judaic ones, do not lead to salvation. We also see here a classic pattern in Paul's work- he immediately goes to the synagogue, irritates the Jews, although converting some of them, and those Jews then make trouble which damages his work with the Gentiles. Chapter 17 records the same pattern almost word for word. I suggest that if Paul had instead followed the Lord's command and left the Jewish ministry to Peter, and focused solely on the Gentiles- then his life would've been much easier, and his intended ministry to the Gentiles would have been far more fruitful. But this is how it so often is when we do not follow the path the Lord intends for us; even though He will work with us in the other, less ideal paths we choose.

Stirred up the Gentiles- The Greek word only occurs a few verses earlier, in the same context (Acts 13:50). As noted above, the impression is being created of a pattern of behaviour. Paul immediately targets the Jews in the synagogue on his arrival in a town, and those Jews there who reject his message stir up the Gentiles against Paul's mission, thus making his intended mission to the Gentiles so much harder to operate.

And poisoned their minds against the brothers- Gk. *kakoo psuche*, literally they evil spirited- providing proof enough that evil spirits are not radically free entities swanning around the cosmos, but refer to the internal human spirit.

14:3- see on Acts 17:34.

Therefore they stayed there for a long time speaking boldly in the Lord- Boldness is a repeated characteristic of the early preachers, but their boldness was "in the Lord", it was a true sense of being brethren-in-Christ which gave them that boldness.

Who bore witness to the word of his grace- This was the purpose of the miraculous gifts in the first century- to back up the verbal preaching of the Gospel at a time when there was no written New Testament available.

Granting- Implying they asked for the miracles to be done? The gifts were not possessed continuously by the apostles, they were for specific things at specific times.

Signs and wonders to be done by their hands- The Lord Jesus was the doer of the works, but He worked through the hands of those in Him.

14:4 *But the crowd of the city was divided; part held with the Jews and part with the apostles*- This reflects how widespread was the Jewish slander campaign. Nobody in the town was left untouched by it.

14:5 *And when there was an attempt by the Gentiles and the Jews, with their rulers, to treat them shamefully and to stone them*- This clearly alludes to the parable of the wicked husbandmen; the same word is used (Mt. 22:6). And Luke uses the word about what was done to the Lord Jesus (Lk. 18:32). In the work of witness, we are as Christ to the world and share in His sufferings, that we might share in His life. There is nothing glamorous about missionary or evangelistic work; it is on one hand a sharing in the Lord's sufferings, seeing that the cross was itself the greatest preaching of all time. 1 Cor. 1:18 speaks of the preaching which is the cross (Gk.).

14:6 *They became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe and the surrounding region*- Carefully following the Lord's instruction to flee persecution rather than willfully be martyred (Mt. 10:23). Several times, Paul has to be bundled away from such persecution by the disciples; he had the Semitic fanaticism when it comes to religion, and was not against violent death for the Christian cause. But the Lord didn't want His followers to serve and die for Him from such impulses of religious fanaticism. The wisdom of the Lord's command is here demonstrated in that the Gospel now spread as a result of their 'fleeing'- to "the surrounding region".

14:7 *And there they preached the gospel*- The Acts record notes so often that after persecution, Paul continued preaching in fresh areas. This is no small testament to the spirit of 'keeping on keeping on' which is to characterize all Christian endeavour. But it also reflects another theme of Acts- that persecution only led to the geographical spread of the Gospel.

14:8 *Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled since birth and had never walked*- Again Luke is alluding to the Lord's words he has recorded in his volume 1, the Gospel according to Luke. This time, to Lk. 18:27: "The things which are impossible [s.w. "could not use"] with men are possible with God". The Lord's ministry in Palestine was being continued by those in Him, just as it is today. We too need to daily read the Gospels and perceive how in essence, the spirit of those incidents and teachings are continuing in our experience daily.

14:9 *The same listened to Paul speaking. Paul looked at him intently*- Why is this detail mentioned? Are we intended to think that Paul was seeking to emulate how Peter had done just the same before healing a man in a similar condition (Acts 3:4 s.w.).? Both men were lame from their mother's womb. Both stood up and leaped (Acts 3:8). Both cases include Paul / Peter looking intently at the man to be healed (Acts 3:4). Paul and Barnabas's denial that they themselves were anything special clearly follows Peter's humble example: "You Israelites... why do you stare at us, as if by our own power and piety we had made him walk?" (Acts 3:12). They had also learnt Peter's example of humility before Cornelius: "Stand up, I am only a mortal man" (Acts 10:26). When addressed by the Philippian jailor "Sirs (kurion), what must I do to be saved?'", Paul answers "Believe in the Lord (kurion) Jesus" (Acts 16:29,30). In this case, we have another piece of incidental evidence for thinking that Paul was trying to copy Peter, and this led to his obsession to get to Jerusalem for a Pentecost feast in order to preach to the Jews assembled there, hoping he would repeat Peter's conversion of 3000 people in one day. It was this desire to emulate Peter's ministry which somewhat derailed Paul from the focus the Lord wished him to have on the Gentiles rather than the Jews. The similarities set up by Luke in his record intentionally set us up to expect that Paul will now make a huge number of converts,

as Peter did after such a healing. But that didn't happen; perhaps out of all the drama, "only" the healed man, Timothy and his mum and grandma and a few others... came to faith. Paul was being led to understand that his desire to emulate Peter's mass conversions was not to be because it was wrongly motivated.

And perceiving that he had faith to be made whole- Faith was not always required for miracles to be done. We think of the healing of Malchus' ear and other examples. But in this case Paul required faith, because he realized he was continuing the Lord's principle spoken of in Lk. 18:27 (see on :8). There, the Lord had taught that with faith, what is impossible, impotent, unable to be used by man- can be used. "Made whole" is the word for "saved". Paul saw the man had faith to be saved- and therefore he performs a healing miracle upon the man. This was not done for the simple sake of alleviating human suffering; but rather to make up what was lacking in the man's faith. Having experienced it, the man's faith would be strengthened to the point that he could be saved.

14:10- see on Acts 3:8.

Said with a loud voice: Stand upright on your feet! And he leaped up and walked- See on 14:9 *Paul looked at him intently.* The leaping and walking of the lame is expressed in terms of the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 35:6. The preaching of the Gospel was demonstrated to be a foretaste of the Kingdom of God which is to come upon earth; and our witness also has something of that about it.

14:11 *And when the crowd saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voice, saying in the language of Lycaonia: The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!*- The meaning is surely that Paul and Barnabas didn't understand this, but when they saw the garlands and sacrifices bring brought to them, then they realized- this is the force of the "but" in :14. The gift of languages was therefore not continually available to the apostles; indeed it could be argued that that gift enabled them to speak in those languages, or for the listeners to understand; but not necessarily for them to understand what was spoken to them. Hence in speaking of the practical usage of the gift of tongues in 1 Cor. 14, Paul says that the gift of interpreting tongues was also required. In any case, that was not available here, and so the point is established that the gifts were for highly specific purposes at specific times, and were not continually available for the usage of believers.

Note that the idea of gods coming to earth as men is a classic pagan belief; and yet it is seen mixed in to Trinitarian theology, with their belief in a pre-existent Christ and a literal 'coming down' of the Lord from Heaven to earth. Indeed, so common was the idea, and so close to it is the language of 'coming down' in John's Gospel, that it could be argued that the NT language is consciously alluding to this wrong idea and showing that this is not the case with the Lord Jesus, but rather His 'coming down' from Heaven was in terms of His manifestation of God rather than anything more literal, as the pagans believed. Standard Christian belief in a physically pre-existent Jesus has therefore missed the point, and taken on board the very pagan ideas which the NT is arguing against.

There is an intended irony here, in that "atheist!" was the term for those like Jews and Christians who denied the existence of the gods. But now the people consider Paul and Barnabas to be gods. And perhaps the same point is made by Paul's comment that "you turned... from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9). Although we see here man's penchant to believe in 'gods' coming out. Total

atheism is unnatural and forced, man wants to believe; and we need to remember this when witnessing to those who appear hardened in their atheism. Underneath, they want to believe.

14:12 *And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercury, because he was the chief speaker*- This would suggest that Barnabas was the more personally imposing in appearance than Paul (cp. 2 Cor. 10:1,10). For this is how they (along with their Greek equivalents Zeus and Hermes) are presented. Hermes / Mercury was the mere messenger of the gods, and so Paul was called this. And here we have again how the Lord loves to work- to make His speaker, His messenger, the one who is not imposing in appearance, and for the imposing one to stand there silent and as it were, unused.

14:13 *And the priest of Jupiter, whose temple was before the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and would have done sacrifice with the crowds*- We see in this incident the basic human desire to worship and to turn men into gods. We see it theologically, in the desire to turn the human Jesus into "very God of very Gods" as the Trinity incorrectly states. We see it in secular folk idolizing sports stars and musicians as their gods. The correct channel for this religious instinct is through the Lord Jesus to the Father, guided by His word.

14:14 *But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they tore their clothes and ran in among the crowd, crying out and saying*- A set of clothes was one of the most valuable things a person possessed at that time. To tear them was a sign of real and genuine grief and passion. This was how strongly Barnabas and Paul felt about any glory being given to them rather than to the Father and Son; and their strong position should be reflected in our attitudes. We are not to glorify ourselves.

14:15 *Sirs, why do you these things? We also are men of like passions with you*- Literally, of the same sufferings, as James 5:17, Elijah was of like passions to us. This is the basis of our appeal to men, and it is the basis of the Lord's appeal to us through having our nature. If Paul was indeed deformed in some way (as tradition claims), then the point would have been that they too were not of perfect health, they also suffered. We note the emphasis on how similar they were to their audience; they ran in *amongst the crowd*, and were of the same sufferings "with you". This is the basis of all preaching work- that we are one with our audience and not above them. Exactly because they were ‘one of us’, they could make the appeal of the Gospel. As the Lord Jesus was and is our representative, so we are His representative to men, whilst being ‘one of them’, ‘one of us’. This is why we shouldn’t be afraid to show chinks in our armour, to admit our humanity, and on that basis make appeal to men: that I, as one of us, with all your humanity, your doubts and fears, am appealing to you to grasp that better way. When Paul wrote that if anyone was weak, he was weak, he seems to be saying that they could match their spiritual weakness by his own. This is why personal contact *must be* the intended way to witness.

And bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them- Literally, we evangelize to convert you. The aim of our preaching should be to convert, not simply to half-heartedly, lamely inform the public of the particular set of convictions held by our denomination or local church. Having a clear and defined aim is critical in interaction with others in order to evangelize them. The idea is the same as in 17:30; in the past, the Gentiles were [for the most part] allowed to do as they wish. But now,

all the world is commanded to be obedient and repent, through the fulfilment of the great commission by the church.

We note the frequent contrast between the idols, the vain things, and a God who is real and alive. All else in life is relatively dead and vain. Paul here quotes Ex. 20:11 LXX "For in six days the Lord made the heaven and the earth, and the sea and all things in them". Peter had led the early church in praying these words in Acts 4:24: "O Lord, you that made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that are in them". We see here the influence of fisherman Peter upon rabbi Paul- it is to the credit of Paul's humility.

14:16 *Who in the generations gone by allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways*- This is another angle on God dealing mainly with the Jewish people during those past generations. Rather than seeing this as unfair, one could take the view that in fact God "allowed" the other nations to do what they wanted- which if asked, would have been their preferred option. They got what they would've wanted if asked by God. The question of 'Why didn't God call nations other than the Jews in Old Testament times?' was obviously going to arise with the Gentiles. Paul addresses this same issue in Acts 17:30, saying that "the times of this ignorance God winked at". He seems to be taking the approach that the Old Testament Gentiles generally need not fear judgment. The same approach may be helpful when we are asked concerning the fate of those who did not know the Gospel.

14:17 *And yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave you rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness*- AV “gave *us* rain…”. I suggest that the "us" refers to Paul and Barnabas and faithful Israel. Paul is saying that *you* are in a position of worshipping idols, but *we* (Paul and Barnabas) are appealing to you to change, and believe in the true God- not in ourselves. What was God's witness to the Gentile world? An obedient Israel. That, at least, was His intention. That obedient Israel should have blessing of fruitful seasons, food and gladness. These are all terms taken from the Old Testament descriptions of how God would bless *Israel* (not the Gentile world) if *they* were obedient. Jupiter was the god of the air and responsible for rain; Mercury was responsible for food. But Lycaonia (14:6) was famous for droughts and famine- the references can be found in standard commentaries (Vine, Matthew Henry etc.). Jupiter and Mercury had *not* given those Gentiles these blessings. But Yahweh, the one true God, had given these things to faithful Israel. Thereby He was a witness to those Gentiles, that they should accept the God of Israel. Paul is saying 'God let you Gentiles live as you wished. But obedient Israel were intended to be His witness to you- *they* received rain, fruitful seasons, food and gladness from their God, Yahweh. But *you* didn't- your Jupiter and Mercury were unable to give those blessings to you. So don't treat *us* as gods, quit your idols, and turn to the one true God of Israel'.

This naturally raises the question: To what purpose then was that witness, seeing at that time His plan was with the Jews and not the Gentiles? Perhaps we can infer from this that if anyone really thought about creation, they would have perceived God's witness and come to Him. Ps. 19:1-4 appears to say the same: "The heavens declare the glory of God, the expanse above shows His handiwork. Day after day they pour forth speech, and night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their voice has gone out through all the earth, their words to the end of the world". This last verse is quoted in Rom. 10:18 in order to prove that "Whoever believes in him shall not be put to shame. For there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile" (Rom. 10:11,12). Paul interprets the "whoever" as meaning that both Jew and Gentile were witnessed to even in Old

Testament times, and therefore there ought to be no barrier at all to taking the Gospel to Gentiles. Without access to the Bible or the witness of Israel and their religion, we can only conclude that God's level of acceptance of Old Testament Gentiles was quite low in terms of detailed knowledge. Admittedly there are few if any examples recorded of such Gentiles in Old Testament times coming to perceive the witness of creation and respond to it. But it would be a weak argument from silence to say there were no such cases. For the Old Testament is the history of God's old testament or covenant, which was with Israel.

14:18 *Even with these words the people were scarcely restrained from offering sacrifice to them*- The implication is that the people cut short Paul's sermon. He doesn't even get on to telling them about Jesus. They wanted to believe these men were gods, they wanted to worship them, they were impressed by the miracle to the extent that they merely said they agreed with the new message- without actually listening to that message in any detail. The words "crowd" and "people" are repeated; their position was a group position rather than an individual conviction. And so their new faith was very quickly swayed. This is typical of what happens in some forms of Christianity today.

We see here the immense strength of the human urge to sacrifice. We see it in the success of the televangelists who appeal for donations- and get them- on the flimsiest of foundations. God's insistence that all sacrifice be offered *to Him* is not Him as it were seeking to dominate us humans. Rather is He explaining how to channel that propensity to sacrifice which we have. In the modern world, it seems that the willingness to sacrifice has been submerged somewhat beneath the chronic egoism and hedonism of our age. Suicide bombers and the like are seen by many Westerners as utterly inexplicable beings; but the desire to sacrifice is in fact a strong part of us, and is more logically and comfortably accepted by other cultures. Our knowledge of the Father and Son provides us with the ultimate way to channel and express it; although we may well need to get in touch with this self-sacrificial part of ourselves first.

14:19 *But there came Jews from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds*- The same words used of how the Jews "persuaded the crowds" to crucify the Lord (Mt. 27:20). Again, we see circumstances being arranged so that Paul entered into the crucifixion sufferings of the Lord. The same goes on in the lives of all who have committed themselves to identity with Him. And we naturally wonder what Saul / Paul was doing at the Lord's crucifixion; seeing he was then living in Jerusalem as a student of Gamaliel, he very likely was one of the Jews involved in 'persuading the crowds'. The same word for "persuaded" has just been used about Paul's preaching (Acts 13:43), and continues to be used about it. We are given the impression that Paul persuaded the crowds one way, and then the Jews persuaded them another way. Paul must have bitterly lamented the fickleness of the crowds; but in so doing he was sharing the experience of the Lord Jesus. For the crowd who shouted "Hosanna!" and wanted Him as their Messianic King were soon shouting "crucify Him!", due to their persuasion by the Jews. We likewise recall how the people of Malta flipped from thinking Paul was an evil criminal whom vengeance didn't suffer to live- to thinking he was a god (Acts 28:6). Clearly the people were so impressed by the miracle that they ignored the doctrinal teaching- that idols were "vain things" etc.. The miracles both of the Lord and Paul clearly had no lasting power in persuading the crowds. The ministry of miracles never really achieved much, and Pentecostalism ought to take due note of that. How Paul must have wished for mass literacy amongst the people,

and for some written record of the Gospel readily available to his audience, which could be their abiding source of persuasion. And in our days we have just that, although human fickleness is no less.

They stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead- Supposing is Gk. nomizo. "This word, which occurs fifteen times, always means to conclude from custom, law, or evidence, never to imagine". We conclude that they were certain that he was dead and had checked this. Paul had been nearly stoned in the previous town but had escaped to Lystra. Now he is actually stoned, probably to death. But he was prepared for this by the near stoning experience in Iconium. They stoned Paul and then dragged him out of the city, implying they were disposing of his corpse. He was either really dead (and was resurrected), or extremely damaged and apparently lifeless. The Mosaic principles about the guilt of death within a city come to mind; they had blood on their hands before both God and the men of the Roman authorities. But Paul never seeks to prosecute them for their behaviour. Paul was stoned and dragged out of Lystra as dead- presumably they didn't want him to die within the city limits as they were under Roman jurisdiction. Yet, hobbling and bleeding, he returned into the city to witness. And it was here in Lystra that he made one of his greatest converts, Timothy (Acts 16:1). And when Paul asks us to follow him, he is speaking in the context of his life's work and preaching. He is our pattern, to be lived out in spirit within the confines within which God has placed us.

Paul's suffering outside the city gate is surely alluded to by him when he writes to the Hebrews that the Lord suffered "without the camp". In everything he saw bridges between his life experience and that of the Lord. And we can do the same. But in this lies the need to be familiar with the Gospel records of the Lord's life and words. Read them daily. We also note that this experience was one of the closest to death Paul ever came, indeed he may well have died and resurrected (:20). But he made few converts out of it all, seeing the "crowds" of converts soon turned away. There was possibly the healed man "who had faith" and the disciples who stood around him after he was left for dead- and Timothy who was from Lystra and is called a "disciple" (Acts 16:1) when Paul revisited Lystra. Timothy is written to by Paul as if he was still a young man, some 15 years later. So it's quite likely that Timothy at this point in Acts 14 was not much more than a child and it was his grandmother and mother who were converted at the time. But he was impressed by Paul even at that time. The "crowds" who had apparently believed were very soon turned away from faith. So it was the greatest suffering for the least visible result, if numbers of converts were the metric. And so it often is- but the point of it all is to bring us closer to the Lord Jesus. And the wonderful convert Timothy came out of all this.

14:20 *But as the disciples stood around him, he rose up- Anistemi* can be used of resurrection. The way he rises up and walks off, when he had been considered a lifeless corpse just minutes before, rather suggests that this was indeed a resurrection. The disciples stood around about him, rather than seeking to minister to his wounds or resuscitate him. This sounds like trying to hold some kind of funeral service. If indeed Paul died and was resurrected, then it is a reflection of his humility that he never seems to specifically refer to this in any later passages of self-justification. However it is the same word just used in :10 of the healed man rising or standing up. What Paul had done to that man, he now experienced himself. One dimension of all this was so that Paul could enter into the feelings of that man, and that is how we are often brought to feel through the Divinely designed experiences we have.

And entered into the city, and the next day he went with Barnabas to Derbe- If indeed Paul had been dragged out of the town to the rubbish dump where corpses were burnt, and then he returned alive and well into the city and spent a day there- this would have been a powerful witness to resurrection. And the Jews would have feared to touch him. He would clearly have been seen as "in Christ", whose death at the hands of the Jews and subsequent resurrection he had been preaching. His return into the city (rather than departing immediately) may have been for similar reasons as to why he did the same after release from prison at Philippi. The community he was leaving behind would have at least some mystique and respect attached to them which would save them from future persecution, at least for some time. We see here Paul's utter selflessness and constant concern for his converts. The way Paul returned to Lystra to confirm the disciples (:21), despite having been stoned and maybe killed there, speaks volumes about him.

14:21 *And when they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch*- This word is that used in Mt. 28:19 about the making of disciples in response to the great commission. Paul clearly saw the commission as applying to himself; this surely disproves the contention that the great commission was only given to the eleven disciples to whom it was originally spoken. For *Lystra*- see on :20.

14:22 *Confirming the souls of the disciples*- 'Confirming' might seem an activity more relevant to the spirit of disciples, to their minds, rather than their 'souls'. But often the words soul and spirit, *psuche* and *pneuma,* are used almost interchangeably. It is too simplistic to argue that the spirit refers to the human mind or spirit, and 'soul' refers to the material person or body. That distinction is at times valid, but not always. "Confirming" occurs only four times in the NT and always in Acts. Such follow up pastoral visits were clearly part of Paul's missionary strategy as they should be of ours. But it is a similar word to that used by the Lord in telling Peter to strengthen his brethren once he was converted. Again we see Paul being asked to see Peter as his model, rather than wanting to compete with him in achieving mass conversions.

Exhorting them- Parakleo means to beg, to strongly ask. But it also has the sense of 'comfort', although this is not the most common sense in which it is used in the 108 occurrences in the NT. The challenge, the asking to continue in the faith is actually a comfort; the height of the calling, the focus on the ideal, is itself a comfort.

To continue in the faith- Paul was a Jew, thinking in Hebrew terms, and steeped in the Old Testament language. And many of his converts were either Jews or Proselytes. The other two NT occurrences of the word likewise reflect the Old Testament idea of continuing in the covenant. Israel did not continue in that covenant (Heb. 8:9), and that covenant cursed all who did not continue in all things written in the Mosaic law (Gal. 3:10- written by Paul to converts in this very area where he was urging them to continue "in the faith"). The contrast is therefore between continuing [or trying to continue] in obedience to Mosaic law, and continuing in the faith in God's saving grace in Christ.

And that through many tribulations- Paul is fond of allusion to the parable of the sower, and he clearly has in mind the need to continue as good soil, and not to be in the category of those who fall away from faith because of tribulations (Mt. 13:21).

Those tribulations *must* come, he is saying. Christianity is no insurance policy against tribulation, but rather a way of attaching meaning to it. Perhaps he also had in mind the Lord's simple statement that "in the world you shall have tribulation" (Jn. 16:33); it is inevitable. Stephen had twice used the word in his speech (Acts 7:10,11), and consciously or unconsciously Paul was maybe recalling that. Paul himself had brought tribulation upon Christians (Acts 11:19; Heb. 10:33), so again he was experiencing what he had done to others (the word is also used of Paul's sufferings in Acts 20:23; 2 Cor. 1:8; 6:4; Col. 1:24)- just as we do. Paul may also have in mind the predictions in the Olivet prophecy that there was to be great tribulation just before entry into the Kingdom of God at the Lord's return. In this case, we have another hint that he expected the Lord's return imminently, and spoke and reasoned accordingly, as we should do.

We must have tribulation, either in the condemnation of the judgment (Rom. 2:9), or now- in order that we will enter the Kingdom (Acts 14:22). We must bear the burden either of our sins (Am. 2:13; Is. 58:6; Ps. 38:4) or of the Lord's cross (Gal. 6:4 etc.). We will experience either the spiritual warfare of the striving saint (Rom. 7:15-25), or the lusts of the flesh warring in our members, eating us up with the insatiability of sin (James 4:1; Ez. 16:28,29).

We must enter into the kingdom of God- The sense is that we are now entering into the Kingdom, but through tribulation. The Lord had spoken of entering the Kingdom through the narrow gate, and Paul is putting meaning into those words, explaining that the narrow gate means tribulation. His own experience of stoning and perhaps death at Lystra exemplified what he was getting at.

14:23 *So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting*- The Greek means literally to stretch the hand upon. It is only elsewhere used in 2 Cor. 8:19 of how the church chose Timothy to travel with Paul. Some argue that the hand stretching refers to voting, but this seems to me to be reading in modern principles of democracy; there is no evidence that democracy in the form of voting was what God ever used. Probably it means that they simply chose some elders, and there is no evidence that the Spirit guided them in this in any supernatural sense. But the point is that they didn't leave the new churches with no leadership structure- they created one. "Elders" literally means an older person; but all the believers were relatively young in the faith. Like many modern missionary situations, they did the best they could in terms of choosing wisely. But they didn't tell the new congregations that they were to just take everything in turns and muddle along; they appointed elders. Because like it or not, people need leadership. Given that they probably didn't know the candidates that well, and most were at the same stage of immaturity in faith, we can understand why they "prayed with fasting" about this. They took most seriously the future wellbeing of these groups; they didn't just baptize them and leave them.

They committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed- Given the difficulties in choosing elders, we can understand why they just gave them over to the Lord Jesus as their good shepherd. For as passing missionaries there was little else practically they could do. Paul uses the same word in committing the elders to the Lord in Acts 20:32. Paul saw the lord Jesus as a very real entity and personage to whom he could hand over [Gk.] these new converts. We might infer that Paul felt he had personal responsibility for them, but now he had to leave, he handed them over to the Lord Jesus.

14:24 *And they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia*- Perhaps the idea is that they travelled through Pisidia, spreading the message. They had visited the area before (13:13), so perhaps they were following up with contacts there.

14:25 *And when they had spoken the word in Perga*- They had passed through Perga before, but without apparently preaching there. We get the sense that Paul was eager to cover ground missed out in his previous pass, so driven was he by the idea of geographically distributing the word to all.

They went down to Attalia- Perga was a port, but up the river from Attalia, from where longer distance vessels would be departing. These details all add credibility to the record. If Acts is a forgery from an uninspired person, it would've had to be created early on in the 2nd century at least. And the chances of not making a major geographical or historical bloomer would be almost zero. Such small incidental true-to-reality local details confirm us in confidently accepting the Bible as Divinely inspired and therefore true.

14:26 *And from there they sailed to Antioch, from where they had been committed to the grace of God*- Paul "committed" the elders to the Lord in :23, but he himself had been committed by elders. All pastoral and preaching work is some reflection of our own experiences; it cannot therefore be solely prepared for by missionary training courses and the like. The Lord works to prepare people, and they are to reflect their own experiences in their work for Him. The same phrase "committed to the grace of God" is used about the sending of Paul and Silas on their later missionary journey (Acts 15:40). Perhaps as noted on :23 about the idea of 'committing', the brethren felt (as we often do) that we can do nothing more materially for others in a given situation; we pray for them and commit them to God's grace. As the missionaries sailed away on a dangerous mission, this sense of commitment of brethren to God's grace would have been natural. It's hard to specifically, neatly define what was understood by "the grace of God". We can only be guided here by how Luke used the term in his volume 1, the gospel according to Luke. "The grace of God" was upon Mary (Lk. 1:30) and John (Lk. 2:40), although he did no miracles. The term is used as if it means 'the general operation of God' in Acts 11:23, God's grace worked through Paul's working (1 Cor. 15:10; Eph. 3:7), and it was *epi* the Corinthians, it worked around them (2 Cor. 9:14). We can frustrate God's grace by not going the way He leads us (Gal. 2:21). God's grace appears to all men in that the sphere of His operation somehow affects all (Tit. 2:11). The Lord Jesus died by God's grace, i.e. according to His plan (Heb. 2:9 in context). It is indeed true that 'grace' refers to undeserved favour / gift and often refers to forgiveness and salvation; and the word meaning essentially a gift it is at times used in the context of specific gifts of God's Spirit. But it would seem that the term has a wider sense of simply the realm of God's activity, which is of course motivated by His grace.

For the work which they had fulfilled- We read in Acts 12:25 likewise of Paul fulfilling a ministry; of John the Baptist fulfilling his race (Acts 13:25). The sense is that God gives a specific task to be done, and we are to fulfil it. The Lord Jesus ascended so that He might fill all things of the church here on earth (Eph. 4:10). The parable of the talents likewise teaches that each believer has been given specific things to do. We need to pray that we will perceive what these things are; because man is never better than when he has a distinctly defined aim and has the wind of the Spirit at his back helping him to fulfil them. Paul felt that his preaching work was a stewardship he had been given and by achieving it, he was fulfilling the word of God (Col. 1:25). The "word of God" in view there would then refer to a specific word of

command from God to Paul to preach the Gospel to the Colossians. Hence the specific command to Archippus to take seriously his ministry and fulfil it (Col. 4:17).

14:27 *And when they had come and had gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done through them*- This is the consistent and commendable emphasis of Paul; that he was not working in his own strength but God was working through him. The language is identical to that in Acts 15:4; the apostles reported back on their activities rather than being free radicals in the world.

And that he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles- The language of God opening doors was familiar to Christians, as the Lord had taught that God opens doors to those who knock. But is there any reason to think that there were believers begging for the Gentiles to be included in the hope of the Gospel, and God responded to their prayers? There is hardly any. Peter and the other early brethren were shocked even at the idea of eating with Gentiles, let alone baptizing them. So we are to conclude that God by grace gave an answer to a prayer that had not been prayed. Or, as I prefer to think, the Father perceives our unspoken, unverbalized, not formalized desires, even our unconscious ones- as prayers. And responds to them.

Paul uses the metaphor of a door being opened in writing that a great door had been opened to him personally at Ephesus and Troas (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12); and he prayed for doors to be opened so that he could preach to people (Col. 4:3). So, to continue the metaphor, the door had been opened to the Gentiles, but Paul (the Jewish rabbi) felt so identified with his Gentile audience that he felt as if the door had been opened *to him* personally. This is what evangelism is all about- identity with our audience, and leading them in essence along the same path of faith which we have been led down by grace.

14:28 *And they stayed no little time with the disciples*- According to some chronologies, there was a five-year period between this time and the council of Jerusalem of chapter 15. Truly we only get a few incidents from the life of all Bible characters.

ACTS CHAPTER 15

15:1 *But some men came down from Judea and taught the brothers: Unless you are circumcised after the custom of Moses*- "Custom" is Gk. *ethos*. This is a major problem in missionary work: the existing believers tend to expect that converts will not only accept the Gospel but also the ethos and culture of their existing community. And this is where this ancient argument about circumcision has so much to teach modern missions.

You cannot be saved- The very same Greek phrase is used by Paul when he calls out in urgency during the storm: "Except these abide in the ship, *you* cannot be saved" (Acts 27:31). Surely Luke's record is making a connection; the legalists taught that it was time to quit the rest of the community unless they got their way, for the sake of their eternal future; and Paul responds by teaching that our salvation depends upon us pulling together against the desperate situation we find ourselves in. It's as if the salvation of Christ's body depends upon it staying together. As time went on in the first century, the gap between the Jewish and Gentile elements, the right and the left wing, the legalists and the libertines, got ever wider. The tension got stronger. But nobody won. The Jewish element returned to the Law, and forgot all about the saving grace of Jesus. The Gentile element mixed even more with the world and its philosophies, and forgot the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. They ended up

formulating blasphemous doctrines like the trinity, which nobody with any awareness of the Jewish foundation of the Father and Son could possibly have entertained. And so the faith was lost, until it was revived again in those groups who again interpreted Christianity in terms of "the hope of Israel".

15:2 *And Paul and Barnabas argued and debated with them; consequently Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders to resolve this question*- "Argued" is far too mild a translation. The word is always used elsewhere about major riot, specifically of rioting caused by the Jews. This is how deeply held is the belief that converts must conform to the pre-existing ethos and culture of the existing Christian community. From our perspective and distance, the argument seems so unnecessary, and the Biblical evidence clear as daylight that circumcision is not required for entry to the new covenant. Many of our fiercely debated divisive issues are looked at in the same way by converts living far removed from our place and culture; and believers of other ages would look at them likewise.

15:3 *Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the believers*- Given our notes on :1, this is a true sign of spiritual maturity: to rejoice in the accession of others to our community of faith, when the newcomers are of a radically different ethos and culture to our own. "Great joy" is a phrase used four times by Luke; it was a characteristic of the early church.

15:4 *And when they arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all things that God had done through them*- This is intentionally similar to the report about their arrival at the Antioch ecclesia in 14:27: "And when they had come and had gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done through them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles". The careful repetition of event and report in Acts 10 and 11 gives the impression that Peter likewise carefully reported to the elders. They were all under the deep sense that God was working through them; no preacher is to be praised for themselves. We are all instruments and being used by the Father. We are absolutely nothing of ourselves.

In Acts 15 the representatives of the ecclesias reported to the whole church at Jerusalem, not just the elders. There seems to have been a series of meetings: initially, the group from Antioch who raised the problems being discussed met with the elders, who met together in a second meeting to consider it all, involving "the whole assembly… the whole church" (:6,12,22). Then there was perhaps a third meeting where "the whole assembly" was also present. And this is why "the apostles and elders *with the whole church*" (Acts 15:22) agreed a solution. It wasn't a top down decision imposed upon the congregation. They all participated. This parallel between elders and the assembly is even found in the Old Testament- e.g. "Let them exalt him also in the assembly of the people, And praise him in the assembly of the elders" (Ps. 107:32). The "assembly of the people" and that of the elders is paralleled.

15:5 *But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees who believed, saying: It is needful to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses*- One of the major themes of Acts is how right from the beginning, there was a struggle within the body of believers. And Paul's letters repeatedly address the problem. The Jewish believers polarised around the Jerusalem ecclesia, and tended towards a keeping of the Law of Moses. They couldn't really accept that Gentiles could be saved, and saw

themselves as a sect of Judaism ("the sect of the Nazarenes"). They were called "the circumcision party" (Acts 11:2), and "the sect of the Pharisees-who-believe-in-Jesus" (15:5). The Lord had foretold that His true people would soon be thrown out of the synagogues and persecuted by the Jews, just as they had persecuted Him. But these brethren so accommodated themselves to Jewish thinking that this didn't happen. However we cannot but be impressed that some amongst the Lord's sworn enemies, the Pharisees, came to believe in Him. His hopefulness for them therefore paid off [we recall his hope that the cured leper could make a witness to the priests, Lk. 5:14]; whereas we would likely have given up with them as hopeless cases. There were very few Pharisees, relatively speaking; 5000 at the most and maybe as few as 1000. That a significant number became Christians therefore shows the power of the Lord's example, and reflects quite some humility amongst these men. So let's not think that their legalism about circumcision reflects total unspirituality amongst them.

Ironically, the Greek word for 'heresy' is the very word used to describe those divisions / 'sects' which should not be amongst us (see its usage in Acts 15:5; 24:5). To divide the Lord's body is itself a heresy; and yet it is so often done in order to protect His body, supposedly, from heresy. Yet the difference between the heresy and the heretic is often fudged. The person gets attacked rather than their beliefs. So often we've seen this happened. A brother may, e.g., have views of the interpretation of prophecy which are found obnoxious by some. Yet the criticism of him will tend to get personal; his character is besmirched, because it's felt that this is justified because he [supposedly] has 'heretical' views.

Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes (John the Baptist's followers) were all converted into Christianity (Acts 6:7; 15:5; 19:1-5). There is no specific statement that they dropped all their previous understandings; indeed Acts 15:5 shows that there were Christians who still called themselves "Pharisees". The uniting and defining feature was their common acceptance of Jesus as Messiah, baptism into Him and commitment to Him. The "one faith" referred to the believers' faith in one and the same person- the one Lord, Jesus (Eph. 4:4-6), rather than only one set of doctrinal propositions about Jesus being "the faith" and all else being apostate. Given the breadth of doctrinal belief within the synagogue system, it's highly significant that the Lord assumed His followers would remain within that system until they were cast out. He established no principle of leaving a community because one disagrees with some of their theological tenets. He in fact taught the opposite; that there is no guilt by association by such things, and His emphasis was on the heart and human behaviour being transformed. It seems to me a romanticizing of the New Testament evidence to suggest that the early church was totally doctrinally united, but was soon fractured by doctrinal declension from a specific set of doctrines and interpretations which were set in stone by the apostles. Rather the amazing unity of the church was and is remarkable in that it was achieved *despite and in the face of* those differences. What split the church was fleshly behaviour, which in turn utilized doctrinal differences to justify the various divisions.

15:6 *And the apostles and the elders gathered together to consider this matter*- There is a distinction made between "the whole church" and "the apostles and the elders" (:22). The issues were of such a nature that they required mature discussion and decision making, but the outcome of the deliberations was shared with and agreed by "the whole church". There are some spiritual issues which it is not appropriate to as it were put to the decision of mass democracy. The resulting letter was signed by "the apostles and elders and brethren" (:23). The idea of a private meeting of the

apostles and elders may fit Paul's account of the meeting in Gal. 2:2, where he says he put the matters "privately to them that were of reputation", and not publicly.

15:7 *And when there had been much debate*- Peter impetuously would have wanted to state his highly significant personal experience in this matter; but he wisely and humbly curbed himself. Although Peter had clearly been the leader of the very early church, he seems now to be eclipsed by James; and although he was "chosen" by God out of all the other apostles to introduce the Gospel to the Gentiles, yet those same 'senior brethren' are described as 'choosing' [the same Greek word] brethren other than Peter to be involved in this work of incorporating the Gentiles (:22,25). A lesser man than Peter would not have taken well to losing the leadership; he spent the rest of his life as a humble pastor, perhaps of a very small group, and according to the Lord's own prediction, died a violent death.

Peter rose up and said to them: Brothers, you know that a good while ago- But it was not so long ago. Perhaps he was trying to give the impression that the Gentile circumcision question had been settled far back in time and there was no need to be raising it. But that is a typical political tactic- and it's not the only example here. This is why the Council of Jerusalem ultimately failed, with Paul later writing advice quite contrary to the agreements reached. There simply wasn't total honesty about the positions held, and whilst on one hand the factions were united by a common acceptance of Jesus as Messiah, the issues added to that by the legalists were such that true unity was never going to be possible. And the same scenario has been worked out multiple times, even if the exact issues and contexts differ.

God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe- Again, the "by" reflects how Peter saw himself as merely an agent, an instrument in God's hands.

15:8- see on Acts 26:22.

And God, who knows the heart- The only other time these words occur is on the Lord's lips in Lk. 16:15, warning the Pharisees that God knows their hearts. And Peter is saying these words to Pharisees who now had believed in Jesus (15:5). He's reminding them, perhaps, of who they had been, of what corrupt hearts they had once had. The Lord had known all about that, but worked to accept them and draw them in to His fellowship. And the same Lord knew the hearts of sincere Gentiles, and was seeking to save them too.

Did bare them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as He did to us- This is legal language. It's as if God is being called as a witness, and the exhibit provided is the fact that He gave the Holy Spirit to the Gentile converts as a sign of their acceptance- before they were even baptized, and without requiring their circumcision. But who, then, was the judge? The brethren there present at that meeting. And the whole question was therefore wisely presented by Peter as effectively judging God. And in fact that is what any of us are doing by questioning which believers in Christ are acceptable with God. We are relegating Him to a witness, and placing ourselves in His place as judges. This idea is continued in :10: "Why do you now put God to the test?", the Greek meaning to examine or scrutinize. This would then continue the legal metaphor- with the suggestion that it is quite inappropriate to examine the exhibit of God's acceptance of Gentiles in this way.

15:9 *And he made no distinction between us and them*- The same word was used when Peter was told to go with the Gentile visitors "without doubting" (10:20; 11:12), i.e. making no distinction between Jew and Gentile.

Cleansing their hearts by faith- This may be a comment upon their receipt of the Holy Spirit (:8). Whilst their speaking in languages was an outward sign of the Spirit's operation, the essence of the gift of the Holy Spirit refers to internal cleansing (see on 2:38). Their hearts were cleansed by the gift of the Spirit- on the basis of their *faith*, not their circumcision. Peter had been told that he was not to make any difference between clean and unclean as defined by Moses, because God had now cleansed the unclean (s.w. 10:15; 11:9). Clearly the unclean animals he had seen represented the Gentiles.

15:10 *Therefore, why do you now put God to the test*- There is the possible suggestion in Acts 15:10 that God was 'tempted' to re-enstate the law of Moses, or parts of it, in the first century, seeing that this was what so many of the early Christians desired to keep. That God is so eager to work with us should in itself be a great encouragement. Or the Greek can mean that they were testing or scrutinizing God inappropriately. See on :8 *Bare them witness*.

Putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?- The Lord Jesus came to place a light yoke upon His followers. Not only were the Judaist brethren acting in the place of the Lord Jesus by putting a yoke on others, rather than bearing it themselves; but the yoke they were placing was heavy and unbearable. A yoke makes the burden lighter by sharing it with others who are under the yoke. The fellowship requirement [in this case, circumcision] was therefore a yoke. The Lord's yoke was light in that His fellowship is and was open, and not based upon meeting legalistic requirements.

15:11 *But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as them*- Note that Peter cried out "*Lord*, save me!" when most men in that situation would have simply cried out "Save me!". But his grasp of the Lordship of the One he followed inspired faith. If He was truly Lord, He was capable of all things. "Lord, save me!" was a call uttered in a moment of weakness. His "sinking" (Mt. 14:30) is described with the same word used about condemnation at the last day (Mt. 18:6), and yet Peter in his preaching persuades condemned men to do just the same: to *call* on the *Lord* in order to be *saved* (Acts 2:21,40,47; 4:12; 11:14). He invited all men to enter into the weakness and desperation which he had known on the water of Galilee, and receive a like unmerited salvation. And when he tells his sheep that the righteous are "scarcely saved" (1 Pet. 4:18) he surely writes with memories of that same gracious deliverance. And so now here in discussing ecclesial problems he points out that all of us have had a similar salvation, and should act with an appropriate inclusiveness of our brethren.

Grace, *charis*, basically means a gift. The gift of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles was the means of their salvation. The reference is not therefore to the visual manifestations of that gift in miraculous terms; for those died out. But the gift / grace of the Lord was the basis of salvation. It is therefore not only available today, but deeply necessary for salvation; for without the spirit of Christ "we are none of His".

15:12 *And all the crowd kept silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul relating what signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them*- This could mean that the crowd were not so silent when listening to Peter. The miracles performed by the Lord through Barnabas and Paul were also "signs"- of His acceptance of the Gentiles. It is a common theme in Acts that the Spirit worked miracles in order to demonstrate the acceptance of the Gentiles.

15:13 *And after they finished speaking*- God seems to have recognized with pleasure the degree to which Paul modelled his life on John, in that Paul's experiences of life were over-ruled to have connections with those of John. These connections simply could not have been engineered by Paul; e.g. the way in which they both died in prison at the behest of a crazy, woman-influenced despot. The Spirit also seems to make connections between John and Paul in the manner in which it describes them (e.g. Lk. 1:14 = Acts 15:13; 13:52; Lk. 1:15 = Acts 9:17; 13:9; Lk. 3:18 = Acts 13:15-19; Jn. 1:7,8,15 = Acts 23:11; 26:22; Jn. 3:27 = 1 Cor. 2:8-16). And the Spirit in Acts 19:18 seems to portray Paul in the language of John: "they came (to Paul) and confessed, and shewed their deeds"- just as men had to John.

James replied, saying- A good case can be made that James was written as a follow up to the Council of Jerusalem- there are some marked similarities [James 2:5 = Acts 15:13; James 2:7 = Acts 15:17; James 1:27 = Acts 15:29]. See on 15:23 *Greeting*.

Brothers, listen to me- The AV and some manuscripts add "Men and brethren". This could refer to the addressing of both the entire church ("men"), and the elders ("brethren"). Throughout Acts 15 we are reminded that the decisions reached were taken by the church congregation *and* the elders- rather than elders imposing a position upon the congregation.

15:14 *Simeon has related how first God visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name*- The conversion of Cornelius was certainly understood as the sign that the Gentiles were to be accepted. This would imply that Cornelius was the first public Gentile conversion by the apostles, which would mean that the Ethiopian eunuch was either a Jew or a proselyte effectively counted as a Jew. After all, he was reading Isaiah in Hebrew, having visited Jerusalem on pilgrimage, when Philip preached Christ to him. It is Luke who three times records that the ministry of the Lord Jesus had been God visiting His people Israel (Lk. 1:68,78; 7:16 cp. Acts 7:23- God visited Israel to redeem them through Moses). No other evangelist records this. Now he is making the point that God was visiting the Gentiles. This did not remain with Paul as some mere theological nicety. The same word is used of how straight away, he decided to go and visit the Gentile converts (15:36). God's visitation of man in Christ quite simply means that we literally go visit others, in pastoral and preaching work. We have mentioned how the letter of James appears to be on one hand an extended commentary upon the Acts 15 decisions, which James had a major part in. His comment on 'visiting' is that we should "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). The "unspotted from the world" would then be his form of the agreement made that Gentiles could be accepted but they must keep "unspotted from the world" by avoiding the fornication and idolatry of the world. James would therefore specifically have in mind 'visiting' *Gentile* widows; and we recall that the issue of discriminating against Greek speaking widows was one of the issues his church had faced in Acts 6:1. Again, God's visitation of men, seeking to take out a people for His Name, must be reflected in our reaching out to others in practice, both materially and spiritually.

15:15 *And to this agree the words of the prophets*- There was a 'symphony' [Gk.] between Biblical revelation and the position they were being led to adopt; and there is nothing more comforting and beautiful than to know that a position is solidly underpinned in Bible teaching and Biblical precedent.

As it is written- In Am. 9:11 LXX.

15:16 *After this things I will return*- This is hard to interpret; the idea seems to be that after the crucifixion, God 'departed' for a time but now was returning to men in calling the Gentiles.

And I will build again the tabernacle of David which is fallen- Not the temple of Solomon, although the language of rebuilding is relevant to a temple rather than to a tent. "In that day (of the future Kingdom- v.14) will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen" (Amos 9:11)- a clear future Kingdom prophecy, but quoted about the building up of the first century church in Acts 15:14-16.

And I will build again the ruins of it- He is surely saying that because the house of David has been rebuilt, therefore it is now O.K. to help the Gentiles "seek after the Lord". James perceived that firstly the Gospel must go to the house of David, the Jews, and once they had responded, then it would go to the Gentiles. Perhaps the Lord had the same principle in mind when He bad His preachers to not [then] preach to Gentiles but instead [at that stage] concentrate on preaching to the house of Israel (Mt. 10:5). Yet the primary fulfilment of Amos 9 is clearly in the last days- then, after Israel have been sifted in the sieve of persecution amongst the Gentiles in the latter day holocaust, the tabernacle of David will again be 'rebuilt', the Gentiles will turn to the Lord, and then "the ploughman shall overtake the reaper… the mountains shall drop sweet wine… and I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel… and I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be plucked up out of their land" (Am. 9:13-15). Surely what we are being told is that there must be a repeat of what happened in the first century. What happened then, in the repentance of a minority in Israel, the spread of the Gospel to the world and then the Lord's 'coming' in AD70… this must all be repeated on a far greater scale. Thus some in Israel must repent in the last days, after the pattern of the 1st century. This will bring about the great latter day gathering in of the Gentiles at the establishment of the Kingdom, when the whole Gentile world will seek to come up to Zion (Is. 2:3; 19:23; 11:10; 51:4,5; 60:3,11; 66:20; Zech. 8:21).

And I will raise it up- An apparent reference to the resurrection of Jesus. He had spoken of His resurrection as a rebuilding of the temple (Jn. 2:19,20).

A note is perhaps necessary about *how* the NT writers quoted from the LXX. Because often it appears they don't quote exactly from the LXX text. The classic example would be the way Amos 9:11,2 is quoted in Acts 15:16-18. The argument of James actually hinges on the LXX reading as opposed to the Hebrew [Masoretic] text reading. 'All the nations' were to have God's Name called upon them, whereas Is. 63:19 describes the Gentiles as people upon whom God's Name had not [then] been called. Yet this 'quotation' is actually a merger of the Amos passage with several others (Is. 45:21; Jer. 12:15; Hos. 3:5). That's why James introduces the quotation with the comment that he is quoting "the prophets" (plural). The quotation is more like an interpretation of the text- which was how the Jews were used to interpreting the OT texts. Their principle of exposition, called *gezera shawa*, linked together Bible texts which used the same language. One of the texts which James incorporates into his 'quotation' is Jer. 12:16 LXX, which speaks of how converted Gentiles will be "in the midst of my people". Yet this very phrase occurs several times in Lev. 17 and 18, where we have the commands for how the Gentiles who lived amongst Israel should behave (Lev. 17:8,10,12,13; 18:26). They were told that there were four areas where their lifestyle had to conform to Jewish practice. And these are the very four areas, in the same order, which James asks the Gentile Christians to obey! Clearly, then, the

decree of Acts 15, commanding the Gentile Christians to e.g. not eat blood, had as its context how Gentile Christians should live 'in the midst of' a Jewish Christian ecclesia. This is the limitation of the context. From this little exercise in exposition we learn how carefully and intricately the early brethren expounded the OT. Yes, they used the LXX, but they used it in such a way as to bring out practical points, searching always for Bible precedents for the situations they found themselves in. They set us quite some example, especially considering that James, the Lord's brother, would have been a manual worker and artisan as the Lord was; perhaps he was scarcely literate. And yet he reached such heights of exposition and wisdom purely from a simple love of God's word and attention to its detail. See on Jn. 13:18.

15:17 *So that the residue of mankind may seek after the Lord*- The remnant of men, a reference to the remnant of Israel who would accept Jesus. This group are distinguished from "And all the Gentiles".

And all the Gentiles who are called by My name- Those who called upon themselves His Name by baptism into it. The tense is chosen to maybe reflect how God already knows His people and had already called the Gentile converts by His Name. This was encouragement to the preachers to go out and fulfil His work with the Gentiles which He had already potentially enabled. This sense is confirmed by the comment in :18 that "[God] makes these things known from of old". He is now making them known ["makes"], but they had already been long planned. This encourages us to preach to the Gentiles "upon whom my name is [Amos says 'has already been'] called". The Name is called upon us by baptism; yet in prospect, in potential, the Name has already been called upon the whole world. But it is for us to go and convert them. This explains why Paul is spoken of as having been a convert before he actually was. Paul was as an ox bound to a yoke, kicking against the goads. But it was as if he was already bound into Christ's light yoke. He wrote that he bore in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus. He seems to be alluding to the practice of branding runaway slaves who had been caught with the letter F in their forehead, for *fugitivus*. His whole thinking was dominated by this awareness that like Jonah he had sought to run, and yet had by grace been received into his Master's service. But the figure implies that he already was a slave of Jesus at the time of his 'capture' in conversion.

15:18 *Said the Lord, who makes these things known from of old*- See on :17. "Of old" is literally "From the beginning of the age". The idea was that God's plan for the Gentiles was evident, reading between the lines, right from the beginning of His "age" of work with Israel.

15:19 *Therefore my judgment is that*- The legal language of a judge arising to give a verdict. This is in line with Peter's earlier warning not to have God as the provider of witness and to judge Him wrongly; see on :8.

We do not trouble- But the Judaizer brethren did 'trouble' the Gentile believers (:24). Later references in the NT to the converts being "troubled" may well refer to the activities of these Judaizers (Acts 17:8; 2 Cor. 4:8; 7:5; Gal. 1:7; 5:10; 2 Thess. 1:7; 2:2; 1 Pet. 3:14).

Those from among the Gentiles that turn to God- Seeing there were few atheists in the first century, we wonder why he doesn't say 'turn to Christ'. He was speaking to Jews, and was using Judaism's language of a Gentile becoming a proselyte and 'turning to [Israel's] God'. But he is saying that becoming a proselyte now meant baptism into

Christ, rather than attempting to keep Mosaic laws and visiting the temple in Jerusalem.

15:20 *But that we write to them, that they abstain*- The word is elsewhere used, probably in allusion to this agreement, about abstaining from idolatry, fleshly lusts and immorality (1 Thess. 4:3; 5:22; 1 Pet. 2:11). I suggest therefore that all the prohibitions were of a moral nature. To eat non-kosher food is not an issue of immorality; so my sense is that this must be understood as part of a prohibition here against involvement in idol worship. It's not right for a young unmarried couple to sleep with each other before marriage, but I don't think "fornication" as used here has that in view. Rather are all these things part of idol rituals- fornication would specifically referred to the use of temple prostitutes as part of the worship rituals. Fornication and the blood laws were therefore elaborations upon "the pollutions of idols". So we could read it as meaning: "Abstain from the pollutions of idols: [i.e.] from fornication, from what is strangled and from blood".

From the pollutions of idols- Only used in the LXX in Dan. 1:8 and Mal. 1:7 about ritually unclean food.

From fornication, from what is strangled and from blood- The Mosaic law required that animals be killed by their blood being poured out.

15:21 *For Moses from generations of old has in every city those that preach him, he being read in the synagogues every Sabbath*- At first blush this may seem rather a disconnected reason for the previous arrangements. The key is in the phrase "in every city". The Gentile converts were foreseen as coming from "every city". James foresaw that there would be Jews living in every place where Gentiles were baptized; and he sought not to give them any reason for stumbling. Note that the synagogue system is described as preaching Moses. They were creating a cult following around a man, rather than acting as a conduit to bring people to God and His Son.

15:22 *Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men out of their company and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas: Judas called Barsabbas and Silas, leading men among the brothers*- The Bible doesn't teach the total equality of role amongst all believers. There are leaders- but they are still among their brethren.

15:23 *With them they sent the following letter: The apostles and the elders, brothers, to the brothers*- Although writing from a position of authority, they emphasized that they were brothers writing to brothers.

Who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia- The scope of the agreement was local to these areas. Judea is not mentioned, neither is there any general clause governing Gentile converts everywhere. This is maybe why Paul advised the Corinthians differently about issues relating to blood. It's also a reason why we should not seek to obey the letter of the legislation here about blood. This agreement was for a limited time and geographical scope.

Greeting- See on :13 *James*.

15:24 *Forasmuch as we have heard that some who went out from us have disturbed you with words, subverting you, to whom we gave no commandment*- The phrase "who went out from us" is exactly that used by John concerning the Judaists in his context, and he uses the term to imply that by going out from the body of Christ they had left Christ (1 Jn. 2:19); and the allusion is to Judas going out from the disciples into the darkness and off to the Jewish leaders to betray the Lord. They "disturbed" the believers, and Paul uses the same word about "some that trouble you

[s.w.] and would pervert the Gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:7; 5:10). This is all strong language. This is the severe danger of legalism. It seems that these brethren had falsely claimed the authority of the Jerusalem church, and their aim was to 'subvert you', to carry them away- back to the Jerusalem temple cult.

15:25 *It seemed good to us, having come to one accord*- The idea is that they were unanimous. It seems unlikely that they were, and subsequent NT history shows that the Judaizer group continued their work of 'troubling' the Gentiles with their demands. So this would seem another example of where the Council of Jerusalem is recorded very positively, differences were papered over, an impression of unanimity was given, and therefore the Council ultimately failed to solve the underlying issues.

To select men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul- Luke always mentions Paul first. But here Luke is recording the letter sent by the Jerusalem brethren, who would have known and respected Barnabas longer than Paul; and so I see here an incidental evidence that the Divinely inspired Luke is indeed accurately recording real events and written words.

15:26 *Men that have risked their lives*- The Greek can equally mean that they had handed over their lives.

For the name of our Lord Jesus Christ- Bearing the name of Christ is in itself an imperative to witness it. Thus “the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” is used as a metonymy for ‘the preaching of Christ’ (Acts 15:26; 3 Jn. 7; Mt. 24:9 cp. 14). We are baptized into that Name and thereby it is axiomatic that we become witnesses to it.

15:27 *Therefore, we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves also shall tell you the same things by word of mouth*- Appropriate because many were illiterate and there may have been concerns as to whether what was being read from a scroll was in fact accurate.

15:28 *For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things*- There is such a thing as compromise in spiritual life. The compromise of Acts 15 about the demands placed upon the Gentile believers was an example. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write that the Mosaic food laws had no binding at all upon Christian converts; and yet "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit" to endorse the compromise reached in Acts 15:28. The laws agreed there as binding upon the Gentile converts in Acts 15:29 are in fact the so-called Noachic or Primeval Laws, considered by some orthodox Jews to be binding upon all the sons of Noah. That interpretation of what God said to Noah is itself stretched and hardly on a solid Biblical foundation- but God was willing to go along with it in order to make concessions required so that there would at least be some human chance of unity in the early church.

“It seemed good to the Holy Spirit” suggests that their conclusions were somehow confirmed by the Spirit. How exactly this happened isn't stated. But we note that in :32, Judas and Silas used the Spirit gift of prophecy to tell the Gentile converts the same message. It could be of course that as with Nathan initially assuming that his message to David about the temple was inspired from God when it wasn't, so these brethren may have assumed their conclusions were supported by the Holy Spirit. The way that Paul later contradicts the ruling about food offered to idols might suggest that in fact, they were simply assuming [as too many folk do today] that their own process of reasoning was correct and was therefore confirmed by the Holy Spirit. At best we can observe that no mechanism for that confirmation is recorded here.

15:29 *That you abstain from things sacrificed to idols*- Out of the four forbidden things, this is the one which differs from what was originally agreed. In :20 they had agreed to write forbidding the Gentile converts "pollution of idols". But this changed

to "thing sacrificed to idols" (although the word is only used in the LXX in Dan. 1:8 and Mal. 1:7 about ritually unclean food). What they agreed to write was not written- an interpretation of it was written. And it is exactly at this point that Paul's advice to the Corinthians differs appears to differ from that of the Jerusalem Council as here recorded. For he writes that there is nothing wrong of itself with eating things sacrificed to idols. Perhaps he considered that the decree of Jerusalem only affected limited geographical areas and wasn't binding on his mission [see on :23]; or that he considered the whole agreement to have failed to such an extent that it was null and void; or he perhaps considered that it was all dirty church politics and he was giving inspired advice which contradicted it.

From blood, from things strangled and from fornication. From which if you keep yourselves, it shall be well with you. Farewell- Note that the Western Text [*Codex Bezae*] of Acts omits "things strangled", leaving us with three basic laws about idolatry, fornication and bloodshed. In this case we would see an allusion to an uninspired passage in the Mishnah (*Aboth* 5) which taught that the captivity in Babylon came about "on account of idolatry, fornication and bloodshed". In this case we would see God willing to compromise and accept the terms which were familiar to the orthodox Jewish minds, rather than merely telling them that their Mishnah was uninspired and so often hopelessly incorrect.

15:30 *So they, when they were sent off*- This alludes to the custom of accompanying a person on the first stage of their journey as a sign of solidarity and acceptance of them. The delegation had the full support of the Jerusalem church.

Went to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter- There is a need for transparency in these things; and so the letter was delivered and read in front of everyone. Remember that many would have been illiterate. They did not "deliver the letter" until the congregation had been gathered together, in order to stop any chance of gossip after some had read the letter and others hadn't. These are the kinds of basic wisdom that are needed in pastoral and mission work.

15:31 *And when they had read it, they rejoiced for the encouragement*- The Judaist visitors had obviously worried the believers with the possibility that their salvation could be in question and actually impossible. Hence their joy when they learned that they were acceptable with God.

15:32 *And Judas and Silas, being themselves also prophets*- See on :28 *It seemed good to the Holy Spirit*.

Encouraged and strengthened the believers with many words- The idea is of confirmation. The context is confirming them that as Gentiles they really were OK with the Lord without circumcision. When we read of Paul and Silas going throughout Syria and Cilicia "strengthening the churches" (:41), the same word is used; and presumably the confirmation provided was again about this issue of Gentile acceptability. We note that Syria and Cilicia are the two specific regions to whom the letter from Jerusalem was addressed (:23).

15:33 *And after they had spent some time there, they were sent off in peace by the brothers back to those that had sent them*- The 'sending off' was a custom demonstrating acceptance and blessing of the mission; see on :30.

15:34 *It seemed good to Silas to stay there*- Again we see the human element in the preaching decisions of the early brethren. Despite Holy Spirit guidance, they made decisions which "seemed good" to them. The same word is used in :22,25 and :28. This is a fair emphasis all within the same chapter. There could be the hint that the decisions of the Council were simply what seemed right to them at the time, although

they claimed some unspecified Holy Spirit confirmation of their thinking. This would again explain why Paul's inspired guidance to the Corinthians about meat offered to idols seems to contradict the position of the Jerusalem elders.

15:35 *And Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also*- "Teaching" may refer to teaching the converts; and "preaching" to evangelism. "The Lord" in Luke-Acts usually refers to the Lord Jesus; the Gospel records would not have been widely distributed, and many people were illiterate. So the teaching and preaching of the Lord's word as recorded in the Gospels would have been vital.

15:36 *And after some days Paul said to Barnabas: Let us return now*- The Greek word used here is that usually translated 'to convert'. It could be that Paul was suggesting that they go and 'convert' their converts, understanding that there are levels of conversion, as the Lord had taught and exemplified in Peter (Lk. 22:32).

And visit the believers in every city wherein we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they fare- See on :14.

15:37 *And Barnabas wanted to take with them John also, who was called Mark*- The Greek really means 'to advise'. And Paul got mad and had a division about even the suggestion! This is not Paul at his best, but the incident is so typical of many divisions in the church.

15:38 - see on Acts 6:1.

But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia- The Greek word and position in the clause suggests '*that* one', reflecting Paul's contemptuous attitude. The Greek idea is of apostasy. But Paul speaks of apostasy from *him*, rather than from the Lord. This is not Paul at his best. Like many of his brethren to this day, he considered a personal departure from him as being apostasy. Likewise he laments how all in Asia had turned away *from him*; whereas the Lord Jesus wrote letters to those in Asia, clearly acceptant of them as His beloved brethren. Personal differences don't thereby declare a divided-from brother to be therefore and thereby no longer a brother of the Lord. It could be, however, that John Mark had separated from them for spiritual reasons, perhaps falling under the influence of the Judaizers.

Mark may have left them in Pamphylia for a number of reasons. We note that it was at that point in Acts 13 that Saul changes his name to Paul. The shift from a Hebrew to Roman name, and the increased emphasis on preaching to Gentiles, may have been too much for Mark. And we note that from that time on, we no longer read of "Barnabas and Paul" but rather "Paul and Barnabas", and we find phrases like "Paul and his company". Paul had been the protege of Barnabas, and whilst Barnabas coped with being clearly outshone by his own protege, perhaps his nephew felt that he ought to have been the protege. And he was being outshone by Paul. In addition to all this, it is quite possible that Saul / Paul had persecuted the family of John Mark, and he found that hard to forgive. We note from Acts 12:12 that the church in Jerusalem met "in the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark". But this sounds very similar to the scenario of Acts 8:3: “Paul was ravaging the church by entering *house after house*; dragging off both men and *women*, he committed them to prison”. We simply conclude that interpersonal fallout occurs for a variety of reasons.

And had not gone with them to the work- Paul's dislike of Mark was for deeper reasons than just surface irritation. This is quoting the Septuagint of 1 Sam. 30:22, where "all the wicked men and men of Belial, of those that went with David, said, Because they *went not with us*, we will not give them ought of the spoil". *Why* does the Spirit make this connection? Is it not suggesting that Paul, zealous soldier of

David / Jesus as he was, was in those early days in some sense a man of Belial, bent on achieving his own glory in preaching, and unwilling to share it with anyone who wasn't spiritually or physically strong enough to do it as he was (cp. the weaker followers of David)? If this is the case, then this is a far, far cry from the Paul who wrote his letters some years later, begging Timothy to come to encourage him, and letters in which the care of all the churches weighs down his soul daily, coming upon him as he woke up each morning (2 Cor. 11:28); the Paul who repeatedly encourages the weak, treating weak and strong as all the same in many ways, until he eventually attains a level of selfless devotion to his weak brethren that is only surpassed by the Lord Himself.

Col. 4:11 could suggest that John Mark ended up in prison with Paul: "Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him)". Philemon 24 describes Mark as Paul's fellow worker in prison- working together for the Gospel, when Paul had earlier said that Mark did not go with him to the work. This would explain Barnabas wanting to take John Mark, as he was his nephew. Paul was expecting that Mark would be released from prison, and he urges others to accept him upon release- perhaps implying that Mark had sinned or fallen away, or Paul had signalled his disagreement with Mark. But prison together for the Lord had united them. So much so that after Mark was released, Paul was so close to him that he asked Timothy to bring him back to Rome to be with him in his final days (2 Tim. 4:11). In this case we see a total reconcilliation between Paul and Mark; but not with Barnabas. As often happens, the collateral damage of interpersonal conflict can cause more damage than the actual conflict, and may never be resolved, even after the initial cause of conflict is resolved.

15:39- see on Acts 13:12,13.

They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus- The "contention" between Paul and Barnabas is described in a word which occurs only thrice elsewhere. In Heb. 10:24, a more mature Paul speaks of how we should consider one another to "*provoke* unto love and good works". Surely he wrote this with a sideways glance back at his earlier example of provoking unto bitterness and division. Likewise he told the Corinthians that he personally had stopped using the miraculous Spirit gifts so much, but instead concentrated on developing a character dominated by love, which was *not* easily provoked (1 Cor. 13:5). The Spirit seems to have recognized Paul's change, when Acts 17:16 records how Paul's spirit was "stirred" at the spiritual need of the masses, and thereby he was provoked to preach to them; rather, by implication, than being provoked by the irritations of weaker brethren.

This whole incident is so true to life, human nature and church experience. There had just been an apparently succesful conference about church unity- and then Paul and Barnabas divide. Personality factors will still in reality dictate division between persons, and only the spirit of Christ unites. We see that unity is never achieved by conferences and on-paper agreements. According to Gal. 2:13, Paul felt gutted that Barnabas had caved in to the pressure from Judaist brethren and had refused to break bread with Gentile brethren. Paul clearly felt Barnabas was wrong in that, and we sense his deep hurt and shock when he writes that "*even Barnabas* was led astray by their hypocrisy". The incident described in Gal. 2 was after the first missionary journey, but *before* the events of Acts 15. And so Paul was sensitive to any whif of a repeated caving in to right wing conservative brethren. He was in no mood to give John Mark a second chance. And this is so true to life- giving others a second chance,

falling out over attitudes to third parties... this is to this day the stuff of Christian division.

John Mark had "withdrawn from them" and returned to Jerusalem, home of the conservative brethren. Paul sensed in this a disagreement with himself personally and his policy of accepting the Gentiles, which the Jerusalem conservatives disagreed with. And so when Barnabas suggested taking John Mark, the associations in Paul's mind quickly led him to snap. This is so absolutely true to human nature and experience.

Barnabas was probably just trying to accept John Mark, just as he had accepted Saul. Saul had radically changed, and Barnabas had accepted that. But Paul, it seems, was not willing to accept that John Mark might have changed. He didn't reflect the same grace which Barnabas had shown to him. And yet Gal. 2:13 is clear that Barnabas had failed in going too far to accommodate the conservative Jewish brethren. As you analyze the situation, you can see legitimate and correct points in the position of each of those involved. Paul was right to stand up against the conservative brethren, and Barnabas was in the wrong in Gal. 2:13 in Antioch. But Barnabas was right to try to involve John Mark; and Paul was wrong to just allow associations of events and possible outcomes to lead him to divide from Barnabas. And so it is in the messy complex of human life and relationships within the church. There are elements of right and wrong, truth and error, flesh and spirit in all of us, and in all divisions and failures.

15:40 *But Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord*- The commendation of Paul's mission by the Antioch brethren could suggest that they took Paul's side in the dispute. But despite being seen as having done the right thing by conservative brethren, Paul's later allusions to the incident suggest he later realized that he had done wrong, and the approbation of his brethren didn't make it right before God.

There is no record that the brothers commended Barnabas and John Mark on their missionary journey to Cyprus, nor is there any account of the journey. But there is the record here that they did as it were legitimize Paul's journey with Silas, although it began under the cloud of personal division. We wonder whether this is a hint that Paul's concerns about John Mark were not totally groundless. Or is it that the focus of Acts is simply upon Paul and therefore the missionary journeys of others aren't mentioned. But we never read of Barnabas again- nor of any reconciliation between him and Paul. Perhaps we are to take comfort that even some of the finest believers have died with unresolved conflicts and relationship breakdown. And yet surely Paul would have tried to practice what he often wrote about our unity in Christ. So possibly Barnabas caved in even more to the Judaizer element, with whom he had grown up in Jerusalem- i.e., the lack of reconciliation was his fault. He would have joined the many Jewish Christians who fell away to legalism and Judaism, caught up in the wave of Jewish nationalism that swept the Jewish world at the time, as lamented in Hebrews, James and the letters of Peter. In this case we see how a man may be gracious and truly inclusive, but still fall away to legalism. Grace has to be worked on and responded to consciously, all our days.

The sharpness of the disagreement seems to suggest that both sides were dogmatic and would not compromise. Barnabas comes over in the previous accounts of him as wonderfully gracious, and having a special care for Paul- we recall how he sought out Paul in Tarsus and roped him in to Gentile-focused missionary work in Antioch. Did he have another, harder side to him? Was he 'hard' over the need to

include John Mark and not exclude him, despite his Jewish conservative background, just as Barnabas had worked to include Paul earlier? Or did Barnabas change into a harder person and continue to cave in to the pressures as he had done in Antioch (Gal. 2:13)? But *contra* that we have Paul's deathbed desire for reconcilliation with John Mark which we read of in 2 Tim. 4? Why at that point did Paul not ask for Barnabas to come and see him? Had Barnabas died? Had he totally returned to Judaism? There are so many intentionally open ended issues here. And that is purposeful, so that we might explore the options- because interpersonal conflict between brethren over fellowship issues is probably one of the most common experiences of all believers.

15:41 *And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches*- See on :32 *strengthened the believers*. The Greek for "strengthening" is from the root for 'establishing'; the word is used both of the Lord establishing His people, and of the preachers and pastors establishing them. Any work we do to build up others has the Lord working through and with us.

ACTS CHAPTER 16

16:1 *And he went also to Derbe and to Lystra; and a certain disciple was there, named Timothy*- Being half Jewish and having a Gentile name, this was a typical case which would have been hard to legislate over given the legalistic mindset of the Judaizers which has just been brought before us in chapter 15. And 'Timothy' means 'Dear to God'; the Gentiles were equally beloved.

The son of a Jewess that believed; but his father was a Greek- Her name was Eunice, and his grandmother Lois also had believed before her (2 Tim. 1:5). Lois and Eunice are Gentile names, so we might conclude that they were not very observant Jews, indeed Eunice had married a Gentile which would have severed her from orthodox Judaism, neither had she circumcised her son; and yet from a child they had taught him the Old Testament Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:15). They loved the word of God but were not seen as having made the grade in terms of their religion. So many of the Lord's people are like that.

16:2 *Well reported of by the believers that were at Lystra and Iconium*- This would imply Timothy was from Lystra (:1 is unclear whether he was from Derbe or Lystra).

16:3 *Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him*- Literally 'to go forth', the word used about missionary endeavour in fulfilment of the great commission to 'go forth' (Lk. 9:6; 3 Jn. 7).

And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek- Remember that this follows hard on the decision made in chapter 15 not to demand circumcision. But an agreed position can still not be followed because of the higher principles of not causing others to stumble. There are several examples in the NT of where Paul could have taken a certain course of action, or insisted on acceptance of a certain doctrinal position, knowing that Truth was on his side. But he didn't. Thus the council of Jerusalem established that Gentiles didn't need to be circumcised, but straight afterwards Paul circumcised Timothy in Lystra out of consideration to the feelings of the Jewish believers (Acts 16:1-3). He could have stood on his rights, and on the clear spiritual principles involved. But he stepped down to the lower level of other believers (e.g. by keeping some of the redundant Jewish feasts), he made himself all things to

all men that he might try to save some, and by so doing stepped up to the higher level in his own spirituality.

Timothy was from a non-standard background, as we will see both Lydia and the prison keeper were. His mother was a Jewess who had married out of the faith and not circumcised her child. But she and her mother had raised him reading the OT scriptures, as Paul reminds him in his letter to him. And they had become Christians. So like Lydia [see later] he was from a black sheep background. Just the type the Lord uses.

16:4 *And as they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which had been determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem*- Presumably just the four forbidden things related to idol worship. Or were there more?

16:5 *So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily*- Implying baptisms were being done daily, immediately a candidate was ready (not left to the weekend for convenience!). The same reference to daily increase is to be found earlier in Acts. The increase in number was related to the [temporary] resolution of the tensions within the community over the question of the Gentiles. Schism between believers is the greatest disadvertisment for the Gospel, and contrariwise, as the Lord laboured in His prayer of John 17, our unity should be enough to convert the world.

16:6 *And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia*- Paul had just had the thrill of being given a green light to preach to the Gentiles in Acts 15. And so he assumed he could launch a preaching campaign in Asia. But then he was stopped. And after a while, given the call to Macedonia. We see this kind of thing often. A green light, followed by a red light, inexplicable and strange at the time; and then a road opens up somewhere else.

Paul writes to the Corinthians of how he had been given areas in which it was potentially possible for him to preach in (2 Cor. 10:13), and he didn't enter into those areas which had either already been preached in, or which were another brother's responsibility. This seems to suggest that God does indeed look down from Heaven and as it were divide up the world amongst those who could preach in it. This is why Paul perceived that he had been 'forbidden' from preaching in some areas [e.g. Macedonia] and yet a door was opened to him in Achaia. Likewise he felt he had been forbidden [s.w.] to preach to Rome until the time of Rom. 1:13. This language is allusive to the way in which the Lord forbad Israel to conquer certain areas on their way to the promised land (Dt. 2:37). The point is, between us, our preaching is a war of conquest for Jesus, pulling down strong holds and fortresses as Paul put it; or, as Jesus expressed it, taking the Kingdom by force, as storm troopers. How the Spirit achieved this 'forbidding' isn't clear, although the same word is used in 1 Thess. 2:16 about how Jewish opposition 'forbad' Paul preaching to Gentiles. But even this, for which the Jews were culpable, was used by the Spirit in the bigger picture of God's purpose.

16:7 *And when they came to the border of Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia*- The Greek really means to put to the test. Having been forbidden or hindered from preaching in Asia, they realized they were being led to some areas but not others. And so when they thought of preaching in Bithynia, they set up various tests to see if their way was to be made prosperous there or not. The spirit of Jesus, perhaps their own

spiritual mindedness, didn't permit them to go there. Perhaps they learnt the lesson and therefore likewise purposefully didn't preach in Mysia (see on :8).

But the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them- Living according to the spirit / mind / example of Jesus will mean that we naturally find the answers to some of the practical dilemmas which may arise in our lives. Could it not be that the spirit of Jesus, a life lived after His pattern, compelled them to (let's imagine) go to visit a sick child and this meant they missed the transport leaving for Bithynia?

We note that later Paul did preach in Asia especially in Ephesus, in fact through Paul's later preaching, "all Asia" heard the Gospel, although initially he was given a red light there (Acts 18:23-19:41); and others preached in Bithynia (1 Pet. 1:1). It was a red light from the Spirit for that time. A red light doesn't mean "never". And it may mean someone else is for the job. Or we could observe that Paul presents in the records as somewhat impatient. Perhaps this was all simply to teach him patience.

16:8 *So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas*- They could not have avoided it, seeing it was impossible to get to Troas without passing through Mysia. Presumably the idea is that they did not preach there. Perhaps the Spirit forbad them, as in Bithynia (see on 16:7).

16:9 *And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. There was a man of Macedonia standing*- Having been led away from two areas and realizing they should learn the lesson and leave a third one alone (see on :8), they were now directed to where the Lord wished them to work. He could have sent them there immediately, but He wanted them to work out and reflect upon His will and processes (see on :7 *attempted*); and once they had got through that, He gave them clear direction. This would explain the immediacy of their response once they finally received clear direction (:10). The same sort of thing happens in our lives if we allow ourselves to be led by Him and be in relationship with Him.

Men of Macedonia were stereotypically associated with mighty warriors, following on from all the images associated with Alexander of Macedon and his military descendants. But this warrior asks Paul to "Come... and help". Literally, 'come to my side'. "Come and help" was a term associated in classical Greece with a call for military help. Polybius (The Histories 10.41.1–6) uses the term several times in describing Philip V calling for military help, supplies and men, during the First Macedonian War- and then going on to victory. If these were indeed the associations which Paul would have picked up, then he had the impression of a mighty warrior [the Lord Jesus] 'needing' human boots on the ground in order to achieve a great victory. And Paul ran to Him with all speed. On one hand, "God requires not help from man". But He structures His purpose so that God is in a sense, in need of man. And men are criticized for not 'coming to help of the Lord' (Jud. 5:23). 'Come up and help [me]' is quoting the LXX of Josh. 10:3,4. where Adonibezek asks other kings to come and help him in a military sense against Joshua.

Urging him and saying: Come into Macedonia and help us!- Parakleo is literally 'to call near', AV 'praying him'. The man was standing- the position of begging and pleading in intercession (as the Lord Jesus for Stephen). "Help" is the same word used in Heb. 2:18 for the help provided by the Lord Jesus in prayer as our intercessor. The language is of prayer- and it's as if Paul and Timothy are in God's place being prayed to and begged by the Lord Jesus. In a sense, we manifest God in our preaching; we are Him to this world. And the need is the call; we too encounter such calls, if we are sensitive to them.

16:10 *And when he had seen the vision, immediately*- Paul and the apostles were urgent in their preaching. When Paul received the go ahead to preach in Macedonia, he “immediately endeavoured” to go there, even not waiting for Titus to join him, such was his urgency (Acts 16:10; 2 Cor. 2:12,13). And the response of people to these urgent preachers was therefore quick too. Men who began doubting and cynical were pricked in their heart, they realized their need, and were baptized within hours (Acts 2:12,37).

We sought to go into Macedonia- This could mean that Luke was now present with Paul; or it could be that he is including here the inspired diary of another companion of Paul.

Concluding that- The idea is of proving, putting together (s.w. Acts 9:22). By assessment of evidence and testing situations and hypotheses, Paul drew a conclusion. And we are likewise required to interpret God's actions in our lives, rather than expecting a bolt of revelation or specific calling. Although at times Paul did have this kind of thing, in his preaching work he was clearly left to join the dots himself in many ways. See on :7 *attempted* and :9 *A vision*.

God had called us to preach the gospel to them- Paul 'assuredly gathered' that "the Lord had called us for to preach the Gospel unto them" (Acts 16:10 AV). The Lord calling is usually used concerning His calling of men to understand and obey the Gospel. Perhaps Paul is saying that the reason why we are called is to preach, and in this context he realised that the people *he* was to preach to, were the Macedonians. He later reminisced: "As we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak (i.e. preach)" (1 Thess. 2:4).

If we don't shine forth the light, both in the world and in the household, we are not fulfilling the purpose for which we were called. Perhaps this is the meaning of Acts 16:10, where Luke says that they preached in Macedonia because they perceived that "the Lord had called us *for* (in order that) to preach the gospel (in this case) unto (the Macedonians)". Whether such an interpretation appeals or not, there are many passages which teach that our salvation will be related to the extent to which we have held forth the word both to the world and to the household (Prov. 11:3; 24:11,12; Dan. 12:3; Mk. 8:38; Lk. 12:8; Rom. 10:9,10 cp. Jn. 9:22; 12:42; 1:20; 1 Pet. 4:6 Gk.).

We noted above the military allusions in the call to "Come and help us!". The military allusions continue. "To preach the Gospel" is literally 'to declare the good news', and is a term used of declaring a victory. Paul was to go to the Roman colony and declare the good news of victory and defeat of all that Rome stood for. It was a radical message. Plutarch (Pompey 66.3) uses the term about ‘bringing news of victory’ or ‘declaring a victory’ in battle, e.g. “many... sailed to Cornelia in Lesbos with the glad tidings that the war was ended”.

16:11 *Setting sail therefore from Troas, we made a straight course to Samothrace and the day following to Neapolis*- A nautical term for sailing before the wind. But wind is the same Hebrew idea as 'spirit'. They were as it were led directly by the Spirit on their journey, confirming the process of 'concluding' we discussed on :10. Recall too how they had been forbidden to preach in two or three places before this; now, everything is going so directly and clearly under the Lord's direction by the Spirit. The allusion may be to the way the cherubim of Ezekiel's vision moved in a straight manner. And the account of Saul's conversion is replete with reference to the commissioning of Ezekiel. The Spirit, working through Angels, cherubim and all

manner of means, confirmed Paul in the direction he had worked out as being necessary to take.

16:12 *And from there to Philippi, which is a city of Macedonia, the first of the district, a Roman colony; and we stayed in this city for some days*- The teaching, conversion and baptism of the Philippians took only "some days"; the jailer would have at best only had a brief exposure to Paul's message before meeting him in prison. Likewise Paul was only in Thessalonica "two Sabbath days" and in that time he had to work night and day to support himself and his team. The impression is that the pre-baptismal teaching was brief. Colonies were "another Rome transferred to the soil of another country" (Vine). This explains some of the language in the letter to the Philippians, emphasizing that our citizenship is a heavenly one (Phil. 3:20), when Philippi had been established as a "colony" for Roman citizens.

16:13 *And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate by a river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women that had gathered*- When Paul is described as going "forth without the gate" to preach in Philippi (RV), this is the very language of Heb. 13:12 about the Lord going forth without the gate, carrying the cross, and bidding us follow Him. For Paul, to preach was to carry the cross of Christ, and so it must be for us. A river was an attractive place for Jews to worship because of their need to perform ritual washing. Paul's message of baptism was therefore particularly appropriate. We get the impression all through of those on the edge hearing the Gospel. Lydia was not even from Philippi, a Gentile on the edge of the Jewish faith. And meeting "outside the gate". The "place of prayer" was maybe a booth of branches or some temporary meeting place by a river, as water was required for Jewish ceremonial washings. We see how this was to lead to the only true washing required, in baptism. See on :14 *hearing*.

16:14 *And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple of the city of Thyatira, one that worshipped God*- Or, a Lydian. Perhaps she was a Jewess from Lydia, or a Gentile from Lydia who had become attracted to Judaism. Archaeological remains indicate a guild of dyers and purple traders there. She would have been accustomed to the use of *baptizo* in her work. Rather like her doing the ritual washings as a Gentile by the river, thinking towards baptism. And the jailor wanting to kill himself in offering to the gods, then washing Paul's wounds with water. All leading him to the idea of baptism in water into the Lord's death as his own self-sacrifice with Him.

Heard us- The imperfect, 'was hearing', could suggest she overheard the preaching rather than sat attentively purposefully listening to it. Otherwise we would expect the Greek word for 'listening' to be used here; but it isn't. The image of Lydia as the pious proselyte who had gone out to pray by the river with Jewish women is therefore probably incorrect. Rather she was by the riverside, as a small time trader woman attending to her purple cloth business, who "worshipped God" in her own way but separate to the other Jewish women. And she overheard Paul preaching to the Jewish women who were praying there. And she believed. As discussed on :13, this is again the theme of those on the edge hearing the Gospel. This is typical of how the Lord works- through indirect means. Indeed some early Christian commentators claimed that Lydia was involved with producing purple garments for immoral pagan practices, as this was the common use of purple cloth. We recall how the whores of the Old Testament prophets and Revelation are dressed in purple. If "Lydia" means 'woman from Lydia', then we have to give due weight to the associations of 'women from

Lydia' with prostitution. "Lydia" was not her personal name; she was from Thyatira, which was located in the province of Lydia, so she was just known as 'the Lydian'. Strabo claims that slaves often bore the names of their nations of origin (*Geography* 7.3.12). So she may have been a freed slavewoman, and again this connects with aspersions that slave women only became free because of involvement in sexual scandal. She presents as not immoral, but with many shady associations. And she is strongly associated with her city of origin; although the record says she worshipped God, perhaps a would be proselyte not accepted by the other Jewish women who were praying at the river, and in any case without a synagogue to be attached to. The description of her as a "seller", "hawker" or "merchant" likewise had shady associations; a woman from another city and province selling anything was seen askance. She is also an independent head of household, able to on her initiative invite Paul and his group to stay with her. We feel all this rather hinted at when she asks Paul to judge whether she is in fact "faithful to the Lord", as if she accepts she may not appear like that. Another stereotype is that Lydia was wealthy. That may not at all have been the case. Because Phil. 4:14-18 and 2 Cor. 8:1-5 are insistent that the church at Philippi was very poor. So we may well imagine her living in cheap accommodation, although head of that poor household.

Whose heart the Lord opened to give heed to the things which were spoken by Paul- This is clear enough evidence that the Lord works directly on the human heart / perception, quite above the power of His written word itself. The Old Testament has several similar examples of God 'opening eyes' of perception (Gen. 21:19; Num. 22:31; 2 Kings 6:17,20; Is. 42:7; 50:5), and David asks for his eyes to be open to behold wonderful things in God's word (Ps. 119:18). There would be no need for that prayer, nor for God to open eyes, if intellectual effort alone is required. This is why in our times, the Holy Spirit is provided to 'enlighten the eyes of your understanding' (Eph. 1:18 "God may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; so that you may have the eyes of your mind enlightened"). It's quite possible Paul there alludes to Lydia as a representative of us all. Her 'giving heed' to the Gospel was because the Lord had opened her heart. It's not as if the Lord faces off against man over an open Bible, leaving us the choice of responding to what we read / hear or not. He goes further than that, reaching across the table, and compelling some to have open hearts to His word. Luke has spoken earlier of how the Lord opened the hearts of the disciples / apostles to understand the word of God (Lk. 24:31,32,45). Indeed the parallels between the Emmaus disciples and Lydia are strong. All had their hearts opened by the Lord, and responded by opening their homes to the Lord or His people. That again is evidence enough that God's word is not simply self-explanatory; the eunuch rightly observed that he couldn't understand it unless a man guided him, and the Spirit operated by sending Philip to do this; the disciples had their hearts opened by the Lord to understand the Scriptures, and Lydia's heart was opened to give heed to the Gospel. This 'extra' factor is reflective of God's grace; without it, salvation would simply be for those intellectually astute enough to correctly interpret the theology of the Bible. But the presence of that 'extra' factor (in the Lord opening hearts to the Gospel) is the mechanism by which He calls. And as Romans demonstrates, the fact He calls one but not another is a parade example of His grace, and how salvation is by grace and not by theological prowess.

The same word for “to give heed” is in Acts 8:6 about how people gave heed to the Gospel which Philip preached. Presumably it would be fair enough to conclude that the Lord likewise assisted their hearts to this end.

The language of opening and closing needs to be put together. The Lord Jesus knocks at the door, and if any man open, He enters and fellowships with that man (Rev. 3:20). But here the Lord as it were goes a stage further, and opens the heart, just as in the Song of Solomon, the lover seeks to open the door from the outside when the beloved delays to open. It is He who opens the door of faith (Acts 14:27), by giving repentance [not just forgiveness] (Acts 11:18). This huge initiative from the Divine side is strange for us. We are all used to a man reaping what he sows, what goes around comes around, *quid pro quo*, crime and punishment... and that is all more or less true to observed reality in this world. But God takes huge initiatives and seeks to almost force through His plan to save. And yet those who refuse these initiatives will themselves knock on His door at the last day, and find He refuses to open (Mt. 25:11). This is in contrast to the faithful, for whom the Lord's coming is again likened to a knock on the door which they open immediately (Lk. 12:36). Our response to His knocking now, in the events of daily life and our regular encounter with Him in the Gospels, will prepare us to perceive His knock when He returns. And our response now prepares us for our response then.

It is not therefore incidental that the 'opening' of Lydia's heart is described with the same word used twice of the amazing, dramatic 'opening' of the prison doors (Acts 16:26,27)- "and every one's bands were loosed", language appropriate to Luke's opening description of the Lord's mission as being to release the bands of the prisoners. That theme of Jubilee, of release, continues throughout Luke-Acts. This earthquake in human hearts is clearly from God. This is how much further He goes than simply knocking on a human heart. This is what love does- it takes the initiative, and keeps on pushing that initiative until it is clear that the person is refusing it. But it is for us to respond to it. And in reflecting that love, it is for us to likewise take the initiative in offering human salvation. Her response to her heart being opened was to open her home to Paul and the Christian preachers.

16:15 *And when she was baptized*- The conversion of Lydia is spoken of in a sub clause: “And when she was baptized…”. There is no statement that she believed what Paul had spoken; merely that she listened with interest and was baptized. The implication is that belief and baptism are part and parcel of the same thing. There is certainly the impression that the period of Lydia’s teaching was quick. To argue that she may have been instructed for several days is an argument from silence. The impression given by all the accounts of baptism is that it was the initial response made by people once they believed a basic outline of the Gospel.

And her household- The way of the world was that the whole household converted to the religion of the head of the house. And yet the call of Christ was to individuals. Therefore when we read of whole households converting (Acts 16:15, 31-34; 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:11,16; 16:15 Rom. 16:10) we must assume that they had resisted the temptation to mass convert, and that Masters had the humility to *not* demand of their slaves and family members that they just blindly follow them. This request would have been axiomatic to their preaching of the Gospel; and yet it would have been a radical departure from how family heads around them behaved. We note from :40 that the faith of her family members is spoken of as legitimate: "they entered into the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the believers, they comforted them".

She urged us, saying: If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay. So she persuaded us- Entering houses and eating together was seen as having a religious dimension to it, as Peter mentioned when accepting Cornelius' invitation. There were present at least Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke, as this is a 'we' passage. For a woman to invite a group of previously unknown men into

her house was scandalous and would have begged all kinds of gossip. But the culture in Christ was and is at radical variance with that of the surrounding world.

Hospitality is pretty much presented as a fruit of the Spirit in the New Testament. It is a qualification for being an elder. To be hospitable to those of other ethnic groups, to welcome them into your home, was a radical thing to do. Strangers were considered sceptically and negatively in their society. And only those moved by the gift of the Spirit would act otherwise. This barrier breaking hospitality was of course a reflection of God's similar generous outreach to us, across all that separates God from man. We learn from the Peter and Cornelius story how freighted was the whole question of whom you showed hospitality to, entering someone's home, let alone staying there, was of huge social significance.

As noted above, Lydia had shady connections and would have appeared an unfaithful woman. But she was faithful to the Lord in her heart, and begged Paul to perceive that- which he did.

16:16 *And it came to pass, as we were going to the place of prayer, that a certain slave girl met us*- See on 16:15. We can imagine the gossip this provoked as Lydia, her family and the foreign men walked to the river. Note that after baptism, she continued to attend the religious meeting place she had attended previously. The Lord spoke of how the time would come when His followers would be cast out of the synagogues, but following Him did not immediately require ceasing attendance at synagogue, despite the terribly wrong theologies preached there.

Who had a spirit by which she predicted the future and who brought her masters much gain by fortune-telling- Acts 16:16–18 are the words of Luke, under inspiration: “a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of Python met us” (Gk.). As explained in the footnote in the Diaglott version, Python was the name of a false god believed in during the first century, possibly the same as the god Apollo. It was believed that the ‘spirit’ of Python took over the ‘immortal soul’ of the person being possessed. Seeing that the Bible strongly opposes the idea of an immortal soul, there is no way that a spirit of Python can possess anyone. So Python definitely did not exist, but Luke does not say the girl was ‘possessed with a spirit of Python, who by the way, is a false god who does not really exist…’. In the same way the Gospels do not say that Jesus ‘cast out demons which, by the way, do not really exist, it is just the language of the day for illnesses’. The demons cast out of Legion went “into the abyss” (Lk. 8:31 Gk.); the pagan concept of the abyss is a nonsense, yet if we believe that the record of Legion’s cure teaches the existence of demons, then we must logically believe in ‘the abyss’ too.

Another take is that Python was thought to be the agent of Zeus "the most high god", responsible for communication to men. But the girl starts redefining the most high God, through the Holy Spirit, not Python. We can take it that this girl, along with Lydia and the jailor, were all converted by the initial work of the Holy Spirit upon them- which they responded to.

16:17 *The same following after Paul and us was crying out, saying: These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation!*- There was clearly a literal element to this, because Paul turns and addresses the girl (:18). But the language of following Paul is elsewhere used to mean that people accepted his teaching (Acts 13:43). It may be that we are intended to understand that she accepted the Gospel. There were so many gods, so her message of a "Most High God" was that of "one God". "Salvation" was a vague concept at their time. In a shame based society, religion was all about appearances in this life. Future, eternal salvation wasn't something much thought about. The jailor finally "believed in God" and asked what

he had to do to be saved- and it would seem all he had heard was this garbled message from this mad slave girl. But the Gospel is dynamite, it may be an atom but has within it huge power. The whole story of Philippi is proof enough. And again we see that it was a woman totally on the periphery who was at the centre of God's method of spreading the Gospel.

16:18 *And this she did for many days. But Paul, being greatly disturbed by it, turned and said to the spirit: I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And it came out that very moment*- Paul didn't allow himself to be irritated. The tragedy of mental illness grieved him; the tragedy of the way in which some people have an all too *partial* knowledge of Gods truth. And his grieving for her didn't merely result in him preaching the Gospel to her; he did something concrete to help cure her.

16:19 *But when her masters saw that the hope of their gain was gone, they laid hold of Paul and Silas*- Circumstances repeat within our lives, as they did for Paul. Because exactly the same complaint was made at Ephesus, with the same persecution; and the same Greek words are used to describe it (Acts 19:24,25). Paul was intended to learn from the events at Philippi so he could cope with those at Ephesus.

And dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers- Paul was likewise 'dragged' in Jerusalem (Acts 21:30). Yet he had himself 'dragged' Christians out of their house churches, along the streets and into prison (Acts 8:3). He would have been enabled to feel for those he had thus treated. We too are brought to realize how others felt as a result of our actions, not so much as a punishment for us, but in order to lead us closer to the spirit of Christ and to His Kingdom.

16:20 *And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said: These men, being Jews, are disturbing our city*- This disrespect was rooted in the fact that these Jews had probably only recently arrived, as a result of Jews being cast out of Rome (Acts 18:2).

16:21 *And advocate customs which it is not lawful for us to receive, or to observe, being Romans*- In both Thessalonica and Philippi, strong opposition arose to the preaching of the Gospel because it was held that it was preaching another King, Jesus, in opposition to Caesar, and that the obligations of this new religion were at variance with the Imperial Cult (Acts 16:21; 17:7). In a sense, these allegations were true. Christianity taught that the convert became a member of a new, spiritual Israel. It was irrelevant whether he or she was a Jew, Roman or Gentile. And the convert had to act inclusively rather than exclusively towards other converts. It must have been hard for a Roman citizen to willingly become as it were a 'citizen' of 'spiritual Israel', a 'member' of the despised and conquered Jewish race. To not participate in the cult of emperor worship was serious indeed; Roman citizenship could be lost over this matter. Pliny wrote that Christians were therefore "unable by temperament or unwilling by conviction to participate in the common activities of a group or community". They were seen as any true living Christian is: a bit weird, unsociable, aloof from worldly pleasure, and thereby a silent critic of those who indulge. "The Christian would not attend gladiatorial shows or games or plays. He would not read pagan literature. He would not enlist as a soldier, for then he would come under orders that might conflict with his standards and with his loyalty to Jesus Christ. He would not be a painter or sculptor, for that would be to acquiesce to idolatry. Nor would he be a schoolmaster, for then he would inevitably have to tell the immoral stories of the pagan gods. The Christian had better steer clear of business contracts,

because they required the taking of oaths, which the Christian abjured. They had better keep out of administrative office because of the idolatry involved… and so on". The Romans considered anyone outside the Roman world or who rejected Roman manners and laws as being a barbarian; and yet the Gospel appealed to Roman citizens to reject these very manners and laws. Thus Ramsay comments: "To the Romans *genus humanum* meant not the human race in general but the Roman world, men who lived according to Roman manners and laws; the rest were enemies and barbarians. The Christians, then, were enemies to civilized man, and to the customs and laws which regulated civilized society… they introduced divisions into families and set children against their parents".

Jews were allowed to make proselytes of other nations, but not Roman citizens, who were not to be religiously preached to by any other group within the empire. Therefore the command to take the Gospel to literally all men, including Roman citizens, was hard to obey. This explains the double complaint that the Roman citizens were being asked to both receive *and* obey the message of Christ. Receiving them, being preached to, was also a matter of offence, as well as the content of the message.

"Being Romans" is the same Greek term used in :37, where it clearly means "being Roman citizens". Their view was that Roman citizenship meant that belief in the Gospel was impossible for them. Perhaps that is one reason why Paul tended not to immediately reveal his Roman citizenship. And quite simply, he despised it and wasn't at all proud of it. Just as we are to despise worldly advantage that may come our way. It also underscores his later teaching to the Philippians that our citizenship is of heaven, not of this earth. Philippi was a retirement place for Roman citizens and military officers, located on unusually flat land amongst the otherwise mountainous land of northern Greece, with a good climate, prosperous local economy, and located near the *Via Egnatia* it had great transport connections. Everyone dreamed of being a Roman citizen; and nobody wanted to lose it if they had it. This is all radically deconstructed in the Gospel message of citizenship of the Heavenly Kingdom of God and His Son.

16:22 *And the crowd rose up together against them; and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten*- The obvious question is why Paul didn't reveal his Roman citizenship at this stage in order to avoid the flogging. He does reveal if afterwards, but seeing flogging could be fatal, there must have been a major reason why Paul went through with it when he didn't need to. One can only speculate: he wanted to show solidarity with Silas [although the plural in :37 could imply he also was a Roman]; he wanted to put the authorities in a position where they were in his debt and would allow the fledgling ecclesia to meet unhindered; he was simply stubborn and angry and wished to embarrass his enemies.

16:23 *And when they had laid many stripes upon them*- This doesn't mean that they personally flogged them. They 'laid' in the sense of laying a penalty upon them. The actual flogging was likely done by the jailor; hence his desire to wash their damaged bodies after his conversion, and his deep sense of fear before them afterwards. When we read that the jailor "having received this order" (:24) put them into the inner prison, the "order" was the sentence of flogging which he was ordered to inflict, and he may well have carried it out in the inner prison.

They threw them into prison- Exactly what Paul had done to Christians, after flogging them (Acts 26:10).

Ordering the jailor to guard them carefully- Especially securely. There seemed to be a fear that Paul would seek to escape; hence having received such a charge, the jailor put them in the inner prison, the most secure zone, probably underground with

no access to the outside. Or it could be that the magistrates wanted these men to die in custody, and 'guard them extra carefully' could have been a nod to abuse them. See on :24 *Shackles*.

16:24 *Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in shackles*- The Greek is literally "the wood". This was an instrument of torture having five holes, four for the wrists and ankles and one for the neck. "The holes being pierced at different distances, the legs might be separated or divaricated to a great extent, which must produce extreme pain". The same word is used for the cross (Acts 5:30; 10:39; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 2:24). Again we see how the experiences of believers in Acts, and Paul especially, were a sharing in the sufferings of their Lord. Just as ours are. Perhaps it was perceiving that connection with the crucified Jesus which led them to burst into praise. "The inner prison" was commonly known as 'the underworld'; dark, with no windows, no sense of day or night, filled with the smell of decaying humanity. It was as if they were sharing the Lord's death.

16:25 *But about midnight*- The stocks were an instrument of torture which would have made sleeping impossible. It could have been that they might have died that night in that dark cave... if the earthquake had not happened.

Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God- Literally, they were praying in singing hymns. Let's not forget that hymns are prayers being sung. The musical issues surrounding them can so easily distract from this realization.

And the prisoners were listening to them- The fact no prisoners ran away (:28) may mean that they were converted by that evening of witness. See on :26. The verb for "listening" is unusual and means to listen attentively. We will discuss on :26 and :27 how quite possibly these prisoners were converted to Christ- which would continue the theme in this chapter, of very quick conversion on the basis of a very slender understanding of the Gospel.

16:26 *And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's bonds were unfastened*- The work of the Lord Jesus is described in exactly these terms, of opening the prisons and releasing those who are bound (Lk. 13:16; Is. 42:7; 49:9; 61:1; Zech. 9:11; 1 Pet. 3:19). The fact all the prisoners had their bonds unfastened would maybe suggest they were all converted, at least potentially they were given freedom in Christ; see on :25 *The prisoners*.

16:27 *And the jailor, being roused out of sleep and seeing the prison doors open*- More language appropriate to the saving work of Jesus in opening the prison doors. The fact he was sleeping means he didn't hear their singing and reciting scripture. His only prior contact with the Gospel would have been through the few words of the slave girl.

The 'opening' of Lydia's heart is described with the same word used twice of the amazing, dramatic 'opening' of the prison doors (Acts 16:26,27)- "and every one's bands were loosed", language appropriate to Luke's opening description of the Lord's mission as being to release the bands of the prisoners. That theme of Jubilee, of release, continues throughout Luke-Acts. This earthquake in human hearts is clearly from God. This is how much further He goes than simply knocking on a human heart. This is what love does- it takes the initiative, and keeps on pushing that initiative until it is clear that the person is refusing it. But it is for us to respond to it. And in reflecting that love, it is for us to likewise take the initiative in offering human salvation. Her response to her heart being opened was to open her home to Paul and the Christian preachers. Lydia and the jailor are clearly paralleled- after the 'opening'

experience they and their families were immediately baptized, and they then entertained Paul in their homes.

Drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped- If prisoners escaped during an earthquake, it wasn't a foregone conclusion that the jailor would therefore be executed for negligence of duty. He had a fair chance of survival. We are therefore left with the impression that this man was perhaps very proud, or committed to his job to the point that he was his career and his career was him, with his family meaning little to him; or perhaps just overly emotional; or maybe new to the job and reacting poorly in a crisis. We meet all these types of people in life, and tend to assume they would not be good candidates for the Gospel. But this man was. Or it could be that he was a very religious man, and saw in the earthquake the wrath of the gods. And so he wanted to die in order to placate the gods and save himself from some kind of eternal condemnation. Whatever, his pride, his religious beliefs, his career... all these things were replaced by the love of God and His salvation in the Lord.

16:28 *But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying: Do not harm yourself! For we are all here!*- Every other usage of the phrase 'to do harm' is always in a moral sense, of sinning (Rom. 7:19; 9:11; 13:4; 2 Cor. 5:10). We can therefore in this case conclude that suicide would have been a sin; although God's forgiveness of that sin is another issue. We naturally enquire why the prisoners didn't flee, grasping the apparent offer of salvation from their prison life. The answer is surely that they had become believers and experienced the spiritual freedom from prison and darkness, and so all other human possibilities in life became of less importance. Isaiah and the Psalms spoke of men in the darkest prison house and sitting in chains... being spiritually liberated. Surely Paul and Silas had sung these words; and those prisoners had been converted. They didn't run to physical freedom because they were so in awe of their experience- that they had spiritually liberated from their prison house chains. I find no other credible reason as to why they didn't run for it.

16:29 *And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas*- At this point, he had believed. So his fear was of God. He had now no fear of judgment by his superiors nor by society. The prisoners hadn't escaped. So this was fear of Divine judgment. Just as "Felix trembled" when he considered judgment to come. Fear of his fate before God for having tortured His servants, and having all the same been shown such grace in that his prisoners hadn't run away.

16:30 *And brought them out and said: Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*-

The prison keeper is presented as knowing nothing about the Gospel prior to this point apart from what the slave girl had been shouting. He would have understood the earthquake as the wrath of the gods. And he felt he was being singled out for their wrath, as he now had to be executed, as he thought, for the prisoners' escaping. "What must I do?" probably had behind it the idea that he had to offer some sacrifice or do some ritual in order to be saved by the god preached by Paul. He knew that his own belief systems had failed him. He also knew that these men were in prison because of healing the mad girl who had been screaming out: "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation!" (Acts 16:17). That is why he now asks what he can do to get that salvation. And Paul tells him the things about Yah-hoshua, Jesus, God's salvation. And he gets baptized into Him, Jesus, that salvation he so needed. Salvation from fear of shame, shame he had not performed in his job as required, salvation from fear of the afterlife's judgment, from fear of the angry gods. 'Salvation' in Greco-Roman thought was a very philosophical concept.

Now he was faced with the need for salvation in hard reality; salvation from the fear of death and the sense that the gods were angry with him through the earthquake and how it had specifically affected him. Salvation from fear of an unknown future. And he remembered the words of the mad woman about salvation. Probably his only exposure to the Gospel had been the words of that mentally disturbed woman, rather than Paul's preaching. A very slender beginning and knowledge base for conversion. There is a marked contrast, therefore, in the command to simply believe. Not do any ritual works or give money or sacrifice to appease angry gods. He perhaps wanted to take his own life because he thought that sacrificing his life would result in his salvation in the after life. He was told he only had to believe. Baptism was a logical thing to do at that point, because it spoke of death with and for Jesus. Not suicide to a god who might or might not make things more bearable in the afterlife, but a life given to the one who had already died for him, and could save him by faith alone and not works. This theme of "salvation" continues in the letter to the Philippians, urging them to continue to "eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20).

He doesn't ask for baptism, suggesting he was unaware of the need for it. This was a highly emotional situation; anyone at the very point of suicide is in a very unstable position. Many today would have told the man to calm down and consider the issue of baptism once things were a bit calmer in his life, urging him not to take such a decision on the cusp of emotion and perceived desperation. Let alone to baptize all his family when he himself was taking the decision under such psychological and circumstantial pressure. But the Biblical example here is quite the opposite to how many would judge today. "What must I do?" is a common phrase recorded by Luke [Acts 2:37; and the crowd ask John "What then shall we do", Lk. 3:10]. All encounter with the Lord Jesus and His message provokes this sense, that we can no longer be passive, but must *do* something in response. "Sirs" translates *kurios*, and maybe we are to perceive that Paul and Silas were manifesting the Lord Jesus to the jailor.

There is no record of his apology or desire for forgiveness from them for what he had done to them (see on :23). He rightly perceived that the essence of his sin was against God and he needed to be right before Him, knowing that what he had done required judgment, which he now realized he needed to be 'saved' from.

The jailer had feared for his physical life had the prisoners escaped. Being assured that he was now saved from that loss of life, it is psychologically credible that he thought of his eternal life. For faced with physical death, every man thinks of what happens after. And he had heard of the slave girl shouting in :17 "these men are the servants of the Most High God who have come to show a way of salvation!". God had nudged him with those words, then through the singing of Paul and Silas, then the earthquake and the prisoners not escaping. He would have been struck by the claim of a "Most High God", seeing the Greco-Roman world was full of gods for various things and there was no concept of a single "Most High God", even if the term was at times used of Zeus who supposedly spoke through Python. The girl was thought to have the spirit of Python. But she is now proclaiming through the Holy Spirit the news of salvation from the true "Most High God". We note that the Lord speaking through the girl didn't seek to immediately debunk all their gods, but to present the one true God as "the most high". There was no god who saved from earthquakes [which were seen as Divine judgment] nor who saved eternally. But the Most High God could save from His own judgment. The man's need, which is every man's need, was met alone in Him. Perhaps his emphasis was upon the word "I". Paul, Silas and

the prisoners had been saved- but how could "I" be saved? His joy is understandable- he had been freed from fear of death, from fear of the wrath of the gods.

Truly this is a case of a very hard, brutalized man being reached by the simple offer of salvation by grace. Philo said of jailers, who were effectively torturers, infamous for cruelty and therefore often alcoholics: "Everyone knows well how jailers are filled with inhumanity and savagery. For by nature they are unmerciful, and by practice they are trained daily toward fierceness, as to become wild beasts. They see, say, and do nothing good, not even by change, but instead the most violent and cruel things... Jailers, therefore, spend time with robbers, thieves, burglars, the wanton, the violent, corrupters, murderers, adulterers, and the sacrilegious. From each of these they draw and collect depravity, producing from that diverse blend a single mixture of thoroughly abominable evil" (Joseph. 81,84). He the man once in power now collapses at the feet of the Lord and His people whom he has abused. His tender washing of their stripes would be an image unheard of in the Greco-Roman world. This hard man had been humbled by the earthquake, the token of Divine wrath. And then by the grace shown him in that the prisoners didn't escape, he was talked out of suicide by a man he had tortured, and felt that salvation was being offered to him. This was no long term Bible student edging towards understanding the fullness of Christ, it was a desperate sinner and bad man brought to his knees by God's grace and converted in a flash. And his family likewise.

16:31 *And they said: Believe on the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved*- We note the humility. When addressed by the Philippian jailor "Sirs (*kurion*), what must I do to be saved?'", Paul answers "Believe in the Lord (*kurios*) Jesus".

In :34, he believed in God. A theme of Acts is that the work of the Father and Son are paralleled (e.g. 16:31 cp. 34; 15:12; 26:17 cp. 22). They are working *together* to achieve our final redemption. The concept is wondrous. The man asked what he must *do* and he is told to *believe*. As the Lord Himself explained, the work of God is to believe on Him.

You and your household- This focus on his family may have been to psychologically assist him to get over his suicidal thoughts. Although :32 is clear that the household heard the word of the Lord and were then baptized, the implication here is clearly that his faith could save his family. The salvation of others for the sake of a third party is clearly established in Mk. 2:5, where a man was forgiven because of the faith of his friends. In the OT we think of Rahab and Abigail saving their families by their faith. Healing was definitely given for the sake of the faith of third parties; the Centurion's servant and Jairus' daughter come to mind, and James' exhortation to pray for the sick that they may be both healed and forgiven.

16:32 *And they spoke the word of the Lord to him, and to all that were in his household*- The "household" would have included children, slaves and distant relatives. The man was wealthy. "The word of the Lord" was the message of the Lord Jesus; the kind of material eventually transcribed and published as the Gospels of the Lord Jesus. Paul clearly had in mind that his "household" could respond; for he commands the jailer that if *he* believed, then he *and* his household could be saved. This makes us wonder whether this man and his household had been known to Paul previously. Or it could be that Paul perceived that because of the faith of one individual, a whole family could be saved- although they too had to respond to the Gospel. Hence he preached it to them. There is no indication the jailer had been a Bible student. Unlike the other prisoners, he hadn't been listening to Paul and Silas singing hymns. He had been fast asleep. His conversion shows the sheer transforming

power of the Gospel when encountered after becoming aware of Divine judgment and grace.

16:33 *And at that hour of the night he took them*- The earthquake occurred at "midnight" (Acts 16:25); Paul and Silas spoke "the word of the Lord" to the jailer, and "that same hour" (Acts 16:33 AV) he washed their stripes and he and his family were baptized. The exact referent of "that same hour" is difficult to determine, but the grammar would seem to imply that within one hour the jailer heard the word of the Lord from Paul and Silas, washed them, and he and his family were baptized. All in the midst of the aftermath of a major earthquake. The record seems to be using "that same hour" to highlight the urgency of baptism [it should be done even in the midst of an earthquake, at night]; and the speed at which it could occur ["that same hour"]. After this, the jailer took Paul and Silas into his home and prepared a celebratory meal; and when day broke, the magistrates sent an urgent message requiring Paul and Silas to be released (Acts 16:34,35).

There is reason to think that the meal afterwards was effectively a "breaking of bread" communion meal. So from this very apparently shaky start, with faith apparently based on a very brief and slim experience, there grew the church at Philippi. Soon afterwards, Paul was to write to them and mention they had "bishops and deacons". A strong church, according to Paul's letter to them, began on this apparently slim basis. But that is the power of confrontation with Divine judgment and humble repentance and immediate baptism.

And washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized- The Greek *louo* specifically refers to complete washing of the body, rather than anointing just some parts of the body, for which the NT uses a different word. Literally, he washed them from their wounds, i.e. the blood and damage from the stripes was over their entire bodies. Their baptizing of him after this is another example in Acts of deep connection and mutuality between the convert and the converter. The hardened torturer now presents as tender and caring- a psychological transformation overnight, and one which was not just on the cusp of emotion but [it seems from the letter to the Philippians] continued.

16:34 *And he brought them into his house*- Therefore the teaching of the Gospel to his family in :32,33 was done outside the house; presumably in the ruins of their house and yard. The house they entered would have been severely damaged.

Set food before them, and rejoiced greatly with all his family- Literally, 'set a table'. As if there is a hint of it being a breaking of bread communion meal. From this slender beginning would develop a church with bishops and deacons, to whom Paul wrote so positively. The theme of "great joy" in the later letter to the Philippians shows that this joy was not merely on the cusp of circumstance, but was to be an abiding experience. Whole households were converted (Acts 10:2; 16:34; 18:8; Col. 4:15), and the earliest Christian meeting places unearthed were rooms in the homes of rich believers. And with us too, the success of our community depends upon God's Truth first and foremost being the centre of family life, with the joy of faith permeating it. Household conversions were a major feature of the first century spread of the Gospel (e.g. Lydia- Acts 16:15; Crispus- Acts 18:8; Priscilla and Aquila- Rom. 16:3-5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Nymphas- Col. 4:15; Onesiphorus- 2 Tim. 1:16; 4:19; Philemon- Philemon 2; "the elect lady", 2 Jn. 10; the home at Troas- Acts 20:6-8). Clearly 'house' was used in the first century as a kind of shorthand for 'house church'. They knew no other pattern of gathering. There was almost an assumption

that if a man converted to Christ, his 'house' also would. Hence we read that Cornelius would be told words "whereby you and your house shalt be saved" (Acts 11:14). The same phrase was repeated to the jailor at Philippi (Acts 16:31). It's emphasized four times in three verses that the Gospel was preached to his house, and his whole house responded (Acts 16:31-34). The Lord likewise rejoiced in Zacchaeus' conversion, that salvation had come to that man's house (Lk. 19:9). He assumed that Zacchaeus would quite naturally persuade his 'house'.

Having believed in God- He was unlikely to have been an atheist [atheism wasn't very common in the 1st century]. But he grasped for the first time the real import of a real and relevant faith in the one true God as a personal being. See on Jn. 14:1. We probably need to read in an ellipsis here: He believed in God's grace and salvation, which is in His Son Jesus. His belief "in God" connects back to how the mentally disturbed slave girl had said that Paul and Silas were servants of the one true and highest God (:17).

16:35 *But when it was day, the magistrates sent their officers, saying: Let those men go*- Word may have got to them from Lydia or other converts, that Paul was a Roman citizen. But note :38 "they feared when they heard that they were Romans". So perhaps news of the strange security of the prisoners and conversion of the jailor had already reached them and they didn't wish to as it were get in trouble with God.

16:36 *And the jailor reported the words to Paul, saying: The magistrates have sent word to let you go. Therefore come out and go in peace*- After baptizing the jailor and eating at his home, Paul and Silas had returned to jail. The temptation to flee must have been very great, and in the aftermath of the earthquake they could well have got away. The fact they returned to the jail indicates Paul had another agenda here, and he doggedly stuck to it. His subsequent usage of the situation would confirm this- he allowed himself to suffer so much in order that the ecclesia there could get off to a good start in terms of being shielded from legal persecution. Our efforts for the newly converted are made in this same spirit.

16:37- see on Acts 22:25.

But Paul said to them: They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned men that are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison, and now they want to throw us out secretly? No!- Literally "men that are Romans". This was absolutely contrary to the initial accusation: "These men, being Jews...". Silas also was a Roman citizen, and so we must note too his willing submission to suffering he could otherwise have avoided. We note too the absence of Timothy and Luke, who were apparently also in the area at the time; perhaps Paul allowed them to slip away, fully intending to uses his citizenship to establish a situation in which the new converts would be left alone by the authorities. We may learn from that that needless suffering was avoided in such a case.

Being beaten uncondemned made them sharers in the Lord's crucifixion sufferings. One of multiple examples of how His people share the essence of His cross, and how He there shared the essence of all our experiences.

Let them come themselves and bring us out- This may have been said with a fleck of pride and annoyance; and yet the evidence provided above indicates that this was exactly according to Paul's game plan. He wanted to be flogged so that he could then pull out the card of his Roman citizenship. He almost did the same in Acts 22:29. And God confirmed him in that plan by bringing about the earthquake that very night, something which Paul in no way could have contrived. Likewise the conversion of the

jailor was all a strengthening of that plan- to get the authorities relatively onside with the Christian movement. Or perhaps the jailor had earlier expressed interest in the Gospel and Paul was by all means seeking to witness to him, and again his plans were confirmed by the sending of the earthquake. In these things we learn how God operates with men to this day- we make plans in His service, and He confirms and enables them by sending situations [like the earthquake] which are well beyond any human contrivance.

16:38 *And the officers reported these words to the magistrates*- As the jailor reported words in :36. All this sending of verbal messages by the hand of messengers would mean that in accordance with Paul's intention, the word about the situation was spreading around.

And they feared when they heard that they were Romans- See on 16:35 *Let those men go.*

16:39 *And they came and pleaded with them, and when they had brought them out, they asked them to go away from the city*- Paul doesn't obey immediately; he goes to Lydia's house. This could be read as his native argumentative, awkward temperament shining through; or additionally, as also part of his game plan to demonstrate that the house church at Lydia's home was to be openly connected with the Christian movement, and now to be left well alone by the authorities, in case they made a formal complaint about the treatment of the men whom they had lodged.

16:40 *And they went out of the prison*- Luke, or the inspired companion, was not in the prison with them and may have bravely remained in Philippi to provide support to the fledgling ecclesia.

And entered into the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the believers- The New Testament speaks of households run by women: Mary (Acts 12:12), Lydia (Acts 16:14,40); Nympha (Col. 4:15) and Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11). These women were presumably wealthy widows or divorcees who hadn't remarried. We are left to speculate whether they were in some way the 'leaders' of the house churches which met in their homes. Women are described as ruling households in 1 Tim. 5:14; Tit. 2:4,5. The woman of Prov. 31 clearly had autonomy within the private sphere of the household, even though the husband was the public leader. Seeing Christianity was initially a house-church, household religion, we are left to wonder how much women actually led house churches, especially seeing that the majority of early Christian members appear to have been women. The wall paintings [frescoes] found in the Christian catacombs around Rome are highly significant for our present study. The significant ones for our purposes are the catacombs of Priscilla on the Salaria Nuova, Callixtus on the via Appia Antica, and that of Domitilla on the via Ardeatine. They feature in places scenes of female Christians raising cups, with the inscription *agape* over them. Some show a woman occupying the central place in the meal, with a large cup in her hand, with the other women looking at it intently. Some of the frescoes [there are many of them] show women dressed as slaves doing this in what appears to be a wealthy home. These frescoes seem to me indicative of how groups of slave women formed house churches, and faithfully kept the breaking of bread. Some frescoes show the women sharing the bread and wine with children around the table; one shows a woman holding a scroll, as if she is reading Scripture to the others. One fresco features a woman holding a cup of wine inscribed *nobis*- 'for

us'. Some frescoes show men in the group, but the woman in the centre, as if she is leading the meeting, or as the host of the household.

They comforted them and departed- We naturally think that it was Paul and Silas who were in need of comfort, with their lacerated backs and aching muscles after hours in the "stocks". But here we see Paul's spiritual greatness; *he* comforted *them*, probably not least over the material losses they had suffered as a result of the earthquake.

ACTS CHAPTER 17

17:1 *Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica*- Having been seriously abused in Philippi, Paul continued. He recognizes this when later writing to the Thessalonians, commenting that despite the shame suffered there, he continued boldly preaching, and thus arose the ecclesia at Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:2). Keeping on keeping on is a hallmark of not only the true preacher but of all spiritual endeavour.

Apollonia was in Illyricum, and Paul later comments that he preached there (Rom. 15:19), so we can assume he didn't merely pass through but witnessed to the Gospel there too.

Where there was a synagogue of the Jews- Gk. *the* synagogue. It has been claimed that there was no other synagogue in Macedonia, although there may have been smaller Jewish prayer houses or meeting places (as in 16:13). It has also been conjectured that there were no Jewish communities in Amphipolis and Apollonia. The impression is therefore given of Paul focusing upon preaching to the Jews, making a specific focus upon the largest concentration of Jews in Macedonia. Amphipolis was the capital of Macedonia, and Paul had been beckoned to preach in Macedonia; the city was the most strategic in Greece and would've been the logical place to concentrate upon in order to fulfil a mission to Gentile Macedonia. But he is presented as passing through this capital city, where the largest concentration of population was, and homing in on Thessalonica. See on 17:2 *As his custom was.*

17:2 *And Paul, as his custom was*- Paul was called to preach to the Gentiles, and yet he repeatedly focused upon the Jews. Many of his sufferings were as a result of this; if he had served as the Lord intended, many of these issues would likely have been avoided. But the Lord still worked with Paul; and that is a lesson for us. I have noted elsewhere that the travel details provided by Luke are not incidental; the wind / spirit was so often against Paul as he travelled to Jerusalem, and so often with him when he travelled towards the Gentiles.

Went in to them- Paul uses the same word in telling the Thessalonians that the testimony of other converts showed "what manner of entering in we had unto you" (1 Thess. 1:9; 2:1 AV). Clearly the 'going in' to the Thessalonian synagogue has more than some literal descriptive reference to Paul passing in through the doors of the building. The word is used several times in Acts of Paul's 'entering in' to various homes, towns and synagogues. The Lord Himself 'entered in' to synagogues and taught (emphasized by Luke in his first volume, e.g. Lk. 6:6). Thus Paul was manifesting the person of the Lord Jesus in his preaching, just as we likewise are Him to this world; for the Lord Jesus 'enters in' to His people (Jn. 10:1,2; Rev. 3:20 s.w.). Our entering in to people and communities with the Gospel is a reflection of God's outgoing entering in to our lives in Christ. This is why there must be a sense of

proactive, outgoing entering in to others in our witness, rather than a passive 'witness by example' alone.

For three Sabbath days and reasoned with them from the Scriptures- The simplicity of what Paul preached can be seen from reflecting how he was only three weekends in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9), but in that time he converted and baptized pagans and turned them into an ecclesia. Given the long hours worked by people, his number of contact hours with the people would've been quite small. His letters to the Thessalonians make it clear that during that time, he himself was working "night and day" supporting himself and those with him, who were presumably unable to work or maybe in Timothy's case too weak to work. He then had to write to them in 1 Thessalonians, addressing basic questions which they had subsequently asked, such as 'What will happen to dead believers when Christ returns?', 'When will Christ return?'. The level of their instruction before baptism must have been *very* basic. It is rare today to see such focus upon the urgency of baptism. Yet I submit that if we have the spirit of the early church, we will be pushing baptism up front to all we meet. And this was one of the first century keys to success.

So Paul stayed a few weeks or months in cities like Lystra and Thessalonica, returning, in the case of Lystra, after 18 months, and then again a few years later. Here in Acts 17:2, he spent three consecutive Sabbaths in Thessalonica, baptized the converts, and then didn't come back to see them for about five and a half years (Acts 20:1,2). How were they kept strong? By the good shepherd, by the grace of God, by the Father and Son working with Paul. He seems to have drilled them with the basics of the Gospel and the life they needed to live, ordained immature elders who were literate and able to teach the word, and then left them what he repeatedly calls "the tradition", a document or set of teachings relating to practical life in Christ (1 Cor. 11:2,23; 2 Thess. 2:5; 3:6; 1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:13; 2:2; 3:14; Tit. 1:9). It was perhaps the simplicity and brevity of the message that was its strength in the lives of the early converts. Their lives were based directly upon reflection upon the implications of the basic elements of the Gospel. It is today amazing how simple men and women remember and reflect upon the things taught them even verbally, and show an impressive appreciation of them when they are visited again after some months or years. Interestingly, Corinth had the most evident problems and immaturity, even though Paul spent 18 months there, whereas ecclesias like Philippi which he established far quicker seem to have been far sounder. It therefore follows that length of pastoral work is not necessarily related to spiritual strength

17:3- see on Acts 13:24,25.

Explaining and proving that it was necessary that the Christ suffer and rise from the dead- The idea of a suffering, murdered Messiah is hard for Jews to accept to this day. Paul sought to persuade them from the Old Testament that this was indeed a requirement for the true Messiah. Once that is established, it becomes easier to connect Jesus of Nazareth with the Biblical picture of Messiah. Jesus thus becomes the Christ.

AV "opening and alleging". 'Opening' translates a Greek word meaning just that. The idea may be that he opened their minds. "Proving" is literally 'to place alongside'; the idea may be that he as it were placed the experiences of the historical Jesus alongside the Old Testament prophecies. "This Jesus" suggests Paul painted a picture of Jesus who was alive and real almongst them; and he was "the Christ" of the ancient prophecies. Truly, the Jesus of history is the Christ of faith.

"It was necessary that the Christ suffer" is the very phrase used of how Paul was to be made to understand that it was necessary [AV "must"] that he too suffered for

Christ's sake (Acts 9:16). Just as Christ had to ["must"] suffer, so Paul "must"; and so we must. Herein lies the myth of the prosperity Gospel. We are called to carry a cross, not be pampered with great health and wealth.

Saying, This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ- Paul could describe his own preaching as "this Jesus, whom I proclaim to you…", as if Jesus was right there before their eyes, witnessed through Paul. It was like screening a Jesus film, but in words. But it was more than words- Paul himself manifested the Lord Jesus, and was His face and body to his audience. As the Lord was Paul's representative, so Paul was Christ's. The idea of representation works both ways: we see in the Gospel records how the Lord experienced some things which only we have; and we show aspects of His character to the world which nobody else can manifest. Likewise Paul could tell the Galatians that in him they had seen Jesus Christ placarded forth, crucified before their own eyes (Gal. 3:1). Paul knew that when people looked at his life, they saw something of the crucifixion of the Lord. The Galatians therefore accepted him "even as Christ Jesus" (Gal. 4:14).

17:4 *And some of them were persuaded, and joined Paul and Silas, as did many of the devout Greeks*- First of all there must be an intellectual understanding if there is to be conversion. Men were "persuaded", not just emotionally bullied (Acts 17:4; 18:4; 19:8,26; 28:23,24). The intellectual basis of appeal is made clear in the way we read of accepting 'truth' as well as accepting the person of Jesus. Thus converts believe the truth (2 Thess. 2:10-13), acknowledge truth (2 Tim. 2:25; Tit. 1:1), obey truth (Rom. 2:8; 1 Pet. 1:22 cp. Gal. 5:7), and 'come to know the truth' (Jn. 8:32; 1 Tim. 2:4; 4:3; 1 Jn. 2:21). Preaching itself is 'the open statement of the truth' (2 Cor. 4:2). And so it is perfectly in order to seek to intellectually persuade our contacts.

People heard Paul's preaching and joined or 'clave' unto *him*, as they did in :34 to other preachers (Acts 17:34; 5:13); but conversion is a cleaving unto *the Lord Jesus* (Acts 11:23; 1 Cor. 6:17 Gk.). Thus Paul "spoke boldly in the Lord [Jesus], which gave testimony unto the word of his grace" (Acts 14:3). To this extent does the preacher manifest his Lord. He was a living witness to Jesus, and those who joined themselves to Him thereby joined themselves to the risen Lord Jesus. And it is likewise to this day.

And not a few of the chief women- Paul had to later remind the Thessalonians that he isn't preaching because he wants to take money and have relationships with women (1 Thess. 2:3-12). There were some wealthy women in Thessalonica who accepted the Gospel (Acts 17:4 Western Text), and no doubt gossip spread from this.

17:5 *But the Jews, being moved with jealousy, taking along some wicked men from the market place and having assembled a mob, set the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the people*- Jealousy was the leading reason for the Jewish crucifixion of the Lord, and also of their persecution of Paul. The surrounding of a house by an inflamed mob and wanting to "bring them out to the people" recalls the situation of the Angels in Lot's house in Sodom. Isaiah described the Jerusalem cult as Sodom, as does Rev. 11:8. The Jews were acting in a similar way. Why was there such anger against Paul, and why is there such similar response in those who reject Christ today? Surely because the very preaching of Him touches a nerve in every human conscience. He is the answer, which fills the hole in every human heart. But to accept Him requires our all and confession of sin, and human selfishness and egocentricity makes so many resist that. And so their contorted conscience responds in anger.

17:6 *And when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brothers before the rulers of the city, crying: These that have turned the world upside down have come here also*- This is a tacit recognition of the extent and power of Paul's ministry; he and his team had "turned the world upside down". They had hardly done so the Roman world, but they had indeed done so to the Jewish world. And in that observation we have a basic insight into human psychology; we tend to assume that 'our' world is the entire world. Time and again, the Roman authorities responded to the Jewish accusations that they could see no wrong in Paul. But for these bitter minded opponents, their immediate world was the whole world. The "rulers of the city" are called the *politarchs*; exactly the correct word, in comparison to the word used for the governors of Philippi which was a colony, whereas Thessalonica was a "free city".

17:7- see on Acts 16:21.
Jason has received them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus- Paul in the face of every discouragement could preach that "there *is* another king, Jesus"- in conscious defiance of the credo of the Roman empire, that "Caesar is lord" and the only, undisputed king. Our message is no less radically countercultural. This was the core of his message; not so much that there *will be* a coming King in Jerusalem, but that there *is* right now a King at God's right hand, who demands our total allegiance. The Acts record associates the height of Jesus with a call to repentance too. This is the message of Is. 55:6-9- *because* God's thoughts are so far higher than ours, *therefore* call upon the Lord whilst He is near, and let the wicked forsake his way. Because the Father and Son who are so high above us morally and physically are willing to deal with us, *therefore* we ought to seize upon their grace and repent.

17:8 *And they agitated the crowd and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things*- The rulers were agitated when they heard that this was a question of the destabilization of the Roman empire; Pilate was likewise agitated by the crowd in handing the Lord over to death. Time and again, Luke is emphasizing that the sufferings of the Lord are replicated in spirit in all who are in Him.

17:9 *And when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go*- Jason and the others had to pay a bond, guaranteeing their keeping of the peace. This is another indication that not all the early Christians were dirt poor. We recall how Felix often summoned Paull, hoping to get a bribe out of him (24:26). Jason had presumably also bound himself in his bond to not accommodate Paul and to get him to leave the city- hence the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away (:10).

17:10 *And the brothers immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night to Berea; who when they arrived there, went into the synagogue of the Jews*- The immediate sending away may have been a condition of the bail paid in :9. There were several times when brethren sent Paul away from danger- as if he himself would have remained. The way situations repeat in our lives is all evidence that the Lord's hand is at work with us, and nothing is random event in our experiences. We note that Paul immediately enters the synagogue and preaches, when many would have been suffering post-traumatic stress and would have felt unable to face Jews in a synagogue let alone preach to them. But Paul's love was greater than that.

17:11 *Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that*-
"In that" has been added by the translators and reflects nothing in the original text. The context before and after this record about Berea is that noble / higher ranking

individuals had accepted Paul's message in Thessalonica (:4) as the same class were to do in Athens (:34). So the reference may simply be to the same class who responded. Even these "more noble" had a predisposition to believe; the message made intuitive sense to them. And so it is with those we might otherwise consider too worldly to respond to the message.

They received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so- The "examining" probably speaks of daily visits to the synagogue where the Old Testament scrolls were kept, asking to examine them. Paul would have been preaching from the Old Testament, quoting from memory. And they would have wanted to check out his quotations and their context in the actual scrolls. It was "therefore" that they believed (:12), for faith comes by hearing the word of God. It was their attitude to God's word which meant that they received the word with such *prothumia*, 'a mindset in advance', "predisposition", to believe. Paul's message of Jesus as Christ meshed perfectly with the scriptures which they so respected. But it is also the case that the message of Christ crucified is in fact the truth which uniquely fills the hole in every human heart- if people are humble enough to accept it.

17:12 *Therefore, many of them believed, including Greek women of high standing and many Greek men*- Lydia in Philippi was a wealthy woman, trading in luxury garments (“purple”), and a female head of household. The attraction of the Gospel for wealthy women has been often commented upon in the historical literature. We are left to imagine wealthy sisters marrying poorer brethren, or remaining single, with all the scandal attached to it in the first century world, pining for children, comforted only by each other and the surpassing knowledge of Jesus their Lord.

It is worth noting that the NT does reflect the fact that a number of wealthy individuals came to the Truth too; and that these were bound together in fellowship with the poor. There were wealthy women amongst the earliest followers of Jesus (Lk. 8:3); and James and John came from a family who owned their own fishing boat and could employ servants (Mk. 1:19,20). Zacchaeus was wealthy- and note that he wasn't commanded to divest himself of all that wealth (Lk. 19:1-10). Consider the Philippi ecclesia- the wealthy lady from Lydia, the homeless slave girl, the middle class, respectable jailer, and the slaves of his and Lydia’s household. There was nowhere else in the ancient world that all these classes could come together in such unity. Paul himself was not poor- “to be a citizen of Tarsus one had to pass the means test of owning property worth at least 500 drachmae”. He was thought wealthy enough to be able to give a bribe (Acts 24:26). He assured Philemon that he personally would meet any debts arising from the situation with Onesimus. Consider the other wealthy converts: the Proconsul of Cyprus (Acts 13:12), Lydia, Jason who was wealthy enough to put down security for Paul, assisted by prominent women (Acts 17:4,9), Greek women of high standing at Berea (Acts 17:12), Dionysius and Damaris in Athens (Acts 17:16-34), Crispus the ruler of the Corinth synagogue (Acts 18:8 cp. 1 Cor. 1:14), Erastus the city treasurer (Rom. 16:23). Marta Sordi quotes evidence for there being Christians amongst the Roman aristocracy even during the first half of the first century. These few wealthy converts would have bonded together with the mass of poor and slaves who had also come to Christ. It was a unique unity.

17:13 *But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there, likewise stirring up and inciting the crowds*- This is another indication of the organized Jewish opposition to Paul's mission. Paul's proclamation was of the Messiah according to the Old Testament scriptures- for the Bereans compared his message against the Old

Testament scrolls (see on :11). If he had been teaching some Eastern philosophy, they wouldn't have bothered. But it was his supposed subversion of their sacred documents which was so infuriating to them.

17:14 *Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there*- This is exactly what happened in :10. This desire to send Paul away was not for his personal safety as much as for their own safety. And so there was only a very short period of contact time with Paul; and again, belief and the baptism which goes with New Testament belief all occurred after a very brief encounter with the message. Paul it seems would have stayed longer, so eager was he to proclaim the Gospel further and strengthen the converts. If he had done so, their faith may have become stronger; for we read nothing further of any ecclesia in Berea. Silas and Timothy therefore risked their lives by remaining, so important did they perceive the work of strengthening converts to be. And we also should give and risk all for the sake of strengthening such babes in Christ.

17:15 *But they that escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving instructions for Silas and Timothy (that they should came to him with all speed), they departed*- The escort was not only for Paul's safety, but perhaps to ensure that he really did leave Berea. "Escorted" is literally 'to bring to the spot'. We sense here the fear of the new converts. It seems that Paul only gave instruction for Silas and Timothy to join him after he had arrived in Athens. We could read this :15 as a summary of events, and then :16 explains why this situation came about. Paul was immediately struck by the idolatry, made a witness, which had some response- and he needed help. He was a man alone in Athens. And so he asked for Silas and Timothy to immediately come to him.

17:16- see on Acts 15:39.

Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw the city full of idols- God can work directly within the mind of men, psychologically provoking them. He stirred up the spirit of Cyrus and the Jewish leadership to enable the restoration, and there are many other Old Testament examples (1 Chron. 5:26; 2 Chron. 21:16; Ezra 1:1,5; Jer. 51:11; Hag. 1:14). Some of these involve the provoking of the spirit of total unbelievers. How much more will God provoke the spirit of those who are open to His leading. Paul's own spirit was provoked by all the idol worship, for he had a heart that bled for human salvation. And God's Spirit works with our spirit, time and again. "Provoked" is literally pricked, and we recall how the Lord had observed that before conversion, Paul was kicking against the pricks of conscience. That conscience now worked again, as he saw the masses in darkness. We should have the same feeling, as we observe crowds of people rushing to and from work, to holidays, to shops... labouring in vain, when they could have the great hope. "Provoked" is the word Paul uses of how love is "not easily provoked". His spirit was "easily provoked" by the plight of men; rather than being easily provoked by the irritations of others. This is to be our pattern.

17:17 *So he reasoned in the synagogue with Jews and the religious persons, and in the marketplace every day with those that met him*- Paul says himself that he was not an eloquent speaker; and the Corinthians were acutely aware of this. And yet it was through his public speaking that many were converted in places like Athens. The lesson is clear- God uses us in our weaker points in order to witness powerfully for Him. Uneducated Peter was used as the vehicle with which to reach the intelligentsia of Jerusalem- and you and I likewise in and through our very points of weakness are likewise used to reach people.

17:18 *And some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also encountered him. And some said: What will this babbler say? Others: He seems to be a preacher of strange gods! Because he preached Jesus and the resurrection*- "A preacher" is Gk. 'a setter forth'. It is clear that we are to seek to relate to our audience in a way they can relate to. Using their terms, shewing our common binds with them. Paul did this when he was faced with the rather mocking comment that he was a "setter forth" of a strange God. He replied that he 'set forth' to them the One whom they ignorantly worshipped (Acts 17:18,23 RV). He seized upon something they all knew- the altar to the unknown God- and made his point to them from that. And he picked up the noun they used for him and turned it back to them as a verb.

17:19 *And they took hold of him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying: May we know what this new teaching is, which is spoken by you?*- There were many passing preachers who turned up in Athens and tried to get a hearing. But the audience physically dragged Paul off to the Areopagus to ensure he had the widest audience for his message. There was therefore something in his message, probably reflected in him as a person too, which was unique and powerfully compelling. Our message too must be fearlessly presented as the unique thing it is, rather than ever seeking to soften the edges so that it appears more acceptable to secular hearers. It is the baldness of the message which attracts, rather than any sophisticated packaging.

17:20 *For you bring certain strange things to our ears. Therefore, we would like to know what these things mean*- As noted on :19, there was about every possible philosophy and religion being pedalled in Athens. But there was something startlingly new and "strange" in Paul's message about the crucified, resurrected Jesus who now demands our total commitment, far beyond the realms of religious curiosity or hobby level theology. There is no hint that Paul used miracles to grab attention here; it was the power and nature of the Gospel message which struck such a deep chord with the hearts of the hearers.

17:21 *(Now all the Athenians and the strangers living there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing)*- As noted on :19 and :20, there was something radically gripping in the message of this Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and resurrected. The hearers were used to a diet of new things, they were not conservatives, they were wide open minded. Therefore the fact they were so gripped by this new message is all the more a testament to its power.

17:22 *And Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said: You men of Athens, I perceive you are very religious in all things*- Although as mentioned on :19-21, Paul's message was a stark presentation of the Gospel in Christ, he still tried to bridge build with his audience. He appealed to their sense of being religious. He commends them for what they themselves were proud of- their religious interest. But his message then sought to take them on from that common starting point, in explaining that the dead and now living Lord Jesus required a following far beyond such religious curiosity. The Greek for "very religious" could strictly mean 'too religious'. It was as if the pole of mere religion had eclipsed actual truth and spirituality; just as we see today.

17:23 *For as I walked along, I observed the objects of your worship; and I found an altar with this inscription: To the unknown god. Whom you worship in ignorance, Him I proclaim to you*- Paul's positivism is a wonderful thing to study. When he met

people believing in “the unknown [Gk. *agnostos*] God”, he didn’t mock their agnosticism. He rejoiced that they were as it were half way there, and sought to take them further. His position regarding the Sabbath and observance of the Law is a prime example of his patient seeking to bring men onward. "Unknown" is the Greek *agnostos*, agnostic. And our world is full of agnostics. There are very few confirmed, hard core atheists. Paul takes a very generous approach to them; he argues that agnosticism is some kind of "worship" of the one true God, but instead of 'chancing it', they must totally commit to Him. Paul uses a related word in :30, when he says that God has overlooked the times of "ignorance" [*agnoia*], but *now* He commands men to repent. It would follow from this that agnosticism is ultimately inexcusable. The command to repent has been made evident in the Lord's resurrection and the appeal to "all men" made by His body, the church, on account of that resurrection. All who hear that appeal to repent cannot remain agnostic without being culpable to His judgment.

17:24 *The God that made the world and all things therein, He, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands*- Solomon's frequent emphasis on the fact that *he* built the house makes a telling connection with the principle that God does not live in houses *built* by men. Paul's speeches are studded with allusions to that of Stephen in Acts 7, and here we see again how Paul had fully mastered Stephen's argument. That speech converted Paul; and what an eternal fruit to his preaching will Stephen enjoy in the Kingdom, when he sees his murderer saved.

17:25 *Neither is He served by men's hands, as though He needed anything, seeing He gives to all life and breath and all things*- That God needs nothing is something very hard for the standard religious mindset to grasp. The whole psychology of works, of legalism rather than acceptance of grace, is rooted in this assumption that God is in need. Instead, He is a giver, a gifter, the very core idea of *charis,* "grace"; and He dearly wishes us to receive that gift. The reasoning used here was absolutely relevant to the Judaist mentality too. Note that God gives life and breath to all things- every breath taken by every organism is consciously out given by Him, rather than the assumption that somehow God wound the world up on clockwork and leaves it running without any conscious input from Him. "Needed" is really 'required'. In one sense, God requires nothing of man; and so religious systems are thereby declared irrelevant and inappropriate. He has done as He has done, in the world and in His Son. It is for us to believe it, or perish in unbelief. Whilst that faith will elicit a desire to serve Him in response, essentially He doesn't "require" anything.

17:26 *And He has made from one, every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined the times set for them and the bounds of their habitation*- "One blood", according to some manuscripts. This surely invites us to accept Adam as the first man, and Eve was the mother of all living human beings. The next verse indicates that God has given men a time and place to be born and an ethnicity which is optimal for their 'seeking and finding' God. We were born in a particular time and space, from a particular genetic pool. And that was not chance. It was overruled so that we might seek after the one true God. As the parable of the vineyard teaches in Is. 5, we have each been given an optimal environment for spiritual fruitfulness. Even if we may struggle to perceive that, believing that if only we had this or that, or had been born elsewhere or at a different time, then we would "find God" so much easier.

17:27 *That they should seek God; so that they might feel after Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us*- How does geographical distribution etc. lead to men seeking the Lord? We must draw near to Him (Ps. 73:28); and yet He is

already near, not far from every one of us (Acts 17:27). David often speaks of drawing near to God, and yet he invites God to draw near to him (Ps. 69:18). Yet David also recognizes that God "is" near already (Ps. 75:1). I take all this to mean that like us, David recognized that God "is" near, and yet wished God to make His presence real to him. Truly can we pray David's prayers. So often, prayer is described as coming near to God (Ps. 119:169 etc.)- and yet God "is" near already. Prayer, therefore, is a way of making us realize the presence of the God who is always present. In one sense, man is far from God; the same word is used of men being "far off" yet being made near by the blood of Jesus (Eph. 2:13; Acts 2:39 s.w.), just as the prodigal son was spotted by the Father from "far off" (Lk. 15:20). But even that distance is not so great; for the love of God in Christ is what means that He is not far from any man who will accept Christ. The distance is therefore a matter of human perception and refusal to accept God's nearness.

17:28 *For in Him we live and move and have our being- as some even of your own poets have said: For we are also his offspring*- Many New Testament quotations of the Old Testament- many of those in the early chapters of Matthew, for example- are picking up words and phrases from one context and applying them to another, often slightly changing them in order to fit the new context. Paul himself did this when he quoted the words of the poet Aratus "We are all the offspring of Zeus" about our all being the offspring of the one true God.

Paul quoted from Greek poets, famous for the amount of unbiblical nonsense they churned out, in order to confound those who believed what the poets taught (Tit. 1:12; Acts 17:28). What we are suggesting is epitomized by Paul's response to finding an altar dedicated to the worship of "The Unknown God", i.e. any pagan deity which might exist, but which the people of Athens had overlooked. Instead of rebuking them for their folly in believing in this, Paul took them from where they were to understand the one true God, who they did not know (Acts 17:22–23).

Paul sought by all means to close the gap which there inevitably is between the preacher and his audience. Thus in Athens and Lystra he mixes quotes from the Greek poets with clear allusions to God's word. His speeches in those places quote from Epimenides and Aratus, allude to the Epicurean belief that God needs nothing from men, refer to the Stoic belief that God is the source of all life… and also allude to a whole catena of OT passages: Ex. 20:11; Gen. 8:22; Ecc. 9:7; Jer. 5:24; 23:23; Is. 42:5; 55:6; Ps. 50:12; 145:18; 147:8; Dt. 32:8. This was all very skilfully done; surely Paul had sat down and planned what he was going to say. He tries to have as much common ground as possible with his audience whilst at the same time undermining their position. He wasn't baldly telling them their errors and insisting on his own possession of truth; even though this was the case. He didn't remove the essential scandal of the Gospel; instead Paul selected terms with which to present it which enabled his hearers to realize and face the challenges which the scandal of the Gospel presented. And Paul's sensitive approach to the Jews is just the same. *If we are out to convert men and women, we will be ever making our message relevant. If we tell the world, both explicitly and implicitly, that we don't want to convert them, then we won't. If we want to convert them, if we earnestly seek to persuade them and vary our language and presentation accordingly, then we will.*

17:29 *Being then the offspring of God, we should not think that the Divine is like gold, or silver, or stone, something crafted by art and the imagination of man*- If we

truly realize that we are made in God's image, then we will not worship any idol. Thinking this through, there is the implication not that humanity alone is made in God's image; *nothing* else is His image. Yet idolatry, in all its forms and guises throughout history, is based around the supposition that those idols are in fact an image of God and as such demand worship. God has revealed Himself through *people*, not through things which they have created.

17:30 *Therefore, the times of ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands men that they should all everywhere repent*- Paul seems to have seen in Christ's prophecy that the Gospel would be fully known world-wide in the last as being a specific, personal command to him (Mt. 24:14 = 2 Tim. 4:17). He saw prophecy as command more than solely prediction; and this is why prophecy has a degree of variation in how and when it is fulfilled. The words of Mk. 16:15,16 are clear: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved". Commands to repent, all men, the Lord's resurrection... these ideas all recur in Acts 17:30, proving they are not solely relevant to those who first heard them; God now commands all men to repent, through our words. These words clearly don't apply to the first century only, for they are intended to be linked with Mt 24:14, which uses the same language about the preaching work of the very last days (even though the context may imply that as a community we will only be obedient to this command once egged on by major persecution). What all this means is that the great commission will be fulfilled in the last days. The connection with the great commission means that the Lord sent out the disciples in order to fulfil this aspect of the Olivet prophecy; but their failure to do the job fully meant that the prophecy had to be delayed and rescheduled in fulfilment. On account of the Lord's resurrection, God has commanded all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30,31)- again, a reference to the great commission. But God's command of men to repent is only through our preaching of that message. Matthew and Mark record how the apostles were *sent* to preach the Gospel and baptize, for the *forgiveness* of sins (cp. Acts 2:38). Luke records the Lord stating that the apostles knew that *forgiveness of sins* was to be preached from Jerusalem, and therefore they should be witnesses to this. As discussed on :23, the appeal to repent was predicated upon the Lord's resurrection, and therefore "ignorance", agnosticism, was inexcusable to all who now hear the appeal to repent. The Lord's resurrection is the appeal to repent in the sense that His resurrection is the basis of the great commission to all in Him, His body, to go into the world with a message of repentance.

17:31 *Inasmuch as He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained; of which He has given assurance to all men, in that He has raised him from the dead*-

The great commission was based upon the Lord's resurrection. His body are witnessing to His living body. In this sense, His resurrection is an appeal to repent and thereby those who hear the message are responsible to judgment. Otherwise, His resurrection would not be of itself an appeal to anyone in distant places and times. The obedience to the great preaching commission is the means by which the appeal is made in practice.

Preaching is motivated by His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:14). Baptism saves us "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 3:21 cp. Rom. 4:25; Col. 2:13). We who were dead in sins were "quickened together with Christ" (Eph. 2:5). If we believe in Christ's resurrection, we will therefore repent, confess our sins and know His forgiveness. Thus believing in His raising and making confession of sin are bracketed together in Rom. 10:9,10, as both being essential in gaining salvation. Because He

rose, *therefore* we stop committing sin (1 Cor. 6:14). We can't wilfully sin if we believe in the forgiveness His resurrection has enabled. Men should repent not only because judgment day is coming, but because God has commended repentance to us, He has offered / inspired faith in His forgiveness *by the resurrection of Christ* (Acts 17:30,31 AV mg.). The empty tomb and all the Lord's glorification means for us should therefore inspire personal repentance; as well as of itself being an imperative to go and share this good news with a sinful world, appealing for them to repent and be baptized so that they too might share in the forgiveness enabled for them by the resurrection. Because the Lord was our representative, in His resurrection we see our own. We are therefore born again unto a living and abounding hope, by our identification with the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:3).

The very fact that judgment day will surely come is therefore in itself a *command* to all men to repent (Acts 17:30,31)- and therefore it is a command to preach repentance. The resurrection of Jesus was to give assurance "to all men". But how? They hadn't seen Him. There was no Euclidean reason for them to believe in His resurrection. How is it an assurance to all men? Surely in that we are the risen Lord's representatives "to all men", and through us they see the evidence of Christ risen, and thereby have assurance of God's plan for them. In the same way, the wicked and adulterous generation to whom the Lord witnessed were given the sign of the prophet Jonah- that after three days, the Lord would re-appear. But that sign was only given to them through the preaching of the apostles- that generation didn't see the risen Lord Himself (Mt. 16:4). But the witness of the disciples was as good as- for in their witness, they represented the Lord.

Acts 17:31 reasons that the very existence of the future judgment seat and the Lord ordained as judge of living and dead is a command to repent. At the Lord's resurrection, a day was appointed for human judgment, and therefore a knowledge of the Lord's resurrection means we are accountable to that day, and must therefore repent and prepare. It is by this logic that Paul argues that the Lord's resurrection is a guarantee that judgment day will come. "For to this end Christ both died and rose and revived, that he might be Lord... [which involves that] we shall all [therefore] stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written... Every knee shall bow to me [as Lord and judge]..." (Rom. 14:9,10).

We will be judged by or in the man Christ Jesus (Acts 17:31 R.V. Mg.). This means that the very fact Jesus didn't pre-exist and was human makes Him our constant and insistent judge of all our human behaviour. And exactly because of this, Paul argues, we should right now repent. He is judge exactly because He is the Son of man.

17:32 *Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; but others said: We will hear you concerning this yet again*- It was particularly the message of future resurrection and judgment which put an end to their religious fascination with Paul's message. The Lord's resurrection can be ours; He wishes to live in and through us, through His Spirit. And no man can have stood before the cross of the Lord and then walk away with a shrug, assuming he shall not have to stand judgment with eternal consequence for his response to the Man who hung there for him. When the audience started to get a whiff of the reality of these things, they pulled out of the dialogue, and didn't want to hear any more. Rather like Israel begging not to hear any more of God's words, as they were too demanding for them.

17:33 *Thus Paul went out from among them*- Paul's initial message had been so provocative that men had literally dragged him to the Areopagus in order to explain himself at more length and to a greater audience (:19). The comment that he "went out from among them" may mean that he was as it were released, once they were challenged with the personal implications of believing in and committing to a resurrected Jesus, whose Spirit living in His people demanded all of their living and thinking.

17:34 *But some people joined him and believed, among whom was Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them*- People heard Paul's preaching and joined or 'clave' unto *him*, as they did in :4 to other preachers (Acts 17:34; 5:13); but conversion is a cleaving unto *the Lord Jesus* (Acts 11:23; 1 Cor. 6:17 Gk.). Thus Paul "spoke boldly in the Lord [Jesus], which gave testimony unto the word of his grace" (Acts 14:3). To this extent does the preacher manifest his Lord. He was a living witness to Jesus, and those who joined themselves to Him thereby joined themselves to the risen Lord Jesus. And it is likewise to this day.

ACTS CHAPTER 18

18:1 *After these things he departed from Athens and went to Corinth*- He had become involved in Athens with intellectual and philosophical arguments, and now Paul turns away from that and goes to pagan, working class Corinth- the very opposite ground for the Gospel. Several times he asks the Corinthians to recall the way he first arrived in Corinth and determined to only preach Christ, the raw, crucified Christ, without philosophy and intellectual argumentation. He was led to that attitude by his experiences of long philosophical debates in Athens which produced relatively few converts.

The "these things" may refer to some unrecorded trauma Paul suffered. Because 1 Cor. 2:1-3 is clear: "I brothers, when I came to you, I came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling". The "trembling" may refer to the shakes of malaria. But it more likely refers to his trembling with fear. His "weakness" uses a word which refers usually to physical illness; he uses it of how his co-workers were "weak" or sick, and he had to work to support not only himself but them too (Acts 20:34,35). He did that perhaps recalling how he too had been weak when he came to Corinth. Perhaps he left Athens because of illness and the climate at Corinth was more conducive. See on :9 *Fear not.*

18:2 *And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a man of Pontus by race, lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla*- "A Jewish guild always keeps together, whether in street or synagogue. In Alexandria the different trades sat in the synagogue arranged into guilds; and St. Paul could have no difficulty in meeting, in the bazaar of his trade, with the like-minded Aquila and Priscilla" (Edersheim, *Jewish Social Life*).

Because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome; and he went to them- The 'Babylon' of Revelation in its first century reference had relevance to Rome and also to Judaism, as I have argued elsewhere. If we accept an early date for Revelation, then the command to come out from Babylon would have meant leaving Rome (Rev. 18:4); and the emperor's decree would have encouraged obedience to this. The situation was analogous to the historical command for Jews to leave Babylon; the decree of Cyrus encouraged their obedience. God can manipulate geopolitics to help His people to conform to His wishes for them.

18:3 *And because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they worked together*- The rabbis all had a trade. Hillel was a wood-cutter, and Shammai was a carpenter. That Paul had such a trade shows how he was indeed a rabbi before conversion. Paul reminded the Corinthians that as he had been amongst them, so he was at the time he wrote 1 Corinthians: "Even to this present hour we [as before when present with you in Corinth] both hunger and thirst and are naked and are buffeted and have no certain dwelling-place; we toil, working with our own hands" (1 Cor. 4:11,12). Accommodation for manual workers who are refugees has never been very stable; he continued then as when he was in Corinth to have no stable living place.

For by trade they were tentmakers- Reputed as a low paying and not respected trade. The way Paul used it to pay for his own expenses plus those of his companions (20:34) means he would have worked very long hours. The trade was despised amongst Jews because the tents were often made of goats hair, involving work with unclean animals. This would have prepared Paul for understanding that the Jewish laws of unclean animals were condemning him as unclean. Peter was prepared the same way, when he stayed for a while with Simon the tanner, who also worked with blood and unclean animal skins. Further, when a tent pole was lifted up and the canvass spread upon it, it was spoken of as a 'crucifixion'. So the Lord's hand was preparing Paul for his Christian conversion and work amongst the Gentiles; this would have been one of the prods of the goads in his conscience before accepting Christ in Damascus. And the same would have been true for Aquila and Priscilla. All this is a great encouragement for those in low paying and despised employment- the Lord works even through that in preparing us for His service.

Paul at times seems to have had money, enough for Felix to try to get him to pay a bribe, and to rent a house in Rome large enough to receive a large number of Jews. But at other times it seems he was living on the limits, needing to work to pay his way, and here he was driven to flat sharing with manual workers who were refugees / asylum seekers.

18:4 *And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded Jews and Gentiles*- According to the Western text of Acts 18:4, Paul "inserted the name of the Lord Jesus" at the appropriate points in his public reading of the Old Testament prophecies. This was after the pattern of some of the Jewish targums (commentaries) on the prophets, which inserted the word "Messiah" at appropriate points in Isaiah's prophecies of the suffering servant (e.g. the Targum of Jonathan on the Prophets).

Acts 18:4,5 implies that when Paul first came to Corinth, he concentrated on his tent making business, and confined his preaching to arguing with the Jews at synagogue on the Sabbath. But when Silas and Timothy came, their presence made him "pressed in the spirit" to launch an all-out campaign. No longer was he the self-motivated maverick. He needed the presence of others to stir up his mind and prod him onwards. He admitted to those he converted in Corinth as a result of this campaign that such preaching was against his will, he had had to consciously make himself do it (1 Cor. 9:17). Indeed, the Lord Jesus Himself had had to appear to Paul in a vision and encourage him not to suppress his preaching on account of his fear of persecution (Acts 18:9). Therefore he later told the Corinthians that he feared condemnation if he gave in to his temptation not to preach (1 Cor. 9:16). See on Acts 27:21.

18:5 *But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ*- Other manuscripts read "pressed in the spirit". The ambiguity may be because it was Paul's meditation on the word which pressed his spirit to realize that Bible study cannot just continue as a passive activity; it leads to the conviction that we must witness that word to others. And the arrival of his fellow workers emboldened him in this conviction.

18:6 *And when they opposed*- The same word used by Stephen, Paul's great exemplar and hero whom he so often alludes to, when he said that the Jews, including Paul at the time, were resisting the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51) insofar as they were resisting the otherwise irresistible spirit of Stephen (Acts 6:10). Again, Paul was being made to enter into the feelings and situations of those he had earlier persecuted; not as punishment, but more in order to help his own spiritual growth, and to prepare him for eternal fellowship with them in the Kingdom. For now *he* knew what it felt like to have your audience resisting the Spirit through which one speaks.

And reviled him- This is the word otherwise translated 'to blaspheme'. Paul had made the Christians blaspheme the name of the Lord Jesus under torture; and now he was being taught what it feels like to be blasphemed / reviled, for it happened to him.

He shook out his garments- This is the language of Ezekiel doing the same to the apostate Jews of his day (Ez. 5:3), and sets up the allusion to Ezekiel as a watchman in the next phrase. But it is also precisely the language of Nehemiah in Neh 5:13: "I shook out my lap and said, So may God shake out every man from His house and from His work". This action here symbolized God's breaking of covenant with Judah; to have them under the wings / skirts of His garments spoke of acceptance into covenant relationship, and to shake them out of His garments spoke of the ending of that relationship. But we ask whether Paul had the right to declare the breach of God's covenant relationship with Israel, or at least, with those Jews in Corinth. I veer towards the thought that Paul took too much upon himself in making this allusion; it seems very much a hot blooded response, and he did not take seriously his vow at this time to turn away from the Jews in favour of his Gentile mission.

And said to them: Your blood is on your own heads! I am innocent- Blood being on their own heads rather than Paul's is straight out of Ez. 33:4, and his shaking of his garments was an allusion to what Ezekiel did in Ez. 5:3. The idea of being a watchman seems to have fired his preaching zeal, Ez. 3:18; 18:13 cp. Acts 18:6; 20:26. And yet this outburst seems to also be a flash of unspirituality. For later, Paul realizes that he may be condemned if he doesn't preach the Gospel; he realized that he perhaps *wasn't* free of his duty of preaching. Yet for all his "from henceforth I go unto the Gentiles" , Paul *still* preached to the Jews (Acts 18:8; 19:8); which would suggest these words were said in temper and perhaps unwisdom. He himself seems to recognize this when he wrote to Timothy at the very end of his life of how we must with meekness instruct those who oppose themselves (2 Tim. 2:25), whereas his own response to those who “opposed themselves” (Acts 18:6) had been to say, without meekness, that he was never going to ‘instruct’ Jews ever again.

From now on I will go to the Gentiles- But this was precisely what Paul had been commanded at the time of his conversion (Acts 22:21 "I will send you... unto the Gentiles"; see too Acts 26:17). Yet Paul doggedly insisted on going to the Jews, and I will argue in commentary throughout Acts 20 that Paul's refusal to fully accept his commission, and his dissatisfaction at leaving the Jewish ministry to Peter, resulted in much hardship for him. The Lord still worked through Paul's insistence on a different path to that the Lord intended, he remained within the Lord's game plan, but on as it

were a plan B. Paul had earlier had another such moment, when he declared that now he turned to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46,47). And yet these were just temporary realizations of his intended mission and his mistake in focusing on the Jews; like us so often, in the moment of failure and having our plans exasperated, we realize our true calling; and yet like Paul, we slip back into our own preferred path rather than that ideally chosen for us by our Lord.

18:7 *And he departed from there, and went into the house of a certain man named Titus Justus, one that worshiped God, whose house was attached to the synagogue*- Paul's desire was clearly to still preach to the Jews, despite his outburst, and his temporary realization that indeed he had been sent not to Jews but to Gentiles. And yet the Lord worked through Paul's misplaced zeal; and He has much experience of doing that with His people to this day. Because straight after Paul's turning away from the Jews, he goes to stay in the house of Justus, presumably because he had fallen out with his previous place of accommodation because of his outburst; and previously he had been staying with Jewish Christians Aquilla and Priscilla. Maybe we can infer that they didn't agree with his outburst, and so he upped and left (although :18 notes they later were together again). But the lodging he found was with a man called Justus, who just happened to live in the house next door to the synagogue. And this meant him talking to the guy next door- who happened to be the ruler of the synagogue. And he was persuaded of Christ, which tied Paul in again to the work of ministering to the Jews. But this happened right after Paul's indignant declaration that he was quitting working with the Jews. He surely knew Crispus, the synagogue ruler, because Paul had been arguing in the synagogue every Sabbath for some time (:4). But the ruler of the synagogue turned the corner and came to faith in Jesus as Christ- right after Paul's outburst against working with the Jews. This was obviously intentional within the workings of the Spirit [or providence, as some prefer to say]. I have explained in commentary on chapter 20 that Paul was wrong to focus on the Jews, when he was intended to work with the Gentiles. But because he subconsciously wanted to continue this focus, despite his emotional outburst here to the contrary, therefore the Lord confirmed him in the ministry he himself chose, although that was very much the Lord's plan B for Paul. Each day, therefore, it's really a case of 'Where do you want to go today in My service?'; and we will be confirmed in the path chosen. The important thing is that quite simply we love God and want His glory and desire to serve Him with all we have all we are, with no self-seeking or jealousy issues. We will then come to the right paths of service and be propelled along them; but if in our weakness we choose less than ideal paths of service, we will all the same be confirmed in them. For man is not alone, neither are we ever rejected from the Lord's game plan with us for so long as we are alive in this world.

18:8 *And Crispus*- See on :7 *He departed from there...*

The ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his family- It was common for the household to follow the religion of the head of the family. But the call of Christ was to individuals, and Paul in 1 Cor. 7 speaks to situations where a marriage was divided between believer and unbeliever. So the records of whole household baptisms, all at the same time, every member of the household, with not even one remaining in the previous religion, are hard to square with the idea of individual calling and each responding at their own time. Especially when there was a culture of a household following the religion of the family head. My conclusion would be that there was no compulsion or conscious pressure placed on the household members to be baptized into Christ; but they all chose to be. That said, their motives

would inevitably have been mixed, and they would have been under psychological pressure to follow the rest of the group. Despite this, there is no evidence that the early preachers sought to investigate the detailed knowledge or motivation of baptismal candidates; they simply baptized anyone who desired it in such missionary contexts. It is true that there is reason to think that one of the Gospel records was learnt by some of the candidates, but this would not have been universally the case.

And many of the Corinthians, *hearing, believed and were baptized*- An exemplification of how faith came by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17). It seems strongly likely that Paul wrote Romans from Corinth, so he would have had this example in mind when he wrote those words in Romans 10. But "the word of God" refers therefore not to the entire Bible but to the message of God in the Gospel of His Son.

18:9- see on Acts 18:4,5.

And during the night in a vision, the Lord said to Paul: Do not be afraid- Quoting the very words of the Lord Jesus to the disciples: "Fear not... you shall catch men" (Lk. 5:10). What the disciples feared was their inadequacy as preachers; and the same context is here with Paul. We see here a humility in Paul which his argumentative and emotional temperament may otherwise hide. His fear was also of physical harm, for the corresponding comfort was that nobody was going to hurt him (:10). Paul's fear of physical harm is again comforted by the Lord during the shipwreck (Acts 27:24). This fearful side of Paul makes the more impressive his continuation to Jerusalem, knowing that prison, beating and maybe death awaited him; it means his willing enduring beating at Philippi when he could have avoided it was the more gracious. He was not some macho fanatic who was genuinely fearless of death. In fact, it seems, quite the opposite. Paul spoke of his arrival in Corinth at this time as being "In weakness and in fear and in much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3). The trembling may have been connected to the "fear".

Paul says that he preached to Corinth in the first place in (spiritual) "weakness" (1 Cor. 2:3)- because it seems that when he first got to Corinth, he wasn't spiritually strong enough to grasp the nettle of witnessing to the city as he should have done (Acts 18:9,10). Having admitted to Corinth that he himself was weak, he can say that whenever one of them is weak, he feels weak too; in other words he's saying that he can totally empathize (not just sympathize) with a weak brother's feelings (2 Cor. 11:29).

But speak out and do not keep silent- Gk. 'be dumb'. We have noted so many conscious connections between the gospel of Luke, and this 'Volume 2' in Acts. Here, the connection is clearly with Zacharias, father of John the Baptist, whom Luke records as being told not to be afraid; and is then told that he will be dumb [s.w. "keep silent"] and not be able to "speak" [s.w. "speak out"] (Lk. 1:20). Paul's mind was soaked with the Gospel records; he alludes to them at least once in every three verses of his letters. So he would have grasped the point the Lord was making: If he would not preach, then he would be effectively faithless in the Lord's promise, as Zacharias had been.

18:10 *For I am with you*- A word for word quotation from the assurance given in the great commission (Mt. 28:20). The specific promise made in the commission that the preachers would take up snakes and remain unharmed was fulfilled in Paul on Malta beach. We see here that the Lord intended the great commission for Paul- and not merely, as some still claim, for the eleven apostles to whom He first addressed it. And we too are to see it as binding on us all. This is also one of a number of instances

of where Old Testament Messianic Scriptures [here Is. 43:5] are applied to Paul in the context of his preaching Christ.

And no one shall attack or harm you- But we must square this with the fact that 18 months later, "the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat" (:12). Maybe the Lord meant that there would be no such behaviour until Paul had reached the Lord's "many people" in the city; perhaps that rising up against Paul was the sign for him to leave, and yet he stubbornly remained there after that "for many days" (:18). "No one shall attack" sounds like God's promise to Israel, that whilst they were busy in His service keeping the feasts, they would not be attacked (Ex. 34:24); it was for as long as Paul was doing the Lord's work with His people that the protection would last. So the attack on Paul and beating of Sosthenes (:17), who had become a Christian (1 Cor. 1:1), clearly was "harm"- and a sign, therefore, to leave. Yet just as Paul refused to accept Spirit direction in warning him not to go to Jerusalem, so it seems that here too he would not follow the Spirit's leading.

For I have many people in this city- This was only potentially true. If Paul had run away because of the opposition, they would not have become the Lord's people. Exactly because of this, the Lord tells him to endure. Likewise if the harvest is not gathered, it spoils- because the labourers have not done their work.

18:11 *And he lived there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them*- The *logos* of God is the Lord Jesus. This information comes after the accounts in the previous two chapters of Paul being quickly hounded out of towns by the Jewish opposition. Perhaps Paul assumed this would happen, hence the Lord's special encouragement to him that that history was not quite going to repeat itself so quickly (:12). The Corinthian letters indicate that there was indeed Judaist undermining of Paul's work there, but they failed to close him down immediately as they had in the other towns.

18:12 See on :10 *no one shall attack...*

But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat- See on :11. The "one accord" of Jewish opposition is presented by Luke as the opposite of the "one accord" which characterized the early Christian community. There is in fact no in between position; we are either united with the world, or with the Lord and His people. Gallio is mentioned in inscriptions as the brother of the famous philosopher Seneca, tutor of Nero. Luke's history is flawless, as we would expect from an inspired record.

18:13 *Saying: This man persuades men to worship God*- Time and again we see that what irked the Jews most of all was that Paul was successful in persuading others of his beliefs. The Jews were missionaries, eager to make proselytes and to gain followers amongst the Jews. Jealousy at another's apparent success in evangelizing their positions remains to this day an envy unto death. I have argued at times, especially in commentary upon chapter 20, that Paul too was partly driven by a jealousy complex against Peter's conversion of thousands of Jews in Jerusalem at Pentecost. And as it were in response to that, the Jews are envious of Paul's successes and persecute and kill him because of it. This was not so much a punishment of Paul, but rather a method through which Paul was intended to come to understand himself, to be more purely motivated in his witness, and to not envy Peter.

Contrary to the law- The law they had in mind was the law of Moses; for Gallio throws their case out of court because there is no question of infringement of Roman law, and tells them that they are arguing about infringement of "your own law" (:15). Paul was being treated as he and the Jews had treated the Christians- by seeking to get

the Romans to judge and punish others for breaking their perception of the law of Moses.

18:14 *But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews: If indeed it were a matter of wrong or of criminal villainy, O you Jews, it would be logical that I should bear with you*- Gallio's judgment here that Paul had done nothing legally wrong was repeated by him later, especially when he first talks with the Jews in Rome. Paul spent some years in prison and was finally killed- when he had done nothing legally wrong. And that had been established in court cases such as these. Given Paul's logical mindset and tendency to legalism, this would have been so painful for him to come to terms with. The rules of justice and logic were not being followed- and he was being condemned wrongly. He uses many of these concepts in writing to the Romans, arguing that we are sinners who *have* done wrong and who therefore should rightly die, but the rules of justice, ethics and logic have all been turned upside down by God's grace in Christ- and we have been pardoned and blessed with the hope of eternity. Paul was therefore writing all this partly to himself. He likely developed those thoughts initially as a way to cope with his deep sense of injustice about how his case was treated. And the Holy Spirit developed his thinking further and led him to express those thoughts in written form under Spirit guidance.

18:15 *But if they are questions about words and names*- The disagreement with Paul was about "names", and surely the Name in view was that of the Lord Jesus, whose Name the apostles preached, baptized into and emphasized. But 'name' effectively means 'authority', and in whose authority they were preaching was a big item for the Jews. And it is with legalistic minds to this day. For some, it's a monstrosity to think that an individual on his own initiative can preach in the name of the Lord Jesus. But that is the spirit of individual response to the great commission.

And your own law, look to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these matters- The Old Testament frequently speaks of the law as God's law, and the feasts as His feasts. But in the New Testament we read of the feasts and law of the Jews. They had hijacked God's way on this earth and made it effectively their own petty religion; and the church has largely done the same today.

18:16 *He drove them from the judgment seat*- The account of Gallio driving the Jews away from his judgment seat is maybe to enable to us to imagine the scene at the last day. "Let them be as chaff before the wind: and let the angel of the Lord chase them. Let their way be dark (cp. the rejected cast to outer darkness) and slippery: and let the angel of the Lord persecute them" (Ps. 35:5,6). "The ungodly are like the chaff which the wind (spirit- the Angels made spirits) driveth away" (Ps. 1:4; Job 21:18).

18:17 *And they all laid hold on Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of these things*- Perhaps another name for Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue whom Paul had recently converted (:8). Or perhaps Crispus had been forced to resign, and had been replaced by Sosthenes; or maybe there was more than one ruler of the synagogue in office at the same time. To do this job whilst being a Christian would have been very difficult if not impossible. Cornelius, Daniel and his friends, the soldiers John baptized and others found themselves in positions of employment or authority which were hard to maintain in view of their spiritual beliefs. We do not read of them resigning, nor of resignation being demanded before accepting them as believers; but we simply notice that in due course, Daniel and his friends faded from the scene of authority, and Crispus likewise. This is surely a pattern for our pastoral response to folks who find themselves in these situations upon conversion. Sosthenes was a co-author of the later

letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:1), so he too converted; and even at this stage, was beaten for his identity with the Christian movement.

18:18 *And Paul, having stayed after this for many days, took his leave of the believers*- See on 18:10 *No one shall attack...*

And with Priscilla and Aquila- Mentioned because they appear to have had a temporary parting of the ways; see on 18:7 *He departed from there*. But see too on :19. Such things happened and still happen.

Sailed to Syria, having shorn his head in Cenchrea. For he had made a vow- Such vows were usually made in thankfulness for deliverance; or it could have been a Nazirite vow. These vows were typically ended in Jerusalem on a feast day. In commentary on chapter 20 I develop the idea that Paul was obsessed with going to Jerusalem because he dreamt of converting mass numbers of Jews there as Peter had done on Pentecost. I suggest that his obsession was misplaced, in that it was partly fuelled by jealousy of Peter, and was in disregard of the Lord's will that Paul focus on Gentiles and leave the Jews to Peter. So his voluntary vow, requiring a trip to Jerusalem at the end of it, may have been a device he developed to give him an excuse to be in Jerusalem at a feast. See on :21.

I suggest that the vow may well have been of Naziriteship. Paul was called to be a preacher of the Gospel, and yet he speaks of his work as a preacher as if it were a Nazarite vow- which was a totally voluntary commitment. Consider not only the reference to him shaving his head because of his vow (Acts 18:18; 21:24 cp. Num. 6:9-18), but also the many descriptions of his preaching work in terms of Naziriteship: Separated unto the Gospel's work (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:15; Acts 13:2); "I am not yet consecrated / perfected" (Phil. 3:12)- he'd not yet finished his 'course', i.e. his preaching commission. He speaks of it here as if it were a Nazarite vow not yet ended. Note the reference to his 'consecration' in Acts 20:24. His undertaking not to drink wine lest he offend others (Rom. 14:21) is framed in the very words of Num. 6:3 LXX about the Nazarite. Likewise his being 'joined unto the Lord' (1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 14:6,8) is the language of Num. 6:6 about the Nazarite being separated unto the Lord. The reference to having power / authority on the head (1 Cor. 11:10) is definitely some reference back to the LXX of Num. 6:7 about the Nazarite. What are we to make of all this? The point is perhaps that commitment to active missionary work is indeed a voluntary matter, as was the Nazarite vow. And that even although Paul was called to this, yet he responded to it by voluntarily binding himself to 'get the job done'. And the same is in essence true for us today in our various callings in the Lord's service.

18:19 *And they came to Ephesus; and he left them there, but he entered into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews*- I suggested on 18:7 and 18:18 that Aquilla and Priscilla had some tensions with Paul after his outburst against the Jews; he left living with them and went elsewhere to lodge. But they reconciled to the extent that they travelled together now towards Jerusalem. But now in Ephesus they again appear to differ. And the difference was over Paul's going into the synagogue and arguing with the Jews. Paul was slipping back from his vow to focus on the Gentile mission and once again giving way to his obsession with the Jews. Perhaps they felt that he was wrong in this, and so despite being Jews themselves, they didn't go to the synagogue with Paul. I have suggested elsewhere that the Holy Spirit kept prodding Paul to focus on the Gentiles, and leave the Jewish mission to Peter; and he was wrong to insist on making the Jews a priority. Perhaps Aquilla and Priscilla had had Spirit revelation about this and were therefore in disagreement with the way Paul insisted on going against it.

I say this based on the force of the "but" or "for" in the next clause; he left them because he went into the synagogue. It can hardly mean that he left them in Ephesus and moved on elsewhere, because he left them and then went into the synagogue in the same town and preached. This tension between Paul and Aquilla and Priscilla is sadly typical of him; someone of Paul's temperament would have been "a difficult bloke" to get along with when he encountered those of his own level of ability. His closest and most loyal friends are described by him as the "weak" whom he had to work to support (Acts 20:34,35). This rather makes sense; those types would have found in him a tower of strength, and if he funded them then this would have reinforced their loyalty to him.

18:20 *And when they asked him to stay a longer time, he did not consent*- "Asked" translates a Greek word meaning to beg. He turned them down because of his obsession with getting to Jerusalem for Pentecost. I have elsewhere suggested that this was rooted in a fantasy to repeat Peter's mass conversion of Jews at that feast. Yet the situation is analogous to the time when the Lord was begged to remain longer in an area, but would not agree because He had to preach the word to other cities (Lk. 4:42,43). We note again that it is Luke who records this in volume 1 of his work. The experiences of Paul, like our own, were modelled around those of the historical Jesus. But we also see here the hint that Paul's desire to get to Jerusalem was in order to preach; and he had been specifically told that Jerusalem would not accept his preaching (Acts 22:18). He had been sent to the Gentiles, and Peter to the Jews; but still he insisted on going his way.

18:21 *But took his leave of them, saying: I will return again to you if God wills. He then set sail from Ephesus*- Some texts add: "Saying, I must by all means keep this feast that comes in Jerusalem". We sense here his obsession with getting to Jerusalem; see on :18. There is no evidence that Paul did in fact go up to Jerusalem as he planned at this stage. See on :22. His plans to go there were frustrated; it was the Lord's intention that Paul preach to the Gentiles and leave the Jews to Peter. And yet Paul still didn't get it; for he again pushes to go up to Jerusalem to keep a feast, Pentecost (19:21). The Holy Spirit warned him not to do this, but he still pushed ahead. The way his plans were frustrated at this earlier stage was surely a lesson he failed to heed.

18:22 *And when he had landed at Caesarea, he went and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch*- We read of how Paul went on from Ephesus to Caesarea, and then "he went [up] and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch". It could be argued that going up and coming down is how visits to Jerusalem are spoken of; but why the ambiguity? Why is not his arrival in Jerusalem mentioned? The more comfortable reading would be that he travelled nearly 1000 km. from Ephesus to Caesarea, on the coasts of Palestine, only 120 km. from Jerusalem; but then some unspecified situation arose which frustrated his plans, and he turned north and headed to Antioch up the coast road; or even sailed there. The silence about any visit to Jerusalem is significant, especially seeing that he refused to stay longer in Ephesus despite the need to- because he was so set on getting to Jerusalem for the feast. Some versions paraphrase as 'Went up to Jerusalem' but that is not in the original. It's hard for interpreters to understand that Paul could have come all the way to Caesarea and not 'gone up' to Jerusalem as he planned. But I have explained that it was not the Lord's will that he went to Jerusalem to preach, and so the plan was frustrated. *Anabaino*, 'went [up]', doesn't have to mean 'to Jerusalem', although it is sometimes used like that. It is used of Joseph 'going up' to Bethlehem (Lk. 2:4), going up to a

housetop, a tree or mountain (Lk. 5:19; 9:28; 19:4). Likewise *katabaino*, "went down", doesn't have to refer to a leaving Jerusalem. It is used about going down from other towns (Jn. 2:12; 4:51; Acts 7:15; 8:15; 14:25).

18:23 *And having spent some time there, he departed and went through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, in that order, strengthening all the disciples*- Perhaps the frustration of Paul's plans to visit Jerusalem at feast time (see on :22) led him to realize that indeed, the Lord had sent him to the Gentiles and not to the Jews. And so in repentance, Paul spent time strengthening the Gentile converts he had already made. There is no reference to him going into the synagogue in each town and arguing with the Jews, as was the pattern on his missionary trips. We just read that he did pastoral work with the converts. Paul twice 'turned to the Gentiles', which is what he was intended to have focused upon in his ministry; but each time we see him fall back into his obsession with Jerusalem and witnessing to the Jews. This weakness came to its full term in the way he refused repeated Spirit warnings against going up to Jerusalem, and suffers the consequences.

Paul is recorded as having passed through Galatia and Phrygia in Acts 16:6; presumably he made converts and established churches there. The fact this isn't recorded indicates how very abbreviated are the records we have. The incidents which are recorded are clearly for our learning. According to the note in the AV at the end of 1 Timothy, Paul wrote that letter from Laodicea in Phrygia. The converts in Phrygia may have been originally a result of Peter's work, for there were Jews from Phrygia baptized by him at the time of Acts 2:10. Given my comments elsewhere about Paul's feelings towards Peter's work, this would have been all intentionally arranged by the Spirit in an effort to re-direct Paul's focus towards the Gentiles. He was being made to understand that if he insisted on ministry to the Jews, then he was treading on Peter's ground and at best playing second fiddle to his ministry, rather than developing his own intended ministry with the Gentiles.

We read this word “strengthening” four times in the NT, all in Acts (Acts 14:22; 15:32,41; 18:23). Conscious programs of pastoral strengthening of the converts were an essential part of the church's missionary strategy, and it must be so today too.

18:24 *Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by race, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the scriptures*- The Greek suggests 'an orator'. Perhaps this was why some in Corinth preferred him to Paul, whom they found relatively unrefined in his style (1 Cor. 1:12; 2:4; 2 Cor. 10:10). The Acts of the Apostles focuses largely on Paul and Peter, and after chapter 15, exclusively on Paul. This brief mention of the work of Aquilla and Priscilla with Apollos is the only example of the focus moving away from Paul. I have argued that Paul's obsession with preaching to Jews, especially at Jerusalem, was not in line with the Lord's ideal intention for him- which was that he should preach to the Gentiles. He ought to have remained at Ephesus, given the level of interest there and the request for him to remain there. But he goes off towards Jerusalem; and then, Apollos comes on the scene. And it is Aquilla who converts him. We may imagine that Paul would have been on the same level as Apollos, fluent in the Scriptures and eloquent in dialogue. But Paul was being taught that although he maybe appeared on paper the ideal person to convert Apollos- that was not the Lord's way. He uses human weakness rather than our ability. I suggest that Paul considered that he was far better qualified to operate the ministry to the Jews than illiterate Peter. He, surely, was more suited to the Gentiles, being from half Gentile Galilee, and mocked by the Jerusalem Jews as being without grammar when he spoke. But the Lord knew what He was doing when He

directed Peter to go to the Jews, and Paul to the Gentiles. And through the conversion of the eloquent Apollos by Aquilla rather than Paul, He was seeking to teach Paul this. This kind of thing happens in our lives many times, and we likely also fail to perceive the teaching process or accept the lessons.

18:25 *This man had been instructed*- Literally, 'catechized'. Luke's community were instructed or learned by rote the Gospel of Luke (Lk. 1:4). This was how the Gospel was spread in the 1st century especially amongst the illiterate. The Gospel records were memorized. Perhaps the form of the Gospel record which Apollos had was incomplete, an early version; for "he knew only the baptism of John". That could mean however that he only recognized John's baptism and did not consider baptism into the Lord Jesus and receipt of His spirit to be necessary (see a similar case in 19:1-5).

In the way of the Lord- A nice description of the Gospel. It is all about the way of the Lord Jesus, the way He took and the way we are to follow in. This is also reflected in how the early Christian community is called "the way".

And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, although he knew only the baptism of John- Although his knowledge was lacking, he is commended for acting with integrity according to the knowledge he had. Cornelius would be another example. These cases show that God does indeed take notice of those who love but misunderstand His Son; but He rewards their diligence and integrity by revealing His fuller truth to them. The principle of Phil. 3:15 is important: "Let us therefore, as many as are mature, be thus decided; and if in anything you are otherwise decided, this also shall God reveal to you". Spiritual maturity involves tolerance of others whilst they too are on the same journey we were earlier on, and continue upon.

"Being fervent in spirit" is Gk. *the* Spirit. The idea of being fervent in the Spirit suggests a degree of freewill control on his part, rather than the Holy Spirit just as it were zapping Apollos. So the reference to *the* Spirit suggests the Holy Spirit, but his 'fervency' suggests his own human spirit; but God's Spirit confirms the human spirit. He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). The only other time this phrase "fervent in spirit" occurs is in Rom. 12:11, where Paul exhorts us all to be like this. Paul may mean: 'Emulate Apollos!'.

18:26 *And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue*- It is surely intentional that we read of Paul doing this in that same synagogue in Ephesus, soon afterwards- "he [Paul] entered into the synagogue and spoke boldly" (Acts 19:8 s.w.). Was not Paul here consciously emulating Apollos, as he bid the Romans do (see on :25 *Being fervent*)? Apollos was an erudite Jew who knew the Scriptures well and could use them powerfully- just like Paul. But I wonder whether just as Paul sought to emulate Peter's mass conversion of Jews in Jerusalem at Pentecost, so he seeks to copy Apollos. Apollos was a convert of John the Baptist, and soon afterwards, at the time of 19:1-5, Paul meets others in Ephesus who likewise were Jews converted by John but needed teaching the complete Christian message; and he baptizes them. Those men were most likely associates of Apollos; Apollos had planted, and Paul just did the last stage in baptizing them. But always, when it comes to preaching to the Jews, Paul is left playing second fiddle and building on another man's foundation. And he would have resented that. The point was, he should have concentrated on the mission which the Lord had for him, which was to the Gentiles. We too can mis-focus our lives by seeking to emulate others in their ministries, rather than perceiving and focusing upon our own unique ministry.

But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately- Appropriate language to use, seeing the preparing of the Lord's way was a major part of John the Baptist's message.

18:27 *And when he decided to go into Achaia*- Where Corinth was. Apollos is mentioned as being at Corinth in 19:1.

The brothers encouraged him, and wrote to the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he helped them who through grace had believed- He helped / inspired the other believers in that he publicly converted others; thus an upward spiral of converting was initiated. "Who through grace had believed" suggests that faith is a gift, for *charis*, grace, essentially means a gift, and is often associated with the work of the Holy Spirit. Likewise Lydia's heart was opened to believe the Gospel (Acts 16:14).

18:28 *For he powerfully refuted the Jews publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ*- Part of the 'help' which he gave the believers was by publicly vindicating their faith before those who opposed them.

ACTS CHAPTER 19

19:1 *And it came to pass, that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper country, came to Ephesus and found some disciples*- Jn. 1:41,43,45 use the same words for how the Lord Jesus at the start of His ministry 'found disciples', who were likewise students of John the Baptist. We note that despite their misunderstandings and gaps in knowledge, they are still referred to as 'disciples'; they were committed to learning, which is the essence of the word 'disciple'. We also observe that Paul, like us, was manifesting the style and actions of the Lord's ministry in his own. The connection with the Lord's calling of the first disciples on the shores / coasts of the lake is strengthened by considering how Paul is described as having passed along the *meros*, translated "coasts" in the AV ["upper country"] to find those disciples.

19:2 *And he said to them: Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? And they said to him: No. We have not even heard*- The aorist implies 'we did not hear', i.e. at the point of baptism. The connection with Apollos in :1 could hint that these people had been converted by Apollos, who knew only baptism of John (Acts 18:25).

That there is a Holy Spirit- As followers of Moses and John the Baptist, they were surely aware of the concept of Holy Spirit. We must fill in the ellipses surely required by the context- "there is [gift of] the Holy Spirit", remembering that the Spirit was not poured out until the Lord's glorification. Jn. 7:39 likewise says that "the Holy Spirit was not yet", i.e. the [outpouring of] Holy Spirit. Perhaps what they meant was that they were aware that John had spoken of an outpouring of the Spirit as a result of the Lord's work, but they had not heard whether this had yet happened. After all, they had encountered John some years ago in Palestine and were now in Ephesus, maybe cut off from news of the progress of Christianity. The Western text here has: "We have not even heard that anyone is receiving the Holy Spirit".

19:3 *And he said: Into what then were you baptized? And they said: Into John's baptism*?- The Acts record presupposes that baptism is part and parcel of belief. Paul has spoken of "When you believed" (:2) as if this was a one time specific event in the past, rather than a drift of interest towards Christianity. That one time point of "belief" was their baptism.

19:4 *And Paul said: John baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying to the people*- How could Paul so confidently quote John's words? Admittedly it could have been the result of a flash of Spirit inspiration. Or it could also have been that he had heard John preaching, which would have been the source of the goads sticking into his conscience... and he constantly alludes to John's words and personality throughout his letters.

That they should believe in him that should come after him, that is, on Jesus- On hearing this, they were baptized (:5); again we see baptism as being part and parcel of belief. Faith was not and is not a position we drift into; God in His wisdom introduced the rite of baptism so that there is a conscious, specific moment of accepting that faith as our own.

19:5 *And when they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus*-

These men had not been baptized with Christian baptism, which is into the death and resurrection of Christ. The command for baptism into His death and resurrection was given after Christ had risen from the dead. It could be argued therefore that this is not an example of adults once baptized [by immersion] into the Lord's death and resurrection being rebaptized. That approach would appear to be the correct line of interpretation once due weight is given to the fact that they had not received the Holy Spirit; surely there is an intended allusion to Jn. 7:39: "He spoke of the Spirit, which they that believed in him were to receive. For the Spirit had not yet been given, as Jesus had not yet been glorified". The Greek idea behind "not yet been given" is similar to the men's words in the Greek of Acts 19:2, where "We did not hear whether there *be* any Holy Spirit" carries the idea 'We didn't hear that the Holy Spirit is present / has been given'. The men had surely heard of "Holy Spirit", but they were unaware it had been given. The connection with Jn. 7:39 could suggest they were actually ignorant of the death, resurrection and glorification of Jesus- hence their need for Christian baptism. Their ignorance of the coming of the Spirit is painted, according to the connection with Jn. 7:39, as ignorance of the fact Christ had been glorified. If these men had been baptized by John but were now in Ephesus, it's quite possible they had left Palestine soon after their baptisms and were ignorant of what had subsequently happened to Jesus until Apollos had now told them. "Into [Gk. *ek*] what were you baptized?" (Acts 19:3) would therefore carry the implication that they had not been baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ; their answer comes across rather lamely: "Into John's baptism". The necessary answer was "Into Christ's death and resurrection", but they are forced to reply somewhat ungrammatically- that they had not been baptized *into* anything much at all, apart from into John. There could even be the implication that they had not been baptized by John himself, but "into John's baptism" by some disciple of John. Acts 19:5,6 sounds as if they were unaware that John had taught the people that they must believe [and be baptized] "into Christ"; and when they understood that this had been his message, then they were baptized into Christ. They had had the idea in their minds that they must make a change, but it would seem they were ignorant of what John had actually taught about Jesus.

Again and again it must be remembered here that John's baptism wasn't Christian baptism; it was to prepare the way for Christ and baptism into Him. Paul explains that John's teaching was intended to lead men to believe "in" or "into" Christ [Gk. *ek*

again- he stresses this twice in Acts 19:4]. When the men understood that, they were "baptized into [Gk. *ek*] the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:5). Baptism *into* Christ is here presented as part and parcel of belief *in* Him. Baptism is assumed in the New Testament as being part of belief. This incident leaves us with the clear impression from the use of the term *ek* , into, that they had been baptized into John and had been ignorant of Christ's death and glorification. Their immersion "into John's baptism" had not therefore been Christian baptism at all.

The connection between baptism and receipt of the Spirit also cries out to be understood within the context of Acts to the great opening example of baptism in Acts 2:38: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit". I have elsewhere suggested that the "gift" in view there was that of forgiveness and spiritual blessing in Christ. The baptism [or, rebaptism] of Acts 19 did not of itself give the Holy Spirit gifts; these came as a result of Paul laying his hands upon the newly baptized people. This would've been a situation analogous to that in Acts 10, where the Gentiles who were baptized exercised miraculous Spirit gifts straight afterwards in order to demonstrate that the decision to baptize them had in fact been correct.

19:6 *And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied*- What foreign language did they speak? I have mentioned previously the possibility that the gift of languages was in order to cement unity between Jews and Gentiles by enabling them to speak in each other's languages. One therefore wonders if these men were in fact all full Jews, or whether the gift of languages in this case was the ability to converse in pure Hebrew.

19:7 *And they were in all about twelve men*- Being twelve of them, and called disciples, they could be presented as a kind of parallel brotherhood to the community of Christian disciples.

19:8- see on Acts 18:6.

And he entered into the synagogue and spoke boldly for the space of three months-"Boldly" is a common word in the New Testament. We are to be bold before the throne of grace, and our confident assurance of salvation means that we are bold in our witness to others about that good news.

Reasoning and persuading as to the things concerning the kingdom of God- We wonder why there is no mention of the things concerning the Lord Jesus, as these two elements seem to go together in the Acts account. Perhaps this group were already persuaded that Jesus was Messiah, but were ignorant of the things of the Kingdom. Those "things" were surely the same "things concerning the Kingdom" which the Lord Himself had taught; and those things were found in His parables of the Kingdom, which were about life now under God's kingship, rather than information about the physicalities of the Messianic Kingdom to be established on earth at His return.

19:9 The Western text here adds that Paul preached in Ephesus from 11a.m. to 4 p.m.- the siesta period. Whilst working with his own hands to support himself, he somehow persuaded men and women to break their usual sleep pattern to come and hear him. F.F. Bruce has commented that more Ephesians were awake at 1a.m. than 1 p.m.

But when some were hardened and disobedient- Paul maybe recalled this case when he wrote to the Romans of how some Jews were hardened when they rejected

the message of the Lord Jesus (Rom. 9:18 cp. Heb. 3:8,15).

Speaking evil of the Way before the crowd, he departed from them- This is typical of how when men cannot answer the truth of Christ presented to them, they then attack the messengers on a personal level. Paul's way of dealing with this slander campaign was to just remove the converts as far as he could from exposure to it.

And separated the disciples- The same ones as in :1?

Reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus- First century preaching wasn't merely bald statement of facts nor a pouty presentation of propositional Truth. A very wide range of words is used to describe the preaching of the Gospel. It included able intellectual argument, skilful, thoughtful use and study of the Scriptures by the public speakers, careful, closely reasoned and patient argument. Their preaching is recorded through words like *diamarturesthai*, to testify strenuously, elegcho, to show to be wrong, *peitho*, to win by words, *ekithemi*, to set forth, *diamar*, to bear full witness, *dianoigo*, to open what was previously closed, *parrhesia*, to speak with fearless candour, *katagellein*, to proclaim forcefully, *dialegesthai,* to argue, *diakatelenchein*, to confute powerfully. The intellectual energy of Paul powers through the narrative in passages like Acts 19: "Disputing and persuading… disputing daily… Paul purposed in the spirit… this Paul has persuaded and turned away much people".

19:10 *And this continued for the space of two years, so that all those who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Gentiles*- Because Ephesus was visited by many from the surrounding area and was a transport hub.

19:11 *And God did special miracles by the hands of Paul*- The idea is 'uncommon miracles'. All true miracles are "special" and far from common; so the idea would be that his miracles far outclassed any done by the idol cults, rather like the miracles performed by Aaron outclassed those of Pharaoh's magicians.

19:12 *So that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick*- Perhaps during the course of his work as a tentmaker, otherwise the choice of the word 'apron' is hard to understand. The point is perhaps that it was out of spirituality in his daily working life that blessing came to others. However the words are used of the clothing of orators in the philosophical schools, who wore belts / aprons and used handkerchiefs to wipe the sweat away from their brows, supposedly caused by their mental exertions. And this is the context of the preceding verses- that Paul was teaching the Gospel "in the school of Tyrannus". So the idea may be that it was the symbols associated with Paul's teaching which were used to cure people. The link is thus forged between the miracles and his teaching; for, as in the Gospels, miracles were used to back up the preaching of the Gospel. And so it seems is the case here.

And their diseases left them and their mental illnesses were cured- This reflects the language of the day, presumably shared even by doctor Luke, which held that disease was caused by some internal beings which could enter or leave the human body.

19:13 *Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had manic illnesses, saying: I command you in the name of Jesus, whom Paul proclaims*- It was common in the first century for there to be travelling preachers. Hence 2 John speaks of welcoming the itinerant Christian preachers if they shared the belief that the Lord "came in the flesh". "Manic illnesses" suggests that it was mental illness in view; and it is these which were generally referred to as the work of demons in the first century, and therefore cure of mental

illness came to be described in terms of spirits departing or being cast out. The incident demonstrates that simply the name “Jesus” is not powerful of itself (:15); it has come to be used as a kind of talisman in some Pentecostal circles. It is His power to heal hearts which is of the essence here. The form of pronunciation of a name is irrelevant.

19:14 *And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, a chief priest, who did this*- There is no historical record of any chief priest called Sceva, and it seems unlikely that his seven sons would all be itinerant exorcists, equivalent of modern day Roma in parts of Eastern Europe. Again, as with the language of evil spirits, things are being recorded from the perspective and understanding of people at the time, without correction.

19:15 *And the maniac answered and said to them: Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who are you?*- The sick man on one level 'knew' Jesus and recognized Paul; on that level of personality, the man was a believer.

19:16 *Then the man who had the mania jumped on them and subdued and overpowered all of them, so they fled out of that house naked and wounded*- “Overpowered” is the same word used in :20 about how God's word, the Gospel, "grew in power". This confirms the impression that the man was representative of believers who had identified themselves with the word of the Gospel.

19:17 *And this became known to all that dwelt at Ephesus, both Jews and Gentiles; and fear fell upon them all. And the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified*- The name of the Lord Jesus had been used by the exorcists, but it was lacking in power unless pronounced in faith by Paul. So humanly, it was more the case that Paul was magnified over the exorcists; they both used the same formula and name of Jesus. But it only 'worked' when Paul used it. But it is a major theme of Acts that all glory was given not to the preachers but to the Lord Jesus whom they served and were identified with.

19:18 *Many also of those that had believed came*- After seeing what happened to the sons of Sceva, it would appear that some who had ‘believed’ went up to a higher level of commitment. This would seem to imply that despite having ‘believed’, perhaps with the same level of shallow conviction as some ‘believed’ in the teaching of Jesus during His ministry, their faith wasn’t so deep. They were taken up to an altogether higher level of commitment, resulting in ‘confessing and declaring’, and quitting their involvement with magic. “Many that were now believers" there (RSV) "came and confessed and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men... so mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed" (Acts 19:18,19). The language here seems to be intended to connect with the description of baptism in Mt. 3:6, where converts confessed and shewed their deeds *at baptism*. The way the Ephesians made their statement "before all men" again recalls the concept of baptism as a public declaration. Yet the Ephesians did all this *after* they had believed. It would seem that we are being invited to consider this as a re-conversion, a step up the ladder. The context is significant. Some who had pretended to be believers and to have the Holy Spirit are revealed for who they are: "they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this was known to all... dwelling at Ephesus. And fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified". The fact that the Lord Jesus is so essentially demanding, the way in

which ultimately He will judge insincere profession of His Name- this motivated the new Ephesian converts to take their relationship with Him seriously (compare how the Lord's slaying of Ananias and Sapphira also inspired a great desire to associate with Him, Acts 5:11-14).

Confessing- There are many connections between Luke's Gospel and his second volume here in Acts. The reference here would be to the Lord's comment recorded only by Luke that whoever confesses [s.w.] Him before men will be confessed before the Father in Heaven (Lk. 12:8). Note that their confession was before all men (:19). Luke saw that confession as not simply at baptism; because these were believers who were now 'coming out' at a higher level of conversion. Here, they confess their sins; in Lk. 12:8 they confess 'Jesus'. To confess Him therefore involves confessing sin. Perhaps Paul had this incident in view when he later wrote of how confession is made unto salvation (Rom. 10:10).

And declaring their sinful deeds- God seems to have recognized with pleasure the degree to which Paul modelled his life on John, in that Paul's experiences of life were over-ruled to have connections with those of John. These connections simply could not have been engineered by Paul; e.g. the way in which they both died in prison at the behest of a crazy, woman-influenced despot. The Spirit also seems to make connections between John and Paul in the manner in which it describes them (e.g. Lk. 1:14 = Acts 15:13; 13:52; Lk. 1:15 = Acts 9:17; 13:9; Lk. 3:18 = Acts 13:15-19; Jn. 1:7,8,15 = Acts 23:11; 26:22; Jn. 3:27 = 1 Cor. 2:8-16). And the Spirit in Acts 19:18 seems to portray Paul in the language of John: "they came (to Paul) and confessed, and shewed their deeds" - just as men had to John.

19:19 *And not a few of those that practised magical arts*- Grammatically, the "those" would refer to those of :18 who were believers who now 'came out' in confession of sin after their conversion- perhaps two years after conversion (:10). It would therefore appear that some were baptized who still continued practicing magic, but now they were persuaded to break with it. We again see here the openness of the apostles towards baptizing people, even when their lifestyles were less than perfect.

Brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all; and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver- See on :18 *Confessed*. The Greek word here for "price" is elsewhere always translated 'to profit' (16 times). The loss was their profit, in spiritual terms.

19:20 *So the word of the Lord*- In contrast to the word of all the books they had just burnt.

Spread widely and grew in power- The same word used about the growth of the seed of the word on good ground (Mk. 4:8) and the growth of the tiny mustard seed of the Gospel (Lk. 13:19). This is Luke's way of signalling that there was good ground in Ephesus, and the burning of the expensive books was a sign of the fruit and power of the tiny seed of the Gospel in practice.

19:21 *When these things were accomplished*- Gk. 'fulfilled'. Perhaps we are intended to understand that these things had fulfilled the parables of the seed of the Gospel growing.

Paul purposed in the Spirit- This could mean that he in his own spirit decided to go to Rome via Jerusalem (although "*the* Spirit" is hard to interpret like this); and the Beza codex confirms this approach: "He resolved, or determined in himself". But it

could be that he conceived the idea [that is a valid translation of the Greek], and the Spirit of God confirmed him in it. The intentional ambiguity of the text is perhaps to lead us to the conclusion that Paul's spirit and God's Spirit were in agreement over the idea Paul had conceived. And yet the Spirit likewise warned him in every city of the consequences of this course of action. We see here how God is prepared to confirm us in whichever course of action we ourselves choose. In our early days in Christ, we agonize over which decision to take. But so often, it's not the decision but the motives behind the choice which are important; and God can equally confirm us in the choices made, whatever they are. It could be argued that all the drama he had in his life as a result of appealing to Caesar could have been avoided if he had chosen the freedom made possible for him. But he appears to have become almost obsessed with the idea of getting to Rome to witness there. His desire to go via Jerusalem first was in order to take the collection money there for the Jews- money raised from collections amongst the Gentile churches. It would likewise seem from 2 Corinthians that this plan was obsessive with Paul, and it badly backfired in Corinth; and his plans for visiting Corinth had to be changed because they simply hadn't raised the funds (1 Cor. 16:5-9 cp. 2 Cor. 1:16,23). And yet God worked with all this, with the Lord Jesus assuring Paul that he would get to Rome (Acts 23:11); although Paul observes that his desire to "see Rome" had been frequently hindered (Rom. 10:13). Maybe this was God working to try to stop Paul, as the Spirit so often warned him not to go there. And so we see how the Spirit can work on two poles, as it were, in the lives of His servants; on one hand confirming us in the way we choose, on another, seeking to preserve us in a better way.

To go up to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying: After I have been there, I must also see Rome- But actually he had written to the Romans that he would drop in to see them on his way to Spain (Rom. 15:23). Spain was his real ambition, to preach the Gospel in "the regions beyond" (2 Cor. 10:16 and context)- not Rome. But Acts 19:21 gives the impression that Rome was the end of his vision.

19:22 *And having sent into Macedonia two of those that assisted him, Timothy and Erastus, he stayed in Asia for a while*- Perhaps to prepare the way for his coming there (:21). Or perhaps Paul sensed the terrible persecution which was to break out in Ephesus, and sent timid Timothy away from a situation which could have been unbearable for him. Perhaps this was the visit to Corinth by Timothy which Paul wrote about in 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10. In which case Paul's love for the Corinthians was such that he allowed himself to be without personal assistants in order for a pastoral trip to be made to them. Maybe he needed personal assistants ("that ministered unto him", AV) because of failing health.

19:23 *And about that time there arose no small stir concerning the Way*- "The way" was an accepted description for Christianity (9:2; 22:4; 24:14). The allusion was perhaps to "the way to the tree of life", which had been guarded by the Cherubim since Adam's expulsion from Eden. In this case, unlike many religions both ancient and modern, Christianity is not an end in itself. There is in Christianity the most clearly articulated and emphasized end point, far more definitely stressed than in any other religion. The end of the Way is the tree of life, partaking of God's fullness for eternity, seeing good and evil with His eyes of love and grace. We already partake of these things, but the way stretches so much further ahead.

19:24 *For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no little business to the craftsmen*- These icons were bought by

visitors and worshippers and placed in homes as good luck charms. The usage of icons in the Catholic and Orthodox churches is clearly the result of such paganism getting mixed with Christianity. I have explained on 1 Timothy that the Artemis / Diana cult came to influence the Christian church in Ephesus, and much of the language used there and the issues addressed must be understood in the Diana cult context.

19:25 *He gathered them together, with the workmen of similar occupation, and said: Sirs, you know that by this business we have our wealth*- He admitted that their religion was nothing less than a business. Those working in the shrine and icon business were a numerical minority within the city; but we see here how a disaffected minority can make huge trouble for the Lord's people. We see too how self-preservation and the basic love of wealth and stability of income can lead men to do deeply evil things.

19:26 *And you see and hear, that not only at Ephesus but throughout most of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and led astray many people, saying that they are no gods that are made with hands*- Note the irony, that they 'turned away' (2 Tim. 1:15) from the one who had 'turned them away' from idols (Acts 19:26). There is a tacit recognition here of the extent of Paul's witness. He was seen as the ringleader of the Christians (24:5), a man who had turned the world upside down (17:6); and here he is known as one who had persuaded people of the Lord Jesus "throughout most of Asia". The claim of the Roman Jews never to have heard of him was therefore untrue. Although Paul was empowered in his ministry by the Lord, he also on the human level still had to achieve it all by his own freewill. And he was in no way forced to do what he did. He chose to. "The power of one" in his case was remarkable. And we each have far greater potential than we like to admit.

19:27 *And not only is there a danger that this our trade will come into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana will be made of no account, and that she whom all Asia and the world worships should even be deposed from her magnificence*- Evidence of Diana worship has been found in Egypt and Eastern Europe; so the idea is that [people from all] "the world" worshipped her. Again, they admit that their religion is no more than "our trade". Religion was and is big business.

19:28 *And when they heard this, they were filled with anger and cried out, saying: Great is Diana of Ephesus!*- Because Paul's preaching 'despised' the goddess Diana, her worshippers perceived that she and they were somehow thereby shamed; and so they were angry. It's perhaps possible to understand the wrath of God in this way, too. For His wrath is upon those who break His commands; and by breaking them we *shame* God (Rom. 2:23); we *despise* his desire for our repentance (Rom. 2:4). We note how pagan gods were local in worship and supposed sphere of influence- Diana was “of Ephesus”, and the Jews considered Yahweh the God of Israel alone, and the likes of Jonah even thought that His presence was limited outside the land of Israel. The Christian message of a loving Father involved with “all men” as their saviour was therefore radical in its huge, global scope.

Their anger was related to shame [being 'despised', :27] that their god had been exposed as a fake. There's a definite link between shame and anger. Take a man whose mother yelled at him because as a toddler he ran out onto the balcony naked, and shamed him by her words. Years later on a hot Summer evening the man as an

adult walks out on a balcony with just his underpants on. An old woman yells at him from the yard below that he should be ashamed of himself. And he's furiously angry with her- because of the shame given him by his mother in that incident 20 years ago. Shame and anger are clearly understood by God as being related, because His word several times connects them: "A fool's *anger* is immediately known; but a prudent man covers his *shame*" (Prov. 12:16); A king's *anger* is against a man who *shames* him (Prov. 14:35). Or consider 1 Sam. 20:34: "So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce *anger*, and did eat no meat the second day of the month... because his father had done him *shame*". Job's *anger* was related to the fact that he felt that ten times the friends had *shamed* him in their speeches (Job 19:3). Frequently the rejected are threatened with both shame and anger / gnashing of teeth; shame and anger are going to be connected in that awful experience. They will "curse [in anger]... and be ashamed" (Ps. 109:28). The final shame of the rejected is going to be so great that "they shall be greatly ashamed... their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten" (Jer. 20:11). Seeing they will be long dead and gone, it is us, the accepted, who by God's grace will recall the terrible shame of the rejected throughout our eternity. Their shame will be so terrible; and hence their anger will likewise be. And yet we have had all shame removed from us by the Lord's death. It is the rejected who will walk naked in shame, not us. And this is a big factor in removing anger from us; for the root of anger is in pride and shame. But the only ultimate shame is before God, and not before men; and that shame is now removed. Like Adam and Eve, we now are clothed through the slaying of the lamb, and no longer walk in shame. And so a significant root of anger is removed.

19:29 *And the city was filled with confusion; and they rushed with one accord into the theatre, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel*- The archaeological remains suggest it would have held up to 56,000 people.

19:30 But *when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him*- Such a huge audience [up to 56,000- see on :29] was seen by Paul as a supreme opportunity for preaching. He did not count his life dear to himself, so that he might obey the ministry he had received, to preach to the Gentiles. The disciples blocking of his desire is to be read along with the various times the disciples bundled him away from a city where persecution had broken out, when he himself was clearly minded to remain. Their motivation was not simply because they wanted him to survive to fight again another day, but because they feared for their own safety if Paul continued to provoke things by his continued public witness.

19:31 *And some also of the Asiarchs, being his friends, sent word to him, pleading that he not venture into the theatre*- The Gospel had won friends in high places, even among the Asiarchs. The Lord Jesus is the representative of all men, and therefore appeals to all. This is why Christianity was and is unique in its appeal to people from all social strata and backgrounds. See commentary on the list of names in Romans 16.

In Paul’s inspired thought, on the cross the Lord “gave himself” for us (Gal. 1:4; 1 Tim. 2:6; Tit. 2:14). And yet he uses the same Greek words to describe how are to ‘give ourselves’ for our brethren (2 Thess. 3:9), to ‘give ourselves’ in financial generosity to their needs (2 Cor. 8:5), and in Acts 19:31 we meet the same phrase describing how Paul ‘gave himself’ into the theatre at Ephesus, filled with people bent on killing him, taking the conscious choice to risk his life in order to share the Gospel with others. In this I see a cameo of how the choice of preaching the Gospel is in fact a conscious living out of the Lord’s example on the cross. Paul was discouraged from

doing so by his friends and brethren; and yet surely he had his mind on the way the Lord 'gave himself' for us in His death, as a conscious choice, and so he brushed aside his reserve, that human desire to do what appears the sensible, safe option… in order to bring others to the cross of Christ. And day by day we have the same choice before us.

19:32 *Therefore, some cried one thing and some another. For the assembly was in confusion and most did not know why they had come together*- "Most" or "the majority" were shouting in passion but were unaware of the real issues behind it. Majorities are often like this; which is why democracy is not something advocated in the Bible [but rather good leadership].

19:33 *And they brought Alexander out of the crowd, the Jews putting him forward; and Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made a defence to the people*- Perhaps the coppersmith of 2 Tim 4:14 who later did Paul much evil by turning against him.

19:34 *But when they perceived that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out: Great is Diana of the Ephesians!*- One side of the theatre was steep rock, and this would have added a distinct audio effect to their voices, making them as it were one voice. There are many similarities between these events in Ephesus, and the riot in Jerusalem recorded in Acts 21:27-23:22. Paul is both times falsely accused of desecrating a temple, there is a riot, and the Roman authorities intervene and justify Paul. The words for the 'confusion' of the incensed crowds are used only in these two incidents (Acts 19:28,32 in Ephesus, Acts 21:27,31 in Jerusalem). The word for "riot" is the same (Acts 20:1 in Ephesus, Acts 24:18 in Jerusalem). And that Greek word is only used in these two places. "Some cried one thing and some another" (Acts 19.32) is what happened in Jerusalem: "Some shouted one thing and some another" (Acts 21.34); both times the crowd "lifted up their voice". In both riots, the same word for "crowd" is used three times (Acts (19:26,33,35; 21:27,34,35); in both Ephesus and Jerusalem, the crowd "rushed together" and "dragged" the accused (Acts 19:29; 21:30). In both cases, there was an attempt to make a "defence" to the rioting crowd which was shouted down (Acts 19:33; 22:1). In Ephesus, a call was made to the men of the city ["Men of Ephesus!"]; in Jerusalem likewise to the men of the city. "This man is teaching everyone everywhere..." is matched by "Not only in Ephesus but in all of Asia" Paul was leading people away from their religion. And there were Jews from "Asia", probably referring to Ephesus, who provoked the Jerusalem riot (Acts 19:26,27; 20:4; 21:29). The similarities are perhaps to again show us how circumstances repeat in the lives of God's people.

Event and circumstance is not random for us. All is under God's hand. Circumstances repeat because we are intended to learn from them, and then the lessons are repeated- either to reinforce the lessons learned, or, to give us a chance to learn lessons we failed to learn. We cannot attach meaning to event, but we can be assured that nothing is random in our lives. All is orchestrated by God towards our spiritual growth. In Paul's case, he had orchestrated the murder of Stephen on the false grounds that Stephen had "spoken against this holy place... Jesus will destroy this place". And by doing so, he had whipped up Jewish sentiment to the point of murdering Stephen. And so he twice had to endure the same false accusation- of having desecrated a temple. This is not mere poetic justice. He was being taught how Stephen had felt. And whilst we are forgiven our sins against others, God does also work in our lives to help us understand how they felt. This prepares us to meet those people in God's Kingdom, as Paul will meet Stephen and eternally fellowship with

him. And the experience strengthens our resolve not to ever sin in that way again, now that we know how it feels.

19:35 *And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: You men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple-keeper of the great Diana and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?*- Religion and locality were connected in the ancient world. The town clerk was arguing that all Ephesians were of course worshippers of Diana by reason of being Ephesians. The whole city kept Diana's temple. Hence he addresses them as [Gk.] "Ephesians!". Indeed, most people even today are born into a religious position. This is where the call of Christ is so radical, making all things new in the minds of those who break out of their natural, birth positioning on spiritual issues.

19:36 *Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash*- The town clerk was arguing, very cleverly and diplomatically, that the commotion was an indication that they were in doubt about their religion. He wanted them to calm down by all means, and hence argues that the relationship of Diana with the Ephesians cannot be sensibly denied and so they should stop getting so agitated as if it could be denied.

19:37 *For you have brought here these men, who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess*- Perhaps the talk on the street was that this was what Paul had done; especially as Jews had a reputation as temple robbers, justifying themselves with the thought that the gods didn't actually exist (see on Rom. 2:22). The town clerk wanted by all means to calm the situation and so he saw the need to make it clear that Paul had not robbed the Diana shrine. Paul had criticized "gods made with hands" (:26); but the clerk reminds them that their belief was that Diana had fallen down from Jupiter, and her image was therefore 'obviously' not made with hands. And so Paul was not blaspheming Diana.

19:38 *Therefore, if Demetrius and the craftsmen that are with him have a matter against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them accuse one another*- The court days were right then in session.

19:39 *But if you seek anything about other matters, it shall be settled in the regular assembly*- The clerk was eager to calm things by taking the sting out of the situation; so he suggests they raise the matters in the correct legal manner. The clerk acts with the sagacity we would expect of such a leading figure; and Luke's record reflects that. It really has the ring of truth to it; this is exactly how a smart town clerk might try to defuse such a situation.

19:40 *For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion*- The local authority was in fear that there could be questioning of what had happened, and so they wanted there to be peace- which meant, the new church being left alone. Likewise, Demetrius was in danger for his life if the matter were investigated further- for raising a mob and making an illegal such gathering was a capital offence. So he too would drop the issues against the Christians. The same happened in Philippi- Paul manipulated the situation to mean that the local authorities would be worried about being charged with wrongly treating a Roman citizen, and therefore they just wanted the Christians to exist quietly and without persecution or fuss made about them. And that of course is what the Lord wants for us too.

19:41 *And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly*- The *ekklesia* could as well be translated "church". And *apoluo* ("dismissed") has a wide range of meaning; it is elsewhere translated to release or set at liberty. There may be the possibility of understanding this as meaning that as in Philippi, events worked out to mean that the ecclesia was at least initially not persecuted by the local authorities.

Wrestling Wild Beasts at Ephesus

In the context of talking about our hope of bodily resurrection at Christ's return, Paul says that this hope was what had given perspective to his wrestling with wild beasts at Ephesus (1 Cor. 15:32). The context surely requires that we understand this as referring to how he had been in danger of losing his physical life because of this wrestling, but he endured it with a mindset which looked ahead to the resurrection of the body. The wrestling with wild beasts, therefore, appears to be a literal experience which he had, rather than using 'wrestling with wild beasts' in a figurative sense. There was at Ephesus an amphitheatre, and we also know that there were cases where convicted criminals were forced to fight wild animals; if they killed the animal, then they went free. It seems this is what happened to Paul. He speaks in 2 Cor. 1:8-10 of an acute crisis which he faced in Asia (and Ephesus was in Asia) which involved his having been given a death sentence, and yet being saved out of it by "the God who raises the dead". This emphasis on bodily resurrection is the same context we have in 1 Cor. 15:32. As he faced his death in 2 Tim. 4:17, Paul reminisced how the Lord had earlier saved him "out of the mouth of the lion"; and the context there is of literal language, and we are therefore inclined to consider that he was literally saved from a lion in the arena at Ephesus. This also helps us better understand his earlier reference in Corinthians to having been exhibited as a spectacle, as a gladiator at a show, "appointed unto death", in the presence of God and men (1 Cor. 4:9). Note that despite this traumatic experience, Paul chose to continue at Ephesus even after that, because he saw a door had been opened to him for the Gospel, despite "many adversaries" (1 Cor. 16:8,9). We who are so shy to put a word in for the Lord in our encounters with people ought to take strength from Paul's dogged example in Ephesus.

But when Paul speaks in 2 Cor. 1:8-10 of his death sentence experience in Ephesus, he does so in the context of having reasoned in the previous verses of how whatever we experience, we experience so that we may comfort others: "[God] comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so in Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer". These verses are profound in their implication. Whatever we experience is according to God's plan, so that we might use that experience in order to strengthen others. We all share in Christ's afflictions, but "in Christ" we experience comfort, insofar as others within the body of Christ mediate His comfort to us. However, the whole process only functions if we open ourselves up to others, understanding their experiences and sharing with them the strength which we received when we went through the same things in essence. No life is of course identical; few believers have experienced what Paul did in Ephesus. And yet he says that he wanted to use that experience in order to comfort those in Corinth who in essence were going through the same thing. We live in an age where mankind is in retreat, retreat back into himself. The online life tempts us to interact only as far as we wish and as often

as we wish, and this has led many to retreat into themselves. Likewise interaction at meetings of the body of Christ can so often focus only around surface level issues. We don't expose ourselves, and others don't expose themselves to us. Within such a spirit of isolationism, we can never allow the body of Christ to function as God intends. We will fail to find ultimate meaning in our experiences; for Paul teaches clearly that they happen to us in order that we may share the fruits of them with others. This is why so many alcoholics and other addicts who do the 12 step courses tend to fail on the very last step- that they hereafter vow to spend the rest of their lives sharing what they have learnt with others. And so they retreat back into the mire of mediocrity and into the old patterns of existence and coping.

This line of thought explains why within Biblical history, it's apparent that circumstances repeated in essence within the experience of God's children. Ezekiel was asked to eat unclean food by God, and he found it so hard to get his legalistic head around it; Peter likewise. Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness and was tempted there for 40 days to reveal what was in His heart- just as Israel had been for 40 years. It also explains why once and if we can dig beneath the facade of normality which we all tend to cover our faces with, we find there are others who have experienced amazingly similar experiences to ourselves. And the extraordinary similarity of experience is in fact designed by God; because these are meetings and connections made in Heaven. We are here for each other, and all we experience is in a sense for others. This opens another window onto the meaning of personal suffering; another take on the eternal question "Why?". There's an element to it which isn't for our benefit at all, but for others. Take Job. That man was "perfect" and solidly with the Lord at the start of the book, and he is the same at the end of the book. The purpose of his sufferings was perhaps not therefore simply for his own personal development; but for the conversion of the three friends. The palsied man was palsied and was healed so that others might learn that the Son of Man had power to forgive sins (Mt. 10:6-9).

We too easily assume that nobody else could ever understand our life path, the way we have taken. We too quickly consider that others have a charmed life. Some seem to have great health and family relationships, money, security and spirituality. But in fact beneath all that veneer there simply has to be in every life lived in Christ an awful co-suffering with Him. People in Christ go through the most awful, unspeakable agonies. Every one of us does. Nobody gets off light. It just seems to our limited vision that some do. We all wrestle with wild beasts at Ephesus, and are saved out of the mouth of the lion. Whatever the Corinthians were enduring, it was in essence "the same suffering" as Paul endured in that arena. And there should therefore have been a meeting of minds; the basis of our fellowship is largely intended to be our common *experience* in Christ. Ideas and theories tend to divide; experience unites. And what people need far more than anything else, than any smart expositions or mental gymnastics with Scripture, more than money, is the simple comfort of Christ's love. We have each received that comfort ourselves in our life experiences; and we are to make the functioning of Christ's body effective by getting out there and sharing that comfort with others. For this is how, mechanically as it were, on the ground, in reality, "we [who] share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, in Christ share abundantly in comfort too".

ACTS CHAPTER 20

20:1 *And after the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them he said farewell and departed for Macedonia*- The same happened at Philippi; at a time when Paul would be the one needing the encouragement from the local brethren, he instead encourages *them*.

20:2 *And when he had gone through those regions*- This implies a prepared pastoral itinerary, just as Peter did in Acts 9:32.

And had given them much encouragement, he came into Greece- Gk. many words [*logos*]. The same phrase is used of how Judas and Silas gave 'many words' of prophetic encouragement, i.e. the gift of prophecy gave them words to say (15:32). And so here too, probably the Spirit gave Paul the words needed for each of the groups he visited.

20:3 *There he spent three months*- Paul had three periods of three months in his missionary work (19:8; 20:3; 28:11). Our lives work according to a Divine program, even if at the time it's hard to always discern this. We think of the three periods of 40 years in the life of Moses.

But as he was about to set sail for Syria- Such last minute changes of plan indicate that Paul had great autonomy in his travel choices. The red lines on maps showing his journeys rather disguise the freedom of choice which he had, and exercised.

He was informed that the Jews planned to ambush him, so he decided to return through Macedonia- Perhaps also related to the fact he was carrying the collection for the poor believers at Jerusalem.

20:4 *Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus from Berea, accompanied him*- These seven men who accompanied Paul and Luke were presumably also in order to provide some level of security seeing they were carrying the collection for the poor at Jerusalem. At no other point do we read of so many travelling with Paul. Seeing that all Asia turned away from Paul, these may have been his only close friends. He was by no means universally accepted in the early church.

And of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus- Aristarchus was a solid friend and co-worker, who enters the record at 19:29; supported Paul on the journey to Rome (27:2), laboured with him (Philemon :24), and ended up in prison with him in Rome (Col. 4:10,11). Tychicus was sent by Paul to confirm the Ephesians (Eph. 6:21,22), Colossians (Col. 4:7,8) and those in Crete (Tit. 3:12). Most people in the first century never travelled more than 50 km. from their birthplace, so this geographical mobility was unusual. Tychicus was perhaps one of Paul's most trusted and well used co-workers.

Paul had commanded Timohty to remain at Ephesus when he left for Macedonia (1 Tim. 1:3). Presumably he had very few trusted brethren he could take with him, and he was desperate for men to be with him at this time, so he recalled Timothy to his side. Again we see a change of plan, the kind of thing the Corinthians later mocked Paul for. Again we see the degree to which Paul's missionary plans were largely left to his own initiative, with God confirming him in them, rather than being told where and when to go.

Sopater was perhaps a relative of Paul (Rom. 16:21).

20:5 *These had gone ahead earlier, and were waiting for us at Troas*- The use of "us" shows that Luke has now rejoined Paul.

20:6 *And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread; and in five days came to those at Troas, where we stayed seven days*- It took them only two days previously (16:11,12), and I suggested there that this was because the wind of the Spirit was behind them. But the whole plan of going to Rome via Jerusalem was not ideally what God wanted; the Spirit witnessed against it in every town along the way, and the wind / spirit was against him right from the start. The wind was likewise against the journey to Malta; and the nautical details at 28:13 [see note there] show that even from there to Rome was against the wind.

20:7 *And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart the next day; and prolonged his speech until midnight*- Paul is presented as a man in a rush- to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost. He was using every hour of the night to deliver his teaching. And this led to Eutychus falling from the window. Yet again we get the impression that everything went wrong on this journey to Jerusalem and thence to Rome. It was not God's ideal plan for Paul, and yet he insisted upon it. And God went along with him. God is open to man; He may know the trillions of possible futures we face, and agonize over our poor decision making; but we are not out of His game plan altogether by making them. He will still work with us. But we shall "have trouble in the flesh" as a result; life doesn't go well, the blessings for obedience, the peace possible in Christ, is not realized on a human level. Frequently young believers come to me to discuss a plan to marry an unbeliever, e.g. a Moslem. I cannot say that they are out of God's game plan if they go ahead. But life will not go well, and the path to the Kingdom will be so much harder for them- even though God works with them through the Spirit on that path they chose to take. For He passionately wishes their salvation. When Paul sailed the same route before, it took him two days, with the wind of the Spirit behind him; he had a straight course, alluding to the straight path of the feet of the cherubim in Ezekiel 1. But now, it took him five days, with the wind against him. Finally Paul achieved his aim, with God's help; he survived at least one shipwreck on the journey, and probably the time he spent a day and night in the sea was also sometime on this journey to Jerusalem (2 Cor. 11:25). And there he was in Rome. But in prison. And he died there. Festus and Agrippa had truly commented that if it were not for his dogged insistence on appealing to Caesar, he could have been set free (Acts 26:32). His loss of freedom was terribly painful for him: "Apart from these chains..." (Acts 26:29). God of course used Paul's time in prison, and his prison letters are proof enough of that. And he did spread the Gospel throughout the Roman soldiers there and even into Caesar's palace: "The things which happened to me have turned out for the progress of the gospel; so that my bonds made Christ manifest throughout the whole Praetorian guard, and to all the rest; and further, most of the believers in the Lord, being made confident through my bonds, are more abundantly bold to speak the word of God without fear" (Phil. 1:12-14). God will use our less than ideal choices; for without the saving action of God's Spirit, Paul's body would have been washed up on the shores of Malta, or he would have fallen down dead on the beach from the viper sting.

"Intending to depart the next day" is language reminiscent of Passover; awake all night, with lamps burning (:8), and ready to leave the next day, breaking bread together, re-living the first Passover. Seeing this was just after Passover time (:6), we wonder if Paul was re-enacting a Passover meal with these Gentile believers.

20:8 *And there were many lamps*- We note the public, open nature of their meeting. They were in accord with the Lord's teaching that we are lamps lit and visible to the world.

In the upper room where we were gathered together- Luke is surely purposefully connecting with the disciples at the first breaking of bread in an upper room (Lk. 22:12), and then being in the upper room gathered together after the Lord's resurrection (Acts 1:13). The point is made that the gathering together in breaking of bread, at any distance in time or space from those early gatherings, is a continuation of them in essence. The same point is made by Luke's preference in Acts for describing the believers as "the disciples", as if their [and our] walk in Christ is a continuation of the way the early disciples followed Him in person around the streets and lanes of first century Palestine.

20:9 *And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus*- Gk. 'well fated'. As with many Bible names, the name seems so appropriate to the person. It could be in his case that he was given this name in the community after his resurrection. And yet it could also be that God arranged the naming of such people in advance as a reflection of how He knows the destiny and future experiences of each of His people from birth.

Who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep, and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third floor and was picked up dead- A cameo of Paul's attitude is presented when Eutychus falls down from the window; Paul likewise runs down afterwards and falls on him, on the blood and broken bones (:9,10). The language of Paul's descent and falling upon Eutychus and Eutychus' own fall from the window are so similar. Surely the point is, that Paul had a heart that bled for that man, that led him to identify with him.

Believe that you really will receive; avoid the temptation of asking for things as a child asks for Christmas presents, with the vague hope that something might turn up. Be like Paul, who fell upon the smashed body of Eutychus with the assurance: "Trouble not yourselves [alluding to his Lord's words' in another upper room]; for his life is in him" (Acts 20:10).

20:10 *But Paul went down and bent over him, and embracing him*- In conscious imitation of Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17:21; 2 Kings 4:34). "Bent over" is literally "fell on him" (AV) or 'stretched upon him'. Paul was clearly imitating Elisha's resurrection of the Shunammite's son (2 Kings 4:33-35)

Said: Don't be alarmed- Using the same word, in the same context, as the Lord Jesus in Mk. 5:39: "Why make you a tumult and weep? The child is not dead but sleeps... immediately the girl got up and began walking... and they were immediately overcome with amazement". We see here how Paul had so absorbed the Gospel accounts into his very being, so that his actions were a reflection of the One recounted there, the One Paul so admired and sought to imitate. And in that we see a pattern for ourselves in our Christ-focused Christianity.

For his life is in him- The Greek in :9 means that he really was dead. So seeing there is no 'immortal soul', Paul presumably meant that the source of new life was within the dead man, i.e. because of his faith, Paul would raise him from the dead. Paul's confident statement that "his life is in him" was presumably uttered in faith. We can only speculate whether the miracle

20:11 *Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten*- It's a hard job for those who wish to separate the open 'breakings of bread' performed by Jesus and Paul from the "breaking of bread" as in our Christian ritual of remembrance of Christ's

death. They would have to argue that 'breaking bread' is used in different ways in the New Testament. Contrary to what their position requires, "" Breaking of bread" was not a standard Jewish designation for a full meal, but only for the ritual act that initiated it" (John Koenig, *The Feast of the World's Redemption* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 2000) p. 91. This is confirmed in Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969) p. 131). The Emmaus disciples were particularly struck by the way in which Jesus blessed and broke the bread (Lk. 24:30-35), showing that 'breaking bread' isn't used to simply refer to any kind of eating. Note how Luke comments on Paul's "breaking bread" at Troas: "After he had broken bread *and* eaten" (Acts 20:11). 'Breaking bread' isn't equal to simply eating any old meal. Likewise the word *eucharistesas* is associated with the "giving thanks" for the bread and wine at the breaking of bread (Mt. 26:26; Mk. 14:22; Lk. 22:17-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25; Acts 2:46); but this isn't the usual word which would've been used to describe giving thanks for a meal. That would've been *eulogia*, equivalent to the Hebrew *berakah*. The word *eucharistesas* seems to have a specific ritual, religious sense (as in Rom. 14:5; Jubilees 22:5-9); some argue that it means to give thanks *over* something, in this case the bread, rather than to simply give thanks *for* e.g. a meal. It is therefore highly significant that this is the word also used for Christ's breaking of bread to the 5000 strangers, Gentiles and semi-believers in the desert, and Paul's breaking bread with the sailors on the doomed ship (Jn. 6:11,23; Acts 27:34-36). This strongly suggests that we are to see in those incidents a spiritual, ritual 'breaking of bread' rather than a mere sharing of food.

And talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed- "Talked" is a more informal word than the word translated "talked" in :7, which implies a more formal discourse. This subtle difference is again true to observed experience and confirms we are reading a genuine eyewitness account; for after an incident like that of Eutychus, everyone would have felt the more relaxed with each other and with Paul. It is in this sense that experience unites, and doctrine left at mere ideas tends to divide.

20:12 *And they brought the lad alive and were greatly comforted*- The chronology presented suggests that Paul preached, Eutychus fell, Paul ran down and resurrected him, Paul returned upstairs, continued preaching, and then they brought Eutychus up to him. This demonstrates how miracles and material assistance were utterly incidental to the essential focus of Paul and the apostles- which was the teaching of the Gospel. Sadly, so many branches of Christianity have maxed out on the material blessings and lost the focus there was and should be- on the teaching of the Lord's word and salvation in Him.

20:13 *But going ahead to the ship we set sail for Assos, there intending to pick up Paul. For so had he arranged, he intending to go*- Intending... arranged... intending- The repetition of the Greek word underlines how these brethren were left to use their own initiative in arranging things, with all the uncertainties of travel, especially given the limited information there was available for travellers.

By land- A distance of around 20 miles compared to 45 miles by sea. Why did Paul again split his party? Perhaps there was real danger of ambush because of the money they were carrying for the poor believers in Jerusalem. The splitting of the group would have given a better chance of some of the funds getting through if the worst came to the worst.

20:14 *And when he met us at Assos, we took him aboard and came to Mitylene*- "We took him aboard" could suggest that Paul was weak and had to be helped aboard.

20:15 *And sailing from there, the following day we arrived off Kios, the next day we crossed over to Samos and the day after we came to Miletus*- Kios was the nearest to a 'resort island' in the ancient world; and we note that they did not stop there.

20:16 *For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, that he might not have to spend time in Asia. For he was in a hurry, hoping to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost*- Paul clearly tried to keep the Jewish feasts, as part of his being as a Jew to the Jews. But the Jewish feasts were also a unique opportunity to witness the Gospel to diaspora Jews from all over the empire who came there. But Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, and Peter to the Jews. If Paul had left such witness to Peter, as the Lord surely intended, he wouldn't have needed to rush to Jerusalem, nor suffered all he did. Again we get the impression that Paul ran into some of his difficulties because of an obsession with involvement with Israel which was not God's intended path for him. It was all the same reckoned to him as service to the Lord, and the Lord worked with him in it- just as He does with us in our less than ideal choices in His service. But see on :24 *Finish my race*.

20:17 *And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church*- Instead of going there himself, he gathered together the local elders in one place. Paul was trying to save every day, in order to be at Jerusalem for Pentecost. Again we see his pressing obsession with getting there in order to witness to the Jews gathered there. “Elders” is a term effectively equivalent to "bishops" here (:28).

20:18 *And when they had come to him, he said to them: You know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia*- But had all those elders been with Paul from his first day in Asia? Or is the idea that his reputation for sincerity was so solid that they therefore knew this? “Set foot in Asia” is alluding to Josh. 14:9 LXX: "Surely the land where you walked ['set foot'] shall be an inheritance to you and to your children forever, because you have wholly followed Yahweh my God". He saw the conquests he made for the Gospel as being part of his inheritance in the promised land; he would eternally enjoy it, and the more he took in this life, the more he would have eternally.

After what manner I was with you- The speech is clearly based upon Samuel's final address of 1 Sam. 12:3. The similarities suggest that Paul felt that his audience were likewise going to turn away from the true God and wish to become like the nations around them, with visible leadership. And the corruption of Christianity shows that his fears were well founded, for this is indeed what happened. True Christianity comprised with paganism and imported pagan ideas such as the trinity and immortality of the soul.

All the time- Codex Bezae adds here "for three years". AV "At all seasons". Paul wrote to Timothy at Ephesus, and his language in 2 Timothy has many allusions to his own behaviour whilst at Ephesus. He spoke at Ephesus of how he had preached the word "at all seasons" (Acts 20:18 AV)- and he tells Timothy to do likewise (2 Tim. 4:2); Paul had taught what was profitable to others (Acts 20:20); and this was to be Timothy's pattern (2 Tim. 3:16 RV). As he spoke to the Ephesians of the time of his departure, hard times to come and the need to use God's word to build us up (Acts 20:29,32), so he told Timothy (2 Tim. 4:3). Paul in writing to Timothy was consciously holding himself up as Timothy's example in the context of Ephesus.

20:19 *Serving the Lord with all lowliness of mind*- The idea is of bondage in slavery. Yet Paul also used this word when telling the Romans that although he did indeed serve the Lord, this was *in his mind*, and he says here it was with "all lowliness of mind"; but in his flesh, he still served the law of sin (Rom. 7:25). His service "with lowliness of mind" was therefore on the basis that he realized that in reality, he still at times served the principles of sin. Paul uses the same term for "lowliness of mind"

when he wrote to the Ephesians exhorting them to have such a mind (Eph. 4:2). So what he here told the Ephesian elders about himself, he later asked all the Ephesian believers to emulate.

Lowliness of mind is one of a number of allusions to Moses: "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly" (Acts 20:20)... Of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things" (Acts 20:30). "The man Moses was very meek" (Num. 12:3). The humility / lowliness of Moses really fired Paul. As Moses likewise warned in his farewell speech that false prophets would *arise* - and should be shunned (Dt. 13:1).

John's mission was to prepare Israel for Christ, to figuratively '*bring low'* the hills and mountains, the proud Jews of first century Israel, and raise the valleys, i.e. inspire the humble with the real possibility of salvation in Christ (Lk. 3:5). Paul uses the same Greek word for "bring low" no fewer than three times, concerning how the Gospel has humbled him (Acts 20:19 "lowliness"; 2 Cor. 11:7; Phil. 4:12). It's as if he's saying: 'John's preaching did finally have its' effect upon me; it did finally make me humble enough for the Lord Jesus'. And as John made straight paths for men's feet that they might come unto Christ (Mt. 3:3), so did Paul (Heb. 12:13).

And with tears and with trials which befell me- The tears of Paul were part of his service to the Lord; that is the force of the word "with". Those caught up in grieving processes need not think that this is all selfish; it can also be part of active serving the Lord.

By the plots of the Jews- The same word used about this in :3.

20:20 *You know how I did not hesitate*- The Greek word means to draw in, and is used about furling / taking in sails. Paul had arrived after a sea voyage, during which he would have observed this and heard the word multiple times. And so he uses it. This is exactly true to life in human language usage, and confirms we are reading words which were really said. The word is used in :27 about his lack of hesitation in revealing to them the whole advice of God; the implication is that he was tempted, as we are, to only tell people those aspects of God's revelation which we think they can cope with or which will be attractive to them.

To declare to you anything that was helpful- The Greek carries the idea of 'profitable' [as AV]. Paul is here addressing the elders from Ephesus, and the same word is used to describe how the converts in Ephesus had burnt their magic books of profit (19:19). Paul had shown them how to really profit, spiritually; and that had involved a loss of secular profit.

And taught you in public, and from house to house- Luke used the same phrase "house to house" in Acts 2:46 to describe house churches. Surely Paul was recalling how he had taught the Ephesian church both "publicly", when they were all gathered together, and also in their house churches. Aquila had a house church in Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:19), and so did Onesiphorus (2 Tim. 1:16,18; 4:19). Another indication of this structure within the Ephesian church is to be found in considering how Paul wrote to Timothy with advice, whilst Timothy was leading that church. Paul advises him not to permit sisters to wander about "from house [church] to house [church]" carrying ecclesial gossip (1 Tim. 5:13).

20:21- see on Acts 13:24,25.

Testifying- A legal term, implying that whenever a person encounters the call of the Gospel, they stand as it were right now before God's judgment seat. Paul develops this metaphor very strongly in Romans.

Both to Jews and to Gentiles repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ- Gk. *the* repentance [in some manuscripts]. Perhaps a technical term used

amongst the Christians, showing the importance they attached to this step prior to baptism.

20:22 *And now I go bound in the Spirit to Jerusalem*- See on 9:14. Consider the following passages in the Spirit's biography of Paul: "Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred within him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry" and therefore he preached to them (Acts 17:16). In Corinth, "Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ" (Acts 18:5). "Now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem" (Acts 20:22) is difficult to divorce from the previous passages. It may be that the Holy Spirit confirmed the desire of Paul's own spirit; but I am tempted to read this as yet one more example of where he felt overwhelmingly compelled to witness. "Paul purposed in the spirit... to go to Jerusalem, saying, after I have been there, I must also see Rome" (Acts 19:21). It was as if his own conscience, developed within him by the word and his experience of the Lord Jesus, compelled him to take the Gospel right to the ends of his world. His ambition for Spain, at a time when most men scarcely travelled 100km. from their birthplace, is just superb (Rom. 15:24,28).

"Bound in the spirit" implies, grammatically at least, bound in his own spirit. There is therefore the intended contrast with the *Holy* Spirit, the spirit of *God*, in :22. The contrast could lead us to think that it was not God's intention that Paul go to suffering and death in Rome via Jerusalem. But Paul bound himself to do this, and his obsession with provoking the Jews resulted in this- when he was surely intended to leave the Jewish ministry to Peter, and focus on being the apostle to the Gentiles.

Not knowing the things that shall befall me there- But the Spirit clearly witnessed about the suffering awaiting him (:23). Maybe Paul meant that he was not recognizing them, and was going to go ahead anyway; or maybe he meant that he accepted the sufferings predicted would happen, but he was unsure what the final outcome would be beyond them. However, he speaks with confidence of taking the Gospel to Jerusalem and Rome, suffering notwithstanding; so I would tend to come down on the side of him reasoning that he doesn't know / recognize these predicted sufferings nor the implied message- that he should not attempt the journey.

20:23- see on Acts 21:4.

Except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city, saying that imprisonments and afflictions await me- Philip prophesied by the Holy Spirit about Paul: “So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owns this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hand of the Gentiles”. They “shall” do this, he said. And many other prophets said the same (Acts 20:23). “And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem” (Acts 21:11,12). Those brethren evidently understood the word of prophecy as conditional- its’ fulfilment could be avoided by Paul not going to Jerusalem. Indeed, there were prophecies that said he should *not* go up to Jerusalem (Acts 21:4). Yet Paul went, knowing that if he died at Jerusalem then the will of God would be done (Acts 21:14). All this surely shows that prophecies are open to human interpretation; they can be seen as commandment (e.g. not to go to Jerusalem), but it all depends upon our perception of the wider picture.

This was quite some witness to Paul, and he chose to go against it. Two of the testimonies are recorded (21:4,11). God is open to us, He leads us one way, but in some cases He is willing for us to go another, and works with us on that path too. Yet the same word has just been used by Paul, in saying that *he* witnessed / testified the Gospel to all men (:21). He is apparently making a play on ideas here, reflecting the tension between Spirit guidance to go to Jerusalem, and Spirit guidance not to. He is saying that the Spirit [of Jesus] testifies of the dangers, and he testifies to Jesus. The

courtroom language again suggests a balancing of testimonies here. And the resolution, as in so many apparently difficult decisions, is that there is no right or wrong in a moral sense; rather does it all depend on our motives, and the Lord through His Spirit is waiting to confirm us, leaving us to choose the path between the guidances received.

The same word used for “afflictions” is used about the persecution and suffering Paul had inflicted upon Christians earlier (Acts 11:19). Again, we see Paul experiencing all he had done to his brethren; not to punish him, but to prepare him for eternal fellowship with them in the Kingdom, teaching him about himself and the result of his desires and actions. Paul uses the word often to describe his own "afflictions", and reasons that afflictions are inevitable, and should not be allowed to hinder our path towards salvation. So it may be that he reasoned that such afflictions were inevitable, whichever path he chose- to Jerusalem, or not.

20:24- see on Acts 18:18; 28:31.

If only I may finish my race- Paul has used this very phrase about the work of John the Baptist (13:25). Paul had likely heard John's preaching, as he had grown up in Jerusalem. He so often alludes to John, and sees his own ministry as parallel to John's, and he clearly too encouragement from this. Writing from Rome at the end of his life, Paul uses the same language: "I have finished my race" (2 Tim. 4:7). I have suggested that going to Rome was not necessarily what God had in mind for Paul, but he set himself that aim. He clearly envisaged starting an ecclesia there- but by the time he wrote to the Romans, he had learnt that there actually was already one there. But so when he knew he was going to die there, he felt he had achieved the race set before him- even though he partly set it before himself. It could be that "my race" and "the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel" are not parallel expressions. "My race" was what Paul had personally set before himself- to witness to diaspora Jews at Pentecost, and thence to go to Rome. Yet the whole plan went rather wrong; the wind was contrary to him to start with (:5), and this was how the whole thing went. The taking of Gentile money to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem was deeply problematic. And he ended up not making a great witness in Jerusalem. There is no evidence he made a great witness that Pentecost; and we suspect he simply wanted to emulate Peter, who had converted thousands at Pentecost. He shouldn't have had this desire to equal Peter; he should have left the ministry to the Jews to Peter. And the Spirit warned him against the whole mission in every town on the way. The whole journey to Rome was traumatic, compared to the ease with which Paul had sailed earlier when he was on a mission clearly intended by God. God brought Moses through it, but surely he must have seen himself in the captain who refused Paul's Spirit guided advice not to make the journey because "I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage" (Acts 27:10).

Paul spoke of his "departure" (Phil. 1:23), how he must finish his course with joy (Acts 20:24); and he knew his time had come; he could speak of having reached "the time of my *departure*" (2 Tim. 4:6). The level of self-knowledge he had as he faced the end is remarkable. Yet it really is possible for each of us; for his glorious race to the finish is our pattern. Despite his surface sadness and depression, Paul was finishing his course *with joy*.

And the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus- The Greek *lambano* translated "received" is not the most comfortable word choice if Paul intended us to understand that he had been given a ministry by the Lord Jesus. *Lambano* far more carries the idea of taking or even grasping; Paul took the ministry from the Lord. Again, we sense the interplay of ideas between Paul being led by the Lord's Spirit,

and on the other pole, Paul's own spirit prodding him to decide the path of his own ministry. Paul's ministry was to be the apostle to the Gentiles ("I am the apostle of the Gentiles; I magnify my ministry [AV "office"]", Rom. 11:13). This did not therefore require him to go to Jerusalem and attempt to match Peter's preaching to the Jews on the day of Pentecost. But he forged ahead anyway... Perhaps by the time Paul wrote to the Romans, he had learnt something of his error; for he writes that if we have a ministry, then let us get on with that ministry (Rom. 12:7 "...or ministry, let us give ourselves to our ministry"). And from prison in Rome, when he finally got there, he writes to others and encourages them likewise to focus on *their* ministry (Col. 4:17; 2 Tim. 4:5). He should have focused on his given ministry, to the Gentiles, rather than getting so obsessed with doing Peter's work of ministering to the Jews. He always went directly to the synagogue to preach in almost every town he entered; and suffered because of it, for it was the Jews who formed the main opposition to his work. If he had ignored them, some of these problems may not have arisen. The collection for the Jewish brethren at Jerusalem had so many problems; he ended up having to go against his own principles and take wages from other churches in order to fulfil that "ministry" (2 Cor. 11:8). That could imply that in order to make up the funds which the Corinthians had promised but not donated, Paul had to take wages for his spiritual services from other churches. And there is no record of any enthusiastic acceptance of the gift in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:31 implies the Jewish brethren may have flatly refused to accept it), nor of Paul even making it on time to Jerusalem for Pentecost, nor of him converting anyone much in Jerusalem when he did get there.

To testify to the gospel of the grace of God- Paul therefore considered that his journey to Rome via Jerusalem at Pentecost, when the city would be filled with diaspora Jews, was necessary for the spreading of the Gospel. But of course the question is, whether that journey to Rome via Jerusalem was the particular way, or path of the race, which the Lord Jesus had commanded Paul. He seems to have decided that it was. But his ministry was to testify to the Gospel; how and where he did it was surely over to him. And the Lord Jesus clearly wanted Paul to focus on the Gentiles, and Peter on the Jews. So the path to Rome was due West; but Paul was obsessed with going to Jerusalem first. And it was that which caused him so much grief.

Some years later at the end of his life he could write that “I have finished my course” (2 Tim. 4:7). He didn’t let anything distract him- and our age perhaps more than any other is so full of distractions. In his time of dying (at which he wrote 2 Timothy), John his hero was still in Paul's mind. Paul speaks of finishing his course (Acts 20:24; 2 Tim. 4:7), using a word only used elsewhere concerning John finishing *his* course (Acts 13:25).

It could be argued that at his conversion, the Lord Jesus predicted the sufferings Paul would endure for the Gospel, but did not give him a set of specific commandments which he was to fulfil in his ministry. And Paul's conversion is typical of that of each of us. Paul's letter to the Romans is a literary fulfilment of a requirement "to testify to the gospel of the grace of God". Paul was inspired to write that letter; and it could be argued that there was therefore no need for him to literally go to Rome. He insisted on it, and the Lord led him there- but he was never free to preach there, he was imprisoned. Note how this idea of testifying to the gospel of God's grace is maybe parallel to "proclaiming the kingdom of God" in :25. The good news of God's Kingdom, His Kingship, is the good news of His grace.

20:25 *And now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom of God will see my face again*- Did he know through a direct

Holy Spirit revelation to himself? It was as if the Holy Spirit was telling him the consequences, but he still chose to go that path, and so the Spirit told him that therefore the consequences would really happen. But we must give due weight to the fact that Paul later wrote to Timothy at Ephesus that he hoped to shortly visit him there (1 Tim. 1:3; 3:14), and he planned on visiting Philemon at Colossae (Philemon 22); and that he did visit Miletus again, which was only 40 km. from Ephesus (2 Tim. 4:20). Paul was inspired to write those words to Timothy and Philemon; there was at least the possibility that he could visit Ephesus, despite here in Acts 20:25 saying that it was certain that he would not see the Ephesian elders again. Presumably he had been directed to that thought by the Spirit [unless it was purely presentiment, which he had wrong]. My suggested reconciliation of this would be that this kind of thing is perfectly in line with the working of the Lord's Spirit which we have noted throughout this chapter; in that the Lord's plans with a person can change, in accordance with their own freewill decisions and desires. One path opened up to Paul was that he would not see them again; but perhaps he repented of his obsession with preaching to Jews in Jerusalem, his pretending to Peter's role, and his desire to "see Rome" almost for the sake of it. And because of that repentance, it became possible for him to return to Ephesus, or at least to that region. This is not to be scoffed at as the Lord being somehow not serious, just as Nineveh's lack of destruction after 40 days is not to be mocked. Rather is this a profound reflection of God's sensitivity to human freewill, and His amazing respect of it.

20:26- see on Acts 18:6.

Therefore I testify to you this day- The language of testimony, especially regarding innocence from blood, continues the legal metaphor we noted earlier. He rightly perceived that the essence of judgment is going on right now. He felt that he was on trial for murder- the murder of all men. And he protests his innocence by saying he has truly witnessed to all men. This is a powerful lesson in the extent of sins of omission. If we omit to share the Gospel of life with men, then we have effectively caused their death, even by murder. That of course is the message of Ez. 33:6, which Paul is alluding to here. He felt as the Old Testament prophets; but his potential guilt was not just before Israel, but "all men", seeing the Gospel is intended for "all men" and the Lord's death is the potential salvation of every man.

That I am pure from the blood of all men- By preaching, they were freed from the blood of men; evidently alluding to how the watchman must die if he didn't warn the people of their impending fate (Ez. 3:18). In line with this, "*necessity* is laid upon me… woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16). It could be argued that Paul felt so truly and absolutely forgiven that he could say that he was "pure from the blood of all men" (Acts 20:26). Yet as he said that, he must surely have had the blood of Stephen on his mind, trickling out along the Palestinian dust, as the clothes of the men who murdered Stephen lay at Paul's feet as a testimony that *he* was responsible for it. But he knew his forgiveness. He could confidently state that he was pure from that blood. Righteousness had been imputed, the sin covered- because he was in Christ. We are covered with His righteousness, and therefore have a share in His victory; and yet it also means that we must act as He did and does.

Paul was guilty of the murder of Christians. But his conscience was cleansed in Christ (Heb. 10:22), and he felt cleansed or pure from that blood. He had already stated that he was pure from the blood of the Jews, and therefore he turned to the Gentiles (Acts 18:6 s.w.). His insistence that he is now pure from the blood "of all men" could mean that he felt pure also from the blood of the Gentiles. And yet he continued by all means trying to preach to the Jews and Gentiles; his angry comment

in 18:6 about turning from the Jews to the Gentiles was surely said in hot blood or perhaps temporary realization that his focus on the Jews was uncalled for; seeing he continued his focus on the Jews and his rushing to Jerusalem to be there for Pentecost. However, Paul's faith in his conscience being cleansed in Christ was, it seems, not total. For he speaks here and in 18:6 as if his preaching work was the cleansing of his conscience; and at the end of his life he feels that he has a "pure conscience" because he has "served" God (2 Tim. 1:3). So in psychological terms it could be argued that Paul's guilt over his past murders, the blood that was on his hands, led him to try to cleanse himself from it by a lifetime of works, in preaching the Gospel to others, both Jew and Gentile. Perhaps his dogged insistence on preaching to the Jews was because most if not all of the Christians he had murdered would have been Jews. It would also explain why immediately after his conversion, he begins manic preaching, willing to give his life for it; which explains why several times in his ministry, starting from Damascus, the brethren had to get hold of him and take him away from danger to his life. This happened enough times to give us the impression that he was as it were looking for a bullet. His insistence on making the Jerusalem-Rome journey, when the Spirit witnessed that he would suffer deeply if he did so, was perhaps something similar. See on 28:19 *I was compelled to appeal to Caesar*.

In the phrase “The blood of all”, "Men" is added by the translators. The reference may be to the Lord's words which Luke had earlier recorded: "The blood of all the prophets shall be required of this generation" (Lk. 11:50). Again, Paul appears to be seeking to get out of condemnation for the blood of all the prophets by preaching to the Jews of that generation, rather than throwing himself upon the Lord's blood to cleanse his conscience.

20:27 *For I did not hesitate to declare to you the whole counsel of God*- The same word as in :20; see note there. Exactly as Moses completely revealed all God's counsel to Israel (Acts 7:33; Dt. 33:3). The reference is clearly again to Luke's first volume, where he records how the Jews "rejected the counsel of God against themselves" by refusing baptism from John (Lk. 7:30). The same Greek words are used. Maybe his addition of the word "whole" reflects the fact that John did not then preach the complete counsel of God because the Lord had not then died or resurrected. Having grown up in Jerusalem, Paul would have heard the preaching of John, and presumably refused baptism from him. He had rejected the counsel of God- and now he was declaring it to others as a basis for his own 'cleansing'. It could be argued that this was simply an appropriate response from Paul given his failure earlier. But psychologically, it could be seen as a way of dealing with his own abiding guilt- through preaching. And *when* this was fulfilled, as he saw it, by preaching on Pentecost in Jerusalem, replicating Peter's success, and preaching in Rome, capital of the known world... *then* he could speak of his cleansed conscience as he faced death (2 Tim. 1:3).

20:28 *Take heed to yourselves*- "Take heed unto yourselves" is repeated so many times in Deuteronomy (e.g. Dt. 2:4; 4:9,15,23; 11:16; 12:13,19,30; 24:8; 27:9)- further evidence Paul is being presented as some kind of Moses of the New Covenant [without denying that the Lord Jesus fits this role pre-eminently]. "Take heed to yourselves; if thy brother trespass... forgive him" (Lk. 17:3) is being alluded to here, where Paul says we should *take heed* of the likelihood of false teachers. Surely what he's saying is 'Yes, take heed to forgive your brother personal offences, take heed because you'll be tempted *not* to forgive him; but have the same level of watchfulness for false teaching'.

And to all the flock- All pastoral work for others must begin with us personally first of all. The same word is used in Mt. 7:15: "Take heed of false prophets", especially Jewish ones: "Take heed of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Mt. 16:6,12; Lk. 12:1; 20:46 s.w.). Paul uses the phrase again about wariness about Jewish teachers (1 Tim. 1:4). Paul wrote to Timothy in Ephesus, from where these assembled elders were from, that some would give heed to false teachings (1 Tim. 4:1). And this is the further context here (:29). "Take heed to yourselves" is word for word what Luke alone twice records the Lord saying to the disciples in Lk. 17:3; 21:34. Again we see how the disciples in first century Palestine were not to be seen as historical icons, far away in space and time; but as living examples to be emulated.

Put two passages from Paul together in your minds. He tells the Ephesian elders to "take heed to yourselves" before adding "and to all the flock". To Timothy likewise: "Take heed to yourself, and to your teaching [of others]" (1 Tim. 4:16). Clearly enough, Paul saw that who we are is related to the effectiveness of our preaching. The preacher is some sort of reproduction of the Truth in a personal form; the word made flesh. The Truth must exist in us as a living experience, a glorious enthusiasm, an intense reality. For it is primarily *people* who communicate, not words or ideas. Personal authenticity is undoubtedly the strongest credential in our work of communicating the message.

In which- The elders are themselves part of the flock and not separate from it.

The Holy Spirit has made you bishops- It was Paul who ordained these elders in Ephesus, straight after their conversion. His choice of the men must have been simply on the basis of what appeared to him; for it's hard to really know the hearts of men and their ultimate suitability for eldership. Yet the Spirit apparently confirmed Paul's spirit, his own judgment. The fact they were "made" or given [*tithemi*] to be bishops didn't mean they were to make no human effort. They had to "take heed" to themselves and the flock, and feed the flock. Again we see how God's Spirit works with the human spirit. They were not turned into mere puppets. In this case, what they fed the flock, and how they fed them, was their choice and down to their initiative and effort, which they needed to be encouraged in.

To feed the church of God- Feeding is also a metaphor for ruling; eldership in the church was not simply on account of having been given an office, but in practice it is demonstrated and actualized through teaching / feeding the flock.

Which he purchased with his own blood- The motivation to care for others is because the Lord died for His flock. Our attitude to others is therefore to be an extension of His abiding and saving care for them. We aren't motivated simply by what He did for us, but by the fact He did so much for others and thereby seeks their salvation; and we are to play our part in achieving the work intended by His death. "Purchased" translates a word which means to literally go around doing; the idea is of a purchaser going around looking at items before buying one. Here we see the Lord in search of man, just as God in Jeremiah likens Himself to Jeremiah running around the streets of a city looking for men who would hear His word. God is in search of man, through His Son; and men, some men, are in search of God. This explains the sense of spark and mutuality when we meet, with all the Angels rejoicing over one found person.

Whose blood is in view in "His blood"? There are several NT passages which make an explicit link between God and Jesus in the context of the salvation of men.

Phrases such as “God our Saviour, Jesus..." are relatively common in the pastorals (1 Tim. 1:1; 2:3; Tit. 1:3,4; 2:10 cp. 13 and see also Jude 24; 2 Pet. 1:1). Acts 20:28 even speaks in some versions as if God’s blood was shed on the cross; through ‘His’ blood the church was purchased; and yet Paul told the very same Ephesian audience that it was through the blood of Jesus that the church was purchased (Eph. 1:6,7); such was the extent of God manifestation on the cross. These and many other passages quoted by Trinitarians evidently don’t mean that ‘Jesus = God’ in the way they take them to mean. But what they *are* saying is that there was an intense unity between the Father and Son in the work of salvation achieved on the cross. The High Priest on the day of Atonement sprinkled the blood eastwards, on the mercy seat. He would therefore have had to walk around to God's side of the mercy seat and sprinkle the blood back the way he had come. This would have given the picture of the blood coming out from the presence of God Himself; as if *He* was the sacrifice.

This passage records Paul predicting the apostasy that was to come upon Ephesus; but he pleads with the elders to take heed and watch, so that his inspired words needn’t come true. Here we again see the openness of God.

20:29 *I know*- By direct Spirit revelation, the Spirit gift of knowledge; because in 1 Tim. 4:1 Paul writes to Timothy in Ephesus, from where these elders were from, that there had been "express" Spirit revelation that some would 'take heed' to false teaching.

That after my departing- Paul warned the new Israel that after his death ("after my departing") there would be serious apostasy. This is the spirit of his very last words, in 2 Tim. 4. This is exactly the spirit of Moses' farewell speech throughout the book of Deuteronomy, and throughout his final song (Dt. 32). "After my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves" (Dt. 31:29). "Take heed unto yourselves" is repeated so many times in Deuteronomy (e.g. Dt. 2:4; 4:9,15,23; 11:16; 12:13,19,30; 24:8; 27:9). Exactly as Moses completely revealed all God's counsel to Israel (Acts 7:33; Dt. 33:3).

Fierce wolves- As noted on :28 *Take heed*, he likely had Jewish false teachers in view. It was consistently the Jews who are presented throughout Acts as coming and disrupting Paul's missionary work after he had made converts. It was Jewish wolves whom the Lord had in mind when He warned the first disciples to "take heed... of wolves" (Mt. 7:15; 10:16; Lk. 10:3).

Shall enter in among you and will not spare the flock- This sounds like a fifth column within the new churches, as if they actually became members and worked from within; those referred to in Gal. 2:4 as false brethren who had been smuggled in, or in Jude 4 as the "certain people who have crept in secretly".

20:30 *And from among you, men shall arise speaking twisted things*- The Greek can mean morally as well as simply doctrinally apostate. And this was the nature of the 1st century apostasy- teachings which appealed to the flesh, justifying immorality in the name of spirituality. The letters to the churches in Rev. 2 and 3, especially to Ephesus, are clearly tackling this problem.

To draw away the disciples after themselves- Hardly any false teacher or divisive person would admit (not even to themselves) that this is the motive for their heresy. But Paul here puts his finger on the real reason for division- people wanting a following and therefore inventing some curious teaching which they present as vitally important. 'Drawing away' suggests the disciples were drawn away from one person to another; and the One whom disciples should be following is the Lord Jesus, the

disciple's Lord. The early disciples walked "after" Him (Mt. 4:19; 10:38; 16:24 and so often, s.w.). The danger of schism is that the flock are no longer Christ centred but following men and their teachings. Loss of personal focus on the Lord Jesus is the observable result of all division.

20:31 *Therefore be alert*- The apostasy which on one hand was predicted by the Spirit did not inevitably have to happen. The elders were being charged to stop it happening. It's rather like the statement that in 40 days, Nineveh would be destroyed. Although there were no conditions attached to the message, like much Old Testament prophecy, it was not a foregone conclusion. There were other possible futures which obedience could elicit and actualize. His prophecy, certain of fulfilment as it sounded, didn't 'have' to come true. Likewise the Lord categorically foretold Peter's denials; and yet tells him therefore to watch, and not fall into the temptation that was looming. Peter didn't *have* to fulfil the prophecy, and the Lord encouraged him to leave it as an unfulfilled, conditional prophecy. He warns him to pray "lest ye enter into temptation" (Mk. 14:38)- even though He had prophesied that Peter *would* fail under temptation.

And remember that for three years- This means that right from the beginning of Paul's preaching in the area, he had warned them that the whole thing was very prone to fall apart because of the wolves he could foresee entering the new flock. To warn new converts of this kind of thing always seems an anti-climax, a possible discouragement to them after the joy of conversion. But Paul's aim was not merely baptism but for converts to get to the Kingdom of God, and so he saw the need to warn them right away of the difficulties ahead.

I did not cease to warn every one- The Greek definitely means 'each of you', rather than a more general 'everyone', which would have been expressed quite differently in Greek. He presumably was referring to the assembled elders.

Night and day with tears- For literally three years, to each and every one of the assembled brethren? This sounds to me like a Semitic exaggeration, and is probably not to be read literally. But Paul's tears at the prospect of anyone turning away... are a great challenge. It's all too easy to shrug off the apostasy of others from the way as being their fault. But Paul had a clear sense of the future they would miss and the judgment to come. He wept for even the possibility of it happening to his beloved converts. Truly Paul served his Lord with many tears (:19); and 2 Cor. 2:4 pictures Paul weeping over his parchment and ink as he wrote to Corinth. The Biblical record contains a large number of references to the frequent tears of God's people, both in bleeding hearts for other people, and in recognition of their own sin. And as we have seen, these things are related. Consider:

- "My eye pours out tears to God" [i.e. in repentance?] (Job 16:20)
- Isaiah drenches Moab with tears (Is. 16:9)
- Jeremiah is a fountain of tears for his people (Jer. 9:1; Lam. 2:8)
- David's eyes shed streams of tears for his sins (Ps. 119:136; 6:6; 42:3)
- Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Mt. 23:37)
- Blessed are those who weep (Lk. 6:21)
- Mary washed the Lord's feet with her tears (Lk. 7:36-50)
- Paul wept for the Ephesians daily (Acts 20:19,31).

We have to ask whether there are any tears, indeed any true emotion, in our walk with our Lord. Those who go through life with dry eyes are surely to be pitied. Surely, in the light of the above testimony, we are merely hiding behind a smokescreen if we

excuse ourselves by thinking that we're not the emotional type. Nobody can truly go through life humming to themselves "I am a rock, I am an island… and an island never cries". The very emotional centre of our lives must be touched. The tragedy of our sin, the urgency of the world's salvation, the amazing potential provided and secured in the cross of Christ… surely we cannot be passive to these things. We live in a world where emotion and passion are decreasing. Being politically correct, looking right to others… these things are becoming of paramount importance in all levels of society. The passionless, postmodernist life can't be for us, who have been moved and touched at our very core by the work and call and love of Christ to us. For us there must still be what Walter Brueggemann called "the gift of amazement", that ability to feel and say "Wow!" to God's grace and plan of salvation for us.

20:32 *And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace*- Paul had elsewhere commended new converts and elders to the Lord Jesus (14:23 s.w.). So "the word [*logos*] of His grace" may be a reference to the Lord Jesus, rather than meaning 'the Bible'. The only other reference to the word of grace is also in Luke, and we should therefore be guided by this in interpretation, seeing that Acts follows on from the Gospel of Luke. The reference is in Lk. 4:22 where the words of the Lord Jesus are described as words of grace. In an illiterate society, the converts would only have the memory of the gospel records as their source of understanding of Christianity, apart from inspired utterances given by 'prophets'. The tendency would have been to memorize a Gospel record before baptism (as early church tradition says was required of converts)- but then to forget it. Paul is urging these brethren to continually recite those Gospel records, the words of grace which came from the lips of the Lord Jesus, as Luke himself had taught his own converts in his Gospel record. It was this which would shield them from errant ideas being propounded by false prophets claiming they were speaking from the Lord directly.

Which is able to build you up- Paul uses the same word in writing to these Ephesians later (Eph. 2:20), saying that they had been built up upon the foundation of the Lord Jesus, and His apostles and prophets, i.e. the inspired speakers forth of His words, men like Luke and the other inspired Gospel writers. This is why a daily reading or reflection upon the Gospel records remains to this day necessary for those who would be disciples indeed.

And to give you the inheritance among all those that are sanctified- This is very much the Old Testament language of Israel's conquest of Canaan and receiving the inheritance amongst their brethren. The Kingdom Paul preached was the same- the re-establishment of God's Kingdom on earth based upon Israel. Paul is quoting here from the words of the Lord Jesus to him at his conversion: "To the end they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among those that are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:18). Paul very often speaks of his Gentile converts as "sanctified", and in doing so he surely had in mind the vision given to Peter, showing him that the Gentile converts were indeed sanctified. It was clearly necessary to continue to remind the Gentile converts that they really were sanctified, for the Jewish 'wolves' would be telling them that they weren't. And Paul likely had to keep reminding himself of the wonder of Gentile acceptance.

The words of Jesus at the judgment, inviting the faithful into the Kingdom (Mt. 25:34), rung in Paul's mind: Acts 20:32; Gal. 3:29; 4:7; Eph. 1:11; Col. 1:12; 3:24; Tit. 3:7.

20:33 *I coveted no one's silver, or gold, or apparel*- This is the spirit of Moses in Num. 16:15: "I have not taken one ass from them". Paul maybe also had these words in mind again in 2 Cor. 7:2: "We have wronged no man... we have defrauded no man". Coveting these three things was precisely the sin of Achan (Josh. 7:21). Perhaps the point of the allusion was to say that calamity was awaiting the new Israel; the great victory over Jericho would soon give way to defeat. This would be due to the 1st century equivalent of Achan- but Paul was not Achan. It would not be his fault.

Wealth in those days was reflected in clothing, hence the warnings about the power of moths to destroy such wealth (Mt. 6:19; James 5:2).

20:34 *You yourselves know that these hands*- Paul told those Ephesian elders, beset as they already were with the evident beginnings of apostasy: "*These hands* (showing them) have ministered unto my necessities... I have shewed you all things, how that *so labouring* you (too) ought to support the weak (implying Paul worked at tent making not only for his own needs but in order to give support to the spiritually (?) weak), *and to (also)* remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (:34,35). Paul seems to be unashamedly saying that those words of Jesus had motivated his own life of service, and he had shown the Ephesians, in his own life, how they ought to be lived out; and he placed himself before them as their pattern. The Lord Jesus recognized, years later, that the Ephesians [whom Paul was addressing] had followed Paul's example of labouring motivated by Christ as he had requested them to; but they had done so without *agape* love (Rev. 2:3,4).

Have provided for my necessities- See on 28:10 *Such things as we needed*. This could well have been said with a fleck of pride, which the events of 28:10 sought to remove from him.

And for those who were with me- Paul had a profession, as all trainee rabbis did. But his co-workers apparently didn't, or couldn't use it over the three years he was in the area. We might be able to infer from this that they were untrained men, who were therefore likely illiterate. Paul could so easily have reasoned that his talents were better used in preaching and pastoral work, than in working in order to support others. His ability to earn enough money to support a group of people, as well as doing all his ministry work, is a testament to his wise use of time, and also his strong dislike of a salaried ministry. We note a possible contrast with the attitude of the twelve in Acts 6:2: "It is not fitting that we should forsake the teaching of the word of God and instead serve tables".

20:35 *In all things I gave you an example, that so labouring you should help the weak*- "The weak" may refer to "those who were with me" (:34). Perhaps they could not work like he did because of physical or mental or spiritual weakness. The Greek for "weak" is particularly used of the physically weak; Timothy appears to have been like this, being frequently sick and weak (1 Tim. 5:23). Paul's co-workers were therefore weak, unable to support themselves, and those whom man might despise. The way they travelled alone such great distances in dangerous circumstances is therefore even more to their credit, and to the credit of Paul's patient belief and hope in them.

And to remember the words that the Lord Jesus spoke- Paul's attitude, working at manual work in order to support others, was motivated by continual reflection on the Lord's words. And he asks them to copy him in this. Note how he reminds the Ephesians to "remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said..."; not, 'how it is written' (for the Gospels were in circulation by this time). He jogged their memory of

one of the texts they ought to have memorized. I suggested above on :34 that they were likely illiterate. See on Acts 6:4.

Saying: It is more blessed to give than to receive- These words are unrecorded in the Gospels. But the same Greek words for giving and receiving are found in the Lord's advice to missionaries in Mt. 10:8,9: "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give. Acquire no gold, nor silver, nor brass for your purses...". Paul has just spoken of not coveting gold or silver. It may well be that the Lord added at this point: "It is more blessed to give than to receive". Paul saw his working in order to 'give' to the weak mission workers as being a form of missionary service in itself. Paul implies he repeated these words of the Lord time and again as his source of motivation, and he asks the Ephesians to do likewise... and we can take the appeal to ourselves.

20:36 *And when he had thus spoken*- The "thus" leads us to think that the prayer was therefore not asking to receive personally anything but glorifying God's giving and seeking for blessing on continued efforts to give of the Gospel. "He knelt down" translates Greek words meaning literally to give the knee. His 'giving' was therefore of praise, in this context, rather than begging to receive.

He knelt down and prayed with them all- They prayed as well as Paul.

20:37 *And they all wept freely, embraced Paul and kissed him*- Literally, 'fell on his neck and kissed him'. This is word for word the words Luke records as having come from the lips of Jesus in the parable of the father meeting the prodigal son (Lk. 15:20). But it appears out of context. I have discussed elsewhere how there are at times allusions and quotations from earlier Scriptures which appear out of context. But that is no necessary requirement within the Semitic usage of literature; Jewish midrash so often lifts Scripture out of context and applies it to another context, and the Bible writers at times do the same. It is an incidental evidence of the same mind at work in the Scriptures, and of how soaked were the minds of the early believers with the words of Jesus.

20:38 *Being sorrowful most of all because of his statement, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship*- It was a commonly reported practice for the brethren to go on the first stage of a journey with their fellow brethren; this Greek word is used only in this context, nine times (Acts 15:3; 20:38; 21:5; Rom. 15:24; 1 Cor. 16:6,11; 2 Cor. 1:16; Tit. 3:13).

ACTS CHAPTER 21

21:1 *And when we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara*- Luke so often mentions these details. Remember that the Hebrew words for 'spirit' and 'wind' were identical. I have argued that Paul's decision to go to Jerusalem and focus upon ministry to the Jews was not the Lord's ideal intention for him; that was Peter's task. But having decided to do it for the Lord, the Lord worked with him. Just as God did regarding a physical temple and system of human kingship.

21:2 *And having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail*- The idea is that they saw or noticed one. "We went aboard and set sail" could imply it was just about to leave; they arrived just at the last minute. As noted on :1, the Lord was confirming Paul in the path he had chosen, whilst warning him that such a course was not ideal and would be problematic. Whatever choices we make, they are confirmed by the hand of providence; which is what gives intensity of meaning to all our choices.

21:3 *When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left we sailed to Syria*- The kind of eyewitness language and detail we would expect. The Bible is either inspired or a clever forgery, and if the latter, then these kinds of eyewitness details would have been hard to invent by a later hand. Especially bearing in mind that there was little experience of long distance travel.

And landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload its cargo- Nothing is chance in our lives. The seven days it took to unload and probably sell the cargo was used to visit the ecclesia there. This likewise [see on :1 and :2] was clearly meant to be, and reflects the higher hand that works in the lives of those who seek to serve the Lord.

21:4- see on Acts 20:23.

And having found the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and these said to Paul through the Spirit- It's not clear whether the Spirit directly said that Paul should not go to Jerusalem, or whether this was their interpretation of what was revealed to them. Reading the text as it stands, Paul's going to Jerusalem would have been rank disobedience. But it seems to me that he was being told of the consequences of his plan, and yet he continued in it, and the Lord worked with him in that choice. We encounter the same conundrum today when we are told 'The Bible says that...'. There's a need to make a differentiation between the specific text of the Bible, and human interpretation of it. It was 'they' who told Paul not to go to Jerusalem- not the Spirit directly.

That he should not set foot in Jerusalem- Paul was clearly told by the Spirit that he "should not go up to Jerusalem" (Acts 21:4 AV). Yet Paul chose to go up to Jerusalem, with the Holy Spirit warning him against it in every city he passed through (Acts 20:23; 21:11). What are we to make of this? Was a spiritual man like Paul simply out of step with the Spirit on this point? Maybe- in the light of all we've seen above. It's possible to get fixated on a certain project and ignore God's clear testimony. Or it could be that Paul knew the Lord well enough to realize that although God was telling him what would happen, he could still exercise his own love for his brethren to the maximum extent. For it was for love of his brethren and his dream of unity between Jew and Gentile that he personally took the offerings of the Gentiles to the poor saints in Jerusalem.

In Rom. 15:31 Paul asks the Romans to pray concerning his visit to Jerusalem "that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe". He was in struggle with God, wrestling God as Jacob did. On one hand, Spirit guidance was clear; but he believed that through prayer and human effort, a different outcome to that stated by the Spirit might be possible.

21:5 *When our time was up, we departed and went on our way, and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, until we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed*- The very same scene as at Troas. And Paul had stayed there seven days too (:4 cp. 20:6). The period of seven days in Tyre was because of the itinerary of the ship they were on (hence "when our time was up"). Clearly the Lord's providential hand was at work helping Paul to see that He was working with Paul according to a pattern. We too can perceive similarities between events within our lives; the meaning attached to those events may not be immediately clear, but all the same we come away with the abiding impression that life is not random event but somehow, somewhere the Lord's hand is there with us.

21:6 *And we went on board the ship, and they returned home*- The pathos of the scene here has absolutely every mark of the eye witness account. We can almost imagine Luke as he was writing, remembering the last waves and hugs, the last sights

of each other, as they walked away from the mooring, and Luke and Paul walked the entrance plank onto the ship.

21:7- see on Acts 4:23.

And when we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais; and we greeted the believers and stayed with them one day- The entire journey emphasizes how Paul looked up the believers in every town he visited, even though they were likely unknown to him personally. The bonds of Christian fellowship were and are strong.

21:8 *And the next day we departed, and went to Caesarea*- AV "We that were of Paul's company". This idea is found in 13:13 "Paul and his company" (AV). We should not therefore assume that only Luke accompanied Paul; there were other unrecorded brethren as well.

And entering into the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him- The seven deacons of Acts 6:5 were appointed to minister practically to the poor in the Jerusalem church. But because of his ground breaking work with the Ethiopian eunuch, he was respected as "the evangelist". He clearly had more than one calling. We note he was now living at Caesarea, not Jerusalem, perhaps as a result of persecution in Jerusalem, or tensions within the Jerusalem ecclesia regarding Gentiles. Perhaps he had quit the church politics of the Jerusalem ecclesia and retired to Caesarea and focused upon raising his four daughters in his house church, and they had responded well to their upbringing.

21:9 *Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied*- This is surely intended to recall the prophecy of Joel, that this kind of thing would happen in the last days. The prophecy has already been quoted in Acts 2. Yet it speaks clearly of the last days. Again we see that from God's side, He had enabled the last days and establishment of the Kingdom on earth in the first century. But it was a lack of response by natural and spiritual Israel which led to the major delay until our last days.

Understanding Corinth ecclesia as a series of house churches explains Paul’s comment to the Corinthians that he ordained his guidelines to be practiced in all the ecclesias (1 Cor. 7:17)- i.e. the house churches that comprised the body of Christ in Corinth. He gives some guidelines for behaviour that appear to contradict each other until we perceive the difference between the commands to house groups, and commands about the ‘gathering together’ for special breaking of bread services. The role of women is a classic example. 1 Cor. 14:34 says that women should keep silent ‘in ecclesia’ [AV “churches” is a mistranslation]- i.e. a sister shouldn’t teach at those special breaking of bread meetings when the house churches ‘came together’ (1 Cor. 11:17,18,20). And yet within the house groups, it’s apparent from other New Testament accounts and from what Paul himself writes, that sisters did teach there (1 Cor. 11:5). Thus in the house church of Philip, there were four women who ‘prophesied’, i.e. spoke forth the word of God to others (Acts 21:8,9). This to me is the only way to make sense of Corinthians- otherwise Paul appears to be contradicting himself.

21:10 *And as we stayed there some days, there came down from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus*- Jews spoke of going up to Jerusalem, and coming down from it. So this is not meant in a geographical sense. "Agabus" meaning locust or grasshopper, he may have been a wandering prophet, going around giving Divine messages as required; the type in view in 2 John, who was to be welcomed and supported by the Lord's people as he travelled around.

21:11- see on Acts 20:23; 21:4.

And coming to us and taking Paul's belt, he bound his own feet and hands, and said: Thus said the Holy Spirit: So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owns this belt, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles- The kind of acted parable beloved of Old Testament prophets (1 Kings 22:11; Is. 20:1-3; Jer. 13:1-7; Ez. 4:1-6). The Lord had predicted that Peter would meet his end by having his hands and feet bound (Jn. 21:18), and we wonder whether Paul again was consciously trying to emulate Peter by seeking the same end.

21:12 *And when we heard these things, both we and they of that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem*- Yet Luke stayed loyal to Paul and accompanied him to Rome, although he felt Paul was not taking the right course. We too can rightly stick with our brethren even if we feel it is plain that their path is less than ideal.

21:13 *Then Paul answered: What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready, not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus*- "Why make you this ado and weep?" (Mk. 5:39) is unconsciously alluded to by Paul here. If this is a conscious allusion, it seems out of context. But as an unconscious allusion, it makes sense.

21:14- see on Acts 20:23.

And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying: The will of the Lord be done- I don't take this as a mere passing comment of resignation. Rather did the brethren perceive that Paul was being shown the consequences of serving the Lord one way, but chose to do the Lord's will in another way- by going to Jerusalem and pursuing his mission to the Jews which the Lord preferred Peter to focus upon. They accepted Paul's choice and wished for the Lord's will to be further developed. Paul was not in that sense going against the Lord's will, but doing it. It would be "done" by the choice he made. We wonder whether Paul wrote to the Ephesians, using the same words, thinking of his own struggles to understand not only the Lord's will, but how he could best fulfil it: "understand what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17). Luke and other early brethren seemed to have had the Gethsemane record in mind in their sufferings, as we can *also* do (Acts 21:14 = Mk. 14:36).

21:15 *And after these days we took up our baggage*- Paul took up his baggage at Ephesus and went on to Jerusalem (Acts 21:15 RV); the baggage would have been the bits and pieces raised by the donors to the Jerusalem Poor Fund. Those who couldn’t send money had sent what little they could spare in kind- presumably clothes and even animals, or goods for re-sale in Jerusalem. However it seems that Luke omits reference to the fact that Paul's heavily invested in 'Jerusalem Poor Fund' didn't achieve its intention. There is no record of it being presented, nor of it impressing the Jerusalem Jews. Indeed, in the lead up to AD70, there was growing nationalism, religious extremism and xenophobia amongst the Jerusalem Jews. Josephus in *The Jewish War* is probably broadly reliable in his account of the feelings in Jerusalem at this time. A gift from Gentiles would not be well accepted; and Paul's mere presence in Jerusalem with Gentiles was enough to spark a riot.

And went up to Jerusalem- This must be understood in the context of how the "we" had repeatedly urged Paul *not* to go up to Jerusalem. They went with him from loyalty to a friend and brother who had taken a path they did not consider wise; but still they travelled it with him. And we can take a lesson from that. The whole picture records the disciples loyally going up to Jerusalem with the Lord, despite their deep misgivings as to His wisdom in doing so.

21:16 *And there went with us also some of the disciples from Caesarea, bringing with them*- Some texts read 'brought us to', which makes sense if Mnason had a house in Jerusalem where he lodged the group.

One Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge- Perhaps this was as it were his Christian additional name, given as a sign of respect for how long he had held the faith. Such terms, like "the evangelist", reflect a culture of respect and "honour to whom honour" amongst the early believers, which we would do well to copy. Likewise perhaps the mention of the fact he was "from Cyprus" might be in respect of the fact that like many Jerusalem Levites, he had had land there, in order to 'get around' the legislation about Levites not owning land in Israel, and had sacrificed it for the Lord's sake. Given the brevity of the records, there can be surely no incidental, pointless addition of background material. Such details surely have meaning, even if we cannot in our age and at our distance immediately discern it.

21:17 *And when we arrived in Jerusalem*- Luke was a Gentile (so Col. 4:11 implies). Note how the other Gospel writers speak of the *sea* of Galilee, whereas the more widely travelled Luke refers to it only as a lake. While Paul was in prison in Caesarea for two years, Luke was a free man (Acts 21:17; 24:27). It seems that during that period, Luke may have spent the time travelling around the areas associated with Jesus, interviewing eye witnesses- especially Mary, the aged mother of Jesus, from whom he must have obtained much of the information about His birth and Mary's song. His preaching of the Gospel in Luke and Acts is made from his perspective- the fact that salvation is for all, not just Jews, is a major theme (Lk. 2:30-32; 3:6; 9:54,55; 10:25-34; Acts 1:8; 2:17).

The brothers received us gladly- This appears in contrast with the spirit of :18. So perhaps the "brothers" in view were those in Mnason's home; see on :16.

21:18 *And the following day Paul went with us to James; and all the elders were present*- Presumably there were now no other apostles present in Jerusalem or they would have been mentioned. They had either fled persecution, been cast out of the church over the Gentile issue [note Philip, one-time deacon of the Jerusalem church, was now running a house church in Caesarea], or were away on missionary work.

21:19 *And when he had greeted them, he related one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry*- Such an orderly presentation of missionary history was made with Luke present (:18 "us"). Surely here we have a hint as to the historical background to the book of Luke-Acts. Luke and Paul presented it as an explanation to the Jerusalem elders; hence Luke opens Volume 1 by saying that he is presenting an orderly chronological account of Gospel events. But as always, the emphasis is upon what God and His Son had done through them. This is a major theme of Luke in Acts [see on 1:1]- that the Lord was working through the ministries of His people. It would also explain why the focus of Acts is upon Paul when clearly there were other preachers also active. The book was initially an explanation and account to the Jerusalem elders of the work of Paul- for it was he whom they were so concerned about. Paul had no accountability to them- if at all, he would have been accountable to the Antioch ecclesia from whence he had initially departed to the mission field. But he graciously goes along with their concerns.

21:20- see on Acts 8:1.

And they, when they heard it, glorified God; and they said to him: You saw, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those that have believed; and they are all zealous for the law- Paul uses the same words in his defence, stating that he like them had been zealous for the law, but had been persuaded otherwise by

the Lord Jesus (22:3; also in Gal. 1:14 about his former life in Judaism). The implication could be that the same crowds baying for his blood were in fact the crowds of the ecclesia of Jerusalem Jews who had accepted Christ. This was the degree to which the church slid back into Judaism; and is an essay in the power of legalism in the church. The Jerusalem Jewish Christians had initially been persecuted and many had fled into dispersion in Asia Minor, as Peter's letters make clear. Why was there now a Christian church in Jerusalem? They had clearly compromised with the synagogue system. And had succumbed to the rising wave of Jewish nationalism and xenophobia in Jerusalem. It can develop to fanatic extents, calling for the death of brethren of Paul's calibre. It may also be that by using this term about his former life, Paul was tacitly recognizing that his political compromise to those brethren had been wrong- see on :21 and :22. He had given the impression of being "zealous for the law", and now he plainly states that zeal for the law was the characteristic of his pre-Christian life, and he had changed as a result of encountering the Lord Jesus.

21:21 *And they have been informed concerning you, that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses*- Paul's intended mission was to the Gentiles and Peter's to the Jews. But here we have a fair summary of what Paul actually did; and it wasn't the Lord's ideal wish. If only he had followed the Lord's intention, then this whole situation with the Jerusalem ecclesia and the subsequent events which led to his arrest and imprisonment... simply wouldn't have happened. We too can save ourselves much grief by going the Lord's intended way for us.

Telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to our customs- Paul should have quietly pleaded guilty, because his letters show this was indeed his position. But in a desperate attempt to placate the legalists, he went along with them- resulting in a chain of events which led to his imprisonment. We too need to be honest with our brethren about our positions regarding fellowship issues and other hot topics of our times, even if we know they strongly disagree. Attempting to compromise and misrepresent our positions is not only dishonest but results in much grief all around. Brethren assume we have a position which we do not- and then get bitter with us when they realize we actually don't hold the position which we apparently espoused for the sake of political peace. Whilst a degree of pragmatism is required in all human relationships, we must learn the lesson from Paul at this point- for his pragmatism and resignation of principle led to a chain of events which was seriously damaging for him and the Lord's work. If he had not then gone into the temple to demonstrate his Jewish orthodoxy, the riot, arrest and subsequent imprisonment would never have occurred. See on :20 *Zealous for the law*.

21:22 *What then? They will certainly hear you have come*- The whole thing smacks of the kind of church politics which have blighted the body of Christ in our age. The elders feared the imagined reaction of others, and so they asked Paul to do something which was more a result of their fears than their genuine convictions; and Paul gave in, leading to serious damage to his ministry as he lay incarcerated for years as a result of the chain of events which then happened. And in the end, the Jerusalem church slid into the apostasy of legalism and returned to Judaism. Nothing good came out of all that fearful compromise.

21:23 *Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow*- The "therefore" reflects how urgently they felt the need to placate the Judaists. Paul did what he was told, even although it was wrong and based around pleasing men. I sense he made this misjudgement not because he was browbeaten by these brethren, although he was pretty much alone before them; but because he like them was desperate at all costs to ingratiate himself to the Jerusalem church and reconcile and

convert the temple cult. Those desires became such an obsession that they clouded his better judgment. The "vow" was apparently a Nazirite vow.

21:24- see on Acts 18:18.

These take and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses- Paul was clearly not poor at this time; or probably it was known that he was bringing funds to Jerusalem on behalf of the Gentile churches. See the note on "baggage" on :15. It was considered a work of piety to relieve needy Jews from the expenses connected with short term Nazirite vows, as Paul does here. Adam Clarke notes: "It was also customary for the richer sort to bestow their charity on the poorer sort for this purpose; for Josephus, *Ant. lib. xix. cap. 6, sec. 1*, observes that Agrippa, on his being advanced from a prison to a throne, by the Emperor Claudius, came to Jerusalem; and there, among other instances of his religious thankfulness shown in the temple, Ναζαραιων ξυρασθαι διεταξε μαλα συχνους, he ordered very many Nazarites to be shaven, he furnishing them with money for the expenses of that, and of the sacrifices necessarily attending it". The idea of the Jerusalem poor fund was that Paul would relieve needy believers who had been affected by recent famines. But we get the impression that this noble intention got caught up in church politics; the funds were spent on temple sacrifices to prove that poor Jewish Christians had achieved legal obedience in ending their vows, and Paul was publicly demonstrating his support of such legalism. Clearly the Jerusalem Jewish Christians knew Paul was loaded with the Jerusalem Poor Fund; and instead of seeing it used to relieve poverty, they wanted it used to demonstrate allegiance to Moses. Paul was surely wrong to go along with this.

That they may shave their heads; and all shall know that there is no truth in the things of which they have been informed concerning you, but you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the law- Note how hurtful this must have been, since Paul was bringing funds for their ecclesia which he had collected at the cost of damaging his relationship with the likes of Corinth. He meekly obeyed, perhaps it was playing a part in the politics in the church, although he had written to the Colossians and others that there was no need for any to be circumcised nor keep the Law, indeed these things were a denial of faith in Jesus. Paul later uses the same word to describe how we are to 'walk' not according to the Law but the Spirit (Gal. 5:25; 6:16; Phil. 3:16); perhaps this was written from prison with a glance back at the fact that he was imprisoned exactly because he had attempted to impress others by how he walked according to the Law, which had led to the riot and his subsequent incarceration. He likewise uses the term 'keeping the law' in a negative sense in Rom. 2:26 and Gal. 6:13.

21:25 *But concerning the Gentiles that have believed, we wrote, giving judgment that they should keep themselves from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication*- The "we" could suggest that this was the same group of elders as at the time of the Acts 15 agreements. But that was now some years ago, and surely some of those brethren had died. So the Jerusalem elders were arguing from a position of inherited authority, claiming that they had effectively done what their predecessors had done. This is a dangerous attitude as it resigns personal responsibility and principle. Paul had written to the Corinthians that food sacrificed to idols could be eaten; so he should have now said up front that he no longer accepted that point, or at best, considered it to apply only to a limited circle of Gentile converts.

21:26 *Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple*- Paul's purification of himself may have been for different reasons than the four men under the Nazirite vow. It was customary for orthodox Jews returning to Jerusalem from Gentile lands to purify themselves in the way Paul does

here. Again, given his understanding of uncleaness and the end of the Mosaic concepts of pure and impure, it was really a great denial of principle for him to do this. We must ask all through: 'What would have happened if Paul had been true to himself and his beliefs?'. He would not have entered the temple, recognizing that as Stephen had taught him in his last breaths, there is now no sacred space. The true temple is the church. He would not have bothered even trying to demonstrate obedience to the law. He would have told the Jerusalem brethren what he had written and taught to others about the law of Moses. He would have given them the funds for the poor- and continued on his way to the Gentiles, seeing he was called to witness to the Gentiles and not the Jews. But he insisted upon his obsession with pleasing and converting orthodox Judaism. And everything went so badly wrong as a result. He had already by this point written the letter to the Galatians [probably during his extended stay in Ephesus]. There he had rebuked Peter for caving in to pressure from the Jerusalem Jewish-Christian brethren. And now he does just the same.

He had written to the Galatians of how the law was "the weak and beggarly elements" and wrote with such invective against Judaizers. So now at this point we see Paul perhaps at his weakest point during his Christian race. He caves in on the very principles he had had revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. Just as the whole scene was reminiscent of that concerning Stephen, so it also recalled Peter's failure with the Jerusalem church, going along with things which were contrary to his own personal experience of revelation from the Lord. This is all so true to human experience. We see brethren cave in on the very principles they have fought so hard to uphold. And we also see brethren in later life going out on tangents, and ending their days "in Christ" but alienated and in very difficult personal situations. And this is what happened with Paul. The rest of his life was spent in prison, increasingly isolated, and failing to achieve his goals- of preaching succesfully to both Jew and Gentile.

The lesson is, to be honest with our brethren. To be true to our Lord, and to ourselves. To state and live by the principles we know to be true, rather than falling into the very strong temptation to say and do what we know others expect from us. And this is particularly true over the vexed issue of fellowship, which was essentially the issue facing Paul at this point.

Declaring the fulfilment of the days of purification, until the offering was offered for every one of them- He 'kept going into the temple' (Gk.). "The days" were seven days (:27). Whilst the law did not stipulate a minimum term for a Nazirite vow, there is evidence that usually the minimum term was 30 days. So this vow was not being done for very genuine reasons but rather just to demonstrate Paul's loyalty to the law and Jerusalem temple cult. And Paul along with the four men made this vow ("himself along with them"). The whole thing smacks of tokenism rather than sincerity, and Paul suffered for it, in that the sequence of events triggered by it affected the rest of his life.

21:27 *And when the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the crowd*- Paul had only recently arrived from Asia; it could be that a group of Jews followed him not only from city to city in his missionary work, but had even followed him to Jerusalem. This was the extent of Jewish opposition against his ministry to them.

And laid hands on him- God has recorded Paul's life in Acts in such a way as to show the similarities between him and Christ; thus the Spirit records that men "laid hands on" Paul, just as it does concerning the Lord Jesus (Mt. 26:50).

21:28 *Crying out: Men of Israel, help! This is the man that teaches all men everywhere against the people and the law, and this place, and moreover he brought*

Gentiles also into the temple and has defiled this holy place- We can read this as conscious slander. But see on :29 *They supposed*. I suggest they rehearsed their fears and [il]logical deductions in their minds to such a point that they became actually convinced this had happened. They saw him with one Gentile, and assume that Gentile had been brought into the temple; and that therefore the other three men seen with him in the temple were therefore also Gentiles. Josephus claims that Gentile entry into the temple was a capital offence. It would've been highly unlikely that Paul would even have got Gentiles beyond the Jewish temple guards. The whole conclusion was improbable in the extreme. But this is where legalistic quasi-logical deduction and supposition lead to.

The accusations they make against Paul are the very ones which were being made by the Jewish Christians in the Jerusalem ecclesia (:21). This is another reason for thinking that the crowds of Jerusalem Jews baying for Paul's blood included legalistic, Judaistic members of the Jerusalem church. If, as I currently believe, Paul wrote Hebrews from Italy (ponder Heb. 13:24), then we see his utter grace in even bothering to reason with them and urge them not to return to Judaism.

The scene and false accusations here are very similar to those made by Paul against Stephen (Acts 6:11-14: "Then they secretly induced men to say: We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God. And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and came upon him and seized him, and brought him into the council, and set up false witnesses, who said: This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law. For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place and shall change the customs which Moses delivered"). The charges were identical; both Stephen and Paul made speeches in their defence which provoked the Jews to fury, to the point that they interrupted them with violence, and each time it is diaspora Jews who are provoking the situation. I think Paul perceived the connection, because he uses the same form of address as does Stephen: "Brothers and fathers" (Acts 7:2; 22:1). And he mentions the death of Stephen specifically in Acts 22:20. So often this happens. We experience what we have done to others. This is not merely poetic justice. The intention was perhaps that Paul needed to repent more deeply of what he had done to Stephen. This phenomena also occurs in order to help create unity between us and our brethren, including those who are now dead. Although they are unconscious, we are enabled to enter into their feelings, in preparation for the glorious unity of the Kingdom.

21:29 *For they had previously seen with him in the city Trophimus the Ephesian*- Seeing the Jews who made the problem were from Asia (:27), they perhaps were from Ephesus and knew Trophimus.

Whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple- “Supposed” is the verb *nomizo,* a form of the noun *nomos*, 'law'. Their legalistic reasoning led them to over interpret facts and draw endless apparently logical conclusions- but they came to a false conclusion as a result of their legalistic devotion to logical deduction. The same mentality is seen in legalists today, who seem highly prone to all manner of conspiracy theories and irrational deductions.

21:30 *And all the city was moved*- The same word used later in accusing Paul of creating dissension (24:5). A division caused by others about Paul was thus made Paul's fault. People likewise falsely accuse the Lord Jesus, and His followers, of causing division when they are merely at the centre of division made by unbelievers.

And the people ran together, laid hold on Paul and dragged him out of the temple- The very same words used about what happened to Paul in Philippi (16:19). Circumstances repeated in his life, as they do in ours, reflecting the same Divine hand

at work with us in different places and situations down the years, but always with the same hallmarks.

And immediately the doors were shut- Both into the court of the Gentiles, and also from there into the court of the Israelites, thus cutting off Paul from any help. The door into the temple would therefore likely have had to be broken down by the Gentile Romans to get to Paul- all full of symbolism! The Roman guard was stationed in the tower of Antonia on the North West of the temple area, and they would have seen what was going on in the court of the Gentiles from above.

21:31 *And as they were seeking to kill him*- Paul's physical sufferings over the course of his ministry were significant. They would already have inflicted major damage on his body before the soldiers saved him from death itself. And there would have been the psychological damage inflicted after each trauma.

News came to the chief captain of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar- In the tower of Antonia. See on :30 *The doors were shut*.

21:32 *And he took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them; and they, when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, stopped beating Paul*- From the tower of Antonia overlooking the court of the Gentiles. The details given here are all so internally cohesive that it's hard to doubt that this is the true word of God and no clever fabrication of a later hand.

21:33 *Then the chief captain came near, laid hold of him and commanded him to be bound with two chains, and inquired who he was and what he had done*- Fulfilling the prophecy of Agabus in 21:11. There is no other record of those words being fulfilled. The chains were therefore presumably on his hands and feet as Agabus had predicted, rather than to two soldiers as many suppose. Hence he was "carried" into the Antonia castle (:34). Again the internal cohesion of the record is nothing short of Divinely inspired.

21:34 *And some among the mob shouted one thing, some another; and when he could not know the certainty because of the uproar, he commanded him to be brought into the fortress of Antonia*- “Shouted” is the word used by Luke for the shouting for the Lord's crucifixion (Lk. 23:21). As with each of us, Paul was brought to know the essence of his Lord's sufferings.

21:35 *When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob*- This is religious legalism come to its full term. The mob was pushing forward the ones in front in a mad desire to kill Paul, regardless of his Roman protection.

21:36 *For the mob followed after, crying out: Away with him!*- Again, Paul like us was being taught the Lord's crucifixion experiences (Lk. 23:18; Jn. 19:15).

21:37 *And as Paul was about to be brought into the fortress, he said to the chief captain: May I say something to you? And he said: Do you know Greek?*- The soldier was so persuaded that his assumption about Paul being an Egyptian was correct that he was shocked. A theme of the whole incident is the dogmatism arrived at from false inference and illogical deduction and presupposition, by both Jews and Gentiles.

21:38 *Are you not that Egyptian, who some time ago stirred up sedition and led out into the wilderness four thousand men that were terrorists?*- Josephus mentions this incident and gives the figure of 30,000 (*Wars* 2.17, 6 and 13,5; *Antiquities* 20. 8,10). This is reason enough to accuse Josephus of gross exaggeration and to question his reliability.

21:39 *But Paul said: I am a Jew, of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I beg you, please let me speak to the people*- This seems rather proud, especially when we learn that Tarsus was famed for being a proud city. She inscribed upon her

coins: “Tarsus, the Metropolis, First, Fairest and Best” (W. Barclay, *Ambassador For Christ* p. 25).

21:40 *And when he had given him leave, Paul, standing on the stairs, beckoned with the hand to the people; and when there was made a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, saying*- The silence may have been from surprise that Paul had been given this privilege of addressing the crowd. We sense Paul’s great zeal to use every and any opportunity to get the gospel over to the largest possible audiences. We would likely not have risked more exposure and provocation.

ACTS CHAPTER 22

22:1 *Brothers and fathers, hear the defence which I now make to you*- This was the very phrase used by Stephen in Acts 7:2, with Saul onlooking. As noted on Heb. 1:1 and throughout Acts 7, Stephen's speech converted Paul, and he alludes to it throughout his life. He saw that he was now fellowshipping Stephen's sufferings. But we note too his respect toward the Jews, who had done so much evil to him. He so wished to save them, and the desire to save others is rooted in a basic respect of them as persons. Another reading is possible, however. To address the Sanhedrin as “brethren” has been described as “almost recklessly defiant” (William Barclay, *Ambassador For Christ* p. 132). The usual address was: “Rulers of the people and elders of Israel”. But Paul instead treated them as his equals.

22:2 *And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they were even more quiet; and he said*- It might seem that it was impossible that Paul, having been beaten and in chains, guarded by soldiers, could make a hand gesture, say a few words in Hebrew, and quell a raging crowd (Acts 21:31-34; 22:2). Yet it was because he spoke to them in Hebrew, in their own language and in their own terms, that somehow the very power and realness of his personality had such an effect. It reminds us of how the Lord could send crowds away, make them sit down…because of His identity with them, His supreme bridge building.

22:3 *I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel*- It is quite possible that Paul heard most of the speeches recorded in the Gospels, and saw many of the miracles. The reason is as follows. Every faithful Jew would have been in Jerusalem to keep the feasts three times per year. Jesus and Paul were therefore together in Jerusalem three times / year, throughout Christ's ministry. It can be demonstrated that many of the miracles and speeches of Jesus occurred around the feast times, in Jerusalem. Therefore I estimate that at least 70% of the content of the Gospels (including John) Paul actually saw and heard 'live'. Another indirect reason for believing that Paul had met and heard Jesus preaching is from the fact that Paul describes himself as having been brought up as a Pharisee, because his father had been one (Acts 23:6). Martin Hengel has shown extensive evidence to believe that the Pharisees only really operated in Palestine, centred in Jerusalem, where Paul was “brought up” at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Hengel also shows that “brought up” refers to training from a young child. So whilst Paul was born in Tarsus, he was really a Jerusalem boy. Almost certainly he would have heard and known much about Jesus; his father may even have been amongst those who persecuted the Lord. See Martin Hengel, *The Pre-Christian Paul* (London: S.C.M., 1991).

Instructed according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, even as you all are this day- Paul says he was "*taught* [NEV "instructed"] according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers" by Gamaliel, receiving the

highest wisdom possible in the Jewish world; but he uses the same word as Stephen in Acts 7:22, describing how Moses was *"learned*" in all the wisdom of Egypt. Remember he heard Stephen's speech live. Paul felt that he too had been through Moses' experience- once mighty in words as the rising star of the Jewish world, but now like Moses he had left all that behind in order to try to save a new Israel from Judaism and paganism. As Moses *consciously* rejected the opportunity for leading the 'world' of Egypt, so Paul probably turned down the chance to be High Priest. God maybe confirmed both him and Moses in their desire for humility by giving them a speech impediment (the "thorn in the flesh" which Paul was "given", 2 Cor. 12:7?).

22:4- see on Acts 9:2 *Bring them bound to Jerusalem* and Acts 26:10,11.

And I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women- Paul is admitting here to murder, which would have been extrajudicial. He could surely have been prosecuted for this, but he makes the admission because he was so deeply convicted of his sins. And it was this which gave his witness such credibility, and made the audience know in their hearts that what he was saying was all true- hence their mad anger. He admits his actions were against women too... and the memories of the victims would have flooded his mind as he made the admission.

22:5 *As also the high priest does bear me witness, and all the council of the elders. From whom also I received letters to the brothers and journeyed to Damascus, to bring them also that were there to Jerusalem in bonds to be punished*- Paul was called "brother" even before his baptism, and even after his baptism, he refers to the Jews as his "brethren" (Acts 22:5,13). Of course, he knew all about the higher status and meaning of brotherhood in Christ; but he wasn't so pedantic as to not call the Jews his 'brethren'. He clearly didn't have any of the guilt-by-association paranoia, and the associated standoffishness it brings with it, which have so hamstrung our witness to the world.

22:6 *And it came to pass, that as I made my journey and drew near to Damascus, about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me*- In the same way as Paul would've been trained to write and present an encomium (as he does in Gal. 1), so he would've been trained in the rhetoric of how to make a public defence speech. There was a set format for defending oneself, as there was for the encomium. And in his defence speeches recorded in Acts, Paul again follows the accepted order of defence speeches- but his *content* was absolutely radical for the first century mind. Quinitilian in his *Instructions To Orators* laid down five sections for such a speech- and Paul follows that pattern exactly. There was to be the exordium [opening statement], a statement of facts (*narratio*), the proof (*probatio*), the refutation (*refutatio*) and the concluding peroration. The speeches were intended to repeatedly remind the judges of what in fact was the core issue- and Paul does this when he stresses that he is on trial (*krinomai*) for "the hope of the resurrection of the dead" (Acts 23:6; 24:21; 26:6,7,8). Yet as with his use of the encomium format, Paul makes some unusual twists in the whole presentation. It was crucial in the set piece defence speech to provide proof and authorized witness. Paul provides proof for the resurrection in himself; and insists that the invisible Jesus, a peasant from Galilee, had appeared to him and "appointed [him] to bear witness" (Acts 26:16; 22:15). That was laughable in a court of law. Yet the erudite, cultured, educated Paul in all soberness made that claim. Aristotle had defined two types of proof- "necessary proof" (*tekmerion*), from which irrefutable, conclusive conclusions could be drawn; and "probable proof", i.e. circumstantial evidence (*eikota / semeia*). Paul's claim to have seen Jesus on the Damascus road was of course circumstantial evidence, so far as the

legal system was concerned- it could not be proven. Yet Paul presents this as his *tekmerion*, quoting it as the irrefutable proof in his defence (Acts 22:6-12; 26:12-16). Luke elsewhere uses this word and its synonym *pistis* to describe the evidence for the Lord's resurrection (Acts 1:3; 17:31). Paul's point of course was that the personal transformation of himself was indeed *tekmerion*, irrefutable proof, that Christ had indeed risen from the dead. And so it should be in the witness which *our* lives make to an unbelieving world. Significantly, Paul speaks of the great light which his companions saw at his conversion, and his subsequent blindness, as *eikota*, the circumstantial evidence, rather than the irrefutable proof (Acts 22:6,9,11; 26:13). Now to the forensic mind, this was more likely his best, 'irrefutable' proof, rather than saying that the irrefutable proof was simply he himself. Yet he puts that all the other way around. Thus when it came to stating 'witnesses', Paul doesn't appeal to his travelling companions on the road to Damascus. These would've surely been the obvious primary witnesses. Instead, he claims that "all Judeans" and even his own accusers "if they are willing to testify", are in fact witnesses of his character transformation (Acts 22:5; 26:4,5). The point is of tremendous power to us who lamely follow after Paul... it is our personal witness which is *the* supreme testimony to the truth of Christ; not 'science proves the Bible', archaeology, the stones crying out, prophecy fulfilling etc. It is we ourselves who are ultimately the prime witnesses to God's truth on this earth. All this was foolishness in the judgmental eyes of first century society, just as it is today. Our preaching of the Gospel is likewise apparent foolishness to our hearers, like Paul it is not "in plausible words of wisdom" (1 Cor. 2:1-7), even though, again like Paul, many of us could easily try to make it humanly plausible. Paul's credibility as a preacher was in his very lack of human credibility- he was hungry and thirsty, poorly dressed, homeless, having to do manual work (1 Cor. 4:11; 2 Cor. 11:27); he was the powerless one, beaten, imprisoned and persecuted (1 Cor. 4:8-12; 2 Cor. 6:4,5). It's hard for us to imagine how unimpressive and repulsive this was in first century society. And yet it was exactly this which gave him power and credibility as a preacher of Christ's Gospel. And he sets before us a challenging pattern.

22:7 *And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me: Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*- Paul's description of himself on the Damascus road falling down and seeing a Heavenly vision, surrounded by men who did not understand, is framed in exactly the language of Gethsemane (Acts 22:7 = Mt. 26:39); as if right at his conversion, Paul was brought to realize the spirit of Gethsemane. His connection with the Gethsemane spirit continued. He describes himself as "sorrowful" (2 Cor. 6:10), just as Christ was then (Mt. 26:37). His description of how he prayed the same words three times without receiving an answer (2 Cor. 12:8) is clearly linked to Christ's experience in the garden (Mt. 26:44); and note that in that context he speaks of being “buffeted” by Satan’s servants, using the very word used of the Lord being “buffeted” straight after Gethsemane (2 Cor. 12:7 = Mt. 26:67).

22:8 *And I answered: Who are you Lord? And he said to me: I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you persecute*- The fact Paul addressed Jesus as "Lord" suggests he knew the answer already, and had subconsciously recognized Jesus of Nazareth as Lord. For the presentation of Him as "Lord" had been a major part of the early witness of Peter, which Paul would surely have heard. Paul was kicking against the pricks of conscience; he knew, therefore, that Jesus was Lord. And amongst the crowds of apparently disinterested sceptics we encounter in our witness, there are surely people who are in a similar position; hiding behind their blasphemy and

inappropriate jokes about the Lord Jesus the fact that they have been convicted of Him as Lord in some deep part of their subconscious. See on :10.

22:9 *And they that were with me saw indeed the light, but they did not understand the voice of him that spoke to me*- They heard a voice (9:7), but didn't understand the content of the words spoken. The idea may be that it was in a language which Paul was empowered to understand, but they were not. But these men were like Paul, haters of the Christians. The same Greek phrase for "not understand" is used of how the Jews did "not understand" the message of the Lord because they chose not to (Mt. 13:13; Jn. 8:43,47; they did not understand Moses so they would not understand the risen Lord, Lk. 16:31; Nicodemus could not understand the voice of the Spirit, Jn. 3:8). And Paul's audience did likewise; they refused to hear or understand further and screamed for him to stop speaking the word to them (:22 s.w.). Perhaps they too could have potentially been converted, but they refused to understand.

22:10 *And I said: What shall I do Lord? And the Lord said to me: Arise and go into Damascus, and there you shall be told all things which are appointed for you to do*- The repetition of the word "Lord" suggests that Paul was convicted of Jesus as Lord already before His appearance to him; see on :8. And we note that Ananias also addressed Him as "Lord" (9:13). We wonder why the Lord did not immediately tell Paul what he was to do. The answer is as in many such questions- He prefers to work through some human mechanism wherever possible. The encounter with Ananias was all part of the required conversion process; for Ananias was a well-respected Jew who had also come to Jesus. And Paul needed to meet him and hear from such a person the need for baptism. In 9:12 we learn that Paul had seen a vision of Ananias restoring his sight; perhaps that vision was whilst with the Lord on the Damascus road.

22:11 *And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand by those that were with me, I came into Damascus*- I suggested on :9 that the men with Paul could also have been converted. They saw the same light (:9), but were not blinded by it. The implication is that Paul was more sensitive to it than they were. And they would later have reflected how it was they who effectively led Paul to Jesus by leading him to Damascus.

22:12 *And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well reported of by all the Jews that dwelt there*- Ananias was a committed Christian, but was carefully obedient to the law. His faith and understanding was therefore immature, but this did not mean the Lord didn't accept him as a significant believer and tool in His purpose. There were clearly Jews within Damascus who were collaborating with Paul; but even they had to respect Ananias. He was therefore just the right person to be used for Paul's conversion; see on :10. Or perhaps it was the case that all the Jews in Damascus were respectful of Jewish Christians like Ananias, and Paul and his group were imposing upon them an aggression which was not what they themselves were persuaded of.

22:13 *Came to me; and standing by me, he said to me: Brother Saul, receive your sight. And in that very moment I looked upon him*- Paul had received a vision of Ananias doing this (9:12). So when news came that Ananias had come to visit him, he knew this was all according to plan; hence he comments that "in that very moment" the healing occurred. Perhaps Ananias was one of those Paul planned to murder or imprison.

22:14 *And he said: The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will, and to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth*- Paul wishes that the Colossians would be “filled with the knowledge of his will” (Col. 1:9), just as at his

conversion he had been chosen so “that you should know his will” (Acts 22:14). He wanted them to share the radical nature of conversion which he had gone through; the sense of life turned around; of new direction…

22:15 *For you shall be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard*- There was some content therefore to what Paul had "seen and heard". Paul was jubilant that the prophecy was coming true right before their eyes and ears, as he now witnessed to so many of what he had seen and heard. "Witness" continues the reference to Stephen; for the word is used of him in :20. As noted on :1, Paul was fully aware that he was to follow in Stephen's footsteps. What a bond those two shall have in God's Kingdom!

22:16 *And now why do you delay?*- The urgent appeal for repentance was quite a feature of their witness (2:38; 5:31; 7:51; 11:18; 17:30; 18:18; 20:21; 26:20; Heb. 6:1). There needs to be a greater stress on repentance in our preaching, 20 centuries later. This is why baptism was up front in their witness, for it is for the forgiveness of sins; thus in 22:16 they appealed for repentance and baptism in the same breath.

Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name- The language of washing away of sins refers to God’s forgiveness of us on account of our baptism into Christ. In some passages we are spoken of as washing away our sins by our faith and repentance (Acts 22:16; Rev. 7:14; Jer. 4:14; Is. 1:16); in others God is seen as the one who washes away our sins (Ez. 16:9; Ps. 51:2,7; 1 Cor. 6:11). This nicely shows how that if we do our part in being baptised, God will then wash away our sins.

22:17 *And it came to pass, that when I had returned to Jerusalem and while I prayed in the temple, I fell into a trance*- The whole argument was that Paul had brought Gentiles into the temple. He now says that he had frequented the temple, and whilst praying there he had received a vision telling him to preach to Gentiles (:21), although "far hence" from the Jerusalem temple. Whilst answering the false allegation that he had brought Gentiles into the temple, Paul was associating Gentiles with the temple. This could be read as an unnecessary provocation on his part. But he wanted them to see that the God whom they believed abode in the Jerusalem temple had a program of including Gentiles amongst His people. Psychologically, we would have maybe thought it was better to just avoid the connection between Gentiles and the temple. But we sense Paul is fearless and utterly prepared to follow Stephen to death; he did not count his life dear unto himself, as witnessed by all the times the brethren had to bundle him out of a town before he was lynched, knowing that of himself, he would have remained and endured it.

22:18 *And saw him saying to me: Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not welcome your testimony concerning me*- And yet Paul always appealed first of all to the Jews, despite his emotional turning unto the Gentiles at one stage. Even by Acts 28:17, he started preaching “to those that were of the Jews first” (RVmg.). The principle of “to the Jews first” was paramount and universal in the thinking of Paul. And despite the Holy Spirit repeatedly warning him not to go to Jerusalem (Acts 20:22,23; 21:11), he went there. He hoped against hope that even in the light of the foreknowledge that Israel would reject the Gospel, somehow they might change.

22:19- see on Acts 26:10,11.

And I said: Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those that believed in you- Paul recounts in Acts 22:19-21 how first of all he felt so ashamed of

his past that he gently resisted this command to preach: "I said, Lord... I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed... and he said unto me, Depart... unto the Gentiles" . The stress on “every synagogue” (Acts 22:19; 26:11) must be connected with the fact that he chose to preach *in the synagogues*. He was sent to persecute every synagogue in Damascus, and yet he purposefully preached in every synagogue there (Acts 9:2,20). His motivation was rooted in his deep recognition of sinfulness. Likewise Peter preached a hundred metres or so from the very place where he denied the Lord.

22:20 *And when the blood of Stephen your witness was shed, I also was standing by and approved, and guarded the robes of those that slew him*- Consented. Paul warned the Romans that those who “have pleasure” in (Gk. ‘to feel gratified with’) sinful people will be punished just as much as those who commit the sins (Rom. 1:32). But he uses the very word used for his own ‘consenting’ unto the death of Stephen; standing there in consent, although not throwing a stone (Acts 8:1; 22:20). He realized that only by grace had that major sin of his been forgiven; and in that spirit of humility and self-perception of himself, as a serious sinner saved by grace alone, did he appeal to his brethren to consider their ways. ‘Feeling gratified with’ such sins as are in this list is what the entertainment industry is so full of. We can’t watch, read and listen to this kind of thing by choice without in some sense being vicariously involved in it- and this seems to be exactly what Paul has in mind when he warns that those who feel gratified in those sins shall share in their judgment. This is a sober warning, relevant, powerful and cutting to our generation far more than any other. For given the internet and media, we can so easily feel gratified in others’ sins.

22:21 *And he said to me: Depart! For I will send you far from here to the Gentiles*- As noted on :17, Paul is making the point that the God of the temple wanted Gentile inclusion; but he had been sent to achieve this "far from here"; he had not brought Gentiles into the literal temple, but into the symbolic, more essential one.

22:22 *And they listened until this word, and then they lifted up their voice and said: Away with such a fellow from the earth! For it is not fitting that he should live*- As noted on :17 and :21, the association of Gentiles with the temple was too much for them. "They" had a singular "voice"; they were united in hatred. This is why Luke likes to draw a parallel between how both the Christians and their enemies were of "one accord". We are caught up in a spirit of unity either for or against the Lord. The Jews had the power to ask for the death penalty for someone who desecrated the temple, and they perceived that Paul's comment here as ground upon which to demand that penalty; they correctly understood him to mean that he had been sent to the Gentiles to include them in a more figurative temple.

22:23 *And as they cried out and threw off their cloaks and threw dust into the air*- The throwing off of their cloaks was exactly what had happened when Stephen was stoned to death; and those cloaks were laid at Paul's feet (7:58). As noted on :1 and elsewhere, the Lord was arranging for Paul to go through in essence the situation with Stephen. Those old enough to remember Stephen's stoning would have later reflected at how a higher hand was replicating Stephen's experience in Paul's; and this would have been an appeal to them for their repentance.

22:24 *The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the fortress, bidding that he should be examined by scourging, that he might know for what cause they so shouted against him*- This indicated a hunch that Paul was not really telling the complete story, and there was some other agenda that he had not explained, given the extent of Jewish anger with him. Luke emphasizes how the Roman authorities were constantly nonplussed at the extent of Jewish opposition to Paul (e.g. 18:15; 25:19).

But Paul had told the whole story; what the Romans were witnessing was the power of a bad conscience, and how the upsetting of traditionally held ideas unleashes irrational anger.

22:25 *And when they had tied him up with the thongs, Paul said to the centurion that stood by: Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?*- Paul seems to enjoy putting the wind up the soldiers by waiting until they had bound him for torture before asking, surely in a sarcastic way, whether it was lawful for them to beat a Roman citizen. The fact he asked the question when he knew full well the answer is surely indicative of his sarcasm. The chief captain commented, under his breath it would seem, that it had cost him a fortune in backhanders to get Roman citizenship. Paul picked up his words and commented, with head up, we can imagine: "But *I* was free born"- I was born a citizen, never needed to give a penny in backhanders to get it either. Surely there is an arrogance here which is unbecoming. And it was revealed at a time when he was in dire straits himself, and after already being in Christ some time. It may indicate that he was tempted to adopt a brazen, almost fatalistic aggression towards his captors and persecutors- what Steinbeck aptly described as "the terrible, protective dignity of the powerless". One can well imagine how such a mindset would start to develop in Paul after suffering so much at the hands of men. Compare this incident with the way he demands the magistrates to come *personally* and release him from prison, because they have unfairly treated him (Acts 16:37).

22:26 *And when the centurion heard it, he went to the chief captain and told him, saying: What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman*- We read (almost in passing) that Paul five times was beaten with 39 stripes (2 Cor. 11:22-27). Yet from Acts 22:26 it is evident that Paul as a Roman citizen didn't need not have endured this. On each of those five occasions he could have played the card of his Roman citizenship to get him out of it; but he didn't. It wouldn't have been wrong to; but five times out of six, he chose the highest level. It may be that he chose not to mention his Roman citizenship so as to enable him access to the synagogues for preaching purposes. The one time Paul didn't play that card, perhaps he was using the principle of Jephthah's vow- that you can vow to your own hurt but chose a lower level and break it.

22:27 *And the chief captain came and said to him: Tell me, are you a Roman? And he said: Yes*- There was no tangible proof that a person was a Roman citizen in moments like this. Paul was being asked to affirm that he was, and he does.

22:28 *And the chief captain answered: With a great sum of money I obtained this citizenship. And Paul said: But I am Roman born*- The chief captain may be admitting that he paid a large bribe for citizenship, for it could not normally be bought for money. Paul's openness regarding his extrajudicial murdering of people (see on :4) elicited a similar openness from this captain. And our openness can likewise elicit the same from others, as we move towards authentic relationship with each other.

22:29 *Then those that were about to torture him withdrew from him immediately; and the chief captain also was afraid when he knew that he was a Roman, because he had bound him*- The captain only "knew that he was a Roman" on the basis of Paul's verbal statement. There was obviously something about Paul and the whole situation that had an uncanny ring of truth to it.

22:30 *But the next day, desiring to know with certainty why he was accused by the*

Jews, he released him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to come together, and brought Paul down and set him before them- As noted on :24, there was a struggle to understand how exactly religious ideas could elicit such a rage against a person, if there was truly no other aspect to the case. What the Romans were dealing with was the power of bad conscience; and it was made the worse by Paul admitting he had had such a bad conscience, but had resolved it by surrender to Christ. The gathering together of the chief priests and council was all reminiscent of the scene at the Lord's trial and condemnation. All the way through Paul's life, and our lives, we are being brought to fellowship the Lord's sufferings. Being "set before them" recalls what had been done not only to the Lord (Lk. 22:66) but also to Peter and John (Acts 4) and Stephen (6:12). In our fellowshipping of the Lord's sufferings, we are led also to understand other believers and to pass through in essence what they did. And this in practice becomes the basis of our fellowship with them.

ACTS CHAPTER 23

23:1 *And Paul looked straight at the council, and said: Brothers*- To address the Sanhedrin as "brothers" has been described as "almost recklessly defiant" (William Barclay, *Ambassador For Christ* p. 132). The usual address was: "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel". But Paul instead treated them as his equals.

I have lived before God in all good conscience until this day- The Lord Jesus Himself informs us that Paul kicked against the pricks of his own conscience (Acts 9:5). And in any case, Paul elsewhere says that his good conscience actually means very little, because it is God's justification, not self-justification through a clear conscience, which is ultimately important (1 Cor. 4:4 RSV). It seems Paul was aware of his weak side when he comments how despite his own clear conscience, God may see him otherwise (1 Cor. 4:4 RSV); and surely this was in his mind. So how true were Paul's words in Acts 23:1? It seems that he said them in bitter self-righteousness. Soon afterwards he changes his life story to say that he had always *tried* to have a good conscience (24:16).

The Greek word translated "conscience", *sun-eidesis*, means literally a co-perception. It implies that there are two types of perception within the believer- human perception, and spiritual self-perception. The conscience that is cleansed in Christ, that is at peace, will be a conscience that keeps those two perceptions, of the real self and of the persona, in harmony. What we know and perceive humanly, is in harmony with we spiritually perceive. Our conscience, our co-perception, our real self, makes sense of the human perceptions and interprets them in a spiritual way. So, a young man sees an attractive girl. His human perception signals certain things to his brain- to lust, covet, etc. But his co-perception, his conscience, his real self, handles all that, and sees the girl's beauty for just simply what it is- beauty. Job before his 'conversion' paralleled his eye and his ear: "Mine eye hath seen all this, mine ear hath heard and understood it" (Job 13:1). He was so sure that what he heard was what he saw; he was sure that his perceptions were operating correctly. But later, he comes to see a difference between his eye and his ear. He says that he had only heard of God by the ear; but only now, he says, "mine eye seeth thee" (Job 42:5). He had heard words, but, he realized, he'd not properly 'seen' or perceived. Finally, he had a properly functioning 'conscience', a co-perception. What he saw, was what he really heard. Our conscience is not going to jump out of us and stand and judge us at the day of judgment. There is one thing that will judge us, the word of the Lord (Jn. 12:48), not how far we have lived according to our conscience. It's therefore unreliable (1 Cor.

4:4). And yet there is Bible teaching concerning the need to live in accordance with our 'conscience', and the joy which is possible for the believer who has a clear conscience (e.g. Acts 24:16; Rom. 14:18-22; 2 Cor. 1:12; 1 Jn. 3:21). This must mean, in the context, the conscience which God's word has developed in us- it cannot refer to 'conscience' in the sense of our natural, inbuilt sense of right and wrong; because according to the Bible, this is hopelessly flawed. The fact the "conscience" is "cleansed" by Christ's sacrifice (Heb. 9:14; 10:22) proves that the Biblical 'conscience' is not the natural sense of right and wrong within our nature; for our nature can never be 'purged' or 'cleansed', the believer will always have those promptings within him to do wrong. The cleansed, purged conscience refers to the new man that is created within the believer at baptism. This new 'conscience' is not just a sense of guilt which is invoked on account of not living an obedient life; it is also a conscience which positively compels us *to do* something, not just threatens us with a pang of guilt if we commit a sin.

23:2 *And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to strike him on the mouth*- The claim to a good conscience before God was seen as blasphemy. This provides a window onto understanding how radical were Paul's teachings to the Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem that their conscience was washed and cleansed in Christ, and they could with boldness enter the Holiest. The idea that we can really be totally right with God in Christ is repellent to those who seek justification by works and legalism. This striking was another fellowshipping of the Lord's sufferings before the same kind of crowd (Jn. 18:22).

23:3 *Then Paul said to him: God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?*- Paul's words here were surely said in the heat of the moment. Yet even in hot blood, not carefully thinking through his words (for this doesn't seem the most appropriate thing to come out with!), Paul was still unconsciously referring to the Gospels (Mt. 23:27 in this case). Having started on the wrong footing by this statement, it was perhaps this arrogant mood which lead him to curse the High Priest as a "whited wall" (23:3-6). It seems to me that Paul realized his mistake, and wriggled out of it by saying that he hadn't seen that it was the High Priest because of his poor eyesight- even though Paul would have recognized his voice well enough. Another possibility is that "I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest" is to be read as Paul claiming that he didn't recognize this high priest, as Christ was his high priest, therefore his cursing was justified. But he thinks on his feet, and suggests that he is being persecuted only because of his belief in a resurrection- with the desired result ensuing, that there was a division between his accusers.

23:4 *And they that stood by said: Do you revile God's high priest?*- Those who stood by were presumably the Jewish temple guards, and they would have been moving towards physically beating him as they said those words.

23:5 *And Paul said: I did not recognize, brothers, that he was high priest. For it is written, you shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people*- It was perhaps Paul's anger and arrogance which lead him to curse the High Priest as a "whited wall". It seems to me that Paul realized his mistake, and wriggled out of it by saying that he hadn't seen that it was the High Priest because of his poor eyesight- even though Paul would have recognized his voice well enough. Another possibility is that Paul is claiming that he didn't recognize this high priest, as Christ was his high priest, therefore his cursing was justified. But he thinks on his feet, and suggests that he is being persecuted only because of his belief in a resurrection- with the desired result ensuing, that there was a division between his accusers. The quotation of "You shall

not speak evil of a ruler" from Ex. 22:28 is parallel with the statement that God was not to be blasphemed. The Mosaic judges were judging on behalf of God. Clearly, Paul's judges were not doing anything of the sort. And yet Paul goes along with the misapplication of the verse in order to demonstrate his familiarity with the law.

23:6- see on Acts 22:3; Acts 22:6.

But when Paul noticed that one part was Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council- Paul had to cry out or "shriek" over the noise of anger at his having cursed the high priest.

I am a Pharisee, son of a Pharisee! Concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question- He says things like “I am a Pharisee” (Acts 23:6), not “I was a Pharisee and now repudiate their false doctrines”. Paul’s general attitude was akin to that of his Lord, in that he was not hyper careful to close off any opportunities to criticize him. This fear of and sensitivity to criticism is something which seems to have stymied parts of the body of Christ. Paul here was behaving very humanly; the Pharisees present did not believe the Lord had risen, but Paul expressed his faith in this fact in terms of his being a Pharisee. And of course Paul was now no longer a Pharisee. But in a few nanoseconds, his sharp mind thought up a way out of his problem by hinting that he was victim of a Sadducee plot because of his previous Pharisee connections. This was untrue, but Paul was desperate for a way out.

Paul saw himself as two people. Consider how this dualism is to be found in many places:

The Natural Paul	The Spiritual Paul
Paul could say: “I am a Pharisee...I am a man which am a Jew” (Acts 23:6; 21:13,39; 22:3; 2 Cor. 11:22) Circumcision and being Jewish has ‘much advantage’ (Rom. 3:1,2). “Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel” (Phil. 3:5). He argues that all Jews are “the seed of Abraham”, including himself, by birth (2 Cor. 11:22).	But he also stresses that “they are not all Israel who are of Israel” because only “the children of the promise”, those baptized into Christ, are counted as the seed (Gal. 3:16,27-29; Rom. 9:8). The spiritual Paul is neither Jew nor Gentile. The ‘gain’ of being personally Jewish Paul counted as loss (Phil. 3:3-7). His circumcision meant nothing (Rom. 2:29; 1 Cor. 7:19). “We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit... and have no confidence in the flesh [i.e. the fact of literal circumcision, see context]” (Phil. 3:7)
“We who are Jews by nature and not sinners of the	This contrasts sharply with Paul’s whole message that in Christ, there is neither Jew nor

Gentiles" (Gal. 2:15)	Gentile, and both groups are all equally sinners (Rom. 3:9,23). He speaks of "theirs is the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship… theirs are the patriarchs" (Rom. 9:4,5). He clearly dissociates himself from Jewry. He had to *become like a Jew* in order to save them, although he was Jewish (2 Cor. 9:20). He carefully kept parts of the law (Acts 18:18; 21:26; 1 Cor. 8:13). To the Jew he became [again] as a Jew; and to the Gentiles he became as a Gentile (1 Cor. 9:20). He acted "To them that are without law, as without law...". He was "dead to the law" (Gal. 2:19) He was a Jew but considered he had renounced it, but he became as a Jew to them to help them. He saw no difference between Jew and Gentile (Gal. 3:27-29) but he consciously acted in a Jewish or Gentile way to help those who still perceived themselves after the flesh. "...(being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ)" (1 Cor. 9:21).
I am carnal (Rom. 7:14)	But in Christ he was not carnal (1 Cor. 3:1 s.w.)
No flesh may glory before God (1 Cor. 1:29)	Paul, in his spiritual man, as counted righteous before God, could glory (Rom. 15:17).
"Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect"	"Let us therefore, as many as be perfect…" (Phil. 3:12,15). In 1 Cor. 13:10, he considers he is 'perfect', and has put away the things of childhood. Thus he saw his spiritual maturity only on account of his being in Christ; for he himself was not "already perfect", he admitted.
"I laboured more abundantly than they all...	... *yet not I*, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor. 15:10)
God set the apostles *first* in the	God set the apostles *last* in the ecclesia (1 Cor. 4:9)

ecclesia (1 Cor. 12:28)	
"I live...	... *yet not I*, but Christ liveth in me [the new 'me']... I [the old 'me'] am crucified with Christ" (Gal 2:20)
"I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office" (Rom. 11:13). He considered himself rightfully amongst the very chiefest apostles (2 Cor. 12:11).	He "supposed", the same word translated "impute" as in 'imputed righteousness', that he was amongst the chiefest apostles (2 Cor. 11:5). He knew this was how his Lord counted him. But he felt himself as less than the least of all saints (Eph. 3:8). "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:9-10).

23:7 *And when he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided*- This was exactly as Paul had intended, in order to get him out of the rod he had made for his own back by cursing the high priest (see on :5).

23:8 *For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit; but the Pharisees believe in both*- Perhaps Paul had developed the idea of the Lord's resurrection by speaking of the appearance of Angels there, and of how the risen Lord is present through His Spirit in the lives of believers. Or perhaps he emphasized that he knew the Lord was risen because the Spirit had revealed this to him; and the Lord's appearance to him on the Damascus road had been perceived by some as the appearance of an Angel in glorious light (hence the words of the Pharisees in :9). All the speeches in Acts are abbreviated. Paul may have framed his words in ways which he knew would provoke the differences between the Sadducees and Pharisees.

23:9 *And there arose a great clamour; and some of the scribes of the Pharisees stood up and argued, saying: We find no evil in this man. What if a spirit has spoken to him, or an angel?*- As noted on :6 and :8, Paul expressed his faith in the Lord's resurrection in terms which made out that the whole problem was because he believed in resurrection, Angels and spirits. He had no belief in disembodied spirits, but he expressed his convictions in terms which suggested he did. This was Paul at his most human, desperate to get out of the problems caused by his anger and arrogance in cursing the high priest.

23:10 *And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing that Paul would be torn in pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the fortress*- The Pharisees were presumably physically protecting Paul from the Sadducees. Again we see the power of religious ideas, and the anger unleashed when traditional positions are questioned; see on 22:30. The trial may have been held in the hall within the temple precinct where Gentiles were not allowed to enter, but which was in full view of the Roman soldiers in the Antonia tower. Hence the watching soldiers rushed down into the holy

space to rescue Paul. And thus Gentiles entered the temple as a result of Paul's witness. This very fact made the entire case against him (of having brought Gentiles into the temple) rather baseless.

23:11 *And the following night the Lord stood by him, and said: Take courage, for as you have testified concerning me in Jerusalem, so also you must testify in Rome*- Whilst Paul comes over as angry and fearless in cursing the high priest, after the event he was weak and fearful of what would become of him. To such an extent that the Lord appeared directly to him. The comment that Paul would also testify in court in Rome as he had in Jerusalem would have been reflected on by Paul. His appeal to Caesar was therefore his way of as it were forcing the fulfilment of these words.

23:12 *And when it was day, the Jews banded together and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul*- They had been up all night planning Paul's murder; and Paul had sensed that, for that same night the Lord had appeared to Paul to encourage him (:11).

23:13 *And more than forty persons participated in this conspiracy*- These men would have been motivated by the account given them by the Sadducees of the words said in court that day. Josephus mentions that ten Jews made a similar vow in attempting to murder Herod. But forty of them did so to kill Paul, such was the power of a bad conscience and religious fanaticism.

23:14 *And they came to the chief priests and the elders, and said: We have bound ourselves under a great curse, to taste nothing until we have killed Paul*- Such vows unto death could be lifted by the elders, according to the Talmud. They clearly intended to kill Paul quickly.

23:15 *Now then, you with the council petition the chief captain to bring him down to you, as though you would judge his case more exactly; and we, before he comes near, will be ready to slay him*- Knowing that he would be under guard, they were willing to give their lives to end Paul's life. This is how deeply the power of jealousy can work, especially when religious conscience has been touched. The fanaticism of some Christians today to eliminate false teachers [as they perceive them] is in the same spirit.

23:16 *But Paul's sister's son heard of their ambush, and he went and entered into the fortress and told Paul*- The ambush plan was surely kept as secret as possible. We can therefore assume that this young man was close to the Pharisees, seeing Paul was from a Pharisee family. He would have been involved enough with them to be party to this top secret knowledge, so we can assume he was not a publicly committed Christian. But still he played a part in saving Paul's life. He was presumably known as Paul's relative seeing he was allowed access to Paul. Perhaps this boy like Paul had been sent from Tarsus to be schooled in Pharisaic Judaism in Jerusalem, and due to mixing in those extreme circles he had heard of the plot.

23:17 *And Paul summoned one of the centurions, and said: Take this young man to the chief captain; for he has something to tell him*- "Young man" is vague, but from the way the captain took his hand (:19) we could assume he was quite young, a boy. Paul had been assured that his life would be preserved (:11); but he still did what was humanly prudent to save his life at this point. We note again how the Lord works through weak human mechanisms in order to work out His saving purpose; just as the boy who provided the loaves and fishes was necessary for the great miracle to be performed.

23:18 *So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said: Paul the prisoner summoned me, and asked me to bring this young man, who has something to say to you*- Perhaps the rather simplistic, almost childish title "Paul the prisoner" stuck

in Paul's mind, for he uses about himself with pride in his later letters (Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 2 Tim. 1:8; Phil. 1:7).

23:19 *And the chief captain took him by the hand, and taking him aside asked him privately: What is it you have to tell me?*- As suggested on :17, the taking by the hand would suggest the young man was no more than a boy.

23:20 *He said: The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire more fully about him*- We have read earlier in this chapter of how "the Jews" were bitterly divided over the case of Paul. Perhaps the idea is that they had now agreed amongst themselves, all convinced that for whatever reason and regardless of theological issues, Paul had to be killed.

23:21 *But do not yield to them, for more than forty of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink until they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for your consent to their request*- The forty men who had made the oath had now grown to "more than forty". Extremism is contagious. We ought to harness that in a positive sense; for our commitment to the Lord and His principles is a form of extremism in our postmodern world. And it ought to influence our brethren likewise.

23:22 *So the chief captain let the young man go, ordering him: Tell no one you have told these things to me*- We get the impression that the captain really wanted to help Paul. Perhaps he was sorry for him, realizing that Paul was basically innocent but was being hounded to death by an irrational group of people who were simply jealous. Or it could be that he was another closet Christian, or with sympathies that way. We can construct a positive picture of Paul's persistently good treatment at the hands of many of his guards and imprisoners, with the exception of the special case at Philippi. Somehow God worked through all the negatives in order to reveal His own gentleness and care for His suffering servant.

23:23 *And he summoned two of the centurions and said: Make ready two hundred soldiers to go as far as Caesarea, and seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen, at the third hour of the night*- At least 470 soldiers on horseback ("spearmen" = 'cavalry'), were needed to protect Paul from 40 bitter maniacs. It was the sudden movement at 9 PM that night which was effective in resolving the situation; for the Jews were awaiting a response in the morning regarding their request to have another meeting with Paul. They were no expecting him to be moved that evening.

23:24 *And provide mounts for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Felix the governor*- By sending Paul to Felix, the captain was washing his own hands of the problem. Felix was renowned for brutality and according to Tacitus "governed with all the authority of a king, and the baseness and insolence of a slave".

23:25 *And he wrote a letter after this form*- We wonder from where Luke got the text of the letter. It could of course have been given to him by a flash of direct inspiration from God; but as conjectured earlier, it might have been that the captain was sympathetic to Paul and later shared a copy of the letter.

23:26 *Claudius Lysias to the most excellent governor Felix, greetings*- The letter was presumably written in Latin, but we read it here in Greek. "Claudius" was his Roman name, taken on obtaining his citizenship; "Lysias" is a Greek name, so perhaps he was originally from Greece.

23:27 *This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be slain by them, when I intervened with soldiers and rescued him, having learnt that he was a Roman*- Lysias omits to mention that he had almost scourged Paul. He only learnt that Paul was a Roman citizen after rescuing him; so we see Lysias wishing to portray himself as

having behaved with an integrity which was not in fact the case. The motive for rescuing him was presumably because he didn't want a riot in Jerusalem which could easily arise after a lynching.

23:28 *And desiring to know the cause why they accused him, I brought him down to their council*- As noted on 22:30, Lysias was genuinely at a loss as to why the Jews were so vehemently against Paul. Lysias could have asked Paul's side of the story and left it at that, but he obviously thought that under examination by the Jews, some more reasons might emerge. But they didn't- it was the power of a bad conscience, people who subconsciously know that the greatest truth is on the side of another, and who therefore seek to persecute them with untellable rage because of it.

23:29 *I found him to be accused about questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or imprisonment*- The accusation was that he had brought Gentiles into the temple. This was a capital offence. But they had not specifically accused him of that before the Romans; and so Lysias wrote that he had not even been accused of anything that carried the death penalty. The questions of the Jewish law were questions of interpretation of it, with Paul arguing that it pointed forward to the Lord Jesus and the Jews forced to deny it... with their denial making the predictions of Messiah the more true.

23:30 *And when it was told that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you, ordering his accusers also to speak against him before you*- Lysias avoids saying that *he* personally was told, ever seeking to avoid responsibility.

23:31 *So the soldiers, as commanded, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris*- The 35 mile journey from Jerusalem, if started at 9 or 10 p.m. (:23), would have taken all night by horseback.

23:32 *But the next day they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the fortress*- As noted on :31, they would have arrived at Antipatris in the morning. But Caesarea was another 26 miles from Antipatris, although the road was through flat plains, whereas from Jerusalem to Antipatris was through rocky territory ideal for an ambush.

23:33 *And they, when they came to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, presented Paul also before him*- The 26 mile journey from Antipatris to Caesarea would have taken several hours by horseback, and Paul had been travelling all the previous night on horseback. He may not have been accustomed to horseback travel and would have arrived sore and exhausted, in addition to the traumas he had suffered in recent days from those who had got close to killing him by beating.

23:34 *And when he had read it, he asked of what province he was; and when he understood that he was of Cilicia, he said*- "What province" could mean 'what kind of province', i.e. whether senatorial or imperial. Cilicia was an imperial province, attached to the province of Syria. So Felix realized that he had a duty to hear the case.

23:35 *I will hear you fully when your accusers also have come; and he commanded him to be kept in Herod's palace*- The Romans required the accusers to face the accused in person. The *praetorium* referred to the guardroom attached to Herod's palace.

ACTS CHAPTER 24

24:1 *And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus; and these gave evidence to the governor against Paul*- These strict Jews hired a Gentile orator to help make their case. We will note on :2 that he uses language and approaches which no Jew should use. But these Jews, who

would not even eat with gentiles and condemned those who did, sacrificed their own religious principles for the sake of destroying someone who threatened those principles. The same contradictions can be seen in the behaviour of all manner of religious extremists [including Christians]. If principles are taught by God Himself and His word, then these are to be abided by; the end [of defending them] cannot justify breaking them.

24:2 *And when he was called, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying: Seeing that by you we enjoy much peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight*- Tertullus follows the standard pattern of such a speech, beginning by praising the judge, as Paul does. The reference to peace was because Felix had succeeded in ending the fighting between Syrians and Jews in Caesarea, and had greatly reduced the brigand bands who roamed the countryside. "Foresight" is really "providence" (as AV); and alludes to how Caesar and his officials were seen as the source of providence within the imperial cult. Roman coins often carried the slogan *Providentia Caesar*. But God is the source of providence for His people. So to say this ought to have been unthinkable for a true Jew. But the Jews used Tertullus and were happy to give up their scruples for the sake of trying to get Roman power on their side in order to destroy Paul, Yahweh's servant. This is typical of how religious people can so easily forget and contradict the most elemental principles of their religion because of hate obsessions against those who have tweaked their consciences.

24:3 *We accept it in all ways and in all places, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness*- The historical records of Felix, especially those of Tacitus, portray him as very far from "excellent". Such flattery is tedious, and :4 is almost worded so as to give the impression that Tertullus himself knew he was being tedious.

24:4 *But, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us*- The Greek for "courtesy" means kindness / fairness / mildness. The historical Felix was anything but any of these. Paul also opens his speech with the traditional praise of the judge, but he is far more realistic and honest. And it was that which contributed to Paul making Felix tremble.

24:5 *For we have found this man to be a plague, and a mover of insurrections among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes*- Paul was known throughout the Roman world; so the claim of the Roman Jews to have not heard of him was either untrue or meant that they did not recognize Paul. "Sect" has connotations of division; they were accusing Paul of being a sociopathic destroyer of their religion because he was causing division. And every shade of politics, every dictator, every stamp collectors club and religious denomination... have had this reasoning. The most awful abuse of a person who differs is justified on the basis of maintaining unity. Anyone who thinks out of the box or is 'different' is painted as someone who is destroying the group through creating disunity. The great paradox is that those who seek to destroy such people are themselves the ones causing disunity and fragmenting their society.

24:6 *Who moreover tried to profane the temple. We laid hold on him, and we would have judged him according to our law*- Profaning the temple was a capital offence; the Jews could ask the Romans to apply the death penalty for such cases. The Jews had raised riot against Paul by claiming that he had actually profaned the temple by bringing Gentiles into it. He had not done so; and now they reduce the charge to claiming that he had attempted to do so. Paul was falsely accused of profaning the temples in both Ephesus and Jerusalem. This was in order to help him enter into the feelings of Stephen, whom he had also falsely accused of profaning the temple by speaking "against this holy place". As Paul had whipped up Jewish sentiment against

Stephen to the point of murdering him, so was done to him. This is far more than 'what goes around comes around', nor is it mere poetic justice. Situations repeat in our lives so that we may understand the feelings of those against whom we have sinned. This is to deepen our repentance, to ensure our repentance continues; and to prepare us for eternal fellowship with them in the Kingdom. See on :20.

24:7 *But the chief captain Lysias came and with great violence took him out of our hands*- The Jews were complaining that Lysias had over reacted, using violence against the Jews who had "laid hold" on Paul.

24:8 *Commanding his accusers to come before you. You will be able, by examining him yourself, to gain knowledge of all these things of which we accuse him*- The charge of profaning the temple was just one of a number of "things of which we accuse him".

24:9 *And the Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that these things were so*- "The charge" singular presumably refers to that of trying to profane the temple (:6). This was hard to prove to the degree required to get Paul the death sentence. Their whole case was extremely weak, and clearly motivated by chronic personal jealousy. It is the inspired record which speaks in the singular, "the charge", whereas the accusers speak in the plural ("all these things", :8). But they didn't boil down to any specific charge apart from that about the profaning of the temple.

24:10 *And when the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul answered: Inasmuch as I do know you have been for many years a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my defence*- Speeches of this nature had a section devoted to praise of the judge. Tertullus spent a long time attempting to butter up Felix with vain praise. Paul is far more to the point, noting the qualification Felix actually had, rather than attempting to flatter the judge. All the way through we get the impression that Paul was more interested in using the trial in order to make a witness, rather than to just win his case.

24:11 *You can verify that it was no more than twelve days ago that I went up to Jerusalem to worship*- The accusations that Paul had been involved in long term agitation in Jerusalem and the temple could not have been true, since Paul had only arrived in Jerusalem 12 days previously. Paul still uses the Jewish idea of going 'up' to Jerusalem. And yet he elsewhere argues that sacred space is within the heart and of the Spirit, and is not now concerned with localities. But he seems to have had a great respect of the Jerusalem Jews and so wished to convert them; whereas the Lord had intended that his focus instead be upon the Gentiles.

24:12 *And neither in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city did they find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd*- Paul had only been in Jerusalem a few days anyway (:11). It was the Jews, and not him, who had disputed and stirred by crowds, both in Jerusalem and in other cities, as Luke has recorded in Acts. So the emphasis may be upon "*me*"; it was not Paul, but the Jews who had done these things.

24:13 *Neither can they prove to you the things of which they now accuse me*- There was no evidence that Paul had brought any Gentile into the temple, nor that he even intended to do so. Paul comes over as very convinced that he is right and cannot be proven wrong; which was why his chain and time in prison was so frustrating for him, seeing he was so convinced of his innocence.

24:14 *But this I confess to you, that after the Way, which they call a sect, I serve the God of our fathers, believing all things which are according to the law, and which are written in the prophets*- Paul can be sensed here almost panting after the chance to make a witness to the Gospel on a fairly high level, to both Jewish and Roman

leaders. "The Way" was a term used to designate the Christian movement. Paul argues that it was not a divisive sect, because "the Way" involved belief of everything written in the law and prophets. Believing them does not of course mean 'obeying' them; for the issues of interpretation were so critical. People may insist that they "believe" the same source documents or God, but this does not mean that they are all going to be saved. For as demonstrated in this case, the critical issue is belief in Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Belief in God alone will not save. Salvation is in Jesus, Yah's Salvation.

24:15 *Having hope toward God, which these people also look for, that there shall be a resurrection, both of the just and unjust*- Paul stops short of implying that his Jewish enemies would be saved; but he says that "these people" were looking for a resurrection at the last day. Bearing in mind the issue between Sadducees and Pharisees over this very issue, it would seem that those who were taking the active part in the prosecution of Paul were Pharisees and not Sadducees. And yet at his previous trial, it was the Pharisees who had stood up for Paul. We see how fickle people are; and how the fact Paul was a former Pharisee was what drove the Pharisees to hate him even more. Another possibility is that Paul was still trying to exploit the tension between Pharisees and Sadducees over the resurrection issue.

24:16 *Herein I also exercise myself to have a conscience void of offence toward God and men always*- see on Acts 23:1. "Herein" means that Paul lived under the perspective of knowing there will be a resurrection and a division of the just from the unjust. That understanding led him to exercise himself in his conscience. The implication is that his conscience was formed and dominated by an awareness that he was a man living under judgment, living in the light of the knowledge that he would be judged for the secret positions of his heart. And we are no different.

A personal focus upon the man Christ Jesus ought to lessen the degree to which our faith is focused upon the church, without making us out of church Christians. We need to toughen up, to realize more keenly the self-discipline and self-sacrifice which following the man Jesus requires of us. Paul "exercised" himself in his spiritual life (Acts 24:16), the Greek word *asko* being the source of the English word ascetic. It should not be that our Christianity gives us merely a headful of vital truths but a life unable to fend off sin. We must translate our doctrines into the practice of a transformed life. On-our-knees prayer, fasting, real sacrifice of time, money and human possibilities… this is what the life of Christ is about. This, too, is what forges real personality.

But Paul's efforts to make a conscience void of offence were not just in trying to obey the 'beep beep' of conscience. For in 1 Cor. 4:5,6 he observes that human conscience is not totally reliable ("I know nothing against myself, but I am not thereby justified"). Rather does he elsewhere write of how the conscience is cleansed in Christ. Our sin has been dealt with, and his 'exercising' was in keeping on believing this. Sin is dealt with for us. It is no longer a barrier. We are no longer offensive to God: "In the past he was patient and overlooked people's sins; but in the present time he deals with their sins, in order to demonstrate his righteousness. In this way God shows that he himself is righteous and that he puts right everyone who believes in Jesus" (Rom. 3:25,26 GNB). Daniel 9 had prophesied that Messiah would quite simply "make an end of sin". The Greek for "conscience" means literally a co-perception. We are to perceive ourselves as God does- counted right before Him. In this sense Paul elsewhere writes of how the conscience is cleansed in Christ. And this itself will lead us to not give offence, leading into sin, neither to ourselves ["before God"], nor leading others into sin ["before man"]. The context here is of judgment to

come (:15). We can make others stumble so that they are condemned at that day. We have far more power and influence than we imagine. Knowing that, we are to be 'ascetic', make great effort, to never cause anyone to stumble. This is all an outflow from our belief in judgment to come.

24:17 *Now after some years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation*- The Jerusalem Poor Fund had been a major preoccupation of Paul, as witnessed especially in 2 Corinthians. "After some years" could suggest he had not been in Jerusalem for "some years" and should not therefore be accused of a program of stirring up trouble there. Paul had reasoned with the Corinthians that he was careful to be 'whiter than white' in handling their contributions, and that others and not himself would bring them to Jerusalem. But here he chooses to argue that *he* brought the offerings- because that angle of truth was more convenient in his legal case. Perhaps it is left as hanging question as to whether he was right or wrong to handle truth in the way he does.

24:18 *Whilst doing this, they found me purified in the temple, with no crowd, nor with uproar; but there were certain Jews from Asia*- Paul emphasizes his legal obedience; he did not profane the temple, he was ritually clean ["purified"] in the temple. This sounds very much like a 'boast in the law', and confirms my earlier suggestion that his whole agreement to go through the purification rituals was a quite wrong tokenistic obedience to laws he had argued were obsolete. Once a political rather than spiritual approach is taken to issues, then a whole sequence of decision making is sparked off which makes it ever harder to pull out of the 'political' thinking and revert to spiritual perspectives.

24:19 *Who should have been here before you and to make the accusation, if they had something against me*- The "Jews from Asia" who had first made the false accusation were likely Jews who had followed Paul from Asia to Palestine in order to continue dogging and upsetting his ministry. What was done in Jerusalem is of exactly the same style to what the Jews of Asia had done in Asia- following Paul around, falsely accusing him, stirring up crowds against him, and pressurizing the Roman authorities to imprison or execute him.

24:20 *Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council*- Again, Paul's broad picture of total innocence is going too far. He says that he did nothing wrong during his trial "before the council" apart from shouting out that he was on trial because of his stance on resurrection. But of course he had shouted that out to deflect attention from the wrongdoing he had actually done "when I stood before the council"- which was to curse the judge. Given the religious implications, this was very serious contempt of court and was indeed "wrongdoing".

The word for "wrongdoing" is three times on Paul's lips in his defences (Acts 24:20; 25:10,11). And it was three times on the lips of Stephen as he made his defence (Acts 7:24,26,27 "seeing one of them *suffer wrong*... why do you *do wrong* to one another... he that *did wrong* to his neighbour"). And it is not a very common Greek word. Why was Stephen's defence in Paul's mind? I suggest this is an example of where we subconsciously use words which others have used, because they are in our mind. Thus a North American who has been thinking about an English or Australian friend may find themselves using the word "bloke" rather than "guy" in conversation with another North American. Because they have in mind their friend, in another context. This is a major factor in our word choice. So, I suggest Paul has Stephen in view here. This is because he is going through what he put Stephen through- false accusation about desecrating the temple. We are made to go through what we put others through. Not as punishment, nor as mere poetic justice for the sake of it; but so

that we might better understand the results of our own actions. See on :6. And in the context here, Paul talks of his conscience, and we will read that the conscience of Felix was touched and he "trembled". But for Paul, the ultimate goad to his conscience had been Stephen's speech. This perhaps is why it is the longest speech recorded in the New Testament. That speech has at least 23 Greek words which never occur elsewhere in the New Testament; and various unique phrases and stylistic features, which all imply it is indeed a verbatim transcript. If we enquire from where Luke the historian got the transcript- humanly speaking [as Divine inspiration could have just beamed it to him], it is likely he got it from the mouth of Paul, whose photographic memory had correctly remembered every word of it. There was likely no other human source of it. Lk. 1:1 seems to be saying that Luke's material delivered to Theophilus [i.e. Luke-Acts] was a compliation of eyewitness material, provided by those who knew Jesus from "the very first" (i.e. the material in the Gospel of Luke), and who had been "ministers of the word" (i.e. the material in Acts, volume 2 of Luke's work).

24:21- see on Acts 22:6.

Except it be for one statement that I cried standing among them: Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am called in question before you this day- There was actual wrongdoing by Paul in that courtroom; see on :20. His 'admission' of an 'error' in raising the resurrection issue is nothing less than a blind, distracting attention from the real issue about his contempt of court in cursing the judge.

24:22 *But Felix, having more accurate knowledge concerning the Way, adjourned the proceedings, saying: When Lysias the chief captain shall come, I will decide your case*- The "accurate knowledge" of Christianity had spread to high places; for Felix knew all about it. He seemed careful therefore not to judge this case with the brash haste for which Tacitus says he was famous. He delayed it until Lysias could come and testify. But Lysias was only a witness to the 'contempt of court' issue as Paul stood before the Jewish Council; and not to the original issue, which was that Paul had supposedly profaned the temple. That was the capital offence which the Jews were trying to push, and it should have been thrown out of court.

24:23 *Then he gave orders to the centurion, that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty; and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs*- Felix knew the Gospel, with "accurate knowledge" (:22). He had some conscience; and he therefore allowed Paul a very liberal regime in prison. There were clearly Christians in the area who were friendly towards Paul, who provided for his needs there- in contrast to how in 2 Tim. 4 we get the impression that the local church in Rome did not finally care for Paul in prison at the end of his life. Paul had boasted earlier that his "own hands" had "ministered unto my necessities [needs]" (20:34); and now he had to rely upon others to minister to his needs. This was all part of the same humbling process which we all pass through until we reach the acme of humility which the Lord has in view for us by the end of our lives. Felix is presented by Tacitus as being conscienceless; but the Gospel had power to reach even the most hardened heart, even if it is not positively responded to. Later, "Felix trembled" at the further challenge of the Gospel which Paul presented to him.

24:24 *But after some days, Felix came with Drusilla his wife, who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul and listened to him speak about faith in Christ Jesus*- Harry Whittaker [*Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*] cites historical evidence to the effect that Felix had only recently married her, and she was only 17.

24:25 *And as he reasoned about righteousness, self control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid, and answered: Go away for now. When I have a convenient time I will call for you*- The very fact of judgment to come is in itself a demand for righteousness and temperance. Felix realized this and trembled, in anticipation of rejection at the judgment. As the Lord had explained in Jn. 5, when a man hears the word of the Gospel, he hears the call to go to judgment. And if he rejects it, he rejects himself from the Lord's presence in the future. Likewise Acts 17:31 reasons that the very existence of the future judgment seat and the Lord ordained as judge of living and dead is a command to repent. Felix had good knowledge of "the way" (:22). He was responsible to judgment. And yet Felix is presented in history as a conscienceless man. But such people, indeed every man, can be touched by our message. And "Felix trembled", with the *phobos* [Gk.] associated with the pictures of the rejected at that day. We too have foretastes of judgment, and are to act accordingly. We can feel condemnation now- and change the verdict. But not then. "Knowing therefore the terror [*phobos*] of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11); and here is an example of Paul doing just that. Talking of the terror / *phobos* of the rejected in that day. And ahead of time, Felix started trembling [s.w. *phobos*]. As we come to the cross, we realize that before Him there, "now is the judgment of this world" and our response is a foretaste of the outcome of judgment day.

24:26- see on Acts 17:12.

He hoped meanwhile that money would be given to him by Paul. Therefore, he sent for him more often and conversed with him- Clearly Paul at this stage was not without access to money. When he first arrived in Rome, he was able to rent a house. At other times in his ministry, he had to work night and day at Thessalonica in order to support himself. The same wide range of experience, in financial and other areas of life, is often seen in the lives of believers. It was all part of Paul being taught (along with us) to "know" how to live in plenty or in want, that we might be spiritually developed. Our range of experience in life as believers is therefore typically far wider, at least in psychological terms, than that experienced by unbelievers in whom the Spirit is not at work in this way.

24:27 *But after two years, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and desiring to gain favour with the Jews, Felix left Paul in prison*- Paul so often expresses frustration with his "chain", obviously thinking that he could have achieved far more for the Lord if he were free rather than imprisoned. We too chafe at the ties that bind in life. But in the bigger picture, all is for a purpose in our spiritual path. Unlike his time in Rome, we have no recorded letters written by Paul in these two years. He may have written some which are unrecorded; or it might be that during that time he was able to develop the ideas which he later expressed in his letters written from Rome. Tradition states that he and Luke spent this time composing the gospel of Luke and parts of Acts. Perhaps he needed that breather in his life's path. We may feel we need such breaks, but it is better to let the Lord give them to us than make the assumption that we can map out our own spiritual path.

ACTS CHAPTER 25

25:1 *Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went to Jerusalem from Caesarea*- Time is not really a healer. The bitterness felt against Paul and his work meant that the Jews immediately approached the new ruler concerning the case, just three days after he had assumed office.

25:2 *And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews presented the charges against Paul; and they petitioned him*- As noted on :1, time had not healed them of their bitterness. Indeed, time can only make bitterness and jealousy grow even worse. This is why the Lord urges us to immediately try to resolve issues with our offended brethren; the idea that time heals is really a justification of our native laziness and preference not to address issues.

25:3 *Asking a favour against Paul, that he would summon him to Jerusalem; for they were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way*- Two years previously, they had attempted the same kind of thing. Perhaps their previous plans and place of ambush were still in their minds; as noted on :1 and :2, time does not heal bitterness and jealousy, especially when it is religiously motivated. The "favour" they wanted was to sentence Paul, to pass judgment upon him (:15).

25:4 *However Festus answered that Paul should be kept in custody at Caesarea, and that he intended to go there soon*- As we see from :9, Festus was not against holding a trial for Paul in Jerusalem. His refusal was therefore related to his awareness of the planned ambush. The Greek behind "should be kept" really is a statement of existing fact; the response was that Paul had been imprisoned in Caesarea and that therefore was where the trial should be held.

25:5 *Therefore, said he, let those that have authority among you come with me, and if there is anything amiss in the man, let them accuse him*- Festus had only just taken on the job of governor. His willingness to deal with this case within the first weeks of his appointment indicates he sensed some urgency to deal with it. This is perhaps a testament to how passionate the Jews were regarding the question.

25:6 *And when he had stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went to Caesarea; and the next day he sat on the judgment seat and commanded Paul to be brought*- Given the precise nature of Luke's style, we wonder why the vague "eight or ten days"; perhaps Luke was relying on various sources for his information. Here we see the interface of Divine inspiration with human writing. Luke gathered his information sources, and the overall recording of it all is inspired. But in God's wisdom, this particular detail is left vague. Another possibility is that "eight to ten" meant 'eight full days', as Jews reckon part of a day as a day. The fact he immediately opened the case the day after arrival, when he was new to the job and must have had a mass of administrative issues to attend to, is again a reflection of how urgently he perceived Paul's case as needing attention. The two year delay had clearly irritated the Jews and Festus wished to demonstrate that he was proactive in dealing with issues.

25:7 *And when he had arrived, the Jews that had come from Jerusalem stood round him, bringing against him many and grievous charges which they could not prove*- The impression is that as soon as Paul entered the court room, the Jews started yelling accusations, and even standing around him in an intimidating manner. Courts then were rather different to the orderly and sober proceedings of today. This gives insight into the Lord's parable of the widow woman pleading with the judge for attention to her case; she would have had to insistently shout her cause over the noise of others.

25:8 *While Paul said in his defence: Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar, have I sinned at all*- Paul was somewhat playing with words here. For his letters and teaching was full of language which was purposefully against the imperial cult, as was the Lord's language of the Kingdom of God; indeed, Paul did preach loyalty to another King and another Kingdom than

Caesar's. And whilst he had not offended against the law of Moses, apart from in cursing the high priest, he had indeed offended against "the law of the Jews". He may of course still be referring to the law of Moses, but alluding to how it had been hijacked by the Jews. Similarly, the Old Testament "temple of Yahweh" and "feasts of Yahweh" are described as "the temple of the Jews" and "feasts of the Jews". They had hijacked Yahweh's laws and religion and turned it into their own religion, just as many have done today.

25:9 *But Festus, desiring to gain favour with the Jews, answered Paul and said: Will you go up to Jerusalem and there be judged of these things before me?*- Festus had sought to be proactive in dealing with Paul's case for the same reason. And he knew that they wanted to see Paul tried in their holy city. He didn't want any ambushes on the way (see on :4), but he was willing to agree to a Jerusalem trial.

25:10 *But Paul said: I am standing before Caesar's judgment seat, where I should be judged. To the Jews have I done no wrong, as you also very well know*- Paul's appeal to Caesar seems to have been quite unnecessary, and again it seems to have been the outcome of bitter exasperation and almost pride: "I ought to be judged", as a Roman citizen..."no man may deliver me...", "as thou very well knowest"; the response of Festus seems to be appropriate to Paul's arrogance: "Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? Unto Caesar thou shalt go" (25:10-12). The word used to describe Paul's "appeal" is that usually translated "to call on (the name of the Lord)", perhaps suggesting that this was whom Paul should have called in, not Caesar. I have elsewhere suggested that Paul was obsessed with getting to Rome and making a witness there. He had also been told by the Lord that he would one day witness there, as was his desire. Having been two years in prison, it must have seemed an impossibility to ever get there, especially with increasing age and health issues. His appeal to Caesar was therefore calculated and not made in hot blood. And yet it was a path to further imprisonment and eventual death; when he could have been set free, as Festus comments later. But his entire journey to Jerusalem had been against the Lord's advice; and the train of events which transpired from it was not so much judgment / punishment as consequence of action.

25:11 *If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not object to dying, but if none of these things are true of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar*- Paul clearly understood that "the wages of sin is death" and that he was "chief of sinners". He had indeed committed many things worthy of death, not least extrajudicial murder of Christians. We get the sense therefore that he was speaking in hot blood, furiously angry with the Jews and with how Felix and Festus favoured them over him. His appeal to Caesar was not without forethought and correct motivation, but it was also mixed with anger and frustration. Human motivation is rarely pure.

25:12 *Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered: You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar shall you go*- This "council" was not the Sanhedrin, but rather the group of advisors called "assessors" who sat with the governor in such trials. Festus could have quashed Paul's appeal to Caesar; he had the power to, especially as there was no clear case against Paul. Perhaps Festus saw in this appeal a nice way out for him; for it would be a lengthy process, and the Jews would have to make representation somehow in Rome. He had not condemned nor released Paul, so the Jews could have no reason to be angry with him.

25:13 *Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the King and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus*- The continued record of days passing, and in :14 of

"many days", is perhaps to help us sense Paul's frustration at the constant waiting and delaying. Agrippa was the son of the Herod who had been smitten by God for his pride in 12:20-23. Bernice was the sister of Drusilla, the teenage wife of Felix; and also the sister of Agrippa. They were rumoured to be in an incestuous relationship. It is ironic that such immoral people were the judges of others' morals. And that is the weakness of all human systems of justice and judgment. We are not to judge simply because we actually *cannot* judge; in essential terms, we are not morally above those we judge.

25:14 *And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the King, saying: There is a certain man left as a prisoner by Felix*- As noted on :13, the endless passing of "many days" and apparently endless delays would have been deeply frustrating for Paul. We too can see life as an endless series of frustrations, assuming that normal life, better life, is around the corner. But the Spirit is working constantly in our lives, so that we can realize that every moment is being used just as much as any other moment.

25:15 *About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, asking for sentence against him*- The Bible is a highly abbreviated record of the history and words of God's people. We wonder why so much attention is given in this part of God's inspired word to repeating facts the record has already given us, especially when they might not appear to add anything to the teaching. That of course may just be appearance- in that we have not noticed various gems of understanding and spiritual insight. But it can also be that the long drawn out accounts here of Paul's judicial process may be to help us to enter into his sense of frustration.

25:16 *To whom I answered that it is not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone, before the accused has the accusers face to face, and has had opportunity to make his defence concerning the matter charged against him*- The 'giving up' refers to the death sentence. The Jews surely knew this, but seeing the Sadducees were the richest people in Jewish society, it could be that they had attempted to bribe Festus to try Paul in Jerusalem in his absence, seeing he was imprisoned in Caesarea. Here therefore he is explaining that he had upheld Roman tradition and justice.

25:17 *Therefore, when they gathered here, I did not delay, and the next day sat on the judgment seat and commanded the man to be brought*- Festus is emphasizing his proactive approach, in contrast to how Felix his predecessor had left the case on ice for two years.

25:18 *Concerning whom, when the accusers stood up, they brought no charge of such evil things as I supposed*- Surely Festus knew that the case against Paul was weak. And he had already met with the accusers in Jerusalem ahead of the trial in Caesarea, so he was surely aware that the accusations were weak. But he gives the impression to Agrippa that he was surprised. This kind of less than total honesty is seen throughout Paul's trials, and also in Paul's responses. Perhaps one purpose of the extended narratives of the trials is to leave us with this impression- that human justice is flawed and is therefore not ultimate justice, and only God's justice is ultimate. Paul writes so much in Romans about justice and chapters 1-8 are so full of legal terminology that we wonder whether in fact Paul wrote Romans during his imprisonment in Caesarea.

25:19 *Rather they had certain questions against him of their own religion and of one Jesus, who was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive*- Festus perceived that the nub of the issue with Paul was not connected to the original case, i.e. that he had

supposedly brought Gentiles into the temple. Rather did the whole Jewish anger with Paul revolve around his attitude to the Lord Jesus and the claim of His resurrection. This was and is utterly critical to any Christian life, and all other issues flow from that. Festus and any secular mind would be confused as to how the issue of a man being dead or alive could make such a huge argument arise. The fact it did make such a difference for the Jews is therefore a testament to their bad conscience; subconsciously, they sensed that the Lord had risen indeed, but their denial of it led them to untold anger with Paul who was living proof of His resurrection. It was Paul's transformed life, which they were all aware of, which was a great evidence that the Lord had risen and worked through His Spirit in the lives of His people; and they needed to destroy that evidence.

25:20 *And I, being perplexed how to inquire concerning these things, asked whether he would go to Jerusalem and there be judged of these matters*- As noted on :19, the secular man is indeed perplexed as to how the possible resurrection of a Palestinian Jew some years back could really be such a critical issue. By offering to hand Paul over to a Sanhedrin trial, Festus was tacitly saying that Paul had done nothing wrong by Roman law, and so his crimes were a matter of breaking Jewish ritual laws. By handing him over to Jewish jurisdiction, Festus was washing his hands of the case. The fact that he could legally hand him over to Jewish legal judgment is an admission that Paul allowed himself to be counted within the synagogue system. He mentions his five beatings by the Jews in 2 Cor. 11:24; but such synagogue discipline could only be administered to those within the synagogue system. This was the price Paul paid for seeking to be all things to all men, for identifying with his target audience in order to convert them. It could be argued that he was the apostle to the Gentiles, not the Jews (which was Peter's calling); and he could have avoided so much grief in his life if he had followed that calling and stopped endlessly seeking to convert Jews.

25:21 *But when Paul had appealed to be kept for the decision of the Emperor, I commanded him to be kept until I should send him to Caesar*- Festus may be suggesting Paul was deeply unwise here. For Festus could close the Roman side of the case, and leave Paul to accept some symbolic punishment at the hands of the Jewish court in Jerusalem. The fact Paul insisted on remaining within the Roman sphere of justice meant that he risked Roman judgment and a death penalty if found guilty. And so it worked out. His obsession to get to Rome and witness for Christ was what led, humanly speaking, to his further imprisonment and final demise. But the Lord was working through that, even if it were not His ideal intended path for Paul.

25:22 *And Agrippa said to Festus: I also would like to hear the man myself. Tomorrow, said he, you shall hear him*- The desire to speed things up is again apparent; the trial was set for the next day.

25:23 *So the next day, when Agrippa had arrived and Bernice, with great pomp, they entered into the place of hearing with the chief captains and principal men of the city; and at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in*- "Paul" is presented in contrast to the great pomp and power of the men he stood to be judged by. The fearlessness and verve of Paul, his refusal to be cowed by the power and pomp of flesh, is a wonderful testimony to the power of the Spirit within Paul.

25:24 *And Festus said: King Agrippa and all men who are here present with us, you see this man, about whom all the crowd of the Jews made appeal to me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying that he should not live any longer*- "You see this man"

recalls "Behold the man" at the Lord's trial. The idea was 'You see what a bedraggled specimen of humanity these Jews are making such a fuss about'. "The crowd of the Jews" is a term of disdain, especially bearing in mind that it was the Jewish leadership who were accusing Paul.

25:25 *But I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death; and as he appealed to the emperor, I decided to send him*- A Roman citizen had the right to ask for his case to be heard by the emperor, but the local authorities had the power to veto that. It is therefore all the more significant that although Festus considered Paul had done nothing wrong, he still allowed the appeal to Caesar to stand. He obviously ran the risk of being accused of timewasting by sending a case to Rome for judgment which clearly should be thrown out of court. It was Paul's passionate desire to get to Rome, and to at last get out of confinement at Caesarea. The Lord too intended Paul to witness at Rome, knowing this was Paul's dominant desire. And so against all sense, Festus agrees to send him there. The only possibility is that he considered that doing this would be a neutral outcome for him; for anything less than Paul's dead body would not placate the Jews, and yet Festus had a conscience, as he knew the Gospel well, and didn't want to go down that path. So in this complex web of less than honest and ideal motivations by all concerned, Paul included, the Lord worked His will.

25:26 *But I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him. Therefore, I have brought him before you all, and especially before you King Agrippa, so that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write*- Festus was hoping that Agrippa might observe some legal issue which would justify sending Paul to be tried at Rome; and hoping that having Agrippa's approval of the appeal to Rome would make his action seem more credible. I suggest the simple truth was that Festus wanted to send Paul there in order to salve his conscience. He did not want to kill Paul to placate the Jews because of that conscience, but he also didn't want to upset the Jews by releasing Paul or appearing to not be proactive. In all this we see the power of the Gospel in probing deepest conscience. If we preach the Gospel, we are touching the conscience of our hearers, for all their bravado of disinterest.

25:27 *For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, without specifying the charges against him*- As noted on :25 and :26, Festus did not have to send this prisoner to Rome. He had every right to turn down the appeal as mere timewasting, and hand the case over to the Jews to judge, whilst disallowing any death penalty. For the original charge of profaning the temple had now been dropped, and that was the only one of their charges which had the possibility of the death penalty. Agrippa must likewise have considered it strange that Festus was so insistent on sending the prisoner to Rome; and again, it was only his own piqued conscience which made him want to hear the man himself.

ACTS CHAPTER 26

26:1 *And Agrippa said to Paul: You are permitted to speak for yourself. Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defence*- "For yourself" may be a reference here to how Paul defended himself, and did not use any advocate or legal team. We recall how the Jews had made use of one, Tertullus, to make their case in an earlier trial. Paul was using these trials as an opportunity to witness to the Gospel and not just to defend himself. We can sense his eagerness as he makes his case for Christ.

26:2 *I think myself happy, king Agrippa, that I am to make my defence before you this day concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews*- Agrippa was Herod Agrippa the second. The whole Herod family had had the Gospel witnessed to them. Herod the Great was told of the birth of the Lord by the wise men and Jewish scribes; his son Antipas and granddaughter Herodias were witnessed to by John the Baptist; his son Agrippa the first had killed James and tried to kill Peter because their message had tweaked his conscience; and now his son Agrippa II was being witnessed to by Paul. This was a family the Lord surely tried to appeal to. Again we sense Paul's eager using of these trials as an opportunity to witness; as his appeal to Caesar had been accepted, he could have actually refused to testify in this trial. But he eagerly used the opportunity to witness by all means, and we need to take some of that spirit with us in our lives.

The codex Beza adds at this point: "taking courage, and receiving comfort by the Holy Spirit". In this case, Paul is directly alluding to his Lord's promise to provide the right words to say in times of public witness under persecution such as this (Mt. 10:18-20).

26:3 *Especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews. Therefore, I beg that you hear me patiently*- "Hear me patiently" is an allusion to the LXX of Prov. 25:15: "By long patience is a prince persuaded". Paul had the spiritual ambition to even try to convert Agrippa. We too need that ambition, never writing people off as unreachable by our witness. Agrippa "the prince" is perhaps framed in terms of this verse when he is recorded as replying using the same word as in Prov. 25:15: "You almost *persuade* me to be a Christian" (:28).

26:4 *My manner of life from my youth, which was from the beginning among my own nation and at Jerusalem, do all the Jews know*- The Jews who were accusing Paul had personally known him in his Pharisee days. They were personal witnesses of his transformation.

26:5 *Having knowledge of me from the first (if they are willing to admit it) that after the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee*- The Jews were unwilling to admit [Gk. 'be legal witnesses in court'] that they knew Paul's past. For it was his radical transformation which was in fact the great witness to the utter truth of Paul's case. By denying it, they were witnesses against themselves. They were in denial of his transformation, which was the proof of the things he taught about the Lord Jesus. And likewise, presentation of true theology alone in our age will convert very few. It is the truth of it seen in our lives which is the compelling witness.

26:6- see on Acts 22:6.

And now I stand here to be judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers- This is another statement to the effect that the Christian Gospel offered the same sure hope which the promise to Abraham and the fathers offered to Abraham and his singular seed. The Lord's death had opened the scope of that promise to whoever wished to associate with the seed. Paul is arguing that the accusations against him are really all about the promise God made to the Jewish fathers. The Jews were therefore accusing God far more than himself.

26:7 *To which our twelve tribes earnestly serve night and day, hoping to attain the promises. And concerning this hope I am accused by the Jews, O king!*- "Night and day" refers to the evening and morning synagogue services, where the promises to Abraham were alluded to or repeated. Paul goes on to explain that the hope of attaining the promises implied belief in a resurrection; for the promises of eternal inheritance, blessing etc. had clearly not been obtained and could only be obtained by immortalization. The Sadducees amongst his accusers would of course take issue with

this, as they denied the resurrection and argued that the promises gave hope only in this life. Hence their manic materialism. But Paul doesn't appear to raise that point; his appeal at this point was to his judges, seeking to convert them, rather than seeking to expose the obvious lines of weakness in the position of his opponents. And this needs to be remembered in all our witness; that we are seeking to convert to Christ, rather than merely exposing logical error in those who are against us.

26:8 *Why would any of you think it incredible that God raises the dead?*- If we have really died and resurrected with the Lord, we will be dead unto the things of this world (Col. 2:20; 3:1). This is why Paul could imply that the greatest proof that Christ had risen from the dead was the change in character which had occurred within him (Acts 26:8 ff.). This was “the power of his resurrection"; and it works within us too. The death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth aren’t just facts we know; if they are truly believed, there is within them the power of ultimate transformation.

"Any of you..." is an attempt to soften the force of Paul's repeated appeals to Agrippa personally as "you". Paul has so far said nothing specific about the resurrection. But he sees that Agrippa thinks or [Gk. *krino*] 'judges' that incredible, a bridge too far for his faith. But Paul implies that in fact, Agrippa is not judging Paul personally so much as judging within his own mind whether Christ rose from the dead. Which, Paul is implying, is what this court case is all about. Paul cuts to the essence- the whole issue was not about him personally and his alleged desecration of the temple. It was about whether men judged that Jesus had resurrected. That was the core of the case, psychologically and subconsciously; and this is why Paul goes on to unashamedly preach to Agrippa and seek his conversion. Just as God made huge personal efforts to convert men like Pharoah and Nebuchadnezzar. At least we must take the lesson that we should seek to convert literally all men; for all have a conscience.

26:9 *I truly thought that I should do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth*- The "thought" connects with the challenge of :8 as to why any should "think" resurrection to be incredible. Paul is saying that his changed thinking could be replicated in them also changing their thinking about the Lord Jesus. Paul remains on the psychological level, as discussed on :8. He sees that Agrippa is thinking to deny his own conscience, just as Paul had done. Just as Paul had imprisoned people because of his bad conscience (:10), so Agrippa would be doing if he left Paul in prison.

26:10 *And this I did in Jerusalem, and I shut up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death I gave my vote against them*- "This I did" shows that his "thought" of :9 became action; he is recognizing the truth of the Lord's teaching that thought is action. The repeated account of Paul's conversion in Acts, when the record is highly abbreviated otherwise, is because Paul is set up as the parade example of all conversions to Christ (1 Tim. 1:13-18).

26:11 *And in all the synagogues I often punished them*- I am convinced that a major reason for the success of the early church was that they weren’t paranoid about issues of fellowship and guilt-by-association; they were simply radical preachers. They preached an exclusive message, but they wished to be inclusive rather than exclusive. The Lord Himself taught that the time would come when His followers would be disfellowshipped from the synagogues. But He doesn’t teach them to leave the synagogues, even though first century Judaism was both doctrinally and morally corrupt. Acts 26:11 would seem to imply that there were Christians “in every synagogue”.

Trying to force them to blaspheme- Gk. 'necessitated'. It could be claimed that it is never 'necessary' to blaspheme; for some died under torture, not accepting any way out, and thus shall receive a "better resurrection" (Heb. 11:35). But Paul takes a more gracious view here; he recognized that the torture he had applied left the Christians with no other human choice but to blaspheme the name of Jesus, and he takes full blame for this. See on 1 Tim. 1:13.

And being furiously enraged at them, I persecuted them even in foreign cities- Paul's progressive appreciation of his own sinfulness is reflected in how he describes what he did in persecuting Christians in ever more terrible terms, the older he gets. He describes his victims as "men and women" whom he 'arrested' (Acts 8:3; 22:4), then he admits he threatened and murdered them (Acts 9:3), then he persecuted "the way" unto death (Acts 22:4); then he speaks of them as "those who believe" (Acts 22:19) and finally, in a crescendo of shame with himself, he speaks of how he furiously persecuted, like a wild animal, unto the death, "many of the saints", not only in Palestine but also "to foreign [Gentile] cities" (Acts 26:10,11). He came to appreciate his brethren the more, as he came to realize the more his own sinfulness. And this is surely a pattern for us all.

26:12- see on Acts 22:6.

Thus I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests- These were the very men who were accusing him, and he is now stating that they were involved as accessories to extrajudicial murder and torture. "Thus I journeyed" invites his audience to imagine the rabid thinking which dominated his mind; the psychological change in him could only have been achieved by external agency. And that agency was the spirit of the risen Lord.

26:13- see on Acts 22:6.

But at midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining around me and those that journeyed with me- The repeated "O King" is because Paul was specifically seeking to convert Agrippa. His spiritual ambition in attempting this is an encouragement to us all in our witness to those who seem so unreachable by the Gospel we preach. "Shining around me" suggests the light was not shone down from Heaven as in a beam; but that the Lord Himself stood near Paul, next to him. The word literally means 'to be a halo around'. Paul was in this sense sanctified, made a saint, through standing with the Lord. Those with him could have responded to this grace too, but chose not to. "And those that journeyed with me" would suggest that the Lord sought to bring them from darkness to light also, but they refused to understand the word spoken, although they heard it.

26:14 *And when we had all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic: Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the cattle prod*- The idea is that Paul understood the voice that was speaking; whereas the men with him heard the voice but chose not to understand. Perhaps Saul had been observing oxen ploughing along the road to Damascus, hence the usage of that analogy. The Lord's question as to "why" Saul so persecuted the believers in the body of Christ was left unanswered. The answer was that Paul's bad conscience was leading him to denial, and that denial was expressing itself in unreasonable anger. And the Jews who were persecuting Paul were in just the same situation. They knew in their consciences that Jesus of Nazareth had been their Messiah; "this is the heir, come let us kill Him" was how the Lord's parable explained it. That guilty conscience meant a desire to eliminate those like Paul who had at first denied it and then accepted it. They were driven by the very same psychological factors which Paul was driven by.

26:15 *And I said: Who are you, Lord? And the Lord said: I am Jesus whom you persecute*- The question "Why?" was answered by Saul with the question "Who are you, Lord?". This may not have been a request for information. It is perhaps in the spirit of Jacob's meeting with Angel, wrestling God as Saul had done, and then asking the Angel's name as Jacob did (Gen. 32:29). As the Lord Jesus called Saul by name, so the Angel gave Jacob a new name, Israel. And it could be that although unrecorded, the Lord then changed Saul to Paul. To ask someone's name can be understood as a Hebraism for recognizing their greatness or superiority.

26:16 *But arise, and stand upon your feet*- This is a quotation from Ezekiel's experience, having seen the glory of God and being asked to go and witness it to an Israel who would not listen because they preferred Babylon (Ez. 2:1,2).

For to this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a servant and a witness both of the things in which you have seen me, and of the things which I will reveal to you- "A servant" is literally, a slave. The apostles in their letters usually open by reminding their readers that they are slaves of the Lord Jesus- this is how they saw themselves. Paul was called to be a slave of the Gospel (Acts 26:16; Gk. *hypereten*- a galley slave, rowing the boat chained to the oars). There were slaves who were made stewards or managers ['bishops'] of the Master's business, but essentially they themselves were still slaves.

26:17 *Delivering you from the people of the Jews and from the Gentiles, to whom I send you*- Paul was therefore confident that he could not be ultimately destroyed by the union of Jews and Gentiles now gathered against him. But we must factor in here that eventually, the Lord did not deliver him from Gentile power and he died under Nero's persecution. The promise of deliverance was therefore in order that he might conduct his intended ministry; but when that ministry was over, then he was in fact delivered to the power of Gentile persecution and execution.

26:18 *To open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light*- The Lord Jesus seems to have encouraged Paul to see Moses as his hero. Thus he asked him to go and live in Arabia before beginning his ministry, just as Moses did (Gal. 1:17). When he appeared to Paul on the Damascus road, he spoke in terms reminiscent of the Angel's commission to Moses at the burning bush: "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of those things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the (Jewish) people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to...turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance... Whereupon... I (Paul) was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:16-19). Moses was promised that he would be protected from Pharaoh so that he could bring out God's people from the darkness of Egyptian slavery ("the power of Satan"); going from darkness to light is used by Peter as an idiom to describe Israel's deliverance from Egypt, which the new Israel should emulate (1 Pet. 2:9). Moses led Israel out of Egypt so that they might be reconciled to God, and be led by him to the promised inheritance of Canaan. As Moses was eventually obedient to that heavenly vision, so was Paul- although perhaps he too went through (unrecorded) struggles to be obedient to it, after the pattern of Moses being so reluctant.

Paul was to bring others to the light just as John had (Lk. 1:77,79 = Acts 13:47; 26:18,23).

God's manifestation of His word through preaching is limited by the amount of manifestation His preachers allow it. Through the first century preaching of the

Gospel, men and women were "turned from darkness to light... *that* they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified" (Acts 26:18).

And from the power of Satan to God-

There are some clear contrasts drawn here:

To open their eyes	(They were blind).
To turn them from darkness	to light.
From the power of Satan (sin)	unto God (cp. 1 Jn. 1:5).
(Unforgiven)	receive forgiveness of sins.
(Gentiles without inheritance by faith in "the hope of Israel")	them (the Jews) that had access to sanctification by faith.

Ephesians 4:17–20 almost seems to directly allude back to this passage in Acts 26:18: "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ...". Being under the power of Satan is therefore a result of having an empty, vain, fleshly mind (i.e. the Satan of evil desires in our mind having full power) and being ignorant, without understanding. Matthew 13:19 says that Satan (cp. Mk. 4:15) has power over a person because of their lack of understanding of the Word. Ephesians 4:17–20 is referring to the same thing as "the power of Satan" defined in Acts 26:18. "To open their eyes" implies to have the eyes of understanding opened (cp. Eph. 1:18).

Acts 26:18 implies that it was "the power of Satan" that stopped the Gentiles from sharing the inheritance of the Gospel which was preached to the Jews in the promises (Gal. 3:8; Jn. 4:22). "Satan" is often connected with the Law and the Jewish system. Maybe this is another example. Note too the allusions in this verse to Is. 42:6,7: "I... will... keep you, and give you for a... light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house". This equates the power of Satan with a prison house, and the Law is likened to a prison in Gal. 3:23 and 4:3.

There are allusions in Acts 26:18 to the Jews' crucifixion of Jesus: "This is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Lk. 22:53); "Satan" (the Jews) has desired to have you" (Lk. 22:31), Jesus warned the disciples at the last supper.

The previous verse (Acts 26:17) shows the Lord Jesus strengthening Paul to be brave in his mission to the Gentiles – "delivering you from the [Jewish] people, and from the Gentiles". Jesus Himself was "delivered to the Gentiles" (Lk. 18:32–33) for crucifixion by the Jews, and Mk. 15:15 implies Jesus was delivered to "the people", too. The phrase "the people' frequently occurs in the crucifixion records. It is as if Jesus is saying: 'I was delivered to the Gentiles and (Jewish) people because of My preaching; I am now commissioning you to preach, facing the same battle against (the Jewish) Satan and man's blindness to the Word of God, due to his love of the flesh, as I did; but I will deliver you from the Gentiles and Jewish people, rather than deliver

you to them, as I was. You are going to spend your life going through the same experiences as I faced in My last hours'. Thus, in yet another way, we can understand how Paul could say "I am crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20).

To the end they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among those that are sanctified by faith in me- Salvation is *not* a purely personal matter. It is part of a shared experience, something we obtain a part in. Christ *is* His body. He doesn't exist separate from His body; for all existence in the Bible is bodily existence. And *we* are His body. He is us. Likewise we are the branches of the Christ-vine (Jn. 15). Because we are all in the one body of Christ, therefore we are intimately associated with the other parts of the body.

26:19- see on Acts 13:9.

Therefore, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision- "Disobedient" is literally 'not persuaded'. Paul is saying that he was not unpersuaded by the Lord's appearance. And this is the same word used by Agrippa in :28, when he says Paul has almost persuaded him to become a Christian. Paul was witnessing from his own experience of being persuaded by the Lord; and he wants to persuade others.

26:20- see on Acts 13:24,25.

But declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to their repentance- It seems likely that Paul went to hear John the Baptist preach; "there went out to him all the land of Judea and they of Jerusalem" (Mk. 1:5), and at this time Paul was living in Jerusalem. I believe Paul heard John and was convicted by him of Christ. John preached the need to "bring forth fruits meet unto repentance" (Mt. 3:8); and Paul here made those his own watchwords in his world-wide preaching.

Paul preached that men "should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance" (Acts 26:18-20). As with Mt. 21:28-31, this refers primarily to baptism. "Repent and turn to God" surely matches "Repent and be baptized" in Acts 2:38. Turning to God is associated with baptism in Acts 9:35; 11:21; 15:19; 1 Thess. 1:9. Following conversion, our works should match the profession of faith we have made. But there is no proof here for the equation 'Forgiveness = repentance + forsaking'. The "works" seem to refer to positive achievement rather than undoing the results of past failures. Works meet for repentance are fruits of repentance (Mt. 3:8 cp. Lk. 3:8). We have shown that there are different degrees of fruit/ repentance which God accepts, and that this fruit is brought forth to *God*, and that its development takes time. We cannot therefore disfellowship a believer for not bringing forth fruit in one aspect of his life.

16:21 *For this cause the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me*- The "cause" was that they had been called upon to repent, and their refusal to do so was leading them to try to kill Paul. This is how conscience works. We seek to eliminate the persons or issues causing our guilt, and which summon us to repentance. The opposition to Christian preaching is exactly because it is [or should be] a call to repentance.

26:22 *Therefore, having obtained the help that is from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses did say should happen*- "The help that is from God" was the gift of the Spirit, both in cleansing Paul psychologically from his past, and in empowering him in his life's work of witness. Paul testified to the Lord Jesus (e.g. Acts 26:22; 1 Cor. 15:15 s.w.), and He in turn bore witness to the [preaching of] the word of his grace (Acts 15:8). In Paul's witness lay His witness. The reference to "small and great" is yet another hint

that Paul is witnessing specifically at this time to "the great", his judges. And Paul insists that he is saying nothing radically new, and therefore Judaism ought to have no problem with him teaching what was in their own Scriptures.

26:23 *That the Christ must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles*- Elsewhere, Paul took a prophecy concerning how Christ personally would be the light of the whole world (Is. 49:6), and applies it to himself in explanation of why he was devoted to being a light to the whole world *himself* (Acts 13:47- although here in 26:23 he applies it to Jesus personally). Paul even says that this prophecy of Christ as the light of the world was a *commandment* to him; all that is true of the Lord Jesus likewise becomes binding upon us, because we are *in* Him. Note that Paul says that God has commanded *us* to witness; it wasn't that Paul was a special case, and God especially applied Isaiah's words concerning Christ as light of the Gentiles to Paul. They apply to *us*, to all who are in Christ. And when on trial, Paul explained *his* preaching to the Jews "and then to the Gentiles" as being related to the fact that he had to "shew" the Gospel to them because Christ rose from the dead to "shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:20,23). In other words, he saw his personal preaching as shewing forth the light of Jesus personally.

The RV offers another slant on this. The Lord Jesus was the light of the world on account of His resurrection: "He first by the resurrection from the dead should proclaim light both to the [Jewish] people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:23 RV). If we are baptized into His death and resurrection, we too are the light of this world in that the light of His life breaks forth in us. And this is exactly why belief in His resurrection is an imperative to preach it. And it's why the great commission flows straight out of the resurrection narrative.

We have suggested elsewhere that Paul was first called to the Gospel by the preaching of John the Baptist. He initially refused to heed the call to "do works meet for repentance". But, fully aware of this, he preached this very same message to others (Mt. 3:8 cp. Acts 26:20).

26:24 *And as he thus made his defence, Festus said with a loud voice: Paul, you are mad. Your much learning is turning you mad*- The loudness of the voice was surely a statement of the depth of unease within his conscience. Again, we see a basic psychological lesson: the louder a person shouts down another, the louder is the internal voice of their own disquiet at the truth being presented. Luke uses the same term in describing how the Jews "with loud voices" demanded both the Lord's crucifixion and the death of Stephen, who had likewise touched their consciences (Lk. 23:23; Acts 7:57). The reference to "much learning", much reading of words, may be a reference to how Paul perhaps had begged for the scriptures to be brought to him in his confinement, and he spent his time for those many months poring over the parchments. We recall how he begged Timothy to bring him such scrolls when imprisoned in Rome.

26:25 *But Paul said: I am not mad, most excellent Festus, but speak words of truth and soberness*- Point blank disagreement with a powerful judge who is shouting at you isn't a smart thing to do. But Paul was there to witness, to seek to convert his judges, rather than to justify himself. If he were out for self-preservation, as are most men who stand in the dock, he would have let this accusation go unchallenged. But Paul is alluding to how he had been "exceedingly mad" before his conversion (:11); and now he was sane.

26:26 *For the king knows of these things, to whom also I speak freely. For I am*

persuaded that none of these things is hidden from him. For this has not been done in a corner- Paul is really out to convert the king; he says that the king knows the truth of all he is saying, and appeals for him to be honest to his conscience and not kick against the goads. The king was of course appraised of the situation with Paul- everybody knew that. So "none of these things is hidden from him" more naturally refers to the truth of the appeal Paul is making to him.

Paul exhorts us to speak 'freely' in our preaching (2 Cor. 3:12), just as he himself "spoke freely' in his witness to Agrippa. He there is our pattern. Our salvation is through faith in God's absolute grace; but if it is *real* faith, we will preach it on the housetops, we simply can't keep the knowledge of *such* grace, such great salvation, to ourselves. "Having, then, such hope, we use much freedom of speech" in preaching (2 Cor. 3:12 YLT).

Despite this direct and emotional appeal, Paul still framed it in terms understandable by his audience; "this has not been done in a corner" is a quotation from Plato. According to Simon Kistemaker, it was a term "which philosophers pejoratively used for uneducated teachers". Paul seems to be saying that he is highly qualified as a teacher- but because of experience, rather than academic qualification.

26:27 *King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you believe*- This suggests that Paul in full flow, even shackled and in prison clothes, had a fleck of arrogance and aggression in his presentation. He was challenging the very conscience of his king and judge. He addresses Agrippa directly by the personal pronoun "you" (:2,3,7,19,27), and mentions his name, when usually a king was addressed by titles and not addressed as "you" in this way. This sets a pattern for our personal appeal to people in our preaching. To ask a personal question like that of your king-judge was just not to be done in court. It would be judged today as contempt of court. But Paul was not standing there in self-defence, but for witness, all out of persuade towards faith in Christ. And that is what our witness should be; not self-defending our theological positions, but earnestly seeking to persuade towards faith in our hearers. How did Paul know that Agrippa believed the prophets? Was there an awkward silence in response to his question? Or was Paul being purely rhetorical, hastening on to say that he knew or recognized that Agrippa claimed to believe the Jewish prophets. We can assume that Luke's highly abbreviated account of the trial has left out frequent quotation from the prophets by Paul, in order to demonstrate that the Lord had to die, rise again and be witnessed to by the members of His glorified body.

26:28 *And Agrippa said to Paul: You almost persuade me to become a Christian*- Paul was not against using persuasion; he didn't just 'preach the truth' and leave it for others to decide. Agrippa commented: "With but a little [more] persuasion thou wouldest fain make me a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that whether with little [persuasion] or with much, not only thou but also all that hear me this day, might become such as I am" (Acts 26:28,29 RV). Paul wasn't against using persuasion to bring men unto his Lord, and neither should we be. He didn't just make a lame witness to true propositions and leave it to his audience to believe or disbelieve it.

Agrippa's words "You almost persuade me to become a Christian" may have been muttered as an aside; and they may have been a total departure from how a king-judge is supposed to act in court. The power of Paul's testimony was such that even he had to admit the effect it was having upon him. We can be encouraged that the message we preach is of huge power in the consciences of others, regardless of all the apparent

disinterest. If you stand on a street corner handing out fliers advertising a product, people will be mildly polite in covering their disinterest. But when they see it's about religion or Christianity... their body language often changes. And if they read further what is on the tract, their response is utterly unlike the response observable in a person reading a flier advertising a product for sale.

26:29 *And Paul said: I will pray to God, that whether in a little time or a longer time, not you only, but also all that hear me this day might become as I am (apart from these chains)*- This was Paul's whole intention. His ambition to make converts knew no bounds. He wasn't only going for Agrippa... he wished the entire audience, including the Jews, would follow his example and path of conversion. They too could stop kicking against the goads of their own consciences and be released into the wonderful freedom of the bondservants of the Lord Jesus. "Apart from these chains" is one of several times when Paul's deep frustration with his situation cannot help but come through. He wasn't appealing for release- for he had appealed to be heard by Caesar, knowing this meant yet more prison time. He made that appeal in order for the Gospel to spread; but he paid a great price for it, willingly. For his "chains" were a deep frustration to him. But he was willing to endure them longer, so that the Gospel could be spread on the very highest levels of the world in which he lived.

26:30 *And the king rose up and the governor and Bernice and they that sat with them*- The rising up of the judge was to signal that the proceedings were over. We are left with the impression that there was no summing up speech by the judge; just a hasty and abrupt end to the proceedings, with Paul having had the last word in :29, in appealing for conversion. The abrupt ending of the court proceedings is a powerful testimony to the power of Paul's witness. He had so touched the consciences of his judges that the trial was ended in a moment. Surely no other accused person has ever achieved anything like this in human history; bearing in mind that his judges were the most powerful political rulers in his area.

26:31 *And when they had withdrawn, they spoke to each other, saying: This man does nothing worthy of death or of imprisonment*- We can imagine them chatting things over later that evening, over coffee [or whatever], as it were. Again Luke is making the point that Paul chose to appeal to Caesar because he wanted to visit Rome in order to witness to the Gospel there, and perhaps he had some idea of getting Christianity legally recognized as a religion just as Judaism was. Perhaps we should give due weight to the present tense, "does nothing"; there obviously had to be some reason given in the documentation accompanying Paul's case, but the reasons given would have to result to alleged past behaviour rather than anything ongoing. The anti-Christian legislation of Nero was yet to come. Agrippa and Festus obviously didn't want their private chat with each other broadcast; and yet here it is, recorded publicly for all generations. Perhaps Luke initially got his information from Agrippa or a source close to him. Perhaps he became a secret believer. In 28:18 Paul speaks as if it were common knowledge that Agrippa and Festus would have released him had he not appealed to Caesar. Or perhaps inspiration beamed this information into Luke. He is obviously drawing parallels with how the Roman powers found no fault in the Lord Jesus, but Jewish insistence all the same led to His death. It could be another way of emphasizing that Paul's imprisonment and final demise was ultimately the fault of the Jews and not the Romans. They truly were the great satan / adversary to the Lord's work in the first century- and are often referred to as such. The extended record of Paul's trials demonstrates that Claudius Lysias, Festus and Agrippa all concluded Paul

was innocent; but it was Jewish envy and political machinations, therefore, which kept him imprisoned.

26:32 *And Agrippa said to Festus: This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed to Caesar*- See on :31. Again the connections are with the Lord's death; Pilate was determined to set the Lord at liberty (Acts 3:13 s.w.), but the Jews machinated so that Roman power was overridden. Surely Paul perceived the connections at the time, and would have taken great encouragement from realizing that his sufferings were those of his Lord. And we are to understand our life experience likewise. Paul was so frustrated by the "chain" of his imprisonment, and we are left to wonder whether he would have been better not to appeal to Caesar, not to force through the fulfilment of the Lord's words that he must bear witness in Rome, and allow the Lord's word of promise to come true in His own way and time. This may have allowed him a few more years of powerful ministry. Looking back at our own lives, we can see how the paths taken could have been so much more effective if we had not tried to force things through in our own strength.

ACTS CHAPTER 27

27:1 *And when it was determined that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion named Julius, of the Augustan Regiment*- The Beza codex adds that Paul was handed over to Julius the very next day after the trial before Agrippa. The theme of haste noted in chapter 26 continues. Luke uses the pronoun "we" very frequently in this chapter; the events clearly left a deep mark upon him. It is a fine testament to his loyalty to Paul that he continued with him through all this. Julius may well have been present at the trial before Agrippa; and none present there would have been unmoved by Paul's witness. Indeed, most of the centurions mentioned in the New Testament came to faith in Christ. The "other prisoners" may have been men condemned to death who were to die in sport as gladiators to entertain Caesar. Julius clearly realized Paul was different to them.

27:2 *And embarking in a ship from Adramyttium, which was about to sail to the places on the coast of Asia, we put to sea; Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us*- "Adramyttium" means 'the house of death'. We are set up to expect the account to be a parable of salvation- and we are not disappointed. Aristarchus had been with Paul throughout the two years of his imprisonment (20:4) and now went with Paul to Rome, where he was his "fellow prisoner" and co-worker still (Col. 4:10; Philemon 24). This kind of huge commitment between persons is only genuinely elicited by our relationship in the Lord Jesus. The huge interpersonal commitment of Christian marriage is another example.

27:3 *And the next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius treated Paul kindly, and gave him leave to go to his friends and refresh himself*- "Refresh" translates Greek which suggests he may have been ill. Perhaps Paul's weak health was one reason why Luke the physician travelled with him. This would have been Paul's first taste of freedom for over two years, having been imprisoned all that time in Caesarea. To get to Sidon in one day meant they had a very good wind- for it was 70 miles. The believers there may have been converted in the wake of the Lord's visit to that area in Mt. 15:21.

27:4 *And putting to sea from there, we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the*

winds were contrary- Luke repeatedly uses correct nautical terms in the account, presumably picked up by him from discussion with the sailors. The whole record has the ring of truth to it, as we would expect from the inspired word.

27:5 *And when we had sailed across the sea which is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia*- Some commentators suggest "Myra" is another name for Smyrna. According to the Lord's letter to them in Rev. 2:8, they were the only one of the seven churches to whom He had nothing negative to say. They were strong in the faith, although facing problems from the Jew who were of "the synagogue of satan". Paul's journey to Rome is characterized by meetings with other Christians all the way. Yet there is no mention of any such meeting here. Perhaps the situation with the Jew there was too explosive. Or perhaps he didn't know them personally, or for whatever reason, they didn't meet up; rather like Abraham and Melchizedek sharing the same faith but apparently not having much to do with each other in their lives although they were both genuine believers.

27:6 *And there the centurion found a ship from Alexandria sailing for Italy; and he put us onboard*- How would a ship from Alexandria be sailing to Italy via Myra? It could be that there had been a major storm which had blown it seriously off course; and this was a Divinely intended warning to the sailors not to tempt providence by risking storms further. We see here how God works; He warned the sailors through Paul as well as through this incident not to attempt the journey, and yet when they insisted, He still worked through their wrong choices- as He does in human life today. And we can add into this nexus Paul's prayer for a "prosperous journey" to Rome (Rom. 1:10). The essence of this prayer was heard ultimately, in that Paul arrived alive; but not in the sense that Paul had perhaps intended. And likewise with so many of our prayers. See on :10.

27:7 *And when we had sailed slowly many days and had come with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us to proceed, we sailed under the lee of Crete, opposite Salmone*- The problems with severe winds ought to have been a warning that the wind of the Spirit was not blessing this voyage; but the sailors weren't perceptive to that. The continual information about the winds makes us think of how God makes His Angels winds / spirits (Ps. 104:4).

27:8 *Passing it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea*- The fact Paul speaks to Titus with such authority regarding matters in Crete suggests he had been instrumental in starting the work there. For he is careful not to get involved in any pastoral work which was the responsibility of others, and he did not build upon others' foundations (2 Cor. 10:16; Rom. 15:20). His mission and vision was to begin the Lord's work afresh in each place- no bad policy for any true missionary. But when was Paul in Crete? The only time mentioned is during his journey to Rome, when they stayed for a short time near Lasea (Acts 27:7-9), but because it was such a small place and not much fun to spend the Winter in, the sailors wished to sail further along Crete towards the larger port of Phenice (Acts 27:12). It was whilst trying to sail there that they got blown right off course and ended up on Malta. It would seem that during the stay near Lasea at the inlet known as Fair Havens, Paul preached in Crete. It would have been no more than a village. And from that work there arose churches throughout Crete, for Titus was to "appoint elders in every city". They were pushing towards Rome, and so they surely would not have spent long at Fair Havens. And yet there is a strange turn of phrase about their stay

there in Acts 27:9: "Now when much time was spent...". The modern versions seek to avoid the difficulty by suggesting that much time had been spent on the journey overall; but the Greek really suggests that they had spent "much time" at Fair Havens. They hadn't, really. But it was a significant amount of time from God's viewpoint, because as a result of this witness, several churches developed. And the witness began in a remote village, a mere anchorage rather than a harbour, near Cape Leonda, from where they had to walk five miles to the nearest shops in Lasea, itself little more than a village by modern standards. And from that remote spot the Gospel spread throughout the island. This to me has the hallmark of the divine.

27:9 *Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast was already over, Paul advised them*- Pliny records that long distance sailing was supposed to finish on the Day of Atonement; and seeing that this was the only Jewish feast which involved fasting, it is likely that they set sail just after the day of Atonement (so the Greek implies). The Day of Atonement was on the 10th day of the seventh Jewish month. We can assume that they left Lasea (:8) on about the 12th day of the seventh month, just after the day of Atonement on the 10th, when navigation was supposed to cease. But three days later (:19), Paul and Luke were throwing overboard the loose tackling of the ship, in the midst of the storm. This would have been the fifteenth day of the seventh month; exactly when the feast of Tabernacles began. This feast lasted seven days (Ez. 45:25 styles it "the feast of the seven days"). During that period, Paul and Luke were probably fasting, and doubtless sharing in the fear which gripped that vessel. It was obviously impossible to keep the feast. The sensitive Jewish-Christian mind of the first century would immediately have picked up on this; and if he (or she) grasped the idea that these events were parabolic, they would have seen in this the powerful demonstration that in the ship of Christ it is impossible to go on keeping the Mosaic feasts.

27:10 *And said to them: Gentlemen, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives*- As noted on :6, God works with human prayer and decision making, even when it is less than ideal. The Lord had told Paul that there would be loss of life; but thanks to Paul's prayer, no life was lost (:24,44). Just as the destruction of Nineveh didn't happen, because God is so sensitive to human prayer and repentance.

27:11 *But the centurion gave more heed to the master and to the owner of the ship, than to those things which were spoken by Paul*- The owner was presumably being paid well for the journey and so was eager to get the contract; he therefore wanted to move on quickly, even if it was just down the coast a bit. "Gave heed" translates better as to believe or be persuaded by. Luke uses the phrase six times earlier, of how people believed or were persuaded by the things spoken by Paul. It could be that he is being presented as effectively disbelieving God's word as spoken by Paul. By the end of the journey, surely this centurion came to believe God's word and convert.

27:12 *And because the harbour was not suitable to winter in, the majority advised to set sail from there also, if by any means they could reach Phoenix, a harbour of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, and to winter there*- Verse 12 in the AV says that their temporary harbour "was not commodious" to stay in, so they left, "if by any means they might attain to Phenice". Given the parable of salvation being worked out here, I just don't think it's accidental, or irrelevant, that this very phrase was used by Paul a few years (or months?) later, once he got to Rome and sat down to write to the Philippians. He wrote of how he struggled to know the real spirit of Christ's self-crucifixion, having counted all the things of this life as dung,

losing them all so that he might know the real mind of the crucified Christ, "*If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead* " (Phil. 3:11). The horrific memory of the shipwreck would have stayed with him all his days. Under the Spirit's guidance, he would have recalled the spirit in that ship, as they all set sail if by any means they might attain unto Phenice. That run down old town of 'Fair Havens', its name promising what it certainly wasn't, full of lonely old men sitting in cheap tavernas... it must have been some depressing place, to make the sailors take the risk of sailing further on in such unpredictable weather. We might be able to imagine or remember towns like that which we know. And that run down ghost-town, Paul said, was typical of how we should see our lives in the world, worth making any sacrifice to leave, if by any means we might attain to a better resting place.

27:13 *And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close inshore*- As noted on :11, the decision is painted in terms of refusing God's word as spoken by Paul, and instead seeing their own way in their own strength; they seized / forced [Gk.] *their* purpose or will, rather than God's. It could be argued that Luke perceived that Paul himself had rather failed in this area, and these sailors did likewise. The whole experience was to show the triumph of the grace of God's will over all human strength and device.

27:14 *But after a short time there beat down a tempestuous wind, which is called Euraquilo*- This record of Paul's shipwreck is written in a way which is not just a narrative of certain historical events. All through there are phrases and ideas which connect with other Scripture. If you look at this whole story from a macro perspective, as it were half shut your eyes and just see the general outline, some bells should start ringing. There were a group of sailors, with an immensely spiritual man in their midst, caught in a freak, unexpected storm which threatened their life, filled with panic and desperation. Then the spiritual man stands up in their midst and inspires them with his words, and on his account they are saved by God and miraculously reach land. Our minds go back to the storm on Galilee, with the Lord Jesus standing up in the midst of those terrified men. And when we analyse the record in detail, we find this similarity confirmed. " A tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon" 'beat' (Gk., AVmg.) against the ship (:14). The same Greek word for " beat" occurs in Mk.4:37, in the record of the Galilee storm. The disciples' comment must have been echoed by Paul's fellow passengers: "What manner of man is this...?" . Closer study of Mk. 4:37-41 reveals many links with Jonah's experience; and Acts 27 also has connections with this, admittedly different ones.

Euraquilo is also called Euroclydon, as AV. The Greek *clydon* is used in the Septuagint for the storm Jonah was in (Jonah 1:4).

27:15 *And when the ship was caught, and could not face the wind, we gave way to it, and were driven along*- As noted on :11 and :13, one feature of this account is the grace of God in saving people who have tried to force through their own path in their own strength. They were rendered increasingly helpless, until they finally cut off the ropes of their lifeboat / skiff and surrendered themselves completely to God's grace, casting themselves into the water [cp. baptism, in this parable of salvation]. They had to give way to the wind and be driven by it; and remember the connection in Hebrew between wind and spirit. They were driven to salvation by the Spirit, thanks to the prayer and witness of Paul amongst them. "Caught" uses the same word used in 8:39 of how the Lord's Spirit caught away Philip. They "were driven along", just as the prophets were driven along by the Spirit (s.w. 2 Pet. 1:21). They could not turn their faces to fight against that wind / spirit. This is not to say that human freewill

plays no part in the final equilibrium of our salvation. But on the other hand, unless God brings us to that salvation, we are too weak of ourselves to get there by a sequence of correct freewill decisions made from the steel of our own will. And in this case, salvation would be by works rather than grace.

27:16 *And running under the lee of a small island called Clauda, we were able, with difficulty, to secure the skiff*- The skiff / lifeboat was rowed parallel to the ship in order to ensure that it was not going to hit rocks; for the ship was hugging the coast as close as possible. "Secure" is literally 'to become masters of'. The whole account reflects the struggle of human strength for mastery being subsumed beneath the power of God's spirit, driving people to realize that human strength cannot save.

27:17 *And when they had hoisted it up, they used supports to undergird the ship; and fearing that they would be cast upon the Syrtis sandbar, they lowered the sail and so were driven by the wind*- "Driven" is the same word as used in :15; as noted there, the whole parable of salvation here speaks of being driven towards it, albeit through a terrifying journey at times. The theme of human strength and ingenuity failing them is repeated here- they had to hoist up the lifeboat. The supports or ropes used to undergird the ship were again their human strength and wisdom; finally, they did not save the ship from being broken up.

27:18 *The next day as we were being violently tossed by the storm, they began to jettison the cargo*- The record of Paul's shipwreck is described in language which clearly reflects the LXX description of Jonah's sea voyage (here, these words = Jonah 1:5); to suggest that like Jonah, Paul was also fellowshipping the cross. Paul made a supreme effort to fellowship the Lord Jesus, to absorb the spirit of Christ deeply into his own mind. God confirmed him in his efforts, by working in his life to give him circumstances which recalled the experiences of Christ, and which thereby encouraged him to do this even more successfully. The progressive lightening of the ship by throwing everything overboard (:18,38) is a clear link back to Jonah 1:5. On the Lord's own authority, we can interpret Jonah as a type of Christ, who saved the ship's crew (cp. the church) by jumping overboard to his three day death (cp. Christ). Thus the boat passengers in both Jonah and Acts 27 represent ourselves, and their physical rescue points forward to our spiritual salvation. See on :34 and :44.

27:19 *And the third day with their own hands they threw overboard the tackle of the ship*- "Tackle" is translated "great sheet" in 10:11; they were presumably using this in addition to the sail in order to try to get some control over their direction. And now they were without even that, and totally at the Lord's mercy as to their direction.

27:20 *And when neither sun nor stars shone upon us for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was now taken away*- One of the signs that they were nearing the end of their ordeal was that "neither sun nor stars in many days appeared". Now this sounds very much like Lk. 21:25-27: "There shall be signs in the sun and in the... stars... the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear... then look up... then shall they see the Son of man coming". The parable of salvation is developed by all the references to "saved" (:31,34,43,44; 28:1,4).

27:21 *And after they had been without food for a long time*- On the voyage to Rome, it was only after much "abstinence" (AV) that Paul openly preached to the crew and other prisoners- as if he struggled against a shyness in public testifying. See on Acts

18:4,5. Yet as Paul stood on that cold, windswept deck, shouting above the noise of the wind, you get the picture of a man whose magnetism was fully effective on that rough crowd of seamen and prisoners. Such was his authority that a word from him resulted in them ditching the lifeboat; the only human chance of salvation. Once they did that, they were completely dependent on the spiritual vision of this extraordinary man Paul. See on :36.

Paul stood in the midst of them and said: Gentlemen, you should have listened to me, and not have set sail from Crete and gained this injury and loss- It is difficult for us to imagine what that fortnight in the storm was like. Verse 21 speaks of the "harm" [[NEV "injury"] which they experienced, using a Greek word which is usually used about mental harm or damage. They were deeply perplexed in mind and body. Their helplessness amidst the fury of those winds is brought home by the Spirit: "We let (the ship) drive... and so (we) were driven... being exceedingly tossed with a tempest...no small tempest lay on us (i.e. smothered us)... we were driven up and down in Adria". Our brief life of probation is described in widely different terms by the Spirit. Here we get the idea that it is a totally horrific experience, full of fear, first of one thing (e.g. of grounding on quicksands), and then of another (being broken on rocks). In other places our experience of life now is likened to a plodding on through the wilderness, in others to a short sharp battle, in others to the monotonous tramping out of corn by an ox, the patient waiting of the farmer, or the lonely, dogged endurance of the long distance runner. And in yet other passages we are promised a life of "all (possible) joy and peace through believing", dashing on from victory to victory, more than conquerors, caught up with the ecstasy of the triumphant march in Christ, all our lives long. We must see our experience of spiritual life in holistic terms, we mustn't just emphasize one of these aspects. The way these different aspects all merge together in our spiritual experience is, to me, one of the most wonderful things about a balanced life in the Truth. An unbalanced approach will lead to us doggedly clinging on to the doctrines of the Truth, rejecting any suggestion that there should be an element of spiritual rapture and ecstasy in our lives. Or it may lead to an over emotional, watery sort of spirituality which reacts against any hint that we ought to be gritting our teeth and holding on to our faith, fearing the ferocious satan of our own evil natures.

27:22 *And now I encourage you to be of good courage. For there shall be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship*- The way in which Paul twice encouraged them "be of good cheer" (:22,25) as they huddled together breaking bread is also quoting the very words of the Lord Jesus, in the same context (Jn. 16:33); and remember that Jesus also said those words when the disciples were struggling in another great storm (Mk. 6:50). See on :34,35.

27:23 *For this night there stood by me an angel of the God whose I am, whom also I serve*- "Whose I am" was understood by Paul to be on the basis that he had been purchased for His service by the sacrifice of His Son (1 Cor. 6:19,20). He may well have explained that to them. His idea was that as a bound prisoner, he was still serving his God, and therefore that God would protect him, because he was on a mission for Him. Even within apparent constricture as a result of the ties that bind us in life situations, we are still on the Father's active service. We wonder why an angel appeared, when at 23:11 it was the Lord Jesus Himself who appeared to Paul and encouraged him that he would surely bear witness at Rome. Perhaps the pagan mariners were more likely to accept the idea of an angel appearing, as a messenger of the gods, than to accept the direct appearance of the Lord Jesus to Paul. The focus

here upon God rather than the Lord Jesus was perhaps in order to witness to the pagans in terms they could more easily relate to- which were to God rather than His Son. Paul's words here are surely alluding to those of Jonah in a similar situation (Jonah 1:9). There are plenty of other Jonah allusions in the chapter. Paul realized that this storm was in a sense for his sake; even though it could be argued from a more human viewpoint that it was the fault of the misjudgement of the crew and owner. We too at times may wonder whether a certain situation is our fault, or debate whose fault it is. The answers are never clear; the question is too nuanced. Especially when God's hand is involved. And so here too, the storm was in a sense for Paul's sake, but also for the potential salvation of all on the boat.

27:24 *Saying: Fear not Paul. You must stand before Caesar*- The Angel was repeating the Lord's words to Paul of 23:11. We are left to imagine the Lord Jesus in heaven itself with the Angels around Him, aware of His words and visitation of Paul; and now repeating their Lord's words. I have argued earlier that Paul was obsessed with getting to Rome to witness to Christianity. And the Lord took on board that wish, and although the path taken by Paul to achieve it [through appealing to a hearing by Caesar] was not ideal, He still went along with Paul and would enable it, through all the trauma of the shipwreck.

And God has granted you the lives of all those who sail with you- As God gave Paul all the men who sailed with him, so we have been given to the Lord Jesus. Of those whom God gave the Lord Jesus, He lost none (Jn. 17:12). This verse is clear evidence of salvation for the sake of third parties (as Mk. 2:5 and often).

27:25 *Therefore gentlemen, be of good courage. For I believe God, that it shall be even as it has been spoken to me*- Mary was an inspiration to Paul in this (Lk. 1:45 = Acts 27:25). The Angel spoke on God's behalf and Paul reflected on the memory of the words spoken that night, and believed. Perhaps the implication was "*I* believe God's word- and I am now asking you to do so also". Faith means believing in the Divine word of promise; if they could believe this word, then they should then believe His word of promise in His Son.

27:26 *But we must be cast upon a certain island*- The Lord's partial revelation of truth is not Him playing hard to get, as it were. He didn't tell Paul that the island was called Malta. He led Paul, as He led Abraham and ourselves, in baby steps. And this withholding of information wasn't because the sailors had never heard of Malta. Some of them would have done, for Valetta was a known harbour in the Roman world (as is evident from the fact that a ship called in there next shipping season, 28:11). It was the part of Malta they arrived at which was unknown to the sailors.

27:27 *But when the fourteenth night had arrived, as we were driven to and fro in the sea of Adria, about midnight, the sailors sensed that they were drawing near to some land*- The "But" shows that faith in the promise of Divine deliverance was being sorely tested; two weeks went by with no answer. The assurance of salvation wasn't given the night before they came near to Malta; it was given two weeks beforehand, to test their faith in the word of promise. And in essence that is how God operates with us; for His salvation is articulated to us through the words of promise to Abraham which were confirmed in the new covenant. The mention of "the fourteenth night" and "midnight" all recall the language of the Passover deliverance; hence Paul's invitation to them to partake in a breaking of bread meeting, in imitation of the Passover meal (:35).

27:28 *And they sounded and found thirty meters; and after a little space, they sounded again and found twenty five meters*- This is exactly the progressive depth of St. Paul's Bay in Malta to this day; an impressive evidence of the accuracy of the Biblical record.

27:29 *And fearing that we should run aground on the rocks, they let go four anchors from the stern and wished for daylight*- Given the strength of the storm, it might seem unlikely that four anchors could hold the ship. But St. Paul's Bay in Malta is characterized by clay and not sand. The account has every whiff of credibility. "Wished for daylight" could be translated "prayed for the day to come"- replete with latter day references. But the immediate reference is surely to their prayer [inspired by Paul's example, and praying presumably to the God Paul had taught them of] that the boat would not break apart that night, until the daylight came and they could see how they could best get ashore.

On that last night, the sailors prayed for the day to dawn (v.29 Gk., RVmg.). "The day" is an idiom for the Kingdom in Rom. 13:12. This fits in alongside the many other connections between intense prayer and the second coming. If we *know* Christ, then we will long to share his glory, we will long to see his beauty with our own eyes. So *are we* praying earnestly for the day to dawn? Or are we just content with the knowledge that it will come, like a slow train coming? Those men prayed for the dawn so intently because they knew that if the winds blew for much longer, they just couldn't hold on, they would be swept away. They feared “lest we should be cast on rocky ground” (Acts 27:29 RV)- replete with reference to the parable of the sower. There are many indications that the body of Christ will be weak and sickly when he returns.

27:30 *And as the sailors were seeking to abandon the ship and had lowered the skiff into the sea, under pretence that they would lay out anchors from the foreship*- It was on the very last, fourteenth night, that some in the ship lost their faith in Paul. They tried to get away from the ship in the lifeboat, "under colour as though they would have cast (more) anchors out" (v.30 AV). The Greek for "under colour as though" is always used elsewhere in the context of spiritual pretence, especially in prayer (Mk. 12:40; Mt. 23:14; Lk. 20:47). Under the appearance of trying to make the salvation of the others more certain (by casting more anchors), these men were trying to leave the ship because they honestly thought that the rest of them stood no chance. Is there here some prophecy of how just prior to the Lord's return, some will try to leave the body of Christ, under the appearance of spiritually strengthening the rest of us? But the watchful Paul spotted what was going on, and somehow got them to abandon it.

27:31- see on Acts 15:1.

Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers: Except these stay in the ship, you cannot be saved- This sounds like the Lord's words of Jn. 15:6: "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth..." . But there is a twist here in :31; as if our all remaining together in the Christ-ship is somehow related to our collective salvation. We see here the evil and collective damage of division, of trying to go our separate ways to salvation, thinking only of ourselves.

27:32 *Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off*- As noted earlier, salvation was achieved for these men after all human hope was abandoned. As

they saw the skiff drifting away from them, disappearing beneath the waves, they would have realized their only hope was in Paul's God and in His word of promise. We likewise are led in our lives to the point where all human strength fails, and we cast ourselves upon the Lord's salvation promise with total faith and trust. The record has much to say about this skiff, which functioned also as a lifeboat. They had trusted in it to keep them from hitting rocks as they hugged the coast at the start of their voyage; and now it appeared their only hope of escape. But they now cut off the ropes and let it drift away. There was no discernible practical reason for doing this; it was done in response to Paul's command that salvation was only to be had in the ship and not in the lifeboat (:31).

27:33 *And while the day was dawning, Paul pleaded with them all to take some food, saying: This day is the fourteenth day that you wait and continue fasting, having eaten nothing*- As noted on :27, the emphasis on "the fourteenth day" was to draw connections with the Passover deliverance, on account of Moses (cp. Paul- Heb. 11:28) and the blood of the lamb. Paul was presenting himself as Moses and the meal he offered them was like the Passover meal. But he wanted them to perceive the power of the invisible slain lamb. The fact they had been fasting may have been because they were all desperately praying to their various gods, just as the sailors with Jonah did. The challenge to stop fasting to those gods and take the Passover was therefore a religious challenge to them.

27:34 *Therefore, I beg you to take some food. For this is for your health*- When Paul tells them to eat food "for your health", he uses the Greek word normally translated "salvation". The whole incident is a parable of salvation. See on :44. The gods they were fasting to (see on :33) could not save.

For not a hair shall perish from the head of any of you- I get the feeling that there are times when Paul consciously alludes to Christ's words, and appropriates them to himself. For example, here we read of how he promised them that "not an hair (would) fall from the head" of any of them, just as the Lord promised His disciples (Lk. 21:18); see on :22.

27:35 *And when he had said this and had taken bread, he gave thanks to God in the presence of all, and he broke it and began to eat*- The uncanny appeal and authority of Paul is brought out when we consider the implication of this: Paul prayed in the presence of them *all*, all 275 of them, presumably mustered on the deck, and then solemnly ate in front of them, passing the food on to them. See on :43.

Paul's 'breaking of bread' on the doomed ship in Acts 27 is described in terms evidently designed to recall the "breaking of bread" service. On the 14th night (cp. the 14th Nissan), Paul took, blessed, broke and shared the bread- all terms associated with the "breaking of bread" in a religious sense. Further, the word *eucharistesen* is used here in :35 to describe Paul's giving of thanks, and this is the word elsewhere used about the breaking of bread service. This is not the usual word used for simply giving thanks for a meal, but has religious overtones. "I urge you to take some food" uses *metalabein* which literally means not to just "take" but to "receive one's share in"- the same express used by Luke in describing the early breaking of bread meetings in Acts 2:46. We can immediately perceive a witness element to this "breaking of bread". Paul was surrounded by people who were despairing of their lives, who had not eaten for some time either because of seasickness or from fasting to various gods for safety. And in the midst of those people he proclaims Christ to them through the breaking of bread, urging their participation, and thereby using the breaking of bread just as the Lord Jesus did- to draw people further into God's plan of salvation.

The same Greek words for "break bread" are used in the healing miracles, where Jesus broke bread and gave it to the crowds (Mt. 14:19; 15:36), and for how Jesus took bread and broke it at a meal with the Emmaus disciples (Lk. 24:30); those two words are also used to describe how Paul 'broke bread' with the passengers and crew onboard ship (Acts 27:35). So the evidence would seem to be that the meals of Jesus [which were open to all, sinners included] were of the same category and nature as the memorial meal known as "the breaking of bread"- for the same phrase 'breaking bread' is used (Mt. 26:26; Acts 2:46; 20:7; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:24). The same rubric of taking bread, blessing and giving to the disciples is found in the feeding miracles as in the Last Supper, and in the Lord's post-resurrectional eating with the couple in Emmaus- as well as in Paul's exposition of the Christian "breaking of bread" which we have in 1 Cor. 11. Mark's Gospel seeks to draw a parallel between the Lord's feeding miracles and the last supper "breaking of bread". In each account, there is the same action recorded: Taking, blessing, dividing and giving out (Mk. 6:41-44 cp. Mk. 14:22-25). That same four fold theme is to be found in the "breaking of bread" which Paul shared on the stricken ship in Acts 27:33-37, where we note that how he "gave thanks" is described using the verb *eucharisteo*.

27:36 *Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves*- His repeated exhortation "Be of good cheer... be of good cheer" (:22,25) was taken to heart by them: "Then were they all of good cheer" (AV). And like a father with sick children, Paul got them, against their will initially, to sit down to a good wholesome meal.

27:37 *And in all we were two hundred and seventy six persons on the ship*- This may be a reference to some taking of an inventory of all on ship, so that they could work out who if any had perished once they got to land. Such a head count would have been the responsible thing to do knowing that they were soon going to have to issue an "abandon ship" order. But it could be argued that this was a lack of full faith in the Lord's word of salvation which Paul had shared with them.

The significance of 276 isn't immediately apparent. It is a triangular number, triangle of 23. And many of the numbers in the New Testament are also triangle numbers. But I have constantly drawn attention to the fact that this is a parable of salvation, and those in the ship represent the redeemed. I am therefore inclined to go with the alternative reading of 70 provided by the Western Text; for 70 is the number of the Gentile nations in Gen. 10 and the number of bullocks offered for the ingathering ritual. Joseph A. Fitzmyer explains: "The Western Text, MS B, the Sahidic version, and Epiphanius [310-403] read rather: "we were about seventy persons." This Western Text reading seems to have risen from a dittography of the *omega* on the dative *ploiō*, "ship," after which the cipher for 76 was written so that it was combined with *s* (= *diakosiai*, "two hundred") and taken as the adverb *hōs*. Other readings: MS A reads "275," and MS 69, "270." (*The Acts of the Apostles (Anchor Bible)*, p. 779). This also solves the problem of such a large number of people on the boat, which was carrying grain rather than masses of passengers. 70 people is a more realistic number of people for Paul to address and break bread on a deck in the midst of a storm. For they "all" heard him. There would have been logistical problems for him to simultaneously address 276.

27:38 *And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship by throwing the wheat into the sea*- They were now throwing away their last food, and the wealth they had. For the owner of the ship was onboard, and to lose the ship and cargo was his ruin. But this too is part of our path towards final salvation- to abandon absolutely everything, left with not even anything to eat, no wealth, just us, and barely with the

clothes they stood up in as they crawled up the Malta beach. "Eaten enough" recalls the Lord's feeding of the crowds, also a form of a breaking of bread service. The hint could be that they were fed to the full; and we hope that they continued their faith experience unto salvation at the last day.

27:39 *And when it was day, they did not recognise the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, and they took counsel whether they could drive the ship upon it*- The description of Malta as a "land which they knew not" (Acts 27:39 AV) is evidently similar to the account of Abraham going to a land which he knew not (Heb. 11:8,9). The land was a strange" land, just as Malta was perceived as a "barbarous", i.e. pagan, land (Acts 28:2). As soon as it was day, we read in v.39, they grounded the ship and swam to land, reaching their salvation at daybreak. This fits in to place alongside the many links between the second coming and daybreak. The men somehow sensed ("deemed", :27) that they were approaching land. It is quite likely that the spiritually aware will have a sense of the nearness of Christ's return. Christ too referred to this when he spoke of how in the Spring we have an innate sense that Summer is coming; so, He reasoned, you will be able to sense my return. Now if we really *know* Christ, have a real two-way, ongoing relationship with him, as a pupil-disciple to his teacher-master, then we will surely have this sense. "They *drew near* to some country" really implies that they were being drawn near; the Greek word is always used elsewhere about the believer drawing close to the Lord. 1 Pet. 3:18 is the best example: "Christ also hath once suffered for sins... that he might *bring us* (same word) to God". Now in our typology that would suggest that in some way Christ guides us into the Kingdom, helps us through the last lap. Watch out for other types and hints that this is the case. And talk about it to some dear old brother in his late eighties who's known the Lord all his days.

And so finally, there they were, crawling up the shore on Malta, the waves breaking over their heads, the backwash pulling them back, but struggling on up the beach in the early hours of that morning, cold and soaked, perhaps with hypothermia setting in, but brimming over with the joy of their miraculous salvation. Now that is the picture, in this type, of our salvation. As we enter the Kingdom, we will be at our most bedraggled, the weakness of our natures will then be made fully apparent to us. "They knew not the land", only once they were saved did they know the name of it (27:39; 28:1). As Abraham went forth into a land which he knew not, so in many ways we do not know much about the Kingdom, our salvation.

The sailors [=us] even at the very end disbelieved the prophecy that the ship would be destroyed- for they sought to "bring the ship safe to shore" (Acts 27:22,39 RVmg.). Even for the wise virgins, the coming of Christ awakes them from their spiritual slumber. Unless the days are shortened, even the elect will be carried away with the ways of the world (Mt. 24:22). If we can really see the spiritual dangers of the last days, if we can sense our real spiritual state, we will realize that we urgently need the coming of Christ, for the simple reason that we are all so weak spiritually that we will effectively lose our faith unless he's back soon. And in response to the elect's prayers, the days will be shortened. The Lord will help us through the final lap.

27:40 *And casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea, at the same time loosing the bands of the rudders; and hoisting up the foresail to the wind, they made for the beach*- The progressive abandonment of all human strength and hope of salvation continues. They had cut off the lifeboat, given up their last food [the wheat] and now they loosed the bands which they had earlier girded the ship with, abandoned

their anchors, and were now left totally at God's mercy unto their salvation. This is all a parable of the Lord's ongoing work in our salvation.

We note the comment "To the wind". The records of Paul's journey to Jerusalem and thence to Rome contains many references to winds being contrary. But at the very last part of the voyage to Malta, the wind saved them. It blew behind them. All the information about the wind must be understood in the context of the fact that the Hebrew and Greek words for wind and spirit are the same. The Spirit of God withstood Paul's plans; but still He saved Paul, and now the wind blew behind Paul to achieve God's way of saving Paul, even though his chosen path was not the ideal. The Spirit still enabled him.

27:41 *But striking a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground*- The desperate situation of Paul and those with him therefore points forward to an awful time of tribulation for the believers just prior to being 'saved' into the Kingdom. This climaxes in coming to the place where two seas meet (Acts 27:41)- surely a reference to the judgment seat. There, it becomes apparent what is to 'remain unmoveable' and what is to be 'broken' or dissolved. These very same Greek words occur in 2 Pet. 3:10-12, about the breaking up or dissolving of all things at the Lord's return; and of the unmoveable quality of the Kingdom which we shall receive, when all other things have been shaken to their destruction and dissolution (Heb. 12:27,28).

And the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves- Several times we read about them using the anchors. Then in :41 we read of the forepart sticking fast and remaining "unmoveable" . There are connections here with Hebrews 6:19, which speaks of the hope of the Gospel as "an anchor of the soul... which entereth into that within the veil, whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus" . The idea of Christ as a forerunner, the firstfruits, is surely to be connected with "the forepart" of the vessel remaining unmoveable. As they crawled up the shore on Malta, Paul and the others would have looked back to that unmoveable bow of the ship; perhaps they went to see it the next morning, as it stood proudly amid the calmed waters. That sight would have stayed with Paul; perhaps the Spirit used that memory when it inspired Paul to use the same Greek word (the only other occurrence in the NT) in Heb. 12:28: "We receiving a Kingdom which *cannot be moved*, let us *hold fast* " (AVmg.), as the bow of the ship "stuck fast" . This is all further proof that we should see the incidents of Acts 27 as parabolic of deeper spiritual things.

27:42 *And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape*- The soldiers had still not come to full faith. Paul had told them that God's will was that he should get to Rome; killing him at that stage was going against God's declared will. Even in the face of every evidence that Paul was God's man, they thought only of their immediate problems and fear of answerability to those above them if the prisoners escaped. The word translated "plan" is used by Luke of the plan / will to murder the Lord Jesus. But God's will was to again triumph over human will, as this whole account of the shipwreck demonstrates so often.

27:43 *But the centurion, desiring to save Paul, stopped them from their purpose, and commanded that they who could swim should throw themselves overboard first and get to land*- According to 2 Cor. 11:25, Paul was in the 'swimmers' category.

Paul's magnetism [which represents that of the Lord, whom he represented in this parable of salvation] is most clearly shown by the Centurion being willing to allow all the prisoners to make their own way to land, rather than allow Paul to be killed. Of

course our mind goes back to how the jailor at Philippi was literally on the verge of suicide because he just *thought* that his prisoners had escaped (actually, none of them had). Yet among those 275 desperate men, there must have been some who secretly despised Paul. The Centurion "kept them from *their purpose*" of killing Paul. This may suggest that even in their personal desperation, some of the men on that ship were prepared to kill Paul, due to their own sense of inadequacy, and jealousy of his spirituality.

27:44 *And then the rest, some on planks and some on other things from the ship. And so it came to pass, that they all escaped safely to land*- Young's Literal Translation brings out the correct sense of Acts 28:1: "They, having been saved...". They escaped safely to "*the* land" (:44 Gk.), symbolic of the Kingdom. As noted often throughout this chapter, the whole incident is a parable of salvation. "All escaped" suggests that there was a roll call, and the figure of 276 was found (but see on :37). Salvation by clinging on to planks and the tree trunks used to construct the boat obviously connects with salvation through the tree / cross of the Lord. The casting into the sea may look forward to baptism, through which final salvation is arrived at. Through so much trauma in our lives, much of our own making.

ACTS CHAPTER 28

28:1 *And when we had escaped*- Luke was on the ship. "Escaped" translates the Greek word usually used for salvation; there is clearly a sense in which the entire account of the shipwreck was seen as parabolic of the journey to salvation.

Then we knew that the island was called Malta- 'Land of honey'. In this case, the parabolic aspect of the shipwreck continues, with Malta becoming symbolic of Canaan.

28:2 *And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome*- Reflecting Luke's adoption of the common Roman idea that 'natives', non-Greeks who had not been brought into the Roman empire, were typically unkind and aggressive to strangers. Likewise the beliefs of the Gospel writers about demons and mental illnesses are reflected in the record without immediate, direct correction.

Because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold- The record holds together internally in a way that only a Divinely inspired account could. For it was because of the cold, as it was Winter, that the viper had hibernated and was mistaken in its frozen form for a stick; and it came to life near the heat of the fire.

28:3 *But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself onto his hand*- An old man, probably with sight problems and / or various other 'thorns in the flesh', it was not for him to run around gathering sticks for the fire. And in their culture, gathering of firewood was the work of women and children. But we see so much about his personality from the fact he did so.

Before a fire (at the burning bush), Moses experienced a rod becoming a snake and a snake becoming a rod. The similarities are intentional, confirming Paul that he, a shivering old man with no dry clothes to his name, was in fact seen by God as being as significant as Moses. Paul's letters reveal that he keenly perceived the similarities between himself and Moses- especially in his letter to the Romans. He was now on his way to Rome; and the Lord is confirming Paul in that perception.

28:4 *And when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to each other: No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped from the sea*- The fact was, Paul was indeed a murderer, of Christians. The whole incident then becomes a testament to God's grace; he should have died then, justice would not permit him to live, he was in the grip of the snake of sin- but was saved by grace. This living parable was exactly what Paul had written to the Romans about grace in his relatively recent letter to them. We see here the Lord's providential action to help Paul perceive the living truth of what he had expounded in theory. 'Justice' translates *dike*, rightness, which is a major theme of Romans. Likewise the Lord works with us, to help us appreciate in reality the things we are taught in theory.

Yet Justice has not permitted to live- Acts 28:3–6 describes how a lethal snake attacked Paul, fastening onto his arm. The surrounding people decided Paul was a murderer, whom "vengeance suffers not to live". Their reading of the situation was totally wrong. But Paul did not explain this to them in detail; instead, he did a miracle – he shook the snake off without it biting him. The Lord Jesus did just the same in relation to the commonly held ideas about demons.

28:5 *However he shook off the creature into the fire and was unharmed*- Paul's calmness is wonderful. He truly believed the assurance of 27:24 that he would reach Rome. Paul's calmness may also have been on account of his belief in the promise of the great commission, that in discharging this, the Lord's people would be unharmed by poisonous snakes and would be able to take them up, just as Paul did here (Mk. 16:18).

28:6 *But they expected that he would have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly; but when they had waited a long time in expectation and saw nothing amiss came to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god*- We see again the fickleness of people; one moment, Paul was a murderer who deserved to die, minutes later he was a god, in their eyes.

28:7 Now in the neighbourhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days- Inscriptions with this title have been unearthed on Malta.

28:8 *And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. Paul came in to him and prayed, and laying his hands on him, healed him*- Word for word, Luke is repeating the descriptions of Ananias coming in to Paul, praying, laying his hands on him, and healing him (Acts 9:12,17). Paul is consciously reflecting the grace shown to him at the time of his conversion, many years ago. We too need to abide under the impression of the grace shown to us- and reflect it to others all our lives long. The beauty of this incident is that it would seem to me that this reflection of God's grace was made artlessly and unconsciously by Paul. See on 28:10 *They put on board*.

28:9 *And when this was done, the rest also that had diseases in the island came and were cured*- Note Luke's humility as a doctor. He would have been far better qualified than anyone on the island, and he likely rolled his eyes at the hygiene levels and nonsense medical theories entertained by the folks on that undeveloped island. But he was left ignored- the folk came to Paul, and were healed better than Luke could ever have healed them. Yet his focus is all upon the Lord's operations through another man, Paul. Luke the professional doctor is left merely noting it all down, playing no recorded part in the whole scene. And his record never betrays a single hint of hurt pride at his exclusion.

28:10 *They also honoured us with many honours; and when we sailed away, they put on board*- Gk. 'they laid upon'. It's the same word used for how Paul had laid his hands upon the father of Publius (:8). I explained there that Paul in turn had been copying what Ananias had done to him. And now, the people reflect the grace Paul had shown to them. This is the ripple effect of grace; the grace of Ananias [meaning 'the grace of God'] to Paul was reflected by Paul to the local people of Malta; and those people then reflected that grace to Paul and those with him.

Such things as we needed- The same word is used by Paul in boasting that his own hands had provided for things he needed, his "necessities", and also the needs of those with him (20:34). But now Paul is being humbled; as a prisoner, he can no longer provide for his necessities nor those of the people with him; they are provided by God by the grace of the wild pagans.

28:11 *And after three months we set sail in a ship of Alexandria which had wintered on the island, whose sign was Castor and Pollux*- Their original ship was originally from Alexandria, so it is likely that the sailors knew Malta. It was only the area they approached which was unknown to them. As noted on 27:26, they were specifically not told what the name of the island was- in order to elicit faith. From Malta to Italy is not so far, but these other sailors wouldn't risk it over the Winter season; highlighting the folly of the sailors in attempting to reach Italy all the way from Palestine at that time. The twin brothers Castor and Pollux were the patron deities of sailors. Perhaps the fact is mentioned to highlight how the gods were unable to save after what they had all experienced. It was likely that images to them had featured on the original vessel that was lost; the spiritually perceptive would have realized that they really could not save.

28:12 *And landing at Syracuse, we stayed there three days*- There is historical evidence of Christian churches in Sicily from the late first century, and we can assume that they arose from Paul's witness there during this brief visit.

28:13 *And from there, we circled round and arrived at Rhegium; and after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli*- This is all evidence that the journey encountered yet more problems. Syracuse to Rhegium is a straight journey; but they circled around to get there. The same word is translated to wander. From Rhegium, they had to sail north to Puteoli; but a *south* wind blew, meaning they were sailing against the wind. As explained on 20:6, Paul's journey to Rome was against the wind / spirit all the way through. God went along with his desire to serve Him in this way, but Paul made the way hard for himself and encountered consistent opposition, in one sense, from God's Spirit / wind.

28:14 *There we found believers and were encouraged to stay with them seven days. And so we came towards Rome*- This is what true fellowship in Christ is about. Given the uncertainties of travel, they weren't expecting Paul; but he sniffed them out, and he stayed with them. We see the same spirit in :15.

28:15 *And from there the brothers, when they heard of us, came to meet us as far as The Market of Appius and The Three Taverns. Whom when Paul saw, he thanked God and took courage*- When some members of the Rome ecclesia (who were rather weak, 2 Tim. 4:16) came to meet him at Appii, Paul took courage at the very sight of them; one gets the picture (from the Greek) of him seeing them, recognizing who they were, and feeling a thrill of courage go through his soul (Acts 28:15; note how Luke says "he" rather than "we", as if emphasizing that Paul was more encouraged than he was by these unknown brethren showing up). Here was no self-motivated old brother, indifferent to what his younger and weaker brethren could do for him by way of encouragement.

28:16 *And when we entered into Rome, Paul was permitted to live by himself, with the soldier that guarded him*- The same word in :3 for how once again, Paul was allowed as much freedom as possible, so that he could continue his mission as best he could.

28:17 *And it came to pass, that after three days he called together those that were the leaders of the Jews; and when they came together, he said to them*- One can only be impressed by the way that within only three days of arriving in Rome after an awesome journey, Paul began preaching by inviting the local Jews to come to him. He would have had so much else to attend to surely, quite apart from getting over the trauma of the journey. However, the speed with which he invites the Jews to him could also be judged to be reflective of the unhealthy obsession he had been nursing for some years to preach to the Jews in Rome. See on :20.

Brothers, though I had done nothing against the people, or the customs of our fathers- This appears to be presenting things in a way in which the Jews might be impressed. The fact is, Paul had taught against the customs [Gk. *ethos*] of the fathers. And that was why the Jews were mad with him. But Paul appears to come over wide eyed and innocent... and he may have overstated his case. Because circumcision was after the *ethos* of Moses and Paul taught this was not required for Gentile converts (Acts 15:1); the Jerusalem Jews had specifically complained that Paul taught Jews not to 'walk after the customs' (Acts 21:21).

I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans- We have to read in an ellipsis here; from [the hands of] Jerusalem [i.e. the Jerusalem, temple leadership] into the hands of the Romans.

28:18 *Who, when they had examined me, desired to set me free*- This may have been an exaggeration, in harmony with his exaggerated statement of innocence regarding the Jews in :17. Felix left Paul in prison in order to please the Jews (Acts 24:27) rather than trying to free him. If it were not an exaggeration, then Paul's insistence on going to Rome seems to reflect an obsession on his part, as often discussed in commentary on chapter 20.

Because there was no cause for putting me to death- The fact Paul died at Rome was therefore the more tragic, and suggests his insistence on going to Rome, despite the Spirit urging him not to, led to an earlier end to his ministry than perhaps was intended by the Lord.

28:19 *But when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar. Not that I had something of which to accuse my nation*- This internal compulsion was from *his* spirit, and not the Lord's Spirit. It is the same word used about how he compelled Christians to blaspheme and murdered those who refused (26:11). The obsessive compulsion he felt about going to suffering and death at Rome via Jerusalem was therefore psychologically a reflection of his guilt over compelling the Christians to blaspheme. More psychoanalysis of the situation within Paul on 20:26 *I am pure.*

28:20 *Therefore, for this reason did I request you see me*- The word translated "reason" as that translated "cause [of death]" in :18. Paul may mean that the whole reason he had appealed to Caesar was in order to get to Rome and preach to the Jews there, which is why as soon as he could on arrival in Rome he called for them. If only he had focused on his ministry to the Gentiles, and left the Jewish ministry to Peter, so much grief would have been avoided. He set himself the goal of preaching to Jews in Jerusalem at Pentecost and Jews in Rome, capital of the world. And yet there were few Jews left in Rome- because Claudius had recently expelled Jews from Rome (18:2). So again, as explained in detail in comments on chapter 20, Paul's whole

mission to Rome via Jerusalem just didn't work out. The money he collected for the Jews in Jerusalem caused huge problems and may never have been accepted by them; the wind was against his sailing all the way; there is no record of any successful witness by him in Jerusalem and maybe he missed the Pentecost feast; and here he admits his reason for appealing to Caesar was in order to preach to Jews in Rome. But they had been chased out of Rome, for the most part. And according to 28:28, Paul is disappointed at the response of the Jews and tells them it is better to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. Which is what he was intended to do anyway.

And speak with me- Paul realized the methodology we use with people can affect their conversion. And he knew that personal contact was by far the best. “For this cause therefore did I entreat you to *see* AND to speak with me” (Acts 28:20 RV). He called men to have a personal meeting with him, rather than just to hear the theory. Not just to hear him, but to *see* him… for we are the essential witnesses. Paul could have written to the Jews in Rome from prison, but he realized that true witness involves personal contact wherever possible.

For because of the hope of Israel- Or, "him for whom the people of Israel hope" (GNB). Messiah is certainly the Old Testament fulfilment of passages which speak of Israel's hope. Israel / Jacob's hope of Messiah was the hope of his life; "I have waited for Your salvation", 'Your Jesus', he commented (Gen. 49:18). Jacob describes the Christ as "the stone of Jacob / Israel" (Gen. 49:24); Jacob's physical stone had been overturned, rested upon, set up and anointed (Gen. 28:13-15); perhaps at the end of his life, Jacob thought back to that incident and saw in that stone a prophecy of the death and resurrection of the Lord. Perhaps he even saw that the anointing, the 'Christ-ing' of the Stone would be after its raising up; he foresaw that the Lord Jesus would be made the Christ, the anointed, in the fullest sense by the resurrection (Acts 2:36). "The hope of Israel", or "he for whom Israel / Jacob hopes", is another title of Christ (Acts 28:20 cp. Jer. 14:8; 17:13; Joel 3:16); he was the one for whom Jacob / Israel hoped. And his hope is the hallmark of all the Israel of God. It may be that Paul used the phrase with reference to Jacob's Messianic expectations, seeing that in the essentially parallel Acts 26:6 Paul speaks of the hope of the promise made to the fathers. Thus Paul saw "the hope of the promise" as being "the one for whom Israel / Jacob hopes" , i.e. Messiah (Jer. 17:13; Joel 3:16). Like Jacob, Paul saw the promises as essentially concerning the spiritual blessings achieved in Christ, rather than merely 'eternal life in the land of Israel'. His exposition of the promises in Gal. 3 follows the same pattern.

I am bound with this chain- As in 26:29, Paul's resentment about his limited freedom comes through.

28:21 *And they said to him: We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor did any of the brothers come here and report or speak any evil of you*- This total silence about Paul may have been because a person disfellowshipped from the synagogue ceased to exist, and was as it were dead and non-existent. But if they admitted that the sect of Christianity was well known (:22), then surely the name of Paul also was well known? They may however be responding in kind to Paul's rather untrue claim that he had done nothing wrong by Jewish customs (:17). It was surely axiomatic that if he had really done nothing to offend the Jews, then he would not have been delivered by them to the Romans.

28:22 *But we desire to hear of you what you think. For as concerning this sect, it is known to us that everywhere it is spoken against*- If the sect of 'Christianity' was known empire-wide but we take on face value what the Jews say about Paul, that he was unheard of, then a rather different picture of Paul emerges than what many now

hold. Today, the words 'Paul' and 'Christianity' go together, and he is perceived as the world's best known Christian. But we must not read back our current perceptions of him into the historical Paul. If indeed [and see on :21] what the Jews say about Paul is true on face value, then we are left with the conclusion that Paul was just a small cog in the large entity of 'Christianity'. The New Testament focuses upon him and the relatively few churches he founded, and records his letters to them. But Christianity was apparently an Empire wide force, according to the comment by the Jews of Rome recorded here in Acts 28:22. Yet Paul was unheard of in Rome. Paul would therefore appear to be one of many missionaries, but the Spirit chose to record so much about him because he was set up as a model for all believers. However, there are good reasons for thinking that the total number of Christians at the time of Paul's death was not much more than 20,000. Paul therefore would indeed have been a significant figure within the community, and the blank response of the Roman Jews was therefore reflective of their view of Paul rather than of actual reality. Or it could be [and I am just discussing possibilities in this entire comment] that the actual words of the Jews are not specifically denying knowledge of Paul, but denying that the Jewish leadership had any issue with Paul.

"Spoken against" is the word used about Jews speaking against Christians; Paul has just used the word in this context (28:19) and it is used elsewhere about them (Acts 13:45; Rom. 10:21). So the Roman Jews surely meant that although the leadership had not informed them about Paul, they were aware that Jews everywhere spoke against Christianity. Luke is now ending Acts, and by saying that the church was "spoken against" he is connecting with how he started volume 1 of his work, by recording that the Lord Jesus personally would be "spoken against" (Lk. 2:34 s.w.). All that is said against the church is said and done against the Lord. The Lord Jesus is His church; that is a major theme of Luke-Acts.

28:23 *And when they had appointed him a day, they came to him into his lodging in great number. To whom he expounded the matter, testifying of the kingdom of God*- Paul must have been blessed with quite a large house to accommodate so many guests. Or it could be that the record is written from Paul's perspective; relatively "many" came. Bear in mind that all Jews had been expelled from Rome not long previously.

And persuading them concerning Jesus, both from the law of Moses and from the prophets, from morning until evening- Literally, 'the things around Jesus'. And thus we have again "the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus".

28:24 *And some believed the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved*- But this is not the usual word used for faith. It more suggests an acceptance. There is no record here of any baptisms, and Paul hardly seemed to be encouraged by the response because he then quotes Isaiah's condemnation of Israel and turns to the Gentiles.

28:25 *So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed*- The impression is given that they walked out of the meeting arguing amongst themselves, rather than some of them rejoicing in any newfound faith. The picture is repeated in :29- they left, arguing amongst themselves.

After Paul had made this final statement: The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying- A classic explanation of the process of Divine inspiration of the Bible.

28:26 *Go to this people and say*- Paul quotes Isaiah 6:9, which his Lord had also quoted about Jewish blindness; and he quotes it in the same way as the Lord Jesus did (Lk. 8:10). Thereby Paul reflects the degree to which he had thought through the

Lord's reasoning and made it his own- an example to we who read the Gospels in this age. This is the art of Christ-centred life; to see that the situations we find ourselves in recall in essence those which the Lord faced, and to respond as He did.

By hearing you shall hear and shall in no way understand, and seeing you shall see and shall in no way perceive- It was and is the whole process of engaging with Scripture which confuses those who do not want to understand it. This is why the Bible is so confusing to so many- it is written in such a way as to confuse those who do not come to it with a desire to understand and respond. Think too of the tone of voice in which Paul said this; he was willing to sacrifice his salvation for Israel's, and his heart's desire was that the Roman Jews to whom he wrote Rom. 9:2 and Rom. 10:1 would be saved. And now he finally encounters them- what disappointment and sadness he would have had, and not angry frustration at their refusal to 'get it'.

28:27 *For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing and their eyes they have closed, lest they should perceive with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart; and should repent, and I should heal them*- Paul alludes to the parable of the sower more than to most of the Lord's parables, and here he clearly has in mind the Lord's quotation of the same scripture in Mt. 13:15. We have an insight into how Paul's mind took the Lord's words and the way he used Old Testament scriptures, assimilated it into himself, and met situations with the same approach.

28:28 *Therefore, let it be known to you that this salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles- See on* 28:20 *Therefore, for this reason did I request you see me*. Paul had earlier turned unto the Gentiles and given up with a mission to the Jews (Acts 13:46). This was as God intended- Paul was to preach to the Gentiles, and Peter to the Jews. But Paul had slipped back, and continued going to the Jews. And now in Rome, with his dream of witnessing to Jews in Rome fulfilled, he saw how wrong he had been. The Jews there were generally disinterested, and he realized again the wisdom of God's intention for him- to preach to Gentiles. And yet God still worked with Paul, for a few Jews apparently did believe due to his presence there. But the letter to the Romans reflects the fact that there were already Jewish Christians in Rome... Paul's desire to go and preach to Jews there appears even more on the side of the stubborn and the obsessive than anything really necessary in the Lord's service. "Sent to the Gentiles" uses the same words which Paul admits were said to him by the Lord at his conversion: "The Gentiles, to whom I send you" (Acts 26:17). Surely Paul must have been reflecting that although he had now achieved his obsessive desire to get to Rome to preach to the Jews... actually the Lord had been right at the beginning of his whole ministry. He was intended to go to the Gentiles. And instead he had sought to emulate Peter and go to the Jews. It was too much for rabbi Paul to accept that illiterate fisherman Peter could convert thousands of orthodox Jews at Pentecost; Paul yearned to do the same and even outdo Peter. He so wanted to get to Jerusalem for Pentecost and then go on to the Jews in Rome. Now he realized that the Jews there were not that responsive, and that his mission really must be to the Gentiles. It was a shame that like us, he spent a lot of grief on things he could have avoided if he had followed his Lord's preferred ministry path for him.

And they will hear- The same words used about how the Gentiles 'heard' the Gospel in accepting it (Acts 13:48); it was at that time that Paul had said he would turn to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46). It seems that he repented of his focus upon the Jews; but soon he was back to his obsession with them. That was but a temporary realization. The idea of the Gentiles 'hearing' is used of how the Gentiles 'heard' the word through Peter's preaching of it (Acts 15:7 s.w.). And it was this jealousy issue

with Peter which seems to have been at the root of much of Paul's dysfunction. At the very end of his life, perhaps in his last few days, Paul writes of how at his trial he was able to make a witness that meant "that through me the message might be fully proclaimed; and so all the Gentiles might hear" (2 Tim. 4:17). This is the same word for "hear". So it seems that Paul went to his death believing that although he had been mistaken in focusing upon the Jews, the Lord was merciful to him, and he died accomplishing the mission the Lord had originally intended for him at his conversion- witnessing to the Gentiles, and them 'hearing'.

28:29 *When he had said these words, the Jews departed, having a great dispute among themselves*- This is the same picture presented as in :25. Paul at great length to earnestly persuade them of Christ, but they argue amongst themselves and walk out of the door disputing with each other, thereby side-lining Paul.

28:30 *And he stayed two whole years in his own hired dwelling*- Paul, like many Bible characters, had access to wealth. Recall how Felix hoped to get money from Paul (24:26).

And welcomed all that visited him- That may sound rather unnecessary to record, until we observe that nearly every time the Greek word is used, it speaks of receiving people on a spiritual level. Paul practiced open table fellowship, welcoming all; at a time when it was obnoxious for Jews and Gentiles to be together in homes. This, for Paul and for so many others, is the sign of spiritual maturity- genuine spiritual openness to others instead of defending the exclusive island of one's own territory and interpretations.

"That visited him" is Gk. 'came in unto him'. The same word is used of how Paul had gone in unto the houses of Christians to torture and kill them (Acts 8:3). Now the whole story was reversed, by grace.

28:31 *Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ*- But his letter to the Romans places the emphasis upon the reign of grace. He speaks of how grace "reigns", as if grace is the dominating, ruling principle in the lives of those who have now sided with the Kingdom of God rather than that of this world. Testifying the Gospel of God's grace is paralleled by Paul with testifying about the Kingdom- and he says this again in a Roman context (Acts 20:24,25).

With all boldness- Paul saw the Lord's "boldness" as an imperative to him to likewise be "bold" in preaching (Eph. 6:19). We all find it hard to be bold in witness, and yet in this as in all spiritual endeavour, 'thy fellowship shall make me strong'. A deeper sense of the presence of Jesus, a feeling for who He was and is, a being with Him, will make us bold too. Even Paul found it hard; he asked others to pray for him, that he would preach "boldly" [s.w.] as he ought to (Eph. 6:19); and their prayers were heard, for in his imprisonment during which he wrote Ephesians, he preached boldly (Acts 28:31 s.w.); indeed, boldness characterised his whole life (Phil. 1:20 s.w.). In passing, we note how Paul felt spiritually weaker than he was; he felt not bold, when he was bold; and we see how the admission of weakness to others and their prayers for it can grant us the victory we seek.

No one forbidding him- Paul uses the same word to speak of how the Jews forbad or hindered his preaching to the Gentiles (1 Thess. 2:16). His entire ministry had been characterized by Jewish opposition and hindrance to his work. This period was the only one where he could preach without any hindrance; and it was because he was at last doing what the Lord had intended for him from the start, witnessing to the Gentiles, rather than arguing with the Jews and giving free reign to his various psychological issues relating to them.